

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: TRANS SPACE AS CULTURAL
LANDSCAPE—TRANSGENDER WOMEN
OF COLOR IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Transgender civil rights and public displays of trans visibility have come to the fore of the American imagination. To date, however, little work has thoroughly examined Black and Latinx trans women's central role as experts in LGBT community-caregiving practices. As a result, scholarship and popular culture concerned with "the transgender tipping point" (*Time* May 29, 2014) generally endorse a narrative that characterizes transgender women of color primarily as celebrities, victims of transphobic violence, or historic figures of the LGBT liberation movement, if they are mentioned at all, making their everyday lives marginal or non-existent at a time when their presence in popular culture is exploding. Without an adequate fieldwork model, we undervalue the everyday lives and landscapes of transgender women of color in the United States, ultimately leading to a two-dimensional conceptualization of identity categories such as race, gender, and sexuality. *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape—Transgender Women of Color in Washington, D.C.* remedies this gap by creating and applying *Bodies in spaces—*

the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model. The trans model extends the work of Americanist Jeremy Korr (2002) to reimagine the study of trans space, place, and gender transition. It is divided into the following components: detailed site description, aesthetics, language and material culture, and community research. At the heart of *Trans Space* is an ethnographic study of Casa Ruby, a bilingual social service nonprofit in Washington, D.C. (casaruby.org). The trans model allows me to address the queer and trans problematics of my particular site: addiction, prostitution, and homelessness. The model then expands to examine the work of trans celebrities such as Laverne Cox in order to trace the circuitous paths of daily transition and sisterhood. The evolution of the following inquiry guides my commitment to cross-discipline methodologies and community involvement. Space stages the expansive possibilities of gender transition. In extending gender transition narratives to functions that do not apply to space, how do we know a *trans* space when we see it? And what do these spatial transitions and pop culture representations tell us about an American investment in identity and its *tipping points*?

TRANS SPACE AS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE—TRANSGENDER WOMEN OF
COLOR IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

by

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Chapter 1: A Trans Presence in American Studies

The nature of the project

Trans Space as Cultural Landscape is an exploratory study of the cultures of everyday life in America for transgender women of color (TWOC) in Washington, D.C. Grounded in the District, *Trans Space* investigates contemporary transgender visibility, representation, and self-representation at the local and national level. At the center of the dissertation is an ethnographic study of Casa Ruby (CR),¹ a bilingual LGBT social service non-profit in Northwest D.C.² My fieldwork at CR focused on the leadership, staff, and client-community of CR. This study highlights specific trans lives, voices, bodies, and the everyday culture of Washington, D.C. My fieldwork charts a collection of ever-shifting narratives in order to re-map the nation's capital as a *trans* space in a *trans* time. As guiding cultural elements that informed and structured both the research and writing process, the specificity of *trans* space as a question and a set of locations read alongside the specificity of intra-community terms and phrases such as *the hustle* and "That gives me life!" allowed me to better contextualize the Black and Latinx women at the heart of my study and the geography of their everyday lives.

D.C. is a unique glo-cal setting from which to discuss the everydayness required by *the hustle*, or a trans women's daily negotiations for survival, sisterhood, and resilience. *The hustle* is a collection of strategies, themes, and stories that guide the listening-scholar from the front steps of Casa Ruby to the rapidly growing presence of TWOC in entertainment, news, and social media. Though these are no longer distinct categories, *Trans Space* contextualizes the relationship between ethnography and the

study of popular culture. The relationship between these two points expands the possibilities of scholarly research, cultural analysis, and visual analysis. I am particularly interested in the ways in which specific trans lives, cultures, and narratives are complicated by local and national movements for transgender inclusion, humanization, and the promise of LGBT normalization. TWOC push the American Studies scholar to develop a *trans*disciplinary approach to the study and methods of the everyday.³

Situated as experts on their own lives, transgender women of color have much to say about the cultures of everyday life in America, the longstanding concern of American Studies to improve the methods of cultural analysis, and future directions in the field. This dissertation is situated within a growing body of work on the transgender subject. Given the transient and precarious lives of the populations at the center of my study, I do not arrive at neat conclusions. Rather, my dissertation documents trans women at this particular moment and place, their reflection on the national stage, their current emergence into the American imagination, and the new and emergent scholarship that theoretically situates them within multiple bodies of literature. As an exploration of lives lived in liminal spaces, I capture the “messiness” of culture and identity as both complex and *livable* categories. Central to this process is a critical approach to the study of *dichotomy*, or the constant navigation of gendered and racialized violence, the desire for respectability and increased visibility through fleeting, but vital, moments of self-acceptance as resistance to poverty, racism, incarceration, and internalized anti-trans stigma. These categories and identities are not neat, and they are fraught. As a transgender person and a Latinx scholar I am interested in how the women of my community not only stay alive, but also find *life*.⁴ Faced with a rising threat of social

inequity and the ongoing effects of economic disparity and social stigma, CR girls⁵ remain determined to thrive one afternoon at a time. Rather than over-simplifying or sharing in their worldviews, my project works through the sometimes subtle shifts between liberation and violence, sex and work, community and research, and isolation and belonging. I have been called to explore these categories as they have been experienced and deployed by the women themselves. The study of TWOC in the District requires an interdisciplinary approach to *trans* scholarship, evidence, research, and methods.

Utilizing aspects of the literature in the fields of American Studies, Cultural Landscapes, feminist and queer theory, Sex Work Studies, and the theoretical mappings these fields provide, my dissertation interrogates the creation of trans space *as* cultural landscape. The dissertation is guided by the following inquiry: we use theory to get closer to the lives we are interested in, if, as we say, we are invested in *centering* the margins. Space stages the expansive possibilities of gender transition. Space *also* transitions to hold these changes, these daily fluctuations in gender and presentation. In other words, what makes a space *trans*? In extending gender transition narratives to functions that do not apply to space, how do we know a *trans* space when we see it? And what do these spatial practices tell us about an American cultural investment in identity and its *tipping points*?⁶ Ethnographic and popular culture research facilitates my theoretical development and the evolution of these questions. My investigation into contemporary transgender visibility, representation, and self-representation reveals the interrelationships of identity formation, space, place, and the everyday for TWOC in our nation's capital.

“Hello, it’s another beautiful day at Casa Ruby. How may I help you?”⁷—



Fig. 1 Trans Latinas at Casa Ruby, Thanksgiving 2012

Thanksgiving 2012 marked my first visit to Casa Ruby. I was brand new to the east coast and had not yet been immersed in the D.C. LGBT community. As my friend and I walked up to CR’s front steps, I could hear cumbia music blaring and women cackling from the third-floor windows. Once we climbed the stairs and into the fluorescent lights, the warm embrace of acquaintances, strangers, and a holiday feast greeted us. Trans Latinas,⁸ Black trans women, their friends, and admirers sat in plastic foldout chairs that lined the walls. I have included an image from that night above as figure one. Amongst the sparse holiday decorations and office furniture, TWOC smiled, gossiped, took photos, hiked up their skirts to dance, and towered over me in their stilettos. That was also the night I met CR’s namesake, Ruby Corado. Although I wouldn’t begin my research until the following year, I knew then that the women of CR had so much to teach me about trans activism, identity, and space.

Casa Ruby is a non-profit organization largely run by and for Black and Latina trans women. Although the organization has since expanded and moved locations, at the time of my field research CR was housed within a three-story brownstone located at 2822 Georgia Avenue in Northwest D.C. From 10:00am to 6:00pm Monday through Friday, Casa Ruby operated to provided such daily services as hot lunch, computer use, and case management.⁹ During the winter months, CR was converted into a twenty-four-hour LGBT hypothermia shelter. From late November to early April, cots and blankets replaced the desks and cubicles of the second and third floors in order to provide shelter from freezing temperatures.¹⁰ The organization is easily bus and metro accessible¹¹ and shares close proximity to the following neighborhoods: Petworth, Columbia Heights, and the U St. corridor. Due to the high percentage of residential housing, elementary schools, public playgrounds, local businesses, and an abundance of side streets and short city-blocks,¹² 2822 Georgia Ave. NW invited a steady flow of neighborhood foot traffic throughout the calendar year. Established in the summer of 2012, Casa Ruby continues to provide bilingual “lifesaving services and programs to the most vulnerable in the [D.C. LGBT] community.”¹³ Currently the organization also includes a transitional youth shelter, an emergency house, a group house,¹⁴ and an off-site administrative office.¹⁵ As the organization expanded its social service locations, 2822 Georgia Avenue continued to be the CR social and community hub. In order to maintain focus, my dissertation concentrates on Casa Ruby’s original Georgia Avenue location.

Casa Ruby is a research site that *houses* racial and gender identity *transformations*. Though levels of responsibility may vary, the women of CR comprise three distinct roles: client, staff, or community member.¹⁶ Although each role carries

varying levels of social importance and responsibility, all three reinforce the social inner workings of the CR project.

Trans Positionality

As a light-skinned, mixed race, androgynous, queer, and transgender Latinx, my social location, role, trans identity, presentation, and presence at Casa Ruby often confused the people around me. At the time, TWOC at Casa Ruby were invested in curating binary gender identities and sexualities for themselves. Their attraction to cisgendered men was in line with their burgeoning female identities. In my time at Casa Ruby, I was referred to as a trans woman, a trans man, a client, a journalist, a college student, honey, baby, “Hey, girl!” and sweetie. Given my limited conversational Spanish-language skill-level, my research at Casa Ruby was conducted entirely in English. A bilingual study of CR, although important, was outside of the bounds of this dissertation. Unfortunately, language limited the types of conversations I could have in and about the space. That being said, the research for this project centered a framework which included but was not limited to: ethnographic fieldwork, a commitment to interdisciplinary academic scholarship, a diverse body of popular culture resources, and the methods of ethnography and textual, visual, and material culture analysis that can more adequately support TWOC populations.

My fieldwork took place at Casa Ruby, located at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW in D.C. and at Casa Ruby-related community events around the District. In order to conduct ethnographic work with ease, accuracy, and time efficiency, I accessed free transcription/playback software and a transcription foot pedal. I utilized my personal smart phone as a recording device due to limited research funds and because these items are ubiquitous in

trans spaces. A communication device, an access point for social media, and self(ie) device, smart phones illuminated the tension between documentation, research, and belonging. In the following section I will turn to the work of Casa Ruby’s executive director, Ruby Corado.



Fig. 2 Ruby Corado and House Rules, *Street Sense* June 2015

Casa Ruby is a safe haven,¹⁷ a model for chosen family, and a home for the D.C. LGBT community. On May 20, 2015, the cover of *Street Sense* featured a full-length image of Casa Ruby founder and Executive Director, Ruby Corado. Established in 2003, *Street Sense* publishes a “biweekly street newspaper” that is distributed by folks who experience homelessness in the District. In this image Ruby holds a sign close to her chest. This image is included here as Figure 2. In the three-plus years that I have conducted research at Casa Ruby, this sign has changed locations within the house, but its message remains the same:

“Family Rules—Hug often, Be nice & play fair, Help Each Other, Use Your manners, Do your best, Forgive Quickly, Be Generous, Use kind words, Try new things, Laugh Every

Day, Respect others, Be Yourself, Never give up.” The sign’s dimensions mimic a standard full-length mirror most likely designed for a childhood bedroom. Its messaging is reminiscent of a Hallmark holiday or greeting card. “Family Rules” is prescriptive and suggests a formula for familial tender love and care.¹⁸ Its conservative rhetoric assumes comforting feelings such as security, support, and unconditional motherly love. Unfortunately, these feelings cannot be easily assumed. The vast majority of CR girls were not raised in households that lovingly adhered to the rules as suggested by Figure 2. Their childhood and teenage years were often shrouded by experiences of neglect and rejection. But desire and positivity persisted. The women of CR wanted more, and they know that more was possible.

Figure 2 reimagines the traditional family holiday card as a *trans* place. Ruby’s body frames “Family Rules” and her arms support its literal and symbolic weight. She is pictured in a domestic space, part living room and part kitchen. The space includes a refrigerator, a small couch, grape-purple walls, and an oversized LGBT pride flag. Rather than occupying separate spaces within the house, all of these items live in one room, the basement drop-in center at CR. This space was more commonly known within the community as the Trans Life Center (TLC).

Figure 2 provided the readers of *Street Sense* with a curated image of Casa Ruby as a house and a family identity. And in this image Ruby creates, enacts, and makes a claim to a family identity. As a sign held gently between Ruby’s fingertips, “Family Rules” is a daily reminder of the importance of touch, forgiveness, and resistance. And so, simply painted particleboard invokes nostalgia for a childhood that never was and for a queer family to call our own. Grounded in the everyday life of the TLC, the framework

of my inquiry and analysis blends the methods of ethnography, cultural landscapes, and popular culture studies. The theories and assumptions that organized my research process and the interpretation of my sources began with the question of space, place and narrative strategy. The tone and quality of the TWOC narrative storytelling practices, and the monologues and conversations I witnessed amongst trans women at CR reveal their instant ability to enliven any space. Conversation fills *trans* spaces, and the women included in my dissertation are vibrant storytellers. Recorded interviews and fleeting one-on-one moments with TWOC ground the work of fieldwork reciprocity and trans methods.

In his essay “Sharing Queer Authorities—Collaborating for Transgender Latina and Gay Latino Historical Meanings,” Horacio N. Roque Ramírez remarks on the ways in which conducting oral history with his confidant, Teresita la Campesina, allowed for inter-generational Latinx *queering* of language. The mix of conversation, song, dramatic reenactment, English, Spanish, and its nimble combination, Spanglish, resulted in a way of thinking with Teresita as a “multilingual, multigender, and multivalent endeavor.”¹⁹ Throughout “Sharing Queer Authorities” Ramírez shares examples of Teresita’s play with metaphor, gender, and crass. In the following exchange, Teresita and Ramírez discuss her decision not have sex reassignment surgery. To this question Teresita exclaims, “Oh, I was going to do it a long time ago. I was a good candidate. When they told me that I was gonna be like a brand-new Cadillac—and *no motor in it?* I’d rather keep this old jalopy; I still have a lot of sparks.”²⁰ Like Ruby Corado and the women of Casa Ruby, Teresita is full of *sparks* and her sarcasm brings bring levity to topics such as gender transition, personal hardship, and unequal access to trans affirming healthcare.

Seeing the beauty, utility, and transitional gender of her “old jalopy,” Teresita, Ramírez, and the reader develop a reciprocal relationship to sharing intimacy in *sharing* queer authorities (Ramírez) through an expertise in *queering* storytelling. Trans Latinx storytelling and imaginative spatial practices encourage the American Studies scholar to center the margins within our own communities. Before turning back to the work to Ruby Corado, my research participants, and the daily life of Casa Ruby as an expansive set of primary re/sources, the following section situates local TWOC collective identity, self-representation practices, and my scholarly investment in space, place, and community-based fieldwork models.

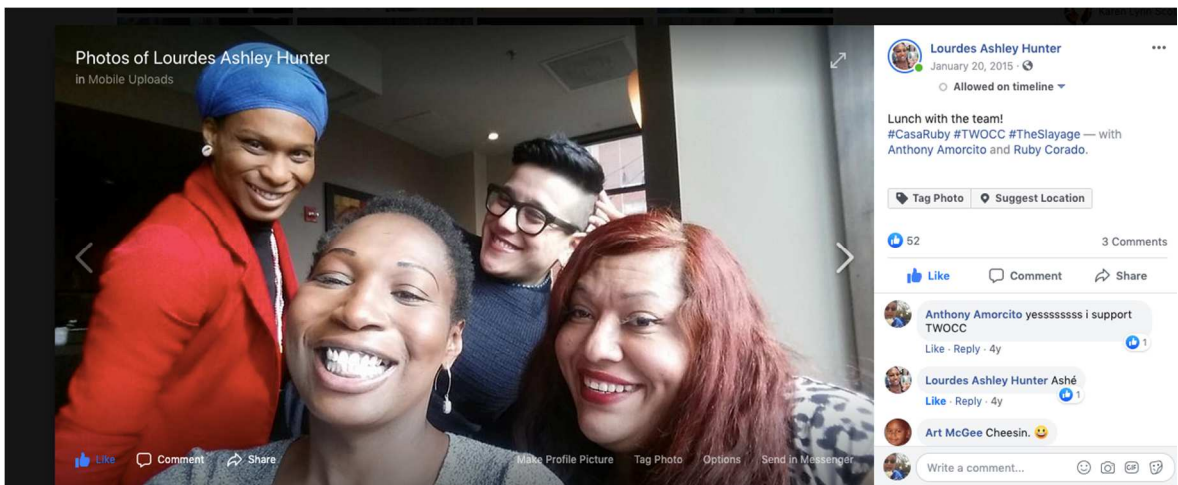


Fig. 3 Black and Latinx trans folks gather for lunch. January 20, 2015. Washington D.C. (Left to right): Diana, Lourdes Ashley Hunter, A. Anthony, Ruby Corado.

TWOC? Who is she?²¹ Where is she?— acronyms, cultural landscapes, visibility

On January 20, 2015, I met up a small group of outspoken Black and Latinx transgender women of color advocates and community leaders at the offices of the NMAC,²² the National Minority Council on AIDS. That day, Diana, Lourdes Ashley Hunter, and Ruby Corado demanded broader TWOC representation by the NMAC at the 2015 meeting of the USCA,²³ the United States Conference on AIDS, held annually in

Washington, D.C. After the meeting, the four of us went to lunch in the U St. Corridor neighborhood. While we ate, the women cackled-yelled-laughed about how they had “slayed,” i.e. “won” the meeting. Lourdes referred to that day’s meeting as a continuation of “the slaying,” a TWOC’s perceived successful ability to persuade and demand rights, care, and visibility. The slaying, or “Lunch with the team”²⁴ is included here as Figure 3. In this particular group selfie turned Facebook post, we posed and smiled into Lourdes’ smartphone camera. In “the slaying,” Lourdes has included two organizational hashtags, #CasaRuby and #TWOCC. Although I was very familiar with the acronym TWOC—the favored collective identity for Black and Latinx trans women at CR—that afternoon I was introduced to TWOCC, the transgender women of color collective.²⁵ TWOCC is

a grass-roots global initiative led by trans and gender non-conforming people of color that works to uplift the lived, narratives, experiences and leadership of trans and gender non-conforming people of color, their families and comrades while building towards collective liberation for all oppressed people through healing and restorative justice.²⁶

Grounded in the foundational and field-defining work of the Transgender Women of Color Collective, *TWOC? Who is she? Where is she?* grounds the dissertation’s most central identity category, TWOC and a trans preoccupation with *visibility*. TWOC is acronym, an organizing tool, a collective identity, a call for coalition, and a social movement organizing tool.

What follows is not intended to be an exhaustive look at the history of the term transgender women of color or its abbreviation, TWOC. Rather what follows is a brief introduction to an acronym through community and scholarship concerned with the collective work and everyday lives of transgender women of color, my research participants, and a queering of the cultural landscape.

In honor of and in response to International Transgender Day of Visibility²⁷ (TDOV) TWOCC put out an official statement on the homepage of their website. Celebrated annually on March 31. TDOV is as an international holiday aimed at raising awareness celebrating trans and gender non-conforming success, accomplishment, and victory.²⁸ In the TWOCC statement entitled “From the laptops of our Leadership Team,” executive director Lourdes calls forth the need to support “Black and Brown” organizations that are led by, employ, and/or and serve transgender women of color. Here the term “Brown” collectivizes various POC (people of color) identities and global locations, including Latinidad, an already imagined diasporic population, and all other non-Black (African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean) people of color including, but not limited to: South-East Asian, Asian, Native American/Indigenous, and mixed-race identities. Rather than celebrating the liberatory promise of trans visibility, Lourdes names what transgender visibility *fails* to do/ how it has failed TWOC:

Trans folk deserve to breath to live and thrive in a world that celebrates all of who we are, Humans./ Visibility is not a job, it will not pay the rent./ Visibility is not a job, it will not pay the rent. [repeat in original]...Visibility is not freedom. Freedom is freedom.²⁹

In this collective definition, TWOC yearn and deserve to enjoy a collective breath, one that not only promises visibility, but can also find and sustain Black and Brown trans life. Although TWOCC identifies its political mission, the organization purposely obfuscates the answer to the following query, *TWOC? Who is she?* There is, of course, no one answer to this question, but the work of contemporary queer and transgender theorists included throughout this dissertation and my research participants argues that we must continue to ask.

In his essay “The Figure of the Transwoman of Color Through the Lens of ‘Doing Gender,’” Salvador Vidal-Ortiz begins with a memory of a trans Latina in Puerto Rico. He remembers a main road on the “outskirts of town” where he would see a “voluptuous woman.” Reimagining the margins and trans feminine embodiment *in* the outskirts of public space, Vidal-Ortiz is moved to document a particular trans woman, a woman he never met who wore “dark hair, tight jeans, and more often than not smoking a cigarette.” He remembers her through the specificity of her aesthetic, gesture, and the way she commanded space and his attention. In his mind’s eye, the author *sees* her: “She stands by the side of the road in what seems to be a small pathway to a house. She cruises the passing cars, but sometimes just stands there-waiting to be noticed.” What is most generative about Vidal-Ortiz’s search for the figure of the trans woman of color is his self-reflexive inquiry. He then turns to the reader: “Does she [the transwoman of color] inhabit the streets? Is she a sex worker?...Can you hear her theorizing from her own experience-and accept it?”³⁰ If gender transition is the desire to be and *do*, gender desire locates TWOC in a process of being and becoming at the outskirts of town. Turning from Vidal-Ortiz’s figure, the women of Casa Ruby inhabit streets, sidewalks surrounding CR, and the sex work strolls that crisscross the outskirts of the District I positioned myself in the field as an active audience, one who could “hear her theorizing from her own experience.”³¹ And I relished in *it*. But in order to more adequately document the TWOC at Casa Ruby, I needed to mine the field of Cultural Landscape Studies, a field that has previously not accounted for TWOC populations, in order develop a more appropriate fieldwork model for the population of clients, friends, and

chosen family at Casa Ruby. This search and professional development would allow me to explore the following inquiry: TWOC? Where is she?

Building a better Korr—Moving towards a trans cultural landscape fieldwork method and model

When considering the study of cultural landscapes and cultural geographies at the turn of the 21st century, a vital sub-field of American Studies closely related to the study of material culture (the study of objects—their creation, production, use, and associated memories and emotions), there are four scholarly voices in this rich intellectual tradition that have had a profound influence on the integrated study of space, place, and everyday formation. "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene" by D.W. Meinig, "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene" by Richard H. Schein, "Interpreting History through Objects" by Barbara G. Carson, and "Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model" by Jeremy Korr have inspired me to continue the work toward building a fieldwork model that would more adequately support the population of Casa Ruby, the marginally housed, drug addicted, TWOC non-profit social service providers, and sometimes sex workers in Washington, D.C. Each scholar focused on his or her immediate surroundings to create a fieldwork and/ or analytic model that would allow others to document the inter-connectedness of their immediate surroundings. The work of Meinig, Schein, Carson, and Korr aimed to address the following query: What is an American cultural landscape? Why should Americanists study the interrelationships of people, places, and artifacts? What types of agency and socio-cultural influence do the elements of the landscape share and enact upon another? And how can this process be recorded? Ultimately, the following section documents my

path to building a “better” Korr model, a trans cultural landscape analysis and fieldwork model that accounts for the racialization, sexualization, and professionalization of gender transition for multiply marginalized trans women striving to live more livable urban lives. The audience for and the potential broader application of the trans model includes everyday people and researchers in such fields as public health and harm reduction, and in the academy in such fields as American Studies, Women Studies, and Transgender Studies. The trans model is intended to be an open pedagogy for future directions in the study of identity formation, space, and place. The need for and application of the trans model is briefly illustrated by the following example.

Positively Trans

On December 8, 2015, I met with Diana, an actress, singer-song writer, self-published author, activist, healer, DMV native, and at the time, one of the newest staff members of Casa Ruby. The bulk of our conversation that day focused on the nature of trans women’s friendships in the District. That evening, Diana described the importance of *sharing* space for TWOC. She exclaimed, “Like queering space, transing space, transcending space, like creating a *trans* space. I think that we are also operating in these non-verbal agreements, these non-verbal ways of existing in space with one-another simply by virtue of *who* we are.”³² A trans woman’s ability to queer, transcend, and create *trans* space³³ becomes clearer once we step inside Casa Ruby.



Fig. 4 “Positively Trans Positively Healthy,” Friends Community Center

Everyday objects of trans materiality coat the social services hub of CR. The walls and flat surfaces of the second-floor office space are covered in posters, fliers, condoms, and the occasional bra or wig. Immediately upon entering the office and looking to the right, one would find a twenty-four by thirty-six-inch poster, the top of which reads “Positively TRANS Positively Healthy.”(see Figure 4)³⁴ “Positively Healthy” portrays two TWOC smiling at each other in the reflection of a single smart phone. At their mid-section the poster reads, “Get in HIV medical care. Stay in HIV medical care. Be Healthy.”³⁵ Documenting friendship *as* selfie and intimacy *as* place, the poster encourages its viewer to meditate on wellbeing and intimacy for TWOC. Although staged, “Positively” is more than a poster campaign. The comfort provided by the park bench at its center and its placement in the entryway of CR invokes the need for *trans* spaces.

“Positively Healthy” does the work of *transing* space, or the spatial and non-verbal relationships that exist between trans women who share space.³⁶ “Positively

Healthy” is affixed to the wall and it fixes our gaze. Figure 4 and Diana’s trans terminology create an entry point into the oft-paradoxical conversations about and between TWOC in D.C. Further, Figure 4 allows its viewer to critically question the responsibility and reciprocity promised by the poster’s call to “care” and “positivity.” These hopeful feelings re-inspire the following inquiry: How can American Studies scholars illustrate the complex relationships forged between trans women, embodiment, and space? And what do these narratives tell us about contemporary transgender visibility, representation, and self-representation at the local and national level? The answer to these questions requires that we analyze the cultural landscape and the *what* (next) and *where* (to) of Space and Place Studies in American Studies.

Perceiving the American Cultural Landscape

In his classic 1979 essay "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene," D.W. Meinig argues that cultural landscapes comprise our socio-cultural, spatial-emotional, and visual environment. For Meinig, the viewer gazes out toward her horizon to perceive the American landscape, a scene, setting, and an experience that takes place at a particular moment in space and time.³⁷ He argues that the viewer can hold one of ten perceptions while beholding the American scene. Each perception is guided by the following simile: *landscape as...* They include: nature, habitat, artifact, system, problem, wealth, ideology, history, place, and aesthetic. Although each viewer/landscape inhabitant may see similar natural or structural elements in the landscape such as a river, mailbox, or a fire station, she also develops an associative relationship to her spatial location, thus giving personal meaning to *her* environment, a landscape that she can belong to. For Meinig “any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes

but lies within our heads.”³⁸ Thus, from within the cognitive landscape, the author excavates the extra-ordinary everyday life of the American cultural landscape. Oscillating between the individual point of view and vantage point, Meinig harnesses the ten perceptions. Of these perceptions, *place* and *aesthetic* are most relevant to my work in Washington, D.C. In a section entitled “*landscape as Place*,” Meinig describes the production of locality, a scale that begins with self, extends to place, and branches out towards a growing sense of belonging to a town and nation. *Place* is a feeling that allows the perceiver to “cultivate a sensitivity to detail, to texture, color, all the nuances of visual relationships, and more, for environment engages all of our senses, the sounds and smells and ineffable feel of a place as well.”³⁹ For Meinig “*landscape as Aesthetic*” is the process by which we “seek a meaning which is not explicit in the ordinary forms [i.e. what is natural and or visible].” In the search for this “essence” place the “landscape becomes a mystery holding meanings we strive to grasp but cannot reach.” The cultural landscape’s scholar takes on the gaze of the artist-poet, striving to convince others “that landscapes mirror and landscapes matter” in as much as “they reveal shared beliefs, ideals, and values of a particular place and time.”⁴⁰ Meinig’s work revolves around simile and symbolism and so does not account for the identity of the perceiver or where she may fall within structures of resilience and oppression, race, class, gender, and sexuality. Meinig’s perceiver is raceless, genderless, and safe within a non-specific American scene at a non-specific time. But it was Meinig’s interest in perception and belonging to place that brought me to Richard H. Schein.

In “The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene” (1997), Richard H. Schein moves with the genealogy of the Cultural

Landscape and Cultural Geography traditions of the early to mid-20th century in order to consider the spatial-ideological legacy of the American residential suburb. For Schein, the American landscape is always already shifting and restricted, “the landscape at once constricts and is constructed by individuals who live in a particular place.”⁴¹ For Schein, the landscape shifts depending upon the ways in which it reflects, represents, is reflective, and representative of a dominant social script; in this case, suburb is to American dream as patriotism is to building restoration.⁴² Unlike Meinig, Schein works to apply his conceptual map to a specific and historic American suburb, Ashland Park, Kentucky.

According to Schein, the American suburb of the 20th and 21st century has come to represent “the cultural normality of residential life.” This normality includes but is not limited to “a gendered division of labor” and a demarcation of public and private space, housework, and *the* workplace.⁴³ Schein’s conceptualization documents the materialization of these divisions through the following sub/urban design categories: architecture, insurance mapping, zoning, historic preservation, neighborhood associations, and consumption. He concludes that the American cultural landscape is an architectural and symbolic reflection of “the ongoing production and reproduction of place and identity” in America.⁴⁴ Further, his work on spatial-discursive analytic categories encourages future Americanists to think with and outside of the suburb to document discursive formations such as normality, deviance, and emergent identities as they are built into and extend the built environment. Yet, without a model for studying the *stuff* of everyday life, the cultural landscape is like a barren kitchen pantry.

In “Interpreting History through Objects” (1985,) Barbara G. Carson asks after our professional desire for historical objects to speak. Central to the work of material culturalists and museum curators, “Interpreting History Through Objects” introduces the reader to the Carson method, an analysis that troubles the politics of display. The Carson method is designed to “move from things to people and their actions and then to an exploration of ideas about the behavior.”⁴⁵ According to Carson, categories such as “ideas and behavior” answer the questions *what* and *why*? Carson is curious about individual motivation as illustrated through the following assertion: “What personal economic, social, political, religious, or cultural assumptions motivated their actions?”⁴⁶ By including themes such as identity, power, race, gender, and social class into her analysis, Carson is able to take notice of the material importance of space and place. In her essay, Carson applies her method twice; once, famously, to the socio-cultural-historical significance a simple can of cherry pie filling and again to the politics of site-specific display in “an unspecified but fashionable-mid eighteenth-century historic house.”⁴⁷ In order to account for “a room full of objects,” Carson aims to teach history *through* objects and object display. Her method includes the following analytic categories: use, assumption, motivation, and historical record. The method contains the following six steps: 1. Object identification; 2. List of activities; 3. The creation, ownership, and maintenance of an object; 4. The collaborative process by which gets used; and 5./6. The life and influence of the object over time. Although my work is not concerned with the politics of museum display, the craftsmanship of exquisitely maintained 18th century Chippendale furniture, or the cultural production of canned fruit and pie filling, Carson’s focused and direct method enables me to ask after the

contemporary history of objects, people, motivation, and space as a living container for trans materiality. By adapting the Carson Method to the 21st century and by taking her work outside of a conservative material culture tradition, I too came to know the socio-emotional life of trans objects which includes but is not limited to categories such as LGBT pride (flags, stickers, buttons), safer sex/sexual health (condoms, lube, dental dams), and transition (empty estrogen bottles, wigs, and lingerie). But it was ultimately the work of Americanist Jeremy Korr that led to the work of the fieldwork model.

In the “Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model,” Jeremy Korr argues that the scholarship on material culture must also include the longstanding concerns of Cultural Landscape Studies and vice versa. Korr’s work bridges an interdisciplinary conversation between disparate bodies of literature, aims, objects of analysis, and methods. He argues that there is a dynamic, agentic, and reciprocal relationship between objects, people, and nature.⁴⁸ Not unlike Carson, the Korr model aims to enhance the scholarly ability to understand the “beliefs, values, and conventions of those people who created, maintained or altered those objects” and spaces in a particular landscape or region.⁴⁹ The Korr model is divided into five modules and subsequent and sub-operations. The modules include detailed descriptions of the following categories: the site dimensions, boundaries, perceptions, dynamic relationships, and cultural analysis. Sub-operations include “the study of spiritual or sacred artifacts, social and political boundaries, aesthetics, nature, and competing meanings.⁵⁰ In Korr’s fifth module, “Cultural Analysis,” he posits the following inquiry: “What ideologies, meaning systems, shared beliefs, attitudes toward nature, attitudes toward people, can the landscape help to understand?” Clearly influenced by Meinig, Schein, and Carson, Korr draws our attention

to the “boundaries, perceptions, and dynamic tensions” embedded in the study of power, agency, and conflict. Korr pushes scholars considering fieldwork to remain attune to our own attitudes towards power, discourse and access. He asks, “Who has had the power to shape the cultural landscape itself and to access it, and who has been denied the powers of creation and access?” Casa Ruby is a contested landscape wherein “[c]ontests overpower, meaning, and access also play out with respect to representations of landscapes.”⁵¹ 2822 Georgia Ave. NW is a collection of objects and people that illuminate the socio-political climate for TWOC cultures in the District right now. CR helps us to understand the women whose “beliefs, values, and conventions” have “created, maintained” and “altered” the objects, spaces, narratives, and architecture that give us *life*.⁵² TWOC attitudes towards people, the built environment, and the cityscape are carried within their stories and aspirations.

Trans Space as Cultural Landscape explores notions of queer spaces, chosen family, and trans homes. I extend Korr’s work and model structure in order to illuminate the interventions of TWOC spaces and transgender scholars to the field of Cultural Landscapes. I argue that the study of Casa Ruby and 2822 Georgia Ave. NW necessitates the creation of a trans cultural landscape analysis and fieldwork model, a model that can more adequately address the queer and trans problematics of this particular site: homelessness, drug addiction, sex work, and gender transition. The women of CR carry personal journeys, experiences and embody memories. They have told me stories about city streets, isolation, and gender transformation. I interrupt Korr’s reliance on the agency of nature and natural surroundings in order to focus on the import of storytelling to the study of cognitive landscapes. I center the *felt*⁵³ relationships between landscapes,

building interiors, homemaking, and identity formation as a complex and interrelated process that blurs distinctions between public and private space. The modules of the trans fieldwork model utilize ethnographic methods in order to center the effects of trans bodies *in trans* spaces. The trans model utilizes and develops a scalar approach that begins with the surrounding sidewalks of Georgia Ave. NW, moves inside CR, broadens to the D.C. cityscape, the nation, popular culture, and circles back again. Through this process, I create modules that guide my analysis through such topics as a detailed site description, language and inter-personal dynamics, the role of the transgender researcher, material culture, site and individual aesthetics, narrative strategies, and cognitive landscapes. The following section broadens an introductory conversation of trans methods to consider the depth and efficacy of scholarly sources and community resources.

Primary Resources—Claiming a space in the literature and tradition of American Cultural Studies for TWOC

The primary sources for the dissertation include but are not limited to: Casa Ruby, scholarly text, commercial media, film, theater, and social media. From an afternoon at Casa Ruby to Janet Mock's speech at the 2017 Women's March on Washington, *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* creates and utilize a scalar approach to trans geographies, intimacies, fieldwork, and analyses. The dissertation is grounded in the production and study of ethnographic fieldwork and interdisciplinary approach to cultural, visual, and textual. For the purposes of this project, I developed a *trans* reading schematic, the ability to read across genres, disciplines, and modalities. This heuristic process allowed me to

better capture precious moments with stigmatized and under-theorized populations. The trans schematic required that I attend and become attuned to the use of disparate sources while also questioning the means of their production. This is especially true for media that captures and represents the figure of the trans woman of color (Vidal-Ortiz).

Media, in its various forms, is a collection of artifacts that provide invaluable information on *the* TWOC. I want to be clear. Media formats are not interchangeable for trans feminine subjects. Instead, commercial, film, and social media present unique and different types of information about TWOC in D.C. and in the nation more broadly. For instance, Ruby Corado utilizes Facebook to post glamorous selfies and status updates that outline her political demands. Ruby has also been featured on D.C.'s local NPR affiliate, WAMU, interviewed as an expert the District's LGBT homeless youth crisis. Similarly, TWOC actresses in films such as *Tangerine* (Magnolia 2015) express their sexualities provocatively on screen for an audience who may be experiencing these identities, images, and stories for the first time. This practice begins with the women of Casa Ruby.

“get to know *who* are the people of Casa Ruby!”— Ruby Corado 2017⁵⁴

Situated within queer and feminist approaches to public, private, and domestic space, I am most interested in the places TWOC call home, the spaces that call them home, and the trans storytellers that give us *life*. Ruby Corado and the CR staff and clients are sources, community resources, and research participants. Over the years, women of CR invited me into their space, lives, and inter-personal conversations. I conducted fieldwork and research at Casa Ruby from fall 2013 until fall 2018. During those five years, I gained insider status in the CR community. CR is a research site, a

social services model,⁵⁵ an office space, shelter, and a community drop-in center. I first began interviewing Ruby Corado in October 2013. Our initial conversations mapped her emigration from El Salvador to Maryland, her life as a “DuPont Circle girl” in the early 1990’s, her transition from “privileged gay boy” to “poor transgender” sex worker, and her ascent into social justice activism, leadership, and motherhood.⁵⁶ During our interviews, Ruby and I have discussed sex work, HIV/AIDS, the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department, quality of life, and chosen family. My fieldwork expanded to include CR clients, staff, and community members. These interviews covered such topics as Casa Ruby, prostitution, addiction, incarceration, violence, social media, gender transition, friendship, activism, and popular culture. My dissertation includes an array of photographic evidence, a broad selection of transcriptions, and field note excerpts.

The following section “introduces” the reader to the Casa Ruby women who took part in my study. I have aimed to protect my research participants with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. I have also omitted specific details about illicit drug use so as not to cause emotional harm or break trust. The majority of the pseudonyms used in this study were chosen by the women themselves. These names were chosen because of their symbolic significance and/or their use in the sex industry, primarily street-based prostitution and/or sex in exchange for basic necessities such as food and housing for that particular day. The subsequent comprehensive roster lists participants in the order in which they appear in the images of the dissertation. Each participant included here gave their informed consent, signed an IRB consent form, and was made aware that they could leave the project at any point. I knew some participants, like Genie and Diana, since my first days of research and others, like Esmeralda and Natalie, for just a few months. The

individual and collective impact of their everyday lives and stories is captured here. It is important to note that while this dissertation is addressed primarily to a scholarly audience, I have worked to make it true enough to the lived experience of my TWOC participants. If the trans women included in this study were to read this dissertation, it is my hope that they easily would recognize themselves and their friends in the work. To this end I have included a large number of individual and group selfies, photos I took during interview and participant observation, and select verbatim transcripts of our candid conversations.

Genie—a Black trans woman in her mid-thirties and my closest CR confidant. Genie is an under-employed, often homeless, drug addicted sex worker, Casa Ruby client and employee. Genie is loud, vivacious and hilarious. She loves candy, smoking cigarettes, and singing to me loudly and out of tune.

Natalie—A young Black trans woman in her mid-twenties. Natalie is housed by relatives and friends. Natalie is a lover of dance, midriff tee-shirts, and her social media. Natalie is a perceptive listener and a devoted friend.

Esmeralda—Friend of Natalie. Esmeralda is also a young Black trans woman in her mid-twenties. Esmeralda is an intermittent binge drug user, sex worker, and she is often homeless—what she calls “sleeping outside.” She has spent significant time in jail due to solicitation of sex work. Esmeralda is overwhelmingly kind, generous, poetic, and has a wonderful singing voice.

Darling—A young Black trans woman in her late teens/early twenties. At the time of my research, Darling was an eager new employee at Casa Ruby. Darling loves the photo-sharing social media platform Instagram, wearing little to no makeup—what she calls

“looking natural,” and hugs. She is most concerned with the rights and daily needs of trans youth of color.

Diana—A Black trans woman in her mid-thirties. Originally from Baltimore, Diana is a locally famous singer-song writer, actor, playwright, and a prolific sub-published mystic. At the time of my research, Diana was a longtime-client-friend and a new employee at CR. Diana is sarcastic and does not trust easily. She is quick to burn bridges and end friendships. Diana loves laughing, self-promotion, singing Jazz, and practicing her spirituality.

Gwen—A white, gender-fluid woman in her mid-sixties. The self-proclaimed “Grandma” of Casa Ruby, Gwen is witty, knowledgeable, and kind. Although I do not include a photo of Gwen in the dissertation, her stories painted a narrative that spans from her time as a sex worker in the District in the 1970’s and 80’s to her work as a nurse to her decades of social service to *all* women in D.C.

All other TWOC included in the dissertation are either celebrities, advocates, and/or public personas in the fight for trans liberation. These women include actresses Laverne Cox, Kiki Kitana Rodriquez, and Mya Taylor, television personality Janet Mock, and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy. Unfortunately, I did not have access to these women during the time of my research. Each will be introduced in the context of a particular section of the dissertation.

It is important to note that Casa Ruby and the CR girls, although kind and forthcoming, were not easily accessible scholarly sources. Although CR’s website indicates that their social services are available Monday through Friday from 10:00am to 6:00pm, there is no discernable pattern to Casa Ruby’s days or hours of operation. These

moments of personal confusion are important because they ran counter to my research expectations. For example, I have arrived at CR on a Friday afternoon excited to engage in a few hours of fieldwork only to be surprised to find that the space is empty. In warmer months, it is equally as common to walk up to CR and find that the TLC is full of boisterous laughter and the sidewalk lined with trans women loudly gossiping, smoking cigarettes, and twerking on the sidewalk to catch the attention of a passersby. The pace and needs that structure their daily lives make it so that they are often difficult to find in person or reach via phone. Given the varying levels of crises TWOC in the District must confront on a daily basis, it is understandable that our conversations could not always be prioritized. But when they could, CR girls have always made time for me. The culture of payday at CR best describes my fieldwork experience.

I have often arrived at CR on payday to join a throng of trans women impatiently waiting for Ruby to arrive with a purse overflowing with checks. Ruby's purse and the communal anticipation it garners have inspired the following questions about workplace culture, roles, and social standing: Who is getting paid? And what are they getting paid to do? The rituals embedded in a CR payday blur distinction between salary, gifts, and motherly benevolence. In the fall of 2013, CR was a fully grassroots community-funded organization with two employees. These employees ran the drop-in center in exchange for a small, although inconsistent, monthly stipend. Over the last few years, CR has earned a non-profit status and expanded its social services, locations, and thus its need for employees and later, a larger space. CR is invested in actively addressing LGBT discrimination in the workplace and increasing TWOC employment in the District, beginning with employment *at Casa Ruby*. Much of Ruby's employment work shuttles

TWOC from the underground to the formal economy. CR currently employs over thirty LGBT individuals. Black and Latinx trans women make up the majority of this workforce.

The women of 2822 Georgia Ave. NW hold a myriad of roles, ranging from receptionist to drop-in center coordinator.⁵⁷ Some employees make a small stipend while others are paid a salary that nears a living wage. Employment opportunities at CR are divided into clerical and social service positions. Administrative positions are most often held by trans Latinas while Black trans women provide client services with an emphasis on crisis management. The social-cultural divide amongst trans women at CR is made more difficult by the inability to translate easily from English to Spanish. A majority of the trans Latinas at CR are El Salvadorian immigrants and monolingual Spanish speakers. Studying the lack of communication, animosity, and growing subdivisions this created within the organization was limited due to my own language limitations. But on payday, all of the girls all came together.

It is important to note that although generous with her time and funds, Ruby Corado does not pay her employees on time. This practice reveals the tensions between Ruby's stated narrative and the day-to-day culture of Casa Ruby. Ruby consistently withholds CR finances while posting luxurious photos of her home and everyday life online. These Facebook posts feature Ruby's Columbia Heights condo and its amenities. These images inspire constant social backlash from her employees. CR girls do not hesitate to complain to each other and to me about Ruby's financial negligence and her posh spending habits. These complaints and catty conversations run counter to Ruby's stated narrative. Ruby sees herself as a tireless social justice advocate, a selfless leader,

and a devoted mother. On payday Ruby hands out paychecks like small but precious bi-weekly Christmas gifts to her community and chosen-family. Despite their anger and annoyance, CR girls always kiss and thank Ruby on payday. After Ruby hands out individual checks and convenes a brief staff meeting, we meet her on the second-floor porch. We sit in broken pink plastic lawn chairs and huddle around Ruby. We laugh at her jokes and listen to her stories. On payday I can catch up with my informants en masse. I would chat with them one on one, take photos, observe, and conduct short interviews.

Many of my most poignant interviews at CR were unscheduled and only possible because of own flexible graduate student schedule. The ever-shifting ground upon which a CR girl stands required that I be able to accommodate constant unanticipated shifts. For example, gaining access to twenty to forty minutes of un/interrupted interview time has, on average, required two to four hours of participant observation. Either I would wait for someone to arrive or she would be needed elsewhere by a client or friend in crisis. Or, she would be more than willing to continue an interview but needed to drop a CR girl off safely at a local check-cashing kiosk. My fieldwork was conducted at CR, but has also been continued offsite at coffee shops, in cars, and at CR related-community events.

From the passenger seat of Gwen's car or the metal railing that lines the front porch, I have enmeshed myself in the company of Black and Latinx trans women. The depth of my participant observation required that I be willing to *catch* butterflies. This use of a metamorphosis metaphor, although quite obvious, is an important transition metaphor for the study of TWOC cultures in D.C. As a researcher and a witness, I learned how to document their non-linear conversations, gender transitions, and filtration

into white-collar professionalization. The women of my community lack institutional resources and experience a diminished ability to meet their most basic needs. Many TWOC in the District face an uncertain future. Their availability to me at any given moment reflects this state of economic, bodily, and psychic precarity. My work on trans precarity is directly informed by the work of white trans scholar, Aren Aizura. In his essay, “Trans feminine value, racialized others and the limits of necropolitics” from the ground breaking anthology *Queer Necropolitics*, Aizura utilizes the lens of the transnational documentary to think through capitalist-necropolitical themes such as institutional neglect, cultural and economic exchange value, risk management (in migration, sex work, and gender transition), dehumanization, disposability, public safety, and “queer death.” According to Aizura, the study of queer death is the “compounding violence of this ungrievability, and the necessity of reasserting the humanity of those who die in the form of discursive recognition.” This brings the author to the following query: “how to mourn properly” and “how to adequately represent the dead.” Aizura asserts that we must also account for “multiple racial otherings” and the cultural politics of transnational migration in our intersectional analysis. While Aizura concludes with a call to “honour the zones of alternative [emergent] trans being,” this particular essay only points to two living fierce and “visible queens [Black trans women],”⁵⁸ Cece McDonald, the star of the documentary *Free Cece* (2016) and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, Stonewall and prison abolitionist legend and star of the documentary, *Major!* (2105). Aizura does not account for the everyday lives of TWOC not depicted in documentary film. *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* accounts for the import of fieldwork to the field of visual

analysis, and the everyday lives of living TWOC leaders and their chosen daughters, sisters, and Aunties.

I care deeply about this group of women, and I can never be sure that they will survive the night. To protect my own emotions, I limited the regularity of my visits and the amount of time that I spent at CR. This structure served to limit my personal and emotional involvement in their everyday lives. I love the women of my community and I care about their wellbeing and our invaluable personal-professional friendships. My insider, queer, trans, Latinx, and activist-scholar perspective allowed me to gather information in the field and on the Internet that other American Studies scholars have not had the opportunity to gather before.

TWOC on social media

In March 2017, *The Advocate* published “America’s LGBT Centers Are Under Attack.” The article included the following tagline: “An attack in Washington, D.C., is the latest in terrifying trend, in which queer community centers have been shot at, smashed and defaced since the presidential election.” “Under Attack” describes the previous day’s horrifying events. On March 12, 2017, a man threw a brick through the window of the CR drop-in center. He proceeded to assault a worker and engage others in violent verbal assault. According to the police report, the suspect screamed, “Y’all tranny motherfuckers think somebody won’t fuck y’all up [?]”⁵⁹

Just moments after the assault, Ruby posted a *live* Facebook video. In this video, Ruby sobs into the camera and cries, “Someone coming to *our* center and destroying *our* property is totally unacceptable. Everyone in our city should be against this! We have so many murders of our people in our city.”⁶⁰ Ruby moves to argue for the *worth* of trans

lives, dignity, and community accountability. Ruby's social media presence was my initial notification to major events surrounding TWOC in Washington, D.C. It was my most immediate source of information on trans news including murder, hospitalization, life accomplishments, and activism.

Trans Space as Cultural Landscape is in conversation with themes of in/stability, or the people, places, and structures that create momentary, but necessary, refuge, safety, shelter, and oases for TWOC. My ability to document the relative safety of chosen kin and trans homes reflects the realities of *the* life and precarity in D.C. for a select group of women. Social media provides a variety of low barrier digital platforms that allow trans women to engage in communication and storytelling. Through the act of "posting," TWOC "share" a self-curated level of raw and emotional intimacy in a semi-public setting. I am a Facebook "friend" to all of the women included in my study. As per my consent forms and individual discussions I have gained access to their statuses, selfies, and public expressions of friendship on two social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram. The CR online presence, as modeled by Ruby, and the subject of chapter five, artfully combines inspiration-aspiration messaging amidst the ongoing violence inflicted upon TWOC both locally and nationally. Social and commercial media bring TWOC, in image, story, and name, into the everyday. Facebook in particular provides TWOC a platform from which to enact moments of self-representation and community preservation. Additionally, Facebook messenger is the most reliable way to contact my informants. A CR girl may not have a stable income or consistent access to a cell phone, but she is *on* social media and well versed in accessing public computers and no-cost Wi-Fi at Casa Ruby and elsewhere. She is a savvy social media user who showcases her

evolving identity formations to flaunt her social presence and to maintain the *cunt*⁶¹ quality of her social media presence. As is common practice, CR girls do a fair amount of *re-posting* instead of posting original content, selfies excluded. These posts link to a vast array of local and national commercial media coverage of TWOC. Additional commercial media outlets such as *National Public Radio*, *The Washington Post* and D.C.'s weekly LGBT paper, *The Washington Blade*, often feature interviews with CR's spokeswoman, Ruby Corado. Commercial media supplies vital secondary source materials and reveals a public desire for a trans archive. Social media allows a CR girl to position herself as the author and subject of her own narrative.

