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Reblogging Gender: Non-Binary Transgender Subjectivities and the Internet

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By Lee Fraser

Abstract:

This thesis is an examination of non-binary transgender communities on the internet and the new, non-binary modes of subjectivity that can be read within these spaces. After my first introductory chapter, which situates my work in the context of previous contributions to transgender theory, I approach non-binary online communities from different perspectives. My second chapter reads certain codes of communication within non-binary friendly online spaces (such as Tumblr) as a form of neo-Dadaism, as well as cyborgian manifestations. My third chapter contends with the interactions of non-binary online communities within a society structured by neo-liberal institutional capitalism. My fourth and final chapter looks more closely at transgender coherence and how non-binary individuals use the technologies of social media (such as selfies) to write more compatible personal narratives of embodied gender expression. My goal is to legitimize and emphasize the accessibility and transformative power of these non-binary communities within online spaces.

Keywords:

Acknowledgments:

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Chapter 1: Introduction to a Non-Binary Analysis

It can be too easy to dismiss the internet and its fast-moving trends as frivolous and representative of some great cultural decline. But for those who do not see themselves represented in traditional forms of media or social institutions, there are online spaces in which certain social technologies and languages can work to supplement this gap. Inspired by my own immersion and development in these spaces, I want to legitimize the contemporary, online iterations of non-binary transgender communities through theoretical analysis. My contribution to the theories and analyses surrounding transgender lives and experiences is indebted to the groundbreaking work of previous and current trans scholars, activists, and writers, as well as their allies. Although the field from which this work has grown has sprouted in many different directions, it is vital to recall that certain central tenets to the beginnings of trans (sometimes intersected with queer) theory and trans studies provide a context that shapes and supports my exploration into online non-binary subjectivity formation. This field is considered recent, but the theorists involved in the formation often weave other works and narratives from across human history in order to avoid naturalizing the idea that trans people and the promotion of their voices are an entirely new phenomenon. There have always been people who live and flourish outside of the coercive gender binary that has come to structure so many social and cultural contexts, but I believe the particular discursive characteristics within online cultures that allow the mobilization of "non-binary" as an umbrella term have unprecedentedly generative capabilities.

There are three characteristics recognizable in the trajectory of trans theory and trans studies that I find most relevant to my own work in the field. I will model my following three chapters after these features; although I organize them separately, they

often inform and build on each other in practice. This introductory chapter is meant to provide the context and historicization necessary to illustrate the theoretical precedents I will be relying on. First, the foundations of trans theory that have drawn attention to the limitations and transformative potential of categorization and language, asking for a sustained mutability even as new names, categories, and forms of communication themselves are proposed. Second, the recognition that technological innovations and resources that directly or indirectly structure trans-centered theorisation and trans lives are provided through cultural capitalism. These technologies can have simultaneously liberatory and suppressive capacities, and so require attention and analysis. And finally, the legacy of trans theory's founding figures and their descendants (often placing themselves and their bodies into their works) that has questioned and problematized how transgender bodies are structured by social narratives that enforce or subvert an oppressive binary gender system. Particularly, they question their own means to legitimization and how they communicate that to others, as well as describing the process and terrain of their body image construction. All of these elements are essential to situate and analyze the specific capabilities of the online non-binary trans communities with which I am engaging. Without the context and histories provided by and problematized by the legacy of trans and trans-ally theorists, it is doubtful that my inquiries could manifest in an intelligible way. I want to take some time now to draw connections and provide a short history for these three elements of trans theory that I rely on so heavily in my own work.

Many of the founding figures of trans theory attend to the possibilities and limitations of language and categorization when talking about groups of people that defy normative gendered expectations. The people speaking and being spoken about could

reject all gendered social conventions, they could blend conventions together, or they could wish to express a very specific set of conventions. It is impossible to predict the full range of gender possibilities and expressions that could arise at any particular time and place, particularly since the cultures and languages of the people involved are woven into local techniques of intelligibility. In the online communities I myself have observed and participated in, the conventions for describing these communities in a macro sense inherit a lot from local academia. They use "trans" as an adjective, which has evolved from "transsexual" and "transgender" (the latter being understood as the long-form version) to refer to anyone that isn't cisgender, a term first coined in 1995 by a transsexual man named Carl Buijs to refer to those who identify with, are comfortable living as, or have never wanted to depart from the gender they were non-consensually assigned at birth (Serano). Debates still pop up all over the place about how these terms get deployed or how they might be made more inclusive or precise. For online non-binary trans communities in particular, the naming conventions of individuals and groups are formed collectively, but individually there is an expectation that one can determine for oneself how one should be called. For example, although "non-binary" functions as an imperfect umbrella term for those who do not identify with binary gender categories, there is a recognition that not all who do so would describe themselves as non-binary or trans for a variety of reasons, as is the case with some agender people who do not identify with what they see as the implication of gender within "non-binary" as a category. For my purposes in this thesis I will use non-binary provisionally, and I will be delving into non-binary naming conventions more deeply in the following chapters. I bring it up at this point to draw a connection to the terminological techniques set up by influential trans theorists and activists in their own writings, writings which, like the blog posts by non-binary

people I've encountered, were often meant to be seen and distributed by and for the people in the communities being described.

Published in 1992, transgender author and activist Leslie Feinberg created a pamphlet titled "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come" in which zie illustrates some of the linguistic agency embedded in early modern trans discourse. I use the pronoun "zie" for Feinberg (as well as "hir") since they are some of the pronouns zie has used and promoted, and such non-binary pronouns highlight how non-binary trans identities and ideas have been central to the formation of trans studies as a field. Feinberg has also used other pronouns for hirself, particularly she/her, but has emphasized that it is context and intent that truly determine which pronouns become inappropriate or appropriate. Feinberg writes the pamphlet as "an attempt to trace historic rise of an oppression that, as yet, has no commonly agreed name" for "people who defy the 'man'-made boundaries of gender" (205). Although the contents of the pamphlet move across time periods and cultural contexts, there is significant space devoted to terminology (205).

Feinberg provides examples of some of the words used to describe "gender outlaws," such as "transvestites, transsexuals, drag queens and drag kings, cross-dressers, bull-daggers, stone butches, androgynes, diesel dykes, or berdache- a European colonialist term" (206). Zie explains that these words "don't fit all of us" and "it's hard to fight an oppression without a name connoting pride, a language that honors us" since many (but not all) of these terms were applied to communities and individuals by outsiders or oppressors (206). Feinberg uses "the gender or transgender community" as an umbrella term to account for all of the variations found in "gender outlaws" since "our community is a diverse group of people who define ourselves in many different ways"

(206). Zie emphasizes that this is *self*-definition, a quality so important to understanding the particular kind of agency non-binary online spaces can provide. The people Feinberg claims for the transgender community reflect diversions not just from the norms of gender, but also sex and sexuality. This is in part due to the Feinberg's interest in historicizing trans communities, since across cultures and time periods categories of "men" and "women" have been complicated by not just people whose identities transcend and cross masculine and feminine boundaries, but also by the behaviors and expressions of people that determine how they are understood by their social contexts. The collapse of gender (and sex) with sexuality is not commonly present in online non-binary communities, but this is in part due to the work done by people such as Feinberg to publicize the nuances of trans lived experiences. Hir 1993 fictional book *Stone Butch Blues* and later works explored the blurred lines that intersect queer and trans lives (particularly speaking of stone butch lesbians and trans masculine experiences).

By indicating that the search for the right words ("however inadequate") to describe "what is similar about the oppression we endure" needs to address variations in gender, sex, and sexuality, Feinberg sets up a space to reveal how binary gender norms revolve around compulsory heteronormativity (206). Recognizing this allows non-binary people to see themselves in historical contexts where gender and sexuality may have been collapsed, as well as providing them with the capacity to separate or collapse their own gender and sexuality in whatever linguistic patterns they see fit. Just as those who transgress gender norms but use identifiers that refer to their sexuality fit under Feinberg's transgender umbrella, so too do those people fit under the non-binary collective if they feel they belong. For non-binary people in particular, representation can be incredibly difficult to find, but an awareness of how language has historically been

used to create categories of collapsed gender and sexuality can provide context for them to push their linguistic mutability or agency even further, since claimed non-binary identities require a recognition of some sort that binary gender categories *can* be rejected.

For example, in *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution*, Shiri Eisner attempts to recount the history of bisexuality as a term and concept. Eisner explains that "around the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century," a popular "theory about sexuality was that of inversion," which claimed "gay men and lesbians were 'inverts'-people who were physically male or female, but internally the 'opposite sex'" (8). Bisexuality then, was called "psychosexual hermaphroditism," making the concept "both a physical state and desire" (9). Following the logic, psychosexual hermaphrodites had internal aspects and characteristics of "both" sexes (like different forms of heterosexual attraction) despite that multiplicity being at odds with their external sexed physical arrangement. This legitimized a non-binary subjectivity; the categorization, while likely harmfully pathologized, nevertheless created space for someone to claim being neither exclusively male nor female (recalling that gender and sex have been collapsed) regardless of how their body has been sexed.

For non-binary people to see themselves as embodied subjects identified outside of the gender binary and its structuring compulsory heteronormativity, they inherit a potential to use non-binary histories and their linguistic, categorical conventions to emphasize the need for future mutability of language as well. In Feinberg's pamphlet, zie writes that "the language used in this pamphlet may quickly become outdated as the gender community coalesces and organizes - a wonderful problem" (206). Since zie was one of the first to use "transgender" in this inclusive way, and directly includes attention to future and present non-binary identities and experiences by giving "careful thought to

our use of pronouns, striving for both clarity and sensitivity in a language that only allows for two sexes," Feinberg's pamphlet sets an important precedent. It links positive linguistic agency and fluency with attending to non-binary representation and includes present and future non-binary identities in the beginnings of the trans discourse that would come to shape such communities (206).

Recounting how non-normative manifestations of sexuality often fit under a transgender umbrella allows us to fully appreciate the linguistic agency coded into foundational transgender theories. Many of the theoretical (and literal) spaces first created for subjectivities that fit under the transgender umbrella (as defined by Feinberg) didn't necessarily require identification with the medically recognized transsexual category (though there were all kinds of trans folk that had varying degrees of gatekeeping tendencies out of pressure to be seen as medically and socially legitimate). This particular quality was expanded into various iterations of a radical rejection of the medical model of transsexuality in favour of self-determination. To situate the social context that online non-binary communities come from, this self-determination must be located in part within the language accessibility and mutability found in these original trans theory texts. Reading the non-binary social context in this way also requires attention to how this rejection of the harmful medical categorical traditions and the pathologization of transsexuality (and simultaneous delegitimization of all other trans possibilities) has influenced the complementarity of non-binary trans communities and the uniquely embodied participation of the internet. Before I expand on this, however, I want to mention how even the foundational trans theory works that perform this function include a wide degree of linguistic agency for those the authors proclaim to speak for and to.

In 1992, trans theorist Sandy Stone published a response to one of the most

influential TERFs (internet-preferred acronym for "trans-exclusionary radical feminist," which illustrates the movement of both trans theorists and those that seek to delegitimize them onto online spaces[1]), Janice Raymond's 1978 work titled *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. This was an attack (at one point personally against Stone herself) on transwomen, or transsexual women, as reinforcing traditional gender norms and performing violence against cisgender women as they express their own femininity in various forms. Stone's response was called *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*, and significantly emphasized the need to encourage self-expression and investigation into how the self is embodied and concurrently constructed into many different possibilities rather than a normative binary.

In this work, Stone seeks to address the missing narrative of the "territory between" gender poles, no matter the interest or investment into cisgender legitimization by mainstream narratives (225). Stone sees this territory as the truly radical potential of the transsexual (which she is clearly using as term that can account for far more than those deemed medically legitimate transsexuals). She claims "for a transsexual, *as a transsexual*, to generate a true, effective and representational counter-discourse is to speak from outside the boundaries of gender, beyond the constructed oppositional nodes which have been predefined as the only positions from which discourse is possible" (230). She emphasizes the speech and counter-*discourse* as the fulfilment of this radical potential, a move that empowers trans folk (including those who come to call themselves non-binary) to name their own place and narrative in trans and cis history. Even more so,

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[1] See the *Transadvocate* article "TERF: what it means and where it came from" by Cristan Williams for further information, including an interview with "one of the cisgender feminists who are responsible for popularizing TERF as a feminist concept" (Williams).

Stone asks us to constitute "transsexuals not as a class or problematic 'third gender,' but rather as a *genre* - a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored" (231). Here specifically she uses a linguistic metaphor for her own categorization that links narrative agency (with a space left open for future narratives and names), radical disruption of normative oppressions, and an evolutionary potential for the interactions of embodiment and language specifically for trans individuals and collectives. This will eventually become relevant for my own work regarding non-binary communities and the internet, especially as I discuss the complementarity of both non-binary and social media genres.

As these trans theories resonated within their communities, a space for people specifically identifying outside the gender binary began to open up. It is important to recognize these moments and contributions as creating space for non-binary communities to organize together online. The linguistic fluidity emphasized in these works proposes mutable categories for people who are specifically identified and living outside the gender binary. The term "genderqueer," often treated interchangeably with non-binary as an umbrella term for genders that "queer" expectations of binary and heterosexualized forms of gender, is often attributed to trans and queer theorist Riki Anne Wilchins. Wilchins provided possibly the first public use of the term genderqueer as a claimed identity in the spring 1995 newsletter called *In Your Face*. Wilchins writes in a "note from your Editrix" that "the fight against gender oppression" is "about *all* of us who are genderqueer: diesel dykes and stone butches, leatherqueens and radical fairies, nelly fags, crossdressers, intersexed, transsexuals, transvestites, transgendered, transgressively gendered, intersexed [sic], and those of us whose gender expressions are so complex they haven't even been named yet" (4). Again there is an inclusion of sexuality-based identities within the

possibilities of non-binary genders, as well as a specific reference to future iterations of non-binary genders. Although not everyone who might claim one of the specific categories Wilchins lists would also claim "genderqueer" as accurate for them, the potential the term offered caused it to resonate for many within the larger trans community. This resonance was further amplified after Wilchins published the anthology *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary* in 2002.

Earlier than this, however, in 1994 "gender outlaw" Kate Bornstein, who identifies as neither male nor female, compiled and published hir foundational work *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (4). This was a personal reflection on Bornstein's life outside the gender binary and analysis of the fallacy of binary gender constructions. Attending specifically to language and categorization, Bornstein explains that to divide different members of the trans community "into rigid categories" is "like trying to apply the laws of solids to the state of fluids" (69). This fluidity is not only what "keeps us in touch with each other" but it, along with the "principles that attend to the constant state of flux," can "create an innovative and inclusive transgender community" (69). This explicit link between the fluidity of categorization and the potential for communication and cohesion will prove particularly relevant as I delve deeper into the newer manifestations of genderqueer and non-binary online communities. It is also important to note here that 15 years after this contribution to trans (and specifically genderqueer/non-binary) theory, Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman compiled an anthology called *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*. This anthology included a wide variety of submissions from people who spoke from outside of the gender binary, and the highly radical quality of its collaborative nature can be understood to set a precedent for a literary-mediated online community of non-binary individuals. This self-determination

and distribution of generative non-binary possibilities was nevertheless unidirectional due to the medium itself, and I will be interested in analysing how the multidirectionality of the online blogs and communities takes up and transforms some of the counter-narratives offered.

Dean Spade, a trans writer and activist who rejects normative classifications, wrote *Mutilating Gender* in 2000 in an attempt to subvert assumptions about trans people and their relationships to the medically constructed category of the diagnosable transsexual. Before I discuss this work in more detail, it is valuable now to recognize that in this formative trans theory text written a few years after the contributions of Feinberg, Stone, and Wilchins (among others, of course), Spade also uses a fluidity for language. He places himself in his work, and describes the difficulty he has faced in getting various trans-masculine physical treatments from the medical establishment. As he does this, he describes his actual feelings: his hesitation towards changing his first name, exclusively adopting the pronoun "he," and being comfortable with strategic self-description that may include a number of categories such as "lesbian, transperson, transgender butch, boy, mister, FTM fag, [or] butch" as being what prevent him from fitting into the transsexual category medically and therefore eligible for his desired treatments (322). This recalls the fluidity of Feinberg's category of transgender, additionally connecting the plurality with a strategic self-determination that can't and shouldn't be delegitimized by outsiders.

Reflecting on the gatekeeping of the medical community, Spade explicitly locates trans contexts as having "a much broader conception of trans experience," since most trans people he has met "believed what I say about my gender" (325). This is despite the fact that "some have a self-narrative resembling the medical model of transsexuality;" ultimately "the people I've met share with me what my counselors do not: a commitment

to gender self-determination and respect for all expressions of gender" (325). This quality

of believing Spade "without question when I say what I think I am and how that needs to

look" is also very visible in online non-binary communities, spaces that I will argue have

a particular advantage in allowing these elements to flourish organically across inorganic

topographies. But the main connection here is through the language, through the fact that

Spade is speaking and describing himself with a self-determination that allows a

persistent mutability to future categorizations and solidarities.

Like Feinberg and Stone in their works, Susan Stryker's reflections in her 1993

essay "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamonix: Performing

Transgender Rage" identify the radical potential of transgender figures and fix a futurity

for them in the process. Stryker's essay attempts to legitimize trans voices in contributing

to their own critical theory and personal narratives, as well as contributing to academia in

a larger sense. In this essay she adds a footnote to explain her own particular deployment

of terminology. She says that although "transgender" was "originally coined as a noun in

the 1970s by people who resisted categorization as either transvestites or transsexuals"

(choosing to portray themselves as a gender other than that non-consensually assigned to

them at birth without seeking surgical alteration) she uses it in its "more recent sense"

(254). This sense employs it as an "umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices

that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed

sex/gender boundaries" which "includes but is not limited to, transsexuality, heterosexual

transvestism, gay drag, butch lesbianism, and such non-European identities as the Native

American berdache or the Indian Hijra"[2] (254-5).

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[2] It is important to note that the non-European identities cited here are often imperialistically included under

Stryker's essay often speaks about transsexuality specifically, defining it as "a culturally and historically specific transgender practice/identity through which a transgendered subject enters into a relationship with medical, psychotherapeutic practice/identity in order to gain access to certain hormonal and surgical technologies for enacting and embodying itself" (255). It is notable here that Stryker does not define transsexuality as a simple movement between poles of the gender binary. This attention to terminology and categorization that allows for variation and self-determination continues the precedent set in these foundational texts for future trans communities to echo these sentiments. Opening things up for future mutation and evolution, Stryker, after discussing the identities sometimes taken up strategically to get access to care and the rage or "queer fury" that erupts, includes a passage that is particularly relevant to the analytical trends I am observing (253). This rage is "for the sake of one's own continued survival as a subject, a set of practices that precipitates one's exclusion from a naturalized order of existence that seeks to maintain itself as the only possible basis for being a subject" (253). She qualifies this by explaining that "by mobilizing gendered identities and rendering them provisional, open to strategic development and occupation, this rage enables the establishment of subjects in new modes, regulated by different codes of intelligibility"

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this umbrella regardless of how the people themselves may identify, and this is something I do not wish to naturalize. This inclusion can encourage the cultural appropriation of non-binary identities that are inaccessible to those who do not belong to the cultural contexts that articulate such identities and their cultural roles (a phenomenon I will be discussing further). See Qwo-Li Driskill's *Queer Indigenous Studies* for context on why the settler colonialist term *berdache* must be abandoned among other contextualizations for Indigenous gender identities (Driskill 2011). See also the recent April 23, 2016 *Washington Post* article by Max Bearak titled "Why terms like 'transgender' don't work for India's 'third-gender' communities" to contextualize why some Hijra would not want to be included under the transgender umbrella due to the erasure of their specific cultural traditions and practices surrounding their communities (Bearak).

(253). Again, we can see explicit inclusions of a linguistic agency for self-determination, a mutability for future iterations of trans subjects, and an acknowledgement that the "codes of intelligibility" will change, in a variety that I will argue allows non-binary identification to currently flourish in a particularly interesting and often "unintelligible" way online.

Stryker's point here about the strategic occupation of gender identities, rendered provisional in a capitalist culture that seeks to delegitimize all non-binary identities, is especially relevant for the second and third chapters of this thesis. For Sandy Stone's *Posttranssexual Manifesto*, the informing principle behind it "is that 'technical arts are always imagined to be subordinated by the ruling artistic idea, itself rooted authoritatively in nature's own life'" (224). This quote is from Donna Haraway's "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City 1908-1936," and Stone specifically refers to Haraway's influences for trans theory. Like Stone, I intend to use Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, And Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" to contextualize my own work in my second chapter, as even though the work is not always explicitly connected to transgender subjectivities it nevertheless creates a space for reflection on the intersections of gender, capitalism, technology, embodiment, and narrative disruption. I will apply her characterization of the cyborg ("a creature in a post gender world" to the virtual non-binary subject, and engage with some of her theories such as "technological determinism," which she calls an "ideological space opened up by the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world" (104, 106). In Stone's manifesto, however, Haraway's influence is evident in how she describes her interest in "the image and the real mutually defining each other through the inscriptions

and reading practices of late capitalism," placing her trajectory in "postmodernism, postfeminism, and (dare I say it) posttransexualism" (224). This account of the reading practices of late capitalism is of great interest to me for my analysis in my third chapter, as I intend to discuss the reading practices and reading technologies that function in online spaces, spaces that are inseparable from the structuring power of such late capitalism.

In Feinberg's historicization of trans lives across different cultures and temporal contexts, a process that is informed by hir own Marxism, zie addresses how various technologies that become distributed through capitalism structure the relationships society and individuals form around their own embodiment. Zie reframes historical figures in a trans context, accounts for an imperialistic spread of mandatory cisgender assimilation throughout history, and describes the transphobic techniques of those in power to divide and control indigenous gender alterity in order to exploit them and maintain their own hierarchy. For example, zie describes how capitalism emerged in a Western context, and says its "early competitive stage" had the "the new bourgeoisie" fight "feudalism and all its ideological baggage," some of which included suppressing peasant traditions that had social spaces for people transcending a gender binary. Though these new bourgeoisie "prided themselves on their enlightened and scientific view of the world and society," once they had solidified their position of power "the capitalists made use of many of the old prejudices, particularly those that suited their own divide-and-conquer policies" (217). Zie concludes that while "as we have seen, transgendered expression has always existed in the Western Hemisphere, the need to 'pass' washed up on the shores with the arrival of capitalism" (217). Describing the enforcement of the gender binary and the imperative to assimilate into it (connected and attributed specifically to capitalism) set up another

precedent in trans theory and trans studies to interrogate this intersection and its role in structuring and maintaining modern transphobia, one that I will employ myself.

To have these founding figures of trans theory and trans studies engage so explicitly with the technologies of capitalism and attribute socially structuring techniques of transphobia directly to its ascension is crucial for many aspects of my own analysis, particularly my third chapter. There have been many other trans theorists who have incorporated such frameworks into their own analyses, and as trans visibility grows and capitalism finds new ways to discipline and control the trans subjects that nevertheless flourish under its regime, that number increases. Even more specifically, there is a growing number of trans studies theorists who connect capitalism and its structuring power to the technological innovations that distribute online communities. For example, in 2008 Beatriz Preciado wrote "The Pharmaco-Pornographic Regime: Sex, Gender, and Subjectivity in the Age of Punk Capitalism." This piece picks up Foucault's theories of power and discipline to argue technologies of control merge with the body through new terrains of neoliberal psycho-pharmacological regulation. Preciado argues that trans people can offer powerful critiques of this process, and uses internet and hacking metaphors to describe the reach of this particular regulation. She ends by stating the question remaining is "whether we want to be docile consumers of biopolitical techniques and complicit producers of our own bodies, or, alternatively, if we want to become conscious of the technological processes of which we are made" (276). For Preciado, "either way, we must collectively risk inventing new ways of installing and reinstalling subjectivity" (276). While the trajectory of Preciado's paper differs greatly from my own work, it is nevertheless valuable to note her engagement with trans subjectivities in order to critique and make sense of late capitalism and its technologies. Using the internet to

illustrate this technique models an intervention that I can use to centralize the virtual terrain in which non-binary communities learn together. This allows me to investigate how powerfully the conscious awareness of both capitalism and gender and sexuality oppression influences the radical potential of non-binary subjects birthed in this social topography.

In the last chapter of my thesis, I will be engaging with Jay Prosser's 1998 work *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, to marry one of the key components of trans theory relevant to my own work (linguistic agency and self-determination) with another (questioning the cohesive process of self-image construction with the body). Prosser speaks specifically about transsexual narratives (which may seem in line with medical narratives or may not, but generally include a desire to recreate one's own embodiment to represent another sexed categorization), but the frameworks he chooses to employ for his analysis lay a base for my own inquiries in an important way. Prosser wants to "introduce into cultural theory a trajectory that foregrounds the bodily matter of gender crossings" by using different meanings of transition ("conceptual, somatic, narrative, historico-discursive, and political") to question the unexamined processes of embodying transitory states as a transsexual individual (4). By using "transition in its narratological sense" in which transition is "the definitive property of narrative" that drives it and "coheres its form," Prosser frames such bodily matters of gender crossing as "enabled" and made possible through the linguistic and narrative agency one employs to narrativize one's own embodiment (4). This legitimization of the narrative agency available to figures who re-encounter their own embodiment outside of their original sexed non-consensual bodily assignment influences how I understand non-binary expression and online experiences.

