

Images of Transsexuality in Philosophy, Theater, and Film: Nietzsche, Brecht,  
Fassbinder.

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## Abstract

This dissertation discusses representations of transsexuality in German philosophy as well as in German and US-American theater and film performances. Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetics provides a basis for my analysis of constructions of sexual identity and gender role performances. Of special interest to me are the philosopher's writings on art, gender, and their performances in the so-called 'Dionysian Greek orgy,' which Nietzsche discusses at length in his first major work *Die Geburt der Tragödie (The Birth of Tragedy)*. A central motif for this dissertation is the combination of the artistic notions of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, which representatives of Nietzschean scholarship repeatedly identify as gender metaphors, and which the performing arts represent.

My dissertation's intention is to familiarize the reader with the issue of transsexuality as a mode of gender representation. With Kate Bornstein's play *Hidden: A Gender* and Bertolt Brecht's *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan (The Good Person of Szechwan)*, I demonstrate how representations of transsexuality on stage emphasize the impact images of the body as a contingent construction have on our understanding of transsexuality. Regarding film arts, my analyses of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden (In a Year With Thirteen Moons)*, Oscar Roehler's *Agnes und seine Brüder (Agnes and his Brothers)*, and John Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* exemplify how gender performances that resist any bi-gendered categorization contribute to the stigmatization of transsexed and transgender character. In recognition of Friedrich Nietzsche's model of the Apollonian and the Dionysian as intertwined artistic drives involving gender performances, this dissertation offers to

counter transsexual stigmata with a comprehensive model of gender contingency that includes transsexual performances.

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation was written at a time that was significant for me professionally as well as personally. Even though I certainly have not written, nor have I ever attempted to write, a reference to my own journey between sexes and genders, it is a funny coincidence that this dissertation was begun when I began my own journey and was handed in when this journey of mine had reached an – at least temporary – end. I learned what it means to write and what it means to live, so I'd like to thank those who inspired me in both.

My thanks go to all who have read parts of this work and who have been generous with critique and suggestions: Beatrice Waegner, Charles Taggart, Kerstin Steitz, and Gabriel Cooper from the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Jen Heliste and Kristin Chester. My dissertation committee, for putting it up with me over the projects time span. I also like to thank Raphaela Tkotzyk for mutually thought provoking conversations not only about my dissertation, but also on gender studies in Germany and the U.S., for working with me on projects that are both educational and entertaining, and for a friendship that goes way past the aquatic borders. I like to thank all those lovely colleagues I have come to meet at various conferences throughout the country. At times, writing would have been much harder without your encouragement: Hannee Chong, Wakaba Futamura, Chuck Jackson, Pamela Mansutti, and Anthony Squiers. Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Karen Randell have inspired me to present and publish on topics that have sometimes turned my audience's faces pale. Uwe Steiner years ago already encouraged me to make the leap and try to 'go American.' Of course, thanks go to my

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## **Introduction**

This dissertation investigates the humanities' approaches to transsexuality as a socio-cultural, medical, and medial phenomenon. It concentrates mainly on Germanic and Anglo-American scholarship and explores how historical and contemporary images of transsexuality influence our understanding of sex and gender. In reference to Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetics, this project suggests how the philosopher's design of the world as a work of art suggests and supports non-essentialist and contingent understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality. After a theoretical occupation with Friedrich Nietzsche and the relations between his philosophy and feminist scholarships, my project proceeds to performative representations of transgender and/or transsexual characters both in theatrical and films arts. My analysis of theatrical and filmic performances of transsexuality through the lens of Nietzsche's aesthetics aims at contributing to an understanding of transsexuality that rejects and resists both biological essentialism and radical constructivism.

The expression of transsexuality encounters several linguistic difficulties. Throughout this dissertation, the transsexual person is also referred to as a transgender person. Similarly, when I write about constructions of sexual identity, I time and again switch to expressions of gender instead of sex. These terminological changes are intentional, if not inevitable. Whereas sex refers to a body's biological materiality, this body only becomes meaningful once it is communicated in a language that shapes the body's reception. The reception and interpretation of a body's sex, however, does not express physical

materiality, but its representation through language, and hence gender. It is therefore impossible to write about sex without using the vocabulary of gender. Similarly, it is also impossible to refer to a sexed body without using a gendered language: “The body cannot be understood as a neutral screen, a biological *tabula rasa* onto which masculine or feminine could be indifferently projected” (Grosz 18).

Analogously, the term ‘transsexuality’ refers to biological alterations of a somehow sexed body which, again, aim at redefining this biological sex, for example through hormone replacement therapy and/or sexual reassignment surgery. But these measurements are only feasible through a language that renders the body meaningful with regard to its sex and hence designs it as male or female.<sup>1</sup> The term ‘transgender,’ by contrast, is defined more broadly and refers to all social acts which cross the distinctions between male and female gender performance. This can be done through drag and cross-dressing, for example, or through the assumption of an androgynous appearance, i.e. a gender appearance that rejects a definite identification as either male or female. In consequence, whereas the transsexual aims at altering his or her body’s biological constitution, these very acts become meaningful only as social acts and thus refer to

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<sup>1</sup> “Man zählt die Geschlechter einer Gesellschaft, häufig ohne genau zu benennen, was Geschlecht in den einzelnen Kontexten eigentlich ist, verwendet einmal indigene, dann wieder ethische Beriffe, recurriert auf Geschlechterstereotypen, soziale Rollen, Körper, Metaphern und Tropen, ohne die einzelnen Ebenen zu unterscheiden, und hat so anstelle einer subversiven Verwirrung der Geschlechter eine babylonische Verwirrung der Sprache geschaffen.“ (“One counts a society’s sexes, often without addressing what gender in each context means, and uses at times indigenous or ethical notions, or refers to stereotypes, social roles, bodies, metaphors, and tropes indistinctly. The result is not a subversive entanglement of gender, but of language”; Schröter 13).

gender. Thus, whereas not every transgender is also a transsexual, every transsexual is also a transgender.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to several positions in queer studies, my dissertation does not offer a so-called ‘third gender position’ that queer scholarship often alludes to. Within the latter, the term is mostly employed in order to refer to performances of gender and sexuality that resist a distinct classification into male female gender categories. My skepticism of a ‘third gender position’ does not mean that I want to adhere to a gender system that only has room for either men or women, or for either male or female genders. I contend that the liberation of gender and sexuality would need an entirely new language that no longer works on the basis of gender categories, but rather of gender scales. Such a vocabulary would express what my study on Nietzsche’s aesthetics emphasizes: that gender performance and sexual identity are fluid and contingent notions, which represent interdependent designs of selfhood. What this means is that not only transgendered and transsexual people, but everybody, men and women, resist a distinct classification into roles and positions that society has so far construed as separate.

The vocabulary that we use at present does not allow any expression of fluidity and contingency with regard to gender and sexuality. Within a vocabulary that construes the terms of male and female in opposition to each other, a so-called ‘third gender’ would only extent a discriminating gender construction, rather than eliminate it. Viviane Namaste comments on the establishment of a third sex as merely being an extraordinary

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<sup>2</sup> “... I accept the usual distinction between these concepts by which sex – whether we are male or female, men or women – is defined in terms of chromosomes (XX or XY), gonads (ovaries or testes), and genitals (the presence of a vagina or a penis – or, more usually, merely the presence or absence of a penis). Gender, specified as masculine or feminine, denotes the psychosocial attributes and behaviors people develop as a result of what society expects of them, depending on whether they were born female or male” (Hubbard 157).

addition to the two sexes and genders legally and socially acknowledged. A third gender in the sense of an additional category thus

ensures that we will not have the time, space, or authorization to address the underlying political and institutional issues that make our lives so difficult: the legal context of sex change, or the administrative policies governing the universal health insurance of sex change surgery and other services related to transsexualism. (49)

I argue that sexual categories like man and woman, or maleness and femaleness do not indicate opposite, but contingent gender and sexual modes. My design of a human being's self-perception with regard to sexual identity and gender performance is based on Friedrich Nietzsche's design of 'worldliness' (Haraway)<sup>3</sup> as a construction that contains the drives and creative urges referred to as Apollonian and Dionysian. In Nietzschean scholarship, these drives have time and again been referred to in gendered terms. While the Apollonian has often been referred to as the 'male' drive, the Dionysian has been considered as the 'female' one.

Since the Nietzschean human being is familiar with both the Apollonian and the Dionysian, everyone is Apollonian and Dionysian at the same time. But this also means that everyone can be referred to as male and female at the same time. Ultimately, this means that not only the transsexed person, but everyone can be seen as both male and female. If we consider maleness and femaleness as gendered modes of 'worldliness,' this means that for men references to a male-gendered language, and analogously that for

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<sup>3</sup> "But the final result, when we speak about biology, is that we are speaking about a specific way of engaging with the world" (Haraway 2000, 26).

women and girls to a female-gendered language predominates. Transsexuality, then, constitutes one extreme version of gender and sexual discomfort, in which surgical and other physical performances aim at an ease of the discomfort level. It also appears as an explicit demonstration how not only gender, but also sex and sexual identity are performance aspects rather than biologically given facts. In reference to Judith Butler, I emphasize how “‘sex’ is ... not simply what one has, on a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the “one” becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life ....” (1993, 2).

Transsexuality is not only a medical, but also a medial phenomenon. Only through the mass media has it been possible for transsexuality to become publicly known, and for the transsexed persona to be recognized. In her autobiography *Crossing: a Memoir*, Deidre McCloskey remembers show she learned about some of the first transsexual women who either sought the limelight or were pushed into it:

In 1953 the first famous gender crosser, Christine Jorgensen, had come back from Denmark. ‘GI Becomes Bombshell,’ the tabloids put it. At eleven or twelve Donald [Deidre’s name as a boy] was embarrassed to stand in the magazine store in downtown Wakefield and read the flood of stories, though he did. (McCloskey 8)

And, similarly:

When in the late fall of that year he and his mother and little sister and brother went to live in Italy for a few months he learned of Coccinelle (which means ladybug), a French sex-changed female impersonator at the Folies [a Parisian

night club], who was indeed beautiful, to a Brigitte Bardot standard. He was fascinated, though he did nothing but look at her picture in magazines. (9)

Both Anglo-American and German scholarships acknowledge the interrelations between transsexuality, the medical industry, and representations in the mass media. Stefan Hirschauer refers to Christine Jorgensen's popularity in the media of the USA's 50s and 60s: "Das Thema mit dem fremden medizinischen Namen bekommt plötzlich ein Gesicht und eine bewegende Geschichte ganz anderen Typs als medizinische Fallschilderungen: Schicksal" (The topic with the strange medical name suddenly receives a face and a moving story of a kind different to medical case studies: fate"; 1992, 79).

The mass media's design of transsexuality as a "fate," however, reinforces gender essentialism. If it is the transsexual's fate to be born in a so-called 'wrong' body, then there is the assumption underlying that a human being has one 'true' body that medicine can provide. Such an understanding is highly problematic, and it is not in Hirschauer's own scholarly intention to support it. However, in the beginning of transsexuality as represented through medicine, this was a model that doctors and psychologists at least implicitly supported. Harry Benjamin, an endocrinologist who until today has significantly influenced the formulation of the so-called transsexual 'standards of care,' refers to transsexuals as follows: transsexuals are people who "feel that they belong to the opposite sex, not only [want] to appear as such. For them, their sex organs, the primary (testes) as well as the secondary (penis or others) are disgusting deformities that must be changed by the surgeon's knife" (12). Anne Bolin, in contrast, criticizes a normative and exclusive understanding of transsexuality as a condition that requires the unquestioned pursuit of a singularized and binding medical procedure: "... if a person is not willing to

move heaven and earth in quest of surgery, and lets age, finances, marriage, or other excuses prevent him from transition, then transsexuals regard that individual as a transvestite” (13).

To write about sexual identity is complicated and delicate for once because of the limits of our vocabulary that expresses gender in binary terms, but also because it address an aspect of a human being’s life that usually remains unchallenged: the construction and the constitution of the ‘I’ as a grammatical, referential expression of selfhood. Gesa Lindemann notes that the reflections about what it means to be called a man or a woman barely reaches anyone’s attention in everyday situations and interactions:

In welche Richtung ich gehen möchte, muß ich den materiellen Boden – ganz einfach die Erde, den Fußboden, auf dem ich stehe – als fest und sicher voraussetzen. Ich darf nicht anfangen, darüber nachzudenken, ob der Boden unter mir plötzlich nachgeben könnte, ob er sich auftut o. ä... Wenn das so wäre, könnte ich nicht mehr selbstverständlich handeln, sondern wäre nur noch damit beschäftigt, den Boden unter meinen Füßen daraufhin zu untersuchen, ob er fest ist. Ich könnte keinen Schritt mehr tun. (“In which direction I want to go, I have to presume the material ground – simply the ground I am standing on – to be safe and secure. I cannot start to think about the possibility of the ground to give way. If that were that way, I would no longer be able to act, but would solely be busy with checking the ground for its consistency. I would no longer be able to do one single step”; 96)

But this “keinen Schritt mehr tun” characterizes many stories of transsexuals, for whom it is not only a question of how to act as man or woman. It is also a question how to refer to

oneself when the respective transsexual person is at one time referred to as a man and the other time as a woman. The person may be able to refer to him-or herself one time in male and the other in female terms. But then, the transsexual is required to use a vocabulary that is based on mutually exclusive gender constructions. This leads to the impression that transsexuals reject biological essentialism when they refuse to adhere to their gender and biological sex as which they were brought up and socialized, but on the other hand reinforce gender and biological essentialism through their medical transitioning processes, for example through hormone replacement therapy or sexual reassignment surgery. Annette Runte comments on the representational paradox as follows:

... die transsexuelle Transformation erstrebt weder die Realisierung androgyner Utopien noch transvestitische Mimikry, sie bezweckt, den Aussagen Betroffener gemäß, eine >Konvergenzprozedur<, die Angleichung der Physis an die Psyche. (“... the transsexual transformation attempts neither any realization of androgynous utopia nor a transvestite mimicry, but rather, according to statements by the affected, a physical adjustment to psychological dispositions”; 1990, 709)

The self-reference through a language that expresses an exclusive gender dichotomy can only work to the transsexual's disadvantage. Consequentially, the latter often are either understood as victims of a rigid gender order that does not allow men to act 'female' or vice versa, or they are considered as allies of a medical and psychoanalytical regimen with which they work on the endocrinally and surgically reinforced upholding of a dichotomous gender order.



I uphold that the reference to either being a man or a woman *regardless* of the corporeal sex assigned at birth may very well be a revolutionary act within itself, if the expression of selfhood, with or without the help of medical (hormonal and surgical) interventions, is self-initiated and affirmed as a part of one's own biography, rather than merely considered a disruption of the 'old' life in favor of a 'new' one. In other words, this dissertation considers hormonal and surgical manipulations of the body not as its essentialist reinforcement, but rather as performative tools to express the Nietzschean idea of a both physical and social contingency.

What does performance mean for both Nietzsche's aesthetics and transsexual biographies? Chapter one develops an understanding of what Nietzsche calls an aesthetic concept, although Nietzsche approached concepts more than skeptically, even reluctantly. I will read Nietzsche's ideas about aesthetics as being those for a theory of action, but again, I must be quick in adding that any notion of a theory as well must be read with a grain of salt. However, we notice how his writings express a certain mantra that applies to the 'creative human being's' actions, a mantra that expresses itself through the collaboration between Apollo and Dionysus.

## **Nietzsche as a Postmodernist Writer, Transsexuality as a Postmodern Challenge to Essentialism**

My reading of Nietzsche is that of a postmodernist.<sup>4</sup> I am aware of the challenges this reading faces especially with regard to Nietzsche's early writings like *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (*The Birth of Tragedy*). This work, within the history of Nietzsche-scholarship, has the air of establishing a thoroughly-composed artistic program and is often considered to belong to a modernist period in Nietzsche's writings. I nonetheless think that Nietzsche's entire oeuvre can be approached a postmodernist lens. Especially Nietzsche's elaboration of the Dionysian and the Apollonian will render this clear, as the interrelations between the Dionysian and the Apollonian are important for my reading of transsexuality.

Nietzsche's reference to the Dionysian and the Apollonian drives to approach the dance that is performed as a spectacle of the Greek Dionysian orgy will be sketched in chapter one and then explored in its practical realizations beginning with chapter three. I use the term *performance* with regard to Nietzsche's description of the dance.

Nietzsche's aesthetics underlines the impact of the human being's "physical embodiment in the world" (Stauth/Turner 3) as a necessary condition to work on a person's sense of selfhood and its needs to safe, change, or modify it according to ones drives, wishes, needs, and desires. These desires and needs involve, amongst other components, references to concepts like sex and gender, which the person learns and

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<sup>4</sup> According to Robert Gooding-Williams, postmodernism is what distinguishes Nietzsche from his most famous character Zarathustra: "Zarathustra is a modernist who, articulating his vision of the overman, aspires to create new, non-Christian-Platonic values that will transform European humanity. As distinct from Zarathustra, Nietzsche himself never assumes that this sort of aspiration can be easily fulfilled" (5).

applies to him- or herself and for his or her own sense of well-being. For Nietzsche, the body is not only a perceptive apparatus, but also an artistically creative medium. When Nietzsche “writes of his ability to transform his inner tension, derived from his own pathos, into signs that are revealed in their original tempo” (128), the body appears both as a medium and an expression of artistic creativity. In other words, humanity expresses itself through the body and its materiality. Although the notion of the body is a metaphor to design human creativity, Nietzsche also implies its very corporeality, for example when he writes about eating habits and the environments in which people live and their impact on human creativity.<sup>5</sup> The body is a versatile metaphor that relates to artistic, medical, and legal discourses.<sup>6</sup> At the same time it expresses a physical materiality that only becomes noticeable through language as a set of metaphors.

Francis Nesbitt Oppel claims that within Nietzsche’s *Geburt der Tragödie* the Apollonian is considered through ‘male’ and the Dionysian through ‘female’ language. The expression of Dionysian is represented through the dance.<sup>7</sup> But the Dionysian can only be noticed because she always co-appears with her male acquaintance, the

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<sup>5</sup> “Die Wahl in der Ernährung; die Wahl von Klima und Ort – das Dritte, worin man um keinen Preis einen Fehlgriß thun darf, ist die Wahl *seiner Art Erholung*“ (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 284). (“The choice of nutrition; the choice of climate and place: the third point at which one must not commit a blunder at any price is the choice of *one’s own kind of recreation*”; Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 242).

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche writes about guilt and debt associated with corporeal punishment: “Es gieng niemals ohne Blut, Martern, Opfer ab, wenn der Mensch es nöthig hielt, sich ein Gedächtnis zu machen; die schauerlichsten Opfer (wohin die Erstlingsopfer gehören), die widerlichsten Verstümmelungen (zum Beispiel die Castrationen), die grausamsten Ritualformen aller religiösen Culte (und alle Religionen sind auf dem untersten Grunde Systeme von Grausamkeiten) – alles Das hat in jenem Instinkte seinen einen Ursprung, welcher im Schmerz das mächtigste Hilfsmittel der Mnemonik erricht“ (*Genealogie der Moral* 295). (“Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges (sacrifices of the first-born among them), the most repulsive mutilations (castration, for example), the cruelest rites of all the religious cults (and all religions are at the deepest level systems of cruelties) – all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics”; Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 61).

<sup>7</sup> “Art is dance, both Western and non-Western” (Winchester 2002, 6).

Apollonian.<sup>8</sup> Nesbitt Oppel points out that not only there are gendered notions of maleness and femaleness involved when talking about the world. The human body as a corporeal site and artistic metaphor for the human being's desires and needs exposes both male and female traits. Nietzsche's texts hence

... go beyond the strict dichotomy of man / woman, so too they disrupt the gay /straight distinction. Clearly his style – hyperbolic, metaphoric, symbolic, ironic – is disruptive and subversive; it both attracts and repels readers, and is difficult to reduce to a single interpretation. A similar ambiguity, a refusal to be pinned down, may hold true for Nietzsche as a sexual being. (Nesbitt Oppel 9)

Nietzsche's aesthetics of the body is thus able to contribute to an understanding of the transsexual body as a creative representation of physical alterations. The body as a cultural site of physical desires requires continuous re-readings and reinterpretations, which is the scholar's task.<sup>9</sup>

Nietzsche and progressive ideas about transsexuality consider physicality, corporeality, and gender performance as fluid and subject to constant modification. Nietzsche's philosophy of the body, applied to the studies of transsexual identities, counters aversions brought up both in academia and the public against transsexuality and the implications of medical transition. At the same time, Nietzsche's philosophy of the

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<sup>8</sup> "Hier haben wir, in höchster Kunstssymbolik, jene apollinische Schönheitswelt und ihren Untergrund, die schreckliche Wahrheit des Silen, vor unseren Blicken und begreifen, durch Intuition, ihre gegenseitige Nothwendigkeit." (Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie* 39) ("Here, in the highest symbolism of art, we see before us the Apolline world of beauty and the ground on which it rests, that terrible wisdom of Silenus, and we grasp, intuitively, the reciprocal necessity of these two things"; Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 26).

<sup>9</sup> "The truth of writing, that is, as we shall see, (the) nontruth, cannot be discovered in ourselves by ourselves. And it is not the object of a science, only of a history that is recited, a fable that is repeated. The link between writing and myth becomes clearer, as does its opposition to knowledge, notably the knowledge one seeks in oneself, by oneself" (Derrida 2001, 1838).

body and its linkages to biochemistry counteracts essentialism without getting rid of the body. Nietzsche's artistic conceptions of the body rather call for a new aesthetics and its visualization preferably through theatrical and film performances. A reading on Nietzsche's philosophy of the body that is exemplified by visual media such as theater and film must recognize the methods of philosophical deconstruction. It also has to provide a concept of performance that clearly emphasizes the role of the body as a material object, which nonetheless resists a fixed and determined assignation.

### **Methodology and Chapter Division**

Chapter one introduces central motifs and metaphors in Nietzsche's aesthetics and discusses how the physical body as an artistic construction gets into the focus of scholarly attention, for example, through Vattimo (2006), Nehamas (2002), Blondel (1991), or Kofman (1993). The body and its sexual identity is addressed in a medical, gendered, and artistic vocabulary, for example, when Nietzsche speaks about life and wisdom in female terms, or when he writes about the need to take care of one's own health in order to be able to develop human creativity and avoid becoming a 'being of the herd.'<sup>10</sup> The body appears as the corporeal site of the human passions, desires, urges and needs, which are comprehended through the Apollonian and the Dionysian. These drives cannot be expressed other than through bodily performance, and they continue to form the founding in Nietzsche's later writings. Associated with the notion of the body-in-flux both

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<sup>10</sup>“Fliehe, mein Freund, in deine Einsamkeit: ich sehe dich von giftigen Fliegen zerstoehen. Fliehe dorthin, wo rauhe, starke Luft weht!” (Nietzsche: Also Sprach Zarathustra 66) (“Flee, my friend into your solitude: I see you stung all over by poisonous flies. Flee where the air is raw and strong. Flee into your solitude! You have lived too close to the small and the miserable. Flee their invisible revenge! Against you they are nothing but revenge”; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra 52 f.).

physically and metaphorically, the transsexual's performance of the physical transitioning process challenges a belief in sexual and gender identity as fixed notions and stable entities. Nietzsche's books *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (*On the Genealogy of Morals*) and *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (*Beyond Good and Evil*) suggest how physical identity influences gender politics and matters of personhood. The chapter concludes that Nietzsche's aesthetics provides an image of gender and sexual fluidity which destabilizes conventional notions of gender and sexual binaries. The gender and sexual fluidity that his aesthetics introduce supports the perception that the transsexed person's transitioning process is a performance and demonstration of the contingency of sex and gender for the human being.

Chapter two gives an overview of the history and current state of feminist activism and gender studies in Germany and the U.S. It begins with feminism's charges against Nietzsche for misogynist traces in his writings. I demonstrate how Nietzsche uses gendered expressions not to discriminate between the biological sexes and social genders, but rather to emphasize their diversity and complementary functions. In contrast to such a relation amongst the male and the female, I outline how gender scholarships in the past have often used the notions of sex and gender against, rather than in relation to, each other, with the former often being compared to a 'blank page' or a blank surface. From that perspective, transsexuality caused unease, as sex for the transsexual no longer seemed to be that blank spot. Especially representatives of a so-called radical feminism feared a re-discrimination, if not a continued discrimination, of women based on their biological sex. Janice G. Raymond's 1979 anti-transsexual manifesto *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She Male* specifically accuses transwomen as being men who

are allies of a medical and pharmaceutical industry that intends to occupy women's bodies for the purpose of the latter's subjugation: "Transsexualism may be one way by which men attempt to possess females' creative energies, by possessing artefactual female organs" (xvi). While Raymond accuses transwomen to localize gender identity within the human body's biology, an argument Bernice Hausman would still touch upon in the 1990ies,<sup>11</sup> and even accuses trans women of causing physical damage to the social position of 'genetic women' in society,<sup>12</sup> the chapter states how Raymond relapses into an essentialist position herself when she strictly separates men and women based on their physical conditions and abilities.<sup>13</sup> In order to counter allegations of gender and sexual essentialism, representatives of transgender studies like Patrick Califia (1997), Joanne J. Meyerowitz (2002), or Kate Bornstein (1994) emphasized the aforementioned fluidity and contingency of sex and gender as modes of being. I conclude the chapter with a demonstration how their references on these modes, together with Nietzsche's elaborations on the Apollonian and Dionysian as gendered drives, help build a conception of personhood that stresses the impact of the sexual body on a person's sense of selfhood without falling into any essentialist flytraps.

What helped many transgender scholars and activists was that they took Raymond's book seriously and re-evaluated a number of her theses. Sandy Stone's essay *The Empire Strikes Back: A Post-Transsexual Manifesto* (1991) is a reaction to

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<sup>11</sup> "What is most consistent in transsexuals' self-representations is the oft-repeated insistence that there must be something physical, measurable, materially detectable that motivates and justifies the desire to change sex." (Hausman 2006, 352).

<sup>12</sup> "All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves" (Raymond 104).

<sup>13</sup> "The words *masculine* and *feminine* are used throughout this work to indicate that a superficial, artefactual, ad socially and surgically constructed change is what takes place rather than a deep intrinsic change that encourages existential development" (--- 3).

Raymond's book as well as on her personal attacks against Stone as a transwoman that eventually caused Stone to lose her employment at the lesbian record company Olivia Records. In opposition to Raymond (1979), Mary Daly (1978), or Robin Morgan (1977), Stone advocates to recognize transsexed characters in their crossing of sexual and gender binaries and suggests that the newly to be invented trans-writings quote the given traditional gender narratives and manipulate them by redefining them as a sample of makeshift gender identities:

In the transsexual as text we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries. (231)

For Stone, the transsexual body is not eliminated by the social structures and radical constructivist conceptions of gender performativity.<sup>14</sup> Rather, the body turns out to be an equally important socio-physical construction which can only be accessed through a socially sanctioned vocabulary, but which is contingent itself and thus subject to being rewritten. Accordingly, Jay Prosser describes the transition of the trans-individual as an act of writing that plays with both the ideas of dematerialization and re-materialization.

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<sup>14</sup> "This rough sketch of gender gives us a clue to understanding the political reasons for the substantializing view of gender. The institution of compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire" (Butler 1990, 22 f.).



For him, the physical body is a non-essentialist entity, which is nonetheless constitutive for the individual's senses of creativity: "Reading transsexuality through narrative, I suggest that the resexing of the transsexual body is made possible through narrativization [sic], the transitions of sex enabled by those of narrative" (5).

In the third and fourth chapter, I consider theatrical and filmic performances that deal with the continuously changing body, such as the transsexual demonstrates and visualizes it through hormone replacement therapy and/or cosmetic and sexual reassignment surgeries. Films and theater plays that revolve around the body and its connotations of fluidity indicate and refer to what Kate Bornstein designs as 'gender fluidity:' "Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one of many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender" (51 f.). This does not mean that sexual identity remains unacknowledged. Jay Prosser announces that "transsexuality is always narrative work, a transformation of the body that requires the remolding of the life into a particular narrative shape" (4). I analyze a selection of film and theater productions that deal with various forms of physical transitions, which include, but are not limited to the trans-individual's stories and experiences of both physical and emotional or self-referential modifications.

For my considerations of theatrical arts in chapter three, I choose Kate Bornstein's *Hidden: A Gender* because of its ironic and subversive tone regarding the administration of transsexed bodies through the medical and psychological discourses. In the piece's initial presentations, Bornstein herself played the character of the game show host Doc Grinder, who continuously questions his transsexed candidates about their commitment

to undergo a sex change, turns the latter into a prize to be won and advertises gender as a high-interest product in blue and pink bottles, for the audience's consumption. Bornstein's play is a parody on gender and sexual binaries. Her play in no way denies the credibility of transsexed characters and their desires to physically alter their bodies. She does not suggest them to be in the need for a psychotherapeutic 'talking cure.' Rather, she cautions them about the dangers to fall into just another form of gender-conformity after having undergone the desired surgical and hormonal transitions. *Hidden: A Gender* thus challenges and questions society's attempts to regroup trans-identities into a heteronormative order, so that society's investment into traditional gender roles and expectations may not experience any fraction.

Bertolt Brecht's *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan* (*The Good Person of Szechwan*) demonstrates complete subordination under preexisting gender norms that contribute to society's economic functioning. Shen Te, who the visiting gods identify as the sole good person in the economically challenged city of Sezuan in China, wants to invest the money she has received from the gods into a tobacco store. With the shop, she wants to climb the social ladder, leave her old business as a sex worker behind and become a businesswoman. But this is a position that Sezuan's society, and the society Brecht critically considers in his plays, does not allow women to occupy. In order to gain recognition as a businesswoman, Shen Te transforms into a businessman and becomes her fictitious male cousin Shui Ta, through a performance of drag that includes most prominently her wearing clothing associated with males and masculinity. In that sense, Bertolt Brecht's play is a satire that revolves around drag. But whereas Brecht's comment on Sezuan's society indeed mocks the latter's rigidity, drag in this play is not subversive

according to Judith Butler. I outline how Shen Te's performance of maleness resembles more what Butler's *Bodies that Matter* calls performativity, the repetitive imitation of gender norms and structures, which does not lead to a subversion of gender binaries, but contributes to their manifestations.

Within my considerations of film, I first analyze Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* (*In a Year with Thirteen Moons*) and Oscar Roehler's *Agnes und seine Brüder* (*Agnes and his Brothers*). Roehler's film is a response to Fassbinder. Both films present the change of sex, similarly to Brecht, as a demonstration of performativity, rather than of performance. Here, the sex change is also taking place within heteronormative societies, in which the main characters Elvira (with Fassbinder) and Agnes (with Roehler) attempt to redefine their sexes according to the gaze and expectations of Lacan's other. Similar to Shen Te's application of drag, Elvira and Agnes turn physically into women because they consider this as a requirement in order <sup>15</sup>to gain happiness in their families and relationships. As a consequence, the transsexual characters in both films do not speak for themselves and not in their own interests either. Rather, Fassbinder and Roehler portray their trans-characters as marionettes of a social order that has no place for non-conformist characters. Transsexuality in *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* and *Agnes und seine Brüder* appears as an indication of a 'social evil' rather than as one of many modes of human existence.

As a contrast to this rather bleak view on transsexuality within the German cinema, I consider John Cameron Mitchells's film version of his rock musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Mitchell's film fulfills Prosser's recommendation to perceive the

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transsexual's transitioning process as both a narrative and performance act, which altogether allows multiple interpretations of transsexuality as both a cultural performance and a medical condition. Whereas Fassbinder and Roehler give a more causal interpretation of transsexuality that tells a story about trans-individuals, rather than providing transgender characters their own voice, Mitchell suggests transsexual identities to be versatile and non-ontological, who confirm that transsexuality cannot be simply 'explained away' and that trans-identities may perceive and express themselves in multiple styles and manners. It is this latter point that corresponds to a Nietzschean idea of interpretative multiplicity, which shows itself with regard to sex and gender, their performed identities which people accept, refuse, or modify. I conclude that the request issued by trans-individuals to 'change their bodies' is not equivalent to a regression into biologist ideas. Finally, what is supposed to become clear through my analysis is that trans-identities are as fluent and as contingent as any other, and that we have to consider transsexuality as a mode of humanity and personhood amongst many others.

## **1) Friedrich Nietzsche and Bodies in Context: An Aesthetic Approach**

This chapter considers Nietzsche's take on gendered identity, the problems of individuality, and the representation of gender and sexuality as a performative approach. Over the course of his philosophical writings, images of the body became some of Nietzsche's most central concepts. The concept of the body is not an isolated image in the philosopher's work. Rather, the concept's metaphorical expression and contextualization refer to topics such as Nietzsche's positions on health, cultural politics, creativity, lawfulness and morality. In these contexts, I analyze in a more detailed manner what Nietzsche means when he writes about bodies not only as a central concept, but also as a special medium. As I will show throughout this dissertation, bodies are media on various levels. They are works of art and at the same time signifiers for other artworks. Regarding the latter point, they are corporeal elements within the theatrical and film settings. The screen and the stage hence share that they both refer to the body as an artistic artwork and a corporeal material within a theatrical or film setting. This being-placed in a set of relations is what bestows meaning on the body as a corporeal expression of identity, selfhood, and artistry.<sup>16</sup> As a focal point both on stage and on screen, the body receives its culturally encoded sense, on the one hand, through its relational placement on the very stage and screen. On the other hand, that relationally

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<sup>16</sup> "Just as the utterance of a noun conveys no information to people who are unfamiliar with adjectives and verbs, so there is no way to convey information except by relating something to something else" (Rorty 1999, 56).

construed sense the body has in these artistic settings is again reliant on social conventions.

According to Elizabeth Grosz, a body is always already a culturally encoded corporeal signifier, albeit with a corporeal constitution that causes cultural significations, rather than being dissolved in them: “The body, especially the human body, is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object that somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of objects not reducible to other objects” (xi). Consequently, although there is no inherent or essential sense associated with a body and its very corporeality, it would be just as futile to assume that the manner in which we perceive and approach it is entirely relative. Nietzsche speaks about a drives that expresses the human being’s physical needs, which find their expression in artistic creations, once we realize that the quest for objective and metaphysical truth is nothing but another variation of these drives:

Dieser erhabene metaphysische Wahn ist als Instinct der Wissenschaft beigegeben und führt sie immer und immer wieder zu ihren Grenzen, an denen sie in *Kunst* umschlagen muss: *auf welche es eigentlich, bei diesem Mechanismus, abgesehen ist.* (Geburt der Tragödie 99) (“This sublime metaphysical illusion is an instinct which belongs inseparably to science, and leads it to its limits time after time, at which point it must transform itself into *art*; *which is actually, given this mechanism, what it has been aiming at all along*”; Birth of Tragedy, 73)

The first aspect I consider is artistic creativity. I examine what Nietzsche means when he writes that the world as we perceive it is an ever-changing result of creative energies, conceived and designed by human artistry. I will also ask what it means to be an artist

who is an element of a larger artwork.<sup>17</sup> I argue that the artist is always already an element of art because of his or her corporeality. This corporeality embodies human drives, instincts, and needs that cause the human being to become active, while the human being is always already involved in a multitude of social relations which ensure that the artist can refer to his or her desires and needs. Regarding artistry, the creative process and the act of writing require closer consideration. What does it mean for Nietzsche to create an artwork, how does this artwork appear, and what constitutes an expression of performance as one of the most crucial artistic utterances? Finally, under close consideration of Nietzsche's earlier major work *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (*The Birth of Tragedy*) I illustrate how we may read an artwork as a representation of the artistic drives of the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

Nietzsche conceives of the 'I' as an outstanding metaphorical expression. Although every expression is metaphorical,<sup>18</sup> the position of the 'I' is distinct from all metaphors in that it denotes the person who uses a certain set of metaphors. The 'I' is an expression that selfhood and hence of authorship. The artist is an author who writes with the body, not with the pen. But authorship and artistic authority can only be claimed if the author or the artist him- or herself knows about his or her own contingent involvement in

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<sup>17</sup> "Der Mensch ist nicht mehr Künstler, er ist Kunstwerk geworden, die Kunstgewalt der ganzen Natur, zur höchsten Wonnebefriedigung des Ur-Einen" (Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie* 30). ("Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: all nature's artistic power reveals itself here, amidst shivers of intoxication, to the highest, most blissful satisfaction of the primordial unity"; Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 18)

<sup>18</sup> "Wir theilen die Dinge nach Geschlechtern ein, wir bezeichnen den Baum als männlich, den Pflanze als weiblich: welche willkürlichen Übertragungen" (Nietzsche, *Wahrheit und Lüge* 878)! ("We divide things up by gender, describing a tree as masculine and a plant as feminine – how arbitrary these translations are!"); Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lying* 144)

the world in which they create. In other words, the ‘I’ works with, recreates, and modifies artistic conventions of personal self-reference.

However, the construction and representation of personhood through the ‘I’ is not entirely arbitrary. Like every living organism, the human body has needs, drives, and instincts, and in order to satisfy them, we have to imagine ourselves in terms of limited and corporeally defined material. That concept alone is not necessarily problematic, until we consider it a given truth and begin to morally classify the expressions of personhood. Such a moral classification leads to a discriminating classification and evaluation of individuals based on their looks and self-presentations.

If the artistic act in general and the act of writing in particular are expressions of vitality, – because, for Nietzsche, art with regard to the involvement of the Apollonian and the Dionysian ideas is supposed to represent an overabundance of life - we can include questions about health into discussions about art. The notions of the Apollonian and the Dionysian are metaphorical expressions paraphrasing a creative process. They also take into account a body’s physicality, since Nietzsche places the Apollonian and the Dionysian in relation to the physical needs and instincts of a person. The relation between these instincts and the drives for artistry and creativity is causal, but does not aim for any metaphysical truth. In fact, the human instincts only find reference retrospectively, within a shared set of linguistic conventions.<sup>19</sup> An example from Nietzsche’s book *Götzen-*

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<sup>19</sup> “Jenes Ringen des Geistes der Musik nach bildlicher und mythischer Offenbarung, welches welches von den Anfängen der Lyrik bis zur attischen Tragödie sich steigert, bricht plötzlich, nach eben erst errungener üppiger Entfaltung, ab und verschwindet gleichsam von der Oberfläche der hellenischen Kunst: während die aus diesem Ringen geborne dionysische Weltbetrachtung in den Mysterien weiterlebt und in den wunderbarsten Metamorphosen und Entartungen nicht aufhört, ernstere Naturen an sich zu ziehen“ (Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie* 110 f.). (“The struggle of the spirit of music to be revealed in image and myth, a struggle which grows in intensity from the beginning of the lyric up to Attic tragedy,



*Dämmerung (Twilight of the Idols)* demonstrates how Nietzsche refers to the body's physicality with a vocabulary that suggests distinguishing between a body's inside in opposition to an environmental outside. This opposition, however, has no inherent correspondence and thus no ontological foundation. Rather, it is part of a set of linguistic conventions that human beings use to express their needs and views about themselves and their hopes, and expectations for their future.<sup>20</sup> Regarding the issue of health and illness, Nietzsche gives the following example for a socially created cause-and-effect relation that refers to the body as a reflecting medium for that relation:

Dieser junge Mann wird frühzeitig blass und welk. Seine Freunde sagen: daran ist die und die Krankheit schuld. Ich sage, *dass* er krank wurde, *dass* er der Krankheit nicht widerstand, war bereits die Folge eines verarmten Lebens, einer hereditären Erschöpfung. (Götzen-Dämmerung 89 f.) ("A young man becomes prematurely pale and wrinkled. His friends say: some illness or another is to blame. I say: *the fact that* he became sick, *the fact that* he could not fight the illness off, this was already the effect of an impoverished life, a hereditary exhaustion"; (*Twilight of the Idols* 177))

This quote can first be understood in a concrete physical manner: the illness as a result of a psychosomatic disease. Clearly, though, this is not the only reading permitted. Given that Nietzsche's language use is explicitly metaphorical and rejects the possibility of

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suddenly breaks off, having just unfolded its riches, and disappears, as it were, from the face of Hellenic art, whereas the Dionysiac view of the world which was born out of this struggle lives on in the Mysteries and, while undergoing the strangest metamorphoses and degenerate mutations, never ceases to attract more serious natures"; Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 82)

<sup>20</sup> "For, a believer who is [...] a fully fledged member of her community will always be able to produce justification for most of her beliefs – justification which meets the demands of that community. There is, however, no reason to think that the beliefs she is best able to justify are those which are most likely to be true, nor that those she is least able to justify are those which are most likely to be false" (Rorty 1999,37).

definite reference,<sup>21</sup> the illness can also stand for an unwillingness to live up to one's capabilities and for a hiding behind an institutionalized value system, which the sick individual considers as metaphysically valid.<sup>22</sup>

When Nietzsche speaks about the importance of nutrition and exercise for the human body in his semiautobiography *Ecce Homo*, he refers to a human self-awareness that includes a person's physical condition.<sup>23</sup> The physical body as an agglomeration of bio-chemical and endocrinal processes is a source of artistic inspiration and creativity. However, the reference and representation of these bodies in turn is another result of a potentially creative naming process, as a part of socialization. In this context, distinctions employed by Nietzsche such as the healthy and the sick, purity and impurity, or the chaste and the pregnant, require further investigation.

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<sup>21</sup>“It seems to me more Nietzschean to write conceptually in the knowledge that a concept has no greater value than a metaphor and is itself a condensate of metaphors, to write while opening up one's writing to a genealogical decipherment, than to write metaphorically denigrating the concept and promising metaphor as the norm” (Kofman 3).

<sup>22</sup> This hiding behind an institutionalized value system is characterized by Nietzsche, in his *Genealogie der Moral*, as ‘ressentiment,’ which is in itself unhealthy for the human being because of its amount of anger conserved within the human being: “Der Sklavenaufstand in der Moral beginnt damit, dass das *Ressentiment* selbst schöpferisch wird und Werthe gebiert: das *Ressentiment* solcher Wesen, denen die eigentlich Reaktion, die der That versagt ist, die sich nur durch eine imaginäre Rache schadlos halten” (270). (“The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, hat of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge”; *Genealogy of Morals*, 36)

<sup>23</sup> In fact, Nietzsche explicitly links the issues of nutrition to the development of creative potential when he speaks about the intellectual and artistic conditions in Germany of his days: “Aber die deutsche Küche überhaupt – was hat sie nicht Alles auf dem Gewissen! Die Suppe *vor* der Mahlzeit, ... die ausgekochten Fleische, die fett und mehlig gemachten Gemüse; die Entartung der Mehlspeise zum Briefbeschwerer! Rechnet man gar noch dazu die geradezu viehischen Nachguss-Bedürfnisse der alten, durchaus nicht bloss *alten* Deutschen dazu, so versteht man auch die Herkunft des *deutschen Geistes*“ (*Ecce Homo* 279 f.). (“But German cuisine quite generally – what doesn't it have on its conscience! Soup *before* the meal, ... overcooked meats, vegetables cooked with fat and flour, the degeneration of pastries and puddings into paperweights! Add to this the virtually bestial prandial drinking habits of the ancient, and by no means only the *ancient* Germans, and you will understand the origins of the *German spirit* – from distressed intestines”; *Ecce Homo* 238)

Given that language is the tool to “become who you are” (Rorty 1991,13) and that language is a relational set of conventions that refers to people’s needs, Nietzsche’s views and comments on cultural and gender politics deserve further consideration. In order to work with the notions of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, we have to find references in language for them for them that refer to a common basis for communication. Again, to define this common basis is not entirely relative. The repertoire of a shared language, which we can see as a starting point for all further artistry, is the surface for the fulfillment for all needs that derive, amongst others, from corporeal needs, drives, and desires. One of these common language conventions is that people perceive themselves as more or less belonging to a certain sex. This does not automatically mean that human beings need to call themselves men or women. Neither does that mean that there are physical aspects that can be characterized as being either male or female. However, it is necessary to recognize that European languages mainly construe references to two sexes, which the speakers call either male or female, and that therefore the social responsibility arises to recognize men and women to be of equal value. In this context, I want to refer to Lewis Call’s essay “Woman as Will and Representation,” in which she reviews Nietzsche’s comments on women and criticizes Derrida’s view on women as merely being a style in writing: “She remains ‘a non-entity, a non-figure.’ Derrida thus ... uses the concept of woman critically, but does not make the next move towards a possible feminist politics, the move of positing woman as representation” (Call 116).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> When Derrida writes that “A woman seduces from a distance” and that “one must be aware to keep one’s own distance from her beguiling song of enchantment” (1979, 49), that very well counts for being aware

Whether or not Call's interpretation of Derrida on women is correct, the question of whether Derrida does justice both to Nietzsche and women, is at this point not of primary importance – this discussion will follow in the second chapter. But this little excursion demonstrates how discussions about the Apollonian and the Dionysian as creative terms of references in Nietzsche's philosophy come up, time and again, in connection with issues gender and sexual identity. Based on a gendered reading of the Apollonian and the Dionysian drives as well as of the application of aesthetics to gendered interpretations, as Francis Nesbitt Oppel<sup>25</sup> and Kristen Brown<sup>26</sup> pursue them, my dissertation critically considers scholars who claim that Nietzsche designs the Dionysian as a 'female' and the Apollonian as a 'male' drive of the human body:

Die Jungfrauen, die, mit Lorbeerzweigen in der Hand, feierlich zum Tempel des Apollo ziehn und dabei ein Prozessionslied singen, bleiben, wer sie sind, und behalten ihren bürgerlichen Namen: der dithyrambische Chor ist ein Chor von Verwandelten, bei denen ihre bürgerliche Vergangenheit, ihre sociale Stellung völlig vergessen ist. (Geburt der Tragödie 61). ("The virgins who walk solemnly to the temple of Apollo, bearing laurel branches in their hands and singing a processional hymn as they go, remain who they are and retain their civic names:

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that there is no ontological essence in anybody that fixes whether someone is 'inherently male' or 'female.' What Call is afraid of is that Derrida may easily diminish one sex at the expense of another, for example, when woman is 'turned into' a style of writing: "Because woman is (her own) writing, style must return to her. In other words, it could be said that if style were a man [...], then writing would be a woman" (57).

<sup>25</sup> "As material and irrational, the mythological drive falls onto the "feminine" side of the conventional tale of binary oppositions that has linked "female" with the formless, dark, and material qualities – and by extension with the unconscious and the irrational, in a repetitive set of associations that is in itself mythic" (Nesbitt Oppel 66).

<sup>26</sup> "I argue that with respect to the concept of natural woman, Nietzsche's words say more than Nietzsche means. They stretch towards a feminist reappropriation" (Brown 7).

the dithyrambic chorus is a chorus of transformed beings who have completely forgotten their civic past and their social position”; Birth of Tragedy 43)

I investigate how Nietzsche’s metaphorical language comments on sexed and gendered notions of identity, which is a topic where metaphors taken from medical discourses become effective. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche is concerned with the ancient Greeks and their performance of the tragedy as a ‘healthy’ expression of physical and creative life through the “Dionysian Greek orgy” (Vattimo 108). Once it has become clear that art can never be of a single origin and hence never be *either* Dionysian *or* Apollonian, Nietzsche extends his aesthetics to cultural criticism:

Jenes ursprüngliche und allmächtige dionysische Element aus der Tragödie auszuscheiden und sie rein und neu auf undionysischer Kunst, Sitte und Weltbetrachtung aufzubauen – dies ist die jetzt in heller Beleuchtung sich und enthüllende Tendenz des Euripides. (Geburt der Tragödie 82) (“What we now see revealed, indeed brilliantly illuminated, is the tendency of Euripides, which was to expel the original and all-powerful Dionysiac element from tragedy and to rebuild tragedy in a new and pure form on the foundations of a non-Dionysiac art, morality, and view of the world”; Birth of Tragedy 59)

One of Nietzsche’s favorite targets is contemporary music,<sup>27</sup> especially Wagner’s music at the time *Die Geburt der Tragödie* was written. Nietzsche specifically criticizes modern

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<sup>27</sup> “In der That, inzwischen lernte ich hoffnungslos und schonungslos genug von diesem „deutschen Wesen“ denken, insgleichen von der jetzigen *deutschen Musik*, als welche Romantik durch und durch ist und die ungriechteste aller möglichen Kunstformen...” (Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie* 20). (“Since then I have indeed learned to think hopelessly and unsparingly enough about this ‘German character’, and the same applies to current *German music*, which is Romanticism through and through and the most un-Greek of all possible forms of art ...”; Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 10)

opera. Considering its lyrics, Nietzsche considers opera to evoke a state the philosopher describes as ‘idyllic’ and hence to avoid gazing into the Dionysian abyss:

Die Voraussetzung der Oper ist ein falscher Glaube über den künstlerischen Prozess und zwar jener idyllische Glaube, dass eigentlich jeder empfindende Mensch Künstler sei. Im Sinne dieses Glaubens ist die Oper der Ausdruck des Laienthums in der Kunst, das seine Gesetze mit dem heitern Optimismus des theoretischen Menschen dictirt [sic]. (Geburt der Tragödie 124) (“The precondition of opera is an erroneous belief that every man of feeling is actually an artist. In line with this belief, opera is the expression in art of lay mentality which dictates its laws with the cheerful optimism of theoretical man”; 1999, 91)

Authentic art, as Nietzsche sees it, rejects any notion of the idyllic and affirms the abyss as the ontological void that nonetheless motivates the human being’s artistic drives. ‘True’ art, for Nietzsche, does not comment on the world, but recreates it. The ‘true’ artist knows that he or she is a social being in the sense that his or her definition of self and abilities is also an outcome of the social environment the artist lives in. But this artist also knows that he or she does not have to take these conditions as a given and granted, but can challenge and question their validity for the future. This corresponds to Rorty’s philosophical pragmatism. The work of the philosopher is the work of the artist, in that both should consider to “substitute[s] the notion of a better human future for the notions of ‘reality,’ ‘reason’ and ‘nature’” (Rorty 1999, 27).

This task requires both the artist’s and the philosopher’s intervention and social interaction. In *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft (The Gay Science)*, Nietzsche considers the

artist's social conditions under which she or he is living<sup>28</sup> and emphasizes that the artist needs to be involved with society, although not devoured by it. Nietzsche assures *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*):

Voll von feierlichen Possenreissern ist der Markt – und das Volk rühmt sich seiner grossen Männer! das sind ihm die Herrn der Stunde. Aber die Stunde drängt sie: so drängen sie dich. (66) (“Full of solemn jesters is the market place – and the people pride themselves on their great men, the masters of the hour. But the hour presses hem; so they press you”; 52)

Being devoured by the ‘flies of the market’ implies forgetting about the origins of art as an expression of the ‘Greek Dionysian orgy’ and its origins in a ‘cross-gendered’ partnership between the Apollonian and the Dionysian.<sup>29</sup> But to remember the ‘Greek Dionysian orgy’ means to remember that its ceremony does not have any essential foundation, even though its celebration is the basis for creativity. What Nietzsche writes about music is interesting in this regard. Music is Dionysian with respect to sound, but also Apollonian with respect to rhythm and harmonies:

Ja selbst wenn der Tondichter in Bildern über eine Composition geredet hat, etwa wenn er eine Symphonie als pastorale und einen Satz als ‚Szene am Bach‘, einen

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<sup>28</sup> “Die Sitten der Gelehrten, der Kaufleute, Künstler, Handwerker, - haben sie schon ihre Denker gefunden? Es ist so viel daran zu denken! Alles, was bis jetzt die Menschen als ihre „Existenz-Bedingungen“ betrachtet haben, und alle Vernunft, Leidenschaft und Aberglauben an dieser Betrachtung, ist diess schon zu Ende erforscht“ (Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* 379)? (“The customs of scholars, businessmen, artists, artisans – have they found their thinkers? There is so much in them to think about! Everything that humans have viewed until now as ‘the conditions of their existence’ and all the reason, passion, and superstition that such a view involves – has this been researched?”; Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 34)

<sup>29</sup> “Dionysus and Apollo arrive at an initial reconciliation by making the pact, and although their antagonism subsists, the pact sets the stage for the Birth of the Dionysian dithyramb as a symbolic world” (Vattimo 106).

anderen als ‚lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute‘ bezeichnet, so sind das ebenfalls nur gleichnisartige, aus der Musik geborne Vorstellungen ..., die über den *dionysischen* Inhalt der Musik uns nach keiner Seite hin belehren können, ja die keinen ausschliesslichen Werth neben anderen Bildern haben. (Geburt der Tragödie 50) (“Even when a musician speaks in images about a composition, as when he describes a symphony as ‘pastoral,’ calling one movement a ‘scene by a stream’ and another a ‘merry gathering of country folk’, these two are merely symbolic representations born out of the music ..., representations which are quite incapable of informing us about the *Dionysiac* content of music, and which indeed have no exclusive value as compared with other images”; 1999, 35)

Remembering this origin of art, and hence of the world in an engendered symbiosis, will eventually contribute to a better understanding of the constitutions of sexual identity, as I hope to show.<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche’s notion of art is ironic in the sense that it suggests the Apollonian and the Dionysian as two symmetrically distributed elements of every artwork. But in fact, this is not the case. Rather, the Apollonian and the Dionysian may best be imagined as a type of substratum which underlies all creative actions, which are nevertheless invisible. Nietzsche’s artist is related to Rorty’s ironic. Both note that we need certain ways to express ourselves, to make ourselves understood, and to organize the world in which we are living. As a matter of fact, gender and sexual identity are two of the linguistic tools that express physical needs and desires. Sexual identity is related to sexuality, the desire and need for a sexual partner who is also perceived as a male or a

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<sup>30</sup>“Following the textual affirmation of the feminine, and the elimination of ‘woman-as-such,’ Nietzsche’s next move (to continue this artificial chronology) is to appropriate the feminine for the masculine, thus altering the stories about what it is to be a man” (Nesbitt Oppel 5).



female. This is important to us because we perceive ourselves as having a certain sexual identity as well. Otherwise, we would not be able to make sense of our sexuality.

However, Nietzsche's artist and Rorty's ironic also note that these modes of reference to our needs, desires and drives may as well be called something else. If a human being consists of both the Apollonian and the Dionysian, and if both drives are not localizable, it is meaningless to define them ontologically and hence to refer to them in a manner that one may deem to be 'accurate.' Despite being important for a human sense of self, references to sexual identity are as contingent as any other form of creative energy, and are subject to change regarding the manner we imagine them. Jay Prosser refers to sexual identity accordingly, approaching the human body as an artistic expression. Referring to a theatrical vocabulary, Prosser asks: "If skin is a mask, where is the self in relation to the body's surface? Deeper than the skin (underneath the mask)? Or not 'in' the flesh at all" (Prosser 62)? Nietzsche's and Rorty's answer to this would likely be: it is where we imagine it to be.

Like any artistic creation and social institution, the description of the human body is an artistic creation marked by fluidity rather than stability. Keith Ansell Pearson addresses the notion of fluidity, which touches upon society and the human being, both as a social and endocrinal being: "The emphasis was on 'transformation', such as 'conjugation' and 'transduction', which involve the transfer of genetic material from one cell to another by a virus" (133). The notion 'virus' can imply that the body containing it has a disease, and is suffering and possibly decaying. But 'virus' can also refer to the viral processes in the physical system altogether. Read in the latter sense, the virus is also a metaphor to refer

to crucial physical processes to sustain life. But just as a virus may be unpredictable with regard to the direction it takes, so may the course of life be unpredictable as well. After all, life is a series of contingencies and continuously negotiated with the human being's environment.

Biology becomes another discursive paradigm for the designation of social life. I do not mean to transfer notions of the healthy and the sick onto notions of the good and the bad. This would all too easily result in biologist notions of the world and the idea that some forms of life are worth more than others.<sup>31</sup> Rather, the way I see biology becoming an important mode of reference for Nietzsche and his sense of artistry may be best expressed by Donna Haraway, who considers biology and the references to the body and physical development. In a book-lengthy interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, Haraway favors a view of genetics that relies on contingency: "Whole entities aren't the result of genes. Rather, genes are a complexly integrated part in this pattern through time. Genes are a name for cutting into that process. A kind of hiving off of a certain part of the structural process that is given the name 'gene'" (2000, 24). The image of genes as defining a human being's identity is only one image among others. This does not mean that genes are not important when it comes to the definition of the human being and the issue of human development. But the claim that genes have an ontological function when it comes to determining the human being's status is wrong: "Biology is a discourse and not the world itself" (2000, 25).

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<sup>31</sup> Steven Ascheim, in this context, refers to the biologist appropriation of Nietzsche through leading National Socialists: "The struggle for self-assertion and heightening of power was the source of mutable law. There was no reason of law or natural law. Nietzschean law followed life, not vice versa; it was not transcendental but immanent, dynamic, anthropological, and biological" (243).

Haraway's notion of biology as another discourse serving an expressive function is close to Nietzsche's notion of art. It can also help to explain how the body in Nietzsche's artistic framework is a suitable image for social engagement: "... while biology is the central organizing principle, biology is always tightly entwined with questions of politics and semiotic practice as well as various cross-disciplinary connections into literature, anthropology, and history" (2000, 50). In the same manner for Nietzsche's understanding of artistry, the body represents the incorporation of drives and instincts that are a source for creative output and social constructions. At the same time, these drives only find their expression in a socially sanctioned code of language use. Otherwise, they remain inaccessible. Both the body and the social conditions that facilitate talking about the body remain contingent and hence flexible in their qualitative attributions. In other words, bodies and societies share that they are never 'pure,' but always transient, in transitional processes and always already 'in transition.' Nietzsche's artist also knows that his or her sense of self will change. Identity is fluid, but the notional reference to images of identity is not irrelevant. As Rosalyn Diprose has argued, this also includes that the artist creates and re-creates while keeping a distance towards him- or herself: "Action at a distance means maintaining the concept of unfathomable changeability ..." (18).

### **Nietzschean Creativity and Performance**

Alexander Nehamas suggests that there is a specific stylistic coherency in Nietzsche's work and that the individual is a conglomeration of every sensation and experience, thus 'shaped' by contingency. However, these multifarious experiences and

sensations nonetheless find a proper definition under one name: “But a person worthy of admiration, a person who has (or is) a self, is one whose thoughts, desires, and actions are not haphazard but are instead connected to one another in the intimate way that indicates in all cases the presence of style” (Nehamas 7). What counts for the individual also counts for the intellectual program as a whole: a conglomeration of thoughts that eventually can be brought together and hence be more or less systematically understood. But Nietzsche’s intellectual model is not detached from a perceptual body. Rather, the intellectual program is considered a performance of the artist’s own physicality, hence an embodied expression of the artist’s desires, wishes and needs. With this in mind, Nehamas’ “presence of style” presumes artistic embodiment. And Diprose reaffirms that intellectual property “is about the projection of bodily experience into the future ...” (4).

There is, however, one problem with Nehamas’ interpretation of Nietzsche’s philosophy – or maybe it would be wiser to speak about Nietzsche’s philosophies. Nehamas chooses to use the term ‘style’ in the singular and thus seems to suggest a specific reading and understanding of Nietzsche’s writings. A debate about the possibility of understanding, however, is significant for Nietzsche himself, for example, when he gives a mock-review of his works in *Ecce Homo*.<sup>32</sup> When Nietzsche reviews the case of Hamlet, in the section titled “Why I am so clever,” Nietzsche points out that understanding is in fact a dangerous, if not disastrous result for the human mind and knowledge:

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<sup>32</sup>“In 1988 Nietzsche becomes *die Sache selbst* of his work. What is this *Sache* and what is the significance of the fact that it is the ultimate concern of his writing”(Harrison 182)?

*Versteht* man den Hamlet? Nicht der Zweifel, die *Gewissheit* ist das, was wahnsinnig macht ... Aber dazu muss man tief, Abgrund, Philosoph sein, um so zu fühlen ... Wir *fürchten* uns alle vor der Wahrheit. (Ecce Homo 287) (“Is Hamlet *understood*? – Not doubt, *certainty* is what drives us insane. – But one must be profound, an abyss, a philosopher to feel that way. – We are all afraid of truth”; Ecce Homo 246)

“We are afraid of truth” because truth would mean that we cannot know about anything that is metaphysically true. The only certainty is paradoxical: there is no certainty. What may at first appear as a frightening void invites to seek stylistic diversity because of that very void. We are able to use a multitude of styles in writing, reading, and particularly in the arts, simply because there is no single correct manner of expression and no single correct worldview available. Hence, there cannot be one right way of writing and creating, and there cannot be one right style, either.

Acts of reading, writing, creating, and understanding lead to a plurality in styles and world views that contradict each other and continue to co-exist in contradiction. Since all acts of creativity emerge from the artist’s embodiment, this also means that the notion of the body changes, too. Nietzsche’s subject is as manifold as there are styles: its expressions and modes of self-reference are potentially indefinite. Regarding the idea of the subject as an unchangeable agent, Christa Davis Acampora writes that it would be “a serious mistake to read it as Nietzsche’s ideal, for when one does so, one remains blind to the fact that the sovereign individual is the very ideal that Nietzsche seeks to replace and whose possible overcoming Zarathustra heralds” (41).