The Newsworthy TWOC

Ruby Corado and the women of Casa Ruby are often featured in local and national commercial media concerned with LGBT advocacy and violence against TWOC. They are featured in headlines and interviewed for their specialized knowledge. The commercial media sources included in my dissertation broaden the reach of my fieldwork. Utilizing and analyzing interview-based coverage in print, online, and radio illuminates local and national investments in a trans personal narrative. A TWOC commercial media archive centers the images and voices of TWOC. For Ruby Corado, interviews are a major part of doing *the work*.

On August 19, 2016 *The Washington Post* published "A transgender force: 'The only thing that kept me alive was doing this work.'" In this multi-media human interest story, Ruby Corado is described through the dual lens of intersectionality and space, "In the realm of the marginalized, she [Ruby] lived on multiple ledges: undocumented, homeless, HIV positive, transgender." Much like the tiers of Gayle Rubin's charmed

circle,⁶² Ruby Corado is a trans-Latina on the critical (l)edge of multi-issue identity-based advocacy.⁶³ I have followed CR's commercial media presence since the fall of 2013. In print, online, television, and radio, Ruby Corado and the CR girls have garnered local and national recognition. These commercial sources illuminate a critical juncture in popular culture, identity formation, and American Studies, more commonly referred to as the "Transgender Tipping Point" (*Time Magazine*).

On May 29, 2014, trans celebrity and activist Laverne Cox, of *Orange Is The New Black*, appeared on the cover of *Time*. In the featured article Ms. Cox declares, "More of us are living visibly and pursuing our dreams visibly."⁶⁴ Cox is a Black trans woman and a hyper-visible public figure. Cox's appearance on the cover of *Time*, a cultural moment that will be discussed throughout the dissertation, signals a national attention to violence against trans people, a growing trans presence in the academy, and TWOC in popular culture. With this attention, Black and Latinx TWOC become "newsworthy." This commercial media transition charts a dual desire for both radical and mainstream trans narratives. Given Cox's visibility and the *Advocate's* "Under Attack," the "newsworthy" TWOC is a figure on the critical ledge of cultural analysis. She knows she is *making* the news and that the time for her story is now. In life and in untimely death, TWOC are demanding coverage, they are making headlines, and they are hitting the red carpet en masse.

TWOC in Film

TWOC actresses are playing leading roles in film and cinema studies. Their characters invoke the everyday-ness of sex work, the assumption of sex work, daily survival, home, and chosen-family. Often playing fictionalized versions of themselves,

TWOC are being cast in trans roles. These new-to-Hollywood roles have begun to allow trans women to engage in daring acts of visibility, representation, and self-representation. An analysis of their work on screen illustrates the ways in which TWOC are claiming artistic space and changing the stakes of cultural production and consumption. This is evident in the first scenes of the film *Tangerine* (2015) (the focus of chapter four).

Christmas music plays as the camera moves in on a brightly lit, etched yellow linoleum surface. As sweet bells of *Toyland* (Doris Day 1964) mystify us, brown hands flutter into view. These hands exchange a small white paper bag whose contents reveal a single donut. As a kind of bon appetite to the viewer, Sin-Dee exclaims, “Merry Christmas Eve, Bitch.” More than a snapshot of a day in *the* life, *Tangerine*,⁶⁵ “Sean Baker’s Sundance [Film Festival] darling about two transgender prostitutes on a Christmas Eve jaunt through Los Angeles”⁶⁶ pushes my dissertation to critically address the unapologetic, almost explosive, presence of TWOC into popular culture. Joining such documentaries as *The T Word* (MTV) and *Free Cece* (Executive director, Laverne Cox), and the award-winning web series *Herstory*, *Tangerine*⁶⁷ showcases the significance of casting TWOC actors *in* trans women’s roles. These trans women-lead productions trouble themes such as friendship, sex work, incarceration, anti-trans violence, homelessness, addiction, and sisterhood. Though fictionalized, the storylines and storytellers at the forefront of *Tangerine*, and the true-to-life women of Casa Ruby chronicle the everyday as a set of interconnected, overlapping, actual, and imaginative narratives with increasing influence on our daily lives.⁶⁸ Sometimes comical and at other times heart wrenching, TWOC narratives are in broader circulation. My dissertation harnesses this heightened level of documented and consumable *realness*. Although I am excited to see how a TWOC

presence grows, I am also curious to see which stories are kept just amongst the *girls*.

The maintenance of TWOC micro-cultures and narratives are both being upheld in public *and* carefully kept private. Moving always from an over-emphasis on TWOC in television, my work in cinema and Performance Studies and Transgender Studies will account for independent cutting-edge expressions.

Out of the archives and into the drop in center

Claiming a space for ethnography in American (Transgender) Studies

In “(De)Subjugated Knowledges,” the introduction to the first edition of *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006), world-renowned foundational scholar, historian, public speaker, and documentary film maker Susan Stryker chronicles the historical-personal impact of Transgender Studies at the turn of the 21st century. In her brief history of trans identity and its study, Stryker situates herself and the project of Transgender Studies as a nascent field, “What began with the efforts of emerging and marginally situated scholars and activists such as ourselves to be taken seriously on our own terms, and not pathologized and dismissed, has helped foster a sea-change in the academic study of gender, sex, sexuality, identity, desire, and embodiment.” In the late 20th and early 21st century, scholars began to mine the archives in search of evidence that would illuminate moments of gendered disruption, denaturalization, and re-articulation of the relationship between sex, gender, biology and gender identity, sociality, and the expected/accepted performance of normatively gendered personhood.⁶⁹ By challenging “gendered personhood” trans scholars and activists began to chip away at *gender* as stable epistemological framework.⁷⁰ Following Michel Foucault’s work on subjugated

knowledges (scholarly knowledge and everyday knowledge,) Stryker claims a space for (de)subjugated knowledges in transgender studies, or “desubjugating previously marginalized forms of knowledge about gendered subjectivity and sexed embodiment” as critical intervention in interdisciplinary study and queer theories.⁷¹ Stryker, like many Transgender Studies scholars, is a historian by training. As is evidenced by my personal experience with Transgender Studies (at major academic conferences and select scholarship) and the table of contents for the *Transgender Studies Reader 1*, a pre-occupation with scientific inquiry and an over-emphasis on historical methods leaves little room for those of us who work in the field with living populations. An emergent generation of queer and trans Transgender Studies scholars, including myself, are taking a leap out of the archives to document the contemporary transgender subject. The work of scholars such as Moya Bailey, David Valentine, and Marlon M. Bailey enables my own work to consider the everyday impact of non-white trans populations in order to document TWOC struggling and thriving the District and a new phase in Transgender Studies, Cultural Landscape Studies, and Popular Culture Studies.

My work in cultural landscapes is invested in queer and trans geographies and the scholarly evidence these practices unearth. In José Muñoz’s final text, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, he asks after the potential of “queer evidence,” or the lasting effects of queer performance and future directions in queer theory. For Muñoz “queer evidence” is that which has “been queered in relation to the laws of what counts as proof.”⁷² Queer evidence enables us to invest in our communities and arrive at our utopian desires. But, can desire, as Muñoz insists, guide us through the landscape of our queer and trans “communal becoming?” Does queerness also long for *our* survival and

arrival? The process of transitioning, or *becoming* queer or trans, confronts us with the immediate “limits of the here and now.” This immediacy consists of the objects, people, places, histories, and institutions that have blocked our way. But when we account for the “transformative [impact of the] then and there,” can transsexuality, like queerness, ease our safe passage? I want my communities to feel and actually be safe. Like queer and queering evidence, I argue for the utility of trans evidence—storytelling, material culture, and spatial practice that illuminate the everyday-ness of gender transition. Rather than a final place of arrival, i.e. male to female, gender transition for the women of Casa Ruby is the everyday decision to embody femininity and sisterhood. This can be found in empty ketchup packets, shared makeup, laughter, and group selfies. Trans evidence might not hold the answers, but she can be our guide. I am a dedicated student of that which is “not yet here.”⁷³ For Muñoz, like Halberstam and Stryker, queerness is the horizon, a tantalizing and ever-receding focal point just beyond our reach.⁷⁴ Building upon Muñoz’s legacy, *trans* evidence, like queerness, illuminates the interrelationships found in the trans cultural landscape.

Getting cunt! Centering the voices of transgender women of color

Trans Space as Cultural Landscape is an exploratory study of the cultures of everyday life in America for TWOC. *Trans Space* investigates contemporary transgender visibility, representation, and self-representation at the local and national level. The dissertation provides an in-depth ethnographic study of Casa Ruby and the geography of their everyday. I contextualize the relationships between ethnography, popular culture, and cultural landscapes in the ever-expanding field of American Studies. By centering the

study of trans space and spatial practice, I capture the “messiness” of specific TWOC cultures and identities as both complex and *livable* categories. I believe that theory can get us closer to the lives we are interested in, if, as we say, we are invested in *centering* the margins. Traveling amongst the margins provides us with important and exciting spatial metaphors for the interdisciplinary scholar. This investigation reveals the unexpected and extraordinary interrelationships of TWOC identity formations, space, and place within and outside of 2822 Georgia Avenue NW.

Further, TWOC are vastly under-theorized even as their presence in the American imagination is rapidly expanding. An in-depth ethnographic study of 2822 Georgia Ave NW. requires the creation and application of the *trans* cultural landscape and analysis fieldwork model. This model and my analysis are my original contributions to the field of American Studies. The model provided me with a *flexible* structure and a container to explore with the women of my immediate community. The flexibility provided by a heuristic framework allowed the model to act as self-guide, an analytic frame, and a queer orientation (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*). It is important to note that this frame did not appear to interfere with the phenomena and population under investigation. The trans model allowed me to turn towards the work of TWOC without clamping down on my personal and professional expectations of trans people in the field. The model places the trans researcher above and within her theoretical framework. This framework is intended to hold its shape and remain porous. Rather than gaining a “bird’s eye view,” this vantage point allows the *trans* cultural landscape to unfold in the field. The model allowed me to hover alongside my research population. The trans model does not allow the researcher to control the space or impose boundaries within the space. In other words,

the trans researcher is a part *of* the space that she is studying. As a transgender researcher and a queer person of color, I have had the unique opportunity to utilize my in-betweenness and study its impact in the field.

The women of CR provocatively upset and defy research expectations and the limitations of previously developed research models. Beginning with Jeremy Korr, interest in modules inspired my project to account TWOC self-representation and their perception of “research.” Through the work of my dissertation, I expand and include myself within the genealogy of intersectional feminist thought. I am eager to see and show my readers how TWOC in the Distract shift the landscape and the stakes of intersectionality. In the concluding section to the dissertation, I provide a final example from my fieldwork at Casa Ruby. This example serves to illustrate how my dissertation endeavors to meet and advance the aims of the field.

Intersectionality, Spatiality, and Transsexuality in American Studies

When considering categories of analysis made canonical by such texts as “A Black Feminist Statement” (The Combahee River Collective) and *This Bridge Called My Back* (Gloria Anzaldúa and Cheri Moraga, Ed.), and such individuals as Kimberle Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Cathy Cohen, Aimee Cox, and Patrick Grzanka, the scholarship on intersectionality has not yet accounted for the importance of spatial contexts. Additionally, third world women of color feminist thinkers of the late 20th century and their contemporaries have, for decades, underserved and neglected TWOC communities, voices, and experiences. *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* centralizes

space as *the* category of analysis for our work with intersectionality, TWOC, and urbanity.

The women of Casa Ruby have created a home within a precarious and nervous landscape (D. Byrne). The following excerpt utilizes exaggerated metaphors in order to reimagine 2822 Georgia Ave. NW *as* a place and a woman in transition. On April 4, 2015, I sat down to interview two CR girls, Esmeralda and Natalie. We sat in office chairs in the second floor and talked about the importance of “getting life” and their dreams for the basement drop-in center. As we spoke, CR girls would constantly walk in and out of the space and Esmeralda and Natalie seemed excited to have an audience. That day I asked, “If you were to explain *this* space [the drop-in center] to somebody how might you describe it?”⁷⁵ Esmeralda and Natalie answered this question in conversation with one another. They discussed the ways they see and have re-imagined the basement of Casa Ruby, lovingly referred to the TLC, or the Trans Life Center. The excerpt below places *space* at the center of their conversation about CR and TWOC:

Esmeralda: And now I guess, now the Trans Life Center is on hormones actually! She’s getting *cunt*, honey!

Anthony: Who?! (surprised)

Esmeralda: The Trans Life Center is on hormones honey, she’s getting *cunt*! She’s getting fabulous!

(All cackle).

Natalie: She’s moaning fiercely!

Esmeralda: She’s moaning fiercely, honey! She’s got knots [breasts] honey...she can shake her breasts! You know! She can stroll the streets like...*cunt*!

(All laugh)

Esmeralda: So, it’s [the TLC] really coming...it’s evolving into something really wonderful!

Natalie: She is moaning fiercely!

Esmeralda: Yes! So, it’s like...yeah, and that’s giving the girls *life*! You know...that you can just reflect upon all that’s going on.

In this exchange, 2822 Georgia Ave. NW not only *houses* trans women, she *is* a trans woman. Casa Ruby is a fierce streetwalker and a confident prostitute. She has turned her dreams into a fierce reality. She is fiercely *working* the stroll and exuding a life-giving force to her sisters. She moans into the night and across the streets. She is the built environment and she spreads possibility of *positivity* to her TWOC community. She is an imaginative dreamscape, a basement, a mother, and a sister. She provides the tender love and care that allows the TLC to “[e]volve into something really wonderful”⁷⁶ in the face of extreme violence and neglect. CR is an unapologetic TWOC, a hustle, and an oasis for TWOC in the District. She stomps, she liberates, she shakes her knots, and she *tells* herself into existence. She is a *cunty* habitus and she is taking us with her.

At the 2017 Women’s March on Washington, Janet Mock, a TWOC, spokesperson, talk-show host, and activist gave a keynote address. She focused on the importance of transgender liberation and TWOC visibility. She began her speech with a call to collective liberation:

So, we are here. We are here not merely to gather but to move, right? And our movements, our movements require us to do more than just show up and say the right words. It requires us to break out of our comfort zones and be confrontational. It requires us to defend one another when it is difficult and dangerous. It requires us to truly see ourselves and one another.⁷⁷

TWOC are on the move. Mock’s speech calls for a collective, inclusive, and intersectional feminist liberation. Her speech invokes Crenshaw’s original street-based analogy.

In Kimberle Crenshaw’s groundbreaking essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” she asks her reader to “[c]onsider an analogy to traffic in an intersection.”⁷⁸ Crenshaw’s spatial analogy is continually relevant. The intersections of

race, class, gender, sexuality, labor, and activism create a meeting place and a place for TWOC to take up space. Following Esmeralda, Natalie, and Janet, TWOC are taking it to Georgia Ave. and the streets that surround the White House. They are crowding the intersections, moaning fiercely, and “evolving into something really wonderful.”⁷⁹ *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* maps these moves, the creation of trans spaces and narratives, the centrality of intersectionality for TWOC in the District and on the national state, and the relevant nature of these topics to future turns in American Studies.

Chapter 2: A literature review

June 2017 marked Casa Ruby's fifth anniversary. During the *gay* month of June,⁸⁰ Casa Ruby (CR)⁸¹ released a series of short promotional videos. Each two-minute video installation premiered on the organization's Facebook page.⁸² This video series invoked a dynamic trans-relationship to social media, social services, fundraising, national LGBT politics, and the socio-cultural economic climate for transgender women of color in the District of Columbia. The first video in the series featured CR's Founder and Executive Director, Ruby Corado. In this video, Ruby invited the viewer "get to know *who* are the people of Casa Ruby" through their role within the organization. In the initial shots, we watch Ruby lovingly brush foundation onto her cheeks and across the bridge of her nose. Through her voiceover and direct engagement with the camera, Ruby is both narrator and protagonist as she invokes the everyday impact of homelessness, employment, and wellbeing on and for her client-community.⁸³ Her narrative style and visual cues are deliberate, yet deceptively simple. She is clear, commanding, and well-rehearsed. She invites us into her story and then into Casa Ruby.



Figure 5. Genie greets her fans. June 17, 2016

As we near Casa Ruby, a bright pink vinyl banner stretches the length of the second-floor porch railing. Included here as Figure 5, I took this photo of Genie on June 17, 2016.

Like a queen on a pride parade float, Figure 5 features Genie poised above a giant, glittering red high heel (much like Dorothy's ruby red slipper) as she floats above and waves to her adoring fans: me and folks passing by on foot or waiting at the bus stop directly in front of Casa Ruby. This particular banner is lined in vivid multi-colored stripes. Its top rim invokes the colors of the trans pride flag—blue, pink, and white—while the classic libratory gay rainbow lines the bottom, this time in reverse color order. The phrase at its center reads, “Everyone Is Welcome/ Tod@s son Bienvenid@s.”⁸⁴

Equal parts banner, flag, welcome mat, welcome home, and warm embrace “Bienvenid@s” marks 2822 Georgia Ave. NW as an everyday place for queer people, trans sociality, and identity in transition. “Bienvenid@s” hangs in the entryway and serves as an entry point for the larger concerns of *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape*. “Bienvenid@s” is our invitation into the cultures of everyday life for TWOC in America.

D.C. is a unique glo-cal setting from which to discuss the everydayness of identity exploration, community, family, and nation. “Bienvenid@s” marks CR as a bilingual organization. It identifies 2822 Georgia Ave. NW as a place for queer and trans people. Rather than being greeted by an individual queer person or a throng of trans women, the vinyl banner, and the building itself, calls out to you. “Bienvenid@s” is a symbol of *pride*. At CR, pride is an idealized and foundational feeling. It is the utopic desire to belong to people, to place, and to a nation in the absence of internalized shame and stigma. Like the banners that line a LGBT pride parade, bumper stickers that politicize a

vehicle and identify its driver, Figure 5 encourages the viewer to speak their truth, take it to the streets, be *out*, and come inside.

*“Hello, it’s another beautiful day at Casa Ruby. How may I help you?”*⁸⁵

On September 11, 2013, the prolific theorist, queer philosopher, and self-proclaimed feminist killjoy, Sarah Ahmed posted a blog post entitled “Making Feminist Points” to her blog “feministkilljoys—killing joy as a world making project.” In this particular post, Ahmed is concerned with the politics of scholarly citation as a critical and ongoing feminist relational practice. For Ahmed, the feminist killjoy is a figure who inhabits particular feminist tendencies and political leanings, an embodied practice of producing bodies of disciplinary knowledge differently. Deciding to not ground scholarly legitimacy through the citation of foundational scholarship written by canonical white cisgender/heterosexual male thinkers, the framework shifts from whiteness in order to assert the everyday work of analytic categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. Ahmed concludes, “We need feminist and anti-racist critique because we need to understand how it is that the world takes shape by restricting the forms in which we gather. We need this now; the time for this is now. We need this critique now, if we are to learn how not to reproduce what we inherit.”⁸⁶ Taking up Ahmed’s call to *gather* information differently, the following non-traditional literature review is not organized by discipline or field of study. In order to better serve the non-linear stories, spectacular though transient and precarious lives of my research population, I have chosen to create and apply what I am calling a *trans* reading schematic. The willingness to read across genres, disciplines, and modalities rather than following the intellectual history of an individual discipline allowed me to create a research library of interdisciplinary thinkers

whose work could create cross-discipline and inter-textual conversations. These *transdisciplinary* scholars and activist scholars enable my work to harness the theories, methodologies, and methods that would serve to capture precious moments with stigmatized and under-theorized populations. In other words, the literature included here does not simply tell the story of American Studies and the field's timely investments in Transgender Studies, but rather the review pivots around the scholarship of queer and trans and women of color scholars who directly address the theoretical and material conditions of race and gender formations and transitions in everyday life. The literature included here directly informed my fieldwork, research, and writing processes. My work begins with the everyday lives of TWOC; I then look to the literature to better serve the representational needs of the women themselves. While I do include canonical (white and cisgender) scholars, they have not been placed at the center of my interdisciplinary reading and research practice, central topics, themes, and main questions. Images, like Figure 5, have directly influenced the development of the dissertation's guiding inquiry: We use theory to get closer to the lives we are interested in, if, as we say, we are invested in *centering* the margins. Space stages the expansive possibilities of gender transition. Space *also* transitions to hold these changes, these daily fluctuations in gender and presentation. In other words, what makes a space *trans*? In extending gender transition narratives to functions that do not apply to space, how do we know a *trans* space when we see it? And what do these spatial practices tell us about an American cultural investment in identity and its *tipping points*?⁸⁷ Ethnographic and popular culture research and scholarship facilitate the theoretical development and the evolution of these questions

in my work to reveal the interrelationships of identity formation, space, place, and the everyday for TWOC in our nation's capital.

I utilize aspects of the literature in the fields of American Studies, Cultural Landscapes, feminist and queer theory, Sex Work Studies, and the theoretical mapping these fields provide in order to interrogate the creation of *trans* space as cultural landscape. The literature that I review here exhibits the centrality of narrative, visual, and spatial analysis to the study of transformative subjects, themes, and topics in American Studies. From within a *trans* places in a *trans* time, the cultures of everyday life unravel in order to reveal the intricacy of survival and resilience for TWOC in our nation's capital. These daily negotiations allow the women of CR to tap into the infectious inspiration, aspiration, and collective desire to be alive, thrive, uplift, and create change. "That gives me life!" is the phrase that most accurately captures the affective energy and spirit that surrounds the daily lives of the women in my study. This call to life is exclaimed loudly and often. Situated within queer and feminist approaches to public, private, and domestic space, I am most interested in the places TWOC call home, the spaces that call them home, and the trans storytellers that give us *life* amongst precarity. The following scholars urge us to *queer* our disciplines and teach us how to read differently.

Though trans subjects do appear within the literature I have collected and review, the voices of TWOC are largely absent. Elaborating on previous interpretations of the cultures of everyday life grounds my work within a previous context of American Studies scholarship. In turn, this process allowed me to explore the interrelationships of identity formation, space, place, and the everyday for a previously under-theorized population.

The literature reviewed here is divided into the following three sections: theoretical grounding, methodology, and methods. The later section will focus largely on the methods of spatial analysis. Though I have pulled these categories apart for heuristic reasons, I do recognize their overlap and interplay in various fields of study. Each section will be guided by select examples from my fieldwork at 2822 Georgia Ave. NW and Casa Ruby-related commercial and social media coverage. The division of the literature included here is intended to provide a porous structure for the complexity of my topic, population, and analysis.

Theoretical grounding

2822 Georgia Ave. NW, “Bienvenid@s,” Georgia Avenue, the sidewalks and bus stops that surround CR, the capital city beyond serve as a vital threshold for TWOC specific social services, activism, and scholarship in American Studies. Their stories informed, inspired, and guided my scholarship and my everyday life as a transgender Latinx in the District. As a site of transition, transgression, and pride, “Bienvenid@s” is a portal, an open invitation, and an ongoing reason to enter and return to CR. The literature offered here was central to the development and application of a trans reading schematic. This practice required that I, the user-creator, be inspired to simultaneously read across genres, disciplines, and modalities. Further, an engaged fieldwork process better allowed me to capture precious moments with a stigmatized, under-theorized, and underserved population. A trans reading schematic is heuristic. It requires that I attend to disparate sources while also questioning the means of their production.

The theoretical grounding for *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* is directly informed by the scholarship on phenomenology, ethnography, deviant sexuality, third world women of color, feminist thought, intersectionality, and cultural landscapes. In this first section I discuss literature that has broadened the scope of scholarship, activism, and coalition in the field of American Studies. I place myself in direct conversation with that genealogy of radical thinkers. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, the editors of *Global Sex Workers, Resistance, and Redefinition*, define *coalition* as the collective effort to redesign the stakes of *Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*. The inclusion of TWOC in American Studies scholarship furthers our engagement in and dedication to coalition as interdisciplinary affinity and a feminist practice.

Coalition—identity, space, and the everyday

On December 8, 2015, I met with Diana, an actress, singer-song writer, self-published author, activist, healer, DMV native, and, at the time, the newest Casa Ruby staff member. The bulk of our conversation that day focused on trans women's friendships in the District. That evening, Diana described the importance of sharing space for TWOC. Toward the end of our conversation, I asked Diana for her personal definition of friendship. I wanted to better understand her dedication to the emotional bonds she had formed with other Black and Latinx trans women in the area. For Diana, friendship is a loving, spatial practice, a practice of symbiotic co-existence. This is illustrated in the following exclamation: "I cannot exist in space without you. You could not exist in space without me. And us existing in space together [laughs]...shifts the atmosphere!" Diana continued, "Existing in love-space with one another can be very

difficult because we are told it shouldn't exist.” According to Diana, love-space allows TWOC to queer, *trans*, create, and transcend space. And so *transing* space⁸⁸ with TWOC extends my scholarly commitment to a *transfeminist* coalition.

Trans Space as Cultural Landscape is indebted to the scholars who have worked tirelessly to redefine coalition as a collaborative practice of anthology. The editors, contributors to, and generations of readers who continue to uphold Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua's *This Bridge Called My Back—Writings by Radical Women of Color* as the living embodiment and dream of cross-racial contact and as a guide to Black and Brown intersectional feminist thought. *This Bridge* is an irreplaceable text in the genealogy of third world women of color feminisms created during the late 20th century. It begins, “We are learning to depend more and more on our own sources for survival, learning not to let the weight of this burden, the bridge, break our backs.”⁸⁹ *This Bridge* lays the groundwork for a massive diasporic homecoming. Like Figure 5, *this* bridge is platform and road sign that announces our arrival and our return to collective thinking. The contributors to *This Bridge* uproot a coming-of-age landscape in order to re/member women of color *as* anthology and anthology *as* a critical identity formation across race and ethnicity. Dismissing the centrality of the single author, *This Bridge* continues to provide us with a revolutionary set of creative tools. Although TWOC are oddly absent from its pages, *This Bridge* continues to give life to future readers and inspires my commitment to centering *all* radical women of color.

In order to *trans* our passage across *this* bridge, Casa Ruby, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which TWOC are “learning to depend more and more on [their] sources for survival, learning not to let the weight of this burden, the bridge, break [their]

backs.”⁹⁰ Almost twenty years after the publication of *This Bridge*, Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema published the unduplicated anthology, *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*. Clearly inspired by the Anzaldúa and Moraga leadership, Kempadoo and Doezema utilized anthology as a platform for feminist coalition and sex work advocacy. Like *This Bridge*, the contributors to *Global Sex Workers* center transnational perspectives and the voices and experiences of third world people of color. As a project, *Global Sex Workers* differs from *This Bridge* in that it centers folks in the sex trades and implicitly includes the international experiences of TWOC.

Global Sex Workers is an anthology that aimed to shift the “paradigms of the erotic” in feminist thought. Its contributors hoped to move away from stagnant notions of patriarchal victimhood and towards the politics of cross-movement solidarity.⁹¹ Most importantly, *Global Sex Workers*, unlike similar texts in the late 20th century, argued that an intersectional analysis must include the study of sex and labor. This text parts from other third world women of color edited volumes, most notably *This Bridge Called My Back*, because of its insistence on sex work as a pivotal category of intersectional analysis. *Global Sex Workers* is a unique anthology whose assertions, to my knowledge, have not been taken up by contemporary Americanists who work at the intersections of gender, sexuality, and labor. Similarly, the TWOC in my study occupy unique social categories. As social service providers, clients, and current and former sex workers, the women of CR enable my work to *queer* and *trans* previous interpretations of the cultures of everyday life in the American city. My scholarship is a contemporary contribution to both of these anthologies and the continual fight for *representation*, rights, resistance, and redefinition.

Coalition is my collaborative research orientation. In “The Orient and Other Others,” the third chapter of Sarah Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed extends her analysis of people, places, and objects to include the study of the raced body. She argues that words create a centrifugal pull. This inward force allows words to “ground the work we do.” Once gathered, words have the power to “point [us] toward the future and toward a world we have yet to inhabit.”⁹² For Ahmed, this intimate re-orientation to race, bodies, and geography is the work of queerness. To inhabit queerness is to “extend what we can reach.”⁹³ But what would it mean to inhabit transgender? When we consider the linguistic landscape of “transgender,” a trans phenomenology could hold us accountable to the complexities of *other* orientations. Trans points of departure allow us entry into conversations on violence of social stigma, the beauty and challenges for transitioning bodies, social services, and temporary oases.

In “Institutional Negotiation: Sex Workers and the Process of Resistance Maintenance” the first chapter of *Sex Work Politics. From Protest to Service Provision*, Samantha Majic invites the reader into the field of Sex Work Studies and social service provision in San Francisco in order to explore the longevity of non-profit funded oppositional politics and “resistance maintenance,” a negotiation practice that aims to combat large-scale institutional co-optation of organizational goals, visions, and practices.⁹⁴ Majic posits non-profit organizations borne out of social movements work to maintain political presence despite a growing dependence on government funding for community-lead public health social services.⁹⁵ Majic’s work on resistance maintenance is particular pertinent to my work at Casa Ruby. As the funding structure of the organization shifted from its grass roots to a mix of government funding and large private

donations, Ruby Corado and the staff of Casa Ruby had to become conversant in the language and culture of the national/global LGBT non-profit. Ruby extends the linguistic-material-monetary reach of resistance maintenance. Casa Ruby is a symbolic site-specific location for political work. By incorporating the language of home, chosen family, and belonging, Casa/Ruby Corado announces to her funders that though this is a place for nationally funded public health, it is our home.

Home is a place that grounds the work of the dissertation. In Gaston Bachelard's "Poetics of Space," themes such as shelter, dream, and memory lead us home. For Bachelard, home is *the* "domain of intimacy." Home is a place whose poetics allows its inhabitants to write and read a house and its rooms. In this dreamscape turned reality, "home" is the author, narrator, actor, inhabitant, and structure of her own narratives.⁹⁶ Home is a cumulative place.

In his seminal essay "Structures and the Habitus," Pierre Bourdieu describes habitus as the culmination of ideological, historical, and discursive networks. These networks produce and house the individual and her collective experiences.⁹⁷ Coalition, like habitus, accounts for spatial distinctions, fluid transitions, and non-linear identity transformations. CR is a trans orientation device: a street address, a drop-in center, a shelter, a family, a home, a hub for community and coalition, and a research site that pushes the American Studies scholar to think through the intimacy found in the cultural landscape of trans people.

As a central actor in late 20th century feminist thought, Gayle Rubin guides my efforts to re-map the study of "otherness" and belonging. In Rubin's infamous, "Thinking Sex—Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," sexuality is an identity

category with a set of social-material conditions. These conditions have their “own internal politics, inequities, and modes of oppression.”⁹⁸ Central to this essay is Rubin’s work on “the sexual value system.” This system considers the measurement and enforcement of “erotic stigma [as] the last socially respectable form of prejudice.”⁹⁹ The sexual value system reorients a feminist analysis of power away from gender inequity and towards a focus on sexuality and sexual expression. When included in this power differential, the women of CR illuminate the need to *think* stigma, space, and transsexuality. Broadening Rubin’s categories of analysis would require that the charmed circle be redrawn. This type of collaborative effort would center everyday moments of coalition that utilize TWOC experiences to reflect the need for real life application. Nevertheless, “Thinking Sex” is a pivotal feminist text that challenges contemporary scholars to push the limits and demarcations of radical trans-feminist solidarity and our investments in identity-politics in the 21st century.¹⁰⁰

Methodology

In “Nightmares of the Heteronormative: Go Tell It on the Mountain versus An American Dilemma,” the third chapter of *Aberrations in Black—Toward A Queer of Color Critique*, Roderick Ferguson centers the Black queer landscape of the James Baldwin novel up against Sociological methods and methodologies of the mid 20th century. He utilizes themes such as discourse, shame, stigma, and insurgence to read and think through “the foundational relationships that link canonical sociology to African American culture” and US racial formations.¹⁰¹ Ferguson utilizes Baldwin’s young protagonist to re-imagine queer Black youth and the racist, sexist, classist discourse of ir/rationality and appropriate-ness of public and private space. He points out, “Moreover, to associate

sexuality with the irrational means that all other constructions of irrationality will inevitably evoke the sexual.”¹⁰² Sociology’s desire to take control of the erotic body and the Black family became the index of difference under liberal capitalism.¹⁰³ From this place of un/belonging, we find *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, a Black queer bildungsroman, queer religiosity, queer Black desire, and the “salvation” offered in “new subjectivities and social relations [that] arise from non-heteronormative spaces.”¹⁰⁴

“Nightmares of the Heteronormative” is a poignant example of critical queer reading praxis. Though not engaged in literary criticism or grounded in the field of sociology, *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* is in awe of the methodological brilliance of Roderick Ferguson’s work *towards* a queer of color critique. Extending Ferguson, queer and trans of color scholars and individual trans women included in the dissertation work *towards* a trans of color critique, a heuristic reading, writing, and research practice that utilizes ethnographic fieldwork to excavate and illuminate the figure of the trans woman of color (Vidal-Ortiz), a woman that exists in public discourse and in the personal aspirational dreams of gender transition in the District. Through themes such as deviance, creativity, and material culture, the following section explores scholars and research participants whose insights allow me to center trans subjects.

The contents of Genie’s “prostitution bag,” April 20, 2016

*Cover Girl lipstick in “Succulent Cherry,” Juicy Couture perfume, L’Oréal lip gloss in “Posey.” My Bella perfume oil, one cigarette, track glue, edge control, Iman press powder, Cover Girl “plumpify” mascara, Revlon “all in one” mascara, a purple lighter, purple lipstick, a purple phone charger, a Magic Wand makeup brush, three condoms (one per person/date), and handful of Reese’s peanut butter cups.*¹⁰⁵

On April 20, 2016, I spent most of the day at Casa Ruby chatting with Genie, a drug addicted marginally housed Black transgender woman from Washington, D.C. Throughout my tenure at CR, Genie and Ruby Corado were my most consistent interviewees. Unless Genie was malnourished, agitated, distracted, actively high, or detoxing, she was generous and forthcoming during our interviews and informal conversations. Genie is most relaxed during our conversations when we sat on or near the CR front stoop where she could intermittently chain-smoke and eat Peanut Chews, her favorite individually wrapped chocolate candy.¹⁰⁶ Genie enjoyed being interviewed. When interrupted, Genie would loudly remind everyone around her that *she* was in the middle of an interview (even if and when this was not the case). Genie knew that I was documenting our conversations and she noticed when I was writing field notes. On that Friday afternoon, Genie asked if I wanted to see what was in her “prostitution bag.” But before I could answer, she haphazardly dumped the contents of her well-worn black canvas tote bag onto the sticky grey surface of a plastic fold out table in the Trans Life Center. As the curator of her own collection of daily necessities, Genie presented each item in turn. She then waited for me to accurately note and “officially” document each object on my iPad before returning it to her purse. Like any quality first aid kit, Genie’s bag contained all of the items that a working girl might need throughout her daily hustle. What most struck me about Genie’s bag was just how unorganized it was. And once unloaded, how its heavily used contents cluttered the already untidy drop in center. Genie’s purse and its contents—a unique pile of personal necessities and half-melted chocolates—pushed me to consider the importance of *messiness* to the study of culture and trans spatial practices.

As an exploration of lives lived in liminal spaces, the dissertation captures the “messiness” of culture and identity as both complex and *livable* categories. Central to this process is a critical approach to *dichotomy*, or the constant navigation of gendered and racialized violence, respectability, labor, desire, health, and fleeting, but vital, moments of self-acceptance, and resistance to poverty and incarceration. Though these categories and identities are not neat, they are fraught. Genie curates her mess-on-the-go and carries its contents transition throughout the day. From her day job at CR, her cot in the second-floor shelter space, and her dates with various paying boyfriends, the prostitution bag contains the detritus of a culture and a life worth paying attention to. Much like Figure 5, Genie’s purse is an invitation to enter Casa Ruby.

Mess, Culture, Archives, & Transitioning Populations

In “The ‘Stuff’ of Archives—Mess, Migration, and Queer Lives,” Martin Manalansan offers an analysis of storage practices, makeshift living arrangements, and affective interventions to queer archival practice. Following the feminist assertion that the archive be a quotidian dwelling space for minority subjects,¹⁰⁷ Manalansan argues for the import of object arrangement, communal living, and the everyday lives of undocumented queer immigrant populations. He posits that these ethnographic “disarrangements”¹⁰⁸ present the scholar with a hoard of treasured objects, trash, foodstuffs, people, papers, memories, dreams, and living quarters. Much like his work in *Global Divas—Filipino gay men in the diaspora* (2003), Manalansan presents an over-investment in material culture as *the* site of queer affect and ethnographic storytelling. This focus prevents him from fully realizing a scalar approach to the study of queer geographies, diasporas, and queer spatial practices. Chipped plates, altars, and plastic storage bins mesmerize

Manalansan while he all but ignores the quotidian rooms, over-sized plastic containers, buildings, neighborhoods, and cities these items are stored in and contained by.

Manalansan is overwhelmed by the sheer chaos and filth of the apartment at the center of his study. He exclaims, “With the lack of spatial symmetry and functional clarity, the home seemed to reek of confusion and the smell of intense human intimacy.” Disorder and anxiety cause the researcher to consider mess in the archives.¹⁰⁹ Messiness forces unexpected encounters in the field. It reorients our work to *queer* ethnography. It confronts our desire to create coherent narratives, center our own reactions, and create legible queer and trans subjects for our readers and students. Mess is subjective. Much like treasured objects tucked away in plastic bins, intimacy, domesticity, and nostalgia create a constant state of impermanence and disposability for queer immigrants. For Manalansan, mess, like the queers who curate and inhabit it, creates impossible subjects who “live with, against, and despite mess.”¹¹⁰

Mess is productive. Extending Manalansan’s work in queer affect, aesthetics, and ethnography, I’d like to post the following line of inquiry: mess is our guide and messiness is the primary methodology to expanding the methods of visual and cultural analysis. Mess is a methodological orientation that necessarily centers queer theory and transgender subjects in space and place. Much like the six-person household at the center of Manalansan’s essay, Genie’s prostitution purse cannot be contained. CR is messy, actually filthy, challenging, and very beautiful. The trash overflows from small bins in the drop-in center. The smell of decomposing fried food, pizza, and caked ketchup hangs heavily in the air. Clothing donations slump against mismatched high heels and tangled mass of smart phone chargers. As Manalansan notes, mess is pungent, anxiety producing,

and possibly disgusting, but not to the people who occupy its center. Encountering and mapping queerness and American Studies requires the use of all of our senses. Mess is but one dichotomy that the women of CR negotiate every day. Genie's purse is a strategic mess. She dumps out and replaces each of its items in heavy rotation. I am interested in the ways in which her mess is stigmatized, spatialized, racialized, gendered, and sexualized. In *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape*, mess, culture, queerness, and transition are considered together. Through these terms are not synonymous, they interlock in unexpected ways. I am interested in capturing mess as a livable identity category and as a place that many TWOC call home. As a transgender researcher, I aim to carefully sift through the mess.

In "Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory," Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that research concerning the indigenous experience requires the production of decolonizing methodologies. In order to decolonize methodological practice, Smith critiques "the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values which inform research practices."¹¹¹ Much like Kempadoo and Doezema, Smith argues that decolonizing methodology requires the "rewriting and rerighting our position in history."¹¹² A methodological decolonization centers indigeneity as a set of concerns, values, and desires for world making.¹¹³ Decolonization is a praxis that requires self-awareness and community involvement.

Cathy Cohen's essay "Deviance as Resistance—A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics" broadens the work she began in her seminal essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens." In "Deviance as Resistance," Cohen argues that the repetitive and cumulative nature of deviant acts and collective identities allows scholars

to approach themes of agency and subjectivity differently. Cohen's interdisciplinary interventions into African American Studies, Black Studies, and queer theory continue to broaden feminist analysis and social justice formations. Cohen pulls at the interlocking seams of deviance and resistance. For Cohen, deviance is social-spatial location. It is *where* you will find "those who stand on the (out)side of state-sanctioned, normalized, White, middle-upper-class, male heterosexuality."¹¹⁴ Extending Cohen, deviance can also be a mode of visual analysis. Genie's prostitution purse was an encounter with deviance. Not only were its contents covered in chocolate, its items seemed to melt into the soft fabric that surrounded them. I'd like to turn briefly to the three condoms in Genie's purse. The condoms, though nestled against a small collection of beauty products, called attention to *working* nature of the purse. Their gold wrapping and magnum size hinted at their intended use and popularity amongst local trans sex workers, client safety, personal risk, health, and current work availability. The purse allowed Genie to navigate her day with a sense of preparedness. Deviance is a spatial "practice, discourse, and politics."¹¹⁵ Deviance is messy, and it allows my work to necessarily complicate our attention to identity categories, research orientations, and cultural landscape formations.

In the face of late-capitalism, renowned science fiction, speculative fiction writer, and organic intellectual Samuel R. Delany published *Times Square Red/ Times Square Blue*. Part savvy lewd personal memoir and part account of the late 20th century gentrification of Times Square, the pornography theaters of NYC of the 1980's and 90's, and the sexual populations that frequented them, Delany theorizes around the need for generative, physical, and social-emotional cross-race inter-class contact. Inspired by Jane

Jacobs' tome, *The Death and Life of the Great American City*, Delany reimagines the queer potential of inter-personal contact and social inter/discourse, or the “physical and conversational...from which nonsexual friendships and/or acquaintances lasting for decades or a lifetime.”¹¹⁶ For Delany, the social-spatial disintegration of the theaters does a discursive violence to sexual pleasure and presents a “major shift in the discourse of sexuality, straight and gay” as a response to the “changes in architecture, commerce, and quality of life in New York City.”¹¹⁷ For Delany, contact is a compass for “quality of street life.” Between the “diminished space between social and “architectural form[s],” Delany raises the stakes of desire, welfare, pleasure, and harmonious perversion amongst strangers.¹¹⁸ Shifting the focus away from a reliance on gay male sexuality, the cityscape of New York City, and the self-importance of the author's personal experience, I arrive at an entirely new set social actors at Casa Ruby. The women of Casa Ruby desire contact. As a hyper-sexualized and stigmatized population, these TWOC retain the intimacy of contact through a formation of sisterhood. Rather than cross-class contact, 2822 Georgia Ave. NW provided the architecture for inter-generational contact.

Straddling the scholarly line between methodology and methods is David Valentine's breakthrough text *Imagining Transgender—an ethnography of a category*. *Imagining Transgender* is a discursive investigation into the everyday “power of categories.” In this text, Valentine aims to reveal the function of the “collective category of identity” in the late 20th century through the production of “transgender.” For Valentine “transgender” is a category that shapes and blurs the terms and experiences of “gender” and “sexuality” in the United States.¹¹⁹ Valentine's work aims to critique ethnographic approaches to the study of “intelligible” populations.”¹²⁰ As a researcher,

outreach worker, and queer person, Valentine follows the sights and sounds of New York City to map the slippage of queer identifiers (gay, trans, cross-dresser), and the inconsistent adoption of “transgender” as an intelligible umbrella for non-normative gender expressions and experiences. Far from a utopian realization, *imagining* transgender narrativizes and produces the people, places, institution, and stories that create the “transgender” “community.” Valentine’s text utilizes a brilliant approach to trans methodologies. He gains access to highly guarded community spaces. What is largely missing from *Imagining Transgender* is interview transcription and thus the specific voices, life stories, and narratives of TWOC. For Valentine, community is a discursive formation rather than a neighborhood/ geographic location. When considering the NYC Ball scenes, Valentine argues that the “the collective power of transgender” is produced through the enactment, active participation in, and experience of what we have come to know as *the* transgender community.¹²¹ From within the space of the Ball, public health outreach, community vocabulary and identity categories such as butch, queen, up in drags, and femme queen necessarily get absorbed into *transgender* though a “confusing conflation of gendered and sexual identities for the purposes of social service [HIV] outreach and documentation.”¹²² *Imagining Transgender* allows my work to critically re-imagine my position as a research outside of the club and what it might mean to be TWOC at the social service center.

To enter CR is to encounter non-linear spatial transition. With varying levels of success, the ethnographic encounter between trans people can minimize the spatial-emotional effects of familial alienation, societal marginalization, and municipal neglect. Being trans and studying trans people requires imagination and dedication. In other

words, *imagining* transgender is a critical step towards studying embodiment and chosen family. In “Nervous Landscapes: Race and space in Australia,” Denis Byrne situates legacies of racial segregation and “spatial control.” For Byrne, the racialized landscape is an intricate nervous system, a sort of tenuous and symbiotic geographic embodiment grounded by “the spatiality of racism.” It is from the space of “nervousness” that inhabitants can “[tweak] the nerves of the spatial system.” Charting aboriginal spatial practices, Byrne posits the following query: “How, in a practical-spatial sense, do you live in a landscape that no longer belongs to you?” Between the work of the dispossessed¹²³ and the promise of a decolonized methodology (Smith) lies the potential insertion of “subversion,” the ability to adapt to and break through the gaps in the cadastral grid.¹²⁴ And so the District is a nervous landscape and Genie’s prostitution bag is its microcosm. *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* centers Casa Ruby as a site that exists as a response to interlocking oppressions. 2822 Georgia Ave. NW is a safe haven and a collection of prostitution bags enmeshed in and dedicated to “tweaking the nerves of the spatial system” and the maintenance of trans space.¹²⁵

In Michel Foucault’s “Utopias and Heterotopias,” he questions historical formations and temporal transformations as past accumulations. Foucault posits a theory on power as the production and maintenance of space over time. Up against “the space of pleasure and the place of work,” Foucault offers up utopia, that which is unreal yet localizable, and heterotopia, that which is “absolutely *other*.”¹²⁶ Heterotopia is a place of no-place “without geographical co-ordinates.”¹²⁷ Posing a question of citizenship, personhood, and subjectivity, utopias and heterotopias in the District, Casa Ruby offers a simultaneous desire for visibility, acceptance, and family and the everyday need to hustle,

navigate the sites and strolls of off- and online, city-supported shelter and welfare systems, prisons, and public encounters with police officials, and always return to Casa Ruby—a site that re-maps identity, resilience, and power of difference.

In “Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference” Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson eschew a methodological investment in asserting otherness in the production of the field(work) of Anthropology; the subjects, objects, and cultures of difference and distinction. They argue that “a politics of otherness” “is not reducible to a politics of [its] representation.”¹²⁸ The authors imagine key concepts such as power, identity, and representation as spatial coordinates on the “topography of power” in order to remap and “reterritorialize” theories and experiences of diaspora, displacement, borderlands, and imagined landscapes.¹²⁹ To this the authors ask, “With meaning making understood as a practice, how are spatial meanings established? Who has the power to make places of spaces? Who contests this? What is at stake” in the ethical and re/production of space and knowledge?¹³⁰

For world renowned philosopher Henri Lefebvre, author of *The Production of Space*, space is always already a social production, “a tool of thought [in] action,” production, control, and domination.¹³¹ And so sociality is itself a “spatial practice.” Sociality is the plane upon which social re/production, representation, and representation coalesce, largely unbeknownst the individual experiencing everyday life.¹³² For Lefebvre space is simultaneously “perceived-conceived-lived.”¹³³ Like standing at the open front door of the Casa Ruby drop-in center or talking with Genie while she dumps out her prostitution bag on a sticky-dirty over-sized gray plastic foldout table, the built environment and the city beyond TWOC inhabit and internalize an ever-transitioning

cultural landscape and political climate for trans people. To Lefebvre's three-part process of cognitive social production of space, I add the import of storytelling and personal narrative. By adding "told" "perceived-conceived-lived," I am able to listen to Genie and the sounds her objects make as she tosses them across the table's plastic surface. I hear her *telling* trans space into being. Extending Lefebvre's spatial imaginary in order to more adequately address systemically marginalized and multiply afflicted populations requires a deeper consideration of race, class, and gender transition.

In "The Spatiality of Social Life," urbanist and geographer Edward Soja, like Lefebvre, argues that "*spatiality situates social life* [italics in the original]," but "the social production of spatiality" must be studied through the lens of a "historico-geographical materialism." By adding geography as a critical missing element to a classical Marxist tenant, Soja explores the socio-spatial-cultural implications of "the physical space of material culture and the mental space of cognition and representation."¹³⁴ By studying space and class, Soja posts a Marxist geography that must conceive of space as both "producer and reproducer of the relations of production and domination."¹³⁵ Notably, Soja makes a claim for "spatial *praxis*." If space is always already society, then society can, in turn, be the place for "spatially-conscious social actors" and social change.¹³⁶ Genie's purse, like the queerness embedded in its soft fabric, illuminates and creates space to theorize the interrelationships of identity formation, space, place, everyday women, and the everyday for TWOC in D.C. The above theorists enable my work conceiving of trans spatiality and the unique implication of trans social-cultural production, subjecthood, and sisterhood at 2822 Georgia Ave.

NW. The following section moves to consider interdisciplinary scholars concerned with race, gender, and methods.

Methods—Intersectionality, Spatiality, and Transsexuality

When considering categories of analysis made canonical by such texts as “A Black Feminist Statement” (The Combahee River Collective) and *This Bridge Called My Back*, and such individuals as Kimberle Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Cathy Cohen, Aimee Cox, and Patrick Grzanka, the scholarship on intersectionality has not yet accounted for the importance of spatial contexts. Additionally, third world women of color feminist thinkers of the late 20th century and their contemporaries have, for decades, underserved and neglected TWOC communities, voices, and experiences. *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* centers space as *the* category of analysis for our work with intersectionality, methods, and urbanity. The women of Casa Ruby have created a home within a precarious and nervous landscape (Byrne). The following excerpt utilizes exaggerated metaphors in order to reimagine 2822 Georgia Ave. NW as a place and a woman in transition. These metaphors will ground a selection of theorists whose scholarship has expanded the methods of cultural and spatial analysis in American Studies. Unlike Genie’s prostitution purse, the following conversation, briefly discussed in chapter one, illuminates and illustrates the reciprocal relationship between storytelling, the built environment, and the cognitive landscape at CR.