But Prosser offers more than just an abstract characterization of self-narrative: the specific placement of narrative in the construction of one's own embodiment has it as not "only the bridge to embodiment but a way of making sense of transition, the link between locations: the transition itself" (9). Later in the book Prosser considers how "transition as a geographic trope applies to transsexual narratives," since transsexuality can be seen as a "passage through space" in which "transition serves as a key means by which transsexuals represent their relations not only to gendered belonging but to sexual communities and politics (lesbian, gay, straight, queer, and, most recently, transgendered)" (4). Speaking specifically to the ways that transition as a concept may inform adjacent theorization, Prosser explains that if for queer theory "transition is to be explored in terms of its deconstructive effects on the body and identity (transition as a symptom of the constructedness of the sex/gender system and a figure for the impossibility of this system's achievement of identity), I read transsexual narratives to consider how transition may be the very route to identity and bodily integrity" (6). So for transsexual accounts and narratives "transition does not shift the subject away from the embodiment of sexual difference but more fully into it," allowing them to cohesively differentiate their sexed and gendered bodily experiences from the ill-fitting categories assigned to them at birth (6). While non-binary individuals, particularly those who manifest themselves through online communities and politics, do not necessarily have the same passages through space, this framework of analysis legitimizes inquiries into the particularities of such transitory movements. In online spaces transition as a concept is transformed and reconfigured into new mediums for narrativization; taking inspiration from Prosser in this context allows us to imagine how such particular forms of online

transition provide a particular route to the identity and bodily integrity of non-binary individuals.

This practice of using interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks to address how trans people construct their relationships not only to their own bodies in a medical context, but also a social context is vitally important to where I intend to take my own inquiries. In trans theory and trans studies this is usually done by and for trans people themselves, hoping to provide counter narratives to the limiting diagnostic criteria required to legitimize qualifications for medical bodily alterations. In Dean Spade's *Mutilating Gender*, he theorizes around "the long-standing practice amongst gender variant people of strategically deploying medically-approved narratives in order to obtain body-alteration goals" while positioning himself and his own relationship with this practice within his analysis (316). This positioning is an attempt to be "part of a project already taken up by Riki Anne Wilchins, Kate Bornstein, Leslie Feinberg, and many others which opens a position for trans people as self-critical, feminist, intellectual subjects of knowledge rather than simply case studies" (317). When I theorize around the non-binary communities found online, I intend to contribute to such a project, attending to the processes of non-binary virtually-informed body image construction from within such practices myself. Spade explains that his "starting point for this analysis is Foucault's understanding of power as productive rather than repressive, and of governance as occurring not primarily through repressive law but through disciplinary forces which exist in 'diverse, uncoordinated agencies'" such as "educational, medical, and psychiatric institutions" (316, 318). Spade's engagement of Foucault locates this productive element in the creation of social categories which provide disciplinary incentive to inhabit or reject, taking his example of homosexuality (where Foucault

"argues that the sexologists who first discussed homosexuality were not identifying a pre-existing identity, but rather were inventing the homosexual") and comparing it to the creation of "transsexuality" (318).

Spade links this framework to the work done by Billings and Urban in an essay "The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism: An Interpretation and Critique." While Spade identifies many limitations and contradictions in this work, he finds generative possibilities in their conclusions regarding the construction of a category of transsexuality (as a deviant with a specific life narrative, which Spade exposes as entirely arbitrary) by the medical establishment to control and discipline transsexual individuals into a heteronormative gender binary for profit. One of Spade's main critiques of Billings and Urban is that they arrive at a conclusion that disempowers transsexuals as helpless victims by "creating an arbitrary line between technology and the body that they place at sex-change procedure" (318). But this doesn't account for how both cis- and trans- people "change their gender presentation to conform to norms with multiple other technologies as well, including clothing, make-up, cosmetic surgery not labeled SRS, training in gender-specific manners, body building, dieting, and countless other practices" (318). By categorizing these practices as technologies of gender, Spade sets up a precedent for linking future iterations of personal extensions into social contexts as technologies of gender as well. This becomes particularly relevant for my later analysis of gender technologies such as selfies, which will reveal how the narrative techniques of social media can provide generative forms of gender expression for non-binary individuals.

Ultimately, Spade means to complicate Billings and Urban's conclusions about the construction of the medically intelligible transsexual by asserting "the problem with the invention of transsexualism is the limits it places on body alteration, not its

participation in the performance of body alteration" (319). At one point, Spade responds to Marjorie Garber, who describes how transsexual people see their bodies "theoretically" (after altering their bodies, they see their bodies as fitting into gender conventions regardless of remaining indicators of the constructedness). Spade is addressing this claim in a larger point about the imperative of passing as a particular gender as a metric of trans success, but specifically says "I would argue that everyone sees their body theoretically, and everyone's self image is mediated through gender fictions and expectations" (324). The term "gender fictions" is complementary to some of Prosser's theorizations that I will use in the fourth chapter of this thesis, and helps to legitimize an expansion of traditional understandings of body image construction and the shifting role of gender technologies in personal understandings of embodiment. Spade also mentions that "most of the trans people I have talked to" do not construct a body image mediated through authentic binary gender, but rather incorporate body alterations and gender technologies to "recognize more of themselves" and enable "more comfortable and exciting self understandings and images" (324). By characterizing trans people (and transsexual people more specifically) as engaging with this personal process of body image self-determination without necessarily anchoring it within binary gender authentication, Spade opens up a space to describe how current iterations of non-binary online communities use such a process themselves.

Sandy Stone's *Posttranssexual Manifesto* historicizes the relationship of medical establishments to transsexual (and other transgender groups) individuals, and precedes Spade's analysis of the distribution of a singular pathologized narrative of transsexuality. Stone encounters some of Judith Shapiro's work to contextualize the apparent obsessive focus of transsexual or transgender subjects on their bodies (and genitals specifically) as

conformation to their own culture's "'criteria for gender assignment'" (231). By understanding this body-image construction as a cultural imperative, we can expand this contextualizing to account for the new virtual cultural criteria for participation that come to inform non-binary subjectivities. Stone also complicates and critiques narratives of trans "success" in passing for the gender they alter their body to better express, and by doing so points to the radical potential of solidarity between those who remain visible and those who become invisible as they come to "pass" (231). This collusion of those who "pass" and those who don't may be in reference to transsexual people, but the grouping itself helps reveal how non-binary online groups operate with inclusion for a wide variety of people whose gendered embodiments are read or misread inside or outside their online communities.

One of Stone's most powerful points, one that can be complementary to both Prosser and Spade, is that everyone (mediated through cultural contexts) understands their sense of self through the constructed relationship to their own embodiment; allowing trans people to speak of this process personally can open up new radical territory for understanding how it operates. Stone explains that the potential for self-determination in trans narratives (ideally freed from a medical/cultural imperative to determine oneself in a specific binary form) counter the usual techniques of history-making, which "struggle to ground an account in some natural inevitability" (229). For Stone "bodies are screens on which we see projected the momentary settlements that emerge from ongoing struggles over beliefs and practices within the academic and medical communities," but rarely have trans voices risen to settle their own narratives onto their bodies (229). This assertion, which describes bodies as screens, also shows Stone's tendency to connect technological frameworks with a temporally specific positioning of trans bodies and self-narratives. In

my work, I wish to illustrate the rise of non-binary trans voices online, speaking to one another about their techniques of self-determination. The online spaces that facilitate this communication forgo any natural inevitability by placing the agency to write new narratives of the body and subjectivity within non-binary individuals or communities themselves.

The patterns of trans theory and trans studies that have shaped my theoretical inquiries allow me to move between different lenses of analysis without losing my central focus on non-binary online subjectivity development. The foundational figures of these fields do not shy away from analysing aspects of their social positioning and experiences that seem contradictory or unintelligible. They recognize the need to aggregate and disaggregate experiences and identities provisionally, attending to linguistic practices and trends that can shape and reflect the specificities and generalities of trans communities. They also call out how contemporary institutionalized capitalism draws lines of accessibility around technologies of legitimization, and describe the ways capitalism has made an oppressive binary sex and gender system profitable. Trans theorists have also performed the difficult work of theorizing the processes of their own body image construction, mediating the structuring power of the medical institutions that allow them access to livable embodiment with the structuring potential of their own perspectives. They provide a base and a framework that allows me to explore how the process of non-binary body image construction is capacitated by the medium in which it is reflected. I believe the critical techniques identified here will allow me to organize my own work in a way that can reflect both the transformative possibilities and the oppressive limitations that contextualize my area of study. As they are delegitimized by a binary gender society,

the non-binary online communities I read and interpret hold an oppositionality at their

core, and I hope I can legitimize that in my own narrative of their generative possibilities.

Chapter 2: Non-Binary Neo-Dada Cyborgs on Tumblr

There are certain online spaces where non-binary users can congregate with various levels of anonymity in order to participate in a particular form of self-narrative construction. They are not the only users in these spaces, and there are a great number of communities within that provide resources (such as social mobility) to marginalized people. Because of the endless oceans of online content, these spaces where non-binary individuals thrive and represent themselves (many for the first time as anything but the sex and gender they were non-consensually assigned at birth) could be missed entirely in a given online experience. Non-binary spaces could be dismissed as inconsequential and capable of being collapsed into the cyclical streams of subcultures that rise and fall in popularity. The linguistic trends of these spaces can seem incomprehensible, but I want to argue that when viewed through certain lenses, these spaces and the non-binary individuals that populate them represent something critical about the collision of bodies, narratives, gender, and the technology capitalism stakes its claims over. If we take time to imagine the radical generative potential of these communities and individuals, Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" can offer an optimistic theoretical framework. I propose that Haraway's concept of the cyborg can be used to characterise the integration of technological narrative agency within non-binary subjectivity development. To support this claim, I characterize the meme culture found in certain online spaces as a form of neo-Dadaism, organically manifested through users' frustration with irrational and harmful social institutions. These rebellious codes of communication create a social space in which non-binary identities and experiences can be legitimized.

In her "Cyborg Manifesto", Haraway asserts that "liberation rests on the

construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of

possibility" (104). The conscious imagination is constructed in relation to the body image,

and the oppressions or possibilities that foreclose or open up how this image is

recognized. In the fourth chapter of this thesis I will describe how the imaginative

possibilities of the body image can be structured by different narrative genres, particularly

the genre characteristics of social media platforms more generally, but here I want to

focus in on some particular precedented and unprecedented narrative conventions.

Haraway doesn't see this imaginatively apprehended liberation as limited by the social

realities that have been considered fit to narrativize, and uses the figure of the cyborg ("a

cybernetic organism" that is a "creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction")

to reframe the environmental circumstances surrounding gender oppression among other

social and cultural intersections (104). Her manifesto, which (among other aspects of her

work) greatly influenced foundational trans theorists like Sandy Stone, was published in

1983, and was meant to reflect how in "the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic

time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in

short, we are cyborgs" (104). The figure of the cyborg is meant to reflect the political

potential hybridity holds to move beyond alienated and solitary Western narratives for the

construction of subjectivity. Haraway contrasts the origin of the cyborg with the old

"origin story in the 'Western,' humanist sense," which "depends on the myth of original

unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother[3] from whom all humans

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[3]Although the "phallic mother" may seem like a symbol of gender fluidity, it is actually a patriarchal symbol that embodies the phallus' presumed "totalizing effects as the unitary signifier of nondifference" (Ian 20). As Haraway mentions, in traditional psychoanalysis a mother and fetus are misread as representing a masculinized singular and unified ideal. Once the child is born and leaves this unmarked totality it is assumed to have access only to a fractured subjectivity that requires individualization,

must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism" (105). The origin stories possible for Haraway's cyborg, on the other hand, hold counter-narratives that can legitimize certain rebellious and playful tendencies.

For the cyborg, it "skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense," and constructs itself/is constructed from parts that stay particular (105). Haraway describes the cyborg as "committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity," as well as being "oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (105). She says explicitly that the cyborg is "no longer structured by a polarity of public and private" since "the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household" (105). The way social relations function through internet-based social media has fractured such public and private polarity. In meme culture (primarily disseminated and generated by youths), which runs through and contributes to the structure of social media platforms, irony and irreverence move at lightning speeds to destroy and remake cultural modes of intelligibility. It is important to mention here, that recently "meme culture" as articulated by so-called "alt-right" internet users (usually espousing hateful views of white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and misogyny,

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developing a basic and constant urge to return to the unified ideal. The mother is made legitimate only through association with phallic qualities and the complex subjectivity-structuring symbiosis of life creation and development is collapsed into one phallogocentric (see below) origin story. In the fourth chapter of this thesis I will be dealing more closely with these assumptions and offering an alternative through Gail Weiss' proposed system of intercorporeal body images. See *Remembering the Phallic Mother: Psychoanalysis, Modernism, and the Fetish* by Marcia Ian for more information on the history and positioning of the phallic mother symbol.

among other things) has been covered in mainstream media discourse[4]. When I discuss memes and meme culture I am not referring to the evolutions and creations by this community, but there is undoubtedly a lot of gendered analysis to be done on these groups, their manifestations, and impact. The connection between social media subjects and Haraway's figure of the cyborg may seem immediately apparent, but, as Matthew Biro points out in his book *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin*, Haraway still emphasizes "the fundamentally ambivalent nature of the cyborg and the global situation that it represented" (7). Abstracting the main characteristics and definitive criteria could lead one to conclude "almost every creature in the contemporary world, human or animal, can be seen to embody the concept" (8). This could be discouraging, but Biro also suggests how to maintain a meaningful application of the framework.

Michael Biro's work will become more relevant when I illustrate how Dadaism functions as a code of communication in certain online spaces that best represent "non-binaryness". His demonstration of how the work of Berlin Dada artists can be seen as representing either "Wiener's and Haraway's divergent concepts of the cyborg," however, is an especially relevant observation. His point about the cyborg's potential over-applicability is that the technological augmentation of humans and animals can be abstracted to transform the concept of the cyborg to fit into various points in human history (8). What maintains the concept as informative and relevant is tracking "the degree to which the cyborg is experienced as an intersubjective phenomenon" (9). I

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[4] See the October 11, 2016 *Los Angeles Times* article "How 'Pepe the Frog' went from harmless to hate symbol" by Jessica Roy for an example of one particular meme's transformation, as well as some historical and cultural context for the development (Roy).

understand this to refer not only to the "intersubjective agreement of so many different observers" that the cyborg now appears in greater numbers, but also that the intersubjective nature of the agreement itself is one of the features magnified by the growing omnipresence of the cyborg figure (9). To identify with and see the cyborg present in society requires a legitimization of the "radical, open-ended, and 'networked'" subjective cyborg agency Haraway proposes (9). This tendency towards intersubjectivity is prefigured by body images constructed through intercorporeality, a concept I will revisit in the fourth chapter of this thesis and situate within trans and ultimately non-binary theory.

Even as Biro accounts for the over-application of Haraway's figure of the cyborg, he also describes her "emphasis on the cyborg as the 'other,' manifested "as a woman, as a person of color, as a homosexual, as an outsider, or as a monster," which clarifies its status as non-normative (7). Non-binary people are similarly othered in a hetero-patriarchal society of binary sex and gender, and the rise in popularity of non-binary identification facilitated through social media could speak to a higher degree of intersubjective non-binary representations. Haraway claims her cyborg lives in a "post gender world" but is also contradictory, and constantly pollutes the social sphere with its own radical fictions that unseat gender from the imperatives of patriarchal and nationalist domination (104). I do not believe the widespread access of the internet and social media platforms has realized this "post gender world," nor would I suggest uncritically that it is a utopia to immediately strive for. I believe, however, that online spaces are well populated with Haraway's cyborgs, and an attention to the characteristics she ascribes to them can point to a heightened degree of non-binary representation, to non-binary cyborgs incorporeally and corporeally fleshed. Because the cyborg is oppositional and

contradictory, it rejects easy categorizations, as do many non-binary gender experiences. The internet in general (as the technology that crystalizes the cyborg) can provide such multiplicity that some cyborgs may never encounter any of the non-binary internet spaces that I mean to describe, continually re-structuring themselves in accordance with social norms that afford them different privileges. There are many more users, however, who find themselves suddenly encountering a subjectivity that houses a terrifying and unexpected resonance. This moment of myth-making for non-binary individuals, which sees gendered embodiment and subjectivity as radical modes of chaos to get lost in, is occurring at unprecedented rates. If cyborgs have risen and fallen across human history (as Biro's work claims), why not use the framework to legitimize and contextualize the hybridity of non-binary internet representations as both old and new? Both the cyborg and non-binary genders have had cycles of generation and erasure, so why not use them both together to examine the current rising trajectory of the figure that soundly rejects its hetero-patriarchal and procreational origin? Haraway explains that the "main trouble" with cyborgs is that "they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism," but adds that "illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins" since "their fathers are, after all, inessential" (105). If we consider how the non-binary subject is formed within a capitalist "mass culture" that seeks to collapse structural differences into neoliberal individualization (a phenomenon I will discuss more in the third chapter of this thesis), we can take heart that the non-binary subject, as an unacknowledged illegitimate child, represents a difference that grows unfaithfully the more it seeks to reject such origins.

Haraway describes the tension between present lenses of domination and the potential for liberation from within a cyborg-populated world. From the former

perspective, such a world would reflect "the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet," fulfilling "the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defence" and "the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war" (107). But from "another perspective," one with liberatory potential, such a world "might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (107). Ultimately, for Haraway, since "cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling" (107). While it is certainly possible that many internet users (even non-binary ones) may use such a potent myth to fix themselves more firmly into a cyborg world of domination, I believe Haraway's characterization of the liberatory cyborg world more accurately reflects the socio-historical position within which online non-binary communities develop.

Non-binary communities see a legitimacy in the expression of binary trans individuals, non-binary individuals whose gender expression appears no different from their cisgender or binary transgender peers, and non-binary individuals who are both fixedly and fluidly outside of binary gender expectations[5]. Expressing oneself and developing one's subjectivity and body image online as a non-binary person in non-binary-friendly spaces requires a level of fragmentation, which conditions the person to be less afraid of permanently partial identities. The non-binaryness that is expressed and developed is not consistently recognized as a legitimate identity outside of these online

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[5] For example, a popular post by "monoceroy" with 68,696 notes simply states: "fun fact nonbinary ppl with boobs, nonbinary ppl who like their boobs, and nonbinary ppl who want boobs are cool and valid and just as nonbinary as ppl w flat chests and deserve to have a good time all the time" (monoceroy).

spaces due to the institutionalization of binary gender oppression. Many cisgender people in Western society have never even conceived of non-binary forms of gender, and many more have never been given an adequate education in the arbitrary, constructed nature of both gender and sex categories. So non-binary people come to use the internet as a place to legitimize their permanently partial identity, and the semi- or full anonymity that some online spaces can provide reinforce this form of identity. Whatever these individuals come to post in these spaces (jokes, memes, selfies, logs, reviews, discursive opinions, etc.), they are interpreted as fragmentary representations of themselves rather than a complete characterization. The curation is constant and conscious, with various levels of publicly identifiable investments. When an author writes a book, the work may represent them, but the representation is unidirectional and static until a new version is published and distributed. But with the instant editing possibilities present in micro-blogging websites, and the mechanisms for communication and availability coded within, the authors are represented by their blogs to an unprecedented extent. These multi-directional social media characteristics will become crucial to my discussion in the fourth chapter of this thesis, but for now they recall the accessible intersubjectivity necessary to read power and legitimacy into Dada-descended cyborg figures.

In her manifesto, Haraway claims that "cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (111). This struggle is why "cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine," which make the "structure and modes of reproduction of 'Western' identity" more alien" (111). While I would not propose that this alienation has been at all institutionally realized, the globalization and accessibility of the internet does

often force users to encounter multiple codes of meaning, though they can limit this if they make the effort to. The cyborg that insists on noise finds it easier to scramble codes of communication in some forms of social media more than others. The qualities that Haraway describes for her cyborg are not all exclusively manifested in non-binary individuals. I mean to illustrate that these qualities are coded into certain social media topographies, in which the language that is shared is one that provides non-binary people with the means to self-actualize into specifically non-binary cyborg figures. Because these social media networks are relatively new, the intensity of adolescent self-actualization finds the freedom of expression intoxicating.

I want to show that certain spaces on the internet and their relationship to non-binary subjectivities can be readily illustrated by examining some of the youth that have grown up in such an environment. This is not to claim that only young people are non-binary, or that all young people are non-binary without even knowing it, but the structuring power of representation undoubtedly works more effectively when it has been present for the formative periods of one's life. As I mean to illustrate in my fourth chapter, one's conception of one's own body image never stops shifting and is constituted by relationships with other people and representations. For me, this means that anyone at any age has the potential to recognize aspects about themselves as non-binary. The codes of communication and counter-phallogocentric myths and narratives that recognize and propagate non-binaryness could be learned and shared by anyone who immerses themselves in the discourse available. In fact, it would do a great disservice to the participants of these communities and social spaces to portray them *all* as teenagers, because it would contribute to the erasure of people who have been non-binary before the internet and potentially legitimize the "transtrender" panic, which I will further theorize

in my third chapter. Nevertheless, teens are the ones who are becoming most vocal about the representations of non-binaryness they encounter, and framed as the online participants most intuitively engaged in the medium. By extrapolating from this presence and characterization I hope to help legitimize the generational movement from within these spaces that enables more and more people to recognize and identify with non-binary genders, a movement that is perceived to be unprecedented.

To contextualize my claims about the relationships teens can have with non-binary genders and the internet, I want to bring up a recent study that was publicized online in an article for *Broadly*, a "website and digital video channel devoted to representing the multiplicity of women's experiences" that is affiliated with the media network *Vice* (Morrissey). The article, titled "Teens These Days Are Queer AF[6], New Study Says," is written by Zing Tsjeng and includes a rundown of the study's findings as well as excerpts from interviews with the study's spokesperson and people *Broadly* deem relevant demographic representatives. Shepherd Laughlin, the "director of trendspotting at J. Walter Thompson," explains that "a survey of Gen Z for a report released in May 2015" led the J. Walter Thompson Innovation group to believe that today's youth held surprisingly fluid beliefs about gender and sexuality (Tsjeng). The sample size for the survey was small, with "less than a thousand respondents across the US," but Laughlin claims in the interview that "he has '90 percent' confidence that the results are accurate and can be generalized for the whole country" since "'we see clear patterns across the different questions that show that Gen Z has a more complex and less binary approach to

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[6] "AF" stands for "as fuck," a colloquial intensifier that has been clumsily appropriated into the mainstream from African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

gender than millennials" (Tsjeng). For example, "fifty-six percent of 13-to-20-year-olds

said that they knew someone who went by gender neutral pronouns such as "they,"

"them," or "ze," compared to 43 percent of people aged 28 to 34 years old" (Tsjeng).

Another headline-grabbing statistic from the study was that "81 percent said that gender

doesn't define a person as much as it used to," which Laughlin extrapolates to mean that

binary forms of gender have less hold on the identities of today's youth. The article

doesn't specify what "knowing" a person who uses gender neutral pronouns actually

refers to, whether it means someone they know in real life or someone they know (or

know of) online. My suspicion is that the latter has certainly influenced the statistic, a

sentiment bolstered by comments included in the article from Tyler Ford.

Tyler Ford is "an agender writer and speaker who counts teens as the primary

demographic in their thousands-strong social media followers" (Tsjeng). They explain

specifically that the "shift in attitude" Tsjeng is reporting on is visible in how "'the

internet plays the greatest role in the self-discovery process today'" since "'young people

have more access to information and to other people than ever before'" (Tsjeng). Ford

recounts "'how many times someone has written something and I think, *Oh my God,*

that's a real thing? That's not just me? There's a name for this?'" (Tsjeng). This access to

information and support from a community make it "'easier to push against traditional

narratives'" (Tsjeng). I agree with this, but I think there's a little more going on than *just*

access to information and community. As per Haraway, pushing against traditional

narratives is certainly one of the paths leading to the generation of counter-

phallogocentric cyborg myths. In particular though, I want to theorize how these internet

resources are surrounded by features of intelligibility that represent other elements of the

new cyborg myths, a cohesion that I think helps elucidate this new acceptance and

identification with gender fluidity and non-binary comprehension. Tsjeng writes that most teenagers *Broadly* interviewed were in agreement with Ford, saying "they learned about sexuality and gender online" with most citing "Tumblr and social media as their primary sources of information" (Tsjeng also gives an example of one teen specifically saying they learned of non-binary genders on Tumblr) (Tsjeng). I believe there's a reason that Tumblr comes up particularly here. More than other social networks, the codes of communication found on Tumblr exemplify those of Haraway's cyborg. The key features are intensified comfort with oppositionality, contradiction, noncorporeality, permanent partiality, the noise, pollution, and irony that replace a unified code of Western subjectivity, and the dissolution of the public and private that allow social reality and fiction to coalesce. Since hybridity defines the cyborg, these features intertwine, overlap, and build off of each other due to the chaotic agency of the spaces and individuals that embody them.