Stylistic diversity and the idea of a multifarious personal identity coincide in Nietzsche's aesthetics. Nehamas is right when he suggests reading Nietzsche's philosophy as a kind of storytelling, and hence as an artistic undertaking that allows a multitude of interpretations.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is any metaphysical model that holds all these interpretations together. Rather, Nietzsche's writing is marked by contingency and continuous modification. Robert Gooding-Williams refers to Nietzsche's figure of Zarathustra, the characters he meets during his repetitious ascending and descending from the mountains, and interprets these journeys as an allegory for a never-ending process of moral and artistic creativity: "In contrast to the metamorphoses of the spirit that express the *necessity* of the movement through which Hegelian self-consciousness achieves absolute knowledge, the metamorphoses of Zarathustra's spirit characterize his *contingently chosen* modes of response to the varying circumstances" (32).

Artistry, especially when represented as a topic within the performing arts, works with notions of the ugly and beautiful. With reference to aesthetic judgments, Nietzsche explains:

*Schön und hässlich.* – Nichts ist bedingter, sagen wir *beschränkter*, als unser Gefühl des Schönen. Wer es losgelöst von der Lust des Menschen am Menschen denken wollte, verlöre sofort Grund und Boden unter den Füßen. (Götzen-Dämmerung 123) ("*Beautiful and ugly.* – Nothing is more highly conditioned – let us say, *more limited* – than our feeling for beauty. Anyone trying to think about

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<sup>33</sup> "Nietzsche looks at the world in general as if it were a sort of artwork; in particular, he looks at it as if it were a literary text" (Nehamas 3).

this feeling in abstraction from the pleasure human beings derive humanity will immediately lose any sense of orientation”; *Twilight of the Idols* 201)

But this does not imply that the mediation of that sensation and judgment is subjective. On the contrary, when communicating ideas about beauty and ugliness, or about good and evil, for example, it is important to consider the social conventions that influence communicative processes:

Es genügt noch nicht, um sich einander zu verständigen, dass man die selben Worte gebraucht: man muss die selben Worte auch für die selbe Gattung innerer Erlebnisse gebrauchen, man muss zuletzt seine Erfahrung miteinander *gemein* haben. (Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 221) (“It is not sufficient to use the same words in order to understand one another: we must also employ the same words for the same kind of internal experiences, we must in the end have experiences *in common*”: *Beyond Good and Evil* 242)

If something or someone is considered to be either ugly or beautiful, this judgment is the expressive result of societal standards of beauty. Standards of beauty also influence gender categorizations. Women, for example, are often considered to be ‘the fair sex.’ But then, what it means to be a man or a woman is also largely the result of social conventions. Nietzsche’s idea of ‘beauty,’ is not an agglomeration of distinct physical characteristics. Rather, his sense of beauty is the expression of an attitude. This attitude is what Derrida refers to as the ‘seduction from a distance,’ the performance of a veil, so to speak: “<<Truth>> can only be a surface. But the blushing movement of that truth which is not suspended between quotation marks cast a modest veil over such a surface. And only through such a veil which thus falls over it could <<truth>> become truth, profound,

indecent, desirable” (1979, 59). Images of sex and gender are involved in this play with the veil, as sex and gender are notions intertwined with the expressions of desire. What people perceive is an appearance, an appearance that is important to them and that they link to themselves as the perceiving. In the case of a so-called sexual identity, that very felt identity refers to the human being’s conviction to be male or female. But people of a certain society cannot know more about what this means save for what language tells them. In the case of being either male or female, feeling alone provides a shaky ground for personal identity and is again a socio-historical product. Knowing about this shaky ground for the sense of self, and then looking for new ways and a new language to express selfhood, and what it means to refer to oneself as a male or a female – these are steps from which Nietzschean beauty emerges.

### **Playing with Style, Playing with Metaphors**

Communication is an entirely contingent and conventional process. Words have no meaning other than those derived from socio-historical conventions. This includes references to the physical body. Language referring to the physical body may also refer to discourses other than biological ones, for example, to ethics and morality:

Der „Reine” ist von Anfang an bloss ein Mensch, der sich wäscht, der sich gewisse Speisen verbietet, die Hautkrankheiten nach sich ziehen, der nicht mit den schmutzigen Weibern des niederen Volkes schläft, der einen Abscheu vor Blut hat – nicht mehr, nicht viel mehr! (Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral* 265)

(“The “pure one” is from the beginning merely a man who washes himself, who forbids himself certain foods that produce skin ailments, who does not sleep with



the dirty women of the lower strata, who has an aversion to blood – no more, hardly more!"; Genealogy of Morals 32)

The transition of the meaning of 'pure' into an ethical discourse is thus another metaphorical mode of speaking.

Language is a game that certainly has its rules, but not in the sense that they are carved in stone. The task of Nietzsche's artist, the 'noble man,' is to resume the renaming and relabeling of notions and conventions, and hence to contribute to a 'revaluation of all values.'

Gerade umgekehrt also wie bei dem Vornehmen, der den Grundbegriff „gut“ voraus und spontan, nämlich von sich aus concipirt und von da aus erst eine Vorstellung von „schlecht“ sich schafft! (Genealogie der Moral 274) ("... what the noble man does, who conceives the basic concept 'good' in advance and spontaneously out of himself and only then creates for himself an idea of 'bad'!"; Genealogy of Morals 40)

In broader terms: The noble man realizes that every act of writing, composing, and performing has its foundation in an agreement which, in turn, derives from social conventions. Consequently, the noble man – who may as well be a noble woman, for that matter – decides that he or she may as well leave socially sanctioned manners and modes of communication behind and look for a new way of speaking. Ultimately, new discourses change society in the way that they restructure and modify social imageries. To create new ways of speaking and perceiving also affects representations of the body, its needs and desires. In fact, the processes of sustaining physical health go hand in hand, for Nietzsche, with the processes of creating a new language: "Just as our physical health

depends upon the accomplishment of nutrition through an active process of consumption and digestion so does the formation of our psychic life occur through ‘inpsychation’ (*Einverseelung*), which is achieved in the interactive process of taking in experience and excreting what is unnecessary or undesirable to absorb” (Davis Acampora 41).

Granted, to speak about a psychic process involving anything that is called a soul is problematic. It is easy to assume a dualism between the material body and a metaphysical immateriality residing ‘within’ the body. However, what I find noteworthy about Davis Acampora’s comment is that all language use is physical. Language is the expression of our needs, desires, and hopes for the world in which we are living and which we hope to be able to change for the better. Zarathustra considers the dance as the performance during which change is exemplified through the body: “Und verloren sei uns der Tag, wo nicht Ein Mal getanzt wurde! Und falsch heiße uns jede Wahrheit, bei der es nicht Ein Gelächter gab“! (Also Sprach Zarathustra 264) (“And we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we shall call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one laugh.” (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 210) As stated above, the only truth is that there is no truth perceivable, so any claim of the opposite must indeed be laughable.

For Nietzsche, it is crucial that every creative act is considered an application of metaphors, most of them which are not even recognized as such any more, as we have become accustomed to them through the everyday use of language.<sup>34</sup> With respect to

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<sup>34</sup> “Wir glauben etwas von den Dingen selbst zu wissen, wenn wir von Bäumen, Farben, Schnee und Blumen reden und besitzen doch nichts als Metaphern der Dinge, die den ursprünglichen Dingen ganz und gar nicht entsprechen“ (Nietzsche, Wahrheit und Lüge 879). (“We believe that when we speak of trees, colours, snow, and flowers, we have knowledge of the things themselves, and yet we possess only

images of the body throughout history, both the model of a dualism between corporeal body and immaterial soul as well as ideas about a world ‘behind’ the appearances have been useful at times. But as needs of societies change, so do their vocabularies. Therefore, a new vocabulary contributes to a change in the ways we perceive other and a sense of self. Again: This does not mean that Nietzsche denies any material existence without the human being present to experiencing it. Rather, he wants to emphasize the futility of an attempt to write about that external world and to claim at the same time that this writing has metaphysical validity.

The artistic human being understands that not only is the world he or she perceives an expressive act of creativity. He or she also knows about him- or herself being such a creative product. Eric Blondel refers to sets of metaphors and their discursive settings within fields of medicine and philology.<sup>35</sup> The materiality of the body is not denied, but Nietzsche is aware of the impossibility of referring to the body as a biochemical entity without applying a set of conventionalized expressions. Zarathustra teaches that “der Leib ist eine grosse Vernunft, eine Vielheit mit Einem Sinne, ein Krieg und ein Frieden, eine Heerde und ein Hirt” (Also Sprach Zarathustra 39). (“The body is a great reason, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a heard and a shepherd”; Thus Spoke Zarathustra 34) and implies that the human reason is another expression for an aspect of the body, rather than an outcome of a mind operating independently from the

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metaphors of things which in no way correspond to the original entities.”; Nietzsche, On Truth and Lying 144)

<sup>35</sup> “It is thus possible to isolate a set of ‘gynaecological’ metaphors relating to the *vita feminine*, which has an ontological import and is in turn related to metaphors of clothing (travesty, appearance, base) and sex (possession, violence, evanescence, seduction); the metaphors of gastroenterology, applied, as we shall see, to the organization of the instincts and metaphorical (or non-metaphorical) order of interpretation ...” (Blondel 15).

latter.<sup>36</sup> Although only language facilitates the reference to the body, Nietzsche nonetheless emphasizes the impact of drives as instincts which motivate language use and modifications in vocabularies.

### **Intoxicated Creations: The Apollonian and Dionysian in Nietzsche's 'Animal Philosophy'**

I have demonstrated how the perception of the world as an expression of continuously ongoing creativity requires the individual to see her- or himself in that very same manner: being an individual that can only be perceived as an artistic conception, but one that is at the same time active and passive: the individual receives influences from his or her surroundings and is at the same time driven by beliefs and surroundings that may either reconfirm or question the conventions in which he or she lives. It is important therefore, that the individual does not locate him- or herself in a remote 'asocial' position, but considers him- or herself as a constitution that is inspired by the influences and affections of other people, since being in the world also means being within society.<sup>37</sup>

On the example of the Greek pre-Socratic culture, or more precisely, the construction of the Olympus, Nietzsche elaborates how culture is an artistic act that also creates the individual within itself. As for the construction of Olympus, Nietzsche considers it a creation that resulted out of instinctive drives such as fear, desire,

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<sup>36</sup> "Werkzeug deines Leibes ist auch deine kleine Vernunft, mein Bruder, die du „Geist“ nennst" (Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra 39). ("An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call 'spirit' – a little instrument and toy of your great reason"; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 34)

<sup>37</sup> "From what position does one therefore speak in order to set the thought of a new culture against metaphysics? If 'poets lie' or through their illusions can promote only an inoffensive 'truth' in the face of 'sacred deceit', the only resource left to destroy moral culture consist in placing oneself *within* the metaphysical field" (Blondel 27).

anxiousness, and eagerness, as well as out of passions and pain that are experienced individually but mediated and shared socially. The turmoil of passionate and painful expressions, however, needs to be put in a certain form, in order to be considered as drives, desires, and passions:

Jetzt öffnet sich uns gleichsam der olympische Zauberberg und zeigt uns seine Wurzeln. Der Grieche kannte und empfand die Schrecken und Entsetzlichkeiten des Daseins: um überhaupt leben zu können, musste er vor sie hin die glänzende Traumgeburt der Olympischen stellen. (Nietzsche, Geburt der Tragödie 35)

(“The Olympian magic mountain now opens up, as it were, and shows us its roots. The Greeks knew and felt the terrors of existence; in order to live at all they had to place in front of these things the resplendent, dream-born figures of the Olympians”; Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, 23)

If the Greeks invented their gods, they invented the subjects of their theaters and rituals. This happened in order to give shape to their drives, desires, and passions. In other words: Drives, desires and passion need some form of embodiment, to be recognized and expressed at all.<sup>38</sup>

What we perceive and understand as our body is thus an outcome of these artistic steps to create a sense of embodiment. But even though this means that there is no essential body

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<sup>38</sup> It is important that we keep the impact of traditions in our attention focus. It is impossible to create within limbo, as Eric Blondel writes. In order for artistic creativity to be effective, history and society must be conceived within terms of diachronicity: “Such a definition of a culture as body economy, a type of life, first of all makes it possible to discover a *synchronic* unity behind various human manifestations: art, philosophy, politics, morality, religion, [...] whose genealogical solidarity can be grasped. But this definition makes it equally necessary [...] to ascertain a *history* behind culture, that is to say, to fix a *diachronic* unity” (--- 68).

that metaphysically defines the human being, such constructions are in fact necessary. In *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*), Nietzsche writes:

Der Mensch ist allmählich zu einem phantastischen Thiere geworden, welches eine Existenz-Bedingung mehr, als jedes andere Thier, zu erfüllen hat: der Mensch *muss* von Zeit zu Zeit glauben, zu wissen, *warum* er existirt, seine Gattung kann nicht gedeihen ohne ein periodisches Zutrauen zu dem Leben! Ohne Glauben an die *Venunft im Leben!* (Die fröhliche Wissenschaft 372) (“Man has gradually become a fantastic animal that must fulfill one condition of existence more than any other animal: man *must* from time to time believe he knows *why* he exists; his race cannot thrive without a periodic trust in life – without faith in the *reason in life!*”; *The Gay Science* 29)

Humanity’s need to verify its own existence as purposeful only works with an image of the body that interacts in and with its environment. This image does not have any ontological verification, but it is important that it exists – in order for human beings to exist at all.

If culture and society are contingent, how does the notion of tradition fit in this image? Nietzsche attempts to give a solution to this problem in his key work *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. In his chapter “On the Three Metamorphoses,” the final metamorphose from the lion into the child contains the key concept of forgetting: “Unschuld ist das Kind und Vergessen, ein Neubeginnen, ein Spiel, ein aus sich rollendes Rad, eine erste Bewegung, ein heiliges Ja-sagen” (*Also Sprach Zarathustra* 31). (“The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred

‘yes’”; Thus Spoke Zarathustra 27). This child is not by all means a child in the literal sense: the child can be any creative human being who has learned and developed what scholars such as Vanessa Lemm call ‘Nietzsche’s Animal Philosophy.’ “Nietzsche affirms the continuity between the animal, the human, and the overhuman. He believes that human life is inseparable from the life of the animal and from the whole organic and inorganic world” (3).

The human being can achieve the position of the child only through forgetting. Forgetting social constraints and conventions does not mean that Nietzsche seeks to promote anarchy. Every work of art implies a certain set of rules. Accordingly, every human interaction requires a certain set of socially binding agreements, in order for the human being to be capable of any action at all. Also, Nietzsche by no means recommends a retreat into solipsism, as scholars like James J. Winchester suggest.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary: Forgetting is a precondition for starting anew, for saying yes to a moral and aesthetic revaluation of categories such as good and evil, beautiful and ugly. Only when we have come to the conclusion that notions such as the pairs of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, are meaningful in relation to each other, can we counter essentialism without promoting anarchy. Nietzsche’s artist is able to see that good and bad, beautiful and ugly only refer to their own logically opposite relation, but not to anything in social reality.

Social and aesthetic traditions are not eliminated. They provide the cultural references that undergo de- and reconstruction. Through these artistic processes, socially

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<sup>39</sup> Winchester interprets Nietzsche’s semiautobiographic style especially of his later phase, beginning with *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, as a praise of the lonely thinker and maybe wanderer, such as the picture was drawn as a motif in romanticism: “In his later works he flirts with an updated version of his solipsism by arguing, on occasion, that art is the product of the lonely genius” (2002, 46).

recognizable bits and pieces are reorganized and recombined, and the communication of ethic and artistic values begins anew. The process of recreation and reorganization is what Nietzsche terms as culture and what he opposes to the very process of civilization.<sup>40</sup>

Culture itself is a notion that escapes any possibility of ultimate determination. It is a process of creating values and styles, placed within a setting of societal conventions. But Nietzsche's artist does not take these convention as a given. Rather, he or she tests them with regard to their further utility in a society the artist creates. Eric Blondel has referred to this never-ending chain of recreations and redefinitions that are responsible for the way Nietzsche sees culture: "... culture for Nietzsche is not an autonomous game of pure signifiers, but, as a law of perspectivism, a *heteronomous* collection and a process that finds its law only in relation to what lies outside of it, which it expresses and represses" (80). Those conventions and values which no longer contribute to the artist's needs within a certain environment are no longer considered. They are, in short, forgotten.

If culture is a contingent construct, then it also contains the Apollonian and the Dionysian notions. When "the Olympian magic mountain now opens up," then what the Greeks call the fear and terror are results from the insight into the 'abyss,' which is again a metaphorical reference for the unintelligibility of meaning in life.

Ja er musste noch mehr empfinden: sein ganzes Dasein mit aller Schönheit und  
Mässigung ruhte auf einem verhüllten Untergrunde des Leidens und der

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<sup>40</sup> "In contrast to the memory of civilization, culture brings forth a "counter-memory" that unveils the illusory character of the truth of civilization. Under the rule of the culture, the human animal forgets the moral and rational norms of civilization, and this animal forgetfulness, in turn, brings back to the human being the forgotten freedom of the animal and the human spirit" (Lemm 12).



Erkenntniss, der ihm wieder durch jenes Dionysische aufgedeckt wurde. Und siehe! Apollo konnte nicht ohne Dionysus leben! (Nietzsche, Geburt der Tragödie 38) (“The Apolline Greek [...] was bound to feel more [...]: his entire existence, with all its beauty and moderation, rested on a hidden ground of suffering and knowledge which was exposed to his gaze once more by the Dionysiac. And behold! Apollo could not live without Dionysos”; Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy 27)

Not only fear and terror emerge from a glance into the abyss. More strikingly, the view into the abyss cannot be put in words. Language in general and words in particular, however, are crucial for the human being to conceive of his or her own existence.<sup>41</sup> With regard to the abyss, language is a tool that helps the human being to conceal it, at least temporarily. The erection of Olympus and the creation of the Hellenic culture are attempts to conceal the abyss, which ensures that mankind can continue living. But Nietzsche’s view on artistry always remembers the abyss. This knowing of the abyss is a condition for the awareness of the Dionysian drive. The artist who has once been afraid of the abyss now affirms it as a precondition for creativity. In other words: He or she develops a will to suffer pain.<sup>42</sup> Only then is the artist ready to work on the self’s deconstruction.

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<sup>41</sup> Lacan accordingly refers to the project of gaining knowledge in terms of linguistic representations, without which the material world would remain meaningless: “Knowledge initially arises at the moment at which S1 comes to represent something, through its intervention in the field defined, at the point we have come to, as an already structured field of knowledge” (2007, 13).

<sup>42</sup> The excursion to the will to suffer and hence to experience and live through pain will also be elaborated in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*: “Damals machte ein Mann seine reiche Schule körperlicher Qualen und Entbehrungen durch und begriff selbst in einer gewissen Grausamkeit gegen sich, in einer freiwilligen Uebung des Schmerzes, ein ihm nothwendiges Mittel seiner Erhaltung; damals erzog man seine Umgebung zum Ertragen des Schmerzes ...“ (413). ( “In those days, a man received ample training in bodily torments and deprivations and understood that even a certain cruelty towards himself, as a voluntary exercise in pain, was a necessary means of his preservation; in those days, one trained one’s surroundings by enduring pain”; 62) Nietzsche here refers to the pre-Socratic era and then again to the Middle Ages.

This does not mean that the artist gives up his or her creative ambitions. Through the deconstruction of the 'I,' the artist is aware that his or her own sense of self is contingent and subject to change. The way we see ourselves does not depend on anything like a 'core identity.' Rather, what one perceives of one's 'I' is shaped by the other, which refers to the socio-cultural conditions. This does not mean that an 'I' consists solely through the others' notion of us. Judith Butler writes that "if my doing is dependent on what is done to me, rather, the ways in which I am done by norms, then the possibility of my persistence as an 'I' depends upon my being able to do something with what is done with me" (2004, 3). This means that a human being's sense of self is not random. Individuals have the ability to refer to themselves in the first person singular, to accept societal assignments and to reject others. The self that knows of its own contingency is in fact more self-confident than the one who adheres to the belief in a metaphysical identity. It knows about the necessity to reclaim and negotiate his or own sense of self in interactions with society. These processes include declarations of belonging to a sex and performing an accumulation of gender roles: "The subject, recognized as corporeal being, can no longer readily succumb to the neutralization and neutering of its specificity which has occurred to women as a consequence of women's submersion under male definition" (Grosz ix).

Disembodying any sense of ontologically founded selfhood resembles the myth of Dionysus: how his body is dismembered, but then reconfigured by the god's own will. The horrors of dismemberment turn into a joyous experience of an overflowing vitality. In other words: the surface - or the 'skin,' expressed metaphorically - has to crack open, for energy and vitality to be able to flow:

Wenn wir zu diesem Grausen die wonnevolle Verzückerung hinzunehmen, die bei demselben Zerbrechen des principii individuationis aus dem innersten Grunde des Menschen, ja der Natur emporsteigt, so thun wir einen Blick in das Wesen des *Dionysischen*, das uns am nächsten noch durch die Analogie des *Rausches* gebracht wird. (Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie*, 28) (“If we add to this horror the blissful ecstasy which arises from the innermost ground of man, indeed of nature itself, whenever this breakdown of the *principium individuationis* occurs, we catch a glimpse of the essence of the Dionysiac, which is best conveyed by the analogy of *intoxication*”; Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 17)

Gianni Vattimo distinguishes between a so-called ‘Barbarian’ Dionysian orgy and the Dionysian Greek orgy, the latter being described in Nietzsche’s *Geburt der Tragödie*.<sup>43</sup> The Barbarian orgy is unreflective and brute, and constitutes a blind exercising of human instincts. However, according to Vattimo, this is not what Nietzsche had in mind when he wrote about the celebration of Dionysus. The Dionysian Greek orgy’s participants know that their celebrations rely on the Apollonian, too. The participants in the Dionysian Greek orgy are ecstatic, passionate, and incited by a physically experienced drive to create new cultural values and images. They are also

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<sup>43</sup> “Dionysus and Apollo arrive at an initial reconciliation by making the pact, and although their antagonism subsists, the pact sets the stage for the birth of the Dionysian dithyramb as a symbolic world. *In comparison to it*, the barbarian Dionysian can only appear as a regression to animality” (Vattimo 106). We must be careful, though, not to mistake this notion of animality with the one Lemm uses when writing about ‘Nietzsche’s Animal Philosophy.’ The ‘creative animal’ is in fact the ‘strong human being,’ who indeed is capable and prepared to emerge artistically, and who has realized that the building of cultures is a never-ending process of creativity which necessary implies the act of forgetting to make room for new ideas – and it is this insight into the nature of the human being that Nietzsche calls his animal philosophy. (“Nietzsche holds that nature seeks the increasing pluralization of life, and he believes that this pluralization can be attained through culture as it emerges from an affirmation of the continuity that exists within the totality of the animal, human, and other forms of life” (Lemm 3).) Barbarian, for Nietzsche, is when the human instincts and drives are lived out not for the sake of creative experiments of the human capabilities, but rather out of pure laziness and sluggishness.

aware of the Dionysian Greek orgy as a performance that includes the corporeal body as the representing site for the human's desires, drives, and needs. When the artist celebrates the Dionysian, he or she not only realizes that the surrounding world is the one that the human intellect and creativity creates, deconstructs, and recreates. Through the celebration, that the creative human being also realizes how he or she him- or herself is an artistic creation, and thus subject to continuous redefinition as well:

Der Mensch ist nicht mehr Künstler, er ist Kunstwerk geworden: die Kunstgewalt der ganzen Natur, zur höchsten Wonnebefriedigung des Ur-Einen, offenbart sich hier unter den Schauern des Rausches. (Nietzsche, Geburt der Tragödie 30)

("Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: all nature's artistic power reveals itself here, amidst shivers of intoxication, to the highest, most blissful satisfaction of the primordial unity"; Nietzsche 1999, 18)

The human being has reached the 'peak' of his or her creative potential when he or she realizes that the realm of the dream is the only realm accessible to mankind, but that, on the other hand, this realm provides all metaphorical tools, i.e. language, to create and recreate. For Nietzsche, the person who has understood this has understood life

Frances Nesbitt Oppel illustrates how the interrelations of the Apollonian and the Dionysian provide interpretative spaces for gendered identities that do not discriminate between male and female on mutually exclusive antipodes. Instead, she suggests that the male is not perceivable without the female and vice versa, just as the Dionysian is not imaginable without the Apollonian: "Nietzsche's revisions create 'whole' human beings; we might say they produce bisexual individuals, if bisexually weren't conceptually too

limiting, prescriptive, and dualistic” (5).<sup>44</sup> If the world, its creations as well as its creators, is structured along the influences of the male and the female, whereby the male is assigned to the Apollonian and the female to the Dionysian,<sup>45</sup> then this also means that everything and everybody is comprised of the intermingling ideas of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, since both are preset in every form of creation. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra himself refers to him as ‘trans-gendered’ while he sings the ‘Dance-Song.’ Zarathustra meets a group of girls who are playing and dancing. When they notice Zarathustra, they stop their games, because they think that Zarathustra despises games and especially those which involve performances by women. But Zarathustra encourages them to continue and even takes part in their actions when he sings a song accompanying their dances. This song is inextricably connected to continuous movement, as it is performed during the dance, and represents the continuously processing creative process, which is also responsible for the construction of sex and gender imageries. When Zarathustra sings about his wisdom, he codes it as female:

Und als ich unter vier Augen mit meiner wilden Weisheit redete, sagte sie mir zornig: ‚Du willst, du begehrst, du liebst, darum allein *lobst* du das Leben!‘ Fast hätte ich da böß geantwortet und der Zornigen die Wahrheit gesagt ... (Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra 140) (“And when I talked in confidence with my wild

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<sup>44</sup> Nesbitt Oppel uses the term ‘bisexuality’ in a rather outdated fashion, which is problematic with respect to current gender discourses. The term ‘bisexuality’ has been used, in the writings of Karen Horney and Magnus Hirschfeld, not for people with a sexual preference for the same sex, but rather for people who were identifying with the opposite sex. For example, Karen Horney writes: “On the issues of biological validity, our conscience can always be eased by the fact of bisexuality .... Bisexuality means not only that everyone has traits of both sexes, but also that it is not possible to content ourselves with one sex role” (32).

<sup>45</sup> “As material and irrational, the mythological drive fall onto the “feminine” side of the conventional table of binary oppositions that has linked “female” with the formless, dark, and material qualities – and by extension with the unconscious and the irrational, in a repetitive set of associations that is in itself mythic” (Nesbitt Oppel 66).

wisdom she said to me in anger “You will, you want, you love – that is the only reason why you *praise* life.” Then I answered almost wickedly and told the angry woman the truth ....”; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 108 f.)

Zarathustra, as Rosalyn Diprose has interpreted him, represents his sense of self as spilt up in multiple parts, which include multiple genders. This performance allows him to present himself as a contingent person with a will to see the self as a contingent work of art. This contingent sense of self includes both male and female references. There is no metaphysical measure of how far a human being is male or female, since both metaphors refer randomly to states of gendered personhood for which there is no prefigured basis.

But this does not mean that notions about men and women are randomly exchangeable. Following, I briefly refer to a philosophy of selfhood that shows how ideas about sex and gender influence our senses of self. Margaret Lock, in her analysis of the medical discourses surrounding the body as a material-in-treatment, observes the comments on and opinions about organ transplant patients and notes that “a good number of organ recipients worry about the gender, ethnicity, skin color, personality, and social status of their donors, and many believe that their mode of being-in-the-world is radically changed after a transplant ...” (226). Certainly, this belief in the material body as a physical site for a human being’s self is based on discourses about the material body as a center of selfhood, and the belief that material body parts take part in the construction of the human being’s own personhood.<sup>46</sup> But this belief is also effective because it touches

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<sup>46</sup>“Mixed metaphors associated with human organs encourage confusion about their worth. The language of medicine insists that human body parts are material entities, devoid entirely of identity whether located in donors or in recipients. However, to promote donation, organs are animated with a force that [...] can be

upon the privileged position of the first person singular and its perception of worldliness, with the body as a site that represents the emergence of cultural narratives: “Understanding the world is about living inside stories. There’s no place to be in the world outside of stories. And these stories are literalized in these objects. Or better, objects are frozen stories” (Haraway 2000, 107).

### **Dismembered Bodies, Dismembered Texts**

On the one hand, Greek Philosophy and Nietzsche have always been interested in the body with regard to the human being’s physical education and the impact a healthy body has on a person’s intellectual and artistic abilities.<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche consistently emphasizes the necessity of healthy nutrition and exercise in *Ecce Homo* and *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. He demonstrates how the terms of ‘pure/impure’ originally expressed hygienic conditions and eventually changed their meaning within a new Christian discourse on morality. Consequently, corporeal states find their expression within language through processes of metaphorization. The physical impact is considered, and Nietzsche accordingly encourages medical specialists and philologists to cooperate rather than to expose mutual mistrust: “Andererseits ist es freilich ebenso nöthig, die Theilnahme der Physiologen und Mediciner für diese Probleme (vom *Werthe* der bisherigen Werthschätzungen) zu gewinnen ...” (*Genealogie der Moral* 289). (“... it is equally necessary to engage the interest of physiologists and doctors in these problems (of the *value* of existing evaluations) ...”; Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 55)

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gifted, and donor families are not discouraged from understanding donation as permitting their relative to “live on” in the bodies of recipients” (Lock 225).

<sup>47</sup> As it will become clear later in this dissertation, this does not necessarily imply a mind-body dualism.

But the interest in the human body both in medicine and philosophy has also been vivid with regard to its endocrinal and anatomical conditions. Gilles Deleuze considers the Nietzschean ‘will to power’ a conglomeration of drives that operate based on the principles of physical attraction and rejection: “But what does ‘the will to power manifests itself’ mean? The relationship between forces in each case is determined to the extent that each force is *affected* by other, inferior or superior, forces” (62).

Of course, the relationship between active and passive states that constitutes the will to power is not limited to the area of physicality. Most of all, the will to power itself is a philosophical idea that is not identical with a body’s conditions. Rather, the will to power demands the artist to interact with society, but not to be subsumed by it. The artist who represents what is paraphrased as a ‘will to power’ work on society, challenges its values and convictions. He or she questions and investigates them, and modifies them in case they are no longer useful. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra proclaims that “wer ein Schöpfer sein muss im Guten und Bösen: wahrlich, der muss ein Vernichter erst sein und Werthe zerbrechen“ (Also Sprach Zarathustra 149). (“whoever must be a creator in good and evil, verily, he must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the highest goodness: but this is creative”; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra 116)

The ‘will to power,’ the will to work on society and the notion of an individual’s sense of self, is not exhaustively explicable in biological terms. However, the notion of the ‘will to power’ can express itself through metaphors that refer to biological discourses. The ‘will to power’ in Nietzsche’s philosophy often refers to the figure of the ‘healthy body.’ Time and again, Nietzsche emphasizes the importance of physical health in order to achieve a creative energy that characterizes the ‘healthy spirit.’ The creative



human being's task is hence a twofold one: He or she must develop a sense of corporeal self-confidence in order to be socio-culturally confident:

Was hält man sonst nicht aus von Noth, Entbehrung, bösem Wetter, Siechthum, Mühsal, Vereinsamung? Im Grunde wird man mit allem Übrigen fertig, geboren wie man ist zu einem unterirdischen und kämpfenden Dasein; man kommt immer wieder einmal an's Licht, man erlebt immer wieder seine goldene Stunde des Siegs, - und dann steht man da, wie man geboren ist, unzerbrechbar, gespannt, zu Neuem, zu noch Schwererem, Fernerem bereit, wie ein Bogen, den alle Noth immer nur noch straffer anzieht. (Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral*, 277) („How much one is able to endure: distress, want, bad weather, sickness, toil, solitude. Fundamentally one can cope with everything. Fundamentally one can cope with everything else, born as one is to a subterranean life of struggle; one emerges again and again into the light, one expresses again and again one's golden hour of victory – and then one stands forth as one was born, unbreakable, tensed, ready for new, even harder, remoter things, like a boy that distress only serves to draw tauter”; Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 44)

The individual must affirm his or her commitment to working with and to recreating society and the self, and this affirmation is an active confirmation of the self: “Affirmation takes us into the glorious world of Dionysus, the being of becoming and negation hurls us down into the disquieting depths from which reactive forces emerge” (Deleuze 54).

Human creativity relies on continuous self-reference and the agglomeration of experiences that constitute the self. The contingent notion of selfhood constitutes the

human being and its reference to the physical drives that motivate him or her to social interactions. To understand the human being as an ongoing ‘work in progress’ includes the conception of the human body as a temporal unit reliant on a certain vocabulary. Consequently, what we understand as the sexed and gendered body needs continuous reevaluation. The latter point indicates that ideas about sex and gender are helpful notions when we refer to ourselves and the sexual identities we assume. It is crucial, however, that we do not consider these identities as ontologically given, but that we remember the fluctuating conditions of either a male-phrased or female-phrased sense of identity.

In his article “Nietzsches Tragödie des Dionysos (Zagreus),” Christophe Bourquin refers to the dismembering and reconstruction to Dionysus, whereby the dismembering is a metaphor for the dissolving into shapeless and ‘pure artistic energy,’ and the reconstitution of forms and shapes, the reconstitution of the deity, is a metaphor for the Apollonian – whereby the notions of the Apollonian and the Dionysian are metaphors themselves:

Als >>Jäger hinter Wolken<< ist Dionysus Zagreus wie der vorausgehende >>Gedanke<< gleichzeitig da und auch nicht da, anwesend abwesend, paradox zerteilt. Die Tropierung der Sinnfigur >>zerreißt<< ihn. Ein- und Vorführung des Zerreißens gehen parallel. („As a “hunter behind clouds,” Dionysus Zagreus, as the preceding “thought,” is simultaneously there and not there, present in its absence, paradoxically fragmented. The figure’s trope “dismembers” him. Introduction and presentation of the act of dismemberment run parallel”; 614)

Bourquin's 'Tropierung der Sinnfigur' refers to a paradoxical act of writing about Dionysus. If Nietzsche refers to the Dionysian as the formless art that resists any notional definition, then any trope that refers to Dionysus performs paradox, since it wants to name a figure that rejects any further naming. We cannot entirely comprehend any idea of a drive, instinct, or desire that underlies our self-reference. Drives, desires, and needs, in short: anything 'Dionysian,' is never accessible on its own. We create notions of them, and these notions operate within conceptual frameworks. But we must never take these concepts for granted, that they as well are fluid and contingent, volatile, and defy any metaphysical manifestations.

For the human being this means that, because of his or her comprehension of both Dionysian and Apollonian aspects, he or she comprises both male and female references. 'Male' and 'female,' 'man' and 'woman' are contingent notions, and they help with the structuring of 'worldliness.' Through self-reference, we relate aspects of social identity like gender to physical phenomena. In consequence, notions of sex and gender are non-metaphysical and interchangeable, albeit not unnecessary for self-references. With regard to gender, sex, and sexual identity, self-references are non-metaphysical, but not arbitrary: "Yes, we can strategize to create conditions under which our desire for a desire might lead to a form of approximately successful behavior ..., and we certainly can find ourselves altered over time through a wide variety of external forces and internal decision-making processes .... However, our sexualities are not mechanically controllable" (Hall 7).

Every human being entails both Apollonian and Dionysian drives and instincts. It is contingent how we refer to these drives, and the modes of reference rely on the

vocabularies that a society currently employs.<sup>48</sup> Regarding any gendered self-reference a human being entertains, his or her body functions as the site for its representation.<sup>49</sup> However, no essential image of a body underlies this representational process:

Selbst innerhalb jedes einzelnen Organismus steht es nicht anders: mit jedem wesentlichen Wachstum des Ganzen verschiebt sich auch der „Sinn“ der einzelnen Organe – unter Umständen kann deren theilweises Zugrunde-Gehen, deren Zahl-Verminderung (zum Beispiel durch Vernichtung der Mittelglieder) ein Zeichenwachsener Kraft und Vollkommenheit sein. (Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral* 315) (“The case is the same even within each individual organism: with every real growth in the whole, the “meaning” of the individual organs also changes; in certain circumstances their partial destruction, a reduction in their numbers (for example, through the disappearance of intermediary members) can be a sign of increasing strength and perfection”; Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 78)

Dismemberment hence takes place on several layers in the text. Dismemberment on a mythical basis is focused on Dionysus and his companion Silen, who is responsible for the revelation of the abyss to the human being. Dismemberment accompanies the body in

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<sup>48</sup>“The metaphors which the pragmatist suggests we put in place of all this masochistic talk about hardness and directness are those of linguistic behavior as tool-using, of language as a way of grabbing hold of casual forces and making them do what we want, altering ourselves and our environment to suit our aspirations” (Rorty 1991, 81).

<sup>49</sup>“... you cannot simply shatter your past sexuality and build a new one in the ruin of the old. Nor can we expect to shatter entrenched belief systems and expect a new configuration of sexual politics to emerge miraculously from its ruins” (Hall 13).

its corporeality and the social conditions that give meaning to the body. Both human body and social spheres are interpreted as artworks:

Hier haben wir, in höchster Kunstsymbolik, jene apollinische Schönheitswelt und ihren Untergrund, die schreckliche Weisheit des Silen, vor unseren Blicken und begreifen, durch Intuition, ihre gegenseitige Nothwendigkeit. (Nietzsche, Geburt der Tragödie 39) (“Here, in the highest symbolism of art, we see before us that Apolline world of beauty and the ground on which it rests, that terrible wisdom of Silenus, and we gasp, intuitively, the reciprocal necessity of these two things”; Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy 26)

Dionysus gets dismembered by the Titans and reconstructs himself in a creative act. His reemergence requires the cooperation with Apollo, the Greek god of the light, the sun, harmony, order, and reason.

The dismemberment addressed in concrete corporeal terms with regard to mythology, to which Friedrich Nietzsche explicitly refers,<sup>50</sup> is metaphorically expressed with the reference to the body’s physicality. At the chapter’s beginning, I have underlined that not only the outside, material world the human being faces is conceived through a vocabulary that is the human being’s creation or construction, but that also the human being him- or herself is perceived as an artwork. Every artwork considers the Apollonian

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<sup>50</sup> “An ihre beiden Kunstgottheiten, Apollo und Dionysus, knüpft sich unsere Erkenntniss, dass in der griechischen Welt ein ungeheurer Gegensatz, nach Ursprung und Zielen, zwischen der Kunst des Bildners, der apollinischen, und der unbildlichen Kunst der Musik, als der des Dionysus, besteht ...“ (Nietzsche, Geburt der Tragödie 25). (“Their two deities of art, Apollo and Dionysus, provide the starting point for our recognition that there exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous opposition, both in origin and goals, between the Apolline art of the image-maker or sculptor ... and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos”; Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy 14)

‘image-maker’ and ‘form- giver,’ as well as Dionysian ‘formless’ ecstasy.<sup>51</sup> The energy and motivation needed for artistic creations is expressed through Nietzsche’s image of the ‘strong will:’

Aber zum Menschen treibt er mich stets von Neuem, mein inbrünstiger Schaffens-  
Wille; so treibt’s den Hammer hin zum Steine. Ach, ihr Menschen, im Steine  
schläft mir ein Bild, das Bild meiner Bilder! (Also Sprach Zarathustra 111) (“But  
my fervent will to create impels me ever again toward man; thus is the hammer  
impelled toward the stone. O men, in the stone there sleeps an image, the image of  
my images”; Thus Spoke Zarathustra 87)

Zarathustra employs the image of the hammer to refer to the destruction of old values, for the benefit of new ones.<sup>52</sup> The so-called ‘will to power’ is another expression for creativity and based on the idea of the human being’s multifarious notions of identity. In consequence, the human being is able to refer to his or her own self-perception and thus to assume a critical distance to his or her own sense of identity. Nietzsche refers to this so-called ‘torn identity’ of the human self at the beginning of his *Genealogie der Moral*:

Wir sind uns unbekannt, wir Erkennenden, wir selbst uns selbst: das hat seine  
guten Grund. Wie haben nie nach uns gesucht, - wie sollte es geschehen, dass wir  
eines Tages uns fänden? (247) (“So we are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we  
do not comprehend ourselves, we *have* to misunderstand ourselves, for the law

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<sup>51</sup> “The two principles ... have become brothers here. But their brotherhood is not in the least one of equals: Dionysus may indeed speak the language of Apollo, but *in the end* Apollo speaks the language of Dionysus, and *in that* the supreme purpose of all art is attained” (Vattimo 103).

<sup>52</sup> “Hier sitze ich und warte, alte zerbrochene Tafeln um mich und auch neue halb beschriebene Tafeln. Wann kommt meine Stunde” (Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra 246)? (“Here I sit and wait, surrounded by broken old tablets and new tablets half covered with writing. When will my hour come”; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra 196).

“Each is furthest from himself” applies to all eternity – we are not “men of knowledge with respect to ourselves”; 15)

The dismemberment as a concrete bodily and material act, as it is shown in the ancient myths, does not only have an epistemological analogy with regard to the individual’s self-perception and self-conception, but also finds its expression in theatrical and film performance. Nietzsche works with ‘dismembered’ texts and multiple styles on various levels. His aphorisms, for example, represent both textual disruption and the agglomeration of diverse thoughts which all find their place within a work of art that contains multiple styles.<sup>53</sup> This multiplicity in styles corresponds to the multiplicity of possible interpretations of a text. The multiplicity of body images, represented on stage or on film, challenges the correlations of aesthetic categories to ethical and moral judgments. Since Nietzsche is strongly against the employment of moral values that only have abstract value, his aesthetics revalue ethical and moral notions and concepts through performance.

Dismemberment as a literary and artistic tool transposes Nietzsche’s writings with regard to the narratives of corporeality, the self and its construction, destruction and reconstruction, as well as with regard to constructing a narrative as an act of writing. In this narrative, images of bodies do not disappear. But there is no body that can claim an

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<sup>53</sup> With Eric Blondel, we can see in the variety of aphorisms Nietzsche oftentimes collects in his books as the demonstration of a stylistic program that cannot find its end and purpose, since the latter consist in exactly the fact that Nietzsche considers creativity as a force that stems from the human desires to create and re-create – an effort which requires the deconstruction of the old and its reconstruction to the new: “Or has Nietzsche tried to write a new language in order to express reality and life? He committed himself to the path of *Versuch*: a metaphorical plurality in which language, he thinks, instead of simplifying, can try to regain a multiplicity of perspectives on life” (Blondel 203).

essential mode of representation. Temporality, instead, marks all references to materiality.

***The Genealogy of Morals: Bodies and how to Relate to them***

When we speak about the ‘I’ and its representations through language, we inadvertently face a dilemma situation. Although the material body exists, we cannot approach it otherwise than with a vocabulary that we have created by ourselves and that we learn through society. This vocabulary does not express a material, ‘objective’ identity, but rather our references to objects.

Nietzsche knows about this situation as well. For him, however, this is not a dilemma, but rather an opportunity for the artist. Nietzsche talks about the body as a medium that rejects dualisms. For him, the body as the site for creativity is a referential vantage point, from which the human being begins to perceive, direct, and design. But just as the world is only something that we can perceive retrospectively, such is there no immediate access to bodies. Douglas Mason-Schrock, in a study about the self-referential narrations transsexuals at times employ, notes that the body always already the source of our motivations and the result of our discursive efforts: “This ‘meaningful whole’ seems to provide evidence of a ‘true self’ that is continuous over time. This is not to say that the self is viewed as immutable; rather, throughout whatever changes an individual undergoes, a continuous thread constituting the “true self” is imagined to exist. This thread is spun by the stories” (177).

Nonetheless, it is important for Nietzsche to refer to the body’s endocrinal conditions. He gives a number of suggestions about what to eat and to drink, and from



which foods and drinks it would be better to abstain.<sup>54</sup> He also gives advise where to live and work, and how a specific climate affects the human being in his or her self-confidence: “Die Wahl in der Ernährung; die Wahl von Klima und Ort; - das Dritte, worin man um keinen Preis einen Fehlgriff thun darf, ist die Wahl *seiner Art Erholung*” (Ecce Homo 284). (“The choice of nutrition; the choice of climate and place: the third point at which one must not commit a plunder at any price is the choice of *one’s own kind of recreation*”; Ecce Homo 242)

How does the referral to nutrition and physical education correlate to non-essential approaches to images of sexed and gendered bodies? Christopher Janaway refers to Nietzsche’s *Geneaologie der Moral* mostly because of its religion critique.<sup>55</sup> With regard to their images of bodies, Judaic and Christian traditions emphasize the primacy of the soul over the body. They hence support a dualism which becomes difficult to uphold once we assume that the world we perceive is an artistic creation. Judaic and Christian traditions, for Nietzsche, also ontologize values concerning good and evil. But notions of good and evil, when ontologized in a religious or other discursive system, turn out to be control mechanisms affecting the human being: “wie muss dazu der Mensch selbst vorerst *berechenbar, regelmäßig, nothwendig* geworden sein, auch sich selbst für seine

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<sup>54</sup> “Keine Zwischenmahlzeiten, keinen Café: Café verdüstert. *Thee* nur morgens zuträglich. Wenig, aber energisch; Thee sehr nachtheilig und den ganzen Tag ankränkelnd, wenn er nur um einen Grad zu schwach ist. Jeder hat hier sein Maass, oft zwischen den engsten und delikatesten Grenzen. In einem sehr agaçanten Klima ist Thee als Anfang unräthlich: man soll eine Stunde vorher eine Tasse dicken entölten Cacao’s den Anfang machen lassen“ (Nietzsche, Ecce Homo 281). (“No meals between meals, no coffee: coffee spreads darkness. *Tea* is wholesome only in the morning. A little, but strong: tea is very unwholesome and sickles one over the whole day if it is too weak by a single degree. Everybody has his own measure, often between the narrowest and the most delicate limits. In a climate that is very *agaçant*, tea is not advisable for a beginning: one should begin an hour earlier with a cup of thick, oil-less cocoa”; Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, 239)

<sup>55</sup> “The Genealogy centres on the morality that has arisen from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, whose values, according to Nietzsche, give priority to selflessness, holding it good to be compassionate and self-sacrificing, to suppress one’s natural self ...” (Janaway 2).

eigene Vorstellung...” (Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral* 292). (“Man himself must first of all have become *calculable, regular, necessary*, even in his own image of himself ...”; Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 58). The overcoming of values thus also always includes the overcoming of physical conditions. Nietzsche’s artist is involved in discussions about what is considered good or bad, permitted or prohibited. He or she is also involved in discourses that decide upon what is prohibited with regard to the expressions of corporeal identity: How a ‘male’ or ‘female’ body has to look like, what one is supposed to do with one’s body, and through which categories we are supposed to decide which behavior is gender-conforming or -deviant. But Nietzsche’s artist knows about the body’s contingencies. Since the body is the site of all drives and desires, it also provides the means to reapply these desires and drives on images of bodies. The artist can also work towards a change of the social parameters through which the body’s sexual and gendered imageries are perceived, until there may be a time when they are no longer needed. Hélène Cixous she writes in *The Laugh of the Medusa*: “A process of different subjects knowing one another and beginning one another anew only from the living boundaries of the other: a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which woman takes her forms (and man, in his turn, but that’s his other history)” (Cixous 2047).

What Cixous describes as the erasure of (sexual) difference corresponds to what Nietzsche refers to as the process of overcoming. Although the stress arising from the task of overcoming is not primarily associated with a body’s endocrinology, the latter takes place physically and effects the construction of images of men and women. This process of overcoming is considered an expression of health.

To care about one's body means to care about selfhood. To care for oneself means to be aware of oneself, to inquire which values one deems important, and how the revaluation of values and the remodeling of the world might eventually benefit more than just one person. As Michel Foucault expresses in his lectures at the Collège de France 1981/82, the care for oneself is also the vantage point to achieve knowledge:

Die Sorge um sich selbst als Sporn, der ins Fleisch der Menschen eindringen muß, der in ihr Dasein eingelassen und das ganze Leben hindurch Grund für Bewegung und Bewegtheit ist. ("The care for the self as a motivator, which has to penetrate the human flesh, which is inserted into human existence and is the reason for movement an motion throughout life"; Foucault 2001, 23)

This is a primarily Socratic undertaking<sup>56</sup>, and even though Nietzsche often distances himself from Socrates, he sometimes has more in common with the Greek philosopher than he might have been willing to admit.

It would be wrong, however, to exclude the notion of sickness from the Nietzschean idea of the healthy body. Quite the opposite is the case, as Nietzsche assures already at the beginning of *Die Geburt der Tragödie*:

Ist Wahnsinn vielleicht nicht nothwendig das Symptom der Entartung, des Niedergangs, der überspäten Cultur? Gibt es vielleicht ... Neurosen der *Gesundheit*? Der Volks-Jugend und Jugendlichkeit? (16) ("Is madness not necessarily a symptom of degeneration, of decline, of a culture that has gone too

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<sup>56</sup> "Sokrates sagt, daß er, indem er die anderen zur Sorge um sich selbst anhalte, die Rolle dessen spielte, der seine Mitbürger aufwecke. Die Sorge um sich wird hier als der erste Augenblick des Erwachens betrachtet. Es ist der Moment, in dem sich die Augen öffnen, wo einer den Schlaf hinter sich läßt und das erste Licht aufnimmt." („Socrates says that he encourages his fellow citizens to care about themselves"; Foucault 2004, 23)

long? Are there perhaps [...] neuroses of *health*, of national youth and youthfulness?"; 7)

The healthy body is taken care of by the human being. The knowledge about the body equals knowledge about one's sense of self. At the same time, the 'healthy body' is also another metaphorical expression for the 'strong human being' with a 'strong will' respectively the 'will to power' – and this human being is able to face every encounter he or she makes in the world and affirms it as an element that constitutes her or his own life:

Die Vergangenen zu erlösen und alles ‚Es war‘ umzuschaffen in ein ‚So wollte ich es!‘ – das hiesse mir erst Erlösung! Wille – so heisst der Befreier und Freudebringer ... (Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra 179) ("To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it' – that alone should I call redemption. Will – that is the name of the liberator and joy-bringer ..."; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra 139)

For Nietzsche, the human body and its physique does exist regardless of any linguistic encoding, but it takes language for the human being to access any idea about the body, to approach it and to work with it. As Butler has also pointed it out in her book *Bodies that Matter*, no one can refer to the "body itself" without making references to socially conventionalized practices of naming and labeling: "'Sex' is, thus, not simply what one has, on a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life, within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (1993, 2). What is important for Nietzsche is hence to incorporate all conventions, names, and labels, to accept them, but not as ontological notions, but as material themselves that can and has to be renamed, remodeled, and refashioned. This

includes the moments of sickness – maladies, mental distractions, and physical viruses – in fact, as Keith Ansell-Pearson notices: The virus is what causes the organism to develop.<sup>57</sup>

The virus as a catalyst: this idea not only visualizes the acceptance of the disruptive in the creative act of designing one's own life – it also counteracts the notion that a focus on the body as a biological entity necessarily relapses into a regressive view of biological determination. Rather, the emphasis of the virus as a catalyst underlines once more that the physical, individual, and societal development – for the body operates as a materialized metaphor on all these three layers – is non-teleological and hence rejects the idea of navigating towards an end in the development. The virus may also be read as a *pars pro toto* for the body that is changing and whose physical condition is hence that of a continuous transitioning process. Nietzsche has always rejected the idea that there may be any teleological sense in the modifications of physical existence a living organism undergoes.

The process of transitioning for the transsexual is a never-ending one that involves all parts and surroundings of the human being – from his or her physical body to the societal structures that are surrounding him *and* her. In fact, Nietzsche's philosophy of the body shows that transitioning is the metaphor for life – for life in its entirety. Life *is* transitioning: socio-culturally and physically.

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<sup>57</sup>”The emphasis was on ,transformation’, such as ‘conjugation’ and ‘transduction’, which involve the transfer of genetic material from one cell to another by a virus” (Ansell-Pearson 133).

## 2) Nietzsche, Women, and Body Images

In this chapter, I address how Nietzsche's philosophy and especially his aesthetics consider the world an artistic production. I have demonstrated how the human being considers his or her body as an artwork itself, which he or she approaches in terms that again are notions derived from conventionalized ways of speaking. Because of this position, the human being is a creation him- or herself, which is an idea that has recently been reemphasized by Kaja Silverman and her view on Zarathustra: "Zarathustra's defining attribute is *solitude*. This does not mean that he has opted out of history; on the contrary, he is the *maker* of history" (2009, 37). Although I disagree with Silverman's take on the role of solitude for Zarathustra,<sup>58</sup> I do support her claim that the human being must conceive of him- or herself as an ever-changing creation by social customs and conventions, which the human being considers regarding their usefulness.

I have also expressed that a gendered reference to human beings that describes them as either male or female does not do justice to a person's potentially multi-gendered condition, i.e. to his or her potential to perform any gender regardless of his or her sex assigned through socialization. When the perception of the own gendered person is motivated by drives and instincts that Nietzsche paraphrases as Apollonian and Dionysian, then the idea emerges that every human being must potentially be understood in both male and female terms.

In the following, I address how the composition of male and female drives in Nietzsche's aesthetics reflects the transsexual's self-referential efforts. In response to past

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<sup>58</sup> "... he does not need to live among other human beings to effect social change, because he has interiorized the categories of "master" and "slave"" (Silverman 2009, 37).

and present trans-skepticism and sometimes even trans-phobia in academia or the public, I explain with the help of Nietzsche's philosophy how and why transsexuals are allies rather than enemies in the fight against sexual and gender discrimination.

Nietzsche's writings provide a basis for a flexible application of sexual and gendered notions to human beings, even though they at times arouse the suspicion of being misogynist. Quotes like the following taken from *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*):

Alle Frauen sind fein darin, ihre Schwäche zu übertreiben, ja sie sind erfinderisch in Schwächen, um ganz und gar als zerbrechliche Zierarthen zu erscheinen, denen selbst ein Stäubchen wehe tut .... (66) ("All women are subtle in exaggerating their weakness; indeed they are inventive at weakness in order to appear as utterly fragile ornaments that are harmed even by a speck of dust"; 73)

We may still be able to interpret this quote as a comment on the playfulness of vanity, but this is no longer that easily possible in the case of *Götzen-Dämmerung* (*Twilight of the Idols*): "Wenn das Weib männliche Tugenden hat, so ist es zum Davonlaufen; und wenn es keine männlichen Tugenden hat, so läuft es selbst davon" (63). ("When a woman has masculine virtues, you feel like running away; and when she doesn't have masculine virtues, she runs away herself"; 159)

The peak of a discriminating distinction between man and woman appears in Nietzsche's semiautobiography *Ecce Homo*: "Das Weib ist unsäglich viel böser als der Mann, auch klüger; Güte am Weib ist schon eine Form der Entartung" (306). ("Woman, for example, is vengeful: that is due to her weakness, as much as is her susceptibility of the distress of others"; 232)

Therefore, it seems astonishing that Nietzsche has that much an influence on feminist discourses. Virginia Wolff refers to the pathologization of women in British society, especially when a woman aims at attaining an artistic position herself.<sup>59</sup> But Nietzsche seems to attack women who want to be influential in artistry and scholarship. A woman, Nietzsche writes, who wants to be recognized as an artist, cannot ‘be taken seriously.’ For her, as he mentions in *Götzen-Dämmerung*, literature and arts are a pastime:

Das vollkommene Weib begeht Litteratur, [sic] wie es eine kleine Sünde begeht: zum Versuch, im Vorübergehn, sich umblickend, ob es Jemand bemerkt und *dass* es jemand bemerkt. (62) (“The perfect woman commits literature the way she commits a small sin: as an experiment, in passing, looking around to see whether anyone noticed and to make sure someone *has* noticed”; 158)

Similarly, Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* does not seem to seriously consider a woman’s efforts in pedagogies and participation in the equality of the sexes:

Das Weib will selbständig werden: und dazu fängt es an, die Männer über das “Weib an sich” aufzuklären – *das* gehört zu den schlimmsten Fortschritten der allgemeinen Verhässlichung Europa’s [sic]. (170) (“Woman wishes to be independent, and therefore she begins to enlighten men about “woman as she is” – *this* is one of the worst developments of the general *uglifying* of Europe”; 182)

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<sup>59</sup> “... and I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of the tradition and the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer ...” (Woolf 24).



With Alan D. Schrift, it is not my intention to determine whether Nietzsche was indeed a misogynist or not.<sup>60</sup> But the quote just cited from Nietzsche's *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* may as well be read in a manner that encourages women to develop their own selves that defy the categorical boundaries between men and women as separate sexes. In this context, I want to refer to the ideas of a feminine style as suggested by Hélène Cixous (2001), one that carries with itself the notion of a female economy<sup>61</sup> and that suggests that modes of expression labeled either as male or female do not appear separately, but work together for an equality of the sexes in writing: "There always remains in woman that force which produces / is produced by the other – in particular, the other woman. *In her, matrix, cradler; herself giver as her mother and child; she is her own sister-daughter*" (Cixous 2045). Given this interpretative background, which may not necessarily reflect Nietzsche's intentions, but is permitted by a mode of reading his books,<sup>62</sup> I want to conclude that the idea of "woman as she is" in fact suggests a separation of women and men, but that eventually turns out to be detrimental to both sexes as they in fact appear to be interrelated.

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<sup>60</sup> "That one can paint a picture of Nietzsche as a misogynist is clear. And it is equally clear that one can construct an interpretation that explains, or explains away, a many of the most offensive of Nietzsche's remarks about women" (Schrift 221).

<sup>61</sup> One figure of speech for the so-called 'female economy' is the mother and the relationships established to the offspring. Cixous considers this relationship as one expression of what Diprose, in an earlier quote, has been calling 'corporeal generosity': "The mother, too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was "born" to her" (2045).

<sup>62</sup> "Perhaps we might look upon Cixous as the sort of reader Nietzsche was seeking, one who would pay him back not by repeating his text, but by taking his text and making it her own, putting it to use as she sees fit" (Schrift 224).

Thomas H. Brobjer is also skeptic when it comes to an ad hoc labeling of Nietzsche as a misogynist<sup>63</sup> and encourages an interpretation of Nietzsche's alleged sexual discriminations as an attack against women and men who either adhere to or reject conventions about sexual identity and gender comportment without any particular reasons: "One must distinguish his hostility as referring to two rather different groups: feminists, modern and emancipated women, on the one hand, and non-feminist women on the other" (185). As I state further below, Nietzsche criticizes both strings of actions: the unquestioning submission under gender norms and dictates regarding physical functionality as well as the unquestioning critique of these norms and perceptual patterns, as both attitudes do nothing to change a normative order for the better.<sup>64</sup>

Nietzsche's writing has had and still has a magnificent influence on feminist writings and on the studies of women and gender. Kelly Oliver discusses the image of woman Nietzsche is actually writing against. Her distinctions relate to the ones made by Thomas Brobjer, but unlike him, she comes to the conclusion that it is the mother rather than an independent woman in general Nietzsche is afraid of. Especially with regard to the process of giving birth, Oliver writes, Nietzsche's opinion oscillates between the view on giving birth as something abhorrent and showing his awe and respect for it.<sup>65</sup> However, the image of pregnancy is a recurring metaphor in Nietzsche's writings, which

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<sup>63</sup> "Nietzsche is regarded as being hostile and contemptuous towards women, but I have never seen a reasonable attempt to explain why he held such views and values – except the claim that it was in response to the women he knew, which seems to me unlikely" (Brobjer 185).

<sup>64</sup> And for Nietzsche, the better is always that which contributes to the human being who rejects speaking in a manner that adheres to any form of categorical thinking.

<sup>65</sup> "Nausea produces both smallness (Christian redemption) and greatness (Dionysian redemption). Nietzsche is both fascinated and repulsed by this nausea, this morning sickness, that is a necessary part of pregnancy. Again he is oscillating between reference for the pregnancy out of which something is born and horror at the same process" (Oliver 65).

continuously expresses an emotional and evaluative ambivalence towards women as the expression of one mode of sexual identity.<sup>66</sup> When we read Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) a little more meticulously, we notice how the pregnancy metaphor not only serves to place women, but also men into an ambivalent position. Immediately after Nietzsche expresses that he'd rather believe in the man on the moon than in women, he relativizes his own statement by devaluing the man as well—albeit, of course, not every male person:

Freilich, wenig Mann ist er auch, dieser schüchterne Nachtschwärmer ... Denn er ist lüstern und eifersüchtig, der Mönch im Monde, lüstern nach der Erde und allen Freuden der Liebenden. (*Also Sprach Zarathustra* 156) (“Indeed, he is not much of a man either, this shy nocturnal enthusiast ... For he is lecherous and jealous, the monk in the moon, lecherous after the earth and all the joy of lovers”: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 121)

Here again, the ‘monk in the moon’ is a metaphor for those who consider themselves as the carriers of an order which the carrier finds being of eternal value, who thus has forgotten about the Dionysian forces and solely attempts to adhere to the Apollonian. Nietzsche refers to the male figure because the carrier of the societal order is also the carrier of patriarchy. When he is “lecherous” after earthly celebrations, he is ‘lecherous’ for a ceremony that strongly resembles the Dionysian Greek orgy, in which the notions of sex and gender, amongst others, are enmeshed.