Figure 6. Esmeralda and Natalie pose for me after our interview/conversation, April 4, 2015

On April 4, 2015 I sat down to interview two CR girls, Esmeralda and Natalie. We sat in office chairs in the second-floor office space and talked about the importance of giving and receiving inspiration and encouragement from another TWOC. These moments are signaled when at least one trans woman exclaims, “That gives me life!” This phrase and the trade in *life* requires a series of simple and effusive compliments about a TWOC’s physique, accomplishments, and aesthetic choices. In these spontaneous moments of encouragement, trans women get up out of their seats and vocally express feeling seen. Getting life, like having dreams, allows Natalie and Esmeralda to express hope for one another and for the basement drop-in center, more lovingly referred to as the Trans Life Center (TLC). As we spoke that afternoon, CR girls would filter in and out of the space. Esmeralda and Natalie seemed excited to be interviewed and to have audience.¹³⁷ Esmeralda and Natalie answered questions in conversation with one another. They passed my recording device (an iPhone) back and forth as they discussed how they

see and have re-imagined the TLC. As discussed in the previous chapter, Natalie and Esmeralda's desire to anthropomorphize the space as a TWOC unafraid of violence, discrimination, harassment, and incarceration expresses a deep and embodied relationship to trans space where we can "stroll the streets like...*cunt!*"¹³⁸ As signaled by Esmeralda, CR is a sister-reflection for candid conversation. More than the reclamation of terms such as fierce, bitch, or pussy, to be or to get cunt is to embody an in-your-face femininity. Getting cunt, like giving life, reimagines the female sexual and reproductive organ as an opening for trans power and prowess. An unabashed cuntiness can be heard in a trans woman's laugh, seen through the mesh in her midriff top, and in her hips when she unapologetically twerks on the sidewalk. In other words, getting life requires an audience of trans women.

From cunt to fierce, *Fierce Angels* by Sheri Parks challenges the activist-scholar to ground herself in the dynamic genealogy, deification, and legacy of the sacred dark feminine. From this sacred image, the everyday material reality for contemporary Black women in America emerges. For a *fierce* angel is one for whom generational strength is powerful, burdensome, and enmeshed in the earth. Herein rests the double-bind:

Every day, black women pick up a load that is heavy and complicated. The role is overwhelming—it calls for incredible levels of emotional, spiritual, and intellectual energy, combined with a selflessness that is truly superhuman and wildly unrealistic. And nobody asked them if they wanted the job.¹³⁹

From images of tireless, un-burdened martyrs, and other-mothers, Parks asks after the inner strength required by Black women dedicated to saving themselves and each other.¹⁴⁰ To me and to each other, the women of CR are goddesses. CR towers over me in her heels and though she is poor, marginally housed, and often drug addicted, her stories give me life. Being a TWOC in the District requires a tireless dedication to individual and

community strength. In short, Casa Ruby must take care of itself and its own chosen family. Extending Park's scholarship on sacred qualities of Black women in America, Esmeralda grounds us in the power of place. In dreams, the strolls of D.C. would be safe and empowering. Esmeralda and Natalie ask us to reimagine CR, her streets, and sidewalks like a chosen family of angels offering refuge from the multiple, injurious, and interlocking systems of transphobic stigma.

Although CR is located on Georgia Ave., she is also in *the* streets. The stroll is her place of business, her catwalk, a place for trans women to congregate, and a walking modality. Esmeralda's dreams for the TLC invoke Kimberle Crenshaw's original street-based analogy. As we know, Crenshaw's essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" reconsiders traffic in an intersection.¹⁴¹ The intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, labor, feminism, activism, and social services create a meeting place and a place for TWOC to take up space. The women of CR are crowding the intersections, moaning fiercely, and "evolving into something really wonderful."¹⁴² *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* maps these moves, the creation of trans spaces and narratives, and the centrality of intersectionality for TWOC in the District and on the national stage. These fierce feelings re-inspire the following inquiry: How can American Studies scholars illustrate the complex relationships forged between trans women, embodiment, and space? And what stories does space have to tell us?

For Michel de Certeau, stories are comprised of "spatial trajectories" that chronicle the everyday as a set of travel narratives. A "spatial story" is an orientation device, a center from which the work of the storyteller and the impact of her finished product can take place and *take up* space. The labor of storytelling, or the transformation

of “places into spaces or spaces into places” allows for a wide spectrum of “narrated adventures.” So situated, de Certeau offers his readers the “paradox of the frontier.” The frontier is a bridge and a theoretical structure marked by the spaces and experiences of liminality and the promise of new and directions.¹⁴³ These directions can lead us home.

In “Home Is the Place We All Share,” Oliver Vallerand investigates queer space theorists and artists of the 1990’s. He documents the interdisciplinary academic and artist labor that went into re-thinking queerness as the in/ability to inhabit, create, and write about space. He challenges us to see queer domestic space, decorative interiors, and housing as resilient acts of “privacy, publicness, and the interrelation between the two.”¹⁴⁴ Following the work of Jose Muñoz and Christopher Reed, Vallerand conceives of queer space as a discursive frame through which its designer, user, and inhabitant can experience *home*. For Vallerand, “no space is totally queer or completely unqueerable” amidst “the process of, literally, *taking* place, of claiming territory.”¹⁴⁵ Built forms, like identities, are in a constant state of use and transition. Vallerand’s work to center self-identifications as they are “performed through space”¹⁴⁶ enables theories on the built environment to exhibit themselves queerly and to shift with and to the needs of its inhabitants. The trans quotidian housed within 2822 Georgia Ave. NW supported the need for trans belonging. The walls of the TLC, once a grape purple now a pastel blue, cocoon a constant shift in ephemera, people, and stories. Casa Ruby is a spatial story, a chosen space. She bridges the narratives of otherness and their transitions in order to create a path in and through our nation’s capital.

My visit to CR on April 4, 2015 pushed my work to further consider the nuanced nature of the built environment for queer and trans people. In “Imminent Domain: Queer

Space in the Built Environment,” Christopher Reed asserts that the study of queer space must be interdisciplinary. Through a visual lens, Reed attends to the provocative and queer elements built into design of the built environment and cultural landscape. For Reed, queer space is an ontological problem. It is a contradiction in terms as an “ineffable ideal of oppositional culture” and material form. Much like the later theories of Halberstam and Muñoz, queerness is imminent. But for Natalie, Esmeralda, and Reed, queerness, like transsexuality, is a spatial-temporal location. Further, it is “so fluid and contingent that that the idea of a queer space is an oxymoron.”¹⁴⁷ Yet, following David Valentine, this does not mean that it cannot be imagined.

Reed stretches queerness outside of the body and maps it into public space. In his essay, he focuses on three physical forms of queerness: the monument, the neighborhood, and the building, or what he calls “the spaces of queer community.”¹⁴⁸ Like Muñoz, Reed’s work is situated in queer space, time, and archives as central to the process of becoming queer. In other words, queer spaces remain even when queer people leave that particular space. We inherit these places. Queer space, like activism, is imminent and visually confrontational. Reed argues that “no space is totally queer or un-queerable, but some spaces are queerer than others.” To be queer is to lay claim to space. As an intervention into the physical landscape and the traditional methods of cultural geography, queer space is knowable, experiential, livable, and walkable. The queer pedestrian builds queerness into space through the process of renovation.¹⁴⁹ When considering theories on home and the built environment, queer domestic space is not merely a place for heteronormative-“de-eroticized” assimilation.¹⁵⁰ Rather, the public and private places where we congregate *are* our claim to space, personhood, and resilience.

Conclusion—Trans space & trans time

On April 4, 2015 I asked Esmeralda and Natalie to define the phrase, “That gives me life!” for my future readers. Below is Esmeralda’s definition in full:

I take it to the literal sense. When we have different experiences it actually gives you more *time*...we always have that, “I’m done!” feeling...you know, like—the next person that comes to me I am going to...you know, lose it. And I am going to be like, “Fuck life!” When I have those experiences, like when I come down and see the girls and we are helping each other it gives me more *time* to like be, more happy. It gives me more *life*, it gives me more energy, [and] it gives me more inspiration to carry on another day. You know? And like going downstairs [to the TLC], it was...it is going through a *transformation!*¹⁵¹

Casa Ruby is a life-giving safe haven. The study of Casa Ruby and the broader Casa Ruby community requires that my scholarship attend to the literature, methodologies and methods that allow me to describe trans women’s desire for “more *time* to like be, more happy.”¹⁵² The spatial-temporal implications of giving and receiving life create sites for scholarly-activism, resistance and redefinition (Kempadoo).

Queers in Space—Communities, Public Spaces, Sites of Resistance was a groundbreaking anthology published in 1997. Gordon Ingram’s contribution entitled “Marginality and the Landscapes of Erotic Alien(n)ations” invokes the spirit of diasporic collectivity, intersectionality, and coalition as described earlier in this review. Ingram begins, “The spaces that we cross and in which we live –to which we adapt, create, and sometimes reconstruct—have great bearing on how we come to express ourselves.”¹⁵³ For Ingram, space, place, and identity, and queerness require a contingent relationship to history, activism, and rebellion. For Ingram, “placemaking” is situated within the broader shared history of public space, the cityscape, and homophobia.¹⁵⁴ From this nexus, queer people have experienced “marginality/alienation” from within the U.S. nation state.

Marginality/alienation is an everyday experience or erasure. The queerscape is a powerful

form of social and spatial resistance. Thus the queerscape is a “a cumulative kind of spatial unit, a set of places, and a plane of subjectivities constituting a collectivity.”¹⁵⁵

Within this collective place “the horizons of power, communality, and lusting and loving creative expression” in order to flourish.¹⁵⁶ Two decades after the publication of *Queers in Space*, queer and trans placemaking practices at CR continue to provide respite from marginality/alienation.

In the literature review I have utilized a broad range of scholarship in order to establish the topics and themes of my dissertation. I have utilized examples from my fieldwork at CR to begin thinking through the development of my main questions. My work will be a contemporary contribution to such collective works as *Global Sex Workers*, *This Bridge Called My Back*, and *Queers in Space*. Rather than offering a revision or filling a “gap” in the literature, *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* builds and elaborate on previous interpretations of the “cultures of everyday life.”¹⁵⁷ In this review I utilized and applied a *trans* reading schematic. As such I have to created intertextual conversations that lend themselves to my work with TWOC.

The dynamic literature I have reviewed here guides my investigation into contemporary transgender visibility, representation, and self-representation both locally and nationally. This process, though inherently non-linear, reveals the interrelationships of identity formation, space, place, and the everyday for TWOC in our nation’s capital. Utilizing aspects of the literature in the fields of American Studies, Cultural Landscapes, feminist and queer theory, Sex Work Studies, and the theoretical mapping these fields provide enables the following of *trans* space as cultural landscape and the trans model.

Chapter 3: Storytelling, sidewalks and domestic interiors—The Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model

August 18, 2017 was a typical summer day at 2822 Georgia Ave NW. The District was hot and humid, and Casa Ruby was open and full of people. As I walked the last two blocks down Georgia Avenue and south towards CR, I could see the loud and large movements of Black and Latinx trans women—braided and unbraided hair extensions whipped against the wind, arms outstretched into full extension, and acrylic manicures gesticulated wildly into the afternoon heat. Even at a distance and no matter the weather, the women of CR have always made me smile.¹⁵⁸ Sunny weather presented a heightened opportunity to catch up with friends, meet new shelter residents, and see research participants en masse. A higher concentration of CR clients and staff on a Friday afternoon indicated that the crowd was anticipating the arrival of Ruby Corado. Ruby has often joked that her car is her office. Crumpled receipts, overflowing file folders, heavily used lipstick and concealer, and a never silent smart phone over-crowd her mobile workplace. The sheer number of passengers, clients, journalists, and everyday tasks that compete for Ruby's attention at any given moment make it exceedingly difficult to reach her in person or via phone. Though she and I had different goals—monetary, activist, and/or scholarly—a Friday afternoon at Casa Ruby provided an excellent collaborative platform for the study of trans methods and relationship building strategies. Whether or not Ruby arrived that day when she said she would, hours late, with or without paychecks, or not at all, the women of CR and I spent would spend Friday afternoon uninhibited by the work of waiting.

This late summer memory illustrates a typical day at my central research site, Casa Ruby, and the trans women that enlivened its entrance and my fieldwork. Chapter Three invites the reader *into* Casa Ruby and the study of *trans* space as the evolution of a question and a set of locations. The primary focus of this chapter, *Storytelling, sidewalks, and domestic interiors*, is the necessity for and the creation of the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model, a model that has allowed me to more adequately address the queer and trans problematics of my particular site. These problematics include but are not limited to poverty, addiction, friendship, homelessness, and womanhood. The lives of the women included in my study are so complex. In order to accurately lead the reader to understand all the ideas presented here, the trans model becomes an adaptable guide. Expanding upon the scholarship of cultural landscape theorist Jeremy Korr, this chapter displaces Korr's reliance on the natural world for the study of cognitive landscapes, gender transitions, and spatial transformations. Grounded in questions of home, belonging, chosen family, and geographic scale, the modules of the trans model will be introduced and applied in the pages that follow. Though the remainder of the dissertation will continue to utilize and develop the trans model, in this chapter I am particularly interested in questions of domesticity, embodiment, safety, and the built environment. Though *safety* is a tenuous and relative term, CR continues to be a critical refuge for a heavily stigmatized LGBT population in the District of Columbia. In addition to the shelter space provided in its top two floors, 2822 Georgia Ave. NW was able to temporarily shield trans women from physical and emotional harm from June 2012 until its move and expansion in the winter of 2018.

Chapter Three is guided by and invested in the following assertions: Black and Latinx trans women transform their built environment. And in so doing they rearrange mundane *and* highly theorized spaces of labor, domesticity, and femininity. Once inside the realm of CR, the in/tangible cultural evidence rooted in the sidewalk, the stoop, or the basement is navigated with our everyday senses, an open heart, and a scholarly mind. Whether gossiping in an office cubicle, microwaving popcorn, or voguing in their socks, the women of CR have pushed me to develop new and careful practices in community-cultural analysis and fieldwork methods. In short, the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model is an exploration of everyday geographies and the trans women that populated a single city-block. In this chapter, I provide detailed descriptions of each of the modules and sub-operations that comprise the trans model. It is my most fervent hope that the trans model will be useful to community activists, interdisciplinary scholars, and non-profits that work at the intersections of social service, public health, and visual representation for multiply stigmatized trans populations. May this model support our dedication to trans women and their daily claims to self and place.

Guided by the living-goddesses that lined Georgia Ave. on a weekday in August, Chapter Three prioritizes a selection of the dissertation's main questions: space transitions to hold these changes, these daily fluctuations in gender and presentation. In extending gender transition narratives to functions that do not apply to space, how do we know a *trans* space when we see it? How do these spaces shift our investments in our daily trans-feminist practice? In other words, how can a trans model allow us to document trans women on their daily hustle; everyday women who craft everyday lives and insurgent moments of social, spatial, and cultural production? *Storytelling, sidewalks,*

and domestic interiors is grounded in the study of trans women and their relationship to the built environment. Subsequent chapters utilize the trans fieldwork model as a pedagogical compass. I have designed the model to be a reliable, yet porous container for my investigation into contemporary transgender visibility, representation, and self-representation at the local and national level.

“Yes, yes it’s like imagine trans people transitioning trans space!” Ruby Corado¹⁵⁹

Going Inside—trans aesthetics, trans beauty rituals

September 7, 2017 ushered in the weekend of the annual United States Conference on AIDS¹⁶⁰ and the second annual Casa Ruby Queer and Trans Ball. The Trans Life Center was buzzing with nervous energy. Folks were excited to see their friends and idols walk their categories in the grand ballroom of the conference hotel, the Marriot Marquis. This would be a huge upgrade from the Ball’s inaugural location, an indoor basketball court in the U St. corridor.

Trans Life Center (TLC) had begun its transformation from basement drop-in-center to cafeteria, dressing room-dance studio. Butch queens¹⁶¹ applied makeup on their trans sisters. Utilizing a shared makeup kit, young queens brushed foundation onto cheeks, darkened brows, and gently applied false lashes to patient eyelids. Not unlike a transsexual Cinderella come-femme queen-diva,¹⁶² Black trans women perfected face, body, and attitude in the Casa Ruby basement. The basement at 2822 Georgia Ave. NW had two doors, one glass and one wood. Each door also contained a screen and door-length black painted metal security doors. During open hours the door facing Georgia Avenue was left open. The boisterous laughter and yelling emanating from the basement would invite the life of the sidewalk back inside. That day, communal makeup

application curated potential interactions and friendships in the space. The following is an excerpt from my descriptive field notes from that day.

The girls sat one by one at a makeshift vanity—two plastic chairs set at the corner of a large grey fold-out table. The majority of the table was taken over by that day’s hot lunch, now room temperature—hot dogs, buns, and a selection of condiments. Part dining table, kitchen counter, and master bath; the center of the TLC became a space for trans ritual, sustenance, and affirmation through beauty. One by one the girls gently closed their eyes and pursed their lips in the absent reflection and bright lights of an elegant and over-sized vanity mirror. Though the Ball was days away, they were getting their faces ready.¹⁶³



Fig. 7 A young Black trans woman has her eyebrows done by a close friend. September 7, 2017

This intimate scene of beauty and friendship is illustrated in Figure 7. On the left of this image is a young black trans woman in profile. Her hair is pulled into a loose, but elegant crown. Her edges wave and neatly frame her face. Her jeweled medusa piercing sits quietly atop chapped lips. She wears a corseted black Renaissance-inspired baby doll-

tee and ripped jeans in a classic denim wash. Her friend sits lovingly close to her as he styles and shades in her eyebrows with a mascara brush. The pair of friends continued their ritual amongst an almost toppling pile of U-Haul cardboard moving and storage boxes, lunch leftovers, and an over-abundance of posters and community-made art Scotch taped to pastel blue walls. Between a pair of friends and a thermostat is an oversized sheet of butcher paper. The poster reads:

Drop in Center Guidelines 1) Follow staff instructions without question. 2) Center Closes at 6:30. 3) Remain fully dressed at all times. 4) One person at a time in the restroom. 5) [Landline] Phone use for five minutes, business only with permission.”

Amongst worn makeup brushes, washable Crayola makers, crumpled sheets of used tin foil, and prescriptive “house rules” written with a blunt Sharpie is the nuanced trans cultural landscape. 2822 Georgia Ave. NW is a heavily trafficked research site and a social service collage of indoor and outdoor space, clients and employees. For six years this address was home to a specific though transient group of trans women who continuously occupied its basement, worked in its cubicles, and/or slept on its remaining two floors. Rather than providing an overview of Jeremy Korr’s “Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model,” the following section details and extend Korr’s key methodological interventions in order to extend them to new and transitioning populations. Korr’s theories on agency, shared values, artifacts, and the affective nature of boundaries, though overly general, provide a particularly useful template for my own work. The following section details Korr’s guiding questions while paying close attention to his third module, *perceptions*. The modules of the trans model revolve around a series of afternoons at Casa Ruby. This comparative fieldwork analysis allows me to demonstrate how a particular trans space can be mapped over time. After I introduce each

of the modules in the trans fieldwork model, I will return to the weekend of the US Conference on AIDS. Though the use of modules can at times seem cumbersome in comparison to the non-linear narratives presented in my fieldwork and interview transcripts, utilizing a structure built by modules and operations allowed me to think methodically through the intimate nature of trans space, trans people, and the role of intra-community researcher.

*Jeremy Korr—cultural landscapes, a radical departure from Material Culture Studies—
Unexpected applications/under-theorized populations*

In the first few pages of “Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model” Jeremy Korr describes the study of material culture as the dynamic exploration of humans and the objects that encase, enhance, and represent communal values and belief systems.¹⁶⁴ Through his scholarship, Korr hoped to broaden a scholarly interest in artifacts to include the landscapes where they were shared and displayed. Much like material artifacts, the cultural landscape is a key site for unearthing scholarly evidence for the study of everyday life. For Korr, the natural world was a critical site for cultural agency. According to Korr, nature aided in producing the all-important American Cultural Studies triad, objects-humans-nature. Inspired by the work of cultural landscapist William Cronon, Korr studied the natural world as a place where growth, decay, purity, and pollution had a direct impact on the environment, inhabitants, culture, and infrastructure of a particular place or region. Rural and urban landscapes are deeply affected by such early elements as air, land, water, and weather patterns. Yet as I sat on the front stoop during many afternoons at 2822 Georgia Ave. NW, the contemporary national cityscape required that I attend to the augmented, changeable, and transitory nature of the built

environment and those trans women who altered, maintained and belonged to the city and its architecture.¹⁶⁵ Korr's third module, *Perceptions*, consists of the following four sub-operations: identify aesthetics, cognitive landscapes, language and terminology, and spatial relationships. The operations of *Perceptions* are most interested in considering *how* humans come to know, understand, and inherit the landscape. These perceptions are a reflection of cultural values, shared beliefs, social rules, and communal aesthetics. From here, Korr jumps from a discussion of aesthetics in order to travel "landscapes of the mind." Melding perception, cognition, and cultural geography, the cognitive landscape allows the inhabitant and researcher to add personal and collective meaning to the physicality of the built environment. From this shared, though altered, state, cognition allow us to explore to places of daily embodiment, memories, and dreams, everyday survival strategies. To this Korr asks himself and his readers, "What intangible meanings, associations, and functional delineations accompany the components of a landscape?"¹⁶⁶ Community storytelling practices allow us to re-map spaces flush with meaning, aspiration, and past experiences. Additionally, community-specific terminology, phrases, and storytelling practices allow us to investigate the physical, linguistic, and conceptual space of race and transitioning identities. And so, the Casa Ruby landscape has her own language and she communicates to us through a multitude of spatial and cognitive relationships. A detailed guide to the trans cultural landscape and analysis model is as follows:

Bodies in spaces—the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model

1. Trans Place—A detailed site description

1. Guiding questions/ initial analysis

- Define major terms / Identify a focused research site

- Decide on a time frame for your fieldwork
- Identify the components of your immediate surrounding
 - Building exteriors/interiors
 - Utilize your senses and note each section of your site
- Spatial context and scale

2. Access and Accessibility

- Is your site accessible? Who accesses your site?
 - Consider ADA accessibility and city infrastructure
- Begin anywhere/begin again
- Narrative structure / creating access w. care
- Who is your reader?

3. Methods and Methodologies

- Identify the methods and methodologies that best suit your site
- Reciprocity - objects-humans-buildings-storytelling

2. Aesthetics, Language, & Material Culture—decoration and adornment

1. Sub-sections—Interiority and Interior Design

- Divide your site into subsections
- Form, function, structural elements
- Use/Re-use & key items of home décor
- Internal worlds / interior landscapes

2. Adornment and Decoration

- Identify, categorize, describe
- Sacred and religious
- LGB and trans pride
- Personal responsibility—safer sex, health, and wellbeing
- Style, beauty, grooming, and transitioning
- Sustenance
- Add your own categories

3. Linguistic codes and familial relationships

- Common words and phrases defined
- First names and familial terms
- Your name and community recognition

3. Expertise and reciprocity—community research, friendship & mutual respect

Implementing the trans powerhouse objects-humans-buildings-storytelling

1. Research as reciprocity

- Active listening—an engagement in giving
- Selfies & group photos

2. From informants to research participants

- Trans fieldwork methodology
- Community-based knowledge production

3. TLC²—Tender Love and Care & The Trans Life Center

- Trans spatial practice—
 - Choose three themes: love, care, and friendship

- Focus on a specific sub-location
- Trans methods and expressions—identify verbal and visual cues and clues
 - Spatial implications—Care and livability

Module 1. A Detailed Site Description

The first module of the trans fieldwork model moves us away from a reliance on the visual shapes and shifts of a woman’s body in transition to a focus on bodies *in* transitioning spaces. Just as a play needs a setting and a theater, the study of trans geography requires a narrator, a cast of characters, and a detailed central location/setting. Trans women’s everyday lives at Casa Ruby are much more than their access to medical augmentation or commercial media’s desire for gorgeous women with relatable transition narratives— life stories that begin with the *wrong* body and arrive someplace, *better*.¹⁶⁷ Laverne Cox’s 2014 oft-theorized and nationally recognized appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine will serve as a brief case in point. Cox advocacy work continues to embody and give voice to an underrepresented though highly stigmatized population.

On May 29, 2014 *Time* magazine’s cover story proclaimed, “Nearly a year after the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, another social movement is poised to challenge deeply held cultural beliefs.” As a marker of mainstream time and a shift in cross-racial equality discourse, *The Transgender Tipping Point* was upheld as “America’s next civil rights frontier,” and the activist, advocate, director, and actress Laverne Cox was pictured at its helm.¹⁶⁸



Figure 8. Activist, director, actress Laverne Cox, *Time* May 29, 2014

In this now iconic image, included here as Figure 8, Cox stands, breathtaking. Legs crossed, she stands in a form-fitting blue knee-length dress, on feet held in ankle-strapped heels. Her golden hair cascades down her shoulders, as her right hand seems to gesture for a pause or to begin public address. On the cover of *Time*, she is perched on the tipping point, an unstable and in-between place for trans visibility and human rights. In this portrait, Cox floats alone, lost in an edited image, and suspended in a sea of off-white panels. In her lead article, staff writer Katy Steinmetz imagines trans people as emerging out of danger and darkness into time/*Time*, representation, awareness, tolerance, sameness, civil rights, and cultural acceptance. In this trans cultural moment briefly described in the dissertation's introductory chapter, Cox tips our discussion of language and insight into the realm of visibility, the politics of representation, and visual culture.

Cox proclaims to her interviewer, “More of us are living visibly and pursuing our dreams visibly.”¹⁶⁹ Although the space for trans people to dream is vitally important, to *live* visibly allows others to recognize trans, to see and feel as if they *know* us because they have seen Laverne Cox’s reproduced image on a well-known magazine. Rather than focusing at length on this particular issue of *Time*, as it has been thoroughly covered elsewhere, I am more interested in *Time*’s positioning of Laverne Cox as the face and body of *the* tipping point. Within her capacity as a highly visible trans person in the public sphere, Laverne Cox has utilized and continues to utilize strategies such as fame, public appearance, and social media to draw much needed attention to the fight for Black and trans lives and sex workers of all hues. In sum, it would be too simple to claim that Ms. Cox’s *Time* appearance was an example of either *good* or *bad* representation, a/political, or void real-life application. Cox’s presence *is* important. Her image matters. Like Beyoncé Knowles, Laverne Cox has become a Black female icon. She is a reflection of the professional and aesthetic desires of many of Black and Latinx the trans women in my community. But she is more than a gorgeous face.

What concerns me most about Laverne Cox’s *Time* cover is the complete lack of attention that critics have given to her spatial context—the other trans women, spaces, and places that Laverne Cox calls *home*. In her cover Cox appears to us like a glossy two-dimensional goddess, a glamorous paper doll or mannequin printed on thin sheets of glossy magazine paper. Instead of her windowless cream one-sheet, I’d like to transport Laverne to Washington, D.C. In my cognitive landscape I imagine Cox holding court in the TLC inspiring the women of CR. On the wall just behind her I can see a ripped, now signed copy of her *Time* cover, gently taped above an unorganized bookcase. Above the

faux wood paneling, she hangs like La Virgen—an inspiration, a protector, a reminder. Whether or not Laverne Cox ever visited 2822 Georgia Ave. NW, her cover has hung like a good luck talisman above our heads and in our minds. Her *Time* cover marks her celebrity and a national moment of communal inspiration and heightened trans visibility. Rather than returning here to an introductory description of my fieldwork site and the culture of Georgia Avenue as illustrated in previous chapters, I'd like to move from a discussion of the tipping point to the first module of the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model. As per usual, we can come in through the basement.

Fake hair and boisterous laughter

On May 15, 2015, I walked up to Casa Ruby and down the three steps to the Trans Life Center (TLC). A few of the women yelled my name as I neared the door. I entered and found myself in the middle of a CR staff meeting. Ruby and a handful of her employees had gathered that day to discuss the organization's involvement in Capital Trans Pride.¹⁷⁰ A cool breeze wafted through the front door of the TLC and mingled with the aroma of burning white sage incense tucked under the weight of an unread book, perfume and oils, lotion, sunscreen, and makeup. I was unanimously invited to join that day's staff meeting. I sat just outside of the sacred inner circle of plastic foldout chairs. At that moment Ruby was unveiling a key element of the CR Capital Trans Pride uniform, a sultry black wig with burgundy highlights. In witnessing the wig's unveiling it is important to note the following: 1. The wigs mirrored the style, cut, and color popular amongst El Salvadorian and Guatemalan immigrants in the District, including Ruby Corado, 2. Most of the women present that day were Black/ non-Latinx, and 3. There is an over-abundance of El Salvadorian owned and operated unisex salons in the

neighborhoods surrounding CR. Neighborhood Latina unisex-barbershop-salons are generally packed with women getting their manes bleached, colored, washed, dyed, blow dried, hot ironed, and/or shaped to reveal a crown of flowing curls reminiscent of the style worn at senior prom or by a bridesmaid. Popular color combinations highlight an explosion of thin or thick zebra-like stripes. Like a trans Latina sunset, these stripes include the following shades: light blonde, deep red, and a harsh copper brown. The wigs we held and celebrated for Trans Pride 2015 were a fantastic example of a contemporary Latina style popular amongst women of all persuasions in the DMV.

That afternoon, Ruby pulled ten matching lace-front wigs in plastic sleeves out of a cardboard box. She gleefully clawed one of the wigs and waved it around yelling like she'd found the perfect example, "*This* organization buys *fake* hair for their employees. Who else does this?" The room snap cackled. The hair seemed to speak. Ruby rallied her girls, "That's a Casa Ruby *girl*, teaching the girls to present their best selves!"¹⁷¹ Utilizing wigs like a discourse of dreams, success, and personal narrative, Ruby conducted the room's enthusiasm for matching hair, group identity, and collective embodiment. The complex relationship between hair, beauty, a self, and trans pride filled the TLC with a jubilant buoyancy. This energy filled the basement and the TLC seemed to settle into laughter—a sound, a shape, a feeling, and an embodied audible emotion. Like an open mouth smile and a belly laugh, the basement expanded with uproarious laughter. The women carefully used the tips of their manicures to tear open plastic bags and combed their acrylic nails through strands of La Rapunzel's hair. That afternoon, fake hair was our archive, a repository for trans storytelling.

Casa Ruby houses a feelings-driven spatial terrain. She soothes pain, provides hair, and expands a capacity for dreaming so central to gender transition. CR is an imperfect ideal. She is often filthy, lewd, loud, high, recovering, and trashy. She is decorated by ketchup stained Styrofoam take-out containers, cigarette smoke, and is often low on toilet paper. 2822 Georgia Ave. NW is an archive, a place of refuge and reciprocity, and she holds the margins that interdisciplinary scholars like me hope to mine. From an afternoon filled with wigs and female empowerment, I'd like to move to a full discussion of the modules and sub-operations of the trans fieldwork model. After these descriptions I return to the weekend of the United States Conference on AIDS 2017. The trans fieldwork model is designed to be porous, expansive, and adaptable. Though I will describe its three modules in order, subsequent chapters will provide re-orderings that best fit the thematic focus at hand. Much like queerness and trans identity itself, one can always backtrack and begin again.

The first module of the trans fieldwork model asks us to provide a detailed site description. In addition to an ongoing list of spatial, social, and symbolic attributes, the first module of the trans fieldwork model establishes the scale and scope of our research with a specific urban trans population. This initial module is grounded in seemingly simple and familiar questions: who, what, when, where, and why? The answers that follow aid in the development and identification of a research goal, spatial terrain, desired time frame, and the methods and methodologies that will best support our particular trans community and its central sites. *1. Trans Place* considers the potential local and national impact of trans spaces, the everyday lives, and interdisciplinary interest that surround sites of contemporary queer and trans culture. Thus far this dissertation has been most

concerned with the creation and exploration of this foundational module. *1. Trans Place—a detailed site description* is comprised of three interlocking sub-operations: 1. Guiding questions/initial analysis, 2. Access and Accessibility, and 3. Methods and Methodologies. Read and practiced together, these operations provide the reader-cartographer with an open-ended manual for the trans fieldwork model. *1. Guiding questions/initial analysis*, as its title suggests, asks us to set the parameters of the research project. As emulated in the previous two chapters, research can be a mindful social justice practice that aims to consistently and carefully account for central themes, terms, and concerns which include but are not limited to: transgender, culture, landscape, and cultural landscape. From here we can consider the physical dimensions of our research site. I'd suggest starting small. I have discovered that studying the life of a single built environment or street address is a manageable and fruitful setting for one's research. Once grounded in place, take stock of your surroundings. Try finding qualitative depth in simple questions: What do I see? What do I hear? Have I been here before? Do people notice me? I have written many versions of this step throughout my fieldwork tenure. Every time I visited 2822 Georgia Ave. NW, I was able to extend this list with different answers and further questions. The evolution of these descriptions allowed me to mine the structural and cultural importance of my trans surroundings and research participants through seasonal, physical, and transitional change.

The impact of these descriptions is captured by the following self-inquiry: How might I describe your research site to mixed company? In other words, how might our work reach a reading audience comprised of queer folks, other trans people, folks of color, and our cisgendered allies? It is important to reiterate that Ruby did not ask that my

work be something that they, the women of Casa Ruby and the organization itself, would use. All she wanted was for me to document and share my fieldwork, my findings, and the stories of the women I was fortunate enough to work with. To that end, I consistently asked myself the following: how might I describe my site to a reader who may never have the resources to visit my city? Storytelling, like even simple documentation on a scrap of paper, can allow us to saturate our writing with the living details of building, sidewalks, and their trans inhabitants. I next considered the interiority of my research site and its affiliate community events. I noted whether the site was a storefront now office space, a basement now drop-in center, a family home now community shelter, or street corner now pride parade. I then described creative strategies and resourceful reuse in the space. After traveling through the different floors, corners, and stairwells, I reconsidered the exterior of my site and its immediate surroundings. This step allowed me to provide a larger spatial context for my research site. By setting a scale and providing a detailed description of my research site, I established have a scholarly *home*, or at least a welcome mat for my community research and its potential reach. Developing a scalar approach allowed the landscape to be situated within neighborhood, city, and nation. Within each realm it is important to note the social, cultural, historical, and political climate for a target population, in our case Black and Latinx trans women in D.C.

2. *Access and Accessibility*, the second sub-operation, considers the creation and provision of *access*. At this stage of the trans fieldwork model, access is an imperative lens, a focused question with an expansive answer, and an innovative approach to trans spaces. As we have seen, Casa Ruby is a low-barrier access point for vital LGBT social services. In order to access services, all one had to do was enter the space and express

need or interest. No forms of identification or referrals were necessary. Though one had to qualify for limited and specialized services such as temporary shelter or part-time employment, entering the space and joining community was always free of charge. Similarly, though drugs and drug use were not permitted on site, CR always provided a *safe* place for many trans harm reduction practitioners and women experiencing the daily coping required of drug addiction and addictive behaviors. CR provided temporary refuge, no questions asked. This type of atypical social service provision prompted the following question: Is this site accessible? Who does it exclude? For example, there are various flights of stairs that lead to the different sections of CR. While blind trans women could lay down their canes, take on receptionist responsibilities, and be led graciously around the space by their trans daughters, other LGBT wheelchair users were unable to receive similar mobility accommodations. As noted previously, CR was easily accessible via public transportation, on foot, and vehicle due to her central location.

For years, the Trans Life Center was the central community hub and thus, the wheel of my research. If the women of Casa Ruby were pollinators, the basement drop-in center was the center of the sunflower and the home of all pollen. It was where I spent most of my time and the bulk of my participant observation. From here the girls would line the perimeter—smoke cigarettes on the stoop, fetch Chinese food across the street, a cold soda from the corner store, disappear around the corner to gossip and/or get high. Though it may take a few minutes or a few hours, each girl would return to the front steps of the TLC. The basement of CR quickly became my research home. The TLC was endlessly complicated, forever reconfigured, and as open as she was concealing. Like myself, she became the narrator of the CR story. Through her limited square footage and

her projected image, the trans fieldwork model allowed me to access specific trans people, knowledge, and cultures. If only through the time spent listening carefully to Casa Ruby's stories, I hope that my work has and continues to reflect the kind of TLC (tender love and care) and respect that interdisciplinary ethnographic methods can express. As a queer transgender Latinx scholar, I had rare access to my community and the guarded tools of higher education. Though I am sure that my research participants did not reveal *all* and that their creative retellings were not always factual, I was there for their stories. I have remained respectful to the bravery of their truths and have left out any and all incriminating and identifying evidence. I have practiced with this editing process. My work documents and provides narrative structure for under-theorized hyper-sexualized criminalized populations. Like the TLC, I suggest that future users identify a portion of the immediate site or surroundings that she is drawn to and ask herself the following questions: how does the built environment speak to you? What does she say? How does she say it? And to whom does she speak?

3. *Methods and Methodologies* allow us to identify and describe the unique nature of a *trans* space. By applying an intersectional lens to photography, field notes, interviews, visual and material analysis, I was we better able to establish reciprocal relationships between myself, my community participants, the space and its landscape, and like-minded folks in adjacent fields. Through expanding Korr's work on agency and the culture triad, objects-humans-nature, I arrived at a new analytic shape, the trans powerhouse: objects-humans-buildings-storytelling. I argue that the intersections housed in this four-part agentic structure unearth the geography of spatial and individual transformation. This is a necessary sifting.

2. Aesthetics, Language and Material Culture—decoration and adornment

Sights & sounds of the domestic sphere

The second module of the trans fieldwork model is deeply influenced by a variety of late 20th and early 21st century Black and Brown, queer and trans scholars, activists, cultural producers, and social actors whose work has mined the intersections of identity, geography, genealogy, and social change as key sites of and models for everyday resistance to systemic oppression. *2. Aesthetics, Language, & Material Culture* begins by pairing two unlikely contributors of the underutilized field of Cultural Landscape Studies. The work of world-renowned Black feminist scholar and teacher bell hooks and the groundbreaking transnational queer theorist Martin F. Manalansan IV enable *Trans Space as Cultural Landscape* to excavate the loving spaces and tender labor that the study of home, care, homemaking, and caregiving require. In “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance,” bell hooks unearths Black women’s labor as *the* foundation of “hearth and home” in America. For hooks, “homeplace” is a theoretical feminist touchstone that re-values Black motherhood, housework, and “women’s work.” Caregiving is reimagined as a quotidian spatial legacy. hooks honors Black women’s “effort to keep something” and I would add, “[someplace] of their own.”¹⁷² From motherhood to sisterhood, Black and Brown women of trans experience in Washington, D.C. build homes and belong to houses of their own making. To borrow from hooks, intergenerational homeplaces now trans women’s social services allow the interdisciplinary scholar to document radical acts of domesticity and shelter.

In “Speaking in Transit: Queer Language and Translated Lives,” the second chapter of *Global Divas—Filipino gay men in the diaspora*. Martin Manalansan

introduces his readers to *swardspeak*, a hybrid de-colonial linguistic code that consists of Tagalog, English, and French pop culture phrases and references. Swardspeak is the most popular mode of communication amongst the *bakla* community (gay men, cross dressers, trans women, and the sissies that love them) in the global queer Filipino diaspora. Much like Clifford's Geertz's ode to thick description and the communicative difference between a wink and a twitch,¹⁷³ swardspeak is an embodied dialect that includes hand gestures, eyebrow raises, quick tone changes, and negotiated cultural codes that play with witticism, irony, and gossip. Through an embrace of the effeminate, swardspeakers create families of girls, sisters, and aunties.¹⁷⁴ Swardspeak, much like the *bakla* who innovate and interpret its global mercurial customs, "is always on the move."¹⁷⁵ Eyebrows are central to the performance of swardspeak. Manalansan explains this through the following popular saying, "Pakitaas nga ang kilay ko! [Can you please raise my eyebrows." For Manalansan's research participants, the ability to push one's eyebrow up with a single finger rather than moving an eyebrow with one's facial muscles queers an expression of shock "without even uttering the words."¹⁷⁶ Like hailing a cab on Georgia Ave., verbal language and embodied expression become a transcendent mode of communication, cultural transportation, a quickly disappearing trail of diasporic swords, hips, acrylic fingertips, and fluttering fingers. Swardspeak, like CR herself, is a beacon that calls us *home*. Though the women of CR are not Filipina and though their stay might last many years or a single afternoon, their lives and words were quickly stitched together to co-create the language of sisterhood in the District.

The bright lights of swardspeak (Manalansan) and the swept corners of homeplace (hooks) lead us to the second module of the trans cultural landscape analysis

fieldwork model. 2. *Aesthetics, Language, & Material Culture* considers the *stuff* of domesticity, the implications of paid and unpaid domestic-service labor, the working conditions of its laborers, and the hazy interpersonal, emotional, and professional lines between chosen family, friendship, scholarship, monetary gain, daily survival, and social service provision. From the mirage of the white picket fence to the close but looming presence of a Trump White House, Casa Ruby's original location was an ingenious site of constant contradiction and unanticipated spatial transformation. 2. *Aesthetics* utilizes the work done in the first module to take a deep dive into the study of trans aesthetic practices and intra-community linguistic and material cultures. Extending the study of embodiment, cognition, and the built environment 2. *Aesthetics* is guided by three sub-operations: 1. *Sub-sections—Interiority and Interior Design* 2. *Adornment and Decoration* and, 3. *Linguistic Codes and Familial Relationships*. When studied together these operations refine the implementation of *trans* fieldwork methods.

The first operation, 1. *Sub-sections*, asks the user to divide a central research site into manageable yet detailed sections. These spaces can include but are not limited to living room, bedroom, bathroom, office cubicle, kitchenette, porch, and alleyway. This operation enabled me to document the form, function, creative use and re-use present in each portion of my research site. After I divided Casa Ruby into several sections, I considered a variation of the following questions: does the use of each space seem to match or exceed its original design or intentions? Restated, what makes a bedroom a bedroom and not, let's say, a kitchen? Is it simply the appearance of a single bed, a microwave or a set of dresser drawers? Does a room full of beds provide *shelter*? Is my site a *shelter* if there are no cots at all? Similarly, does the placement of a couch in any

room transform that particular space into a place for family and/or living? The answers to these Casa Ruby-related and inspired questions provided a method of *trans* inquiry, questions that do not aim to provide definitive answers.

Next, I took note of the structural elements in each room. These elements included faucets, central air conditioning, electrical outlets, windows and doors. If possible, I suggest including dimensions for each subsection. Though I never measured the square footage for each of the three floors of 2822, my fieldwork did archive the shape and feel of each sub-section. For example, CR's basement drop-in center was a rectangle with linoleum floors and very low ceilings. As previously noted, the front entrance was a glass door gated by thick black safety-bars. This gate was often left open to lean lazily against a beige-yellow stucco wall. Natural light spilled in from the front door and was met by a matching back door and three small windows at the right rear corner. The windows lay just below the basement ceiling adding height to an otherwise stocky room. The backdoor led directly to the CR backyard that hosted many a Fourth of July BBQ-fundraisers. In the far-left corner of the TLC was a kitchenette. In this alcove, dishes and trash would pile up in the small sink. Next to the sink was an almost always empty bottle of neon green Dawn dish detergent and a desiccated sponge. On days that hot dogs and buns were on the lunch menu, one of the CR mothers on staff (most likely a Black trans woman in her early thirties) would nuke a meal for her queer and trans children (a group of LGBT young adults in their late teens and early twenties). A detailed appearance of the CR kitchen and the placement, use, and style of basic household items gave me a window into the TLC as a basement-homeplace (hooks). The model's user may also find other notable elements of home décor in her research site. These items can

include a plastic standing lamp, toaster oven, bedside or kitchen table, small throw rug, towel rack or a toothbrush holder. If the site is a social service center or an office space, it is important to archive the presence and use of individual, communal, new and outdated technology such as smart, flip, or landline phones, boom-box radios, flat-screen televisions, laptop or desktop computers, desk fans, chalk and/or dry-erase boards. Record the number of people that use any one item at a time. When considering an office space, I thought through the spatial expectation of workspaces. For example, what is the nature of administrative and client-facing deskwork? How often does this labor involve “scrolling” on various social media platforms? In the TLC this work included folks singing and twerking along to their favorite club and singing to gospel hits. Also featured was a semi-disturbing CR favorite, the communal boisterous viewing of brutal multi-gender inter-racial street fight videos. A mix of recorded hair grabbing and thrashing and afternoon hotdogs in the TLC showed me the meaningful impact of the mundane and complex everyday activities in trans spaces. In the following operation, I shift away from a building’s interior to the impact of internal landscape.

This operation begins with the following question: does a trans woman’s access to safer spaces or places of temporary shelter expand her access to a more livable life in the District? Further, what does this place of safety and feelings look, act, and sound like? Lastly, what kinds of friendships does/can it produce? “Internal worlds/interior landscapes,” the final section of *I. Sub-sections—Interiority and Interior Design*, explores trans world making as a process of externalizing a trans internal landscape in a semi-private domestic and domestic space. As an environment overrun with dreams, aspiration, past pain, and current violence, CR and its basement drop-in center revealed

the precarious intricacies of the present moment. Though the ethics of research and friendship will be discussed at length in the chapters that follow, I'd like the reader to consider here how CR was a site that spoke, listened, and archived trans women's stories and everyday lives.

For six years 2822 Georgia Ave NW. was full of TWOC. When those same TWOC moved on and away from 2822 and further up Georgia Ave. to a much larger site, CR's original location continued to be a site that was at once able to show, tell, and remain trans to those who remembered her in her heyday. The following springtime memory provides a branch between interior landscapes, personal and communal aesthetics, decoration, and adornment. On April 8, 2016, I spent a few hours chatting with my best CR girlfriend, Genie. At that time Genie was the office manager and receptionist at 2822. Her desk was on the second-floor years before it would trade in its cubicles, desks, and rainbow flag for cots and hypothermia-safe bedding and cots. For years, Genie loved to pose and perform for a quick and candid photo just as much as she seemed to revel in telling me her sordid and often scandalous weekly tales. A strikingly tall, beautiful, hilarious, and drug-addicted femme queen, Genie has always been my closest CR friend.

In Figure 9, Genie flashes me a jokingly seductive smile as she pretends to flirt with, with her desk phone, or with the imagined person on the other end of the line. In this image, she is surrounded by several wall hangings such as the "Positively Trans" poster discussed at length in Chapter One and a flier for the Whitman Walker/Trans Law Center name and gender change clinic.¹⁷⁷ Of all the items featured in Figure 9, the objects

that most grab my attention today are as follows: a single cigarette, red Bic lighter, a bottle of Essence of Beauty forbidden (apple)

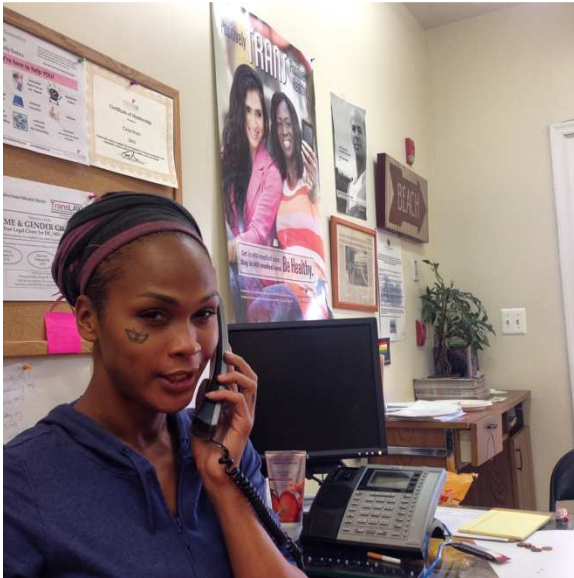


Fig. 9. Genie hard at “work” April 8, 2016

orchard lotion, Genie’s butterfly tattoo, and her neatly twisted black and burgundy linen head wrap. After utilizing these two sub-operations, I could identify, categorize, and describe items that speak to such themes as safety, ritual, beauty, and the sacred with confidence. As an operation, 2. *Adornment and Decoration* allowed me to name the deeply personal and political act of TWOC adornment and decoration. Describing the impact of trans adornment of Genie’s desk and workspace allowed me to explore the decoration of one’s self, space, and place as central to trans space and trans identity formation/transformation. Genie’s facial tattoo serves as an excellent case in point. Though faded, the butterfly’s wings permanently cling to Genie’s prominent right cheekbone. Genie’s smile lines leave the corners of her mouth and reach towards the center body of the butterfly and the edges of Figure 9. The butterfly is one of Genie’s most recognizable features and the most important reason for providing her with a

pseudonym of her own choosing. Rather than reading meaning onto her tattoo many years after its initial application, I'd like to explore the butterfly as an embodied object of adornment and transition. Genie's simple though bravely placed tattoo is an everyday act of defiance and central to her expression of Black trans femininity. As an uncommon piece of D.I.Y. body art, the red and black butterfly is a piece of permanent makeup, a wearable artifact that can fall into many different evidence categories. 2. *Adornment and Decoration* is an ongoing list of artifact categories. This list includes a space for sustenance, the sacred and religious, and those items whose purpose is to encourage safety and wellbeing. I have included the categories that are most pertinent to my research site. Each researcher should amend this list as needed. As has been covered in countless examples from my tenure at CR, the final operation of the second module moves us towards the study of oral traditions, the importance of personal narrative, and the methods of community conversation and self-description.

The final operation of this module is 3. *Linguistic codes and familial relationships*. This operation prompted my fieldwork to provide insight into the everyday conversations between trans sisters and trans spaces. When engaging community members in one-on-one or group conversation, or during countless hours of participant observation, I was sure to collect the most popular words and phrases shared amongst friends. This list included words and phrases that I had never heard before and common phrases used in unexpected and ingenious ways. This list includes but is not limited to: the hustle, getting life, TWOC and expletive exclamations such as cunt, bitch, and fierce. In addition to my ability to glean working definitions from casual conversations and formal interviews, my project has greatly benefited from definitions as set by the Casa

Ruby women themselves. I valued making the time to ask folks to provide me with in-depth descriptions for terms as well as example sentences for their favorite phrases. After all, TWOC are our resident experts in trans linguistic cultures. Community definitions cemented my fieldwork in the daily life of my research site. This list of intra-community terms and phrases also includes intentionally lewd and empowering descriptions for women's bodies, body parts, and body sizes. These self-proclamations include: "She's a BIG girl," "He was lookin' at my tiny titties," and "she's got a big pussy." These phrases indicate a gender transition process that does not rely on prohibitively priced medical intervention and/or surgical augmentation. Imagination is key. In the above examples, "pussy" becomes a reimagined and desired female body part rather than an effeminate and sometimes-reclaimed synonym to the homophobic slur, "faggot"—a common and hateful description for a perceived effeminate person. Reclaiming pussy instead of being "called" a pussy allows TWOC to lay claim to their womanhood. Like swardspeak, the way TWOC at CR reimagine and repurpose words allows the women to invoke and cheer on the transformation of the female sex organ, a crowning piece of anatomy, and an embodied sense of defiance shared between mothers, sisters, and daughters.