These features on their own do not invariably lead to non-binary expression and identification, but I believe they make it far easier for such subjectivities to find legitimization through internet social topographies like Tumblr. Elspeth Reeve's article "The Secret Lives of Tumblr Teens," was published on February 17th, 2016, and will be helpful in contextualizing some of these key characteristics in the intersection of youth internet use and Tumblr. This article, written for the independent journal *New Republic*, tracks the structured and often fleeting absurdity of famous Tumblr teens and their capitalization of the medium. It opens with an account of the rise and fall of the Tumblr user "Pizza," a teenager who most often used the anonymity and absurd conceptual framework of responding to any random person on Tumblr writing about "'pizza'- either the food or herself" *as* pizza. Reeve describes Pizza's fame, saying "In June 2014, Pizza

had more than 1 million followers and was the biggest star of the Tumblr teen comedy

world," but "two months later, her blog was gone" (Reeve). Reeve opens with this

particular example in order to contextualize her claim that "each social media network

creates a particular kind of teenage star" (Reeve). She claims that Youtube is the realm of

"those blessed with early-onset hotness," Vine is that of "the most charismatic actors,

dancers, and comedians," Instagram is for "the fashionable and seemingly wealthy," and

Facebook is where most adults have settled since "every link you share and photo you

post is a statement of your identity" (and so is the most broadly socially acceptable

version of yourself, since the audience is usually people you know personally) (Reeve).

This account does not include Twitter, but the enforced brevity of the medium cultivates a

lot of cross-posted content, making it difficult to attribute as a whole to a particular

demographic. One particular subset of Twitter, "weird Twitter," with its fragmentary

absurdism and anonymous celebrities deserves its own complete analysis. Nevertheless,

the popularity of such disruption humour speaks to the popular "lingua franca" that I will

get into shortly, even within an economy choked with Twitterbot accounts that

automatically generate content for revenue or other purposes. Although a Tumblr post

Reeve cites describes it as the realm of the popular, there are many diverse communities

that populate the network mobilized by shared identity and larger goals such as social

activism.

Regardless, Reeve claims that based on her reporting, Tumblr is "seen by teens as

the most uncool" (Reeve). She attributes this to how on Tumblr you can "revel in

anonymity," but also more specifically to how on Tumblr there is a great appreciation for

specificity and the creation of "as many Tumblrs as you like, one for each slice of your

personality" (Reeve). I connect this intensified specification with the information

accessibility (particularly the discovery of names for experiences previously thought singularly alien) both Ford and Tsjeng attribute to Tumblr in Tsjeng's article. Tumblrs such as "nonbinary-support.tumblr.com," "askanonbinary.tumblr.com," "nonbinaryresource.tumblr.com," and "nonbinarycuties.tumblr.com" are all popular non-binary centred blogs that are run by multiple (non-binary) moderators who moderate content and answer questions. Most of these mods provide links to their own personal Tumblrs as well, which usually show much more individual and cross-content curation (while often posting about being non-binary as well or reblogging non-binary content). This illustrates how although non-binary educational content is curated in specific, non-personal Tumblr spaces, it is not strictly relegated to these spaces. To truly understand how non-binary genders and nonbinaryness are represented on Tumblr, one has to recognize the fluidity and constant movement of the medium, which puts content and information in the hands of the users themselves alongside whatever other personal information they want to divulge at a particular time. This culture of multiple selves expressed on multiple Tumblrs with the maintenance of relative anonymity (Reeve provides examples of different fandoms or specified sexual identities) encourages a cyborg-like permanent partiality.

If teens see binary and normative forms of gender as defining a person less than they used to, then we can see such a medium encouraging exploration of non-binary forms of gender in spaces that feel less dangerously all-encompassing. The labels and identities feel mutable and flexible because the relative anonymity can discourage one from making assumptions about a person's entire life based on the face value of their Tumblr page. Of course, this doesn't account for how relatively popular Tumblr faces (rather than blogs themselves) deal with massive amounts of entitlement from their fans

and readers, a trend bred by celebrity consumer culture that can trickle down into even the smallest pools of familiarity. This cultural phenomenon requires further attention than I can give to it at this time, but certain aspects of it will become relevant again in the fourth chapter of this thesis. In this discussion at least, mentioning this trend of entitlement allows me to specify more clearly that the characteristics of Tumblr that I think are most relevant to non-binary representative codes tend to veer away from this. According to other internet forums, as illustrated by the rise of the derogatory term "transtrender" (those who are seen to be selectively trans to seem "special" or "trendy"), Tumblr is dominated by weird, non-normative teens who purposefully invent and engage in weird codes of communication. I want to investigate how the language of "weirdness" Reeve identifies inherits from and can represent Haraway's figure of the cyborg.

Tumblr as a medium "launched in 2007," with a "simple layout - text, photo, quote, link, chat, audio, video," but the "defining feature" of its culture is "reblogging" (Reeve). Users repost content from other Tumblrs and add their own comments or content. So multiple versions of the post circulate through the site's feed with the likes, reblogs, and comments of various users that "pile up in a log of 'notes' appended to the original post as it travels through the network's feed" (Reeve). Since the defining feature of Tumblr culture can be found in reblogging as a communicative tool, it reveals that the originally intended codes of communication that structure Tumblr are not only permanently partial but distributed by the user's peers. Haraway's cyborg rejects a phallogocentric code of unification, the singular narrative that speaks universally. On Tumblr there is no singular code of meaning because the specification made possible through the anonymity and micro-blogging features ensures that discord and contradiction are always present. Chronology becomes ambiguous since content appears without much

context and posts can reappear in circulation years after they were originally created

depending on how they resonate with a particular audience. For teens on Tumblr, the

content they encounter is always assumed to have links to other users, and sometimes

content that wouldn't be interesting otherwise *becomes* interesting with the addition of

comments or other content from other users. There are always multiple areas of Tumblr

that have different interests and definitions, and long conversation chains abound that

debate central features of each community. While many of these communities take

themselves and their content very seriously (consider the moderated educational non-

binary tumblrs), a pervasive sense of irony and oppositionality is usually inescapable

since the most popular content producers center themselves around the relatability of

absurdity and meaninglessness from the fringes of social normativity. This positioning of

"awkwardness" or "weirdness" as a feature of typical Tumblr users reveals how the

famous teen users Reeve examines and interviews know their communication is outside

normal structures. Linguistic noise and the pollution of normative conventions are

common, and new codes of meaning take shape that may be incomprehensible to those

who aren't intimately familiar with them. For her piece, Reeve also interviews Danielle

Strle, "Tumblr's 34-year-old head of culture and trends, whose job it is to figure out what

the teens are up to" (Reeve). Strle claims that "'increasingly, the lingua franca is

absurdist dada'," which is "usually rendered in the uncapitalized and unpunctuated

casualness of instant messages" (Reeve). There is an agency of narrative here, a decisive

pollution of linguistic standards in order to communicate a sense of irony about the very

medium of communication.

  For example, Tumblr user "dorkysetters'" created a text post on June 17, 2016

that read "tfw you're on mobile and have to work hard against auto-correct to keep your

lowercase aesthetic™"[7] (dorkysetters). The post has 103,808 notes, although this number

will certainly change as it continues to circulate. The construction of the post includes a

set up that reflects youthful engagement with the medium (teens and smartphones are a

constant moral panic) and relies on the relatability of purposefully misusing linguistic

conventions in order to convey a cultivated aesthetic of approachability and irony.

Lowercase letters express a less intense commitment to what is being said (the

"casualness" that Strle identifies), and "dorkysetters'" post reflects the irony inherent in

the expectation of genuine casualness that in reality causes more inconvenience to the

user to express. The use of "™" at the end of "lowercase aesthetic" is also self-

deprecating, ironically suggesting that the compunction to maintain a conscious aesthetic

of casualness is akin to corporate control over copyright and trademark brands. There is a

sense of oppositionality to linguistic conventions (which are purposefully discarded) and

a sense of relatability (which implies a level of longevity) that requires a cultivated and

yet ever-present partiality of social expression. From this small example, which is

nevertheless distributed to a significant number of Tumblr users, we can see how certain

codes of communication that characterize Haraway's cyborg are woven into social

expectations in certain areas of Tumblr. One of the main points here is that these codes

are consciously employed even as they manifest organically and fluidly.

Another set of posts by "inrealityadream," who has since changed their URL to

the ironic "anti-sjw-nagito[8]" followed by "mawgito," eloquently describes how Dada

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[7] "tfw" is an acronym for "the feeling when," meant to invoke a sense of relatability about the following
content.

[8] I mention this intermediary change to emphasis the user's fluency in casual irony. "Sjw" is slang for
"social justice warrior," and is used in a derogatory sense for anyone who distributes or participates in

functions on Tumblr. The first post, merely states that "tumblr meme culture is really just a form of neo dadaism" (note the lowercase letters) (mawgito). This original post includes the tag "this is a shitpost" (which is meant ironically, as the post is an attempt at sincere analysis), was created October 7, 2015, and currently has 210,463 notes. The user, who goes by "Kasael" in their about section, then reblogs their own post and adds commentary "to clarify," providing a short history and explanation of Dada in order to contextualize their claim. They explain that because "the artists who made dada lived in a world in which nothing made sense – in which conventional logic led to the senselessness of a world war" they made art that made "no sense:" "ANTI-art that rejected the conventions that brought about that atrocity in the first place – it made total sense. (if that makes any sense)" (mawgito). The user then goes on to propose a "serious intellectual continuity between the absurdity of attaching a bunch of tacks to the bottom of an iron, rendering it useless, and say…, bath bomb posts[9]" (mawgito). This meme in particular resonated among young people on platforms such as Tumblr in part because of the sharp escalation towards making something so seemingly valuable (an expensive corporate brand of electronics) completely useless. Kasael characterizes this rupture by saying "Nobody fucking cares anymore. you want something funny? you want a punchline? gun. that's

content that is meant to bring awareness to social injustices. Users who support the status quo sometimes call themselves an "anti-sjw," and the user who created the post in this instance is using that moniker ironically. "Nagito" is most likely a reference to a personally preferred character from the game *Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair.*

[9] Bath bombs are products made to dissolve in baths with an explosion of colour, essence, glitter, or more. It is common for pictures of the results to be posted online, and in late 2014 a formula was reached to parody these posts in which non-dissolvable items are thrown into the bath and captured in images framed as if they are legitimate, some of the most notable including ramen packets, an egg, and a MacBook and other Apple products (Twisty).

your punchline. Take it. I am laughing" (mawgito). There is a level of misbehavior here, of celebrating and sharing a sense of futility in social conventions. This sets a precedent for participants to see themselves in spaces of chaos, where the illogical (including "illogical" genders) can work to undermine the phallogocentric, Kasael provides similar commentary, comparing the mindset of those involved in the first Dada movements to the "frustration and hopelessness and dissatisfaction that Tumblr's userbase (largely, disenfranchised millennials) feels in the modern day" (mawgito).

Although they describe Tumblr as populated by millennials rather than teens from "gen z," the two often get conflated in common discourse, and there is undoubtedly overlap in the memetic trends (necessary in order to have successful circulation in the first place). Specifically, Kasael explains that "of COURSE we make nonsense jokes" because "it's a coping mechanism for a world which doesn't make any sense" (mawgito). Fundamentally, the user claims "my generation is fed up with this bullshit, and the best way that we can express that is by shitposting[10]," to which "dada was an early precursor" (mawgito). They describe some of the things Tumblr users are fed up with (from an acknowledged Unites States-centric perspective) as "growing up in a constant state of questionably justified war, income inequality, an economic recession [. . .] police brutality, being called lazy and self-absorbed by the generations that gave us these problems in the first place" (mawgito). I think these are valid points, but I would like to add specifically that binary and hetero-patriarchal norms of gender are also inherited from

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[10] See the "knowyourmeme" entry on "shitposting" for a history of the term on other forums, but in this context it refers to the practice of intentionally posting unconstructive or "worthless" content, which may actually be constructive in its function as catharsis or even analysis. Opinions are constantly shifting on what constitutes a "shitpost" and how it might be read in different online social contexts (Mercer).

previous generations, and would like to suggest that they majorly contribute to the sense of futility and frustration Kasael describes. The about section of Kasael's profile explains that they are "agender (ish?)" and requests the use of they/them pronouns (mawgito). So then, this analysis on Tumblr meme culture or "shitposting" is apparently coming directly from a non-binary Tumblr user themselves. With over 200,000 notes, many Tumblr users clearly agree with the suggestion that neo-Dada characterizes their "lingua franca", and this suggests an intersubjective understanding Michael Biro would anticipate as indicative of a cyborg concentration. To me this legitimization of a "worthless" practice illustrates some of the oppositionality and contradiction that I connect to non-binary generative spaces like Tumblr. As Haraway says, the cyborg is not without innocence, but it is also utopian. One only need spend some time on the various non-binary resource blogs to see many affirmative posts written to a gender utopia that has yet to be realized, and yet some of Tumblr's most visible codes of communication decry innocence about their own positioning or social realities. This hybridity of non-innocence with utopian gestures is made especially possible through the intense accessibility of information and imagination on the internet. The appearance of the nonsensical jokes Kasael describes seems to imply frivolity and immaturity, but it's clear that there are users who participate while abstracting their own nonsensical actions into new logics that reflect their dissatisfied realities.

To be clear, the explicit connection of Tumblr's communicative codes with neo-Dadaism is a rare occurrence on Tumblr itself. Generally, those who participate in and generate the inclusively nonsensical culture I'm describing do so organically, without awareness of the proposed cultural precedent. In fact, the organic quality of these practices is what draws me specifically to the analytical framework of Haraway's cyborg,

since it illustrates the merging of the natural and the technological to produce neo-Dada fluent cyborgs that likely don't even recognize the Dadaist characteristics of their language. This illegitimate offspring, which sees its fathers as inessential, is able to manifest the inheritances of Dada through technological expression without necessarily sharing any of its larger goals about art and the artistic community. The offspring is simply subconsciously, organically primed to see legitimacy in what has traditionally been rendered illegitimate. In "The Joy of Anti-Art: Subversion through Humour in Dada," Oliver Speck argues that among the techniques employed during the original Dada movement, "collage and pastiche (e.g. Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield, Hannah Höch), performance (Hugo Ball), assemblage (Kurt Schwitters), nonsensical or pseudo-metaphysical titles (George Grosz, Max Ernst)" there included genuine subversion of "prevalent ideology" and even attempts to "subvert the gendered body" (371). This precedent is promising for my interest in placing non-binary generation within this neo-Dada culture, but Speck's analysis of other artistic movements illustrates some important limitations when characterising Dadaism. Specifically, he describes the self-destructive and self-mutilating work of David Nebreda as "post-dada" rather than a contribution to Dadaism as it stood when it was most popular. In contrast to Dada positing art as "hovering between discourse and the embodiment of an object, Nebreda's art insists on the embodiment in the artist himself" (374). For Dada, "the work of art has been done away with," and with it the prestige of the artist who creates it (374). The nonsensical posts on Tumblr are not posited as art and the posters are not posited as artists. But even as the posts come to represent the fulfillment of Dada's supposed "anti-art" aims there is nevertheless a deep intersubjectivity of content consumption that informs embodied relationships, moving the culture away from the movement again.

This oppositionality illustrates the need to recognize how the description of Tumblr's cultural codes as "neo-dada" is provisional; it's a means to legitimize the subversive potential motivated by a similar disillusionment with mass culture without having to subscribe to a unified code of meaning that would undermine the entire point of comparison. Speck uses a 1921 essay by Roman Jakobson to emphasize that because, as Jakobson argues, Dada "'relativizes itself historically'," "such a relativized movement can not only not have a centre, but must also necessarily be without firm identity" (376). This would be a very difficult to emulate as an artist standing behind works of art, but can easily and organically manifest in a medium that amplifies the conflicting perspectives of many people around the world. This is particularly evident in how non-binary communities easily adopt a definitive framework that shifts depending on the context of the person doing the defining. Much of Speck's work in his article is meant to demonstrate what is lost in modern manifestations of Dada (which he reclassifies as post- or anti- depending on the work), and cautions against raising "the spectre of the artwork that will not leave us" by giving into the temptation to playfully "reify or deify it once again" as the art movement "returns in major exhibitions" of galleries and the like (379). While the frustrated and nonsensical patterns of Tumblr's "lingua franca" differ from the original Dada movement in many ways, I believe the fact that these codes manifest regardless of how the creators identify with Dadaism is in part what legitimizes the elements as Dada in the first place. There is no reifying or deifying here, but rather the organic and technological expression of Dada-descended cyborgs who casually break down binaries to write new, more reflective narratives. The technology that these cyborgs merge with is not only represented by the devices available in their own time; they also organically manifest the technological and material innovations of Dada artists in order to

better express and legitimize their subjective experiences, including non-binary gender identities.

In Matthew Biro's *The Dada Cyborg*, he examines the Berlin Dada movement specifically "through the concept of the cyborg" (historically situated from figures such as mathematician Norbert Wiener and Donna Haraway) to bring greater prominence to some of the movement's features that have been "downplayed or ignored" (255). He explains that "specifically, the cyborg has helped reveal the constructive side of Dadaism in Berlin," which used art to criticize "traditional types of German subjects" and "imagine and explore new forms of hybrid identity" (255). In his understanding, this hybrid identity is "better suited to cope with the novel conflicts and possibilities inherent in postwar modern life during the Weimar Republic" (255). This emphasis on Dada's constructive potential is particularly relevant to my arguments here. Just as Kasael theorizes, Tumblr's neo-Dadaism blossoms from and helps construct the modern hybrid identities that are better suited to cope with the novel conflicts and possibilities inherent in our current context. The characteristics that make Dada read as "anti-art" and illogical are not meant to be solely destructive, but also open up unexpected narrative pathways for new ways of being. In *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein*, Alex Goody describes the work of Juliette Roche among others. He explains that she "poses herself as an observer of, as well as participant in, New York Dada, challenging traditional gender roles and manufacturing a cyborg identity," which explicitly connects even the Dada movement in New York with the opportunity to use cyborgian qualities and identities to rupture traditional gender narratives (115). Tumblr arises in a cultural context where sexual and gender education can be outsourced to the personal Tumblr blogs of those who live outside normative parameters or specific

resource bogs that have a far greater comprehensive knowledge of sexuality and gender than traditional venues. It can also be outsourced to blogs or areas on the internet full of misinformation, but the accessibility of counter-narratives to heteronormativity found in such spaces of relative anonymity make it easier for non-binary friendly neo-Dada codes to be integrated into the medium itself.

In *The Dada Cyborg*, Biro explains that myths about Dadaism that claim its sole purpose was to criticize or destroy, that it was "anti-art" merely to "inspire institutional critique," or that it was "exclusively focused on the trauma of World War 1" obscure "the movement's primary contribution" (255). Although these features are only myths in as far as they are seen as the definitive features of Dadaism, for Biro the primary contribution he seeks to emphasize is "its interest in creating new forms of non-traditional identity through cultural production" (255). Non-binary identities are non-traditional in the sense that they disrupt very entrenched views of gender as static polarities, and the cultural production that Tumblr facilitates through its neo-Dadaist tendencies (along with other resources) allows such identities to flourish. For Biro this view of Dadaism is made apparent by reading it through the hybridity of the cyborg, the constructive possibilities of deconstructive cultural production. Biro emphasizes that a focus shifted towards the cyborg also "helped bring out how the Berlin Dadaists contributed to the development of a new form of spectator for modern art" (255). This spectator was "engaged and highly self-conscious about the interrelationships between making, viewing, and interpreting" (255). This breakdown between the creator and the interpreter/spectator was an expression of the Berlin Dadaists' hope that they could "transform the way art was perceived, break down the division between art and life, and inspire new modes of being and acting in the world" (256). Specifically, this spectator was anticipated to be

"sensitized to how new modes of technological perception were changing its experience of the world" so that their sensory perception was "transformed through different forms of technological prosthesis" (256-7). This will become relevant again in the fourth chapter of this thesis, as the relationship between the body and its extension into social media are more deeply discussed in a non-binary context. Biro is well aware of how relevant these features of Berlin Dadaism become when applied to the current social and cultural context that creates such social spaces as Tumblr, and wants to make clear that "Berlin Dadaists anticipated this trajectory of cultural activity" and how they stand "as precursors to much of the identity politics prominent in contemporary art" (257). He believes that attention to Dada's interest in hybridity and technology, new forms of identity through cultural production, and reimagining the spectator's role in artistic production offers a lens to better see how these features continue today.

For Biro, just because "the Berlin Dada artists anticipated" the prominence these features would come to have in society, it in "no way diminishes the radicalism and importance of contemporary production" (258). Rather, "it simply shows that the strategies of representation that emerged in Berlin Dada art have yet to reveal their full potential" (258). I believe that these strategies of representation are actively working today, and on Tumblr they can allow non-binary subjectivities to develop alongside casual communication and self-expression. The extension of the self into technological and virtual spaces allows for a hybridity, a permanent partiality, that doesn't feel bound to the sex category coercively assigned to the user's body. This unbounding creates new forms of identity, non-binary forms, which are reproduced through oppositional narratives that deliver agency to their recipients rather than mandatory conformity. For this to happen as smoothly as it does the relationship between creator and spectator is

compromised, as on Tumblr a performance of one's reaction can overtake the influence of the original content creation. On a site known for "reblogging," users see images and text and content not as individual cultural productions by individual artists, but as intelligible moments of feelings and aesthetics between multiple subjectivities, one minute resonating enough to reblog on their own site and the other lost among the thousands and thousands of other posts that pop up immediately after the content is appropriately sorted. The memetic characteristics of Tumblr are a particularly visible expression of this collapse of spectator and artist. Oliver Speck describes the Dada techniques of using "ready-mades" as well as "waste, devalued items, and cut-outs" to expose "the process of creation" (374, 377). Viral memes, which could be seen as a kind of "ready-made" devalued expressive format, become widely circulated for a similar reason. They are often based on something recognizable, something unexpected, and something relatably mundane that all coalesce into an artistic package that is easily accessible and easy to edit and reproduce. The editing is usually made intentionally obvious (sometimes the image is intentionally over-edited or over-processed so as to be humorously incomprehensible), and it is expected that many spectators will pick up the meme themselves and distribute it either as a faux-creator or create/edit their own version of it, focusing in on a detail that hasn't been expressed yet.

Internet memes have varying levels of staying power, but typically they rise and fall pretty quickly until a new version gains popularity again. A late 2015 meme, typical of the genre, is represented by a crudely drawn image of two dogs wearing blue pants (appearing to be the same dog), with a caption asking how a dog would wear pants if it

wore them (one dog has pants horizontally covering all four limbs and the other has pants only on the hind legs)[11]. Memes like this are supposed to be cute, funny, and temporary, allowing users to weigh in inconsequentially on the idea of how cute animals would wear clothing. Such a meme gets shared across multiple social media platforms because it has safe, mass appeal, and is just divisive enough to encourage users to share the image in order to receive validation for whatever opinion they happen to agree with. I would say this image had at the most a period of a few weeks (but probably more like a few days) where you could expect to see it shared, and then it died down. In its place, however, altered versions of the original meme sprang up, taking advantage of the temporal gap to express larger frustrations in a neo-Dada framework (for example replacing the dogs with images of police and asking how a pig might wear pants instead). As might be expected, this is often most visible on Tumblr, where the medium is set up to quickly mobilize recognizable images and is prepped for nonsensical iterations of niche interests. One particular example of how this meme was transformed into a version of itself that is hospitable to non-binary development was created by "trustmeimanengiqueer." In this version, the question is changed to "If a dog wore facts would he wear them like this or like this?" (trustmeimanengiqueer). The word "facts" is digitally pasted over the original "pants" and is intentionally dissonant to the rest of the text in terms of font and size in order to highlight the constructed quality. The dogs in this image have large boxes on their limbs instead of pants, with the first box (replacing the horizontal all-limb pants) reading "gender is an illusion" and the second box (replacing the vertical two-limb pants)

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[11] See knowyourmeme.com/memes/how-should-a-dog-wear-pants for an example of this image as well as an account of its origin (Don).

reading "corporations exploit our insecurities for profit" (trustmeimanengiqueer). This post has been deleted from "trustmeimanengiqueer's" blog (likely because it got too popular and inundated the poster with notifications as it circulated), but is preserved through numerous reblogs, culminating in a current 130,763 notes. Recalling what Tumblr user Kasael says about this particular generation's disidentification with major institutional structures, such an evolution of this meme seems to directly represent some of the neo-Dadaist tendencies they identify in Tumblr meme culture. The meme takes a recognizable and "safe" image and messily transforms it into a platform for dissatisfaction. The style of visible editing and the connection between gender and corporate exploitation make the image seem over the top, illogical to many, and ironically radical given the context. The contradictory elements here make the meme a prime example of Tumblr's neo-Dadaist tendencies, and these tendencies operate favourably to non-binary understandings of gender, recognizing that binary gender enforcements have vested interest from large corporations (the outcome of which I will discuss further in the third chapter of this thesis). The oppositional tone this form of the meme takes then (as a concentration of cyborg characteristics) is one that is oppositional to oppressive binary gender norms, opening up neo-Dadaist Tumblr to be able to legitimize non-binary gender expression.

