

Points of Refusal: An Arts-Based Exploration of the Medicalization of Mad Trans Identity

Max Ferguson

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Abstract

This project discusses the impact of medicalization on transgender identity, examining how it enforces transphobic, white, abled, sane, cisgender, patriarchal norms, and effectively eugenics. By incorporating crip and trans theory, art, and embracing a mad aesthetic, I first highlight the concept of deliberate, productive failure through my inability to be read as transgender, showcasing my ability to pass as a white, cisgender, abled, sane man in photographs. I then apply the frameworks of mad aesthetics and disability art and justice to critique and transcend the photograph's history as an object that pathologizes medicalized bodies through the gender binary, by using the concepts of crip technoscience and the glitch. This glitching of the technological software of the digital photograph leads to the creation of a final body of artworks that disrupt and visually disorient patriarchal readings and traditional perceptions of sex and gender, rendering the inability to language my transgender experience visible. By achieving this sense of visual disorientation and incongruence in my digitally created bodies, one that is not articulated through words, I expose the limited linguistic pathological transphobic roots of the medical model. Finally, I propose that through the artistic act of glitching the photograph and making bodies sexually illegible, we empower ourselves as mad trans people, and can do away with medical language when describing trans experiences. In other words, disability art and justice can advocate new ways of languaging trans corporeality through the space of the (digital) photograph. Through mad disability art and aesthetics, this project aims to challenge medicalized definitions of transgender identity and transcend their transphobic agendas.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my ever-expanding chosen family, as well as my colleagues and friends. Thank you for being here, looking out for me, believing in me, and seeing my potential. I carry you all with me, always.

Acknowledgments

The heart of this project is composed of endless conversations, many hours and days of discipline and hard work, years of artmaking, and faith in the big picture. I owe so much of its success to so many people, and it is important to acknowledge their roles in its conjuring and completion.

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I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Rachel da Silva Gorman, one of my committee members. Rachel's input and feedback on my first dissertation draft became the springboard for this project's second series of artworks. This dissertation flourished because of Rachel's astute observations related to my work as an artist. They encouraged me to stretch, expand my abilities, and rework my concepts and writing. The result was a project I am proud of.

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Preface-- “A Fear of Hospitals”

I’ve used photography to document my journey as an artist for many years. My camera has been a constant companion, documenting all aspects of my life. As an artistic medium, it has never failed me-- until now. This project begins with the photograph’s failure to depict my identity as a trans man, more specifically, its inability to depict all of who I am.



Figure 1 Max (Sarah) Ferguson, *Self Portrait in Calgary*, 2003, Digital Print.

This is a picture of me, taken in 2003, in my former female self (Fig.1). I remember the act of taking it; turning the camera toward my body, lining up the screen so that my face did not obscure the texture of the brambles behind me, and pressing the button. It is the only record I have of that period in my life. It was a difficult time then: I was jobless, very poor, and my transgender identity was buried beneath my assigned female at birth appearance, alongside decades of female conditioning. Nevertheless, this self-portrait highlights the importance of photography in my life and art practice. This photograph is particularly important because it was taken shortly after I was released from the psychiatric ward of the Regina General Hospital.



Figure 2 Max Ferguson, *Self-Portrait* 2022, Digital Print

I look very different in photographs now. (Fig. 2) Testosterone and surgery have transformed my body from that of a full figured, plus sized woman to an average framed,

white passing, cisgender man. The person in the previous photograph is now invisible. However, she is still part of me, and through the refusal of my capacity to pass as a cisgender man in this project's photographs, I refuse to partake in the photograph's capacity to silence her and her difficult history.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the technical term for "fear of hospitals" is the word "Nosocomophobia". Online descriptors that arise around the subject make it seem like an everyday occurrence. "Surprisingly common", reads one website. "Irrational" is another word that makes an appearance, alongside the headline "Here's What to Do About It."

I have a fear of hospitals. I am mad and neurodivergent, someone whom, according to mad scholarship, "conventional psychiatry would condemn to a jumble of diagnostic prognostications based on subjective opinions masquerading as science"¹ and it was in the spring of 2003 that I committed myself to the Regina General Hospital, because I no longer wanted to be alive. Completed suicide and mental illness are longstanding traditions in my family, and while I was afraid of the hospital, the prospect of what would happen if I did not face the realities of my mental health was worse. I was terrified of death, so I chose to live.

During the month and a half that I was in the psychiatric ward of the hospital, I heard, felt, and saw things that would change my views of my condition forever. My family disowned me. I had two visitors. The suffering I witnessed and endured also politicized me. I

1. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 2.

exited the hospital with a comorbid diagnosis of bipolar disorder and a complex form of PTSD. I was heavily medicated during my time in the ward and had not acknowledged my identity as a trans man at that time. The medications took away my ability to feel and robbed me of my personality. I gained over eighty pounds and my body suffered. I eventually chose to go without them and took a hiatus from medication until one year ago, when I decided to try it again. By opting not to medicate myself despite my diagnoses, and through articulating and deconstructing their origins and meanings in this dissertation, I place myself as an activist within the Mad movement, who aims to “challenge the conventional biological paradigm of ‘mental illness’ and expose the systemic and symbolic violence that lies at the core of the psychiatric system.”²

Mad Studies provides a means of unpacking the psychiatric labels I was ascribed to, and this dissertation draws centrally from that field as a means of discussing them. As Menzies, Lefrancois and Reaume articulate in their anthology *Mad Matters*, the Mad movement’s origins in the 1960s-70s provided a means of galvanizing and pushing back on the psychiatrization of society that occurred alongside Post WWII therapeutic discourse and rhetoric, bolstered by the collapse of the asylum system.³ As psychiatry has increasingly dominated avenues of social life in Western culture, “it seem(s) like no sphere of late 20th

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2. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 3.
 3. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 4.

century life fell beyond the mandate of mental medicine...to make us all happy, actualized, docile, and safe”.⁴

In other words, Mad studies (and by extension this dissertation) deconstructs psychiatry, a legitimized field of medicine that is seen as progressive and effective.⁵ Instead it asks: “What if society had it wrong? What if this were not legitimate medicine? What if psychiatry’s fundamental tenets were inherently faulty...what if we were to question the very concept of mental illness that psychiatry rests?”⁶

Since mental illness and its diagnosis rest heavily on the medical field of psychiatry, enduring life as a mad person who rejects psychiatry and lives in a high functioning unmedicated state is complex and overwhelming. To be unmedicated and functional in the face of a mental illness diagnosis is viewed as an anomaly. Because I am viewed as an anomaly, my functional capacity and experiences with my medicalization have led me to “take an about-turn [and question] the seemingly indisputable truths about psychiatry that are

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4. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 4.
 5. Bonnie Burstow, *Psychiatry and the Business of Madness: An Ethical and Epistemological Accounting* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.
 6. Bonnie Burstow, *Psychiatry and the Business of Madness: An Ethical and Epistemological Accounting* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

taken for granted”⁷ It is this questioning of the medical apparatus and psychiatric medicine that is vital to how this dissertation will function.

Further complicating the issue is how my diagnoses affect the way I am perceived medically, and how that medicalized view complicates my perception. In other words, through my mental illness diagnosis, I am effectively “othered”, and as Burstow claims:

“...We fear the “other”, the person who is not like us or who we fervently pray is not like us...we may be authentically frightened...[and] the medical paradigm acts as a medical tranquilizer in its own right...if their appearance is outside our comfort zone, we are likely to surmise that they present a danger...and ‘need’ to be under control...[through medicine] we are continually primed to be convinced that such measures are for their own good.”⁸

For most of my life I’ve been praised as a “high functioning” mentally ill person, someone who “beat the odds”, and a “poster child” for success despite my biological failings, at least from a psychological and psychiatric point of view. My mental illness is invisible, and I have learned to camouflage its effects, changing the subject in conversations, white lying when I dissociate from environments that make me uncomfortable, or hiding in bathrooms during anxiety attacks.

I will never forget a visit I had with one psychologist, who upon looking at my diagnosis said, “I have a patient in your shoes who never leaves the hospital”. Yet, the “high

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7. Bonnie Burstow, *Psychiatry and the Business of Madness: An Ethical and Epistemological Accounting* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.
 8. Bonnie Burstow, *Psychiatry and the Business of Madness: An Ethical and Epistemological Accounting* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.

functioning” label has come at a cost for me, and I often find myself in situations where I am operating a skillful form of mimicry, rather like a parakeet who can utter the “right words” for its people but does not necessarily relate to them or even understand. The diagnosis of mental illness is painful and masking that pain has been a fact of life for me.

Robert McRuer has articulated there is a connection between ablebodiedness and heterosexual identity. “Ablebodiedness even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things.”, he states.⁹

McRuer articulates a theory of “compulsory able-bodiedness” that threads itself around and through narratives of compulsory heterosexuality,

which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness: that, in fact, compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness, and vice versa... The relatively extended period, however, during which heterosexuality and able-bodiedness were wedded but invisible (and in need of embodied, visible, pathologized, and policed homosexualities and disabilities) eventually gave way to our own period, in which both dominant identities and nonpathological marginal identities are more visible and even at times spectacular.⁶ Neoliberalism and the condition of postmodernity, in fact, increasingly need able-bodied, heterosexual subjects who are visible and spectacularly tolerant of queer/disabled existences.¹⁰

Additionally, McRuer states that the medical, rehabilitation, counselling and special education fields depend on and are committed to the prevention of disability, and/or its cure, with the result being that a disabled person is to feel and appear “as normal as possible”.

According to McRuer, such a commitment is grounded in the definition of disability as a

9. Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 1.

10. Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 9.

physical, sensory, emotional, or intellectual “abnormal condition” that happens to some individuals.¹¹

It is for the reasons above that I, from an early age, have hidden the pain of my condition from the outside world. Sensing that I do not perceive the world as the majority do has led to the development of my art practice. For me, art is a way of dealing with the pain I cannot articulate openly, as well as a means of expressing the hopes and fears that I harbour but cannot translate easily in my everyday life. The space that art inhabits in this dissertation is an affective one, and one that translates to research creation as a methodology, as a way of articulating what theory cannot.

Through my career as a mad identified artist, I’ve been rewarded for enduring, and for my capacity to be resilient. But the reality is that my capacity for “high functioning” sometimes camouflages great levels of mental pain and anguish, blazing highs and gut-wrenching lows. My psychologist diagnosed me with cyclothemia because of these. It is characterized by alternating episodes of depression and elation in a form less severe than that of bipolar disorder¹². The rapid cycling of my brain, depending on anything from the degree of light in the sky to the colour of a duvet cover that reminds me of my childhood makes it hard to distinguish what is real and what are simply sensations of my mind.

11. Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko, *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2009), 1-2.

12. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cyclothymia>

Perhaps the most complex label that I grapple with, alongside Madness, is that of being a transgender man. What I did not realize all those years ago, during my hospitalization, was how my transgender identity shaped my responses to life. And what is even more complicated is that for most of my life, that aspect of myself was hidden and denied, only coming to light over the past five years through my transition. What I find especially frustrating about the trans label is that it is viewed by the medical community as pathology. The dovetailing of my madness with my trans identity makes my relationship to hospitals even more conflicted and complicated. On one hand, the hospital is where my recent top surgery took place. I woke up liberated from a part of my body that always felt alien to me. The hospital can easily be framed as a place of liberation in these contexts. Yet, it is also home to the medical apparatus and houses the medical gaze associated with psychiatry and madness, and the suffering I've described above.

Then there is the fact that I am white, and by that designation, as a trans man, I am privileged to certain narratives that oppress other trans individuals, despite all the complexities I've outlined. Namely, it is through my whiteness that I have gained the privilege to discuss these issues at all. More specifically, to paraphrase Rachel Gorman in her article *Quagmires of Affect: Madness, Labour, Whiteness, and Ideological Disavowal*, in an autobiographical and auto-representational project, I must ask myself how I can attend to the ways in which whiteness creates opportunities for disabled identities to be folded into respectability.¹³

13. Rachel Gorman, "Quagmires of Affect: Madness, Labor, Whiteness, and Ideological Disavowal," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2017): pp. 309-313, 312.

I do not tell the reader these facts as a means of garnering sympathy, but as a way of setting the tone for this dissertation. This project is autobiographical, and what informs it is based on personal experience as well as theoretical discourse. I am acutely aware that my biology, or that which contains my biology—my body—has been medicalized for most of my life, from the experience of being born too early, put in an incubator because my lungs were deemed too fragile, to the orthopedic and neurological issues that arose because of that experience and were treated by pediatricians, to my upbringing by a mad and traumatized mother who could not take care of me, to the overloaded brain that has been deemed “hypersensitive” by several medical professionals. The eyes of doctors, psychiatrists, and the medical apparatus that they represent were burned firmly into my existence, long before I decided to transition. Sometimes, they have been a source of great pain and shame, and in others, have been the reason I am still alive today. The effect of their presence became the inspiration and drive behind this dissertation. It is through the unpacking of the medical gaze that I initially experienced firsthand in relation to my trans body and mad mind, and that I’ve observed in discussions of the body’s relationship to the medical apparatus and to trans lives, that I aim to contribute to the field of Feminist and Gender Studies, but also to Trans, Mad, and Critical Disability Studies.

I invoke the concept of “madness” as a means of “entering into the field of power where psychiatry and my life have collided and played out.”¹⁴

As Menzies, Lefrancois and Reaume articulate, declaring oneself as ‘mad’ in the context of mad studies and activism

...has come to represent a critical alternative to “mental illness” or “disorder” as a way of responding to emotional, spiritual, and neurodiversity...to acknowledge and validate these experiences as being authentically human, while rejecting clinical labels that pathologize and degrade...challenging the reductionistic assumptions of the medical model; locating psychiatry and its human subjects within wider historical, institutional, and cultural contexts, and advancing the position that mental health research, writing, and advocacy are primarily about opposing oppression and promoting human justice.¹⁵

To confront the medical gaze in relation to one’s “mad” body and mind is not simply about calling out heteronormative, cisgender, ableist ideologies. It also means confronting a history of power. Foucault’s discussions surrounding medicine and the medical gaze situate the medical disciplining of the body through language converted to discourse and the physician’s articulations of disease in the body of the patient.

He asks:

14. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 15-16.

15. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 10.

“From what moment, from what semantic or syntactical change, can one recognize that [medical] language has turned into rational discourse?”¹⁶

According to Foucault, from the eighteenth century onward, medicine underwent an epistemological shift, and became the authoritarian in relation to the body, through a precise biological (scientific) mapping of anatomy and illness. What Foucault points to, in essence, through his volume, is that science (and medicine, governed by science) is not an objective discipline, but one that is shaped by sociocultural attitudes and trends.

The acknowledgement of the power of medicine over the patient and the body's perimeters has been explored through an outcry for expansion of theories of biological variation, for instance through the writings of Anne Fausto-Sterling, when she claims in the preface to her well-known work *Sexing the Body* “the need for theories that allow for a good deal of human variation and that integrate the analytical powers of the biological and the social into the systematic analysis of human development.”¹⁷ However, this outcry and acknowledgement surrounding the “objective” biological roots of medical discourse is not enough. The reality is that the biomedical model, which medicine relies upon, is a flawed subjective system.

16. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989), xi.

17. Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), ix.

The medical institution's power over bodies and by extension, the capacity of a body is something to be pondered and examined. I feel that it is through a transgender-oriented lens that a deconstruction of the medical gaze and the biomedical model can expose deeper forces at work that serve to silence and ostracize an individual.

Merrick Daniel Pilling highlights these forces in his book *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice*, when he applies a Mad Studies oriented, anti-psychiatric lens to mental illness, (locating it in dysfunctional biological processes) “to explicate how the biomedical model is entrenched in, and perpetuates, cisnormative, heteronormative, white supremacist, and colonial ideologies.”¹⁸

By extension, and from the fulcrum described by Pilling, I view my body, and the bodies of others, as sites of intersectional complexity. Kimberle Crenshaw cites intersectionality as “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.” Her deeper definition relates to “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.”¹⁹

18. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 7.

19. “Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, More than Two Decades Later,” Columbia Law School, June 8, 2017, <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>; <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/intersectionality#:~:text=intersectionality-,noun,in%20additional%20disadvantage%20or%20discrimination>

In other words, to be born into a body is to be socially categorized and politicized. From the time it is born, the body, through its appearance, sex, abledness, and race, becomes a site where multiple sociopolitical oppressions, privileges, ideologies, and understandings are reiterated and/or played out on its surface, and these dictate the quality of life of an individual, and in some cases, whether that individual qualifies as human.

As Judith Butler states,

The human is understood differentially depending on its race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, the recognizability of that morphology, its sex, the perceptual verifiability of that sex, its ethnicity, the categorical understanding of that ethnicity.²⁰

The sociopolitical categorization of the body is especially visible through the trans body's relationship to the biomedical model and transition, where through interactions with medical professionals, the classification of bodies according to the uniform standards of appearance, race, health, and illness are laid bare. And beneath the surface of medical classification in the name of health is a system informed by dominant ideologies and systemized oppressions.

In other words, if a body in question conforms to its demands (white, cisgender, abled, heteronormative), these ties remain invisible. However, when a body does not conform to them, it is subject to examination, ostracization, and scrutiny. These ideologies and oppressions become especially visible when referring to and examining the transgender body and its refusal to conform to heteronormative ideals. As Prosser claims, narratives about the

20. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

trans body, rupture the identities between binaries, opening a transitional space between them.²¹

Prosser claims trans narratives as body narratives, “texts that engage with the feelings of embodiment; stories that not only represent but allow changes to somatic materiality”²²:

Transsexuality is... narrative work, a transformation of the body that requires the remolding of the life into a particular narrative shape... Transsexuality consists in entering into a lengthy, formalized, and normally substantive transition: a correlated set of corporeal, psychic, and social changes. As the insider joke goes, transitioning is what transsexuals do...²³

One of the most direct ways of addressing the materiality of the trans body in relation to these concepts is through image, specifically, the photograph. This project is conceptually anchored by the photograph, and by the methodology of research creation, that is, my photographs: a group of self-portraits involving myself and a skeleton prop within the setting of my apartment.

21. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 16.

22. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 4.

23. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 16.

On Conceptualization

When I began conceptualizing this dissertation, I had big ideas. The photographs would be beautiful and dramatic, with a larger-than-life energy. Then COVID 19 struck. I got sick. The photographs I wanted to make were too involved and expensive to produce. I'd planned to talk metaphorically about transition through those photographs. As the world receded and drew inward, I turned to my camera phone as a way of documenting my body. I'd been in transition from female to male. Beginning in 2018, I documented my transition openly, on social media. My friends watched me transform from one person into another. I also talked openly about some of what I experienced. In my current form, as my photographs illustrate, I pass as a white cisgender man, but throughout my transition, I was read as a trans woman. (Fig.3) I'd endured stares and microaggressions, had my clothes stolen from the communal laundry room in my dorm, and was the subject of scrutiny for the first two years of my transition.



Figure 3 Max Ferguson, *Self-Portrait*, 2018, Digital Print

I lost a year to long haul Covid complications during the conceptualizing of this dissertation. The pandemic shrunk my social circle and my capacity to function. Depression set in, along with doubt. And then I became ill and ended up in the hospital. The doctor x-rayed my lungs. “It takes a long time to get over Covid”, she said. She was right.



Figure 4 Max Ferguson, *COVID Lungs* (2020), Graphite on Paper.

My art and digital photographs were my faithful witnesses. I drew and took dozens of pictures, documenting my changing body, my isolation, and my emotional states. (Fig. 4) I shared them with the disability art community and my community online. My art and the digital photograph lie at the heart of this dissertation, but so do the autobiographical details around it, in the context of my life. (Fig. 5) I wanted to take my photographs and use them to construct a dialogue around the clinical view of transition, my own documentation, and stories. I wanted to push back on mirroring cis representations of trans masculine bodies and dwell in an emotional (affective) space as a way of short circuiting the medical gaze related



Figure 5 Max Ferguson, *Contagion* 2020, Digital Painting

to my trans body and mind, through refusal to appear cisgender, patriarchal, racist, heteronormative, and ableist.

As a potent tool of surveillance, documentation, and authority, and a complex object with a controversial history, the photograph provides a physical means of discussing and confronting the trans subject's sociopolitical and affective relationship to medicalization and power through its capacity to depict and capture what T. Benjamin Singer calls “the social

situation of non-normative embodiment.”²⁴ Singer explains that such photographs do not aim to make social stigma disappear, rather they enact the ambivalence of living in a nonstandard body that is constantly bombarded by prurient medical, talk show, or pornographic gazes.²⁵

Further, when the subject of the photographs that Singer discusses looks back at the viewer, that viewer “cannot hide behind the fetishistic unidirectionality of their look. Their privilege of seeing without themselves being seen has been subverted.”²⁶ This project aims to abide by the aesthetic details that Singer refers to, as a means of confronting the medicalized gaze in relation to the trans body. The first series of photographs in this project depict my body in such a way that it appears white, cisgender and abled, and they become sites of productive failure: points of refusal wherein I refuse to pass, and by extension, refuse to be psychiatrized through the label of gender dysphoria.

I am also including a series of sketches to be considered, as they represent the jumping off point for the second (final) series of artworks in this project, composite digital

24. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 609.

25. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 609.

26. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 609.

multimedia photograph-based, glitched sexed body collages which aim to confound the medical gaze and claim the digital photograph as a space for mad trans disability justice.

The photograph's meaning as both a cultural object and one of cultural production will provide an entry point into my discussion of effects of the medical gaze upon the trans body. Specifically, the first series of self-portrait photographs contain representations of my body. They feature depictions of myself lying next to a realistic skeleton prop (Fig. 6), illuminating the lost history and violence imparted on my trans identity and mad mind.

On a deeper level, the skeleton prop stands in as an allegory for a haunting, it is a ghost or death related to my former embodied self, the female identity which perished when I underwent transition, but which dwells in memory. However, it also relates to aspects of my mental health condition, and my dialogues with familial loss, mortality and death in relation to my trans identity and depressive states. Aesthetically, I draw from the inspirational portraits of the late Loren Cameron, who died in 2022 by suicide. Cameron became his own photographer in his book, *Body Alchemy* and in doing so, took control of the representation of his trans masculine body and trans identity, moving it away from medicalization. His portraits and their complexities will be discussed later in this dissertation.

The symbolism of the skeleton in my photographs also recalls references to trans histories, specifically those that relate to suicide, death, and suffering. As Heather Love claims in the Introduction to her work *Feeling Backward*:

The history of Western representation is littered with the corpses of gender and sexual deviants. Those who...most often end up dead; if they manage to survive, it is on such compromised terms that it makes death seem attractive.²⁷



Fig. 6. Max Ferguson and Felicia Byron, *They #5* (2021), Digital Print.
According to Love, the losses of the past motivate us and give meaning to our current experience, we are bound to memorialize them (“We will never forget”). But we are equally

27. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1.

bound to overcome the past, to escape its legacy (“We will never go back”).²⁸ The skeleton prop is a marker for memory that would otherwise be invisible and inaccessible, the haunted feelings of disembodiment and dissociation associated with the complexities of my trans body and mad trans identity.

Prosser states, “being trapped in the wrong body is simply what transsexuality feels like...The image of being trapped in the wrong body conveys...how body image is radically split off from the material body in the first place, how body image can feel sufficiently substantial as to persuade the transsexual to alter his or her body to conform to it. The image of wrong embodiment describes most effectively the experience of pretransition (dis)embodiment: the feeling of a sexed body dysphoria profoundly and subjectively experienced.”²⁹

Within this definition, affect is “not an expression of transgender experience but rather the definitive condition of it.”³⁰

This chapter aims to situate my project by historically describing the theories and concepts and main areas of research that it draws from: Autobiography, Critical Disability

28. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1.

29. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 69.

30. Lucas Cassidy Crawford, “Transgender without Organs?: Mobilizing a Geo-Affective Theory of Gender Modification,” *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3-4 (2008): pp. 127-143, 132.

Theory, Trans Theory, Mad Studies, Whiteness Studies, and Research Creation. Using a “scavenger methodology” as articulated by Jack Halberstam, one that “uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects ...and attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, ...it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence.”³¹

My project “scavenges” from Feminist and Queer Studies, (Butler, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989,1993, 2017; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Foucault, 1994; Halberstam, 1998; Love, 2007; Prosser, 1998) Trans Studies (Aizura 2013; Bhanji 2013; Crawford 2008; Garfinkel 2006; Gorton 2013; Irving 2013; Lamble 2013; Meyerowitz 2006; Noble, 2006, 2007, 2013; Singer 2006; Snorton and Haritaworn 2013; Stryker, 2008, 2013, 2017) Sociology (Bayer 1987; Brown 1990; Conrad 1979, 1992; Dejong 1983; Dewey and Gesbeck 2017; Rogler 1997; Whooley 2010; Zola 1972) Cultural Studies (Hall, 2012, 2021), Mad Studies (Burstow 2015; Pilling 2022; Gorman 2017; Menzies, Lefrancois and Rheaume 2013; White and Pike 2013; Reid (2019)) Whiteness Studies (Frankenberg, 1997) and Disability Studies (Clare 2013, 2017; Chandler 2019; Kafer 2013; McRuer 2006; Mingus 2011) and applies an intersectional feminist approach to trans and disability theory, as well as Research Creation (Chapman and Sawchuk 2012; Springgay 2017; Truman, 2022).

My dissertation is divided into two parts: the first relates to the medico-historical perception of the trans body, its visual representation and the theories surrounding it, and the

31. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Duke University Press, 1998), 12.

second contains the transmutation of that representation as research creation, and cultural production. In other words, the dissertation uses trans and disability theory to unpack the medical gaze in relation to the trans body, then transforms the negative affect of that gaze through artistic means, where it becomes a form of cultural production through my photographs and art.

Ultimately, the dissertation works to move beyond the interpretation of the physical surface of the trans body and the invisibility of the mad mind, through the vehicle of disability art and justice and by considering the effects of pathologization and medicalization on the trans body/identity and mad mind, promotes the photograph as a space where this medicalization and pathologization can be made visible and through that visibility, confronted and transcended.

This dissertation asks the following questions: Can an unpacking of the medical gaze and its effect on a trans individual lead to an examination of transphobia and/or internalized homophobia that can reform the medical field and society at large? More directly, what happens when the transgender subject autobiographically curates the construction of their visual representation as a vehicle for affect and for themselves? What happens when a trans person affectively becomes their own viewer/photographer, and takes back the othered gaze for themselves, as Cameron did? And what does autobiographical work mean to a white trans scholarship?

Chapter 1- Of Methods and Trans Madness

1.1 Introduction

Good research, we are told, maps foreseeable conclusions, the stability of forms, and the relationships between predictable objects and concepts. But how do you build a flow chart from flakes of skin, passion, blood, wounds, memories, and screams? I cannot construct a bar graph or build a focus group around the number of tears shed or hours spent alone, in sadness, love, loss, or frustration. I can only speak from my truth, and my truth is not a universal fact. It is mine. Life is not symmetrical, linear, or predictable. How then, to quantify my life as research? The answer is through artmaking.

As I articulated in my MFA project (2017) *Monstrosities*,

Through photography, I situate myself in the world. Through photography, I dialogue with the limits of the world and confront my beliefs about those limits. Through photography, I mark moments in my life. Through photography, I reclaim myself again and again, through the act of documentation. When I take photographs, I allow...the problematic relationship I have with my body: I validate my fluidity. In the act of taking a photograph, I look into the viewfinder and point the camera (both my eye and the viewer's eye) away from or at my body and its assumed, ascribed meanings. The photograph can affirm these if I choose, or I can affirm my presence in the world by choosing what I photograph. When I make photographs, though, it is in relationship to what I capture in the lens. To take a photograph is to interrogate the relationship I have with my environment and the world and affirm my existence.³²

32. Ferguson, Sarah Jean. "Monstrosities: Genderfluidity as Art Practice." Handle Proxy. Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Regina, May 1, 2017. <http://hdl.handle.net/10294/7861>, 65.

The first photographic component of my research in this project featured a series of large-scale portraits involving myself and a life-size skeleton. When I first caught a glimpse of the photographs I'd co-created for this project, I was temporarily seduced by their beauty. Their soft light and rich sepia tones led me to believe they were successful. The assumption of course is that beautiful art is successful, and that art for art's sake within the context of beauty is successful. My classical art training ruled me in that moment, and I felt accomplished.



Figure 1.1. Max Ferguson and Felicia Byron, *They #10* (2021), Digital Print

My assistant and I had taken an afternoon to shoot them, after much planning. Keeping the themes of isolation, madness, the resurgence of COVID 19, and intimacy in mind, I decided to shoot them in the bedroom of my student apartment on York campus, lying in bed. These self-portraits were to be revealing, vulnerable photographs of myself and the skeleton prop, with the idea that my transness would be shown through them. I had hoped my top surgery scars would be visible, and that my transness would be a topic of discussion which I could springboard my dissertation subject matter from.

But the seduction wore off. However, and despite their beauty, when I posted one of them on social media, their apparent beauty seduced viewers too. “You look like an actor in a Greek tragedy,” said one viewer. My father’s spouse remarked on how my nose and my father’s nose were “almost identical”. One of my friends said the images reminded her of “European paintings”.

There was no mention of my transgender identity by any of my viewers. None of the “You can’t even tell you’re in a female body!” remarks came up as they did in my transition days. In fact, everyone who spoke to me praised their success. “You’re a handsome man” was as far as it went.