Of particular interest to my project is the community's investment in personal naming. For the women of CR, naming one's self is a two-part process of social transition, involving first choosing and sharing a new first name, and then being chosen by a trans mother, auntie, or sister and her family, like Ruby herself. Women in these leadership roles would usher the newcomer into her extended family and raise her anew. She would then fiercely advocate for her adopted child in the face of hateful and homo/transphobic family members and transphobic government officials. Additionally, if

an older CR girl-now mother had a supportive relationship with her family of origin, these family members would nurture her new trans daughter or gay-son as well. Even more than an individual's first name, which may change from week to week, what struck me most about these matrilineal naming practices was the importance of one's familial identity and role, i.e. mother, sister, auntie, and daughter. A leadership role relied less on age and more on the amount of time a girl had been in "the life" and gender transition.

It is important to note that many of the younger CR girls did not know my first name unless we were also friends on Facebook. Though I always felt recognized and seen as a member of the CR community, I believe that folks didn't know my name for a few, but important reasons. First, I was often fifteen years older than most of the newer girls, and second I am not in the Ball scene Though visibly effeminate, I am not a trans woman. Additionally, my fieldwork was regular, it was not always weekly or monthly, and the increasingly high turnover of CR community and staff members, meant I was not always familiar to CR girls. Add to this the drastic increase in CR employment, and most notably, the shift towards LGBT youth-oriented services (ages eighteen to twenty-four) and an expansion in client services. After this shift and the large influx of young people, I began to have fewer recorded interviews. I focused more heavily on participant observation and informal conversation. This meant that I did not always meet or know the TWOC at CR on a given day. Instead, facial recognition became the most important social cultural research practice in the space. Names began to feel less important. A simple, "Hey girl!" and a hug became an instant moment of acceptance. As such, my formal interviews included TWOC who ranged in age from twenty to fifty. The later portion of my fieldwork would focus on young Ballroom members and their friends. I

will also say that my androgyny, extensive tattoos, nose ring, age, and racial ambiguity allowed me to be readily accepted by most if not all CR sub-cliques. The space and its family members offered a refuge of acceptance and research. Earned acceptance seemed to supersede traditional practices of introduction. In other words, at CR you did not have to be your name, you could be *yourself*. This knowledge of a transitioning self and self-making made each TWOC that I interacted with a resident expert in everyday life. In the following section I return to the work of Jeremy Korr in order to reconsider the role of the community researcher and the final module of the trans model.

*In order to get life, you also have to be willing to give*¹⁷⁸

The role of the researcher—Returning to the Korr model

The final module of *Bodies in spaces—the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model* is 3. *Expertise and reciprocity—community research, friendship & mutual respect*. Though each of these analytic themes has appeared in all previous modules and sub-operations discussed thus far, 3. *Expertise* revisits the conclusion to Korr's breakthrough fieldwork model, his relevant though self-conscious preoccupation with scholarly perception, and shifting role of the researcher in the field of American Cultural Studies. Central to this module is the application of the implementation of the trans powerhouse. An intersectional square, the trans powerhouse positions the socio-political, spatial-emotional, and affective-cultural implications of interdisciplinary and community-based ethnographic research. This module extends a feminist investment in race-class-gender-sexuality as central to an intersectional analysis to encompass four additional identity-based analytic categories: objects-humans-buildings-storytelling. The trans powerhouse will provide much needed methodological structure to the porous

operations that follow. 3. *Expertise* moves us away from a unidirectional focus on perception, i.e. perception of self (the researcher) in relation to others (research participants and broader community), perception of the field and its inhabitants, and broader perception of stigmatized populations and marginalized locations. This module instead centers the active maintenance of relationality and shared space.

Korr concludes his model with a brief but critical template for questioning “the role of the researcher” in the academy and out in the field.¹⁷⁹ In the last few pages of his appendix, Korr questions scholarly subjectivity and his lingering desire/preoccupation to be protected by the legitimating powers of scholarly objectivity.¹⁸⁰ He concludes that our everyday powers of self-perception tint the narratives we carefully create, document, and interpret as scholars. As a module adjacent to Korr’s own aims, 3. *Expertise* reconsiders the researcher’s responsibility to her community and to the landscapes in which trans people thrive. As we have seen, TWOC knowledge production and space are grounded in the regional, imaginative, and collaborative practice of experience and expertise. This module provides a space to explore personal narratives and communal truths in order to recreate, rearrange, and redefine trans methods. Though this model does not include guidance on quantitative data collection, future versions and extensions would benefit from statistical research in fields such as sociology, anthropology, social work, and public health.

I am a qualitative researcher invested in in/tangible cultural artifacts, liminal spaces, and transient peoples. As such, I’ve developed an ambivalent relationship to *facts* in my work with trans women. For instance, I decided early on in my fieldwork not to fact-check the interviews or conversations gathered during the research process. I instead

found infinite qualitative value in and paid witness to the quiet power of trans personal narrative. I don't doubt that individual TWOC embellished their narratives, made them fantastical, or at least less tragic, for me. CR was a building full of protagonists, and each leading lady utilized the interview space to illuminate the struggles, dreams, and aspirations that have made daily life more livable. Storytelling is a viable trans method to the women of Casa Ruby. And though I hoped that my presence and my role in the field was perceived as positive, participatory, supportive, and only minimally disruptive to the CR environment, I had to remain attuned to the constant shifts in the landscape and its inhabitants. My research site implicated me, and I am obligated to represent and theorize her from this place. Trans fieldwork and analysis are an expression of this care. Once embedded in the field of Casa Ruby my presence altered and was constantly changed by my surroundings. Fieldwork is a *very* trans process. Extending Korr's culture triad objects-humans-nature to objects-humans-buildings-storytelling, 3. *Expertise* reconsiders the *work* of fieldwork as an exercise in heartfelt research, respect, and reciprocity within queer and trans community. Although the women of Casa Ruby are not the intended reading audience for this dissertation, they were always the in-house experts and I was their enthusiastic audience-participant. A now familiar excerpt from my fieldwork serves to broaden this inquiry and usher the initial sub-operation, 1. *Research as reciprocity* and its initial phase *Active listening—engaged giving*.

Towards the end of my conversation with Natalie and Esmeralda on a spring afternoon in 2015 Natalie expanded upon her then favorite phrase, "That gives me life!" She reflected:

Natalie: Yeah so that's what gives me life. Seeing us help each other out. *This* right here gives me life. This little conversation we're having given me life. I've never done something like *this* before.

Anthony: What do you mean?

Natalie: Like sitting here talking, with other transgendered people—I've never done that before! I mean sit here and have a really good conversation...I've never done that.¹⁸¹

At the time of our interview, both Natalie and Esmeralda were in their late twenties, in and out of homelessness and trans identity, and brand new to the CR community. What is particularly poignant about Natalie's realization was just how comforting it was to chat with *other* trans people about what it means to be trans, be heard, and dream about a District full of trans *life*.

Of all the interviews I conducted at CR between 2013-2017, this particular conversation was the only opportunity I had to conduct a group-facilitated interview. That afternoon, we sat in a triangle on slightly broken office chairs as a smoke detector low on batteries squawked loudly in the back-left corner. Once comfortable in the second-floor office, Natalie and Esmeralda began to interview one another. They asked pointed questions, laughed, finished each other's sentences, passed my recording device back and forth, remembered time in prison and sex work, and added personal experience to a new collective story about Black *life* and Black women in *the* life. Unfortunately, I did not gain access to the financial resources that would have allowed me to give women cash or gift cards in exchange for time interviewed. I instead made myself available to listen, record, and follow up with women who wanted their stories recorded, documented, or revised. This is not to say that I wouldn't have loved to donate large sums of money to the organization and its individual constituents. I did not have this kind of financial or institutional support as a graduate student. Outside of offering bus fare or a cold drink on

a hot afternoon to a girl short on cash, monetary gain was never the basis of my relationship to CR or individual women. Instead, we traded in what was readily available—dedicated quality time and the promise to find a reading audience. Having these conversations and reliving the interview experience through transcription has afforded me the opportunity to continually pay witness to the inaugural and rehearsed stories of emergent Black and Brown womanhood.

3. *Expertise* is a module built for personal and professional reflection. The following operations offered me an opportunity to meditate on my hybrid social position, activist-scholar-community member, and the rare access to the trans landscape and her people. Though 3. *Expertise* appears third in the trans fieldwork model its sub-operations can be added as needed to or repeated anywhere during the first two modules. 3.

Expertise consists of three sub-operations: 1. *Research as reciprocity* and 2. *From informants to research participants* and, 3. *TLC²—Tender Love and Care & The Trans Life Center*. 2822 Georgia Ave. NW was home to everyday experts on transsexuality, nationality, race, class, and gender in America. In representing trans lives lived this dissertation offers longevity to the life-giving powers of CR and the TWOC who once occupied its front porch, sidewalk, and all three floors of 2822 Georgia Ave. NW. The next operation, *Selfies & group photos*, sets the groundwork for the dissertation's final two chapters, case studies in contemporary TWOC visual cultures, ethnography, and pop culture. *Selfies & group photos* begins with a focus on a material object, the smart phone. Next to food, shelter, and the search for a husband or boyfriend, one's own smart phone and access to free wi-fi were major daily priorities to a CR girl between the ages of nineteen to twenty-five. A girl's smart phone had many duties. It was a quick way to

secure a Craig's List date or a ride to the next Ball. But the central purpose of a smart phone at CR for a young Black trans woman was three-fold: communication, social media, and selfies. A functioning self-facing camera was often used as or instead of a compact mirror. Smart phones appeared during and just after fresh makeup application in order to document prime selfie taking moments. During the research process, the smart phone was both my camera and my recording device. I have witnessed countless TWOC selfie moments in-person and online. I have taken group selfies with many trans women and I have been asked to take "candid" (highly stylized "casual") group photos of TWOC at Casa Ruby community events such as birthdays and barbeques. During my fieldwork, I used my smart phone to capture portrait-inspired photos of all of my interviewees at the conclusion of each interview. It is important to note that the women that starred in these photos and in the dissertation more broadly required photo approval. This was true for any photo in which a woman's face and identity may be clearly visible. I have also included many posed and candid group photos throughout the dissertation. I can say with awe and certainty that CR girls have self-representation and visual expertise documentation superpowers. They can create breathtaking selfies even in the most trash-filled locations and during dire life moments. Yet, selfies reveal as much as they conceal, including states of hunger, homelessness, addiction, poverty, and mental-emotional-physical turmoil, crisis, or illness. I have never had a CR girl turn down my request for a photograph and vice versa. These closing moments of informal portraiture provided a collaborative closing ritual to each interview. This seemed especially important as most of my participants were first time interviewees. Group photos and group selfies (outward

versus self-facing photos) allowed me to document 2822, a building alive with her people.

The next operation, 2. *From informants to research participants*, is a two-part process. It includes the evolution of a trans fieldwork methodology and the strategies for building community-based knowledge production. This operation is greatly influenced by the collection *Bodies of Evidence—The Practice of Queer Oral History* (2012). Editors Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Rodriguez center the body as *the* site of queer knowledge production and storytelling as the “most basic performative ingredient to [queer] oral history.” They claim that oral history is a collaborative performance wherein each player is “seeking expression through voice and gesture to create and document public meaning.”¹⁸² Though the dissertation is not an oral history project per se, trans fieldwork and analysis are a parallel and embodied research process. To document contemporary trans lives is to participate in the documentation of public and private meaning making amidst the rise of TWOC counter-publics.

3. *TLC²—Tender Love and Care in the Trans Life Center* is our final sub-operation. I began this operation by selecting a highly frequented sub-section of my research site to focus on. Narrowing my approach to scale enabled me to create a focused and detail-rich case study. Future example locations can include, but are not limited to, the front stoop, “ladies” bathroom, front or back porch, a bench, or the back-left corner of a multi-purpose gymnasium or stage. As is evident, the basement of CR was the focal point of and stage for my participant observation. The TLC was a hyper-local entry point for my fieldwork and a low barrier entry point for all those in need of social services, information, and familial connection. Individuals who found their way into CR via the

TLC included researchers, print, online, and radio journalists, financial donors, television film crews, college-aged volunteers, and hundreds of TWOC. By waiving basic access qualifications, the basement of 2822 Georgia Ave. NW became the (epi)center for trans arrival and return. 3. *TLC*² marks our return to the weekend of the 2017 United States Conference on AIDS and the second annual CR Queer and Trans Ball. This operation purposefully revisits all previous modules and operations in order to magnify the spatial impact of tender love and care. This ever-changing collection of methods and strategies is the study of trans spatial practice 3. *TLC*² brings our focus back to the built environment. While the trans model has aimed to identify *what* makes a space trans, 3. *TLC*² theorizes *how* we might come to know a trans space if we saw and felt it. This operation asks that its user choose the three themes that speak to the interrelationships of trans identity, space, and place. I have chosen: trans love, care, and friendship. Though much of the remainder of the dissertation will be concerned with themes of trans sisterhood, an autumn afternoon in the TLC re-presents questions of interiority, embodiment, and the built environment. With an eye to the private sphere and the queer safe haven, trans verbal and visual cues point us towards the social implications of care and livability in the District. The TLC was an agentic space; it was a place that gave *life* to all those who entered. 3. *TLC*² is the culmination of trans fieldwork and analysis. It relies heavily on the belief that research should be a reciprocal process. I'd like to return to two images from September 7, 2017 to close out this chapter on the creation and application of trans cultural landscape analysis model and the final sub-operation: *Trans methods and expressions*. Extending themes such as love, queer caretaking, the following fieldwork excerpt illustrates the spatial implications of care and livability.

Part glamour, part hot dog, dorm room-elementary school classroom-sweet-sixteen-LGBT pride party, Figures 10 and 11 depict parallel images of trans experience. That afternoon, I sat in the center of the TLC. To my left were two friends enjoying lunch and eye makeup. The wall to my right was fully covered in printer and construction paper, fluttering rainbow streamers, and an oversized trans pride flag taped to the powder blue wall.



Fig. 10 and 11 Scenes from TLC on September 7, 2017—side wall / friends, lunch, and makeup

Figure 10 features the upper right corner of the TLC’s walls. At that corner we can see a small black magazine rack (now bookshelf), a grey plastic table with matching chairs, and Tupperware. For the purposes of 3. *TLC*², I’d like to draw our attention to the wall decorations. The epitome of tender and informative trans expression, a basement wall became a teaching tool and at its center was a glowing ode to our Stonewall foremother, Ms. Martha “Pay It No Mind” Johnson. A TWOC legend of the late 20th century and a heroine of the 1969 Stonewall Riots, Marsha lives on the wall of the TLC. Ms. Pay It No Mind is a “real life superhero” and her Xeroxed portrait lays lightly amongst multi-color construction paper hearts and Crayola washable marker rainbows. She lays gently on a

flag that she never got to see.¹⁸³ Beside her are thank you cards laid out in a heart-shaped wreath and behind her is a blanket of crepe paper streamers. Though pink replaced purple, the streamer rainbow flutters, twists, and hangs at different lengths. Like an oversized wig just big enough for a basement, the streamers create an ever-ready photo booth backdrop and a curtain to a place without an exit. Strips of multi-colored paper camouflage the wall like peacock feathers. These soft and bright tones envelope the space and gently cloak two friends too focused on perfect eyebrows and eating hot dogs to notice the cisgender world just outside the glass door and security gate of their basement hide-away. The following chapter introduces the first of two case studies that apply the trans model the women of Casa Ruby and TWOC in popular culture in the time during the transgender tipping point.

Chapter 4: Everyone needs a place to crash—Transgender women of color, fieldwork, sisterhood, and popular culture—Part 1

Chapter Four is the first of two popular culture case studies utilizing and adapting the Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Field Work Model. Throughout the following chapters, I refer to and broaden modules, operations, and sub-operations as a necessary refrain to add structure to non-linear narratives and discursive shifts for TWOC during a time and place in research and popular culture more commonly referred to as *the* transgender point. While chapter four concentrates on transgender women of color in film, chapter five will focus on TWOC as critical pop culture consumers on social media producers. The later pays particular attention to Black and Latinx trans feminine affinity for a highly curated and well-*liked* Facebook status. I argue, though younger generations of trans women, their immediate friend communities, and celebrity counter-parts—think Laverne Cox and the stars of the award-winning television series *Pose*¹⁸⁴ favor evolving youth-focused platforms such as Instagram.¹⁸⁵ For quick and strategic image sharing, friend-ing, and branding, Facebook continues to provide TWOC in the District of Columbia with an user-friendly platform for intergenerational communication, event planning, and self-representation. Beyond the immediate rewards of selfie sharing, friending, and web-based interactive-popularity modalities, chapter Four studies the landscape of TWOC in film and the shifting stakes of queer cinema. While I will follow the operations of the trans model as they are listed, *Everyone needs a place to crash* documents the unstoppable presence of TWOC in front of and behind self-facing cameras. Through insurgent and theatrical interventions into everyday life, art, narration, and self-creation, TWOC are critical viewers. They demand to be seen.

Everyone needs a place to crash is guided by a selection of the dissertation's central questions and new lines of inquiry for the study of trans women in fieldwork and film: we use theory to get closer to the lives we are interested in, if, we are invested in *centering* the margins. In extending gender transition narratives to functions that do not apply to space, how do we know a *trans* space when we see it? In extending ethnographic research methods, what new things can we learn and do with our fieldwork? What happens to the landscape of popular culture, visual analysis, and critical scholarship when trans women begin to represent themselves? Lastly, what do these spatial practices tell us about American cultural investment in identity and its *tipping points*?¹⁸⁶ *Everyone needs a place to crash* explores the edges of *the* field of fieldwork and new directions in interdisciplinary cultural analysis. Grounding in my fieldwork with Casa Ruby, chapter Four is an exploration of new trans geographies, pop cultures, friendships, and the vibrant and circuitous, though precarious paths of trans experience.

Blending film, fiction, and fieldwork, *Everyone needs a place to crash* endeavors to showcase individual Casa Ruby community members alongside up-and-coming TWOC actors and filmmakers as essential experts, innovative content creators and cultural producers, active community participants, audience members, activists and social actors in the dual fields of community-based ethnography and the study of trans popular culture(s). Although the study of film and ethnographic fieldwork are not interchangeable, they do support each other well. Through a careful and ongoing process of scholarly documentation and imaginative story(re)telling, chapters Four and Five are guided by my research findings at Casa Ruby. Each chapter features excerpts from my fieldwork at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW while prioritizing the ongoing application of the

Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model. For the ease of the reader, the model is on pages eighty-three through eighty-five. Through investment in creative personal narrative, intra-personal communication, and shared love of the built environment, the following two chapters endeavor to investigate the interplay between ethnography and popular culture, transition and chosen family, architectural space, and city-infrastructure for a small group of Black trans women.

In chapter Three, *Storytelling, sidewalks, and domestic interiors*, I argued, the study of trans space and public trans femme of color populations require a trans-specific analytical fieldwork model. The creation and application of this model, *Bodies in spaces—the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model*, is directly informed by the women of Casa Ruby and the daily tender love and care I witnessed at 2822 Georgia Avenue in Northwest D.C. *Storytelling, sidewalks, and domestic interiors* presented an in-depth description and exploration of each module. The trans model moves our attention away from a solitary fascination with and intellectual investment in the physicality of trans women’s bodies to study the impact of the trans cultural landscape—the spatial elements that ground trans women’s everyday lives, social services, and familial relationships. In order to re-map the District as a *trans* space in a *trans* time, I revisited May 29, 2014, a significant turning point in national discussions on LGBT identity, visibility, and human rights. A temporal-spatial analogy, the transgender tipping point, not unlike the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City, had come to represent a time when transgender people entered a moment of emergence. *Time* magazine encouraged its trans and gender non-conforming readers to imagine ourselves, like Laverne Cox, standing at the tipping point, staring into the horizon of “America’s next

civil rights frontier.”¹⁸⁷ The transgender tipping point has become a precipice for public discourse, the height, future, and promise of LGBT liberation. Its announcement came quickly behind the heels of gay marriage and marriage equality in America as the next logical step in civil rights.

The lead article of the May 29, 2014, issue of *Time* was entitled “America’s Transition.” It began with the following description: “Nearly a year after the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, another social movement is poised to challenge deeply held cultural beliefs.” In this metaphor, America, like Laverne Cox, utilizes her gender identity, expression, and transition into womanhood to influence a long-awaited cultural shift. Staff writer Katy Steinmetz opens “America’s Transition” with a narration of an awestruck queer audience awaiting the public appearance of transgender actress-advocate, Laverne Cox. She describes Cox as an “unlikely icon” who “has gone from being bullied to appearing feminine as a kid in Mobile, AL to acting in *Orange is The New Black* and becoming a public face for a transgender movement.” In this hero’s narrative, Cox speaks for the LGBT collective:

We are in a place now where more and more trans people are willing to tell their stories. More of us are living visibly and pursuing our dreams visibly so people can say, ‘Oh yeah, I know someone who is trans.’ When people have points of reference that we are humanizing, that demystifies difference.¹⁸⁸

Like a Black lady liberty Laverne Cox announces that to see trans is to know trans, and thus, to be trans is to be both seen, visible, and cognitively recognizable.

On February 16, 2016, Melissa Gira Grant, author of *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work*, published a response article entitled, “After the Transgender Tipping Point.” In this critical op-ed Grant interrupts *Time* magazine’s emphasis on themes, visibility, progress, rights, and citizenship. She begins, “Visibility is the currency we use

to judge how much and whose lives are valued, but it's not everything." In this article, Grant, and her interlocuter trans activist and advocate Tourmaline Gosset, urge readers to reconsider the vulnerability and exclusion that comes with moments of hypermedia driven visibility.¹⁸⁹ If, as Grant suggests, visibility like progress is decoupled, we might create fruitful intra-community LGBT conversations about the everyday socio-political life of inclusion and social death for multiply marginalized transgender Americas. *Everyone needs a place to crash* is an exploration of specific trans stories, bodies, cultures, spaces, and emotions as they circulate in everyday life and into the contemporary popular imagination.

Chapter Four situates TWOC as experts on their own lives and their cinematic representations. I argue film featuring TWOC actors in trans roles have so much to teach us about the hybrid study of cultural landscapes and popular culture. Sean Baker's feature-length film, *Tangerine* (2015), dedicates its minutes to representing the messy, dangerous, and vibrant lives of Black trans women in an urban America. *Tangerine* gained national attention in both queer and mainstream commercial media. The film's release coincided with a peak moment in national TWOC visibility, and during time I was conducting fieldwork at Casa Ruby. *Tangerine* carefully invokes, represents, and documents the complicated chosen family dynamics, the American cityscape, and the creation of trans visual cultures. A cinematic analysis utilizes key scenes, published interviews with actors, filmmakers, and official press material. Films featuring trans women invoke a now familiar trans cultural landscape; the beautifully intimate and dangerous everyday-ness of sex work, survival, romance, home, and the strength of trans women's friendships. The specific trans women and narratives featured here, and in

Tangerine, reflect key pieces of relatable and imaginative non/fiction that simultaneously mirror, exaggerate, and soften the edges of everyday life of the women I knew at Casa Ruby. I trace these circular narratives and the creation of trans space by implementing the modules and operations of Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Field Work Model.

Fieldwork and Cinema Studies exist in different physical and scholarly planes, and thus, provide very different types of *live* interaction. *Everyone needs a place to crash* broadens the perception of *the* field and the breadth of interdisciplinary fieldwork. After all, researchers are social actors. Further, the category we have come to know as *ethnography*, much like transgender, is an inconsistent and intersectional category by design. Its practice hides under, eludes to, and edits just as much as it reveals its findings in the name of identity formation, objectivity, and non-biased research. Herein lies the lessons of *unrelated kin*,¹⁹⁰ what Linda Williamson-Nelson has called “gradations of endogeny.”

In her essay “Hands in the Chit’lins—Notes on Native Anthropological Among African American Women,” Williamson-Nelson reminds us that once we become researchers of our communities, we are no longer *just* one of the “homegirls.” Williamson-Nelson recognizes the meaningful pre-existing social bonds between Black women. She comes to realize that these bonds are not always enough to gain trust with potential research participants. She describes her methodological approach as follows:

As I began to gather data for the larger project (code-switching and cultural themes in black women’s oral narratives (from which this discussion derives,) I heard my own voice unmistakably among those of my informants. This led to the construction of a naïve and all too simplistic concept of endogenous or native anthropology, one that predicted that my insider status would be largely taken for granted as I sought entrance into the homes and lives of my informants.¹⁹¹

Community insider-status is a tenuous social location. Though I, too, shared many identities with my research participants (transgender, queer, Latinx), I would often reflect on the work of Linda Williamson-Nelson to remind myself of my unique access to the everyday life of Casa Ruby. This level of access was determined by which CR community members were present on a particular day. TOWC encompass a broad set of overlapping marginalized identity categories. Mapping the spatial lives of TWOC I learned to simultaneously move through multiple conversations, geographies, disciplines, and sources. Leaning thoughtfully into this critical inconsistency, I began to reimagine¹⁹² trans, ethnography, fieldwork, and the breadth of geographic scale, analytic categories central to the study of queer and trans populations in the District and beyond.

Everyone needs a place to crash is inspired by the spaces, places, people, and films that provide TWOC with the necessary tools for daily survival in the District of Columbia and the major American City. In chapter One, I defined these strategies as the *hustle*—a trans woman’s daily negotiations for survival, sisterhood, and resilience. The hustle, visually and thematically portrayed in film and fieldwork, is comprised of two central two elements friendship and shelter. The hustle is found in the relationship between the built environment, personal narrative, and popular culture. During my time in graduate school, I have been an active consumer of trans women lead popular cultures. I consume and document trans popular cultures because I have been fortunate enough to witness the current wave of TWOC voices within walking distance of my apartment, on magazine covers in print and online, on the front lines of social justice, arts, and activist circles, and an award-winning television programming and film production. I continue to be in awe of their grit and their non-apologetic take-no-shit demand for trans specific

resources, rights, and visibility, no matter how impermanent the social-cultural salve or how local the impact. Much of the daily activity documented in my fieldwork took place indoors at Casa Ruby's original location, 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. 2822 was a place where Black and Latinx trans women freely produced and consumed new trans worlds. They inhabited new trans bodies, names, and lives. CR was a place where, through practice, trans people could come to recognize themselves in one another.¹⁹³ It was a place where we could feel *seen*. These moments of in/sight are reflected in the trans model.

Everyone needs a place to crash expands and re-applies the Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model in order to explore the interdisciplinary and intra-community bonds between trans people, ethical ethnographic practice, and desire to see ourselves represented on screen and in scholarship. By incorporating the previous chapter's focus on fieldwork and love for trans people, I utilize Casa Ruby as a home-base for the study of Black and Latinx trans life, representation, individual and collective distress, and resilience. I argue, the study of transgender women of color in film broadens the necessity for and the application of The Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model. Chapter Four provides an in-depth application of the model's third and final module, *Expertise and reciprocity—community research, friendship & mutual respect*. Grounded by the trans powerhouse, objects-humans-buildings-storytelling, I refine the ethics, reach, and creativity of the trans model as a whole. Returning to the third module, I reflect on the role of the model, the results of my findings, and the emergent interdisciplinary inter-textual conversations between scholars, films, and trans women cultural producers and consumers.

Following a two-pronged approach to the hustle, *Everyone needs a place to crash* is structured around two pairs of friends and the shelter they were able to provide one another. These friendships included Genie and I (Anthony) and Sin Dee and Alexandra (*Tangerine*). Unique co-created fictional, and fieldwork friendship narratives exist in the ever-expanding metropolitan landscape of trans sisterhood in America. Giving face and taking up space, TWOC in Northwest Washington, D.C. (Casa Ruby), and Los Angeles (*Tangerine*) chronicle the close bonds formed between trans women on and off-screen. In short, cinematic performances illuminate what it might mean for TWOC to live their *best* lives in a time when “living visibly”¹⁹⁴ as feminine and effeminate Black and Brown trans people is both extremely dangerous and very beautiful. Widening the scope and scale of the trans model to address the daily impact of shelter and friendship (broadly imagined), I revisit the *how* and *where* of visual and cultural analysis for my target population. I consider the daily creation, maintenance, and study of shelter and friendship as a *hustle*; a collection of carefully told stories about caregiving with limited resources.

Chapter Four is inspired by Michel de Certeau’s essay “Spatial Stories.” For de Certeau, *stories* are always already spatial. Carefully told narratives to provide a roadmap. These maps reorient the storyteller to the joys of wandering. De Certeau describes the work of storytelling as the transformation of “places into spaces or spaces into places.” He encourages scholars and wanderers alike to walk with determination, make creative spatial interventions, and get lost. De Certeau offers his readers two images frontiers and bridges. For Certeau, storytelling opens an interstitial space wherein the scholar-storyteller bravely oscillates between “(legitimate) space [frontiers] and its (alien) exteriority [bridges].” Not unlike *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga,

Anzaldúa), Certeau's bridge, when crossed by trans women, provides shelter in unlikeliest of places.¹⁹⁵ *Everyone needs a place to crash* utilizes de Certeau's work as a bridge to the spatial stories about the shelters we find in trans friendship and the trans friendships we find shelter in. I capture moments in the field and on-screen when trans people are *seen* as whole and loved. I have witnessed the collective impact of trans sight. These moments come and go in a flash, but their impact lingers much longer. Theorizing the spatial tenderness of these moments creates a necessary bridge to trans embodiment.

From a trans place in a trans time after the transgender tipping point (Grant), the following case studies are dedicated to the women of Casa Ruby and indebted to the editors of and contributors to *Trap Door—Trans Production and the Politics of Visibility* (2017). *Trap Door* is a groundbreaking anthology whose pages bravely capture the paradox of contemporary trans life. This paradox combines the impact of hyper visibility and rapidly increasing commercial attention. In the face of limited and limiting mainstream acceptance, diminishing human rights and equality measures, and a drastic increase in anti-Black racism and anti-trans violence, the editors *Trap Door* offer the image of the trapdoor. Both physical and intangible, trapdoors are “those clever contraptions that are not entrances or exits but secret passageways that take you someplace else, often someplace yet unknown.”¹⁹⁶ From the threshold of the Trans Life Center in Northwest Washington, D.C. to the endless sidewalks and Laundromats of downtown Los Angeles reimaged in the film *Tangerine*, chapter Four argues for the study of trans space as a cultural landscape. These vivid fieldwork vignettes and scene analysis feature central themes from my time with research participants, fictionalized

characters, and overlapping storylines. Mapping the local onto the cinematic, chapter Four utilizes 2822 as an oasis that welcomes frequent return.

In chapter Three, *Storytelling, sidewalks, and domestic interiors—The Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model*, I invited the reader into Casa Ruby and the study of *trans* space. Grounded in the nation's capital, I explored such themes as home, belonging, geographic scale, and the role of the researcher. I focused on a single city block in Northwest Washington, D.C. I argued that fieldwork is a very *trans* process. I came to understand that fieldwork with Black and Latinx transgender women of color requires a dedication to research *as* reciprocity. The research process necessitates a willingness on the part of the researcher, to change and be changed by the field and fieldwork. Through themes such as interiority, embodiment, and the built environment, I asserted, trans women transform their built environment, and in so doing they rearrange mundane *and* highly theorized spaces of labor, domesticity, and femininity. Research like reciprocity is not a culturally neutral relationship. As a mixed-race Latinx, a female socialized, androgynous trans person, I found and built invaluable kinship at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW for five years.

I have and continue to be a part of trans women's community of Washington, D.C. It is important to reiterate here. I am not a trans woman. It was very common for a Casa Ruby community member to mistake me for a woman of trans experience. Being read as a trans woman is a beautiful compliment. When asked, I was transparent about my non-binary, trans identity and my love of bright pink lipstick. My visually ambiguous race, gender, and age were both confusing and amusing to the TWOC around me. All queer and trans experiences were welcome at 2822. I wasn't one of *the* girls, but I never

felt excluded from their space or their conversations. I am so grateful to have been a part of a D.C. trans sisterhood. CR and her community shaped me as a trans person and as a trans-feminist scholar. From interiors to exteriors, the geography of chapter Four reflects a sense of pride in city sidewalks, streets, alleyways, public toilets, public transportation, the Laundromat, donut shops, and the red carpet. The TWOC featured in this chapter beckon us to critically examine private moments and counter-publics formed in the public sphere and the American cityscape. In the following section, I return to an afternoon at Casa Ruby with my good friend Genie. I explore the major themes and guiding questions of the dissertation and the applicability of the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model.

Though she has appeared in other sections of the dissertation, Genie is the omniscient narrator of, and inspiration for *Everyone needs a place to crash*. Aside from Casa Ruby's founder, mother, leader, and executive director Ruby Corado, Genie was my most consistent confidant and peer. We are both transgender people of color and share many of the same pop culture references. We are the same age, and our life trajectories have significantly differed. Guided by the stars of *Tangerine* and Casa Ruby, the following holiday afternoon with Genie leads us back to the trans model.

Truly outrageous¹⁹⁷--Genie and the Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model

It was Thanksgiving 2017 at 2822 Georgia Ave NW. As I walked to CR on that brisk November afternoon, I hoped to find a boisterous drop-in center and a feast covered in gravy. The Facebook event page listed a 3:00 pm celebration start time. I left my apartment around 4:00 pm so that I would not be the first to arrive. On November 23, 2017, The Trans Life Center was plastered with hand-made and bought holiday

decorations. Bright orange balloons clumped and held by twine, white, and orange crepe paper streamers twisted into messy garlands and smiling cartoon paper turkeys boasting messages of gratitude. Three large grey plastic fold-out tables created a vertical line down the center of the basement. Their collective plastic surface stretched to create a community dining room. Additional chairs lined the perimeter of the basement, creating the illusion of a balcony overlooking the upcoming holiday-buffet and festivities. There was a dense layer seasonal sadness that hung to the small handful of people aimlessly milling about the basement. Amongst the Hallmark decorations, trans-inclusive wellness posters, and bowls of complimentary safer sex supplies, there was an overwhelming emptiness that no number of inspirational quotes or washable markers could uplift. Folks stared at their smartphones and intermittently gossiped to themselves. And then I saw Genie.

Genie was recently released from an in-patient drug rehabilitation program. Though Genie has asked me not to discuss her drugs of choice she has encouraged me to share her daily experience. The three major components of Genie's hustle are survival sex work, drug addiction, inconsistent housing, and non-profit social service. In her years at 2822 Genie was.¹⁹⁸ She was a client, an employee, and often both. She was a receptionist, a program coordinator suspended for excessive drug use, a part-time CR shelter resident, and a residential shelter assistant. I was glad to see Genie that day. I was often afraid that Genie was going to die at her hand, accidentally, or in a moment of transphobic violence or domestic assault. Genie's precarious finances, employment, housing, mental health, and heavy drug use seeped into her paid work and romantic relationships. Genie didn't have many friends. She wasn't interested in the responsibility

and “drama” that friendship with trans women, outside of work, might require. It is important to note that Genie *never* needed me to worry about her or take care of her. She very rarely asked me for anything but to laugh at her jokes or a dollar or two for something cold and sweet to drink from the corner store. She is a self-sufficient woman whose stigmatized habits, though intensely debilitating, were routine. No matter how high Genie might have been on a particular day, she always expressed her friendship by playfully mocking what she perceived to be my saccharine concern for her wellbeing. Genie was cognizant that I was aware of her daily struggles to maintain her sobriety, its direct effects on her mental health, and her ability to sustain employment and housing at Casa Ruby. We each identified, tolerated, and negotiated moments of crisis and crisis response very differently. Genie did not experience her daily precarity *as* a crisis. These productive moments of friendship and personal/emotional discomfort in the field would come to shape my work with the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model.

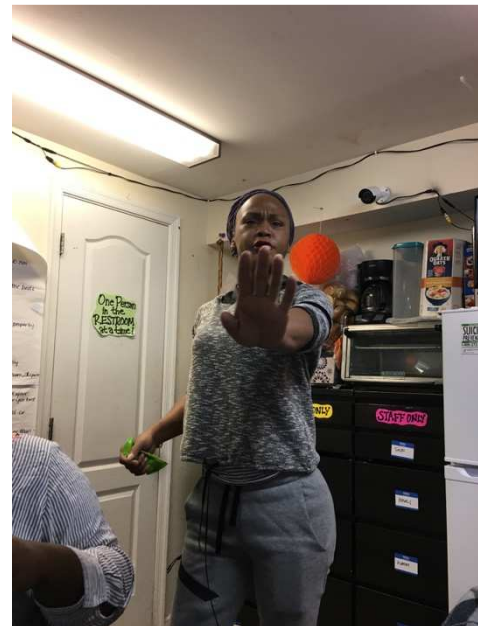


Fig. 12 Genie, high and starting wistfully past a bundle of orange balloons, Thanksgiving @ CR 2017

Fig. 13 Genie mid-song, Thanksgiving 2017

On Thanksgiving 2017, Genie, as she often did, insisted on singing for me. This repeat performance is captured in figure 12. She sang loudly, horribly, and I loved it. She sang her favorite song, the theme from *Jem and the Holograms*, a famous American cartoon from the mid-1980's. She is seen here standing at the back-left corner of the Trans Life Center. Her mouth is full of candy as she sings, yells, chews, and holds a half-eaten bag of sour Skittles in her right hand. To Genie's right is a restroom with a hand-made sign fit for a co-ed undergraduate dorm. It reads, "One Person in the Restroom at a time!"

Behind her are a makeshift storage space and a seldom-used security camera. The top surface of two overflowing "staff-only" filing cabinets creates an additional kitchen and pantry surface. This pantry includes Kleenex tissue box, toaster oven, bagged bagels, coffee maker, empty plastic Tupperware, and a family sized container of individual instant Quaker Oats packets. The pantry spills over onto the top of one of two refrigerators. There is a magnet on the top left corner of the first refrigerator. The magnet provides pertinent information for a national suicide prevention hotline. That day Genie wore a hooded heather grey long-sleeved shirt, fitted sweatpants, and a faded maroon linen head wrap. After my serenade, I joined Genie for a quick trip to the back patio. Genie was a chain-smoker who loved sugar and often skipped or forgot to eat meals. Shortly after we stepped outside and sat in our broken lawn chairs Genie began to growl harshly into her sentences.

A low growl, slurred words, or speaking at a higher pitch was a typical sound for Genie to make. These and similar sounds indicated physical and emotional exhaustion and/or a much heavier period of active drug use. That day I noticed that Genie was

missing most of her top front teeth. They were jagged as though someone had roughly hacked them in half. I leaned in and looked closely at her open mouth. Shocked, I asked her what had happened to her teeth. She stared into the distance and whispered to no one in particular, “I must have lost them somewhere...” Her growl turned faint. She lifted her eyelids just enough to re-light a neglected cigarette that dangled stuck to her glossed lips. I laughed and asked if she had fallen asleep. Startled, she exclaimed, “No, Anthony! I was just nodding off. It’s not sleeping!” I didn’t know the difference and we laughed as we often did at my goody-two-shoes naiveté and lack of knowledge about drugs and drug use. Our laughs faded and I let her rest. I walked back through the TLC, and I smiled to myself about what I did and did not know about Genie’s lived experience.¹⁹⁹

Support your sisters not just your cisters²⁰⁰- trans fieldwork methodology

The final module of *Bodies in spaces—the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model* extends the work of Jeremy Korr to reconsider the role of the researcher. The third module of the Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model, *Expertise and reciprocity—community research, friendship, and mutual respect*, investigates community-based knowledge production and the spatial relationship between community care, transition, and livability. *Expertise and reciprocity* advocates for ethical and loving fieldwork. For me, analysis and fieldwork is an investment in deepening friendship. Moving away from a unidirectional focus on the impact of *perception*; perception of the self (researcher) in relation to others (population being studied) and perception of the field and its inhabitants (as reflected in our scholarship), allowed me to center the women of Casa Ruby in my research. In the rich, popular examples that follow, I apply what I learned from Genie on Thanksgiving 2017. Listening is not enough. Research with

TWOC is a deep dive into an engaged and intersectional feminist practice. It requires active listening, care, and documentation of lives that have not been deemed worthy of adequate study and social services. And in the field, Genie is the expert of her daily hustle.

Emergent Black womanhood—intersectionality and spatial analogy

Our approach to freedom need not be identical, but it must be intersectional and inclusive. It must extend beyond ourselves. I know with surpassing certainty that my liberation is directly linked to the liberation of the undocumented trans Latina yearning for refuge. The disabled student seeking unequivocal access. The sex worker fighting to make her living safely.²⁰¹ Janet Mock, The National Women's March. Washington, D.C. January 21, 2017

In chapter Three, I introduced the trans powerhouse. The powerhouse is an analytic shape that extends feminist investment in multiple categories of identity, difference, analysis. By adding objects, humans, buildings, and storytelling to the iconic categories of third world women of color feminist thought (race-class-gender-sexuality), the trans model foregrounds intersectionality in *space*. In attending to intersectionality's spatial contexts, as popularized by Kimberle Crenshaw, I return to the image of the four-way stop. Crenshaw was not the first scholar-activist to promote intersectional thinking and the interlocking binds of race, gender, identity, systemic oppression, and the law. However, her attention to everyday violence and its analogous relationship to the common street intersection is particularly pertinent to Black and Latinx trans women. Rather than seeing Crenshaw's most famous analogy as simply additive, I to turn to how TWOC continue to find relevance in the premise and promise of trans inclusive Black feminism and intersectional feminist. Although potentially unanticipated by Crenshaw's published work in the late 20th century, Black trans women's identity is inherently intersectional. For Black-Hawaiian trans activist, model, television personality, and *New*

York Time's Best-Selling author Janet Mock, intersectional feminism, as illustrated by the quote that begins this section, seeks to humanize marginalized women's experiences of the labor, bodies, citizenship status, and freedom.²⁰²

The theoretical impact of a TWOC standpoint epistemology foregrounds legacies of Black feminism and radical Black and Brown trans women. On her website, JanetMock.com, Janet Mock has dedicated an entire page to her work as a member of the policy team and a speaker for the 2017 Women's March in Washington, D.C. In a blog entitled, "I Am My Sister's Keeper: Read my Women's March on Washington Speech" Mock includes live footage of the event via radical-leftist news and activism hub, *Democracy Now*, a brief self-penned introduction to keynote address, and links to previous posts which highlight the ways in which trans women and sex workers must be included in the women's movement's current and future work.²⁰³ From the policy table to the podium surrounded by microphones and cameras, Janet Mock *knew* that she "wanted to speak about what solidarity, liberation, and commitment to the work truly looks like." For Janet Mock, *liberation* is a link in an ever-expanding inclusive circle. From within this circular shape, Mock stood on an outdoor stage in freezing temperatures on a morning in 2017 as a dedication to the work of her feminist ancestors Sojourner Truth, Sylvia Rivera, from Ella Baker to Audre Lorde, Harriet Tubman, and Marsha P. Johnson.²⁰⁴ By widening the circle of WOC (women of color) feminism to include pioneering TWOC voices, Mock demands, from the winter streets of D.C., that our liberation be intersectional in new and un/anticipated ways. Though Mock does not mention Kimberle Crenshaw by name, Crenshaw's scholarship and public appearances have popularized the terms of intersectionality. Although a current generation of

feminists including, Janet Mock gravitates towards the work of intersectionality as popularized by Crenshaw, this too invisibilizes pioneering WOC feminist voices, which include but are not limited to the Combahee River Collective, Barbara Smith, Bonnie Thornton Dill, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Patricia Hill Collins. Between the scholarship on and the popular culture surrounding intersectionality and its adoption in many feminist-activist circles is Crenshaw's 1989 essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics."

As the reader is by now very familiar, Kimberle Crenshaw offers her readers an analogy to the street intersection. Collisions/discrimination take place at the intersections of identity. A single axis analysis cannot account for the injuries sustained within the intersection. The tendency to address one category of discrimination at a time i.e. race or gender, but not both. The street intersection, both imagined and real, requires pedestrians, drivers, activists, and theorists to *see* Black women in America. As others have critiqued, Crenshaw's essay does not account for nuances in Black female gender identity and/or sexuality. From a socio-legal standpoint, Crenshaw asks us to stand in the middle of the street. We wait at the stop light and loiter on the corner, we critique discourse, doctrine, and anti-racist politics in America in the late 20th century.

Though under-theorized, Crenshaw's work with the image of a basement is even more pertinent to the study of Casa Ruby and the everyday life of Trans Life Center. According to Crenshaw's analysis, to be in the basement (a reimagined spatialization of *the margins*) requires "bottom-up commitment" to addressing structural oppression, the privileging of masculinity in activist work, and the valorization of whiteness in feminist

circles. In this particular basement, the reader finds herself crushed by an endless pile of disadvantaged peoples. In this interwoven mess of oppressed and oppressive human flesh; we are stacked “feet standing on shoulders.” We are unable to sit or move we struggle to keep upright. Those at the top are minimally disadvantaged because they have received other privileges such as education and employment, while those at the bottom experience the multiplicity of oppression and identity-based discrimination. Black women hold up the bottom of the pile. In this dark box full of disregarded humanity, only the most privileged of the oppressed reach the basement’s ceiling. The ceiling is an evasive portal. For Crenshaw, “the ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are *not* disadvantaged in any way reside” (italics in the original). Crenshaw notes that some can squeeze through the hatch in the ceiling/floor, gain subjectivity, and leave the less fortunate behind.²⁰⁵ The basement is both a place and a spatial division. 2822 Georgia Avenue NW and the women of Casa Ruby guide me to reimagine the underground life of intersectionality and the promise of the basement whose hatch is as always already impermanent, public, and private, a low barrier entrance and exit. Through its many incarnations, The Trans Life Center, the Casa Ruby’s basement drop-in center was the embodiment and built environment for trans life; bilingual “lifesaving services and programs to the most vulnerable in the [D.C. LGBT] community.”²⁰⁶ Although they may be the foundational layer of the basement, as imagined by Crenshaw, the women of CR uplifted one another, decorated the basement, and often returned to the TLC to be with each other.

As illustrated by my afternoon with Genie, the social pressures of the American family holiday exacerbate a unique seasonal focus on togetherness, care, family, and

gratitude or the loneliness felt at the lack thereof. November 23, 2017, like many afternoons spent in the basement of Casa Ruby, allowed me to revisit a highly frequented sub-section of my research site. The English basement that housed the Trans Life Center evolved during the years. The TLC was a reflection of the organizations shifting goals and target populations. Before Casa Ruby's move and expansion in the winter of 2017, the TLC had been an under-utilized under-staffed drop-in-center, a storage space for donated clothing and food, a popular hangout for Casa Ruby queer and trans youth, a hypothermia shelter, and later a year-round LGBT youth-focused shelter space. Each of these transitions included an aesthetic and linguistic makeover. What we *called* the space and how she was decorated shifted our shared relationship to shelter, friendship, and social service. As an entryway between the underground and formal economies and an initial entry point for D.C. LGBT folks seeking community and social services, the TLC was a place to falter and begin again.

The trans cultural landscape is a shared space. The symbiotic inter-relationships of space, place, and identity formation allowed me, the trans model's user to research a reciprocal process. I approached the *field* as a place of study, active listening, and community-based knowledge production. Alongside contemporary tools of visual and cultural analysis, this particular module provided a malleable guide to documenting critical moments of TWOC visibility, representation, and self-representation in the field of American Cultural Studies. In the following section, I move from the basement of Casa Ruby to the space of the roundtable. In 2017 *Variety* magazine placed Laverne Cox at the head of the *Transgender Actors Roundtable*, an unprecedented multi-media discussion surrounding the explosive emergence of trans actors in Hollywood. As an

object and a location, the roundtable became a temporary refuge, a gathering place for everyday experts on transsexuality, nationality, performance, and representation in America. Departing from Crenshaw, I visualize the roundtable as a hatch. In this case, a hatch is a strategic entry into the study of trans expertise, research, and reciprocity.

Trans Women in Trans Roles—self-representation strategies in American film and television

On August 7, 2018, *Variety* magazine released *Transgender Actors Roundtable: Laverne Cox, Chaz Bono, and More on Hollywood Discrimination*, a multi-media exposé on the transgender tipping point, the Trump administration, and their effects on transgender representation strategies in film and television. The *Transgender Actors Roundtable (TAR)*²⁰⁷ was a gathering for six leading members of the trans film and television industry for an edited one-hour hour-long facilitated conversation. In addition to video documentation curated partial transcripts, glamorous photos of the roundtable participants are available in print and online.²⁰⁸ Additionally featured excerpts from the roundtable are available as two-minute video clips. Each clip focused on an individual participant and his or her poignant insights and comments on a, particularly vibrant, sub-topic. The *Transgender Actors Roundtable* is a necessary and candid conversation on the changing visual life of transgender men and women in American film and television.