Tumblr user "queenwhiskey"[12] posted a specifically non-binary neo-Dada post on March 2, 2016. Although not as popular as many similar memes, it has nevertheless accumulated 8,879 notes, and illustrates the catharsis of neo-Dada expression by non-

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[12] Although this user's blog does state they are a "pansexual lesbian," their gender identity and pronouns are not specifically described, so I will use "they/them" pronouns provisionally.

binary cyborgs in cyborg spaces. The post is an image of a presumably cisgender white man wearing a black t-shirt. Text on the shirt reads "Please state your gender" and is followed by three checkable options: "MALE" (with the astrologically derived "female sex" symbol beside it), "FEMALE" (with the astrologically derived "male sex" symbol beside it) and "GAMER" (which has a symbol that evokes the astrological sign system while representing a computer networked input/output system). The box beside the latter is checked on the shirt, and the caption "queenwhiskey" has added to the image (preparing it for circulation among non-binary friendly spaces), reads "this is the nonbinary representation we deserve" (queenwhiskey). The user writes in lowercase letters and uses a lack of punctuation to intensify the juxtaposition of casual linguistic cues to the gravity of deficient media representation. The entire statement echoes what Tumblr user Kasael claims about neo-Dadaism on Tumblr, that the punchline of the joke is an abrupt disruption of expectation. The mismatched symbols for binary sexes contribute to the overall illogical tenor of the shirt's message.

Searching Google for "'male female gamer shirt" doesn't seem to bring up this exact shirt, but there are a number of shirts with a very similar construction, except the sex designations are "correct" in these cases. My point here is that it is likely at some point that either "queenwhiskey" or another Tumblr user edited the image of this mass-produced shirt to show this discrepancy, undermining the original joke to actually reflect a more non-binary understanding of gender through seemingly nonsensical choices. The ironic claim that designations of "gamer" over male or female are what non-binary people "deserve" is meant to reflect the deep dissatisfaction non-binary people and allies actually have with their representation. Another Tumblr post by "roy-rnustang" (a now deleted blog with posts preserved through reblogs) has 24,930 notes and simply reads "yeah

that's cool but *non-binary gender options in video games*" (roy-rnustang). The popularity

of such a post and its abrupt segue into a conversation one hasn't anticipated illustrates

the contention non-binary users have with video games and their overwhelming

representation of only binary genders. This contention, that games and their communities

at best misrecognize non-binary gender possibilities as accessible to them as nevertheless

cisgender people, only emphasizes the irony "queenwhiskey" employs to express their

actual frustration with the lack of non-binary representation. This frustration, instead of

being expressed through strictly aggressive terms, is instead funneled through neo-

Dadaist codes of communication. Such codes ultimately contribute to building a cyborg-

friendly online space that rewrites phallogocentric narratives of gender into accessibly

illogical ironies.

Elspeth Reeve describes Tumblr's meme-producing teens as "self-deprecating and

anti-aspirational," (which doesn't account for the aspirational content of marginalized

communities) and suggests that "being a social outcast can make you a better social

observer of the gap between our real selves and our public image" (Reeve). On Tumblr, a

focus on this gap and an intuitive awareness of how to navigate it recalls Haraway's

claims that her cyborg is no longer structured by a polarity of public and private (105).

The public and the private are not eradicated entirely as concepts, but they are no longer

defined through pure oppositionality to one another. The anonymity and linguistic agency

Tumblr offers provides a sphere of social development for teens that mash up and

contradict expectations for how public and private operate. In the fourth chapter of this

thesis, I will delve more into how our subjectivity extends our body image into new

technological possibilities, expanding the corporeal possibilities of body image

development. Tumblr is a place where users can use the relative privacy of the medium

and its available anonymity (and freedom to present oneself however one chooses) to express vulnerability publicly. The permanent partiality of having multiple Tumblrs or multiple versions of oneself across different social mediums, with different levels of vulnerability and authenticity of self-presentation, restructures the public and private. A 2013 online article (written for *TechCrunch*) by Adam Rifkin called "Tumblr Is Not What You Think" mentions this explicitly in its response to surveys that indicate Tumblr is used by young people more than other social media platforms (Rifkin). Rifkin claims Tumblr became "huge because it is the anti-blog," which certainly helps illustrate its position as a producer of neo-Dadaism (since Dadaism is so often positioned as "anti-art") (Rifkin). His reasoning is that most blogging platforms are driven by a need to acquire a niche audience that can propel one into internet fame and recognition. Tumblr users, on the other hand, "don't actually WANT an audience" except for "a few close friends who they explicitly share one of their tumblogs with" (Rifkin). Oliver Speck, in "The Joy of Anti-Art", explains that the subversive strategies employed by Dada included a "constant play of closeness and ironic distancing in their performances" (376). He also reflects on the subversive validity of Dada's "refusal to build any community, even one that is only defined by opposition," which is "directed against the romantic ideal of a community bound by a shared aesthetic experience" (378). The neo-Dada spaces of Tumbr *are* bound by a shared aesthetic experience when they distribute and circulate memes, but this binding is ironic, as the strongest bonds of community are often based around material conditions of inequality and exploitation.

Tumblr's neo-Dada cyborgs, including non-binary users, are not unified by directionless opposition, they oscillate between expressions of closeness and distance according to the proximity of oppression. The most insular neo-Dada content is created

with the intention of close-knit catharsis for those who are primed to understand the language, but users also use Tumblr to boost awareness and participation for important social justice causes. Nevertheless, gaining exposure outside of their communities can absolutely be unwanted, especially when those communities are marginalized and even face dangerous consequences for being "outed" (for queer and trans users, for example). Rifkin describes how Tumblr as a media platform offers "security through obscurity and multiple pseudonymity," which is contrasted with Facebook's "sophisticated fine-grained privacy control," which Tumblr users reject (Rifkin). Specifically, he claims that with Tumblr "the issue is less about public vs. private and more about whether you are findable and identifiable by people who actually know you in real life" (Rifkin). For Tumblr users who use the medium to explore non-binary forms of gender, this works well to provide a space that protects them from the oppression they face when they become public with their gender identity.

To connect this discussion back to Dadaism, Amelia Jones writes in her essay "'Women' in Dada: Elsa, Rose, and Charlie" on how the collapse of public and private during Dada's rise also created space for gender to be similarly collapsed and recreated. She explains that because "women were the primary consumers in an expanding market economy during World War I," "female bodies became the purveyors of commercial value in increasingly ubiquitous print advertisements" (146). This resulted in "male artists" and "popular culture" in general articulating "broad anxieties about the collapse of individualism and the corresponding threat to masculinity" in relation to the "gender-ambiguous figure of the 'New Woman' or *garçonne* (girl/boy)" (146). Jones claims this "marked the collapse of the boundaries between male and female—and those separating the 'separate spheres that kept 'proper' women out of the public arena in nineteenth

century Europe'" (146). The artists of the New York Dada movement, such as "Picabia and Man Ray," "articulated their antagonism toward bourgeois culture largely in terms of mechanical tropes that encoded the anxieties of this threatened masculinity in relation to American industrial capitalism" (146). So here we can see a social and cultural precedent in which the collapsing of public and private spheres resulted in new articulations of gender. Dadaism provided a space to use mechanical or technological tropes in order to expose reactionary responses to increased gender freedoms as reinforced by institutional, capitalist interests. It makes sense that in social media spaces like Tumblr, in which users fluently move between closeness and ironic distancing, neo-Dada codes of communication emerge as the most effective means to express dissatisfaction with institutionalized capitalism and the binary sex and gender system it relies on. The anxieties of a rigidly binary society towards increased representations of trans and non-binary people are contextualized with illogical catharsis and the development of anti-phallogocentric means of communication.

Even though non-binary people still encounter transphobia (in general and specifically targeting non-binary genders) on Tumblr, affirmative posts for non-binary people who must keep their gender hidden in "real life" are nevertheless common. A lot of young people on Tumblr use the medium to express their non-binary gender, and they often use Tumblr as their legitimizing outlet due to the fact that they have to remain closeted while living with transphobic parents, guardians, or school systems. An example of such a post is one by "crushingthebinary," which reads "Shoutout to all the closeted nonbinary people who deal with constant misgendering and gendered language and can't do anything about it without outing themselves. You'll get through this" (crushingthebinary). This post has accumulated 44,265 notes, and although it doesn't

represent Tumblr's neo-Dadaist tendencies, it does help illustrate how the public social media platform Tumblr becomes a space for aspects of the self that must be kept "private" for reasons of safety and security. Therefore, Tumblr users in the spaces that represent non-binary possibilities aren't structured by a polarity of public and private. Instead, they build their subjectivity through a mixing of the two in order to rewrite and reblog personal narratives outside of the confines of phallogocentric and oppressively transphobic traditions.

Part of Tumblr's affirmative tendency extends to all different kinds of fringe communities, some of which have non-binary users finding new ways to explore their neo-Dada enabled linguistic freedom and agency. Although so far I've only mentioned "they/them" pronouns as those that read explicitly non-binary, I want to briefly draw attention to "neopronouns" to provide an example of how the cyborgian creative potential can manifest in non-binary linguistic codes. Neopronouns usually refer to pronouns that are not commonly recognized or legitimized and are either reclaimed from archaic uses or completely invented. The resource Tumblr "askanonbinary.tumblr.com" has a page set up in which the moderators have compiled "Every Pronoun Set of Which We Are Aware" (askanonbinary). This list is further divided into the following categories (each with their own subcategories): "General," "Non-English," "Animal," "Nature," "Creature," "Royal," "Misc/Vaguely Grouped," and then includes "Pronoun Credits" (askanonbinary). A common "animal" example, taken from the word "bunny," would suggest the pronouns "bun/buns/bunself" (askanonbinary). The possibilities seem endless when it comes to neopronouns, and intense debates arise in which both cisgender and transgender people speak disparagingly of the choice to adopt such pronouns. Some users that create or adopt such neopronouns can also describe themselves as "otherkin," which

refers to individuals who see themselves as identifying to varying degrees with non-human subjectivities (such as animals, mythical creatures, androids, etc). I mention this to clarify that I do not see these identifications as equivalent to the realities of transgender identification, as lenses of gender come only from human perceptions. While otherkin can be completely harmless and not participate in any of the following, I think their claim becomes fraught when they appropriate mutated concepts of Native "spirit animals," when they see themselves as exempt from contributing socially along codes of human morality, or when they claim oppression along the same axes as sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and others (rather than a more generalized derision from capitalism's demand for assimilation into normative "productivity"). Nevertheless, the neopronouns that they often pioneer help illustrate the self-constructing linguistic agency available to explore on Tumblr. While otherkin can be a representation of Haraway's cyborg hybridity, it is the growing accommodation to neopronouns and pushback and rejection of the larger Tumblr community (and those outside it) that draw attention to their radical linguistic experimentation, of a kind that favours non-binary self narratives.

Of course, Tumblr users who use neopronouns (otherkin or not) are certainly not the majority of its users, but it's difficult to tell the prominence of various demographics when so many users have different Tumblrs for their different selves. The agency the cyborg demands allows uncountable narratives to be written. Nevertheless, the cultural assemblages visible on Tumblr show more generally the newly emerging nonsensical translations of legitimate dissatisfaction. The characteristics of this culture allow users to rewrite and reblog new gender narratives, embracing the chaotic and seemingly nonsensical contradictions. It's easy to see this in the most criticized or most casual expressions of non-binaryness in these spaces, but as the J. Walter Thompson Innovation

group study suggests, even young, popular cisgender users find new comfort with less strict gender expectations. In her article about the "secret lives of Tumblr teens," Reeve interviews Zach Lilley and Jeremy Greenfield, whom she describes as having grown up "with the internet as a toy" (Reeve). The two launched their ad-adorned Tumblr "So-Relatable" in "late February 2012" and made increasingly large amounts of money off of the page views (Reeve). Reeve claims the quality of relatability their URL refers to "has a slightly different meaning on the teen internet than in the adult world," and is "about revealing vulnerabilities" (Reeve). I think a connection could easily be made here to the cultural context Tumblr user Kasael describes as neo-Dadaism, specifically as its function to express dissatisfaction outside of normative expressive venues. Reeve cites Tumblr's head of culture and trends own assertion that Tumblr is a public medium for seemingly private expressions, and goes on to describe how Lilley and Greenfield have used one-liners and GIFs to hit on a formula that contributes to and replicates this trend (eventually reaching "more than 450,000 followers" and "growing other blogs") (Reeve). When Reeve asks Greenfield how he is able to produce content that resonates with so many people, he attributes it to "internet research," writing about phenomena he was familiar with and saw often enough to recognize as profitable (Reeve).

This is why Tumblr's head of culture and trends calls the successful teens "'so, so advanced'" in their "business savvy" and "'the most brilliant digital strategists','" "better marketers than anyone in the game right now" (Reeve). In the third chapter of this thesis I will analyze how capitalism becomes intertwined with these social spaces and how the strategic mobilization of relatability allows (constrained) movement within social economies. For now, I mean to contextualize why Lilley and Greenfield are driven and able to market themselves and their content so broadly. Reeve claims that "as of last fall"

(2015) and according to "the Pew Research Center," while "10 percent of internet users use Tumblr," "23 percent of teen girls" opposed to "5 percent of teen boys" help make up that amount (Reeve). I couldn't find the methodology this study used, but I assume that their binary gender classification misses out on significant non-binary presences. Nevertheless, Reeve uses this perceived audience of girls to explain why, after noticing "65 percent of the So-Relatable readership was female," Greenfield began writing many posts "from a girl's point of view, posts he didn't relate to" (Reeve). Reeve says he gets flustered when pushed for specifics, but he and Lilley provide "period posts" as an example, such as someone "asking a friend to check her pants in the bathroom" (Reeve). While this understanding doesn't recognize that not all women have periods, and that there are non-women who do have them, it is nevertheless revealing about the social space itself. Because Lilley and Greenfield see the profitability of expressing themselves in a fluid or non-singularly binary fashion, they show that, even through a lens privileged by a patriarchal gender binary, the space itself lends itself towards new narratives of gender. A traditionally binary feminine menstrual experience has a quality of relatability that surpasses binary categorization. Although hesitant to align themselves outside of their privileged gendered position, Lilley and Greenfield mobilize marginalized gendered narratives without fear of losing portions of their audience that wouldn't traditionally "relate." This demographic awareness, while inaccurate in its binary application, also illustrates that Tumblr is notable in that it is not dominated by cis-male patriarchal perspectives, opening up the potential to represent and share marginalized gendered experiences, including those that are non-binary.

   To reach towards liberation, Donna Haraway's cyborg must incorporate into its consciousness an imaginative grasp of anti-phallogocentric possibilities. The

representational content of the online media new cyborgs consume has the potential to inflame the imagination in this way. People who grow up with social media and the online spaces that naturalize oppositionally utopian and destructive codes of communication are given the means to embody Haraway's figure of the cyborg, an intersubjective phenomenon (as Matthew Biro describes) made all the more possible through massive online resources of information. The polarity of public and private has been completely transformed, creating subjectivities that move in permanent partialities. As cyborgs, online participants can simultaneously inherit from and reject the interests of their progenitors, and this can be seen in the non-binary cyborgs that flourish in online spaces such as Tumblr. These non-binary cyborgs use the resources of their technological apparatus to reject the interests of social and cultural institutions that benefit from oppressive binary gender systems. They can use both irony and intimacy simultaneously, and so the linguistic agency available to them in spaces such as Tumblr can be unprecedentedly generative. The new forms of myth-making that become possible, misread as worthless and completely nonsensical by those that aren't fluent in the appropriate disillusioned languages, can be legitimized when compared to neo-Dadaism.

Just as Dadaism challenged the phallogocentrism of the artistic institutions of its time, this neo-Dadaism challenges the phallogocentrism of contemporary communicative codes and subjectivity formation. And yet, as cyborgs that are not beholden to the aims of their ancestors, this manifestation of neo-Dada tendencies happens organically, without a unified goal. This accessibility empowers non-binary individuals to reject the non-consensually applied binary sex and gender categories in order to embrace the nonsensical and fluid expressions that see legitimacy in the illegitimate. If these online spaces present a multiplicity that indicates there is no one dominant, singular way to

define or express anything, "non-binary" as a category inherits this mutability, allowing

individual non-binary myths to be legitimized in new ways. My goal in this chapter was

to focus on how the cyborgian, neo-Dada spaces legitimize and generate the potential for

non-binary development. I have discussed how existential "nonsense joke" posts, ironic

posts, "shitposts," and posts that intentionally highlight their intersubjective constructed

nature can create a space for the acceptance and expression of non-binary subjectivity. I

am eager, however, to see further theorization on how meme culture in spaces such as

Tumblr express different aspects of neo-Dadaism. I did not touch on the online, ironic

evolution of montage, or the development of glitch art and intentional low poly computer

renderings (often associated with vaporwave) or the re-mixing of lo-res obsolete

technologies (usually broken down to short bursts for comedic effect). All of these

aforementioned techniques of contemporary neo-Dadaism express a cathartic

senselessness in a time where supposedly rational institutional pillars of society are

senseless and harmful in their application. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will

examine how cultural capitalism has come to shape these irrational rationalities more

closely.

Chapter 3: Non-Binary Navigation of Capitalist Mass Culture

I have previously established a precedence in trans theory for interrogating the contradictions that arise when arguing for liberatory potential from within capitalist social terrains using technological innovations provided by capitalist structures. Maintaining a strict gender binary is profitable for capitalist societies: the subordination of one gender by another allows for exploitable vulnerabilities and the implementation of false rationalities[13]. If I want to illuminate the generative possibilities of online non-binary experiences and representation, it is necessary to engage in some interrogations of my own. Social media platforms are usually owned by conglomerate corporate entities, who see the communities (non-binary users among them) that mobilize around certain social media spaces as an untapped market (and so seek opportunities for profit through the integration of advertisements into the platform, for example). Tumblr, the social media site I have argued is most friendly to non-binary representation, was purchased by Yahoo in 2013 for $1.1 billion with "the goodwill portion of the deal" equalling "roughly $750 million" (Kim). In February of 2016 Yahoo admitted this goodwill portion would become impaired, implying that Tumblr never reached the profitable potential that instigated the original purchase, though not for lack of trying by the company (like the decision to merge the ad sales teams of Tumblr and Yahoo, which is now being reversed) (Kim).

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[13] For example, in Joan Acker's article "Gender, Capitalism, and Globalization," she explains that "as European and then American capital established dominance through colonization, empire, and today's globalization, one of the cultural/structural forms embedded in that dominance has been the identification of the male/masculine with production in the money economy and the identification of the female/feminine with reproduction and the domestic" (24). Although this did not and does not reflect the reality of distribution, Acker claims "the rules and expectations of ordinary capitalist workplaces are built on hidden assumptions about a separation of production and reproduction" (24). This influences the "gendered organization of social life" that reproduces "different and unequal lives of women and men" as well as "images and ideologies [like a strict, subordinated gender binary] that support difference and inequality" (24).

This indicates how platforms like Tumblr can be unpredictable commodities: they and the users that populate them attract corporate interest, but can rarely be cleanly fit into established narratives of profitability (especially as I have indicated in the second chapter of this thesis that Tumblr in particular is the realm of the weird). Nevertheless, since it is clear that non-binary online communities do not exist in a capitalism-free vacuum, it becomes necessary to frame the cultural and social context that may limit the reach and potential of these communities and their participants. I believe some relevant frameworks described by Mary Poovey, Herbert Marcuse, Pierre Bourdieu, and Beverley Skeggs can be integrated to illustrate the mass, one-dimensional capitalist culture that demarcates the movements and mobilizations possible for non-binary communities and individuals across equally capitalist online social terrains.

Mary Poovey defines the term "mass culture" in her book *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864*, and this book is particularly helpful when analyzing how non-binary bodies inherit a legacy of simultaneously aggregated and disaggregated cultural formation. In her first chapter Poovey explains that she uses "the dynamics of British cultural formation" to illustrate her larger analytical framework, one that sees cultural "*formation* as an active concept—the process of forming" rather than a noun "of stasis or realization," since "we can see that culture is never fully formed, never achieved as a unified, homogenous whole" (1). This helps explain how a platform like Tumblr can be unpredictably both liberatory *and* suppressive, since it is an ultimately unfixable cultural space that allows for moments of non-binary intelligibility (or intentional unintelligibility) to surface alongside moments of gender oppression. Recognizing that culture is never a unified whole sees legitimacy in cultural movement, even as that movement is constrained by the inheritance of hegemonic cultural

precedents. While I've provided some means to understand non-binary communities and their local epistemological trends on Tumblr, attention to the more global cultural terrain is needed to better assess the radical potential these trends hold. Turning to Poovey to understand the modern processes of cultural formation allows us to avoid conceiving both a capitalist culture of consumption and non-binary experiences as fixed, static entities, focusing in part on the distribution of epistemological power.

For Poovey, the groundwork laid for the eventual dominance of "'mass' culture" can be traced to "early nineteenth century Britain," particularly the institutionalization of population aggregation and disaggregation (2). She explains that as we know it, however,

> In its late twentieth-century form, mass culture appears as an aggregate of individuals and a series of domains that seem more alike than different: individuals seem alike because they are all apparently animated by the same desire, the desire to consume products that take the form of commodities; domains, such as the aesthetic or the theological, seem alike because they all resemble the economic domain of commodity production (3).

For my analysis of non-binary online platforms, particularly those that are provided by conglomerate corporate interests, these features of mass culture need to be addressed. Poovey clarifies that by using "domains" she means to emphasize "the transformations that occur when land becomes property" in order to draw connections to "similar transformations" in an "epistemological field" (5). She means to make tangible how these transformations obscure what were previously perceived as "an undifferentiated continuum of practices and ideas," and reframe them as "new and more specialized conceptual - or imaginary - entities" (5). The transformations occur "in the register of representation," and "in the register of materiality," which she explains only appear

separate from one another as an effect of the historical precedent she is attempting to describe (5). The representations that appear the most material reflect a monoglossic rather than heteroglossic view of gender in order to subordinate gendered experiences into a mass culture of consumption. This is a framework proposed by Becky Francis, who applies Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of monoglossia and heteroglossia[14] to gender categorisation. It allows recognition of both "the impact of the material and the discursive in gender construction" and "the active work undertaken by the dominant, traditional accounts of gender to author themselves as 'real' and total" as well as providing the means to identify "the contradictions and diversity within these productions" (1). Here, this framework allows us to recognize how mass culture structures monoglossic forms of gender (in an unequal binary system) through a dominance of representation and the resulting material conditions. But there are nevertheless lived, contradictory realities that make up heteroglossic expressions of gender, such as non-binary gender experiences, and they must exist and seek ways to thrive within the mass culture that attempts to deny and delegitimize them.

As was made clear in Elspeth Reeve's account of Tumblr's and other social media platforms' possible profitability and intuitive marketing techniques employed by savvy teens, the internet comes to resemble an economic domain of commodity production in many ways. These venues are made possible by corporate advertisers that constantly try to grab users' attention, users who are incentivized to incorporate ads into various

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[14] For Bakhtin, as Francis explains, "language is never neutral," which is denied by the macro-appearance of stable, monoglossic linguistic forms, "dominant forms of language, representing the world-view/interests of dominant social groups, which are positioned or imposed as unitary and total" (3-4). In reality, as language is "diverse and inherently dialogic," on a micro-linguistic level "there is plasticity, contradiction and resistance: heteroglossia" (4).

personal social media platforms to be financially compensated. Making money from your

blog presence is certainly appealing, especially to marginalized groups, including non-

binary users who find themselves in need and without support (and more analysis must be

done on the crowdfunding methods those in need often turn to). I will discuss further how

such opportunities can be read across a social economy, but for now they are a reminder

of the expansion and application of the economic domain of commodity production. The

internet itself is mainly provided by corporations that charge for usage; using open

networks or piggybacking off other users is framed as an unsecure practice or theft even

as experimentation with universal free Wi-Fi is conducted around the world. The

materials for the devices that connect to the internet and make it useable are harvested by

a stranglehold of conglomerate corporations that extend a global and oppressive reach[15].

As of August, 2016 the information technology media platform *InfoWorld* reports that

major internet providers "T-Mobile" and "Sprint" have internet packages that undercut

net neutrality (the principle and ethical imperative that Internet providers must stay

neutral about internet content and not provide incentives or disincentives to particular

content or products) (Craig). The report states that the FCC has "taken a glacial pace in

reviewing" offerings from mobile and internet carriers that claim to offer "unlimited" data

plans without disclosing hidden caps that reduce the speed of the internet and quality of

streamed videos when reached (Craig). Users have to pay more to get around these caps,

and certain participating streaming sites (such as Netflix or Hulu, which charge for use)

don't count towards the data caps, clearly violating net neutrality principles (Craig). This

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[15] See an article written by Lucy Siegle for *The Guardian* titled "Is there an ethical laptop?" for a brief rundown of some of the global harm inflicted by these corporations in the process of providing various branded electronics for consumers (Siegle).

is just one recent example of how internet providers privilege capitalist-based economic domains over more ethical distribution, shaping the internet space itself to reflect mass commodification.

Branding of both devices and social media platforms are implicitly described as vital to an internet experience, connecting both the domain and the individual to a process of commodification as well. This is clear in how Tumblr and its relative anonymity is framed as such an anomaly, and a contradictory one. For the most part "success" on the internet functions around recognisability and quantifiable attention, seen even on Tumblr with the profitable "relatable" blogs or even "Pizza's" blog herself (Reeve). Poovey describes how she inherits work by Adorno and Horkheimer that characterizes mass culture as "organized by a 'culture industry,' a series of institutions that discipline desire and subordinate difference to homogeneity through technologies that reach (nearly) everyone" (3). This subordination of difference to homogeneity is primarily how I mean to understand the constraints facing non-binary online communities. Is it possible to read the liberatory potential of these online spaces as widely transformative or radical if they are primarily constituted in a domain that encourages and profits from an invisibly-rendered process of homogenization?