I was distressed by these reactions. Through my transition and embracing of my identity as a trans man, I had not anticipated that my project photographs would fail to depict my transgender identity, that they would erase my former self so effectively. There is so much more to me than appearances, and while my transition has effectively finished, the

erasure of my history through my recent photographs troubles me immensely: my years as a fat activist, a butch genderfluid woman, a sex worker, are now invisible to the naked eye. My madness is also hidden. Even the scars on my chest have disappeared.

I am now a white cisgender passing allegedly average able-bodied/minded transman. I am not okay with this. My appearance replicates and encourages oppression. Therefore, I must break the silence. I must refuse the comfort of not being harassed as I walk down the street. I must admit that my average frame now does not induce stares the way my fat female form did. I must resist blending into the background. I must resist passing in these photographs, for they have failed to depict my full identity, and they ironically re-create the very space I intend to disrupt through my transness.

In these photographs, I have effectively replicated a space of white, cisgender, patriarchal, ableism (and sanism), and this is exactly what I did not intend to do. Therefore, beauty aside and upon further reflection, I realized that my artistic attempts to illustrate my identity failed. However, this failure is productive. It creates friction between what I appear to be and who I am. The failure of this first series of works also became the inspiration for their title.

1.2 Embracing the Plurality of “They”; The Refusal to Pass

1.3

As a way of attempting to illustrate the complexities of my identity in this project, and because of their failure to depict all of me, I entitled the series “They”. This refers to the skeletal corpse and myself—the two of us-- in the photographs, but also, this title is a wish to

embrace the plurality of the pronoun “They” as a means of attempting to preserve the multiplicities of my identity. To take the term literally is to acknowledge all of myself and my history, and the part of me that is classified as female, and the female identity that carried me through my lifetime to this point, represented by the skeleton in the images. To this day, I prefer the pronoun “they” when describing myself, as a nod to all that I have been and am becoming.

Still, these images fail to replicate or represent my transgender self, and all of who I am. *Through their failure to depict this, they complicate and create knowledge.* Were their goal to illustrate my passing, they would be effective indeed. But I am not content with passing because to do so as a white cisgender average man is to silence myself and everything I stand for. To summarize the meaning of the photographs in this project is to acknowledge this failure and to articulate the heart of who I am: I refuse to pass.

Further, the refusal to pass and the willingness to acknowledge the multiplicity in myself and my identity is a way of refusing the medicalization of my body and mind described in the previous chapter, otherwise known as the diagnosis of gender dysphoria. The first group of photographs in this project are a springboard for a discussion of the complexities around my passing; they are a crucial and valuable part of my dissertation. As I will illustrate, even though they fail in their lack of capacity to illustrate my trans identity, they are needed, because they illustrate and refer to how I appear to the world.

All these realizations would not have materialized if it were not for the failure of my first series of photographs and their implications. Through them, and by extension, my art practice, I have been able to articulate aspects of myself which have remained invisible as a result of my passing. Without their presence in this project, this would not have been possible. From their failure, I was able to construct a point of refusal related to how my passing as a white allegedly cisgender sane able bodied man creates oppression, and therefore knowledge. This creation of knowledge was the springboard for my second set of images, that I use to confound the medical gaze and claim space in the world as a mad trans man, through disability art and justice.

1.3 On “Being An Artist”

I am still bewildered by the term “artist” and what it means, especially in relation to methodology. For more than twenty-five years, I’ve lived in the privacy of my unconscious mind, haunted by a compulsion to make things. Simultaneously, I’ve always had a twin compulsion to describe them, theorize them, and by extension, discuss their sociopolitical implications. But how does one formulate knowledge through artmaking? In the case of this dissertation, the reproduction of knowledge is found through a dialogue with the photograph, its failure to depict my full identity, its history and metamorphosis from analog to digital “object” and the capacity of its history to serve as an effective vehicle of disability art, activism, and disability justice.

I am an artist, and art is my primary method through which I conduct my research. In many ways, for me, “art” is synonymous with “coping”, alongside verbalizing,

communicating, and trying to make sense of the world. My need to make art often feels more like a compulsion than a vocation. Over the course of my life, I've curled up in small apartments, couch surfed, doodled, dripped paint from paper, ruined carpets and friendships, fell in love and wrote poetry, took photographs, sat in emergency rooms and drew pictures, wrote prose and short stories, wrote songs and played guitar, performed spoken word and music at local clubs and spent countless hours experimenting with digital photographs on Photoshop. I quit jobs because the need to make objects haunted me, and because my obsessive, free associative need to "make" made it nearly impossible to hold down a nine to five job. Part of the problem was how the muse functioned. Inspiration seemed random or could come out of nowhere at any time. A stimulus in my environment (an object, a scenario, a happening) would trigger my creative impulse. That impulse would lead to an overpowering feeling. From that feeling, words would form in my memory, or a vision would enter my mind that I would feel compelled to replicate, and an internal voice would push me to the page, the paper, or the stage. When people kept calling what I did "art" and exclaimed that I was an "artist", I accepted the label graciously. It gave me comfort to know that my behavior had a name.

When I began studying art in the 1990s, it was implied that I would focus on one medium, and hone that medium as my specialization. From the start, even though I could not articulate it, my erratic relationship to artmaking became problematic to some of my classically trained instructors. I'd break a chocolate bar in half, stick thumbtacks into it, and make a giant cardboard sculpture out of its silhouette. Then, I'd become obsessed with drawing nudes. A few months later, I'd make a clay sculpture of an anatomically correct

arm. Then I'd become obsessed with wax and fake skin, or anatomical models and decapitated mannequins. Through the course of my studies, I shifted from one material to another, and was labelled a commitment phobic artist who would not "invest time" in my creations or devote myself to one medium. I was also scolded for writing in my sketchbook and doodling in my reflective portions of assignments. At one point, one professor suggested that I switch to a degree in English because I didn't "draw enough" in my sketchbooks and put "too much text" in my work. Words, I was told, did not belong in my drawings.

However, this did change. In my second last year of my program, an interdisciplinary approach-based department was founded at the University of Regina, and at last I could mix mediums and follow my intuition in my creative processes. I was able to at last define my interests without fear of reprisal. The resulting creations were a hybrid of mural making, text, painting, drawing and video installation. By the end of my program, I had taught myself Photoshop and started experimenting with photography and mixed media collage work, a development which extended into my MFA series of photographs and my MFA thesis, *Monstrosities*.

Today, I continue to work as an artist in photography. I am not a classically trained photographer who came to the medium through darkroom techniques and theory, but someone who is self-taught and who has learned the medium by feeling their way through software platforms and engaging with a visceral relationship to the camera. My photography shoots are conceptualized by myself but often involve the input of an assistant to help me to actualize my vision, and the photographs in this project are no exception. However,

legitimizing my life and my whimsical creative impulse as research is complex. While I incorporate a variety of methodological concepts into this project, my art practice is interwoven among (and intermingles with) these concepts.

1.4 Towards A Scavenger Methodology

In his well-known volume *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam describes a methodological approach that relates to what I've described above,

...a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence.³³

Drawing from Halberstam's discussions, this project "scavenges" and gestures toward a variety of different methodologies, some which are not harmonious or are even at odds with one another. Stacey Waite articulates in her essay *Cultivating the Scavenger: A Queerer Feminist Future for Composition and Rhetoric*, that applying a scavenger methodology is messy and disorienting, that it involves changing our methods, our approaches, our ways of knowing, and is a form of activism in itself—and is the only way to catalyze changes in consciousness within the academy.³⁴

33. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Duke University Press, 1998), 13.

34. Stacey Waite, "Cultivating the Scavenger: A Queerer Feminist Future for Composition and Rhetoric," *Peitho Journal* 18, no. 1 (2015): pp. 51-71, 67.

35. Stacey Waite, "Cultivating the Scavenger: A Queerer Feminist Future for Composition and Rhetoric," *Peitho Journal* 18, no. 1 (2015): pp. 51-71, 67.

Even though scavenging methods is not always a seamless endeavor, by combining Intersectional, Autobiographic, Trans, Mad, Whiteness Studies and Critical Disability theoretical approaches with aspects of my art practice and research creation, new territories are forged and pioneered. Above all, this project seeks to fuse an intersectional approach to the theories described above with research creation through photography, namely by using the photograph as a cultural object, one that symbolizes dominant white patriarchal cisgender abled privilege and an illustration of that privilege, a jumping off point that initially relates to the refusal to pass, as I articulated earlier, but also a space for mad trans agency, empowerment, and transformation.

Waite argues that the “scavenger” serves to complicate and deepen some aspects profoundly valued by feminist and queer scholars in two significant ways: by disrupting ways of knowing that seem dominant, taken for granted, or obvious and by valuing contradiction—what we might also call messiness, fragmentation, or even confusion.³⁵

As this project is informed by fragmentation and failure—specifically the failure to represent myself through my images—applying a scavenger methodology to its contents makes sense.

As this is a project that scavenges from a variety of methods, the main question at its root is “Why photographs?” The answer lies in the photograph’s capacity to depict. As photographer Jeff Wall highlights in his essay *Marks of Indifference*, “Photography cannot find alternatives to depiction...It is in the physical nature of the medium to depict things.”³⁶

While this may seem to be an obvious statement, it is through friction related to the photograph’s limitation to depict, and its failure to capture and depict all the complexities of my identity beyond my physical body that knowledge is produced in this dissertation. As I claim in the introduction to this chapter, my photographs surprised me. They did not depict my trans identity and they erased my history. They replicated an environment and space that perpetrates white, patriarchal, able-bodied, cisgender ideals, rather than one which confronted those ideals. Yet it is through this acknowledgement, and in their lack of depiction referred to in the photograph that those ideals can be confronted and transformed into new works. This realization could not have taken place in a more conventional qualitative or quantitative approach. As I have iterated, the photograph is necessary. It creates or provides an illustration of the patriarchal, ableist, white ideology necessary for critique and refusal, through a depiction of what my appearance represents.

36. Douglas Fogle, Karen Jacobson, and Jeff Wall, “Marks of Indifference,” in *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960-1982*. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minn.. Oct. 11, 2003 - Jan. 4, 2004. UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Calif.. Febr. 8 - May 11, 2004 (Minneapolis, Minn, 2003), pp. 32-44.

1.5 Interdisciplinarity, Research Creation, and Arts-Based Research

Further related to the scavenger methodology in relation to this project, I am reminded of Halberstam's discussions of academia and queer theory in relation to the academy, particularly the advantages he mentions regarding interdisciplinarity:

The liability of not having a clear institutional home, of course, is that the study of sexuality is central to no single discipline or program and in fact may be taught everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. However, the advantage of the stealth approach to the study of sexuality is that it remains multidisciplinary, a promiscuous rogue in a field of focused monogamists.³⁷

The same could be said about this dissertation, in that the group of theories it encompasses is everywhere and nowhere simultaneously and that it is multidisciplinary, that “promiscuous rogue in a field of focused monogamists”; that through its scavenging and mixing of theories and research creation, it remains delightfully messy, chaotic, and even reckless in its approach. Ultimately, what a scavenger methodology offers to this project is the justification of productive failure, and the subsequent creation of disciplinary ruptures which allows for new spaces of theoretical and research creative exploration, as well as new modes of inquiry.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, my tendency to shift mediums in my art practice, or relate in multiple mixed media ways to the creation of artworks is an applied example of scavenger methodology in relation to my research creation process. In this way, the research creation (art) component of this dissertation, (photographs and composite photographs) works in tandem with the theoretical components, serving as a jumping off

37. Judith Halberstam, “Reflections on Queer Studies and Queer Pedagogy,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, no. 2-4 (2003): pp. 361-364, 362.

point related to the theories it embraces, explores, and embodies, and as a challenge to conventional approaches to academic research.

The capacity to create academic discourse is the value of research creation and arts-based research in the academy. According to Sarah Truman, “Research-creation as a concept helped me navigate my way through graduate school when I felt split between the social sciences and humanities, as I attempted to link disciplines that didn’t always (want to) understand or relate to each other”.³⁸

Like Truman, I have felt a “split” between my theoretical gender studies-oriented self and my artistic self. That split is evidenced through the scavenging of theories in this project, but also in its mixed methods approach surrounding the fusion of autobiography, whiteness, trans, mad, critical disability theory with research creation. In the co-existence of these theories and approaches, I have found it difficult to articulate one aspect of myself without silencing the other. Additionally, through research creation embodied by the photograph, the silenced trans mad artistic aspect of myself can speak of what lies beneath the privileged façade of my images, and by extension can offer new approaches to the theoretical discourse of the different fields I am bringing together in this project.

38. Sarah E. Truman, *Feminist Speculations and the Practice of Research-Creation: Writing Pedagogies and Intertextual Affects* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), xvi-xvii.

As Natalie Loveless states, “while research-creation is (most often) linked to artistic production, its real potential rests in its demand for an inter- or transdisciplinary perspective that, while marshalling the insights of emerging and developing fine arts research methodologies, exceeds the fine arts proper.” In other words, by applying photography to the research described above, an interdisciplinary lens emerges that allows for a deeper examination of the ideas concerning medicalization, pathologization, and representation of the trans body that theory alone would not initially offer.³⁹

According to Chapman and Sawchuk (2013),

Research-creation” is an emergent category within the social sciences and humanities that speaks to contemporary media experiences and modes of knowing. Research creation projects typically integrate a creative process, experimental aesthetic component, or an artistic work as an integral part of a study.⁴⁰

Chapman and Sawchuk claim that research creation is a methodological and epistemological challenge to argumentative forms of academic scholarship, as the theoretical, technical, and creative aspects of a research project are produced in tandem, and scholarly form and decorum are breached in the name of experimentation.⁴¹

To illustrate, besides the fact that failure and experimentation inform my research methods in this project, the fundamental heart of my research revolved around the

39. Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 6.

40. Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, “Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and ‘Family Resemblances,’” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): pp. 5-26, 5.

41. Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, “Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and ‘Family Resemblances,’” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): pp. 5-26, 6.

actualization of my photographs. During their creation, I explored options for spaces to photograph that related to the effect I intended to project in them. I considered light, camera angles, and whether what I am intending would be reflected in them through the editing process. In my second group of composite photographs, I also considered how to effectively render abject, skewed bodies through software. I used Photoshop's photo editing tools and effects to create a series of abstract self-portraits aimed to confound medicalization and the sexing of the body through the medical gaze. All of this, considering Chapman and Sawchuk's assertion, can be viewed as research within the realm of research creation.

Chapman and Sawchuk highlight four different approaches to research creation:

"research-for-creation," "research-from-creation," "creative presentations of research," and finally "creation-as-research." And in each approach... research-creation innovates cultural analysis "that troubles the book, the written essay, or the thesis, as the only valid means to express ideas, concepts and the results of experiments."⁴²

They also state that

...it is important to acknowledge that any creation, even (and especially) creation that is pursued as a type of research in and of itself, involves an initial gathering together of material, ideas, concepts, collaborators, technologies, et cetera, in order to begin. this gathering is "research" in the same way that reading through recent journal articles, tracking down important references, or conducting interviews are key elements of producing various academic contributions to knowledge, conventional, research-creation, or otherwise.⁴³

42. Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances,'" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): pp. 5-26, 7-10.

43. Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances,'" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): pp. 5-26, 15-16.

In other words, the complexity I am grappling with as an academic researcher who incorporates research creation into their methods is not unusual. In fact, Chapman and Sawchuk claim that the tension of defining art as research is an ongoing side effect related to the reformation and transformation of academic research today. This fact is discussed in their article *Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances"*, where they address the concept of abstract (arts based) "research-creation" within the academy, saying that arts-based research or research that integrates a creative component into its study acts as an epistemological intervention into the regime of truth of the university.⁴⁴ In other words, as I stated earlier, the academy's notions of research are firmly rooted in qualitative and quantitative, rationally based frameworks, making the nebulous behavior of arts based approaches a direct methodological challenge to the protocols of mainstream academia.

Further, Chapman and Sawchuk claim art is a transformative agent in the postmodern academic condition we live in today. The unconventional nature of free associative arts-based research practices like mine has the capacity to reform how academic institutions function. Chapman and Sawchuk also state that arts-based research promotes critical awareness within the academy. Like them, I see what I do as instrumental in raising the social consciousness of the institution. According to them, arts-based research opens the

44. Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances,'" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): pp. 5-26, 6.

institution up to new ways of being and thinking and can lead to the creation of new expansive academic paradigms, even within the practice of academic art itself.

In the case of this project, applying the photograph to the concept of medicalization, and using the photographic space as a site of refusal related to the phenomenon of passing creates new opportunities for discourse around concepts of dominant ideology and oppression.

1.6 The Photograph

The photograph is also the conceptual anchor of this project and is an object intimately tied to how bodies are socially seen and interpreted. Singer asserts "...ways of seeing are intimately linked to social practices... deconstructing the medical gaze is not about practicality, but about ethics."⁴⁵ As a potent tool of surveillance, documentation, and authority, and a complex object with a controversial history, the photograph provides a physical means of addressing and deconstructing the trans subject's ethical, sociopolitical, and affective relationship to medicalization and power. The photographic series within this dissertation also serves as a means of creating space to discuss the methodologies explored within its perimeters.

45. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, "From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 602.

Applying a mad trans disabled lens to the research creation of my photographs within this dissertation, and to the theories I will describe in this chapter creates ruptures in their capacities. Most obvious of these is the photograph's failure to depict my trans and mad identity, in my appearance as a passing white trans man. However, these ruptures are productive ones, that create new spaces to examine and formulate knowledge. In the case of this dissertation, these spaces give way to capacity for expression, particularly around the issues I've already described, through the second series of photographs, which address through their digital and representational capacities, the authentic identity of my trans self, beneath the passing white assumed cis male veneer I've inherited through my corporeal assimilation into the (white supremacist, patriarchal, cisgender abled, sanist) world via the medical model.

In the case of simultaneously bringing a trans/cis cognizance to Mad Studies and a sanist approach to Trans Studies, the photograph serves as the perfect vehicle, namely through a depiction of my invisibility: the photographs in this project illustrate my passing as a white, supposedly able minded/bodied cisgender man. In not representing the female part of my identity, they document the erasure of my history, and serve as a reference point of that erasure. This erasure forms the reasoning behind the conception of the second group of works in this dissertation: ten composite photograph-like image collages that serve as abstract self-portraits made as response to the failure of my first group of photographs.

In terms of this project, my artmaking is intertwined with theories surrounding my passing, involving "Practices, procedures, and rules", not terms traditionally equated with a

creative process. Yet it is through this intermingling between theories and research creation that new knowledge forms. The photographs in this project are illustrations of the theory contained within its perimeters. In this case, it is their failure to depict my transness and madness, their invisibility, that opens the door to knowledge.

Despite the expansive nature of research creation as method in relation to academic discourse, and its application in relation to my photographs, the tendency to overlook how research creation can contribute to the replication and re-creation of oppression within that discourse must be discussed. Thus, the need for an intersectional approach in relation to this project.

1.7 Intersectionality

As Helma Lutz states in her article *Intersectionality as Method*, while its conception occurred in gender studies, intersectionality has expanded beyond its original foundation and is now used in a broad array of fields ranging from sociology to the sciences, and many other fields dealing with social inequalities and identities.⁴⁶ But how to apply intersectionality to the process of artmaking, specifically my own art practice, and research creation itself? It is worth considering that intersectionality “has played a major role in facilitating consideration of gender, race, and other axes of power in a wide range of political

46. Helma Lutz, “Intersectionality as Method,” *Digest Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 2, no. 1-2 (January 1, 2015): pp. 39-44, 39.

discussions and academic disciplines”⁴⁷ and that it has been used “to capture and engage contextual dynamics of power”⁴⁸ Therefore, as success is a measure of power in relation to artwork, I will address the “success” of my photographs.

As Crenshaw states, because of the inherent dominance of white patriarchy, the privileging of whiteness and maleness is usually not perceived at all ⁴⁹and this is the case in the audience reception of my photographs. In other words, their “beauty” is contingent on their representation as images of white masculine power. Even though these images are informed by trans discourse, to look at them without the afore mentioned refusal to pass that I have articulated would be to replicate an image space that relates to white cisgender patriarchal ideologies.

As I claimed earlier, to call these images beautiful misses the point completely, for to say they are beautiful really means that I have effectively replicated a space where my body and identity are interpreted as white and cisgender—as one who passes. Therefore, the refusal to pass and need to articulate how my former history as a fat genderqueer woman has

47. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (2013): pp. 785-810, 785.

48. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (2013): pp. 785-810, 785.

49. Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 Article 8, no. 1 (1989): pp. 139-167, 151.

been erased by these images, despite their apparent “beauty” must be acknowledged, and an intersectional lens must be applied for them to be legitimized in this project. It is through the lens of intersectionality and the ruptures it creates in white cis-abled patriarchal medical narratives that my second series of artworks can be conjured and actualized, especially when this lens intersects with disability justice, as I will discuss in Chapter Four.

According to Crenshaw, “intersectionality both notices and contends with the realities of multiple inequalities as it thinks about ‘the interaction of’ those inequalities in a way that captures the distinctive dynamics at their multidimensional interface.”⁵⁰

Worded differently, Crenshaw states that intersectionality “resists dissociation—the trance state of much academic theorizing—[and] begins in the concrete experience of race and sex together in the lives of real people, “with Black women as the starting point”.⁵¹ In other words, intersectionality becomes a method, aimed at the moving substantive reality “where systems of race, gender, and class discrimination converge,” not one or another or even all static abstract classifications⁵².

50. Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 Article 8, no. 1 (1989): pp. 139-167, 140.

51. Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 Article 8, no. 1 (1989): pp. 139-167, 140.

52. Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991), 1246.

Worded yet another way, intersectionality plays an integral role in this project because it is necessary to acknowledge how my photographs can replicate privilege concerning the convergence of systems of dominant ideologies around white patriarchal cisgender representation. In other words, because I pass as white, able-bodied and cisgender, my photographs pass as well. Were their contents to depict me as not passing, or as visibly disabled, they would not likely be deemed successful by cisnormative, able-bodied audiences.

As Crenshaw articulates, “dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis... limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group.”⁵³ In terms of trans representation, my white cisgender able-bodied-appearing privilege described above allows me to be visible and in many cases, accepted and perceived as “a handsome man” by my audience.

In other words, conventional discrimination analysis replicates the conditions of hierarchical power relations, and these reinforce inequalities rather than challenge them. Therefore, even though this dissertation operates from an autobiographical trans lens, because I am white, appear able-bodied and cisgender passing as a trans man, I must incorporate an intersectional, disability studies oriented lens in my approach so that I do not

53. Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 Article 8, no. 1 (1989): pp. 139-167, 140.

replicate the oppressive systems that invoke patriarchal dominance, white male dominance, compulsory able-bodiedness, and white supremacy, as these have already become dominant in disciplinary scholarship.⁵⁴

So, in examining the photographs used in this dissertation of my white trans, allegedly abled, masculine body, I ask myself what my appearance replicates, and how details such as light, colour, position of my body, expression and facial features play into my passing as a man holding a skeletal replica in my arms. I recall its reception on social media, mentioned earlier, and having my body compared to that of a male Greek tragic figure, and I ask myself why. I ask myself if my body were one of colour, one that did not pass, or did not replicate visible systems of able bodied/minded cisgender masculinity, would these photographs have the same meaning?

I ask myself how my passing replicates masculine ideals, even masculine ideals of beauty and Classical (white) Eurocentric artistic tropes in my photographs, how these have affected my mind subconsciously having been trained “classically” as an artist. I am left with more questions than answers, and I am reminded again of Bobby J Noble’s quote about the anti-racist practice of embodying whiteness through a transed body:

The first step toward that practice, which is really a practice of being a race traitor, is to understand that our White bodies are articulated in a larger grid of power over which we have little control. To create strategic interventions, then, means stepping into Whiteness with the goal of fully, intentionally and with an understanding of the consequences of our actions, create as much race trouble as gender.⁵⁵

54. Srilata Sircar, “Emplacing Intersectionality: Autoethnographic Reflections on Intersectionality as Geographic Method,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 29, no. 7 (2021): pp. 903-922, 905.

55. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 15.

While the photographs in this dissertation replicate cisgender representations of trans masculinity, by viewing them through an intersectional lens, their meaning shifts, and the “race trouble” created by questioning the aspects in their appearance leaves space for discussion. Calling out and discussing the politics of their whiteness and representations is a crucial and important aspect of this dissertation. I am in effect, through my photographs, replicating and mirroring aspects of patriarchal, ableist, white, cisgender masculine representation within them, but through an intersectional analysis of my passing within them, I move beyond that replication. I am, in effect, in these moments and as I’ve previously mentioned, autobiographically attending to the ways in which my life and representation--my whiteness--creates opportunities for my disabled identity to be folded into respectability (Gorman, 2017), and I work hard at troubling that respectability, which is vital to the success of this project.

1.8 Autobiography

Autobiography has always been the starting point for me as an academic and artist. I’ve always used in-the-moment emotive responses from my life as springboards to fuel my research, writing, and creations. Personal experience has always been a source of inspiration:

I needed a purpose, so I killed my twin. Now I devote myself to watching the flesh of my old self decay. She died quickly. Blunt force trauma. A blow to the head. She just wouldn't stop talking about how the leaves were starting to change and how they raped her that fateful day in September, on the high school lawn. The past was dead, I told her. But I was past trying to rock her to sleep. Now I keep her in the closet, and watch her flesh fall off. The bones of her knees are starting to become exposed. Her skull is still relatively covered in skin. Her heart is overbloated and engorged with Blackened, drying blood. Over the past while, I have dedicated myself to observation. I study the cycles of the flies eating her remains. I find solace in measuring time this way. How much longer?

— Journals, 2009

I mention this excerpt from my journals because it is this autobiographical aspect of my life which inspired the photographs that have become part of this project. They initially took shape through the form of an emaciated life size skeleton prop, which arrived from Wisconsin in early fall. It now stands erect, with the help of a metal rod, looming above me as I write: a meditative object that I reflect upon, and used in a series of self-portraits as part of this dissertation. It is partially covered by latex rubber skin, which is viscerally real to the touch. Its mouth, half gaped, almost appears to smile at me as I work. The long bones of its legs hang limply from the fulcrum of a partially exposed pelvis. Its fingers and hands twist aimlessly in all directions.

It is the prop's chest and ribcage that I dwell upon most of all. The "skin" there is stretched, and the bones push through a translucent mesh of fleshy latex. The skeleton represents the part of me that remains hidden, that part which carried me through my life to my transition, but which allegedly had to die for the masculine part of me to live. To me, this idea of having to silence one part of me so another could live makes no sense. I am both, more than one, many, and this was what I attempted to depict in my photographs.

As I examine the first group of photographs which embody the research creation component of this project, I find myself feeling vulnerable. Of particular significance is one photograph, taken with the prop's bony back exposed to the camera. Its vertebrae push the skin outward, and a light spreads warmly across mine and its "flesh". My head rests on its left shoulder. My arm and its arm mirror each other in the shape of their curves and lines. My eyes stare into the distance. The top part of my body looks male, and the bottom part of

me, though obscured, bears little resemblance to my former fat butch queer identity. I look almost peaceful next to what the skeletal elements of its objecthood represents: an invisible confession made visible-- the death of the body and identity of my twin female self, the haunting of that dead self that carried me across my lifetime.

A supplement to the photographs within this dissertation is a series of nearly thirty autobiographical self-portrait drawings and digital paintings which further illustrate my grappling around the subject of the body, the mind, and madness. These were created alongside the photographs as a means of mapping my state of mind while writing my dissertation and preparing myself for the photography shoot, over a series of years and months. Each of them is a free-form attempt to give shape to the mental state that I inhabit on a day-to-day basis. They also represent an externalized, representational form of body-mind confession, and will be discussed later in this dissertation.

In *The Limits of Autobiography* Leigh Gilmore comments that every autobiography is a fragment of a theory and an assembly of [intersectional] theories of the self and self-representation; of personal identity and one's relation to a family, a region, a nation; and of citizenship and a politics of representativeness (and exclusion).⁵⁶ My research and work is borne out of what I've experienced personally, and is inspired by reactions to those experiences. In the case of this dissertation, it is informed by my life as a trans person, both from a pre-transition standpoint and post-transition. I believe inherently that the entirety of

56. Leigh Gilmore, *Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Cornell University Press, 2001), 12.

my being comprises my life experience, and my photographs are an extension of that experience.

As an aside, the function of autobiography has made me anxious, especially when justifying it within the constraints of the academy. I am aware of my life's subjectivity, and of its potentially un-universal implications, which can easily be critiqued as narcissistic, self-absorbed, simplistic, and transparent.⁵⁷ However, Editors Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson state in the introduction to their book *Interfaces*, that, contrary to generic perceptions, an autobiographical approach is not as straightforward as it seems. Smith and Watson say that the generic understanding of "autobiography" in Western culture complicates things further by obscuring the balanced representation of women and other minorities not included in the category of "great men", who are most often associated with the term.⁵⁸ They are also quick to defy that autobiographical text (and art) is simplistic and self-absorbed. Contrary to these beliefs, they claim that the autobiographical artist's life is interconnected with the sociological elements of the society they inhabit.⁵⁹ I would argue that my project reflects all of these concepts.

57. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 8.

58. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 8-14.

59. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 8-14.

By extension, this project embraces a mad aesthetic: one that is suspicious of conventional linguistic and artistic structures because of how they enforce, normalize, and sanitize images language, communication, institutions, and people. I equate congruence with a type of perfection that cannot be achieved in human form. Congruence is an ideal, not a fact, and it is one that many artists, philosophers, and pundits have chased across time. I am reminded of the Nazification of art during the era of the Third Reich, and the vapid, hollow romanticism that it attempted to call “art” when I think of this need for absolute unity of form, line, shape, colour, or medium. Congruence hints at an ultimate body, goal, and future. I equate it with the concept of cure. It suggests that we need to strive rather than acknowledge our capacity to be mortal. It represents a lack of humility. Therefore, this project is suspicious of congruence, absolutes, binaries and binary-based representations, and the absolutes of balance, perfection, and ideals, especially related to human lives and language. In the face of disciplinary forces, a mad aesthetic in art and language rejects these terms. It sees them as extensions of the systems that discipline the body and mind of human beings in the name of compulsory ablebodiedness, cisgenderism, heterosexuality, and sanism. This tendency toward curing the body of imperfections through hyperbeauty, balance, and aesthetics is common in AI-mediated imagery today, suggesting that the human is disappearing from the artwork. I argue about these issues and unpack them in detail in Chapter Six.

Additionally, in this dissertation, the reader will engage with mad tropes in the writing: repetitive words and phrases, stimming through repeated sentences, and some circular language. The function of these tropes came from the need to root myself in the text as I

wrote, and because I am a mad scholar and artist, I wish remain honest rather than hide my vulnerability. This is my mad activism: the refusal to remove the trace of my madness in the writing. To sanitize the text under these circumstances would replicate the structures and forces I am critiquing in my project, particularly medical ones.

This repetition and syntactical-verbal tickage also served to foreshadow the role of the glitch in my project as a form of disability justice and activism. Again, leaving these “blemishes” in the work “glitches” the text so that it mirrors the aesthetics of my final series of works. It exposes what conventions attempt to domesticate: anything deviating from normativity, and white, abled, sane, cisgender, heterosexuality.

Smith and Watson assert that an individual working within an autobiographical methodology engages in a multitude of dialogues with their environment and culture. Aside from “being in dialogue with the specific time and place they inhabit, the autobiographical subject also dialogues with her own processes and archives of memory, culturally marked differences of identity, and different multiple audiences.”⁶⁰ They also describe the autobiographical as “a moving target” and “a set of shifting self-referential practices” which offer occasions to negotiate the past, reflecting on identity, and critiquing cultural norms and narratives. They describe the autobiographical subject as a richly informed person who engages in personal modes of “storytelling” related to aspects of their lived experience

60. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 8-14.

“narratively, imagistically, and in performance”.⁶¹ This applies directly to my photographs, which can be synthesized as performance in front of the camera, informed by my lived experience as a trans man. However, as Sidonie Smith articulates in her discussion *The Autobiographical Manifesto*, all ‘I’s’ are not equal⁶² and one must acknowledge the ‘epistemologies’ around the speaking/writing ‘I’.

As articulated by Paul Smith:

... what is taken to *be* the "subject," the "I" that speaks a given discourse, reflects, as it has always been taken to reflect, specific epistemologies. Wherever the "I" speaks, a knowledge is spoken; wherever a knowledge speaks, an "I" is spoken. This is the dialectical mechanism of a certain *presumption* of the "subject": that is, a "subject" is presumed to exist, indexed as an "I" and loaded with the burden of epistemologies, wittingly or not.⁶³

In other words, autobiography is most often defined as a self-written account of one’s own life (Oxford English Dictionary), but the ‘I’ in that life is seldom questioned. According to theorist Phillipe Lejeune, autobiography is “the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality”⁶⁴ This project is informed by a confessional narrative of my own experiences around medicalization, my body, and my assumed white cisgender trans male self, and uses those experiences as a springboard, first referenced through the first body of photographs as a space of white patriarchal privilege and then

61. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 8-14.

62. Sidonie Smith, “The Autobiographical Manifesto: Identities, Temporalities, Politics,” *Prose Studies* 14, no. 2 (1991): pp. 186-212, 186.

63. Shirley C. Neuman, *Autobiography and Questions of Gender* (London: Cass, 1991), 4.

64. Carole Allamand, “The Autobiographical Pact, Forty-Five Years Later,” *European Journal of Life Writing* 7 (2018).

deconstructed through my second series of composite body photographs through their incapacity to be sexed or recognized.

It is worth noting in terms of literary genre, Autobiography historically was conceived “as a way to write about one’s life in a confessional frame, and included reflections and speculations about history, politics, religion, science, and culture”⁶⁵ which traced the beginning of the author’s life up to the point of writing. ⁶⁶In this light, my photographs can be seen as reflections of their own, which support the content of this dissertation. The literary genre of this project is autobiographical, and the prop I described earlier in this chapter is a projection of that autobiography: the invisible self that hovers next to me, post transition. More specifically, as I conflate the narration of this project with my authorship, it also resonates deeply as a work of autofiction.

1.9 Autofiction

In a recent discussion of his debut novel *Fuccboi*, Sean Thor Conroe explained in an interview about his work that writing autofiction was therapeutic: “I needed to write [my novel] in order to be okay,”⁶⁷ he told the interviewer.

65. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012), 2.

66. Fatma Massoud, “Emerging Voices: Life-Writing and Autofiction in Radwa Ashour’s *The Journey*,” *Cairo Studies in English* 2020, no. 2 (January 2021): pp. 193-213, 194.

I relate to the idea of writing autofiction as a therapeutic tool. On a much deeper note, there are several reasons why the writing and shape of this project should be classified as autofiction. The most obvious one is that I am theorizing and hypothesizing about the medicalization of the trans body, along with what has happened to and within that medicalization, while bringing to light a critical lens on its parameters, through the refusal to pass in my photographs. This project is also not a memoir as I am not the central protagonist in relation to its contents.⁶⁸ Rather, my life and body function as medicalized examples; representations of the life and appearance of a white cisgender able bodied/minded appearing trans man, first constructed through the photograph, then deconstructed through my refusal to pass.

Drawing aesthetically from autofiction, this dissertation contains linguistic slippages, and uneven language. I keep “slipping into rhetoric and lyricism”⁶⁹ and these are features of fictional writing. To read my text as autofiction would eliminate the problems encountered when referring to autobiography “and help to mediate self-referentiality, history, and self-

67. “A Fuckboy's Own Story: A Conversation with Sean Thor Conroe,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, March 9, 2022, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-fuckboys-own-story-a-conversation-with-sean-thor-conroe/>.

68. Ava Dean, “‘To Be Novelized’: An Investigation of Autofiction & How It Operates in Gwenaëlle Aubry’s *No One*,” *University Honors Theses Paper 409*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.408>, 3.

69. Fatma Massoud, “Emerging Voices: Life-Writing and Autofiction in Radwa Ashour’s *The Journey*,” *Cairo Studies in English* 2020, no. 2 (January 2021): pp. 193-213, 197.

exploration without the fear of ‘slipping’ into fictional modes that...would sabotage the ‘authenticity’ of the text.”⁷⁰

Further enriching the definition of autofiction, in her discussion of Gwenaëlle Aubry’s novel *No One*, Ava Dean discusses its literary complexity, claiming it to be neither a memoir, nor autobiography, even though it is a text written in memoriam to Aubry’s father.⁷¹

Dean states:

when Aubry uses the “I,” it is not so much to tell her own life story but to reflect on her father’s life. Thus, her portions cannot be entirely called memoir as there is no central focus on Aubry as the protagonist of the text. This is the most blatant complication of *No One*, confusion in genre. If [it] is not an autobiography, and *No One* is not entirely a memoir, then what exactly is the reader holding in their hands?⁷²

Dean offers up the definition of autofiction as a response to her question, claiming that the term signifies a new genre that denies conventions of life writing while encouraging atypical plot, form and writing styles.⁷³ And the writing in this dissertation is atypical: it contains theory and prose simultaneously, as a means of mediating and fortifying autobiographical evidence. As Dean further explains, “autofiction”, created by Serge

70. Fatma Massoud, “Emerging Voices: Life-Writing and Autofiction in Radwa Ashour’s *The Journey*,” *Cairo Studies in English* 2020, no. 2 (January 2021): pp. 193-213, 198.

71. Ava Dean, “‘To Be Novelized’: An Investigation of Autofiction & How It Operates in Gwenaëlle Aubry’s *No One*,” *University Honors Theses Paper 409*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.408>, 2.

72. Ava Dean, “‘To Be Novelized’: An Investigation of Autofiction & How It Operates in Gwenaëlle Aubry’s *No One*,” *University Honors Theses Paper 409*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.408>, 3.

73. Ava Dean, “‘To Be Novelized’: An Investigation of Autofiction & How It Operates in Gwenaëlle Aubry’s *No One*,” *University Honors Theses Paper 409*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.408>, 3.

Doubrovsky in the late 1970's, unifies the paradox of "autobiography" and "fiction".⁷⁴ It can also describe an autobiography with fictionalized elements, or "fiction of strictly real events"⁷⁵

Karen Fererra-Meyers claims that Doubrovsky's initial understanding of autofiction is to describe "a narrative which has a strictly autobiographical subject matter (certified by the nominal shared identity between author, narrator and main character), but whose manner, that is the narrative organization and stylistic craft, is novel-like"⁷⁶

Dean adds:

The term is contradictory as autobiographies are built upon a basis of complete honesty. Antagonistic to this, autofiction's intention is to blend fiction into its life-writing by disregarding some of the conventions of truth-telling that autobiography operates on.⁷⁷

Additionally, as explained earlier by Fatima Massoud in her discussion about Radwa Ashour's book *The Journey*, Autofiction contains a historical narrative; one that is molded and affected by the narrator themselves:

74. Ava Dean, "'To Be Novelized': An Investigation of Autofiction & How It Operates in Gwenaelle Aubry's *No One*," *University Honors Theses Paper 409*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.408>, 3.

75. Ava Dean, "'To Be Novelized': An Investigation of Autofiction & How It Operates in Gwenaelle Aubry's *No One*," *University Honors Theses Paper 409*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.408>, 3.

76. Karen Ferreira-Meyers, "Does Autofiction Belong to French Or Francophone Authors and Readers Only?," in *Autofiction in English*, ed. Hywel Dix (Macmillan: Palgrave, 2018), 28.

77. Ava Dean, "'To Be Novelized': An Investigation of Autofiction & How It Operates in Gwenaelle Aubry's *No One*," *University Honors Theses Paper 409*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.408>, 3.

[the narrator] does not just tell the story... but it is the story of how [the narrator] perceives all the history that [they] have learned about or witnessed and how [that history] has shaped them. So, it becomes a mutual process: [the narrator] shapes history, and history shapes her as well.”⁷⁸

Massoud continues to emphasize the complex relationship that the narrator has in these matters:

The [narrator in the story] is...not entirely autobiographical. It is autofictional. In the text, Radwa offers an amalgamation of the author’s personal past, heritage, history and contemporary present. Here is the intersection of the [literary] genres of autofiction, history, travel-writing and life-writing. So, in other words, the Radwa in the text is a persona that could have fictional aspects derived from her reflections on history, the past and the present, rather than just Radwa Ashour the writer and the teacher we know...⁷⁹

Also of note is Ferrara- Meyers’s notion of autofiction as the blending of imagination with memory⁸⁰ and this autofictional concept relates to how I recount and relate to the different linguistic tones and aspects of my dissertation, when they are applied autobiographically.

1.10 Whiteness

Part of relating autobiographically and applying that lens to this project means acknowledging my white privilege. As a white trans man, and as articulated earlier in this dissertation, it is imperative that I “self-consciously and willfully embody an anti-racist, anti-

78. Fatma Massoud, “Emerging Voices: Life-Writing and Autofiction in Radwa Ashour’s *The Journey*,” *Cairo Studies in English* 2020, no. 2 (January 2021): pp. 193-213, 211.

79. Fatma Massoud, “Emerging Voices: Life-Writing and Autofiction in Radwa Ashour’s *The Journey*,” *Cairo Studies in English* 2020, no. 2 (January 2021): pp. 193-213, 211.

80. Karen Ferreira-Meyers, “Does Autofiction Belong to French Or Francophone Authors and Readers Only?,” in *Autofiction in English*, ed. Hywel Dix (Macmillan: Palgrave, 2018), 29.

white supremacist politic”⁸¹ in this dissertation. Therefore, it is crucial that I employ Whiteness as a methodology within this project.

While it is true that “undertaking intellectual work on whiteness might contribute to processes of recentering rather than decentering it, as well as reifying the term and its “inhabitants” ... there are also tremendous risks in *not* critically engaging whiteness.”⁸² To draw from this fact, perhaps the most obvious point that relates to my photographs is that, as I have said earlier, to praise their contents as beautiful misses the point, which is their capacity to manufacture a space of white patriarchal power. Yet, to overlook this fact is hardly unusual, as whiteness resists the mapping of its contours and operates largely through invisibility, wielding power by operating as an unarticulated position.⁸³

As stated by Ruth Frankenberg, “white people and people of colour live racially structured lives,” and “in a social context where white people have too often viewed themselves as nonracial or racially neutral, it is crucial to look at the “racialness” of white experience.”⁸⁴ This is especially true, as whiteness operates through ironic codes of

81. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 15.

82. Ruth Frankenberg, “Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness,” in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Pr., 1999), pp. 1-33, 1.

83. Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81, no. 3 (1995): pp. 291-309, 291.

invisibility, epistemological and discursive power.⁸⁵ The space of the photograph is a catalyst related to the visual contents of the world around us, and is an extension of that worldly space. My photographs replicate this white code of invisibility, even and as they attempt to replicate the complexity of my identity through my engagement with the skeleton prop within the frame.

To paraphrase, in my photographs, my whiteness allows me to bypass transphobic and racist dialogues, which, were my body read as visibly trans and of colour, would potentially prevent the acceptance of my public audience. As I've already iterated, "beautiful" really is a stand in for "successfully passing"—and what that literally means is to pass as a white cisgender man. In the case of my photographs, as I've described previously, they become spaces of white privilege. To not articulate the significance of my whiteness within these photographs would replicate systems of patriarchy, oppression, colonization, and domination, and yet these are presumed natural, and beneficial: the reward for being deemed "beautiful" is invisibility—to pass is to be invisible.

For, as Sara Ahmed writes,

whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach. By objects, we would include not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits. In putting certain things in reach, a world acquires its shape; the white world is a world orientated "around" whiteness precisely at the point where whiteness disappears from view.⁸⁶

84. Ruth Frankenberg, "Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness," in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Pr., 1999), pp. 1-33, 1.

85. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 77.

Therefore, similarly to Noble, I must engage with the feminist analytical intersections of capitalism, class, and race by offering my white trans body, formerly butch/genderfluid female, now female to male transsexual, as a case study in resistance through the refusal to pass in my photographs.⁸⁷ Noble's concept of "strategically unmaking the self" as a means of articulating "a class, trans, anti-racist, and union politic" and resisting today's capitalist commodity of the self is one I wish to adapt in the discussion of my artwork, and one that guided the creation of my second series of works in this project.

Additionally, it is my whiteness that privileges me, as a doctoral student and artist, and as I've articulated previously, that allows for me to confront the forces of medicalization in this project. As I've highlighted, the medical system and psychiatry, by extension, are steeped in white supremacist, and colonial ideologies, which are then extended to police transgender healthcare practices, and which replicate oppressive, racist, cisnormative conditions.

Further, regarding the research creation and artistic component of this dissertation, as a white cisgender passing trans man, it is important for me to highlight the patriarchal, colonial, Eurocentric, white dominated roots of the Western art historical canon, and its role

86. S Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* Issue 8, no. 2 (2007): pp. 149-168, 143.

87. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 77.

in silencing non-white narratives through an invocation of whiteness. In other words, by invoking whiteness as a methodology within my research creation and art practice, I hope to “decenter art history’s Eurocentric accounting of twentieth century artistic modernisms, and to expose ghettoizing attitudes within the art world.”⁸⁸

1.11 Critical Disability Theory, Disability Arts

As Rachel Gorman states, while Deaf and disability arts have been practiced since the 1970s in Canada, it has begun to be recognized as its own field of arts practice and production by arts councils and cultural funding bodies.⁸⁹

As Eliza Chandler, Nadine Changfoot, Carla Rice, Andrea LaMarre & Roxanne

Mykitiuk articulate, within the development of Deaf and disability arts comes

discourse specific...about how [to] make arts accessible and how [to] blend accessibility with aesthetics and curatorial practices, about the development of distinct disability, crip, Mad, Deaf aesthetics, and about the role the arts play, and have always played, within the achievement of disability rights and justice.⁹⁰

Further, in their article, they paraphrase the words of Mia Mingus, stating

The disability arts and culture movement makes the representation of disabled people a political issue: it asserts that in order for disabled people to be truly liberated, we must change the way society sees us. This is the work of the artist...We take heed of the main tenet of the disability rights movement that disability rights are human rights and join this with a disability justice framework that takes an intersectional approach to foregrounding the conditions necessary to achieve justice for all people with disabilities.⁹¹

88. Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, “Mapping Modernisms Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism,” in *Mapping Modernisms Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), pp. 1-30.

89. Rachel Gorman, “Whose Disability Culture?,” *Fuse*, 2007, pp. 46-51.

90. Eliza Chandler et al., “Cultivating Disability Arts in Ontario,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 40, no. 3 (2018): pp. 249-264.

This project is founded on the principles of disability arts discourse and disability justice outlined above. My discussions related to this dissertation implement disability justice and revolve around decentering art history's unabashed promotion of ableist attitudes. Recently, at a disability arts talk, one member of the audience pulled me and a colleague aside to speak about the impact of disability justice on her life and work as an artist. "I'm so grateful that the disability arts movement exists," she said, leaning against her cane.

"However, there are a few people who give lip service to what we do, who see disability as nothing more than a physical issue, and who don't see the value in what disability culture has to offer, what we have to offer, other than a box to check...they're tourists." A man in the crowd stood beside me, looked me up and down, and said wryly "Are you a tourist?"

While I bluntly replied "No", the man's reaction to me and his sudden attack on my person brings up another aspect of erasure related to my character: the diagnosis of mental illness and my identity as a psychiatric survivor, and neurodivergent person.

Yet again, I am left with the concept of "passing" —this time, as an able bodied/minded white man who allegedly bears no resemblance to the images and assumptions associated with disability. The invisibility of my disabled self extends to my photographs. How does

91. Eliza Chandler et al., "Cultivating Disability Arts in Ontario," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 40, no. 3 (2018): pp. 249-264,.

one negotiate and represent disabled identity when their disability cannot be seen with the naked eye?

I think back to the smirk on that audience member's face, as though he was unmasking some great secret of mine. I wonder who he thought I was, or what I represented to him in my blond haired, allegedly able-bodied/minded white skinned cisgender male identity? Further, I was left with the question of what I could do to push back on the invisibility of my condition, and how I could bring it into the light in relation to my photographs, as they are informed by the spirit of disability justice and critical disability theory. I am left with a responsibility: I must call out the aspects of myself which erase difference and articulate my assumed white able-bodied sane cisgender male privilege: my appearance also allows me to speak through a disabled lens, despite the nature of my invisible disability.

Equally relevant is the question or definition of disability being based on physical difference, on visibility of that disability. How does one depict a fractured, scarred mind within a physical definition of disability when one's primary disability is assumed related to madness and is rendered invisible? In the case of my photographs, I must also again refuse to pass, but this time, it is as an able minded individual.

I recall a quote from James Watson, a geneticist who was partially responsible for the discovery of DNA and also helped found the Human Genome Project:

“We already accept that most couples don't want a Down child. You would have to be crazy to say you wanted one, because that child has no future.”⁹²

According to Alison Kafer, Watson's assumption, that disability is seen as the sign of no future, or at least of “no good future” is a commonly held concept.⁹³ In other words, “the value of a future that includes disabled people goes unrecognized, while the value of a disability-free future is seen as self-evident”.⁹⁴ Kafer also states that we must recognize this perspective as colored by histories of ableism and disability oppression. She argues for a crippled politics of access and engagement based on the work of disability activists and theorists.⁹⁵

Going deeper, the dominant mainstream assumption that disability is legitimized through visibility creates a conundrum for those whose disabilities are not visible: often, in our hypercapitalist environment, anyone whose body and mind appear “high functioning” or who remain invisibly disabled and can hide their struggles is praised and through that praise, invalidated in the same breath.

Adding another layer of complexity to the concept of passing as a high-functioning disabled individual is how invisible disability and high-functioning as a disabled person feed

92. Michael Gerson, “The Eugenics Temptation,” *Revista de Prensa*, November 15, 2021, <https://www.almendron.com/tribuna/the-eugenics-temptation/>.

93. Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (United States: Indiana University Press, 2013), 3.

94. Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (United States: Indiana University Press, 2013), 3.

95. Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (United States: Indiana University Press, 2013), 3.

into neoliberal ideals. Disability scholar Kelly Frisch connects the concept of disability and its relationship to “no future” with Edelman’s concepts of reproductive futurism and queer lives. Frisch explains that, similarly to how these ideals have produced Edelman’s notion of the (productive) heteronormative affirming queer, (or for that matter, the cisgender appearing trans person), Neoliberal ideals

produce the figure of the disabled child that is productive—as far it creates varied discursive and affective economies aimed at preventing life, ending lives, capacitating some bodies, and re-investing a caring public in biocapitalism—and also re-inscribes the hope for a future without disability or, at least, a future in which disability no longer seems to be a difference that matters...I show that it is at the confluence of this double lack-of-futurity—disabled children without futures and a future without disability—that some disabled adults become unanticipated lives left to wither while others become capacitated as inspirational, hopeful, and progressive success stories of neoliberal inclusion.⁹⁶

Because of my appearance and the fact that my disability is invisible, as well as the fact that despite my difference I am a doctoral student who appears white, male, and cisgender, I could easily be co-opted as a “success story”. Therefore it is imperative that I claim and acknowledge my whiteness, my alleged male able bodied appearance, once again, within the context of my photographs.

There are further complications to being read as invisibly disabled. As Kattari, Olzman and Hanna describe, passing as able-bodied/minded may be seen as a privilege but it can also be a challenge for invisibly disabled people to find community and be validated by disabled

96. Kelly Fritsch, “Crippling Neoliberal Futurity: Marking the Elsewhere and Elsewhen of Desiring Otherwise,” *Feral Feminisms Untimely Bodies: Futurity, Resistance and Non Normative Embodiment*, no. 5 (2016): pp. 11-26, 11-12.

people....and they may also have issues accessing the services, support and spaces that they need, given assumptions about what their bodies and minds are able to do, and whether those given the power to make the distinction decide whether they are “disabled enough”⁹⁷ As illustrated by the story I told at the beginning of this section, this has often been the case for me. Additionally, because I appear able bodied and minded in my photographs, the concept of their subject matter being related to disability may be completely overlooked. My experiences with madness are erased, and the trauma and aftermath of my hospitalizations are also invisible.

However, through my engagement with the emaciated skeleton prop in my work, I attempt to bring my dialogues with an ongoing history with family members who have lost their lives to completed suicide, as well as the losses and hauntings I have experienced as a witness in the lives of others who struggle with similar conditions. As Jill Bennett explains in her discussions of trauma and contemporary art, art itself is often viewed as a vehicle for the interpersonal transmission of experience.⁹⁸ What does it mean for a white, cisgender passing invisibly disabled trans man to lie in a bed with the facsimile of a rotting corpse? What are the implications of such an act? Perhaps extending the discussion of critical disability theory to a discussion of disability art will enlighten the discussion further.

97. Shanna K. Kattari, Miranda Olzman, and Michele D. Hanna, “‘You Look Fine!’: Ableist Experiences by People With Invisible Disabilities,” *Affilia* 33, no. 4 (2018): pp. 477-492, 478.

98. Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 7.

As Eliza Chandler remarks, disability arts are political.⁹⁹ As she explains, disability art is a burgeoning artistic practice in Canada that takes the experience of disability as a creative entry point.¹⁰⁰ To invoke disability art in this project, and to make my madness and trauma a source of inspiration is a political act. Chandler continues, stating that disability art is mobilized “by the experiences of living in a world that does not typically desire us, or even imagine us as cultural participants,” and names disability arts as “a disruptive politic.”¹⁰¹ As Chandler further explains, a way of engaging this disruptive politic is through the word ‘crip’. The use of the word crip and the concept of “Crippling the Arts” stems from disability studies scholars Robert McRuer and Kelly Fritsch’s application of the word. McRuer states that to “crip” is to, “expose ways in which bodies, minds, and impairments should be at the absolute centre of a space or issue or discussion get ‘purged’ from that space or issue odiscussion...”¹⁰² In a similar fashion, Kelly Fritsch states that, “to crip is to open up with desire to the ways that disability disrupts”¹⁰³

99. Eliza Chandler, “Introduction: Crippling the Arts in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 8, no. 1 (2019): pp. 1-14, 3.

100. Eliza Chandler, “Introduction: Crippling the Arts in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 8, no. 1 (2019): pp. 1-14, 3.

101. Eliza Chandler, “Introduction: Crippling the Arts in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 8, no. 1 (2019): pp. 1-14, 3.

102. Robert McRuer, *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 23.

103. K Fritsch. *Crip theory*. Paper presented at the Society for Disability Studies Conference, Denver, CO, June 2012.

As a child growing up in the 1980s and 90s who was diagnosed with a mood disorder, I was psychiatrized from a young age. Some of my earliest memories include being put in a special education class because I “walked funny” according to one of my grade school teachers, and being called “retard” by my elementary school classmates. I was also told that I needed to be prescribed Ritalin, because of my inability to concentrate. I refused to take the medication, did some research on it myself, and found it to be a derivative of cocaine. Intuitively, even as a teenager, I felt something was deeply wrong and that such medication did not belong in my body. I was fifteen. Six years later, while enduring treatment for addiction, I encountered young people in the treatment centre who referred to Ritalin as ‘R’, a street drug, one that could “get you high” if you ground it up and inhaled the dust. I was also prescribed the antidepressant Paxil, which led to seizures and memory loss, long before my first hospitalization. To this day, I remain skeptical of medications.

Growing up in those decades, where “pills were the ultimate panacea” and in the widespread fad of “diagnosing children with a variety of psychiatric disorders with the aim of controlling their thoughts in schools, at home, and in institutions”¹⁰⁴, I was groomed to submit to psychiatric analysis, and subject to the whims of an authoritarian parent who believed that I was to be seen and not heard. Before I was removed from my mother’s care, she continued to insist that I was sick and needed to be medicated. My mother’s behaviour was a psychological mirror of the times she inhabited, and she kept her fingers on the pulse

104. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 7.

of psychiatry practices. Like many parents, she was advised by institutional leaders (teachers, counselors, even priests) to medicate me as I was a “problem child”. Menzies et al. describe the psychological imperative of the times in relation to children, saying that

children who were once thought of as behaving badly have been increasingly diagnosed with conduct disorders; children—including toddlers—once seen as having vivid and creative imaginations have been increasingly diagnosed with psychotic disorders; and children who were once understood as expressing sadness or low moods have been increasingly diagnosed with depressive disorders, whilst high energy, “uncontrollable” children have been increasingly diagnosed with a range of hyperactivity-related disorders. Perhaps most disturbingly, children who have survived child abuse and other forms of trauma, including state sanctioned and politically motivated violence have been increasingly diagnosed with a wide range of “mental illnesses,” including many different permutations of those mentioned above, and have been given a cocktail of drugs to presumably match each diagnosis.¹⁰⁵

As a childhood survivor of psychiatry, and one whose survivor status continued into adulthood, the significance of Mad Studies within this dissertation is an imperative one.

1.12 Mad Studies

Mad Studies informs the goals of this dissertation, specifically around issues of medicalization and activism. This project draws from the history of the Mad movement, and the antipsychiatry movement’s galvanized themes of

human rights for psychiatrized citizens, and in its opposition to the burgeoning therapeutic state and the medicalization of everyday life; from arbitrary, exclusionary, racist, homophobic, gender-biased diagnostic codes and interventions; to involuntary mental confinement and enforced “treatment”; to electroshock, Big Pharma, and the profusion of chemical straightjackets branded as therapy; and, increasingly, to systemic deinstitutionalization and the wholesale urban ghettoizing of ex-patients under the transparent deceit of “downsizing” and “reintegration.”¹⁰⁶

105. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 7.

106. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 5.

I have endured many of these “treatments” and have suffered within them. Within my hospitalizations, I have also witnessed the treatments of other patients who were labeled “mentally ill” and never left the hospital. My art practice and the photographs contained in this dissertation are outcroppings where the silenced part of my being speaks of their effects. The artwork I create stands in for the invisible parts of myself that have been psychiatrized. Mad Studies and the Mad movement give agency to these silenced parts of myself, and they inform the subject matter of my work and the activist spirit embedded in this project.

I wish to adhere to the radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing’s “politics of experience”, and “the premise that madness can only be understood and engaged existentially and through the eyes of those who live it”¹⁰⁷ in this dissertation. My research is also grounded in the belief that “the objectification of so-called ‘mentally ill’ people under the guise of science is a deeply dehumanizing pursuit that requires challenging through a wholesale rethinking of human consciousness and being.”¹⁰⁸

As stated in Chapter one of this dissertation, I also seek to invoke discussions at the intersections of queer and trans madness articulated by Pilling, who suggests “reclaiming the ‘lunatic fringe’ as a site that fights the co-optation of resistance”¹⁰⁹ and that foregrounds a

107. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 5.

108. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 5.

platform of madness, queerness, and transness as well as intersectional analyses of structural racism, coloniality, sanism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and other forms of oppression in the biomedical model of mental illness.¹¹⁰

This “lunatic fringe” can be thought of as a productive site and platform from which to theorize against mainstream ideologies,¹¹¹ As Pilling exclaims, “If the centre encompasses sanist, cisnormative, heteronormative, racist, and otherwise oppressive worldviews, is it so bad to be a lunatic on the fringe?”¹¹²

The interdisciplinary nature and variety of methodologies described throughout this chapter relate to a fusion of theory and practice, specifically fusions of trans and mad studies, whiteness studies, autobiography, autofiction and disability theory with that of research creation and arts-based methodologies in relation to the refusal to pass. While this fusion is not seamless, the need to incorporate both theory and research creation remains a key element of this project: both are required to achieve a full scope of the dissertation, and it is my hope that through a fusion of the theories described throughout this chapter that new

109. Lucy Costa et al., “‘Recovering Our Stories’: A Small Act of Resistance,” *Studies in Social Justice* 6, no. 1 (2012): pp. 85-101.

110. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 41-42.

111. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 41.

112. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 41.

spaces for discussion will arise, particularly around the topic of failure to pass as method, which my photographs serve to illustrate. This concept will be discussed and taken up further in the following chapter.

Chapter 2- On Applying the Photograph

2.1 Introduction

The photograph is a complex and highly debatable entity. In the contemporary art world, it has been treated as a rogue object, a “Trojan horse” that infiltrates the sacred space of the gallery with its infinite productive capacities and ability to erase the physical trace of the artist’s hand.¹¹³ The behaviour of the reproducibility of photographs is also famously documented in Walter Benjamin’s famed article *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and is a subject that I will return to later in this dissertation.

The photograph has also been used to document criminality, and even as a tool of eugenics, as photographer and critic Allan Sekula recounts in his famous article “The Body and the Archive.” As Singer highlights, photography also contributed to the collusion of the medical gaze with criminology, as it was used by police and medical professionals to establish a connection between visual evidence of physical pathology and deviance.¹¹⁴ The idea stemming from this correlation was that the colonizing eye of authority could detect the “truth” in the nonstandard body, using the photograph as a vehicle, and further that the authority would perceive that truth to be located in the image itself rather than in its staging.¹¹⁵

113. Thierry De Duve, “Art in the Face of Radical Evil,” *October* 125 (2008): pp. 3-23, 7.

114. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 604.

2.2 Photography and Trans Representation as Power

Despite its sinister history, photography has been a source of power for trans people, including myself. As an artist, giving shape to my feelings through creating objects helps me to make sense of them, and is empowering. The immediacy of the photograph, and its capacity to depict has been a gratifying source of validation within my art practice. In his article *Video Blogging as a Vehicle of Transformation: Exploring the Intersection Between Trans Identity and Information technology*, Tobias Raun discusses photography within the context of video logging in online trans communities, saying the camera can act as a mirror to the world for trans people, a means of validating the self.¹¹⁶

On a deeper level, one need only recall Loren Cameron's landmark book *Body Alchemy*, which features the self-portraits of a select group of FTMs, to get a sense of how the camera can promote a sense of autonomy and strength to trans identified individuals.

Cameron's comments come to mind as I recall his photographs:

"I was fueled by my need to be validated and wanted, in turn to validate [other trans men]. I wanted the world to see us, I mean, really see us."¹¹⁷

or

115. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, "From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 604.

116. Tobias Raun, "Video Blogging as a Vehicle of Transformation: Exploring the Intersection between Trans Identity and Information Technology," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2014): pp. 365-378, 368.

117. Loren Cameron, *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1996), 11.

“I don’t really mind that the [camera bulb] is visible. Its presence serves as a metaphor: I am creating my own image alone, an act that reflects the transsexual experience as well.”¹¹⁸

Cameron also remarks that at the time of his book’s publication (1996) trans men “have been virtually invisible to the dominant culture.”¹¹⁹ Juxtaposing Cameron’s photos with my own, I cannot help but think of the irony around my photographs: how the trans FTM invisibility he describes in the outside world has leaked into my photographs as well, and how in juxtaposition to Cameron’s images where that difference is often more obvious, my depictions of myself are not.

Singer refers to Cameron’s self-portrait “God’s Will”, (Fig. 8) an image of Cameron’s white, naked, muscular body which features him injecting himself with testosterone, as a photo which exemplifies a muscular, masculine beauty-- “the beautiful”.¹²⁰ Singer then discusses the aesthetic qualities associated with that beauty and uses words like “unity” and “totality central to European aesthetics”¹²¹ to describe Cameron’s photograph. But as I’ve articulated, beauty in this context, as it has in my own photographs, bears the white ableist

118. Loren Cameron, *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1996), 11.

119. Loren Cameron, *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1996), 11.

120. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 606.

121. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 607.

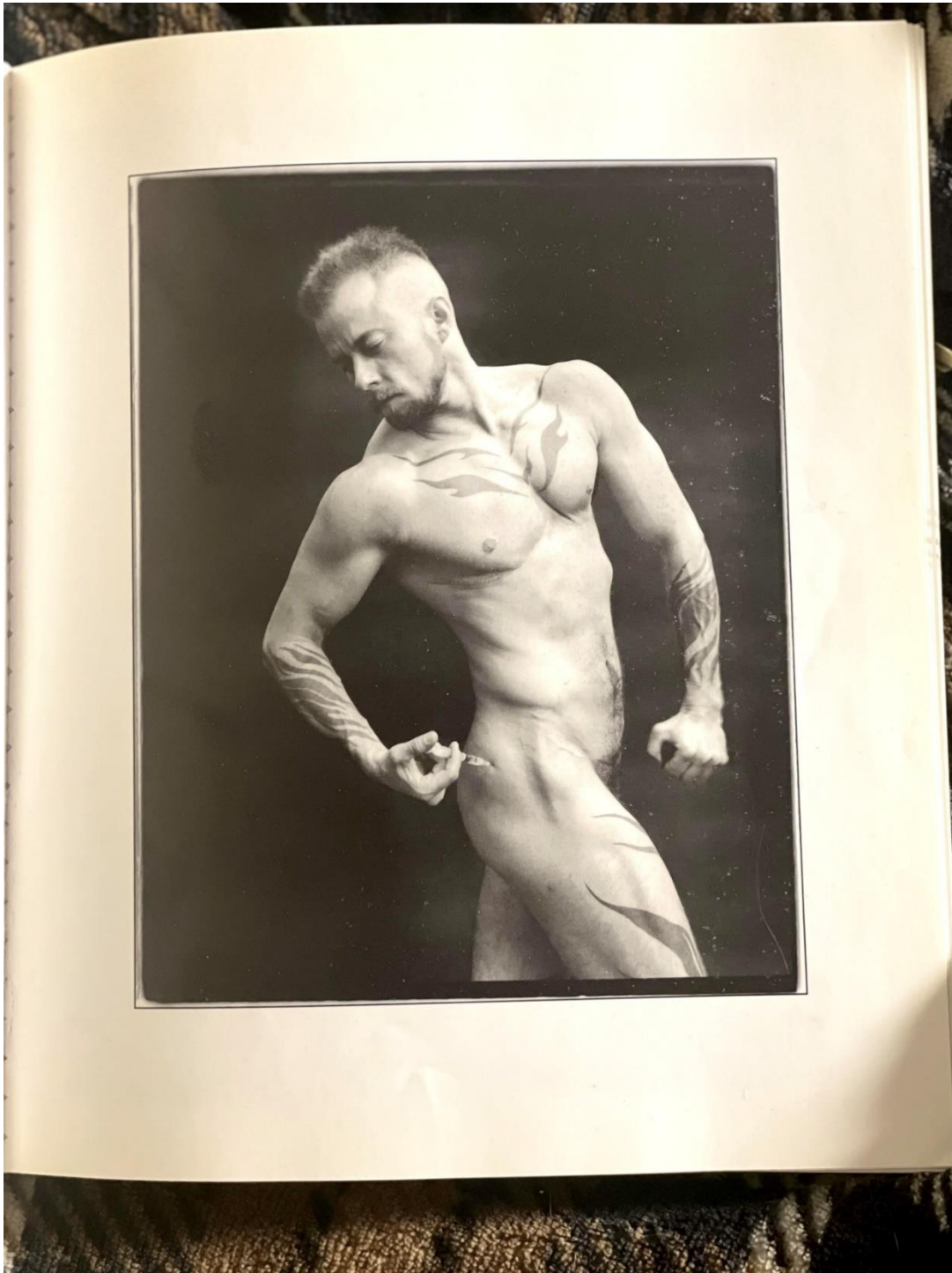


Figure 2.1 Loren Cameron, *God's Will (Detail)*, 1996, Photo print in *Body Alchemy* (Book)

cisgender markings of oppression and is not what it seems. Cameron's image does feature a full depiction of his body, and below the waist of the image, it is obvious that he is not cisgender. However, it stands to reason that passing and white notions of beauty are easily conflated in this context, making it a debatable image.

It is true that Cameron's famous volume also features images of metoidioplasty and phalloplasty, as well as visibly frontal shots of his own body in full view. Yet many of these point to an idealized masculinity and, in most cases, a desire to pass or replicate idealized masculinity. There are no refusals in his body of work. Each portrait and its description passes or alludes to passing. Within the context of this project, these portraits become points of discussion and controversy in the same breath.

2.3 Photography and "Truth"

The "true" meaning of photographs has always been debatable and, at points, controversial. In his discussion of Post-War Black Settlement images, cultural theorist Stuart Hall claims there is no such unitary thing as "photography", that it is a convenient way of referencing the diversity of practices, institutions, and historical conjunctures in which the photographic text is produced, circulated, and deployed.¹²² Hall cautions that "evidence which the photographic text may be assumed to represent is already overendowed, overdetermined by other, further, often contradictory meanings, which arise within the

122. Stuart Hall and Charlotte Brunsdon, *Writings on Media: History of the Present* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2021), 79.

intertextuality of all photographic representation as a social practice”.¹²³ His interpretation is an historical one. As Hall suggests, over time, photographic meanings shift according to their appearances in relation to the field of representation, where they are inscribed or “placed” according to their positioning in time.¹²⁴

Further, Hall states that

Their meanings will already have been inflected by the discourses of photographic studio, high-street shop, news-photo agency, book publishing, newspaper or magazine, colour supplement or gallery. The vast majority will already have been organised within certain systems of classification which transfer to them the supplementary imprint of their own generic meanings, etc.: family portrait, news shot, agency scrapbook, photo exposé, etc. Each practice, each placing, each discourse thus slides another layer of meaning across the frame ...¹²⁵

According to Hall, one cannot capture the original meaning of a photograph, because of its intertextual nature:

... the search for their “essential Truth”—an original, founding moment of meaning—is an illusion. The photographs are essentially multiaccental in meaning. No such previously natural moment of true meaning, untouched by the codes and social relations of production and reading, and transcending historical time, exists.¹²⁶

123. Stuart Hall and Charlotte Brunsdon, *Writings on Media: History of the Present* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2021), 79.

124. Stuart Hall and Charlotte Brunsdon, *Writings on Media: History of the Present* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2021), 78.

125. Stuart Hall and Charlotte Brunsdon, *Writings on Media: History of the Present* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2021), 79.

126. Stuart Hall and Charlotte Brunsdon, *Writings on Media: History of the Present* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2021), 79.

As I've alluded, Hall's comments push back against the concept of the photograph being a document of absolute truth, or scientific objectivity, particularly in relation to medicalization. They contrast with those of Singer, who imparts the photograph with an idealistic concept of truth surrounding bodies and the medical gaze. Singer claims the photograph as "an object whose depiction generates the aura of an unmediated reality."¹²⁷ The key, however, in Singer's curated surveyed depictions of medicalized bodies is that he claims they are visibly "non-normative", their non-normativity thus providing a springboard for discussion around intersectional concepts of race, gender, cisgender, and so on. In contrast, my project requires the photographic representation of the trans passing body to be refused in order to initiate discussion, as it represents white, patriarchal, cisgender, masculinity, and thus fails to depict the "non normative" trans body and by extension identity.

It is of note that the behaviour of photographs and their "truthful" implications also relate to concerns inside and outside of the realm of art, history, and art history. However, in this project, the photograph's relationship to the gallery is superseded by its behaviour and significance as a form of documentation. And within this realm of documentation, the intertextual nature of the photograph also is a space for research creation. In other words, in the case of this dissertation, the photograph works to consider the physically depicted surface of the trans body as a cultural site of complexity. By considering its pathologization and

127. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, "From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 607.

medicalization, the project promotes the photograph as a space where these can be brought to light and through that visibility, confronted and discussed. As I've already mentioned, however, the visibility promoted by my photographs is one which depicts me as a white, cisgender, able-bodied/minded man, and erases the multiplicities of my trans identity. Therefore, the limitations of the photograph (its tendency to only depict the surface of the body) lead to its failure in this project.

What do these failed points of reference mean for me as a trans male artist who uses photography and self-portraiture in their work, and for the photographs within this project? It is through this questioning lens, that I hope to discuss and deconstruct their supposed "objective" meaning and purpose and connect these to the theories discussed within this dissertation.

2.4 "Objectivity" and Photographs

As articulated by Peter Hamilton in his discussion on French post-war photography, representations available through photography are qualitatively different from those available through writing. Where writing consists of words, photographs illustrate lived experience, and are easily claimed as documentary objectivity.¹²⁸

In the case of this objectivity, it is assumed that the camera produced image can 'fix' the meaning of a text by providing it with representational legitimacy. That is, the

128. Peter Hamilton et al., "Representing the Social: France and Frenchness in Post War Humanist Photography," in *Representation : Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 87.

photographer's treatment of the subject alongside its alleged objectivity secures a status for its significance as documentary, which places its meaning above pure opinion.¹²⁹

As the photographs within this dissertation are of my white, cisgender-passing, trans masculine body, (therefore running the risk of bypassing medicalization), the “objectivity” which they inherit by virtue of being documents representing my life, must be deconstructed and discussed. In other words, my dissertation works to consider the cultural relevance of the photograph in relation to the physically depicted surface of my trans body.

The dissertation works to address my trans body as a cultural site of intersectional complexities and promotes the digital photograph as a space where these complexities can be made visible and through that visibility, confronted and articulated. Although my first series of digital photographs fails to accomplish this goal, through their failure and the application of disability art and justice in response to this failure, through their contents, the second group does, as I will explain later in this dissertation.

2.5 The Photograph, Representation and The Erasure of Difference

As mentioned earlier, the subject matter of my photographs revolves around my white trans body and its interactions with a lifesize skeletal prop. At various points, throughout the series, I cradle, caress, and lie with it. In showing these pictures to my Instagram audience

129. Peter Hamilton et al., “Representing the Social: France and Frenchness in Post War Humanist Photography,” in *Representation : Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 87.

online, as I've mentioned, many have called them "beautiful", "mindblowing", and the themes in them have even been compared to those of Greek and Roman art. As I've already articulated, these reactions miss the point. Many of the pictures are taken from the waist up, and my body passes for that of a cisgender man, even when it is entirely exposed.

Hall's discussions of representational difference are worth noting here, in that they rely heavily on obvious visible difference in relation to pictorial depictions of individuals and bodies, what he terms "the marking of difference".¹³⁰ In these cases, Hall is discussing the impact of difference in relation to racialized bodies and how they are received and even fetishized. In contrast, my images do not display great difference at points, even though I had initially, during the conception of this project, thought that they would, particularly around my transgender body. So, again, I must address, in the images where the photographic representation of my body is fully visible, and evidently that of a white transgender man, where my privilege arises in terms of that representation.

Hall claims that many meanings are potential within a photograph, but there is no one true meaning. Rather, he states that meaning floats, and representation aims to fix a preferred meaning of an image.¹³¹

130. Stuart Hall et al., "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 233.

131. Stuart Hall et al., "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 228.

He states,

Representation is a complex business, and when dealing with difference, it engages feelings attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way.¹³²

However, when difference is invisible in the photograph, as it is in the case of my seemingly cisgender white male photographs of my body, how can it be discussed at all? This is another reason that my first series of digital photographs fail as objects in this dissertation: they erase difference.

Drawing further from Hall, in a section of his seminal volume *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, he asks “Why does ‘difference’ matter?” He puts forth four theoretical accounts related to questions of ‘difference’ and addresses both positive and negative aspects related to it, suggesting that difference is both necessary and dangerous.¹³³

Linguistically, Hall claims that ‘difference matters because it’s capacity to illustrate contrast is essential to meaning.’ He draws from Saussure, stating that meaning is relational,

132. Stuart Hall et al., “The Spectacle of the 'Other',” in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 227.

133. Stuart Hall et al., “The Spectacle of the 'Other',” in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 234.

and it is through difference and binary opposition that meaning is signified.¹³⁴ Equally important is how binary oppositions run the risk of being reductionist and over-simplified through their dual structures, and how that relation of power between these poles relates to a dominant vs oppressed linguistic relationship structure.¹³⁵

Hall reanimates Saussure in another point of difference, that we can only construct meaning with it through a dialogue with the 'Other'. Hall states that everything we say, and mean is modified by the interaction and interplay with another person. He also states that because of this, meaning can never be fixed and that one group can never be fully in charge of meaning.¹³⁶

Thirdly, Hall states that culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. Difference therefore is the basis of the symbolic order known as culture.¹³⁷ However, he states that because of this, when something

134. Stuart Hall et al., "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 234.

135. Stuart Hall et al., "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 235.

136. Stuart Hall et al., "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 235-236.

137. Stuart Hall et al., "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 236.

does not fit into a clean category, or is hybridized, it does not fit into culture clearly, and is rejected. The mark of difference, therefore, can lead to stigma, taboo, and fetishization.

The final explanation Hall offers around the matter of difference is psychoanalytic, namely that the 'Other' is fundamental to the constitution of the self, to us as subjects, and to sexual identity.¹³⁸ That is, subjectivity can only arise, and a sense of self can only be formed through symbolic and unconscious relations which the young child forms with a significant 'Other' which is outside and different from themselves. From a negative perspective psychoanalytic premise assumes there is no such thing as a given stable inner core to the self or identity, and thus forms through a persistent lack since we are dependent on the Other for completion of the self.¹³⁹

All of this points to the fact that the subject matter of my photographs (my white cisgender passing body) led to the erasure of difference, which means that their problematic depictions and the intersectional oppressions they reinforce cannot be addressed. In essence, they pass or are interpreted as "beautiful" rather than images that replicate white patriarchal cisgender qualities, or as images that have the capacity to promote oppression.

138. Stuart Hall et al., "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 237.

139. Stuart Hall et al., "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 238.

Additionally, through the introduction and discussion of these points surrounding the importance of difference in representation, one can surmount how making difference invisible in my photographs leads to an inability to forge discussions around the subject matter. Passing, therefore, in these photographs, while it might be celebrated by the average viewer, and while the average viewer might perceive my photographs as successful examples of art, erases difference, and reinforces transphobia. My photographs are deliberate failures representationally, because they omit the discussion of difference rather than promoting it, much the way a white abled sane heterosexual cisgender man can omit the capacity to confront visible privilege in day-to-day life.



Figure 2.2 Max Ferguson and Felicia Byron, *They #60*, 2021, Digital Print

2.6 The Photograph's Failure to Depict: Refusing to Pass as Method

Susan Sontag once remarked that photographs furnish evidence, that what we hear about, but doubt seems proven once we're shown a photograph of it.¹⁴⁰ However, what happens in the case of my photographs, when the photograph's capacity to depict fails? I ponder this thought and consider a deeper analysis of the photographs I've constructed for this project. As I've already articulated, through their depiction of my passing, they fail to depict my identity. In other words, this project is informed by failure, specifically, the failure to represent myself.

What does this mean? What does it mean to fail? Can failure become a means of knowing? The heart of this project relates to failure, a sharp contrast to the subject matter in my MFA thesis, where through a six foot contorted handmade alien doll and a series of camp photographs, I articulated a sense of genderfluidity and successfully represented myself, or what I thought I was. However, infailing to represent me and my history as a fat activist, psychiatric survivor, feminist artist, and sex worker, I argue that my first group of photographs creates friction and a space to question that omission, and articulating the idea of refusing to pass as method.

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140. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977), 5.

In other words, by refusing to pass, one can also resist the category of Gender Dysphoria that I've described in this project, and by extension, medicalization and the apparatus of psychiatry that it represents.

It is interesting to note that within my MFA project (2017), pre-transition, I also argued about my body's failure to represent my identity, and initially, through artmaking, sought to create a space to mourn that which I could not be, in my failed womanhood.¹⁴¹

I remarked that

"I will never get 'there', but through the criticism of the gender binary and 'naturalized' norms associated with it, there is room to move and evolve."¹⁴²

At that time, I felt transition would solve my representation problem, but based on the evidence provided by the photographs in this dissertation, it hasn't. If anything, my photographs point to the fact that transition does not solve our identity problems as trans people. In my case, transition does help me to feel more aligned with my body, but it does not eliminate the politics I grapple with as a trans person who is not easily defined. Today, my cisgender appearance hides my history, renders it invisible to the outside world. I do not feel comfortable when I am referred to as 'he', preferring the pronoun 'they' as a means of

141. Sarah Jean Ferguson, "Monstrosities: Genderfluidity as Art Practice," Handle Proxy (Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Regina, May 1, 2017), <http://hdl.handle.net/10294/7861>, 11.

142. Sarah Jean Ferguson, "Monstrosities: Genderfluidity as Art Practice," Handle Proxy (Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Regina, May 1, 2017), <http://hdl.handle.net/10294/7861>, 11.

honoring all of myself and my sides. It's quite interesting how, even after my transition, I am still grappling with failure. To add, I do not relate deeply to the non-binary category because it does not represent me either. In my experience when I was at the beginning of my transition, I kept getting read as a trans woman. It led to me nearly being beaten up in several instances. Now, most people don't even blink at me, and I find that quite interesting. It's also quite curious how being read as passing means that I'm not read as transgender. In failing to represent me as a transgender subject, the photographs within this project create a space to discuss this concept, and what that means.

2.7 Failure

Halberstam describes this concept in *The Queer Art of Failure*, whose agenda he claims is to “lose the idealism of hope in order to gain wisdom and a new relation to life, culture, knowledge, and pleasure.”¹⁴³

He playfully gestures towards the concept of failure, saying

Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world.¹⁴⁴

And further, that

disciplines actually get in the way of answers and theorems precisely because they offer maps of thought where intuition and blind fumbling might yield better results.¹⁴⁵

143. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) Kindle edition.

144. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Kindle edition.

In many ways, this project represents that mixture of intuition and blind fumbling in some ways, but a deliberate sense of fumbling, in that I claim that fumbling is necessary to find meaning.

In particular, I wish to draw from Halberstam's discussions of failure in relation to feminism, especially his remark that from a feminist perspective, failure is a better bet than success; that due to the fact that feminine success is measured by male standards, and gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals, not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures; namely that if one falls outside of patriarchal norms, they can re-create meanings of their genders.¹⁴⁶

To draw again from my MFA thesis:

...what is a woman? I have never felt comfortable in my body: I am taller and larger than average women, I have more body hair than most women, my voice is deep, and has often been called 'masculine', I cannot have children; I have never felt comfortable with the social forces that I have always sensed, pressing on my body, urging it to exalt or deny aspects of itself, or even destroy itself for not fitting into society's expectations of what a 'woman' is.¹⁴⁷

145. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Kindle edition.

146. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Kindle edition.

147. Sarah Jean Ferguson, "Monstrosities: Genderfluidity as Art Practice," Handle Proxy (Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Regina, May 1, 2017), <http://hdl.handle.net/10294/7861>, 7.



Figure 2.3 Max Ferguson and Felicia Byron, *They #41*, 2021, Digital Print

In other words, I believe this project exemplifies Halberstam's statement. "Failing" at womanhood initially led me to transition, and because they also fail to represent all of who I am, my photographs create new space for meaning and discussion around the concept of gender—failed gender in particular. It is through this concept of failed gender, as I will discuss later in this dissertation, that my project's second series of artworks were conceived. Giving shape to the productive failure of gender is one of the main themes in their execution. What does it mean to fail at gender? How and where does one begin when they are not recognized?

Perhaps with the notion of gender itself, namely that it is inherently flawed. Teresa De Lauretis discusses the flawed nature of gender in relation to feminist thought, saying that gender as sexual difference and its outcroppings: women's culture, feminine writing, mothering, and the concept of femininity itself are a limitation and a liability to feminist thought. Gender in these conditions remains tied to Western patriarchy and constrained to conceptual opposition, bound in dominant cultural discourses (biological, medical, legal, philosophical and literary) and their underlying master narratives.¹⁴⁸ Thus, posing the question of gender under patriarchal conditions reinforces them through reproduction and retextualization. Put another way, decrying gender and sexual difference within the

148. Teresa De Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender," in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 1-30, 1.

framework of Western patriarchy simply re-creates patriarchal conditions, as my first photographs illustrate.

De Lauretis also borrows Audre Lorde's metaphor, which is appropriate here, highlighting that sexual difference "tends to recontain or recuperate the radical epistemological potential of feminist thought inside the walls of the master's house."¹⁴⁹

She emphasizes four propositions concerning gender which relate to the heart of this project:

- 1) Gender is a representation.
- 2) The representation of gender is its construction-and Western Art and high culture is the engraved with the history of that construction.
- 3) The construction of gender goes on today as it did in earlier times, through what Louis Althusser has called the "ideological state apparatus.", in the academy, in the intellectual community, in avant-garde artistic practices and radical theories, and especially, in feminism.
- 4) Paradoxically, therefore, the construction of gender is also effected by its deconstruction; that is to say, by any discourse, feminist or otherwise, that would discard it as ideological misrepresentation.¹⁵⁰

In a sense, my photographs are an illustration of the discussion above, as they depict me (a representation), a white disabled trans man as a white, able bodied cisgender man in dialogue with an artificial corpse. Without a radical deconstruction of their contents and discussion of what lies beneath their appearance, they run the risk of replicating dominant patriarchal ideologies (white, male, cisgender, able bodied/minded).

149. Teresa De Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender," in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 1-30, 1.

150. Teresa De Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender," in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 1-30, 3.

2.8 “Legitimate Trans Identities” and the Refusal to Pass

As I articulated earlier in this dissertation, I have observed through my transition and subsequent passing that the reliance of trans individuals on medicalization as a means of accessing healthcare through a diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria is problematic. Through medicalization, the validity of trans individuals is pathologized. Further, the idea of a healthy trans person in these contexts relies upon sanist logic and ableism, that legitimate trans identities are oriented toward “healthy”, sane, white, and able-bodied discourses. In many ways, my early photographs illustrate and mirror these discourses.



Figure 2.4 Max Ferguson and Felicia Byron, *They #63*, 2021, Digital Print

As mentioned earlier, I entitled the photographic series “They” as a direct reference, not to just the pronoun related to trans identities, but to illustrate the plurality of “They” as I understand it. I embrace the literal translation of “They” in these photographs: “They” as a plurality, a multiplicity, signifying more than one.

Further, I discussed earlier how the skeleton in these photographs refers to the silenced feminine and invisible part of my identity that carried me to the transitional point in my life yet remains dead to the outside world through my masculinized appearance. (Fig.10) It also refers to, in its plural meaning, the presence of/trauma related to my madness and psychiatrization, processed through sanism, patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, white supremacy, and ableism. The skeleton is the form, the affect or the haunting that is left behind, as described in the previous chapter.

The aesthetic of these photographs was partially inspired by a photograph that I will never forget, *Felix Partz, June 5, 1994*, which featured AA Bronson’s deathbed portrait of his lover and friend Felix Partz, who died of AIDS. (Fig. 11) Directly, these images also attempt to represent me taking power back from my medicalization, and defining my identity for myself, outside of the dominant power structures I am outlining here, and as Cameron iterates through his photographs, discussed earlier in this chapter.

Hall’s discussions of representational difference are worth circling back to again here, in that they rely heavily on obvious difference in relation to pictorial depictions of

individuals and bodies, what he terms, as I've mentioned previously, "the marking of difference".¹⁵¹ In these cases, Hall is discussing the impact of difference in relation to



Figure 2.5 AA Bronson, *Felix Partz, June 5, 1994*, Inkjet Print on Vinyl, 84 × 168'
<https://whitney.org/collection/works/16348>

racialized bodies, and how they are received and even fetishized. To reiterate, my early images do not display great difference at points, even though I had initially, during the conception of this project, thought that they would, particularly around my transgender body. I look like a cisgender man. The scars on my chest from my top surgery, for instance, are not always obvious or visible. Only at certain points, when my entire body is visible in the photographs, would my identity as a trans man be questioned. The difference here is not so

151. Stuart Hall et al., "The Spectacle of the 'Other'," in *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 233.

easily marked. So, again, I must address, in the images where the photographic representation of my body is fully visible, and evidently that of a white transgender man, where my privilege arises in terms of that representation.