It is important to note, the comments section on YouTube for this video is far more celebratory than on *Variety*'s website. I reported the following comment on *Variety.com*. Although it is no longer available for public view, the first comment on *TAR* from July 2018 began, "Trans actors, and trans people in general, need to understand that just because Hollywood accepts you, doesn't mean the rest of the world does." The

comment author predicts that viewing trans bodies in entertainment will disgust straight men. The disgusted cisgender men will then withhold their money and boycott any production that features or promotes the lived trans experience in order to revolt against all trans attempts at life and representation. The comment continues, “You can’t force inclusion with [typo in the original] this type of subject [trans people in popular culture]. Trans actors will have to settle for bit parts on tv [lower case in the original] and select market art house films, which they should be thankful to get.” Despite a surprising awareness of independent film, the above comment is a typical example of the general violent ignorance and self-righteous hatred of trans people in comment sections on the internet and live in offline life. Whereas on August 14, 2018, a young trans man made the following comment on *Variety.com*’s YouTube page, “I’m watching this while recovering from Top Surgery [emphasis in the original]. It’s so amazing to just watch a group of trans people having a conversation together.” This sentiment was followed by three rainbow flag emojis. To which a community member replied, “All you need to do is read the comments on videos like these and you’ll understand why positive representation and normalization of trans people is so important.”²⁰⁹ The difference in emotional-political content for comments sections on *Variety.com* and YouTube was striking.

The *TAR* roundtable provided its participants with a circular, intersectional, vibrant, and equitable platform for conversation. Each participant gained visibility as an expert and an active listening witness to her peers. Participants were quickly able to engage with one another, in large part because of the size, shape, and even surface of the table. Although it seemed to disappear into the room, the table allowed its participants to shape a national conversation and transform a conference room into a captivating, though

temporary, trans space. Tables *queer* place and *trans* space. Much like the large multi-use collapsible plastic grey tables kept in the Trans Life Center for daily meals and larger holiday celebrations, tables interrupt space, create room, and invite communities to gather anew. The *TAR* created an invitational platform for shared space, conversation, supportive smiles, and enthusiastic head nods.²¹⁰ Round tables are objects that tether queer people and trans theories to space.

In “Orientation’s Towards Objects,” the first chapter from her manuscript *Queer Phenomenology, Orientations, Objects, Others* Sarah Ahmed argues, tables are “objects that matter” to philosophers. According to Ahmed, the ordinary nature of the table orients us to the page and the materiality and temporality of our writing. These orientations affect *how* we inhabit space and augment our sense of socio-proprioception. Ahmed encourages us to wonder. She asks, “how [do] other forms of social orientation affect how bodies arrive at the table?”²¹¹ Extending Ahmed, *how* do experiences of trans visibility orient marginalized trans bodies to the tools of self-representation? Once seated at the table of popular culture, trans people become vocal, visible, legible, and thus representable subjects to commercial media outlets. These platforms provide a place for self-hood, room décor, and trans world making. The *TAR* round table is a trans extension of Ahmed’s phenomenological query. The round table moves the viewer past the screen and into *trans* space. The viewer is a part of an outer ring surrounding and supporting the participants of *TAR*. As queer and trans audience members, we take up the unlit portion of the room, a loud but unseen group of supporters. Between the audience, the screen, and the panel participants, the round table becomes the *roundtable*. This material-spatial

transition creates a trans viewing orientation, and space for *transcendence*, activism, glamour.

In her clip, “Why ‘Our Lives Are on the Line’ When it Comes to Trans Representation,” Laverne Cox draws us near the table to explore the rippling effects of trans representation in American. She sparkles in a long-sleeved fuchsia sequin dress. Her eyelids are frosted in a matching shadow, and her hair softly cloaks her shoulders. She begins with a note on inequity and representation. She exclaims, “If all things were equal, then everyone should be able to play every character, but *all* things are not equal.” Referencing the many instances in which non-queer actors have played queer and trans characters, Laverne Cox provides the following statistics, “I think it’s 84% of Americans do not personally know someone who *is* transgender. So, most Americans learn what they learn about trans people through the media.” These teach mainstream audiences about what it might mean to *be* trans or *know* trans by sight. Cisgender actors in Hollywood come to temporarily embody trans people and co-opt potential moments of trans visibility. Like an expensive designer sweater, trans becomes an item worn once, and returned later. It is important to note that this is not because there is a shortage of aspiring and professional trans actors.²¹² In the following excerpt, Cox expands her thoughts on the dangers of “playing” trans.

[I]n this cultural environment when we see representations of cis[gender] people playing us over and over again it reinforces this idea that trans women are not “really” women and that trans men are not “really” men and non-binary people don’t exist. The crux of so much of discrimination we experience is that we are not “really” who we say we are and that we don’t really exist. And so, it’s crucial that the representations that exist in the media *at least* at this historical moment reflect the realities and the humanity and the complexities of our *real lived* experience because our lives are on the line.²¹³

Extending Cox, can trans representation of trans people/characters provide this type of vital support? For Cox, trans representation by, and often for, trans people solidifies that trans people do exist and that our visibility is a necessary social-cultural transition. Rather than further sensationalizing the instances in which cisgendered actors are applauded for the professional *risks* they may have taken in order to represent important moments and icons in queer history, chapter Four documents groundbreaking and ordinary moments in which outspoken TWOC have gained local and national attention. Laverne Cox reminds us that the embodied experience of transition, sisterhood, and visibility requires a representational space. The daily maintenance of this space “reflect[s] the realities and the humanity and the complexities of our *real lived* experience.”²¹⁴ The *TAR* viewer is a witness to the emergent landscape of trans popular cultures. Critical surfaces, like round tables, allow trans people to reimagine locatable, accessible, and precious sites of shelter, and the friends we might find there.²¹⁵ Furthering scholarship on home, 20th-century philosopher, Gaston Bachelard claimed that our relationship to *home* and comfort “transcend[s] our memories of all the houses in which we have found shelter.”²¹⁶ Extending Gaston, a trans spatial poetic might find a welcome home in Casa Ruby. If, home is a feeling and shelter is a place, then the *TAR* roundtable and the Trans Life Center provide local and national platforms for trans inspiration and self-representation. In the following section, I work my way back through the third module of the trans model. For the ease of the reader, I follow the order of operations as listed on pages eighty-three through eighty-five. I avoid naming my methodology in every chapter in order to let my insights, fieldwork, and the women I worked with, the rooms we worked in, and the street corners we stood on stand on their own. Each section is clearly labeled.

The following case studies broaden the application of the trans model, tap into the potential of community-centered ethnography, the study of popular culture, cultural geography, and visual analysis for an emergent population of theorists and critical pop culture enthusiasts.

3. Expertise and Reciprocity/community research, friendship, & mutual respect

Implementing the trans powerhouse, objects-humans-buildings-storytelling



Fig. 14 Darling on the corner August 3, 2016

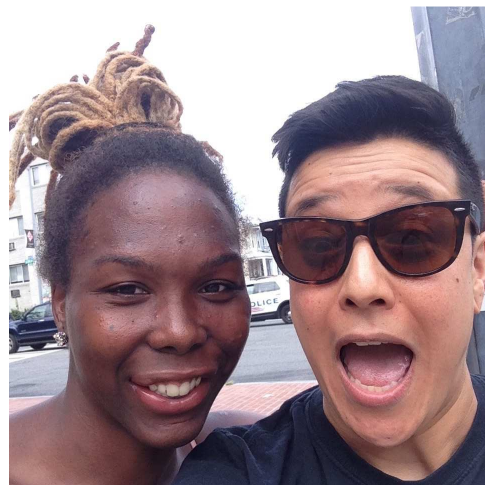


Fig. 15 Darling and Anthony take a selfie August 3, 2016

On a warm afternoon in August 2016, I stood at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Gresham Place with Darling, a young Black trans woman in her early twenties and an excited trans youth employee of Casa Ruby. That afternoon Darling wore a form-fitting burnt orange tank top, acid-washed jeans with an elastic waistband, large “diamond” earrings, and her hair pulled up in a high but loose ponytail. As we stood in front of the corner store most frequented by the Casa Ruby community, Darling and I had a conversation about her dreams for CR youth programming and her thoughts on transgender women of color representation in popular media. Darling held my iPhone during our

interview. Phone in hand, Darling talked directly into the recording device as though she were making a phone. I had hoped that this would draw less public attention to our conversation as CR and neighborhood folks walked by or into the corner store. I asked Darling to share her thoughts on TWOC celebrity, authenticity, and trans youth. The following is an excerpt of our exchange from that day:

Anthony- What do you think of folks like Laverne Cox and Janet Mock and the kind of work they are trying to do for trans women of color?

Darling- I don't think that's a *real* representation of transgender women. I think it is a positive, it's a very *very* positive representation it is...but it's not a *true* representation because no *one* transgender woman has the same story. And out of the billions that are making it as *good* this year, a few of them make it. I just don't feel like they [Laverne Cox and Janet Mock] do a lot to uplift the transgender youth that are still currently living on the street that are still prostituting, [trans youth] that would like to be actresses, actors, and models. I just don't think they are doing enough to push those types of things...it's just really about *self*. It's about...like they [Janet Mock, published author] have books and stuff or do they do things. But it's really about *them*."²¹⁷

Darling sees TWOC celebrity and representation as self-serving. For Darling, Black trans celebrities, like Laverne Cox and Janet Mock, do not represent the *true* everyday lives of young Black trans women like herself. We hang out on a busy street corner and paced in front of the corner store. Though she longs for adequate mentorship, Darling does not believe that a famous trans adult can represent the wildly varied and intersectional identities and experiences of trans youth and aspiring trans actors. For Darling, Cox and Mock fail to provide the everyday thriving of young TWOC. Darling strives to uplift her CR peers without sugar-coating her own or their experiences.²¹⁸ Darling's opinions on the work and impact of TWOC celebrity reinforce the communal need and social service possibilities of TWOC self-representation practices alive at Casa Ruby. Darling's desire to see self-representation as a communal extension of self-care, encourages my

scholarship to re-approach one of the dissertation's guiding questions. What happens to the landscape of popular culture, visual analysis, and critical scholarship when trans women begin to represent themselves? *Transing* the spaces and places of gender transition, Black and Brown womanhood, and trans visibility informs the nimble intersectional mapping practice contained in the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model. On that afternoon in August, Darling taught me that trans youth are experts, viewers, and consumers of trans film, media, and popular culture. They desire to feel seen and see themselves clearly represented on and off-screen.

In the field of trans cinema, the researcher is the viewer. The research site is embedded in a viewing device and projected onto a screen. We no longer have in-person contact with our community members. Unlike traditional ethnographic practice, watching traditional film is, generally, a widely accessible, low-cost, and low-barrier modality for studying and eagerly watching everyday trans geographies as they unfold. I expand the scope and scale of the trans model to include film required that I reimagine my research subjects, fieldwork, and the potential uplifting impact of TWOC cinematic representation. Careful, creative, and intersectional implantation of the trans powerhouse was central to this process. While each element of the powerhouse (objects-humans-buildings-storytelling) enacts cultural agency, together, they remap geography of spatial transformation and gender transition. A careful viewing and analysis of an original film, *Tangerine*, and one set of friends, Sin Dee and Alexandra, is grounded in the lessons I learned from Darling. The study of film production, media and press coverage, and key scenes reflect but are not interchangeable with my ethnographic work and years at Casa Ruby. Each scene highlights the applicability of the trans model for trans women in an

urban environment. Pairing the study of film and ethnography honors the tumultuous vitality of trans women's friendships and the invaluable, though temporary shelter, found at places like Casa Ruby.

As we have seen, a trans woman's hustle is a collection of strategies, themes, and stories that guide the viewer/scholar from the front steps of Casa Ruby in Washington, D.C. I utilize the hustle to re-consider the active maintenance of *trans* research relationality. Trans space is shared space for trans knowledge production. As I argued in chapter Three, the creation, maintenance, and documentation of trans space is grounded in the regional, imaginative, and collaborative practice of lived expertise. The following is a cinematic-ethnographic-spatial exploration of communal truths, collective spaces, and mutual trust. It is my hope, that an interdisciplinary approach to visual analysis allows us recreate, rearrange, and redefine the methods of ethnography and popular culture.

*All sidewalks lead to you—[Trans] Sisters are doin' it for themselves*²¹⁹

Trans Cinema and national visibility—trans researchers, viewers, (social) actors

The third and final module of *Bodies in Spaces—the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork module* takes a reflexive turn in search of a more livable District and community-facing research practice. As we have seen thus far, TWOC embellished, and heavily rehearsed storytelling strategies and hustling techniques provide an excellent qualitative research guide. My scholarly hustle documented CR TWOC self-documentation strategies, research findings, and fieldwork insights. My interview with

Esmeralda and Natalie on April 4, 2015, centers on these diverse and interlocking documenting strategies.

That afternoon we sat down in the second-floor office space to talk about the phrase, “That gives me life!” and the importance of space for young Black trans women in the District. At the time, the second floor of CR was the central office space for administrative workers. Upon entering the space, one would encounter Genie, the then front desk receptionist, a never-ending cloud of white sage incense, and a series of cubicles housing all Latinx/Spanish speaking staff members. Although this floor would later provide shelter for LGBT youth, in 2015, it was where the everyday “business” of CR took place. That afternoon Esmeralda and Natalie both spoke to their desire to get *life* with TWOC at Casa Ruby. The following is Esmeralda’s definition of the phrase, “That gives me life!”:

Esmeralda: “I take it to the literal sense. When we have different experiences it actually gives you more *time*...we always have that, “I’m done!” feeling...you know, like—the next person that comes to me I am going to...you know, lose it! And I am going to be like, “Fuck life!” When I have those experiences, like when I come down and see the girls and we are helping each other it gives me more *time* to like be, *more* happy. It gives me more *life*, it gives me more energy, [and] it gives me more inspiration to carry on another day. You know? And like going downstairs [to the TLC], it was...it is going through a *transformation*! At first when you come down there it was kind of like—[the] T.V. is on, [and] everybody is sitting around talking...

Natalie: With a whole bunch of clothes in the back.
(both laugh and repeat this sentence)

Esmeralda: And some over here in the corner. And now...it gradually the clothes were gone and it got a little bit better; you know you were able to breathe a little more, okay! And then you look there are more computers now so a lot more people can, you know work and do their own things and stuff like that. It’s [the TLC] becoming more, I guess, professional. And if you really need to do something you can really do it. Nothing is really preventing you or halting you from...you know you can Google you can fill out applications.²²⁰

With more time to be “more happy,” Esmeralda creates a conversational storytelling style. Her verbal hustle engages a call and response echo. Esmeralda provides a fantastical voice to the spatial-temporal life-giving trans powers of 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. Esmeralda and Natalie narrate the transition and transformation of the basement, 2822 Georgia Ave. NW, and Casa Ruby. Esmeralda’s breath after the disappearance of piles upon piles of clothing donations that have built up during the winter months. She gets her life in the basement and she breathes life back into the space. With the appearance of a computer workstation, the TLC becomes a more “professional” space to apply one’s self and explore, with the help of a search engine. As seasons changed, objects shuffled, and the use of the space transformed. As the space transformed, Esmeralda and Natalie transitioned. As they transition, they had “more *time* [and space] to like be, *more* happy.”²²¹

Esmeralda and Natalie’s collaborative story about gender transition and the drop-in center, like Muñoz thoughts on queerness as the “the not yet here,”²²² shifts traditional categories of acceptable scholarly evidence. Esmeralda’s trans poetics motivate me to question the where, when, and feelings of transition, especially when our circumstances get “a little bit better; you know you were able to breathe a little more... [in the trans cultural landscape], okay!”²²³ Searching for a more livable present, the TWOC of Casa Ruby, and key spokespeople of trans popular culture fill buildings with breath and presence. Each woman presented in this dissertation is the fierce leading lady of her own local or national transition journey. Like Esmeralda, I care deeply about the materiality of TWOC storytelling practices and the every day goddesses they invoke. As a researcher, viewer, and consumer of trans-fronted popular culture, my work centers on the active

maintenance of shared space. Moreover, from this place, I found that I too could be transported to a time and place when and where I knew I could “breathe a little more” easily.²²⁴ The remainder of this chapter gets curious about the role of the viewer, their impact on the field, and the trans methods in visual and cultural analysis that can take us there. I do not claim objectivity in the analysis that follows. Quite unlike the impact my physical presence and ethnographic research had on 2822 Georgia Ave. NW, I can assure the reader that though my presence as an ideal (trans Latinx) audience member was, most certainly, anticipated by the filmmakers, my presence in the field of visual ethnography went unnoticed by the fictionalized inhabitants of the *Tangerine* landscape.

The trans model inspired me to better understand myself as a researcher, my responsibility to my community, and my ability to illustrate the landscapes in which trans people thrive and *arrive* (Muñoz). I, too, am a trans social actor. Studying trans women’s work in film reimagines the research site and the target population as both vividly real and geo/graphically representational. Fieldwork is a *very* trans process. It alters the cultural artifacts, buildings, and people we research. *Expertise and reciprocity* encourage the model’s user to *trans* fieldwork as an exercise in heartfelt research and viewership. I seasoned audience-participant, and I have been trained well by the women of Casa Ruby. The following section re-approaches research as reciprocity.

Friendship, shelter, and the ideal audience

Though I have discussed Diana’s views on trans space and friendship elsewhere, I would like to revisit that winter evening in 2015 as a way of extending the trans model to begin an analysis of *Tangerine*. On December 8, 2015, I met with Diana at a neighborhood coffee shop. We chatted about her love of social media, selfies, self-

promotion, TWOC sisterhood, and film. Diana expressed a harsh yet catty critique of the film *Tangerine*, a film *Variety* magazine has described as “Sean Baker’s Sundance darling about two transgender prostitutes on a Christmas Eve jaunt through Los Angeles.”²²⁵ *Tangerine* is a film about a (Christmas) day in *the* life of a small group of Black and Latinx sex workers. *Tangerine* was directed by Sean Baker, a white cisgender man whose films about society’s “outcasts” have been heralded by mainstream and independent press as “raw, real, revolutionary (not to mention weirdly beautiful).”²²⁶ Although the film borrows heavily from the documentary film genre, the grit with which first-time actresses Mya Taylor and Kiki Rodriguez play fictionalized versions of themselves, inspired many critics to treat the film as though it were a documentary. I will discuss the documentary-inspired elements later in this chapter.

I had just seen *Tangerine*, and I was ready to gush about the film’s rich and thoughtful visual portrayal of race, gender, sex work, and friendship. Instead, Diana began by critiquing lead actress Mya Taylor. Diana mused,

“I thought Maya Taylor’s character [Alexandra] was actually...could have been the most interesting character if we would have entered her character as a performer who *had* to do sex work. And the sex work was because she had to eat, right? The sex work wasn’t *what* she was.”²²⁷

Although she has never engaged in sex work, Diana, like the character Alexandra, is a nightclub singer who dreams of fame and struggles to make a name for herself in a large, and sometimes unforgiving city. Diana is a semi-professional small ensemble theater actress, and she speaks with a determined authority. In the above excerpt, Diana expertly identifies a shift in sex commerce and identity formation. She parses the selling of sex as additional income i.e., what one does *for* money versus identifying as/what one “has to” does for money i.e., to be a sex worker. I knew Diana wanted to see herself *in* Alexandra.

She couldn't because of this new yet tenuous line between work, income, and selfhood. In *Tangerine*, Alexandra's daily decision to engage in street-based prostitution, and/ or Mya Taylor's decision to simulate sex work on film, whether or not she identified as a sex worker, meant that Diana was unable to *feel* seen in and by the film. As a question of Black trans female labor, Diana argues that there should be a clear difference between sex work (a transactional sex act) and sex workers (a labor-based and/or politicized identity/community). For Diana, Alexandra's professions (singer/sex worker) were sadly incompatible. Whether Alexandra was a singer, who did sex work or a sex worker who sang, Mya Taylor, failed to represent Diana's life and dreams in the District. But Los Angeles is not Washington, D.C. Cinematic representation of the contemporary American landscape is but a simulacrum of the lived city-experience. Transgender identity, like intersectional analysis, contains beautiful contradictions. I could feel Diana's disappointment. She spoke as though she were a Hollywood casting director, or an actress wrongfully turned down for the film's lead role. She critiqued what she perceived to a lack of theatrical rigor and professional talent. More importantly, Diana was not impressed by first time TWOC actresses who, perhaps, played fictionalized versions of themselves. She found the film mediocre and dismissed the film's potential impact on other trans people and general audiences. Though I wasn't surprised at the degree of shade thrown, Diana's response to *Tangerine* spoke to the importance of community reception of and standards for TWOC representation.

Rather than focus on personal taste i.e., whether or not the film was "good" or "bad, I am more invested in how a difference of opinion, mine, and Diana's, illuminates the work of active listening as an engagement in the community. One of the most crucial

lessons I learned in the field was how not to be easily swayed by big personalities (Ruby), big opinions (Diana), and the collective charisma of my research participants (the women of CR). The women of Casa Ruby are beautiful, vivacious, and incredibly persuasive. Like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, Ruby has taught her daughters to speak with the authority of lived experience, rehears narratives of personal suffering, claim ultimate triumph. Ruby and the women of CR taught me to claim my own scholarly voice life. Although this dissertation is an homage to Ruby Corado's life's work, it is not an oral history project. In order to differentiate my work from the personal and persuasive opinions of my participants and from the Casa Ruby brand and project, I learned to make space for a different story. The following is a brief example.

On January 5, 2017, I sat down to catch up with Ruby. As per usual, Ruby began to talk immediately. She opened with CR's current struggle, or what she identified as "the big picture" versus the "small little pictures."

Ruby: I am doing *really* good when it comes to the big picture because I always live a life from the big picture. So, in the small litter pictures that I navigate I don't feel frustrated because you know whether it is: immigration, HIV or discrimination, or violence—that's very discouraging. So, I always have to look at the big picture, what do we do for one person today? So, on that end I am very happy because we do so much here with so many limitations."²²⁸

Identifying "little pictures" like systemic violence, discrimination, and poor health outcomes and unconditional faith in the big picture, Ruby saw her daily work as minimizing limitations and increasing community happiness. She expressed her anger and frustration with the "little pictures," or the daily effects of supporting underserved populations living with HIV/AIDS. Rather than asking further clarifying questions, I decided to change the subject. I asked Ruby to talk to me about the changing infrastructure of Casa Ruby. I was curious about the spatial transformation and

renovation of each the second and third floors. These floors had shifted to accommodate cots and hypothermia bedding. She assured me that the basement would remain the TLC, a low barrier access point for new and returning community members. Generally speaking, Ruby responded seamlessly to my interjections and quick shifts in the topic during our conversations. I mentioned that the emptying out of the basement had seemed to affect participants in the space. The following discussion of transitioning people, places, seasons, and well-being at CR illustrates how Ruby and I shared authority.²²⁹

Anthony: You know Ruby, I walked in today and it just seemed like kind of sad in there [the TLC].

Ruby: Who was in there?

Anthony: Not that many people, it just felt like there was less *life* happening in the Trans Life Center.

Ruby: Today?

Anthony: Yeah, downstairs it seems like...

Ruby: Well, you know...it's *not* a beautiful day. You walked in on a snow day.

Anthony: It's like what you say, "It's a beautiful day at CR" [the official phone greeting at CR] though...

Ruby: (*laughs*) Well, I know that! But what I am saying you know is...

Anthony: For sure, but there was like less lighting and the T.V. was gone.

Ruby: Well actually, like I said. Well technically we had a choice...

Anthony: It seems less cute and less decorated... Where did it all go?

Ruby: You're right, you're right. The thing is we had the option to close it [the hypothermia shelter space] or to open in the middle of the winter. So, you know, it's winter right now. It may not be like what you are used to, in the summer. And you know with all the fun and everything.

Anthony: It still is [fun].

Ruby: It is, and you know why? Those are the things that the staff sometimes...because this is the other thing, Casa Ruby is the reflection of people, right? Sometimes CR is not doing good, but that doesn't mean we are not *fabulous*.

Anthony: (*laughs*) I never said that...

Ruby: Right, you know, but really...I am so glad you talked to me about that because we...this organization *is* the reflection of people. As a transgender organization we struggle the same or worse than trans people in *this* city. So therefore, you know like, today was definitely a *shitty* day. You know we had a government site visit at the other site, you know we have been experiencing defunding which is normal for non-profits...But you know all of those things play a role. Now, despite that once people got money in their hands, and today was a happy [pay] day because you see how people were like, "Hey!" Eventually

because I do think that economics are still part of you know how trans people thrive or not, right? So, once a check went in their hands you see how the...it [the atmosphere] all changed...I don't want to say it was once *I* walked in the door (*sarcasm*), but that would be too...

Anthony: That's what worked for me because you didn't pay *me* (smiles)!

This particular conversation illustrates the professional intra-community relationship Ruby and I were able to co-develop. Ruby is not the target audience for the dissertation, but she is its original inspiration. Visiting Casa Ruby on a “*shitty*” winter allowed Ruby and I to move past the city's wintry exterior and into the *fabulous* inner world of Casa Ruby.

In my interview and fieldwork, I learned to tolerate and respect productive moments of confusion, differing goals, stories, opinions, and to share ethnographic authority²³⁰ with the women of Casa Ruby. In sum, I didn't need Diana to love *Tangerine* as much as I did, and I didn't always have to tell *Ruby's* story. But what I needed was a reminder. TWOC are developing standards by which to measure authentic representation and critical opinions on the how they are reflected in buildings, research, and film. Caring about the lives and voices of trans women does not require that I idolize their accomplishments or romanticize their lives. However, it was my responsibility to notice the trans details, small and beautiful moments in the field and in film that deserve immediate scholarly attention. Like Ruby, Diana, and the women of Casa Ruby, the actresses of *Tangerine*, TWOC are uniquely beautiful and imperfect. Each group of friends desires for love, friendship, and representation. Each faces obstacles such as racism, sexism, poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, sex work, and arrest. Making room for disagreements between unrelated kin (Etter-Lewis) in the field presented me with an opportunity to meditate on my unique hybrid social location as a trans activist-

scholar-community member. Differing opinions amongst trans people burst common assumptions that surround shared identity. For example, not all trans women are friends. Being trans does not guarantee a chosen queer family. Trans sisterhood is not without betrayal and forgiveness. I am invested in encountering interruptions in the field, in film, and in one-on-one interactions with other trans people. And although Diana was never easy to interview, our productive and consistent disagreements were an active engagement in listening *as* an expression of care and reciprocity. In the following section, I turn from a focus on film reception to its broader cultural economy. From directing to writing to acting and viewing, the social actors of *Tangerine* remap the circular and reciprocal terrain of TWOC knowledge production—an invaluable and living artifact, space, and place for the study everyday life in America.

2. From Informants to Research Participants—TWOC space, actors, white cisgender directors: iPhone cinematography & a bid for the Oscars

The visual culture of Casa Ruby directly inspired the creation and application of the trans powerhouse. Implementing this analytic shape required that I attend to four intersecting intersectional categories, objects-humans-buildings-storytelling. While later sections of the model focus more heavily on the impact of the built environment, the study of TWOC world making in *Tangerine* relied upon the importance of objects, people, and the stories these objects allow their users to tell each other and the viewer. As discussed in Chapter Three, the smartphone was *the* prized possession for any young TWOC at Casa Ruby. A trans woman's smartphone had tireless daily duties at 2822 Georgia Ave. NW. These duties included but were not limited to communication, social

media, and photographic documentation. A smart phone's self-facing camera is a readily available emergency compact mirror and as a vital selfie producing device. As a lens that could be at once outward and inward facing, a smartphone's camera allowed an individual TWOC to create, edit, document, and share her daily gender transition story both on and offline. Posing for, taking, and sharing a selfie is an embodied activity. For example, Darling, a young Black trans woman discussed earlier in this chapter, enjoyed taking selfies and seeing selfies by other trans women. The following excerpt from our August 3, 2016, conversation illustrates the joy of selfies, the risks trans women take to publicly document transition, and the threat of transphobia online.

Anthony: What do you like about selfies for trans women?

Darling: I like them because it gives trans women an opportunity to share themselves and how they were looking that day, at that moment, sitting, *slaying*, turning it...whatever they felt they were *giving* in the moment they were able to share it and I think it's a good outlet.

Anthony- How does it make you feel to see selfies like that of trans women?

Darling: It makes me feel good that people are comfortable sharing and are willing to share themselves with the world. Because despite what people would like to believe it's not easy to be trans, it's not easy to put yourself on display for people to ridicule you at any given moment, or the day year. It's not easy and like you really have to have like a tough skin to take a picture of yourself and post it to social media. Because people behind computers and phones are very *very* mean because they are hiding behind something. You are choosing to share yourself and your reality. I guess it makes them upset because they are not comfortable with their own reality, so it gives them an outlet to talk at someone. It takes a lot to let yourself be the *target* to let someone else feel better about their miniscule life that they are living, so...It makes me feel good to see that these people feel that good about themselves that they are willing to share even at the risk of someone else trying to hurt them and bring them down and terrorize their selfie.²³¹

Darling and the TWOC of CR are experts in self-representation and self-aware documentation. Selfie strategies include lighting and camera angles unearth glamour in a trash-filled basement. Trans selfies augment the moment, and in so doing, allow the

TWOC self-photographer to talk back transphobic stigma and those who would try to “bring them down and terrorize their selfie.”²³² The iPhone was the central piece of technology featured in the filming and celebrity of *Tangerine*.

I do not see cinema studies, film production, and ethnography as interchangeable pieces of primary scholarly evidence. I am interested in how these modalities can support each other and trans women well. TWOC carefully choose to share their self-images and their realities (Darling). *Tangerine*'s release in 2015 coincided with a peak moment in TWOC visibility after the tipping point, and with the time I was conducting my fieldwork. During this peak historical moment in trans cultural production, I was struck by how the film reflected many of the same challenges and desires I saw during my field work and in my interviews. Film like ethnography is built into real-time – necessarily selecting, sorting, editing, presenting – as does fieldwork, but for a different purpose. In what follows I map these circular conversations, exchanges in trans storytelling, knowledge, and pop culture production by, for, and reflecting particular aspects of the TWOC experience.

After its release at the Sundance Film Festival in early 2015, critics were mesmerized by the look and feel *Tangerine*. According to *Variety*, *Tangerine* was the “second Sundance [film festival] acquisition for [its distributor] Magnolia [pictures].” Magnolia purchased the rights to the film in the high six figures and would later give the film a traditional nation-wide theatrical release that same year.²³³ Beyond *Tangerine*'s “comedic”²³⁴ off-beat storyline and characters, mainstream critics were most often drawn to director Sean Baker's “innovative” use of relatable technology, the iPhone. *Tangerine* was shot entirely on an iPhone5S. This small hand-held object allowed Baker to reduce

his overall budget and gain trust and access to the underground minutia of the Los Angeles trans cultural landscape. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Baker described his fascination with the trans women that make up the geography of a trans Los Angeles on a local scale. He was particularly interested in the trans sex work stroll located near his home at the intersection of Santa Monica and Hollywood Boulevard. This particular street intersection and the work of iPhone video makers featured on the popular video-sharing website *Vimeo*, inspired Baker to invest in the multi-functionality of the iPhone as a low-budget non-professional camera and everyday object with basic video and recording capabilities. Baker's use of the iPhone allowed him to impart an avant-garde edgy mystique to his industry interviews, the film, and to the trans actors. According to Baker, passing over obtrusive traditional film equipment allowed first-time actors Mya Taylor and Kiki Rodriguez to become comfortable with the acting and filming process required of a feature-length film.²³⁵ Smart phones are ubiquitous and welcome devices in the urban world of TWOC. For example, during my April 2015 interview with Esmeralda and Natalie, each woman held and/or used her personal smart phone while she spoke into my iPhone/recording device. As Baker discovered, the smartphone is a pocket-sized visual documentation device that can be easily ignored in a technology-saturated cityscape. It can also be hidden close to one's body, in a back pocket, or next to a small bundle of cash in working girl's bra (as was very common at CR).

Situated as experts on their own lives, the women of CR and the stars of *Tangerine* have much to say about the cultures of everyday life in America, the field's longstanding concern to improve the methods of cultural analysis, and future directions in

interdisciplinary fieldwork methods. Left-leaning mainstream publications such as the *New York Times*, *Indie Wire*, and *Wired.com* promoted *Tangerine* as a breakthrough in film technology, while also mis-gendering the film as an excellent “buddy film.” This focus loses sight of the film’s larger cultural impact, mainly, the importance of TWOC in film cast as TWOC characters. The Black and Latinx trans cast of *Tangerine* was asked to *play* themselves, and in so doing lead-actresses Mya Taylor and Kiki Rodriguez knowingly centers the everyday lives of TWOC in Los Angeles, their communities, and community-street-based knowledge production. When interviewed by *The Guardian*, Baker told a staff writer that he had searched the streets of Los Angeles looking to cast his film with TWOC. Though colonizing, this method would eventually lead Baker to the courtyard of the Los Angeles LGBT Center to meet his lead actors, Mya Taylor and Kiki Rodriguez.²³⁶ Baker utilized Taylor’s already existing connections to trans women and sex workers like a snow-ball method “passport” into the underground culture of TWOC in Los Angeles. Importantly, Taylor and Rodriguez demanded heavy involvement in the making of the film. Before agreeing to work with Baker, Kiki Rodriguez had one stipulation. This is evidenced by the quote below. In an interview with staff *Guardian* staff writer, Nigel Smith, *Tangerine* director Sean Baker paraphrased Rodriguez’s request as follows:

I trust you [Baker], I want to make this movie with you, but you have to promise to show the harsh reality of what goes on out here. These women are here because they have to be, and I want you make it hilarious and entertaining for us and the women who are actually working the corner.²³⁷

Not only would Rodriguez and the girls be *the* focus of the film, but they would also be its content consultants and consumers, thus gaining power in the writing, filmmaking,

and reception process. Much like Laverne Cox, Taylor and Rodriguez had demanded a spot at the table.

Rodriguez's call to document harsh reality with a sense of levity reflects the importance of humor as a daily strategy in the hustle. Not unlike chatting with Ruby during a "shitty" winter day, the collective and cumulative use of humor to describe states of crisis or a change of season provides a heuristic and reciprocal approach to the study of objects, humans, buildings, and storytelling in community-based research with trans women. By centering the agentic voices and lived experiences of Black trans women like Genie, Diana, Mya, and Kiki the trans model provides an equitable approach to the ever-evolving methods of everyday cultural, spatial, and visual analysis. Between the role of the researcher (Korr) and the role of the viewer, I propose a methodological shift. By loosening our grasp on the power of scholarly expertise, we approach our interviewees with a beginner's mind, a mind that doesn't anticipate the exact time and location of knowledge, and relishes in learning and unlearning in the field. In his breakthrough 1982 essay, "The Ethnography of Everyday Life," John Caughey advocates for a self-reflexive approach to ethnography. For Caughey, a "successful" one-to-one relationship between ethnographer and informant is developed through three distinct stages: mutual apprehension, exploration, and "cooperation and full participation."²³⁸ Though "full" participation would be a difficult quality of participation to gauge, especially when working with highly stigmatized populations, and their pop culture counterparts, Caughey's three-part relationship arch from apprehension to camaraderie is continually invaluable to Americanist fieldwork. The shift to reflexive, reciprocal, and accountable ethnography has happened. A reciprocal approach to the classic ethnographic

relationship shifts our expectations of and in the field. Our participants are not inanimate artifacts. Treating them this way would only reify the dehumanizing nature of transphobia. Extending Caughey, how and can we develop a methodological arch from an informant to research participant and from apprehension to mutual appreciation?

Within the history of the disability rights movement and adjacent social justice causes, the following demand echoes throughout the decades, “Nothing About Us Without Us.”²³⁹ Rather than making an analogous relationship between race, gender, and ability, this cross-movement rallying cry and dedication to coalitional solidarity retains its initial intersectional roots. By locating marginalized communities at the epicenter of knowledge production, the loving fervor behind this phrase remains. “Nothing about us” informs my work with community-based knowledge production. Following Kiki’s demand to make cinematic representation hilarious “for us and the women who are actually working the corner,”²⁴⁰ trans women’s self-representation strategies should not be documented *without* them. If nothing about us is made without us, then trans cultural landscapes are a place where conversation, theory, and fieldwork can potentially ameliorate ongoing transphobic stigma created by under-representation and under-theorization. As a researcher and a viewer, I am cognizant of how my work may make particular members of our community visible, hyper-visible, or invisible. It was then necessary to remind my research participants that I was there to work with their ongoing consent. “Nothing About Us Without Us” is a phrase that inhabits the tenuous space between trans representation by cisgender social actors and the documentation of self-representation practices that have been created by and for TWOC.

I assert, *Tangerine* brings levity to a harsh reality and precarity of the Los Angeles cultural landscape for a select group of Black and Latinx trans women, *Tangerine* is not a comedy. The creation of and Kiki's demand for cinematic hilarity, not unlike Genie's raucous rendition of the theme from *Gem and the Holograms*, is a survival strategy and a creative truth-telling hustle. Hilarity brings a knowing sense of ease to the daily threat of looming systemic, emotional and physical violence or, "the harsh reality of what goes on out here." The corner of Santa Monica and Hollywood Blvd., the front steps of Casa Ruby, and their cinematic and theoretical representations are the *where* of trans cultural landscapes. *Tangerine* is a film grounded in community-based knowledge. Press surrounded the film reflected the many ways in Baker co-opted and benefited from a story that is inherently *not* his. Kiki Rodriguez's stipulation further illuminates the calculated art of TWOC storytelling *as* an effective negotiation and representation strategy. Both Mya Taylor and Kiki Rodriguez knew that Sean Baker needed *their* trans knowledge, community, bodies, spaces, and personal connections to make the film. They then utilized his professional skills, privileged identity, staff, technology, industry connections, and budget to find an audience for their harsh and hilarious reality. Mya and Kiki/ Alexandra and Sin Dee made sure that nothing would be made about them without them. The realness of their acting allowed each actress and the overall *Tangerine* project to receive national attention and recognition.

In October 2015, Magnolia Pictures and the film's producers shocked Hollywood by launching *Tangerine*'s Oscar campaign. In an article entitled "Magnolia, Duplass Brothers Launch First Oscar Campaign for Transgender Actress (Exclusive)" staff writer Ramin Setoodeh, the same writer who would later facilitate *Variety's Transgender Actors*

Roundtable,²⁴¹ alerted Variety readers to the presence of rising Black trans actors in Hollywood. Described as a “scrappy campaign” that forwent the traditional ““For Your Consideration” advertising,” this particular Oscar bid marked the first time that a movie distributor official “backed an awards season push for a transgender actress in Hollywood history.” The studio hoped to nominate Maya Taylor in the category of best actress and Kiki Rodriguez as the best supporting actress. A successful academy nomination would have made trans/cinematic history. Rather than continuing to applaud cisgender actors and their portrayal of trans characters, think Hilary Swank in the acclaimed *Boys Don’t Cry*, these nominations would have drawn attention to never-before recognized theatrical trans.²⁴² Sadly, *Tangerine* “failed to garner any Oscar nominations” and the Academy of Motion Pictures chose instead to archive Sean Baker’s iPhone²⁴³ rather than its lead actors. Mya Taylor expertly capitalized on the Oscar buzz to cultivate trans-glamour on the national stage.

In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Maya Taylor reminds a staff writer and her future readers that if we are going to talk about sex work, then “*please* get the words right.” For Taylor, *these* words, and the discourse that follows allow non-sex workers to have a better understanding how the sex work community plays with the shifting lines between sex and work. And in so doing, Taylor opens an urgent ontological query. What is sex work? Where is sex work? Who does sex work? What does our ability to understand these categories tell us about Mya, Alexandra, and *Tangerine*? And lastly, what does this say about the viewer? In a nod to intra-community linguistic-play, Taylor provides her reader with a vocabulary lesson for the hustle through a definition aimed at highlighting collective meaning-making:

“A ho is self-employed. A whore sleeps around with different men. Then you have a slut, and then you have a tramp—a tramp, you know, somebody who’s married, but she’s sleeping around with different men. I was a ho. There’s a difference between being a ho and a prostitute. A prostitute has a pimp.”²⁴⁴

Illuminating the rallying cry that sex work *is* work, Taylor makes an embodied claim to knowledge, labor, and monetary gain, sans pimp. By knowingly shocking her interviewer with the words of sex work, labor, and sex-positivity, Taylor engages the trans powerhouse with a touch of sarcasm. Taylor’s vocabulary lesson demonstrates storytelling mastery. She invokes the things, people, places, and stories that invoke the everyday life (Gail Pheterson) of the self-employed ho. The fantastical personal narrative brings hilarity to the harsh reality of street-based prostitution. Taylor’s dictionary for the life of a ho makes space for her own lived experience, and that of her character, Alexandra. Taylor’s personal experience of life as a sex worker recalls the objects and places of sex for cash. Unlike Diana, Taylor’s ability to quickly differentiate sex from sex work demystifies and decouples the figure of the Black trans woman and the prostitute. At this moment, sex work breaks out of analogy into a social reality. Now located in everyday life, the savvy ho becomes an organic scholar armed with a Black trans feminist standpoint.²⁴⁵



Fig. 16 Mya Taylor at home for *Cosmopolitan*, February 26, 2016.

Mya Taylor brings a similar savvy hilarity to her interview with women's fashion-lifestyle magazine, *Cosmopolitan*. *Cosmopolitan* is renowned for its content on beauty, style, politics, sex, and sexuality. In her feature article, "Mya Taylor and the Trans Actress's Dream of Going to the Oscars," begins with the following description, "The *Tangerine* Star went from being a sex worker to campaigning for an academy award for playing one. And her acting hustle has just begun." Featuring the language of the hustle, *Cosmopolitan* expands its brand to include the experiences of Black trans women, sex workers, and the people/readers who love them. By centering the knowledge of lived experience and blossoming acting career, "Trans Actress's Dream" utilizes images of Mya Taylor at home. Rather than reifying the scantily clad image of a sex worker out for the evening (an image which is neither good nor bad), Mya is seen here in figure 16. This photo portrait invites the reading viewer into Taylor's home and into a domestic scene of her own making, her workspace/ home office. In this image, we see Taylor. She is seated at a large wooden desk in a comfortable brown leather chair. Rather than looking directly at the camera, Taylor stares past elegant wire-rimmed glasses at her laptop screen. Taylor is a businesswoman. She is shown here wearing tank top and leggings. She is relaxed at home and surrounded by simple home décor. In her home, Taylor becomes a relatable domestic ho turn professional actress/ everyday professional woman. Underneath this photo, Mya complains to her interviewer, "It's so annoying to me. I transitioned to be a woman. I don't want to be the type of transgender woman that's like, 'Oh, well I got a pussy now, don't associate me with that transgender stuff.' I want to be the type of transgender woman that always represents and supports my community." By calling

attention directly to her physical body, her changing sexual anatomy, and her commitment to community,²⁴⁶ Mya Taylor brings attention to her physical transition, her socio-cultural transition within popular culture, and reminds us of her intersectional identity turn Hollywood hustle. As Alexandra and Sin dee Rella (Cinderella), Mya Taylor and Kiki Rodriguez lovingly guide, and sometimes forcefully drag, the viewer through the turbulence of a day in the life. *Tangerine* is a beautiful, unapologetic, and tumultuous rendition of Christmas day full of all of “that transgender stuff.”²⁴⁷

3. TLC²—Tender Love and Care in the Trans Life Center

Hos and prostitutes in the Laundromat—using the senses with *Tangerine*

Although a full film analysis is outside of the scope of the dissertation project, the following selected scenes utilize *Tangerine* to consider the care and sisterhood embedded in trans spatial practice. I re-consider how cinema, like ethnography, is built into real-time—necessarily selecting, sorting, presenting, but for a different purpose. Neither *Tangerine* nor this dissertation are documentary films. Each document and re/present a local, intimate, narrative glimpse/representation of the everyday lives of TWOC in an urban America. While *Tangerine* utilizes fiction, I deploy interviews and participant observation. Each project hopes to outlive its participants. There are academic theories and methods of visual representations that work hard to present women *just* as they are. In her canonical essay on documentary film, “Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary,” Linda Williams takes on the postmodern turn in documentary filmmaking. While film may not tell “the visual [objective] truth of objects, persons, and events” they do tell a “postmodern truth” about the “the multiple,

contingent, and constructed nature of history.” For Williams, documentary in the late 20th century “attempt[ed] to overturn this commitment to realistically record “life as it is” in favor of a deeper investigation of *how* it became as it is” (emphasis added).²⁴⁸ By studying the built environment and the stories, dreams, and aspirations, it contains, I came to understand how life at CR became as it was and as I hoped to become. I’d like to return to my conversation with Ruby on January 5, 2017, to provide an example.

Partway through our interview that afternoon, Ruby needed to pick up checks for her employees at a local accounting firm and give one of the daughters a ride. As I sat in the passenger seat and amongst Ruby’s file folders, food, beverage, and makeup containers, I asked her about the shifting needs of the organization and how this was reflected within each floor of 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. The following is an excerpt from our conversation-car ride in Columbia Heights, D.C. This exchange marked a period when the Latinx staff was moved to an office space in Fort Totten, D.C., and all office-related objects were moved. These items included desks, cubicle partitions, desktop computers, office chairs, and an array of LGBT pride artifacts such as flags and banners.

Anthony: And then the second floor is unused right now? Basically except for special events.

Ruby: Well, no not really, we use it for storage we have meetings. You know, like I had the little staff meeting there. So no, no it’s not closed.

Anthony: So [2822] Georgia Ave. is still like the central....?

Ruby: Oh yeah, that’s the intake center, that’s everything. They *love* their Casa Ruby.

Anthony: I love it too, okay! But I feel like when I walked into the Trans Life Center.

Ruby: We are in a transition process....

Anthony: (*sarcasm*) Oh, are you? You’re in a *transition* process?

Ruby: (*coquettish tone*) Yes, yes! It’s like imagine trans people transitioning trans spaces!

(drops off one of the girls on 14th St. NW)...I am going to tell you the truth!

Anthony: (laughs) do you ever *not* tell me the truth?

During this time, CR services and locations were rapidly expanding. Ruby reiterates that the basement of 2822 Georgia Avenue NW was widely recognized by community-clients as the social hub of the organization, referenced here by the phrase, “They *love* their Casa Ruby.” The latter half of this excerpt takes on metaphor, wherein Ruby/Casa Ruby are in transition, and the co-creation of “truth” claims, broadly imagined, reveals the overlapping “multiple, contingent, and constructed nature”²⁴⁹ of Casa Ruby and her central themes, love transition, and place.

Tangerine does so much for the utility and expansion of *Bodies in spaces— the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model* and the work, scope, and scale of community research, fieldwork, and reciprocity, by centering the work of the built environment. City infrastructure, including the dimensions of a common city sidewalk and neighborhood proximity to basic amenities, provides necessary moments of contact for city dwellers. Theorist Jane Jacobs identifies city sidewalks as a central location for potential cross-class inter-personal trust. In her groundbreaking 1961 tome, *The Death and Life of the Great American City*, Jacobs argues, “The trust of a city street is formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts.” For Jacobs, most contact “is ostensibly utterly trivial, but the sum is not trivial at all.”²⁵⁰ *Tangerine* is a film whose visuals heavily rely upon the centrality of sidewalk navigation, or what Jacobs has called, the importance of inter-class contact in the walkable city. Los Angeles, California, is an infamous car and freeway-oriented city. *Tangerine* asks its viewers to step outside of their vehicles and into the hustle onto the street.

As we have seen throughout the dissertation, the hustle encompasses a trans women's daily negotiations for survival, sisterhood, and resilience. In this Chapter I have argued, the hustle illuminates the thematic import of friendship, shelter, and everyday life. By threading the hustle, a place, and a storytelling-style, through the built environment, I have spent the bulk of this chapter implementing the work of research reciprocity. I am guided by the dissertation's main questions and new lines of inquiry for the study of trans women in film. A selection of these questions informs this final section. In extending gender transition narratives to functions that do not apply to space, how do we know a *trans* space when we see it? In extending ethnographic research methods, what new things can we learn and do with our fieldwork? And how does the landscape of popular culture allow trans women to better represent themselves? By embodying the role of the trans researcher, viewer, and community member, the remainder of this chapter centers the third element of the trans powerhouse, buildings, as the lens for remapping the trans cultural landscape of *Tangerine*. Trans space is a wildly dynamic cultural landscape. *Tangerine* is a raucous and beautifully unnerving adventure through, what Gordon Ingram has called the queerscape, a time and space for queer placemaking in the face of marginality and alienation. For Ingram, the queerscape encompasses "the spaces that we cross and in which we live—to which we adapt, create, and sometimes reconstruct—[that] have great bearing on how we come to express ourselves."²⁵¹ *Tangerine* invites the viewing audience to *trans* Los Angeles.

As the reader recalls, this chapter began at a Casa Ruby Thanksgiving. The emotional weight of an American holiday season allowed me to reconsider geographic scale and the temporality of tender love and care in a highly frequented room, street

corner, and the daily life of an English basement and drop-in center in North-West D.C. The Trans Life Center was a living piece of architecture and a vibrant setting for participant observation and the study of everyday life. The basement shared a symbiotic relationship to her inhabitants, objects of decoration and adornment, and the stories told within and about her space. Not only did I spend time at TLC, I was emotionally and scholarly invested in her well-being. From my afternoons with Genie, to my many viewings of *Tangerine*, I have studied the emergence of trans cultural landscapes. My work with *Tangerine* focuses on two sub-locations, Donut Time and a coin-operated Laundromat. Likened to participant observation, film viewership, and cinematic analysis provide a hyper-local low-barrier entry point for interdisciplinary fieldwork. *Tangerine* is not a film for “everyone.” Unlike most buddy films, romantic comedies, and Christmas films, *Tangerine* fails to fall into any particular film genre. It contains graphic and visceral scenes of sex work, heated transactions with Johns and police officers, extreme acts of intra-community violence, and opulent moments of crowded motel rooms and very active drug use. *Tangerine* is a beautiful film about the human condition and a deep need for human connection. Much like 2822 Georgia Ave. NW, *Tangerine*’s use of everyday storefronts allowed its production staff and talent to carve out simple and unexpected locations for trans arrival and return. *Tangerine* pushed me to consider the ephemeral intimacy and livability Black trans women can find in the public sphere. *Tangerine* utilizes Los Angeles to unearth the verbal, visual, and spatial cues and clues of new and magnetic trans urban geographies

“Merry Christmas Eve, Bitch”²⁵²—An exploration of trans spatial practice

In the opening moments of *Tangerine* Doris Day’s “Toyland” ushers us into Donut Time, a doughnut shop, a real-life recently closed long-time sex worker haven, and a Los Angeles landmark.²⁵³ The film opens onto a bright and sunny Christmas morning at the doughnut shop. A wall of scratched and vandalized oily windows protects two friends from the world just outside the sweet smell of donuts on a shelf. The yellow walls and graffiti etched yellow linoleum table create a space for friendship, reunion, bottled orange juice, and a split sprinkled doughnut. The morning sun bounces off Sin Dee’s uncombed wig, coloring it like an uneven coat of hydrogen peroxide to match her yellowed surroundings. Donut Time was a real-life TWOC sex worker hangout located at a very busy street intersection in West L.A. On Christmas morning, Alexandra and Sin Dee hold court at its apex. The friends rest their elbows on the yellow linoleum and smile at one another. As folks waited impatiently at the crosswalks that branch out from Donut Time, Sin Dee discovers that her pimp-boyfriend-fiancé, Chester, has been cheating on her with “some white fish” (a common graphic epithetic given to cisgender woman born with “female” reproductive systems) while she was in prison for December. While Sin dee grows increasingly angry, Alexandra exclaims, “Out here it is all about our hustle, and that’s it.” She looks knowingly at Sin Dee, and the viewer looks in on the friends as if through a fishbowl. Viewed from outside of the glass, we can see sparse holiday decorations at Donut Time. They include red cases half-filled with doughnuts and eclairs, a red trash can with a topped with a place for used trays, a refrigerator filled with drinks, and a white tiled floor with a wide red stripe. Sin dee licks frosting off her fingers, and Alexandra asks, “What are you plotting?” Loud trap music plays, and Alexandra is off on

foot storming down the streets surrounding the Santa Monica Blvd. trans stroll. The harsh blue skies hurt our eyes. We are surrounded the loud clicking of their heels as they pound the sidewalks. Sin Dee promises that there will “no drama.” Alexandra spends the rest of the film chasing after Sin Dee and promoting her singing gig at a local club that evening.