Poovey claims that mass culture's homogenization process operates through "a series of repetitions," by creating "individuals who assert their 'individuality' by consuming products that are ever more precisely differentiated yet always already the same" and "domains that mirror each other even as their practitioners proclaim the esoterica of specialization" (4). A skeptical view of non-binary alterity could argue that individuals are just asserting their "individuality" by consuming different gendered products (such as clothing, make up, purchasable body modifiers, etc.) than those that

align with the gender they had been coercively assigned at birth, proclaiming

specialization that ultimately fails to differentiate them from their constituting domains.

This may certainly be true at some points for some of these individuals, but it does not

account for the entirety of the non-binary online experience. Consider the codes of

communication that flourish in these spaces, the anti-phallogocentric narratives and neo-

dada myth-making agency that many users come to articulate. There are no products that

non-binary people can buy that will make them socially and culturally visible as

"legitimate" non-binary individuals, and this is part of the reason why they gravitate to

"nonsensical" means of expression and representation. In addition, the domains and

institutions that might provide such a product have a vested interest in maintaining their

invisibility and misrecognizing them (appearing as though one does not conform to the

gender they have been assigned at birth does not mean that they will actually be

symbolically or institutionally legitimated as other than this gender). This interest is to

profit off of the manufactured compulsion to consume that is spread to temporarily

relieve the anxiety people feel from toxic and impossibly narrow binary gender

constraints. They are left to find an "individuality" in gender expression that ultimately

merely re-inscribes gender roles to perpetuate the cycle of consumption.

　　　　If any individual is forced to rely solely on gendered purchases to feel comfortable

in their gender expression, their "individual" gender identity is at the whims of the

domains and institutions that want it to stay narrow and controllable. This is so they can

treat gender as a commodity and individuals as though their gender identities are

motivated by a desire to consume gender in falsely "individual" ways. Consider the recent

report by Hollie Shaw for *Financial Post* that describes a "pink tax" which "has women

paying 43% more for their toiletries than men" as an example (Shaw). Non-binary

communities do share resources to purchase gendered products (some specifically tailored to relieve gender dysphoria like compression wear or breast forms, for example) in order to help members of the community feel more comfortable in their gender expression. Even as they do this, however, non-binary online communities stress the importance of self-love, acceptance, and importantly *recognition as non-binary* without any purchasable gendered markers that may communicate someone is gender non-conforming. We've established how this fluid understanding of boundaries and authoritative definitions is a feature of the cyborgian and rebellious aspects of non-binary online culture, but it is relevant again when considered in comparison to how domains spread their epistemological power. As a reminder of how non-binary definitions are often understood on Tumblr, one post by agender user "sunsetquartz" (who requests they/them pronouns on their blog) reads

Friendly reminder. Not all nonbinary people want to look androgynous. Nonbinary doesn't mean you can't have boobs. Nonbinary doesn't mean you don't want genitals. For some it does. For some it doesn't. Nonbinary can look feminine. Nonbinary can look masculine. Nonbinary can look like both. Nonbinary can look androgynous. But Nonbinary doesn't have to look like anything. Nonbinary looks nonbinary. If you are nonbinary then you look nonbinary. There is no specific look you have to have (sunsetquartz).

This post currently has 88,123 "notes," and was created in July, 2015. Here the protocols of knowledge distribution in the realm of representation are being shaped by non-binary people themselves. How this affects the realm of materiality will be further explored in the fourth chapter of this thesis. We've already established some of the

characteristics of Tumblr's most non-binary friendly protocols of knowledge distribution, but we must also attend to the structures of the social field in which they are distributed.

Participants in online non-binary communities come to recognize themselves as non-binary not only in commodities themselves, but in newly embodied (cyborg-friendly) oppositional protocols of knowledge (anti-phallogocentric myth-making). Because individuals are aggregated in mass culture according to a desire to consume and are themselves commodified, everything they do is "branded" as part of their commodity. Non-binary people cannot escape this, and often have no desire to if they have needs met by the commodification, but we must inquire whether their "non-binaryness" gets branded *as* "non-binaryness." And if they aren't recognizable to mass culture, but are nevertheless deeply embedded within that cultural and social terrain, can they use this potential misrecognition to their advantage? To answer this question I want to establish a little more about the inescapability of commodified population aggregation. Poovey clarifies that "institutions are best understood as subsets of domains," which "actualize the domain's rationality - its logic - in representations that everyone can see and in protocols that are increasingly specialized and refined" (6). These protocols for knowledge distribution instrumentalized by domains and their institutions serve the simultaneous disaggregation of the "individual" and the larger aggregation of a mass culture of individuals commodified in the same way. For Poovey, because "emergent domains develop out of and retain a constitutive relationship to pre-existent, or residual, domains, the rationalities and forms of calculation that are institutionalized in new domains tend to carry with them traces of the rationality specific to the domain in which they arise" (14). She uses the example of "mathematical calculations about risk that are specific to discussions of uncertainty in the economic domain" that "retain traces of the

language of providence, which is specific to the treatment of uncertainty (miracles) in the theological domain" (14). Using this framework, we might ask whether the "rationality" of binary genders in institutionalized domains is inherited by non-binary online communities that then form their own non-binary domains.

There are a number of reasons why this characterization falls short, perhaps the most obvious arising from the markedly irrational (neo-dada) codes of communication that are deployed within and around the communities on platforms like Tumblr. For Poovey, however, the creation of a domain implies the "drawing of boundaries and codification of rules" particularly to create specifications from "what once seemed to be an undifferentiated continuum of practices and ideas" (5). This might seem to describe the aggregation of "non-binary" as an umbrella term, recalling a number of gendered or sexual experiences from their institutionalized collapse into categories that rarely fit the people they claimed to describe (like medicalised transsexual terms that require a specific life narrative for a diagnosis, which I will speak more on in the fourth chapter of this thesis). To a certain extent, the fluid definitions and neo-dada codes of communication may indicate boundaries and the establishment of rules, but they do not easily resemble the economic pattern of ownership upon which Poovey bases her definition of domains and their institutions. Semi-anonymity, anti-phallogocentric myth-making, and a permanent partiality due to a lack of institutional recognition all prevent a unified, commodified domain from forming. While certainly there is a precedent for vilified and oppressed communities to become newly palatable and subsumable into established

domains[16], many of these characteristics of non-binary communities would have to be greatly altered before non-binary individuals could be commodified for their non-binaryness alongside other aspects of themselves. The non-binary tendency for fluid, self-definition is perhaps how they temporarily escape the "individualization" elements of mass culture: there is a collective disaggregation of gender that is taken up moment to moment as it is needed rather than a static, falsely individual positioning that can be bought and sold through material control. For right now, no one single person or group gets to dictate what non-binary means and what it has the potential to do for someone, and the nature of this understanding is not compatible with a mass culture that seeks fixed, "rational" definitions for identities (though this may change if "non-binaryness" becomes comprehensible to mass culture). This openness does not automatically indicate radical liberation for everyone all the time, and I will get into the operative limitations shortly, which are primarily constituted through a settler-colonial patriarchal social economy. Uncritical mass accessibility of all social and cultural identity formation that ignores institutional inequalities and marginalization will create a falsely "individual" specialization only for those privileged enough to have access to it rather than a truly accessible form of self-constitution. Even though non-binary communities and online experiences have elements that are incompatible with the way Poovey's institutionalized domains operate in mass culture, the people that make them up do not exist separately and untouched by the domains that do currently exist. An awareness of institutional

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[16] See Jaspir Puar's biopolitical framework of homonationalism for an example, in which it functions as "a deep critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship—cultural and legal—at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations" (originally referring to white, cis, affluent gay citizenship at the expense of racialized others in the wake of 9/11 in America) (337).

inequalities and historical precedents is not mutually exclusive with the agency non-binary communities may offer through their fluid definitions; it merely allows the community to recognize actual fluidity for all rather than limited fluidity for some. However, now that we've established Poovey's understanding of a mass culture that limits the liberatory potential of self-particularities through a subordination into individual commodification, Herbert Marcuse's somewhat similar framework of a one-dimensional society can provide even more context for this analysis.

In Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, his first chapter "One-Dimensional Society" details a constructed social process of rationalization and implementation of "individual" needs for social control comparable to Poovey's mass culture of domains and institutions. People who claim they are non-binary or fall under a non-binary umbrella in the current social climate are often accused of simply wanting to be "special" or "individual" rather than expressing a legitimate gendered subjectivity (I will contextualize this more later). Because of this, it is important to further establish how commodified individualization is woven into the daily life of all people, in order to then explore how non-binary people fit into and take moments to subvert this totality. Although Marcuse was writing in 1964, well before online communities and internet domains were created, his description of an "advanced industrial society" maintains relevancy. His "distinguishing feature" of this society is "its effective suffocation of those needs which demand liberation - liberation also from that which is tolerable and rewarding and comfortable- while it sustains and absolves the destructive power and repressive function of the affluent society" (7). My initial reaction to this characterization sees the dismissal of non-binary experiences as attention-seeking and selfish to be part of the suffocation of needs Marcuse is talking about. The "choice" that non-binary people are criticized for making is seen to be purely

individual, and it is the "wrong choice" because it complicates the falsely tolerable, rewarding, and comfortable binary gendered society.

Nevertheless, for Marcuse as well as Poovey, the range of apparently individual choices available are structured in unseen ways. Comparable to Poovey's system of domains and institutions, Marcuse identifies a process by which "social controls exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste," disguising these needs as individual choices (7). A large range of choices seem available to the individual, but in reality "free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear- that is, if they sustain alienation," which a binary gender system certainly does (7-8). Poovey emphasizes the realm of language and knowledge production (the realm of representation and materiality) in her work as the site where domains maintain and exercise control, and the language and protocols of knowledge production that develop on the internet inherit and occasionally diverge from established domains modeled in an economic image. The internet can also reinforce these domains, and when this is done by individuals blogging or sharing content it becomes part of a process Marcuse describes as "the spontaneous reproduction of superimposed needs by the individual," which "does not establish autonomy; it only testifies to the efficacy to the controls" (8). Because groups or classes seem to disappear, or "labels" seem unnecessary due to shared patterns of consumption (even though the oppressive distinctions remain institutionalized), individuals seem to be primarily motivated and constituted by a desire *for* consumption, which allows the producers of these consumptive needs to suffocate alterity as necessary.

Marcuse identifies "the prevailing forms of social control" as "technological in a new sense," since "this civilization transforms the object world into an extension of man's

mind and body [which] makes the very notion of alienation questionable" as people "recognize themselves in their commodities" (9). Non-binary people are not exempt from this transformation, but self-recognition made possible through an extension of the object world, particularly the somewhat disembodied object world of the internet, is not inherently harmful. Such recognition can go a long way in allowing many people, including non-binary individuals, to exercise new forms of agency in the relationship they construct between their self-expression and their bodies (see the fourth chapter of this thesis for more). The problem arises, as I'm sure Marcuse means to emphasize, when the object world is reconstructed into a world of objects to be consumed and commodified, which allows for bodies and minds to be staticized and exploited as part of the same homogenous whole. Because this exploitative power is so often utterly disguised, Marcuse asks whether one can really "distinguish between the mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination" (9). A key point that Marcuse could not fully anticipate, however, is that "mass media" referring to the media that propagates "mass culture" can now cohabitate with the masses of shareable content from individuals as well as domains. For him, a social subject that recognizes themselves only in elements of mass culture is at risk to be "swallowed up by its alienated existence" and becomes lost to "only one dimension" (or one, singular, mass cultural dimension) which is "everywhere and in all forms" (11).

Marcuse explains that indoctrination is carried alongside the mass distribution of beneficial products to individuals and the resulting assumption is that life is universally commodified and improved upon, which "militates against qualitative change" (12). Specifically, he identifies "a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe

of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe" (12). We know that non-binary communities are repelled by the established universe of binary gender systems and heteronormativity since they have no representation within them. The question is what happens when non-binary communities reduce their "non-binaryness" to terms that *do* fit into this universe in order to render themselves visible at all or relieve the dysphoria caused by their invisibility and pressure to conform. The neo-dada linguistic codes of Tumblr are just one example of how impenetrable the social norms of non-binary communities can seem, but as established by their permanent partiality non-binary people must also exist and thrive within mainstream, one-dimensional society. Marcuse says ideas that transcend the established universe of discourse "are redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension," a rationality that is actually extremely irrational in nature (12). In this case, non-binary reduction to the terms of a binary gendered universe does not necessarily forever relinquish the potential to transcend it. The rational justification behind strategic non-binary reduction locates the rationality in the need for survival, not necessarily in the binary and heteronormative systems that are appealed to. I will extend this analysis of partiality further by introducing concepts by Pierre Bourdieu and Beverly Skeggs, but for now I want to briefly explore how Marcuse himself sees transformative potential within his own societal characterization and determine how non-binary individuals or experiences fit within it.

In the third chapter of his book, called "The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation," Marcuse expands on the role of culture and art in expressing multiple or singular dimensions of reality. Since non-binary people can have such a high concentration of permanent partiality structuring their subjectivity, it seems pertinent to indulge in these theories. Marcuse is cynical about the time period he

writes in, claiming "today's novel feature is the flattening out of the antagonism between

culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and

transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted *another*

dimension of reality[17]" (57). This other dimension becomes incorporated wholesale "into

the established order" through "reproduction and display on a massive scale," as "mass

communications blend together harmoniously, and often unnoticeably, art, politics,

religion, and philosophy with commercials" (57). So alterity and transcendent cultural

possibilities become reduced to a "common denominator:" the "commodity form" (57).

As established in my previous chapter, the neo-dada tendencies of online non-binary

communities that circulate on Tumblr seem to aspire to oppositional and alien elements,

with many expressions coming directly out of disdain for the relentless commodification

of the users' lives. Marcuse believes the ideal function of art is to express a sublimated

representation of an alternate dimension of reality and claims it comes from a history in

which the figures that occupied it were methodically alienated from "the entire sphere of

business and industry, and from its calculable and profitable order" (58).This

historicization may or may not hold up under different frames of analysis, there is a lack

of contextualization for this supposed shift in artistic production, and particularly absent

is explicit mention of global colonialism and imperialism. Nevertheless, we can see how

the current, inherited system of repressive domains and institutions do not truly provide

"images of another way of life," and instead provide images of "freaks or types of the

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[17] The representation of oppositional cultural elements has a much rockier and contradictory global history than is implied here, but I read Marcuse's point here as supporting Poovey's claims that the realm of representation and the realm of materiality are forced into superficial division to obscure the power one has over the other.

same life, serving as an affirmation rather than negation of the established order" (59). For Marcuse this is a feature of an advanced industrial society because the fine arts are so much more accessible, specifically through commodification.

He clarifies that "it is good that almost everyone can now have the fine arts at his fingertips, by just turning a knob on his set, or by just stepping into his drugstore" but in the "diffusion" of this access "they become cogs in a culture-machine which remakes their content" (64). This commodified diffusion of the arts, described as "repressive desublimation," provides an immediate gratifying and commodified identification with social and cultural figures and the ways of life they may represent, rather than a mediated experience that allows space for social critique and alterity. With this space for critique missing, alterity can easily become another commercial made to suppress any actual social transformation. Marcuse explains that "artistic alienation succumbs, together with other modes of negation, to the process of technological rationality" which is anchored to modernity when "it is seen as a result of technical progress" (65). When we recall how neo-dada trends on Tumblr call into question the relationship between the artist (or content-producer) and the spectator, it seems likely that there is at least a desire among non-binary users to use the mediated space of the internet for social critique both explicitly and implicitly coded into content that is meant to be distributed. They revel in technological induced irrationality, overwhelmed by emerging comprehension of the irrationality binary gendered and hetero-patriarchal domains and institutions use to structure their lives.

I've established that there are non-binary spaces online (particularly Tumblr) where resources and information about non-binaryness and adjacently oppressed experiences of gender and sexuality are shared and accompanied by viral affirmations of

these experiences. Addressing a particular kind of permanent partiality, there's one set of Tumblr posts that illustrates how there is an enforced gap between the one-dimensional suppression of the industrially advanced society and the idealism of non-binary acceptance and representation. These posts are not necessarily framed as specific to non-binary communities, instead they outline how Tumblr as a social media platform contributes to the exhaustion of its activist users by combining spaces of positive affirmation and representation with spaces meant to raise awareness of the various manifestations of gender oppression. The original post was written on November 3rd, 2015, by user "gingerautie," a self-described genderfluid person, and it, along with added commentary from various users currently has 29,309 "notes." This post describes a "worrying" pattern "gingerautie" sees where "people (especially young people)" spend "the majority of their downtime" on Tumblr while their blogs are also "mostly some form of activism, from thought out long posts to clicking reblog on a petition" (gingerautie). The post goes on to describe how users are inundated with various forms of oppression that are rendered invisible to most other people, and they exhaust themselves by always responding to and analyzing these modes of oppression without any truly safe and separate spaces. It ends with advice on how to find these safe spaces, claiming that "you have to have something in your life that is totally disconnected from the horrific things you are seeing everyday" (gingerautie). User "icecoldcaffeine," a since deactivated account, responds and adds that activists in offline spaces "are told to clearly separate their two main tasks which are *providing help* and *making demands*" but "Tumblr completely conflates the two" (icecoldcaffeine). Specifically related to trans activists on Tumblr, the user says that they will "tell transgender people they are valid and important, then in the same breath, *in the same post and on the same blogs*, remind transgender

people that they are unloved and unwelcome by society, along with factual proof of transphobic violence" (icecoldcaffeine). This user then advocates for other users to maintain a separation in their blogs, with one for "raising awareness and making demands" and one that may "provide help to individuals" through "happy, uplifting" representation supplementation (icecoldcaffeine). I've discussed how this practice of managing multiple blogs is common on Tumblr, but I think the larger point that these users are getting at is that a separation between spaces for critical social demands for non-binary rights and idealistic platforms of non-binary acceptance must be cultivated for survival when one is a transgender user.

Non-binary users see even less cultural representation than binary trans people (though to be clear, a very small amount of binary trans representation is positive), and so many must turn to places like Tumblr for all non-binary representation. The separation these Tumblr users advocate for is an attempt to emulate the compartmentalization of social critique and artistic enjoyment that is so keenly instrumentalized by domains and their corporate institutions. Strangely, it is this compartmentalization that actually ends up unifying artistic experience under a singular mass culture that commodifies the spectator's reaction into an individualized urge to buy something to emulate the artistic content. The reason non-binary Tumblr users' (and others) tendencies to mix social critique, supplementary affirmation, and personal content are "worrying" is because it is a tendency very difficult to sustain in the culture Marcuse describes without feeling *too* alienated. I don't believe their solution to separate blog content is harmful, but I do think the need to articulate such a solution helps to illustrate the mediated space non-binary users get pushed into (especially on blogs like Tumblr). The users experience artistic content on more than one dimension since they are not able to easily forget the critical

dimension that is developed by the very same social platform that presents content or affirmation in the first place. Marcuse writes that "prescriptions for inhumanity and injustice are being administered by a rationally organized bureaucracy, which is, however, invisible at its vital center," and this rationality disguises the irrational role bureaucracy and its institutions play in perpetuating the injustices (71). It is the social spaces of non-binary Tumblr blogs that can two-dimensionally critique these "rational" prescriptions, recognizing and advocating for what is actually helpful for non-binary communities from within an irrationally rendered social media platform. For example, when there is news of a nation adopting a "third gender" designation for passports (a rationally organized bureaucratic prescription), it is non-binary online communities that might emphasize the actual limitations of the application (usually these designations are only open to a select few people, generally those deemed medically intersex) and debate the necessity of why sex designations are required in the first place[18]. Through Marcuse's framework the solutions to inequality and injustice cannot come organically from such invisibly corporate bureaucratic prescriptions, and so instead they must emerge from spaces of conscious reflection that also acknowledge participation within cultural modes of repressive desublimation.

Marcuse writes that "all sublimation accepts the social barrier to instinctual gratification, but it also transgresses this barrier" and this "consciousness of the renunciations which the repressive society inflicts upon the individual" actually "preserves the need for liberation" (75,76). So then, what is necessary to liberatory

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[18] Consider Ontario's recent (now closed) online consultation asking for "feedback to help inform a new policy on how and when gender and sex information is collected, used, retained and displayed on Ontario government IDs and forms," reflecting a precedent set by online trans discussions and activism (Lalonde).

sublimation is not so much an immediate solution (that would fall under the one-dimensional instant gratification) or a denial of the instant gratification that has come to be inextricable from social practices, but actually the preservation of a space that recognizes the need for liberation. We could compare this to Poovey's understanding of cultural *formation*, which implies a non-static impression of cultural moments that are always in the process of being made recognizable and do not become disguised as rational and natural in their suppression. Non-binary individuals in their online communities do not need to devote every moment to explicitly emphasizing exposure and demands for justice in order to articulate and develop sublimated transgression and liberation. As long as they maintain elements necessary to sublimation such as "a high degree of autonomy and comprehension," and mediate "between the conscious and unconscious, between the primary and secondary processes, between the intellect and instinct, renunciation and rebellion," they still maintain the potential to defeat "suppression while bowing to it" (76). Many of these juxtapositions recall the cyborgian neo-dada forms on Tumblr that deftly work to incorporate oppositionality, contradiction, and nuance into the subjectivities of those who engage them. Non-binary individuals cannot defeat their own suppression (at least as much as they can within the constraints they inhabit) without bowing to it in some capacities in order to function in the suppressive society itself. There is no truly exterior position that they can fight from, and they can sometimes use elements of this binding social topography strategically, as I intend to make clearer with the following frameworks.

In his work titled "Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," Pierre Bourdieu explains that "the social world can be represented as a space (with several dimensions) constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the

set of properties active within the social universe in question" (196). Within that space, "agents and groups of agents are thus defined by their relative positions" and are "assigned to a position or a precise class of neighbouring positions (i.e. a particular region in this space) and one cannot really - even if one can in thought- occupy two opposite regions of the space" (196). This framework can be complementary to the economic cultural formation that both Poovey and Marcuse describe. The important thing to remember about the relative positioning of agents in the social space is that for Bourdieu "inasmuch as the properties selected to construct this space are active properties, one can also describe it as a field of forces, i.e. as a set of objective power relations which impose themselves on all who enter the field and which are irreducible to the intentions of the individual agents or even to the direct *interactions* among the agents" (196). These external forces might make it seem as though non-binary individuals, as agents on whom "objective" power relations are imposed, have no way to exercise mobility within the social world, but this is not necessarily the case.

Bourdieu emphasizes that his view of the social field is in response to deeply embedded modes of cultural capitalism, writing that agents are distributed in it in one dimension "according to the overall volume of the capital they possess" and in another "according to the compositions of their capital- i.e. according to the relative weight of the different kinds of assets within their total assets" (196). These capitalist constructions are inherited from oppressive social histories like settler colonialism and the resultant implementation of white hetero-patriarchy, and so this explains why non-binary individuals have such difficulty finding social representation. Bourdieu explains that social groups (non-binary people in this case) do not exist in "real" classes that physically and mentally demarcate their subjectivities, but instead navigate "a *space of relationships*

which is as real as geographical space, in which movements are paid for in work, in efforts and above all in time" (196). This depiction of relational social space can also provide an explanation for how the internet functions within it; an account of the physical bodies of its users are not required to get a sense of its interactivity. An internet presence is defined by the relationality of the user to the contributions and constructions of other users; even if someone doesn't contribute themselves they are still shaped through the relationships they have to the content they consume. They might never need to confirm the "real" physicality of the community itself, instead they indicate a portion of the space of relationships that make up the internet in general. For non-binary individuals, this space is primed then to give them a certain amount of freedom for their potential embodiment and their relationships to their gendered bodies. I have discussed how non-binary subjectivities are difficult to commodify due to their fluid definitions and socially conscious tendencies, but there are ways in which the novelty does become profitable within social economies, and this must be further investigated.

If Bourdieu's social world is structured by a logic of differentiation and distribution, and this logic is actually irrationality made to appear rational (cultural capitalism), then any movement or transformation possible within this field must also rely on this logic to some extent. In Beverley Skeggs' book *Class, Self, Culture*, she unpacks Pierre Bourdieu's "attempt to locate the economic within the symbolic organization of social space" (16). Bourdieu differentiates forms of capital (including economic, cultural, social and symbolic) to address a history "of increasing power, autonomy and expansion made in the interests of powerful dominant groups" (16). To clarify, economic capital strictly refers to the financial assets available to someone, while cultural capital refers to the culturally imbued advantages one has in how their body/mind is culturally attributed,

in cultural goods (an objectified state), or in an institutional form (16). Social capital

refers to the resources one has "based on connection, networks and group membership,"

and symbolic capital is conferred when various other forms of capital are seen as

legitimate and inherent, and their origin is obscured (17). The transformation into

symbolic capital is common for many forms of capital conferred through oppressive

societies, since the obfuscation of the source of capital is important to maintaining the

perception of inherent power and dominance. These different forms of capital are not

static however, and people access them in different ways depending on the intersections

of their social legitimacy and positioning.