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<sup>66</sup> “Als gestern der Mond aufgieng, währte ich, dass er eine Sonne gebären wollte: so breit und trüchtig lag er am Horizonte. Aber ein Lügner war er mir mit seiner Schwangerschaft; und eher will ich noch an den Mann im Monde glauben als an das Weib“ (Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* 56). (“When the moon rose yesterday I fancied that she wanted to give birth to a sun: so broad and pregnant she lay on the horizon. But she lied to me with her pregnancy; and I should sooner believe in the man in the moon than in the woman”; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 121)

As we will see later on in this chapter, the role of women is only seemingly strictly attached to giving birth in a concrete sense, and that with this revision of the physical impact the treatment of women is extended towards the treatment of men as well. In the following, I will refer to selected writings by Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler. I want to trace how their engagement for making the voices of women being heard coincides with Nietzsche's 'gender projects' in many respects, also with regard to the sexual constituency of women and men alike.

Friedrich Nietzsche and Luce Irigaray both understand men and women to differ from each other regarding their references to their sexual identity. Even though Nietzsche never explicitly makes the distinction between biological sex and societal gender, his awareness of it becomes clear when he talks about the role of women in society.

If we now go back to Nietzsche's criticism towards women who pursue to be independent from men, this then does not mean that women have to remain in the shadows of greater men. Rather, Nietzsche criticizes categorical divisions and separations between men and women. Although men and women often differ in their self-referential accounts, this difference is merely a matter of degree and not based on general incompatibility. In this sense, Lynne Tirrell seconds that "Nietzsche's strategy for disarming the dualist is to claim that the distinction in question is not a distinction in *kind*, but only in degree" (163). The statement that the difference between men and women is only gradual holds true both biologically and socially: "If we use these categories to anchor the poles of a continuum, it turns out that most people are in the middle, displaying a mixture of masculine and feminine traits. So neither biologically

based sexes nor socially based genders form an exclusive ontological opposition” (164 f.).

Nonetheless, biological constructions traditionally assigned to either a male or female gender remain valid in Nietzsche’s philosophy. His comments as the aforementioned one on women’s access to literature, or on more biologically motivated aspects of sexuality like childbearing<sup>67</sup> seem to rather suggest that although women and men are not entirely separated from one another categorically, they are nonetheless bound to remain strangers to each other because of their different living conditions in society.

However, what we can learn from Nietzsche is that for women to simply assume a performance traditionally interpreted as maleness does not free her from patriarchy, but rather reinforces the old societal structures of dominance and subordination. Luce Irigaray supports that women need to distinguish themselves from men in order to be able to set their own terms to live as women in society: “Claiming to be equal to man, woman runs the risk of doubling her traditional exclusion from society and culture. Perhaps she will obtain a social and cultural post then, but often by conforming herself to norms and values that are not hers” (2004, ix). Women’s independence and autonomy, according to Irigaray, must not be conflated with a disappearance of woman within the patriarchal structures that had already been there before. This does not mean that Irigaray suggests women to be essentially different from men, She, similar to Nietzsche, is no believer in categorical differences between the sexes. But she does support that women recognize

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<sup>67</sup> “Hat man meine Antwort auf die Frage gehört, wie man ein Weib *kurirt* – „erlöst“? Man macht ihm ein Kind. Das Weib hat Kinder nöthig, der Mann ist immer nur Mittel...” (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 306). (“Has my answer been heard to the question how one *cures* a woman – “redeems” her? One gives her a child. Woman needs children, a man is for her always only a means ...”; Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 267)

their relational difference from men. This relational difference recognizes the biological modalities that are used to differentiate between the sexes – such as the ability to give birth or genital difference -, but it denies that it founds any difference between men and women ontologically: “In fact, sexuate difference does not only result from biological or social elements but from another way of entering into relation with oneself, with the world, with the other” (---, x).<sup>68</sup>

Irigaray’s efforts are important and necessary for the recognition of womanhood in all its diversities. It is once again important to state that she does not support essential divisions between men and women. She remains suspicious, however, of gender crossings that are started by men before patriarchy has been abolished: “Some women today are claiming their own exclusion and the exclusion of all women from our sociocultural world while some men are claiming to become women, to enjoy feminine values” (---, ix).

Under these conditions, skepticism of transsexuals in academic discourses can be interpreted as a concern that transsexuality, on the societal level of gender, may be another mode of patriarchal order. Oftentimes, skepticism towards transsexuals had been emerging into outright aversion. The most prominent transphobic publication within radical feminism probably comes from Janice G. Raymond. In her 1979 publication *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She Male*, she accuses the transsexual individual, mainly the male-to-female transsexual, of reinforcing the structures of patriarchal societies and of trying to dominate the woman also on an endocrinal and hence physical

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<sup>68</sup> “Biological sexual dualism is a statistical regularity that we work to make a universal fact. The claim that there are only two genders turns out to be normative as well” (Tirrell 164).

level.<sup>69</sup> Labeling Raymond's writing as transphobic is not my own prejudice speaking. On the contrary, Raymond's writing has caused irritation not only, but dominantly queer and transgender scholars.<sup>70</sup> Her aversions against transsexual individuals are already visible in the book's title, in which she refers to individuals 'she-males.' This term, however, originates in a pornographic discourse, and is used for male-to-female pornographic actresses who emphasize the role of their male genitals during sex. Thus, Raymond incites the discrimination of an entire sexual minority based on a stereotypical professional assignation.

Raymond certainly has her followers, such as Mary Daly, Catherine Millot, or Robin Morgan. In the course of this chapter, I refer to their writings and demonstrate how all of them refuse to recognize especially male-to-female transsexuals as women and at times even provide the floor for discrimination against them, which most virulently evidences in Robin Morgan's keynote speech at the West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference in Los Angeles in 1973. When transsexual male-to-female musician Beth Elliot appeared on stage, her presence provoked hostile reactions among a larger section

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<sup>69</sup> "In its attempt to wrest from women the power inherent in female biology, transsexualism is not an isolated or aberrant biomedical procedure. It can be placed along a continuum of other male interventionist technologies such as cloning-test-tube fetishization, and sex selection" (Raymond xvi).

<sup>70</sup> Male-to-Female gender activist, writer and therapist Patrick Califia wrote that Raymond's anti-transsexual agenda is motivated by her personal aversion against transgender individuals, who she suspects of wanting to take the lead in feminism: "The fact is Raymond doesn't really want transgendered women to be feminists. She just wants them to go away. She wants them to not exist at all" (Califia 104). Califia's reproach against Raymond is historically verified by the fact that Raymond actively campaigned for the closing down of gender clinics in the United States and argued for the cutting down of medical services provided for transgender men and women. See *Transsexual, Transgender, and Intersex History*: "The book is not the most damaging writing that Raymond has penned. Far worse is a United States federal government commissioned study in the early 1980's on the topic of federal aid for transsexual people seeking rehabilitation and health services. This paper ... effectively eliminated federal and some states aid for indigent and imprisoned transsexuals. It had a further impact on private health insurance which followed the federal government's lead in disallowing services to transsexual patients for any treatment remotely related to being transsexual, including breast cancer or genital cancer ...."

[http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Rogue%20Theories/Raymond/Transsexual,%20Transgender,%20and%20Intersex%20History\\_Janice%20Raymond.htm](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Rogue%20Theories/Raymond/Transsexual,%20Transgender,%20and%20Intersex%20History_Janice%20Raymond.htm), April 18, 2010.

of conference participants. In her keynote speech the following morning, Morgan approved Elliot's forceful removal from the conference and referred to her as a male in drag who attempted to violate womanhood:

And I will not name this man who claims to be a feminist and then threatens women with federal criminal charges; I will not give him the publicity he and his straight male theatrical manager are so greedy for, at our expense. But I charge him as an opportunist, an infiltrator, and a destroyer – with the mentality of a rapist. (1977, 181)

Certainly, representatives of the radical feminism movement did undergo commendable efforts to fight against the discrimination, stigmatization, and oftentimes mutilation of women. But with regard to the recognition of transsexuality, a number of feminist scholars and activists were thrown back into that what they actually intended to fight against: biological determinism. When Raymond preserves the right to call oneself a woman only to women born female, justifying her point of view with the condition that only genetic women can give birth, she unavoidably categorizes people based on their biological potentialities.<sup>71</sup>

Irigaray's distinction between men and women, by contrast, does not focus on genetic information and biological material. Certainly, there is a material and corporeal difference between sexes we label as either male or female, but for Irigaray, it is primarily important to recognize differences as non-separating relations that connects genders and sexes rather than separates them. To distinguish between genders is

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<sup>71</sup> “*Words and More Words*. Furthermore, what does the word *transsexualism* say to us? We use this word to speak of both pre- and postoperative individuals, but does it make sense to call a person transsexual if that person has not been anatomically altered in a surgical way” (Raymond 11).



important, as they express different modes of ‘wordliness.’ But this step is only intermediate. For men, to recognize woman as the other, and for women to recognize man as the other, ultimately means to work out a common ground for communication and mediation, which, for both Irigaray and Nietzsche, refers back to a communication of drives, instincts, and desires.<sup>72</sup> What I refer to as the ‘common ground’ does not mean that men and women ultimately get mashed together to an undifferentiated ‘social porridge.’

In a similar regard, Donna Haraway’s concept of worldliness suggests that we take the drives, desires, and needs the human being has regardless of his or her sexual identity as the provision for a modes of expression that help us organize the perception of our world. With reference to the use of pronouns that divide genders into male, female, or transgender male and female categories, Haraway identifies the expression of a desire to provide the illusion of stability regarding a gendered position within the social world:

‘Our’ relations with ‘nature’ might be imagined as a social engagement with a being who is neither ‘it,’ ‘you,’ ‘thou,’ ‘he,’ ‘she,’ nor ‘they’ in relation to ‘us.’

The pronouns embedded in sentences about contestations for what may count as nature are themselves political tools, expressing hopes, fears, and contradictory histories.” (1991, 3)

Neither Haraway nor Irigaray intend to define women and men biologically and argue for a strict division between the sexes. But it is not aim either to suggest that all differences

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<sup>72</sup> “This does not yet reach communication between us with respect for our difference(s), transforming our instincts or drives, creating meaning, art, and alliances towards a world that we can share – not only at the level of needs, and with the help of a neutral language or of money, but at the level of desire” (Irigaray 2004, xi).

between what we refer to as men and women are solely an effect of culture. The latter would even be a step further in reinforcing the existing patriarchal orders.<sup>73</sup> In fact, Irigaray, Bernice Hausman, Butler, and also Raymond aim at protesting against a social domination and discrimination of women through patriarchic structures.<sup>74</sup>

It would also be all too simple to reject second wave feminism and radical feminism in particular, as a project allegedly to reinforce biologist structures. In fact, feminism wants to counter this argument, and second wave feminism as well as radical feminism is by no means an exception. However, I find it worth analyzing how representatives especially of the radical feminist movements refer to a biological terminological when the aim is to argue against a recognition of transsexuality as an expressive mode of another gender variation.<sup>75</sup> In their positions against transsexuals as their alleged enemy, radical feminists resorted to rhetoric that, although it had actually been employed to reject the biological determinism of women, eventually can easily be interpreted as a suggestion for the reinforcement of biologics.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> In that regard, Donna Haraway cautions in her essay *Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic* of both biological reductionism and ignorance of the impact of biological organisms on the construction of culture: "I think it is possible to build a socialist-feminist theory of the body politic that avoids philosophical reductionism in both its forms: (1) capitulating to theories of biological determinism of our social position, and (2) adopting the basically capitalist ideology of culture against nature and thereby denying our responsibility to rebuild the life sciences" (1991, 10).

<sup>74</sup> "This distinction between male/female and masculinity/femininity came under serious challenge from a number of theoretical directions in the 1980s – from persisting essentialist strands within radical feminism, from feminist philosophers influenced by Lacan and Irigaray, and from American theorists like Butler and de Lauretis. Radical feminists like MacKinnon (1987) continued to talk about "sex," and to insist on absolute differences between men and women and the irreducible fact of male power most clearly manifested in heterosexuality, rape, and pornography" (Jolly/Manderson 2 f.).

<sup>75</sup> "Rather, women have been assimilated into the transsexual world, as women are assimilated into other male-defined worlds, institutions, and roles, that is, on men's terms, and thus are tokens" (Raymond 27).

<sup>76</sup> Julia Serano refers to feminism that argues for the separation of trans women from the feminist agenda as a scholarship which advocates 'gender essentialism.' "While many feminists – especially younger ones who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s – recognize that trans women can be allies in the fight to eliminate gender stereotypes, other feminists – particularly those who embrace gender essentialism – believe that

Interestingly enough, the ambiguity of vocabularies that are in permanent danger of being read literally is one of the most interesting aspects Nietzsche has in common with feminism and in particular with second wave and radical feminism. Although Nietzsche is in fact far remote from a definition of woman on strictly biological terms, the vocabulary he uses steadily keeps him in close proximity to biological interpretations. Such a reading can be as dangerous as a biological limitation of second wave and radical feminism, and it must be encountered by a reading that recognizes biology and biological references to the body as another socially produced discourse. Donna Haraway observes that for the twentieth century, biology and the concentration on primates has called the life of primates ‘natural’ in order to relate to the needs of living organisms both in animal subjects and contemporary human being as providing the ground for the expression of wants, needs, drives, and desires.<sup>77</sup> The reference to the human instincts reminds of what I have written about Nietzsche’s reference to the human instincts and their influence on human’s creativity. This certainly makes sense, because both Haraway and Nietzsche distinguish between the ‘nature’ of living organisms and the reference to these organisms. If we closely compare Haraway with Nietzsche, we see that both consider biological life as the basis for expressions of life. But both also agree on the circumstance that the reference to these drives is always already the result of cultural codes being effective, in the sense that cultural life always already has given us the parameters through which we perceive these drives. Hence, it is vain to distinguish between any natural state of human

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trans women foster sexism by mimicking patriarchal attitudes about femininity, or that we objectify women by trying to possess female bodies of our own” (48).

<sup>77</sup> “The ways arguments have been constructed for relating primate science to human needs have also changed. But a constant dimension of primate studies has been the naturalization of human history; that is, making human nature the *raw material* rather than the *product* of human history” (Haraway 1991, 47).

beings and social states of the same. Any human being is already a social human being when referred to. What we then learn from second wave feminism is that the discrimination of women through presuming a qualitative difference between men and women is a cultural construction that easily is used to serve the purpose to argue against the equality of the sexes. The difference between what we call men and women is undeniable. But that is merely a gradual difference in materiality. When it comes to the embedding of organisms into society, these differences must be seen as a blank screen or surface.

This chapter introduces crucial terminological definitions. In order to further elaborate on the role the body plays for the construction of selfhood, we have to distinguish, foremost, between notions which are sharing biological and sociological connotations, and a terminology that is almost exclusively used in social and philological sciences. As I will demonstrate, there is no terminology that, in its usage, can only be expressed with reference to physiology. However, humanities and social sciences often neglect the impact of the material body as a screen for drives and needs that human beings share in order to establish a sense of being-in-the-world.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Mary Holmes, for example, criticizes that “contemporary society is based upon a heteronormative gender order: an order based on the idea that there are two opposite sexes that are attracted to each other. The gender order demands that we categorize people as women or men” (21). This is certainly true, as a look at most marriage laws and those regulating other forms of cohabitation demonstrate. Holmes then continues and notes the persistence of heteronormativity also with regard to biology. As we know from Haraway’s aforementioned essay on *The Biological Enterprise*, biology and the biological references to the physical body always already carry a socially mediate point of view with them. In that sense, Haraway is interested “how the field of modern biology constructs theories about the body and community as capitalist and patriarchal machine and market: the machine for production, the market for exchange, and both machine and market” (1991, 43 f.). However, Haraway also points out that there is a difference in the modes of expressing human drives alongside the distinction of the sexes. In her studies of psycho-biologist Robert Mearns Yerkes, she notices that he observed a difference in expressing drives in men and women, albeit not on a qualitative level: “Males and females had the same psychological (ideation) and drive (motivation) structure. But as a consequence of hormonal structures there were differences in expression of drives. The

I do not suggest that gender scholarships should strive to look for a direct access to physicality, as this is not doable at all. However, a scholarship suggesting that the transsexual transition only through social performance rather than with the help of medical interventions runs danger to ignore that the need to change the physical body is also an expression of a desire to reject body images designed by society for the sex referred to through socialization.

Images of transsexuality are paradoxical. On the one hand, transsexuality is an anti-essentialist representation of body images. Through the means of hormonal and surgical interventions, transsexuals affirm Nietzsche's approach to the worldliness as artistic creation that defies essential categorizations. Through the physical changes performed, transsexuals declare the initial biophysical classifications of their bodies as being meaningless and hence as without any essence. On the other hand, scholars like the aforementioned representatives of radical feminism, but also certain postmodernist scholars of sex and gender criticize that transsexuals don't challenge, but rather reinforce a bi-gendered social order through switching from one gender pole to the other when they take so-called 'sex hormones' or even undergo surgical procedures.

The latter aspect is mainly responsible for blaming the transsexual for what he or she does. More so, the blame arises out of the aforementioned neglect for the physical need to express a sense of identity that the person feels he or she needs to have. The

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result was personality" (53). Thus, where it may in fact be secondary whether we distinguish sexes as males or females, it is nonetheless important to understand that there are structural differences between sexes, wherever we may call them. This very difference in structure often gets neglected, and Holmes has observed that "only recently has 'the body' come to figure as a specific field within sociology ..., but it crystallized many of the difficulties sociologists of gender had long grappled with in trying to understand woman's bodies as something other than a problem to overcome" (Holmes 87 f.).

neglect of this drive associated with physicality comes up rather frequently in Germanic scholarship. For Hilge Landweer,

das Program >>Transsexualität<< zielt auf die Realisierung der Zugehörigkeit zu genau einem Geschlecht und nicht etwa darauf, den Durchgang auf Dauer zu stellen und die (zeitweilige) Nicht-Zugehörigkeit zu fixieren. (“The concept of transsexuality aims at the realization of a belonging to exactly one sex and not at making the transitioning period and a feeling of non-belonging permanent”; 149)

Consequently, Alice Schwarzer supports transsexuals in their rejection to further conform to a gendered role model that had been assigned to them upon birth, but criticizes that many of them find it necessary to establish a legal and biological identity that aims at switching gender poles rather than refusing to adhere to any of them:

Dass den meisten Transsexuellen der neue Ausweis nicht genügt, sondern dass sie auch einen “neuen” Körper wollen, ja ihnen das Voraussetzung zum Weiterlebenkönnen scheint – das ist schlimm. (“It is tragic that for most transsexuals the new passport is not enough, but that they also insist on a “new” body as a precondition to continue life”; 1/1984)

A gender scholarship that disapproves of characters wishing to transition physically neglects to see how the need to alter the body is by far not the ‘easier’ way to rearrange life in a society that not only prohibits a living in between genders, but also prefers hindering the physical modification of sex. In addition, it risks neglecting the dangers that arise for transsexual people who choose to transition by taking hormones and/or undergoing surgeries.

These people perform a change of modus in their identity that is a taboo especially in a society that is marked by ‘male privilege.’<sup>79</sup> The term ‘male privilege’ is not to be mistaken for ‘privilege of the man.’ “Male privilege is not the exclusive province of men; there are some few women who have a degree of this horrifying personality trait. Male privilege is, in a word, violence” (Bornstein 108). Violence, in turn, means that the patriarchal order unconditionally requires the adherence to a performance of gender and sexual identity that aims at the separation of the sexes and at preventing gender equality. Gordene Olga MacKenzie describes models of so-called ‘Western’ cultures as embodying the ‘male privilege.’ “By fusing sex, gender identity and sexual preference, Western gender ideology denies human variability and choice and advances biological determinism” (14).

The transsexual violates the requests set forth by ‘male privilege.’ In case he or she transitions physically, this even means that he or she physically represents his or her aversion to the sex originally assigned. This performance causes hostile reactions on behalf of those who stand for a gender-separatist society. Judith Halberstam writes extensively on the death of Nebraska-based transman Brandon Teena, who was first raped and then shot a few days later, on New Year’s Eve, by two men who had been friends with him until they found out that Brandon was born female:

While Brandon literally did not measure up to the physical test of manhood, his two male friends took him out to a remote spot, where they then raped and

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<sup>79</sup> “Male privilege is woven into all levels of the culture, from unearned higher wages to more opportunities in the workplace, from higher quality, less expensive clothing to better bathroom facilities” (Bornstein 108).

sodomized him. The punishment, as far they were concerned, fit the crime inasmuch as Brandon must be properly returned to the body he denied. (2005, 66)

Certainly, physical violence enacted against the transsexual and the body that deviates from a patriarchal order of gender and sexuality always needs interpretation through the lens of social discourse and need to consider the perception of the body. But when scholarship investigates only the perception and interpretation of these bodies, then it runs the risk of denying any sense of authenticity regarding the transsexual's design of selfhood. The idea of authenticity that I am referring to is delicate, admittedly, and it deserves further explanation, which I provide in the chapters three and four. But it is important to recognize that the transsexual's need to transition physically is, for him or her, another mode of referring to the drives we have talked about in chapter one, and which have been characterized as being necessary for the human being's creation of a living environment that is the basis for his or her ability to live in the first place.<sup>80</sup>

A scholarship that rejects transsexual identities either because of alleged gender essentialism on their part or because of its negation of the physical impact a body has on social representations and institutions fails to recognize a large series of hate crimes which go unnoticed otherwise.

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<sup>80</sup> Regarding the problem of physical 'authenticity' Susanne Schröter writes: "Die Vorstellung eines >>wahren<< geschlechtlichen Selbst artikulieren auch Green und Bornstein, wie Cromwell führende Mitglieder der *transgender*-Bewegung, die in ihren theoretischen Ausführungen schärfste Kritikerinnen der Idee des Geschlechterbinarismus sind. Der Widerspruch zwischen der eigenen Identität, nämlich entweder männlich oder weiblich zu sein, und den theoretischen Postulaten, die auf eine Abschaffung der Kategorie *gender* hinzielen, ist eklatant und nicht lösbar." (211 f., "The image of a "true" sexual self is also articulated by Green and Bornstein, like Cromwell leading members of the *transgender*-movement who in their writings are strong critics of gender binaries. The contradiction between their own claims of identity and their theoretical writings is explicit and not solvable.")



Gender studies, transgender studies, and studies of Nietzsche's aesthetics can contribute to a revised understanding of gender and sexuality. Reading Nietzsche and his writings on man and woman encourages to think about how to access the topic of gender and trans-gender identities in a non-deterministic manner that rejects the regress into biologism, but nonetheless regards the body as an important factor for the formation and development of self-references. In chapter one, I have already mentioned that the world is perceived as an artistic creation that results from the so-called bodily drives, which Nietzsche perceives as being 'trans-gendered.' This factor will now be further examined in this second chapter of my dissertation.

Important aspects will be how Nietzsche writes about women: how he perceives them, and which kind of social interactions he recommends when being in the company of women.<sup>81</sup> Whereas I will not deny that his take on women remains ambiguous in various respects, I want to show how this ambiguity remains in feminist research itself, mostly when the topic is how to deal with trans-individuals. I will close the chapter demonstrating how Nietzsche's aesthetics of the body suggests an image of the physical body which is not only helpful for his own aesthetic and ethical program, but also and especially for an ongoing discourse in the studies of women and gender in general and transgender studies in particular.

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<sup>81</sup> One could argue that this again is a chauvinist approach towards Nietzsche's take on feminism, in so far as the male talks about how to deal with the female. However, we will see that eventually Nietzsche requires a lot more socio-cultural flexibility from the man rather than from the woman, which, at the end of the day, makes visible his reference and respect for woman rather than his contempt.

### **Sex and Gender, Men and Women: Confusions in Debates about Sex and Gender**

Is a man born a man or born male? Is a woman born a woman or born female? And what is the difference between the feminine and femininity? And: What is the difference between the masculine and masculinity? At first, it appears that distinctions about what is a man and a woman, and what is a female and what is a male individual, are long since resolved. We walk around and can easily recognize who is a man and who is a woman because we have learned to classify people into two distinct gender categories based on the perception of some of their physical features, respectively of the clothes they wear.

But what if that decision whether someone we perceive is either male or female is no longer that easy? According to Julia Serano, we become suspicious of our own judgments once we can no longer decide at first glance who is male or female – and we are getting intensely uncomfortable when we cannot pass the verdict after a second and third glance either. Her assumption is that this is because we build our entire social order alongside dichotomies which we deem impenetrable – and a person who rejects this aspect of impenetrability is perceived as being a threat to that societal order: “The fact that a single individual can be both female and male, or ugly and beautiful, at different points in their life challenges the commonly held belief that these classes are mutually exclusive and distinct from another” (2007, 59).

The transsexual performs a switch of genders, and although very often the transsexual wants to be identified as either male or female, what the respective body always semiotically indicates is this very process of change, or fluctuation. Very often, though, it

seems that the claim for a sexual and /or gendered identity is made difficult, if not impossible for the transsexual. Viviane K. Namaste deplores that transsexual individuals have no choice other than to represent themselves as ‘queer,’ meaning that the only way for them to be socially recognized by gender scholarship and queer studies is to perform a gendered sense of selfhood that resists calling itself man or woman, but rather insists on a position of in-between-ness.<sup>82</sup> Regarding sexual orientation as a concept that ultimately relies on the classification of potential sexual partners as being male or female, Namaste observes that the transsexual seems to be required to reject heterosexuality because of its allegedly inherent heteronormativity: “within English-speaking contexts, transsexuals are silenced to the extent that we do not speak the language of lesbian/gay politics” (54).

While Namaste’s thesis will require more elaboration in the course of this work, she refers to one distinction which is crucial for discussions about sexual and gendered identities. When Namaste mentions the English-speaking context, she refers to the linguistic distinction between gender and sex and which does not in the least suggest that sex and gender may be interrelated.<sup>83</sup> In addition to her conclusion, her examples demonstrate that Namaste is mostly concerned with a vocabulary of gender, which establishes a set of sociological discourses. This set of discourses, however, cannot be considered without reference to biological discourses, which become relevant with hormone replacement therapies and surgeries like facial feminization or sexual

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<sup>82</sup> “If we dare to present ourselves as we are – if those darned FTMs [female-to-male transsexuals] have the audacity to beat up the air like that, if those MTFs have the temerity to wear perfume to the conference even when they know it is a scent-free event – our gestures, clothing, “experience,” thoughts, and political commitment are sure to be questioned” (Namaste 53 f.).

<sup>83</sup> For further illustration: The German language does make this linguistic hint for an interrelation between the notions of sex and gender. As for the category of ‘sex,’ the German language distinguishes between ‘Frau’ and ‘Mann,’ and with regard to the category of ‘gender,’ it distinguishes between ‘weiblich’ and ‘männlich,’ which bears a morphological relation to the vocabulary of ‘sex.’

reassignment. In other words, the biological discourse is evoked through the application of means that effect the physical constitutions and hence redirect the parameters of perception with regard to the body.

But then, does the reemergence of the medically modified body signalize an attempt to reinforce gendered stereotypes based on biological determinisms? Or may the transsexual body rather indicate that it challenges gender stereotypes? Namaste is concerned that every interaction the transsexual undertakes is considered as a statement to support the traditional gender binaries, and that as a consequence, the trans-individual who wants to avoid a gendered regression has no choice other than rejecting any ‘clear-cut’ traits of sexual and/or gendered identities.<sup>84</sup>

I suggest that in order to lead a discourse that pays tribute to a self-declared personhood of individuals whose bodies are perceived to neither fit into the so-called male nor female categories, scholars and activists need an understanding not only of both the sociological and the biological discourses and vocabularies, but also of the social structures in which these are supposed to be effective.

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<sup>84</sup> “The preoccupation with identity common in Anglo-American transgender communities needs to be questioned for at least two reasons: first, insofar as the identity debates are always premised on a lesbian/gay/queer paradigm, explicitly and implicitly excluding heterosexual transsexuals and those who refuse to articulate themselves in the terms of lesbian/gay politics; and second, insofar as an uncritical engagement with identity actually pre-empts any kind of institutional analysis” (Namaste 19).

## **The Becoming of ‘Sex’ and ‘Gender:’ Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Radical Feminism**

Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) begins with an excursion into biology. In fact, it refers to the biological constitution of animals first, and then shifts its focus onto the human being.

De Beauvoir does not work with two set of terms, but rather with three: ‘woman/man,’ ‘female/male’ and ‘feminine/masculine.’ The first set is assigned within a biological context and refers to the human being as a biological species, whereas the latter two sets refer to the social designations and functioning of this species, its functioning in a social context.<sup>85</sup> This does not mean that the first set designs an immovable entity, one that cannot be altered by any discourse. Quite the opposite: As it is impossible to refer to biology without any socially sanctioned vocabulary, every manner in which we are talking biologics cannot help but talking sociology as well. Now, Simone de Beauvoir states that this interrelation is especially difficult for the female human being, since it oftentimes places her within a condition of insufficiency that also threatens her identity: “If her functioning as a female is not enough to define women, if we define also to explain her through ‘the eternal feminine’, and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: What is a woman” (xliii)?

In her research presented in the book’s first part entitled “Facts and Myths”, de Beauvoir defines ‘woman’ as the term referring – in English – to the female gender once

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<sup>85</sup> On the following pages, I will mostly be considering the ‘female/male’ pair with regard to ‘woman/man.’ I will later connect the pairs with the ‘feminine/masculine’ pairing.

this is embodied by a human being.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the English term ‘woman’ or the German term ‘Frau’ denotes the concrete human being who is biologically and/or phenomenally representing the female gender.

For the terminological labeling of ‘Frau/Woman,’ the body is of immense importance. The body is both the phenomenal and semiotic signifier for the gender that is associated with the terminus ‘female.’ It would be false, however, to infer from the biological signification ‘woman’ to an evaluative determination of the female sex, for the term ‘Frau/woman’ defines only the phenomenal entity which is perceived with the human female body. De Beauvoir accordingly denies that biological denominations “establish for her a fixed and inevitable destiny. They are insufficient for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes; they fail to explain why woman is the Other [sic]; they do not condemn her to remain in this subordinate role forever” (34).

The perceived body represents an image of either a man or a woman. Mary Holmes refers to the process of a sexual labeling as follows: In order to categorize and identify a body’s gender and/or sex, language assigns them qualities based on the distinction of whether they are appearing as male or female. Thus, hormones predominant in the bodies representing women are called ‘female hormones.’ Those predominant in the bodies representing men are then called ‘male hormones.’ Both Holmes and Anne Fausto-Sterling both find these labels doubtful: “To call some hormones ‘sex hormones’ and others ‘female sex hormones’ is misleading given that we all have them both and some women (for example post-menopausal women) may have more testosterone than

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<sup>86</sup> “This accounts for our lengthy study on the biological facts; they are one of the keys to the understanding of woman” (de Beauvoir 34).

some men” (Holmes 24).<sup>87</sup> Anne Fausto-Sterling does not entirely deny the influence of hormonal conditions on the gendered self-perception. “The CC [corpus callosum, the part of the brain that is supposedly responsible for the gendered self-identification] is not voiceless. Scientists, for example, cannot arbitrarily decide that the structure is round rather than oblong. With regard to gender differences, however, let’s just say that it mumbles” (145).

A ‘mumbling’ gender identity does not determine a human being’s sex and gender. However, a mumbling gender identity is not silent either, and hence – all constructivist gender theses notwithstanding – sexual identity is not solely a matter of socialization.

The reference to a person’s life in the form of a narrative does not imply that life has a metaphysical purpose. It proceeds as a succession of experiences, but the interpretation of these experiences as meaningful events is a narrative effort that the human being entertains. However, every notion of a standstill indicates life’s end, and hence death. This means that non-directionality is in fact crucial for life to continue at all. If life was directional and aiming at reaching a certain goal, no life would in fact be able to persist once this goal had been reached. Kaja Silverman indicates how only the moment of death marks a stop to the organic life. She refers to the individual’s life via the metaphor of the, in which the first point is also the last one: death. “Only at the moment of our death will a period be inserted into our life, thereby fixing its meaning. Since until that moment we will remain in a stage of perpetual becoming, this futural relationship to

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<sup>87</sup> “... relentlessly, over this century, scientists have integrated the signs of gender – from genitalia, to the anatomy of gonads and brains, then to our very body chemistry – more thoroughly than ever into our bodies” (Fausto-Sterling 147).

ourselves makes it possible for us to change” (2009, 180). The image of life which Silverman entertains does not exclude the body as a corporeal construction. Quite the opposite: life is a series of perceptions which contribute to the subject’s constructions of his or her referential sense of self.<sup>88</sup> That way, ideas including those about sexual identity get created, modified, affirmed, or rejected.

In consequence, the idea that images of the human being exist without relations to the other is misleading. Nietzsche respects the life of every human being, but under the condition that the idea of its metaphysical value is abandoned:

Demnach ist der einzelne Mensch nicht mehr als einheitliches Subjekt, sondern gerade auch aufgrund der Möglichkeit, verschiedene Kulturen ‘durchleben’ zu können, als Vielheit von Seelen und Subjekten zu verstehen. (“Thus the human being is not an autonomous subject, but rather a variety of subjects, also because of its capability to interact in various cultures”; Elberfeld 119)

An idea of a contingent self and of social life is then possible because of a sensing and perceiving subject. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra shares the knowledge about a non-essential subject that resists the categorical distinction between an individual inside and a social outside world: “Für mich – wie gäbe es ein Ausser-mir? Es giebt [sic] kein Aussen! Aber das vergessen wir bei allen Tönen; wie lieblich ist es, dass wir vergessen“ (272)! (“For me – how should there be any outside-myself? There is no outside. But all sounds make us forget this; how lovely it is that we forget”; 217)

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<sup>88</sup> “I am not a living creature or even a „man,“ nor even again „a consciousness“ endowed with all the characteristics which zoology, social anatomy or indicative psychology recognize in this various products of the natural or historical process – I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out and towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself ... the tradition which I elect to carry on ...” (Merleau-Ponty 135).



De Beauvoir observes that this very notion of flexible identity, which is mainly nourished by the idea of the ‘perpetual becoming,’ has been brought to a halt with regard to the woman respectively the female gender. In her history of patriarchy, she observes that society almost always aimed at the conservation of women, in order to gain and maintain authority over them. This conserving mechanism violates women because it disregards becoming with regard to both their social roles (gender) and their bodies (sex): Women are allowed to speak, but only as long as they speak the language of patriarchy.<sup>89</sup>

The discursive confinement of women is brought in by rigid gender assignments that in fact are not corporeally inherent to the female sex, but rather the result of social negotiations of the meaning of the term ‘femininity.’ Via this term, we are referring to social types of actions and types generally assigned to woman as the female sex.<sup>90</sup> De Beauvoir explicitly refers to this form of ‘engendered comportment’ when she speaks about the raising of children into adulthood, via a pattern of ‘gendered education and pedagogy.’ One of the most ‘basic’ traits of comportment the girl learns, for example, is that girls have to be quiet, modest, and step back whenever possible; in other words: to assume the position of the enduring sex which is patient and ready to serve: “Thus the passivity that is the essential characteristic of the ‘feminine’ woman is a trait that develops in her from the earliest years. But it is wrong to assume that a biological datum is concerned; it is in fact a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society” (de Beauvoir 294).

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<sup>89</sup> “It is this ambivalence of the Other, of Woman, that will be reflected in the rest of her history; she will be suspected to man’s will up to our own times” (de Beauvoir 86).

<sup>90</sup> Of course, this mechanism is applicable with regard to both sexes: social comportment generally assigned to man as the male sex is described by the term ‘masculine’ respectively ‘masculinity’.

Especially with regard to femininity, studies about fashion show how the printed word often and still influences women's place, position, and female role expectations in contemporary societies. With regard to fashion magazines, Jennifer Craik observes that they are seen as special treats within a day fulfilled with domestic duties and leisure activities:

Through processes of prestigious imitation, young girls construct a social persona from techniques of femininity including the body trainings, codes of dress and decoration and mental techniques (acquired through imitation of friends, siblings, relatives, popular role models, magazines and television). (56)

De Beauvoir notifies how this construction of femininity is not independent, but rather inextricably intertwined with cultural imageries of what woman as the female gender has to represent and contribute to a society which is, as we will see, mostly influenced and maintained by patriarchal dominance:

Body management became a means of 'normalizing' the body in the process of reproducing gender relations and power relations more generally. Through processes of self-monitoring and self-regulation of the body, multiple demands and conflicts placed upon it could be accommodated. (Craik 66)

It would be wrong, however, to see the male gender as the ultimate perpetrator in this scenario. The engendered role expectations are also more or less binding for him as they are for her. Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* suggests that patriarchy is based upon a society that not only recommends that the male be the dominant gender and establish societal orders, but also demands him to do so. Being dominant and strong, in

the sense that a social order and an order of gendered role expectations is maintained, is not an offer; it is an order.<sup>91</sup>

When the socialization processes for the ‘classical male’ tells man that he has a higher social status than woman, this also means that his level of social impact is higher. Should this social model and its influences on assigning different social recognition to different genders become challenged, he sees his social status decreasing:

The male subject’s aspirations to mastery and sufficiency are undermined from many directions – by the Law of Language, which founds subjectivity on a void; by the castration crisis; by sexual, economic, and racial oppression; and by the traumatically unassimilable nature of certain historical events [like war or women’s movements towards increased socio-political participation, also and especially on a global level]. (Silverman 1992, 52)

We see how society labels and construes dichotomies of ‘man/woman,’ ‘male/female,’ and ‘masculine/feminine’ and mediates them through socialization. The body gets ‘sexed’ to indicate two sexes which are perceived as being entirely separate from each other, so that they are said to clearly distinguish between either men or women. Thus, men or women have to fit into the categories of either male or female. Based on socially trained modes of perception, people are perceived as being either male or female.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> “The Name-of-the-Father is also lived by the boy as the paternal legacy which will be his if he renounces the mother, and identifies with the father” (Silverman 1992, 40).

<sup>92</sup> These acts of perceiving and identifying, with regard to gender and gender identity, are so inherent that we do not even notice them. Stefan Hirschauer emphasizes that it takes us less than a second to determine whether we have a male or a female in front of us – which is also a reason why we often are so convinced that gendered and sexual identity are ‘naturally given and originally visible.’ In fact, as Hirschauer writes, these acts of perceiving and identifying are appearing as being so immediate to the human mind that we think that the body is the source for our identification, rather than that we identify a body by checking it against a culturally learned archive of gender images. “... in einer zeitlichen Inversion

Socialization is based upon this classification of male and female people and applies to them specific forms of education and pedagogy according to the gender roles individuals are supposed to fulfil. As that, their engendered comportment is a display of either femininity or masculinity.

Feminism and gender studies have always been concerned with a categorical distinction between sex and gender. The debate about nature versus nurture re-emerged with medical images and discourses of transsexuality.

### **The Perception of the Transsexual Body: Trans-Scepticism and Trans-Phobia in Academia**

One might assume that gender studies in general and feminist literature and research in particular would be receptive towards the condition of transsexuality and the transsexual individuals, respectively their conditions and living situations. In fact, transgendered individuals, people who chose to live contrary to the conventional role expectations assigned to the gender they were born into, more often than not find feminist approval. German feminist and journalist Alice Schwarzer argues for an acceptance of transgendered individuals by a referral to the repressions of normative gender roles.<sup>93</sup> However, advocacy for transgendered people quickly turns into disapproval and even hostility, once the transgendered person wants to undergo measurements of physical

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wird >der Körper< als ihr vorausliegender Grund angesehen und in einer räumlichen Inversion das Geschlecht eines Individuums >am Körper< lokalisiert, wo eine soziale Praxis einen Körper in einer Geschlechtszugehörigkeit lokalisierte" (1993, 38). ("In a temporal inversion, 'the body' is seen as its source and gender is localized within the body, whereas social practice establishes a body within gendered identities.")

<sup>93</sup> "In diesem Konflikt haben die Transsexuellen selbst keine Wahlmöglichkeit mehr: ihr Haß auf en "falschen" Körper ist weder durch Argumente noch durch Therapien zu lösen. Transsexuelle sind zwischen die Räder des Rollenzwangs geraten" (Schwarzer 11).

alteration to perform the crossing of social gender roles. Several academic writings turned into hate pamphlets, amongst them psychoanalyst Catherine Millot's essay *Horsexe*. For Millot, transsexuality is not the expression of a self-confident gender performance, but rather a mental illness that medicine uses as a tool for the reinforcement of gender inequality and the discrimination of women.<sup>94</sup> She remembers a conversation with a female-born patient who came to her for a letter of referral to a gender clinic in order to undergo a sex change from female to male. Millot told her that a change of sex was impossible and that the patient could not be a man since she has not been born as one, and that she needs psychological support to accept living as a woman rather than changing the body to a male-identified shape:

A young female once came to see me in the mistaken belief that I would give her the address of a sex change surgeon. When I pressed her to tell me why she so much wanted surgery, she said it was because she had the impression of living a lie in having the appearance of a woman whilst feeling herself to be a man. I objected that surgery would merely exchange one lie for another. (143)

Millot is not an essentialist in the strictest sense of the word. She does not support the idea that men and women are of different value because of their chromosomes. But within the demands of transsexuals to change their bodies because they feel they belong to the sex that society calls as either male or female, and which is the other with regard to the sex assigned to them at birth, Millot chides transsexuals for simply repeating a discriminating gender order by turning it around by 180 degrees:

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<sup>94</sup> "The transsexual, who is formed through assignation by the other – a doctor or psychologist – finds an obdurate and even fallacious response to the enigma of his desire when he encounters his Other in Science" (Millot 142).

The transsexual symptom appears to function as a substitution of the Name-of-the-Father inasmuch as the transsexual aims to incarnate The Woman. Not *one* woman in the sense of “not all,” implying that no one can claim to present All [sic] women – the transsexual’s position consists of wanting to be All, all woman, more woman than all women, and representing them all. (42)

But does the transsexual really claim to change sex? Of course, it is not possible to speak for every trans-person individually, and this cannot be the purpose of this work even though it is so concerned with personhood and other questions of identity. But given that transsexuality is a condition excessively reliant on linguistic expression, it first has to refer to a linguistic repertoire that is at hand by the time of utterance. Kaja Silverman comments on the linguistic embedding and constitution of the self that “the images within which the subject ‘finds’ itself always come to it from outside” (1992, 6). I contend, though, that transsexuals are not merely dissatisfied with the body as it had been assigned at birth, but also with the linguistic modes of referral to bodies.

I have already mentioned that transsexuality represents a medical and linguistic paradox. For one, their modification of their bodies denies any biologist claim that DNA allegedly determines a person’s sexual identity. But then, their declaration that they are of the so-called ‘opposite sex’ seems to reinforce again that gender order that they initially had defied. Based on my elaboration of trans-sceptic opinions in gender scholarship and feminism, I now also want to comment that in fact transsexuals never claim to ‘change’ sex, but rather to modify it. But by that, they are also modifying language conventions, specifically the way we may talk about personal identity and selfhood, which includes

aspects of sex and gender.<sup>95</sup> Already on a logical level, it is clear that you can only change what you have in the first place. But: if it is true that the transsexual woman is not a man even though she had been ‘born a man,’ it is not possible to change an aspect of identity that allegedly had never been realized at first instance. Further, if it is true that every human being conceives of him- or herself as a creative image containing both ‘male’ and ‘female’ metaphoric and drives, a change is not possible because one is already both at the beginning. What remains feasible, however, is a modification of sexual identity, or a modification in the self-perception of one’s own sexual identity. I find it therefore telling that transsexed scholar Emi Koyama wrote a *Transsexual Manifesto* in which she supports exactly this: the playful subversion of sex and gender binaries in particular and sex and gender categories in general. She writes that

it is our belief that each individual, has the right to define his or her own identity and to expect society to respect it. This also includes the right to express our gender without fear of discrimination or violence. Second, we hold that we have the sole right to make decisions regarding our own bodies, and that no political, medical, or religious authority shall violate the integrity of our bodies against our will or impede our decisions regarding what we do with them. (245)

Modifications of the body, as many transsexuals undertake them, may as well be a rejection of traditional images of gender. It is important that the desire to modify the body’s sexual attributes needs to be effective regardless of any social constraints or expectations. When this is the case, then the transsexual demonstrates what feminism has

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<sup>95</sup> “Rather than seeking access for all subjects to an illusory “wholeness,” we need to work at the level of representation and theory to renegotiate our relationship to the law of Language, and thereby to challenge the dominant fiction at its most vulnerable and yet most critical site: the Phallus” (Silverman 1992, 50).

always wanted to demonstrate: that biology does not matter once we speak about sexed or gendered modes of personhood, and that the self-confident decision to modify the sexual characteristics of one's own body is a corporeal demonstration that personhood does not have a sexual essence.

Patrick Califia, however, observes that out of all academic and activist disciplines, radical feminism is one of the most trans-sceptic branches, if not even one of the most aversive of transsexuals, especially transsexual women: "Nothing upsets the underpinnings of feminist fundamentalism more than the existence of transsexuals. A being with male chromosomes, a female appearance, a feminist consciousness, and a lesbian identity [though not with all transwomen] explodes all their assumptions about the villainy of men" (91). The image of transsexuals as agents of a reinforced suppression of women at times when women had already aspired equality with men in the sections of public life is also an image upheld by Catherine Millot: "Transsexuality would also seem to play another role, that of reinforcing sexual stereotypes, with a view to maintaining women in the conventional, subordinate role from which they were at the point of freeing themselves" (14).

Writers like Millot mostly refer to Simone de Beauvoir's famous stance that 'one is not born a woman, but becomes a woman,' in order to define why it is futile for transsexual people to pursue physical transformation, when 'living male' or 'female' are, after all, merely social constructions. Simone de Beauvoir was not yet acquainted with the emergence of transsexuality, or at least she does not mention the condition in *The Second Sex*. She does, however, talk about hermaphrodites, who are sometimes mistaken



for transsexual individuals,<sup>96</sup> but who, instead, show an anatomical ambiguity that transsexuals usually do not have. De Beauvoir's investigates how patriarchal societies and the suppression of the female gender came into being, but she rejects the idea that non-discretely sexed people may help challenge patriarchal societies: "With a hermaphrodite we should be no better off, for here the situation is most peculiar; the hermaphrodite is not really the combination of a whole man and a whole woman, but consists of parts of each and thus is neither" (lvii).

Although de Beauvoir criticizes the suppression of women based on their postulated, alleged biological constitutions,<sup>97</sup> she runs the risk of applying the same basis of discrimination to people who are not definitely sexed and/or gendered. Similarly, Janice G. Raymond denies transsexual women the right to define themselves as being female. Raymond states that transsexual women cannot be women because of their XY-chromosomal sex, which cannot be changed even through sexual reassignment surgery and hormonal replacement therapy<sup>98</sup>:

What does this delineation of the various kinds of sex say about the reality of transsexualism? The most significant fact is that it is biologically impossible to change *chromosomal sex*. If chromosomal sex is taken to be the fundamental basis

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<sup>96</sup> Hermaphrodites do not have a distinct anatomical sex, but rather share the primary sexual organs of both male and female gender. A transsexual in the clinical definition does not have this anatomical ambiguity. Instead, he or she is referred to as "a person who is said to firmly believe that, in spite of all physical or genetic evidence to the contrary, that he (or she) is inherently of the opposite sex" (Russell 535).

<sup>97</sup> "From puberty to menopause woman is the theater of a play that unfolds within her and in which she is not personally concerned" (de Beauvoir 29).

<sup>98</sup> Raymond does not support that chromosomes determine the human being's sense personhood. She rejects, however, the concept that sexual identity can be modified, because she assumes an unchangeable state of human sex through the human being's chromosomal structure: "Chromosomes contribute to bodily integrity, and one clue to their importance is the fact that transsexuals must continually suppress their anatomical and morphological consequences by estrogen or androgen therapy" (18).

for maleness and femaleness, the male who undergoes sex conversion surgery is *not* female. (10)

On the other hand, Raymond argues against chromosomal determination of a person's gender identity: "If we don't recognize chromosomal sex as determinative, plus the subsequent history that attends being chromosomal female or male, what are we really talking about when we say female or male" (Raymond 11)?<sup>99</sup> The next logical step, then, would be to consider transwomen and -men as allies in the feminist agenda: since chromosomes, after all, do not determine gender.<sup>100</sup> However, for Raymond it is important that chromosomes determine sex. Such a position, however, is essentialist.

For Raymond, Millot, or Morgan, transsexuality is a phenomenon of patriarchal society that has no basis in the individual. Instead, the condition is a modernist invention of men in order to invade women's lives and bodies and to counter their quests for gender equality.<sup>101</sup>

Although Raymond is right that we can only understand and talk about transsexuality when we recognize the societal institutions amongst which the individual lives, transsexuality is more than just the sum of gender roles. Although the desire to modify sex alone is already evidence for the transsexed person's rejection of an allegedly

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<sup>99</sup> Raymond does not claim that chromosomes do determine the human being in its identity. She rejects, however, the concept that gender and sexual identity can be change because of the unchangeable chromosomal structure of a human being: "Chromosomes contribute to bodily integrity, and one clue to their importance is the fact that transsexuals must continually suppress their anatomical and morphological consequences by estrogen or androgen therapy" (18).

<sup>100</sup> "Raymond aggressively attacks any suggestion that women's identities are biologically determined. Again and again, she comes down on the side of environmental factors or social learning against physiology. But she never seems to realize that, if her arguments are taken to the next logical step, she is actually arguing that *anyone* could learn how to be a woman" (Califia 94).

<sup>101</sup> "The sexual organs and the body of the opposite sex come to incarnate the essence of the desired gender identity and role, and thus it is not primarily the body that is desired, but what a female or male body means in this society" (Raymond 70).

essentialist ‘core’ of sexual identity, the desire to shift regarding his or her assignation as man or woman also with respect to his or her physical constitution is the enactment of a desire that searches for an expression in a societal system that in fact does not provide these means of expression for the transsexual.<sup>102</sup> Assignations of sex and gender are contingent, but not irrelevant for the persona’s sense of self. If this does not happen, transgender people stay, as Michael Bochenek writes, “misunderstood at best and vilified at worst” (60).

The transsexual woman has often been considered to be a ‘man behind the mask’ whose purpose is to overthrow the feminist ambitions of protesting against a male-dominated society. In other words, the transsexual woman is considered male and seen as an ‘intruder’ into women’s lives.<sup>103</sup> Jeanne Cordova remembers the aforementioned West Coast Lesbian Conference and Robin Morgan’s keynote speech: “... asserting that ‘man-hating is an honorable and viable political act,’ Morgan called upon lesbians as women to refute and separate themselves from ‘male (gay and straight) attempt to destroy the united women’s movement’” (Cordova 360). In her attempt to warn of a ‘male conspiracy

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<sup>102</sup> Regarding the problematic to find social recognition in a system that does not provide the means of recognition to people considered as ‘deviants,’ Joanne J. Meyerowitz observes: “Many transsexuals gravitated to the sexual margins in their search for a social home. The stigma associated with gender variance made it difficult for them to feel at home in the social mainstream” (186). The very process of social marginalization, which will be of further interest to us in chapter four, drove and still drives many transsexuals into prostitution. David Valentine, for example, has researched extensively the hardships of transsexed and transgendered individuals who have to rely on sex work in order to make a living. In his book ‘Imagining Transgender,’ he also did field research at the Manhattan ‘Meat Market,’ at Christopher Street: “The girls do not live in or around the Meat Market; rather, they come from different parts of the city to congregate here. Some live in low-income public housing, others have their own apartments in lower-rent areas in the city. The Meat Market, then, is a space in which they work, exchange information, gossip, socialize, and come to understand themselves as constituting a group” (109).

<sup>103</sup> Feminism should not be understood as being identical with the formation of lesbian activist groups in the 1960s and 1970s. However, many representatives of radical feminist movements and programs have identified lesbianism as a sexual orientation that equals a political statement. A woman turning towards a woman in a most intimate fashion was seen as setting a statement against male dominance also within the bedroom, as the localization of private life then turned out to be political: “Feminists who still sleep with the man are delivering their most vital energies to the oppressor” (Johnston 356).

against women,’ Cordova also recalls Morgan to also have warned of of male-to-female transsexuals as part of a ‘male conspiracy:’ “Terming male transvestism (the practice of men wearing female clothes) as ‘obscenity’ because transvestites ‘deliberately re-emphasize gender roles,’ Morgan analogized both transvestites and transsexuals to ‘whites who wear black faces’” (360).

Variations of activist and/or academic trans-phobia have persisted over the years. In her essay “Believing is Seeing: Biology as Ideology,” Judith Lorber refuses to refer to the male-to-female transgender tennis player Renée Richards with female gender pronouns, which signals the refusal to accept a trans-identity according to its expression and signification. With regard to gender identity tests in sports competitions, which can, in rarer cases, include the inspections of an athlete’s genitals, Lorber comments: “Transsexuals would pass this test, but it took a lawsuit for Renée Richards, a male-to-female transsexual, to be able to play tournament tennis as a woman, despite his [sic] male sex chromosomes” (16).<sup>104</sup>

### **Gender Essentialism versus Social Conventionalism**

Anthropologist Sam Winter, with regard to the Thai term ‘kathoeay’ referring to male-to-female transsexuals, lists and explains two opposing views on gender identity, one that he identifies as a Western/Judeo-Christian model, and one that he mainly perceives as Eastern/Buddhist. Winter identifies the Western/Judeo-Christian approach as

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<sup>104</sup> Renée Richards was one of the first open male-to-female transsexuals, who started her career as a male surgeon and switched to professional sports in 1977.

promoting essentialist views on gender:<sup>105</sup> “The natal anatomic view of gender has been pretty much the mainstream view in some parts of the developed (particularly English-speaking) West ... this overconcern with anatomy is arguably irrational as well as damaging to large numbers of TGs” (120).

Opposed to this essentialist view is a performative approach on sex and gender which tells that a mismatch between anatomical and felt sexual identity is possible, and which gives priority to felt sexual identity, regarding the person’s appropriate gender assignation: “Some of us will grow up with a gender that does not match the sex category into which we were placed at birth. A child born male may grow up feeling female, or at least nonmale. A child born female may grow up feeling male, or at least nonfemale” (121).

Feminism and feminist studies share, to a larger part, this constructivist and performative approach on gender. These approaches encourage reading the term ‘gender identity’ with a grain of salt. In itself, the term is contradictory: If it is true that ‘gender’ refers to the set of social practices we do as either men or women, then gender cannot have any aspect of identity. Kate Bornstein suggests that eventually we may want to get rid of the notion of gender entirely, as gender would in fact be a limiting constraint regarding the potentials to express human selfhood: “So, look for the oppression, and name it – give it some trouble; its name may well be gender” (116).

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<sup>105</sup> “It is important that each of us grows up with a gender that matches what is considered appropriate for our sex category. *Those born male should grow up to be men, feeling that they are men and presenting to the world as such. Those born female should grow up to be women, identifying and presenting as such*” (Winter 120).

But Bornstein also emphasizes how visions of a world without gender are utopic with the vocabulary available. In a world where the equality between the sexes has not yet been achieved, the step towards the abolition of gender is premature. When Bornstein suggests attacking gender as a concept, she in fact advocates working with the usage of the term ‘gender,’ and to no longer see it as a concept, but rather as a modifiable tool: “So, even without a gender identity per se, some workable identity can be called up and put into motion within a relationship, and when we play with our identities, we play with desire” (39).

The transsexual plays with gender through performance. Through the means of physical modification, the idea that a certain gender corresponds to a certain anatomical and chromosomal construction becomes futile and useless. However, many feminists and gender scholars regard the physical modification of the body as a problematic re-affirmation of exactly that what transsexuals want to reject because their referral to medicine appears to them as a reinforcement of the gender binaries.

Feminism and gender studies that seek to include all gender expressions and performances also have to recognize the transsexual’s wish to modify his or her physical condition. Only a scholarship that considers both the body and the social structures and conventions that underlie and define it can counter fight gender inequality, discrimination, and gender-based violence. Raymond, Millot, and Morgan certainly would subscribe to this, but they would have to include transsexuals in their agendas.

### Possible Reasons for Trans-Phobia in Academia

One reason for trans-phobia in academics is the following misconception about transsexuals: Their claim of being ‘born in the wrong body’ is often taken literally. This impression may have been promoted by the autobiographies of early transsexuals like Christine Jorgensen<sup>106</sup> or Jan Morris,<sup>107</sup> who first brought the issue of transsexuality to the attention of a larger public and referred largely to physical signs allegedly indicating their gender identity condition. In her essay “The Empire Strikes Back,” Sandy Stone criticizes essentialist notions of sex and gender. Stone distances herself from a connection between physical conditions and gender performance and shows understanding for trans-skepticism in feminist writings: “No wonder feminist theorists have been suspicious. Hell, *I’m* suspicious” (227).

Another reason for trans-phobia in academic discourses can be identified in the historical tensions between male and female genders, a tension that lived on the domination of one sex over the other. We observe within that history a linkage of sex and gender, in the sense that the sexes ‘man’ and ‘woman’ experience different societal values – according to the way in which they are assigned tasks and privileges, or disadvantages.

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<sup>106</sup> “Well, there are certain symbols the world has adopted that differentiate between the sexes almost from birth. You know, blue for boys and pink for girls, toy trains for boys and dolls for girls, and do on. I always wanted the things girls wanted, because somehow I felt that they just naturally belonged to me. Gradually, of course, I had to accept the things that were forced in me” (Jorgensen 51 f.).

<sup>107</sup> “I feel small, and neat. I am not small in fact, and not terribly neat either, but femininity conspires to make me feel so. My blouse and skirt are light, bright, crisp. My shoes make my feet look more delicate than they are, besides giving me [...] a suggestion of vulnerability that I rather like. My red and white bangles give me a racy feel, my bag matches my shoes and makes me feel well organized [...] When I walk out into the street I feel consciously ready for the world’s appraisal, in a way that I never felt as a man” (Morris 18, quoted in Stone 2006).

In her essay *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf muses about what may have happened to 'Shakespeare's sister,' given that she existed and given that she showed as much talent and interest in writing dramas and staging theatrical plays. She assumes that, because of the rigid separation of the sexes- the man in business and arts, the woman at home, in the kitchen and busy with childcare, if a nanny is not available – his sister would have never had a chance to achieve recognition equal to her brother.<sup>108</sup> But Woolf does not stop here. She realizes the tendency to pathologize women who are not content with sticking to the assigned gendered requirements society gives to women. Shakespeare's sister as an ambitious woman in the fields of arts and literatures would not only face admonition from her family. In addition, moral discourses may also categorize her as insane, since her behavior does not correspond to norms of feminine behavior. In other words, Shakespeare's sister as an ambitious woman does not display the characteristics of a femininity a 'healthy' female person would 'naturally display.'

For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. (Woolf 49)

Woolf recognizes the separation of the sexes in everyday life when she visits a university she alludes to as 'Oxbridge,' a combination of Oxford and Cambridge. She is denied access to the library because she is approaching it without the company of a man, an

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<sup>108</sup> "Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers" (Woolf 47).



incident that leads her to think more about the economic inequalities that result from an education and pedagogic that works towards the financial and social dependency of women on men: “Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor” (25)?

The separation of the sexes based on their gendered bodies also extended to the engendering of endocrinology and neurology – and the idea that women and men are intrinsically different in their physical, intellectual, and mental capabilities received a pseudo-scientific foundation. Mary Daly states that

in 1848, the year of the first Women’s Right’s Convention, Dr. Charles Meigs was advising his students that their study of female organs would enable them to understand and control the very heart, mind, and soul of woman. Clitoridectomy, ‘invented’ ten years later by the English endocrinologist Isaac Baker Brown, was enthusiastically accepted as a ‘cure’ for female masturbation by some American gynecologists. (227)

Thus, women experienced not only social, but also medical and psychological stigmatization. Mary Daly sees this efforts of ‘keeping women in the line’ continued by a patriarchal medical lobby that designs women as being in more frequent need for treatment. This, again, reinforces the image of women being the allegedly weaker sex and hence being inferior to men:

There is every reason to see the mutilation and destruction of women by doctors specializing in unnecessary radical mastectomies and hysterectomies, carcinogenic hormone therapy, psychosurgery, spirit-killing psychiatry, and other

forms of psychotherapy as directly related to the rise of radical feminism in the twentieth century. (228)

I doubt that surgeries such as those mentioned by Daly only serve the purpose to dominate women – many of these procedures actually contribute to the health of both men and women, and have contributed and still contribute to saving lives that would otherwise have been lost. Daly, more often than not, gets carried away by her own agitation against men and transsexuals. However, Daly refers to the interesting condition that indeed most work in human biology and endocrinology had targeted, at least in the past, women, rather than men, as potential clients. One other example Daly brings up in this context is the issue of contraception:

Yet another application of this myth is the medically masterminded maze of lethal ‘choices’ among surgical, chemical, and mechanical solutions to The Contraceptive Problem. It is obvious to Hags that few gynecologists recommend to their heterosexual patients the most foolproof of solutions, namely Mister-ectomy. (239)

She also brings up a topic that belonged to the most pressing issues on the agendas of second wave feminism: abortion rights. Daly joins in second wave feminists’ aspirations to approach the situation of women in society not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of class and race. Although abortion was not federally legalized until the Roe vs. Wade case in 1972, state laws had determined whether an abortion was legal or illegal. Daly observes that abortion is only beneficial and affordable for rich and Caucasian people, and that the chances of obtaining an abortion legally decrease in the case the woman is of low-income and/or of color:

Women, particularly nonwhite and other low-income women, are the unwilling victims not only of sterilization but of forced motherhood – a fact demonstrated repeatedly, as in the 1977 U.S. Supreme Court decisions allowing Congress and state legislatures to ban funds for elective abortions. (245)

As controversial as Mary Daly was as a scholar and as a person, – for example, her dismissal of men from her advanced classes in women's studies led to her dismissal from Boston College in 1999 - she referred to issues of sexual and gender discrimination based on biological essentialism. Through the analyses of discourses that treat men and women unequally based on their biological constitutions, Daly emphasized how sexual and gender inequality does violence to women, both socially and physically.