While they pass brightly colored murals, shops, wide-set sidewalks, single planted palm trees, and empty strip-mall parking lots, Alexandra reminisces about the time she received a Barney doll for Christmas. She tells Sin Dee the following childhood memory.

I remember one Christmas I was like six or six of seven, my family bought me the cutest little Barney doll, that I would take with me everywhere. And one day I put it inside the tub with me, to give it a bath. And it just stopped working. It stopped singing the “I love you” song. And I was just so upset. The world can be a cruel place.

To which Sin dee replies, “Yeah, it is cruel God gave me a penis.” As the reader may recall, *Barney and Friends* was a popular live-action children’s television show featuring actors in multi-colored dinosaur costumes. Its theme song expressed the importance of love and family.²⁵⁴ The breaking of a small purple dino-doll reminds Alexandra of her family of origin. Alexandra’s memory reminds Sin Dee of her unwanted embodiment. Crossing streets and sidewalks when the light is always green, racing in and out of restaurants, sitting on park benches, and hopping over subway turnstiles, Sin Dee surrounds herself in a cloud of determined cigarette smoke. She is *going* to find that *fish* and Chester her boyfriend/pimp. The hustle races on. Between dates with men who slow their cars, blowup jolly snow men waving in the wind, working girls on the corner getting hassled by cops and collecting their coins,²⁵⁵ driving taxi cabs through carwashes and busy intersections, and later violently dragging their found fish Dinah all over town, we learn about life on the block. We fall into the bright and polluted beauty of a West Los

Angeles Sunset and an evening full of neighborhood gaudy Christmas lights and blinding fluorescent lights in public transit. Like a wildly transsexual Wizard of Oz-Alice in Wonderland, we follow Sin Dee back and through Donut Time and tip into trans space and time very different from the promise of the transgender tipping point. The neon lights of Donut Time buzz louder than the traffic surrounding the store. Donut Time is both a safe haven for trans women at work and Chester's "business" office. The neon and florescent lights of Donut Time maintain that night never falls on the epicenter of *Tangerine*, a place for high drama, sweet treats, sex work, free time, and a merry Christmas at the corner of Santa Monica and Highland. The film redefines street-based prostitution by centering the workplace, the sidewalk, and the small businesses that provide shelter between dates. These places always smell sweet and provide respite from whirling streets and inconsistent income.

Just out of the dryer: wigs, urine, shelter, and sisterhood



Fig. 17 Alexandra and Kiki at the Laundromat, *Tangerine* (2015)

At the end of the film we are left to hang out with Sin Dee and Alexandra on the sidewalk facing the donut shop. Sin Dee's boyfriend Chester reveals that he has recently slept with Alexandra. Sin Dee storms off, furious at her friend's betrayal. Alexandra runs after her yelling, "You know you're my best friend. You know I love you. I would never

do anything to hurt you.” The constant oscillation between hip hop and classical music fades and we are surrounded by ambient noise and palm trees at night. Alexandra and the viewer trail a few feet behind until we all reach the Laundromat parking lot. Very upset, Sin Dee ignores Alexandra and instantly begins working the corner. She distracts herself and instantly creates a workplace. We don’t find out why Alexandra slept with Chester, but it’s clear that this is not what matters to Sin Dee. Alexandra pleads with Sin Dee to forgive her. A car honks, and Sin Dee approaches a van to see if they want to *party*. One of the potential Johns tosses a full plastic cup of urine in Sin Dee’s face and screams, “Merry Christmas, you Tranny Faggot.”

The urine covers Sin Dee’s face. She screams, and Alexandra rushes Sin Dee into the Laundromat. Sin Dee and Alexandra rush to a tiny back corner of the Laundromat to hide inside the mop closet next to a double-stacked row of dryers. Using the mop sink Sin Dee angrily rips off her clothes but is very reluctant to take off her wig. She snatches it off but continues to clutch her yellow hair. Alexandra helps Sin Dee disrobe and sponge bathes her. They are alone in space, and so we are alone with them. Sin Dee begrudgingly takes off her wig and throws it defiantly at the white linoleum floor. Included here as figure 17, Sin Dee and Alexandra sit quietly on a small bench that is pushed up against huge panes of glass and beside a folding table. In this image, Sin Dee, dressed only in a wig-cap, bra, skirt, and fishnets, looks at Alexandra, rolls her eyes, and reaches her hand out in forgiveness. When they do make eye contact, Alexandra offers Sin Dee her wig. She reaches out, “Girl...here.” Sin Dee smiles, Alexandra straightens out her hair. Sin Dee says, “We’ll...let’s just be bald together.” Alexandra fixes Sin Dee’s fallen bra strap,

Sin Dee grabs Alexandra's hand, and the two disappear, replaced by the film's credits and the continual soft-comforting rolling hum of dryers.

Much like the Trans Life Center, the Laundromat reveals the refuge that only friendship can provide. As we sit, legs swinging off of a folding table, across from Sin Dee and Alexandra, we are witness to their friendship and the warm smell and safety found in a load of warm, clean laundry. The coin-operated Laundromat like Donut Time provides for intimacy and temporary privacy in the public sphere. And for the length of a dry cycle, we too can *trans* cinematic, geographic, and scholarly space. We can be tranny faggot-best girlfriends, and we can forget about the violence just outside the glass windows of a Laundromat in Los Angeles.

As the first of two popular culture case studies utilizing the Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Field Work Model, *Everyone needs a place to crash* has documented the unstoppable presence of TWOC in front of and behind self-facing cameras, in film, and at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. Through insurgent and theatrical interventions into everyday life, art, narration, and self-creation, I have investigated heightened moments in the field and in popular culture where and when TWOC demanded to be seen. *Everyone needs a place to crash* has been an exploration of new trans geographies, pop cultures, friendships, and the vibrant and circuitous, though precarious paths of trans experience. This chapter was structured around two friendships, two holidays, and my research findings utilizing the trans the model's third and final module, *Expertise and reciprocity—community research, friendship & mutual respect*. The trans cultural landscape is a shared space. I have considered the reciprocal relationship between researcher and research participant, and film and viewer in the daily creation,

maintenance, and study of shelter and friendship as a *hustle*. I have studied carefully told stories about caregiving and trans livability with limited resources. In the following chapter, I focus on TWOC on social media. Moving away from film as a site of high production value, I attend to an expansive investment in Black and Latinx trans self-representation practices online, the ways in which these practices tug at the study of popular culture and ethnography, and the ways in which interdisciplinary methods allow push at the edges of fieldwork and new directions in interdisciplinary visual-cultural analysis. Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Field Work Model is central to this process. *Giving Face And Taking Up Space Space—trans sociality, ethnography, social media* returns the models second module, *Aesthetics, Language, & Material Culture—decoration and adornment* in order to test the heuristic malleability of the trans model itself.

Chapter 5: Giving Face And Taking Up Space—trans sociality, ethnography, social media/ Transgender women of color, fieldwork, sisterhood, and popular culture—Part II

The Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Field Work Model allowed me to document trans women on their hustle; women who spent hours in the basement drop-in center of Casa Ruby and the women of *Tangerine* who race down the streets of Los Angeles in search of *fish* (non-trans sex workers), cheating boyfriends, and take shelter in Laundromats and donut shops. By blending the methods of ethnography and Cinema Studies, I have sought to portray living TWOC, Black, and Latinx women who are not *artists* but real hustlers who craft and document everyday life in film and at Casa Ruby. Chapter five utilizes the trans model to investigate TWOC social media content and online spaces as key sites of cultural and knowledge production. The communication strategies TWOC utilize in and to create these spaces are necessarily as savvy, individual, collective, multi-platform, and intersectional. By bringing together mainstream media and community reception to depict trans life, this chapter capture moments when and where TWOC *tipped* public discourse, broadened reception of trans people on and off-screen in their favor and used all media sources at their disposal to make to give us *life* in the process. *Giving Face And Taking Up Space—trans sociality, ethnography, social media* applies expansive investment in Black and Latinx trans and digital self-representation practices. I document how these practices tug at the study of popular culture and participant-observation, and the ways in which interdisciplinary methods allow contemporary Americanists to push at the edges of fieldwork and create new directions in interdisciplinary visual-cultural analysis. Beyond the immediate rewards of posting to and sharing our everyday (trans) lives and selves (selfies) with social media platforms

and global capitalist media conglomerates such as Facebook and its subsidiary photo-sharing and scrolling application Instagram, the power of a well-curated body of text paired with a relatable image or likable selfie has and continues to allow Black and Latinx trans women in the District of Columbia to interweave the inspirational power of self-imaging and the aspirational narrative of transitional self-making in order to create narratives that foster more livable trans lives. Chapter five extends my ongoing ethnographic study of the Casa Ruby *hustle*—trans women’s daily negotiations for temporary refuge and sisterhood in the District in order to include the study of TWOC on social media and the creation of intimate and mutually supportive trans of color digital-publics. *Giving Face And Taking Up Space* follows the social media presence and advocacy work of two TWOC: Casa Ruby’s founder and executive director, Ruby Corado, activist-actress Laverne Coz. Individually and collectively, these women create and employ social media strategies that wield the potential socio-cultural-political influence of the public profile. The public personas politicize trans of color femininity, promote trans visibility and human rights, and document personal moments of relatable vulnerability. This vulnerability is captured on and by platforms that are always already public, privatized, intimate, local, national, global, co-opted, and insurgent gestures towards queer and trans community spaces and chosen family. While social media can be a readily available platform for self-expression, it is not a conflict-free anti-capitalist low-barrier shelter or a social service center by design. Nevertheless, local and national TWOC social media users create tailored moments and oases of respite for their extended friend-follower-family to dream of living their best life.

While Facebook continues to provide Ruby Corado and the women of Casa Ruby with an intergenerational user-friendly and reliable platform for familial communication, event planning, popularity, social capital, and self-representation in Washington, D.C., evolving youth-focused platforms such as Instagram call in a massive influx of younger trans women from across the country, their immediate-local friend communities, and their celebrity counter-parts to engage in quick and strategic image sharing and branding through easily shared hashtags and links to related online articles, promotional photoshoots, and interviews. In this chapter, I argue that Casa Ruby's founder Ruby Corado's use of Facebook (a combination of her account and the Casa Ruby Facebook page) and Laverne Cox's personal-professional-public Instagram account demonstrate local-to-national influential trans-social media branding as self-promotion-self-representation modalities. Each woman has created an easily replicated and identifiable branding style and thus an easy to follow model for TWOC-lead identity-based online activism and cause promotion. A TWOC social media hustle, as manifested by Ruby Corado and Laverne Cox, employs a scalar approach: gathering locally in smaller numbers on Facebook via the computers and free Wi-Fi at Casa Ruby and gaining national attention on Instagram for a small group of TWOC celebrities like Laverne Cox. While there is a consistent overlap between local and national content and reposting between social media platforms, Facebook was the overwhelmingly preferred site for personal and organizational use at Casa Ruby, mainly because of the addition of the Facebook messenger application. Content on and followers of Casa Ruby-related Facebook pages focus largely on local turn national cross-movement solidarity and local fundraising, and informational events that respond to the local-national politics of D.C.

Ruby's personal Facebook page would also become a mobile and accessible Casa Ruby. Laverne Cox's Instagram presence has focused on her journey as a trans woman, professional actress, community advocate, and style icon after the transgender tipping point. To lend structure to an otherwise diffuse social media landscape, I turn to Facebook as a local site with followers limited to the Casa Ruby community and Instagram as the social media platform for TWOC shifting the terrain of self-imaging and popular media culture in America.

Ultimately, a TWOC digital hustle, as illustrated by Corado and Cox has, and continues to drive contemporary transgender visibility, representation, and self-representation at the local and national levels. By curating the space for and the affective reach of inspiration-affirmation-aspiration messaging via an online trans sisterhood from Facebook to Instagram, the women of Casa Ruby and the TWOC who have been inspired by the work and lives of trans icon Laverne Cox push us, a community of activist scholars, social media friends and followers, content producers and consumers, and people of queer and trans experience to map new trans geographies, pop cultures, friendships, and the vibrant and circuitous, though precarious paths of trans experience and representation on and offline. While I am a social media friend and follower of all of the women included in the dissertation, as a graduate student, I did not have access or the social clout and connections to communicate directly with celebrities like Laverne Cox or Mya Taylor. Instead, the women of CR and I admired the work of trans celebrities from afar, and through our smartphone screens, we hoped to get some life.

Because a lot of people that's all they know of transgeders, just like Craig's List, and standing on the stroll, and sucking dick, hooking up, freaking, and being nasty. And I would really like to change that image around because everybody is

not like that. Darling on shifting the perception of transgender women in popular culture. August 3, 2016.

Giving Face And Taking Up Space continues to document the unstoppable presence of TWOC in front of and behind self-facing cameras. Through insurgent and theatrical interventions into everyday life, art, narration, and self-creation, TWOC are politicizing the quotidian, calling on intersectional feminist interventions, and demanding to be seen online and IRL.²⁵⁶ *Giving Face And Taking Up Space—trans sociality, ethnography, social media* is guided by a selection of the dissertation's main questions and new lines of inquiry: We use theory to get closer to the lives we are interested in, if, as we say, we are invested in *centering* the margins. In extending gender transition narratives to functions that do not apply to space, how do we know a *trans* space when we see it? In extending ethnographic research methods, what new things can we learn and do with our fieldwork? What happens to the landscape of popular culture, visual analysis, and critical scholarship when trans women begin to represent themselves? What do these spatial practices tell us about an American cultural investment in identity and its *tipping points*?²⁵⁷ And lastly, why these questions? We cannot know a trans space only by sight. As I have demonstrated throughout the dissertation *knowing* trans space is to know trans people within their spatial context. It is a sensation, a feeling, a reciprocal process, an evolving personal turn collective story, and the desire to lean into the temporary safety of the built environment. It is the smell of day-old take-out, words like cunt and bitch mixed with loneliness and joy, dreams of addiction-free permeant housing, and the rooms and sidewalks that support and showcase the evolution of Black and Latinx womanhood. *Giving Face And Taking Up Space* explores the edges of *the* field of fieldwork and new directions in interdisciplinary visual cultural analysis.

Giving Face And Taking Up Space is guided by the study of trans space, representation, and the always shifting terrain of trans sociality. In this chapter, I argue that the study of transgender women of color on social media broadens the necessity for and the application of The Trans Cultural Landscape Analysis Fieldwork Model. While Chapter Four provided an in-depth application of the model's third and final module as a necessary refrain that repositions the viewer-scholar Chapter Five restructures the model's second module, *Aesthetics, Language, & Material Culture—decoration and adornment*. By working backward, I resituate and amplify my investment in interdisciplinary fieldwork while honoring everyday forms of self-representation, livability, visibility, and inter-connectivity. I continue to investigate the adaptability of the model and its overlapping applicability to the study of self(ie), space, and place.

Diana: *Honey, I don't know about her [Ruby's] selfies, but I live for her social media. She also cusses people out on Facebook, which I like to see. That's the Ruby I know and love.*

Anthony: *She will take a selfie—make up no makeup nails grown out in front of a hypothermia bed...*

Diana: *The way her realness is set up honey, she could take a picture with no makeup and still slay the children. —Anthony and Diana discuss Ruby's Facebook. December 8, 2015²⁵⁸*

The everyday art of trans aesthetic practice and digital space making on Facebook is executed through what is commonly known in social media discourse as the status update. Status updates constitute posts, so-called because one posts digital text-based information and images, much like one would post a physical paper flier to a community bulletin board. Like its paper pinned to corkboard counterpart, status updates allow Facebook users to make, share, and announce upcoming personal and community news and events such as birthdays, new jobs, injuries, surgeries, or the death of a loved one. In her book *Status Update: celebrity, publicity, and branding in the social media age* Alice

Marwick argues that social media has become a powerful symbol of “American entrepreneurialism and innovation, freedom and participation, and revolution, and change.”²⁵⁹ For Marwick, Web 2.0, a cultural history of the Internet from 2006-2009, marked the simultaneous rise of the neoliberal “attention economy.” According to Marwick, the Web 2.0 subject is acculturated to prioritize visibility, status, self-branding, and social influence, thus blurring “the lines between cultural, social, and financial capital.”²⁶⁰

A TWOC status update and entrance into the attention economy (Marwick), broadly witnessed at 2822 Georgia Ave. NW and imagined online. An updated status is a combination of visual and textual data that aims to 1. Express a state of being (in transition) 2. Garner innumerable likes from fellow trans women and/or admirers, local community celebrities, and local government officials, mayoral candidates, policymakers, and 3. Augment cultural capital and individual social status to that of icon-advocate-hero-model for trans visibility/ human rights. The TWOC status updates included in this chapter, and their local-to-national curators work to convince us to trust our inner beauty and to see that #transisbeautiful.²⁶¹ The second module of the trans model provides a three-part thematic lens: aesthetics, language, and material culture. Daily acts of decoration and adornment document and embody the trans cultural landscape. Shuffling between the liminal and IRL (shorthand for In Real Life) spaces of digital trans self-representation, this chapter maps the almost explosive social media presence held by TWOC across socio-economic class strata.

Giving Face And Taking Up Space is structured around the social media presence of two extraordinary TWOC and the savvy branding strategies that leave us feeling cared

for and teach us how to post in those moments when “[even] if you feel like nobody loves you, that nobody gives a shit about you” Ruby does.²⁶² The scope, scale, and pace at which TWOC update messages of tender love and connection on the Internet is noteworthy and constantly expanding. Like a sunny summer afternoon twerking on the sidewalks that surround 2822 Georgia Ave NW., the TWOC featured here to bask in the temporary refuge and social life of the Internet and in so doing they produce an adaptable spatial practice that necessarily shifts the study of contemporary media, sociality, and visual culture.

Theorizing beauty/Navigating visibility

#transisbeautiful, Black womanhood and the shifting politics of passing

Approximately a year after *Time* published “The Transgender Tipping Point” Laverne Cox was honored with the 2015 Maybelline Cosmetics—New York *Make It Happen Award*. According to Maybelline Cosmetics, the #makeithappen movement captures, enhances, and awards women’s “ability to transform” with the help of Maybelline cosmetics. Written like a personal affirmation Post-It on the bathroom mirror Maybelline’s make it happen web page boasts, “You’ve already got the brains and the beauty, but with Maybelline by your side you’ve got the tools to express your fabulous self.” Linking transformation and makeup to fabulous moments of confidence-boosting self-expression, Maybelline annually features a small group of “makers,” i.e. the women who wear Maybelline products and inspire *us* with the beauty to #makeithappen.²⁶³ To my knowledge, the entirety of Cox’s #makeithappen award speech was not recorded. *Elle* magazine staff writer Leah Chernikoff documented the inception of Laverne Cox’s

hashtag #transisbeautiful in her article titled, “Laverne Cox’s Explanation of Why #Transisbeautiful Will Make you Cheer and Cry.” Deviating only slightly from an “it gets better”²⁶⁴ discourse, Laverne Cox’s acceptance of the 2015 Maybelline *Make It Happen Award* illuminates the affective and humanizing pull and promise of the transgender tipping point: trans visibility, equity, rights, and self/acceptance. As the reader may recall, in “America’s Transition,” the centerpiece of “The Transgender Tipping Point—America’s Next Civil Rights Frontier” (*Time* 2014) Cox conceives of the transgender tipping point as a historical moment, place, and a personal turn relatable story about difference, knowledge, and visibility.

We are in a place now where more and more trans people want to come forward and say, ‘This is who I am’ And more trans people are willing to tell their stories. More us are living visibly and pursuing our dreams visibly, so people can say, ‘Oh yeah, I know someone who is trans.’ When people have points of reference that are humanizing, that demystifies difference.²⁶⁵

Extending her desire to live visibly, Cox’s #makeithappen awardee speech is a beautifully honest personal recitation on the materiality of race, gender, embodiment, personal narrative, transition, and the navigation of public space for Black women. #transisbeautiful has since taken on a life of its own and its users, uses, and overall socio-cultural impact. Rather than edit the small portion of Cox’s acceptance speech that exists in print, I have included the entirety of the transcription as it first appeared on *Elle.com* in late 2015. The genesis story of #transisbeautiful is as follows:

“I started a hashtag earlier this year called #transisbeautiful. And I started that because years ago, at the beginning of my transition, I would walk down the street and I would hear people yell, *That’s a man*. And I would be devastated. Because here I was, I had finally accepted my womanhood, and the world was not reflecting that back on me and I was devastated. It took me years to fully internalize that someone can look at me and tell that I am transgendered and that is not only okay, but beautiful, because trans *is* beautiful. All the things that make me uniquely and beautifully trans—my big hands, my big feet, my wide

shoulders, my deep voice—all of these things are beautiful. I'm not beautiful despite these things, I'm beautiful because of them. So, I would like to encourage every single one of you in this room to join with me in showing the world that trans is beautiful in terms of how we cover trans stories and diverse stories in general. There are so many different kinds of beauty in the world that I want to celebrate, and I know you want to celebrate it, too.”²⁶⁶

By decoupling gender transition from an individual's daily in/ability to *pass*, to be read “successfully” and consistently *as* cisgender in public by the general public, the genesis of #transisbeautiful is an ontological claim to beauty *and* trans experience. Grounded in the everyday act of walking, #transisbeautiful is an ode to the imperfect nature of legible, visible, and audible binary gender identity and gender expression lived out in public space. When reading about its inception, the hashtag, like much of Cox's social media messaging, has an annular narrative-branding focus that oscillates between themes of affirmation and resistance to internalized transphobia via a singular daily goal, trans visibility/public safety. By combining the personal and political and the individual and the communal in order to cultivate the wide breadth of trans beauty, #transisbeautiful invites us to walk along Laverne Cox on a path (daytime city street or nighttime sidewalk) to personal acceptance despite the violent moments in which we are mis-gendered or mis-read. This portion of Cox's #makeithappen acceptance speech taps into her journey as a Black woman of trans experience *and* as a trans woman of Black experience in a contemporary America. As she tells it, Cox evolves to find inner beauty in and through the discrepancy between her feminine felt sense of self, the woman she knows herself to be, and her more ambiguous/androgynous physicality: the size of her hands and feet and the tenor of her voice. Cox's #makeithappen (self)acceptance speech is a devotional account to her transition into Black womanhood.

Though Cox doesn't indicate here how old she was when she began her transition or the time period in which her memory took place, her 2015 #makeithappen speech is grounded in its spatial context—unnamed city streets and sidewalks where the threat of anti-trans and racist violence by night and street harassment by day looms large for TWOC. Recalling a moment of cis-sexist-racist-transphobic street harassment and interpellation allows Cox to continually refuse i.e. refuses what José Muñoz has called the “Hey, you there!” interpolating call of heteronormativity” and legible gender.²⁶⁷ The all too common experience of being mis-gendered despite our efforts at social transition, aesthetics, and/or medical intervention devastates many trans people of color because it awakens in us a foreboding sense of failed visual and cognitive dissonance²⁶⁸ and thus, the threat of anti-trans hate-speech and/or physical violence. Cox makes two hopeful claims about the impact of public moments of gender misrecognition 1. That we come to know ourselves as trans through a connection to our inner beauty/trans essence and 2. A love for trans visibility will inevitably inspire acceptance in trans and non-trans communities. In other words, to *know* trans is to know inner beauty and to claim a space for intersectional identity is to see trans resilience. Cox decouples beauty from legible/binary gender through an embrace of all things trans. Rather than reifying the experience of being born in the *wrong* body as natal violence done to her by biology or valorizing the safety net that social passing or going *stealth* (undetectable as trans) unevenly provides, Cox, echoes that not only is Black beautiful but that trans is beautiful. Cox decries the dream of passing by claiming that Black trans women are *already* women and thus that there may be no need for passing, broadly imagined. In accepting herself, an award, and in her acceptance of us as trans people, Cox invites her audience to utilize the

hashtag #transisbeautiful and our disparate genders to disrupt the cultural landscape of social media and documented self-imaging. Cox encourages fellow trans people to manifest the socio-political-social media prowess of self-love and visibility through the reach of a hashtag. Whether or not a hopeful hashtag or a single moment of trans visibility on or offline can bring out moments of ease, safety, and self-confidence to a select group of trans people/celebrities Cox's auto-ethnographic refusal to pass in order to be a Black woman finds academic kin in the avant-garde scholarship of Adrian Piper.

"So, no matter what I do or do not do about my racial identity, someone is bound to feel uncomfortable. But I have resolved that it is no longer going to be me"—Adrian Piper²⁶⁹

Since 1961 the transnational journal *Transition* has told "complicated stories about race and racialization with elegant prose and beautiful images."²⁷⁰ World-renowned philosopher and multi-media artist Adrian Piper's essay "Passing for White, Passing for Black" was the inaugural piece of scholarship to appear in *Transition's* 1992 special edition entitled, *Passing*. Published in the aftermath of the infamous Rodney King beating and the subsequent Los Angeles, California Riots, *Passing* responds to an incredibly violent moment of anti-Black racism and the urgent need to rise and respond. "Passing for White, Passing for Black" is a moving piece of personal non-fiction on blackness, embodiment, the im/possibility of racial passing, classification, and the daily violence of racial distinction, colorism within Black communities, and racism in late 20th century America. Although Piper's essay is a renunciation of monolithic racial constructs rather than distinguishable binary gender identity, she too speaks to what it might mean to refuse passing's promise and navigate everyday moments of visual confusion and violent verbal confrontation.

The cover of *Passing* is a stark black and white photograph of two androgynous young Black people in striking white face. White paint is smeared onto their face and smudged into the fine hairs of their eyebrows and extends like errant theatrical streaks into their hair. Each wears false eyelashes heavily weighted by pigmented mascara and ringed in thick eyeliner. The figures animate and otherwise all-black background. Without recognizable spatial-temporal signs, they appear embodied, but out of place, space, and time. Their bodies and faces almost but do not make skin to skin contact. Instead, they stare defiantly at the viewer with an expression that beguiles the viewer's desire to *really* know emotion, gender, blackness, and sexuality. The models evoke legacies of anti-Black racism, minstrelsy, and the politics of Black resilience, representation, theater, and performance in a 20th century America. Sitting between their clavicles is simply the issue's title, *Passing*.²⁷¹

Not unlike Laverne Cox's non-linear path to #makeithappen, #transisbeautiful, and the desired power of hashtags this particular cover invokes themes which evoke, but are not limited to race, legibility, and visual variation and the elusive never-ending process more commonly known as passing. Transition out of systemically oppressed groups and passing into more privileged white and/or cisgender identities call in everyday aesthetic maintenance practices, and those body-based gestures and movements that threaten to undermine seemingly trustworthy identity categories such as race, gender, and sexuality. Following José Muñoz's work on queer utopias, personal accounts of passing's failures are reimagined as a set of transition narratives. These journeys reimagine the beautiful virtuosity²⁷² of race and gender, blackness, womanhood, and trans experience as an ongoing daily performance of self/ preservation.

Adrian Piper's "Passing for White, Passing for Black" like Laverne Cox's #makeithappen speech begins with memory and misrecognition. On her first day of graduate school Piper recalls being introduced to a famous and well-respected white male faculty member. In the moment of their meeting, he mocks, "Miss Piper, you're about as Black as I am."²⁷³ For Piper, who self-identifies as educated, upper-middle-class, Black, and light-skinned these moments of devastating disorientation and accidental passing into and out of whiteness, blackness, and denied acceptance catch her off guard. These inter-racial disorientations destabilize and upset her deeply held and embodied beliefs in blackness and intrinsic self-worth.²⁷⁴ Piper's personal decision "to not pass for white" required that she verbally announce her blackness and in so doing, consent to heightened moments of gendered and racial discomfort. "Passing for White, Passing for Black" is a provocative essay on the cumulative daily effects of racial distinction and the visual life of blackness. Like Cox, Piper is most concerned with the self-inflicted violence of misrecognition. Recalling feelings of placelessness, Piper remembers being "put in her place" by white people who accused her of insidious racial deceit. They demand that she alert others to her Blackness to not make *others* feel uncomfortable.²⁷⁵ Piper concludes that anti-racist action requires readiness and preparedness: "the question should not be whether an individual is racist; that we all are to some extent should be a given. The question should be, rather, how we handle it once it appears."²⁷⁶ In these (sadly) inevitable and cumulative moments of racism and transphobia's arrival and reveal as illustrated by Cox and Piper, we are asked to be unapologetic and personally responsible for how we accept, react, or respond to *what* happens next.

While the title to Piper's essay names a two-fold dilemma: colorism within the Black community and anti-Black racism amongst white colleagues, she does not attend to the how and if variations in Black feminine gender expression might affect her hypothesis. Understandably, this appears to be outside the scope of Piper's personal lived experience, scholarly research, and art practice. Like Cox, Piper concludes by tying Black women's lived experience to the complicated politics of hyper/visibility. She resolves, "So no matter what I do or do not do about my racial identity, someone is bound to feel uncomfortable. But I have resolved that it is no longer going to be me."²⁷⁷ Piper's decision to proclaim her blackness is her refusal to shoulder the expected visual-emotional discomfort of others. Read alongside Cox's intent to utilize #transisbeautiful in order to #makeithappen for Black and trans people, Adrian Piper and Laverne Cox create a pivot point for this chapter's adaptation of the trans fieldwork model and its ability to map the everyday digital interventions of Black and Latinx trans women on the study of space, place, identity, and visuality in American Cultural Studies.

2. Aesthetics, Language, & Material Culture—decoration and adornment

The second module of the trans model oscillates between TWOC practices of feeling *at* and making one's self *at* home through daily acts of decoration adornment and creation. These practices are at once embodied, added to the body, and/or interior decoration of the built environment. Central to this socio-emotional-geographic practice is the daily labor found in acts of community caregiving. In "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance bell hooks recodes and revalues gendered and racialized sites of Black women's domesticity and domestic tasks by centering the *work* of Black women's housework, housekeeping, and homemaking."²⁷⁸ As discussed in chapter three, suturing

home to place creates what hooks calls *homeplace*, a symbolic, material, and linguistic *site* of Black women's daily resistance. Though hooks' does not account for the broadness of Black womanhood, she does not preclude nuances in Black feminine gender identity and its potential impact on hearth, home, and family. *Aesthetics, Language, & Material Culture*, considers the value of trans women's multi-generational caregiving practices, paid and unpaid emotional labor, support and care work, and the hazy interpersonal and professional lines between chosen family, friendship, and ethnographic research, daily survival and social service provision. In the following section, I investigate the spatial-emotional elements of Ruby Corado's social media presence as an ongoing and interdependent process of social service, mobility, influence, and status. I focus on visual and text-based content that includes personal stories, short aspirational messages, inspirational selfies, and creative location-based content modalities. I illustrate how Ruby's work with still self-images, self-videography, and "selfless" social service shifts the TWOC social media landscape of the District.

*"When I transitioned into a transgender woman of color—Latina immigrant, then all of a sudden...I feel like I transitioned into happiness, but I transitioned into instant poverty. And I have been struggling my whole life ever since."*²⁷⁹—Ruby Corado on happiness and gender transition. November 6, 2014.

On November 6, 2014, Ruby Corado and I met in her third-floor office space at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW, a floor that would later become a full-time LGBT youth shelter in the winter of 2018. We discussed trans-Latinx experiences with the DC Municipal Police Department, condom use, drug use, homelessness, street harassment, and street-based prostitution in the District. During that conversation, Ruby reflected on the two-plus decades she had spent advocating on behalf of hyper-marginalized queer and trans Washingtonians and El Salvadorian immigrants and her identity as an out proud

trans Latinx woman. She described her theories on social disparity, municipal neglect, sexism, and trans precarity, early gender transition, and the exceptional lives of transgender celebrities. As was often the case, Ruby did not need much prompting to begin our interviews. She would generally sit down and immediately begin telling/rehearsing her narrative for that day. I would then gently facilitate her to a particular sub-topic. That particular day she uncharacteristically entered into the story at its beginning.

“As for most people in society...they basically have it rough sometimes because they may get into drugs, they may get into depression, they may get into alcoholism, substance abuse and all of those things. But they overcome and they have these great outcomes and these great stories. For trans women, one in a million—Laverne Cox is the only trans woman [of color] that overcame all of this shit. All of us are still struggling and it makes me wonder—Why when we transition why does that happen, what is ...? There has to be some underlying reasons why we go from privileged people to completely marginalized, repressed under-served...I mean you name it—it's the whole transitioning—the outcome...other than our internal happiness which a lot of us are *so* happy, but it's really hard. The system, you know the legal system, government system, the educational systems—they are all against us and they put us in this (*audible sigh*) position to fail. They drive us to commit suicide, they drive us to contract diseases, they drive us to abuse substances, they drive us to make decisions that either take our lives or eventually put us at risk for bad health outcomes. And I want to know, I kind of have an idea, but I really would love to have the answer—Is it the fact that we transition into women and women are less...privileged in society than men? Is it the fact that gender norms punish us? Is it the fact that...you know that we are meant to become *disposable* people? I sometimes would love to find the answer.”²⁸⁰

Ruby's investment in telling *great* stories, narrativizing the everyday lives of others, and tangible livable outcomes for TWOC are a central part of Ruby's everyday narrative of self as self-promotion-branding. I came to understand that every interview provided Ruby with another opportunity to practice her captivating and persuasive storytelling strategies with and local press agents and me. Ruby's trans Latinx adversity-storytelling or telling her way of adversity and into advertisement is a hustle that Ruby

has learned craft and navigate well. Ruby's narrative situates herself and other TWOC as the protagonists of their own life's journey in the pursuit of happiness, social services, *good* outcomes, dreams of wealth, ease, fame, and husbands. In each interview, Ruby recalls or fabricates a personalized cultural landscape. Ruby's landscape includes the following spatial elements: a major city, a nod to embodiment or emotion, and most often—a specific sub-location. These micro-geographies range from bedrooms with bedside tables full of condoms, to street corners with the girls, to time alone in prison. But what strikes me most about this particular interview early in our working relationship is the complicated and hard-hitting questions Ruby began to pose that day. Her drive to question the systemic denial of happiness and livability for trans women pushes her to wonder aloud, "Is it the fact that...you know that we are meant to become *disposable* people?"²⁸¹ Ruby's love of queer and trans people informs her determination to ask after the disparaging process and lethal effects of societal disposability, precarity, and or the denial "good" health outcomes. The robust nature of Ruby's demand for happiness continues to inform Ruby's narrative-interview style in person and online via her social media presence on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. In the section that follows, I map the general shape and style of a Ruby Corado Facebook status update in order to work through the digital and spatial potential of a mobile Casa Ruby. While I follow the operations of the trans model as they are listed, I do not interrupt the chapter with the title of each operation and sub-operation. The following adapts the model's second module in order to showcase my research findings, fieldwork, and insight into trans aesthetics, language, and digital material cultures.

Sub-sections—Interiority and Interior Design

“I Am Amazing! AND SO ARE YOU!”—Ruby Corado, Status Updates, Facebook Profiles

During the week of Valentine’s Day 2016, Casa Ruby’s Founder and Executive Director Ruby Corado sent digital valentines to her DC LGBT community-family on two different social media platforms. These digital valentines included 1. A Facebook status entitled “feelings happy” and 2. A YouTube video titled “Happy Valentine’s Day.” “Happy Valentine’s Day” was shared to Facebook as “feeling thankful.” While “feeling happy” and “Happy Valentine’s Day” follows similar holiday-inspired themes and love-filled sentiments, they also tap into more fraught emotions such as desire and disappointment. In each post, Ruby is attuning to the emotional needs that are likely to accompany Valentine’s Day at Casa Ruby: a sense of queer and trans community loss or loneliness and the absence of loved ones, partners, and significant others. In short, Ruby’s social media presence during the week of Valentine’s Day 2016 creates a mobile Casa Ruby drop-in center. By relocating/duplicating the easily accessed basement of 2822 Ruby illustrates a receptivity to community caregiving and provides a space for digital social service in the service of visual, spatial, audible trans love, and the desire to *feel* happy.



Fig. 18 “feeling happy” Ruby Corado in her car Valentine’s Day week 2016, Facebook

Like the majority of Ruby’s Facebook status updates,²⁸² “feeling happy” included each of the following four major elements: 1. A simple graphic used to indicate a universally understood emotion 2. A publishable geographic location 3. A memorable and emotive self-image, and 4. Text-based inspirational messaging and content. In this section, “*I Am Amazing! AND SO ARE YOU!*”—*Ruby Corado, Status updates, Facebook profiles* I provide examples of each of the above elements in order to move through the components and sub-sections of Ruby’s Facebook communications strategies; strategies that always welcome us home to 2822 Georgia Avenue NW.

The Facebook status “feeling happy” appears here as figure 18. At the top right corner, the viewer comes across the guiding spatial element of a Ruby Corado Facebook status update, symbolic emotion. In this case, a classic yellow happy face 😊 and a pink heart ♥ are used to connote the physical-emotional sensation of smiling, an expression

aimed at communicating and sharing personal happiness. To the right of these universally recognized symbols, we find a text-based description of an emotional state. This content answers the question, “How are you feeling?” In this instance, Ruby was “feeling happy.” To the right of this emotion is the second major element of a Ruby Corado Facebook status update, 2. A strategic geographic location either real, aspirational or imagined. Geographic location curation and identification on Facebook are completed through a set of actions, more commonly referred to as geo(graphy)-tagging or “checking in.” According to Facebook, “checking in” encourages Facebook users to provide the social media site with access to current geographic location. By providing one’s location or the location of the wireless electronic device in use, the user answers the question “Where are you?” by answering, “Here. I am here.” Once location access has been permitted, Facebook then provides its users with a list of nearby locations. A posted check-in allows users to publicize their “exact” location, thus adding spatial awareness to the overall emotional-informational content of an update. Once posted, this information is shared with a personal Facebook “audience,” a selection of our friends and followers.²⁸³

I navigate Ruby’s Facebook page like a mobile research site. I divided her page into distinct and manageable sub-sections, explored functional and structural elements of each micro-geography, attended to the creative use and re-use of the status update, and explored the emotional intimacy that Ruby was able to create and curate in a digital trans landscape similar to that of the drop-in center. Like the TLC, the visual and spatial elements of Ruby’s status updates could co-exist separated only by the placement of easily recognizable faces, objects, words, and the emotions they invoked. Similarly, I was interested in how status sub-sections match or exceed their original design or

Facebook's intentions. Restated, what makes a selfie a selfie, and not, let's say a headshot or a candid photo? Is it merely the appearance/performance of direct eye contact or a smile that appears a tad too theatrical?

Facebook is a social media platform that aims to gather people together. As we are now familiar, in *Queer Phenomenology*, Sarah Ahmed argues that words, themselves, create a centrifugal pull that promotes innovative-queer worldmaking.²⁸⁴ For Ruby Corado, this word is *status*. Ruby shares and augments her social media status and therefore, her social reality on Facebook. A TWOC social media landscape, as modeled by Ruby Corado, is comprised of individual and organizational Facebook profiles, timelines full of inspirational status updates, selfies, and re-posted content. Ruby Corado's public profile can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/ruby.corado.5>. It provides her friend-follower-audience-community with temporary shelter, a homeplace (hooks). Like the Trans Life Center, Ruby's public profile becomes *ruby.corado.5* is a refuge for Black and trans Latinx chosen family to congregate, comment, share, and like. Part diary, dream journal, and press release, *ruby.corado.5* is an essential sub-section of Casa Ruby, a street address, a non-profit organization, and a social service brand. Each status update carves out its own space on an ever-expanding-scrolling chronological timeline that asks Ruby, "How are you? How do you feel today? Where are you? To which she can assert, I feel happy I am *here* for you.

An interaction between self, Facebook, and Facebook friend, the art of checking in produces Facebook users *as* locatable subjects. The subject authors and consumes descriptive social media geographies *as* daily interactive social content. In "feeling happy" Ruby locates herself at or en route to The White House in Washington, D.C.

Though we do not *see* the White House within the frame of figure 18, we can imagine its edifice to be nearby or imminently approaching. By locating herself *at* the White House, Ruby Corado places herself within and alongside a specific and easily recognized glo-cal (read: global-local) geographic location. By calling in the power of 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. Ruby identifies a specific street address, a building, and a national symbol that can be easily navigated to on foot, by car, or public transit. Whether or not Ruby was physically at, near, or in front of the White House in “feeling happy,” checking in at the White House allowed Ruby to draw herself into the White House while also drawing attention to another structural element of the Facebook status update, the profile photo. Her then profile photo is included here as figure 19.



Fig. 19 Ruby Corado and President Barack Obama, Facebook profile August 2016

In a city where the local is always already glo-cal Ruby’s February 2016 profile picture reimagines the aesthetics, coalition, and location of Black and Latinx leadership. According to Facebook, a profile photo can be chosen and changed at any time by an individual user. A profile photo appears to the right of your Facebook name on all posted content. A profile photo is “how people recognize you.” This repeated image also allows your audience-friends-family to identify you with your Facebook content.²⁸⁵ Profile

photos read like metaphors for self-representation and are often chosen because they communicate to the viewer and potential friend, “*This is me.*” Profile photos, like figure 19, extend the geographic reach of the check-in. Figure 19 features Ruby at The White House with President Barack Obama. In this image, President Obama stands closely beside Ruby. They both wear cerulean blue fabric, a tie for him, and a blazer for her. Their teeth gleam, and smiles stretch wide. Hovering above the president’s signature, we see the expected White House Americana decor: white marble busts of notable men amongst paintings of the “vast” and historical American landscape. In this souvenir Polaroid turn-profile photo Ruby is simultaneously tourist, guest, and esteemed local-community leader. Though figure 19 appears as a thumbnail photo, a small square next to Ruby’s name, this particular image allows us to consider Facebook status as a place for creative reuse. By locating herself at/en route to the White House on the morning of February 10, 2016, Ruby usurps the power of the check-in. Figures 18 and 19 allow Ruby to reimagine the D.C. Metro Area as a place for local and national trans visibility, social service, leadership, and personal, local, and national cultural transition. Rather than marching down to the White House in protest “feeling happy” invokes the oppositional power of a calm smile.

The third element of a Ruby Corado status update is an expressive selfie. Ruby’s Facebook selfies, like the one featured in figure 18, accentuate hair, manicure length, and a vibrant trademark color. Ruby’s signature look almost always centers around a deep ruby red. We see her here in figure 18 bundled in a black pea coat. The muted textures of her coat seem to fade into the car’s upholstery as her red glossed lips stretch towards the soft tendrils of her shoulder-length hair. Of particular interest is the spatial enclosure

captured in the frame of figure 18 is the way we face Ruby as if turned around from the front seat of her car. Rather than watching the road, we become an outstretched arm, a selfie stick, and an extension of her self-facing camera. Ruby is dressed for late winter in the District. She sits patiently in a car. She is surrounded by the vehicle's soft beige faux leather interior. From her seat, she smiles at her reflection, and through her selfie, she smiles at us, her Facebook friends. Whether the car is moving, stopped at a red light, parked around the corner 2822 Georgia Ave. NW, or cruising around D.C. blocks from 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Ruby's ruby red hair and warm the screen.

It is important to note that every status update on Facebook includes a timestamp. Gathered together and scrolled through like a collection of status updates, timestamps create what is more commonly known as the Facebook timeline. A Facebook timeline provides a chronological look at one's social media life, beginning with the most recent status update. Ruby's timeline, *ruby.corado.5* archives the space, place, and emotions of the Ruby Corado status update. Stylistically located somewhere between a diary entry and motherly advice, "feeling happy" relies heavily on the fourth and final element of the Ruby Corado status update: the meaningful message. Meaningful messages appear as text-based content directly to the right of a shared image. "feeling happy" sends the well-wishes of an over-sized Hallmark valentine card with balloons and glitter and the affirmations of an Oprah-approved self-help book. "feeling happy" reads, "I am beautiful! / I am worthy! / I am amazing! / AND SO ARE YOU! / I Deserve The Best In Life AND SO DO YOU." Like a healing salve, self-worth, self-love, and self-acceptance are buoyed by Ruby's list of affirmations. Ruby asks that we join her *at* the White House and tap into our collective amazing-ness in the face of systemic disposability.²⁸⁶

“Feeling happy” includes all four major elements of a Ruby Corado status update, as outlined above. Though not always included, the fifth element is the ability to “tag” i.e., include fellow Facebook friends; thus, imagining they are here or there with you. Read like a daily affirmation written on a gratitude list “feeling happy,” and her offline persona rarely waver from Ruby’s four-part narrative style. On *ruby.corado.5* Ruby is the heroine of the status update, mother and community savior, and in this instance, the Casa Ruby/White House valentine delivery service. “feeling happy” reimagines the possibility of a world where we can feel and provide unconditional happiness. *ruby.corado.5* tells stories of rebirth, redemption, self-love, and self-making. Read silently, aloud, or repeated often, Ruby’s selfie status-as-self-love mantra elicits an affective response within the queer and trans Facebook friend. Like the timeline it has been pulled from, “feeling happy” provides us with a mobile meeting place, a digital trans cultural landscape that encourages us to “like” a post, love ourselves, be trans, and imagine what it might mean to embody the happiness that Ruby so feels we deserve. I will conclude this section by mapping my continuing investment in interior landscapes. I provide an interlude on home, caregiving, storytelling, and cognitive landscapes before mapping the interior of Ruby’s car and her investment in self-documentation and self-videography. I then transition to community member investments in selfies and reactions to Ruby’s social media presence.

Internal worlds/ interior landscapes—notes on home, caregiving, and storytelling strategies

“I am actually starting my day...actually I went to KFC because I am on my way to Casa Ruby and I am going to bring some food for people who just...you know I love them!”

*Ruby Corado*²⁸⁷

My investment in the study of cognitive landscapes is inspired by the work of Native American novelist and American poet Leslie Marmon Silko and Casa Ruby’s resident nurse practitioner, Gwen. By placing Gwen, Ruby, and Leslie Marmon Silko into conversation with one another, I investigate the emergent relationships of space, place, and communal storytelling as (a) social service amongst women of all experiences. In her essay, “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination,” Silko investigates the centrality of ritual, myth, and oral traditions of her pueblo, the Laguna Pueblo Reservation in New Mexico.²⁸⁸ Writing from a “high arid plateau,” Silko identifies the interrelationships of geography and a collective story that recount the cultures of everyday life. She describes the import of pueblo orality as follows:

“Instead the ancient Pueblo people depended upon collective memory through successive generations to maintain and transmit an entire culture, a world complete with proven strategies for survival. The oral narrative, or “story” became the medium through which the complex of Pueblo knowledge and belief was maintained. Whatever the event or the subject, the ancient people perceived the world and themselves within that world as part of an ancient and continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories.”²⁸⁹

For Silko story bundles ground a people in space, place, and history in order to transmit the cultural and cognitive import of the landscape. This endless spatial-temporal loop forms the geography of past, present, and future relationships to the land, to place, and to identity.

My fieldwork at Casa Ruby did not center native topography of Georgia Avenue. Silko's work on storytelling and everyday place-making informs my work the District. My fieldwork aimed to create multi-generational and experiential conversations with TWOC about TWOC storytelling strategies and oral traditions specific to a singular street address in Washington, D.C. Through the medium of *story* and *status*, Ruby Corado's world-making practices on and offline are a complex bundle (Silko) of memory, inspiration, aspiration, and personal narrative in service of the creation of an oasis. Casa Ruby is a storytelling funnel. The stories told at 2822 carried the emotional weight (positive, negative, and neutral) of countless previous geographic memories. These locations included: schools, prisons, sex work strolls, and back alleyways. The below excerpts from my initial interview with Gwen were foundational to my work on the centrality of *story* to the creation and maintenance of inter-generational chosen family, family history, and collective belonging.

“Or if I catch them doing something wrong, like twerking on the front steps. You know, what Ruby says, “No twerking on the front steps,” right? I’m like, “Are you twerking out there?” And they’re like, “Shit!” And I’m like, “If you’re twerking, you can get a job as a dancer and you can be making money.”—Gwen on monetizing skills. Casa Ruby April 1, 2016

On April 1, 2016, Gwen and I sat on broken white plastic lawn chairs in the back patio at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. Gwen is a white, non-binary, queer-identified woman in her mid to late fifties. That afternoon under the shade of a few trees, Gwen and I talked about her life journey in the District: her experience as a sex worker, human trafficking survivor, former drug user, social service provider, and nurse practitioner. That afternoon Gwen was most interested in talking about her experience as a Casa Ruby “grandma,” her love of queer and trans youth, chosen family, and the two-plus decades she has spent

advocating for the health and wellbeing of women and trans folks. Towards the middle of our hour-long conversation, I asked Gwen to provide me with a definition for *family*. For Gwen, home and family are the active choices to feel chosen and claimed by others. The following is an excerpt from this exchange:

Gwen: But we are all part of the same community. But I think the terms of [familial] endearment are important. And I think its part of claiming it.