Skeggs uses a particular form of femininity to exemplify how Bourdieu's social

economy changes depending on how it is accessed by individuals that inhabit different

spheres within his social topography. We've established that Bourdieu sees the

distribution of agents across this field as relative to both the amount of capital and the

relative *weight* of this capital. Skeggs is interested in explaining more specifically how

the process of weighting capital differently is so often based on social and cultural factors

that alter whether it is exchangeable in local, national, or global social economies. She

claims that femininity, for example, is only a form of cultural capital "if it is symbolically

legitimate" (16). For femininity to be legitimate in this way, Skeggs explains that it needs

to fit certain criteria, such as being of an acceptable class, being youthful, and having the

appropriate moral and sexual approval of various patriarchal institutions (with

disagreements on what is acceptable further indicating the fluctuation of legitimacy) (16).

I would expand this list of requirements to include other modifiers, such as being able-

bodied, straight, white, and being cisgender (with this last one being particularly relevant

to my interests, although the list could go on and on since different institutions require

different criteria). To be clear, Skeggs claims that although femininity can operate as a form of cultural capital for some, femininity under institutional patriarchy is nevertheless "a form of regulation rather than domination" and is embodied "in local rather than nationally symbolic forms of exchange" (16). At the same time, addressing how similarly transformable types of capital do function as exchangeable in certain contexts can allow a more thorough understanding of both the potential and limitations of those particular forms of capital. Skeggs wants to "focus on resources (economic, cultural, moral) instead of just capitals, to show how some cultural resources [. . .] are not exchangeable but do have value for those who use and make them" (17). She addresses criticisms of Bourdieu that claim he "reduces everything to exchange-value" by emphasizing that his categorization of different forms of capital can still work to describe the social economy if they include an attention to "the difference between use-value and exchange-value" (17).

Skeggs explains that Bourdieu also acknowledged that different forms of capital are "context specific" (17). Such contextualization is attentive to how the social space of relationships is altered by "the global *volume* of capital [people] possess, the *composition* of their capital, the relative weight in their overall capital of the various forms of capital, and *evolution in time* of the volume and composition according to their *trajectory* in social space" (17). Skeggs adds to this that "different bodies carry unequal values depending on their position" (17). Non-binary bodies certainly don't carry the same values as cisgender bodies under cultural capitalism (even though the former may get misrecognized as the latter, they have different values *as* non-binary bodies). Attention to how non-binary people access different forms of capital and mobilize them through use-value rather than exchange-value can be, as Skeggs puts it, "a means of showing how

bodies and peoples are inscribed with worth (both moral and economic), and how this

process of inscription makes entitlements and fixes limits" (26). While affirmative

representations of non-binary internet users are self-created and distributed through

specific communities, they are nevertheless visible and accessible to a much larger

audience due to social media platforms and internet providers. As I've mentioned, these

are controlled by conglomerate corporations made possible through capitalist enterprise.

This, among other things, indicates the internet as a social space is not easily separable

from a neoliberal capitalist settler colonial social economy. To explain how an online

non-binary presence fits into this social economy, I want to illustrate how non-binary

people can mobilize the use-value of both the social capital of the internet and the cultural

capital of their supposedly novel position in order to raise awareness of their existence

and liberatory needs amongst the oppressive cultural capitalism that surrounds them.

Although I've established that many elements of online non-binary communities

have the potential to be inaccessible to a one-dimensional mass culture, the people who

make them up do not exist in some magical state of invisibility. Another way to think of

their distribution in the social topography is to say that non-binary people have access to

the use-value of different forms of capital. The use they get is contextual and momentary,

but because they and their bodies are misrecognized by cultural capitalist domains and

their institutions, the forms of capital they use do not have long-term exchange value. To

explain how this process operates, I think focusing on the idea of "trendiness" can be

helpful. Pop culture owes a lot to queer communities (especially queer people of colour),

and has begun to represent individuals from these communities as more than cautionary

tales or monstrous figures[19]. Because of this larger process of normalization, certain queer

social positions, such as those inhabited by white cis gay men, attain an occasional

legitimacy that allows them access to forms of capital that fluctuate in national social

economies[20]. Because their queerness is rewritten to be complementary to

heteronormativity (for example, elevating whiteness and masculinity as more desirable

and legitimate), the forms of capital they mobilize have nationally symbolic exchange

value in the social economy since they are seen as symbolically legitimate. White, cis,

masculine gay men can align themselves with the cultural capital of settler

heteronormativity and use it to distance themselves from *those* (femme, fat, non-white,

disabled, othered) queer figures, who are the real threats to the domains these men can

now propel themselves further into. This is not to suggest that there is comprehensive

acceptance of white gay men in all heteronormative national social economies, but rather

the movements they have made into normativity create moments of legitimized visibility.

This visibility is interpreted as novel, and contributes to the perceived "trendiness" of

queerness and gender alterity, the symbolically illegitimate chasing after the newly

symbolically legitimate. But for many forms of queerness which cannot be as easily

subsumed by heteronormativity, the movements of exchange take place in local

economies, as Skeggs describes with femininity. The concept of non-binary genders

seems strange and new to many on the internet, and the disaggregated and inclusive

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[19] Laverne Cox is an example, being a transwoman who has played trans roles that are often considered respectful and substantial, and she is currently seen as a celebrity actress with significant legitimacy as a trans activist. Another example is the mainstream ABC sitcom *Modern Family* casting trans child actor Jackson Millarker to play a small role, a gesture of inclusion that I suspect still requires critical assessment (Melas).

[20] Referring again to Jaspir Puar's framework of homonationalism and one of the social and cultural contexts she describes (Puar).

definition seems impenetrable to those raised only on phallogocentric social narratives. People who publicly identify as non-binary can be accused of being a "transtrender," *especially* if they do not display visible effort to receive medical treatment to alter their bodies. The word is meant to imply that because being queer and trans is "trendy," non-binary people want to be a part of the trend without participating in the "true" trans requirements (inhabiting a binary gender and accepting the appropriate medical treatment to "match" their body to this gender). As is made clear by some of the founding scholars of academic trans theory, this process to legitimacy has never been an inherent necessity to all trans people, and there has been great effort made to stop this process from becoming compulsory to people who don't necessarily want to undergo it but who still do not identify with the gender they have been coercively assigned. But to the mass, one-dimensional culture, non-binary genders are not symbolically legitimate, and so they cannot be leveraged in national social economies. They are "trendy", however, and symbolically legitimate within certain local economies. This means that non-binary writers can make use of the "trendiness" that sees their identification as strange and interesting, the illegitimacy creating potential controversy that will encourage people to click on content they contribute to online forums. Their "non-binaryness" has a local use-value that can be exchanged on the internet for visibility and representation, but the linguistic and conceptual codes that structure the umbrella of identities cannot be exchanged in national economies for any kind of long-term advantage. This is because it cannot be legitimized under patriarchal heteronormativity without undermining its logic of superiority and subordination.

I look to the internet to define "transtrender," since that is the only place I have ever encountered the term, and one entry (rated the third-highest definition) on the classic

slang directory Urban Dictionary (where anyone can define anything) describes a "transtrender" as "one who creates a ridiculously specific non-binary gender identity for themselves, and often repeatedly changes it, because it's seemingly the trendy thing to do" (NotQuiteAnother). The term "transtrender" is not the only one out there to describe the disdain people feel for individuals who don't match up with societal expectations of a trans person (how and when dysphoria occurs and if it is necessary to all trans experiences is hotly debated), but it does clearly link this divergence with "trendiness." The way the user on Urban Dictionary describes a "transtrender" is interesting in that it recalls both the anti-phallogocentric self-narrativization and permanent partiality of non-binary people mentioned in the previous chapter. The user clearly frames these as negative, however, and explains that "transtrenders" are "usually found on Tumblr" and provides an example of "someone who calls themselves a demiboy, genderfucked transqueer" (NotQuiteAnother). Apparently such people trivialize "the struggles of people who are actually transgender" while avoiding criticism themselves by reframing it as bigotry (NotQuiteAnother). Threads on the social media giant Reddit occasionally discuss or condemn "transtrenders" (Reddit is a place to rate web content, share news, and hold discussions, hosting many sub-reddits that are splintered off according to content and often develop their own community of regular contributors).

One sub-reddit in particular (which functions as a network for further sub-reddits as well) is devoted to cataloguing complaints against "Tumblr in Action," referring to the perceived ridiculousness of the use or misuse of social justice discourse on Tumblr as well as on other forums. Discussion topics like "Has anyone met a 'transtrender' in real life? What are they like?" (WildlifeAnalysis), "Transtrender gets offended when a cis person chooses to be trans. The lack of self awareness is astounding" (myhatrules),

"Another transtrender callout. These are always fun to see" (Someoneman), are easily found and are well-received by the core demographic of this particular sub-reddit. There are also threads across Reddit that question the narrative of dismissing non-binary genders as "transtrending," and one trans user and frequenter of the TiA subreddit inquires into why "33% [of TiA users who self-reported in a poll] openly state that non-binary don't real [sic]" (eDurkheim). This, like with the threads "Could someone explain the 'truscum/transtender [sic]' hate" (QuantumDrej), and an "asktransgender" (a completely different subreddit) thread titled "On 'transtrenders' on tumblr: am I crazy, or are they bothering anyone else?" (throw12345away56789) quickly turn into genuine discussions from both trans and cis users about how those critical of "transtrenders" are apparently only concerned with the delegitimization of "true" (socially acceptable, usually binary) trans people and their experiences. I've described how the term "transtrender" is often mobilized on Reddit (excluding of course, those who are critical of the term or who use it satirically) because I hope it underscores the social discomfort that is present around the idea of non-binary genders even as they supposedly get more socially acceptable or widespread, even among those who supposedly support trans rights. This is particularly when non-binary genders are explored by those already deemed frivolous (usually young, feminine people) and whose exploration itself seems unintelligible. The point is that non-binary gender experiences, viewed through the lens of "transtrending," are seen as entirely new and selfish; the term itself is a reactionary response to the representation of "liberatory needs" (recalling Marcuse) that aren't easily suppressed into a mass, one-dimensional culture that accepts self-definition only under strictly "rational" parameters.

Nevertheless, the "trendiness" that gets associated with these "new" non-binary gender identities and experiences *can* be marketable. That is, the social capital accessible through internet platforms along with the cultural capital of embodying a potentially trendy (or at least compellingly non-normative) gender experience can be mobilized through limited frameworks. These forms of capital can be exchanged for other forms of capital, such as the social capital available through more widely shared representation and even economic capital in the cases where non-binary contributors are compensated for the content they provide. The site xoJane is modeled after magazines *Sassy* and *Jane* in that it "is written and created by an entirely devoted community of women (and some token males) who have strong ideas, identities and opinions, who are living what they are writing about" (Pratt). They have regular contributors who write articles on a great number of topics, but they also have open article submissions and a category called "It Happened to Me," which is meant to entice anyone to recount unusual or interesting personal stories, with a stable compensation fee of $50 (Cochrane). There are non-binary themed entries to this specific category, like the story submitted on May 5th, 2016 by non-binary writer Courtney Keese entitled "IT HAPPENED TO ME: I'm a Nonbinary Trans Person, And I Was Sexually Harassed When I Used the Men's Bathroom" (Keese). There is also a regular non-binary contributor to the main content of the site (not actually as an employed, listed regular writer, however) named Lore Graham who has written a number of articles with titles such as "How to Be a Good Ally to Nonbinary People" (Jan 11, 2016), "The Double-Edged Sword of Being Both Androgynous and Nonbinary" (Apr 4, 2016), and "I am Nonbinary and I Am So Frustrated When Masculinity is Considered the Default" (Mar 14, 2016) (Graham). I don't mean to indicate anything disparaging about these articles, or to suggest that they are *only* accepted because of the non-binary status of

their writers, but I mean to point out that these writers can use their "nonbinaryness" as a means to elevate and distribute their voice and their work. Even though this is a process of exchange, it must be understood through Skegg's specification of use-value rather than exchange-value. The benefits and privileges are local rather than global, and are not always or even universally accessible to all non-binary people.

A site like xoJane provides an easy way to understand how non-binary people can mobilize the use-value of their temporary cultural capital in order to receive other forms of capital or advantages, but it is certainly not the only site where this phenomenon is observable. In fact, some sites can more clearly illustrate the limitations of this particular form of cultural capital. BuzzFeed, a fast-paced, semi-community generated site for viral content/news, constantly seeks any way possible to get people to click on their content or articles. There are plenty of journalists who write important stories that are hosted on the site, but there are also many stories that are ultimately reducible to reaction GIFS and funny images accompanied by humorous captions. The latter is meant to be a part of the marketable "relatability" that I touched on in the second chapter of this thesis. Many supposedly niche perspectives or experiences are compiled and presented in such "listicle" formats, meant to encourage both the people supposedly represented by the content and others to click on it, often straddling a line between light, fun appealing content and enough "controversial elements" to add a level of debate that boosts the viral potential of the content. There are quite a few articles on BuzzFeed that use non-binary identities and experiences to generate "clickable" content. Some compile content from non-binary Tumblr users ("23 Times Tumblr Cleverly Explained What Being Genderqueer Means") and some compile "confessions" from the anonymous app Whisper to sensationalize non-binary experiences to make them more "clickable" while also

supposedly providing much needed representation ("21 Eye-Opening Confession From People Who Are Genderfluid") (Lan, Mallikarjuna). Some articles provide much more direct attribution and contribution from non-binary people themselves, like in the June 23, 2016 article "We Gave 16 Trans People Makeovers to Honor Their Idols" (Whelan). While the title doesn't refer to non-binary people specifically, there are a number of non-binary people featured (such as Tyler Ford, who was also featured in Zing Tsjeng's article[21] about teenagers' increasing acceptance of gender and sexuality norm deviation) (Tsjeng). In this article, the people featured are given a space to describe themselves, their relationship to their gender experiences and identities, and are given a makeover and photoshoot (which also serves as an advertisement for the corporations providing the means to do so) that represents them as a chosen famous person.

Buzzfeed articles have a system where readers can select their "reaction" at the end out of a number of options, which is then aggregated into a poll. These categories are both positive and negative, and on the article about giving trans people makeovers the positive reactions are as follows: 346 people selected a heart as their reaction, 86 selected "win," 49 selected "yaaass," and 19 selected "cute" (Whelan). On the other hand, 27 people selected "fail" as their reaction, 20 selected "ew," and 12 selected "wtf" (Whelan). There were also 10 people who picked "lol," 6 people selected a broken heart symbol, and 5 picked "omg;" all of these options are a bit more ambiguous as a response to this particular article. This distribution helps illustrate how the use-value of non-binary cultural capital operates on the internet, with a large response of positivity underscored by a significant reminder of a larger social disadvantage or disapproval. Capital conferred to

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[21] See the second chapter of this thesis for more details.

the people involved in the post (speaking specifically about the non-binary people for the sake of consistency, though the binary trans people likely experience this mobilization very similarly) through the power of visibility, self-narrative, and representation is useful in a local context. Both Buzzfeed and xoJane host content that is meant as "clickbait," and is therefore supposed to instigate only a temporary engagement, enough to be shared around. These sites, particularly Buzzfeed, want to be seen as though they are on the cutting edge of viral internet content, and so the non-binary representation they provide is a response to that need. It's "trendy," and controversial enough to spark debate (which means higher visibility on other social media platforms as people post responses from linked accounts), but the non-binary representation and content is not meant to reflect Buzzfeed's views on a large scale. If it were not "trendy" to be non-binary, it is likely there would be little to no non-binary representation on Buzzfeed at all. There may be an "LGBT"-specific section of the site, but the content that appears on the main site (including this non-binary makeover article) is assumed to get enough positive and negative attention that it becomes marketable. For non-binary people to mobilize the potential cultural capital of their "non-binaryness" they must engage in local social economies that don't provide widespread global exchange-value for themselves as non-binary people. Even for non-binary figures that achieve a level of fame online, it is likely that the social capital of their fame has limited mobilization for their "non-binaryness," since that part of their identity and experience must be recognized to be connected to their fame. Since non-binary people are not currently seen as symbolically legitimate by the domains and institutions that have the power to structure the intersected and globalised social, cultural, and material economies, this recognition becomes more unlikely the more famous the non-binary person may become.

Non-binary people are not positioned on Bourdieu's social topography solely by their gender experiences and expressions. Obviously, their race, class, age, ability/disability (along with many other factors) all influence how they can participate in both local and global social economies. These attributed circumstances may limit or privilege this participation; white non-binary people can use their settler colonial white privilege to appropriate non-white gender expressions that exist beyond the gender binary. This is important to account for, because it can illustrate the difference between use-value and exchange-value when determining the nature of the cultural capital derived from "trendy" queered social experiences. White settlers can use their settler colonial whiteness as cultural capital with global exchange-value. This means that when they feel entitled to use a term like "two-spirit" to describe themselves, they use symbolically legitimate forms of cultural capital (whiteness) to legitimize their appropriation. The term "two-spirit" is meant to refer broadly to a great number of tribally and culturally specific traditions and experiences regarding things like same-gender attraction and gender variance ("Two-Spirit Community"). Its creation is "attributed to Albert McLeod, who proposed its use during the Third Annual Inter-tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference, held in Winnipeg in 1990," and is a translation of "Anishinaabemowin term *niizh manidoowag*, two spirits" ("Two-Spirit Community"). The term is provisional, and is not meant to erase the specific terms and identities that have been used by a number of different indigenous cultures across the continent. Indigenous people have voiced their frustration and disapproval of white people appropriating the term "two-spirit" for themselves, and frequently posts will crop up on Tumblr with the intent of spreading this information. One post, by "nehiyaw two-spirit" user "cosmicqt," and titled "a grumpy two-spirit PSA," explains that the term is

"culturally bound" and white appropriators are "shitting on our self-advocacy and

resistance to colonial violence" and "reducing [the term] down into a simplified, binary

identity that is palatable and ~friendly~ to everyone" ("cosmicqt"). Since patriarchal

heteronormativity was a disciplinary method of control used in the project of settler

colonialism[22], people of colour, most relevantly indigenous people, are inherently seen as

queered and deviant in specifically racialized ways. So in local exchanges, white settlers

can leverage the cultural capital of their whiteness to claim an appropriated "two-spirit"

status. Because of this exchange-value laden cultural capital they do not experience the

racialized oppression that accompanies the way "two-spirit" is viewed in a settler society.

The white settler who appropriates a "two-spirit" identity is not seen in global economies

as symbolically legitimate for the result of the appropriation, but the appropriation *itself* is

seen as symbolically legitimate due to the legacy of global colonialism that continues

today. Although I have argued the non-binary umbrella definition is resiliently and fluidly

disaggregated, to appropriate "two-spirit" identities (ignoring the tribal differences,

potential social roles, etc) positions white non-binary people well within a mass one-

dimensional culture. Positioned here, white non-binary people are seeing "two-spirit"

identities as individual in Poovey's mass cultural sense, in that non-binary as a category

has equally accessible individual specializations. All non-binary identities and

experiences are seen as universally accessible individual choices rather than engaging

with the cultural and social roles, histories, and traditions that shape the many different

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[22] See Scott Morgensen's "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer
Modernities" for an in depth account of this process, as well as Qwo-Li Driskill's "Doubleweaving Two-
Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies" for an account of how this project
of settler colonialism continues and how it may be addressed in academia.

manifestations of gender and sexuality that have come to fall under the "two-spirit" umbrella. I have spoken positively about the fluid and accessible definitions of non-binary as an umbrella term, but it is clear that certain types of exclusivity become necessary in order to preserve the liberatory and transgressive potential of self-narrativization and agency for all, rather than just a few. This protection is different from the process of territory-marking and capital accumulation that Poovey ascribes to domains and their institutions because the need for protection arises only when culturally bound non-binary experiences and identities (such as "two-spirit") are excluded from cultural legitimacy in the first place. I use this example to not only call attention to the harm of such appropriation, but also to illustrate how non-binary people have a variety of privileges and limitations that shape how they may come to be seen as symbolically legitimate.

Clearly non-binary people are not unilaterally arranged across a social topography, and are affected differently according to the privileges or disadvantages they face alongside binary gender oppression. Mobilizing appropriative trends to claim Indigenous identities at the expense of Indigenous people and their cultures is one way white non-binary individuals can quickly inject exclusionary, exploitative commodification into their social articulations. But they can also lose out on the transformative power of their anti-phallogocentric codes of communication if they try to codify non-binary definitions into a domain of aesthetic and social norms accessible only to those deemed appropriately "non-binary enough." The medium through which non-binary people express their self-narratives and develop new protocols of knowledge distribution is provided by capitalist conglomerate corporations and the technologies and networks they distribute. The cultural capitalism that surrounds these distributions

encourages aggregation of individuals and groups into one commodified mass. The people within this mass become identifiable through their suppression of liberatory needs into instant gratification, manifested through an urge to consume. But this shared compulsion is cultivated in the interests of capitalist domains and institutions, and they fail to recognize the oppression that shapes the lives of marginalized groups and prevents them from even being capable of fully participating in and manifesting the mass culture that is advertised to them. Because of this, liberatory moments emerge from within the cracks, and misrecognition creates space for permanent partialities that can question the structuring irrationalities made to seem rational. I see this particularly in the way non-binary people use their online communities as space for mediation, reflecting on the ways in which they do not fit into the categories and compulsions assigned to them.

Under new supposedly progressive socialities people are told they can be whatever men or women they want to be, but the reliance on these falsely rational categories and the implanted disciplinary need to punish and ostracize those who transgress them illustrates their hidden irrationality. In their ideal form, these non-binary communities embrace irrationality to reject phallogocentrism without emulating the institutions that falsely advertise universal access to everything. They preserve space for those oppressed through social circumstances other than their gender, picking up rational frameworks (legitimizing cultural territory, for example) as needed to insist that everyone is not equally individual on a social topography in order to allow truly accessible irrationalities. Because the "choice" non-binary individuals make to articulate "non-binaryness" is one that they must actively maintain, their liberatory needs are not so easily suppressed. They come to navigate spaces that misrecognize them without giving up their insistence on representation, floating between cultivated online spaces that do

represent and legitimize them through irrational means and spaces that do not, but nevertheless may provide them with a platform. This movement reflects how non-binary people can mobilize different forms of social and cultural capital on the internet.

The perceived newness and "trendiness" of non-binary individuals, although meant to discredit and delegitimize them in global social economies, can nevertheless be employed in local economies for their potential benefit. This reflects a use-value within the cultural capital of trendy "non-binaryness" rather than a reliable, long-term exchange-value. This indicates that even within cultural capitalist practices that seem to reward non-binary people for their participation, for now it is the trendiness that is marketable rather than the "non-binaryness." However, culturally legitimate privileges such as settler colonial whiteness can also alter what is possible for non-binary individuals in global economies, as is made apparent through certain culturally appropriative trends. I hope these specifications and larger contextualization of a mass culture work together to encourage a nuanced understanding of how non-binary individuals and their communities are situated in cultural capitalism. Trans and gender theorists have long worked to expose how capitalist enterprise and the domains and institutions it privileges use an oppressive, settler colonial gender binary to exploit the population. My work here is an attempt to articulate the oppositional, often misrecognized thread that provides both movement and constraint for online non-binary experiences. I believe these experiences are worthy of respect, analysis, and representation, and my next step will be to follow in the legacy of foundational trans theorists and activists to further investigate the possibilities of the body image and how its structuring narrative capabilities may transform under online non-binary circumstances.

Chapter 4: Non-Binary Technologies of Coherence

Non-binary individuals may choose to alter or adorn their bodies in completely different ways and to completely different intensities, with some choosing not to alter their bodies at all. As I have discussed, there is no singular "non-binary body," as the definitive properties of the term as I've come to know it generally allow anyone access regardless of the arrangement of their bodies (cultural appropriation and the like notwithstanding). But theorizing the relationship between non-binary bodies and the internet becomes necessary when proposing the latter as a generative space for the former. Because of the huge variation in embodied non-binary experiences, I don't wish to use the "non-binary body" as an object of study. Instead, I want to set up theoretical frameworks that elucidate the *process* of generating embodied online non-binary subjectivities. I want to illustrate what is missing from non-binary experiences that is supplemented by certain online spaces, and do so without disregarding the ways non-binary embodied subjectivities are performed and constructed by non-binary people themselves.

A March 23, 2016 article for *The Guardian* by Sarah Marsh and "Guardian readers" called "The gender-fluid generation: young people on being male, female, or non-binary" supports my claim about the importance of online spaces to non-binary development. The article presents the results of an international survey "inviting millennials to define their gender" and includes what "Ham, 20, who was born in to a British Muslim family" says about the awakening of their agender identity (Marsh). Specifically, Ham says "'it came about over the last few years mainly because of social media and blogging" as they "'started to discover different views on gender and became more comfortable talking about how I felt'" (Marsh). One interview with "Adam, 20,

from the Netherlands," who "has transitioned from female to male" specifically explains

that "he doesn't think generation Y has been brought up with different ideals, but as

digital natives young people of this generation can research gender themselves online"

(Marsh). The term "digital natives" that Adam uses indicates how easily young non-

binary people can learn to navigate online spaces, and their intuitive grasp of the language

and narrative conventions that structures them.

  The groundwork laid by trans theorist Jay Prosser provides me with a starting

point for theorizing the narrative conventions that render trans bodies legible without

falling into reductive prescriptivism or erasing the generative power of trans subjects to

construct their own cohesive body images. Expanding on the nature of body images and

their constitutive and cohering power, I then turn to Gail Weiss and her proposal of

multiple, intercorporeal body images to help frame the shifting performer/audience social

relationship of non-binary online participants. As I apply these frameworks to social

media, I will use Edgar Gómez and Elisenda Ardévol's "playful embodiment" to focus in

on the role of the "selfie," and use work by authors such as Anne Burns and David

Marshall to contextualize how the selfie is consumed. Finally, I will provide some brief

examples of what these theoretical frameworks look like in action, in the hopes of

illustrating the genre conventions that allow non-binary subjects to construct their own

body narratives.