The transsexual person seems to violate all attempts undergone by feminists and gender scholars to fight the idea that gender and gender expression is intrinsic to bodily constituency. When transsexuals undergo hormone replacement therapy and/or sexual reassignment surgery to obtain a body that resembles more closely the opposite gender, many scholars interpret these efforts as attempts to apply social value to physical bodies. Janice G. Raymond therefore vehemently denies that transwomen are women and that transmen are men, and also Bernice Hausman is suspicious about transsexuals' claims about being 'men trapped within women's bodies,' or 'women trapped within men's bodies:' "What is most consistent in transsexual's self-representations is the oft-repeated insistence that there must be something physical, measurable, materially detectable that motivates and justifies the desire to change sex" (352).

Hausman is not as hostile to transsexuals in her writing like Raymond, Morgan, Daly,<sup>109</sup> or Lorber. After all, she commented positively on Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back." She acknowledges and approves Stone's intention to argue against essentialism in transgender discourses:

'The Empire Strikes Back' is a powerful essay, representing the first attempt by a transsexual woman to argue as a lesbian-feminist and as a transsexual for the destabilizing potential of transsexualism within a cultural context that regulates the phenomenon into the relative safety of socially acceptable discourses about gender. (338)

Hausman realizes that transsexuals – no matter if they are male-to-female or female-to-male – are allies rather than opponents to feminism. Still, as the quote further above proves, she remains skeptical as to whether transsexuals really need to modify their bodies, or whether a switch in gender performance regardless of the body assigned at birth, would not be enough.

A scholarship such as it is represented by Raymond risks regressing into what Patrick Califia calls 'gender essentialism,' which may result in anti-male and/or anti-transsexual positions:

Either way, men are assumed to be, by their very nature, oppressors, prone to violence, objectification, insensitivity, sexual perversion, and domination. Women

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<sup>109</sup> Like Raymond, Daly considers transsexuality as an attempt to dominate women also on a hormonal and hence physiological level, an attempt that she also sees justified by Christian doctrines of trinity: „In the ideal transsexual world of christian [sic!] myth, 'he' manages not only to impregnate Mary physically, producing the 'Incarnate Word,' but also to fecundate the souls/minds of the faithful, engendering 'supernatural life' and inspiring them with 'divine' ideas and images" (229).

are assumed to be, by their very nature, egalitarian, nurturing, creative, spiritually advanced, nonviolent, and motivated more by love and tenderness than by lust or sexual desire. (87)

When Raymond denies transwomen the right to refer to themselves as females because of their XY chromosomes,<sup>110</sup> she comes dangerously close to biologist determinations herself. But a scholarship that rejects the transsexual's social recognition remains ignorant of hate crimes based on perceived gender identity. Such hate crimes against transgender and transsexual people are significantly brutal, in that they seek immediate contact to the victim's body, rather than trying to avoid it.

### **Trans-Phobia in the Public: A Call to the Humanities**

Anti-transsexual attitudes I have discussed up until this point have mainly been expressed in writing. It is frightening and saddening, though, to see that several arguments of academic anti-transsexualism seem to have been picked up, or at least shared, by and with communities that do not refrain from physical violence at all. For example, when Jeanne Cordova quotes Robin Morgan saying that transsexual women are similar to "whites who wear black faces" (Cordova 360), we can easily trace that this verdict imposed on transsexuals declares them as fake at best and deceivers at worst. When transsexuals are accused of deceiving people over their gender, i.e. when they refer to their preferred gender rather than to their biological sex, violence often turns physical.

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<sup>110</sup> "While transsexuals are in every way masculine or feminine, they are not fundamentally male or female. Maleness and femaleness are governed by certain chromosomes, and the subsequent history of being a chromosomal male or female" (Raymond 4).

Reported killings of transgender and transsexual people are recorded by the official homepage for the International Transgender Day of Remembrance, <http://www.transgenderdor.org/>.<sup>111</sup> As for the year 2009, the site records 142 cases of murders based on gender identity. A closer look at the tables recording the ways in which the individuals were killed verifies the excessive amount of aggression seeking corporeal contact rather than avoiding it: Out of 142 known cases, 30 victims were stabbed to death, 7 were tortured and beaten, 7 were strangled and 2 were dismembered. Other causes of death reported include being burned, slashed throats, or being thrown out of and overrun by a vehicle.<sup>112</sup> GenderTalk radio host Nancy Nageroni reports accordingly: “A close study of the best available national murder statistics reveals that transgender people are nearly twice as likely to be stabbed to death as other murder victims, and more than three times as likely to be bludgeoned to death” (<http://www.gendertalk.com/articles/oped/stabbing.shtml>).

Feminism and Studies in Women and Gender often can and do contribute to an understanding of women and men that liberates them from gender essentialism and determinism. However, we see that gender studies in general and feminism in particular run the risk of falling back into gender essentialism, should they insist on an existential difference between men and women in their gender assignation. Specifically, studies in women and gender as well as feminist studies who display anti-transsexual traits tend to

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<sup>111</sup> The site registers all known cases of individuals being murdered because of either being transgender or of being friends or otherwise affiliated with people being transgender. International Transgender Day of Remembrance is observed globally and is annually on November 20.

<sup>112</sup> <http://www.transgenderdor.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/people-we-are-memorializing-in-2009.doc>.

disregard and remain ignorant towards violence against transsexual victims. This is not to say that scholars ignore trans-individuals who are victims of assaults. And this also does not imply that transgender cases are entirely ignored within the more ‘traditional’ branches of gender studies and issues of feminism. The example of Alice Schwarzer in the German context of the 1980s, such as Judith Butler’s more recent *Undoing Gender*, in which she writes that transgender and transsexual issues and advocacies are “only one version of feminism, one that is contested by views that take gender as an historical category, that the framework for understanding how it works is multiple and shifts through time and space” (2004, 9).

But gender studies that remain ignorant to transgender issues are unable to recognize attacks with a trans-phobic background as a crime that is different from other crimes like profit-oriented robbery and murder, in the sense that it can be classified as a hate-crime. A hate-crime is a crime that is motivated solely on the basis of the victim’s personal characteristics. A murder classified as a hate crime is neither committed because the criminal wants to obtain something the victim has, nor because the criminal wants to seek revenge for something the victim has done to him or her. Rather, a hate-crime is a crime committed against something the victim *is* and thus cannot change.<sup>113</sup> Consequently, when a transsexual identity is not defined and accepted as a category of gender identity *different* from either male or female, crimes against transsexuals cannot

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<sup>113</sup> The US History Encyclopedia defines that “Hate crimes are crimes committed because of the victim’s race, gender, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, or other protected status.” (<http://www.answers.com/topic/hate-crime>).

be recognized, and no engaged scholarship for the advocacy of transgender rights can effectively take place.<sup>114</sup>

Whereas Julia Serano has expressed her suspicion and reservation towards second wave feminists' anti-transsexual remarks in the context of their research and publications mainly from the 1960s and 1970s, she expresses more hope towards current feminists in academia.<sup>115</sup> However, she and Namaste are also concerned with a so-called 'queering request' for transsexuals. Serano argues for a new support of femininity as a flexible and creative category which the individual must create, vary, and recreate. Such a consideration, says Serano, does not reinforce stereotypical gender behavior, but supports continuous creativity:

Instead of attempting to empower those born female by encouraging them to move further away from femininity, we should instead learn to empower femininity itself. We must stop dismissing it as "artificial" or as a "performance," and instead recognize that certain aspects of femininity (and masculinity as well) transcend both socialization and biological sex – otherwise there would not be feminine boy and masculine girl children. (2007, 18)

When Namaste accuses contemporary Anglo-American gender studies of imposing a 'queering request' upon transsexual men and women, she joins Serano in the claim that a

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<sup>114</sup> "How is it that cultural taboos regarding speaking openly about sexuality and genitalia with people you do not know well, go out of the window when it comes to transsexuals? One of the effects of this demand is that it is difficult for transsexuals to address the real issue: cops who harass street prostitutes and escorts, access to health care and social services, changing one's name and sex" (Namaste 4).

<sup>115</sup> "While many feminists – especially younger ones who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s – recognize that trans women can be allies in the fight to eliminate gender stereotypes, other feminists – particularly those who embrace gender essentialism – believe that trans women foster sexism by mimicking patriarchal attitudes about femininity, or that we objectify women by trying to possess female bodies of our own" (Serano 48).



choice of a 'lifestyle' must include the possibility of living 'male' or 'female,' defining 'masculinity' and 'femininity' without being accused of gender essentialism:

Transsexuality is about the banality of buying some bread, of making photocopies, of getting your shoe fixed. It is not about challenging the binary sex/gender system, it is not about making a critical intervention every waking second of the day, it is not about starting the Gender Revolution. (Namaste 20)

But how can we then bridge the gap between gender essentialism and queering gender roles? Is there any way we can use the notion of identity without falling into determinist views about the body and the human being, or, in other words, about the self? For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on Nietzsche's view on women and his writings on gender roles and gendered/sexual identity.

### **Women, the Female Sex, and Femininity in Nietzsche's Aesthetics of the Body**

At the beginning of this chapter, I have already briefly referred to Nietzsche's ambivalent view on women in his writings. If we understand his texts and especially the parts that deal with women literally, we easily receive the impression that women are both adored and loathed, because of a sense of the uncanny allegedly emerging from woman.

Kelly Oliver has analyzed this ambiguity in Nietzsche's writing and relates these – seemingly – ambiguous images of the feminine in general and the maternal in particular. She observes a division between the feminine and the maternal, and she states that Nietzsche in fact rejects the female gender as a whole, based the psychosocial category of the mother, or the maternal role embodied by the mother:

His relationship to the figure of woman and the feminine must be read through this relationship to the maternal. Both his attraction to and repulsion from the feminine and woman revolve around the maternal and a misplaced abjection.

Nietzsche reduces woman and the feminine to the maternal. (60)

Nietzsche writes in *Ecce Homo* how his father died at the age of thirty-six, when Nietzsche still was a little boy. In his semiautobiography, he aligns this early death with a decrease in his own vitality - interestingly, exactly when Nietzsche reached the age at which his father had died:

Mein Vater starb mit sechsunddreissig Jahren: er war zart, liebenswürdig und morbid, wie ein nur zum Vorübergehn bestimmtes Wesen, - eher eine gütige Erinnerung an das Leben, als das Leben selbst. Im gleichen Jahre, wo sein Leben abwärts gieng, gieng auch das meine abwärts: im sechsunddreissigsten Lebensjahr kam ich auf den niedrigsten Punkt meiner Vitalität, - ich lebte noch, doch ohne drei Schritt weit vor mich zu sehn. (264) ("My father died at the age of thirty-six: he was delicate, kind, and morbid, as a being that is destined merely to pass by – more a gracious memory of life than life itself. In the same year in which his life went downward, mine, too, went downward: at thirty-six, I reached the lowest part of my vitality – I still lived, but without being able to see three steps ahead"; 222)

The quote shows that Nietzsche refers to his father not with the notion of 'man,' but rather via 'father.' 'Fathering,' for him, does not mean being a biological father, but having the ability to manage creative processes, a concept that Nietzsche describes with a metaphor that refers to physical vitality.

At the same time I caution against a literal reading. As already mentioned, *Ecce Homo* is not an autobiography, but rather a semiautobiography, a piece of writing that may be inspired by authentic experiences, but does not limit itself to their recording. Oliver thus overlooks the idea that Nietzsche does not really identify the female gender with the ‘feminine’ role of the mother, respectively the maternal. Instead, his writing criticizes the societal identification of woman with the mother and hence the confinement of women in society.

### **Mother and Pregnancy**

In Nietzsche’s writings, marriage, pregnancy, and domesticity often appear within the context of designing ‘women’s place in the world:’ “Das Weib hat Kinder nöthig [sic], der Mann ist immer nur Mittel: also sprach Zarathustra” (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 306). (“Woman needs children, a man is for her always only a means: *thus spoke Zarathustra*”; Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 267) The idea that woman can best act according to her alleged femaleness by receiving and giving birth appears in a misogynic and essentialist light. If that is the destiny designed for women rather than one option amongst many, then there seems to be no hope of proving that Nietzsche’s writings bear any admiration and respect for women that may serve the feminist – and ultimately the transgendered – cause.

But we have to inspect the quote from above more closely. If it is true that woman needs children, and if we – for one moment – adhere to a dichotomous world design that only allows male or female genders, then it is clear that the quote can only stem from a male perspective. Consequently, the thesis that ‘man is for her only a means,’ implies that

this statement stems from the very same male perspective. Thus, the entire quote reveals an interesting and multifarious structure of dominance and subordination, which has its origins in the interplay between the Apollonian and the Dionysian:

sein ganzes Dasein mit aller Schönheit und Mässigung ruhte auf einem verhüllten Untergrunde des Leidens und der Erkenntnis, der ihm wieder durch jenes Dionysische aufgedeckt wurde. (Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie* 40) (“his entire existence, with all his beauty and moderation, rested on a hidden ground of suffering and knowledge which was exposed to this gaze once more by the Dionysiac”; Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 27)

In his lecture “Femininity,” Sigmund Freud introduced the idea of an ‘Electra complex,’ which is a derivative of the so-called Oedipus complex. The ‘Electra complex’ is assumed by Freud to apply to girls and their detachment from the mother and from ‘feminine imagery.’ To direct the girl’s attention to the father is important for Freud, if the girl is to be able to develop a heterosexual relationship in her later years, the ‘normal’ direction in sexual life:

In the course of time, therefore, a girl has to change her erotogenic zone and her object – both of which a boy retains. The question then arises of how this happens: in particular, how does she pass from her masculine phase to the feminine one to which she is biologically destined? (119)

The rejection of the mother because of the assumption that the mother as ‘being female’ is not the appropriate gender for future sexual relationships goes hand in hand with a reproach the girl is said to utter towards the mother – hence the term ‘Electra Complex.’ In addition to her dismissal of her attention to her clitoris as a feminine center for sexual

pleasure, she reproaches her mother, thinking her mother is responsible for her not having a penis.

Assumptions like this may appear crude, and even Freud himself expresses reservations towards his own statements: “It was [...] a surprise to learn from analyses that girls hold their mother responsible for the lack of a penis and do not forgive her for their being thus out at a disadvantage” (124). Nonetheless, Freud will adhere to his idea that women always define themselves in relation to the model of ‘male anatomy,’ always conceiving themselves as the ‘lacking gender’ – which then influences their behavior and actions assigned as ‘femininity.’ “The fact that women must be regarded as having little sense of justice is no doubt related to the predominance of envy – in their mental life ...” (134).

This take on gender easily leads to gender essentialism. Freud himself, throughout his writings, repeatedly assures that society and its institutions play a part in the formation of gender comportment.<sup>116</sup> However, this does not prevent him from assuming that gender has a ‘natural’ and thus ontological fundament, within the human being, according to his or her physiology. Accordingly, he closes his lecture with the words that he has “only been describing women in so far as their nature is determined by their sexual functions” (135).

The woman as the passive, reactive individual who orientates her actions according to the male model – in Nietzsche’s *Geburt der Tragödie*, this model is

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<sup>116</sup> “Shame, which is considered to be a feminine characteristic *par excellence* but is far more a matter of convention than might be supposed, has as its purpose, we believe, concealment of genital deficiency” (Freud 132).

radically challenged. But that does not mean that the woman is now turning into the 'dominant' gender, as well as that the man turns into the 'submissive' one. Such a reversal would rather continue the traditional, dichotomist model of society than change it.

For Nietzsche, the 'female' Dionysian and the 'male' Apollonian conjoin with each other to a temporary unity that is based on the Dionysian idea that everything existent in socio-cultural life is contingent und subject to change in its perception and constitution, but that nonetheless needs the 'male' Apollonian idea of form and structure that every society needs to be conceived and understood. The 'female' Dionysus is the basis for all cultural life, but the 'female' Dionysus is nothing without the 'male' Apollo.<sup>117</sup>

If it was supposed to be the 'destiny' of women to 'bear children,' we are now able to see this pregnancy also as another metaphor for creativity. Jacques Derrida refers to women in his essay *Spurs – Nietzsche's Styles* and describes the variety of styles surrounding them: "A woman seduces from a distance. In fact, distance is the very element of her power. Yet one must beware to keep one's own distance from her beguiling song of enchantment. A distance from distance must be maintained" (1979, 49).

The seduction out of a distance alludes to the songs of the sirens in Homer's *Odyssey*. What prevents the sailors from falling for them is that they stuff their ears, which also means: that they work with the seduction. In fact, they are not avoiding the

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<sup>117</sup> "So it is only the full panoply of the arts, in their hierarchized diversity subordinated to music, that symbolizes Dionysus: this god who is dismembered into a thousand pieces and who revives every year, reunified" (Kofman 12).

seductive call – that would have meant that they turn around. The sailors face the seduction by working against it, or rather, by working with it. It is this critical distance that women know about themselves, according to Nietzsche, and which differentiate them from men in the traditional sense. Nietzsche writes about the impact of female appearance that the emotional realm of the individual provides her tools for representation. Charm, love, and hate are her characteristics, and she applies them in her appearance, also and especially towards men.<sup>118</sup> Consequently, as Nietzsche writes in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, “Das Weib lernt hassen, in dem Maasse, in dem es zu bezaubern – verlernt“ (“Woman learns how to hate in proportion as she – forgets how to charm”; 1989, 88).

It would be wrong to assume that this means a confinement of women into the role of the irrational – otherwise, this would lead into a gender-essentialist discrimination which already Virginia Woolf had warned of. As we have learned from *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and later again from *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, there is no rationalist and hence definite approach to a worldly basis which could claim ontological or ‘eternal’ validity. Thus, every value and every set of societal customs is contingent, and driven by the ‘will to create,’ which is understood not in terms of cold reflection, but passionate creativity. This creativity cannot hope for an ever-lasting ontological basis. Nietzsche accordingly compares it to a dreamlike state of existence:

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<sup>118</sup> “Wo nicht Liebe oder Hass mitspielt, spielt das Weib mittelmässig“ (Nietzsche: *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 93). “Where there is neither love nor hatred in the game, woman’s play is mediocre“; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 92).

Ich habe für mich *entdeckt*, dass die alte Mensch- und Tierheit, ja die gesamte Urzeit und Vergangenheit alles empfindenden Seins in mir fortverdichtet, fortzieht, fortfliehet, fortschleusst, - ich bin plötzlich mitten in diesem Traume erwacht, aber nur zu dem Bewusstsein, dass ich eben träume und dass ich weiterträumen *muss*, um nicht zu Grunde zu gehen .... (Die fröhliche Wissenschaft 417) (I have *discovered* for myself that the ancient humanity and animality, indeed the whole prehistory and past of all sentient being, continues for me to fabricate, to love, to hate, and to infer – I suddenly awoke in the middle of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I *must* go on dreaming lest I perish ...”; The Gay Science 63)

This passage strongly alludes to Zarathustra’s dialogue with his ‘female’ wisdom during the ‘dance song.’ The idea that world cannot be conceived other than a dream – in which the dreamer has no means to check his dream about factuality or illusions – is resumed in Vanessa Lemm’s writings about Nietzsche and his ‘animal philosophy.’ Nietzsche’s animal philosophy is significant in that it does not seek to comprehend cultural phenomena under a common intellectual system. Rather, animal philosophy shares with animal life the ability and tendency to forget. The difference between human beings and animals is only that human beings know that they can and will forget, and they can interpret this forgetting as a chance of ever new outbursts for creativity:

Life is historical through and through because it is forgetful through and through. The perspective of animal forgetfulness reveals that memory is an artistic force (*Kunsttrieb*), and that historiography must therefore be understood as a work of



art (*Kunstwerk*) rather than as science, concerned with interpretations rather than with the factual representations of the past. (Lemm 7 f.)

Thus, when Nietzsche writes that “wenn ein Weib gelehrte Neigungen hat, so ist gewöhnlich Etwas mit ihrer Geschlechtlichkeit nicht in Ordnung” (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 89), (“when a woman has scholarly inclinations there is generally something wrong with her sexual nature”: *Beyond Good and Evil*, 96) this does not mean that it is directed against the sexuality, respectively sexual identity of women. Rather, this quote is directed against scholarship, which still pursues the idea of reaching for eternal truths and hence for an ontological basis for the world, which, again, for Nietzsche, must remain a useless undertaking.

Nietzsche’s association of women together with the emotional outbursts of hate, love, charm, and seduction thus represent creativity, and as such they ‘threaten’ men in the sense that they invite men to participate in this new emotional and creative approach to world.

This invitation is threatening in the sense that it abolishes any ontological safety the human being may deem him- or herself to be in. Zarathustra is not free from this belief either. When his stillest hour calls on him – and also the stillest hour is female – he shivers, since she urges him to go on, to move on, in short: to continue the creative journey:

Ach, meine zornige Herrin will es so, sie sprach zu mir: nannte ich je euch schon ihren Namen? Gestern gen Abend sprach zu mir *meine stillste Stunde*: das ist der Name meiner furchtbaren Herrin. (Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* 187)

(“Alas, my angry mistress wants it, she spoke to me; have I ever yet mentioned her name to you? Yesterday, toward evening, there spoke to me *my stillest hour*: that is the name of my awesome mistress”; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 145)

The stillest hour does not incite a rational and impartial reflection. Rather, she evokes the human being’s most intense emotions, by at the same time displaying these emotions, by demonstrating them. In the quote above, this emotion is anger, and this suggests individual, emotional involvement, which rejects the idea that there is a distanced reflection of emotions. Instead, Zarathustra is urged to continue his journey, which Gooding-Williams describes as a form of modernist essayism – which ultimately is different from Nietzsche’s own view, which can rather be described as post-modernism: “Zarathustra is a modernist who, articulating his view of the overman, aspires to create new, non-Christian-Platonic values that will transform European humanity. As distinct from Zarathustra, Nietzsche assumes that this sort of aspiration can be easily fulfilled” (5).

The stillest hour incites Zarathustra to continue his quest, but not, as it first seems that he is able to reach his goal, but in order to learn that he *cannot* reach his goal. Winchester compares this idea of multiple goals to the variety of styles Nietzsche employs in his writings, and which represent the variety of interpretations possible: “But Nietzsche’s view will change how we view, for example, science, good and evil, morality, and Christianity. He interrogates these “truths” and the mentality that erected them, and deflates their grandiose claims without erecting new truths to take their place” (1994, 3).

Derrida refers to these stylistic varieties when he writes about women ‘seducing from a distance.’ Women ‘seduce from a distance,’ but the seduction is effective, which means that a distance of the directed act of seduction touches the recipient directly, emotionally: “There is no such thing as the truth of women, but it is because of that abyssal divergence, because that untruth is <<truth.>> Woman is but one name for that untruth of truth” (1979, 51).

‘Woman’ is thus a metaphor that is incorporated by, but not limited to the biological individual usually classified as woman. Nietzsche’s *Die Geburt der Tragödie* shows that, because of the intertwined effects of the ‘male’ Apollonian and the ‘female’ Dionysian, there is human being who is exclusively male or female. ‘Woman’ is thus a metaphoric reference to a sex that is conventionally associated with a so-called female gender, but this metaphor derives its meaning through its linguistic relation to the other, ‘man.’ As Nietzsche employs a variety of styles in his writings, he also encourages a variety of truth and hence a variety of engendering. Man and woman, the female and the male, even femininity and masculinity are not isolated notions. Rather, they co-exist in multiple styles that influence and determine world perceptions, which can be identified as ‘pluralistic’ in the sense that they are multiple and non-hierarchical.

### **3) Trans-Sexing the Scene with Nietzsche: The Transsexed Body in Film and on Stage**

This chapter suggests how representations of transsexuality may be performed on the theatrical stage. Based on Nietzsche's image of the world as a work of art and his specific consideration of the Dionysian Greek orgy as a theatrical event, the following pages assume that the theatrical reference to physicality emphasizes the contingency of sexual identity and gender performance. One central motif will be the dance in Kate Bornstein's play *Hidden: A Gender*, whereas Bertolt Brecht's *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan* (*The Good Person of Szechwan*) underlines Butler's distinction between subversive and affirmative drag. Preliminarily, this chapter considers photo shootings of transsexual model Lea T. as well as cursory sketches of films that revolve around the killing of transman Brandon Teena, in order to express how both self-design through a Lacanian other are important factors in the negotiation of sexual identity.

As seen in chapter two, there remains a lot of controversy about how to approach the issue of transsexuality and especially how to approach transsexual people have undergone medical treatments to alter their bodies. Whereas Janice G. Raymond's writings castigate transsexuals for their alleged discrimination and suppression of women, activist, writer, and therapist Patrick Califia considers their physical alterations a challenge to gender essentialism: "When transgendered men and women demand their right to define their gender themselves, they are simply taking one of the first lessons of feminism to heart and asking that it be implemented" (100). Canadian activist and scholar

Viviane K. Namaste agrees with Califia, but she rails against Judith Butler's postmodernist approach towards sexual identity. She considers Butler's approach detrimental to the transsexual's own sense of self:

Don't look to Butler to learn about transsexuals and health care; don't hope to understand issues around transsexuality and addictions in the next genderqueer anthology, forthcoming from Routledge New York. When we restrict ourselves to the *identity* of sex change, we simultaneously limit our understandings of social change. (18 f.)

Namaste's critique of Butler is focused on her reading of Butler's comments regarding the death of Venus Xtravaganza, a young male-to-female transsexual who worked as an escort in order to earn money for her sexual reassignment surgery. Venus was featured as a member of the House of Xtravaganza in Jennie Livingstone's documentary *Paris is Burning*. Contrary to other genderqueer performers of the New York City queer ball culture, Venus was mostly portrayed apart from the others, walking along streets, talking to other transwoman about the chance of either being read or being able to pass,<sup>119</sup> until the film projects her death in the form of a news broadcast. Venus' wish for a conventional life with a man in a suburban neighborhood had been a major part of her post-operative plans. This is seen, for example, when she refers to the reasons for her working as an escort in New York City:

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<sup>119</sup> For the concepts of reading and passing, referring to whether the public recognizes a person as being transsexed or does not, Rachel Ann Heath refers to socially sanctioned categories of femininity and beauty, which the transwoman specifically has to consider in case she wants to hide her transsexed status: „Most transsexed women value their feminine appearance as confirmation of their new identity. Such behavior reflects the cultural importance of women looking like women, the more attractive the better“ (170).

If you're married, a woman in the suburbs, a regular woman, who is married to a husband, and she wants him to buy her a washer and dryer set, in order for him to buy that, I'm sure she'd have to go to bed with him anyway .... So, in the long run it all ends up the same way.

When the news about Venus's death emerged while the film was still in the making, the reactions in the ball community were of shock. Her 'house mother' Angie Xtravaganza remembered how she had always warned Venus of the dangers of hustling.<sup>120</sup> Butler, in her chapter on *Paris is Burning* in her book *Bodies that Matter* comes to the conclusion that to aspire 'heterosexual' – or heterosexist – designs of life must be detrimental for those whose physical body does not conventionally fit into the either/or gender binary. In other words, if Venus wants to live the life of a heterosexual woman, this desire must eventually lead to her demise, since such a design of life is not made for people who are either transsexual or perform other aspects of gender nonconformity:

If the signifiers of ... femaleness ... are sites of phantasmatic promise, then it is clear that ... lesbians are not only everywhere excluded from this scene, but constitute a site of identification that is consistently refused and rejected in the collective phantasmatic pursuit of transubstantiation into forms of drag, Transsexualism, and uncritical miming of the hegemonic. (1993, 130)

Butler's detached writing on Venus' death has met harsh criticism in transgender scholarship. Namaste, for example, accuses her of keeping the transsexual individual

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<sup>120</sup> „But that's part of life, that's what's about being a transsexual in New York City and surviving ...” (*Paris is Burning*).

locked in a so-called ‘third gender position,’ thus denying that person the chance to live either as a man or as a woman:

there is no place for the lives of transsexual women, who are not interested in attending the Michigan Women’s Music Festival, and who would rather look at the latest *Prada* catalogue. There is little respect for transsexual men who change sex and live undetected as transsexuals: self designated transgendered activists constantly lament that these transsexuals “go into the woodwork,” reproach them for not helping their own community. (20)

Jay Prosser is more lenient with Butler and concedes that she contributes to a closer understanding of transsexed identity,<sup>121</sup> but he is nonetheless concerned with the ‘third gender position’ that seems to be the only one remaining for transsexuals. Living as either a man or a woman, such as many or most of Viviane Namaste’s transsexuals allegedly want is supposedly considered with suspicion and skepticism in *Bodies that Matter*. According to Prosser, Butler claims that the division of man and woman, as well as of male and female, is the result of a sexist conventionalism, which the transsexual joins once he or she wants to be either a man or a woman:

Butler’s conceptualization of sex as a heterosexual melancholic fantasy of literalization, of sex as the phantasmatic encrypting of gender in the body, implicitly designates corporeal interiority as “disciplinary and constraining” and, conversely, privileges surface as that which breaks up interiority and reveals its status as fantasy. (42 f.)

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<sup>121</sup> “That Butler chooses to elucidate the limits of the transgendered subject’s deliteralization of sex through the figure of a transsexual is a powerful indicator of the conceptual splitting between transsexual and, indeed, of queer theory’s own incapacity to sustain the body as a literal category” (Prosser 27).

The circle of conflicting scholarly opinion regarding gender and sexuality, focusing on the transsexed 'body of evidence,' seems to close when Butler argues against Janice G. Raymond's condemnation of both cross-dressing and trans-sexing expressions of identity. Butler demonstrates that she indeed notices a difference between a drag king or queen and a transman or -woman: "Raymond, in particular, places drag on a continuum with cross-dressing and transsexualism, ignoring the important differences between them [...]." (1993, 126)

What remains to be discussed in various transgender and transsexual scholarship is the image of the transsexual who happens to blend in with society and who happens to want to be either a family father or mother, either through adoption or marrying a male or female partner with children, for example. Instead, queering seems to be almost a necessity for transsexed people, since their very act of physical transitioning inadvertently refers to a performance demonstration of the other. As enticing as that may seem for some, the designation of the other can never be transferred into a positive terminology: one can never say what the other is, but only designate what the other is not – neither man nor woman, neither male nor female. As necessary as it is to define things and people in relation to each other and thus through an emphasis of their differences, the transsexual, in addition to that, must avoid to fall into a medially sensationalized and fetishized version of otherness: "Ultimately, mainstream media themes of transsexuals and transgenderists as sick, deviant, dangerous and in need of medical treatment are used to arouse audience responses of 'shock,' confusion, outrage, feelings of betrayal and titillation" (MacKenzie 107).



The imposition of a ‘third gender position’ on transsexed individuals and groups of transsexed people ultimately leads to the same result as insisting on a man/woman binary: the exclusion of transsexuals from social recognition. I contend that the insistence on considering transsexuals as a ‘third gender’ ultimately places transmen and -women into a position where they are spoken about, but never with. This does not allow them to speak for themselves.<sup>122</sup> The following examples should illustrate my position.

### **Identity Misperceived, Identity Erased: Lea T, Brandon Teena, the ‘Real’ vs. ‘Realness’**

Italian fashion designer Riccardo Tisci, the major fashion designer for the French *haute-couture* brand Givenchy, has a very special model as a member of his staff. In an interview for the New York-based fashion magazine *W*, Diana Solway talked to the transgender model Lea T. and refers to the transwoman’s extraordinarily slim features, which she herself interprets as a sign of both her fragility and fashionable elegance: “Tall and striking, with impossibly narrow hips, pronounced cheekbones, and long black hair, she has about her an air of fragility, even in open-toe bondage sandals with thick wedge heels” (331).

The deliverance of fragility is countered with a purported strength that is to result from her transformation from a biological man into a woman. In fact, Lea T. is not only a model for Givenchy. She is also the Tisci’s close confidante. Lea T. remembers how he inspired her to undergo the initial steps for a sex change. In the aforementioned interview

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<sup>122</sup> ”And allow me to say it clearly: queer theory and much transgender theory do not respect transsexuals because they do not understand transsexuality on its own terms. The current identity debates only contribute to this misunderstanding“ (Namaste 20).

she recalled how “he was the one who had the courage to tell me I should think about a sex change [...]. We had a party to go to, and he was like, ‘Why don’t you try these shoes?’ They were high heels” (Solway 331).

But Lea does not walk the runway solely to present *haute-couture*. In *French Vogue*’s fall 2010 edition, she poses completely naked, with her right hand wrapped around her waist, giving sight on her right breast, her left hand barely covering her male genitals. “Lea T – Born Again” reads the picture’s heading. This physical demonstration of her body in the making sparked reactions from praise to damnation. Ruthie Friedlander, for the internet fashion forum *Stylelite*, remarks that

Lea T. looks absolutely stunning in the *French Vogue* shoot, her hair cascading ^ delicately, her gaze appearing strong, yet vulnerable, staring directly at the camera. Her lips rival Esther Canadas’ and her eyebrows remind us of Natalia Vodianova’s – which we think equates the perfect facial structure for a top model in the making. (“<http://www.stylelite.com/media/lea-t-naked-photos/>”)<sup>123</sup>

The metaphor of the top model ‘in the making’ reveals two things: Lea T. is an aspiring newcomer on the runway, and at the same time she is physically ‘in the making:’ being a pre-operative transsexual model, she poses nude and presents a body that is ‘in between,’ that suggests breasts as a physical indicator of a departure from a shape interpreted as male into one that is interpreted as female. But she is also ‘in the making’ in a strictly social sense: she is a model, but she is also studying veterinary medicine in Milan,

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<sup>123</sup> Negative comments have mostly been coming from readers who claimed, as an example, that Lea is still male because of the mutually exclusion of male and female as allegedly stated in the Bible: “God created man in His image. He made Man and Woman separately for one reason and one reason only. Our world is so terribly confused. I am sad for this Man.” (<http://www.stylelite.com/media/lea-t-naked-photos/>)

Italy.<sup>124</sup> Her performance, the term ‘performance’ being understood as the representation of a self-designed and self-defined sense of self, fulfills Judith Halberstam’s requests for multiple discourses ranked around and emerging from a bodily identity that is marked by change. Regarding the self-presentation of transman Brandon Teena and the violent reaction which eventually lead to his murder, Halberstam assures the viewer of the film *Boys Don’t Cry* that “Brandon’s story, while cleaving to its own specificity, needs to remain an open narrative” (25). I argue that Lea T.’s story is open as well, since it spans both her physical transition from a male into a female gender and her professional development. Lea T.’s design of her life questions and challenges ideas about masculinity and femininity as they are currently present in many mainstream fashion magazines and shows.

But that is only one side of the story. While Lea is hailed by fellow artists and writers for her demonstration of gender androgyny and as living proof that there are grey areas in the sexual and gender spectrum,<sup>125</sup> the model herself is not always that enthusiastic. *The Guardian* reports the other side of transitioning as providing the impression to be ‘placed out’ of and excluded from a system that – whether we want it or not – gives our social existence meaning and a significant sense of security:

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<sup>124</sup> See Luchina Fisher for ABC news coverage on Lea T.: “While Lea, who is also studying veterinary medicine in Milan, may be hoping to eliminate confusion by becoming a woman, she told Vanity Fair the transition to female has not been easy.” (<http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/lea-givenchys-transgender-star-brazilian-supermodel-undergoing-sex/story?id=11269995>)

<sup>125</sup> Solway quote Abramović that transsexuals “are a kind of abandoned race who he [Tisci, DVK] can include in his work. They have this advantage or disadvantage not to be one sex or the other but to be in between” (331).

The enduring difficulties which people incur when they choose to switch sex are all too familiar to Lea. From the everyday humiliation of being laughed at by strangers to the disorienting effects of sex change drugs – ‘I would wander the streets, full of hormones, depressed, with people laughing behind my back’ – she is proving to be an eloquent ambassador to what remains a globally marginalised and misunderstood community.

(Phillips and Davies,

[“http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/aug/01/fashion-transgender”](http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/aug/01/fashion-transgender))

The effects of being an outcast, resulting from the occupation of sexual and gendered positions that the mainstream society does not recognize as a proper classification, may be unsettling for Lea and was certainly deadly for transman Brandon Teena, as I will elaborate further below. Jay Prosser distinguishes between ‘the real’ and ‘realness’ with regard to transsexual identity and asks under which conditions transmen and –women can claim to be ‘real men’ or ‘real women.’ “The claim to “be” a man or a woman is made possible by the binary and oppositional positioning of these terms within heterosexuality. Sex, gender, and desire are unified through the representation of heterosexuality as primary and foundational” (30 f.).

Halberstam distinguishes between ‘the real’ and ‘realness’ as well, coming to the conclusion that ‘real’ as the indicator for heterosexuality and a binary gender order can impossibly be applicable to transgender and transsexual individuals, not even if the transsexual had undergone sexual reassignment surgery: “Realness – the appropriation of the real, one could say – is precisely the transsexual condition. The real, on the other hand, is that which always exists elsewhere, and as a fantasy of belonging and being”

(2005, 52). While ‘the sexual real’ as a chromosomally determined constitution is unattainable to transsexed people, ‘realness’ seems to be an option – given that ‘realness’ is an allusion to and a performative flirtation with ‘the real,’ without the transsexed person ever reaching the point of ‘being real.’ Judith Halberstam agrees with Butler on exactly that ‘realness,’ when she comes to similar conclusions about Venus Xtravaganza:

Venus Xtravaganza, in the clips from *Paris is Burning* discussed by Prosser and Butler accordingly expresses her desire for the real in the form she will obviously never attain such as white suburban respectability; meanwhile, in another performance of realness, the transgender man expresses his desire for a manhood that will on some level always elude him. (---)

The alleged impossibility for transsexuals to live according to a construction of normalcy causes unease in scholars like Prosser and Namaste. Also, Lea T. has her own story to tell about what it means to be classified as ‘neither/nor,’ as occupying the sphere of ‘realness’ instead of ‘the real.’ Although Halberstam may be right in her definition that the ‘real’ is the ‘other’ for the transsexual, for everyone else cisgendered the ‘real’ is not the other: rather, it is the sphere of social gratifications. And social gratification is not limited to money or fame, for Lea has plenty of both – also love is a social gratification, and love is made impossible when the transsexual is always per definition estranged from the rest. Lea’s reflections about love can be read accordingly. In an interview with the British magazine ‘The Observer,’ she denies that she can afford to fall in love, since falling in love is more dangerous for the transsexual who is neither male nor female, but is always identified as the other:

Those transsexuals who do enter into serious relationships, she says, often do so by keeping their past from their partners. ‘They live as hypocrites; it is a variation on solitude,’ she said. ‘We transsexuals are born and grow up alone. After the operation we are born again, but once again alone. And we die alone. It is the price we pay.’ (Lea in an interview with Tom Phillips and Lizzy Davies, [“http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/aug/01/fashion-transgender”](http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/aug/01/fashion-transgender))

Note that Lea does not bemoan her transition – what she bemoans is her being positioned at the social margins. In other words, what is at stake in Lea’s case – and in the case of many transsexed and transgendered individuals – is a so-called “economy of representation” (Halberstam 71). This economy promotes the turning of minorities into fetishized subjects that are declared as being worth a sensationalist look. When Lea is no longer able to express her own sense of identity with regard to herself, when she is muted by others speaking about her body and her transition, without noticing the expressive acts, or the creative acts, that in a Nietzschean reading stand behind every affirmative expression of selfhood.

Furthermore, Lea does not complain about the inaccessibility of the ‘real.’ The ‘real’ is a phantasmagoric image and hence not attainable for anybody. An alleged loss of authenticity whatsoever has never been the scope of her performance, as there is no authenticity of male- or femaleness to enter once the physical transition is in progress.<sup>126</sup> In regards to Brandon Teena, exclusion turns increasingly into aggression and physical violence.

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<sup>126</sup> Dean Spade recalls that “most of the trans people I have talked to do not imagine themselves entering a realm of “real manness” or “real womanness,” even if they pass as non-trans all the time, but rather recognize the absence of meaning in such terms ....” (324).

In 1999, film director Kimberly Peirce released a film about Brandon Teena, a transman from Lincoln, Nebraska, who was raped and killed in 1993 by John Lotter and Paul Nissen.<sup>127</sup> Having been notorious for several felonies such as check forgery in his hometown Lincoln, he fled to Falls City.

This location did not signify the beginning of Brandon's life as a male, but rather as a site for its continuity. Brandon had been living as Brandon, and no longer as Teena Brandon, his birth name, already while being in Lincoln. Coming from a low SES background, hormone replacement therapy and sexual reassignment surgery were nothing more than a far glimpse at the horizon. One of the film's initial scenes shows Brandon, still in Lincoln ice-skating with a girl he fancies. He soon runs away from several boys who know about him being a biological woman and who chase him as they regard his approaches towards the girl as an inappropriate attack on the girl's assumed heterosexuality. When Brandon hides from them, he calls his cousin and defends his living as a male even though he does not take testosterone. Brandon expresses his inability to pay for a medically supervised transitioning process because "hormones cost a fortune". His life as a male despite having a body that is identified as biologically female seems to find gender-queer approval easily. Brandon remains in a body that retains an anatomical and hormonal constitution that is known as female, despite his self-depiction as being male. However, this had not been the favorite solution for him.

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<sup>127</sup> "... two local ex-convicts who had befriended Brandon, John Lotter and Tom Nissen, were so outraged to learn that Brandon was a biological female, they beat him up and repeatedly raped him. When Brandon filed rape charges against them, they hunted him down and shot him to death, [...] then stabbed his body. After allowing Lisa Lambert to place her infant son in his crib, Lotter and Nissen gunned her down and shot the other witness, Philip DeVine ...." (Cooper 44).

Brandon Teena remained in a hormonally female body because she was lacking the economic resources to change that.

Melissa Rigney's comment on Brandon's body, especially with regard to the 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry*,<sup>128</sup> must therefore be taken with a grain of salt. When Rigney declares that "Brandon is a marker of difference and of inconsistency, a threat to both individual and national identity and security" (186), she neglects to elaborate on the violence that emerges from his subversive enactment of masculinity and that ultimately carries deadly consequences with it. This observation joins Prosser's critique on Butler's take on Venus Xtravaganza, when again that what causes death to a transgender and transsexed person – a physical mismatch – is hailed by gender and queer studies as the marker of an effective challenge of gender norms.

Brenda Cooper, in her article on *Boys Don't Cry*, mentions how the presumption of an unconditional heterosexual masculinity is the source of aggression against Brandon, as his articulation of masculinity is deemed illegitimate in the framework of heterosexual dispositions: "Heteromascularity as exhibited through the characters of John and Tom, therefore, seems not only unnatural, strange and lacking in virtue, but also a serious threat to society" (51). Brandon Teena certainly challenged heteronormative ideas about sex and gender. His identity as a transman clearly showed and proved that sex and gender are no foundational categories and can be crossed, i.e. they are not fundamentally assigned at birth. In that sense, it is also not my intention to claim that transsexuals entertain physical alternations because they need to attain a body that 'naturally' belongs to them, but had

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<sup>128</sup> Starring Hillary Swank as Brandon and Chloe Sevigny as his Falls City girlfriend Lana Tisdel.



not been assigned to them at birth because of a so-called 'birth defect.'<sup>129</sup> In fact, physical alterations are the result of cultural efforts themselves and by far not 'by nature:'

Transsexuelle arbeiten daher zunächst fast ausschließlich *gegen* ihren Körper: sie bearbeiten ihn durch Make-up, Epilationen, Hormonbehandlungen und kosmetische Operationen, aber auch durch Diät oder Bodybuilding“ (“In the beginning, transsexuals almost exclusively work *against* their body: they modify it through make-up, epilation, hormone treatment and cosmetic surgery, but also through diet or body building”; Hirschauer 1993, 42).

But this does not imply that transsexuals do not feel the need to chance their bodies. Transsexuals describe this need as felt in a more intense manner that cannot be satisfied through a change clothes or hairstyle. With respect to Brandon Teena's biography, I argue that it is not heterosexuality that is the problem at stake, but rather a reinforced heteronormativity. Brandon intends to perform heterosexuality regardless of his physical and anatomical body. Heterosexuality was what he was aiming at, and vaginal intercourse with him as the penetrating partner and his girlfriend as the partner being penetrated by a phallus was indeed his preferred sexual act.<sup>130</sup> What distinguishes him from his attackers' enactment of heterosexuality is that Brandon is aware of his own heterosexuality as a performance, one that is dependent on another performance of himself as a male regardless of his biophysical constitution. Brandon's performance relies on a performative repetition of 'realness,' as discussed in *Paris is Burning*. His performance is

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<sup>129</sup> Stefan Hirschauer argues in the tradition of Judith Butler's 'Bodies that Matter,' when he refers to the social labeling of bodies as male and female: “Die kulturell normalen Geschlechterbilder sind ihnen einfach nicht >auf den Leib geschnitten<“ (“The culturally normative gender images simply are not ‘tailor-made’ for them”; 1993, 42).

<sup>130</sup> “After John and Tom ransack Brandon's duffel bag and find a dildo, stuffed socks, and a pamphlet on sexual identity crisis, they violently confront him“ (Cooper 51).

aware that there is no ‘real’ with regard to sexual and gender identity and sexual interactions. His attackers are not aware of the unreality of the ‘real,’ and as such, a performed identity as that of Brandon’s does not have a place amidst them – in the most physical sense of the word. Brandon Teena is aware that his performance of his male selfhood may be dangerous. Nonetheless, he went through with it also because he did not want to be seen as an incorporation of a ‘third gender position,’ but as a man. But his notion of masculinity was one that constantly referred to its own contingency and hence on its dependency on a vocabulary through which masculinity is expressed. His idea of masculinity challenged heterosexuality as a normative construction from the vantage point as a self-defined man.<sup>131</sup>

Brandon’s desire to be perceived as male, regardless of the physiological sex assigned at birth does not imply that there is something inside his body that had always indicated to him that he is a man. But that does not annihilate the legitimacy of his desire to physically transition, as well as to pass as a male. Melissa Rigney’s text, in contrast, designates Brandon not as a transsexual with the wish to undergo a medically induced physical transition, but as a transgender, as a person who positions his or her sense of personal identity *in between*. For Rigney, Brandon’s bodily performance signifies an “act and identity (transgender) that represents resistance and a desire to remain separate and “different” rather than seek the obliteration of assimilation” (186). However, that has not been the case with Brandon at all: Brandon did not want to ‘remain separate,’ but rather

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<sup>131</sup> “Brandon’s performance of masculinity [...] can be interpreted as operating on two levels in the narratives: When Brandon tries to establish his male identity with his new buddies, he imitates the kind of overly aggressive macho machismo that John and Tom represent. But Lana falls for Brandon because of his version of masculinity, which contradicts and challenges traditional assumptions about what it takes to be a man and to please a woman” (--- 53).

‘be included,’ be considered and perceived as ‘man’ rather than a so-called ‘neither-nor.’ I add that if one wants to approach the issue of transsexuality and crimes against transsexual people with the accuracy and respect the topic deserves, one must learn that not every endeavor to ‘fit in’ is an enactment of conformity that aims to support a mutually exclusive gender order.

Brandon’s performance does not exclude the insistence on a sense of self designed as ‘male’ or ‘female.’<sup>132</sup> Whereas his biological body may have had a more female shape, Brandon did not uphold an ambiguous gender shaping, but rather tried to suppress any reference to female patterns of representation. Kimberly Peirce’s *Boys don’t Cry* repeatedly includes close-up shots of sex toys such as penises and pumps Brandon uses when he is with a girl, but which he does not show to his dates, in an effort to hide and ‘sell’ them as his own penis. Also, the film repeatedly implies mirrors in which the viewer sees Brandon watching himself, clad in underwear only, binding his breasts tight to his body and stuffing his pants with socks. Although his body is queering through the rejection of its anatomical and biological construction, Brandon’s attempt in his gender performance is to pass as a male rather than queering as a ‘third gender.’

One year before Peirce’s feature film was released, documentary filmmakers Susan Muska and Gréta Olofsdóttir directed *The Brandon Teena Story*, a documentary of

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<sup>132</sup> Stefan Hirschauer “verweist auf eine Alternative für Transsexuelle, in der Geschlechterdarstellung defensiver oder offensiver zu sein, den eignen Körper primär zu verbergen oder gerade einzusetzen, Aufmerksamkeiten zu vermeiden oder zu nutzen. Die Pluralität möglicher Geschlechterbilder liegt nämlich nicht nur auf einem Kontinuum von Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit, sondern auch auf einer >vertikalen< Achse mehr oder weniger großer Signifikanz“ (“refers to an alternative for transsexuals to pursue their gender preference more or less provokingly, to hide the body or use it expressively, to raise or to avoid attention. A plurality of possible gender images not only extends on masculinity and femininity, but also on a vertical axis of more or less a significance”; 1993, 43).

Brandon's life of male performance in Lincoln, via his escape to Falls City, his love relationship with Lana Tisdel, up until his being raped and eventually murdered, together with friends Lisa Lambert and Phillip DeVine, by Thomas Nissen and John Lotter. For the documentary, Muska and Olofsdóttir went to Falls City and conducted interviews with Brandon's friends, his girlfriend Lana Tisdel's family members, and the law authorities to whom he reported his being raped, but who refused to take action against Nissen and Lotter identifying Brandon's transsexuality as the actual source of provocation instead.<sup>133</sup>

It seems astonishing that many of his former friends, though they are not condoning Nissen's and Lotter's murdering Brandon, throughout the documentary are seeking to accuse Brandon of 'deception.' Lana's mother Linda Guthieres deplores that Brandon "still didn't want to reveal the 'truth'" and claims to assume the role of the "concerned mother," while Michelle Lotter, the sister of Brandon's eventual killer, goes on ranting about Brandon's "manipulating like that" (*The Brandon Teena Story*). It seems crucial to me that the comments mentioned here are expressions of a violent verdict against the wish to live with the sense of identity that one wishes to adhere to and that

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<sup>133</sup> The documentary displays at length the interrogation of Brandon by Sherriff Laux, which original purpose indeed was the filing of a rape complaint. The hearing instead turned into an order for Brandon himself who found himself being attacked by Laux and turned into the perpetrator: "Laux: Why do you run around with girls instead of guys being you are a girl yourself? Why do you make girls think you are a guy? [...] The ones, the girls that don't know about you, thinks [sic!] you are a guy. Do you kiss them? Brandon: What does that have to do with what happened last night? Laux: Because I'm trying to get some answers so I know exactly what's going on. Now, do you want to answer that question for me or not" (*The Brandon Teena Story*)?

one finds most appropriate for him- or herself – no matter if this sense of self and of identity corresponds to the physical constitution assigned at birth.<sup>134</sup>

### **The Enactment of Proper Bodies: Playing with Fire**

Theater and film work with notions and employ concepts of embodiment that compel the audience to perceive and value their bodies according to social parameters the audience has been, more or less, familiar with. Kate Bornstein emphasizes that bodies we cannot properly gender and hence classify cause uncertainty, even irritation:

This culture [of western capitalism] attacks people on the basis of being or not being correctly gendered (having a politically correct body). It's when we get to a point of knowing we're not gendered in the same way as our friends, relatives, and co-workers – it's then that we get angry and start to do something about gender. (79)

Every physical body we perceive, not only on stage and on screen, compels us to gender the character that we see represented through the respective embodiment: we want to decide whether the person to which the character refers accords to the categories of either male or female – and we are confused in case we are unable to come up with a clearly decisive answer.<sup>135</sup> Presentations of bodies on stage or on screen that refuse a determinate

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<sup>134</sup> A look back into the balls held in Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* also seems to suggest that passing can at times be a necessity to survive, and that hence every gender scholarship that wants to consider people's social living conditions needs to be aware that the ability to queer often goes together with a socio-economic luxury that not everybody has. Passing for a biological male as a female is required and supposed to be successful should the performers of a female gender be able to exit the New York subway "and still have all their clothes and no blood running off their bodies" (*Paris is Burning*).

<sup>135</sup> See also Hirschauer, who underlines that recognizing a person's gender is more than just the assignation of a further characteristic: Assigning a gender is assigning recognition of a person as person, as well as reassuring the standards of self-perception: "sie zu >erkennen< heißt immer auch, sie implizit in ihrer

classification of sexual identity demonstrate to an audience the arbitrariness of categories like sex and gender, and hence of the denominations of man and woman, male and female, and masculinity and femininity. The spectator who simply tries to classify the character associated with the body as either male or female is forced to reconsider whether there can be a 'real' in the sense of an authentic sexual or even gendered identity a person is able to express. Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* had already problematized the distinction between 'real' and 'realness:' the ball culture presented in the documentary is not concerned about the 'real,' but is content with 'realness,' that is a performance of social categories that the performer in fact does not purport to carry once the performance is over: "In a ballroom you can be anything you want. You cannot be an executive, but you can look like an executive" (*Paris is Burning*). But what does *Paris is Burning*'s ball culture say when it comes to the categories of man and woman? It now seems that you can be a woman if you feel like a woman, and that you can be a man if you feel like a man. But that ultimately means that the distinction between the 'real' and 'realness' vanishes and becomes obsolete: Behind performance, there is no persistent substratum denoting sexual or gendered identity. For Bornstein, "my identity becomes my body which becomes my fashion which becomes my writing style. Then I perform what I've written in an effort to integrate my life, and that becomes my identity, after a fashion" (1).

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Geltung anzuerkennen. Andererseits sind sie auch für den Irrenden blamable, weil er darin versagte, das >doch Offensichtliche< zu erkennen ...." ("to 'recognize' [transsexuals] always means to acknowledge their legitimacy. On the other hand, they can also be humiliating for the one who fails to recognize 'the obvious'"; 1993, 30 f.).

Diana Taylor speaks of a ‘truth’ within a performance that is expressed via a language of the body. What she means by that is the semiotic interpretation of bodily gestures, comportments, and other socio-cultural markers such as clothing the body carries and offers for a socially ratified interpretation to the public.<sup>136</sup> In the same way, performance is what finds its place on stage, within dance, on parades, during concerts and all types of mass events. Performance here does not necessarily need the theatrical space. Taylor distinguishes between the performance as an act or succession of acts and theatricality as the staged framework that allows and institutionalizes these acts.<sup>137</sup> While the theatrical frame, the theater itself in its architectural state and with its interior arrangements, designs and institutionally facilitates the staging of acts and performances as a succession of acts or movements, performance and performance acts in general use the body as a referential medium to put forth a person’s wishes, desires, needs, and manners in which the person sees and refers to him- or herself. Also, whereas the theatrical frame and the filmic screen distinguish between the character embodied and the person embodying a character, the artist involved in performance art often refers to incidents, conditions and situations that relate to persons as persons, more than to characters as fictitious constructions on stage and on screen:

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<sup>136</sup> “Embodied performances have always played a central role in conserving memory and consolidating identities in literate, semiliterate, and digital societies. Not everyone comes to “culture” or modernity through writing. I believe it is imperative to keep reexamining the relationships between embodied performance and the production of knowledge” (Taylor xviii).

<sup>137</sup> “Theatricality (like theatre) flaunts its artifice, its constructedness. No matter who restages the colonial encounter from the West’s perspective – the novelist, the playwright, the discoverer, or the government official – it stars the same white male protagonist-subject and the same brown found “object.” Theatricality strives for efficaciousness, not authenticity. It connotes a conscious, controlled, and thus, always political dimension that performance need not imply” (--- 13).

Performance carries the possibility of challenge, even self-challenge, within it. As a term simultaneously connoting a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world, it far exceeds the possibilities of these other words offered in its place. (Taylor 15)

Brandon Teena's body may represent a 'third gender,' but for Brandon himself, the body was a medium through which he channeled the manners and fashions of how he wanted to be seen in regard to his sense of being gendered.

Joanne J Meyerowitz asserts that "many transsexuals gravitated to the sexual margins in their search for a social home. The stigma associated with gender variance made it difficult for them to feel at home in the social mainstream" (186). But it is important to have a home, and part of the provision of this home will be to close the gap between the writing especially about transsexuals and the transsexed individual's expression of his or her self. A Nietzschean approach towards performance comes from outside the disciplines of gender and women's studies.<sup>138</sup> But Nietzsche's aesthetics, with its reference to gender as a constitutive tool for the creation of the world as an artwork, shows how genders and sexualities known and designed as male and female are interweaving concepts that encourage seeing gender and sexuality as scales rather than exclusive categories. A new image of gender and sexuality will come along with a new

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<sup>138</sup> In that sense, Will Rockwell has published an attempt to join together in an attempt to end violence against socially marginalized people on a comprehensive layer: "Queer and transgender people will never be respectable in the eyes of America, no much property we own or how normal-seeming our demeanor. Our dignity and 'respectability' shouldn't be measured by some external standard. True respectability is measured by our commitment to a concept of liberty that includes all people." (<http://williamrockwell.wordpress.com/2010/12/24/'no-humans-involved'-violence-against-queer-and-transgender-sex-workers/>)



image of transsexuality which aims at its inclusion into more contingent notions of maleness and femaleness.

### **A ‘Truthful’ Performance and the ‘Truth’ within the Body: Complications and Clarifications**

Anne Bolin uses the metaphor of the passage, through which, in a kind of ritual, the transsexed individual has to go in order to be perceived in the categories of sex and gender that he or she finds suitable for him- or herself.<sup>139</sup> It is common and justified, even methodologically ‘essential’ that we listen when words like ‘truth’ and ‘essence’ fall, this even in the context of physical assignations and applications. We must therefore be very careful how we understand these notions.

The metaphorical ‘passage’ Anne Bolin is talking about is nothing else but the period of psychic and physic transition from one sex to the other:

The metaphorical becomes real in the transsexual’s self-awareness when she feels herself to be a “real” woman upon whom nature has played a cruel joke. Described in these terms, the metamorphosis has all the characteristics of a rite of passage in which identities and statuses are transformed within ritual parameters.

(6)

It seems, then, that a model of gendered and sexual performance, which I will further elaborate on the following pages, serves most appropriately to represent the journey ‘from man to woman’ or ‘from woman to man’ that transsexed people undergo. These

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<sup>139</sup> “The death and rebirth was symbolic and actual as the transsexuals severed themselves from a male past, forged new identities as women, and feminized their bodies through a hormonal management program. The culmination of this process was surgical conversion” (Bolin 19).

performances are brought to the public either on the theatrical stage, via the cinematic screen, or in otherwise specified settings like a museum space, a convention hall, or other places where larger groups of spectators come together.<sup>140</sup> An important key concept is that the bodies perceived in performance do not have a representative, but rather an expressive function. To assume that bodies on stage, in film, or even on photo have a referring function would mean assuming a correlation between a dualist relationship, that between the representing character and the represented image. Instead, whereas it is perfectly possible for bodies to be semiotic signifiers of cultural conditions, values and shared customs, it is important to remember that these significations are not references to otherwise immaterially present values. Rather, physicality works as the enactment of values, customs, and beliefs, which in turn have no existence independently of these enactments. The latter makes it possible to get rid of a former distinction between film arts on the one hand and performance arts / theatrical arts on the other. Performance/theatrical arts and film arts were formerly deemed to be mutually exclusive because of the spatial relations between event and spectator. Erika Fischer-Lichte writes in *The Transformative Power of Performance* that the notion of performance originally relied on at-place interactions between performers and audiences: “The performance’s materiality [...] eludes one’s grasp. The performance brings forth its materiality

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<sup>140</sup> “Unlike the institutional conditions of a marriage ceremony or baptism, the institutions of art simply do not provide any definitive criteria for reaching a confident verdict on the success or failure of a performance shaped by audience intervention” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 26). This, in turn, also implies that there is no fixed set of institutional and local preconditions that has to be fulfilled before we can actually speak of a performance: “In the 1990s, the performative turn of the arts was long completed. Performance art had become an established and generally recognized genre of art. A lively exchange existed between theatre and performance art, bringing both genres closer together. Theatre had since incorporated methods and approaches from performance art such as its use of non-traditional performance spaces ...” (---49).

exclusively in the present and immediately destroys it again the moment it is created, setting in a motion of a continuous cycle of generating materiality” (2008, 76).

That would have excluded film from this dissertation. But the specific conditions of the transgendered/transsexed body allow the inclusion of film, because of the element of fluidity on which the transgendered and especially the transsexed body programmatically relies.