For instance, if my body displayed “difference”, if it were one of color, if it were non-binary in my physical presentation, or if I was an MTF trans person, would these photographs evoke the same response from viewers? I would think not. Again, I am drawn back to thinking of what “passing” means in these cases. Does the fact that my body passes mean that I get to bypass the inherent violence and transphobia that a transgender identity grapples with through visibility? And if I bypass that violence through virtue of my white passing body, how can I attend to the difference that it carries invisibly and the privilege that arises from that invisibility?

Through the introduction and discussion of these points surrounding the importance of difference in representation, one can surmount how making difference invisible in my photographs leads to an inability to forge discussions around the subject matter. Passing, therefore, in these photographs, while it might be celebrated by the average viewer, and while the average viewer might perceive my photographs as beautiful examples of art, they are in some ways, deliberate failures representationally, because they omit the discussion of difference rather than promoting it, much the way passing as a white cisgender man omits the capacity to confront privilege in day to day life.

This leads to the question, what did I want from my photographs? What did I want them to embody? How did I hope to present myself? When I began this project, my hope was that through a direct gaze and the images of my body, I would be able to embody the confrontation of the medical apparatus that had effectively psychiatrized me. Singer's discussions of the dehumanizing of bodies by medical texts come to mind: depictions of atypical bodies with "bars across their eyes" representing scientific objectivity and meeting the gaze of the viewer with my eyes in spite of my "atypical body". But as it turns out, my body looked typical in the photographs, and as I confronted the viewer, they were met not with the gaze of someone atypical, but of someone who appeared cisgender, white, abled. Because I passed in my photographs, the message could not be delivered.

As this project has unfolded, I would argue that there is no way for the photograph to depict the multiplicities of my identity. It can, as I articulated earlier in this dissertation, only depict the surface of the body, not its inner workings, or those of the mind, for that matter. And the body is a singular object. Further, it must be acknowledged that today's photograph has undergone a complex aesthetic evolution, through its transformation from a physical object into a digital one. This transformation is also modulated, monitored, and culturally informed through photographic software and its engagement with the Internet, AI and the metaverse.

Therefore, if this project is to acknowledge and engage authentically with these realities, give shape to the pluralities of my trans identity, and by extension, refuse the gender binary, medicalization and passing, it must transcend the photograph's capacity to

depict singularity, and even the medium of the photograph itself. To depict myself authentically, I must rely on imaginings, and on my artistic capacity to give shape to those imaginings, but I must also acknowledge how the photograph's qualities and meanings have shifted from past to present.

By combining the concepts of the photograph (body) and an aesthetic based upon the series of drawings accompanying my photographs (mind—these will be explored further in detail in Chapter 4), and considering the limitations of their capacities, this can be accomplished: combining body and mind and fusing them together artistically, can lead to a new concrete expression of my multiplicity through my art practice, but also recalls, as I will mention later in this dissertation, Eli Clare's concept of body-mind, which refuses Cartesian dualism, medicalization, and the concept of cure.

Therefore, because my body's appearance replicates cis-heteronormative structures, my refusal to pass must transcend the physical limitations of the photograph (to depict things) or can only be expressed through other capacities. Given these facts and their failure, I feel it is necessary to recreate my photographs-- their subject matter, meanings, composition, even their physical structure-- by rupturing their contents to depict that failure. This will be discussed in chapter four.

Chapter 3- "...Anywhere, to Anyone?"

3.1 Introduction

In the foreword to the Transgender Studies Reader published in 2006, Stephen Whittle states that "a transgender identity is now accessible "almost anywhere, to anyone".¹⁵²

Is this statement true? Reflecting on my time in the hospital, labelled then as a Mad woman in psychiatric distress, my trans masculine identity buried under decades of internalized homophobia, transphobia and failed feminine conditioning, I am left with several questions related to Whittle's statement: Where is 'anywhere'? Who is 'anyone'?

Certainly, Whittle's statement does not apply to institutionalized individuals like those described by Eli Clare in his article *Yearning Toward Carrie Buck*,

...a congress of sterilized women and men— raging, fierce, grief filled. Puerto Rican women sit with Appalachian men. First Nations teenagers sit with self-described mad women. Disabled folks who have lived their entire lives locked away in state-run hospitals sit with southern Black women who know all too well the words Mississippi appendectomy, the meaning behind them. Women of color ordered by judges or paid to take Norplant sit with women tricked into signing tubal ligation consent forms...¹⁵³

I still recall many of Clare's descriptions in that article, recounting Carrie's life, trauma, and sterilization in a hospital, marked as a "feeble-minded" mentally ill woman.¹⁵⁴ Despite

152. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), xi.

153. Eli Clare, "Yearning Toward Carrie Buck," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 3 (2014): pp. 335-344, 343.

154. Eli Clare, "Yearning Toward Carrie Buck," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 3 (2014): pp. 335-344, 335.

the trials and anguish Carrie encountered in her experience, Clare asks in what ways Carrie's whiteness protected her. I apply that question to myself in this project: how has my whiteness protected me as a trans man? How did I/do I profit from my whiteness despite my trials? I think of the list of people Clare discusses in his article, and the grim picture painted by that list: he recounts the "thousands" of Black men and women in the asylum where Carrie was housed and how he cannot find a record of their names. One could say that Carrie's whiteness allowed her to be named and gave her an identity amongst numerous anonymous people who were not granted one. I could, considering what I've described in this project, say the same thing about myself.

I also think of Kortney Ziegler's discussions of Black trans male privilege, when he talks about how his newfound passing identity allows him to bypass the once held fear of assault he held around men in his former body, and how he can walk in public without being harassed.¹⁵⁵ I think of my own fears of assault during my early twenties as a sex worker, a man trapped in a female, full figured body, often fetishized and assaulted by clients and how now, nobody sees that person when I walk down the street. I am stealth. My passing is amplified by my whiteness. My hair is blonde. Waitresses flirt with me when I order meals. I get called "bro" and "dude" now. My history is hidden by my passing.

155. Kortney Ziegler, "The Peculiarity of Black Trans Male Privilege," *Privilege*, 2018, pp. 209-211, 210.

Whittle's remarks, considering what I've just described, might make the term "transgender" seem commonplace, but they also appear naive. I am perplexed by the 'anyone' Whittle refers to. Are they white and privileged? Is a visible (accessible) transgender identity contingent on being white? What about, as C. Riley Snorton describes,

The recurrent practice of enumerating the dead in mass and social media...the logics of accumulation that structure racial capitalism... the quantified abstraction of Black and trans deaths...the calculated value of Black and trans lives through states' grammars of deficit and debt.¹⁵⁶

It is important to further consider, as Katherine McKittrick articulates in Snorton's introduction to his celebrated volume *Black on Both Sides*, "where historic Blackness comes from: the list, the breathless numbers, the absolutely economic, the mathematics of unliving."¹⁵⁷ Is the 'anyone' Whittle discusses within these sociopolitical perimeters? I would argue, no.

It is true, as Bobby J Noble states, that "at its most evocative, *trans-* is descriptive, marking lives lived across, against or despite already engendered, sexed, national and even racialized bodies...[and that] at its most provocative, *trans-* and the space it references refuses the medical and psychological categorical imperatives through which it has always been forced to confess."¹⁵⁸

156. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 7.

157. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 7.

158. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 3.

It is also true that nowadays, new communities of transgender people have “created new industries, a new academic discipline, new forms of entertainment...they offer new challenges to politics, government and law, and new opportunities to broaden the horizons of all who have a trans person as their neighbour, coworker, friend, partner, parent, or child.”¹⁵⁹ Based on these remarks, today’s transgender subject seems ordinary, domesticated, fully actualized. Today, scholars even muse about concepts of transgender satire, where discussions about “how truly [mundane] and disappointing it is to be a trans person” are dwelt upon.¹⁶⁰ However, I would argue that the luxury of applying qualities of the mundane to trans experience to be cisgender middle class musings, which have no basis in trans experience. Additionally, I see these types of musings as primarily privileged White Western phenomena.

3.2 Whiteness and Trans “Acceptance”

In other words, if trans lives have been equated with acceptance and monotony in Western culture, I argue it is from a White privileged vantagepoint that this is claimed. Drawing from the work of Ruth Frankenberg, in her germinal text *The Social Construction*

159. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), xi.

160. Andrea Long Chu and Emmett Harsin Drager, “After Trans Studies,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January 2019): pp. 103-116, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7253524>, 104-105.

of Whiteness, it is important to consider how “whiteness” invisibly and visibly shapes the lives of white individuals, particularly how it shapes trans identities.¹⁶¹

According to Frankenberg,

Whiteness... has a set of linked dimensions. First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint,” a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society... Third, “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.¹⁶²

She remarks, in her discussions pertaining to 1980s feminism, that

As a white feminist, I knew that I had not previously known I was “being racist” and that I had never set out to “be racist.” I also knew that these desires and intentions had had little effect on outcomes. I, as a coauthor, in however modest a way, of feminist agendas and discourse, was at best failing to challenge racism and, at worst, aiding and abetting it. How had feminism, a movement that, to my knowledge, intended to support and benefit all women, turned out not to be doing so?¹⁶³

As a white transgender man treading in murky but similar waters without an acknowledgment of the privilege of my Whiteness, I, too, would fail to challenge the inherent racism that my white trans masculinity represents. I would also replicate the disciplinary racial whitewashing that is inherently plaguing academic institutions today.¹⁶⁴

161. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1.

162. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1.

163. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 3.

164. Crenshaw Kimberlé et al., “Praying to the Disciplinary Gods with One Eye Open,” in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), p. ix-xviii.

In other words, I must consider an intersectional approach to the themes in this project. As Kimberle Crenshaw claims, "...the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intra group differences."¹⁶⁵ Drawing from Crenshaw's discussions on intersectionality, I wish to embrace the intersections between the categories of race, gender, able-bodied/mindedness, illness, medicalization and more through my discussions within this project.

Moreover, echoing Crenshaw, my intersectional focus in this project "highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed,"¹⁶⁶ particularly around trans identities and politics.

I also wish to appropriate Heather Love's resistance to "the affirmative turn in queer studies in order to dwell at length on the "dark side" of modern... representation" of trans lives¹⁶⁷ in this project. I relate to Love's desire to dwell upon and revisit notions of texts and

165. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): pp. 1241-1299, 1242.

166. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): pp. 1241-1299, 1242.

167. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

concepts which have been perceived as outdated, homophobic, depressing and manipulative. For as Love points out, despite these criticisms, these texts (ie. Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*, which she discusses at length using those adjectives) are among the most compelling to readers.¹⁶⁸

However, I do not invoke the “dark side” to compel or titillate, but rather as a refusal of the homogenization of ‘queer’, and how it erases individual experience. In other words, I feel that to dwell exclusively in the homogeny of affirmative ‘queer’ experience often comes at the expense of the neoliberal- necropolitical aspects of trans lives and erases the history and realities of trans experience.

3.3 ‘Queer’ As a False Unifying Umbrella: The Politics of Erasure

In other words, as Gloria Anzaldua remarks, “Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all ‘queers’ of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it, we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences.”¹⁶⁹

168. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

169. Anzaldua Gloria and Ana Louise Keating, “To(o) Queer the Writer—Loca, Escritora y Chicana,” in *The Gloria Anzaldua Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 163-174, 164.

Anzaldua, who refutes the term “lesbian” in her essay, dismissing it as a white, middle class, and English dominant term that erases her identity as a woman of colour, begrudgingly claims ‘queer’ as “an identity label in the English language”, but also critiques that label by asserting her difference from it:

...we are not the same. Our ethnic communities deal differently with us. I must constantly assert my differentness, must say, This is what I think of loving women. I must stress: The difference is in my relationship to my culture...This is one way I avoid getting sucked into the vortex of homogenization, of getting pulled into the shelter of the queer umbrella.”¹⁷⁰

According to Anzaldua, ‘queer’ is appropriated by white middle class lesbians and gay men who control the debate around its perimeters:

It is they who have produced queer theory and for the most part their theories make abstractions of us colored queers. They control the production of queer knowledge in the academy and in the activist communities. Higher up in the hierarchy of gay politics and gay aesthetics, they most readily get their work published and disseminated. They enter the territories of queer racial ethnic/Others and re-inscribe and recolonize. They appropriate our experiences and even our lives and “write” us up. They occupy theorizing space, and though their theories aim to enable and emancipate, they often disempower and neo-colonize. They police the queer person of color with theory. They theorize, that is, perceive, organize, classify, and name specific chunks of reality by using approaches, styles, and methodologies that are Anglo-American or European. Their theories limit the ways we think about being queer... whatever positions we may occupy, we are getting only one point of view: white middle-class...”¹⁷¹

The white queer label is also something I must acknowledge as a Western white trans man. I must claim how easily I blend into the fray, and how easily I can replicate the conditions described by Anzaldua in her discussions. Beyond that, as an individual with a

170. Anzaldúa Gloria and Ana Louise Keating, “To(o) Queer the Writer—Loca, Escritora y Chicana,” in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 163-174, 164.

171. Anzaldúa Gloria and Ana Louise Keating, “To(o) Queer the Writer—Loca, Escritora y Chicana,” in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 163-174, 165.

trans identity, I must also, as Anzaldua proclaims, prevent myself from being assimilated into the queer umbrella to contend with the themes of my life and this project. Therefore, I must also distance myself from the queer label, as a trans person.

For as Noble asserts, the term ‘queer’ is not at all meant to be synonymous with “gay”, “lesbian”, “bisexual”, or “transgender”. However, as a noun, it still marks a space as gay, and often defers to the space of “gay male” culture.¹⁷² Further, quoting Ruth Goldman, Noble suggests that lesbian feminists have resisted the term because it erases gender, and by doing so potentially reduces the issue of gender-based oppression to one of sexuality.¹⁷³ By extension, trans discourses that resist the label “queer” resist the assimilation of queer equaling sexuality and can claim trans identities as issues of gender and embodiment.

Additionally, Noble states that

While it is true that “T” (trans) is often lumped together in the colloquial “LGBTQ,” there are many reasons why such a lumping makes little sense. At its best, queer theory has often advocated quite vehemently against stable identity claims. Trans activism, on the other hand, focus on and advocate around the opposite—that is, the right to make the very claims about identifications and corporeal materializations that queer theory claims to disavow.¹⁷⁴

172. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 12.

173. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 12.

174. Ann Braithwaite et al., “Trans-,” in *Rethinking Womens and Gender Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 277-292, 279.

3.4 Queerness, Biomedicalization, and “Damage Centred Research”

It is also this homogenized White middle-class “queer” label that allows for the biomedical model to be inserted into discourse liberally among queer and trans communities, namely through a focus on queer “brokenness”. In fact, damage-centered research (Tuck 2009, Pilling 2022) is a predominant theme when addressing mental concerns among LGBTQ people. Tuck, writing about the “damaged” concept prescribed to Indigenous people, calls damage-centered research the type that “operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation”¹⁷⁵

Extending Tuck’s discussions, damage centred research focusses on

...pain or loss in an individual, community, or tribe...It looks to historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy. Common sense tells us this is a good thing, but the danger in damage-centred research is that it is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community.”¹⁷⁶

Merrick Daniel Pilling counters the promotion of damage-based discourses toward queer communities by applying a Mad Studies approach in relation to the pathologizing of queer individuals. This project aligns with Pilling’s claim to challenge the biomedical model as a whole instead of the mainstream tendency of individualizing pathologized differences,

175. Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (January 2009): pp. 409-428, 413.

176. Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (January 2009): pp. 409-428, 413.

(ie. claiming that queer individuals are more prone to mental health issues) and results in achieving greater social justice.¹⁷⁷

According to Pilling,

the biomedical model is steeped in oppressive ideologies about 2SLGBTQ people and BIPOC and reduces the effects of violence and trauma to individual deficits while also sometimes perpetuating harm and violence through treatment.”¹⁷⁸

In her negative discussions of queer history, Love remarks that “the emphasis on damage in queer studies exists in a state of tension with a related and contrary tendency—the need to resist damage and to affirm queer existence.”¹⁷⁹ To paraphrase and working from Love’s statement, this contrary tension, to affirm positive non-ableist notions of trans existence while simultaneously acknowledging the pathologization of “trans” must be both admitted and resisted in this project, particularly around ableist, sanist, and healthist notions of bodies, and the medicalization of trans identities.

177. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 15.

178. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 16.

179. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

3.5 Transgender: A History of Pathologization

Despite the apparent monotony of (Western) trans existence, it is still important to remember that the word “transgender” is rooted in pathology. Though popularized through Dr. Harry Benjamin’s advocacy related to surgeries for trans individuals¹⁸⁰, the term transgender originated as pathology in 1949, relating to a patient being treated by sexologist David O. Cauldwell, whom he labelled a “psychopathic transsexual”, a female who identified as male and wrote to Cauldwell seeking hormones and surgery.¹⁸¹ The medical and psychiatric forces behind the invention of the term transgender and its psychiatric history as illness are important to consider when relating to its meaning and cultural associations, for it is through these medicalized and socially constructed meanings that trans individuals are still invisibly contextualized and are forced to relate to society at large today.

This has been especially true in Canada. Its first gender clinic, the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, opened in 1969 in Toronto. Also known as “The Clarke”, the institute was originally named after Charles Kirk Clarke (1857-1924). According to activist Andrea James, much of the anti-trans thinking in the world today originated from The Clarke, long nicknamed “Jurassic Clarke” in the Canadian trans community for its regressive policies.¹⁸²

180. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 37.

181. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 9.

182. Andrea James, “Toronto’s Clarke Institute (Now CAMH) and Eugenics” transgendermap.com. Deep Stealth Productions Inc., 2023.
<https://www.transgendermap.com/resources/canada/ontario/camh/clarke-institute/>

It later renamed itself the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in 1998, as a means of distancing itself from its questionable past.¹⁸³ Clarke was an early proponent of eugenics, emphasizing the importance of restrictive laws that would limit the immigration and marriage of the “defective.”¹⁸⁴ According to archived documents, Clarke managed the two largest Canadian mental hospitals of the time, before accepting a government mental-health post. In addition to his desire “to keep this young country sane,”¹⁸⁵ he sought to advance the psychiatric profession’s influence in making medical and political decisions, mainly through eugenics oriented and by extension, homophobic and transphobic lenses.¹⁸⁶

183. Andrea James, “Toronto’s Clarke Institute (Now CAMH) and Eugenics” transgendermap.com. Deep Stealth Productions Inc., 2023.
<https://www.transgendermap.com/resources/canada/ontario/camh/clarke-institute/>

184. Ian Robert Dowbiggin, *Keeping America Sane: Psychiatry and Eugenics in the United States and Canada, 1880- 1940* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Pr, 1997), 142-143.

185. Ian Dowbiggin, “‘Keeping This Young Country Sane’: C.K. Clarke, Immigration Restriction, and Canadian Psychiatry, 1890–1925,” *Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (January 1995): pp. 598-627.

186. Ian Robert Dowbiggin, *Keeping America Sane: Psychiatry and Eugenics in the United States and Canada, 1880- 1940* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Pr, 1997), 138-39.

187. Ian Robert Dowbiggin, *Keeping America Sane: Psychiatry and Eugenics in the United States and Canada, 1880- 1940* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Pr, 1997), 134.

Additionally, since Clarke and other Canadian psychiatrists relied heavily on Government support, Dowbiggin asserts they were “much less likely to develop second thoughts about eugenic measures”¹⁸⁷ around psychiatry.

Historically across time, by extension, Clarke’s extensive influence of eugenic measures in Canadian psychiatry related directly to the medicalization of transgender patients, until recently. Up until 2016, the residue and aftermath of these measures were reflected in the practices of several psychiatrists who worked in the CAMH gender clinics for adults and children, including Ray Milton Blanchard who has been accused of academic exploitation of sex and gender minorities, and founded several trans-exclusive medicalizing pathological labels and disputed diagnoses: “Autogynephilia” (AGP), a sex-fueled mental illness created in 1989, defined by Blanchard as “a man’s paraphilic tendency to be sexually aroused by the thought or image of himself as a woman.”¹⁸⁸ Blanchard also coined “Gynandromorphophilia” a disease he co-created with Peter Collins in 1993. used to describe “men with sexual interest in transvestites, transsexuals, and she-males.”¹⁸⁹ CAMH gender clinics were also affiliated with psychologist Kenneth Zucker, whose influence spanned to international proportions. Zucker, who ran the institution’s gender clinic for youth, became known for forcing gender-diverse children into reparative therapy to

188. Ray Blanchard, “The Concept of Autogynephilia and the Typology of Male Gender Dysphoria,” *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 177, no. 10 (1989): pp. 616-623.

189. Andrea James, “Ray Blanchard vs. Transgender People,” Transgender Map (Deep Stealth Productions Inc., September 15, 2022), <https://www.transgendermap.com/politics/psychology/ray-blanchard/>.

conform to his expectations for male and female behavior in children.¹⁹⁰ Following provincial legislation outlawing gender identity change efforts, CAMH conducted an investigation that led to the closure of the clinic in 2015.¹⁹¹ However, the corrupt medicalization of transgender individuals through CAMH is still a point of contention for many in the Canadian transgender community and beyond.

3.6 Medicine, Medicalization, and Whiteness

According to Peter Conrad, the term “medicalization” first appeared in sociological literature in the 1970s and is a “process by which nonmedical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illnesses or disorders”¹⁹². Through this definition, illness falls under the surveillance of the medical profession, which dictates how bodies should behaviorally, socially, and psychologically function.

As Stryker highlights,

...since the end of the eighteenth century, science has gradually come to replace religion as the highest social authority, and since the middle of the nineteenth century medical science has played an increasingly central role in defining everyday life. It has often been used for very conservative social purposes—“proving” that Black people are inferior to white people, or that females are inferior to males. Medical practitioners and institutions have the social power to determine what is considered sick or healthy, normal or pathological, sane or insane—and thus, often, to transform potentially neutral forms

190. Andrea James, “Kenneth Zucker vs. Transgender People,” Transgender Map (Deep Stealth Productions Inc., July 25, 2022), <https://www.transgendermap.com/politics/psychology/kenneth-zucker/>.

191. Andrea James, “Kenneth Zucker vs. Transgender People,” Transgender Map (Deep Stealth Productions Inc., July 25, 2022), <https://www.transgendermap.com/politics/psychology/kenneth-zucker/>.

192. Peter Conrad, “Medicalization and Social Control,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 18, no. 1 (1992): pp. 209-232, 209.

of human difference into unjust and oppressive social hierarchies. This particular operation of medicine's social power has been especially important in transgender history.¹⁹³

As Pilling points out by extension, “psychiatric [medical] knowledge production and practice is steeped in white supremacist and colonial racial hierarchies.”¹⁹⁴ (Pilling, 2022, p. 42) Ideas about race, civilization, and primitivity informed psychiatric knowledge production as it was first generated in the mid-nineteenth century, with white Europeans and Americans being constructed as “civilized,”¹⁹⁵ Nineteenth-century anthropological and sociological scholars Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Francis Galton hypothesized that racialized individuals were lesser developed than white individuals and these ideological biases were absorbed by psychiatry and psychology and continue to inform present day (Western) thought.¹⁹⁶

To quote Frankenberg, “... whiteness and Westernness have not, for the most part, been conceived as ‘the problem’ in the eyes of white/ Western people, whether in research or

193. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 150-51.

194. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 42.

195. Pilling quoting Fernando, 2010, p. 61

196. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 61-62.

elsewhere... the white Western self as a racial being has for the most part remained unexamined and unnamed.”¹⁹⁷

More directly, drawing from Frankenberg’s discussions on Whiteness, racism is a force that shapes white lives, and by extension, since medicine is dominated by colonial/ white supremacist attitudes, it is appropriate to say that racism has invisibly shaped medicine.

According to Frankenberg,

... Naming “whiteness” displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance. Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility.¹⁹⁸

One aspect of that invisibility relates to the work of Charles Darwin, and his influence on the discipline of psychiatry. It is important to consider that in the nineteenth century, when the basis of the psychiatric discipline was being formulated, Darwin’s theory of evolution (1871) was used as a model for theories of human psychological development, and races were held to exist at different stages of development on a biological ladder of human evolution. This was also known as Social Darwinism.¹⁹⁹ The overarching ideology lurking beneath these concepts was a racist perception of culture which supposed that European culture, associated with white races was ‘civilized’ and that cultures of Black people were ‘primitive’ and inherently degenerate.²⁰⁰ These concepts informed American views,

197. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 17.

198. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 6-7.

199. Suman Fernando, *Mental Health, Race and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 61.

particularly those around the lives of Black Americans. It was through the assumption that Black Americans lacked culture, that racist ideologies fed into how these ideas developed within the practice of psychiatry and medicine overall in Western culture.²⁰¹

Frankenberg highlights three moments/discourses that have shaped racism within the confines of Western democracy. These discourses have transformed across time and have currently camouflaged themselves by moving from an emphasis on “difference” to “sameness”. The first paradigm she defines as “essentialist racism” which draws from ideologies of hierarchical biological inequality; the second is colourblindness, stemming from the concept that “we are all the same, we all have the same chances, and any failure to achieve is the fault of people of colour themselves.”²⁰²

In Frankenberg’s third moment, essentialist racism is articulated by people of colour. Where difference initially signaled inferiority of people of colour, in the third moment she articulates how difference signals autonomy of culture, values, aesthetic standards and so on...inequality in this case relates not to ascribed characteristics but to the social structure, which she references as ‘race cognizance’.²⁰³

200. Suman Fernando, *Mental Health, Race and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 63.

201. Suman Fernando, *Mental Health, Race and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 63.

202. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 14.

In other words, to name the role of whiteness in the development of attitudes related to the medicalization of bodies reveals histories of colonialism, imperialism, and assimilationism.²⁰⁴ Working from Frankenberg's naming of the shape of whiteness, I want to echo her goal of gesturing and generating work toward antiracist forms of whiteness, or at least toward antiracist strategies for reworking the terrain of whiteness,²⁰⁵ particularly around issues of medicalization and the body in my project.

Fernando documents a failure by mental health professionals, no matter their ethnicity, to allow for racial bias in practice and institutional racism in the delivery of services; institutional practices and assessments that are inherently institutionally racist being put through in a denial based fashion that does not allow this bias to be expressed; and social pressures that apply differentially to BIPOC communities not being acknowledged, resulting that anger arising from racism in society is not validated by health care providers or taken into consideration; and a sense of alienation from BIPOC communities being interpreted as illness rather than validated as a societal problem.²⁰⁶ The bottom line is that the patient

203. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 14.

204. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 7.

205. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), 7.

206. Suman Fernando, *Mental Health, Race and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 73.

doctor relationship implied in the medicalization and psychiatrization of trans bodies and minds is informed by institutional racism which remains hidden and contributes to further oppressions.

3.7 The Normalization of Medicine and “Objectivity”

Conrad states that the sociological power of medicine has become an active agent in establishing and sustaining cultural norms by eliminating or normalizing what is deemed deviant behavior.²⁰⁷ Additionally, through this lens, economic, political, and social beliefs are obscured through the authority of science and socially constructed medical “facts”²⁰⁸. In other words, through their active power to dominate and define disease, Medical and psychiatric discourses do not just respond to “facts”, but transform subjects into objects of an unceasing gaze, where certain bodies are surveilled both physically and socially (Armstrong 2006; Brown 1995; Conrad 1997, 2005; Foucault 1989, 1997; Riessman 1983; Zola 1972). Within these contexts, medical knowledge is thought to be objective and based on “scientific” principles. However, in the field of transgender health care, psychiatric and medical knowledge is continually being revised.²⁰⁹

As Dewey and Gesbeck explain:

207. Peter Conrad, “Types of Medical Social Control.,” *Sociology of Health and Illness* 1, no. 1 (1979): pp. 1-11.

208. C. K. Reissman, “Women and Medicalization: A New Perspective,” *Social Policy* 14, no. 1 (1983): pp. 3-18.

209. Jodie M. Dewey and Melissa M. Gesbeck, “(Dys) Functional Diagnosing: Mental Health Diagnosis, Medicalization, and the Making of Transgender Patients,” *Humanity & Society* 41, no. 1 (2016): pp. 37-72, 38.

...so many changes have occurred in the last 30 years that we can see the social construction of transgender medical knowledge unfold before our eyes. Stereotypes about gendered and sexed embodiments, as well as the benevolence we attribute to doctoring, often obscure the historical processes through which they are produced.²¹⁰

3.8 Transgender Identity, Pathologization, and Medicalization

As Susan Stryker points out in her well-known volume *Transgender History*, following the depathologization of homosexuality in the 1970s, transgender identity was medicalized and diagnosed as psychopathology under the term Gender Identity Disorder (GID). Its definition appeared in the DSM in 1980, the edition that eliminated homosexuality from its contents.²¹¹ Additionally, Stryker's documentation of transgender history in relation to the declassification of homosexuality points to how science shifted its gaze from a concern with sexual orientation to one related to gender identity.²¹² Stryker points out simultaneously that the success of feminism in destabilizing social control over women's bodies made the concept of gender a charged political battleground. In other words, medical science attempted to engineer, fix, and define gender as a means of "stuffing the feminist genie back into its bottle".²¹³ At the same time, historically the field of psychiatry entered a time of

210. Jodie M. Dewey and Melissa M. Gesbeck, "(Dys) Functional Diagnosing: Mental Health Diagnosis, Medicalization, and the Making of Transgender Patients," *Humanity & Society* 41, no. 1 (2016): pp. 37-72, 38.

211. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 138.

212. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 140.

213. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 140.

crisis, because of competing mental health approaches and the launch of the antipsychiatry movement, which critiqued the harsh treatment of patients by asylums.²¹⁴ In response to this pressure, the APA professionalized psychiatry by aligning the contents of the 1980 DSM III and standardized mental health approaches.²¹⁵ In effect, the APA transformed deemed pathologies into regulated disease categories (Horwitz 2002, Rogler 1997), legitimizing psychiatry by aligning it with the biomedical model.²¹⁶

In his volume *Queer and Trans Madness*, Pilling connects mad and trans identities through a discussion of Fitzpatrick and Voronka's (2016) article *Trans activists, don't throw mad people under the bus!* Fitzpatrick highlights the article's argument, that the disciplinary force of psychiatry has been applied to trans and mad people through medicalization, in similar ways:

Trans people are "de facto if not self-identified, psychiatric survivors" by virtue of being subject to gender-related (or other) diagnoses. Therefore, they have a natural affinity with non-trans mad people.²¹⁷

214. Owen Whooley, "Diagnostic Ambivalence: Psychiatric Workarounds and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 32, no. 3 (2010): pp. 452-469, 452.

215. Jodie M. Dewey and Melissa M. Gesbeck, "(Dys) Functional Diagnosing: Mental Health Diagnosis, Medicalization, and the Making of Transgender Patients," *Humanity & Society* 41, no. 1 (2016): pp. 37-72, 45.

216. Jodie M. Dewey and Melissa M. Gesbeck, "(Dys) Functional Diagnosing: Mental Health Diagnosis, Medicalization, and the Making of Transgender Patients," *Humanity & Society* 41, no. 1 (2016): pp. 37-72, 45.

217. Cat Fitzpatrick and Jijan Veronka, "Trans Activists, Don't Throw Mad People Under the Bus!," *Feministing*, 2016, <https://feministing.com/2016/02/10/trans-activists-dont-throw-mad-people-under-the-bus/>.

That the trans individual derives from pathology and medical invention is where this dissertation centres its argument. Despite discussions of trans visibility related to mainstream media and the Internet, and those related to increased visibility and discussion of trans identities in contemporary life, the trans body remains tied to the medical apparatus and is still connected to narratives of that apparatus. Because of its connection to these, “sickness” is still deemed necessary for trans people to access medical interventions.²¹⁸ Pathological narratives associated with medical science and the transgender body’s relationship to those narratives have been well documented. One can draw a line of psychiatric historicization in relation to them and associations of mental illness, extending from Krafft-Ebing’s first discussions on “deviant” sexualities in *Psychopathia Sexualis*²¹⁹ through to Cauldwell’s psychiatric labelling of trans patients as mentally ill, to the formation and political oppressiveness around the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder, to the present day psychiatric diagnosis of gender dysphoria.

3.9 Diagnosis, the DSM, and Gender Dysphoria

It is said that diagnosis is the language of psychiatry, that

locates the parameters of normality and abnormality, demarcates the professional and institutional boundaries of the mental health system, and authorizes psychiatry to label and deal with people on behalf

218. Jodie M. Dewey and Melissa M. Gesbeck, “(Dys) Functional Diagnosing: Mental Health Diagnosis, Medicalization, and the Making of Transgender Patients,” *Humanity & Society* 41, no. 1 (2016): pp. 37-72.

219. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and David O. Cauldwell, “Psychopathia Transexualis,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 40-44.

of society at large...in the guise of the DSM, psychiatric diagnosis is the social representation of psychiatric knowledge and [the profession's] presentation of self.²²⁰

Yet, despite these facts, the nature of diagnosis is loosely studied.²²¹ It has also been pointed out that in relation to diagnosis, psychiatrists do not adopt a unified approach based on the standardized medical model that the DSM promotes, but rather relate through a variety of subjective approaches and even workarounds in relation to it, depending on their individual perceptions.²²² Rogler states that the magnitude of change across the editions of the DSM has been uneven, a volume of shifting paradigms and configurations of diagnostic presuppositions that are largely discontinuous with previous ones.²²³ The ongoing evolution of the DSM according to Rogler, has been “an official attempt to reduce vagaries of diagnosticians subjective understandings by specifying sets of diagnostic criteria”²²⁴ These observations render the nature of psychiatry and its language of diagnosis subjective and point to a failure to unify the profession through standardization, and by extension, a failure

220. Phil Brown, “The Name Game: Toward A Sociology of Diagnosis,” *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 11 (1990): pp. 385-406, 388-89.

221. Phil Brown, “The Name Game: Toward A Sociology of Diagnosis,” *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 11 (1990): pp. 385-406, 385.

222. Owen Whooley, “Diagnostic Ambivalence: Psychiatric Workarounds and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 32, no. 3 (2010): pp. 452-469, 466.

223. Lloyd H. Rogler, “Making Sense of Historical Changes in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Five Propositions,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 38, no. 1 (1997): pp. 9-20, 10.

224. Lloyd H. Rogler, “Making Sense of Historical Changes in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Five Propositions,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 38, no. 1 (1997): pp. 9-20, 11.

related to the DSM and its contents as an objective, reliable source of standardization in relation to mental health, despite its claim to expertise.²²⁵

Rogler's comments on the DSM's increase in size are also important to consider in relation to the influence of psychiatry on transgender healthcare. For instance, from 1952 to 1994, its size grew from 130 pages to 886, and the size of the volume grew from 54 to 67 square inches. The weight of the DSM also increased, from 8 ounces to 3 pounds 6 ounces. In addition, the first manual's 102 diagnostic categories more than tripled²²⁶. Rogler states that these size increases were based on the DSM's intention to remedialize the discipline of psychiatry, and that these efforts coincided with the [medical] changes in American society. The manuals grew as they acquired more institutional significance. Thus, one can observe the historical subjective shift and increasing influence of psychiatry in Western medicine through the evolution of the DSM as its influence on mainstream mental health and institutions grew.²²⁷

225. Owen Whooley, "Diagnostic Ambivalence: Psychiatric Workarounds and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 32, no. 3 (2010): pp. 452-469; 466, 452.

226. Lloyd H. Rogler, "Making Sense of Historical Changes in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Five Propositions," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 38, no. 1 (1997): pp. 9-20, 9.

227. Lloyd H. Rogler, "Making Sense of Historical Changes in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Five Propositions," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 38, no. 1 (1997): pp. 9-20, 18.

The conversion of the term Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Dysphoria in the DSM is perhaps one of the most recent developments that exposes the psychiatric apparatus lurking beneath the concept of medicalization and transgender identity, and how that label's medicalization relates to the psychiatric agency of dictating normal and abnormal designations related to dominant social values.²²⁸ The first of these incidents was the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973. The struggle to declassify homosexuality in the DSM exposed the invisible nature of dominant concepts of health and illness and dismantled mainstream views of psychiatry and mental health.²²⁹ According to Ronald Bayer, the status of homosexuality as a disease is a misreading. Rather, he states it as a political question, one rooted in historical and social systems.²³⁰ It can be said that if psychiatry can misread the nature of homosexuality under these contexts, then the same could be said about the relationship between transgender identities and gender dysphoria.

3.10 Psychiatric Diagnoses as Social Control

It is also known in some circles that psychiatric diagnoses have historically been used to socially control those seen as deviant or a threat to the political, economic, and religious

228. Ronald Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis: With a New Afterword on AIDS and Homosexuality* (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 1987), 39-40.

229. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 48.

230. Ronald Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis: With a New Afterword on AIDS and Homosexuality* (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 1987), 4-5.

order of society²³¹ and transgender individuals are seen as deviant, in that they contradict social expectations of what is considered typical for men or for women.²³²

As Irving states

...the majority of medical professionals classified transsexuals as the most damaged — and *damaging* — among nonnormatively gendered individuals. Frequently borrowing terminology from psychological professionals, doctors degraded transsexuals as narcissistic, destructive, and self-loathing.³⁶ This characterization extended beyond the frame of individual abnormality to encompass socially corrosive forms of deviance.²³³

Another significant way that the agency of psychiatry has applied deviance to trans identified individuals and accomplished their social control is through the diagnosis of mental illness (madness) and disability. According to Conrad, it is worth noting that The Independent Living Movement has asserted that for those individuals diagnosed or living with disabilities, “much of the medical presence is both unnecessary and counterproductive...[and] management of stabilized disabilities is primarily a personal matter, and only secondarily a medical matter.”²³⁴

231. Jodie M. Dewey and Melissa M. Gesbeck, “(Dys) Functional Diagnosing: Mental Health Diagnosis, Medicalization, and the Making of Transgender Patients,” *Humanity & Society* 41, no. 1 (2016): pp. 37-72.

232. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 45.

233. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 22.

234. G. Dejong, “Defining and Implementing the Independent Living Concept,” in *Living for Physically Disabled People*, ed. N. M. Crewe and I. K. Zola (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1983), pp. 4-27, 15.

More emphatically, the conflation, labeling, and association of Gender Dysphoria with mental illness, and by extension, trans individuals, create other complex concerns. As expressed above, the label Gender Dysphoria is problematic. Not only does it tie trans identities to legitimization through pathology and medicalization within the realm of psychiatry, but it also claims to demedicalize and destigmatize transpeople, while marking “inverted” gendered expressions as pathological.²³⁵ In other words, the diagnostic criteria themselves are problematic.

Leading up to the diagnostic shift in the DSM, members of the Workgroup suggested that their aims were to reduce the stigma surrounding transpeople, while proposing a diagnosis that third party funders would accept for issuing payments for transitioning treatments.²³⁶ As a result, the DSM-5 authors changed the diagnosis for transpeople of all ages from Gender Identity Disorder (GID) to Gender Dysphoria. However, they retained similar gender identifying and expression criteria.²³⁷

In effect, the DSM-5 states:

235. Zowie Davy, “The DSM-5 and the Politics of Diagnosing Transpeople,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44, no. 5 (September 2015): pp. 1165-1176, 1165.

236. Jack Drescher, “Controversies in Gender Diagnoses,” *LGBT Health* 1, no. 1 (2013): pp. 9-14.

237. Zowie Davy, “The DSM-5 and the Politics of Diagnosing Transpeople,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44, no. 5 (September 2015): pp. 1165-1176, 1165.

[i]ndividuals with gender dysphoria have a marked incongruence between the gender they have been assigned to [...] and their experienced/expressed gender. This discrepancy is the core component of the diagnosis. There must also be evidence of distress about the incongruence.²³⁸

This diagnostic change addresses the gender identity formation issue brought to light in criticisms of the previous DSM IV, by focusing on the distress caused by gender incongruence rather than gender identity as the problem. Davy claims the emphasis on distress to be problematic because trans people require a diagnosis from gender specialist psychiatrists to access affirming healthcare, transition technologies and legal recognition. Additionally, the diagnosis of GD can misrepresent trans lives.²³⁹

3.11 Gender Dysphoria, Medicalization, and the Transgender Subject

On a deeper level, the reliance of trans individuals on medicalization to access healthcare and legitimization through a diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria relates to another problem: that the legitimization of trans individuals relies upon sanist logic and ableism, that one can only claim legitimate trans identities if one is oriented toward “healthy”, sane, white, and able-bodied discourses. This “single issue” political approach, of depathologizing gender dysphoria mirrors the fight to depathologize homosexuality that occurred in the 1970s, in that its foundation ultimately excludes those trans individuals who identify as Mad or who are disabled. As Pilling points out, the refutation of homosexuality as a mental illness or disability distanced queers from the associated stigma of mental illness and disability.

238. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 453.

239. Zowie Davy, “The DSM-5 and the Politics of Diagnosing Transpeople,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44, no. 5 (September 2015): pp. 1165-1176, 1176.

Representation then, in relation to “the average trans individual”, based on issues of sanism and ableist views, does not include those who fall outside of able-bodied/minded, white, cisnormative, heteronormative presentation ideals.

In his article *Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Trans Body as Productive*, Dan Irving discusses the relationship between social ideals, trans visibility, gender non-conforming individuals, doctors, and psychological professionals. and states that medical professionals “wielded enormous power over the range of possible ways that gender-variant individuals could express gendered identities.”²⁴⁰

Irving also mentions how the privileged reinforcement of heteronormative categories of sex, gender, and sexuality were reinforced through interactions and diagnoses by medical health professionals, but emphasizes that the economic facets surrounding these diagnoses are not often considered.²⁴¹ He states that “By assessing their transsexual patients in terms of their aptitudes, earning potentials, education, and class backgrounds, medical professionals also strengthened hegemonic discourses of citizenship and productivity that buttressed the economy.”²⁴²

240. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 18.

241. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 18.

242. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 18.

Irving recounts four economic themes that appear as subtexts in medical discourse on the “treatment” of transsexuality. These four themes related to the construction of a trans subject that is white, privileged, and cisgender passing. The writings of Cauldwell also factored heavily into the construction of the Western trans subject, and these writings asserted that one’s class location played a clear role in fostering trans identities. Cauldwell noted a higher prevalence of transsexualism among “well to do families,” and claimed that “impoverished people, consumed by the obligations of providing bare necessities for themselves and their families, did not have the means or time for such “deviant” pursuits. For Cauldwell, then, poverty served as a deterrent to transsexualism.”²⁴³

Irving states that class discipline also factored into the visibility and legitimization of trans identities within Western society. Historically, most of the gender-variant individuals who enlisted medical experts for substantive assistance were white, middle-class, able-bodied male-to-female trans people more likely to be able to finance medical transition.²⁴⁴

According to Irving, at the heart of trans visibility and legitimization through the medical apparatus lies the productive body, which contributes economically to society. Medical professionals under these contexts were gatekeepers who contributed to the creation of a

243. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 18.

244. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 18-19.

uniform trans body that could perform according to hegemonic (heteronormative) ideals and was invested in mainstream gender normative, scientifically based discourse:

Doctors who opposed any medical intervention enabling one to change sex did so in part because they believed that this transition would thwart the industrious potential of the middle-class, able-bodied (presumed) male and (re)productive potential of the (presumed) female... they understood the economic value created by individuals through their labor as a social concern, some medical professionals refused to support deliberate medical interventions that would compromise capable bodies...²⁴⁵

Irving explains further:

Transsexuals were disciplined partially because their sex/gender variance violated social codes that contributed to the growth, development, and global expansion of the domestic economy. Like other citizens, doctors often internalized the social expectations of the upper and middle classes that undergirded hegemonic discourses of productivity. The Hippocratic oath extended beyond their professional obligation to heal individual patients to encompass a broader sense of civic duty. In other words, doctors understood their professional obligation to restore health to individuals as part of a broader imperative to act as moral, upstanding citizens. As physicians, their value lay in contributing to the vitality of the nation.²⁴⁶

Irving also provides a valuable critique of the emphasis on heteronormative sex categories in relation to trans identities, and how the productivity of the trans body in relation to economy is overlooked. For instance, he claims Prosser's "directed attention to the construction of hegemonic sex/gender categories, diagnostic criteria, and requirements of transsexual

245. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, "Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive," in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29,19.

246. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, "Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive," in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29,19.

patients prior to their receiving hormone therapy and SRS”²⁴⁷ does not consider how the valorization of the maleness or femaleness of post-transition transsexuals hinged in part on understandings of their productive capacity. Additionally, the validity of post transition trans individuals, validated by Gender Identity Clinics alongside the Benjamin Standards of Care²⁴⁸ rested on “the real-life test”, whether they could live as “a demonstrable member of the opposite sex” and if deemed successful by doctors and psychiatrists, qualified for hormone replacement therapy and sex reassignment surgery.²⁴⁹

In other words, the value of the trans individual’s contribution to society rested on the capacity of their body to be productive and capacity to be converted to (heteronormative) labour power.²⁵⁰ Medical experts were gatekeepers in this regard, who “believed that the individual who succeeded in withstanding the daily harassment and discrimination that

247. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 19.

248. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York: Seal Press, 2017), 138.

249. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 20.

250. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 20.

accompanied the real-life test demonstrated a genuine dedication to pursuing transition and therefore deserved to be diagnosed as transsexual.²⁵¹

Irving also stresses that the “real-life” test contained an “economic” aspect (in other words, a class-based agenda) that could not be translated to sex and gender issues, and related to

a facet of economic rehabilitation that required transsexual patients to obtain employment while living full time in their self-identified sex/gender. Regardless of the personal intentions of medical experts, the employment requirements of the real-life test worked to legitimize sex/gender divisions of labor that buttressed the use of gender to maximize profits.²⁵²

Further, the distinct application of heteronormativity in the post-WWII era, according to Irving rested on the male body’s capacity to be economically industrious²⁵³, an aspect that led to the validation of FTM trans individuals through the labour market, but omitted the validity of MTF trans people.

John Money’s quote which appears in Irving’s essay, solidifies, and reiterates this bias:

There is a general consensus among professionals in transexualism that female-to-male transexualism is not an exact homologue of male-to-female transexualism. *Whereas the gender coding of the male-to-female transsexual is prevalently that of the attention-attracting vamp, not the devoted Madonna, the masculine gender coding of the female-to-male transsexual is prevalently that of the reliable provider, not the profligate playboy.* Throughout Europe, America and the English speaking world, clinicians of transexualism agree that a successfully unobtrusive sex-reassigned life is more prevalent in female-to male reassignment than male to female reassignment even though the success

251. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 20.

252. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 20.

253. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 20.

of the female-to-male sex-reassignment surgery leaves something to be desired, namely an erectile penis.²⁵⁴

Irving states that Money's quote reflects how the gender binary system devalued women and nonnormative masculinities. Equally important, he highlights how that devaluation systematically oppresses those individuals, and "was practiced by government and institutional bureaucracies, appropriated within spheres of capitalist production, and it is within sites of commodity production where we can witness the amalgamation of exploitation with relations of domination."²⁵⁵

In other words, through his discussion of the trans body as a mode of production, Irving plots the body's perimeters as an extension of the institutions that it is enmeshed within socio-politically. Through Irving's lens, the assimilation of the trans body by dominant ideologies of heteronormative society is contingent on its capacity to be productive: that is, to "pass" visibly as able bodied, white, cisgender and male. Tosh (2017) echoes this assertion claiming that within the constraints of medicalization and psychiatry, "the concept of normality has become so constrained that it represents an idealized form of white, middle class, heterosexual, cisgender masculinity that is impossible to attain"²⁵⁶

254. John Money, *Gay, Straight, and in-between: The Sexology of Erotic Orientation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 92.

255. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Dan Irving, "Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive," in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15-29, 20.

Evan Vipond complicates the concept of normativity further by documenting its effects on passing trans persons, through a concept known as “transnormativity”. Vipond defines Transnormativity as “the normalization of trans bodies and identities through the adoption of cisgender institutions by trans persons.”²⁵⁷

Vipond continues:

Through gender normativity, the medical establishment, government institutions, identification documents, and historical narratives perpetuate the medicalization of trans persons. ...to be truly “normative” one must be white, middle class, mentally and physically able, heterosexual, cisgender and, typically, male. Anyone who deviates from this strict classification is, in one way or another, nonnormative. To be transnormative, one must ascribe to the social categories white, middle class, mentally and physically able, heterosexual, and adhere to normative notions of gender (masculine man and feminine woman).²⁵⁸

Perhaps the most well-known example of transnormativity, passing, and the production of “credible” gender is that of “Agnes” by Harold Garfinkel, a social interactionist theorist (1967). At the time, Garfinkel published eight rules of gender, which could be described as “transnormative”, that he ascribed to when treating patients:

256. Jemma Tosh, “ Gender Non-Conformity or Psychiatric Non-Compliance? How Organized Non-Compliance Can Offer a Future without Psychiatry,” *Critical Inquiries for Social Justice in Mental Health*, 2017, pp. 255-282, 263.

257. Evan Vipond, “Resisting Transnormativity: Challenging the Medicalization and Regulation of Trans Bodies,” *Theory in Action* 8, no. 2 (2015): pp. 21-44, <https://doi.org/10.3798/tia.1937-0237.15008>, 23.

258. Evan Vipond, “Resisting Transnormativity: Challenging the Medicalization and Regulation of Trans Bodies,” *Theory in Action* 8, no. 2 (2015): pp. 21-44, <https://doi.org/10.3798/tia.1937-0237.15008>, 24.

1. There are two and only two genders.
2. One's gender is invariant.
3. Genitals are the essential signs of gender. (A female is a person with a vagina; a male is a person with a penis.)
4. Any exceptions are not serious.
5. There are no transfers from one gender to another except ceremonial ones.
6. Everyone is one gender or the other.
7. The M/F dichotomy is a "natural" one.
8. Membership in one gender or the other is "natural."²⁵⁹

It is important to consider that Garfinkel's gender rules and the perceived "naturalness" of the gender binary which they exude exclude the possibility of trans bodies and trans identities, promoting cisnormativity, and the concept of health equaling a person whose gender and sex align at birth.²⁶⁰ Therefore, beneath the praises of Garfinkel and the documentation of Agnes's case, there is an inherent prejudice toward her trans identity. At the heart of Agnes's medicalization is an inherently transphobic discourse, one which is echoed and perpetrated through the medicalization of transpeople today.

259. Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York: Vintage Books, 2016), 55-61.

260. Evan Vipond, "Resisting Transnormativity: Challenging the Medicalization and Regulation of Trans Bodies," *Theory in Action* 8, no. 2 (2015): pp. 21-44, <https://doi.org/10.3798/tia.1937-0237.15008>, 24.

3.12 The Case of 'Agnes': Passing, Transphobia and Cisnormativity

Agnes first attended the Gender Identity Clinic at the University of California, Los Angeles, as a physically and socially feminine woman with male genitals. Her claim was that she began to feminize at puberty and was completely comfortable being a woman. She had a rare intersex condition known as testicular feminization syndrome.²⁶¹ Doctors felt that Agnes, because she presented as attractive and heterosexual should have a vagina, and because she desired this, a surgery to transform her genitals was arranged on her behalf. In his study, Garfinkel claims Agnes's capacity to live *visibly* (italics mine) in her gender as a "managed achievement"²⁶² and defines passing within his study as

The work of achieving and making secure [a person's] rights to live in the elected sex status while providing for the possibility of detection and ruin carried out within the social structured conditions in which this work occurred...²⁶³

This definition and its meanings are still present in discussions of transgender identity, and echoes Irving's point, that bodies are seldom viewed in terms of their political meaning and productive value, but instead in terms of their visible capacity to conform to cisgender bodies.

261. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and Harold Garfinkel, "Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an 'Intersexed' Person," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 58-93, 58, 60-68.

262. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and Harold Garfinkel, "Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an 'Intersexed' Person," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 58-93, 59.

263. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and Harold Garfinkel, "Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an 'Intersexed' Person," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 58-93, 60.

Billard remarks that, “the instances of stigma management related to Agnes’s identity described by Garfinkel nearly all centered on [Agnes’s] physical appearance and/or the physical manifestations of social performance...the management of transgender stigma...centers in large part on visual components of passing.”²⁶⁴

But as Dawkins highlights, acts of passing are about more than physical appearances, they are also about rhetoric—“the symbolic social construction and reconstruction of identity within particular situational constraints and social networks. And rhetoric includes verbal and nonverbal symbols such as speech, clothing, skin color, tattoos, performances, Facebook posts, physical and social mobility, and many other symbolic exchanges that influence thought and behavior in the interests of identification and social action.”²⁶⁵

As Anderson, Irwin, Brown and Grala state, passing is a paradox. It is seen as the “gold standard” of a successful trans identity, grants reprieve from social stigma, and affirms individual identity. However, it

both subverts and reinforces the racial and gender binary by simultaneously exposing its frailty while granting authority and credibility to the “color line” and binary notions of the categories man and woman. In fact, to some advocates/authors, passing as cisgender is a political move that can potentially erase someone’s trans identity by utilizing (perhaps unconscious) gender conforming, binary reinforcing mechanisms.²⁶⁶

264. Thomas Billard, “‘Passing’ and the Politics of Deception: Transgender Bodies, Cisgender Aesthetics, and the Policing of Inconspicuous Marginal Identities,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Deceptive Communication*, ed. Tony Docan-Morgan (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 463-478, 465.

265. Marcia Alesan Dawkins, *Clearly Invisible: Racial Passing and the Color of Cultural Identity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2023), 3.

Garfinkel's definition of passing does not consider the numerous social complexities, culturally problematic intersections and oppressions that lurk beneath the surface of the passing trans body, and how "passing" can be viewed as an extension of cissexist, ableist, racist, and heteronormative institutions. That is, Garfinkel's article does not acknowledge the realities of cisnormativity and how these affect Agnes's passing as female. In fact, I argue that the study of Agnes can be viewed as one of the first case studies of institutionalized cisnormativity in relation to early transgender healthcare, rather than a production of "credible gender".

As Pilling accounts,

Cisnormativity is the privileging of cisgender identities, bodies, and ways of being as natural, normal, and authentic...It is a system of power that treats cisgenderism as the default and enables erasure of, and violence against, trans and non-binary people...Cisnormativity upholds a binary understanding of sex (male and female)

and gender (men and women) and expects and enforces enduring congruence between sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity.²⁶⁷

Additionally, Pilling explains that

Cisnormativity... allows cisgender people (such as health professionals) to be unaware of, or to underestimate the frequency, severity, and extent of transphobia all around them. Cisnormativity allows cisgender people to be surprised when confronted with an example of transphobia or to engage in wilful denial, disbelief, or minimizing because they do not personally experience transphobia. Transphobic incidents are thereby portrayed as being much less prevalent than they are, as a one-time mistake, or due to some other factor (a

266. Alecia D. Anderson et al., "'Your Picture Looks the Same as My Picture': An Examination of Passing in Transgender Communities," *Gender Issues* 37, no. 1 (2019): pp. 44-60, 49-50.

267. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 180.

misunderstanding, a bad day, etc.) rather than seeing transphobic incidents for what they are: examples of harm perpetuated within a pattern of systemic violence endemic in society.²⁶⁸

While Agnes’s case was established in 1967, cisnormativity is still the default in medical institutions and according to Bauer et al. (2009) within these institutions “cisnormative assumptions are so prevalent that they are difficult at first to even recognize... [and] embedded within “texts and forms, protocols and policies, and institutional infrastructure” that are “set up in ways that assume cissexuality and are thus often inappropriate for trans identities, trans bodies, and trans lives”²⁶⁹.

Pilling explains that the heart of cisnormativity inherent within the system of medicalization (and by extension medical providers) endured and experienced by trans individuals contains an ahistorical Eurocentrism that denies the binaried sex/gender system is a colonial construct.²⁷⁰

This explains why Garfinkel’s definition also does not consider the concept of “passing” and its relationship to race—specifically racial history. The term “passing” was first used as a way of describing runaway slaves. Those with light complexions were

268. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 180-81.

269. Greta R. Bauer et al., “‘I Don’t Think This Is Theoretical; This Is Our Lives’: How Erasure Impacts Health Care for Transgender People,” *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care* 20, no. 5 (2009): pp. 348-361, 355.

270. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 179.

overlooked and moved into cosmopolitan environments to seek opportunities for economic and social advancement by passing for white.²⁷¹ To restate, passing signified a nonwhite person who was seen as white.²⁷² Today, passing is used to describe other minorities' means of gaining power in an unequal and hierarchical society...where identity hierarchies are present, passing continues to be a “way of seizing control”²⁷³

3.13 Dubois, the Double Self, and Passing

The theories of W.E.B. Dubois are also said to apply to passing, though their application to the white subject is controversial because of the privilege that a white body invokes and the fact that Dubois discussed passing as a race-oriented premise. Dubois, who theorized discrimination and its effects on African Americans in the 19th century, discusses the concepts of “the veil” and the “double self” resulting from its effects.

Dubois describes a disconnect which he felt from a young age between himself and others. He claims the root of this disconnection as a barrier related to the color of his skin, and describes it as a veil, which all African Americans wear as a result of colonial racial

271. Allyson Vanessa Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

272. Marcia Alesan Dawkins, *Clearly Invisible: Racial Passing and the Color of Cultural Identity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2023), 1.

273. Marcia Alesan Dawkins, *Clearly Invisible: Racial Passing and the Color of Cultural Identity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2023), 1.

categorization and discrimination.²⁷⁴ This veil, according to Dubois, prevents African Americans from achieving true self-consciousness, and hides their identity from whites: “Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil”.²⁷⁵ This veil created a feeling of “double-consciousness” described by Dubois as “a peculiar sensation...this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”.²⁷⁶ According to Dubois, this double-self causes internal conflict in the individual, and he describes it as “two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body”.²⁷⁷ Dubois claims that it is important to merge the “twoness” into one to obtain full equality in the U.S.²⁷⁸ According to Dubois, the veil must be lifted for this to occur.