  It has been difficult for many trans and non-trans critical theorists to address the

body in a transgender (and especially a transsexual) context. This is because they can too

easily fall into the unproductive binary thinking that Jay Prosser critiques in his 1998

book *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. Prosser explains that his

primary purpose is to use transsexual narratives "to introduce into cultural theory a

trajectory that foregrounds the bodily matter of gender crossings" (4). Prosser wants his readers to encounter the transsexual subject in new ways (a figure that seeks out and receives treatments and procedures to change their sex according to the narratives of the medical establishment that provides the means). This may seem at odds with my non-binary project, but Prosser goes to great lengths to explore transition and gender crossing through different lenses, such as "transition as the definitive property of narrative, the progression and development that drives narrative and coheres its form" (4). Used in this way, the transitive characteristics of narrative will help me apply Prosser's theoretical frameworks to my non-binary subject. Even as he foregrounds the perceived theoretical messiness of bodily transsexual sex-transition, Prosser isn't prescriptive about sex and gender, striking a difficult and important balance when theorizing embodiment.

Prosser wants to avoid the tendency of critical theory to obsess over bodies only as "effects or products of discourse," a process that "remetaphysicalizes" the body and places its "fleshy materiality even further out of our conceptual reach" (12). As I write and theorize about non-binary subjects constituting their non-binary selves through online terrains, it would seem easy to avoid talking about the body's relationship to these experiences. If the most important things for non-binary subjectivities are happening online, the body might seem too peripheral to be relevant. But a non-binary person doesn't exist entirely online, as indicated by the permanent partiality of the social position they find themselves in; they move between being legitimized and delegitimized as they are read and misread in different social circumstances. Their bodies do matter to the construction of their subjectivity, and it is no longer true that online and offline can be separated into spaces of embodied and disembodied social expressions. In *Playful Embodiment: Body and Identity Performance on the Internet*, Edgar Gómez and Elisenda

Ardévol recount how internet studies have reflected this shift. They explain that "early internet studies dealt with the disembodiment and simulation possibilities that computer mediated interaction offered to individuals, pointing to disembodiment and anonymity as the keys to understanding online identity performance" (41). For Gómez and Ardévol now, however, "the scenario for interaction, communication and identity performance has changed with the emergence of new technologies and platforms for social networks," resulting in the body becoming "again the basic artifact of cultural identity" but this time in new and more playful ways (44). I will go further into the context of Gómez and Ardévol's arguments shortly, but their historicization of embodiment theorization in internet studies sets a precedent for new interpretations and theorizations that better reflect such a fast-changing social context. They make room in their field for me to apply Prosser's frameworks to the genre of social media, allowing me to avoid placing the "fleshy materiality" of non-binary subjectivities out of conceptual reach.

Prosser writes his analysis in part to respond to certain "constructionist theories of transsexuality," which "overwhelmingly fail to examine how transsexuals are constructing subjects" and perpetuate the idea that "construction in fact connotes nothing positive" by ignoring this agency (8). Rosemary Hennessey describes Prosser's argument in *Intersections between Feminist and Queer Theory* as positioned against the "social constructionist paradigm" that was "spurred on by the publication and reception of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in 1990" (120). While this social constructionism provided an "important critique of the positivist notion that biology determines gender," the "unfortunate effect" of this movement (for theorists such as Prosser) encouraged "a new understanding of gender as a purely discursive reiterative practice" (Hennessey 120). Since this account of gender has "comprehensively influenced queer studies," Prosser is

compelled to highlight what is lost by this account: "the relation between psyche and body in shaping gender identity" (120). This relationship is what becomes most relevant to me in this analysis, as I intend to investigate the relation between psyche and body in shaping specifically non-binary gender identities in an online context.

The way psyche and body are treated with regards to Prosser's transsexual subjects in critical theory reflects a complicated, seemingly contradictory positioning. They are read as both literalizing (reinscribing gender norms after they are exposed as constructed) and deliteralizing (exposing gender norms as constructed by transgressing the boundaries between them) the discourse of gender and sexuality depending on the argument (Prosser 14-15). Prosser describes how "neatly superimposed on the literalizing/deliteralizing binary is another binary, that of the reinscriptive versus the transgressive" (15). So all literalizing is "hegemonic (bad)" and all deliteralizing is "subversive (good)," which rarely provides the means to account for an intersectional analysis of social phenomena (15). Prosser seeks to complicate these easy but ultimately unproductive conceptual frameworks by reading transsexual narratives as "body narratives: texts that engage with the feelings of embodiment; stories that not only represent but allow changes to somatic materiality" (16). At the time of writing, Prosser was responding to an emerging trend in critical queer theory that pushed away binary trans narratives as passive victims constructed from the gender binary (ignoring the subjects as authorial and constructive themselves) in favour of more "transgressive" narratives. Now, I believe non-binary trans narratives (along with binary trans narratives) are also read and dismissed by many, particularly trans-exclusionary feminists, as both literalizing and deliteralizing, reinscriptive and transgressive. The argument goes, if we've moved to the point where the gender binary has become so deconstructed in its

oppressive applications, how can one argue they *feel* like any particular gender at all outside of cultural expectations and pressures? Yet somehow the arguments for why someone identifies with their assigned gender identity are rarely as scrutinized.

Non-binary people may deliteralize and transgress the gender binary, but they can also be presumed to essentialize, literalize, and reinscribe gender in their "reasoning" for the way they dress, the way they speak and act, their interests, their body modification and transformation (if they choose), and more. This criticism is often provided by cis-gender people who have never felt alienation to the gender category they've been assigned but want to insist that the things they do and feel aren't gendered and haven't been their entire lives. There is also criticism from people who have felt alienation to an ill-fitting oppressive gender binary, such as what is described in the trans-exclusionary radical feminist article "Coming out as 'non-binary' throws other women under the bus" (written by Susan Cox for *Feminist Current*, a self-described leading feminist website of Canada) (Cox). In this article, the category of "women" is reduced to externally-applied "sexist stereotypes," (that the author applies herself to non-binary people that present femininely) and so therefore not identifying as a woman when one is coercively assigned this category somehow indicates that all cisgender women are voluntarily participating in their own gender oppression (Cox). This view includes no futurity for gender outside of purely oppressive categories and disavows all positive and generative elements of gender identification. It sees the constructed nature of gender categories as static and inaccessible rather than recognizing and celebrating new gender constructions by people who recognize and reject structural binary gender oppression.

But proceeding as though gender identifications don't matter to people outside of gender oppression normalizes a neoliberal society that aggregates a mass culture of

"individuals" into a "post-gender" society, where "boys" and "girls" can do anything and everything and stay in their assigned gender categories. When non-binary people articulate their own narratives of masculinity, femininity, or a lack thereof, however, they are the ones seen to be conjuring gender out of thin air to ascribe it to the aspects of themselves that help them make sense of their identities and experiences in a society of institutionalized and oppressively binary gender categories. This individualized, neoliberal "post-gender" society also erases the intersections of gender with race, class, sexuality, religion, size, ability, and more that change the way people experience and identify with gender. This casual dismissal of non-binary gender narratives expects non-binary people to simply shut up and identify with their assigned sex category since they now have the "freedom" to perform any gendered expectations they want from within that category. But again, gender still matters to people, and sex assignments are still used to categorize and control populations regardless of how "transgressive" those limited spaces become for the people who fit within them. I believe the similarities of positioning between binary trans narratives at the time of Prosser's analysis and non-binary narratives in this neoliberal context can make his focus on *body* narratives extremely pertinent and helpful to avoid this delegitimizing trend.

By using Prosser's theories in this way, however, I don't mean to collapse binary and non-binary trans experiences, particularly as he emphatically theorizes around bodily crossings that are usually only provided if the trans individual appeases the binary narrative the medical establishment has made for them (such as being "born in the wrong body", etc.). It must be said, however, that even as the process of interacting with this pathologized narrative is what drives a good portion of his book, Prosser's definition of transsexuality includes not only crossing "between" but "beyond" gender poles or sexual

difference (2). This is possible because, as he explains, even though "transsexuality concerns the deliberate transformation of the material body more than any other category catalogued by the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), transsexuality does not symptomize itself in the subject's body, at least not visibly or reliably so" (103-4). Even within the medically approved (and very problematic, to say the least) view of transsexuality, "the diagnosis required for this transformation must instead derive from the patient's narrative: narrativization as a transsexual necessarily precedes one's diagnosis as a transsexual; autobiography is transsexuality's proffered symptom" (104). I read Prosser's analysis here with online non-binary trans communities in mind. When non-binary people encounter the elements of autobiography found in other non-binary blogs and social media presences, it opens up the possibility for them to write their own body narratives using the tools available in certain online spaces. These autobiographical elements have not replaced the medical binary narrative, as it's more accurate to say that a transsexual diagnosis "acts as a narrative filter, enabling some transsexuals to live out their story and thwarting others" (107). Many non-binary people report having to spin a binary gendered and sexed narrative about themselves in order to get the treatment they need[23]. It seems clear to me, however, that these adopted narratives are only provisional and are sometimes supplemented with newly legitimized online non-binary body narratives.

It is immediately apparent, however, that "autobiography" as a narrative genre does not truly reflect the way non-binary people engage or participate in blogs and social

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[23] For an example, see Lucas Kieran's piece "Navigating the Standards of Care as a Transtrender," in which they (a non-binary person coercively assigned female at birth) describe pretending to conform to the medical establishment's binary narratives of gender in order to continue receiving testosterone injections.

media. Autobiographies "correspond life to textual form" and "order the disorder of life's events into narrative episodes" with a "formal structure that life does not indeed have" (116). As transsexual subjects were required to formalize their life structure according to the narrative filter of the medical establishment, the "gendered coherence" their body narratives provided was "inextricable from the narrative coherence of the genre [of autobiography]" (116). But blogs and social media participation are not autobiographies, that is, formalized, episodic, retrospective reflections on life experiences. Prosser does consider "journals and diaries" within his framework, writing that, although they also recount the past since "writing can never be absolutely synchronized with the present moment of living", their "dated entries fragment life into an organization less linear and coherent" and ultimately "resemble life more closely as it is lived" (118). Importantly, "the continuous present of the journal creates life as open-ended, less schematic" (118). So if we read social media as a genre closer to journals and diaries than autobiographies, the gendered, embodied coherence that Prosser claims is inextricable from the coherence of the genre is also opened up in less linear, coherent, schematic ways.

Social media that displays the day-to-day lives of participants clearly differs from traditional journals and diaries in how the audience is conceived. The appeal of participation is largely a social gesture rather than a private one, and direct interaction with an audience becomes possible instead of the mediated distance between author and audience when publishing traditional journals and diaries. The genre of social media also allows for traditional forms of self-expression like textual narrative and self-portraiture to be made much more accessible and instantaneous. Features of the genre such as these, when used by non-binary subjects to explore their own body narratives and identities, surely affect the way their gendered narratives cohere. I have already established that

Tumblr in particular houses concentrations of non-binary users that become fluent in narrative conventions that seem nonsensical, adopting definitions and frameworks for gender that are fluid and responsive. So the genre of self-narrative I read into certain pockets of social media is one that coheres the gendered body narratives of non-binary users in a way that seems, among other things, unprecedentedly non-prescriptive.

Prosser's analysis is not just about the formalizing power of the autobiographical genre to cohere gender narratives of binary trans subjects in an abstract, purely mental sense. That's the purpose of his "body narrative" proposal, to account for the mediation between mind and body that harmonizes the body image to the gendered narrative that is developed and adopted. In order for me to take into account how this mediation might operate in the context of non-binary internet users, I must attend to Prosser's conception of the body image, especially since the language of images is so fundamental to the social media genre. Prosser's second chapter in *Second Skins* is entirely devoted to exploring the relationship between one's body and one's conception of it. He engages with Didier Anzieu's concept of the "skin ego," which "suggests the body's surface as that which matters most about the self" due to how it functions as "the key interface between self and other, between the biological, the psychic, and the social" (65). So for Anzieu, "the image of the body" is "derived from the feeling of the body" and ultimately "the body is crucially and materially formative of the self" (65). Prosser uses this to contextualize the transsexual "image of being trapped in the wrong body" (69). He argues that the "concept of the skin ego emphasizes not the imaginariness of the figure [who is trapped in the wrong body] (rhetorical image) but its sensibility (embodied image); for in Anzieu's topography of the subject the unconscious is isomorphic to ('structured like') and materially supported by the body through the psychosomatic surface of the skin" (72).

While I don't intend to delve too deeply into Anzieu's "skin ego" in my own analysis, Prosser's mobilization of the concept is important to get away from thinking of the body image as a purely visual phenomenon.

Prosser explains that because "the feeling of owning one's body is more foundational than visual body image to our body's operations" (since visual body image "is of course absent in the blind") to focus too heavily on the visual doesn't allow legitimacy for material conditions. To do so emphasizes the "'image' at the expense of the body, rendering the body equivalent to that which can be seen" and "omitting to account for the subjective experience of the body, the body as it is (or is not) felt" (79). Prosser suggests that it is only when putting both of these together that one can understand why "the transsexual's gender identity, originally invisible but deeply felt, can wield such material force: why 'feeling like' in the face of such opposition from the visible body can be experienced as a core self" (79). What resonates most effectively with me is how Prosser emphasizes the body image as an interface without reducing it to merely that abstract function; he equally emphasizes the material relationship of the body to this interface, the resulting physical sensation of alienation that grows when that interface is only capable of miscommunication.

For the non-binary subject, being trapped in the wrong body is often (but not always) experienced differently than Prosser's typical transsexual subject. Again, there is no one "non-binary body" to seek out like the binary gender and sex normative templates offered by the medical establishment. The mobilization of "non-binary" in the contemporary online spaces I'm interested in makes room for countless new gender body narratives that legitimize the "non-binaryness" of a subject regardless of their particular bodily arrangement. This doesn't mean that gender dysphoria and material sensations of

unease in one's body are not commonly experienced, but in a genre that is more equipped to legitimize a multiplicity of body images, the interface of the body image changes and develops in its capacity. I believe the dual features of the body image Prosser describes — material subjectivity as well as an interface that communicates the otherness of visual or social conception — can be supported by Gail Weiss' theory of the intercorporeal body image, which is actually an assemblage of multiple, shifting body images.

In Weiss' book *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*, she argues that people have multiple body images that "overlap with one another and are themselves constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed through a series of ongoing, intercorporeal exchanges"(165). Weiss knits together a context for her multiple, intercorporeal body images from a number of theorists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Paul Schilder. The characteristics most relevant to her own framework are dynamic organization, the sort of actuality and material anticipation acquired when body image possibilities are reckoned with, and the imaginative potential of body images that allow people to conceive an unlimited number of them (9). From this perspective, Prosser's concerns about mediating the body image as it is seen by others (and oneself) with the subjective experience of the body's material conditions (specifically for transsexual subjects) can potentially be addressed. Since I am concerned with non-binary subjects online, I believe these aspects of Weiss' body image theories can help move us towards understanding how embodied participation in these spaces inspires gender coherence along new (imaginative) narrative conventions. Weiss argues that that "the body does not impose any sort of pregiven structure upon the world, but is itself structured by its world, which in turn implies that the body image reflects from the start the particularities and generalities of a given situation, not merely the idiosyncrasies of its own physiological or genetic makeup and

psychical constitution" (11). This kind of reciprocal, symbiotic relationship of being structured by the world as one structures one's own comprehension of it allows for a legitimization of the social (intercorporeal) elements of body image development, very relevant when situating the role of the social media genre.

Weiss's emphasis on intercorporeality proposes a foundational series of body images that are based more on the transformative power of empathy than the alienating split between self and other that has been traditionally assumed in privileged theoretical works (Weiss uses Lacan and Merleau-Ponty as examples of the latter). When one learns to anticipate a recognition of themselves from other people's perspectives it "provides the ground for strong *identification with others*," which "expand the parameters of the body image" (13). When one reconciles this specular self with their subjective experience of their body it accomplishes "the development of an intercorporeal spatiality," or the incorporation of other people's perspectives into one's own. Weiss argues that newborn babies are not without body images, but instead have fragmented, fluid images based on sensation rather than reflection that merge as they develop. Therefore, if a conception of body image development allows for multiplicity, there is no need to assume a singular alienating moment when the child develops enough to incorporate an intercorporeal spatiality, recalling the possibilities of Haraway's generative anti-phallogocentrism (15).

For cisgender people, the gendered elements of this incorporation go largely unnoticed, as they retain a dynamic organization of gendered body images even as the gendered elements of these images are reconstructed and deconstructed in life (these are the "particularities and generalities" of gender for most people). But for trans people in general there is an often unlivable friction that becomes impossible to ignore at some point, as the "deep community between one's own body-image and the body-image of

others" becomes fraught and disconnected (33). Later in her book, Weiss uses anorexia

nervosa to explain the features of a distorted body image, arguing that the contradictions

between the images anorexics have of themselves versus what other people see are not in

themselves the source of the distortion (97). While I don't mean to legitimize the medical

pathologization of transsexuality (although I do mean to legitimize the

transsexual/transgender people who cohere themselves to this narrative), the aspects of

contradiction and the feeling of "wrongness" in the body that informs and structures the

body images of those with anorexia nervosa do recall Prosser's earlier points.

Weiss argues that "we all have contradictions in our body image," but the

multiplicity of body images available to us generally allows us to navigate these

contradictions (99-100). She explains that this multiplicity "guarantees that we cannot

invest too heavily in any one [body image]," which serves to "destabilize the hegemony"

of "a singularly alienating specular (or even cultural) image" (100). Here is where the

deep community of body image production and reconstruction is reflected, as the

potentially generative flaws and faults in all forms of communication are echoed in the

communication of body images. But Weiss believes that "it is precisely the lack of

destabilization in the anorexic's body image" that results in them becoming "*too*

coherent" (101). For the anorexic, Weiss claims there is a "corporeal reduction of an

anorexic's universe" that is "facilitated by a singularly oppressive body image" (102).

This means that the anorexic has no way to live out their corporeal contradictions, which

should have been mediated by a fluidity in body images. Instead of focusing on the

"cultural and bodily contradictions," to actually help the anorexic, there needs to be a

response "*corporeally* to these contradictions through the creation of multiple body

images" (102). Even though initially these body images "will inevitably be in tension

with one another," communication through "body image intercourse" allows "us to negotiate productively the turbulence of our corporeal existence" (102). Weiss emphasizes that this turbulence "cannot and should not be abjected from our body images, since it is precisely what enables us to meet the vicissitudes of our bodily life" (102).

So if we are to apply this conception of body image distortion to gender dysphoria, we could suggest that the body image interface of Prosser's transsexual subject is not permitted to communicate the subjective experience of someone with gender dysphoria's material conditions. They cannot destabilize their body images in a healthy way because their corporeal experience is forced into a singular and external gendered body narrative that they do not fit into (there is no room for them to negotiate the corporeal contradictions of their lived experiences). Weiss' phrase "body image intercourse" recalls the interface aspect of Prosser's materially informed body image, and her solution to addressing the distorted, hyper-cohered body image of the anorexic is a corporeal response that creates multiple body images. The solution for Prosser's transsexual subjects is of course to seek out and receive a corporeal response to their gender dysphoria in the form of a "sex change", and ultimately the generation of more body images (differently gendered) that might navigate the turbulence of body image management more productively. For non-binary subjects, a similar solution might be equally productive, depending on the individual. But more abstractly, non-binary subjects receive ineffective and unproductive treatment to their perceived problem of "non-binaryness" when cis-gender people and institutions insist that they identify with a binary gender identity in order to be legitimate. This enforces a hyper-coherence of body images

that are no longer capable of the body image intercourse that can address the contradictions felt materially and subjectively to a binary gender categorization.

Clearly non-binary subjects must look elsewhere for alternatives to the distorted body images they receive back from a binary gendered society. The problems of non-binary subjectivity are only problems because of social and cultural gender oppression and marginalization. Non-binary subjects are forced into a binary hyper-coherence of gendered body images in many day-to-day situations, but Weiss's insistence on multiple body images can also allow for a more nuanced understanding of this hyper-coherence. The pressure to hyper-cohere is still there, and is likely why some non-binary people do seek out more traditional corporeal responses (altering the physicality of their bodies) to find relief. But what happens when we explore the ways in which non-binary subjects (particularly young people who have grown up online) also extend themselves corporeally onto the internet? It is easy to imagine how the affirmations of non-binary resource blogs (who proclaim the only requirement to a non-binary identity is the self-identification as such) can provide a framework for fluidly navigating multiple body images without diminishing the accessibility of "non-binaryness." If a non-binary person experiences a body image that is informed by the binary misreading of others, there are spaces such as these blogs that encourage them to rewrite this misreading into a body narrative that allows the cues of a binary gender to represent a personal non-binary experience. But this does not fully address the mechanisms of corporeal extension available across social media. The genre of social media and the self-representation it articulates allows for a corporeal response to the distorted and hyper-cohered body image non-binary people receive from their society as a whole.

In Gómez and Ardévol's article *Playful Embodiment*, they analyze "the practice of

'self-presentation' based on posting photos of one's own body using different Internet technologies" (41). They particularly emphasize "the playful relationship established by individuals with their own bodies through these practices" (41). Using "playful" in this way implies a kind of positive, generative agency, which I read as having the potential to affirmatively write and rewrite body narratives without being bound to a more "legitimate," static (binary) affixment of such narratives. Gómez and Ardévol write that although "individual identity traits (age, sex, race, etc.) are extremely visible, openly displayed and shared," this "public self-presentation" is "far from being a simple exhibitionist practice" (42). The most common form of public self-presentation, and the form Gómez and Ardévol focus on, are of course "selfies" (slang for self-portraits, usually taken with one's phone, often posted on social media). Although now well-integrated into the techniques of social media, they are still often regarded in the simplistic way that Gómez and Ardévol describe, as narcissistic exhibitionism.

Jill Walker Rettberg, in *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology: How we Use Selfies, Blogs, and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves,* writes extensively on this reactionary response. She includes an argument made by Pierre Bourdieu in *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* that claims "what is photographable, seen as worthy of being photographed, is quite rigidly determined by social norms" and expands it to apply to selfies (53). Rettberg believes "perhaps much of the discomfort we see surfacing around selfies is related," arguing that the social norms, or "cultural filters," are changing at a pace well behind the "technological filter" that "allows us to photograph so much more than when the social norms for photography developed" (53). The social norms that dictate what is "photographable" obviously reflect gendered social norms as well, which

Rettberg accounts for in her appraisal of Anne Burns "excellent research blog *The Carceral Net: Photography, Feminism, and Social Media's Disciplinary Principle"* (17).

This blog, which ran from 2013-2015, sought to document and analyze "many examples of selfie hatred" accompanied by "ridicule and pathologising," which Burns locates as a mechanism "that society uses to discipline the stereotypical selfie-takers: young women" (Rettberg 17). In a blog post created on August 9, 2014 titled "Gendering Photography," Burns' compiles a number of "examples to demonstrate how the selfie has become discursively associated with women, and how this permits a targeted form of criticism" (Burns, "Gendering"). She writes that "it is not who actually takes selfies that interests me, rather than the discursive limitations which conceive of selfies as feminine, and as a problematic kind of feminine" (Burns). The men who participate in selfie culture are not discouraged solely because of the feminine association, but because of the association with traits "emblematic of problematic women" (Burns). Burns refers to "a piece on the website *Elite Daily*" to sum up these traits, which states that "selfies are not for men because they are 'strictly for women', they are for 'shallow people', and they are for 'attention seekers'" (Burns). Burns' focus on the disciplinary gendered response to selfies as located around undesirable gendered *traits* rather than undesirable gender categories can be helpful to understand how selfies can be particularly powerful for non-binary individuals. The "problematic" feminine traits that are associated with selfies are not only capable of being expressed by cis women, but by everyone. They are not part of the ideal heteronormative gender binary; the "narcissistic" impulse behind selfies is not "photographable" according to social norms because it is not an appropriately masculine one.

As masculinity (specifically cis-manhood) is framed as an unmarked identity category in hetero-patriarchy, any unfavorably marked alternate categories are collapsed into deviancy. I don't mean to legitimize this collapse when I attend to the particular kind of femininity attributed to selfies, especially since non-binary masculinity can be extremely diverse. However, a masculine-identifying non-binary individual cannot fully conform to the dominant patriarchal masculinity since it requires an unequal binary gender system to legitimize its presumed superiority. In the online context I'm analysing, non-binary identities in particular are characterized as expressions of millennial vanity and trendiness (both traits Burns identifies as key to the unfavorable gendering of selfies)[24]. Burns also devotes a whole post on her blog (content which she eventually used for a thesis) cataloguing and analysing "Discipline and the Duck Face[25]" (Burns). She concludes that "something as seemingly innocuous as pouting in photographs" generates comments that feed "into a wider discourse that restricts and punishes particular performances of female identity and sexuality" (Burns, "Discipline"). Instead of being seen solely as a frivolous and superficial selfie trend, "the discourse regarding duckfaces, and those who do them, disciplines women into adhering to certain prescribed gender norms, realigns their priorities to match those of the (male) viewer, and promotes mockery[26] and threat as legitimate forms of leisure" (Burns). I mention the disciplinary

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[24] In the third chapter of this thesis, I focus on this social response through the derogatory term "transtrender."