### ***The Archive and the Repertoire: Representations of Transsexuals on Stage, on Screen, and on the Operating Table***

Talking about transsexuals in particular and transgendered individuals in more general terms unavoidably includes talking about ambiguity, an ambiguity that is an effect of transgendered performance and its visibility. For gender ethnographers and anthropologists, as well as for researchers in the studies of women in gender, trans-individuals are a paramount subject/object of their research. Rosalind Morris (1995) argues that because of their rejection of mutually exclusive usages of categories like ‘man’ and ‘woman,’ ‘male’ and ‘female,’ transgendered bodies can explicitly well demonstrate that gendered categories mainly rely on representation and are not inherent within a gendered human being.<sup>141</sup> We identify a person as ‘male’ or ‘female’ because we have learned to classify gender based on the relations of difference and similarity, and because we identify physical shapes or other gender symbols in clothing, hairstyle, or

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<sup>141</sup>”Given that the constructedness of bodies becomes most visible when it deviates from the expectations of the dominant ideology from whence the writer comes, it is not surprising that so much of the work on embodiment and the performative constitution of gender should focus on cases of seemingly ambiguous genders, whether these are institutionalized, temporary, or even theatricalized states” (Morris 570).

others as either signifying similarity or differences.<sup>142</sup> Transgendered and transsexed individuals, by contrast, reject these categories of similarity and difference as indicators of a mutually exclusive separation of gendered and sexual identities. They therefore advocate an ambiguity which Morris identifies as the enemy of discourses that do not want to know about gender fluidity: “Ambiguity is the taboo of medicalized bodies, the impermissible threat against which hormone therapies and surgical intervention are marshaled so relentlessly” (570). But what does that mean for transsexuals who are requesting medical measurements in order to change or alter their bodies, to readjust their appearance to the socially mediated, gendered image of man or woman? Are they reactionary, in the sense that they may not want to be ‘gender-queer,’ or live a life that resides in the categories of ambiguity? Can we actually understand them as women? Are we prepared to understand them as women? Or are we entering into an understanding of sex and gender that rather insists on queer identities as expressing themselves explicitly as ‘neither-nor,’ before we’d be accepting that biological men can also be women and vice versa, with the respective personae identifying as men and women regardless of their biological constitution assigned at birth? In other words: Can a transsexual who undergoes different phases of physical transition be gender-subversive and nonetheless feel comfortable as being either male or female, when these categories are no longer attached to a person’s physiological condition assigned at birth?

One critical issue here is the Thai notion of the *kathoei*, which traditionally is a term for effeminate gay men and men who dress and act as women, rather than

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<sup>142</sup> I hurry to add: that does not imply that gender and sexual identity are solely social concepts – as the history of transsexuality and transsexuals demonstrates. In the following sections of this chapter, I will further elaborate on this specific history.

transsexual women in Thailand.<sup>143</sup> However, the term also applies to transwomen undergoing hormone replacement therapy and/or sexual reassignment surgery, whereas these performances of medically altering the person's physique are a manifest statement that the initial assignment to be a man is not accepted. The International Encyclopedia of Sexuality even goes that far as to assign hormone replacement therapy and/or sexual reassignment surgery to *kathoeys* as gay men, instead of to transsexed women:

As implied in the usage today, a *kathoeys* is a man who sees himself more as a woman and often dresses, to varying degrees, as a women [sic], and is likely to have sex with men. Some take estrogens and progesterone to facilitate breast development and other body transformations. A few will undergo surgical sex-reassignment surgery. This surgery is well known and available in Thailand, although it is extremely expensive by Thai standards. (<http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/IES/thailand.html#6>)

Whereas the physiological performances enacted signify that the category 'man' should no longer be applicable, the literature nonetheless seems to persist on it. Australian anthropologist Peter A. Jackson regards a 'kathoeys' a 'third gender,' which, in Western terminologies, would allude to a cross-characterization and allocation of male and female roles onto an otherwise non-gendered person. However, since East and South-East Asian have never worked with these dichotomous models, a 'third gender' may as well refer to an individual who manifests more as a female rather than a male, or vice versa. Jackson is

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<sup>143</sup> "Unlike its role in the Thai categories 'man' and 'woman,' sexuality has been central to the construction of the *kathoeys* category in recent Thai cultural history. It is appropriate to refer to the *kathoeys*, which is a noun not a verb, as a type of male homosexual identity, not simply a form of homoerotic behavior" (Jackson 170).

expert enough on East Asian and South-East Asian cultures. Hence, he pursues exactly such a concept behind the notion of the ‘third gender.’ However, he does not place the *kathoeys* in proximity to the female, but rather to the male, and affirms the birth sex rather than the sexual identity the *kathoeys* themselves identify with and also act as.<sup>144</sup> Sam Winter objects to Jackson and states that “there is a common notion that MtFs [including ‘kathoeys,’ DVK] are female, or indeed a third sex. Furthermore, it is not only the *kathoeys* who perceive their condition in this way. Many ordinary (non-TG) Thais believe this, too” (126).

We have to pause here and have a closer look at Kate Bornstein’s conception of gender fluidity, which is not an equivalent to that of gender ambiguity, but rather its complement and helps us in saving a space not only for the gender-queer, but also for the transsexed. Bornstein writes that,

if ambiguity is a refusal to fall within a prescribed gender code, then fluidity is the refusal to remain one gender or the other. Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one of many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender. (51 f.)

Bornstein introduces a reference to gender that strongly reminds us of Nietzsche and the will to create, the will to be an artist and to act like an artist: one can be any gender one wants, regardless of the actions performed and based on the identity people assign to

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<sup>144</sup> “... I suggest that gay male identity in Thailand represents the emergence of a ternary term in the previously binary structure of Thai male sex/gender categories, and that gayness renders a preciously unlexicalized domain between the poles of the Thai ‘competent man’ and the demasculinized *kathoeys*” (--- 167).

themselves.<sup>145</sup> And the latter sentence is crucial: one need to be able to choose from a repertoire of gender roles, to be able to repeat, change or modify them, to affirm them or challenge them. In other words, the ‘I’ is a specific metaphor in the sense that it designs a point of reference that serves as a site of self-reference, the site of desires and urges, wishes, and needs, that the person learns to phrase and to express in interactions with the social world, but which the person always has to question with respect to whether these express his or her wishes, needs, or desires, regardless of what any criteria for these selection processes may be.<sup>146</sup>

Diana Taylor recognizes two major cultural domains that are ubiquitous in all human presentations and interactions, either explicitly, as a programmatic enactment, or as an everyday comportment, during social rituals and gathering. The archive, as Taylor states in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, comprises the stack of cultural practices, which are present in the common, public memory. People refer to this archive of more or less conventionalized or ritualized practices in case they want to express themselves in a

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<sup>145</sup> “Ja, diess Ich und des Ich’s Widerspruch und Wirrsal redet noch am redlichsten von seinem Sein, dieses schaffende, wollende, werthende Ich, welches das Maass und der Werth der Dinge. Und diess redlichste Sein, das Ich – das redet vom Leibe, und es will noch den Leib selbst wenn es dichtet und schwärmt und mit zerbrochnen Flügeln flatter“ (Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra 36). (“Indeed, this ego and the ego’s contradiction and confusion still speak most honestly of its being – this creating, willing, valuing ego, which is the measure and value of things. And this most honest being, the ego, speaks of the body and still wants the body, even when it poetizes and raves and flutters with broken wings. It learns to speak ever more honestly, this ego: and the more it learns, the more words and honors it finds for body and earth”; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra 32).

<sup>146</sup> “Alles was wir brauchen und was erst bei der gegenwärtigen Höhe der einzelnen Wissenschaften uns gegeben werden kann, ist eine *Chemie* der moralischen, religiösen, ästhetischen Vorstellungen und Empfindungen, ebenso aller jener Regungen, welche wir im Gross- und Kleinverkehr der Cultur und Gesellschaft, ja in der Einsamkeit an uns erleben ...“ (Nietzsche, Menschliches, Allzu Menschliches 24). ““All we need, something which can be given us only now, with the various sciences at their present level of achievement, is a *chemistry* of moral, religious, aesthetic ideas and feelings, a chemistry of all those impulses that we ourselves experience in the great and small interactions of culture and society, indeed even in solitude”; Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human 14)

fashion recognizable by the public. But the performing persona may also contribute to the archive's creative extension: "The repertoire [...] enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (Taylor 20).

The reproduction and reconfiguration of cultural knowledge via a repeatedly renewed enactment strongly resembles Nietzsche's artistic program outlined in chapter one,<sup>147</sup> and as such it is also represented by the figure of the child, which Nietzsche introduces in *Als Sprach Zarathustra*. Forgetting does not mean that a society entirely erases a cultural practice or cultural values out of the public memory. I understand forgetting in this case as a characteristic that is 'inherent' in the performance act itself: a performance may include technological media, but nonetheless relies on 'liveness,'<sup>148</sup> which means that it is embedded and refers to a social setting. In order to revive a cultural ritual, that must be reenacted anew, time and again: "The live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive. A video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a *thing* in itself (the video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire)" (Taylor 20). This means that, although video art and film art in particular are not performance art in the strictest sense of the word, film, television, and other forms of digitized visual materials

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<sup>147</sup> "Insofern aber das Subject Künstler ist, ist es bereits von seinem individuellen Willen erlöst und gleichsam Medium geworden, durch das hindurch das eine wahrhaft seiende Subject seine Erlösung im Scheine feiert" (Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie* 47). ("But where the subject is an artist, it is already released and redeemed from the individual will and has become, as it were, a medium, the channel through which the one truly existing subject celebrates its release and redemption in semblance"; Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 32)

<sup>148</sup> "Live performance thus has become the means by which mediatized representations are naturalized, according to a simple logic that appeals to your nostalgia for what we assumed was the im-mediate: if the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been "real" to begin with" (Auslander 38).



are traditionally included in the theatrical live performance or the performance enactments in otherwise non-traditional settings:

When a live performance recreates a mass-reproduced one, as in the case of the replication of music video imagery in concerts or cartoon images in theatre, an inverted version of the same effect takes place. Because we are already intimately familiar with the images from our televisual and filmic experience of them, we see them as proximate no matter how far away they may be in physical distance. (Auslander 35)

Technological media and the corporeally more ‘immediate’ arts like theatrical and performance arts also have in common that they refer to the audience’s – individual and collective – desires, needs, and expectations, as well as to the morals and values relating to the former.<sup>149</sup> The performances enacted address the audience in the way that they play with the audience’s expectations regarding what is supposed to happen in front of their eyes, what they wish and expect to see. And some performances become virulent and especially effective as far as they violate exactly those viewing expectations, or manipulate an audience’s desires, which they at first invoke and ultimately mislead.

When, for example, in Neil Jordan’s 1992 film *The Crying Game*, the camera shows us what is supposed to develop into a love scene between the male protagonist Fergus and the transgendered female character Dill, the camera directs and influences the viewer’s

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<sup>149</sup> Theatrical artist and writer Jill Dolan relates these sets of needs and expectations as they are directed towards the scene to the problems arising with the performance of diverse and potentially deviant sexual and gendered identities. “Morality and sexuality are closely linked and regulated through their representation, especially during moral panics like the one gripping this country, which variously scapegoats obscenity, pornography, homosexuals, and people with AIDS, along with other so-called sexual deviants” (Dolan 181).

attention and expectations as follows: The camera starts with a close up of Dill's face, then slowly zooms down her body and comes to a sudden halt on her naked, exposed male genitals. The camera then switches to Fergus, with a stop of the non-diegetic soundtrack, and halts on him, shortly before it records him slapping Dill and running into the bathroom to puke. What the spectator sees is not the discovery of a transsexed body as such. What he or she discovers is the idea of a transsexual body as an unacceptable condition for the non-transgendered partner. Violence against a woman in a film is - rightly so! - declared as morally inferior by the setting - this is different, as we see, once the woman turns out to be transsexed. In addition to all of this, the camera also switches between assuming a close-up scan of Dill's body and assuming the point of view of Fergus, ultimately placing the spectator in Fergus' position. The effect, emphasized by a large advertisement campaign about the 'secret the film is about to reveal,' is the following: the spectator shares the surprise of Dill's transsexed body. Because the camera designs the body as an offense to heterosexual desire, her body turns into literally a nuisance for the heterosexual gaze - for this gaze is expected throughout the film.<sup>150</sup>

For the camera, the transsexed body here is as important as it is on stage - in fact, nowhere in the fields of the visual and theatrical arts is the body as important as it is on stage. But for the film, this body as the 'imprint of all shock effects' is important as well, and it is also important for the film with regard to the possibilities of its conservation.

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<sup>150</sup> Read with Laura Mulvey, we can say that Dill's body undergoes a heterosexist check-up both through the camera and the viewer. Jordan's camera is a vehicle for the male heterosexual gaze, which becomes heterosexist because of its forceful denunciation of Dill's 'checked-out' body as 'not worthy' to invoke a desire that the audience may want to cultivate: "As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence" (20).

What French film theorist Jean-Louis Baudry has to say about the camera as a semi-actor that channels our beliefs and evaluations of the characters perceived on screen<sup>151</sup> is valid also with regard to our perception of transsexuality: we do not see a body ‘directly,’ which means that we do not see a body only in terms of material factuality. What we see is a body in the way we are taught to see it through a ‘gendered lens:’ as belonging to a male or female sex. The perceptual classification of the representation of transsexual individuals through the camera poses a larger challenge for gender classification. When we perceive a certain body, however, we are led to assume that this bod represents a certain design of selfhood, which undergoes modifications, but construes itself out of the string of experiences and events the individual encounters. Such an image does not exclude changes in somebody’s self-performance. We are still able to see the middle school friend in the man who appears twenty years later at a class reunion – no matter whether he is bald, grey-haired, or has gained – or lost - a few pounds. We have learned to order our perceptions in temporality and to adhere to the model of temporary linearity, for the purpose of making sense of a person’s ‘preserved’ identity, no matter how much this person changes over time. This makes us, in Kaja Silverman’s terms, ‘world spectators:’ “The world spectator is consequently not just someone to whom the past returns, but someone who holds himself open to the new form it will take – who anticipates and affirms the transformative manifestation of what was in what is” (2000, 25).

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<sup>151</sup> “The spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees; this is exactly the function taken over by the camera as a sort of relay” (Baudry 295).

The pursuance of selfhood is a constructive device via which the person makes sense out of his or her life. The transsexual's narrative, however, is in the position to construe a narrative for her- or himself that refers to differently gendered senses of self at different times. Christine Overall characteristically formulates the decisive issue as follows:

In what way does the person herself persist through the sex/gender transition? She persists insofar as her way of being, after transition, is desired and actively sought by her previous self, so that the way of being after the transition grows out of the previous self, is generated by the previous self, and can be understood in terms of characteristics of the previous self. (20)

In other words: We can identify a transsexed person by focusing on what I want to call an 'energy pool' that he or she creates, and out of which he or she draws and nourishes his or her desire to become who he or she feels he or she is. In other words: We can identify a transsexual person because of his or her expressed desire to undergo what we call a 'sex change:' we see the expression of needs, drives, desires, wishes, and fears, all that serve as the site of 'outpouring' that Nietzsche expresses in his writings about art, for example about music:

Und so frage ich mich: was will eigentlich mein ganzer Leib von der Musik überhaupt? ... Ich glaube, seine Erleichterung: wie als ob alle animalischen Funktionen durch leichte, kühne, ausgelassne, selbstgewisse Rhythmen beschleunigt werden sollten; wie als ob das eherne, das bleierne Leben durch goldene zärtliche ölgliche Melodien seine Schwere verlieren sollte. (Nietzsche Contra Wagner 419) ("And so I ask myself: What is it that my whole body really

expects of music? [...] I believe, its own *ease*: as if all animal functions should be quickened by easy, bold, exuberant, self-assured rhythms; as if iron, leaden life should lose its gravity through golden, tender, oil-smooth melodies”; Nietzsche Contra Wagner 664)

The process the transsexual undergoes, and which he or she expresses through an array of physical modifications, is an expression of self-confident creativity. If that were not the case, the transsexual would adhere to a suffering that would rather be a lack of energy.<sup>152</sup> The transsexual’s personhood is then the expression of a performance that physically represents his or her sense of self. This process of self-reference relies extensively on visualization, because it must make itself perceivable for the other, in order to find approval or at least in order to challenge the other’s perception of the transsexual’s expressed gender. Ultimately, however, this process refers not only to the transsexual, but to everybody. The transsexual is only one more extreme mode of gendered performance, and this kind of performance is at stake for everyone, every single day.

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<sup>152</sup> “Jede Kunst, jede Philosophie darf als Heil- und Hülfsmittel des wachsenden oder des niedergehenden Lebens angesehen werden: sie setzen immer Leiden und Leidende voraus. Aber es giebt zweierlei Leidende, einmal die an der *Überfülle* des Lebens Leidenden, welche eine dionysische Kunst wollen und ebenso eine tragische Einsicht und Aussicht auf das Leben – und sodann die an der *Verarmung* des Lebens Leidenden, die Ruhe, Stille, glattes Meer *oder* aber den Rausch, den Krampf, die Betäubung von Kunst und Philosophie verlangen“ (Nietzsche, Nietzsche Contra Wagner 425). (“Every art, every philosophy, may be considered a remedy and aid in the service of either growing or declining life: it always presupposes suffering and sufferers. But there are two kinds of sufferers: first, those who suffer from the *overfullness* of life and want Dionysian art as well as a tragic insight and outlook on life – and then those who suffer from the *impoverishment* of life and demand of art and philosophy, calm, stillness, smooth seas, or, on the other hand, frenzy, convulsion, and anesthesia “; Nietzsche, Nietzsche Contra Wagner 669 f.)

### **Theatrical Arts, Performance Arts, and the Specifics of the ‘Energy Pool’**

As important as the body is, the surroundings of the body play an important role as well – whether this environment is the stage, the performance setting on a street,<sup>153</sup> or the scene in front of a camera lens. The actress or actor (both on stage and in film) cannot act without a specifically designed space, even if that space is defined *ex negativo*. Regarding the conventional theater setting, with its three material walls and the imaginary ‘fourth wall,’ a space of interaction is created that lives of the effects the staging creates for the audience and the reactions the audience may show towards the actors and actresses on stage. Although there usually is no formal setting of interaction between spectators and theatrical performers or performance artists, Erika Fischer-Lichte nonetheless postulates that a kind of energetic pool beneficiary to both parties – acting personal and spectators - is created. To analyze this energetic pool during a performance, Fischer-Lichte states that

it needs to be investigated how actors and spectators influence each other in performance; what the underlying conditions of this interaction might be; what factors determine the feedback loop’s course and outcome; and whether this process is primarily social rather than aesthetic in nature. (2008, 39 f.)

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<sup>153</sup> In spite of the terms overlapping, Erika Fischer-Lichte distinguishes between performance art taking place in seemingly random contexts, and performance arts that make use of a theatrical framework. Nonetheless, performance arts in its ‘purest’ sense works effectively because the usual theatrical context and its socio-cultural framework is lacking. Regarding to performances by Marina Abramović, Chris Burden, Michael Journiac, and Gina Payne, who all have in common that they violate their own corporeal health and cross the limits of human tolerability of pain and exhaustion, Fischer-Lichte notes that “the performances could only achieve their specific effects because they lacked this context. They exposed the spectators to actions they pushed beyond the limits of the performers’ physical well-being. The artists did unto themselves what the spectators feared for themselves” (2008, 91).

Nietzsche's Zarathustra refers to this energy pool when he speaks of the mind as the instrument of the body.

In the following, let me briefly sketch the role of the body as a material instance. Udo Rauchfleisch (2009) includes an essay written by non-hormonal, non-operative transgender woman Jacqueline Born, who identifies the request for physical transformations as the reaffirmation of a sexist societal order that insists on a mutually exclusive gender order. She shares Raymond's opinion of 'medical' transsexualism being an expression of a patriarchal society:

Die somatische Transsexualismus-Therapie folgt einem >>männlichen Prinzip<<, sie unterliegt einem eindimensionalen, reduktionistischen Ansatz, ist eine Methode der männlichen Allmachtsphantasie, ein Krieg gegen den eigenen Körper, ein Weg der Unterwerfung des Körpers durch Gewalt, Zerstörung und Verstümmelung. ("The debate about transsexual therapy follows along a 'male principle,' it underlies a uni-dimensional, reductionist approach, it is a method of male phantasms, a war against one's own body, and a way to subjugate the body through mutilation"; Born 131 f., quoted in Rauchfleisch)

It appears as if for Born all transsexuals who request medical and psychological interventions ultimately are allies of a system that aims at a mutual exclusion and discrimination of genders. Rauchfleisch's own position also gives insight into a sufficient mistrust against physiological changes for people identifying as transsexuals: "Damit ist das *Prinzip der Zweigeschlechtlichkeit gerettet* und die alte Ordnung von zwei – und nur zwei – Kategorien, >>Frauen<< und >>Männer<<, wiederhergestellt" („Hence the old order of a dual gender system, consisting of ‚men‘ and ‚women,‘ is restored“; 142).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Diana Taylor discusses the ‘truth’ of and within the performances of characters, which includes the expression of gendered, ethnic, and other social identities. It would be a mistake, however, to identify this truth as a fixed, ontological entity, which could be clearly analyzed in a way to fixedly label it. Such a procedure, in the case of individual identity – be it ethnic, gendered, sexual, or anything else like that – leads to pathologization and even criminalization; it decides on which individual’s choices are acceptable, advisable, or, in plain language: right.<sup>154</sup>

On the other hand, looking for the ‘truth’ in gendered or sexual performances is not equal to looking for absolute contingency in gendered and sexual presentations either. An overemphasis on the constructed character of social roles inevitably falls prey to a relativity of individual expressions and, *vis-à-vis*, an ignorance towards violence enacted upon people *because* of their gendered and sexual expressions and hence identities. Similarly, Edward Davies writes that “without boundaries there are problems of self definition, problems in terms of discrimination based on this unacknowledged social location, and problems with the loss of a sexual standpoint for political action” (Davies 114).

What this means is the following: Radical constructivist and deconstructionist theories that sincerely attempt to fight racial, ethnic, gendered, and sexual inequalities

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<sup>154</sup> Regarding the classification of people and their actions, choices, and preferences into ‘right’ and ‘wrong,’ certainly so make sense in case their choices and preferences violate the safety, security, freedom, and health of other. However, applied too broadly, these criteria entertain a broad act of criminalization and pathologization which cuts down individual autonomy in a dangerous manner. As an example, Blanchard and Collins not only classify transsexed individuals as mentally deranged, but also pathologize the men who are looking for a partnership with trans-women. They lament that these men “may have remained obscure to science and medicine, in spite of the celebrity accorded to the *objects* [sic!] of their desire, because they rarely complain to clinicians, or because the evidence of their interests and activities occurs in sources rarely accessed by researchers: pornography, prostitution advertisements, and personal advertisements for romantic and sexual partners” (570).



and discrimination, tend to oversee social inequalities that are based on individual qualities that are inextricably based on physical features other than clothing, hairstyle, facial expression, and gestures. What they forget to see is that there are features of a person he or she may not be able to influence simply with a deliberately enacted performance. In her essay “Die Frau ohne Unterleib,” a reply to Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, Barbara Duden talks about the physical sensations and sentiments a human being has, and which turn him or her into that very individual, even if that, as she writes, may sound suspiciously essentialist:

Wenn der einen das Geblüt zu Kopf steigt und der anderen die Mutter im Bauch rumort und die dritte noch als alte Frau an der Stockung leidet, mit der sie das Feuer in der Scheune Inneren gebranntmarkt hat, dann kommt hier eine Materialität zur Sprache, an der ich nicht vorbeiwill, auch wenn ich mich damit der Kritik aussetze, die Konkretheit meiner Autozeption zu einer heuristischen Bedingung von Geschichtsschreibug zu machen. (“If someone suffers from high blood pressure, another one experiences pregnancy, and the third women still suffers from the aftermath of a fire, then a physical materiality emerges which I do not want to ignore, even if I expose myself to criticisms of an essentialist writing of history“; 25)

Accordingly, Jay Prosser denotes that the process of transitioning, meaning the pursuance of a bodily transition from endocrinally and anatomically male to female, or vice versa, is equal to writing a narrative that is not only dependent, but constitutive of physical expression: “For transsexuality is always narrative work, a transformation of the body that requires the remolding of the life into a particular narrative shape” (Prosser 4).

Where do we place Diana Taylor's claim for a 'truth' in performance, considering the dilemma situation which almost inevitably comes up? I suggest that the 'truth' in performance is the energy, the desire and the lust to create, in other terms: Nietzsche's will to power, which expresses itself in the theatrical performance and the filmic acting on celluloid. Taylor expresses what she means by truth as follows: "Performances may not ... give us access and insight into another culture, but they certainly tell us a great deal about our desire for access, and reflect that politics of our integrations" (6).

This desire, this striving for creative self-expression and self-realization, which shows itself via the various means of bodily expressions, whether on stage, on film, or on the streets and other public places, is mediated and expressed through the image of the transsexual body. References to images of transsexuality are made both in film as well as in theatrical arts. In the following, I will give various examples for such representations.

### **Staged Bodies: The Body as a Material Entity in Kate Bornstein's *Hidden: A Gender* and Bertolt Brecht's *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan***

A first step in attempts to represent transsexed bodies on stage is to familiarize the audience with the phenomena of transsexed individuals, who – in fact – can only be perceived as such via the very materiality of their bodies and a vocabulary that provides them with meaning. Rachel Ann Heath emphasizes that transwomen and 'genuine women,' transmen and 'genuine men,' are in fact more similar to each other than it may seem – on a very concrete physical, i.e. hormonal level:

Hormonal sex represents the different combination of hormones that characterize the two sexes: Generally, men have mostly testosterone and women estrogen. However, for good reproductive and homeostatic reasons, both sexes have a little of the other sex's hormones. (33)

Indicated here is the potentially unstable character of gender performance and sexual identity. In fact, being male and female is not being either of those, but rather being both of those to a certain extent – a thought which gender activist and performance artist Kate Bornstein resumes and applies to the organization of a non-essentialist gender model.

Bornstein identifies herself as a lesbian transwoman and describes her journey through her time as a male, until she finally transitioned from male to female and started living 'full-time' as a female. Her encounters with the authorities, for example, when she gets to the Department of Motor Vehicles in order to have her driver's license changed, certainly have a comical effect.<sup>155</sup> However, the agenda at stake is more serious. She considers gender to be an investment product which regulates social inclusion or exclusion.<sup>156</sup> Bornstein's theatrical play *Hidden: A Gender* accordingly employs a sales agent and game show host as barker for the audience as well as for the actresses and actors performing on stage: Doc Grinder is an androgynous figure, whose gender is undefined (Mostly, Bornstein herself plays him, in male drag, hence as a drag king), and who has invented a medicine called the 'gender defender,' a medicine that is said to

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<sup>155</sup> "On my way over to the booths, old Fred called out, „Honey, they treating you all right?“ Before I could reply, the second officer snarled at old Fred to "get his but over" to look at all my paperwork. I reached the testing booths and looked back just in time to see a quite crestfallen old Fred looking at me, then the paper then me, then the paper" (Bornstein 29).

<sup>156</sup> Bornstein 195; First Actor: "Oh! You think male and female is gender! [...] Nah, that's not gender. Gender is the feeling that you need to be one or the other. Gender is the need to belong – it doesn't matter to what. Gender is the need to fit in, be part of something. All the rest is marketing. Sales. Public Relations" (--- 195).

ensure people of the gender they were born into – or what society tells them to have: “Gender Defender – one bottle and your fears disappear! Two bottles and your family breathes a sign of relief. Three bottles and you can vote Republican” (192). The play’s acts sometimes employ the explicit removal of the theatrical ‘fourth wall,’ only to integrate the destruction of that very same wall into the theatrical performance. Bornstein’s Doc Grinder interacts with the characters of Herculine Barbin, a 19<sup>th</sup> century transsexed character living in France,<sup>157</sup> and Herman/Kate, Bornstein’s male-to-female alter ego, whose life story often is identical with that of Bornstein’s. Various passages Herman/Kate experiences are in fact the passages Bornstein herself has gone through: Her involvement in scientology, which she joined while still being male and left again after she had witnessed how the association had mocked and thrown out a transwoman seeking counseling<sup>158</sup> – and also after she had found out about the congregation’s organization of financial transactions: “I, uh, left the Church of Diabology some years later when I found out that all the money I’d been making was going into the Swiss bank accounts of the Founder” (Bornstein186). With regard to Herculine/Abel Barbin, Bornstein refers to Barbin’s memoirs entitled *Les Vies Parallèles – Herculine Barbin dite Alexina B*, which have been edited by Michel Foucault. S/he<sup>159</sup> at first identified as a

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<sup>157</sup> Herculine Barbin was born on November 8, 1838, and committed suicide as Abel Barbin in 1868 in Paris.

<sup>158</sup> “They were just bustin’ a gut shakin’ like jelly turnin’ all red and she’s going boo-hoo, boo-hoo. And it turns out she’s transsexual and she’s had this operation to make her a woman and now that she’s gotten into Diabology they’ve convinced her she’s done the wrong thing and she wants to know if she pays enough money to me can she grow another cock and the guys in the doorway they just keep on laughing and I have to tell her I don’t know if you can grow another cock” (Bornstein 186. The stances are spoken by Herman/Kate in the drama).

<sup>159</sup> I use the designation of ,s/he’ with regard to Judith Butler’s address applied in her 1990 publication ,Gender Trouble.’ “Herculine, called Alexina throughout the text, narrates a story about h/er tragic plight as one who lives a life of unjust victimization, deceit, longing, and inevitable dissatisfaction. From the time s/he was a young girl, s/he reports, s/he was different from the other girls” (Butler 1990, 97).

lesbian, when she experienced romantic feelings for Léa, her convent mate,<sup>160</sup> and suffered feelings of guilt for loving women, especially since she was raised at a convent where carnal love was forbidden anyway – and which did not recognize the existence of lesbianism as one of many sexual variations, declaring it as an illness from which women affectively had to be cured.

In observance of the fictitious fourth wall, Herculine, played in the initial performances by androgynous male performer and actor Justin Bond, remembers her romantic encounters with Léa, reminding herself of what she has been taught: that it is a sin for women to love women. Bond performs a prayer as a textual medium representing the confessions of an institutionalized declaration of a sexual sin:

I had no sooner finished than I started – hastily – to go back the way I had come. Oh, Blessed Mother, I had not gone halfway when familiar footsteps made me tremble. My teacher was behind me and she had seen me. And so, Blessed Mother, I've just come from the office of Mother Superior [...] where she told me she had almost struck me from the list of those to take the First Communion this year. (Bornstein 175)

Herculine was a good student and an avid reader, and she obtained the possibility to study, at the age of seventeen, at an Ursuline convent, in order to become a teacher at a girls' school. There, she fell in love with her colleague Sara, with whom she began a

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<sup>160</sup> “Sa belle tête blonde se penchait vers moi, et je la remerciais par un baiser plein de chaleur. Léa, lui disais-je alors, Léa, je t’aime ! La cloche de l’étude venait bientôt nous séparer, car mademoiselle de R... s’asseyait sur les bancs de la première” (“She turned her head with her beautiful blonde hair towards me, and I thanked her with kisses full of passion. Léa, I love you! The begin of work will soon separate us, as Miss R... has tried during the first time at school”; Fouault 1978, 17).

romantic relationship.<sup>161</sup> Shortly after, she experienced frequent physical pain, whereupon she was examined by a physician, who detected that her body was intersexed, meaning that she had no ovaries, but a small penis that had developed inwards and into a vagina. In Bornstein's *Hidden: A Gender*, Bond's Herculine experiences this diagnoses as traumatic. The difference between sex as the biological precondition of an individual and gender as the learned set of social practices has not been clear to her, since that distinction had not been practiced at all:

Oh, no – no no no no no I am a woman. I am sensible I am charming I am literate  
I am happy I am what men are not. Men are busy – I am to be idle. Men are rough  
– I am to be gentle. Men are strong – I am to be frail. Men are rational – I am ... I  
am rational. God help me I must be a man. What? Yes, more laudanum, of course.  
I have no uterus? What in heaven's name is a uterus? Oh. (Bornstein 188)

She is leaving Sara, because she is told by the medical authorities that she is a man and hence obliged to live her life as a man, a life in which Sara as a lover of women is not supposed to take part: "I know you don't want me as a man, and I must leave for Paris to begin my life as one. I must obey the doctor" (196).

We must note that Herculine, soon to be named Abel, is not leaving Sara on her own will. She is following what Nietzsche later would condemn as the behavior of the weak: the request to give in to society unconditionally. For Nietzsche, as we know, it is the sign of the weak to resign to what he calls as a resentful life, as elaborated in the

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<sup>161</sup> See Foucault 52: "J'étais *très-fatiguée*, Sara me conduisit elle-même à ma chambre attenante à la sienne. Là, elle s'enhardit jusqu'à m'embrasser, ce qui acheva de lui concilier mon amitié" ("I was very tired. Sara brought me herself to my room, which was next to hers. There, she kissed me, in order to assure her of our friendship"; --- 52).

*Genealogy of Morals*. Resentment as the predominant characterization of a lifestyle, according to Nietzsche, leads to the vital exhaustion of the human being pursuing that lifestyle – which is marked by resistance against one’s own wishes, drives, desires, and inclinations, in other words: against the principles of human vitality. A mistake would be, however, to deny a sense of creativity to the idea of resentment; it does in fact develop morals, but these are morals that limit human beings’ potentials of vitality, rather than encourage their development. As such, these morals are shared by a large part of society, that, for example, tells someone like Herculine Barbin how to live properly, according to a gendered order that movement of resentment has co-created:

Die ungeheure Arbeit dessen, was von mir „Sittlichkeit der Sitte“ genannt worden ist ... - die eigentliche Arbeit des Menschen an sich selber in der längsten Zeitdauer des Menschengeschlechts, seine ganze *vorhistorische* Arbeit hat hierin ihren Sinn.... (Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral* 293) (“The tremendous labor of that which I have called “morality of mores” ... – the labor performed by man upon himself during the greater part of the existence of the human race, his entire *prehistoric* labor, finds in this its meaning, its justification ...” (Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 59)

Herculine leaves Sara when she learns that an allegedly biological male has to live as a male socially – and hence to stick to a severe set of role expectations. This subjugation under a repressive gender order effects his decision to eventually kill himself, after he had delivered an accusation at the grave of Cardinal Levevre, who had sent the doctors on Herculine to eventually diagnose intersexuality: “I was such a fool to have believed! To have trusted! To have obeyed! To have thought I would have enjoyed this. Who were you

with such a grand stone? [...] How fitting that you lie there and I tread upon your bones” (Bornstein 217).

Butler sees in Herculine’s inability to live the role of what is supposed to be a man as a sign of heterosexist oppression, exercised by a societal order that does not tolerate same sex desire at all: “If Herculine desires a girl, then perhaps there is evidence in hormonal or chromosomal structures or in the anatomical presence of the imperforate penis to suggest a more discrete, masculine sex that subsequently generates heterosexual capacity and desire” (1990, 99).

Butler’s argument is that it, in fact, does not matter that much whether Herculine was a girl/woman, a boy/man, or whether s/he embodied an identity that rejected both allegedly exclusive gender identities. For her, Herculine/Abel was an individual who signified the processes of social inscriptions of a body, which in turn could only be perceived as a body because it was socially produced. This would mean: Herculine has no saying in who s/he is. Instead, society - the norms and values saying that only a man may love and desire a woman, and that only a woman may love and desire a man – instigates and supervises heterosexuality as the normative and exclusively sanctioned framework within which desire is permitted, and which alone determines which romantic relations are positively sanctioned and which are not. But Butler also knows that the search for ‘authenticity,’ in the sense in which Herculine continuously asks herself who she ‘really is,’ is a misleading one. Both the heterosexist paradigm and the search for a ‘true self’ that tries to locate itself either in accordance with or regardless of the socially defined categories of gender and sexuality, are social constructs in which no authentic sense of self can be found:



Whether as a naturalistic paradigm which establishes a causal continuity among sex, gender, and desire, or as an authentic-expressive paradigm in which some true self is said to be revealed simultaneously or successively in sex, gender, and desire, the ‘the old dream of symmetry,’ as Irigaray has called it, is presupposed, reified, and rationalized. (Butler 1990, 22)<sup>162</sup>

Bornstein also criticizes heterosexism, which turns gay men and lesbian women into freaks, and which tries to ‘correct’ transgender people in order to ‘create’ heterosexual relationships between men and transwomen preferring men, respectively: between women and transmen preferring women. Butler and Bornstein both regard drag as a potentially subversive performance confusing the performer’s sexual anatomy, his or her gender identity and the gender he or she performs,<sup>163</sup> in order to challenge and undermine a hierarchical and segregating gender order that does not permit the overlapping of gender identities. As such, drag contributes to the dissolution of an essential model of gender identity:

As much as drag creates a unified picture of ‘woman’ (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience

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<sup>162</sup> Butler here refers to Luce Irigaray’s studies and criticism of Platonic philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis, which the French philosopher describes as the foundation and elaboration of patriarchy, in that the female sex is made similar to the void, the dark and muted receiver of the male phallus as the symbol for enlightenment and knowledge: “Thus, at the age of thirty, married, mother of one, two, three ... children, she has no more goals to pursue that would be acceptable to society. She can only carry on tirelessly with the same task. Perhaps she may have to accept that her husband has a mistress or two? This could lead her in the best of circumstances to reconsider or analyze her relationship to homosexuality. But these are not things one talks about, and it is not even certain that she herself will have the opportunity to say anything about it” (Irigaray 1985, 128).

<sup>163</sup> “The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already different from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance” (Butler 1990, 137).

which are falsely naturalized as a unity though the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. (Butler 1990, 137)

Bornstein agrees with Butler on the oppressiveness of a heterosexual requirement upon society, which is the unconditional requirement to act according to gender roles and gendered identities that support and ensure the endurance of so-called ‘straight’ relationships as the normative pattern for all relationships. Herculine Barbin’s social identity had to be ‘readjusted’ according to her revealed anatomical constituency. The heterosexual parameters placed upon h/er incited her to leave her male lover Sara and lead a life as a man – in which s/he sees him/herself failing: “The incessant struggle between nature and reason exhausts me more and more each day, and drags me with great strides toward the tomb” (Bornstein 218).

With regard to the play’s stage directions, Bornstein’s Doc Grinder seems to almost exactly act according to what Butler wrote about the dissonance of gender identity, gender performance, and sexual anatomy within drag. Doc Grinder has originally been played by Bornstein herself. The character constantly changes his gender appearance from male and female and sometimes remains in an androgynous state. Bornstein instructs in her stage directions for *Hidden: A Gender* the following:

L.C. Doc Grinder is part twentieth century television talk show host, and part nineteenth century medicine side-show barker. It is never clear whether Doc is a man or a woman, and this ambiguity is never acknowledged by Doc him/herself. Doc speaks directly to the audience, and the actor playing Doc is encouraged to ad lib in response to any audience comments. (172)

But Bornstein differs from Butler when it comes to the aspect of identity as a self-referential act. *Gender Trouble* suggests gender identity to be a variable field which can be played with and manipulated at will. What is missing, though, is the aspect of sexual identity, which the body performs out of a creative urge. Via the dance as a theatrical element, Bornstein considers the change from one sexual mode of being to another as an expression of a human being's drives and urges. A human being's change of sex is the expression of a person's wish to be perceived in a gender and sexual mode that he or she affirms on his or her own terms.

The strict rules of social and hence gendered conformity also aim at affecting the play's second character Herman/Kate, the character of a transgender woman who was initially played by female actress Sydney Erskine. Herman/Kate perceives herself as female and actively initiates her research about how to acquire sexual reassignment surgery. On her journey, she is confronted with the others' expressing mockery, not necessarily because she wants the surgery, but rather because of her self-identification as a lesbian. Herman/Kate wants to live as a woman with another woman. Following is an excerpt of a consultation between Herman/Kate and her potential surgeon, Dr. Razor:

Dr. Razor: No fiancé! But you are seeing a man, aren't you?

Herman: No.

Dr. Razor: But you are planning on marrying a man, adopting two-point-three children,

a dog, a third of a cat, and a white picket fence?

Herman: Sometimes I think about a white picket fence. And I have two cats.

Dr. Razor: Two cats! Are you telling me you're planning to become a ... lesbian!?!?

(Bornstein 205)

Dr. Razor is a satirical sketch of surgeons in the tradition of Harry Benjamin, or psychologists in the tradition of Robert Stoller. Benjamin, however, has always been careful not to limit the amount of 'authentic' transsexuals by a too strict categorization as well as by criteria which too narrowly define who qualifies as a transsexual with the need to undergo measurements of physical alterations. At times, his work even resembles Kate Bornstein's theories and practices of a gender-bending behavior, which is represented through a body which shows the physical signs of sexual reassignment surgery and hormonal replacement therapy, but which retains several indicators of the former sexual mode it represented corporeally. A person's sexuality then becomes the playground on which identity becomes a matter of performance: "According to the dictionary, sex is synonymous with gender. But, in actuality, this is not true. [...] 'sex' is more applicable where there is the implication of sexuality, of libido, and of sexual activity. 'Gender' is the nonsexual side of sex" (Benjamin 4).

Bornstein and Benjamin in fact agree on the possibility of detaching the notions of sex and gender, and considering them under different perspectives. In fact, through the consideration of sex as the physical expression of one's desire for sexual recognition serious is the only manner in via which an argument for sexual reassignment can persist. What Benjamin puts in an elaborate academic language, is expressed more bluntly by Bornstein: "... sex is fucking, gender is everything else" (Bornstein 116).

She differs, though, from Benjamin with regard to how she wants gender to be treated. Bornstein imagines a world without gender. For her, gender is an organizing principle for a heteronormative and heterosexist society. Socially inscribed norms demonstrate how a human body is classified into either male or female categories. Any inseparability between gender and sex becomes proof for heterosexism's ongoing validity.<sup>164</sup> Whereas Bornstein wants to keep gender and sex apart from each other, Benjamin wants the opposite. For him, the agenda is a reconciliation of sex and gender: "From all that has been said, it seems evident that the question 'Is the transsexual homosexual?' must be answered 'yes' and 'no.' 'Yes,' if his anatomy is considered, 'no' if his psyche is given preference" (22).

Benjamin differentiates between sex and gender. However, an entire detachment of the two notions is not on his agenda. In contrast, whereas Benjamin considers an eventual reconciliation of sex and gender as a condition for the transsexual's happiness, Bornstein uses elements from Bertolt Brecht's epic theater to underline how a too close interrelation between sex and gender ultimately is detrimental to her characters performed on stage.

During a scene which involves a game show hosted by the barker and show master Doc Grinder, Herman / Kate is still able to counter the tricks Doc Grinder employs in order to test if the candidate is a 'true transsexual' who is able to earn her sexual reassignment surgery through the 'correct' answer to his questions:

Doc Grinder: Hey – he's not a gay man! But that's just the first of our questions.

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<sup>164</sup> "So, look for the oppression, and name it – give it some trouble; its name may well be gender. Please, don't call it "biological sex," or "social gender." Don't call it "sex" at all ...." (Bornstein 116).

The next question is... oh, this is a killer ... Herman, can't you just dress up like a woman, occasionally, like a hobby?

*Canned audience – whoa-oh-oh.*

Herman: It's not the clothes, L.C. – I feel I'm a woman no matter what I'm wearing.

*Canned audience – mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.*

Doc Grinder: Works for me. Tell you what, folks – let's take a short commercial break while we try to figure out his answer to that last question, and then we'll return to play ... *What's My Gender?* (Bornstein 190)

The estrangement effect Brecht employed in his epic theater<sup>165</sup> results from Bornstein's performance of the character Doc Grinder. When she appears as a male show master, for example, or when she mimes the questioning psychotherapist who has to examine whether Kate is eligible for hormone replacement therapy and sexual reassignment surgery, then she subverts male gender performance. However, she incorporates a character that supervises a strict separation of sexual and gender roles and performances. Through her own performance of drag, Bornstein thus ironizes a heteronormative society which Doc Grinder is supposed to represent. Contributive to the realization of the alienation effect is also that Doc Grinder functions both as game show master and sales assistant. Although he himself is a staged result of a drag performance, he begins to sell the aforementioned 'Doc Grinder's Gender Defender,' a potion which is designed to

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<sup>165</sup> "Die Voraussetzung für die Hervorbringung des V-Effekts ist, daß der Schauspieler das, was er zu zeigen hat, mit dem deutlichen Gestus des Zeigens versieht" (Brecht 1967, 341). ("A precondition for the estrangement effect is that the actor/the actress bestows the gesture of demonstration on the character or the object he or she has to show")

preserve a strict division between male and female sexes and gender roles. The product thus appears in stark contrast to Doc Grinder's own gender performance: 'Gender Defender' is supposed to confirm gendered identity, and the sales assistant Doc Grinder advocates gender conformity. But his<sup>166</sup> body represents exactly what 'Gender Defender' fights: gender ambiguity, or more precisely: gender fluidity. Bornstein explains in *Gender Outlaw*: "If ambiguity is a refusal to fall within a prescribed gender code, then fluidity is the refusal to remain one gender or another. Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one of many of a limitless number of genders..." (51 f.). Sexual identity is another word for a person's desire to be perceived as either a male or a female, without the need to conform to actions that are traditionally associated with maleness or femaleness. The desire to be seen as a man or a woman is not in question on Bornstein's stage. But what her play criticizes is the idea that a modification of a person's sex needs to go along with a modification of his or her actions based on his or her sex.

Consequently, Bornstein rejects the idea that there is a specifically essential core within every individual that can be called either male or female. What is meant is that every human being has a sense of the self that, although being a conglomerate of various characters and characteristics, the individual considers as his or her 'true' self, that which serves as the starting point to perceive and consider all incoming any phenomena and to interpret these phenomena in a more or less socially sanctioned manner. This perception of the 'true' self is important for the individual to accept him- or herself as a person, a person that perceives and can say that he or she him- or herself is

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<sup>166</sup> With respect to Kate Bornstein's identity as a transsexed woman, I choose to employ the possessive pronoun often used to denote transgender female identity DVK.

the person who perceives – and is the person he or she can confirm as being him- or herself.<sup>167</sup> This self as a floating, but nonetheless crucial entity is signified and performed in the dance between Herculine/Abel and Herman/Abel. Both change their appearance during this dance. They lose the physical signs of their initial genders, before assuming the bodily traits of the opposite gender.<sup>168</sup> Herculine/Abel and Herman/Kate embrace each other in oblivion of gender roles, gender labels, and of more general categories like time and space.

This does not imply, though, that the release of all sense of identity is the purpose of the dance. Quite the opposite: the loss of former identity is experienced by Herculine/Abel and Herman/Kate in a condition of ecstatic anticipation:

Herman/Kate: I'm to be a woman, I said to the man

I once had been, goodbye he said.

Oh god, I'm disappearing.

Herculine/Abel: It is as though I come apart from

myself. No longer woman, not yet

a man. Standing outside.

Bidding myself adieu. (Bornstein 209)

The dance both perform strongly reminds of the festivities Nietzsche describes as belonging to the Dionysian Greek Orgy, as I mentioned in chapter one. Nietzsche's Dionysian orgy is different from pure Barbarism, as Vattimo had mentioned in his book

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<sup>167</sup> "If my doing is dependent on what is done to me or, rather, the ways in which I am done by norms, then the possibility of my persistence as an "I" depends on my being able to do something with what is done to me" (Butler 2004, 3).

<sup>168</sup> "They have no more identity. Herman becomes One. Herculine becomes Another. They hear each other for the first time, and search for one another" (Bornstein 209).



Dialogue with Nietzsche. Nietzsche's idea of Dionysian ecstasy is not only about forgetting and losing control, as it may seem. Nietzsche's dance is the embodied expression of existential fluidity, to which also gendered and sexed identity belong. Zarathustra's invitation to the girls to continue dancing is accompanied by the words that are directed against notions of stagnation, and which defy any notions of lifeless conservation:

Und mit Thränen im Auge soll er euch um einen Tanz bitten; und ich selber will ein Lied zu seinem Tanze singen: Ein Tanz- und Spottlied auf den Geist der Schwere, meinen allerhöchsten großmächtigen Teufel, von dem sie sagen, dass er ‚der Herr der Welt‘ sei. (Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* 139 f.) (“And with tears in his [a god’s] eyes he shall ask you for a dance, and I myself will sing a song for his dance: a dancing and mocking song on the spirit of gravity, my supreme and most powerful devil, of whom they say that he is ‘the master of the world’”; Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 108)

Rejecting gravity is a metaphor of rejecting fixed notions that allude to an alleged essence behind our notions and concepts. Gendered and sexual identities are some of these notions and concepts that tend to be perceived essentially, hence ontologically. Performing a dance to defy notions of gravity thus eventually means defying the idea of an essence that we can find behind gendered and sexual identities. With regard to the words of Nietzsche scholars Turner and Staught, performing the dance means defying stagnation and bodily incarceration: the incarceration of the individual, based on his or her physicality. Theatrical and filmic enactment thus means to “develop a notion of

practice which transforms and transpose these dichotomies through the notion of embodied practices” (Stauth/Turner 21).

Nietzsche’s artist is not an autonomous subject. But that does not mean that his or her identity does not matter. The artist losing his or her subjectivity rejects his or her condition of being subjugated under the laws and institutions of society, hence under the laws and institutions that also govern and supervise gender roles and sexual identities. Of course he or she still has an identity – and the awareness of this identity is what distinguishes him or her from the adherents of the so-called ‘Barbarian orgy.’<sup>169</sup> The artist perceives his or her identity as fluid, in the sense of fluctuating, and the fact that the artist is able to perceive this self as being fluent prevents him or her from turning into a barbarian. But most importantly, this self-identity the artist keeps – and that is where I see the non-essentialist conservation process, as I have outlined it further above, enabled – is not only manifested through the body; it is the body, and it is the body’s well-being.

This idea of the body’s well-being is by all means meant physically. Chapter one has already referred to this condition, when Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* discusses in length the importance of good nutrition and of physical exercise. As Stauth and Turner confirm:

The programme which follows from Nietzsche would not be a general programme for society, but again would involve an emphasis on the social individual of finding good food, congenial music and supportive social relations in order to develop themselves over a life span. (22)

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<sup>169</sup> “Granted, it is a “regressive“ phenomenon, in which man returns to the level of the tiger and the ape“ (Vattimo 105).

This physical well-being is the preliminary position an individual has to assume in order to be called an individual. But an individual in a Nietzschean sense does not perceive him- or herself as an essentialist and thus a categorically limited being. Because of his or her construction out of the ever-fluent forces of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, as we have learnt in chapter one, the Nietzschean individual is literally trans-gendered. That does not mean that identity is arbitrary. Both Apollonian ‘male’ drives and Dionysian ‘female’ drives persist in all human beings at the same time. But eventually, one drive prevails for a human being, regardless of his or her biological sex. Most of the times, the prevalence of the male drive coincides with a sexual identity perceived as male, as does the female drive with a perceived female physicality. For the transsexual character this is not the case. Here, the female drive is opposed to a male sexual body or the male to a female physicality.

The transsexual’s suffering under this so-called ‘mismatch’ between perceived sexual drives and assigned sex at birth emerges from a socially construed opposition between a person’s sexual self-reference and expected gender behaviors. The urge to alter the body’s physical appearance results out of what Nietzsche has called the “will to create” (1978, 86) and is therefore an aspect of selfhood. But in order to be able to express and channel these drives and urges, a vocabulary is needed that the human being learns through socialization and the correspondence with the other. Although the transsexual’s urge to alter his or her body in order to mediate his or her desire to appear as male or female, this urge is never monolithic. Jacques Lacan describes drives and urges the human being experiences as socially designed products:

The *montage* of the drive is a *montage* which, first, is presented as having neither head nor tail – in the sense in which one speaks of *montage* in a surrealist collage. If we bring together the paradoxes [...] at the level of *Drang [urge]*, at that of the object, at that at the aim of the drive, I think that the resulting image would show the working of a dynamo connected up to a gas-tap [...]. (1981, 169)

In order not to fully submerge into the social other, the creative human being needs to consider his or her body as a work of art, which accordingly emerges and becomes a point of reference through performance. Performance becomes a site of anticipation that mediates between the drives and urges and the social other.

Herculine/Abel's and Herman/Kate's dance expresses this very anticipation and the desire to express what both perceive to be their identities. As such, their physicality is important, and as such, it is also important that their physicality expresses 'proper' sexual self-identification. Herculine/Abel, finally Abel only, fails not because he has changed her body. Rather, he fails because he did not have the opportunity to self-administer his own life based on his sexual identity. Herman/Kate, finally Kate is only a little bit better off: Similar to Bornstein, Kate decides to become a 'Gender Outlaw:' "Well, I used to have a cock, and now I don't. I have a cunt. And I still fuck women, and women still fuck me. If the right man came along, I might fuck him" (Bornstein 222).

Kate Bornstein is definitely writing in the pursuit of a feminist agenda – a feminist agenda that explicitly includes transsexed women, and of course transsexed men. As Patrick Califia has written before, trans-individuals perform, via the transitioning body, what de Beauvoir means by the claim that women are not born women, but rather become women. But transsexuals go one step further: they perform the becoming of women via

their bodies – something that raises suspicion among those feminists – but not only among those – who pursue the social components of gender identity almost, if not entirely, exclusively, and hence subsume sex under the social category of gender.

### **Vanishing of Sexual Identity: Bertolt Brecht and the New German Cinema**

The summarization of sex under gender is most explicitly elaborated within politically left-winged intellectual and artistic circles. As we will see in chapter four, the New German Cinema considers camp as a politically effective expression of gender subversion and social challenge, most effectively in the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder or Ulrike Ottinger:<sup>170</sup> Camp, cross-dressing, and transvestitism are representations of an enactment that attempts to challenge the potentially repressive societal orders, to which also belong the expectations and social distinctions between the male and the female gender. One of the most impressive films that are often considered camp is Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Warnung vor einer Heiligen Nutte* (*Beware of a Holy Whore*). Via the usage of excessive make-up also on men, the representation of men clad in tight leather, and enactments in a highly stylized filmic environment, Fassbinder plays with images of American pop art and transfers it into contemporary West Germany. In this sense, Jane Shattuc relates Fassbinder to Andy Warhol: "Warhol's dispassionate and typically voyeuristic chronicling of a star's death makes the unusually self-conscious acknowledgment that he and Rainer Werner Fassbinder were both 'strange'" (84).

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<sup>170</sup> Caryl Flinn, for example, speaks about „... examining Monika Trent's and Ulrike Ottinger's representations of female and other nonmale bodies as they bring fantasy, humor, and eroticism into explorations of postwar German film culture“ (22).

All efforts to undermine gender notwithstanding, Fassbinder's orchestration of desires deal with sexual orientation, not sexual identity. Fassbinder's characters especially in *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* (*In a Year with Thirteen Moons*) and *Warnung vor einer Heiligen Nutte* (*Beware of a Holy Whore*) 'queer,' but they are either bi- or homosexual, albeit never transsexual. Erwin/Elvira Weishaupt – the naming significantly changes during *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* – is portrayed as a transsexual woman, but turns out to be a bi- or homosexual male who changed his sex because of an unhappy love to his admired Anton Saitz. Transsexuality – or with regard to a sociological terminology: transgenderism – has no source within the body, nor in the corporeal body either.

Interestingly, this rooting of all transsexed issues almost, if not entirely, exclusively within society, is what links Rainer Werner Fassbinder to Bertolt Brecht. Even though Fassbinder staunchly denied being influenced by Brecht – Caryl Flinn reports about "Fassbinder's well-known criticism of Brecht for the latter's purported disregard of emotional response and identification" (87) – his conception of camp for the purpose of social criticism make him and Brecht superb comrades.

Looking back to the editorial letter Alice Schwarzer wrote in *Emma* (1984), we remember her statement that in a world that bears any rigid distinctions between gender and class, transsexuality would not exist. While Schwarzer nonetheless tries to develop an understanding for transsexual individuals and summarizes them amongst her concept of feminists and feminist supporters, Janice G. Raymond and Catherine Millot, for example, vehemently deny that transsexuals can be feminists, as they allegedly insist on what feminism, especially second wave feminism, rejects: that there would be a sexual

identity underlying all individual traits and characteristics. Millot criticizes that “transsexuals who claim to possess a female soul imprisoned in a man’s body are perhaps the only ones who can boast a monolithic sexual identity, one that admits of neither doubts nor questions” (15). Raymond accordingly has problems with the term of gender, by saying that it evokes the idea of an existing gender essence, an idea which she sees vivid in her perceived ‘transsexual agenda.’ “The word *gender* has certain problems for the feminist critic. It gives the impression that there is a fixed set of psychosocial conditions that determine gender identity and role” (9).

If there is something like a transsexual, the task for this person cannot be to alter the body, since that would be the phenomenal indication of a psychosis.<sup>171</sup> A discomfort with one’s gender is, in fact, not so much the result of an ‘inner self’ within the human being that demands to ‘come out,’ but the sign of a repressive social order that needs to be changed.

Traits on German theater that follow this line of a sociological point of view go together with those that emphasize the more psychological, if not also psychotic aspect of individuals’ gendered self-perception and comportment. Of course, both programs have in common that they deal with and expound the problems of a socio-cultural discourse that defines and delimits the options of an ‘acceptable’ gender behavior and self-conception. In addition, both programs have in common that they tend to ‘explain away’ the legitimate existence of transsexuals by underlying that their existence is just another

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<sup>171</sup> “It should nonetheless be emphasized that the first cases of transsexuality to be reported by psychiatrists and sexologists appear to have been cases of psychosis. Lacan argued the existence, in psychosis, of a clear tendency towards transsexuality” (Millot 26).

outcome of socially induced, if not supported, solutions that prevent a liberalization of people based on their perceived identities.

An example for the sociological direction is Bertolt Brecht's *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan* (*The Good Person of Szechwan*). There is no evidence in the scholarly works dealing with Bertolt Brecht, nor is there any proof in Brecht's writing, that the sex worker Shen Te is supposed to represent a transsexed character. However, time and again she performs acts of gender switching, not only gender bending, which indeed receives a transsexed connotation once she pretends to be her own male cousin, Shui Ta, while at the same time being pregnant.

As we find out, Shen Te performs these acts of switching genders not because of personal needs, but rather because of the social and economic conditions under which she is forced to lead her new tobacco store. This keeps up central theses from chapter two, in connection with the potential conclusion that transsexuality is a condition that can go away once the repressive social roles regarding gender identity and gender expectations are abolished.

### **Gender Switching out of Necessity: Brecht's *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan***

Three deities arrive at the Chinese town of Szechwan, which has been struck by poverty for a considerably long time. The citizens tell themselves the story that their worries and sorrows have been heard by the gods and that they were about to send of the mightiest deities to them, in order to bring release to the town. However, when they finally arrive, no one wants to host them and provide them a place to spend the night –



save for the impoverished sex worker Shen Te, who grants them hospice. Shen Te wants to be a good person, something she assures to the deities, but at the same time admits that unfortunate economic conditions often prevent the possibility for the human being to actually do good deeds – or to live *morally*:

Erleuchtete, ich bin gar nicht sicher, ob ich so gut bin. Ich möchte es wohl sein, nur, wie soll ich meine Miete bezahlen? So will ich es euch denn gestehen: ich verkaufe mich, um leben zu können, aber selbst damit kann ich mich nicht durchbringen, da es so viele gibt, sie dies tun müssen. Ich bin zu allem bereit, aber wer ist das nicht? (Brecht 1989, 184)

(I am by no means sure that I am good. I should certainly like to be, but how am I to pay the rent? Let me admit: I sell myself in order to live, and even so I cannot manage, for there are so many forced to do this. I would take on anything, but who would not (Brecht 1985, 10)

The deities give her an amount over one thousand dollar, which enables Shen Te to quit her job as a sex worker and to start her own business as a tobacco saleswoman and to finally be able to start ‘good things:’ “Gestern bin ich hier eingezogen, und ich hoffe, jetzt viel Gutes tun zu können” (Brecht 1989, 185.). (“I moved in here yesterday, and now I hope to be able to do a great deal of good” (Brecht 1985, 12).)

Doing good things – for the socially impoverished town of Sezuan, this means to support people financially, with food and/or harborage. Shen Te is doing exactly this, but people want more: They demand from Shen Te support that brings her at the brink of bankruptcy. Shen Te realizes:

Sie sind schlecht. / Sie sind niemandes Freund. Sie gönnen keinem einen Topf Reis. Sie brauchen alles selber. Wer könnte sie schelten? (1989, 187 f.)

(The Good / Cannot remain good for long in our country / Where cupboards are bare, housewives start to squabble. / Oh, the divine commandments / Are not much use against hunger. (1985, 49))

Already before the business has been started, Shen Te is facing unpaid bills from the carpenter who has provided the shelves for the tobacco store, as well as entire families who are using her shop as their home, for they would have no other place to stay.<sup>172</sup>

It is not in Brecht's theatrical intention to present individuals in their greediness towards one or more of their fellows. As Shen Te announces in her aforementioned speech towards the audience, people react recklessly towards the other because economic conditions force them to – and the only way for Shen Te to survive and to prosper on her business is to turn into a businesswoman that only decides according to her own profits.