274. W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Orinda, CA: Seawolf Press, 2020), 8-9.

275. W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Orinda, CA: Seawolf Press, 2020), 8.

276. W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Orinda, CA: Seawolf Press, 2020), 8.

277. W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Orinda, CA: Seawolf Press, 2020), 8.

278. W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Orinda, CA: Seawolf Press, 2020), 8.

Dubois states that to “attain his place in the world, [the African American] must be himself, and not another...This is the first critical step toward asserting equality through political and economic activism.”²⁷⁹

Dubois’s concepts are often said to relate not only to the experience of African Americans, but to other marginalized groups that are forced to consider their identity in relation to a majority group.²⁸⁰ According to Schilt and Westbrook, transgender people, because of their experience occupying multiple gendered positions within society, may relate to Dubois’ concept of “double consciousness” in a similar way as African Americans.²⁸¹ As Anderson et al. point out, African Americans and transgender people have experienced widespread discrimination and have used similar means of coping through the act of passing.²⁸² However, unlike African Americans who *pass* as white, transgender people *pass* to affirm their gender identities.²⁸³ I would adamantly argue that the conflation of Dubois’s

279. W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Orinda, CA: Seawolf Press, 2020), 8.

280. Alecia D. Anderson et al., “‘Your Picture Looks the Same as My Picture’: An Examination of Passing in Transgender Communities,” *Gender Issues* 37, no. 1 (2019): pp. 44-60, 44.

281. Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook, “Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: ‘Gender Normals’, Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality.,” *Gender & Society* 23, no. 4 (2009): pp. 440-464.

282. Alecia D. Anderson et al., “‘Your Picture Looks the Same as My Picture’: An Examination of Passing in Transgender Communities,” *Gender Issues* 37, no. 1 (2019): pp. 44-60, 45.

283. Alecia D. Anderson et al., “‘Your Picture Looks the Same as My Picture’: An Examination of Passing in Transgender Communities,” *Gender Issues* 37, no. 1 (2019): pp. 44-60, 46.

theories with the concept of passing in relation to transgender identities still overlooks the concept of white privilege, particularly in relation to passing and trans identities as a whole.

3.14 Passing, Safety, Transphobia, and Whiteness

In their article *Contrary to All the Other Shit I've Said': Trans Men Passing in the South*, Baker A. Rogers also ties the phenomenon of passing to issues of safety and transphobia.

As Rogers explains:

When trans men are worried about their own safety, or the safety of their families, passing allows them to curb some of that fear.²⁸⁴

According to Rubin, due to “potentially dangerous identities, many of these men prefer to be invisible.”²⁸⁵

Extending this discussion further, it is important to consider the impact of passing, privilege and Whiteness, particularly if a trans identified individual is male, as discussed

284. Baker A. Rogers, “‘Contrary to All the Other Shit I’ve Said’: Trans Men Passing in the South,” *Qualitative Sociology* 42, no. 4 (2019): pp. 639-662, 643.

285. Henry Rubin, *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transsexual Men* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), 3.

above. For instance, in *Sons of the Movement*, Bobby J Noble argues that it is imperative for white trans men in particular, to adopt an active anti-racist practice:

That we transition into a masculine identity is not enough; we must also self-consciously and willfully embody an anti-racist, anti-White supremacist politic at the same time. The first step toward that practice, which is really a practice of being a race traitor, is to understand that our White bodies are articulated in a larger grid of power over which we have little control. To create strategic interventions, then, means stepping into Whiteness with the goal of fully, interentionally and with an understanding of the consequences of our actions, create as much race trouble as gender.²⁸⁶

Whether motivations also centre around whether the trans body engaged in passing is doing so for survival reasons, or for privileged ones, drawing from Irving again, it is important to look deeper and relate to how passing can be viewed as an institutional extension of dominant ideologies in Western culture that centralizes on the body disciplining capacities of the gender binary and heteronormativity. A trans person who “passes” must consider this fact, and I argue must make a stance against cisnormativity as part of their politic.

3.15 Singer: Correlating Aesthetic Judgment and Quality of Trans Healthcare

In his article *From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations*, Benjamin Singer discusses his observations of the relationship between aesthetic judgment and the quality of healthcare provided by medical professionals to transgender individuals. He contends that the appearance and configuration of transgender bodies leads to an affective response by

286. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 15.

professionals which results in a poorer quality of care for trans people.²⁸⁷ Singer uses a variety of photographs and artistic images to illustrate his point, contrasting and describing them in context of the history of “deviance” in relation to medical textbook images of transgender bodies, and artistic photography, to construct what he deems “a transgender sublime”, and a call for greater compassion towards “non-normative” bodies. His hope for a paradigm shift in relation to medical practices and gender relations involves a re-mapping of visual representations of trans bodies through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomic approach, which he then applies to gender complexity.²⁸⁸

3.16 Rhizomic Approaches to Medicalization and Trans Identity

As explained by Deleuze and Guattari,

the rhizome . . . operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots . . . [and] is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical

modes of communication and pre-established paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without . . . an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states.²⁸⁹

287. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 616.

288. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 601-02.

289. Gilles Deleuze, Guattari Félix, and Brian Massumi, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 7-21.

Singer's application of the rhizome to trans identity relies on an idea of "limitless possible bodies, genders, and sexualities in trans worlds"²⁹⁰ and asserts that transgender sublimity, like the rhizome, can encompass "all manner of becomings".

However, while his discussion of transgender representation and artistic (photographic) practice contains great glimmers of hope, and Singer's attempts to create spaces for discussion extend the lattice of gender complexity related to the medical gaze, he fails to mention the inherently white supremacist, patriarchal, racist, ableist aspects of the biomedical model I've described.

I argue that without the impulse to look beneath the root system of the biomedical model itself, no matter what structure is placed above its perimeters, no matter how it is stretched, that (medical) model can only replicate itself. I also argue that applying an intersectional approach to trans identity makes Singer's application of the rhizome to trans identity problematic. For if the rhizome behaves according to "expansion, conquest, capture...[and] offshoots", these bypasses are potentially complicated by the intersectional oppressions I have outlined above.

290. Susan Stryker, Stephen Whittle, and T. Benjamin Singer, "From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 601-620, 617.

As Reese Simpkins highlights in his discussions on Trans feminism, there is room to expand on the concept of trans embodiment, through the politics of “becoming”.²⁹¹

Discussing the asterisk in trans* (which he subsequently employs throughout his articles), Simpkins links the term with “a dynamic conceptualization of materiality, whereby matter takes on a life beyond normative boxes that produce matter as inert material, subject to the whims of discursive production.”²⁹²

Simpkins explains that such accounts of trans* identity “require that we understand trans* more holistically, where trans* embodiments are understood to incorporate temporal, spatial, and affective processes.”²⁹³

According to Simpkins, within the logic of identity,

“...trans* is a highly regulated space...trans* people are subject to the demands of various discursive regimes including those regimes associated with what are now familiar intersectional categories. In contrast, by emphasizing the force of becoming, both trans* and intersectionality are delinked from their basis in identity and are reconceptualized as movement, as the force of becoming.”²⁹⁴

291. reese simpkins, “Trans*Feminist Intersections,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1-2 (January 2016): pp. 228-234, 233.

292. reese simpkins, “Temporal Flesh, Material Becomings,” *Somatechnics* 7, no. 1 (2017): pp. 124-141, 131.

293. reese simpkins, “Temporal Flesh, Material Becomings,” *Somatechnics* 7, no. 1 (2017): pp. 124-141, 131.

294. reese simpkins, “Trans*Feminist Intersections,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1-2 (January 2016): pp. 228-234, 233.

This concept of becoming is echoed by Singer's discussions of "all manner of becomings." However, applying an intersectional critique of the biomedical model to Singer's idea of the trans sublime still exposes the medical gaze toward the trans body for what it is: inherently faulty and a grave and dangerous premise.

3.17 The Biomedical Model, The Gender Binary, Self-Representation

For what the biomedical model and vocabulary relies upon is a heteronormative sense of binary gender, alongside numerous incongruent, blatantly racist, white supremacist and ableist ideals. As Noble points out, confession in terms of trans identity has often demanded congruency and adherence to these ideals: so-called changed desire and object choice; between chosen gender and sexual conservatism, and most pernicious, between sex and gender themselves.²⁹⁵

Even more importantly, Noble highlights that what is at stake is a politics of self-representation that is at odds with this dualism:

Central to this polemic...has to be something of a paradox for trans folks seeking images of themselves/ourselves: how does one represent oneself when one's self has unrepresentable (within current and often conservative categories) forms, practices and discourses?²⁹⁶

295. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 3.

296. Jean Bobby Noble, *Sons of the Movement: Ftms Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Cultural Landscape* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2006), 3.

Noble's own answer to his question is transgender art, and its capacity to manufacture representation of the transgender self is one way that I argue the transgender individual can actively take back their power from the oppressive forces I have documented above.

At the beginning of the second chapter of his new volume, Pilling writes: "There is something [queer and]... trans about madness."²⁹⁷ He documents the intersections between Queer, Trans, and Mad Studies, and "the historical and current struggles against psychiatry by queer and trans people, as well as psychiatric survivors alike".²⁹⁸ Pilling comments that there have been few critical scholarly and activist interventions within these intersections. In all, the issues addressed in this chapter and the complicated emotional ground that they represent and activate (personally for me, as well as theoretically) relate to Pilling's observations, and reiterate the need for a query between the fields of Mad Studies and Trans Studies. The discussions within this chapter also highlight the need to bring a trans/cis cognizance to Mad Studies and a sanist one to Trans Studies. It is my hope that this project will accomplish all of this and more.

297. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 40.

298. Merrick Daniel Pilling, *Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022), 40.

Chapter 4- A Mad Trans (Self) Portrait of Passing, “Cure”, and Refusal

4.1 Introduction: Trans, Spivak’s Dominant Male Subject, and the Photograph

In deconstructing the failure of my first series of photographs in this project, I have illustrated how my passing as white, cisgender, male, ablebodied/minded and assumed heterosexual translates to privilege. Drawing from Spivak’s assertions in her famed essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, the deconstruction of my passing and appearance is vital to my project because the ideological construction of the subject is founded upon physical traits of the colonizer that I mirror, those of the dominant exploiter of labour in society: the white, heterosexual, ablebodied/minded, cisgender man.²⁹⁹

Spivak’s analysis relates to institutional structures of international labour and is hinged firmly to the gender binary. She documents how the white Eurocentric (assumed sane, cisgender and ablebodied) male subject cannot escape the dominant patriarchal confines of the linguistic or sociological mores of his society, and that because he is dominated by these, he cannot speak. She ends her essay by commenting that linguistically, the female subject is “even more deeply in shadow”.³⁰⁰

299. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Essay. In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossman. London: Macmillan, 1988.

300. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Essay. In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossman. London: Macmillan, 1988, 28.

What do Spivak's statements mean when they are applied to a white cisgender able-bodied/minded-passing trans man in a female sexed body? If the transphobic language of medicine and the gender binary dominates social modes of production, as a trans man, how am I coded in the context of Spivak's discussion? How does a trans man speak under these conditions? Moreover, because Spivak's discussion does not blatantly acknowledge the existence of trans people, nor disability or madness, and because I pass as a dominant subject, even though I am trans and mad, how do I speak authentically, or even at all?

As a trans man living in Western contemporary times, there is plenty to speak about. I think of TikTok videos of Montana senator Zooey Zephyr's impassioned speech in April 2023 about how the denial of gender affirming healthcare in the US will lead to more trans suicides.³⁰¹ I think of how that speech was seized by right wing pundits, who mocked her appearance to further their agendas. I think of speaking about the cries of trans genocide in the United States, protests about SOGI erupting at Canadian school board meetings, Internet comment sections full of online trolls, Nazi flags and swastikas on streetcorners during drag queen story hours, the 1 Million March for Children and "parental rights" in Canada, the justification of hatemongering and "homosexual panic", trans visibility and what that means. I think of the role of the mad transgender artist under such conditions. I recall my art history

301. Zephyr, Zooey. "Zooey Zephyr Addresses Montana State Legislature Prior to Vote on Disciplinary Action | ABCNL." YouTube, April 26, 2023.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_W-Xy9-ky8.

classes, World War II, and how Nazi Germany labelled its expressionist artists as “mentally ill degenerates bound for the madhouse”.³⁰² I think of Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill and its impact on queer children. I think of Daily Wire host Michael Knowles’s call, at the Conservative Political Action Conference, to “eradicate transgenderism”.³⁰³

I also think of the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s, the role of 2SLGBTQIA art within those, and its relationship to the politics of that time. I recall the vitriolic statements of Republican Jesse Helms and his attempts to censor the work of well-known gay photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, in the name of “indecentcy”, while Mapplethorpe was dying of AIDS. In recounting the controversy surrounding Mapplethorpe’s famed show *The Perfect Moment*, (which opened shortly before Mapplethorpe died of AIDS-related complications in 1989) art historian Richard Meyer states that “the language of censorship summons its own fantasies of erotic transgression and exchange.”³⁰⁴

302. Cohen, Peter. “The Architecture of Doom I Arquitetura Da Destruição (Legendado) I Full Version I 1989.” YouTube, May 25, 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQv8eT1mO_o&t=1117s.

303. Kilander, Gustaf. “CPAC Speaker Sparks Alarm with Call for Transgenderism to Be ‘Eradicated.’” *The Independent*, March 7, 2023.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/cpac-transgenderism-daily-wire-michael-knowles-b2294252.html>.

304. Meyer, Richard. “The Jesse Helms Theory of Art.” *October* 104 (April 2003): 131–48, 133.



Figure 4.1 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Man in Polyester Suit*, 1980, Gelatin Silver Print,
17 15/16 × 13' 15/16'
<https://www.artforum.com/features/robert-mapplethorpes-man-in-polyester-suit-204287/>

Mapplethorpe's photographs of the black male body have been criticized as racially fetishistic. It is also interesting to note that Mapplethorpe's intuitive visual sense of the aesthetics of fetishization (which his art is known for), also applied to his documentation of queer and gay kink and fetish culture and made him famous. Mapplethorpe's visual capacity to apply shock tactics and photographic precision to his images allowed him to point the camera back at the assumed straight heterosexual viewer and expose their fetishistic gaze, while also revealing his.

Meyer recounts the impact of Mapplethorpe's photographs further in his article *The Jesse Helms Theory of Art*. He describes how Helms's political agenda centralized on exploiting public fears and fantasies about male homosexuality at the height of the AIDS pandemic and used Mapplethorpe's art as a means. Helms accomplished this by labelling art as a vehicle that promoted homosexuality.³⁰⁵ Helms also attempted to curtail public funding related to the arts, specifically assigning the label of "perversion" to Mapplethorpe's art, and art in general.

Fast forward to the present, and I think of how mad trans artists and people like me, forced by transphobic medical doctrines and social mores to be complicit in their

305. Meyer, Richard. "The Jesse Helms Theory of Art." *October* 104 (April 2003): 131–48, 141.

medicalization and to “pass”, relate to art and these words, even as they are labeled “groomers” and “pedophiles”. And then I think of resistance.

Considering how trans lives and politics are being weaponized by right wing extremists today, and recalling earlier discussions in this chapter, how does a white cisgender assumed abled and sane mad transmasculine artist occupy cultural space in an openly transphobic society? How do public fantasies of transgender identity and life affect transgender art (In my case, photography) and its reception? To answer this question, I cannot help but return to Sekula and relate current concepts of censorship and eradication to how he ends his discussion of photography’s future.

Sekula’s famed article *The Body and the Archive*, mentioned earlier in this dissertation explains how photographs are visual documents and warns they easily become testimony that can fall into the hands of the police or apologists. He cautions how photographs can become tools which document the “microphysics” of barbarism and articulates that the problem of artists and intellectuals living near centres of global systems of power will be how to prevent the cancellation of that testimony by authorities.³⁰⁶ With the advent of the Internet and AI, the influences of surveillance capitalism, digital colonialism and neoliberalism intermingling with white transphobic ableist discourses, Sekula’s statement is still relevant today. These forces will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

306. Sekula, Allan. “The Body and the Archive.” *October* 39 (1986): 3–64, 64.

4.2 “How Do You Make a Portrait of Something You Can’t See?”

Relating the above forces back to my own work, my passing, and my failed photographs, how can they be transcended? Here I am reminded of Australian trans artist Archie Barry’s question: “How do you make a picture of something you can’t see?” Barry’s query relates to a commission he was assigned, related to hidden trans histories, using collections of (Australian) archives. He states in his article *Trans Erasure, Trans Visibility: History, Archives, and Art* that “At the State Library of Victoria, the search term *transgender* brings up zero results in the multimedia, images and scripts collections.”³⁰⁷ He remarks further that “genuine accounts of the lifestyles, needs, interests and desires of transgender people over time are mostly invisible to society at large.”³⁰⁸ I am struck by this statement: while his commentary relates to transgender history in an Australian context, it can be applied to transgender history and to trans visibility in Canada. Documentation about the histories of Canadian transgender men is sparse, and our voices are easily drowned out and forgotten in these contexts. Barry’s question also contains a double entendre: one that relates to the erasure of trans histories, but also one that indirectly applies to the multiplicity of the pronoun “they” that I discussed earlier. In other words, I am contained in one body, as one

307. Barry, Archie. “Trans Erasure, Trans Visibility: History, Archives, and Art.” *Archer Magazine*, December 1, 2019. <https://archermagazine.com.au/2018/11/trans-erasure/>.

308. Barry, Archie. “Trans Erasure, Trans Visibility: History, Archives, and Art.” *Archer Magazine*, December 1, 2019. <https://archermagazine.com.au/2018/11/trans-erasure/>.

person, yet I have lived as two people, and they are both part of me. I am plural. My body can never fully represent this duplicity.

To paraphrase the question I attempted to answer in the contents of my first series of photographs, how do I make a representation of my dualism and complexities, when the camera relies on the appearance of my physical body and there is no way to corporeally depict my duality? As Barry points out, the conundrum of trans representation relates to the fact that sometimes, you cannot depict that which is unseen. In my case, my body is only capable of reflecting one identity, not the two that I represent.

Barry's question also applies to those of us trans people who pass as white and cisgender and occupy the space of pathologization in both a medicalized "trans" sense, and through a diagnosis of mental illness. In other words, (and in relation to my photographs), Barry's statement also recalls how my passing in them renders my madness invisible to the outside world. Nevertheless, it was Barry's question about how to depict erasure and invisibility that propelled my quest and led to the discovery of how to best represent myself in this dissertation: by "cripping" my assumed appearance as dominant cisgender male through a disability-mad artistic lens.

4.3 Refusing Pathologization: Reworking My Mad Trans Photographs

I briefly discussed the concept of “cripping” my art practice earlier in this dissertation but will revisit this process by grounding my artistic practice in my trans body and its relationship to medicalization, through a discussion of pathologization.

Eli Clare’s article *Body Shame, Body Pride*, ends with a warning:

“As we talk about the DSM, let’s not act as if trans people don’t belong...because we aren’t really “crazy”, unlike the “crazies” over there ...Let’s remember the gender nonconforming youth who endure psychiatric abuse, the transsexuals who need drug treatment programs but can’t find placements because their transness is seen as psychiatric illness.”³⁰⁹

Jasbir Puar unpacks the sentiments behind Clare’s statements further in her formidable volume *The Right to Maim*, when she asserts (as I have throughout this dissertation) that the medical complex (and normative culture) views trans as disability (mental illness):

“The explicit linkages to the trans body as a body rendered disabled and/or rehabilitated from disability have been predominantly routed through debates about gender identity disorder (GID).”³¹⁰

Drawing again from Irving’s discussions on legitimizing the trans body as productive, I note that from birth, the medical model (as an extension of the dominant patriarchal subject and white, abled, colonial capitalist mores) employs the gender binary as means of taxonomizing bodies. In other words, the gender binary (and capitalism, using the medical model, as Irving has claimed) organizes bodies according to their sex, to convert them into productive subjects. To medicine’s binarized gaze, the transed body/person is not easily categorized, and poses a problem that is translated to illness. This perspective is also studied

309. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Eli Clare, “Body Shame, Body Pride: Lessons From the Disability Rights Movement,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 261-265, 265.

310. Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 36-37.

by Singer in his analysis of trans healthcare workers and their negative responses to trans bodies, an analysis which served as inspiration for the artworks in this project.

4.4 “Normalcy”, Docile Bodies, and Singer’s Transgender Sublime

Singer’s writings also serve as inspiration and impetus for my second series of artworks in this project. Of particular importance is how he describes the affective response of care providers and their incapacity to decode “the complex configurations” of trans bodies, which he describes as “non-normative”.³¹¹ Singer reveals his medical bias by using this term, shedding light on the medical professional difficulty in detaching from the ideology of “normal”.

“Normalcy” promotes a distancing between the “normal” beholder and the beheld, between the omniscient eye of the medical worker or physician and the patient. As Foucault has famously documented, the eye of the physician or medical worker is indoctrinated and informed by the gendered language of the white, patriarchal, cis/heteronormative ableist medical model.³¹² Part of the work of medicine involves applying that model to the bodies of

311. Singer, T. Benjamin. “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images.” Essay. In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Stephen Whittle and Susan Stryker, 601–20. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013.

312. Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan. London: Routledge, 1989.

patients, to convert them into docile productive subjects, a fact that is also articulated by Irving.

Foucault claims the “docile body” as malleable object, that submits to control through conditioned dependency on the structure of state and institutional disciplinary practices.³¹³ The medical model is an extension of these disciplinary practices. The medical worker/physician, as extension of these, remains in a state of constant surveillance, monitoring bodies, and disciplining them according to their capacity to conform to the medical model and the gender binary, and seeking to “cure” (discipline) those bodies which do not.

Returning to Singer’s observations, as mentioned previously in this project, his descriptions of (negative) affective responses that carers grapple with when treating trans patients allow him to articulate a “transgender sublime” that disorients the senses of (predominantly white cis/heteronormative) care workers, leading to a lower quality of healthcare for trans people.³¹⁴

313. Foucault, Michel, and Alan Sheridan. “Docile Bodies.” Essay. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 135–94. London: Penguin Classics, 2020.

314. Singer, T. Benjamin. “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images.” Essay. In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Stephen Whittle and Susan Stryker, 601–20. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013.

This visual and affective disorientation that trans bodies evoke in the (presumed physically “normative”) viewer is worth dwelling upon, for it is this disorientation which I failed to reproduce in my first series of photographs, because of my passing in them.

I would argue that the jarred affective responses of health professionals to trans bodies that Singer articulates, point to the fact that (as articulated throughout this dissertation) the gender binary is a deeply entrenched taxonomical system of capitalist production, and because of its need to reinforce that production through the gender binary, the medical model is transphobic and ableist. Yet, ironically, it is in their capacity to disorient the viewer, and force them to confront their (transphobic, white supremacist, cisnormative, heteronormative, ableist) perceptions that Singer’s survey of artistic and medical images of bodies are interpreted as trans. When this affect oriented disorientation is absent in the representation of a body in an image (as is the case with my first series of photographs), one cannot identify the “transgender sublime” that Singer describes—that is, the underlying sociopolitical ruptures that the trans body/identity creates in patriarchal cis-heteronormative, white, ableist institutions and culture through visual representation.

One could argue that when Singer’s concept of the transgender sublime and subsequent affective disorientation is missing from (my) visual representations/interpretations of the trans body, when they are erased by white cis-heteronormative ableist ideological assumptions and structures, they fail as trans representations because they are absorbed by these structures. This absorption ironically renders them complicit in the reproduction of those dominant, oppressive ideological structures and in the recreation of transphobic ideologies, despite their efforts to transcend them. I would argue that because of the inherent

reliance on the gender binary when interpreting and reading a body in society (and in art) this “visibly trans” affective friction must be present in the second photographic series of this project for it to succeed as disability art, and as a form of disability justice. I would also suggest that attempts to erase or deny this friction through Singer’s concept of “beauty” (outlined below) point to deeper disturbances, namely in the white supremacist, cisgender, heteronormative, abled roots of our human perceptions and assumptions. A deconstructive analysis of “beauty” in Singer’s article became the inspiration for my aesthetic choice of abject-ness and ugliness in my final series of works. It is through the refusal of this beauty and the “abjectification” of the white body in their contents that I represent the refusal of the white supremacist, ableist, patriarchal, sanist ideologies of medicine and their implications in my final series of artworks.

In other words, I argue that cis/heteronormative patriarchal colonial ableist forces dominate our world, and we are indoctrinated into a transphobic society from birth. Transphobia is further reinforced through social and institutional replication and reinforcement of the gender binary, and the trans body and individual’s dependence on medicine for gender-affirming care.

4.5 Internalized Transphobia: Photographs, Disability Art, Transness, and “Beauty”

As a mad trans artist-subject, entrenched in and silenced by the forces I’ve outlined, for this project to succeed, I can approach art as an abstracted form of language, to transcend them. Through disability art and the anti-ableist lens of disability justice, I give shape to my

complexities and frustrations. Through disability art, I can use my artistic practice to acknowledge the transphobia I have witnessed and absorbed in my lifetime. Upon further reflection, the erasure of corporeal difference in my first series could point to my self-portraits as expressions of internalized transphobia. As Bockting et al. state in the results to their Transgender Identity Survey, transgender individuals are not exempted from the impact of transphobia in the world, and internalize gender norms and expectations, and may develop shame and self-hatred because of their lack of capacity to conform to culturally established definitions of sex and gender.³¹⁵ I was raised in a homophobic and transphobic household, so I am no exception.

Therefore, another reason why my photographs failed was because they replicated my internalized transphobia, and the conditions that reinforced it: they could not displace the white cis heteronormative, ableist (medical) gaze because through erasure of my body difference, they comply with that gaze. It is for this reason among others that I must recreate my images and formulate a new approach to photography and self-portraiture in this dissertation.

315. Bockting, Walter O., Michael H. Miner, Rebecca E. Swinburne Romine, Curtis Dolezal, Beatrice “Bean” Robinson, B.R. Simon Rosser, and Eli Coleman. “The Transgender Identity Survey: A Measure of Internalized Transphobia.” *LGBT Health* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 15–27.

To contextualize my new artworks, I will once again dwell on Singer, and the representational politics of beauty and difference he highlights in his article, in an attempt to dislocate the medical gaze in relation to the trans body. This is also the goal of my project. Singer asserts that an aesthetic shift away from concepts of beauty toward concepts of sublimity provides a “more ethical way to relate to non-normative bodied people in medical contexts”.³¹⁶ Here, I will comment on what I feel is Singer’s strongest (but problematic) attempt to deconstruct the medical gaze by using a medical perspective: through Cameron’s self-portrait, “God’s Will”.

In his deconstruction of the image, Singer contrasts the image of Cameron’s transmasculine physique with (cisgender) art historical notions of “the beautiful”. Singer critiques the appearance of Cameron’s body, “held in a classic bodybuilding physique pose...a unified portrait of physical beauty...the impression of a living Greek statue.”³¹⁷

316. Singer, T. Benjamin. “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images.” Essay. In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Stephen Whittle and Susan Stryker, 601–20. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013, 618.

317. Singer, T. Benjamin. “From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images.” Essay. In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Stephen Whittle and Susan Stryker, 601–20. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013, 607.

To restate: Singer's stance is to appeal to the medical gaze through the reframing of the "transgender sublime" as "beautiful". He revisits this concept again and again in his article, leading the reader through a visual survey of medicalized transgender and disabled bodies (a juxtaposition that conflates trans and disability, which also invalidates trans disabled/mad lives) before finishing his discussion with a group of artistic and aesthetic trans photographs that exalt the "beauty" of his concept of the sublime.

Singer's article curates a progressive transformation of the trans/disabled body/subject through a series of carefully chosen photographs, that allegedly philosophically shift and transform that body from dehumanized medical specimen to an object of beauty and therefore, appreciation and potential acceptance. Ultimately, it is through the concept of "beauty" that Singer proposes Cameron's trans body becomes legible/acceptable to white cis/heteronormative culture and the medical gaze. He argues that beauty rebukes the pathologization of the trans body by the medical model and society at large.

However, Singer does not fully unpack what his proposed concept of "beauty" entails, or what it is socially or culturally composed of. As a result, his attempt to reframe the transgender body and sublime as beautiful does not denounce the inherent pathologization of trans in medicine.

It is because he does not consider his perception of beauty in the contexts of his descriptions to be a white supremacist, ableist, colonial, cisnormative, sanist term (even though he attempts to address the pathologization of trans bodies using a disability rights

perspective) that his argument is unable to completely dislodge the connection between trans and the concept of medical pathologization. Singer's example illustrates the futility of attempting to language the trans subject away from medical contexts because those medical contexts are the only descriptors available to describe trans bodies and lives.

In other words, Singer's discussion of trans bodies affirms what this project has asserted: that the medical model itself is inherently rooted and invested in the concept of trans body as pathological. As I've articulated earlier in this dissertation, the interpretation of my own portraits as "beautiful" relied on my capacity to pass or be read as white, cisgender, and ablebodied/minded.

I would argue that Cameron's self-portrait, while powerful and trans, conjures similar forces, and Singer's praise of it through formal Classical patriarchal art historical aesthetics, using a one-dimensional colonial lens, by recalling the stereotyped aesthetic mimicry of the bodies of (white) cisgender Greek Olympians is too simplistic. As my failed photographs prove, one cannot override or transform the inherently patriarchal white supremacist, transphobic, sanist, ableist (medical) gaze by mimicking its contours or pandering to its ideals.