Anthony: Can you tell me about that?

Gwen: It's about claiming your life! [And saying,] "I am a part of this community and I am actually claiming it *right* now. And I belong!" And I think that is the important part, "And I actually belong. And it's a wonderful feeling." It doesn't happen right away with the young kids. It's a process. But I think that, you know...I tell so many people that...especially for...in the family a lot of the things that...a lot of the families that have remained intact do a lot for one another. What it is...is that they show up and breathe. And that's all they have to do. They show up and breathe. And at these celebrations and at these rituals that we go through become shared memories. And all we did was show up and breathe. Is it that hard, you know for a lot of people? But it is."²⁹⁰

For Gwen, like Esmeralda, the breath speaks multitudes. The simplicity of breath and presence families of belonging were formed at Casa Ruby—a non-profit organization, a symbolic home and, a casa (house). Claiming life and breath,²⁹¹ Casa Ruby became an ideal, a story, and a place for memory, celebration, and time spent on broken chairs. Energized by Leslie Marmon Silko and Gwen's thoughts on orality for marginalized populations, cultural traditions, and claims to place, I now return to Ruby Corado's social media presence, a digital landscape for trans tender love and care.

A home office on wheels—Happy Valentine’s Day from Casa Ruby, 2016



Fig. 20 “Happy Valentine’s Day,” February 14, 2016. YouTube

On February 14, 2016, Ruby Corado posted a YouTube video entitled, “Happy Valentine’s Day.” In this short video, Ruby employs select elements of the Ruby Corado Facebook status update into her digital storytelling strategy. These self-documentation elements include easily identifiable emotion, clearly recognizable geospatial location clues, memorable visual aesthetics, and clear inspirational content. The summation of these elements translate effortlessly into self-promotional messaging, branding, and social media content told about and within the trans spaces we inhabit, find shelter in, or claim (Gwen) as *home*.

“Happy Valentine’s Day” is a one minute and thirty-second video published by Ruby Corado on her on YouTube page.²⁹² Ruby does not regularly update her YouTube channel or have many YouTube followers, more commonly referred to as YouTube subscribers. Instead, deliberately utilizes YouTube as a platform for uploading and sharing video content across her more actively used social media platforms. For example, Ruby deploys essential YouTube functions in order to easily re-post videos to her heavily trafficked personal Facebook page and/or upload videos to the video section of Casa

Ruby's official Facebook page.²⁹³ By engaging across social platforms, Ruby has shrewdly ensured that potential community member-family-followers can search for "Ruby Corado" and find content on and about her and her organization on a variety of search engines and across multiple densely populated social media sites and applications. For example, a simple "video" search for "Casa Ruby" or "Ruby Corado" on *Google.com* provides individual links to Facebook and YouTube videos as well as commercial media coverage on sites such as *NBC News* and the *Washington Post*.

Published days after her Facebook status, "feeling happy," "Happy Valentine's Day," takes place inside Ruby's car. The video opens and with Ruby seated in the driver's seat and has been included here as figure 20. In this still image, we can see that Ruby is wearing a black peacoat over a light grey V-neck sweater. Her lips shine with the assistance of a sheer red gloss. This lip tint also matches her wavy, ruby red hair. Ruby's eyebrows appear freshly manicured, and her false eyelashes pressed firmly into place. For "Happy Valentine's Day," Ruby films herself from the comfort of the driver's seat. From this vantage point, we can also see the back seat, which appears to be uncharacteristically empty of extra passengers and errant objects, some of which may or may not be in use or trash waiting to be discarded. Ruby's car clutter generally consists of empty food and beverage containers, heavily used makeup bottles, and overflowing file folders. The beige interior of Ruby's car accentuates the bleak February light that shines through the car windows and sunroof. Through the windows, we can see a blue sky and mostly leaf-barren trees.

It is important to note that Ruby chose her car as a location for this video instead of Casa Ruby or a nearby city park. Ruby's vehicle affords her a certain amount of

physical safety, geographic mobility, and personal anonymity for “Happy Valentine’s Day.” Her vehicle provides a semi-private interior landscape/office space while also allowing Ruby to navigate very public space, a city street. Ruby has often described D.C. city streets, sidewalks, and strolls as sites for potential *profiling*—the assumption that a Black or Latinx trans woman is *seen* in public is always already soliciting for sex work, subject to stigma, ridicule, and potential physical harm, or what has been more commonly referred to by TWOC advocates as, walking while trans.²⁹⁴ Driving and recording *while* trans on Valentine’s Day during daylight hours does not appear to hold this same social-cultural consequences as a nighttime stroll. During our conversation on November 6, 2014, Ruby described *profiling*. In the following interview excerpt Ruby recounts, the socio-emotional and spatial impact of *profiling*:

“*Profiling* is a way of life for us, you know... When you walk down the street, [people say,] “There goes the freak, there goes the tranny!” They've got all of these names and labels they have for us. Then all of a sudden, we stop being human beings then they [police officers, government officials, everyday people with anti-trans bias] profile us as the bad people, the *undesirable* people that are not supposed to be here—and that profiling translates into losing access to what everybody has like housing.”²⁹⁵

Ruby moves on to explain the false promise of daytime, public space, crowds and city sidewalks,

“Because if I am a trans woman sitting at a bus stop, a place where it's *supposed* to be safe because it's in the light. You know...it's recommended for people in big cities to stay safe to stay on a main street—to be seen. At the bus stop there's lots of people...[but] because of profiling that becomes a very dangerous space for us [trans Latinx/TWOC].”²⁹⁶

From memories of street harassment at bus stops to the front seat of her car on Valentine’s Day 2016 to the video-sharing platform giant YouTube, Ruby inhabits “story” (Silko) is intimacy in public space and the trans social media landscape. Here

Ruby usurps the themes of Valentine's Day most notably, romantic love in order to speak to the cyclical violence of social disposability and the ability to cultivate self-compassion.

From within the micro-geography of Ruby's car—part office, part bedroom, part dining room, "Happy Valentine's Day" finds safety and reciprocity from within the functional and structural elements of her car. The visual aesthetics of and the transcript for this video provide a heavy dose of emotional-inspirational content. This content reimagines the world outside of the car, a world where trans people cultivate self-love and feel seen and thus loved by Ruby/Casa Ruby. The video for "Happy Valentine's Day" begins, "Hello everybody today's Valentine's [Day] and I want to wish everybody a happy Valentine's. I want to remind you that the *first* love should be *you*. You should love yourself you should give kisses and hugs to yourself and then love someone that you really care about that is close to you." The inward nature of self-compassion and its imaginative physical expression, kisses and hugs re-directs a desire for external care and holiday romance and sexual pleasure to friendship of and with the self. Ruby reassures her viewers that she feels *our* love and that she loves us in return. She ends "Happy Valentine's Day" with a direct address to her viewing audience- by urging us to bask in the selfless reciprocity of love and to share this love *on* Facebook. Ruby exclaims,

And I want you to know that [even] if you feel like nobody loves you, that nobody gives a shit about you, I do. And I know you care about me. Today is the day to really, *really* love yourself. If you don't have a boo [a significant other], guess what? It's okay! But celebrate it. Celebrate. Send someone a [Facebook] message telling them that you love them even if you are mad at them...just post it on Facebook. Just tell the world that you love them. Because someone out there today is feeling like nobody cares. And if you are one of them, I want to let you know that I care, that I love you so much, and thank you for loving me back.²⁹⁷

By encouraging her viewers to post love notes on Facebook timelines or send Facebook instead of sending more traditional material objects such as cardstock paper Valentine's,

chocolate, or a dozen red roses, Ruby utilizes self-videography, YouTube, and Facebook to redirect to her social media platform of choice, Facebook. Ruby never leaves her car during the video. She tells us that she is on her way to Casa Ruby with a front seat full of KFC for the people she loves at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. Ruby's declaration of motherly love and an invitation to self-compassion accentuate the spatiality of trans aesthetics, language, and material culture as they are reflected in gender transition, self-documentation, and local/national celebrity.

2. Decoration and adornment

Getting “likes”—Transgender women of color on selfies, sociality, and celebrity

In my fieldwork at Casa Ruby, I paid close attention to the look, placement, and use of material objects. They include but are not limited to wearable and decorative items of ritual, beauty/adornment, safety, sustenance, pride/celebration, and gender transition. Each artifact category encompassed a significant or and observable theme within Casa Ruby. Adorning one's self and decorating a shared space was central to the transformation of each floor of 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. In Chapter Three, I described Genie's butterfly facial tattoo and the objects that cluttered her desk space in April 2016. As one of her most recognizable features, I noted the small and faded red and black butterfly on Genie's right cheekbone as an embodied object of decoration, adornment, and transition i.e., stages of metamorphosis. Depending on the day, outfit, room, and time of Genie's butterfly fell into different artifact categories. Though the butterfly on Genie's face is not itself a physical object, its placement gives it a living shape and form. Extending this work to online spaces and social media platforms inhabited by Ruby

Corado and the women of Casa Ruby allows me to reconsider the everyday needs and decorative and documented stylings of a small group of TWOC on social media. In the following section, I continue my study of selfies as a central digital location for motivation, communication, and gender transition. By returning to my conversations with Diana, I hope to investigate self-documentation and representation from the personal to the collective.

At the end of our conversation on December 8, 2015, Diana and I moved from talking about sisterhood, sex work, professional acting, and the politics of representation in the film *Tangerine* to explore her thoughts on what social media does and does not do for trans women's IRL friendships in the District. I asked Diana about her dedicated interest in taking and posting selfies on Facebook. The following excerpt illustrates this conversation.

Anthony: Can I ask you one more question? What do selfies do for you? And you can include the video ones or whatever...But I think mostly the non-video ones because I feel like your singing one's do something different.

Diana: I feel like my non-singing selfies...they help me to track it's really about progress and tracking. What I do is that I take a selfie and then I feel good about it. And it could get like no likes, but that never happens (laughs)...It could get no likes, but like I see [my selfie], right? So, I can literally look at a selfie that I took a year and a half ago when I started hormones and my selfie I'll take today, and I see the growth.

Anthony: Can you tell me what you mean by tracking?

Diana: Yeah, and it [selfies] helps me to track those things [physical/embodied changes due to estrogen intake] and it's really refreshing...really empowering too because I see myself becoming the person that I've always wanted to be, right? So, it is a tool of affirmation.²⁹⁸

Tracking her transition online allows Diana to produce a selfie archive for personal trans beauty on Facebook and Instagram. These digital placemaking

empowerment tools allow Diana to turn on, plug in, and see herself “becoming the person that I’ve always wanted to be, right?”²⁹⁹ Not only does Diana use selfies to track her physical-social-culture-medical transition, or what she refers to as progress and growth, she also uses selfies posted to Facebook and Facebook status updates to track Ruby Corado through her selfies. As noted in Chapter one, being Ruby’s Facebook friend was one of the most reliable ways for me, and other community members to stay in touch with Ruby on any given day. On days when Ruby utilized all four elements of her Facebook status update strategy: 1. Emotive graphic 2. Geographic location 3. Selfie and, 4. Inspirational messages. These messages answer the following basic Facebook friend-query categories: 1. Feeling: How is Ruby right now? 2. Location: Where is Ruby right now? 3. Fashion: I wonder what Ruby is wearing today? And, 4. Daily inspiration: I am feeling lost; I wonder if Ruby posted to Facebook today? These inquiry-categories are central to Ruby’s communications strategy and personally important to friends/employees like Diana and community researchers like me. This parallel four-part inquiry invites the viewer-Facebook-friend-potential client to be in conversation with Ruby and her replicated self-image on Facebook.

I ended my conversation with Diana by asking her the following question: “What does Ruby’s social media do...what do her selfies do for you?” After commenting on Ruby’s selfie realness, i.e. selfies without makeup, Diana talked to me about her ability to track Ruby on Facebook:

“So, for me, I can’t really comment on Ruby’s selfies because that’s not what I look at, right? I love when she goes off [illuminates systemic inequity] and talks about why we need funding. I love when she does all of those things. And then also to be quite honest it is a way to *track* her, to see *where* she is right? What she is doing [and] to be checking in with her without always feeling like I am blowing up her phone [calling or texting often] every five seconds to ask her how she is doing.”³⁰⁰

Although Ruby's selfies aren't what draws Diana to Ruby's Facebook page the, remaining three elements of a Ruby Corado Facebook status update allow Diana to track Ruby without the need for a phone call. Before I move to discuss TWOC in popular culture, Laverne Cox's social media/Instagram presence, and the ethics of analyzing publicly available TWOC social media content, I'd like turn to Diana's insights on tracking, transition, and the materiality of Black trans female empowerment.

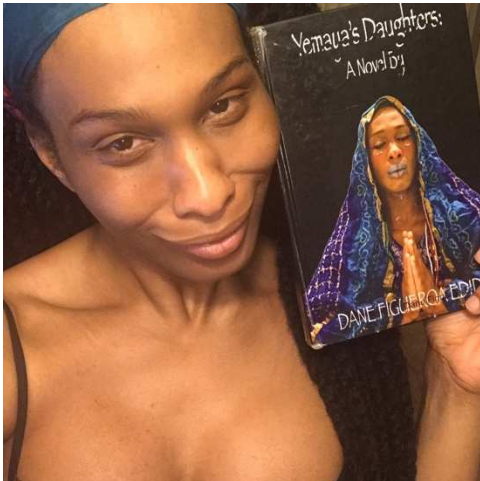


Fig. 21 Diana posing for a selfie with her latest self-published book with redacted personal identifiers. Facebook April 9, 2018.

On April 9, 2018, Diana posted a selfie to Facebook. I have included this image here as figure 21. In this cropped selfie, we see Diana from her pectoral region to the top of her forehead and a portion of her left arm and hand. To take this photo, Diana would have had to have held her smartphone with her extended right arm or place it propped up on a flat surface. In the field of figure 21, we witness Diana as she stares lovingly into her self-facing camera and her Facebook audience/potential book buyers. In this image, it appears as though Diana is wearing little to no makeup, giving her a *realness* glow. She smiles with her lips closed as she rests a book

against her left cheek and temple. In this selfie, Diana is posing with her most recently self-published novel. I have omitted the title and Diana's full name to maintain her anonymity. At the time this photo was taken, Diana was wearing a black top with thin straps, a turquoise headwrap, and her hair in thick braids. The cover of the novel featured here also includes Diana. In this second and embedded image within figure 21, we see Diana posing as the heroine-author-goddess of her novel. She sits or stands in character with her eyes closed and her hands in a prayer shape at her sternum. She is pictured here in makeup around her eyes, the tops of her cheeks, and lips. Diana's lipstick is a light blue with a horizontal red stripe running in a vertical line from her cupid's bow to her bottom lip. She is draped by a large shawl or ceremonial cloth that runs from the top of her head to at least her ribs. The cloth is royal blue, purple, and gold with an intricate patterned design.

In this double selfie-self-image Diana is the selfie taker, and a character sprung forth from her own novel, a prolific self-published author and a higher self/ie. She is both real, digital, and printed matter, goddess, and author. Diana's novel is the central artifact in this selfie-space. The book is an object of adornment that holds and symbolizes the sacred and religious pride and empowerment, holistic wellness, beauty in transition, and provides spiritual and mental sustenance to Diana. But most of all figure 21 allows Diana and her Facebook friends to *track* her professional success, personal accomplishments, and buy her books. At the moment this selfie was taken, Diana stood next to a printed image of herself—an author and a muse, and she took a selfie. This particular image exists in a sub-section of Diana's personal Facebook page entitled, "photos." Facebook photos are listed chronologically with

the most recent at the top. Scrolling through this trans digital landscape, I track Diana “without blowing up her phone every five seconds to ask her how she is doing”³⁰¹ in Facebook moments when the trans cultural landscape is always already beautiful (Cox). The following section moves from Diana and her thoughts on tracking back to Laverne Cox’s most famous hashtag #transisbeautiful. What proceeds is not intended to be an exhaustive study of Laverne Cox’s social media presence after the transgender tipping point. Instead I attend to vibrant examples of Laverne Cox’s everyday social media life and communication strategies. Cox’s communication strategies include but are not limited to selfies, self-videos, highly stylized photos pulled from commercial and magazine publications, the hashtag #transisbeautiful, personal anecdotes, and strategic inspirational messaging that invites an easily tracked conversation amongst an ever-expanding inter-generational audience of cisgender and transgender activists, advocates and everyday people online and on Instagram.

3. Linguistic codes and familial relationships online

As an investigation of common linguistic codes and aesthetic practices, I have found that the artifacts, words, and phrases of adornment, decoration, and transition are often captured in selfies and framed by inspirational messaging. Self-promotion and self-branding on Facebook, as deployed and illustrated by Ruby and Diana, are further expanded by TWOC celebrities like Laverne Cox, whose savvy use of hashtags, messaging, and glamorous photos shared on the social media/photo-sharing applications such as Instagram to an explosion of follower-friends. A subsidiary of Facebook, Instagram, was designed to become *the* home for innovative storytelling

and authentic communication.³⁰² Instagram allows its users to illustrate, augment, and filter their social reality in order to negotiate an increase in demands for social status and social influence. An exploration of personal narrative and visual ethnography offered me a daily opportunity to encounter her interviewees and their trans celebrity/idol counterparts online. Expanding the study of trans digital landscapes and self-imaging with women far outside of my immediate research site required a different approach to comparative trans methods and the trans model itself. In the following section, I discuss the influential work of digital humanities and transgender studies scholar Moya Bailey. By putting my work at Casa Ruby in conversation with Bailey's theories on feminist digital ethnography, I amplify the potential symbiotic relationship between regional ethnographic research with and contemporary representation of TWOC in popular media culture.

#girlslikeus—Moya Bailey on Black trans digital worldmaking

Published the year after Laverne Cox graced the cover of *Time Magazine*, Moya Bailey's, "#transform(ing)DH Writing and Research: An Autoethnography of Digital Humanities and Feminist Ethics" illuminated the ways in which Black trans feminine social media influencers, activists, and everyday people utilize social media. Bailey's work illuminates how TWOC utilize Twitter to redress systemic socio-cultural oppression through the provision of intra-community emotional-care work online. Bailey calls this public health praxis "digital alchemy." For Bailey, digital alchemy encompasses how Black trans women create "better representations for those most marginalized." The alchemical celebration of transmuting "everyday digital media into valuable social justice

magic” enables Black trans women to redefine systems of digital self-representation and create the potential for better health outcomes (Ruby).

Central to Bailey’s work is the 2014 launch of Janet Mock’s hashtag, #girlslikeus. The sister-tag to Laverne Cox’s #transisbeautiful, #girlslikeus eschews the need to pass seamlessly into normative womanhood and instead celebrates all women of trans experience. Bailey marvels at the breadth of information #girlslikeus has grown to encompass: “it [is used] to discuss everything from the desire to transition and the violence of being outed in unsafe situations as well as the banality of everyday living and dreams of job success.” While Bailey’s study centers the text-based landscape of the #girlslikeus Twitter-sphere, she does not center analysis of #girlslikeus self-imaging, i.e. selfies and short videos that often accompany and add further context to the hashtag.

Bailey argues for an ethnography of “collaborative consent.” It is important to note that Bailey has a digital-personal relationship to Janet Mock. This specialized access allows her to broaden her participant network and have unique conversations with trans celebrities. Further, Bailey is rightly concerned that her work, like my own could potentially “expose an already vulnerable community.” Driven by a genuine fear of Black trans-over-exposure, Bailey encourages fellow scholar-activists to consider consent *as* an ongoing act of collaboration. She shares, “What I appreciate about the language of *collaborators* as opposed to *research subjects* is that it provides the potential for multiple levels of relationship between those participating in the research.” For this particular study, Bailey empowered an advisory panel to reshape the project based on community needs, thus giving up a certain level of “control” and “ownership” over the project and its outcomes.

At the end of “#transform(ing)DH,” Bailey provides her readers with an outline entitled “Putting Process Into Practice.” The outline briefly describes a three-step process that reads like an analysis and fieldwork guide. The process, so called, is divided into three sections: Connect, Create, and Transform. Connect asks its users to identify collaborators and potential project/community benefits. Create asks after methods of and places for collaboration. While Transform asks questions such as, “How will you be transformed?” Bailey concludes that by “leveraging both visibility and education at once,” the study of #girlslikeus offers a place to center Black trans women and to think through a new feminist fieldwork ethic.³⁰³

My research on Black trans celebrity focuses heavily on Laverne Cox’s self-image, Instagram, and the hashtag #transisbeautiful rather than the continual influence of #girlslikeus, Twitter, and the celebrity prowess of Janet Mock. Bailey’s process encourages a parallel conversation to the work I am trying to accomplish with the trans model in this chapter and the overall dissertation project. While I will not replicate or apply all three steps of Bailey’s collaborative process, I do think that her work could have a profound influence on American Studies scholars who work in the digital humanities and wish to research *as* an ongoing act of reciprocity. The largest difference between our projects, Bailey’s and my own, is the location of our ethnographic work: online versus off. Though its contents were discussed, no one employed by Casa Ruby has read this dissertation. Moreover, they have run side by side, my project is not the Casa Ruby project. Rather than collaborate on a shared document and/or publishable reports with suggested outcomes, I chose instead to build a reciprocal project; a study that would reflect and respond to the complex needs and resilience of the Casa Ruby

community. Encouraged by Bailey's work on digital alchemy and community care-work by and for Black trans women, the following section turns to Laverne Cox's Instagram as a community hub for the #transisbeautiful cultural landscape. The terrain of #transisbeautiful provides social media follower-scholars a place from which to analyze, map, and explore the interconnections and (hyper) links between selfies and hashtags.

#(We)WontBeErased, #TransIsBeautiful and Laverne Cox on Instagram

Common Phrases and Words Defined & First Names and Familial Terms

In his introduction to the anthology *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* renowned Black Cultural Studies scholar Stuart Hall argues that language is what makes representation *matter*. For Hall, "Language, then, is the property of neither the sender nor the receiver of its meanings. It is the shared cultural 'space' in which production of meaning through language—that is representation—takes place."³⁰⁴ By considering the symbiotic relationship of space, place, and language, Hall's work on representation continues to provide ethnographers and Pop/Cultural Studies scholars with the everyday politics of representation *as* cultural communication. Hall's work is deeply embedded in the study of race and class, rather than the nuances of race and gender identity, transition, and/or expression. By exploring the trans cultural landscape as the place where language/representation takes place (Hall), I explore the relationship between the following two hashtags: #WontBeErased and #TransIsBeautiful. In the sections that follow, I utilize commercial media, Instagram, Facebook, and interviews at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW to think through the spatial implications of

TWOC digital and social media landscapes. I utilize images and messages archived on Laverne Cox's Instagram @lavernecox to trace the narrative web that tethers Cox's social media presence, to the everyday life of Casa Ruby, and my own experience as a community researcher at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. Through the overarching themes of language, community, and family, I investigate trans of color investment in self/representation.

On October 22, 2018, a month before @britishvogue and @lavernecox promoted the #WeWontBeErased video. *The New York Times* released a series of articles covering Trump Administration proposed policies to more narrowly defining gender *as* biological sex i.e., sex assigned at birth determined by the presence of medically and visually distinguishable gendered genitalia. At the time, many Americans feared that collapsing these definitions would *erase* trans people and their cultural-linguistic claims to gender transition, lived experience, and gender expression. In their article, "'Transgender' could be defined out of existence Under Trump Administration" staff writes Erica L. Green, Katie Benner, and Robert Pear cover what they call "the most drastic move yet in a governmentwide effort to roll back recognition and protections of transgender people under federal civil rights law" under Title IX.³⁰⁵ Through institutionalized themes such as health, law, education, and human services, the proposed changes hoped to alter the discourse of gender and discrimination through the lens of biology, medicine, and scientific "evidence." From social status and social media, the discursive battle being waged over sex vs. gender, and science vs. culture marked a move away from Obama-Era policy protections. Many feared would result in the violent, symbolic, and potentially literal erasure of what Eric Stanley has called "gender self-determination." "In Fugitive

Flesh: Gender Self-Determination, Queer Abolition, and Trans Resistance,” the introduction to the groundbreaking anthology *Captive Genders*, editor Eric Stanley pinpoints “gender” as “[a]mong the most volatile points of contact between state violence and one’s body.” Stanley offers her readers an abolitionist-linguistic term, gender self-determination, or the “theoretical and embodied practice” of actively and defiantly choosing and being acknowledged for one’s chosen gender identity.³⁰⁶

Meanwhile, in a different *New York Times* article published that same day, staff writers Sarah Mervosh and Christine Hauser covered a rally held in front of the White House in Washington D.C. against these same proposed measures. In an article entitled, “At Rallies and Online, Transgender People Say They #WontBeErased.” The article begins, “L.G.B.T. activists mobilized a fast and fierce campaign that included a protest outside the White House on Monday to say transgender people cannot be expunged from society, in response to an unreleased Trump administration memo that proposes a strict definition of gender based on a person’s genitalia at birth.”³⁰⁷ According to the authors, the hashtag was coined by the D.C. based legal and advocacy services non-profit organization, the National Center for Transgender Equality, an organization that fights to “replace disrespect, discrimination, and violence [against trans and gender non-conforming peoples] with empathy, opportunity, and justice.”³⁰⁸ The article quotes NCTE executive director Mara Keisling’s explanation for the hashtag, “What this feels like to transgender people is trying to make us invisible, trying to say that we don’t exist, trying to say that we are nothing.”³⁰⁹ But why put so much stock in language or the battle over meaning (Hall)? #TransIsBeautiful and #WeWontBeErased are hashtags and linguistic tools in a discursive battle over trans representation, gender, human rights, and subject

legibility that mean *a lot* to specific trans people. *The New York Times*, journalists, Laverne Cox, *British Vogue* identify the systemic violence of binary categories.

Transgender people present at a rally in D.C. on October 22, 2018, and those who gathered globally, and online, utilized a hashtag, and in so doing make a linguistic claim.

This claim made a rift in landscape of trans visibility, representation, and self-representation on a local and national level. Alternatively, as, Laverne Cox reminds us, “We exist. And WE WILL NEVER BE ERASED. We cannot be erased, eradicated, dismissed, or invalidated. We aren’t going anywhere and it’s *incredible*.”³¹⁰

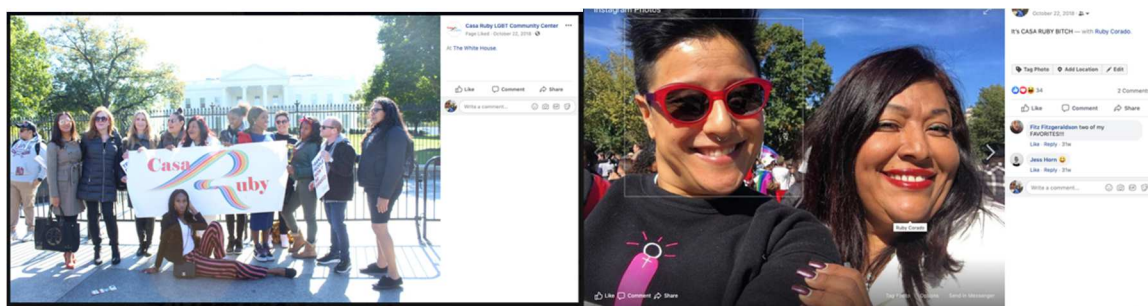


Fig. 22 Casa Ruby community members in front of the White House on October 22, 2018
Fig. 23 Anthony and Ruby Corado in front of the White House on October 22, 2018

On October 22, 2018, #WontBeErased became an uprising, a hashtag for transgender collectivity, and a growing sense of chosen trans family represented by local and national trans celebrities and social service providers. Casa Ruby community members gathered at the rally for trans rights in front of the White House on October 22, 2018. That day two photos were posted to Facebook. I have included them here as figures 22 and twenty-three. Figure 22 is a photo posted to the Casa Ruby LGBT Community Center Facebook page, while figure 23 is a status I posted to my personal Facebook page. Figure 22 features a small inter-racial group of transgender people holding and posing with a Casa Ruby banner. The banner, previously discussed in Chapter Two, rests in the hands of Ruby Corado (center) and the Casa Ruby girls. One black trans femme sits on

the floor, modeling glamorously for the camera. Each member of the group photo seems to be looking at a different smartphone/camera while I look forward (fourth from the right). The gates and trees surrounding the White House and the White House itself can be seen behind us. We stand in unison, a small handful of trans people @ 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

In figure 22 Ruby and I gather for a selfie. This selfie illustrates a moment of Facebook status updates overlap. To be physically included or tagged in Casa Ruby group photos posted to Facebook was to be seen as a member of the CR community and to be visible as a trans person in the District. I did not attend the rally that day as a researcher concerned with conducting off-site research. I was there as a concerned trans person who desired to be surrounded by trans chosen acquaintances, family, and allies. In this image, we stand closely together and embrace for the camera. Ruby holds my left shoulder with her left hand. We smile at my smartphone, and I snap our picture. The bright pink of my sunglasses picks up the red in Ruby's lipstick as a bright blue sky, and a group of fellow protestors surround us. Following Ruby Corado's strategies for Facebook status updates, I have included elements three and four: 3. A memorable self-image and 4. Inspirational text. As per her request, I have also tagged her in this image, @RubyCorado and the phrase, "It's Casa Ruby, Bitch!" A crude though familiar rallying cry for the women of CR. This phrase of trans pride was often yelled in public to announce the arrival of CR TWOC community members, people who represented and carried 2822 Georgia Avenue NW at/to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. These two photos were taken at the same rally covered by *the New York Times*. Each image provides an

intimate and local gathering place from which to chart the bonds between self, sisterhood, and representation.

From Linguistic Codes to Familial Relationships

Before moving to Laverne Cox's social media presence and her influential Instagram persona @lavernecox, I'd like to return to my conversation with Gwen in April 2016 to think through the spatial implications of chosen and re-defined family and queer collectivity at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. On that afternoon in April as we sat in our broken lawn chairs and talked about the transformative power of family at the Casa Ruby.

Anthony: Can you tell my future, hopeful readers... (*laughs*) because I think what I am trying to do is kind of like... these words that we think we know like *family*, right, you know. I want to spread the definitions that *we* work with, you know. If you were to describe family for what it is like for folks in the Trans Life Center, who may never actually be there... you know like somebody who picks up an article I write or something... Like how would you describe *family* for folks? How do you think it works here?

Gwen: Well, I don't think it happens right away. But the more time we spend together I think we begin to use terms of endearment like, auntie, or grandma, or mom. And everybody sort of finds the person on staff that they are comfortable with, the most comfortable with, and then that becomes Auntie... And then it spreads to everyone and it's kind of like, "Yeah that's my Auntie who belongs to... that's Nicki's Auntie. But we are all part of the same community. But I think the terms of endearment are important. And I think it's part of claiming it."³¹¹

Collective moments of choosing, being chosen, and belonging to family at CR and at rallies throughout the city make this claim with gestures—people hold each other, they hold banners, they hold smartphones, and they stand together. Although we may not know each other's names, on October 22, 2018, a few hundred transgender people and our allies gathered in front of the White House. We stood in solidarity for forty-five minutes,³¹² and our incredible³¹³ ability to gather there “point[ed] [us] toward the future

and toward a world we have yet to inhabit.”³¹⁴ In the following section I turn to Laverne Cox’s Instagram personal @lavernecox. @lavernecox much like *facebook.com/ruby.corado.5* utilizes a combination of text, self-image, relatable emotion, and inspiration to affirm the everyday life of TWOC and collectivity on and off the Internet.

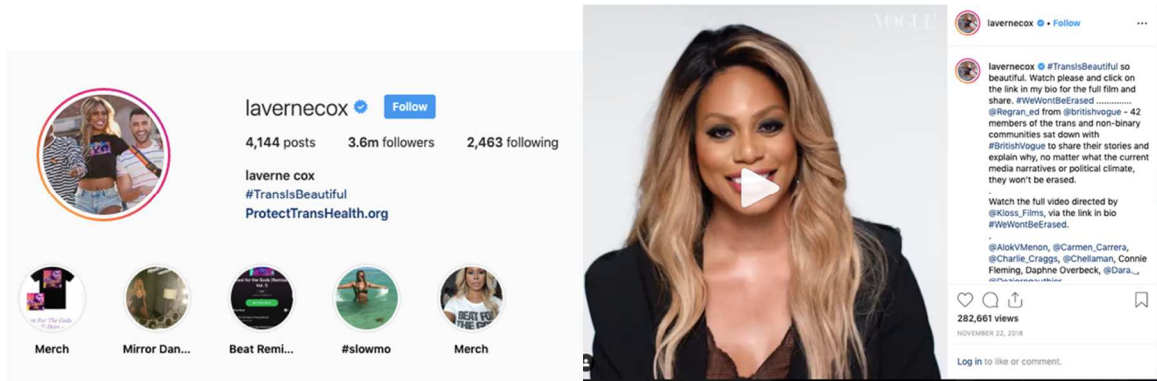


Fig. 24 The top of @lavernecox on Instagram

Fig. 25 Laverne Cox, Instagram post by @lavernecox November 22, 2018

Laverne Cox’s personal-public Instagram page can be found at @lavernecox. The very top of @lavernecox,³¹⁵ included here, as figure 24 includes Laverne Cox Instagram “bio.” Laverne Cox’s personal bio/graphy contains the following digital-spatial-identifying elements: 1. Name and handle (@ followed by a series of letters and numbers), 2. A list containing the number of posts, followers, and individuals and/or entities (businesses, non-profits, and social justice causes, etc.), 3. A signature hashtag, identifying phrase, and personal website, 4. A profile photo, and 5. “Highlights.” In figure 24, followers can see a thumbnail photo from Laverne Cox’s 2019 h&m pride clothing campaign “Stay True To You,” a campaign that featured a wide array of pride flag rainbow-inspired t-shirts and crop-tops.³¹⁶ In this particular image, Laverne Cox is wearing a black crop top with rainbow sequin lettering spelling the word “LOVE,” and denim cut off shorts. She is standing in a cityscape

showered with multi-colored paper confetti reminiscent of an LGBT Pride Parade. The fifth element of @lavernecox's bio are highlights, a series of small circles just below elements one through four. These circles allow administrators of @lavernecox to categorize and archive her "stories," short videos or still images that are generally programmed to disappear after twenty-four hours after they have been posted.³¹⁷ The sixth and final element of a @lavernecox Instagram bio is a bright blue checkmark. At the top right hand of @lavernecox, the viewer can see this symbol more commonly referred to as a "verified badge." According to Instagram, the verified badge is designed to "help people more easily find the public figures, celebrities, and brands they want to follow."³¹⁸ In this case, the symbol provides authenticity to Cox's rising social status as an advocate-icon-celebrity. This hyphenate identity, not dissimilar to activist-scholar verifies that Cox inhabits an intersectional cross-class cross-social media social status.

On November 22, 2018, Laverne Cox posted a video clip to @lavernecox on Instagram. I have included a still from the #WeWontBeErased video here as figure 25. To date, this video clip has received almost 300,000 views as compared to the three hundred and one people who *liked* Ruby Corado's Facebook status update "feeling happy" discussed at length earlier in this chapter. This particular video clip opens with an image of Laverne Cox before she quickly morphs into a montage of trans-identified people of various racial-ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, and ages. Each person has been placed in front of a stark white background. The video reflects a selfie aesthetic (a flattering tight-shot featuring a highlighting one's face), mimics an professional industry headshot, and emulates the talking-head style of

interview-driven documentary film. By blurring genre, aesthetic and visual style, each participant is carefully framed from the crown of the head to bust and at a range close enough that the viewer could imagine each participant's arm outstretched filming him or herself with the aid of a selfie stick.

The video clip opens with a strong and steady electronic beat not dissimilar to the beat of a drum or a heart. We encounter Cox in the first few seconds of the clip. Her hair is golden blonde with deep black roots and parted to the side. She is wearing a smoky eye and soft pink lipstick. Her outfit includes a form-fitting black jacket and a sheer black camisole. As the beat hits, we hear Cox's voice. While the full seven-minute video for #WeWontBeErased can be viewed online on the fashion and lifestyle magazine *British Vogue*'s YouTube page.³¹⁹ The message contained in this shareable one-minute clip features Laverne Cox as its omniscient narrator. The text accompanying an Instagram post on @lavernecox includes the following structural-spatial elements: 1. Her handle (@lavernecox), 2. Option to "follow" her, 3. The verified symbol, 4. Her signature hashtag #TransIsBeautiful, 5. An additional hashtag that describes the reason for the post and extends the meaning of #TransIsBeautiful in this case, #WeWontBeErased. Rephrased #WeWontBeErased because #TransIsBeautiful, 6. The @ symbol which "tags" i.e., includes/alerts additional people, for-profit companies, organizations, and causes, and 7. Whether or not Cox operates @lavernecox the last and most important element after a captivating image is an inspirational and personal and, therefore, relatable-promotional message *from* Laverne Cox, herself. The text for figure 25 reads as follows:

#TransIsBeautiful so beautiful. Watch please and click on the link in my bio for the full film and share. #WeWontBeErased @Regran-ed from @brisithvogue – [video description] 42 members of the trans and non-binary communities sat down with #BritishVogue to share their stories and explain why no matter the current media narratives or political climate, they won't be erased.³²⁰

By pairing these hashtags, Cox creates a more extensive conversation between trans people in order to create a sense of shared space via shared experience.

@brisithvogue curates a global message that invites a politicized trans resilience/resistance aesthetic beauty to the space of Instagram.com via YouTube.

Through a dual claim to beauty and persistent presence, Laverne narrates this particular film clip. Cox narrates, “I feel like there has been throughout my life, efforts to erase me. In the face of all kinds of policies that try to erase us. In the face of murders, trans people persist. We exist. And WE WILL NEVER BE ERASED. We cannot be erased, eradicated, dismissed, or invalidated. We aren't going anywhere and it's *incredible*.”³²¹

As an actress-advocate-icon Laverne Cox and her fellow participants invoke a collective “me;” a me/we that is trans and has experienced systemic erasure. The violence of erasure is the denial of gender self-determination and thus, visibility rather than invisible/erased. Erasure, as described by Cox, includes such synonyms as eradication, dismissal, and invalidation. Laverne Cox's claims to the *incredible* nature of trans persistence³²² finds a parallel/sister sentiment in Ruby Corado's Facebook status update, “feeling happy.”

As the reader may recall, “feeling happy” was a Facebook status posted by Ruby to [facebook.com/ruby.corado.5](https://www.facebook.com/ruby.corado.5) on February 10, 2016. “feeling happy” contained the following message: “I am beautiful! / I am worthy! / I am amazing! / AND SO ARE

YOU! / I Deserve The Best In Life AND SO DO YOU.”³²³ Ruby’s “feeling happy” combines text and image. Ruby and Cox anticipate similar audiences. Ruby pairs self-love and self-acceptance at the regional level (figure 18, Ruby Corado Washington, D.C.), while Cox fortifies inspiration at the national/inter-national screen. Laverne Cox and Ruby Corado utilize parallel social media platforms. They broadcast to audiences of various sizes and regions. Together they speak to the systemic disposability of trans people and our incredible will to give face, take up space, and seize recognition on and offline.

*Some of us just blend*³²⁴

Self-representation, community recognition, and TWOC reception at Casa Ruby

Towards the end of my fieldwork at Casa Ruby, the client-employee population of 2822 increased and began to provide services for a younger generation, and I was not able to make personal contact with the community the way I had in years past. I continued to share space at 2822 with the help of key youth members like Darling. Darling kept me tethered to Casa Ruby and granted me quick acceptance in the burgeoning CR youth community. On August 3, 2016, I stood on the corner with Darling. As the reader recalls, Darling is a young Black trans woman in her early twenties and, at the time of our interview, an excited youth employee of Casa Ruby. That afternoon Darling and I discussed her dreams for youth programming and her thoughts on TWOC representation in popular media. I asked her about her thoughts on Laverne Cox and Janet Mock. Not only did Darling not feel represented by Cox and Mock; she also expressed disappointment that neither of these celebrities has done enough to support

trans youth who also aspire to “make it big.” I asked Darling to talk about to me about her thoughts on Cox, Mock, and their success as celebrities. The following is her response: “I don’t think that’s a *real* representation of transgender women. I think it is a positive, it’s a very positive representation it is...but it’s not a *true* representation because no *one* transgender women has the same story.”³²⁵ Darling does not feel like either Cox or Mock represent *her* or her life at Casa Ruby. For Darling, there was a certain level of community outreach missing from the social media communication strategies of these TWOC celebrities. She continued:

Darling: It’s not like, “Let’s travel to different cities and get other people’s opinions about how they were brought up and what they are going through right now.” It’s just about them [Cox and Mock], “I [a reference to Janet Mock] struggled and I prostituted and then I became famous.” That’s nice (*sarcasm*), but what about the in-between time. That’s what I would like to hear. Like what about when you were not famous and not acting? What were you doing in-between then? How did you grow up? Everybody does a lot of sugar coating and I would like to read or hear a *real* story of real [trans] people that are still struggling or have been in a *real* struggle. Everybody didn’t grow up with rich parents that could put them through acting classes and stuff like that. I know I didn’t. I grew up in a middle-class home with eleven brothers. You know, so that’s my reality. My parents didn’t have money to get me to acting classes or modeling or anything like that.³²⁶

Darling appreciates the work Cox and Mock do to increase and embrace TWOC visibility. She does not believe that their visibility supports her life, her struggles, or her future goals. Towards the end of our conversation that afternoon, I asked Darling about her love of selfies and social media. The following is that portion of our conversation.

Anthony: What do you use social media for?

Darling: For sharing photos and sharing my memories and sharing my journey through life. I have like over six thousand photos [selfies on Facebook]. And so, I can share *my* image. And get out to the world that all transgender people are not walking around with beards and makeup...It’s like an image of a transgender woman has to have big obscene top and bottom lashes, and these huge double-D breasts, and this fat old ass, and her hair all the way down to her knee caps [a

popular look amongst TWOC at Casa Ruby]. And that's nice, but that's not my image. I have like natural hair, I have no makeup, I have no [false] eyelashes, I have no really huge breasts [implants], I don't have a ridiculous ass [a reference to elective plastic surgery, a common embodied aesthetic at CR]. So, I think I put out a different image of transgendered women. Like a more natural...everybody doesn't look like a cartoon character. Every transgender person doesn't look like Barbie or Ken. Some of us just *blend*.³²⁷

For Darling, social media is about social *blending*, the creation of an almost “down to earth” representation of feminine self that is neither glamorous celebrity, Ball diva, or sex worker. Although Darling does seem to judge the later, many of her CR sisters, aunties, and mothers were huge fans of the oversized and the synthetic: earrings, hair, eyelashes, breasts, etc. A selfie clearly illustrates Darling's desire to *blend*, but not pass as a Black cisgender woman. Darling posted the following selfie just days after our interview.



Fig. 26 Darling and Genie on Darling's Facebook. August 13, 2016.

In this image Darling, (left) and Genie (right) stare into the reflection of Darling's smartphone. Both wear colorful tank tops (Darling olive green and Genie neon aqua blue), berry-toned glossy lipstick and mascara. They both wear their hair in a natural style, Darling in dreads with bleached ends and Genie in a multi-colored headwrap with a geometric design. Darling wears her signature oversized “diamond” earrings. They sit on the brick outside on a summer afternoon in front of a yard with a “Bernie Sanders for

President” sign, an electric meter, and plant overgrowth. They softly look at and smile for the camera and each other. Their images blend into a single selfie. The following section returns to @lavernecox to think through national claims to community, self, and space.



Fig. 27 @Lavernecox via Self Magazine

On October 17, 2018, just days before the launch of #WontBeErased, Laverne Cox posted a video clip to @lavernecox on Instagram.³²⁸ This particular post contained a selection of the structural-spatial-self-promotional elements of a @lavernecox Instagram post, the most important of which is the seventh element: 7.A captivating image (video or still) with a personal message *from* Laverne Cox. The text included in figure 27 is a quote from her interview with fitness, beauty, and lifestyle magazine, *Self*. The post reads, “My body matters. But I am more than my body.” She moves on to promise her followers that this is her most “revealing” interview. *Self* magazine claims to *be* “wellness that you can trust” because they emphasize inclusivity, accuracy, and empathy.”³²⁹ By wedding #TransIsBeautiful to a publication bent on holistic wellness, @lavernecox is not only able to expand her brand, but also claim her health and wellness under the umbrella of #transisbeautiful. In this video clip, Cox encourages her viewers to consider her transsexuality beyond the body.

I am more than my body. For me, personally, my body matters. How I exist in this body, feel in this body, is really important. But I am more than my body. I've been very reluctant to talk about the details of my medical transition because, historically, when folks have talked with and about trans folks, folks almost always want to exclusively focus on transition, surgery, "What procedures did you have?" And I fundamentally feel that those kinds of conversations objectify trans people. We have begun to insist that our identities, that our selves exist beyond our bodies, beyond surgery, beyond genitalia. And it's been a process over the past twenty years to be the woman sitting before you today who feels pretty good about herself.³³⁰

In this video, Cox wears her hair in tiny blonde braids. She is wearing false lashes, eye makeup, and a nude color lip. She wears a spaghetti-strapped black tank top and blue denim high waisted shorts. She sits in front of a white background and sits on a tall wooden bar stool. By making a linguistic and a familial claim to trans as beauty and trans as wellness embodied, she creates and takes up space for herself and countless other trans people, followers, friends, and sisters. Whether or not she represents my life as an activist-scholar, Darling's life as a young professional hopeful, or Ruby life as mother to the most marginalized LGBT folks in the District Laverne Cox recognizes *us* as her community, takes advantage of countless opportunities with national social and commercial media to shift the stakes, tools, and landscape of transgender representation and self-representation through name and community recognition at the glo-cal level.

Bodes in spaces—Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the study of trans sociality, ethnography, social media in order to document how Black and Latinx TWOC utilize self-imaging strategies to take up space online, in the District, and on the national stage. I have expanded my personal and scholarly investments in Black and Latinx trans self-representation practices

online, the ways in which these practices allow activists scholars to *track* (Diana) the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, space, and storytelling within the interlocking realms of popular culture, interdisciplinarity, and ethnography. By continuing to center the question of *trans* space, I argued for the development of interdisciplinary methods that will allow push at the edges of fieldwork and new directions in interdisciplinary visual-cultural analysis. By applying an individual module of the trans model to a select group of multi-generational and multi-racial TWOC social media personas and their status updates, I have documented how specific trans women create and employ communication and documentation strategies that wield the potential socio-political influence of the public profile. Reclaiming everyday digital cultural landscapes further politicizes trans of color femininity, promotes particular trans rights and advocacy organizations (Casa Ruby), and an overall sense of trans intimacy, sisterhood, and visibility on platforms that are always already public, privatized, local, national, global, and co-opted. By following these insurgent gestures towards self-promotion and communal branding, queer and trans community and chosen family made locally by Ruby Corado, Diana, and Darling on Facebook and nationally by Laverne Cox @lavernecox on Instagram I have mapped a TWOC digital landscape *hustle*— the affective reach of inspiration-affirmation-aspiration messaging that allows TWOC to *track* (Diana) one another throughout space and time in order to chart more vibrant livable present and future trans geographies.

Chapter 6: “Visibilize this shit. “I like transgender people”³³¹—A Conclusion

Miss Major talks Trans Day of Visibility, from her sofa at home... it's not enough for us to just be visible. #SupportUsInTheLight #AlliesBeVisible #TDOV #TDOV2019. www.houseofgg.org + www.missmajor.net



Fig. 28 Miss Major Griffin-Gracy on TDOV 2019, Facebook

On March 27, 2019, trans activist, advocate, former sex worker, and “veteran of the infamous Stonewall riots,” and Black trans elder Miss Major Griffin-Gracey³³² posted a two-minute video clip to her personal Facebook page facebook.com/MissMajorGriffinGracy/. A still image from this video is included here as figure 28. In this Facebook status update plus video Miss Major, as she is more lovingly referred to by the queer and trans community, asks her viewing family, Facebook friends, and allies critical questions about transgender visibility, hypervisibility, and cisgender allyship on Transgender Day of Visibility (TDOV).³³³ Transgender Day of Visibility was founded in 2009 as an international holiday aimed at raising awareness and celebrating trans and gender non-conforming success, accomplishment, and victory.³³⁴ TDOV is celebrated annually on March 31st. In this particular personal video-public service announcement, we see Miss Major *at home* in a living room. She is seated on a large beige sofa. She begins her TDOV 2019 address by facing and speaking directly to the camera, to us. She is seen here without makeup and with a small amount of black and

grey stubble underneath her chin. Her right eye remains wide open while her left eye appears to wander while partially shut. Miss Major is wearing a simple black cardigan, a scoop neck top, and a matching black, white, and grey cheetah print scarf tied loosely around her hair thinning hair and head. Behind her are a bright orange wall and a print in a gold frame. The oversized print appears to be a rendering of a famous painting. Though we cannot see the entire print in this short video, the painting features a group of multi-generational Black individuals outlined in thick black border and gold filigree with a title that includes the words “The Beauty.” Miss Major’s face blocks the remainder of the painting’s title. Two hashtags are included in Miss Major’s post: #SupportUsInTheLight and #AlliesBeVisible. The video opens with a greeting and demand.