Or, in that case: into a businessman. Shen Te leaves the tobacco shop – respectively: the stage – and returns as her own cousin Shui Ta. Whereas Shen Te's characterization was that of a Samaritan woman who is unable to tolerate impoverishment around herself, even if that means sliding into her own economic misery, Shui Ta is hardhearted, throws out the people seeking harborage in the tobacco store, and introduces a strict regimen of

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<sup>172</sup> “Die Frau *verlegen* zu Shen Te: Das ist mein Bruder Wung und die Schwägerin. *Zu den beiden*: Schimpft nicht und setzt euch ruhig in die Ecke, damit ihr Fräulein Shen Te, unsere alte Freundin, nicht stört. *Zu Shen Te*: Ich glaube, wir müssen die beiden aufnehmen, da die Schwägerin im fünften Monat ist. Oder bist du nicht der Ansicht“ (Brecht 1989, 1989)? (“The woman, *embarrassed*: This is my brother Wung and my sister-in-law. *To the two*: Stop nagging and sit quietly out of the way, and don't bother our old friend Miss Shen Teh. *To Shen Teh*: We ought to take them both in, I think, what with my sister-in-law being four months gone. Or are you against it?”; Brecht 1985, 16 f.)

profit calculations, without any consideration of personal hardships. But again, it is not in Brecht's theatrical intentions to portray a single individual in his hardheartedness, but rather to show what is necessary to do in times of economic shortages and within a society that governs and supervises the orders in which these hardships persist:

Herr, um diesen kleinen Laden zu retten, den meine Kusine als ein Geschenk der Götter betrachtet, bin ich bereit, bis an die äußerste Grenze des gesetzlich Erlaubten zu gehen. Aber Härte und Verschlagenheit helfen nur Gegen die Unteren, denn die Grenzen sind klug gezogen. Mir geht es wie dem Mann, der mit den Ratten fertig geworden ist, aber dann kam der Fluß! (Brecht 1989, 202)

(To save this little shop, officer, which my cousin regards as a gift of the gods, I am prepared to go to the utmost limits of the law. But toughness and duplicity will serve only against one's inferiors, for those limits have been cleverly defined. I am in the position of a man who has just got the rats out his cellar, when along come the floods. (Brecht 1985, 29))

We are tempted to see Shen Te's appearance as her own male cousin Shui Ta as drag, and in a semiotic sense this is the case. But that does not mean that Shui Ta is a product of an enactment of drag that is indicating a staged challenge of social structures. Of course, Brecht wants to present the split-gendered character of Shen Te/Shui Ta as the expression of the impossibility of a character to do things beneficiary for the environment and to be economically successful at the same time.<sup>173</sup> But Brecht does not show this task to challenge social norms and requirements, its oppressive social and economic functions

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<sup>173</sup> "The Brechtian theatre's most fundamental principle is its commitment to social change. The dramaturgical principle most basic to fulfilling this commitment is, in turn, that the theatre must attempt to present society and human nature as changeable" (Rouse 28).

directly within a single character – rather, this is shown through the interactions performed on stage, both between actors/actresses and between actors/actresses and the audience: “Brecht is quite specific in his demand that production must shift focus away from the characters themselves to what happens between them” (Rouse 28).

In the middle of the play, the actress playing Shen Te appears in front of the curtain, indicates the switch into the male identity of Shui Ta by holding the mask identifying him in front of her face and states:

Um zu einem Mittagessen zu kommen / Braucht es der Härte, mit der sonst  
Reiche gegründet werden. Ohne zwölf zu zertreten / Hilft keiner einem Elenden.  
(Brecht 1989, 220)

(In order to win one’s mid-day meal / One needs the toughness which elsewhere  
builds empires. / Except twelve others be trampled down / The unfortunate cannot  
be helped. (Brecht 1985, 48))

Shen Te wants to be a caring person and thus is about to ruin herself financially, as people are taking advantage of her. She supports entire families who populate her shop and nearly ends up starved herself.<sup>174</sup> In order to be able to be safe and support herself, she appears as her cousin Shui Ta, who appears to be the opposite of her: reckless, entirely business minded, and radically adhering to an order of uninhibited capitalism. This helps the enterprise, for sure: The shop soon gives way to a prospering tobacco factory. The ninth scene in *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan* is introduced accordingly:

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<sup>174</sup> “Wang: ... Jeden Morgen teilt sie Reis aus, dafür geht mehr als die Hälfte des Verdienstes drauf, das könnt Ihr glauben“ (Brecht 1989, 211)! (“Wang: ... Every morning she distributes rice; believe me, it must cost more than half her earnings!”; 1985, 211)

Der Laden ist zu einem Kontor mit Klubsesseln und schönen Teppichen geworden. Es regnet. Shui Ta, nunmehr dick, verabschiedet das Teppichhändlerpaar. Die Shin schaut amüsiert zu. Sie ist auffallend neu gekleidet. (Brecht 1989, 259)

*(The shop has been turned into an office, with easy chairs and fine carpets. It is raining. Shui Ta, now become fat, is showing out the old couple of carpet-dealers. (1985, 88))*

Shui Ta's excessive weight evokes a two-way process for interpretation. On a metaphorical level, the enlarged body symbolizes the increased wealth the capitalist accumulates. But on a concrete, corporeal level, this seeming 'obesity' is nothing else than Shen Te's pregnancy, as the tobacco store's landlord, Mrs. Shin knows. She is the only stage character who is aware that Shen Te and Shui Ta is one and the same person:

Sie sind im siebenten Monat! Die Aufregungen sind nichts für Sie. Seien Sie froh, daß Sie mich haben. (1989, 259)

(You're six months gone! You mustn't let yourself get worked up. Lucky for you you've got me. Everyone can do with a helping hand. (1985, 89))

To anyone else, Shui Ta and Shen Te remain not only different characters, but also different persons that are entirely opposite characters, until the final reveals their identity. And in a sense, this is exactly what Brecht intends to show with his epic theater: the contradictions within a character, as these contradictions are the result of the human being living in a society that actually hinders the human welfare, well-being, and self-fulfillment. In his *Kleines Organon für das Theater* he writes: "Die Einheit der Figur wird ... durch die Art gebildet, in der sich ihre einzelnen Eigenschaften

widersprechen“ (1965, 404). (“A character’s unity is ... construed by the manner in which its single characteristics contradict”)

This contradiction in personality traits as they are influenced by the respective societal order now receive an interesting corporeal twist, when Brecht not only allows gender bending on stage, but also adds an anatomical component to it. Regarding the enactment of cross-gendering on stage, Brecht writes that “von einer Person andern Geschlechts gespielt, wird die Figur ihr Geschlecht deutlicher verraten, von einem Komiker gespielt, tragisch oder komisch, neue Aspekte gewinnen“ (---, 406). (“played by a person of the opposite sex, the character will reveal its sex more distinctly, and, if played by a comic, tragically or comically, will gain new aspects”)

Brecht’s twist resembles what Butler’s threefold drag performance demonstrates: the distinction between gender identity, performed gender, and sexual anatomy. Brecht has a woman on stage playing a woman playing a man. However, Brecht’s idea about drag differs in a very crucial manner from Butler’s notion of subversive drag.

For Butler, drag may as well reinforce the social order’s validity rather than subvert it.<sup>175</sup> Shen Te analogously adapts to the societal structures she lives in. adoption to society’s structures. When Shui Ta is put on trial before the three gods for allegedly having kidnapped Shen Te, Shui Ta finally collapses and confesses his identity. He tears down the mask and his male costume. The drag is resolved, and Shen Te announces that mask and costume of the ‘opposite’ sex have been a means for her to deal with the social contradictions that prevent her from being successful as a woman:

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<sup>175</sup> “The ‘performative’ dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms. In this sense, then it is not only that there are constraints to performativity; rather, constraint calls to be rethought as the very condition of performativity” (Butler 1993, 94 f.).

Ja, ich bin es. Shui Ta and Shen Te, ich bin beides. / Euer einstiger Befehl / Gut zu sein und doch zu leben / Zerriß mich wie ein Blitz in zwei Hälften. Ich / Weiß nicht, wie es kam: gut sein zu andern / Und zu mir konnte ich nicht zugleich. Andern und mir zu helfen, war mir zu schwer. (Brecht 1989, 275)

(Yes, it is me. Shui Ta and Shen Teh, I am both of them. / Your original order / To be good while yet surviving / Split me like lightning in two people. I / cannot tell what occurred: goodness to others / And to myself could not both be achieved. / To serve both self and others I found too hard. (Brecht 1985, 105))

Hedwig Fraunhofer observes that in Brecht's plays, "capitalism is feminized by being associated with *prostitution*" (120). Brecht's *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan* is a play with gender roles and gender norms that as a play questions the social status quos legitimacy. Not only is it impossible for a human being living in a capitalist society to be good and prosperous. It is especially impossible for a woman. When She Te works as a street walker or changes her gendered appearance in order to be a businessman, she cannot do other than fail in the eyes of her social surroundings, when she tries to do good deeds. Unlike Butler's conception of drag in *Gender Trouble*, Shen Te's appearance as Shui Ta is not a challenge of a social order, but the expression of a desperate attempt to live in it. However, in a society like the one sketched in *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan*, people cannot be man and woman at the same time.

One interpretation that has been taken from Brechtian analyses like that and transformed into the New German Cinema reads as follows: Drag must be a means of social challenge again, and for that it has to show that notions like man and woman are *per se* notions of social suppression. This, of course, certainly does not help the

transgendered individuals, who in fact are, in difference to Shen Te, doing more than 'just' doing drag when they request sexual change.

The dramatic irony which Bertolt Brecht's *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan* includes is that the spectator immediately knows that Shui Ta is nothing else but a performance of conventional maleness by Shen Te. It would be entirely against the elements of a Brechtian epic theater to let the actress immerse into her character, in Shen Te's case: to turn entirely into Shui Ta. Certainly, Brecht's *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan* participates in debates about sex and gender enactment. Brecht's actor or actress refers to the gender represented, rather than 'being' it. In fact, the latter holds true for his entire theatrical art. Regarding the actor's or actresses' relation to her or his character performed on stage, Brecht decides:

Da er sich mit der Person, die er darstellt, nicht identifiziert, kann er ihr gegenüber einen bestimmten Standpunkt wählen. Seine Meinung über sie verraten, den Zuschauer, der auch seinerseits nicht eingeladen wurde, sich zu identifizieren, zur Kritik der dargestellten Person auffordern. (1967, 346) ("Since he does not identify with the person portrayed, he is able to put himself into a certain position towards him or her. To reveal his opinion, and to invite the spectator, who was not encouraged to identify either, to criticize the person portrayed")

Through the mask, the actress playing Shen Te indicates gender bending not as subversive performance, but rather as a necessity for the female in order to economically succeed in a society that strictly associates different role expectations and values to the genders recognized as either male or female. Since her switch between genders is reactive



to society's rules, Shen Te remains faithful to and supports the social order that suppresses her.

William T. Vollmann (2010) extensively wrote about the Japanese Noh-Theater, even though he admitted that he had no knowledge of Japanese language and no profound proficiency in the scholarship of dance and performance either. The question he pursues throughout his book *Kissing the Mask* is what it means to perceive someone as a woman. Vollmann agrees that the question what makes a woman depends on what society identifies and labels as woman. However: "The unanswerable question, 'What is a woman?' can be approximated, 'What manifests a woman?' – in other words, how does somebody of either sex express, we might as well say, *herself* in such a way that we perceive or interpret her femininity?" (22) This may sound redundant when in fact it does not. I interpret Vollmann as follows: In order to represent oneself as a woman or a man, one has to desire to be perceived as a woman or a man. Nietzsche's references to desires and needs include the desire to create an image of oneself that society may most likely perceive in a distinct manner. With regard to gender, this desire to create would mean the desire to create an image of oneself that society most likely perceives as either male or female.<sup>176</sup>

Shen Te's gender swap confirms that no gender performance can persist on a continuous basis if the societal other does not acknowledge it. She does not appear in male drag because she feels like a man, but rather out of a necessity to achieve the others'

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<sup>176</sup> Vollman refers to the mask that is a crucial component about Japanese Noh theater, which he devotes his entire book to: "A mask is a lie, of course, but by virtue of being so, it leaves behind many of the flesh's native-born accidents, asserting a specific being, and hence, if you believe that we can make our destinies, truth" (383).

approval, in order to have a chance in being economically successful. For this purpose, she has to be perceived as a male rather than as a female. Shen Te's assumption of a male 'alter ego' unveils a sexist, bi-gendered society. However, her performances do not subvert it. The figure of Shui Ta is a consequential appropriation to a society that does not guarantee or even pursue gender equality. Nobody believes in Shen Te's abilities as a businesswoman, but everybody is ready to acknowledge her in the role as a sex worker.

Shen Te enacts what Judith Butler calls *gender performativity*: a repetition and representation of expected enactments, each tied to a specific gender.<sup>177</sup> Through her character, Brecht shows how society determines what a man and a woman are supposed to do and what the influence of either men or women in public is supposed to be for that very society. The latter creates one type of gendered persona and prevents acknowledgment of the other. To show how these ratified 'social persona' merge is one of the epic theater's purposes.

*Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan* exposes a heteronormative social order that provides a platform for economic injustices suppressing its citizens, especially women. I also chose to work with Brecht in the context of my dissertation because several of his plays include a homoerotic and queering subtext.<sup>178</sup> Accordingly, they challenge the

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<sup>177</sup> "Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint, is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity" (Butler 1993, 95).

<sup>178</sup> "As one of Brecht's tactics for representing homosexuality, he ducks under the aegis of already canonical playwrights who depicted relationships between men. *Edward II* draws, of course, on Christopher Marlowe's *Edward the Second*, although Brecht and his collaborator, Lion Feuchtwanger, revise the Renaissance play more significantly than has been previously noted" (Phillips 71).

heteronormative order responsible for discrimination on the basis of class, but also of gender identity and sexual orientation.<sup>179</sup>

Brecht relates to the problems arising from a strictly bi-gendered society without openly questioning the latter. While his critique on its economic inequalities and injustices becomes explicit, his criticism on gender inequality remains rather implicit. However, his view upon a gender-discriminating society that draws with itself a number of economical inequalities finds itself again in feminist writings. We are even able to draw links to Judith Butler and her take on drag as a performance that is able to undermine heteronormativity, heterosexism and hence gendered inequalities: “This critical task presumes ... that to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relation of domination. It offers the possibility of a repetition of the law which is not its consolidation, but its displacement” (1990, 30).

Shen Te performs drag, too, but her repetition of heteronormativity does not serve the ‘displacement’ Butler writes about. But it is important, on behalf of the theatergoer, to avoid Shen Te’s resignation at the end of the play. Moreover, Brecht seems to suggest resuming the performance of drag outside of the theater, albeit now under more subversive presumptions. This may include an expression of women’s desire to be publicly recognized as women equal to men, with drag now being the mode to express this desire. The body becomes the site for social inscriptions, but also a medium to express desires physically.

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<sup>179</sup> Phillips explains Brecht’s lack of openness in his writings with regard to homosexuality or drag with the emerging threat of the Third Reich that strictly persecuted homoerotic tendencies, although they most certainly played a larger role within the NSDAP leadership: “At the same time Brecht was writing *In the Jungle* (1921-1922), the streets of Munich were already swarming with Hitler’s Brownshirts. ... In 1920 the Nazis in Munich beat up the homosexual researcher Magnus Hirschfeld and boasted about it in their newspapers ...” (86).

Nietzsche's body as "a great reason, a plurality with one sense" (1978, 34) perceives itself mainly because of the emotions evoked in and by it, though the experiences made in exchange with the 'outside world,' its social surroundings. Regarding the manners in which to gain and regain creative energy, or creative potential, Nietzsche suggests in *Ecce Homo* that the person listen to music, which Nietzsche associated with Greek Dionysian excess:

Ich sage noch ein Wort für die ausgesuchtesten Ohren: was *ich* eigentlich von der Musik will. Dass sie heiter und tief ist wie ein Nachmittag im Oktober. Dass sie eigen, ausgelassen, zärtlich, ein kleines süßes Weib von Niedertracht und Anmut ist. (290) ("I shall say another word for the most selected ears: what I really want from music. That it be cheerful and profound like an afternoon in October. That it be individual, frolicsome, tender, a sweet small woman full of beastliness and charm" (251)

The 'beastliness' Nietzsche writes about and that I have referred to the first chapter is a metaphor that expresses creativity out of the 'fervent will to create' and thus out of desire. 'Beastliness' draws on the ability to forget and thus on the bliss out of the rupture.<sup>180</sup> At first instance, this means that the creativity of the human being is marked by the sensual impulses he or she receives, and that he or she reworks and develops into the manners and styles he or she perceives the world. Crucial for Nietzsche is the awareness of a healthy and strong body – not only in metaphorical terms, but also in the literal sense of the word. In that the physical body is both the site and reference of desire.

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<sup>180</sup> "The figure of the sovereign individual makes its lone appearance in Nietzsche's corpus on the section of the *Genealogy* that immediately follows the one identifying forgetting as an active force" (Davis Acampora 39).

On a gender level, the recourse on bliss means that one can only apply and cultivate a gendered terminology of someone *desires to be perceived* either as a man or a woman. Only when the person refers to himself as a man and is acknowledged in that perception through the other can he construe the sexual category ‘male’ and draft gendered categories of maleness and masculinity. Likewise, only when a person refers to herself as a woman and is acknowledged in that perception through the other can she construe the sexual category ‘female’ and draft gendered categories of femaleness and femininity. The aspect of the social aspect plays an indispensable role. Self-references and –perceptions are impossible without the so-called other, which the human being becomes aware of through language: “Hooking up to the other is not alien ... to the essence of speech. Without doubt, speech is mediation, mediation between subject and other, as it implicates this coming into being in this very mediation” (Lacan 1988, 48). Nietzsche’s aesthetics acknowledges this ‘other,’ along with the condition that the human being wills, needs, desires, and longs.<sup>181</sup> In other words, Nietzsche acknowledges that the human being seeks pleasure, but that the human being needs language and mediation in order to refer to the pursuit of pleasure. This pursuit relies on social interaction, but if the outcome is the submission under the other, pleasure turns into what Nietzsche calls resistance. Shen Te meets resistance in Sezuan’s population. Her desire to define her own perception of selfhood is denied recognition. But Shen Te reacts with resistance herself. She adjusts to a resistant society through conformist drag. She acknowledges the ‘other,’

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<sup>181</sup> “Wir haben kein Recht darauf, irgend worin *einzel*n zu sein: wir dürfen weder einzeln irren, noch einzeln die Wahrheit treffen. Vielmehr mit der Nothwendigkeit, mit der ein Baum seine Früchte trägt, wachsen aus uns unsere Gedanken, unsre Werthe...” (Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral*, 248). (“We have no right to *isolated* acts of any kind: we may not make isolated errors or hit upon isolated truths. Rather do our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit – related and each with an affinity to each ...”; Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 16)

but neglects the input of her own urges and desires. Nietzsche's expression of 'beastliness' has no room in Sezuan.

Nietzsche fosters that gendered and sexual categories are a product of socially mediated desires that help constitute ideas of selfhood especially when he writes about women. This often reads as misogyny. Jennifer Ham observes that Nietzsche often relates women to animals and states that out of these comparison many misogynist interpretations have been resulting – though that may not necessarily be the only possibility to read Nietzsche's texts: "The beginnings of an understanding of Nietzsche's poetic overstatements about animals and women lie in an appreciation of his overall conception of the animality of the human being, both male and female" (194).

Certainly, Nietzsche does not argue against a categorical gender order. For him, there are men and women who each have sexual and gendered identities that are different from, but nonetheless unthinkable without each other. Time and again, Nietzsche appears to reinforce and hence to play with essentializing stereotypes separating men and women. For example, in *Menschliches, Allzu Menschliches* (*Human, All too Human*) he writes regarding the relationships between men and women:

Eine Ehe, in der Jedes durch das Andere ein individuelles Ziel erreichen will, hält gut zusammen, zum Beispiel wenn die Frau durch den Mann berühmt, der Mann durch die Frau beliebt werden will. (269) ("A marriage in which each wants to attain an individual goal through the other holds together well, for example, when the woman wants to be famous through the man, or the man popular through the other"; 198).

The mutual attention given and maintained by man and woman in the most traditionally institutionalized bond seems to rest on a perceived difference between man and woman, and it is here where Nietzsche tampers with the abyss of misogyny – however, without falling into it: “Das vollkommene Weib ist ein höherer Typus des Menschen, als der vollkommene Mann: auch etwas viel selteneres” (Menschliches, Allzu Menschliches 265). (“The perfect woman is the higher type of human than the perfect man, and also something much more rare”; Human, All too Human 195). While this may read like a restrictive separation between men and women and a document of gender discrimination for both women and men, the reader needs to keep in mind that Nietzsche speaks in metaphorical terms and hence sees men and women in themselves as works of art which reflect the societies in which and through which they were ‘created.’<sup>182</sup>

If women and men, as Nietzsche suggests, are contingent constructions regarding the phenomenological categories through which they are perceived, then this means that the idea of men and women as being two entirely separate sexes is itself a product of a temporal social agreement. Nietzsche’s aesthetics therefore suggests that metaphorically called ‘male’ and ‘female’ drives persist in both men and women at the same time. The fact that we perceive a person as either ‘male’ or ‘female’ is then because we have learned certain patterns of perception through society, and masculinity as well as

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<sup>182</sup> Kristen Brown embodies Nietzsche’s theory of a reciprocal influence between self and surroundings in the Western contexts, much as Nietzsche often opposed German cultures to Italian and favored the latter. Western societies like the German one function on the Foucauldian dogmas of ‘discipline and punishment,’ dogmas that inform the self about which sexual and gendered expressions are allowed and which are rejected as being ‘abnormal.’ Hence, every society carries within its values what a legitimate man or a legitimate woman are and whether these categories allow identities ‘in-between’ or not: “This ongoing reciprocal movement within and across the planes of corporeal punishment, conscience, and human being’s idea of self points to social influences participating in the formation of meaning and its physical infestation in people’s bodies. It points to a relationship between idea and body, and indicates that only provisional borders separate them. It points to an idea-body integration” (7).

femininity are performance games that a person plays when the person either wants to be perceived as male or female or feels that he or she is supposed to be perceived in one way or the other.<sup>183</sup> One can as well say that masculinity and femininity are pretend games. In consequence, if society allows the pretend game more for one sex (female) rather than for the other (male), this means that women are allowed more occasions in which they can explicitly refer to this pretend game through masquerade.

When Nietzsche thus seems to engage in misogynist writing and compares women as animals, this rather means that Nietzsche does not derogate women's value, but rather exercises criticism towards a society that encourages, if not even enforces the strict separation of sexual and gendered identities and assigns unequal values to them.<sup>184</sup> British philosopher Nick Land reads Nietzsche against Schopenhauer, and given that for Schopenhauer "woman is matter, formless and unrepresentable, arousing and thus tormenting", and that "everything about her is pretense, deception, alteration, unlocalizable irrational attraction" (248), Nietzsche in fact beats Schopenhauer with his own weapons: If women indeed were more 'irrational,' then that would mean that women were more closely familiar with what Haraway calls 'worldliness,' her concept of perceiving the world metaphorically, which again is itself "irrational."

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<sup>183</sup> Thomas Brobjer states that the difference between men and woman for Nietzsche is not categorical, but rather an expression of gradual distinctions: "The fundamental difference between man and woman in this second sense is that woman is *more* animal than man" (183).

<sup>184</sup> Vanessa Lemm even speaks about the animal trope as a symbol for the cultural memory that enables the human being to be creative in the first place: "Life is historical through and through because it is forgetful through and through. The perspective of animal forgetfulness reveals that memory is an artistic force (*Kunsttrieb*), and that historiography must therefore be understood as a work of art (*Kunsttrieb*) rather than as science, concerned with interpretations rather than with the factual representations of the past" (7 f.).



When Nietzsche speaks about women as ‘less involved by nature’ in the worldly states of affairs, this is most of all a critique of the society defining the alleged ‘nature’ of woman (and thus also of man), which eventually confines the sexes in mutual separation and hostility: “If the ideology of dualism overpowers an individual, he or she is endlessly trapped in cycles of self-hatred and self-division. This leads to the fragmentation of one’s creative energy. An individual’s life becomes more limited, if it is not completely impaired” (Schutte 5).

Attempts to counter a debilitating effect on gender and sex can nonetheless not neglect that all materials provided against a metaphysical fostering of mutually exclusive sexual and gendered categories nonetheless have to draw on the very same pool of resources that provided separation in the first place. Nietzsche also knows that the human being is a social being, and cannot help but mingle with the crowd at times. Otherwise a figure like Zarathustra would not make any sense at all: Although living as a hermit most of the time, his repeating descends from the mountainous solitude prove that living in complete solitude is impossible. Steven V. Hicks and Alan Rosenberg call Nietzsche’s idea of ‘abstinence’ the expression of a refusal to be swallowed by societal rules and values. However, “the ascetic ideal still gives us a feeling that there is, after all, something worth living for, something that can satisfy our psychological need for a sense of power and effectiveness in the world” (Hicks/Rosenberg 138 f.).

Nietzsche’s ‘animal philosophy’ also extends to the manners in which the human being perceives of him- or herself. He or she learns through society how he or she is named through the other, either as male or female. He or she also learns through the very process of naming what it means to be called man or woman, boy or girl. At the same

time, though, there is also the desire to be perceived in one way or the other, either as male or female. Mostly, the desire to be perceived as a certain sexual identity corresponds with the identity named by the other. For the transsexual, however, this is not the case. Negotiations between the transsexed person's desire to be named and the actual naming process through the other do not find an agreement, which results in the transsexual's frustrations and possibly the need to alter the physical constitution that serves as a phenomenological indicator of his or her personhood. This does not mean that the transsexual claims an ontological sexual identity for him- or herself. Rather, it means that the person needs to emphasize that all notions of identity are contingent, as they are negotiable on both ends. Butler writes: "'Sex' is, thus, not simply what one has, on a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life, within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (1993, 2).

Ultimately, the phenomenon of transsexuality, its expressive dependency upon a language code and physical expressions of selfhood, describes an ironic play with identity. Transsexuals refer to a sexual mode of being which they desire to express physically, regardless of the sex and gender assigned at birth. They express that they are 'born in the wrong body,' but nonetheless they resist any metaphysical value to their expressions of identity. Transsexuality is thus the ironic desire of an identity that the person calls his or her 'real' sexual identity, while at the same time, through the very process of physical alterations, transsexuality demonstrates how there is no such thing as an ineradicable or unchangeable sexuality or physicality.

However, none of this means that the need for these physical changes are eradicable or just a symptom of the transsexual's pathological character. A comparison between Kate Bornstein's play *Hidden: A Gender* and Brecht's play *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan* suggests that the notion of transsexuality is used to express a need to change sex for reasons other than those to better adapt to a society's demands. Whereas Shen Te's change of gender remained on the level of social interaction and social visibility, Bornstein's Herculine and Kate express unease with their gender and sexual identities assigned to them at birth that has a decisive reference to their physical bodies. Shen Te does nothing of that sort. She changes her gender but retains her female sexual identity, which is evident all the more by the time she is pregnant while she still runs her tobacco store as her alter ego Shui Ta.

#### 4) Filmic Surgeries: Transsexed Embodiments on Screen

When a transsexual alters the corporeal conditions of his or her physicality, then he or she expresses an urge, drive, or desire to object to the gender and sexual assignments given at birth. I will now analyze two German films that deal with transsexuality, the social conditions in which it is recognized as a medical condition, but through which it often marginalizes the people who are referred to as transsexuals.

Gender bending and gender switching on stage has not just become popular in the twentieth century. However, transgender and transsexed characters have recently become more familiar through film. Judith Halberstam remarks that “the fantasy of the shape-shifting and identity-morphing body has been nowhere more powerfully realized recently than in transgender films” (2005, 76).

Halberstam also refers to the complex relationships between characters and audiences, a relationship mediated and therefore influenced by the camera as a quasi-actor. *The Crying Game* and *Boys Don't Cry* introduce transgender characters<sup>185</sup> in their ability to “surprise[s] audiences with his/her ability to remain attractive, appealing, and gendered while simultaneously presenting a gender at odds with sex ....” (---) This attraction results out of the viewer's scopophilia, the pleasure to look at the woman on the screen, through which the spectator gets into “contact with the female form displayed for his enjoyment (connoting male fantasy) and that of the spectator fascinated of his like set in an illusion of natural space” (Mulvey 204). The pleasure to look's effects on the

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<sup>185</sup> I would differ from Halberstam in calling *The Crying Game*'s Dil a transsexed character, for the reasons given in chapter three.

subject to be looked at meets critical discussion in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1978-film *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* (*In a Year with Thirteen Moons*) and in Oscar Roehler's *Agnes und seine Brüder* (*Agnes and his Brothers*, 2004).

### Changing Sex for the Other

Roehler's film strongly resembles *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden*. It was advertised as 'Freud meets Fassbinder,' and the connection to the New German Cinema director is almost painfully clear when the two main characters, Roehler's Agnes and Fassbinder's Erwin/Elvira are compared against each other – with regard to both their traits of character as well as the filmic plots in which they are involved.<sup>186</sup> Although both characters allow intimate insights into their pasts and presents, both directors do not portray individual characters. As Brecht did for his theater, they draft societal types which the characters in the films embody, but which at the same time they merely exemplify. Paul Cooke recognizes that Roehler, just like Fassbinder, very often "portrays a figure living on the edge of society, who becomes a symbol of a wider sense of crisis in West Germany as a whole" (36). Consequentially, the figure in the film then becomes a representation of a type of character that numerous individuals may embody.

Both films essentially share the same plot, with only slight diversions. Also, their sets of characters resemble each other. Both films introduce a male-to-female transsexual character in the main roles who in fact is a gender-queer male who has been unable to reconcile his same-sex desires with a heteronormative society. Both films start with their

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<sup>186</sup> Paul Cooke observes that Roehler "on the one hand [...] uses the tradition of the New German Cinema, and particularly the work of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, against itself, to interrogate the values of Fassbinder's contemporaries" (34).

to-date lovers leaving them. But whereas Fassbinder's main character Elvira is able to retain her own apartment, Roehler's character Agnes is thrown out on the streets by her violent partner Rudi. Both Elvira and Agnes set on an odyssey through their hometowns, Elvira in Frankfurt and Agnes in Cologne. Both meet once more their former loves for whom they underwent their sex change surgeries, and both commit suicide<sup>187</sup> once they realize that their lovers in fact are not at all interested in them, thereby indicating their own 'made-up' identities as an expression of a lifelong failure. It is no coincidence that both films heavily draw on images of their main characters being in make-up, which again is a main utensil for drag. In fact, both Elvira and Agnes appear to be men in drag rather than transsexuals, but they do drag because their female attire is supposed to refer to a female identity that in fact does not exist. In that, they resemble Bertolt Brecht's character Shen Te. Elvira and Agnes enact female roles and assume a female appearance because the conditions around them force them to – their enactment is reactive, not proactive.

Agnes Tschirner is a transsexual woman who has undergone sexual reassignment surgery in order to enter a legal and institutionally legitimized marriage with her New York boyfriend Henry. Her boyfriend, however, is gay and has been more interested in Agnes'

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<sup>187</sup> Whether Elvira and Agnes indeed commit suicide is debated in scholarship. Danish filmmaker Christian Braad Thomsen has been familiar with both the person and the works of Fassbinder and comments on Elvira's death that "whether she commits suicide or has taken an overdose by mistake is unclear ..." (261). Wallace Steadman Watson concurs with Thomsen on that very same issue and remarks that after her final desperate and futile attempts to find solace she "goes home and dies, perhaps by suicide (although there is no evidence of that in the film) or perhaps only of a "broken heart" as Fassbinder once explained it" (178). My response is that to die of a broken heart and to commit suicide are not mutually exclusive causes of death, and that several motifs in the film like the beggar hanging himself in front of Elvira or the tape recording of Elvira's former suicide attempt make the definition of her death as a suicide at least plausible.

former physical appearance perceived as a male. He leaves Agnes as soon as her surgery is performed. Her search for love leads her back to Germany and her hometown of Cologne, where she moves in with her new boyfriend Rudi and violent worker and resumes contact to her father and her brothers Werner and Hans-Jörg. When Rudi, in a violent outburst of jealousy over Agnes' job as a night club dancer, throws her onto the streets, her life entirely gets out of order. After a discouraging effort to reconnect to her former boyfriend Henry, she dies in the home of a friend, her last thoughts being those of her childhood as a boy, which she eventually considers as being the image she actually ever wanted to have of herself.

Whereas Elvira tries hard to entirely forget her childhood in a cloister foster home, Agnes wants to find out more about her childhood. In a video interview that opens Roehler's film, she muses whether it is true what she has heard about her mother she has never gotten to know, and whether her father who told her stories about her did in fact tell her the truth or just lied:

Ich hab ja meine Mutter nie kennen gelernt ... sodas ich darauf angewiesen war zu glauben, was mein Vater mir über meine Mutter erzählt hat. Dass ich das Kind von ihm und einer Renate Lehmhoff sein soll. Dass ich in einem Fluchtauto zur Welt gekommen sein soll. Ja, es gibt keine Beweise für diese Geschichten. ("I never knew my mother. ... I had no choice but to believe my father. He said Renate Lehmhoff was my mother ... That I was born in a get-away-car. But there's no proof.")

Agnes' father entertains the story that her mother was a woman called Renate Lehmhoff, who had been a member of the Red Army Fraction and had been imprisoned in

Stammheim, the location where the actual criminal case against the organization's leading members Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, Jan-Carl Raspe, and Gudrun Ensslin had been held. During the much-reported turmoil in Stammheim, at the end of which stood the terrorists' deaths, Renate Lehmhoff was said to have been battered as well, although Agnes is unable to retrieve any proof for her father's claim.

Agnes' image of her mother is more an umbra than anything else, and she finds herself unable to escape the haunting specter of an undisclosed childhood. When she visits her father together with her brother Werner, she appears to be troubled, which is in all likelihood because of her living with an abusive boyfriend and her mourning over the loss of her love Henry, both of which I will come to speak about shortly. Her father Günther does not recognize the reasons for Agnes' sadness, but has his explanation already at hand:

Du weißt, warum du unglücklich bist? Nicht wegen mir ... Es ist wegen deiner Mutter. Und wegen Stammheim. Ich weiß, was sie mit ihr gemacht haben. Und jetzt geh, mein Kind. ("Know why you are unhappy? [...] Not because of me ... Because of your mother. Because of Stammheim. I know what they did to her. Go now, child.")

Although Agnes gives the film its name, her character is introduced last, after those of her brothers Hans-Jörg and Werner. She lives with her abusive boyfriend Rudi in a run-down multistory-building in Cologne's outskirts. When Rudi throws her out, Agnes starts a journey through Cologne that resembles that of Fassbinder's main character Elvira.



### **Agnes and Elvira De-Constructed: The Impact of Physical Violence on Identities**

Fassbinder's film *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* recounts the last days in the life of transwoman Elvira Weishaupt. When her boyfriend Christoph finally leaves her, Elvira sets out to a journey through Frankfurt am Main. She visits the foster home she has been raised in, meets the man for whom she had physically turned into a woman, and finally attempts to live in her former male gender again. As all attempts to come to terms with the course her life has taken fail, she dies in her apartment, with the people she has met during her last days surrounding her.

The film begins when Elvira, after a series of lonely days and nights, heads out to find herself a male hustler. She wears men's clothes and dresses in the style of gay leather boy culture, in a leather jacket and a leather cap, paired with men's jeans and high leather boots. Her explicitly masculine appearance, however, is soon identified as 'fake,' when one of the hustlers at the Main's waterside reaches for her crotch and detects a vagina rather than a penis. Ironically, this is one of the very few scenes in Fassbinder's film where Elvira cross-dresses back into her former sexual identity as the male Erwin. In difference to Judith Halberstam's concept of 'female masculinity,'<sup>188</sup> Elvira does not consider the male appearance she performs as subversive drag and thus as detachable from the corporeal body. Her appearance as a male expresses a nostalgic reference to the sex she had been assigned at birth. However, the hustlers do not consider Elvira's male gender performance as an indicator for the sexual identity she wants to be perceived as.

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<sup>188</sup> Halberstam states that masculinity as a script of gender does not have to apply to male bodies exclusively, but can also apply to females. Her attempt is hence to demonstrate the multitude of genders and their accessibility for all sexual identities and to outline "a model of female masculinity that remarks on its multiple forms but also calls for new and self-conscious affirmations of different gender taxonomies" (1998, 9).

Rather, they interpret her appearance as a mockery of masculinity and an attack against their own sense of masculinity. They force Elvira to strip down her pants and start to beat her up until the camera catches her crawling away. Back home, she is surprised by her lover Christoph, who had been absent for several weeks. At first, Elvira expresses happiness and relief when she spots him. But her delight soon turns into horror when Christoph attacks her, not primarily because she has tried to seek the company of other men, but because of her – in his opinion – worsening outside appearance. Christoph grabs her by her hair and drags her in front of a mirror, forcing her to look at her make-up smeared face.

Christoph: Du schaust dich jetzt an, oder ich schlage dir die Zähne ein. ... Siehst

du, weshalb ich nicht mehr nach Hause komme? Siehst du's?

Elvira: Ich sehe mich dich lieben.

Christoph: Ach! Deswegen säufst du, wirst fetter und fetter, bis dein Gesicht

aufplatzt und unappetitlich wird, dass man sich ekelt, als sei es eine  
Krankheit, die ansteckt, wie Lepra.

Elvira: Ich habe dich nie verletzen wollen.

Christoph: Pfui Teufel! Du bist nicht mal komisch, du bist nur noch widerlich.

Fettes, ekelhaftes, überflüssiges Stück Fleisch. ... So etwas wie du hat  
keine Seele. Und auch überhaupt, du bist ein Ding, ein Ding bist du, ein  
Ding! Völlig überflüssig. Es würde überhaupt niemandem auffallen,  
keinem, wenn es dich nicht mehr geben würde.

("Christoph: Look, or I'll smash your teeth in. Look at yourself. Do you see now  
why I don't come home anymore?

Elvira: I see myself loving you.

Christoph: So that's why you drink and get fatter and fatter till your face revolts  
me like a contagious disease, like leprosy.

Elvira: I never wanted to hurt you.

Christoph: Ugh! You're not even funny. You're just repulsive. You're a fat,  
revolting, superfluous lump of meat. ... Something like you doesn't have a  
soul. You're just a thing, an object, completely superfluous. Nobody  
would notice if you ceased to exist.")

Mirror shots are one of Fassbinder's favored filmic means. Christian Braad Thomson recalls how Fassbinder always used to request a number of mirrors to be at hand on his film sets: "His first set designer, Kurt Raab, knew he always had to bring along a whole stock of mirrors in every shape and style in the scenery van because Fassbinder repeatedly made a point in doubling a scene with the help of a mirror" (27). These doubling effects are important in this context mainly for two reasons. One is that the mirror images in *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* symbolize both corporeal violence and the violence of the naming process through the 'other.' Lacan outlines that the 'other' is not only the construction responsible for the subject to name him- or herself as a subject that refers to him- or herself as 'I.' The 'other' is also envisaged as an embodied position: "What has a body and does not exist? Answer: the big Other. If we believe in this big Other, then it has a body, ineliminable from the substance of the one who has said "I am what I am," which is another form of tautology altogether" (Lacan 2007, 66). The subject does not define his or her physicality in separation from the 'other.' Rather,

the ‘other’ provides the social frameworks that tells through language which definitions of physicality, sexual and gender performance are possible to conceive at all.<sup>189</sup>

When Christoph threatens and humiliates Elvira, Christoph is therefore not the ‘other.’ But for Fassbinder’s camera, he performs the ‘other’s’ role and provokes the self-depreciation Elvira will perform almost throughout the film. Fassbinder’s mirror shot in the take discussed symbolizes Elvira’s subjection to a punishing and subjugating gaze that denies the credibility of her performance as a woman. Ultimately, Christoph leaves Elvira by saying: “Das ist der Dank dafür, dass ich mich angestrengt hab all die Jahre. Wenn ich doch nur mal wieder in den Kopf become, dass du keine richtige Frau bist” (“That’s the thanks I am getting for trying so hard all these years. I just couldn’t get it into my head that you’re not a real woman”).

Fassbinder’s and Roehler’s films deal with the ‘other’s’ denial of person’s right to express the gender mode the person wants to be perceived at. Whereas Christoph denies the possibility of Elvira’s femaleness, Agnes’ partner Rudi attacks Roehler’s protagonist’s performance regarding specific qualities that he deems as essential for “being a woman.” Agnes’ first scenes with her partner on film resume several important filmic elements introduced by Fassbinder. Agnes looks into the bathroom mirror and gets ready for her work as a nightclub dancer. We hear a door open, towards which Agnes redirects her view. Rudi enters the apartment and takes off his shoes, but remains standing in the hallway and thus underlines the physical and emotional distance towards his partner. Roehler here resumes a classical theme of mainstream melodrama – the

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<sup>189</sup> “When I say, “the use of language,” I do not mean that we use it. It is language that uses us. Language employs us, and that is how it enjoys” (Lacan 2007, 66).

homecoming of the male partner to his wife – but disrupts its harmonious allusion, which the following dialogue reinforces:

Rudi: Gehst du schon wieder aus? Ich hab dich was gefragt!

Agnes: Möchtest du vielleicht mitkommen?

Rudi: Nein!

(“Rudi: Going out again? I’m talking to you!

Agnes: Want to come along?

Rudi: No!”)

Rudi disappears into the living room and turns on the TV. Agnes remains in the bathroom for a little bit longer and looks into Rudi’s direction. She then follows into the living room and asks: “Rudi, was ist den? Du weißt doch, dass ich da nur tanze! Rudi! Ich will doch auch Geld verdienen” (“Rudi, what’s wrong? You know I only dance. Rudi! I want to bring in money”).

Rudi’s aggressive behavior for once is a result of jealousy, but most of all it is because, in his view, Agnes fails to perform according to a heteronormative order that distinctively separates the sexes according to their tasks and roles:

Agnes: Möchtest du vielleicht ein Bier, Rudi?

Rudi: N Bier. Hast du mir was zu essen gemacht? Hast du mir einmal in den  
letzten zwei Jahren was zu essen gemacht ...?

Agnes: Ich hab’s doch versucht.

Rudi: Lass mich alleine. Mach die Tür zu. Wer muss denn morgen um halb fünf  
raus?

(„Agnes: Want a beer, Rudi?

Rudi: A beer. What about food? Have you ever cooked in the past two years?

Not even once!

Agnes: I tried.

Rudi: Go away. Close the door. I have to wake up at 04:30.”)

The scene lacks the physical violence Fassbinder creates between Elvira and Christoph. But it lays the ground to demonstrate how violence against non-normative genders and sexualities becomes effective.

In Fassbinder’s film Christoph threatens to smash Elvira’s teeth should she not look into the mirror. Roehler’s film shows a second encounter between Agnes and Rudi, during which this threat is acted out. Rudi punches Agnes into the face, with the camera producing a close-up shot on her face and her bleeding nose. Especially interesting is the immediately following succession of takes. Agnes leaves the house without the two suitcases containing her belongings. The camera then pans slightly ahead of her and records her walking down a downtown street, almost literally guiding her way into a bar that is still open when it is already the daytime again. Agnes does not walk on the sidewalk, but on the still deserted road, while she is being watched by a crowd of streetwalkers and remaining night crawlers who have not gone home yet. Agnes is subjected to the ‘other’s gaze, she is the object that the ‘other’ finds pleasurable to look at. But the pleasure that the bystanders reflect is not that of erotic admiration. Rather, the pleasure resulting out of the voyeuristic gaze is that which mocks Agnes and turns her into a ridiculous object. Roehler maintains the motif of the gaze even when Agnes has already entered the bar, ordered a beer and finally leans against a mirror. She is still followed by the look of the other, whether they emerge from single bystanders or groups

of young men mustering her. Even though Agnes does not look into the mirror she leans against, the object still fulfills its task to symbolize the judging look of the 'other' who is responsible for her identifying herself as a subject. The fact that the others' looks judge and hence stigmatize her provokes self-deprecation on her own part. Roehler's use of costume underlines Agnes' self-deconstruction. Although the transwoman has full brown long hair herself, she is wearing a blond long hair wig, which eventually lets her natural hair shine through and thus reinforces the impression of her artificiality.

The gaze of the 'other' continues that what Rudi has initiated: the stigmatization of Agnes as the outcast transsexual who now reaffirms the image of the person 'fallen from grace,' or, in other words, fallen out of a ratified gender order. When Rudi hits Agnes in her face, he violates her in two different ways. For one, there is the already mentioned assault on her corporeal safeguard. But Rudi's hit also devalues her social identity and her status as a female in a society that usually condemns violence against women.

To hit someone is an alienating act. Not only with regard to transsexed individuals does it imply the commodification of the other. Rudi's violent outburst is also a stigmatizing act, and "stigma generally refers to an adverse reaction to individuals who are perceived to be 'different' based on one or more characteristics" (Melendez / Pintho 234). When Agnes walks down the road, followed by the bystanders' gazes, these gazes reinforce Rudi's stigmatization of Agnes as the outcast. Again, Roehler's usage of costume confirms this impression.

## Queering and Stigma

I have already stated that Agnes, in the scene just sketched, is wearing a blond wig – although that in fact would not have been necessary, since Agnes has full long hair on her own. Roehler's film flirts with the genre of camp<sup>190</sup> through the usage of wigs and flamboyant outfits. Thus, it exposes clichés about transsexual women as drag queens who perform their ideas about femininity for the 'other's viewing pleasure.'<sup>191</sup>

In fact, both *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* and *Agnes und seine Brüder* place their protagonists closer to drag than to being transwomen. The films reveal that both Agnes and Erwin/Elvira did not transition out of their desires to express their sexual identity different from their chromosomal sex. Both Fassbinder and Roehler suggest that the transitions take place because of the characters' inability to cope with the social conditions around them, especially with those belonging to life's allegedly private sectors, which in turn are again highly institutionalized. For both directors, German post-war society is violent. One aspect of violence is the one that I have outlined further above, with the violence enacted upon Elvira's and Agnes' bodies. The other aspect of violence is silent, but more effective in the sense that it facilitates the violence against

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<sup>190</sup> Roehler often uses make-up and costume in order to express statements of social status. For example, Hanna Flanders' make up in his 2000-film success *Die Unberührbare (No Place to Go)* is excessively overstating her eyes, this contributing to the impression of a rigid masquerade which equals the hiding from contemporary society behind a picture of make-believe consistency. "The film then cuts to the next morning where the bathroom mirror now holds the reflection of an elegantly dressed woman, wearing white make-up with wide black eyes and a huge Cleopatra-like wig. This is Hanna's public face." (Cooke 38).

<sup>191</sup> I deliberately speak of an 'alleged camp genre' because of the large discussion whether Fassbinder, for example, in fact was a camp-art director or not. Jane Shattuc outlines the media's labeling of art forms, which not always corresponded to the artists' own creative intentions: Regarding Fassbinder, thus, "[w]e need to reconsider ... how the popular press responded to Fassbinder's mixing of the art cinema and popular culture as a critique of 'art' and 'the artist.'" Consider how the bourgeois press responded to Fassbinder's mixing of the art cinema and popular culture as a critique of 'art' and 'the artist'" (98).



Elvira and Agnes remaining unpunished. I call this permission of physical violence one aspect of an institutionalized violence.

Kate Millet writes about institutionalized violence as resulting out of a silent consent to patriarchy and heterosexism which then allows gender discrimination and even sexual violence to emerge. The system itself does not need physical violence in order to become effective: “We are not accustomed to associate patriarchy with force. So perfect is its system of socialization, so complete the general assent to its values, so long and so universally has it prevailed in human society, that it scarcely seems to require violent implementation” (Millet 43). Patriarchy and heterosexism does not provide a safe space for transsexuals, but it does not provide that space for homosexuality, either. Agnes’ and Elvira’s transition and change of sex indicates an adaptation to the more or less mute, but nonetheless effective social norms that do not permit any cross-identifications. Back when they were men, both Agnes and Elvira fell in love with men. In Elvira’s case, it was a carelessly uttered joke by Anton Saitz, the man she adored, that made her undergo sexual reassignment surgery.<sup>192</sup> The connection between the formation of identity and the male ‘other’ is not that evident in Roehler’s design of the past relationship between Agnes and Henry. However, his initial mockery of Agnes when he sees her as a woman again – a scene which I will come to speak about later – suggests that their relationship had been of an unequal nature in which Agnes never learned the means to self-identify

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<sup>192</sup> “The love-hungry child Erin becomes the trans-sexual Elvira because of a thoughtless remark made by a certain Anton Saitz, formerly pimp and property speculator. When Erin declares his love, he says – without intending it to have any deep significance – that it would, of course, be different if Erwin were a girl. The latter immediately flies to Casablanca in order to have everything removed down below ...” (Thomson 261).

according to her own needs and desires.<sup>193</sup> What Agnes and Elvira have in common, again, is that when they are in their role of women, the level of stigmatization experienced increases. Rita M. Melendez and Rogerio Pinto emphasize that “within the public sphere, stigma and discrimination is prevalent in the lives of MTFs; their experiences of stigma and discrimination create a heightened need to feel safe and loved – and they turn to men in an attempt to feel loved, desired and affirmed as women” (238).

In both films, the male partners attack the transwomen’s sexual identity, but Agnes and Elvira are each unable to hold a self-affirmed performance of selfhood against them. Agnes and Elvira change their gender through what Judith Butler calls performativity, but they are not redefining their mode of sexual identity. They are not women out of an inner drive, as Nietzsche would have put it, but rather because of traumatic experiences that have been left unexplored in the past. Agnes and Elvira turn out to be not transsexual women, but male transvestites, given Louise Kaplan’s take on transvestitism referred to by Laura Kipnis: “a male transvestite ... doesn’t want to *be* a woman, but is coping with forbidden feminine longings and the insurmountable anxiety they cause by demonstrating that he *can* be a woman but a woman with a phallus, a woman who hasn’t been castrated” (209).

If this is true, then this means that Agnes and Elvira enact their roles of femininity and femaleness in order to overcome past traumata. But male and female travesty nonetheless is a form of art. It indicates a cross-gendering performance that places its

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<sup>193</sup> This also indicates that Agnes and Elvira had never learned the self-identifying process during their childhoods either.

emphasis on that very act of crossing through clothes, hairstyles and make-up alone. The drag performer does not reject his or her physicality, even though he or she performs a stylized change of sex through clothing. Within a German scholarship that marked the initial reception of Butler's 1990 publication *Gender Trouble*, Hilge Landweer writes:

damit die Travestie als Parodie funktioniert, muß der Akteur seinen Geschlechtskörper affirmieren, ihn als seinen anerkennen, um sich der Lust der Verkleidung hinzugeben .... ('in order for travesty to function as parody, the agent has to affirm his or her physical body's sex, and to acknowledge it as his or her own, in order to devote to the pleasure of the masquerade"; 142)

However, Agnes and Elvira do not parody gender and sexual identity as heterosexuality has designed their notions. Rather, they turn into parodies themselves within a society that creates images of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity.

It is remarkable that both in the narration of Agnes' and Elvira's biographies, there is only one reference to the physical aspect of transition, which is to sexual reassignment surgery. Interestingly, it is the one aspect of a trans-sexuality that critics often comment on as an indication to adhere to a heteronormative society that assigns sexual identity to a person's genital anatomy. Other indicatives of sexual transition remain unmentioned: there is no electrolysis, no facial feminization, no hormone replacement therapy,<sup>194</sup> and no tracheal shave. In Roehler's and Fassbinder's films, the surgery becomes the undertaking that does not bring fulfillment of Agnes' and Elvira's

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<sup>194</sup> Only in Roehler's film is there one short scene in which Agnes is told by her doctor that her blood levels have not been very well recently – indications of an endocrinal issue, and a hint to the fact that contuse monitoring of blood levels is essential part of a through transsexual health care.

desires. Rather, it estranges them from their own sense of selfhood and from the societies they live in.

After Elvira had been left by Christoph, she meets a friend, streetwalker called 'Red Zora.' Together, they go into the female restroom of a nearby café. Zora vets Elvira's wounds she has acquired when she got hit by Christophe's car, and she wonders why Elvira had put on men's clothes when she had gone to the river in order to receive 'love for sale.' Elvira responds that she thinks it is more appropriate to appear male, and ultimately to BE male, when one is paying for sex.

Elvira: Einen Jungen habe ich mir kaufen wollen. Das war alles, ist doch nicht weiter schlimm, oder?

Zora: Überhaupt nichts ist daran schlimm. Aber ... warum die Männersachen, dass du die anziehst?

Elvira: Ich schäme mich nicht so, wenn ich bezahle, mit Männersachen, als mit Kleidern, wie ich es getan habe ein paar Mal.

("Elvira: I wanted to buy myself a boy. Is that so terrible?

Zora: It's not terrible at all, but ... Why did you wear men's clothes?

Elvira: I'm not so ashamed to pay for it with men's clothes on, as I am when I wear women's clothes, as I have, sometimes.")

Through her men's clothes, Elvira attempts to reassume a male identity. Her intentions to be perceived as a male are not limited to the sexual sphere, but extend to the working world. Elvira wants to start working in her old job as a butcher again, and her male appearance is supposed to be more helpful in her endeavors to find work again. But she also switches into a male appearance for her job hunt because she thinks that this mode of

gender appearance corresponds better to the way in which she wants to be perceived by others:

Elvira: Vorige Woche habe ich sogar versucht, eine Anstellung zu finden in meinem Beruf.

Zora: In Männersachen?

Elvira: Natürlich.

(“Elvira: Last week I tried to get a job in my old trade.”)

Zora: In men’s clothes?

Elvira: Naturally.”)

Fassbinder shows a repressive society that allows only two distinct genders, and as such a society that has been described and criticized by Kate Millet as patriarchal and discriminative. In this society, Elvira wants to be both, according to the occasions: sometimes she wants to be perceived as a female, but increasingly, she wants to be perceived and recognized as a male.<sup>195</sup> But this society, which does not allow gendered cross-identifications, has no place for anyone such as trans-sexual characters and identities either.

### **The New Name as an Indicator for Desire**

One element that accompanies the transsexual’s physical transition is the selection of a new name. Whether and when the name change is legally feasible often depends on the respective countries’ laws, but in any case transsexuals at least informally indicate

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<sup>195</sup> “Erwin/Elvira wants to be both man and woman, but becomes neither one nor the other. His attempt to extent his identity is a form of castration in the name of conformity” (Thomson 255).

through a new name that they perform a change which they self-govern and affirm: “Transsexuals are participating in a metaphorical as well as literal transition to womanhood, in which their male gender is given a death blow symbolically and actually as they don the female role, and are reborn phoenix-like into a new gender through passing, female hormones, and the surgery” (Bolin 6).

The transitional passage Bolin mentions corresponds to Zarathustra’s speech about the three metamorphoses: In order to achieve a self-affirmed life, Nietzsche announces that „drei Verwandlungen nenne ich euch des Geistes: wie der Geist zum Kameele wird, und zum Löwen das Kameel, und zum Kinde zuletzt der Löwe“ (Also Sprach Zarathustra 29). (“of three metamorphoses of the spirit I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel; and the camel a lion; and the lion, finally, a child”; Thus Spoke Zarathustra 25).

The metamorphosis from the spirit to the camel equals the processes of civilization and the self’s subjugation under these rules set forth by it. The metamorphosis from the camel to the lion indicates the uprising against these internalized rules and conventions. But a life’s makeover that acknowledges the past as its necessary pathway can only begin when the third metamorphosis is undertaken, which the turning of the lion into a child allegorizes.

For Nietzsche, the child also symbolizes the new beginning after a forgetting of old values. Forgetting is a precondition for the human being in order to be able to learn new things. Only if we forget are we able to modify the values we have learned. The term ‘forgetting’ also implies a conscious challenging and questioning of what we learned and grew accustomed with in life. To challenge and question socially more or less binding

conventions enables us to revalue social roles and identities, but also our ideas of self-reference and out being perceived through others: “Nietzsche explains how new-values creation is possible by showing how Zarathustra [...] can succeed in realizing his personal and poetic intention” (Gooding-Williams 24). To recognize these values and identity positions that give these values a voice and an author is the task of the child and in itself a process that takes time – and it is a process that requires that formerly binding social values, norms, and conventions that influences how a person has been recognized regarding aspects such as sex and gender become disregarded.

The child’s forgetting does not describe a literal process. Nietzsche uses the term metaphorically to express how nothing happens because it is predestined. Instead, the human being who subscribes to the notion of the child contents that anything that happens and influences the human being’s sense of selfhood may have turned out in another fashion, given the particular socio-cultural circumstances in which the human being lives:

The essence of the third metamorphosis is not transition from willing to being (that is, from ‘I *will*’ to ‘I *am*’), but a shift in self-understanding that involves a disappearance of the idea of a substantial subject (a so-called ‘doer behind the deed’) to whom various acts of willing can be ascribed. To be sure, none of this shows that the motto ‘I am’ is irrelevant to the attempt to make sense of the figure of the child. (Gooding-Williams 41)

The child’s creativity is related to the transsexual’s passage to which Anne Bolin refers. The child’s affirmative ‘yes’ is the transsexual’s ‘yes’ to his or her modified sense of self that is accompanied by the choice of a new name.

I admit that this comparison of Nietzsche's child with the transsexual's search for the 'correct' sexual identity still bears several problematic aspects and issues, especially the issue of contingency. Douglas Mason-Schrock observes how transsexuals narrate how they found their 'true' and 'felt' sexual identity in retrospective: "To resolve this identity dilemma, transsexuals gave accounts of being "in denial" before they came to terms with transsexuality" (Mason-Schrock 183). I content that, like Nietzsche's metaphor of the child, the transsexual construes a new model of identity he or she can adhere to. Accordingly, to choose a new name in order to express this new sense of identity implies the performance of a "sacred 'Yes.'" The old name, in contrast, is 'forgotten,' meaning that it is no longer mentioned, whether it still appears in the passport or not.

Fassbinder's Elvira and Roehler's Agnes have gone through the final stage of the passage Bolin describes – with their sexual reassignment surgeries the performance of their anatomical transition is 'complete.' However, their male names 'Erwin' and 'Martin' are not forgotten at all. Elvira and Agnes continue to refer to themselves as either 'Erwin' respectively 'Martin,' which has been Agnes' name as a boy. When Elvira on her journey through Frankfurt visits Sister Gudrun, the clerical foster home's abbess who tried to provide him with foster parents when he was a young boy, the transwoman explicitly states that her transition was not an affirmative performance, but a plain mistake: "Ich habe mein Leben kaputt gemacht, Schwester Gudrun" ("I've ruined my life, Sister Gudrun").

Elvira's confession is preceded by a conversation Zora leads with the eccentric 'Soul Frieda' who has not left the house for months because "natürlich ist mir klar, dass man kaum eine Chance hat, was auch immer aus einem hätte werden können, wenn man



sie gehabt hätte” (“we don’t really have a chance whatever might have become of us if we’d had the chance”). In it, she comments that Elvira’s trip to Casablanca, where many of the 1970s sex reassignment surgeries were conducted, as not because of Elvira’s self-defined wish to modify her sexual identity according to her own desires. Zora knows about Anton Saitz being the reason behind the surgery, and mentions that with regard to Elvira’s own mode of self-reference, the surgery was an attempt to subjugate under the perceived demands of the other:

Zora: Elvira war eine sehr schöne Frau, in den ersten Jahren nach der Operation.

Seelenfrieda: Krebs?

Zora: Nein, keine Krankheit. Sie hat sich einfach alles abschneiden lassen da unten.

Seelenfrieda: Na und? Das kann doch nicht der Grund sein, dass sie unglücklich ist. Wahrscheinlich war sie in ihrer Seele schon immer eine Frau.

Zora: Eben nicht. Das ist es ja gerade: Sie hat es einfach so gemacht. .... Nicht mal schwul ist sie gewesen, glaube ich.

(“Zora: Elvira was a very beautiful woman in the first years after her operation.

Soul Frieda: Cancer?

Zora: She just had everything cut off there.

Soul Frieda: That can’t be the reason she’s unhappy. She was probably always a woman deep down inside.

Zora: No, she wasn’t. That’s the trouble. She just did it. ... I think she wasn’t even gay”)

When Elvira still lived as Erwin, she fell in love with Anton Saitz, a notorious and ominous stockbroker and survivor of the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen and who achieved economic success in postwar West Germany by applying the same means of supervision and suppression he had experienced as a prisoner in the camp.<sup>196</sup> Zora's insistence on Elvira not being a gay male despite having undergone the sex change exclusively for Saitz reminds Douglas Crimp of a reproduction of the "clichés of transsexualism: its denial of homosexual desire, its determination by an essential identity – to make the body conform to the soul" (Crimp 77). But Elvira herself does not even believe in her having acquired access to what be her 'essential identity,' since "Elvira's identity ... is arbitrarily imposed from without [sic], in her case the result of an off-hand remark by Saitz: 'It would be really nice if you were a girl'" (---).

When Elvira arrives at Anton Saitz' office in order to apologize for an interview she has given about him, the broker at first does not recognize her, even though she introduces herself as Erwin. When Elvira hands him a photo of him when he was still endocrinally and anatomically male, Anton Saitz orders his colleagues to perform a dance with him that presents Anton as a person who is fervently trying to prevent being introduced into finishing school. Elvira is required to join the dance, at which end Saitz hops onto his chauffeur Smolik's arms, imitating a woman's posture at the end of a revue dance. Simultaneously, Elvira, who has difficulties keeping pace with the dancing steps, falls to the floor and needs help to get up again onto her plateau heels. Anton hops off

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<sup>196</sup> Thomson reveals about Anton Saitz that "as a child he was in a concentration camp – and as an adult he runs his brothel in a similar style" (261).