[25] "Duck face" is the derogatory term for the feminized trend of noticeably pouting in selfies (so that the extended lips are likened to a duck's protruding beak), generally in a way perceived to be unattractive by hetero-masculine standards.

[26] For a recent (June 2016) example, consider the "Washington-based comedian" who mockingly recreated his 19-year-old daughter's "sexy" selfies (apparently having "even mastered the duck face") (Howard). He claims he did so because "she posted something and the guys in the comment section were too much" and

element of Burns' analysis here because it demonstrates how selfies can become tools with which to participate in gender alterity, and the fear they instill in those invested in patriarchal binary gender systems indicates the power of this potential. With this in mind, it's easy to imagine how the reactionary selfie hatred indicates a resonance and an association (perhaps unconscious) of selfies with far more than "just" cis women in general. There is a precedent for selfies to be associated with gender non-conforming behavior, which opens up what becomes "photographable" for people who are gender non-conforming. In this way selfies become an easily available technique of the social media genre for non-binary participants to write new body narratives.

So now that there is a clear precedent for selfies to be culturally positioned against the ideals of a hetero-patriarchal gender binary, we can look further into how they might function as a social media technique used by non-binary people in particular. Gómez and Ardévol, in "Playful Embodiment," assert that "the widespread use and availability of digital recording devices (digital cameras, video cameras, camera phones, etc)" has resulted in "the everyday life and the body of a person who photographs" becoming "some of the main photographic objects shared online" (44). For non-binary individuals, who may have only ever seen people like themselves culturally represented as a joke or a monstrous, alienated figure, this element of making the body in "everyday life" photographable can hold great transformative power. In the genre of social media, the

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so intended to deter this heterosexual male audience. But the exaggerated and contorted duck face expressions he pulls in comparison to the relatively muted and neutral facial poses in the original selfies seem to indicate that the target of his mockery is actually his daughter, and he means to discipline her through this mockery so that she will be too embarrassed to post such selfies online in the future (Howard).

body "becomes again the basic artifact of cultural identity construction, and has once again become a crucial element of identity performance, but this time with the utilization of self-images in a playful way and in relation with other devices" (44-5).

Cultural identity construction, for Gómez and Ardévol, is not "only … a result of constant social interaction" (specifically computer-mediated communication) or only a "*bricolage* of self-representation activity on webpages, but … a practice in constant flow between representation, interaction and play, where heterogeneous elements are brought together" (47). This understanding is cohesive with Weiss' intercorporeality, and with the definitive properties of non-binary identities, which are organized around a principle of constant, playful flow, bringing together heterogeneous gendered elements under the same fluid, self-defining principle. The individual identities can be static or in flux, but to claim a non-binary identity in this context has both such identities recognizing a legitimacy in the other without losing it for themselves. This helps explain why the principles of playful embodiment articulated by Gómez and Ardévol are so relevant to my claim that the genre of social media and the techniques available within it can be generative for contemporary non-binary identities.

Gómez and Ardévol explain that the field of internet studies previously identified sociability as something done in public virtual spaces, but now "sociability is the consequence of the 'consumption' of the personal identities performed online, mainly through personal blogs" or "personal profiles" (45). This consumption is made possible because the infrastructure of social media comes to more closely resemble other forms of consumable media in that the user obtains "a 'digital materiality'" (45). For Gómez and Ardévol this refers to how "in blogs or Flickr and YouTube accounts, the address is fixed and permanent, and the content is managed by the owner" (as opposed to users previously

participating in nebulous IRC channels) (45). I have discussed the semi-anonymity of

Tumblr blogs, and while this may lessen the digital materiality in the form of fixed

addresses (users on Tumblr often change URLs seasonally or for reasons of personal

taste), the ownership is still reliably personal, and many Tumblr users also have other

forms of social media in which they participate as well (in which such materiality may be

more or less fixed). Regardless, Gómez and Ardévol also write that not only is the user

profile "recognizable, solid and constant, but also deeply framed by a visual support,

specifically photos, where self-portraits are becoming the key for self-presentation,"

creating "a 'return of the flesh'" (45). This conceptual grasp of fleshy materiality

(recalling Prosser) reinforces their claim that participants of social media (who use it in

this way) do not become disembodied on the internet, interacting solely with other

disembodied presences. While there is still anonymous communication, overwhelmingly

social media participants navigate varying levels of anonymity and materiality depending

on their online context, with most having a basis of playful embodiment through personal

blogs or accounts from which to write and consume the body narratives of themselves and

others. For non-binary participants in particular, as they consume the "practice of one's

identity construction" (as Gómez and Ardévol put it) through non-binary contexts, they

can replicate this practice and transform their own identity construction processes for

others in turn.

The hyper-consumptive impulses of contemporary culture are not sustainable, and

have many devastating effects around the world as inequalities and exploitation are

perpetuated for very selective profit. I have discussed how non-binary communities and

participants are not currently recognized as symbolically legitimate by a mass culture of

consumption, but they nevertheless exist within this culture and learn from its means of

self-production. In David Marshall's "The Promotion and Presentation of the Self: Celebrity as Marker of Presentational Media," (cited in "Playful Embodiment"), he locates this self-productive means in the "pedagogy of the celebrity" (36). He explains that the concept of "celebrity taught generations how to engage and use consumer culture to 'make' oneself" (36). In the "transformation of the individual into consumer," there was no simple transition from production to consumption but instead "a shift to a wider and more pervasive *production* of the self" (36). This production of the self "implies the mutability of the production process, as it is built from the array of possible forms of consumption and expression that these types of consumption provided for the individual" (36).

According to Gómez and Ardévol, social media users learn from this mutability that they can playfully make and produce embodied selves through the forms of consumption available to them, transforming their bodies into the "main consumer object" through filters of self-confidence and positivity (47). David Marshall calls the pedagogy of celebrity in the twentieth century "a very elaborate morality tale that mapped a private world into a public world," declaring an "ideal self" that allowed celebrities to sell "a wide variety of products" (37). This is certainly still culturally present, and there are many social media users who leverage their ability to match their image to the ideal self still articulated through celebrity and consumer culture (an extremely narrow and oppressive mould). This is most commonly seen on Instagram promotional posts, available to both traditional celebrities and the more "regular" users who can emulate them. But even though this morality tale still holds disciplinary power in celebrity culture, the mechanism of being able to make the private self into a public presence loses such moral narrative cohesion when made available to an unprecedented variety of people.

From the case studies Gómez and Ardévol examine for their article, they infer "personal blogs, as well as user profiles, are closely related to autobiography" (48). Recalling Prosser and the power of the autobiographical genre to allow transsexual subjects the power to write new body narratives, it again seems clear that the autobiographical elements of the social media genre can function similarly for non-binary users. Gómez and Ardévol explain that body images on the internet are not solely "a representation of the subject," but a "way to perform self-identity in a playful way and [function] as material objects of exchange in social interaction" (48). Applying this to a non-binary context, the material objects of non-binary selfies are exchanged and consumed by other non-binary users. They supplement the gap left by the celebrity morality tale that delegitimizes non-binary body narratives, but reinforce the inherited mutability of self and identity construction, encouraging them to post their own body images to be further consumed and exchanged. This mutability also suggests the potential for non-distorted body images according to Gail Weiss' theories of intercorporeality. As discussed, such distortion comes from a hyper-cohered body narrative that doesn't allow a fluid navigation of a multiplicity of body images according to the needs and context of the individual. So having the option to playfully perform or deny the gendered elements of one's body or embodied identity through social interaction provides an unprecedented intercorporeal empowerment. Non-binary users that consume non-binary selfies and then produce their own are generating the capacity to see themselves differently and manifesting that potential for difference for themselves. The intercorporeal elements of body images provide non-binary users in the audience role the potential to manifest a multiplicity beyond a hyper-cohered binary gender assignment as well.

This is not to erase the potentially restrictive and harmful norms and expectations that influence how people are taught to consume selfies; Gómez and Ardévol emphasize in one of their case studies that "choosing the 'right' photo is a practice learned through a process of socialization" (54). Non-binary users who post and consume non-binary selfies are not exempt from perpetuating hegemonic aesthetic expectations in the body images they deem worthy of posting or consuming online. However, the fact that they nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of "non-binaryness" regardless of the quality of the picture or the arrangement of the body within the picture indicates a mechanism with the potential of acceptance and cohesion for non-binary body narratives. The "playful" quality emphasized by Gómez and Ardévol again comes to demonstrate this, with selfies discursively employed in non-binary friendly spaces as examples of both fun body positivity and empowering resistance. Instead of a "trivial practice," this play is "transformative," "challenging the conception that body equals a stable and fixed identity" (55). For non-binary individuals, coercively forced into a binary body narrative that is read as stable and fixed against their will, the potential to challenge such a conception can allow them to rewrite their body narratives. The shifting role of content producer and audience/consumer can allow them to consume body images of people like and unlike themselves, learning new ways of being and playfully navigating the gendered relationship between self and body without needing to conform to an ill-fitting impersonal and pathologised narrative.

The extent to which non-binary selfies are actually "seen" can vary immensely, with some photos and their accompanying captions going viral and some only ever being seen by a few individuals. When non-binary selfies go viral, their reach is obviously much greater as they are consumed by a greater amount of people, and because content

generally goes viral in spaces that are already primed to recognize its legitimacy, the people sharing and consuming the content are more likely to represent non-binary populations. The blogs that Gómez and Ardévol choose to analyze (*En busca del cuerpo perdido* run by Yreal, *Soy cuerpo* run by Rafael, and the fotolog account *VeronikA*) also vary, with some having established followings and an explicit desire "for a transformative experience through body representation" and some that are less known and simply use self-portraits as "a form of self-expression and, above all, a pleasurable way to make friends" (50). There is similar variation for non-binary blogs or social media presences, with some spaces explicitly dedicated to non-binary selfie representation and distribution. These spaces also often encourage both the reader/consumer and the selfie posters to capitalize on the exposure provided in order to make new social connections/friendships. There are some non-binary individuals who have well established online presences, and some who gain exposure when their selfies or content goes viral. Regardless, the potential for non-binary users to consume non-binary selfies is significant in certain online spaces regardless of their own personal popularity. I will now briefly outline a few examples of where influential non-binary selfies may be found, and where body narratives are sometimes being explicitly rewritten.

On August 17th, 2015, a black American non-binary Tumblr blogger with the username "blewthischance" posted a selfie of themselves taken in a bathroom (presumably a "male" designated bathroom due to the visibility of urinals). The selfie

went relatively viral on Tumblr, gaining 31, 276 notes so far ("likes" or "reblogs" or both). They caption the image[27] as follows:

> Please stop assuming that everyone who dresses outside of the binary is ashamed of their anatomy. So you can stop giving me your unsolicited tips on how I should do softer makeup to "look better" or only wear high waisted bottoms to "have a better figure". Please stop. I am fully aware of my muscular stature, broad shoulders, chiseled jaw, narrow hips, and everything else that makes me look "manly". But it's my body. And I love my body. And I will decorate it how I please. If that doesn't neatly fall into your heteronormative aesthetic standards that means there's something YOU need to fix. Not me. On that note. Peep this beauty. Normalize this beauty. Cuz it ain't going nowhere sweetheart 😙 (blewthischance).

In this caption there is an explicit rejection of the "passing" ideal usually associated with trans individuals (in *Second Skins* Prosser delves deeply into this). There is an acknowledgement of fleshed and gendered attributes that are corporeally underscored with an image of the poster's body itself, a body that the poster is not ashamed of and considers loveable in its current state (regardless of how it may get misread or misgendered).

In terms of how the poster uses their selfie to physically reject "cis-ness," they are wearing makeup, have long hair, and are wearing tight pants with a crop top, which are all feminine-coded adornments that stand out within the traditionally cis-male physical space in which the poster playfully and proudly stands. Any delegitimizing of the poster's

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[27] For links to all the selfies discussed here, please see the list of works cited.

gender is thrust outwards to be the problem of someone else; the poster themselves has

rejected the hyper-cohered binary body image placed upon them in favour of a self-

constituted multiplicity of images. This is especially evident in the poster's assertion that

their beauty isn't going anywhere, setting up a futurity for non-binary bodily acceptance.

The body narrative the poster articulates can be "decorated" how the poster chooses

without losing non-binary or transgender legitimacy. The way the poster writes the

caption is assured and definitive, but also reads playfully due to the tone it's written in

(using slang, and emojis, for example). The overall positivity of the post speaks to this

tone as well, demonstrating the transformative elements possible within playfully

embodied social media extension. In this context, the poster doesn't have to absorb the

negativity of the oppressive gender norms that surrounds them; they have the means to

instead focus on affirmative generation.

      Interestingly, the poster's imperative to "normalize this beauty" recalls Prosser's

complaints about critical theory's inability to contend with embodied subjects,

particularly trans subjects. The "normalization" could be a literalizing/reinscriptive call to

consider non-binary genders and their body narratives as mundane as cisgender body

narratives, while also deliteralizing and transgressing the gender binary itself. This

position is difficult to categorize, especially as it shifts based on which perspective it is

considered from, but I can't help but consider it a part of how the fluid definitions and

social positioning of non-binary identities maintain their multiplicity. The poster's

insistence on normalization also complicates the narrative proposed by David Marshall,

that the potential to produce oneself is shaped by the celebrity culture of the 20th century.

The poster is asking for their body to be normalized as a non-binary body, which stands

in apparent opposition to the celebrity imperative of vanity and superficial fame that is

usually used to dismiss social media output. At the same time, the poster is nevertheless

addressing an audience of critics, positioning themselves not unlike a celebrity

responding to "haters" or critics themselves.

There is more to be done on the role of celebrity and how it comes to shape young

trans subjectivities, especially for non-binary individuals, but I bring up this point now to

emphasize how the process of material exchange that Gómez and Ardévol identify can be

difficult to trace. Nevertheless, even though the poster appears to be addressing a binary

gendered audience, their confident embodied display with its accompanying body

narrative uses the genre of social media to form healthy, multiple/mutable body images.

These can potentially be consumed by other non-binary individuals so that they may

emulate them for themselves: the poster calls for their perceived audience to "peep this

beauty" and blogs like "genderfluid-dragon," "many-things-genderfluid," and

"queerpositivity" are immediately visible in the list of notes as having liked or reblogged

the post. This poster's rewritten body narrative uses techniques from the genre of social

media (selfies, captions, addressing an audience to produce oneself, etc.) to construct and

perform a playfully embodied non-binary identity and experience, a process that is

consumed and replicated by other non-binary users.

A common technique of the non-binary social media genre is to post selfies that

represent both masculinity and femininity juxtaposed together, though this only

represents and likely only resonates with non-binary people who are genderfluid (an

agender person, for example, would likely identify with neither masculinity nor

femininity). In a now deleted post from 2015 (which had accumulated 182,579 notes),

user "eeveesarts" posted two selfies placed side by side, in which they are wearing the

same clothing and hat and holding the same mug. The selfie on the left shows the poster

with thickened eyebrows, short hair, masculinizing makeup and a more masculine pose. The selfie on the right shows the poster with long hair, feminizing make up, smaller eyebrows, and a more feminine pose. The caption reads "Some days I'm like ♂.. Then some days I'm like ♀," a playful way to show off how the poster can "pass" as either masculine or feminine (eeveesarts). This is a marked difference from "blewthischance'"'s post and its explicit rejection of binary passing, but it still reflects an attempt to use the techniques of the social media genre to resist a hyper-cohered body image. Another example of someone who demonstrates this trend is Miles Jai, is a popular queer Youtube vlogger. Although he seems to identify as a gender non-conforming queer man rather than non-binary (according to a possibly outdated Youtube vlog[28], he nevertheless uses the hashtags "#genderfluid," "#nonbinary," "#androgynous," "#iamenough" to distribute a similarly constructed set of selfies.

In a September 20th, 2015 Twitter post Jai writes "Playing with masculine/feminine looks and everything in between" to describe two selfies placed side by side (the post has gained 931 retweets and 2,349 likes). Interestingly, the masculine selfie (no visible makeup, leather jacket, more masculine pose) is again on the left and the feminine (makeup, earrings, crop top, more feminine pose) is again on the right. This placement tendency could possibly indicate a troubling aspect of this genre technique, that it ultimately reinscribes a gender binary that sees masculinity as a neutral (so it gets placed first) and femininity as a marked spectacle (so it gets placed last, as the evidence of "doing" gender). This may also be a complete coincidence, and I don't mean to legitimize the reinsciption (literalizing)/transgression (deliteralizing) binary that Prosser

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[28] See works cited (Jai, "Q&A").

critiques, but I do want to complicate any easy narrative that suggests all these genre

techniques are transgressive in the same way. I hope that future work in this field can

gather more data and further investigate such technical patterns. Regardless, Jai's use of

hashtags clearly connects self-affirmation with non-binary-friendly selfies, and provides a

playful means for hyper-cohered non-binary users to embrace and construct multiple

gendered body images.

This template insists that regardless of whether the user is perceived as masculine

or feminine, their non-binary identity is still valid, and they have the freedom to juxtapose

gender expression or experimentation within this framework. This capability allows for

multiple corporeal social extensions at once; their rewritten body narratives don't

necessarily have to rely on the medical establishment and binary sexed body

modifications in order to *feel* as though their body images and gender identity are

harmonious (although the aforementioned options can work in tandem for many

individuals). Both an explicit rejection of binary aesthetic beauty norms and a juxtaposed

display of gender alterity that represents navigation of both masculinity and femininity

function as social media genre techniques for non-binary users to write new, playful body

narratives. The selfies I've provided as examples are all from either established social

media presences or viral successes that intensified the exposure of the subjects beyond

what they would typically get on their personal blogs. But there are also blogs set up

specifically to amplify the corporeal and social outreach of non-binary users such as "nb-

selfies" (whose introductory text reads "Your gender is valid! Submit your cute selfies

and meet other Nonbinary friends!"), "nbselfielove" ("we love non-binary selfies"),

"nonbinarycuties" ("a blog for anyone whose gender identity or expression does not quite

fit the binary. submit your selfies or the links to them and we'll post//reblog them!"), and

"lovelynbpoc" ("a space for non-binary people of colour"). These blogs generally accept all selfie submissions regardless of the established popularity of the subject, and in fact make it part of their purpose to particularly boost and build social connections for "regular" non-binary individuals.

Gómez and Ardévol write that selfies function in part as "material objects of exchange in social interaction," and this is especially evident in blogs like "nb-selfies" that explicitly connect the submission and posting of non-binary selfies with meeting new non-binary friends (48). For newly non-binary subjects, constituting and cohering themselves based off the social media genre, places such as these underscore the potential for a social legitimacy that does not require them to force themselves in a hyper-cohered box. Instead, they are encouraged to consume and produce non-binary selves according to individual preference without having to commit to a permanent gendered self. The body narrative conventions that are made available through this genre are mobilized around a recognition of form rather than kind. If a non-binary person can take and post selfies, sending them out to spaces that call for them, the legitimacy of their gender to the social institutions that otherwise shape their life is not the defining feature as to whether or not they can successfully participate in the genre (though the genre is gendered by such institutions for its deviancy). This ultimately allows them more narrative freedom and the capacity to see themselves both legitimized as and "more than" simply their gender identity.

As narrative techniques of the social media genre, it is important to note that selfies can also function to erase non-binary trans people when mobilized in certain contexts. In an article for *Advocate* titled "Bathroom Bills, Selfies, and the Erasure of Nonbinary Trans People," non-binary author Ashe McGovern responds to recent social

media campaigns that use binary trans selfies to fight against "North Carolina's recently adopted House Bill 2 and the fear-stoking, transphobic narratives that justified its passage" (McGovern). McGovern describes these campaign participants as "mostly white, masculine-presenting trans men who 'pass' as cisgender," who post "pictures of themselves in women's bathrooms, sometimes using the hashtag #wejustneedtopee" (McGovern). The intent is to argue that "so-called bathroom bills, which require them to use the women's bathroom, are clearly absurd and actually create the dangerous dynamic that lawmakers claim to be fighting" (namely, "men" being "allowed" to access women in bathrooms) (McGovern). McGovern's main critique of this campaign is that it actually reinforces gender policing, and "the idea that one can determine by looking at a person in which bathroom that individual 'belongs'" (McGovern). This is particularly harmful for "masculine-presenting women, feminine-presenting men, and nonpassing, nonbinary, or gender-nonconforming people" (McGovern). I feel it necessary to include this critique because it illustrates that context is vital when discussing the transformative potential of social media narrative techniques for non-binary individuals. Just as selfies can legitimize a multiplicity of gendered body images and intercorporeal body image interfaces, they can also legitimize binary gender social narratives that leave no room for non-binary representation.

Nevertheless, I have discussed how embodied non-binary online subjectivities are often generated when social media techniques are used in productive ways, and I hope these trends continue. Jay Prosser's foundational work in the trans theory field recognizes the importance of narrative coherence between the material body and a trans person's subjective experiences. This process of coherence is shaped by the specificities of the narrative genre available to such individuals, and the genre of social media is particularly

compatible with non-binary development. As non-binary people are misgendered and misread into ill-fitting binary gender categories, they develop binary body image distortion. Gail Weiss describes this distortion as what occurs when individuals cannot access a multiplicity of intercorporeal body images. This makes it extremely difficult or impossible for these individuals to navigate the contradictions between their subjective non-binary experiences and what is communicated by their body image interface as it is structured by others who do not recognize their "non-binaryness". Weiss' proposed solution is a corporeal response that supplements a hyper-coherence of body images with the space to develop a mutable multiplicity. The discursive, generative role that selfies can play is described and legitimized by Gómez and Ardévol, who see selfies as material objects that are exchanged by online participants. This materiality can be read as a corporeal response to hyper-coherence, as well as an embodied narrative technique of the social media genre that informs and structures non-binary legitimization. I am excited to see further analysis into the patterns and specificities of this genre that has the possibility to cohere non-binary subjectivities. It can be very easy to dismiss social media techniques, as they push the private into the public, as harmfully superficial. But for those who become fluent in the language of this genre, and who are deprived of social and cultural representation, simply seeing non-binary bodies legitimized and celebrated as *worth seeing* can change everything.

As my analysis draws to a close, I hope to have set my own precedent in critical theory in which the contemporary experiences of non-binary individuals and communities are considered worthy of study. I was inspired to investigate the relationship between non-binary subjectivity development and the facilitation of this development by new forms of media based on my own experiences and observations. The crucial role of new

media led me to see participants as embodying an iteration of Haraway's figure of the cyborg. I noticed the narrative and linguistic characteristics of the online spaces that had the most non-binary representation reflected an inheritance of anti-structural cultural formations. I described this as the expression of neo-Dadaism, and was delighted to find other non-binary people (among others) had come to this conclusion as well. The subjectivities in these spaces are primed to understand and embody fluid definitive properties, embracing the technological irrationalities of their medium as a vehicle for disillusionment with phallogocentric narratives. But non-binary individuals and their online communities can only ever partially exist amidst these spaces, and so it was necessary to examine their larger societal positioning.

Describing the qualities of a neoliberal capitalist mass culture that aggregates individuals motivated by consumption, I wanted to show how non-binary experiences are not currently legitimized by this cultural force. This mass culture subordinates difference to homogeneity, and stifles the spaces for critical engagement, but non-binary individuals can never forget their difference in a culture that can't currently homogenize their "nonbinaryness." Even in online spaces that are most friendly to non-binary representation, affirmation and news of binary oppression are distributed together, kindling the critical awareness of many non-binary online participants even as they find the means to their own legitimization. But being non-binary is only one element of how one is situated in social and cultural economies (both global and local), so I turned to analysis of different forms of capital and their potential for mobilization. The characteristic of being non-binary holds only use-value in certain local economies, as in global economies it holds no value at all. But this changes when other privileges are considered, particularly visible in situations of cultural appropriation. It is crucial to

recognize how the privileges available to some non-binary people can greatly alter their movement in social and cultural economies, as it reflects some of the contradictions that arise under provisional umbrella categorizations.

In this final chapter, I sought to directly engage with the aspect of my analysis that inherits the most from trans theory: embodiment. I recognized that non-binary individuals were formulating new relationships to their bodies from their online experiences, and used Jay Prosser's transitional properties of narrative to articulate how these new relationships were possible. Engaging with proposed processes of body-image development led me to locate the techniques of the social media genre as generative and supplementary for the binary body-image distortion that affects many non-binary individuals. By focusing on the power of techniques such as selfies, I wanted to legitimize the seemingly frivolous social media practices that prove to be so generative for both the individuals who produce them and those who consume them. This leads me to my final point. The analysis and narratives I have spun here are articulated from the non-binary perspective I have observed and experienced, but there are many more patterns, techniques, and characteristics found in the online spaces I have mentioned that undoubtedly structure non-binary experiences in entirely different ways. They may be assumed to be frivolous or incomprehensible, but I hope to have shown in this thesis that this doesn't necessarily negate their potential. As non-binary communities grow, they will also spread outside of these online spaces, and will require analysis from different frameworks and perspectives. Just as trans theory has a history of reclaiming trans narratives to reflect the actual experiences and voices of trans people, I hope that I have set a precedent in which other non-binary theorists can describe and theorize their own subjective non-binary experiences.

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