Hi, This is Miss Major. I am doing this because I wanted my [trans] guys and girls to understand that I have some issues over this Day of Visibility for us as trans people. I really don’t understand why we need a Day of Visibility since for most of us especially black [trans] girls [trans women of any age] we are as visible as we *need* to be. Our visibility is getting us killed, you know so it’s not that we need to be visible I think the thing is that the people who care about us, who are involved in our lives, and who know us, they’re the people who need to become more visible. They need to acknowledge that we exist, claim and show that they support us and the best way to do that is to talk about us in a positive light on *our* day of visibility.³³⁵

For Miss Major, TDOV lacks an intersectional lens, racial analysis, and over-simplifies the concept and the felt experience of trans visibility, or the everyday experience as a Black trans woman and an elder in public space. It is important to note that Miss Major makes her TDOV address from the comfort of a couch rather than at a podium at a public venue or rally. By inviting us into her home and allowing herself physical comfort and support her personal Facebook profile becomes a public platform for trans activism broadcast from the private space of a living room. Miss Major’s poses an important moment of critical confusion and the unequal promise of trans visibility amidst ant-Black

racism, anti-trans stigma, violence, and death. For Miss Major, visibility is a strategy that cannot be applied evenly by all trans people. She turns the lens of visibility to cisgender allies. She demands that allies actively and publicly acknowledge us on “our day of visibility.”³³⁶ Miss Major brings attention to qualities often associated, at least metaphorically with daytime in the city; i.e. sunshine, hope, outdoor safety, nine-to-five formal economies, visibility, a quality of being “out,” about and thus visible versus twilight and night, i.e. impending dark, hopeless, unsafe, outdoor, underground, or closeted illegal activity and identities, street-based prostitution, and despair, Miss Major asks that our friends and clients “visibilize” our social value and personal importance. Throughout this video, Miss Major encourages allies to be vocal and thus visible about the trans people in their lives. She continues,

They [cisgender allies] need to stop supporting us from the shadows step out into the light and say, “I appreciate, acknowledge, and *like* transgender people. And transgender people need to live, be appreciated, be enjoyed and be left alone to live *our* lives, pursue *our* dreams, and be the *best* people that we can be *on our fucking own*, you know what I mean? So, you want us to have a day of visibility? Visibilize this shit. “I like transgender people.”

Strategically harsh, comedic, and wonderfully hard-hitting Miss Major’s Facebook status-as digital hustle demands and redefines trans visibility—the know and advocate for trans people actively. Miss Major deftly collapses visibility and audibility. By interlocking the senses of sight and sound, Miss Major places the onus of visibility on non-transgender people thus, “flipping the script” on the American melting-pot discourse of TDOV i.e., trans=visibility=celebration=equality=human rights. Miss Major closes, “Tell a transgender person that you appreciate them, acknowledge that you like them in public, to your friends, to your co-workers, to your damn family, don’t keep us in the dark, on the side, in some little secret place in your mind. Step out. Acknowledge who we

are to you and appreciate us like that. Thank you.”³³⁷ If trans visibility is a daily cis responsibility, then it is Miss Major that insists that our friends and family speak up and *step* out into the light that shines on the everyday materiality of our existence. Not unlike the women discussed throughout this dissertation, Miss Major’s home-video from the couch calls attention to the specificity of trans space, time, chosen-family, and the need for community-lead tender love and care. As a trans person who is not a trans woman, I have aimed to answered Miss Major’s call to “visibilize this shit” and vocalize my commitment to and love of TWOC in the District and beyond. In the sections that follow, I return to Ruby Corado, Casa Ruby, the trans model, reflect on the dissertation’s guiding inquiry and conclude with interest in and the future potential of the trans model.

Feeling Blessed—The tipping point? Shifts In Public Discourse

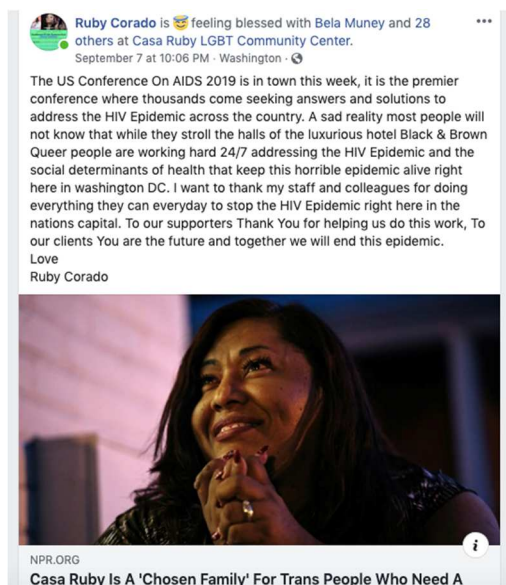


Fig. 29 Ruby Corado on the US Conference on AIDS 2019

On September 7, 2019, Ruby Corado posted a Facebook status update entitled “feeling blessed.” “feeling blessed,” included here as figure 29, contains all four major

spatial, informational, visual, and aspirational elements of a Ruby Corado Facebook status update as outlined in Chapter Five: 1. A small yellow happy-faced angel/ a symbolic blessing with a light blue halo. 2. A hyperlink to a location and the organization's Facebook page @CasaRubyLGBTCommunityCenter, 3. A memorable portrait of Ruby and a shared link to national commercial media content. In this case, Ruby has shared an NPR human-interest story from 2015. This portrait is central to this particular status update. Additionally, Ruby's NPR image mirrors the tiny yellow angel at the top left-hand corner of her status. In this portrait, Ruby clasps her hands as if in prayer or gratitude. She presses her long ruby red acrylics towards one another, producing a cleft at her chin. In this image, as with most of her selfies and sharable photos, Ruby is her own deity, goddess, angel, and trans community fairy godmother. The blurred buildings of DC surround her. She smiles lovingly past her thick false eyelashes off into the distance, and lastly, 4. A personal message. This particular message penned by *ruby.corado*.⁵/ Ruby borrows from the language and style of letter writing, public address, and public health and public policy. Ruby writes,

The US Conference On AIDS 2019³³⁸ is in town this week, it is the premier conference where thousands come seeking answers and solutions to address the HIV Epidemic across the country. A sad reality most people will not know that while they stroll the halls of the luxurious hotel Black & Brown Queer people are working hard 24/7 addressing the HIV Epidemic and the social determinants of health that keep this horrible epidemic alive right here in washington DC. I want to thank my staff and colleagues for doing everything they can everyday to stop the HIV Epidemic right here in the nation's capital. To our supporters Thank You for helping us do this work, To our clients You are the future and together we will end this epidemic [all misspelling and creative grammar strategies included in original].

Love

Ruby Corado³³⁹

In this love-letter PSA Ruby transports discourses surrounding street-based prostitution the language of *the* stroll off of the D.C. sidewalks, out of the drop-in-center, off of the streets, from a noun and a workplace to a verb in motion, and into the glittering halls of the Marriot Marquis Hotel in downtown Washington, D.C. the site of the annual US Conference on AIDS. Ruby quite literally capitalizes “Black & Brown Queer people” as she imagines allies strolling by without a glance. And in so doing she illuminates the uneven and ongoing effects of the AIDS epidemic, HIV/AIDS research and a professional conference, and the racist anti-trans anti-sex worker stigma embedded into social services and social welfare aimed at addressing “the social detriments of health” for “Black & Brown Queer people”³⁴⁰ with a positive HIV status.

“feeling blessed” is both a status update and a re-post in which Ruby curiously links to NPR coverage of Casa Ruby from four years prior, mid-2015. Always already local and national to residents of the District, D.C. based news and media conglomerate National Public Radio has published seven stories to date on Casa Ruby and the work of Ruby Corado. These stories can be easily searched via keywords, “Ruby Corado” or “Casa Ruby.” In this particular six-minute segment, “Casa Ruby Is A ‘Chosen Family’ For Trans People Who Need a Home” *Morning Edition* host Renee Montagne, invites NPR listeners to “Doing More With Less,” “an occasional series about individuals who don’t have much money or power but do have a big impact on their communities.” Montagne introduces the general NPR morning listener to “transgender people” via Casa Ruby, “Still, most transgender people in America face lots of challenges, and theirs can be a confusing and lonely path. One woman who has seen it all is Ruby Corado.” After this rather broad and indirect introduction to the precarious, transient, and resilient lives

of TWOC in the District and a quick warning about possibly offensive language Montagne hands off the story to a local correspondent, Pam Fessler. In this interview, Corado gives Fessler her definition for “the concept of a chosen family.” Ruby explains, “most of the people who come to Casa Ruby don't have a family that accepts them or that loves them for the most part, so we have a family here.” Fessler utilizes words like prostitute instead of sex worker and is audibly confused, uncomfortable, or simply out of place in the TWOC cultural landscape at 2822 Georgia Avenue NW. She closes with the story of a family meal at Casa Ruby. Fessler vividly describes her experience in TLC. She says, “it's chaotic, like a big family gathering. When the food's finally ready, everyone gets in a circle, and holds hands. Corado takes the floor.”³⁴¹ In the center of what Ruby likes to call a grace-like “healing circle” Ruby audibly tears up and expresses thanks for her community and the blessing of their existence, support, and daily resilience. What is most striking about Fessler’s coverage as an outsider looking in on Casa Ruby is her ability to vocalize accurately, “visibilize” (Miss Major), feel, and admire the significance of trans space, Casa Ruby, and Ruby Corado. It is clear in her description of the view from the second-floor porch, “Corado is the founder and matriarch. With a deep, rich laugh, long red-tinted hair and manicured nails, she holds court on the front porch, sitting in a purple plastic chair.”³⁴² As Fessler, Montagne, NPR listeners, and the reader of this project have discovered, we cannot *know* a trans space or trans people simply by sight or sound. We *come* to know trans people and trans places through the lens of the trans powerhouse. The objects, people, buildings, and stories people tell situate trans people in a particular physical-geographic space. This scale

includes spatial memories, dreams, and daily desires after the transgender tipping point (Gira-Grant).

I'd like to return to "America's Transition," the lead article of *The Transgender Tipping Point*. In this article, *Time* magazine staff writer Katy Steinmetz aims to trace our collective socio-cultural transition from "transgender people" to "transgender activist[s]." She explains,

Transgender people—those who identify with a gender other than the sex they were "assigned at birth," to use the preferred phrase amongst trans activists—are emerging from the margins to fight for an equal place in society. This new transparency is improving the lives of long misunderstood minority and beginning to yield new policies.³⁴³

More than a sense of biology versus the cumulative and daily acts of personal, public, social, and gender justice, Steinmetz marks May 2014 as the socially constructed time and place of "America's Transition." Inspired by Miss Major's critiques of TDOV 2019, the tipping point pushed TWOC from the margins into a "new transparency" who were already "as visible as we *need*" or wanted to be.³⁴⁴ Whose daily lives have been improved by the transgender tipping point? The tipping point, as imagined by Steinmetz, was aimed at decreasing cisgender confusion and panic while also increasing access to basic human rights for a select group trans people who could make it through the hatch on the floor (Crenshaw). Queer and trans visibility is neither wholly good nor bad, it is enjoyed by some, and benefits others. But I do not feel like the tipping point made us any safer. As Miss Major argues, "transgender people need to live, be appreciated, be enjoyed and be left alone to live *our* lives, pursue *our* dreams."³⁴⁵ American popular culture is continually captivated by images of TWOC. The majority of these women are not "protected" by pseudonyms and anonymity (as they have been in this dissertation), the

benefits of professional acting gigs, book deals, modeling careers, or trans-competent social services. So, what do we do with this visibility now that it's here?

TWOC? Who is she? Where is she?—Fieldwork, friendship, place

Trans Space as Cultural Landscape—Transgender Women of Color in Washington, D.C. has been an exploratory study of the contemporary cultures of everyday life, visibility, representation, and self-representation for a small group of transgender women of color in North-West Washington D.C. and their counter-parts celebrities in film and popular culture. Blending the methods of ethnography with the study of popular and visual culture provides a pivotal inroads to the study of TWOC social-cultural-emotional moments. TWOC have strategically tipped the points of social justice in their favor. They have used all media sources and non-profit resources at their disposal. And they create the necessary platforms and drop-in centers in order to be “the *best people that we can be on our fucking own.*”³⁴⁶ TWOC are critical pop producers, consumers, avid cultural theorist, and hustling strategists. Rather than identifying a single moment in history, a place, or an individual commercial media produced analogy, transgender tipping points are always already plural, elusive, distinctive, individual, and collective, in transition, and shared place without end. On a good day, these moments are available to even the most systemically marginalized trans peoples. The period now known as the transgender tipping point coincided with my work in the field. I could sense and hear its effects locally at Casa Ruby and nationally in film and social media. No longer of the moment, the transgender tipping point, like all impactful pop culture phenomena, has receded quickly out of view, and new moments, people, and places have taken its place. Though my work is not outdated, per se, this project would have been

entirely different had it begun in 2019. The continued applicability of the trans model allows us to map shifts in public discourse from the need for visibility to the demand for community, friendship, space, and place. In my interview with Diana on December 8, 2015, I asked her to talk to me about the importance of trans women's friendships as they were depicted in *Tangerine* and in her own life in the District. The following is an excerpt from that conversation.

Anthony—But if you had to say, if you know...trans women's friendships are important to me because...and I know that that's a cheesy sentence [laughs] but I think it could be very powerful. So, especially for people who will never meet me or won't ever meet you...and when I publish this stuff...Like whether or not someone meets us ... I say to you, what is important to you about trans women's friendships?

Diana—To me what's important about trans women's friendships is the fact that they are me. I am them. I have mostly cis friends, cis[gender] women friends, but I also have some very dynamic trans friendships. And it's important because we are one. I cannot exist in space without you, you cannot exist in space without me and us existing in space together shifts the atmosphere... But being with two trans people in a space watching out for each other loving each other existing in love space with one another can be very difficult because we are told it shouldn't exist. So, it [trans friendship] is important because it exists, and we have to fight extermination at all costs. And part of that idea too, is that we cannot not support one another.

Anthony—Mic drop! [both laugh]³⁴⁷

Throughout the fieldwork, research and writing process for this dissertation I spent time in and documented “love space” within the TWOC community. This included acts of caregiving, space creation, identity formation, and world making practices locally at Casa Ruby and nationally in and social media. As Diana describes, the space created by trans people through care and spatial proximity enabled me to create and apply the trans model. Love space at Casa Ruby and in the TLC allowed me to see and feel the

study of space and place are vital to intersectional-interdisciplinary cultural and visual analysis and future turns in American Studies.

In Chapter One, I introduced the reader to my central research site, 2822 Georgia Avenue NW, Ruby Corado, the women of Casa Ruby, and the scope of my research. I argued for the development and application of *Bodies in spaces—the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model* and its ability to address the problematics specific to my site. I utilized the first module of the trans model, *Trans Place—a detailed site description* as an introductory exploration of the dissertation’s central themes, desire for equitable and ethical community-centered methods and methodologies, and intra-community terminology. In Chapter Two I provided a non-traditional and non-linear applied literature review. This literature reviewed in this chapter was sampled from the fields of American Studies, Cultural Landscapes, feminist and queer theory, Sex Work Studies, and the emergent field of Transgender Studies. I showcased the utility of the *trans* reading schematic, the heuristic desire to read across genres, disciplines, and modalities in order to better capture precious moments with a highly stigmatized and under-theorized population of TWOC in an urban America. In Chapter Three I outlined and applied all modules and operations for the model through themes of embodiment, domesticity, and housework. In Chapter Four I applied the third module of the trans model, Expertise and reciprocity—community research, friendship, & mutual respect to the necessary components of the hustle—friendship and shelter. I analyzed my friendship with Genie and its parallels to the work of Mya Taylor and Kiki Rodriguez in the 2015 film, *Tangerine*. In Chapter Five I investigated the TWOC social media hustle, public profiles, status updates, selfies and short video clips, and the sharable power of

#transisbeautiful. I analyzed the online communication strategies of Ruby Corado and Laverne Cox to think through the local versus the national impact of social media and trans self-representation. This chapter utilized the second model of the trans model, *Aesthetics, Language, & Material culture—decoration and adornment* to interrogate the insurgent landscapes of TWOC digital cultures and world making strategies. In the following section, I will reflect and answer this inquiry by reflecting on my final fieldnotes and close with the potential future application and expansion of the trans model in Philadelphia, PA.



Fig. 30 & 31 The front door to the TLC and a pile of clothes left in front of the door

On February 15, 2018, I visited 2822 Georgia Avenue NW for the last time. Casa Ruby had recently moved further down Georgia Avenue into a much larger space. The following is a selection of images and field notes from that evening.

It was an unseasonably warm February night in the District. Georgia Avenue, and was alive with foot traffic. Black folks sipped coffee with friends under the glow of streetlamps. Howard [University] students decked [out] in form fitting tank tops, ripped fashion-jeans, and high heeled sandals as they waited to cross the street. Though Casa Ruby had recently expanded its services to a larger space further up Georgia Avenue I had hoped to see folks at 2822 Georgia Ave. As I walked towards Sherman Avenue, I first passed the local playground—generally abandoned, now full of folks of all ages from around the neighborhood. I stopped

in front of Blue Nile, an African cultural institution in the District and [a] seller of incense and other [African] wares. Reminiscent of summer scenes on the block from Spike Lee's, *Do The Right Thing*, two Black men chatted between the notes they each played for each other on their saxophones.

And then I saw it. Not only was Casa Ruby closed *she* was gone. All that was left was an eight by eleven and a half piece of white paper taped to the inside of the glass door. Just beyond the metal security gate was the handwritten sign, "CASA RUBY HAS MOVED TO 7530 GEORGIA AVE NW WASH DC." I took a photo of this short sentence penned in Sharpie. It had been quickly written by hand. I can see myself in my reflection in the photo [figure 30]. Though I am so happy that Casa Ruby has been able to expand, I felt left behind. My fieldwork was officially over.

As quickly as Casa Ruby had blossomed at 2822 Georgia Avenue, she was gone. Just below the change of address was a small pile of women's clothing. Much like a discarded cocoon, the following items [included here as figure 31] were strewn at the foot of the Trans Life Center: a purple terrycloth towel, a red plastic water bottle, glittery pink sunglasses, a pastel pink handkerchief, a vintage burgundy purse, pink and purple striped socks, drawstring pajama pants covered in the phrase "I love you," and a pair of women's running shoes. As I stared lovingly at these objects, I wondered why they had been left behind? One last clothing donation? A final costume change?"³⁴⁸

That night I stood in the reflection of Casa Ruby and the glass just behind the TLC security door. All that was left was an empty three-story building, a white three-ring binder, clothing, accessories, and a piece of paper. Casa Ruby had moved north up Georgia Avenue and the afternoons spent watching TWOC twerk hands pressed to brick, laughing into the summer heat, or eating warm meals inside during the winter exist in transcripts, fieldnotes, and memories. And that night, even if I was the only who knew it, this building in NW D.C. was pivotal for the study of trans cultural landscapes—a place, a group of people, a collection of things, feelings, dreams, and memories, and a space of personal acceptance, struggle, storytelling, Black and Brown womanhood, and becoming

Throughout the dissertation I have been guided by the following inquiry: We use theory to get closer to the lives we are interested in, if, as we say, we are invested in *centering* the margins. Space stages the expansive possibilities of gender transition.

Space *also* transitions to hold these changes, these daily fluctuations in gender and presentation. In other words, what makes a space *trans*? In extending gender transition narratives to functions that do not apply to space, how do we know a *trans* space when we see it? And what do these spatial practices tell us about an American cultural investment in identity and its *tipping points*?³⁴⁹ Centering the margins requires marginality to be a place, a destination, a collection of oral and documented stories, and the amplified voices of the most afflicted. Borrowing from Vidal-Ortiz, when we “hear her theorizing from her own experience-and accept it”³⁵⁰ Black and Brown trans women can take up space as experts on the study of everyday life and identity formation and gender transition in and outside of the academy. Centering is radical work. Theory and academic scholarship is not always the *thing* that will get us there. I have argued for the necessity of working with and talking to living trans populations. The methods of ethnography enabled me to de-center historical figures of the LGBT liberation movement and thus veered away from heavy reliance on two women of the Stone Wall era, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. These women are important trans ancestors and foremothers in the fight for social justice, but not all Black and Brown trans women are activists taking it to the streets. Some women use hashtags, while others take countless selfies. In a time when Black trans women are slain, and anti-trans and anti-sex work discourse thrives, the work of remembering those we have lost to hate is just as important as spending time with the trans women who still give us so much *life*.

Countless elements make a space trans. As evidenced by a vacant Casa Ruby, sight alone did not give me a sense of trans space. Identifying and distilling the production and everyday life of trans space required a malleable structure and an

adequate fieldwork and analysis model. Pulling from the work of classical cultural landscapist D.W. Meinig, material culturalist Barbara Carson, alongside contemporary work by historical preservationists Richard Schein and cultural geographer Jeremy Korr I built *Bodies in spaces—the trans cultural landscape analysis fieldwork model*. I was inspired by Korr’s use of modules and operations to provide structure to an otherwise diffuse body of knowledge on transient spaces and transitioning populations. But what the five of us have in common is an investment in discovering the types of agency and socio-cultural influence that the people, places, and objects American landscape share and enact upon one another and the stories, discourse, values, and worlds that transpire therein and reach out. By beginning with a detailed site description, moving towards the study of aesthetics, language, and material culture, and then to the work of reciprocal community-based research, the trans model gave me the space to learn, to do fieldwork, and to become an unlikely scholar with the women of my own community. The women of this dissertation taught me the importance of being trans—the ability to carve out the time and space to listen without judgment, to be heard without apology, to feel seen, to center friendship.

In “Making Ethnography,” the conclusion to *Imagining Transgender* David Valentine resituates “transgender,” “transgender is useful wat if getting around, of going from one thing to another, of framing a set of diverse moments and social practices in time and space as an entity.”³⁵¹ For Valentine transgender becomes “a *category of knowing* [italics in original]” rather than a discrete and knowable population.³⁵² Trans spaces are like that too. If we, like Valentine, utilize transgender, and in our case TWOC, as a co-created social vehicle for knowledge production, community and identity

formation, social service provision, and Valentine's road bicycle, a reliable mode of city transportation, then the trans model can be transported as well.

Mural Arts is a world-renowned Philadelphia based public arts institution. Committed to collaborative community work and restorative justice “rooted in the traditions of mural-making, to create art that transforms public spaces and individual lives.”³⁵³ In August 2019, I was approached by Nadia Malik, the director of Mural Arts Porch Light program. Porch Light is “a collaboration with the City of Philadelphia's Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services” the program “focuses on achieving universal health and wellness among Philadelphians, especially those dealing with mental health issues or trauma.”³⁵⁴ Every year Porch Light selects two local non-profit agencies to create two murals over the span of two years. Through the dual lens of public health and public art, Porchlight identifies the importance of space, visibility, and storytelling that *centers* the margins. One of the current organizational candidates this year is Morris Home. Morris Home is an incredibly unique organization. They provides comprehensive drug rehabilitation, housing and employment services for transgender and gender non-conforming people in the city of Philadelphia. Morris home is “the only residential recovery program in the country to offer comprehensive services specifically for the transgender community, provides a safe, recovery-oriented environment in which people are treated with respect and dignity.”³⁵⁵ Morris Home's population consists almost entirely of Black trans women. Porch Light is interested in utilizing and applying the trans cultural landscape fieldwork analysis model as a guide to collaborative cultural competency for non-trans working artists and muralists working with the TWOC of Morris Home. Nadia has received and reviewed a copy of the trans

model and the third chapter of the dissertation. Not only is she interested in having me join then project as a site-consultant, she has described the trans model as “exactly the kind of work we were looking for to guide our potential project with Morris Home.” An east coast working-class city similarly steeped in foundational American History (think sections of town with cobblestone roads, white colonial reenactors on horseback, and the Liberty Bell), HIV/AIDS, LGBT, and social justice organizing Philadelphia is a logical next city for the trans model. Expanding the reach of the model from city to city, from the academy to the world, the arts, health, and harm reduction allows the model to address the ever-broadening terrain of the contemporary TWOC American Landscape a place for space, place, friendship, and gender transition.

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Us Without Us' -- Mantra for a Movement." *HuffPost* (blog), September 5, 2017. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/nothing-about-us-without-us-mantra-for-a-movement_b_59aea450e4b0c50640cd61cf.

¹ This is not a nickname given to the organization by its client-community. Rather, for the sake of brevity I will often refer to Casa Ruby as CR. This abbreviation will help to distinguish the organization, Casa Ruby, from its namesake and Executive Director, Ruby Corado.

² "Casa Ruby Home Page."

³ The scholarly study of transgender women of color in the District, to my knowledge, has not previously been deemed worthy of examination in the field of American Studies.

⁴ "That gives me life!" is a phrase that will be discussed at length in dissertation. More than a compliment about someone's vitality, nails, hair, or physique, the giving/receiving of "life" utilize vital moments of inspiration, support, and encouragement amongst trans women. In short, "life" is transformation. This phrase is most commonly heard in English and utilized by and amongst Black trans women.

⁵ Girl—A term of endearment amongst trans women at Casa Ruby. Rather than infantilizing, "girl" is used as a form of address that indicates group membership. The use of this word within TWOC circles is both inspired and informed by cisgendered (non-trans) women of color cultures and expressions in the District. The women of CR follow the Black and Latina aesthetic trends common to this region. This work contains elements such as: over-sized eyelash extensions, long wigs and hair-extensions, open-toed stiletto sandals, heavy eyeliner, and all forms of ath-leisure (athletic/leisure) ware.

It is important to note that I am also referred to as "girl." A longer discussion of how my race and gender is received and/or assumed will be addressed in the larger project.

⁶ Steinmetz and Gray, "America's Transition. (Cover Story)."

⁷ The standard telephone phone greeting at Casa Ruby.

⁸ The common vernacular for a Latina TWOC. Often indicates an engagement in activism and inter-racial organizing within the LGBT community.

⁹ "Casa Ruby Home Page."

¹⁰ "In D.C., Nearly Half Of Homeless Youth Identify As LGBTQ, Survey Finds."

¹¹ Casa Ruby is a ten-minute walk from the Georgia Ave./Petworth Metro Station. There is also a stop for the 70 and the 79 at the foot of Casa Ruby's front steps.

¹² Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities.*, 55–73.

¹³ *Casa Ruby*. Official website. <http://www.casaruby.org/>.

Casa Ruby's programming is currently shifting to being entirely youth focused (ages eighteen to twenty-four). This shift in social services leaves adult populations, formerly served by Casa Ruby, to find other roles in the organization, i.e. as mentors or staff.

¹⁴ Unlike the shelter locations, the group house provides long-term housing to members of the DC LGBT community who are not in need of case management or oversight. In other words, all residents are "roommates" and Ruby acts as their "landlord." The group house is one of many ways that CR works towards housing equity in the District.

¹⁵ The number of additional facilities and their services fluctuate often.

¹⁶ Although anyone of us could be considered a member of the larger Casa Ruby community clients and staff can be located at a Casa Ruby location. These two groups either receive or provide social services. Casa Ruby staff member is someone who receives varying levels of monetary compensation from the organization to provide social services. In most cases a staff member was identified by Ruby as a self-motivated client. Many regular clients voice a desire to become staff members. In my most recent IRB renewal, I added the community category. A community member is a person in the DC LGBT community who does not currently work for or receive services from Casa Ruby. It is my hope that this category allows my work to assess Casa Ruby's broader reception and impact on local and national rights-based LGBT politics.

Not all staff members or all clients are necessarily trans or LGB identified. Though, to my knowledge, the majority of this population identifies as belonging to the LGBT community. My dissertation will focus on CR's central populations, Black and Latina trans women. It is also important to note that all of Casa Ruby's

staff is compensated monetarily. Although positions and salaries may vary in amount and/or regularity, CR generally employs at least thirty TWOC at any point in time.

¹⁷ Cauterucci, "D.C.'s Best Safe Haven 2015."

¹⁸ In the spring of 2015, the basement drop-in center of Casa Ruby was rebranded, The Trans Life Center. The TLC is central to my dissertation. Much if not all of the "hanging out" at Casa Ruby occurs at the TLC, thus making it the primary location to make contact with Casa Ruby staff, clients, and potential research participants.

¹⁹ Boyd, *Bodies of Evidence*, 184–85.

²⁰ Boyd, 192.

²¹ A tongue-in-cheek reference common in queer community on and offline. A question one would pose/ announce about one's self to draw out positive attention, "turn heads," and "make an entrance." The answer to the question, regardless of gender identity, would be, *She* is, me! In this case *she* is a gender-neutral that references the individual as a queen, embodying the essence of drag queendom, and/or otherwise fabulous fashion, makeup or hair.

²² NMAC, "NMAC, National Minority AIDS Council, Home Page."

²³ AIDS.GOV, "Don't Miss AIDS.Gov at the U.S. Conference on AIDS!"

²⁴ Hunter, "Lunch with the Team! The Slayage."

²⁵ TWOCC, "TWOCC, Transgender Women of Color, Homepage."

²⁶ "Lourdes Ashley Hunter, MPA."

²⁷ "TDOV."

²⁸ "TDOV."

²⁹ TWOCC, "TWOCC, Transgender Women of Color, Homepage."

³⁰ VIDAL-ORTIZ, "THE FIGURE OF THE TRANSWOMAN OF COLOR THROUGH THE LENS OF 'DOING GENDER,'" 102.

³¹ VIDAL-ORTIZ, 102.

³² Diana, Interview with the author.

³³ Diana.

³⁴ "Poster Resources."

Although this poster no longer hangs in the office, its long-time presence informed the space and served as an illustration of a trans approach to transgender social services.

³⁵ "Poster Resources."

³⁶ Diana, Interview with the author.

³⁷ Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 33.

³⁸ Meinig, 34.

³⁹ Meinig, 45.

⁴⁰ Meinig, 46–47.

⁴¹ Schein, "The Place of Landscape," 660.

⁴² Schein, 661.

⁴³ Schein, 666.

⁴⁴ Schein, 667.

⁴⁵ Carson, "Interpreting History through Objects," 2.

⁴⁶ Carson, 2.

⁴⁷ Carson, 2.

⁴⁸ Korr, "Washington's Main Street," 476, 477, 484, 485.

⁴⁹ Korr, 477.

⁵⁰ Korr, 482.

⁵¹ Korr, 499, 500–501.

⁵² Korr, 477.

⁵³ Million, "Felt Theory," 267–72.

⁵⁴ *Casa Ruby 5 Year Anniversary!*

⁵⁵ According to Gwen and my field notes from July 27th 2016, the Casa Ruby model utilizes all three locations and consists of the following four components: The drop in center (the TLC) and low barrier hypothermia shelter at 2822 Georgia Avenue, CR1—the transitional youth shelter, CR2—formerly the adult emergency house which now has a youth-only focus. Gwen describes the Casa Ruby model as "a moving process" and "a screening process" in one. Given the low barrier access community members

experiences at 2822, they may then matriculate from CR2 to CR1 while continuing to utilize the services at Casa Ruby (2822). I hope to discuss the model further with Ruby and staff. I am interested in seeing how it evolves to meet the needs of the client-community.

⁵⁶ Corado, Interview with the author, October 7, 2013.

⁵⁷ Due to research focus and my fieldwork and 2822 Georgia Ave. I will not be discussing the evolving cultures and employment opportunities at the other CR housing facilities or the office in Fort Totten.

⁵⁸ Haritaworn, *Queer Necropolitics*, 130, 143.

⁵⁹ “America’s LGBT Centers Are Under Attack.”

⁶⁰ Corado, “United Against Hate, We Will Resist!”

⁶¹ Cunt or cunt—A reclaimed word. A synonym for *bitch*, or a “boss” bitch. Much like the phrase *pussy power*, TWOC’s use of the term cunt is high praise. To be or act cunt is to embody fierceness and womanhood.

⁶² Rubin, *Deviations*, 137–81.

⁶³ Vargas, “A Transgender Force.”

⁶⁴ Steinmetz and Gray, “America’s Transition. (Cover Story).”

⁶⁵ Duplass Brothers Productions and Baker, *Tangerine*.

⁶⁶ Setoodeh, “Magnolia, Duplass Brothers Launch First Oscar Campaign for Transgender Actresses (EXCLUSIVE).”

⁶⁷ Duplass Brothers Productions and Baker, *Tangerine*.

⁶⁸ Pheterson, “The Whore Stigma.”

Utilizing stigma as a social category Pheterson argues, in part, that those invested in the figure and plight of the prostitute must consider “actual whore life.” For Pheterson, the everydayness of sex work shifts our focus away from the prostitute to a larger discussion of power and social construction.

⁶⁹ Stryker and Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader*, 3.

⁷⁰ Stryker and Whittle, 10.

⁷¹ Stryker and Whittle, 13.

⁷² Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65, 66, 67.

⁷³ Muñoz, 71–73, 169, 173, 174, 182, 189.

⁷⁴ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 87–121.

⁷⁵ Esmeralda and Natalie, Interview with the author.

Note: All participant names have been changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of my participants. In most cases participants have chosen their own pseudonyms. Ruby Corado is the only exception to this structure—as per her local and national notoriety as a leader, advocate, and social service provider.

⁷⁶ Esmeralda and Natalie.

⁷⁷ Democracy Now!, *Trans Author & Activist Janet Mock at Women’s March*.

⁷⁸ Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 44.

⁷⁹ Esmeralda and Natalie, Interview with the author.

⁸⁰ “Presidential Proclamation -- LGBT Pride Month, 2016.”

On May 31, 2016 then President Barack Obama declared that the month of June be nationally recognized as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month. He echoed the celebrated claim to “love is love,” human rights, and diversity. Many pride celebrations have historically taken place during June, most notably: Washington, D.C., San Francisco, California, and New York City, New York. It is important to note that the celebration of trans pride and/or the existence of a trans march are a more recent phenomenon. Unlike other major cities, D.C. does not host a trans specific march during Capital Pride.

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⁸² “Casa Ruby LGBT Community Center - Home.”

⁸³ *Casa Ruby 5 Year Anniversary!*

⁸⁴ @ rather than the more current “x” marks the importance of gender neutrality within activist circles.

⁸⁵ The standard telephone phone greeting at Casa Ruby.

⁸⁶ feministkilljoys and Ahmed, “Making Feminist Points.”

⁸⁷ Steinmetz and Gray, “America’s Transition. (Cover Story).”

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- ⁸⁸ Diana, Interview with the author.
- ⁸⁹ Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back*.
- ⁹⁰ Moraga, no page listed.
- ⁹¹ Kempadoo, *Global Sex Workers*, 10, 8, 24.
- ⁹² Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 132, 85.
- ⁹³ Ahmed, 91.
- ⁹⁴ Majic, *Sex Work Politics*, 2.
- ⁹⁵ Majic, 5, 6, 10, 11, 22, 23.
- ⁹⁶ Leach, *Rethinking Architecture*, 86, 91, 92, 94.
- ⁹⁷ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 76, 82, 88–89, 90–91.
- ⁹⁸ Rubin, *Deviations*, 138, 147.
- ⁹⁹ Rubin, 151.
- ¹⁰⁰ The second image in “Thinking Sex” is, “The Sex Hierarchy: Struggle Over Where to Draw the Line” between “Good” and “Bad Sex.” This illustration does include “Transvestites” and “Transsexuals,” but only in as much as they mirror the lower rungs of the hierarchy. And so, gender non-conforming folks sit alongside and are equated to individuals who trade sex for money, engage in sadomasochism, and/or pedophilic intimacy (R. 152).
- ¹⁰¹ Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 83.
- ¹⁰² Ferguson, 84.
- ¹⁰³ Ferguson, 86.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ferguson, 108.
- ¹⁰⁵ Anthony, Fieldnotes written by the author, April 20, 2016.
- ¹⁰⁶ “Home | Peanut Chews | Celebrating 100 Years | Join the Party.”
- ¹⁰⁷ Manalansan, “The ‘Stuff’ of Archives,” 94.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 94.
- ¹⁰⁹ Manalansan, “The ‘Stuff’ of Archives,” 96, 97.
- ¹¹⁰ Manalansan, 105.
- ¹¹¹ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 20, 39.
- ¹¹² Smith, 21, 28, 29, 34, 37, 38.
- ¹¹³ Smith, 39.
- ¹¹⁴ Cohen, “DEVIANCE AS RESISTANCE,” 37, 38.
- ¹¹⁵ Cohen, 27, 29, 37, 38.
- ¹¹⁶ Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, 122–23, 126, 127.
- ¹¹⁷ Delany, 144–45.
- ¹¹⁸ Delany, 153, 154, 164, 168, 193.
- ¹¹⁹ Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*, 19, 22, 27, 3–4, 23.
- ¹²⁰ Valentine, 14.
- ¹²¹ Valentine, 76.
- ¹²² Valentine, 88.
- ¹²³ Byrne, “Nervous Landscapes,” 170, 175, 177.
- ¹²⁴ Byrne, 177, 178, 180.
- ¹²⁵ Although the study of Blackness in the District is outside of the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the study of nervous landscapes in the field of American Studies must also consider the impact of trans gender and racial identity formations.
- ¹²⁶ Leach, *Rethinking Architecture*, 350–52.
- ¹²⁷ Leach, 352–54.
- ¹²⁸ Gupta and Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture,’” 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 17.
- ¹²⁹ Gupta and Ferguson, 8, 10, 17, 18, 20.
- ¹³⁰ Gupta and Ferguson, 11, 13.
- ¹³¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 26.
- ¹³² Lefebvre, 31, 28, 29, 32, 37, 42.
- ¹³³ Lefebvre, 39, 40, 43, 46–47, 50, 52.
- ¹³⁴ Gregory, *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*, 90, 91, 92, 94, 95, 98, 105, 109, 110, 114, 92, 93, 98, 101.
- ¹³⁵ Gregory, 112, 110.

¹³⁶ Gregory, 114–16.

¹³⁷ Esmeralda and Natalie, Interview with the author.

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¹³⁸ Esmeralda and Natalie.

¹³⁹ Parks, *Fierce Angels*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Parks, 185, 197.

¹⁴¹ Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 44.

¹⁴² Esmeralda and Natalie, Interview with the author.

¹⁴³ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 115, 118, 116, 126–28.

¹⁴⁴ Vallerand, “Home Is the Place We All Share,” 62.

¹⁴⁵ Vallerand, 65.

¹⁴⁶ Vallerand, 73.

¹⁴⁷ Reed, “Imminent Domain,” 64.

¹⁴⁸ Reed, 66, 67.

¹⁴⁹ Reed, 66, 67.

¹⁵⁰ Reed, 69.

¹⁵¹ Esmeralda and Natalie, Interview with the author.

¹⁵² Esmeralda and Natalie.

¹⁵³ Ingram, *Queers in Space*, 27, 50, 51.

¹⁵⁴ Ingram, 31, 28–29.

¹⁵⁵ Ingram, 30, 41, 43, 46.

¹⁵⁶ Ingram, 51, 52.

¹⁵⁷ “Graduate Studies | Department of American Studies.”

¹⁵⁸ Anthony, Fieldnotes written by the author, August 18, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Corado, Interview with the author, January 5, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ “The United States Conference 2017.”

¹⁶¹ A common name in Ball culture for non-trans gay men of color. For more on Ball culture gender categories see *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance and Ballroom Culture in Detroit (2013)*, Marlon M. Bailey

¹⁶² Femme queen—a Ballroom category most often walked by Black trans women. Contemporary femme queens often present a confident and empowered female sexuality. A femme queen towers in heels, has a manicured mane that trails her thighs, and can drop her body to the floor and float up again with ease.

¹⁶³ Anthony, Fieldnotes written by the author, September 7, 2017.

¹⁶⁴ Korr, “Washington’s Main Street.”

¹⁶⁵ Korr, 476, 477, 484, 485.

¹⁶⁶ Korr, 492–93.

¹⁶⁷ “It Gets Better.”

Begun in 2010 by renowned advice columnist, Dan Save, IGBP aims to empower youth through uploadable personal narrative videos. These videos showcase celebrities and common folk describing the oft-horrific violence that have incurred in order to arrive somewhere better, i.e. LGBTQ identities “somewhere over the rainbow” (J. Garland). Borrowing from a nationalist discourse on “melting pot” patriotism, IGBP requires that the viewer, straight or queer, identify with a human experience, broadly defined.

¹⁶⁸ Steinmetz and Gray, “America’s Transition. (Cover Story).”

¹⁶⁹ Steinmetz and Gray.

¹⁷⁰ “Pride 2019 Capital Trans Pride.”

¹⁷¹ Anthony, Fieldnotes written by the author, May 15, 2015.

¹⁷² hooks, *Yearning*, 383, 382, 384.

¹⁷³ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 3–30.

¹⁷⁴ Manalansan, *Global Divas*, 53.

¹⁷⁵ Manalansan, 46, 47, 49.

Derives from Cebuano. Sward—homosexual, sissy.

¹⁷⁶ Manalansan, 52.

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- ¹⁷⁷ “Legal Services - Name and Gender Change.”
- ¹⁷⁸ Anthony, Fieldnotes by the author.
- ¹⁷⁹ Korr, “Washington’s Main Street,” 482, 508–9.
- ¹⁸⁰ Korr, 508–90.
- ¹⁸¹ Esmeralda and Natalie, Interview with the author.
- ¹⁸² Boyd, *Bodies of Evidence*, 8.
- ¹⁸³ The trans pride flag was created by Monica Helms in 1999. Marsha died in 1992 at age 46.
- ¹⁸⁴ In my monograph, I will add a chapter on TWOC on television. This chapter will focus heavily on *Pose* as a celebratory reimagining the 1980’s queer vogue aesthetic most famously captured in Jennie Livingston’s heavily theorized documentary; *Paris is Burning* (1990). As an ode to our trans ancestors (transcestors), *Pose* allows its actors to reembody previous incarnations of queer and trans identity in order to remap a more trans-fronted future.
- For more on *Pose*, please see:
<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/pose-transgender-actors?verso=true>
<https://www.fxnetworks.com/news/pose/>
- ¹⁸⁵ A subsidiary of Facebook
- ¹⁸⁶ Steinmetz and Gray, “America’s Transition. (Cover Story).”
- ¹⁸⁷ Steinmetz and Gray.
- ¹⁸⁸ Steinmetz and Gray.
- ¹⁸⁹ Grant, “After the Transgender Tipping Point.”
- ¹⁹⁰ Etter-Lewis, *Unrelated Kin*.
- ¹⁹¹ Etter-Lewis, 183.
- ¹⁹² Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*.
- ¹⁹³ Hall, *Representation*.
- In the introduction to *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, he argues for the centrality of language as the battleground over discourse and meaning. Popular culture is not merely the accumulation of stuff. It is an ongoing process that requires readily recognizable cultural practices (2).
- ¹⁹⁴ Steinmetz and Gray, “America’s Transition. (Cover Story).”
- ¹⁹⁵ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 115, 117, 118, 126.
- ¹⁹⁶ Gossett, *Trap Door*, Xv, xxiii.
- ¹⁹⁷ The chorus from the cartoon *Jem and Holograms*, Hasbro and Marvel Productions 1985-1988. *Jem* is a hologram that cloaks the show’s main character, *Jerrica*. *Jem* is an alter-ego that allows *Jerrica* to transition from everyday girl to music superstar seamlessly. I’d argue that a trans reading of *Jem* would inspire a trans woman like *Genie*, to be truly herself, i.e. trans.
- ¹⁹⁸ Recently released from prison, *Genie* now works for a local anti-violence non-profit in D.C.
- ¹⁹⁹ Anthony, Fieldnotes written by the author, November 23, 2017.
- ²⁰⁰ A common rallying cry at trans marches across the country. This phrase ushers in a trans feminist standpoint that calls attention to trans femme exclusion and discrimination in women’s rights movements.
- ²⁰¹ Democracy Now!, *Trans Author & Activist Janet Mock at Women’s March*.
- ²⁰² Mock, “I Am My Sister’s Keeper.”
- ²⁰³ Mock.
- ²⁰⁴ Mock.
- ²⁰⁵ Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 45.
- ²⁰⁶ “Casa Ruby Home Page.”
- ²⁰⁷ Abbreviated for the ease of the reader.
- ²⁰⁸ Setoodeh, “Transgender Roundtable: Hollywood Actors Get Real About Trump and More – Variety.”
- ²⁰⁹ Setoodeh.
- ²¹⁰ Setoodeh.
- ²¹¹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 4, 5, 7, 10.
- ²¹² For more on the movement to demarginalize Hollywood please see Now>Artists a TWOC lead production company based in Los Angeles, CA.
<https://www.noweverartists.com/>
- ²¹³ Though I believe the reverse argument to be true: trans women should be cast as cis or trans women characters in their acting career this argument is outside of the scope of my research.

Cisgender people in trans roles: This comment was in response to the controversy surrounding the white cisgender actress Scarlet who was to be cast as a transgender man in the film *Rub and Tug*. For more on this please see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/13/movies/scarlett-johansson-rub-and-tug-transgender.html>

Cox's statement also appears to be in direct conversation with cisgender actors winning prestigious awards playing trans characters and thus mis/representing the equality they claim to bring to the screen. Please see the controversy surrounding Jared Leto, star of *Dallas Buyer's Club*.

<https://www.glamour.com/story/should-cisgender-actors-be-allowed-to-play-transgender-characters?verso=true>

<http://time.com/10650/dont-applaud-jared-letos-transgender-mammy/>

²¹⁴ Cox, "Laverne Cox: Why 'Our Lives Are on the Line' for Trans Representation – Variety."

²¹⁵ hooks, *Yearning*.

²¹⁶ Leach, *Rethinking Architecture*.

²¹⁷ Darling, Interview with the author.

²¹⁸ Darling.

²¹⁹ Lennox, *Eurythmics - Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves (Remastered) - YouTube*.

²²⁰ Esmeralda and Natalie, Interview with the author.

²²¹ Esmeralda and Natalie.

²²² Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65-67, 71-73, 169, 173, 174, 182, 189.

²²³ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

²²⁴ Muñoz.

²²⁵ Setoodeh, "Magnolia, Duplass Brothers Launch First Oscar Campaign for Transgender Actresses (EXCLUSIVE)."

²²⁶ Gleiberman, "Director Sean Baker Talks About His New Film 'The Florida Project' – Variety."

²²⁷ Diana, Interview with the author.

²²⁸ Corado, Interview with the author, January 5, 2017.

²²⁹ Boyd, *Bodies of Evidence*.

²³⁰ Boyd.

²³¹ Darling, Interview with the author.

²³² Darling.

²³³ Lang and Setoodeh, "Sundance."

²³⁴ "Tangerine."

Magnolia Pictures International promoted *Tangerine* as a comedic "rip-roaring odyssey." Mis-categorized as a Christmas comedy, the film was able to reach a broader cisgender heterosexual audience. Further this comedic categorization allows viewers and critics to take the film's acting and narratives less seriously.

This is not to say that comedy is a less-than genre, but rather that this is a manufactured mis-categorization. *Tangerine* exhibits all four elements of the trans powerhouse while centering the vital import of survival, sisterhood, shelter, and storytelling. To laugh at difference would be to misunderstand everyday trans life.

²³⁵ Murphy, "Sean Baker Talks 'Tangerine,' and Making a Movie With an iPhone."

²³⁶ Watercutter, "Tangerine Is Amazing—But Not Because of How They Shot It | WIRED."

²³⁷ Smith, "Tangerine Is a Big Deal, Not Just Because It Was Shot on an iPhone."

²³⁸ Caughey, "The Ethnography of Everyday Life," 222–43, 234.

²³⁹ Wolff et al., "'Nothing About Us Without Us' -- Mantra for a Movement."

For more on sex work advocacy and the use of this phrase please see:

Provost, Claire. "Nothing About Us Without US—sex workers the-decision makers new fund." *The Guardian Online*. January 3, 2013.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/jan/03/sex-workers-decision-makers-new-fund>

²⁴⁰ Smith, "Tangerine Is a Big Deal, Not Just Because It Was Shot on an iPhone."

²⁴¹ Setoodeh, "Transgender Roundtable: Hollywood Actors Get Real About Trump and More – Variety."

²⁴² Setoodeh, "Magnolia, Duplass Brothers Launch First Oscar Campaign for Transgender Actresses (EXCLUSIVE)."

²⁴³ Sharf, "'Tangerine' iPhone Will Be Immortalized By The Academy | IndieWire."

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- ²⁴⁴ McDonald, “Mya Taylor Is the Face of This Year’s Most Improbable Oscar Campaign - The Washington Post.”
- ²⁴⁵ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.
- According to Collins there are four basic components to Black feminist thought “its thematic content, its interpretive frameworks, its epistemological approaches, and its significance for empowerment” (17). By included Black trans women and sex workers into the broader category of black women, standpoint epistemology extends an intellectual platform to new an evolving category of identity and experience.
- ²⁴⁶ Ruiz, “Mya Taylor and the Trans Actress’s Dream of Going to the Oscars.”
- ²⁴⁷ Ruiz.
- ²⁴⁸ Williams, “Mirrors without Memories,” 9–11, 15.
- ²⁴⁹ Williams, 9–11.
- ²⁵⁰ Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities.*, 56.
- ²⁵¹ Ingram, *Queers in Space*, 27–52.
- ²⁵² Duplass Brothers Productions and Baker, *Tangerine*.
- ²⁵³ Swan, “Why Donut Time’s Closing Marks the End of an Era in L.A.”
- ²⁵⁴ “PBS Kids - Barney and Friends.”
- ²⁵⁵ A common phrase amongst TWOC that signifies the importance of getting paid.
- ²⁵⁶ While Casa Ruby has intermittently updated it’s Twitter and Instagram accounts throughout the years, it’s organization’s Facebook page and Ruby Corado’s personal page continue to be updated daily.
- ²⁵⁷ Steinmetz and Gray, “America’s Transition. (Cover Story).”
- ²⁵⁸ Diana, Interview with the author.
- ²⁵⁹ Marwick, *Status Update*, 3.
- ²⁶⁰ Marwick, 10, 16.
- ²⁶¹ #transisbeautiful is a hashtag and phrase coined by Laverne Cox in the fall of 2015 during her acceptance speech for the *Make It Happen Award* (Maybelline New York).
- ²⁶² Corado, *Happy Valentines Day*.
- ²⁶³ “Make It Happen Movement - Makeup Inspiration - Maybelline.”
- ²⁶⁴ “It Gets Better.”
- ²⁶⁵ Steinmetz and Gray, “America’s Transition. (Cover Story).”
- ²⁶⁶ Chernikoff, “Laverne Cox’s Explanation of Why #TransIsBeautiful Will Make You Cheer and Cry.”
- ²⁶⁷ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, Introduction. 33.
- ²⁶⁸ Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black,” 4–32.
- ²⁶⁹ Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black.”
- ²⁷⁰ “Indiana University Press - Transition - IU Press Journals.”
- ²⁷¹ “Front Matter.”
- ²⁷² Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 169.
- ²⁷³ Piper, “Passing for White, Passing for Black,” 8.
- ²⁷⁴ Piper, 21.
- ²⁷⁵ Piper, 27–28.
- ²⁷⁶ Piper, 28.
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