Smolik's arms and resumes the mockery that Christoph had directed against her and which she again confirms herself:

Anton: Elvira ... Du bist aber ganz schön aus dem Leim gegangen. Fett geworden bist du, was?

Elvira: Na ja, das kommt vom Trinken.

Anton: Ist doch egal. Wirklich. Fett geworden sind die meisten heute. Elvira!

Das ist n verrücktes Huhn, Jungs! Die ist echt wahnsinnig. Total meschugge. Früher ist es n Junge gewesen und hat Erwin geheißten. Stimmt's? Eines Tages ist sie ins Flugzeug gestiegen, ist nach Casablanca geflogen und hat sich den Schwanz abschneiden lassen. Einfach so.

(“Anton: Elvira. Hey, you're really splitting your seams. You're fat.

Elvira: That comes from drinking.

Anton: That doesn't matter. Most people have grown fat nowadays. It's great, boys! It's real mind blowing. Real meschugge. She used to be a boy by the name of Erwin. Am I right? One fine day she boards a plane, flies to Casablanca ... and has his dick cut off. Just like that. And because of me.”)

The English subtitles suggest that Elvira's sex reassignment surgery indicates a 'mind blowing,' 'meschugge' situation. However, the German original language does not label the situation, but rather Elvira herself as being crazy. In the German version, Saitz says: “Das is'n verrücktes Huhn, Jungs! Die ist echt wahnsinnig. Total meschugge.”<sup>197</sup> The dance performance, in which Elvira is forced to participate, and which is filmed through a

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<sup>197</sup> The literal translation would read as: “She is a crazy hen. She seriously is insane. Totally meschugge.”

doorframe, emphasizes the staging and mockery of Elvira. When Anton Saitz enacts an exaggerated version of a frightened girl who fears being brought into a girls' school, his enactment refers to a mockery of Elvira, who in fact only reluctantly turned into woman reluctantly, against her own wishes, which she abandoned for Saitz.

Elvira herself identifies time and again as a ridiculous person. She confirms that in fact she is not a woman, but rather a parody of a woman, which however lack as the subversive potential of drag that Judith Butler has emphasized. First, Smolik denies her access to Saitz' office. Elvira responds that he must deny her entrance since she indeed is a ridiculous figure and cannot be taken serious when spotted:

Es ist nur ... als hätte ich lauter Stroh im Kopf, sie nehmen mich nicht ernst, nicht wahr? ... Doch, doch, doch, doch, doch, ich bin lächerlich, natürlich bin ich lächerlich. Es ist nur, weil... weil... ich habe nur an mich gedacht. ("It's if I had sawdust in my eyes. You don't take me seriously, do you? I know I cut a ridiculous figure. Of course I am ridiculous. It's just that ... I was so wrapped up in myself. In my mind, you know")

A crucial part of performance art is bodily posture and costume. Fassbinder underlines Elvira's 'ridiculousness' in that he gradually moves her attire to drag. We are able to classify Elvira's appearance as a female into three stages, excluding the film's initial and final scenes, during which she wears male clothing. When she enters a gambling saloon, Elvira is dressed in a blue-white ensemble and wears a silver pearl necklace. Upon her visit to Sister Gudrun, she has added a large white sunhat with a white veil. Finally, when she visits Anton Saitz, Elvira wears a black dress, black nylon stockings, a black feather boa, black lace gloves, and a large black hat with a black veil. In other words, her attire is

a caricature of herself, something which she knows and admits when she tells Smolik: “Natürlich bin ich lächerlich.”

Camera editing and framing does its part to underline and reinforce the impression that Elvira’s appearance is in fact a huge stage production that now is supposed to last a lifetime. When Elvira enters Anton Saitz’ offices, the camera pans past a long line of windows giving way to downtown Frankfurt and an array of doorframes appearing in extreme close-up. When Elvira has to dance with Anton Saitz and his colleagues, the camera captures this performance from a low angle position and assumes a theatergoer’s point of view. Elvira’s costume exposes her as a freak, because she appears in stark contrast to the business or sports attires of the men as representatives of the effective societal power structures. Elvira had to realize how her sex change comes with a loss of social ties she could have only maintained as a male. Her life as a husband and father cannot be resumed once Erwin has physically transformed into Elvira, even though at the end of the film she cuts her hair, puts on a male suit and tie, and wears men’s shoes again.

Non-subversive drag also appears in *Agnes und seine Brüder*. Here, as in *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden*, drag serves the trans-characters humiliation and the emphasis of her ridiculousness. Let me go back to the scene in which Agnes leaves Rudi’s apartment in her blonde wig and is eyed continuously on her way to the bar and throughout the time she spends there. I have already mentioned how the camera follows Agnes in a pan down a Cologne inner city street that has nightclubs which remain open throughout dawn, and how the camera catches how she is watched by hustlers, streetwalkers, and bar guests. Agnes enters one club and orders a beer at the bar, when a

group of young men observes her again. The gaze controls Agnes' appearance and questions her sexual identity. Roehler's choice of costume for her character reconfirms that her self-representation needs scrutiny: Agnes' wig has lost fixture and now gives sight on her natural brown hair. By discovering the 'real' under the layer, Agnes moves closer to drag's parodying effects, but further away from the perception of a transwoman.<sup>198</sup>

*Agnes und seine Brüder* contains another scene where drag plays a major role. When Agnes leaves a doctoral appointment at whose beginning she learns that the blood labs during a routine examination haven't turned out well. On her way through Cologne's inner city, she spots a poster that advertises a performance at the Cologne cathedral designed by her ex-boyfriend Henry from New York City. Agnes drives to her father and picks up her wedding dress which Henry had bought for her in New York, shortly before the surgery.

When she appears in her wedding dress in front of the Cologne cathedral, in order to wait on her former boyfriend Henry, Agnes undermines her own representation as a female in that she identifies herself publicly as Martin, the name she was assigned at birth, when she was born physically a boy.

During the following dialogue, the camera uses the shot-reverse shot technique and thus captures not only Agnes' efforts to self-identify as the formerly male lover of

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<sup>198</sup> Again, I am painfully aware of the difficulty such expressions and terminologies like 'a real woman' or 'a real man,' the statement that someone 'is' a man or a woman provide. However, as scholars like Anne Bolin and Douglas Mason-Schrock have stated, we cannot ignore that for many clients undergoing gender treatment the obtainment of a physical constitution that they can subscribe to and which they can refer to in terms of authenticity is of utmost importance, and this does not by any means imply as well that all transsexual clients achieve to turn into 'identical' men and women, DVK. See Bolin with regard to transwomen: "It became apparent that I was watching a 'tomb to womb' transformation; males died a social death and were reborn as women" (Bolin 19).

Henry, but also Henry's and his staff's reactions to her self-presentation. The camera creates a scene of mockery which the shot technique intensifies in that it contrasts Agnes' gaze towards Henry with the responding gazes by the others. When Agnes spots Henry and his staff exiting the Cologne cathedral, Agnes steps over the chord separating the audience from the star. In a sense, Agnes initiates her own staging, and the fact that she is wearing a bridal dress intensifies the impression that she is representing a parody on marriage and the female role in it, which, however, has not been her intention at all. Instead, her attempt is to provide Henry with a visual reminder of the times they had spent together:

Henry: Who are you, honey? I don't know who you are.

Agnes: Don't you remember me?

Henry: Well, it looks like you're coming from your honeymoon. No, seriously, I still don't know who you are. Can you help me? Who are you?

Agnes: I'm Martin. Martin from New York.

When Agnes refers to her male name, the camera catches the gazes both of the staff and the bystanders. Based on Henry's preceding ignorance, we can deduce that Agnes passes well as a woman, without being detected as a transsexual – even her former boyfriend did not recognize her again. But through the reference to her male name, it is not the social environment that deconstructs Agnes. Instead, this deconstruction is initiated upon her own initiative.

Stefan Hirschauer analyses transsexuality from a sociological perspective. He is mostly interested in the role institutions play in the transitioning process the transsexual undergoes, and how these institutions shape the images the transsexual creates and

mediates of him- or herself. One of these institutions deals with the regulations of the name change. In Germany, the new name must be clearly identifiable as an indicator for a female, should the transsexual be a transwoman, or for a male, should the person considered be a transman. Of course, there are normative regulations behind these agreements on the choice of a new name. But seen through the lens of Nietzsche's aesthetics, where the subject is responsible for the creation of new names, the transsexual's new name also reaffirms and underlines the modified gender appearance and performance. Should the transsexual not adhere to his or her new name that he or she has given him- or herself according to his or her new gender performance, the person may on the one hand express disagreement with an institutionalized aspect of the transition. But on the other hand, he or she might as well contribute to a self-parody. Hirschauer confirms that in German contemporary legislation which requires names that indicate one gender or the other,

ein Mann mit einem Frauennamen oder auch mit weniger eindeutigen weiblichen Geschlechtszeichen oder Aufmachung ist ein unmögliches Subjekt, das nicht zur Ordnung des Sichtbaren gehört und gehören soll. ("a male with a female name or with less distinct female sexual characteristics is an impossible subject, which does not and is not supposed to become visible"; 1993, 31)

Agnes continues to identify herself as a male even when she is able to talk to Henry alone in a friend's kitchen. In another shot-reverse shot sequence, the camera starts with their faces in close up, then moves to medium shots, and terminates the scene with long shots, thereby visualizing the distance between the two:

Henry: How could I forget you.



Agnes: Is that true? You haven't forgotten me?

Henry: How's life treating you?

Agnes: I don't know. I'm always a little sad. But not right now.

Henry: Good... This dress. It's a beautiful wedding dress.

Agnes: You bought it for me. Back then in New York. Just before the surgery.

Henry: Listen... Listen to me. I think it is important that you understand...

Agnes: No! No ... I understand that. You had such big plans. Your head was so full of plans that there was no room for little Martin, I understand that.

It becomes clear that Agnes' sadness is an expression of melancholia – she mourns the past and longs to relive what she has missed when she was still with Henry. But the fact that Henry is gay means also that Agnes does not wish to continue her life in the new body she has now. This intense discontent with what Agnes is now makes it impossible that she refers to her former male name out of a desire to queer and challenge a heteronormative order. Rather, her reference to herself as Martin expresses a regret of her sex change.

Agnes and Elvira refer to their sex changes as acts that ultimately have destroyed their lives – both characters consider that they are living the narrative of someone else. I interpret that both characters consequentially end their lives through suicide.<sup>199</sup> Elvira

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<sup>199</sup> My thesis that both characters kill themselves is not uncontested in scholarship. In his analysis of Fassbinder's *In a Year with Thirteen Moons*, Wallace Steadman Watson concludes that "Elvira has no more success in getting help from the journalist to whom she gave the interview; it is late, and he has to take a trip the next day. So she goes home and dies, perhaps by suicide (although there is no evidence of that in the film) or perhaps only of a "broken heart" as Fassbinder once explained it" (178). I contend that the motif of self strangulation, either in the scene in which a homeless hangs himself in Saitz' office complex, or in a masturbation scene of Elvira that includes self-induced choking, is so prominent that the film's plot suggests Elvira's death being a suicide by strangulation. Marco Abel, who also reads the section about Agnes Tschirner in Roehler's *Agnes and His Brothers* as a reproduction of Fassbinder's film, claims that,

cuts her hair and suffocates herself on her bed, whereas Agnes cuts into her vagina and bleeds to death. The film visualizes her enraptured last thoughts of herself when she was a young boy, running across a field glazed in sunlight and sprinkled with blossoming spring flowers. In the end, changing sex and gender was nothing but a tragic mistake, a mistake enhanced by the social institutions and some individuals' desperate attempts to be both men and women in a society that does not allow cross-identifications. Lois McNay considers postmodernist considerations of gender and sexual identity as something which "cannot be explained through the monolithic framework of symbolically prescribed sexual difference; rather it emerges from the dynamic fusion of personal and cultural meaning" (40). Both Elvira and Agnes do not participate in this dynamic. Rather, they dissolve their own notions of identity with the societies they live in. The results of their immersions with society are paradox: They each try to be both women and men, but ultimately they lose both chances of gendered self-identification.

Fassbinder's *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* and Roehler's *Agnes und seine Brüder* introduce characters that both undergo a physical transition within the sphere of sexuality that does not reflect their own desires. For both, sexual reassignment surgery is a means to an end that has nothing to do with any allusion to gender and sexual identity. Christian Braad Thomson and Wallace Steadman Watson have explained how Elvira's intention had been to find fulfillment in a romantic relationship by undergoing the surgery.

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"now a woman, Agnes lives in an abusive relationship, harbors the most sentimental, or, in any case, non-confrontational, feelings for her father [...], and she eventually dies of post-op complications." (89) While also Abel has many valid reasons for his considerations of Agnes' death, the final dialogue between Agnes and her brother Hans-Jörg, during which she calmly permits her blood flowing out of her vagina suggests that she is not upset about this occurrence at all and does not consider it as an accident or as a complication resulting from post-operative stress, but rather as an incident that she wished for.

Analogously, Marco Abel points out that “Agnes’s decision to have a sex change has been (possibly) driven by her sense that she would be able to find true love only by radically altering her identity, a hope that remains unfulfilled, as, ironically, the man for whom she has fallen is gay and thus not interested in *her*” (89).

Both Fassbinder and Roehler give impressive accounts on the impossibility to achieve happiness in the traditional social systems like family, the profession, or love. Regarding the latter, the directors even assume an impossibility to achieve happiness through a romantic relationship. In an interview with Hella Schlumberger, Fassbinder expresses his doubts that happiness is in fact an option in his postwar Western Germany: “It seems to me the society I live in is shaped not by happiness and freedom but rather by oppression, fear, and guilt. In my opinion, what we’re taught to experience as happiness is a pretext that a society shaped by various forms of compulsion offers the individual” (6). Abel sees in *Agnes und seine Brüder* a demonstration of the same impossibility: Agnes’ and her brothers’ narratives “dramatize their fear of relationships and separation, which, perhaps, suggests that the generation on-screen stands in the way of its own happiness” (89). Regarding the viewer’s education about the sensitive topic of transgender and transsexual identities, Fassbinder’s and Roehler’s films do not contribute at all to an understanding of transsexuality as another mode of gender and sexual performance of personhood.

Laura Mulvey refers to the image of woman as the object of “fetishistic scopophilia,” which “builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself” (205). The woman in the media is not necessarily the woman in the streets. But the medial image of womanhood allows the elaboration of

values that determine what a woman is supposed to look like and to do in society. Thus, the medial image of woman turns into a benchmark for the woman in social interactions. With regard to mainstream cinema that serves the so-called male gaze, Mulvey concludes that, “as the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence” (204).

Fassbinder and Roehler both present societies that are entirely patriarchal and in which sexual, gendered, and ethnic minorities assume the role of the other. This other does not appear on its own terms, but assumes the position of objects that people talk about and ultimately may consume: “Fassbinder’s films do not so much create autonomous worlds, as they represent media-worlds, which is to say, they live by the quotations, references, borrowings from newspapers, press photography, popular music, and above all, from other films” (Elsaesser 22 f.). Elvira Weishaupt is another of those media images that are looked at, judged, ridiculed, and hence consumed. But that does not mean that the viewer is supposed to feel sorry for her. Fassbinder’s and Roehler’s films object to any identification with a character. For Fassbinder’s *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden*, this means that the spectator is not supposed to feel any sympathy either with the representatives of the societal order or with the transsexual Elvira Weishaupt: “Fassbinder [...] makes us experience our frustration, our impotence; he doesn’t give us a chance to feel ennobling sympathy because knows that everyday life would not allow us that if we meet Elvira outside the cinema. So why should we pretend” (Thomson 257)? In

a similar manner, Roehler designs Agnes not as a character that requires the viewer's sympathy. Rather, the transwoman turns into an indicator for the impossibility to achieve happiness for a generation that cannot take its parents as role models and is hence left on its own. Accordingly, its "serialization of relationship breakdowns and their immanent performative transformation into necessary failure ends up configuring a sense of utopia" (Abel 82). But through the very same critical distance the viewer assumes to Fassbinder's and Roehler's films, one may also see that both directors appear to suggest that transsexuality is a signifier for a social 'malaise' rather than another mode of gendered worldliness a person may assume. In other words: Both directors seem to suggest that in a society which rejects to function via a bi-gendered structure, transsexuality as an indicator for a person's indecision regarding in which gender they want to be perceived may eventually disappear as well.

Judith Halberstam notes three processes regarding the medial representation of transgender, of which the second is of special interest to me. She comments on the projects of stabilization, rationalization, and trivialization. Fassbinder and Roehler are specifically engaged with the second project. Through rationalization, both directors place transsexuality in a causal context and come to the conclusion that by fighting the societal 'causes' for transsexualism, transsexuality may eventually eliminate itself. Halberstam explains how "within a rationalizing project, the biographer, filmmaker, or writer find reasonable explanations for behavior that may seem dangerous or even outrageous at first glance" (2005, 55). Agnes's and Elvira's transitions are indeed dangerous undertakings. Both undergo surgery (and I suppose hormone replacement therapy) purely for the sake of the societies which they find themselves born into, in that

they intend to repeat a pattern of heterosexuality that, all efforts notwithstanding, insists on their exclusion. Hence the conclusion lies near that a change in the normative structures of gender may solve the problem of transsexuality: men are then allowed to be female and women are allowed to be male, regardless of their corporeality.

But this also means that, in a converse argument, the transsexed persona is declared as the embodiment of a social illness, and the cure against heteronormativity would then also be the cure against transsexuality. There is no doubt that the connection of sexual orientation to gender identity is indeed a product of socio-historical definitions. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes: “The definitional narrowing down in this century of sexuality as a whole to a binarized calculus of *homo-* or *heterosexuality* is a weighty fact but an entirely historical one” (31). This historical agreement on a categorical definition of sexual practice does not cover sexuality’s entire scope, as Marjorie Garber analyzes in her major study on bisexuality as a label for a sexual preference for both male and female sexes alike.<sup>200</sup> Also, the categorical definitions of sexual practice and sexuality do not prevent that transsexuality keeps being mistaken for another form of sexual orientation, or even an extreme form of homosexuality.<sup>201</sup> Indeed, the societal fixation on combining

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<sup>200</sup>Marjorie Garber points out that bisexuality as a label for sexual orientation has not only been marginalized by the heterosexual mainstream, but also within the gay and lesbian communities themselves: “In January 1990, organizers of the Northampton, Massachusetts Lesbian and Gay Pride March voted to remove the word “bisexual” from the march’s title, even though the word had been added, in gesture of inclusion, only a year before” (81). Garber takes this incident as an indication for the misunderstanding of bisexuality in the larger contexts: Not only by the heterosexual order does bisexuality not have a place, neither does it for various gay and lesbian activists: “More difficult to set aside is the sense that bisexuality threatens identity politics, and thus undermines the hard-won gains of gay and lesbian liberation” (85).

<sup>201</sup> “It is rarely questioned that there are only two biologic sexes, male and female, with two resultant genders, masculine and feminine. The evidence for biologic or psychologic bisexuality does not contradict this division, but only demonstrates that within the two sexes there are degree of maleness and femaleness (*sex*) and of masculinity and femininity (*gender*)” (Stoller 29). The categorization of maleness and femaleness to sexual identity and of masculinity and femininity to gender identity is one reason why transsexual discourses more often than not embark on the topics of gender rather than of sex. Since gender

anatomy to the classification of sexual practices is itself the work of heteronormativity. The abolition of an anatomically centered classification of sexual practices and identities will indeed be helpful in the contributions to a broader understanding of gender and sexual diversity.<sup>202</sup> However, this all does not entail that with the abolition of anatomical centrism we can get rid of the transsexual as well.

### **Performing Identity with or without Surgery**

Of course, in a time of increased transphobia, but also of an increasingly affirming pro-transgender activism, Roehler would have done well in introducing a transgender character whose trans-identity would not have been subject to being rationalized away. But we have to do this job on our own. We need to reflect upon what must be different in the presentation and self-performance of transsexuals and their efforts to be recognized as embodying a varying mode of gendered existence.

The question then is: How can a depiction of transsexed individuals on screen be designed to show that very proactive energy that Nietzsche has conjured in his dance involving the Dionysian and the Apollonian as forces of creativity? In a sense, and applying the theoretical implications outlined at the beginning of chapter three, we can adhere to the concept behind the dance as Kate Bornstein stages it in her already

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is a fluid category, theorists could also argue that there is no valid basis for transsexuality either and that transsexuality as an expression of identity may be easily questionable. See Calhoun Davis 50: "In crossing gender boundaries, one is not necessarily challenging the existence of categorization. In fact, the very fact that one moves from one status to another status (rather than transcending status altogether) can serve to reaffirm gender categorization" (Calhoun Davis 50).

<sup>202</sup> Joanne J. Meyerowitz traces the intersection of anatomy and sexual practice, relevant for sexual identities and practices that had been considered 'abnormal,' back into the 1930s and notes that "from the earliest publicity in the 1930s, much of the public interest in and anxiety surrounding sex change had stemmed from its implicit connection to taboo forms of sexuality" (Meyerowitz 168).

discussed play *Hidden: A Gender*: the dance as a performance of floating and fluctuating energies. These energies design fluid identities, which nonetheless do not dissolvable into relativity. What the characters in Bornstein's dance experience is a doubling of their modes of worldliness, in which one mode may prevail, in case this mode is brought to the fore through the character him- or herself.

When the transsexual desires to change his or her gender performance and sex assigned at birth, the wish becomes visible through performance. Although the performance refers to the presentation of the physical body, the latter itself is meaningless. As Gayle Salamon expresses how "only as a blunt materiality, severed from any psychic investments, it has no meaning at all" (591). What the body makes meaningful is the socialization process that enables the reference to the body as a sexed and gendered being.<sup>203</sup> The transsexual's self-reference that he or she 'always knew that he was supposed to be a girl' or that he 'always knew that she was supposed to be a boy' is the expression of a 'reverse narrative: in order to make sense of the present, the past is revalued and reinterpreted, albeit with the knowledge of the present: "From this perspective we can see how self-making is a collaborative process extending over time and acting back on culture" (Mason-Schrock 177). But the fact that making sense of the self is a culturally learned and culturally practiced process in which an idea of the 'true self' is continuously modified does not mean that we are free to declare endocrinology and surgical procedures as being without effects for the transsexual's self-reference.

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<sup>203</sup> "To claim that the body is socially constructed is not to claim that it is not real, that it is not made of flesh, or that its materiality is insignificant. To claim that sex is a social construct is not to claim that it is irrelevant, or invariant, or incapable of being embodied or reworked" (Salamon 581).



### **How much Bio-Chemistry do we Need?**

Read through the lens of Nietzschean aesthetics, sexual transition through hormone replacement therapy and potentially through cosmetic surgery turns into performances. From the third chapter, we remember that Bornstein's Herculine and Kate perform a dance through which they express their perceived identities as fluid and changeable. Both experience initial discomfort with the sexuality they have been socialized to live with, and as a consequence they are set out to modify their gender appearance. The modification of gender and sexual identity that Kate Bornstein discusses in her play is not limited to corporeal alterations. Herculine turns out to be an intersex person, which means that her genitals are ambiguously shaped. Additionally, she feels uncomfortable with her female physicality and with the clear-cut roles society provides for men and for women respectively. Whereas Herculine wants to change her gender mode and will then be recognized as Abel, the medical determinations about her 'corrected' gender and sexuality are imposed on her. On stage, she is able to express through the dance with Kate, who actively sought physical alteration, that a socio-physical arbitrariness of gender and sexuality is her or his preferred self-reference and appearance. Interestingly, this is an aspect of worldliness on which Herculine/Abel and Kate agree.

William Vollman states that a contingent conception of selfhood disregards essentialism and stresses the role of emotions like desire, lust, love, and longing in the temporary formations of gender and sexuality's performance: "Only the individuality of any woman – My intimacy with my own body, and with the bodies of women I have loved, allows me to feel an instant comprehension ... which must in part be spurious,

since their context is contextual ....” (297). Vollman’s idea of an intimate reference of a person to his-or herself resembles Nietzsche’s conception to the Dionysian Greek Orgy.

Gayle Salomon emphasizes that a person’s reference to his or her emotions necessitates socialization and hence a social context. Although “the felt sense of the body delivers a certainty about identity, and though that felt sense might arise from a complicated nexus of body and psyche, the feeling itself is described as simple – the conviction that one is either a man or a woman – and as powerful and incontestable evidence of a coherent identity” (587). But that idea of a certainty about either being a man or a woman is itself a culturally driven product. The idea of a simple identity may serve and channel the people’s desires to be perceived in a certain fashion, but it is not based on these desires alone. Salomon critically examines the idea that behind every personhood there is a uniquely identifiable, autonomous instance at work. “A reading of gender, then, that focuses exclusively on the agency of the individual misses this entire matrix of power in which gender takes shape”(584). Instead, every self-reference works with projections mediated through society’s other, which creates worldliness and which provides images of manhood, womanhood, and anything ‘in between:’ “What is a woman to me? The answer must be: A projection. Who is projecting, and for what reason, I cannot necessarily know from the performance itself” (Vollman 151).<sup>204</sup> The transsexual’s undertaking is then to choose the projection that is found most agreeable, and the shaping of one’s sense of self accordingly.

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<sup>204</sup> The establishing of projections is further emphasized by the negotiations of identities in transsexual individuals. Rachel Ann Heath expresses that, “since gender expression is a performance or imitation, transsexualism represents an imitation of an imitation” (9).

This aspect of agency cannot persist without the other's recognition. We can only be men and/or women in case we are acknowledged as such.<sup>205</sup> That's why it is so important for many transsexuals to 'pass' as either a man or a woman – passing as either a man or a woman brings social recognition with itself : “Successful passing by transsexed women requires use of language structures that are more characteristic of women than men” (Heath 143).

Agnes and Elvira have an overall knowledge of the gender codes, and they certainly do their very best to follow them (considering their excursions into drag, they sometimes do the codes way too good). But their gender performance lacks the desire to be perceived in the manner in which they actually appear, as women. And they also lack ability to say a Nietzschean 'yes' to their new self identities.<sup>206</sup> Kate Bornstein underlines how “passing by choice can be fantastic fun. Enforced passing is a joyless activity” (127). Elvira's and Agnes' passing is almost perfect in a technical sense, yet joyless.

A filmic or a theatrical piece that wants to provide a voice for the transsexed people has to perform self-confident declarations of identity in a continuous exchange with society and its paradigms about sex and gender. Vollman underlines that gender and sexual identity is a temporal and contingent phenomenon and refers to transgender

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<sup>205</sup> Stefan Hirschauer employs the term 'Geschlechtszugehörigkeit,' which translates into English either as 'sexual identity' or 'gender identity.' Both aspects work together in social interactions of the sexes and cannot be analyzed separately from each other: “Titel und Körper legitimieren sich nicht einseitig, sondern wechselseitig: ein bestimmter Körper rechtfertigt, einen Geschlechtstitel zu tragen, der berechtigt, einen bestimmten Körper als eigenen und richtigen zu beanspruchen und der verpflichtet, bestimmte körperliche Funktionen zu erfüllen oder sich als >krank< zu begreifen.” (“Title and body do not legitimize themselves unilaterally, but mutually: a definite body justifies carrying a gender title, which again permits claiming a certain body as one's own, and which comes with the social responsibility to fulfill physical functions or otherwise be labeled as 'sick'”; 1993, 51)

<sup>206</sup> “Alles Fühlende leidet an mir und ist in Gefängnissen: aber mein Wollen kommt mir stets als mein Befreier und Freudebringer“ (Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra 111). (“Whatever in me has feeling, suffers and is in prison; but my will always comes to me as my liberator and joy-bringer. Willing liberates: that is the true teaching of will and liberty ...”; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra 87)

photography as a visual example. He remembers a series of photographs taken of transsexual woman Nancy, which documents her physical changes and creates the metaphorical passage Bolin has mentioned through her body as a tool:

In church Nancy had wavy hair. Now she has straight hair and bangs. The year after that, Nancy stands nude in her home in Cambridge, with her hand on her hip, looking younger than ever [which is an effect of continuous estrogen treatment in combination with anti-androgens like Spironolactone], large-eyed and small-breasted, so beautifully feminine, slim-bodied like an adolescent girl, an penis hangs between her legs. (Vollman 383)

Vollman's description of Nancy resembles that of the transsexual model Lea T, who currently works as a fitting model for the French fashion label Givenchy and who posed nude for French Vogue in summer 2010:

Now, French Vogue has decided to feature Lea T., completely nude, with only her hand barely covering her genitals. We could talk about the cultural impact the shoot has, what people's reactions may be to seeing a transgendered women in a largely circulated magazine ... but instead, we'll leave it short and sweet: Lea T. looks absolutely stunning in the *French Vogue* shot, her hair cascading delicately, her face appearing strong, yet vulnerable, staring directly at the camera. (Fiedlander, <http://www.styleite.com/media/lea-t-naked-photos/>)

The viewer of these pictures is able to identify their performance as the expression of their own desires. These desires are expressed through a societal framework which influences, but does not determine modes of gender and sexual expression. Lea T. and Nancy visually perform their transitions as a narrative which photography attempts to

document. But their bodies on the photos defy any categorization into a bi-gendered system. Any sexual reassignment surgery would seem to reconvert their bodies back into orders of gender and sexual binaries. But their photos capture their bodies in development and thus make sure that these women's pasts of 'in-between-ness' is remembered and thus included into their designs of their selves. This continuous flux represented and performed through the body encompasses the past (the body in a shape perceived as male) and the future (the body in a shape perceived as female), and just as Nietzsche's jester jumps over the acrobat, causing him to fall and break his neck,<sup>207</sup> so Lea and Nancy 'jump over' gender conventions and even biology, in the sense that they declare their biological sexes as meaninglessness for their self-reference. Both embody Meyerowitz' "fierce and demanding drive" and Nietzsche's "will to power."

Theater and film that include or even center on transsexual bodies need to envision these desires that are the aforementioned photograph's topic. Therefore, theatrical and film works show the desires as emerging from social interactions the transsexual entertains with his or her social environment. It must become visible how the transsexual and the social other influence and name each other, and how this very sort of interaction is needed for desires to manifest. This leads me to my second and more structural request for a 'transsexual' theater and film designs: The structures of social interactions regarding the presentations and recognitions of gender and sexual performances need to become

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<sup>207</sup> "Und mit jedem Worte kam er ihm näher und näher: als er aber nur noch einen Schritt hinter ihm war, da geschah das Erschreckliche ...: er stieß ein Geschrei aus wie ein Teufel und sprang über Den hinweg, er ihm im Wege war. Dieser aber, als er so seinen Nebenbuhler siegen sah, verlor dabei den Kopf und das Seil; er warf seine Stange weg und schoss schneller als diese ... in die Tiefe" (Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra 21). ("And with every word he came closer and closer; and when he was but one step behind, the dreadful thing happened ...: he uttered a devilish cry and jumped over the man who stood in his way. This man, however, seeing his rival win, lost his head and the rope, tossed away his pole, and plunged into the depth even faster ..."; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra 19)

visible on stage or in film. In other words: theater and film must visualize the social processes that otherwise take place without being explicitly noticed by social agents, whether they are transsexual or not. Stefan Hirschauer elaborates how

die interaktive Konstruktion von Geschlechtszugehörigkeit ist ein gegenseitiges Entgegenkommen und auch eine dichte *Kollaboration* in der Unkenntlichmachung eines Konstruktionsprozesses“ (“the interactive construction of gender identity is a process of mutual recognition as well as a close collaboration in efforts to make this process unrecognizable”; 1993, 55).

Theater and film need to bring this very process back to visibility, by turning the physical body on stage or on screen into the center of attention. We have seen how Kate Bornstein exemplifies this project for the stage, and we will soon see how this works for film.

### **Finding the Other Half: Corporeal Yearnings in John Cameron Mitchell’s *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*.**

If we want to address films in which transsexuality appears in a more positive light than it has been in Fassbinder’s *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* or Oscar Roehler’s *Agnes und seine Brüder*, there are unfortunately not many examples left that have their origin on the Germanic film market. This is all the more surprising since the first well-known case of sexual reassignment surgery was not that of the US-American ex-GI Christine Jorgensen, who had received sexual reassignment surgery in Denmark,<sup>208</sup> but rather that of Lili Elbe, a Danish painter who sought surgical assistance

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<sup>208</sup> What has been a premiere, so to speak, in Jorgensen’s case was the fact that an extensive hormone replacement therapy, the intake of estrogen medication, had preceded the sexual reassignment surgery.

in Dresden.<sup>209</sup> Certainly, the process which Elbe underwent – in the third one of a series of surgeries, she died while doctors tried to transplant ovaries into her organism – is no longer practiced today; it is therefore difficult to compare Elbe’s case with that of Jorgensen. Nonetheless, Germany provided some of the most prominent studies in homosexuality, transvestitism and transsexuality before the Second World War and the rise of National Socialism.<sup>210</sup>

Sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld wrote extensively about homosexual communities and circles in Berlin and was one of the earliest educators on homosexuality and transvestitism. He also was one of the leading activists to end the criminalization of homosexuality in Germany’s politics in the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>211</sup> and introduced the idea of the so-called ‘third sex’ to the German public, especially with his 1904 publication of *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht: Schwules und lesbisches Leben im Berlin der Jahrhundertwende*. Although Hirschfeld employed the term of the ‘third sex’ for

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Susan Stryker, in her introduction to the 2000-edition of Christine Jorgensen’s autobiography, remarks that “the procedures employed on her behalf, as well as the rationale for using them, had been championed by the eminent German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, at his Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin, in the years between the World Wars” (Stryker, in Jorgensen 2000, vii).

<sup>209</sup> “Nach zahlreichen ergebnislosen Arztbesuchen in Paris unterzog er sich schließlich im Frühjahr und Sommer 1930 in Deutschland einer Reihe geschlechtsangleichender operative Eingriffe. In Berlin führte der Chirurg Erwin Gohrbandt zunächst eine Kastration durch, nach der Wegener nun ausschließlich als Frau lebte. In der Dresdener Frauenklinik wurden von Gynäkologen Kurt Warnekros zwei weitere Eingriffe vorgenommen.“ (“After numerous failed visits at doctors in Paris, he underwent several surgeries with the purpose of sexual reassignment. In Berlin, surgeon Erwin Gohrbandt at first performed a castration, after which Wegener lived exclusively as female. In Dresden’s gynecological clinic, gynecologist Kurt Warnekros performed two further interventions”; Meyer 38)

<sup>210</sup> “By the early 1930s, approximately eighty sex reform organizations, with a total membership of about 350 thousand people, exerted a considerable force on German life” (Irvine 5).

<sup>211</sup> For example, Hirschfeld co-wrote the script to the film *Anders als die Andern* (*Different from the Others*) which was one of the first films ever including the topic of homosexuality, and in which Hirschfeld advocated the abolition of Paragraph 175 that criminalized homosexuality and the exercise of male homosexual practices. Laurie Marhoefer adds how frequently, “blackmail took the form of men threatening to report their sex partners to the police for violating Paragraph 175, unless their partners paid. [...] If Paragraph 175 were repealed, Hirschfeld, Kahl, and others argued, blackmailers would lose their power over their victims” (539).

homosexual men and women rather than for people we today consider as transsexuals, and although he wrote mostly about transvestitism even then when from today's point of view the transvestite would be called a transsexual, the German sexologist was still one of the first to emphasize that gender crossing for some was more than just a masquerade.<sup>212</sup> In one of his descriptions of a lesbian ball, Hirschfeld notices a larger number of women dressed as men. Instead of considering all women dressed as men as female transvestites, he acknowledges that several women dress as men because their garments are meant to signify a desire to be perceived as men regardless of the wearer's biological constitution:

Kein Mißton trübt die allgemeine Freude, bis die letzten Teilnehmerinnen beim matten Dämmerlicht des kalten Februarmorgens den Ort verlassen, an dem sie sich unter Mitempfindenden wenige Stunden als das träumen durften, was sie innerlich sind. ("Nothing spoils the overall happiness, until the last participants leave the location at the crack of dawn, when they could be for a few hours the way they feel they really are"; Hirschfeld 1991, 111)

As outlined previously, German scholarly discussion about sex and gender have mostly focused on masculinity and femininity as modes of social role. A take on sexual identity as the expression of a desire to be perceived physically as male or female has largely remained confined to the publications of transsexual autobiographies. To be perceived as male or female because of a self-identified physical need has largely been ignored, if not doubted in German scholarship.

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<sup>212</sup> Janice M. Irvine points out that, although transsexuality as a medical condition was already known by the times of the German Weimar Republic, it was only until the 1970ies when "transsexualism was an acknowledged syndrome, buttressed by a vast medial armamentarium of research, publications, and treatment programs" (208).



Perhaps this is because of the horrors of German National Socialism and the racism combined with anti-Semitism, which attributed human value to alleged physical characteristics. It is no small wonder that a culture with a history like that of Germany is more than hesitant to consider notions of selfhood that even in a remote sense approach biology, albeit in a non-essential matter.<sup>213</sup> Here it does not seem to matter that National Socialism's biologism had also turned vigorously against Magnus Hirschfeld's activism for the political and legal liberation of homosexual people and against their being pathologized – after World War II, it seemed, the self-confident proclamation of sexual orientations and identities other than being cisgendered and heterosexual was over and was not picked up again by a German post-war culture. Susanne Schröter remarks that

für die homosexuelle Subkultur bedeutete der Nationalsozialismus den Untergang. Wie in Berlin erholte sich die Szene [in Paris] nach Kriegsende nicht: Die Subkulturen der zwanziger und dreißiger Jahre waren nicht wiederholbar. („for homosexuals‘ subcultures, National Socialism meant they demise. As in Berlin, the scene in Paris never recovered again: the subcultures could not be restored to the state they had been in during the 1920ies and 1930ies”; Schröter 177 f.)

I hope that transgender and transsexed characters in Germanic films will receive increasing recognition through an emerging new wave of feminism that includes

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<sup>213</sup> For sure, biologism has been extensively used by representatives of the fascist regime during Germany's period of National Socialism, in order to suppress, persecute, and extinguish the so-called 'Third Gender,' as homosexual individuals according Hirschfeld have been called. In his commentary on the 1991 edition of *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht*, Manfred Herzer writes that Hirschfeld's research "blieb Provokation genug, um den Haß all jener >>Verfechter einer falschen Moral<< auf sich zu ziehen, die ihn 30 Jahre später endgültig aus Deutschland verjagten, die aber bei ihrem Versuch, Berlins Drittes Geschlecht auszurotten, glücklicherweise scheiterten ..." ("remained provocative enough to draw the hatred of all those "advocates of false morals," who fortunately failed in extinguishing Berlin's Third Sex"; 151)

transsexual women and men and that acknowledges them as potential partners in its political work against a patriarchal and heteronormative society that defines men and women as being categorically different. Armin Züger examines the possibility of an androgynous society which breaks down categorical walls between men and women, as well as between masculinity and femininity:

Vielleicht sind [es] diejenigen Frauen und Männer, die sich mit ihrer rollenspezifischen Sozialisation durch das Patriarchat auseinandersetzen, dieses patriarchale Verständnis durchbrechen und in Richtung auf eine androgyne Utopie hin überwinden wollen .... ("Maybe those women and men who are concerned with their socialization within a patriarchal system [are] those who want to breach the patriarchal system and work towards an androgynous utopia..."; 110)

Transsexual feminist and activist Emi Koyama's has published a *Transfeminist Manifesto* in which she writes that "sex and gender are both socially constructed, furthermore, the distinction between sex and gender is artificially drawn as a matter of convenience" (Koyama 249). Taken as a representative of a new German gender scholarship that start to pay attention to matters of sexual identity in gender performance, Züger's take on the social construction of sex and gender can be read in correspondence to Koyama:

Sämtliche Analysen der Geschlechterverhältnisse verfehlen ... ihren Gegenstand, wenn sie nicht zur Kenntnis nehmen, dass das Verhältnis von Mann und Frau auch von der jeweils historisch spezifischen gesellschaftlichen Produktionsweise strukturiert wird; die gattungsspezifischen biologischen Momente, die in dieses Verhältnis eingehen, können nur in der Ausprägung auftauchen, die sie von dieser

erhalten haben. (“All analyses of gender relations miss ... their point if they do not recognize that the relationships between men and women are also influenced by society’s economical structures. All biological characteristics can only emerge in the manner they are designed through the socio-economical structures”; 115)

John Cameron Mitchell’s film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* is a U.S.-American independent production focusing on both transsexuality and German cultural background. But other than Fassbinder’s *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* and Oscar Roehler’s *Agnes und seine Brüder*, I consider Mitchell’s film as a more positive example on how to see transsexuality as its own mode of gendered existence for human beings.

John Cameron Mitchell’s *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) is an adaptation of an Off-Broadway musical from 1998, which has been written by John Cameron Mitchell himself (text) and Stephen Trask (lyrics and music). Both film and musical are about the life of Hansel Schmidt, who moved with his mother to East Berlin after the Wall had been built. After he is thrown out of college for having written a thesis about the Western rock music he falls in love with the American GI Luther Robinson. The soldier promises to marry Hansel, in case he undergoes sexual reassignment surgery and assumes a woman’s appearance. Hansel, who is on a “search for his other half” and feels as physically and socially insufficient, complies and assumes his mother’s name, Hedwig.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Both characters Hansel and Hedwig are played by John Cameron Mitchell himself.

The surgery, however, fails. Hedwig does not receive a vagina, but ends up with a botched end of what has formerly been her penis – hence the film title *The Angry Inch*.<sup>215</sup> All marriage vows notwithstanding, Luther abandons Hedwig in a trailer park in Kansas and runs off with another young man. Via the news on television, she learns that her escape from East Germany coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Socio-politically, this event means for Hedwig that she ran away from the site where the reconciliation of two formerly separate parts has happened, from which she now is excluded again. But that very moment of both a personal and social defeat also marks the birth of the figure ‘Hedwig,’ the glamorous yet angry front-woman first of an all-girl band and then, after she is left by her protégé and lover Tommy Speck (and later rock star Tommy Gnosis) of a punk rock group consisting of illegal immigrants. The group accordingly performs under the banner ‘Hedwig and the Angry Inch,’ during which concerts the reference to Hedwig’s physical and performance-related androgyny is a constant cornerstone of every performance: “By using punk rock conventions, marked by masculine aggression, Hedwig expresses anger while celebrating her abject position in the world” (Hsu 104). With her new band, Hedwig’s search for her ‘other half’ continues on to levels. For one, the band is following the tour of now superstar Tommy Gnosis, and Hedwig repeatedly attempts to confront her former lover and student in rock music regarding the songs she has written, but with which he now makes a fortune. But the search for Hedwig’s ‘other half’ also takes place virtually, with regard to Hedwig’s own personhood, and to a means

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<sup>215</sup> In his review of the film musical, George Seminara points out that the surgery has been grotesquely performed by a podiatrist – which has a satirizing effect on the issue of undertaking a sexual reassignment surgery for purely practical reasons, but also on the characters’ ignorance on sex and gender problems: „The predictably botched operation leaves Hansel/Hedwig with the titular ‘angry inch.’“ (22).

of her representing herself in a fashion that she can fully affirm. When the film finally reveals that Hedwig is no one else than another aspect of Tommy Gnosis, the search appears to be over. But Hedwig passes on the need to continuously work on one's sense of self to her background singer Yitzhak, who turns into the woman he has longed to be for a long time, and which becomes possible by the time Hedwig reassumes a male appearance.

It is deliberately unclear during the film whether Hedwig is a transsexual or incorporates an extreme version of drag. Elizabeth Wollman's, chapter on 'Hedwig and the Angry Inch' refers to her as a transwoman and a female: "Hansel, renamed Hedwig and *self-identified as a female* after the surgery, marries the GI and accompanies him to the United States, only to be abandoned in a Kansas trailer park where she dejectedly watches the fall of the Berlin Wall on television" (Wollman 180, emphasis my own).

Hedwig is also the film's narrator and comments on her life retrospectively, on- and offscreen. Hedwig continuously insists that "I must find my other half." The trope of the 'other half' refers to Aristophanes' myth which also appears in Plato's *Symposium*. This myth tells that in the beginning of mankind's history there have been three sexes: men, women, and a combination of both where the name has been forgotten: "there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word 'Androgynous' is only preserved as a term of reproach" (143 f.). When the gods, jealous of the human capacity to love and hence to strive for qualities that have initially been those of the

divine,<sup>216</sup> Zeus separated the ‘androgynous species’ into separate units, all they wanted was to find together again. Plato’s Aristophanes recounts how Zeus redesigned the elements of the originally ‘androgynous’ sex in a manner that they were able to temporarily combine. In case this happened between a male and a female being, the reproduction of the sexes was possible: “and they sowed the seed no longer as hitherto like grasshoppers in the ground, but in one another; and after the transposition the male generated in the female in order that by the mutual embraces of man and woman they might breed, and the race might continue ...” (145). However, the original goal the newly created sexual beings had was not to reunite for a sexual act, but rather for a restored sexual unity. In other terms: their initial goal in their paring attempts was to recombine elements now separately perceived as male and female, so that “after the division the to parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one ...” (---). This desire is indicative for the transsexual, and it is also indicative for Hedwig’s own search, no matter whether we call her a transsexual or a male in drag.

The film connects Hedwig’s search for her ‘other half’ with her attempts to reconnect with the internationally renowned rock musician Tommy Gnosis. The musician’s name symbolically suggests that he is the bearer of knowledge, which is also related to love. After all, his character is Hedwig’s creation. He performs a rock music character dressed in the costumes that she has tailored for him, who she has written songs with and dedicated songs to, which he eventually interpret without giving her credits. But

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<sup>216</sup> “Phaedrus began by affirming that Love is a mighty god, and wonderful among gods and men, but especially wonderful in his birth. For he is the eldest of the gods, which is an honour to him ...” (Plato 129).

at the same time when Hedwig seeks the recognition of Tommy Gnosis, she denies the same respect to her band mates, especially to her male background singer Yitzhak.

The film suggests that Yitzhak is Hedwig's new husband. He is in love with the singer and hides a desire to appear as a female character himself. During the band's final stage performance, his desire to put on wigs develops into a desire to be a woman physically. Yitzhak realizes this desire through a jump into the concert audience, which in fact, and during the last moments of the film, turns the center of attention away from Hedwig onto him, now her.

But this is not the only physical transition that the film shows through a recording of a theatrical, or musical, performance. Before, Yitzhak turns into a glamorous woman on stage, Hedwig has transformed into Tommy Gnosis, which leads Elizabeth Wollman to conclude that "the ambiguous ending of the show suggests at one that Hedwig and Tommy were two parts of the same person, and that Hedwig has found the strength to forgive Tommy, release Yitzhak [her co-singer and intimate friend while touring with 'The Angry Inch'] from virtual slavery, and stand alone as a self-respecting, emotionally sound individual" (181).

The viewer may argue that, since Hedwig reassumes a male appearance and designs this as a major stepping stone on her journey, Fassbinder and Roehler are eventually justified in an assumption that transsexuality is an entirely social, rather than a bio-medical phenomenon. But *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* does not practice the transsexual's erasure. Although Hedwig transforms herself into a male, the now male main character transfers, in an act of Nietzschean 'generosity of the giver,' the femaleness he has freed himself of to Yitzhak, who throughout the film desperately

yearns for being a woman: “Just as Hedwig is transformed from glam queen to rock king, Yitzak is transformed from a gender-bending cross-dresser to a classic rock mainstay: a female backup singer” (185).

I argue that an analysis of Hedwig’s transition from male to female and back needs to include a close consideration of Yitzhak’s yearning to be a woman not only for the stage, where in fact he appears in the male gender. For the chapter’s remainder, I demonstrate how both characters’ reference to their sexes through gender performance underlines the transsexual person’s performance of gender fluidity. Hedwig and Yitzhak also indicate that there is no simple dichotomy between what we are socialized to call man and woman, respectively maleness and femaleness. To illustrate both characters’ performances of both gender and sexual identity, I now turn to a more detailed analysis of film scenes that are crucial for the film’s interpretation.

### **Hedwig: Transwoman, Transgender, Gay Male – or Nothing of the Above?**

Wendy Hsu identifies three narrative layers within the film. Hedwig’s off- and onscreen comments on her own biography are accompanied by her band’s performances in the present, in the fictitious Bilgewater chain restaurants. Throughout the film, *The Angry Inch* performs all songs live on stage.<sup>217</sup> The third narrative layer refers to the androgynous male-female beings from Plato’s *Symposium* and allegorizes Hedwig’s

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<sup>217</sup> George Seminara remembers cinematographer Frank de Marco’s impressions of the difficulties for the crew to film a live performance that eventually will be seen on screen as a result of numerous takes, put together in the cutting room: “John [Cameron Mitchell] sang many of the production numbers live because he wanted the film’s audience to experience the live feeling of his stage show ... However, John’s voice was only good for about six takes. Each take was essentially a new performance, and getting matching coverage was the key” (25).



search for her ‘other half.’ “As a rock musical, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* states its queer politics with a view expressive vehicles: the characterization of Hedwig, the musical performances, and the ongoing narrative references to Plato” (Hsu 104).

Whereas it is common that the transsexual almost ritualistically performs is or her transition from male to female or from female to male, Hedwig literally gets stuck in the middle. After the misfortunate surgery Hedwig is practically incomplete in terms of her genital anatomy and in terms of her gendered self-reference: “Hedwig grew into an ambiguous gender identity, starting as a “slip of a girlyboy” named Hansel Schmidt who suffered a botched a botched sex-change operation in an attempted transition to womanhood – hence the “angry inch” of scarred flesh between her legs” (Tobias, <http://www.avclub.com/articles/hedwig-and-the-angry-inch%2C35004/>).<sup>218</sup>

With regard to her indeterminate anatomy, Hedwig appears to be neither male nor female. But Cameron’s film also defies any settling into a gendered identity that contents itself with being the ‘third spot’ or ‘third position’ within an otherwise binary gender structure. If that were the case, Hedwig would be confined to the social position of ‘neither-nor,’ which I have describe earlier. Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Oscar Roehler, at the other end of the spectrum, have demonstrated through their characters Elvira and Agnes how the position of the ‘neither-nor’ also excludes the incorporation of both genders, should a strict division between male and female genders based on their sexual constitution remain intact. Hedwig’s ‘incomplete’ transition through a failed

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<sup>218</sup> “Not a typical male-to-female transsexual, Hedwig is now a biological he/she with neither-female-nor-male genitals which s/he refers to as ‘an angry inch’” (Hsu 104).

surgery is also a motif to continue both the film's plot and Hedwig's narrative within the latter.

Is Hedwig a transsexual in the design I have sketched in the preceding chapters? At a closer look, this does not seem to be the case. Although the search for her other half is introduced by her offscreen voice right at the film's beginning, it does not focus right away on the change of sex. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* sets off with a performance of the band's punk rock song "Tear me Down," with Hedwig's stage performance alluding to drag in a fashion that Judith Butler may enjoy. Hedwig appears to celebrate a gendered in-between-ness. The film's first take shows her dressed in a fake fur coat, when she enters the kitchen of the Bilgewater restaurant in Kansas City. On stage, Hedwig is dressed in a coat that is heavily spray-painted in yellow-orange-blue colors, which she unfolds into oversize wings that reveal the writing 'Yankee go home with me.' Her make up is a mocking overstatement of stereotypical femininity: Her eyebrows are shaved off and replaced by thick black eyeliner, with additional silver glitter on her brows. Hedwig's eyeshades are blue-silver and sparkle as much as the dark red lipstick color. The viewer, especially during the close-up shots on her face, recognizes in Hedwig's stage persona not only a satire on 'classical femininity' – demure modesty and the effort to look appealing to the male gaze -, but also on the wishful thinking-images of the United States as the land of freedom of self-expression without boundaries.

During the film's flashbacks into Hedwig's childhood, the viewer sees the setting of an overstocked, cramped apartment in East Berlin, which Hansel used to inhabit with his mother, and which was so tiny that he had to play in the oven, secretly listening to US-channels on the radio:

Most of my time I spent listening to American Forces Radio. Our apartment was so small that mother made me play in the oven. Late at night, I would listen to the voices of the American masters [Here the film employs temporal montage techniques, with the present-day Hedwig in full make-up lying in the oven, with the head close up in the oven's interior, instead of the figure of then six-year-old Hansel. These artists, they left as deep an impression on me as that oven rack did on my face.

Hedwig's search for her 'other half' begins with the construction of the Berlin Wall<sup>219</sup> and the construction of Berlin as a city divided into two seemingly irreconcilable opposites, the socialist East and the capitalist West. Just like the city functions as a symbol for the desire to reunite what has once been together – one city, one nation, one people – so Hedwig expresses a desire to somehow fee complete, although at first she does not have a clear idea about what this is supposed to mean. Cartoon sketches, included as a means of montage into the film's storyline, help to visualize how Hedwig was raised as Hansel by his mother. The cartoon sketches mostly appear in the film's first half and then reappear in the end, when the Hedwig appears to be at the end of her search. The cartoons' functions intersect. For once, they serve as a means for flash-backs. The first series of cartoon sketches illustrate Hansel's siring, birth, and him growing up in the years in the Western economic miracle – which he and his mother may follow from a distance, since they'd moved to the East as soon as Hansel was born and as soon as the wall had been

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<sup>219</sup> It is noteworthy that Hansel in fact had been born in West Germany, but that his mother, a convinced socialist, moved to the east as soon as the wall had been coming up: „In the year I was born, the wall went up, and many people decided to move west to freedom. Mother threw me into a wheelbarrow and headed east.”

erected. On a more abstract level, the cartoons also illustrate Aristophanes' tale of the 'third sex' that included elements considered both male and female, who got separated by Zeus, after which they found themselves on a painful journey in search for their respective 'other half.'

On the narrative level of the stage performances, the performance of the song "The Origin of Love" is specifically interesting. The song concludes the first flashback on Hansel's childhood and contains shots of the cartoon sketches which illustrate the myth of the 'third sex.' Hedwig wears a similar make up to what she had put on or the first performance in the film, the aforementioned "Tear me Down." However, her costume is more demure now and consists of a black spider web vest, a red shirt and sparkling black pants. The cartoons are also projected against the wall of the Bilgewater in Chicago, where this performance takes place. At times, the camera fades into a full take of the cartoons, in order to then switch back and forth between cartoon shots and live takes of Hedwig and her band.

Interesting about the song "The Origins of Love" is that Hedwig not only sings about three sexes, but rather about three sexes that are in themselves consisting of manifold combinations:

And there were three sexes then,  
 One that looked like two men  
 Glued up back to back,  
 Called the children of the sun.  
 And similar in shape and girth  
 Were the children of the earth.

They looked like two girls  
 Rolled up in one.  
 And the children of the moon  
 Were like a forked shoved on a spoon.  
 They were part sun, part earth  
 Part daughter, part son.

The song aims to illustrate an idea also Nietzsche wants to underline when he lets his Zarathustra talk to his wisdom during “The Dance Song” or when he talks to his ‘Stillest Hour.’<sup>220</sup> This idea expresses how nobody in fact is monolithically male or female. In fact, every human being from the very beginning is already a complex pattern of various drives, which comprises various gender expressions and which bears no center.

Every human being acts and creates because he or she is on a journey which we may also call a search. This search often is a painful experience because it entails a yearning for something that is amiss, but perceive as deeply needed. In Hedwig’s song as well as in the Platonic records of the myth, this yearning is called ‘love.’ Without the ‘fierce and demanding drive’ to ‘search the other half,’ this feeling of love cannot be experienced and referred to. The sentiment of love is therefore dependent on the existence of the other. And, most importantly, love as a yearning out of a ‘fierce and demanding’ drive is sensed and expressed physically. Love and the transsexual’s desire to change his or her sex have in common that they are both directed towards the other, which is only recognizable through a social framework.

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<sup>220</sup> “Gestern gen Abend sprach zu mir *meine stillste Stunde*: das ist der Name meiner furchtbaren Herrin“ (Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra 187). (“Yesterday, toward evening, there spoke to me *my stillest hour*: that is the name of my awesome mistress”; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra 145)

German philosopher Ulrich Pothast explores the perceived physicality of emotions that a person perceives to be his or her own, and which come up via an interaction with another person. Pothast does not explicitly talk about love as an emotion. But his main topic is attraction, which is, through its expressed desire for the other, related to the sentiment of love:

>>Anziehend<< bezeichnet eine Eigenschaft, die ich der Kollegin von meinem Innengrund her zuschreibe, bei Gelegenheit meiner neuerlichen Erinnerung an den gemeinsamen Nachmittag. Es ist ein Wort für das Wahrgenommene in seinem Verhältnis zu mir. (“‘Attractive’ refers to a quality that I assign to my colleague from an inner motivation, while remembering the recent afternoon we spent together. It is a word that describes the relations between me and the thought”; 1988, 164)

This notion of the “Innengrund,” the “inner cause” “within a human being, at first appears to be a problematic term, and analytical philosophers like Ursula Wolf have suspected an ontological foundation in Pothast’s model of the human being’s sense of selfhood.<sup>221</sup> Pothast, however, uses the critical term metaphorically and in order to refer to the special cognitive function the ‘I’ has in the constructive perception of what also Haraway has called ‘worldliness.’

Unser Zugang zu unserem spürenden Leben als einem solchen ist gänzlich anders  
beschaffen als unser Zugang zur umgebenden Welt; eben deshalb braucht es

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<sup>221</sup> See Wolf 110: “Die Vorstellung, daß die Philosophie die Frage zum Thema hat, was es überhaupt heißt, als Mensch in der Welt mit anderen zu leben, gehört vielmehr zur ... traditionellen Auffassung von Philosophie. ... Diese Konzeption von Philosophie knüpft an das an, was früher ‘Metaphysik’ hieß ....” (“The notion that philosophy is concerned with the question what it means for a human being to live with other human beings, rather adheres to a traditional concept of philosophy. Such an understanding refers to what has been called ‘metaphysics’”; Wolf 110)

vermutlich zur Arbeit über ihn theoretischer Mittel, die anders sind als die vom Philosophieren über äußere Wahrnehmung her gewohnten. („Our access to our sensitive lives is differently designed than our access to the surrounding areas. Because of that, we supposedly need more work on modes of reception which are different than those with regard to our perception of the external world”; Pothast 1992, 408)

If the feeling of attachment to the other is disturbed, or even destroyed, such as it happens in Aristophanes’ parable, attraction turns into pain and into a longing that is called love. Correspondingly, Hedwig finishes her song “The Origin of Love” as follows:

Last time I saw you  
 We had just split in two.  
 You were looking at me.  
 I was looking at you.  
 You had a way so familiar,  
 But I could not recognize,  
 Cause you had blood on your face;  
 I had blood in my eyes.  
 But I could swear by your expression  
 That the pain down in your soul  
 Was the same as the one down in mine.

The experience Hedwig sings about is sensed in a physical manner – yet, of course, it cannot be perceived without its embedding in a social context. Rosalyn Diprose connects Nietzsche’s philosophy of the body to Judith Butler’s post-modernist model of

subjectivity and states that “the manner in which the corporeal self is constructed as a social structure of drives and emotions is first a question of how the body is unified through social concepts” (Diprose 21). Diprose and Butler don’t doubt the existence of materiality before its social encoding. But this materiality only becomes meaningful through the socialization processes that every human being undergoes and which not only teaches an intellectual, but also emotional reference to what we perceive to be our ‘own’ bodies: “... the individual is a culturally specific corporeal artifact whose existence is a product of the exclusion of other possibilities for one’s embodied place in the world” (23). Although feelings are some of the components of what Nietzsche calls the urges and the will to create, only the socially learned reference to them enables the human being to feel in a manner that he or she can recognize and handle: “... gender as it is lived and embodied is, in some powerful sense, always already theorized” (Salamon 578).

Hedwig deduces that her other half is experiencing pain because she herself is experiencing pain. Ironically, in order to construct an awareness of one’s self, a retrospective distance of the ‘I’ from the self becomes necessary. In Lacan’s words, the ‘I’’s distance from the self is created through the other and the impact this other has on the self during interactions: “There is something that becomes present by virtue of the fact that all determination of the subject, and therefore of the thought, depends on discourse” (Lacan 2007, 205).

The loving and yearning subject is both agent and patient, and only through being both is it in fact possible to give and to receive in a Nietzschean sense. Zarathustra is a giver, and he considers this talent to give his greatest weakness and his obligation,



because it is through giving and the acknowledgment of corporeality that Zarathustra constitutes and reconstitutes himself:

Unersättlich trachtet eure Seele nach Schätzen und Kleinodien, weil eure Tugend unersättlich ist im Verschenken-Wollen. Ihr zwingt alle Dinge zu euch und in euch, dass sie aus eurem Borne zurückströmen sollten als die Gaben eurer Liebe. (Nietzsche, Also Sprach Zarathustra 98) (“Insatiably your soul strives for treasures and gems, because your virtue is insatiable in wanting to give. You force all things to and into yourself that they may flow back out of your well as the gifts of your love”; Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 75)

Love, according to Nietzsche, is selfish. It wants to attain as much as possible from the other, which is a condition that *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*’s final scenes visualize. Here, the final transformation from Hedwig into Tommy as well as Yitzhak’s transformation into a woman is performed. The scene concludes with a final cartoon animation that is a comment on the performance just given: the two halves which Aristophanes has introduced in the fable have finally found together and reunite by mutually devouring each other.

To devour someone is another metaphorical term for to love someone. If the Nietzschean love is a yearning to receive as much as possible, in order to give as much as possible, then the mutual swallowing is the ultimate expression of love. As such, love is accompanied by a yearning that is physical: “Also geht der Leib durch die Geschichte, ein Werdender und ein Kämpfender. Und der Geist – was ist er ihm? Seiner Kämpfe und Siege Herold, Genoss und Wiederhall” (---). (“Thus the body goes through history,

becoming and fighting. And the spirit – what is that to the body? The herald of its fights and victories”; ---)

The film performances continuously refer to love as an expression. Especially interesting is the relationship between Hedwig and Yitzhak, her new husband.<sup>222</sup> Yitzhak is ‘The Angry Inch’s background singer, with a suspiciously high voice which right from the start challenges the perceptions of a male identity.<sup>223</sup> He and Hedwig often get into fights on stage- about where to stand and who is to be heard louder on stage. During the first song “Tear me Down,” Hedwig approaches Yitzhak from behind, hugs him and moves her hand towards the background singer’s genital area. Yitzhak pushes Hedwig away and soon after enters a singer ‘battle’ when he raises his voice over that of Hedwig’s at the end of the song, only to have the microphone plugged out. When alone, he tries on Hedwig’s wigs, which give an initial hint to the viewer that the singer, after all, does not necessarily identify with the boy he pretends to be. His clearly feminine voice suggests on an aural level that Yitzhak continuously aspires to perform a role recognized as ‘female.’

Yitzhak certainly has feelings for Hedwig, and so does Hedwig have for him. In that matter, I disagree with Hsu who writes that “their relationship is never at any point marked by love” (Hsu 111). Instead, I argue that the gesture of the ‘generous gift’ that Hedwig performs on Yitzhak during the band’s final performance, which I will analyze shortly, underlines their love relationship. After the band’s opening concert in a

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<sup>222</sup> When Yitzhak receives the role of a cross-dressing drummer for a South Polynesia tour with the musical ‘Rent,’ he appears in a black wig and demands to be ‘divorced’ from Hedwig, because of ‘irreconcilable differences.’ Hsu, in her reading of the film, also reconfirms that “Hedwig and Yitzhak have a regular sexual relationships as well as a legal marriage ....” (111).

<sup>223</sup> Yitzhak’s character, both in the musical and in the film, is played by the female actress Miriam Shor.

Bilgewater's in Kansas, Yitzhak is in a hotel room all by himself and surrounded by a huge amount of blonde wigs. He slowly picks one up in order to try it on, but when Hedwig enters he quickly hides the wig, as if she was caught committing a sacrilege. Yitzhak seeks Hedwig's face in order to kiss her, to which Hedwig willingly complies. But when the TV, caught in the camera's close-up, plays the video of Tommy Gnosis' number one success "Tear me Down," Hedwig gets upset and interrupts the romance. Yitzhak sullenly jumps up and inquires: "Why don't we... why don't you write a new song?"

Yitzhak's slip of the tongue is significant. It suggests that, despite all the shown animosity between Hedwig and him, there is a certain desire to give and to receive, as their most intimate moment of the aforementioned kissing scene, suggests. However, Yitzhak and Hedwig at first are unable to grant gifts to each other. As much as Hedwig has to find her other half, so does Yitzhak, which eventually happens in the film's last performance.

This last performance is that of the song "Midnight Radio." During the preceding performance of "Exquisite Corpse," Hedwig has fallen into frenzy. She trashes the band's equipment, tears off her wig, removes her breast prosthetics, and rushes off the stage. When in the next scene she finds herself in the shape of male and in a dark room with a dimly lit stage, where Tommy Gnosis sings by himself, or seemingly just or Hedwig. The following scene introduces the performance of "Midnight Radio." Hedwig herself has now assumed Tommy's physical appearance and shape. She now wears the Greek symbol for knowledge that she had first drawn on Tommy's forehead, and through

which she had encouraged him to transform from a small-town boy into a self-confident rock star.

The last performance provides also the platform for reconciliation between Hedwig and Yitzhak. Earlier in the film, Hedwig had initiated a fall-out with her band members, especially with Yitzhak, who had come to his wife once more to request both a divorce and his passport, in order to separate himself from her and the band.<sup>224</sup> When Hedwig tears up his passport, this deed is meant to be an attack against Yitzhak's personhood, the expression of his will and hence his desires. But Mitchell works with a lot of implicit irony throughout his film – one of them, if not *the* most important one, being the tearing up of Yitzhak's legal proof of identity that may most likely have identified him as male. What first must appear an assault on Yitzhak's freedom ultimately turns out to be a necessary preparation for him to turn into *her*. This transition takes place with the performance of "Midnight Radio," and the very performance serves as the transition's catalyst.

Wendy Hsu writes that its performance takes place after Hedwig has learned to depart from Tommy Gnosis. In her view, the song signifies the recognition that the long-anticipated wholeness can only be found in oneself rather than through dependence on someone else: "Hedwig wants (his/her) audience to love and be in love, to feel and be affected by Eros, while at the same time be in touch with oneself, not get overinvested in

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<sup>224</sup> Scott Tobias refers to Yitzhak's plans to apply for a role in the Guam- and Polynesia-tour of the musical *Rent*, which would signify the separation from *The Angry Inch*: "The flyers for *Rent* are a [sic!] like a casting call for a Benetton ad: The parts are all the same (each described as a young, "edgy," aspiring-artist type), but the show needs a blond, a black, and a Puerto Rican drag-queen type, and he's good enough for the latter. And abandoning Hedwig's current tour/personal vendetta means no more suffocating hotel rooms, no more humiliating gigs at a chain of seafood-buffet restaurants, and no more living in the shadow of a larger-than-life personality who's doomed to the fringes."

a relationship. Wholeness resides in oneself” (113). Whereas the latter is certainly true, I nonetheless hold with Elizabeth Wollman that Hedwig and Tommy Gnosis are one person and not two. The lyrics, in fact listed by Hsu, seem to almost insist on the interpretation of a unity in personhood:

Breathe feel love  
 Give free  
 Know your soul  
 Like the blood knows the way  
 From your heart to your brain  
 Knows that you’re whole.

The desire for an experience of wholeness, in this context, does not suggest a definite separation from the persona of Tommy Gnosis, who indeed *is* a creation by Hedwig, rather than being an independent character.<sup>225</sup> But when Hedwig finally turns into another variation of her male self, then this must mean “that Hedwig and Tommy were two parts of the same person, and that Hedwig has found the strength to forgive Tommy [as her other half], release Yitzhak from virtual slavery, and stand alone as a self-respecting, emotionally sound individual” (Wollman 181).

The permission to Yitzhak to become free, however, is not a permission to cross-dress, as Hsu suggests.<sup>226</sup> Instead, “Midnight Radio” is the performance that visually initiates Yitzhak’s becoming a woman both through clothing and physical alterations.

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<sup>225</sup> “The transformation from Tommy Speck into the rock star Tommy Gnosis is actually Hedwig’s creation (or cocreation with Tommy himself). It is Tommy Gnosis ... who is an imitation of Hedwig, not vice versa” (Hsu 113).

<sup>226</sup> “Hedwig lets go of Yitzhak’s hand as Yitzhak puts on a wig. This gesture signifies that Hedwig finally allows Yitzhak to cross-dress, an act that the latter has longed to do” (---).

Whereas drag as performance to cross-dress includes an explicit reference to the own body and the discrepancy between the latter and the clothes and the make-up which covers it, Yitzhak's transition, although highly ritualized, renounces this explicit self-reference. It even progresses without any words other than those sung by Hedwig on stage, while Yitzhak's transition takes place besides the stage, which in turn would have been the space for an ironic reference to the discrepancy between body and clothing and makeup, as it is indicative for subversive drag.<sup>227</sup>

Chapter one has considered the world to be a creative output of the so-called Nietzschean 'Kunsttrieb.' This drive includes the interplay of Apollonian and the Dionysian modes, which are expressed in terms of gender. Often the Apollonian is considered as a 'male' mode and the Dionysian as a 'female.' If every human being is a part of this creative output that makes up our view on 'worldliness,' then it holds that every human being conceives of himself as both female and male. Wendy Hsu correctly observes that "wholeness resides into oneself," but I add that this implies that Tommy Gnosis had been a part of Hedwig right from the start, and that Tommy and Hedwig express different modes of physical aspects. This, again, emphasizes that the borders not only between the social categories of gender, but also between the biological and biomedical ones of sex are fluid, so that it is possible for a human being to be biologically male and female, albeit at different times and not at the very same time. Susanne Schröter

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<sup>227</sup> Anthropologist Susanne Schröter summarizes the elements of subversive drag as a performed objection to a fixed and solid assignation of gender to the sex given at birth: "Zu diesen dominanten Bedeutungsträgern zählten Kleidung, Haartracht, Gestik und sexuelle Praktiken sowie bestimmte Aktionsfelder, die von einem Geschlecht monopolisiert werden". ("Clothing, hairstyle, gestures and sexual practices as well as other field of action that become gender monopolies constitute its central fields of meaning"; 95)

points out how transvestites and transsexuals together have drawn the public's attention to these matters:

Die Idee des Fließens, des Ambivalenten stellt sich beim Lesen solcher Beispiele zwangsläufig ein, und die Forderung nach Öffnung kategorieller Grenzen entschließt sich der Leserin als logische Konsequenz. ("The idea of fluidity, of the ambivalent involuntarily emerges while reading, and the demand for an opening of categorical borders appears as a logical consequence"; 201 f.)

Hedwig finds herself within Tommy, with the sign for knowledge on her forehead, because

s/he has learned that designs for maleness and femaleness account for every human being. Consequentially, the transsexual is in no way different in his or her physical constitution from anyone else who does not see him- or herself as transgendered. Only the discomfort level may be higher: "Some of us have less tolerance for the dissatisfaction, that's all" (Bornstein 118). The transsexual perceives maladjustment of male and female elements for him- or herself. Often, he or she attempts to respond to these emotions with alterations of his or her body, endocrinally and/or surgically. The transsexual works actively on his or her endocrinal and/or anatomical reconstruction, with the Nietzschean intention to be able to say: 'This is me and thus I willed it.'<sup>228</sup> But it is important that this 'thus I willed it' is not expressed because one dwells in the past:

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<sup>228</sup> See also Prosser 67: "What makes it possible for a female-to-male transsexual to name the somatic material (skin, tissue, and nerves) transplanted from his forearm or his abdomen to his groin "my penis," or for a male-to-female transsexual to name the inverted remains of her penis "my vagina" is a refiguring of the sexed body that takes place along corporeal, psychic, and symbolic axes" (Prosser 67).

“Moving beyond the present self is not a matter of declaring oneself born again by simply reaching for a new part to play: it requires working on oneself” (Diprose 25).

The notion of work which the subject exercises and which in turn affects the subject's sense of self constitutes a common aspect the transsexual person and Hedwig's character share. In order to accomplish this work, Hedwig and the transsexual character outside the film need to conceive of themselves as being works of art that are continuously in the making. Underlying is the idea that at no time is the body a solid, in the sense of fixed, element. Instead, the body is in a constant flux, both biologically and with regard to an emphatic self-reference of the subject.<sup>229</sup> In the same manner, and referring to the emotional relations to the perceptions of one's own body, the sense of self is not a fixed and stable unity either, and “part of the reason is that the “unity” of Dionysus has ever already been divided up. This is evidenced by our own individuation” (Brown 97). In the same manner as the past is included and incorporated in the character's present, as such is the present always and already an instant that again is an indicator for the future. What this means with regard to the transsexual is that the transman or the transwoman, through their acts of physical transition, emphasize what accounts for every human being's physicality and sense of selfhood. Both a human being's physicality and sense of self is continuously fluid and contingent, hence non-essential. The transsexual's performance of a physical alteration demonstrates this contingency of body and sense of self through the very processes of hormone replacement therapy and cosmetic surgery. The body, in that case, becomes a corporeal

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<sup>229</sup> “The body is said to be a (non)foundational basis because the body transposes and is itself a transposition of multiple world forces. It is without identity proper” (Brown 96).



writing pad, such as plastic surgery writes on the body and indicates physical change according to the performer's will. In that sense, the human being in general and the transsexual in particular is able to perform what, in the following, will be called the 'generous gift.'<sup>230</sup>

Hedwig acknowledges her fluent sense of identity through the very transitional process, which will continue through the gift that Hedwig bestows upon Yitzhak, and which consists of the latter's physically becoming a woman. The cartoon sketches that signify the end of "Midnight Radio's" performance demonstrate how Aristophanes' separated males and females enter a reunification process. But this reunification process is not streamlined and includes continuous ruptures. The cartoon strips show how the two separate halves need several attempts to reunite. Even then, the film does not stop with the image of the unified halves. The concluding high-angle camera shot captures a naked Hedwig/Tommy walking away into a nightly street, disappearing in the dark.

This 'finding of the other half' is an important precondition for what Rosalyn Diprose refers to as Nietzschean 'corporeal generosity.' Only because of this can Yitzhak fulfill his desire to become and a woman, rather than merely limit to cross-dressing.<sup>231</sup> "Midnight Radio" includes Yitzhak's stage diving into the crowd, after he has put on a blonde wig that has been handed to him by Hedwig. The leap from the stage into the crowd is similar to the Nietzschean jester's jump on the rope, a jump that has cause the acrobat to fall and break his neck. After a dance that Hedwig and Yitzhak perform

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<sup>230</sup> "The self as a work of art is never the same as the self that creates it, not because the self as artist is the true or essential self in contrast to a false, unique, extra-social image projected, rather, the image the artistic self creates is a moment beyond the present self that creates it" (Diprose 24).

<sup>231</sup> "Singing 'You're shining like the brightest star,' Hedwig lets go off Yitzhak's hand as Yitzhak puts on a wig. This gesture signifies that Hedwig finally allows Yitzhak to cross-dress, an act that the latter has longed to do." (Hsu 113)

together, Yitzhak climbs up an elevated part of the stage. The camera records Yitzhak putting on the wig from a low-angle position, then, when he jumps, directs the lens right into the stage lighting, which causes the film spectator to see nothing but a bright beam of light. This glare of light signifies more than just the fulfillment of a cross-dresser's dream. Moreover, it symbolizes an existential change from a male to a female mode of being expressed physically, not limited to clothing alone.

The person who the spectator sees after the leap differs significantly from the imagery of drag in Butler's sense. Although the female version of Yitzhak has a hair-style that is similarly to the wig he had put on before the transitional leap into the abyss, the wig appears in a physical context different from that of Hedwig's. The female the viewer is seeing from a high-angle position in close up wears a sparkling red dress and pink-brown shoes. Their heels are moderate in height and the dress is simple-tailored. The make-up is not excessive, but rather underlines a feminine-appearing face, which for the first time ever in the film is smiling happily.

The excess of make-up and attire Hedwig's own performances contained have vanished from Yitzhak's female selfhood. At the same time, her female mode is no performative reinforcement of conventionalized gender roles either, which would only be the expression of a "kind of reiteration of norms which cannot be called subversive ...." (Butler 1993, 124). For the latter to happen, the now female persona would have to resume the position in the band she had had before: Hedwig's marriage partner and background singer. But exactly this does not occur. The newly female version of Yitzhak does not rejoin the band. When 'The Angry Inch' continues its performance, she is carried on the audience's hands out of the camera's frame and disappears, fulfilling what

her desire had been before: to separate from Hedwig in order to continue her life on her own. Hedwig's own gift-giving virtue relies on the creation of distance and separation. Zarathustra confirms the necessity to create a distance one's self through the creation of a distance to the other. He concludes his speech on that very same 'gift-giving virtue:'

“Allein gehe ich nun, meine Jünger! Auch ihr geht nun davon und allein! So will ich es. Wahrlich, ich rathe euch: geht fort von mir und wehrt euch gegen Zarathustra.“ (Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* 101) (“Now I go alone, my disciples. You too go now, alone. Thus I want it. Verily, I counsel you: go away from me and resist Zarathustra!”; Nietzsche 1978, 78).

As I have just written, the act of giving is embedded in a chain of giving and receiving, and the act of giving is in itself a creative act. Nietzsche's Zarathustra refers to the act of giving as follows:

Achtet mir, meine Brüder, auf jede Stunde, wo euer Geist in Gleichnissen reden will: da ist der Ursprung eurer Tugend. Erhöht ist da euer Leib und auferstanden; mit seiner Wonne entzückt er den Geist, dass er Schöpfer wird und Schätzer und Liebender und aller Dinge Wohltäter. (--- 99) (“Watch for every hour, my brothers, in which your spirit wants to speak in parables: there lies the origin of your virtue. There your body is elevated and resurrected; with its rapture it delights the spirit so that it turns creator and esteemer and lover and benefactor of all things”; --- 75 f.)

The body as the 'creator' and 'benefactor,' the giver and the receiver, assumes more than just a constructivist, metaphoric function. It is a corporeal medium for the Nietzschean 'gift-giving virtue.' The body as the site for a creative output is physical, but nonetheless

temporary in its states of being. Thus, Hedwig gains knowledge about her own ‘trans-sexuality.’ For her, transitioning symbolically indicated a search for the other that eventually every human being undertakes. Because of her ‘gift-giving virtue’ that she has acquired during her journey, she is able to recognize that trans-sexing occurs on various level, during various stages of everybody’s lives.<sup>232</sup> For Yitzak, the perceived mismatch between his ‘inner’ sense of gendered selfhood and the ‘outer’ expectations of the other regarding his pre-transitional male appearance were too much of a gap to tolerate. Through the dance performed during “Midnight Radio,” the ‘gift-giving virtue’ enables Yitzak to transition and thus to turn into a giver himself – or should I better say: herself?

### **Performing the Search: The Generous Gift and the Nietzschean Dance**

I have already talked about the significance of the dance for Nietzsche’s aesthetics, especially in the part of chapter three, about Kate Bornstein’s staging of her play *Hidden: A Gender*. It was in the dance in which the two main characters, crossing their sexual identities, but not yet assuming opposite gender roles, feel at ease with their selves the most. Also for Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, the dance in its moving and hence transgressing qualities has an alluring effect that encourages viewers to turn into participants. Although an interpretation of the dance that is shaped by a view on Dionysus is not the only one possible, – Paul de Man, for example, has an almost

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<sup>232</sup> Ansell-Person sees the body as an organism that is continuously changing and altering, thereby also blurring any distinctions between inside and outside, hence “leading to the construal of a fluid relationship between ‘inner’ and ‘outer,’ between autonomy and heteronomy, and between nature and artifice” (142).

opposing view on the dance as a rather restrictive artistic expression<sup>233</sup> - Nietzsche's view of the dance as an ingredient of the Dionysian Greek orgy provides an alternative to a repetition of conventions.

For Nietzsche's aesthetics, the dance is a cultural expression that serves as a collective medium of ecstatic experience:

Die dionysische Erregung ist im Stande, einer ganzen Masse diese künstlerische Begabung mitzutheilen, sich von einer solchen Geisterschaar umringt zu sehen, mit der sie sich innerlich ein weiss. (Geburt der Tragödie 61) ("Dionysiac excitement is able to transmit to an entire mass of people this artistic gift of seeing themselves surrounded by just such a crowd of spirits with which they know themselves to be inwardly at one"; 1999, 43)

In that sense, 'The Angry Inch's rock concerts may be thought as being the perfect enactment of 'Dionysiac excitement.' But at the beginning, this appears not to be the case. Instead, the first Bilgewater concerts are presented as awkward, because unwanted performances for an 'audience' that for the majority did not even expect to find a rock band where they were initially planning to dine. Time and again, guests stand confused, complain to the waiter's staff and to a part leave the restaurants. On the fictional *Menses Fair*, very likely an ironic reference to the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*, which does not even permit the presence of transwomen on festival grounds, and only recently

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<sup>233</sup> In his essay on Friedrich Schiller's *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* and on Heinrich von Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* as a response to Schiller, Paul de Man emphasizes that the steps and directions of movement in a dance follow an elaborate system of rules that reinforces conventionalism rather than challenging it: "Mankind [...] is human only by ways of art. On the other hand, as a principle of formalization rigorous enough to produce its own codes and systems of inscription, tautology functions as a restrictive coercion that allows only for the reproduction of its own system, at the exclusion of all others" (265). Nonetheless, Nietzsche's view on the dance as an ingredient of the Dionysian Greek orgies offers an alternative to a restrictive model of the dance.

allowed transmen,<sup>234</sup> Hedwig plays with her band on a dilapidated, makeshift ‘9<sup>th</sup> Stage,’ at the end of a long row of mobile toilets. It is raining, but the stage has no cover, which is why the band simply is unable to play: the instruments are wrapped up in rain blankets, in order to prevent the musicians from being electrocuted. One single spectator is standing in front of the ‘9<sup>th</sup> Stage,’ clad in black, with black lipstick, and with black lace cloths, therewith blurring the boundaries between male and female and revealing him- or herself as one of the band’s very few ‘disciples.’<sup>235</sup>

During the concert in the Bilgewater’s in Baltimore, the camera catches, in a shot-reverse shot series, a small amount of fans, a makeshift gathering of a most diverse group, spanning all ages and gender expressions – from the aged man in a suit and tie to the androgynously styled gender-crosser, where it is difficult to determine whether the character is male or female. What they have in common is that they all emphasize elements of drag: In the ambience of an eatery, the followers of ‘The Angry Inch’ wear large halves of a whole around their heads, reemphasizing the aforementioned Platonic myth and wigs of diverse colors.

But are these efforts in drag indeed subversive in the programmatic sense Butler pursues? The band and the small group of followers, both through appearance and performance, attempt to challenge and redefine the expectable sort of interaction within an American chain restaurant, and they also challenge conventional expectations about

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<sup>234</sup> See Serano: ”Despite more than 15 years of repetition and a growing acceptance of trans identities in both mainstream society and queer, feminist and other progressive circles, the festival still official maintains its “womyn-born-womyn”-only policy, and countless other lesbian- and queer-woman-focused groups and events continue to harbor dismissive, if not outright disdainful, attitudes towards trans women.” ([http://www.alternet.org/reproductivejustice/93826/rethinking\\_sexism%3A\\_how\\_trans\\_women\\_challenge\\_feminism/?page=1](http://www.alternet.org/reproductivejustice/93826/rethinking_sexism%3A_how_trans_women_challenge_feminism/?page=1))

<sup>235</sup> One extreme close-up of the spectator’s smiling mouth, however, captures traces of black facial hair, suggesting the sphere of the male sex.

what to wear in one. The Bilgewater's is no longer just a place to have an after-work dinner. Rather, the guests involuntarily turn into an audience of a rock show and are brought into Dada-esque experiences: Faced with an unexpected occurrence within an otherwise familiar space, people have to redefine not only the setting of the restaurant-turned-concert hall, but also their own positions and roles in it.<sup>236</sup> Neutrality, or even indifference, is no longer possible for the guests to uphold: They are turned into performers as well.

Die vermeintlichen Zuschauer ... entpuppten sich als die wahren Protagonisten, während die vermeintlichen Handelnden ... in die Rolle von Zuschauern gedrängt wurden: Die ganze bürgerliche Welt war als Theater decouvriert. („The spectators ... found themselves to be the actual protagonists, while the actors and actresses ... received the roles of the spectators”; Fischer-Lichte 1999, 269)

It is true that the American working class that is present at the Bilgewater's is not by all means identical with the bourgeois society the Dadaist performers encountered in Germany's beginning 20<sup>th</sup> century. But that does not mean that the happenings of Dadaism and that of Hedwig's concerts are incomparable. Irony is omnipresent in both types of setting, and the questioning of social frameworks and conventions is one of the key components in both sorts of performance. While Hedwig performs the song “Sugar Daddy” at the Bilgewater's in Miami, she sings about how she, first met her first husband

Luther Robinson:

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<sup>236</sup> Das Theater der Dadaisten trug sich an den Schauplätzen bürgerlicher Rituale – wie Kirche und Regierungssitz – zu und entlarvte so die Rituale selbst: Gottesdienst, Parlamentssitzung – als theatralische Vorgänge“. („Dadaist theater took place at locations of bourgeois rituals – such as churches and parliaments – and hence exposed the rituals of church services and governmental meetings as being theatrical processes”; Fischer-Lichte 1999, 268 f.)

So you think only a woman  
 Can truly love a man.  
 Then you buy me the dress  
 I'll be more woman than a man like you can stand.  
 I'll be your Venus on a chocolate clam shell  
 Rising on a sea of marshmallow foam,  
 And if you've got some sugar for me,  
 Sugar Daddy, bring it home.

Different from the concerts performed at the Bilgewater's in Kansas City and Baltimore, for example, the guests in Miami's Bilgewater's are actually listening, seeking eye contact with Hedwig and silently consenting to her mock-sexual advances. But the setting is ironic: almost the entire audience consists of aged and elderly men, those who could indeed and easily fulfill the role of the sung about 'Sugar Daddy.' But that means that the audience is not only listening, but also acting: Hedwig's call for a sugar daddy is confirmed and in fact – more or less voluntarily - approved, whereas her 'botched sexuality' she sung about at the Bilgewater's in Baltimore<sup>237</sup> is aggressively rejected and attacked by one of the male audience members, who throes the insult "faggot" at the transgender singer.

But *The Angry Inch*'s performance in Baltimore is in fact the most tantamount to Dadaist theatricality and performance art. When Hedwig is called a "faggot," Yitzak jumps at the caller and starts an encompassing bar fight, which ultimately the entire

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<sup>237</sup> "My sex change operation got botched / My guardian angel fell asleep on the watch / Now all I've got is a barbie doll crotch / I've got an angry inch."



restaurant guests plus the musicians join. As a consequence, the dividing line between the positions of performer and audience is blurred, if not explicitly rejected.

The drag that Hedwig and her followers perform underlines the parodying effect that extends on the settings, the alleged division between performers and audience, and on the alleged divisions between the male and female gender.<sup>238</sup> So, why is *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, in my reading, a film that serves as a positive, appropriate representation of transsexed identities rather than just another drag show?

Hedwig is not a transsexual in the socio-cultural and medical sense of the word. Not only does the final performance “Midnight Radio” show a male character on stage who emphasizes male physicality through a bare-chested performance. In the preceding performance of “Exquisite Corpse,” Hedwig refers to herself as a hallow shape, a corporeal entity that is in itself meaningless, even for herself:

I’ve got it all sewn up  
 a hardened razor-cut  
 scar-map across my body  
 and you can trace the lines  
 through misery’s design  
 that map across my body.

Her performed statement about her own body lacks the certitude Prosser emphasizes when a transsexual human being repeatedly and officially declares the wish to undergo

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<sup>238</sup> “Identifying with a gender under contemporary regimes of power involves identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications by which they are insistently approximated” (Butler 1993, 126).

measurements of physical alterations like hormone replacement therapy or plastic surgery.<sup>239</sup> In contrast, Hedwig is finally no longer able to refer to her female shape as a physical expression of her sense of selfhood.

However, Hedwig continues to express that all physicality and all manners of self-reference are fluid and contingent. In a dance that resembles the Dionysian Greek Orgy, Hedwig transforms ecstasy into an uncoordinated dance during “Exquisite Corpse.” In an accelerating succession of shots, she first smashes the band’s musical instruments, then dismembers her own physical appearance, taking down the wig, her costume and ultimately her make-up, before she stumbles out of the room and into the aforementioned encounter with her alter ego Tommy. After that, she finds herself back on the stage, transformed into a male shape, and performs “Midnight Radio.” The uncontrolled performance Hedwig assumes responds to Paul de Man’s objection to the dance as a set of regulating rules. It is also the necessary precondition for the last performance, and associated with it the generous gift to Yitzhak, to happen.

In order to cross from female to male, Hedwig metaphorically leaps into a Nietzschean abyss. But that metaphorical leap in fact involves physicality. To experience ecstasy means to perform a leap which separates a newly defined personhood from an earlier one that has been entirely designed by the other for the self, rather than in a collaborative effort. The leap has been a novelty for the newly transformed Hedwig. Her search for her ‘other half’ indicated that she was looking for something she has not come

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<sup>239</sup> “In both its medical and its autobiographical versions, the transsexual narrative depends upon an initial crediting of this feeling as generative ground. It demands some recognition of the category of corporeal interiority (internal body sensations) and of its distinctiveness from that which can be seen (external surface): the difference between gender identity and sex that serves as the logic of transsexuality” (Prosser 43).

to know before. Analogously, the transsexual who undergoes hormone replacement therapy or sexual reassignment surgery initiates a process to achieve a sense of selfhood that she or he in fact does not know yet, but which society suggests to him or her. A decision to undertake measure of physical alterations is hence based on the transsexual's weighing of his or her present physical discomfort level against the potential comforts and discomforts that may await him or her during an after the transitioning processes. This is what Gayle Salomon means when she writes that the emotional self-references are learned through social interactions.

If the yearning for something that society only permits to anticipate exists, as it is shown by the global existence of transsexuals, then Butler's claim from 1993 that "... 'being a man' and this 'being a woman' are internally unstable affairs" (1993, 126) certainly holds true, but nonetheless must allow to create a sense of a gendered and sexual identity which objects to anatomical determinism and essentialism, but still expresses a desire to be perceived and recognized in a temporally consistent manner that allows the interpretation to be either man or woman. Of course, this is not to emphasize an 'either-or' relation that declares exclusive validity. Hedwig's continuous search for her 'other half,' however, goes to painful extents to demonstrate that there is a certain sense of perceived livability that the gendered and sexed individual must be able to accept in order to live at all. Butler assumes "Although being a certain gender does not imply that one will desire a certain way, there is nevertheless a desire that is constitutive of gender itself and, as a result, no quick or easy way to separate the life of gender from the life of desire" (2004, 1 f.).

The desire referred to is expressed physically through dance. During her performances, Hedwig dances all the time. But whereas at the beginning her dances had been entirely self-centered, the occasional snap against Yitzak having been the exception, this changes during “Midnight Radio.” When Hedwig picks up the microphone, she directs her view towards Yitzak, who in turn observes her with a gaze that reveals the aforementioned yearning. Hedwig picks up a blond long haired wig and hands it to Yitzak. The background singer at first tries to put it on Hedwig’s head, as he had been used to do it numerous times before, but this time Hedwig objects and motions Yitzak to apply the wig on himself.

What follows is a dance where Hedwig and Yitzhak hold each other on one hand, move slightly to left and right, before Hedwig waves Yitzak away. I grant that this seems more like a traditional dance and thus seems to verify de Man’s suspicion of a performative enforcement of regulative acts, hence as a “trap of an aesthetic education which inevitably confuses dismemberment of language by the power of the letter with the gracefulness of a dance” (de Man 290). But the dance’s continuing objects to this reading. When Hedwig now waves Yitzhak away, this is not meant as a dismissal of the latter’s identity, but rather as its facilitation: “Action at a distance is defined philosophically ... as the idea that one body can affect another without any interesting mechanical link between them” (Diprose 38).

Yitzak’s aforementioned leap into the Nietzschean abyss then facilitates his transition. The viewer notices the shift from yearning to fulfillment on her face. Throughout the film, the background singer looks with an air of longing towards Hedwig, which changes when ‘he’ is finally ‘her.’ It is noteworthy that in these last filmic

sequences, the female Yitzak's look is no longer directed at anyone else: After her stage-diving, she is carried on her back, on the audience's hands, with the camera capturing her face from a high-angle position, focusing on her eyes and smile, the latter being another new component to her face.

Costume once more becomes important. The setting in which the band performs "Midnight Radio" is that of a regular rock concert, with the audience eagerly waiting for 'The Angry Inch' to begin. The musicians are all dressed in white clothing, performing a unity that actually affirms their belonging to an actual band. John Cameron Mitchell's film underlines the importance of affirmed identity. A performed reaffirmation of selfhood is not monolithic. Rather, Hedwig and Yitzhak as 'makeshift' characters perform their senses of self as contingent designs, which again are compositions of male- and female-perceived elements. Both Hedwig and Yitzak don't break with their past. Rather, the film itself as a medium makes sure that their pasts are kept alive, but that the past, as Diprose referred to it before, is important because it affects the future.

## Conclusion

The films and theatrical pieces discussed in this dissertation demonstrate how transgender and transsexual characters work on the reconstruction and redefinition of their newly sexed and gendered selves. During this process, a lot of them face difficulties such as discrimination or the loss of social status. Kate Bornstein's *Hidden: A Gender* suggests that the transgender and transsexual stigmatization in many societies, specifically in the Western spheres, happens because trans-characters refuse to continue their unquestioning investment into the gender market, which is full of economical goods catering to specific sexes and which forms expectations of socially acceptable gender behavior. Another one is that their challenge of their own sexuality's factuality may have a discomfoting effect on others. People who have never been question their own sexual self-perception may, once they have been confronted by a transsexual human being, start to ask themselves what it actually means when they perceive themselves as either men or women, males or females, or when they are supposed to act according to social standards of femininity or masculinity. In Bornstein's own words, "one of the things that makes me, and others like me, dangerous is that we do speak up. We break the silence imposed on our people. And what we talk about is the very real oppression of women. ... I've come from a place of privilege and I am now experiencing life as very different and non-privileged" (110 f.).

The loss of privilege Bornstein talks about occurs when society perceives a mismatch between physical appearance and gender behavior. Within the context of

German gender scholarship, Dorothee Alfermann emphasizes the ongoing impact of expected gender-conform behavior on people's lifestyle decisions until today:

Die Erfüllung dieser Rollenerwartungen kann den individuellen Fähigkeiten geradezu zuwiderlaufen oder jedenfalls ihnen nicht besonders entsprechen. ... Männer haben die Ernährerrolle zu übernehmen, was schon früh im individuellen Lebenslauf von Jungen gelernt und antizipiert wird. Dementsprechend läßt sich bei Mädchen eine ganz andere Lebensplanung beobachten. Sie kalkulieren stets die Notwendigkeit ein, Familie und Beruf miteinander zu vereinbaren. ("The fulfillment of gender role expectations can be contradictory to the individuals actual talents ... boys learn from an early age that men have to be the providers. Accordingly, there is an entirely different design of life for girls. These plans persistently consider the necessity to combine family and professional life"; 7)

The matter of course regarding socially expected gender behavior based on a person's perceived biological sex experiences a radical challenge with the transsexual's appearance. The transsexual person rejects not only traditionally expected gender behavior, but also the initial constitution of his or her body. Through measurements of its physical alteration, he or she signals how both biological sex and social gender are contingent.

Transsexual bodies become a public site for gender and sexuality debates and discourses. The body which undergoes hormone replacement therapy, cosmetic and/or sexual reassignment surgeries renders itself as a spectacle to the public, albeit not for the latter's scopophilia, but to challenge what this public sphere thinks about the validity of sex and gender dichotomies. The transsexual body questions the matter of course that

members of a certain society usually associate with sex and gender.<sup>240</sup> This does not mean that the transsexual performance of sex and gender as a genuinely subversive enactment by any means wants to abolish a perceptive distinction between men and women. Dorothee Alfermann emphasizes how

die Aufmerksamkeit auf zwei Geschlechterkategorien bzw. die Fähigkeit, zwei Geschlechter kognitiv zu unterscheiden, kann über bildliche Versuchsanordnungen bereits bei einjährigen Kindern nachgewiesen werden. (“Tests on one year-olds can already demonstrate how efforts in socialization are made to distinguish between two genders”; 13)

With my reference to the two notions of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, I have not attempted to get rid of a gender and sexual system that works with the dual structures of maleness and femaleness. But what Nietzsche’s aesthetics and his work with the mutually interdependent drives reveal is that men and women are not categorically different. Although both denote varying modes of gendered and sexual ‘worldliness,’ intersections and transgressions between them are the norm rather than the exception.

In my dissertation, I have written about the impact that medical discourses and techniques have on today’s perception of transsexuality as a condition that goes along with physiological and psychological programs. The chapters two and four explain how transsexuality is also, but not exclusively a product of medical and psychiatric discourses. There have always been so-called gender-benders in society that did not live as a man

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<sup>240</sup> “Geschlechterstereotype sind ... Bestandteil des Alltagswissens in jeder Kultur und werden schon früh in der kindlichen Entwicklung erworben“. (“Gender stereotypes are ... parts of a culture’s everyday knowledge and are acquired already at an early age”; Alfermann 13)



despite having been born male, or did not live as a woman despite having been born female. Trans-activist Jason Cromwell refers to pianist Billy Tipton, who lived his life as a man, although he had been a biological woman and kept his biological identity a secret, even if that implied refusing medical treatment for a stomach ulcer that eventually was the cause for his death.

Cromwell refers to Tipton in order to counter accusations against transsexuals to transition for want of a privileged and more convenient social status: “The male privileges that accrue from living as a man do not justify spending fifty years living in fear, hiding from loved ones, taking extreme measures to make sure that no one knows what their body is or looks like, and then dying from a treatable medical condition (a bleeding ulcer)” (89).

Similarly, Brandon Teena would have had a significantly higher chance to survive in rural Nebraska had he remained female for the public. Finally, my reference to the transsexual supermodel Lea T. shows how despite her fame as an internationally acclaimed model she still suffers from social ostracism, but nonetheless continues to live her life as a woman and also continues with the corporeal aspects of her transition.<sup>241</sup>

Such a commitment to the own body’s modification, whether through drag alone or through surgical and hormonal interventions, amounts to more than an opportunist measurement to gain control or dominance over the so-called ‘other sex,’ nor is this measurement appropriate to increase the person’s own social and/or economic status.

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<sup>241</sup> As of 2011, Lea T. is waiting for permission to undergo sexual reassignment surgery “T. is currently in Milan waiting for her sexual reassignment surgery. ‘This is something you are going to keep for your life,’ she explained. ‘I will always feel uncomfortable, but it will make my life a little easier, and I will look in the mirror and see something I like more’” (<http://www.styleite.com/media/lea-t-transsexual-model/>).

Oftentimes, the person does not gain, but rather lose social recognition and sometimes even his or her life.

Underlying the loss of social recognition is oftentimes the ideal of a ‘normalized’ body and an ‘appropriate’ gender behavioral code accompanying the perception of its very shape. Within the cognitive mechanisms that participate in the physical image of the body, the concept of sexual identity plays a significant role. Although the construction of the sexual organs do not provide something that can be related to an alleged gender-essence, sexual organs deeply influence our ways in which we recognize the sexual identity we are supposed to assume, and the gender roles we are more or less supposed to play according to these sexual identities. Elizabeth Grosz notes that “no matter how the individual may wish or will it, male and female genitals have particular societal meaning in Western patriarchal cultures that the individual alone – or even in groups – is unable to transform insofar as these meanings have been so deeply etched into and lived as part of the body image” (82).

This does not mean that our physical construction tells us how we think about or perceive ourselves. In fact, transsexuality contradicts this point. But the condition shows us to use the physicality to which we refer as ‘our bodies’ as a tool, a modifiable tool, and as a tool that is non-static in every human being, not only in case of the transsexual.

Socio-medical and ethnological discussions about the normalizing effects on our perception of sexed bodies often refer to sciences, either to *underline* or to *undermine* normative tendencies within their respective fields of scholarship. Donna Haraway teaches that science itself is a mode of performance, which uses metaphorical language as

much as the humanities and the arts do: “The road is magical, a kind of labyrinth, with many detours promising the golden reward of endlessly fruitful scientific reproduction, the specific kind of immortality mythologized in laboratory travel literature” (1989, 233). I deduce that therefore, performance is the link between presentations of transsexuality and transsexual persons being compared to each other in a global perspective. Although there is a large variety of cultural differences with regard to how the transsexual is seen and valued, the most common denominator is that transsexuality, whether in the cultural contexts of South-East Asia, Europe, the Americas, or wherever in the world we encounter it, is enacted through and as a performance. In these performances, the transsexed physique is perceived as a transsexed physique because it “becomes a rhetoric vision, in which the body becomes a rhetoric, a persuasive language linked to social practice.” (---)

Donna Haraway’s perception of the body as a rhetoric signifier that is realized through performance is not solely applicable to the transsexual body. In fact, her book *Primate Visions* does not mention transsexed bodies at all. But her research underlines how everybody is perceived and accessible through the social lens, through which again it turns into a medium of performance. This goes back to Kate Bornstein’s observation that the issues of sex and gender are virulent for everybody, with the transsexed covering only one part of the gender and sexual spectrum:

... nearly everyone has some sort of bone to pick with their own gender status, be it gender role, gender assignment, or gender identity. And when this dissatisfaction can no longer be glossed over, with good manners, or cured by purchasing enough gender-specific products or services – and when this

dissatisfaction cannot be silenced by the authority of the state, the medical profession, the church, or one's own peers – then the dissatisfaction is called transsexuality, or gender dysphoria. (Bornstein 118)

If everybody – and in the literal sense: every *body* – needs to repeatedly undertake efforts to define and redefine ones own sense of self through a continuous signification process of his or her physicality, then this also implies that any notion of a normal physical shape is nothing else but a normative abstraction from repetitive perceptions of physical shapes. Both U.S.-American and German gender scholarship agree on the socio-economic impacts that play a role in the determination of which body shapes are to signify an 'ideal' shape. Christa von Braun, for example, traces Europe's gendered history and concludes that the model of mutually exclusive genders assumedly based on biological sex is itself the outcome of an intellectual and economical process that governs the working world along with the social separation of the sexes: "Vor allem dem Mann wurde in diesem Denken und in dieser Zeitvorstellung die Rolle eines Subjekts zugewiesen, der Frau jedoch die eines Objekts." ("In the course of modern Western thought, primarily the male was assigned the role of a subject, whereas the female only received that of an object"; 1989, 20) The distinct identification of social genders became tied to physical distinctions between men and women, verbalized through a vocabulary of biological metaphors:

Ihr [the woman] wurde die Rolle zugewiesen, eine geistlose Masse zu inkarnieren. An ihrem Körper, stellvertretend für den Körper überhaupt, an ihren Sinnen, stellvertretend für die Triebe, vollzog sich der Kampf gegen Natur und Weiblichkeit. ("She [the woman] was assigned the role to be material 'without

intellect.’ Her body was turned into a site for the instinctual drives, which image served in the battle against nature and femininity”; (---)

Although a strict separation as in the earlier days of industrialization is no longer actual,<sup>242</sup> Dorothee Alfermann observes how parts of this thinking have persisted in stereotypes regarding women and men: “Denn die an Frauen gerichteten Erwartungen sind im Kern nach wie vor die der Fürsorglichkeit und des Dienstes am Menschen und an der Familie“ (“Expectations directed towards women are generally still those of being in service to mankind and family”; 46).

Alfermann emphasizes androgyny as a performance measurement to challenge a strict alignment of gender roles to sexual and gender identity. In her interpretation, which reveals influences from Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, men and women are able to assume as many gender roles as they like, no matter to which sex they had traditionally been assigned: “Im Androgyniekonzept wird diese postulierte Konvergenz von biologischem Geschlecht und Geschlechtsrollenidentität in ihrer faktischen und normativen Bedeutung in Frage gestellt.” (“The concept of androgyny challenges the images of a convergence between biological gender and gender role identity in their normative meaningfulness”; 59)

However, Alfermann continues to distinguish strictly between biological sex and psychological sex role identity evident in gender behavior. While this distinction is in congruence with my take on sex and gender, Alfermann’s more or less monolithic picture

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<sup>242</sup> “Mädchen und junge Frauen streben eine Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf an. Wie Umfragen übereinstimmend zeigen, ist eine Berufsausbildung und eine zeitweilige oder lebenslange Berufstätigkeit bei Mädchen fest eingeplant ....“ (“Girls and young women aspire to combine professional with private life. As surveys demonstrate, girls plan to acquire a professional education and either temporary or permanent employment”; Alfermann 44)

of sexual identity causes problems and does not go far enough to provide the floor for transsexual human beings to walk on:

Das Androgyniekonzept basiert ... darauf, daß die *psychologische* Geschlechtsrollenorientierung auf (mindestens) *zwei* Dimensionen anzusiedeln sei, nämlich einer Maskulinitäts- und einer Femininitätsdimension, und daß jedes Individuum, Mann wie Frau, *unabhängig vom biologischen Geschlecht* auf diesen beiden Dimensionen jeden beliebigen Punkt einnehmen kann. ("The concept of androgyny refers to the assumption ... that a *psychological* gender role identification relates to an at least two-dimensional model, that contains a dimension of masculinity as well as of femininity, and that every individual, *regardless of biological sex*, may assume any given position on their intersection"; 59)

Alfermann's concept of androgyny is interesting with regard to its impact on social interactions between men and women, but it does not part ways with normative ideas regarding appearance and image of a normalized physical body. Her assumption is that within the concept of androgyny, men and women question the set of roles and actions available to them according to their genders, while the physical constitution of their bodies remains untouched. The result is that for the scholar, an increased fluidity in gendered actions and roles becomes possible, while such a development with regard to the body's physical states is missing.

Performance can be an endeavor to familiarize with the unfamiliar. Regarding gender, sex, and sexuality, the pieces and performances discussed illustrate how these notions

may function as acting tools and means of embodiment either to reject or to support any “structure of oppositional discourse” (Haraway 1989, 257). Gender, sex, and sexuality do not exist ‘naturally.’ They are products and results of a cultural creative process. Nonetheless, they are not merely reflections of social norms either. As sex, gender, and sexuality are also the outcome of the human being’s expressive urges, or, in Nietzsche’s words, expressions of a “fervent will to create,” they design the patterns and fields within which the human being negotiates his or her desires, wishes, and needs. Transsexuality emphasizes that social recognition is an outcome of negotiation, which, however, must avoid establishing new metaphysical norms regarding a fixed gender and sexual identity. This would only lead to renewed mechanisms of social exclusion, in which the human body becomes a signifier that bears the marks which decide about inclusion or expulsion from a society.<sup>243</sup>

But the transsexual’s transitioning process does not necessarily imply that there is a metaphysically designed instance in the human being that essentially constitutes the human being’s sexual or gendered identity. In fact, a human being does not have any concrete sense of identity that has not been negotiated with the requirements and role expectations brought forth by society. But the very process of negotiating requires that both sides involved in the interactions establish a sense of self-reference, because this self-reference is necessary to realize the other as a partner of equal worth to oneself: “It is

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<sup>243</sup> Donna Haraway, in her studies of anthropology, has observed that there exists the danger to interpret the findings out of field research in a manner that serves the researcher’s own interests. As a consequence, studies of customs within tribal cultures are seen as ‘natural’ in difference to industrialized societies’ customs as being ‘cultural’ or ‘artificial,’ yet more familiar and less ‘uncanny.’ “Those [peoples] studied are regularly found to have just those properties that the writer’s culture lacks and needs or fears and rejects. It is this structure that defines the logical move that constructs what will count as ‘primitive,’ ‘natural,’ ‘other’” (1989, 257).

this inseparability of self from situation and the consequent necessity of adopting some kind of interpretative or phenomenal perspectivity [sic] that informs, for instance, the emphasis placed by recognition thinker on language as a form of pragmatic interaction rather than as pure signification” (McNay 5).

Through social interaction, a person constitutes, revalues, and expresses aspects of the experiences which constitute his or her sense of self, but also the encounters with the other. In that way, we learn what it means to live in society as a man or a woman, what it means to be a man or a woman in society, and finally what we perceive ourselves as either being a man or a woman. The latter aspect of social negotiation does not forcibly involve essentialism. As I have written in chapter four, William T. Vollman avoids the essentialist trap-door by answering his question about what a woman is with his image that he has of her, as a type that relies on the experience of interacting with many individual women. He thus answered his question about womanhood not with an ontological definition, but with a summary of his experiences. In the same manner, as I have referred to in chapter two, can we approach the question regarding what the self, or the ‘I,’ is.

Within the process to construe and negotiate identity, the ‘I’ is in a particular situation: He or she embodying his or her sense of self has to be able to consider him- or herself not only as a subject, but as an object as well. Only if he or she is able to create an image of him- or herself is she able to create an image of the other. These creative processes, which I have extensively described and developed in my chapter one about Friedrich Nietzsche’s aesthetics, involve the corporeal body.



The transsexual who considers his or her transition a self-initiated performance corresponding to Nietzschean creativity exposes heteronormativity in societies that still work with gender binaries, but demonstrate physical permeability in film and video arts. Visuals arts not only visualize and demonstrate techniques with which to change a person's body shape in cyberspace, but also familiarize the viewer with manifold variations of physical changes that take place in everyday lives. Christina von Braun considers the transsexual's medial presence as a proof for her claim that in contemporary society, lines between biological sexes and social genders blur increasingly:

Nicht nur im Kino, im Internet, in den akustischen Medien ... werden Körper und Geschlecht als austauschbar erfahren. Ähnlich verhält es sich auch mit der leiblichen Körpererfahrung, bei der das biologische Geschlecht nicht nur als >anders< oder austauschbar phantasiert wird, sondern auch tatsächlich verändert werden kann: etwa durch eine transsexuelle Operation. ("Not only in the cinema, on the internet, and in audio media ... are bodies perceived as interchangeable. Similar experiences occur with regard to biology, where the own sex is not only fantasized as interchangeable, but where indeed it can be modified, for example, through sexual reassignment surgery"; 2000, 48)

Whereas Alfermann's conception of androgyny as gender fluidity does not go far enough and does not consider transsexual's change of corporeality, rather than of his or her social interactions, von Braun's interpretation of transsexuals' medial representation as an indicator for a growing acceptance of both gender and sexual fluidity appears to draw too positive a light. My analysis of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *In einem Jahr mit Dreizehn Monden* and especially Oscar Roehler's *Agnes und seine Brüder* as a response to the New

German Cinema director's film proves that the mere presence of transsexuals on screen does not yet guarantee a growing awareness of gender and sexual fluidity and contingency.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 'Elvira' is presented as a pathetic cross-dresser who 'crossed' the lines between the change of clothes and 'change of skin,' who wallows in self-pity because of her inability to keep either a steady job or a steady relationship, and who subjected to the structures of "compulsive heterosexuality" (Rich).<sup>244</sup> Changing sex, ironically, means for Fassbinder to lose the ability to establish a self-defined notion of identity. Oscar Roehler's *Agnes und seine Brüder* doubles Fassbinder's character of Erwin/Elvira and embodies it as 'Agnes,' who just like Elvira is also a post-operative transsexual and who as well, after the surgery, is unable to live in a society for which she has changed herself rather than having reconfigured the body according to how she herself would want to be seen. Like Elvira, Agnes is unable to keep a steady job as well as a steady relationship. Both characters proved themselves to be unable to face and challenge structures of 'compulsive heterosexuality' and unable to combat through an embodiment with which they could feel more comfortable. Although their transsexed bodies are both times the films' focal motif, Fassbinder and Roehler do not advocate transsexuality as a variant of gender and sexual modification that involves the body. Rather, transsexuality gets closer again to psychopathology. Admittedly, this is the purpose of their films. But they reveal that it is enough to simply present transsexual

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<sup>244</sup> "But whatever its origins, when we look hard and clearly at the extent and elaboration of measures designed to keep women within a male sexual purlieu, it becomes an inescapable question whether the issue we have to address as feminists is, not simple „gender inequality,“ nor the domination of culture by males, no mere „taboos against homosexuality,“ but the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male right of physical, economical, and emotional access“ (Rich 647).

characters on screen. This can also have the purpose to expose them as sick, deviant, and pathological.

John Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, especially their main characters Hedwig and Yitzhak, demonstrate that it is also important *how* transsexual characters are present either on the stage or on screen. I interpret the film through the lens of Nietzschean aesthetics and especially in consideration of the dance as a performance element with which the characters perform their own gender and sexual fluidity. Nietzsche's modeling of the Apollonian and the Dionysian as gendered drives and urges that the human being cultivates in him- or herself and with which he or she creates 'worldliness' contribute to a sense of gender and sexual fluidity that does not stem from gender scholarship alone, but draws back on the history of German philosophy. This does not mean that my view on transsexuality as a performance interpreted through philosophy replaces or excludes present studies in gender, transgender, and transsexuality studies. Instead, both approaches are complimentary.

Read through the lens of sociologist Harold Garfinkel, transsexuals question the necessity of the reintroduction into a heteronormative society and its 'gendered and sexual normalcy:' "From the standpoint of persons who regard themselves as normally sexed, their environment has a perceivedly normal sex composition. This composition is rigorously dichotomized into the 'natural,' i.e., *moral*, entities of male and female" (116). But the transsexual body, even after a completed sex reassignment surgery, always bears the marks of such surgery, which John Cameron Mitchell's 'Hedwig' signifies in a radical manner. Janice G. Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She*

*Male* denies a female status to transsexual women – and a male one to transsexual men – because of their chromosomal constitutions, but also because transwomen have not been raised and socialized as women, and transmen not as men: “After birth, the biological program shifts to one of psychosexual conditioning, and gender identity now becomes largely a matter of biographical history, especially social biography” (47).

Interestingly, transsexuals’ socialization as the ‘opposite sex’ does not subvert feminist efforts to combat sexism, but rather supports them. Hedwig and Yitzhak never deny that they have been born as males. In fact, the sex which they had been assigned at birth constitutes a crucial part in their narratives. Through their performances, both characters demonstrate the contingency of biology and socialization. Their makeshift characters underline that both masculine and feminine drives are constitutive of every human being, no matter whether the respective person perceives of him- or herself as a man or as a woman.

What transsexual women have been sharing with non-transsexual women is the experience of being second class citizens based on their biological conditions. While Gilbert and Gubar emphasize the definition of hysteria as a ‘female disease’ according to Freud, their remarks on anorexia as a disease still mainly affecting women are still valid: “And, indeed, such diseases of *maladjustment to the physical and social environment* [emphasis my own] as anorexia and agoraphobia did and do strike a disproportionate number of women. Sufferers from anorexia ... are primarily adolescent girls. Sufferers from agoraphobia ... are usually female, most frequently middle-aged housewives ....” (2030). Still today, Jennifer Posner, in an analysis of multimedia presentations of male

and female genders, observes how “women are most often depicted as victims, and victim-blaming is still prevalent” (38).

What strikes me is that, although women both transsexed and non-transsexed, seem to suffer the same mechanism of repression, second wave feminism in particular had turned the transsexual into the perpetrator rather than into the victim. I have followed the arguments set forth by Janice G. Raymond, Robin Morgan, and Mary Holmes, who are either skeptical of transwomen’s and transmen’s self-declared selfhood as women or men regardless of their biological conditions, or who even lash out against transsexed people as ‘raping women’ by assuming women’s physical features<sup>245</sup> or declare them as mentally ill, such as Catherine Millot.<sup>246</sup>

It is fortunate that in the recent years, and mostly with the emergence of studies in transsexuality (Stryker 2006, Prosser 1998, Namaste 2005, Serano 2007, Valentine 2007), a closer understanding of transsexuality not only as a medical condition, but also as a further mode of sexual and gendered identity has emerged. However, it is stunning that the majority of the scholarship speaking in favor of transsexuality as a mode of gendered and sexual identity is mainly from an Anglo-American origin. German scholarship has been more reluctant when it comes to this view on transsexuality.

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<sup>245</sup> “... since men have been socialized to fetishize women, it is not surprising that this fetishization process is one more explanation of why there are more male-constructed-female transsexuals” (Raymond 31). Raymond’s statement about the prevalence of male-to-female transsexuals has been proven wrong by statistical evidence, but it serves her point, in the confines of her own text, to focus predominantly on transwomen, DVK.

<sup>246</sup> “The transsexual symptom appears to function as a substitution of the Name-of-the-Father inasmuch as the transsexual aims to incarnate The Woman. Not *one* in the sense of “not all,” implying that no one can claim to present All women – the transsexual’s position consists of wanting to be All, all woman, more woman than all women, and representing them all” (Millot 35).

Medical definitions still dominate, which the research by Hirschauer (1993), Rauchfleisch (2009), or Runte (1996) confirms. For the transsexual in the German discourse, to resist medical pathologization does only seem to lie in the decision to reject medical alteration of the body entirely. Only Susanne Schröter (2002) or Lindemann (1992) seem to be invested in a closer understanding of transsexuality as a mode of sexual and gendered identity that includes the investment into hormonal medication and plastic and corrective surgeries transsexed people undergo as a tool amongst many to express feelings of identity through performance.

Medial tools like hormone replacement therapy and/or sexual reassignment surgery may as well be powerful tools for the liberation of sex and gender. With Jay Prosser I want to conclude that the transsexual who chooses to undergo sexual reassignment surgery makes a revolutionary statement that I want to phrase as follows:

- 1) The transsexual who is usually classified – or who classifies him- or herself as post-operative signifies a willingness to be perceived as either male or female. As such, he or she wants to work *with* the categories of gender and sexual identity in the fashion as we know them. They do not want to be considered a ‘neither-nor,’ but either as a male or a female.
- 2) At the same time, transsexuals challenge traditional notions of gender in the sense that they deny that the gender assigned at birth has any determining qualities that bind them to the gender they were born into. Whether one is a male or a female has nothing to do with the sex and gender one is born into. Rather, whether one is

a male or a female has something to do with the way how one feels one need to be perceived – either male or female, regardless of the sex and gender assigned at birth.

- 3) While the second point counts for all kinds of transsexuals, post-operative transsexuals extent their performance of their felt sense of identity through the statement of physical formations of gender representation as entirely malleable. The body, thus, is not bound to any gender, but can be altered to match any form of felt gender, according to what one feels as being his or her sexual identity, that then gets expressed socially as gender.
- 4) Sexual reassignment surgery is a variant of cosmetic surgery. And like other forms of cosmetic surgery such as rhinoplasty or facial feminization, it aims at an improvement of ones felt quality of life.<sup>247</sup> But unlike a surgical procedure like a rhinoplasty, sexual reassignment surgery does not erase the personal history past. For example, the neo-vagina built in the case of the male-to-female transsexual is made of the penis. This means, if we consider the corporeal aspects of performance, through the lens of Diana Taylor, Erika Fischer-Lichte, or William T. Vollman, the performance of the surgery connects, or ‘sutures’ (Silverman) the transsexed person’s past to his or her present and future, thus not only enabling him or her to live in two different modes of gendered and sexual existence, but even requesting him or her to do so. This does not mean that the affected person is

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<sup>247</sup> ”More recently, feminist critics have acknowledged that cosmetic surgery is increasingly represented and experienced as an intervention not only in beauty (understood as superficial, transparently culturally dictated, and conformist) but in identity. That is, like sex reassignment surgery and weight loss, cosmetic surgery is increasingly represented through the resonant discourse of becoming one’s true self by having one’s body represent the person one feels one is inside” (Heyes 89).

not allowed to reject the one mode of identity in favor of the other. Rather, this is often intended and encouraged. Rather, this means that the transsexual has the opportunity to actively design the narrative of his or her own journey alongside the gender spectrum.

- 5) This latter statement is all the more important insofar as it demonstrates how not only the transsexual's sexual identity and gendered expression of selfhood is a matter of performance that is at stake every day. Rather, *every* human being has to negotiate on an everyday basis what it means to be a man, a woman, and what it means to love men, women, or both. Gender and sexual identity are always performances, with the transsexual only occupying one farther vantage point. My elaborations on Kate Bornstein in the chapters three and four have hopefully made this clear.

Sabine Hark refers to gender models and categories as being the basis for feminist agendas:

Obgleich die biologisch gedachte Zweigeschlechtlichkeit eine meist totgeschwiegene Voraussetzung des feministischen Diskurses bildete, war damit noch keine Aussage darüber gemacht, welche Bedeutung diesem Unterschied zugeschrieben wurde. ("Although the biologically perceived model of a two-gendered system is the tacit basis for feminist discourses, it does not include any statement about this model's meaning"; 43)

Note that Hark does not say that these biological differences in men and women define men and women in difference to each other, but rather that they are *though as* defining



men and women in difference to each other. These thought patterns connect biological conditions to expectations regarding social roles of masculinity and femininity.

If society wants to uphold the gender system that I have just sketched again, this system needs to castrate on a level of everyday social interactions as well. Again, this is another connecting point in which feminism and gender studies are connected and in which the road towards studies in transgender and transsexuality is paved.

To date, Germanic studies in gender and feminism has been rare in providing tar and stones for that pavement. However, the Germanic traditions of intellectual history, in which Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetics are embedded, provide a rich and fertile ground from which we can take the job to contribute to the discourse on sex and gender that is led by Anglo-American scholarship.<sup>248</sup> There is no sense in weighing a philosophical approach towards transsexuality discourses against those exercised by gender scholarships. Transsexuality is a globally occurring condition, and all over the world it involves, but is not limited to, medical interventions. The standards of care which Harry Benjamin had worked out long before the phenomenon was all over the media are recognized worldwide. But that does not necessarily count for the rights to participate in the public businesses for all kinds of human beings, whether they are transsexual or not. Our job to fight gender and sexual discrimination is not limited to the protection and recognition of transsexual human beings alone. But they certainly belong to the most marginalized until today. In our global endeavors, we are well advised to work on an

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<sup>248</sup> "Es liegt keine systematische Geschichte der Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung im deutschsprachigen Raum vor, nur wenige Publikationen beschäftigen sich etwa mit der Frage, wie es denn überhaupt dazu kommen konnte, dass Feminismus akademisch wurde". (There is no systematic history of the studies of women and gender in Germany, and only a few publications considered the question how it came that feminism had become academic"; Hark 14)

alliance of the humanities. If that includes combining Anglo-American queer studies and gender studies with German philosophy, very well then. We may be one step further in our endeavors.

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