4.6 "The Life of A Supercrip": Sanism and Outing Myself as A Psychiatric Survivor

To further illustrate how difficult it is to override the medical gaze in the context of trans identity, I draw from Eli Clare's discussions of ableism in his celebrated book *Exile and Pride*, specifically a chapter entitled "The Mountain". Within this chapter, Clare

recounts a “Supercrip story” and aligns tales of his experience with cerebral palsy with other “supercrips” in an ableist context:

A boy without hands bats .486 on his Little League team. A blind man hikes the Appalachian Trail from end to end. An adolescent girl with Down syndrome learns to drive and has a boyfriend. A guy with one leg runs across Canada.³¹⁸

“The nondisabled world is saturated with these stories,” Clare continues. “...They reinforce the superiority of the nondisabled body and mind. They turn individual disabled people, who are simply leading their lives, into symbols of inspiration.”³¹⁹

In other words, it is important to out myself as a psychiatric survivor in this dissertation. For if I were not to disclose these details, my white cis/abled passing appearance, could translate to my life and identity being co-opted as a “success story”.

Disclosing relevant details about my experiences within the psy apparatus also illustrates how the intersections between transness and madness, (discussed earlier by Pilling), operate. To offer myself up as an example that represents these intersections, and to articulate my personal and psychiatric history as a mad transman, a former sex worker and fat activist, a woman-man who has been institutionalized in spite of my passing appearance flies directly in the face of being appropriated as a story of hope and inspiration, as a success

318. Eli Clare, Levins Aurora Morales, and Dean Spade, “The Mountain,” in *Exile & Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 1-13, 2.

319. Eli Clare, Levins Aurora Morales, and Dean Spade, “The Mountain,” in *Exile & Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 1-13, 2.

story, as a type of human unicorn that somehow has beat the odds and survived. To be co-opted as a success story amid the shame-based discourses I have been privy to, to be viewed as “acceptable” because my passing makes those facts invisible would replicate the very conditions that oppressed my former fat activist, female genderfluid self. It would make me a hypocrite of the highest order.

To deepen the significance of this concept, I also draw from Butler, who states in their introduction to *Undoing Gender* that

The terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable. And sometimes the very terms that confer “humanness” on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status, producing a differential between the human and the less-than-human...Certain humans are recognized as less than human, and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life. Certain humans are not recognized as human at all, and that leads to yet another order of unlivable life.³²⁰

Butler articulates a commonality, the human desire to be recognized and validated in the world. It is also important to note that through that desire to be recognized as human, we as mad trans people become vulnerable to the language of medicalization and its implications; for it is through the archways of medicalization and transition that passing occurs (as I’ve mentioned, “the gold standard” of trans identity), and it is through passing as white, cisgender, ablebodied and sane that we become visible to the dominant patriarchal, ableist, white structures of the world. Sadly, to be trans and read as human in these contexts replicates the very conditions which we are attempting to escape: the disciplining forces of hetero/cisnormativity, white supremacy, and patriarchy.

320. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

Drawing further from Butler:

... if the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that “undo” the person by conferring recognition, or “undo” the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced. This means that to the extent that desire is implicated in social norms, it is bound up with the question of power and with the problem of who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not.³²¹

In other words, through the human desire to be recognized as human, we become open to being manipulated by hegemonic systems of power—in this case, the medical complex. I will now draw attention to Foucault’s famed discussions of biopower: the sovereign’s control over human bodies and power, and its say over who lives and who dies. For as Foucault famously articulated in his lectures at the College de France, since the end of the eighteenth century, death no longer manifests in dramatic fashion, but is a subtle force. It no longer works as an epidemic that swoops down on a population, but rather death is connected to illness as phenomena affecting a population, “something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it.”³²²

As Foucault further explains

...the form, nature, extension, duration, and intensity of the illnesses prevalent in a population... were illnesses that were difficult to eradicate and that were not regarded as epidemics that caused more frequent deaths, but as permanent factors which—and that is how they were dealt with—sapped the population's strength, shortened the working week, wasted energy, and cost money, both because they led to a fall in production and because treating them was expensive.³²³

321. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

322. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani et al., trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997), 243-44.

323. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani et al., trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997), 244.

It is within these discussions of biopower, the sovereign, and human populations that Foucault also charts the result of the effects of these illnesses alongside the development of medicine, whose agenda is to mobilize knowledge through the medical institution and medicalize the population.³²⁴

4.7 Medicalization, Pathologization, Ableism and Biopolitics

To be trans and disabled (mad) and to inhabit the human desire for recognition noted by Butler, more specifically, to inhabit this intersection of forces (oppression and that desire), is to be buffeted by the forces of medicalization and ableism.

Foucault's words foreshadow the intertwining of neoliberal agendas with biopolitics and the medical apparatus discussed later in this chapter, particularly in his discussions of "individuals who...fall out of the field of capacity, of activity."³²⁵ While much of his discussion on biopolitics focuses on old age, one could easily extend his commentary to trans mad and disabled people as well, as they also fall outside of the field of capacity he describes.

324. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani et al., trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997), 244.

325. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani et al., trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997), 244.

It is within these biopolitical confines of accidents, infirmities, and various anomalies that Foucault also claims we will see the introduction of “subtle, more rational (control) mechanisms: insurance, individual and collective savings, safety measures, and so on”.³²⁶

The focus on visible disability described by Clare in his discussions of advertising featuring intersections of celebrity and disability (discussed below), for instance, or the mainstreaming of the rehabilitation of disabled celebrities under the guise of thinly veiled ableism manifesting as inclusion, are illustrations of Foucault’s ideals intertwined with neoliberal control mechanisms related to biopower. Even disability access can be reframed in terms of neoliberal agendas. I would argue even today’s emphasis in disability activist circles on access and its politics can run the risk of becoming neoliberally co-opted by organizations through a series of checked boxes on paperwork, ramps, and wheelchair signs.

4.8 “Successful Transition”, Cure, and Productive Failure

To return to the discussion surrounding my capacity to blend as a white trans man who appears able bodied and sane implies that my “successful transition” and capacity to remain invisible to the psy complex, through that transition (read: capacity to appear cisgender, able bodied, sane, productive, and white) means that I am “cured”. Medically, I am coded in

326. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani et al., trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997), 244.

these terms as being freed of my affliction of gender dysphoria, redefined as male, and can now function as a white male academic in a white male dominated society. Therefore, I must remain open and vigilant: for to pass as a white able bodied/minded cisgender man despite the complexities of my transgender identity and psychiatric history is to infiltrate the system that threatens to swallow me through privilege. I must dismantle that privilege for this project to be successful.

In other words, the failure of my first series of photographs is productive. As Halberstam states,

“Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world.”³²⁷

Put another way, by refusing to pass (as able-bodied and cisgender) in my photographs, I am not only acknowledging the entirety of my identity, but I am also simultaneously refusing the medical apparatus’s biologically determinist influence (via the diagnosis of gender dysphoria) and its ableist origins. The failed photograph serves as a stand-in for my awakening, a point marking the refusal of the medical system’s violence and influence on my being. It is a springboard, a conceptual U-turn, whereupon my agency over my identity, body, and mind can be articulated independently of the forces I’ve described and reclaimed.

327. Halberstam, Judith. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Kindle edition.

4.9 “Inspiration Porn”: The Limitations of the Photograph, Stereotyping “Trans”

As trans people are constantly bombarded with mainstream and medical perceptions of their identity as mental illness in Western culture, a mad trans person (like me) who passes as white, cisgender, and abled lives in a double bind of invisibility. This is another reason why my photographs failed--they easily become “inspiration porn”—used by the white/cis/heteronormative/abled population for the purposes of inspiration, a phenomenon which insidiously hints at the low expectations placed on people with disability who are celebrated simply for living their lives. I would even argue that my photographs were deemed successful (beautiful) by my audience not because they were effective at replicating an accurate representation of my identity, but because they *mask* my mad transgender self.

My digital photographs are also read as successful because my appearance is easily hijacked, conflated, and appropriated, through passing, into a success story (because of my capacity to conform to the white, cisnormative, ableist, sanist institutions that are oppressing my trans identity and madness) , and therefore invalidate my experience as a mad trans man. Adding to these complexities is how the photograph is limited by both its capacity to depict, and its attested relationship to realism. As I’ve articulated throughout this project. the photograph cannot depict internal states. This means that mainstream artistic photographic depictions of the trans body have mainly focused on its surface appearance and through that, it’s incapacity to conform to the gender binary.

Keeping this assertion in mind, I argue that because of the limitations of the analog camera and photograph to only depict the physical surface of bodies, trans self-portraiture

has historically centered on trans corporeal representations and visibly trans or cis passing stereotypes. Cameron's unclothed self-portraits or images such as the work of trans photographer Amos Mac, for example, often highlight displays of obvious trans-related physical markers such as top surgery scars or genderfluid/nonbinary representations that juxtapose and combine masculine and feminine physical characteristics. These images are tied to the idea of trans representations opposing the gender binary, and its modes of production, but usually in relation to it, through a sense of being able to pass. This was what I replicated in my first series of photographs and also relates to the portraits of Loren Cameron's clothed trans subjects who pass as cisgender men.

Here, I am reminded of Hall's analysis of visual representations and stereotypes.

As Hall articulates, stereotyping sets up

a “symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'Other'...It facilitates the 'binding' or bonding together of all of Us who are 'normal' into one 'imagined community'; and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them - 'the Others' - who are in some way different - 'beyond the pale'.”³²⁸

4.10 “To Sanitize and Organize the World”: Photography, Eugenics, and Transphobia

It is also worth noting that Hall's discussions of stereotyping draw from the work of cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, who articulated the human impulse to sanitize and

328. Hall, Stuart. “Stereotyping as a Signifying Practice.” Essay. In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, 257–61. London : Sage, 2013, 257.

organize the world. She describes how perceived disorder is viewed as a form of pollution by human beings: dirty, dangerous and taboo.³²⁹ According to Douglas, the knee jerk response to the concept of disorder is associated with negative feelings, which must be symbolically rejected and eliminated for the ‘purity’ of culture to be restored. In their most insidious form, I argue that these negative feelings, when combined with the white supremacist, cis/heteronormative, ableist, sanist transphobic medical model transform into an ideological instinct towards eugenics, reinforced by white patriarchal cisgender abled heteronormativity.

An added consideration to this discussion is how historically photographs and the camera itself have been used in human societies as surveillance devices by authorities and the state, to survey and archive “abnormal” bodies, and criminals.³³⁰ These factors transform the photograph from an aesthetic object into a political object with meanings that move beyond “art for art’s sake” and into the realm of cultural surveillance, and political agency.

Therefore, when a trans man’s body such as my own or Cameron’s is praised for its capacity to conform (when it is called “beautiful” under Singer’s medical contexts, for instance) representationally, when it evokes admiration rather than a transphobic response, it is because it does not appear culturally or socio-politically “out of place”, not because it is

329. Douglas, Mary. Introduction. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo with a New Preface by the Author*, 1–6. London: Routledge, 2001.

330. Sekula, Allan. “The Body and the Archive.” *October* 39 (1986): 3–64.

“accepted”. This is not liberation. As Hall has pointed out, stereotyping fetishizes “the other”, it does not liberate them.³³¹

My failed first series of photographs illustrates Hall’s observation. In other words, when my trans body is granted passage in society (invisibility and therefore safety from transphobic microaggressions and violence) by the (patriarchal) ableist, sanist, cisnormative gaze, or its institutions (through the capacity to pass in my photographs, for example), that passage does not resolve the transphobic/pathological intent or agendas that these dominant ideologies and their institutions represent. Rather, it upholds them.

Circling back to Singer’s comments, he identifies as a trans activist working within healthcare environments, but because of the oppressive nature of those environments, even as he attempts to transcend their inherently problematic structures, the language of medicine’s aim is to reproduce a palatable trans representation of a medicalized body to be “cured” of illness- medically treated (disciplined) and reproduced as a cis-passing body suitable to be integrated into white, patriarchal, ableist, neoliberal and capitalist systems of power, as Irving detailed earlier in this dissertation. It is of no coincidence therefore that Cameron’s self-portrait is the centrepiece of Singer’s analysis: it is deemed to be acceptable,

331. Hall, Stuart, Peter Hamilton, Henrietta Lidchi, Sean Nixon, and Christine Gledhill. “The Spectacle of the ‘Other.’” Essay. In *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications, 1997, 264-267.

even “cured” of its transedp otheredness, through its capacity to replicate aspects of the very structures designed to oppress its existence: white, cisgender, ablebodied, patriarchal power.

Put another way, Singer’s superficial Eurocentric art historical interpretation of difference in Cameron’s photograph is “skin-deep”, based solely on outer appearance, one that through animation of white, ableist, colonial, art historical, Eurocentric ideals, re-creates oppression. His critique affirms Cameron’s body’s capacity to blend with the forces oppressing it, rather than articulating the transphobic malevolence of those forces. Singer’s interpretation of Cameron’s portrait reiterates what Hall would describe as “the preferred meaning” of an image—that is, the dominant ideological one that de-pathologizes the trans body within the transphobic realm of medicine through its capacity to conform to white, cisgender, patriarchal culture and ideologies.

I continue to reflect upon Singer’s critique with trepidation. Another dominant perception related to my passing has also been one of being able bodied/minded, because my madness and neurodivergence are invisible. In the introduction to his well-known volume, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, Robert McRuer draws a connection between hetero/cisnormativity and able-bodied identity. He states that ablebodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, is interpreted experientially as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things.³³²

332. McRuer, Robert. *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability*. New York: New York University Press, 2006, 1.

4.11 Compulsory (Cisgender) Able-Bodiedness: Fetishization, and “Acceptance”

McRuer puts forth a term he calls “compulsory able-bodiedness”, which produces disability and otheredness. He links this term with heteronormativity. “Compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness, and vice versa”, he states.³³³ Linking McRuer’s discussion back to my passing appearance in my failed self-portraits, I will add that they also “pass” and appear successful (beautiful) to audiences because of the compulsory ablebodied/mindedness they depict, and even their ability to blend with heterosexual male tropes.

Therefore, I argue that while Singer’s analysis addresses the pathologization of the medical gaze in relation to the visibly transed body, he does not address the compulsory ablebodied, pathological, transphobic roots of the medical gaze. His analysis is incomplete. I draw deeply from Singer’s analysis because my first series of photographs replicates the same problem.

One way to reframe their contents would be to consider why I am hiding the trans aspects of my body in these photographs. I am reminded of the question posed by Hall in his introductory discussions about the Spectacle of the Other, “What is the (real) secret

333. McRuer, Robert. *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability*. New York: New York University Press, 2006, 2.

fascination with otherness and why is popular representation so drawn to it?”³³⁴ Note that it is precisely because of my otherness that so many who know I am trans viewed my first series of photographs in this project as a triumph. I appear as a cisgender man, no longer transed, effectively “cured” of otherness.

According to Hall, another aspect that is glossed over in Singer’s curative analysis is how “typical” (White cis/heteronormative, ableist, patriarchal) forms and depictive practices in photography (like my first series of images and Cameron’s) reinforce pathologization of otherness and difference in the white, Western, ableist, colonialist, cis/heteronormative world. More specifically, I ponder how Singer’s survey of images in his article and juxtaposition of non-normative (trans) bodies with disabled ones in his curated group of photographs reinforces white ableist/sanist/transphobic stereotypes, even though it claims to liberate them through a “disability rights” lens. To juxtapose disabled photographs with trans photographs insinuates that transness is disability, via the psy complex. It is the assumption that transness and mental illness are one and the same. It also indirectly invalidates the experiences of trans disabled and mad trans people, and the rich individual life experiences they live out.

334. Hall, Stuart, Peter Hamilton, Henrietta Lidchi, Sean Nixon, and Christine Gledhill. “The Spectacle of the ‘Other.’” Essay. In *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications, 1997.

Aside from the problematic/simplistic conflation of ableism and transness in his discussion of these images, does Singer's analysis of trans bodies and identities (through Cameron's photograph, and subsequent images of disabled people in his article) not "reduce people to a few simple, essential characteristics which are represented as fixed by nature"?³³⁵ Under these conditions, the praise and acceptance of trans people by healthcare providers is not actually acceptance at all. Rather, are the people in Singer's images granted acceptance because of their capacity to be stereotyped and fetishized, not unlike the Hottentot Venus "reduced to her body and her body in turn was reduced to her sexual organs... The 'bits' of her...served, in an essentializing and reductionist manner, as 'a pathological summary of the entire individual'...turned into a set of separate objects, into a thing - 'a collection of sexual (body) parts'".³³⁶

4.12 Trans-scending Medicalization: "Crippling" the Digital Photograph

Keeping these overwhelming factors in mind, how do I, as a mad trans man, circumvent being reduced to a medicalized, fetishized pathological collection of body parts in my

335. Hall, Stuart, Peter Hamilton, Henrietta Lidchi, Sean Nixon, and Christine Gledhill. "The Spectacle of the 'Other.'" Essay. In *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications, 1997, 266.

336. Hall, Stuart, Peter Hamilton, Henrietta Lidchi, Sean Nixon, and Christine Gledhill. "The Spectacle of the 'Other.'" Essay. In *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications, 1997, 266.

images? The answer lies in transcending the physical dimensions of the transgender body through technology, by harnessing the technological transformation of the photograph today (from concrete paper object based almost exclusively in aesthetic concerns, to a sociopolitically informed digital hologram composed of computer code and pixels), then “cripping” its perimeters through a mad/disability arts and justice lens.

When I speak of disability justice and disability art in this project, the word ‘crip’ can be compared to the word ‘queer’—a slur reclaimed as an agent of mobilization for community, identity, culture and scholarship. Through a disability arts lens, the label of disability unifies rather than alienates, humanizing us as people rather than disconnecting and reducing us to statistics and members of a population.³³⁷ As Titchkosky writes, the word ‘disability’ is often used in normative culture to distract from our humanity and experiences, then detached from us in order that we might achieve personhood.³³⁸ The concept of “cripping” one’s art practice is an act of resistance that challenges the transphobic ableist forces I’ve described throughout this dissertation, specifically those that medicalize and pathologize mad trans people.

337. Chandler, Eliza. “Introduction: Crippling the Arts in Canada: Canadian Journal of Disability Studies.” View of Introduction: Crippling the Arts in Canada | Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, 2018.
<https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/view/468/708>.

338. Titchkosky, Tanya, and Rod Michalko. *Rethinking normalcy: A disability studies reader*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2009.

To unpack the term further, McRuer explains that to ‘crip’ is to, “expose ways in which bodies, minds, and impairments should be at the absolute centre of a space or issue or discussion, rather than get ‘purged’ from that space or issue or discussion”.³³⁹

As Eliza Chandler notes, to take disability (and madness) as a creative entry point in artistic practice is inherently political, and moves art beyond mainstreamed aesthetic concerns, transforming disability-led artwork into innovative abstract language vital for imagining new perspectives of disability:

Animated by the experiences of living in a world that does not typically desire us, or even imagine us as cultural participants, disability arts specifically mobilizes a disruptive politic... the disability arts community doesn’t want to be included in an ableist world/culture, we want to create something new.³⁴⁰

In other words, considering the conflation of disability, transness, and madness upheld by the medical model in normative culture, (and how the medical model silences mad trans people using ableist/sanist/ transphobic institutional/linguistic structures), through a social justice framework, disability art provides a dialectal means of agency, allowing the mad

339. McRuer, Robert. *Crip Times disability, globalization, and resistance*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.

340. Chandler, Eliza. “Introduction: Crippling the Arts in Canada: Canadian Journal of Disability Studies.” View of Introduction: Crippling the Arts in Canada | Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, 2018.
<https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/view/468/708>.

trans subject to speak about the traumatic dimensions of being medically and socioculturally disciplined and silenced. This will be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

As I've outlined throughout this dissertation, my transgender experience and life have been traumatic. Art historian Jill Bennett remarks that trauma is beyond the dimensions of conventional language.³⁴¹ However, she does not touch on the oppressive sociopolitical structures or institutional language governing this expression. Still, Bennett stipulates that encounters with artworks do not usually invite us to extrapolate a persona from them but communicate affective messages through their direct engagement with audiences. These emerge from sensation as it registers in the work, which becomes a language all its own: a subjectless dialect that relies on feeling and sensation to communicate. This allows disability art to fulfill a specific, powerful role: allowing the medicalized, pathologized mad trans person to language their experience.

4.13 Mad Trans Resistance: Crippling the Digital Photograph

So how does a white invisibly disabled, cisgender male passing transgender artist address these issues? How do I combat the complexity of "beauty" that I've outlined above, and its transphobic/ableist/sanist implications? How do I represent myself and tell my story considering these forces? How do I move beyond the photograph's capacity to depict? How

341. Bennett, Jill. *Empathic vision: Affect, trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, 6-7.

can I resist compulsory ablebodiedness/mindedness in my representations? In other words, how do I “crip” my photographs?

I will begin by stating that my second photographic series in this project was made with the aim of disrupting the white/transphobic/ableist/sanist hegemonies and corporeal-political assumptions embedded in photographic representations of transgender bodies. My second series also aims to disrupt the technological evolution and digitization of photography (and the political and aesthetic conventions/implications of that digitization). It seeks, through disability arts and justice framework, to transcend the institutionally hijacked language of the medical system and claim space for mad transgender representation and language outside of its perimeters.

My second series is also informed by my assertion that pathologization of trans bodies and validation of trans identities in Western culture relies on, as my first series of photographs illustrate, passing and adherence to the gender binary. Trans is socially disciplined through stigma (upheld by the medical model) and because trans people rely on medical pathologization to receive gender affirming care, they cannot linguistically escape the transphobic institutions they are bound to, and neither can those who work within those institutions. As a result, trans voices remain silenced, and visual representations of trans bodies remain monolithically bound to white, cisgender passing, abled models, and to the transphobic conventions of these systems, even as they try to language their way out of them.

As Singer's article illustrates through its inability to transcend dominant representational ideologies of the medical model, by proxy, healthcare professionals also remain silenced, bound to the medical model and its transphobic ableist language when assessing bodies. As I've articulated earlier in this dissertation, the medical model is inherently transphobic, white supremacist, ableist, patriarchal, cis/heteronormative and colonial. Because of this, the language used to describe bodies in medical contexts will always be inherently rooted in ableism and transphobia, making it difficult to linguistically transcend its structures through conventional language.

Put another way, as I've previously mentioned, the medical instinct to "cure" the trans body of its "complex configurations"(and the interpretation of these) by making it legible to the gender binary (hetero/cisnormative, passing) is transphobic, ableist, and sanist. As a mad trans artist, I argue that the most productive way to transcend the medical model is to move beyond its conventional institutionalized language, and into the realm of affect, abstract expression, and specifically art made through a disability justice lens.

Returning to Cameron's famed self-portrait and juxtaposing it with my own failed ones, I am reminded of my surgeon's remarks during my final post-surgical appointment. I recall how he reinforced my internalized transphobia, by praising my white cis/heteronormative able-bodied/minded male appearance. In remarking on the "beauty" of my chest and his work, he touched on my ability to pass in the world outside the hospital, while subtly hinting that he perceived me to be mentally ill: "We're doing this, so you get to see fewer white coats, and I think you'll be much happier".

4.14 Cure: The Gender Binary as Disciplinary Mode of Production

In other words, the transed body confounds the gender binary's taxonomizing of bodies for capitalist production. The trans body does not resemble that of the (productive) cisgender dominant male subject described earlier by Spivak nor can it be exploited for labour as cisgender female subject. Therefore because it is not recognized by the gender binary, and by extension, the medical gaze, a trans body is medically viewed as a disabled body, one that must be "rehabilitated" and "cured" by the medical complex through surgeries and hormones in order to (ideally) pass as a productive (cisgender , white, abled, sane, heterosexual) subject.

As previously mentioned in this dissertation, sexologist John Money infers the medical perception of trans as medical defect, and its devaluation of trans identities through a patriarchal lens, calling the "male to female transsexual...the attention getting vamp" and the female to male trans identity one that "is prevalently that of the reliable provider".

Money also describes how the medical model is invested in the naturalization of trans as disorder, and the gender binary itself. This idea of naturalization reinforces the authority of the medical model over trans identities, and by extension, promotes ableist attitudes that contribute to global transphobic rhetoric and ideologies.

To summarize, it is through the medicalized concept of "cure" via gender dysphoria (and passing) that trans bodies and minds are disciplined by state and institutional structures

to be brought back into alignment with the capacity to produce or be productive.³⁴² Through the eyes of the medical model, the “medically/mentally ill” trans person is “cured” of their gender dysphoria by their capacity to “pass” as a ‘productive member of society’. It is because my first series of self-portraits render me “cured” by the medical model through my passing that they reinforce the oppressive transphobic and ableist structures that silenced me across my life. This is another reason I label them as failures.

Titchkowsky and Michalko write that disability (transness/madness) is perceived by normative culture as a personal problem of tragic proportions requiring assistance or help from others, that must be contained and managed (cured)—that is, treated as a problem in need of a solution³⁴³. These pathological perceptions also devalue, invalidate, and silence the histories and experiences of mad trans people, like me.

According to Clare

Cure, [is not only] a medical process but also... a cultural ideology, that functions in many different ways. It saves lives and normalizes body-minds deemed broken, deformed, troubled or troubling. It provides one kind of answer to body-mind loss and prioritizes some lives over others. It supports comfort and acts as profound social control.³⁴⁴

342. Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 136.

343. Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko, *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2009), 3.

344. Sandra Alland. “Eli Clare on Our Relationship with 'Abnormal' and the Promise of Cure.” Disability Arts Online, May 19, 2018. <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/eli-clare-relationship-abnormal-promise->

As I've highlighted earlier in this dissertation in my discussions of Carrie Buck, cure is a form of control and an extension of the medical gaze. Cure sanitizes and disciplines the body in an attempt to align it with the dominant patriarchal subject through the apparatus of the gender binary. In effect, as I've already claimed, the function of the gender binary is to transform the subject into a docile subject through enforced gender roles.

When this cannot be accomplished, when a body cannot be visibly disciplined into passing via medicine (hormones and surgeries) and/or replication of the dominant male subject (able-bodied, male, sane, cisgender, white, colonial) it is shunned by normative culture (deemed unproductive) and that body/person is sentenced to a life outside of these systems. Thus trans, mad, and disabled subjects are silenced through the 'curing' forces of ableism and the violent undercurrents of transphobia ever present in the world.

Ultimately, the medical model is a normalizing agent, an apparatus that actively participates in the policing, silencing and erasing of bodies and lives who do not replicate white, male, cisgender, ableist, sanist ways of being.

As mentioned previously, Foucault has noted, the state sanctions and isolates bodies/minds through the medical model. I argue that the primary means it accomplishes this

cure/#:~:text=Clare%3A%20Cure%2C%20not%20only%20as,prioritizes%20some%20lives%20over%20others.

is through the gender binary. The gender binary is therefore a mode of production, applied as a disciplining force on the body through medicine, to assure its (white patriarchal cisgender abled sane) productivity.

I also argue that the medical model is used by the state to silence those who cannot contribute to the labour production of society (read: cannot be “cured” of their madness, of their dysphoria and assimilated/transformed into “passing”, sane, and or abled bodyminds) This leads to the dehumanization of the mad trans subject, and potentially necropolitics, as Mbembe states, through “loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status...identical with...social death (expulsion from humanity altogether).”³⁴⁵

Additionally, through the influence of neoliberalism on these conditions, as described by Puar, the violent death forces of necropolitics have become more subtle and veiled in Western culture. As Sakellariou and Rotarou note, In the neoliberal discourse, *all bodies* are continually being evaluated in terms of their success of failure in achieving health, wealth, or career realization ³⁴⁶ though this fact is seldom articulated.

345. Achille Mbembe and Steve Corcoran, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 21.

346. Dikaïos Sakellariou and Elena S. Rotarou, “The Effects of Neoliberal Policies on Access to Healthcare for People with Disabilities,” *International Journal for Equity in Health* 16, no. 1 (2017): pp. 1-8.

As highlighted by Duggan, neoliberal discourse co-opts and grafts itself to human society and bodies through the infiltration of “reasonable” language, applying itself to aspects of speech within communities. For instance, “access” has become a central focal point, even a buzzword now that disability has gone mainstream and has “levelled up” in Western culture. Therefore, it is a term that can be easily co-opted and applied to neoliberal agendas. Such trends also extend to the visibility and synthetization of trans bodies, under white heteronormative, cisgender and compulsory able-bodied, ableist conditions.

For, as Duggan has remarked,

Neoliberalism is often presented not as a particular set of interests and political interventions but as a kind of nonpolitics—a way of being reasonable and of promoting universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government globally. Who could be against greater wealth and more democracy?³⁴⁷

As Duggan highlights however, neoliberal agendas bring grave consequences to publicly funded concerns and services:

The primary strategy of turn of the millennium neoliberalism is *privatization*, the term that describes the transfer of wealth and decision making from public, more-or-less accountable decision-making bodies to individual or corporate, unaccountable hands. Neoliberals advocate privatization of economic enterprises...[and] advocate that many ostensibly public services and functions be placed in private profit-making hands.³⁴⁸

The complex intertwining of forces described above with neoliberalist agendas extends to and includes medicine, mental health services, and publicly funded programs. Considering what I have outlined earlier in this project, the result of these intermingling forces and their connections blend together biopolitical forces with heteronormative, white supremacist,

347. Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” *Materializing Democracy*, 2002, pp. 175-194, 177.

348. Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” *Materializing Democracy*, 2002, pp. 175-194, 178.

racist, and ableist forces, creating a web of multiple oppressions which is nearly impossible to penetrate.

One question that neoliberal discourse camouflages and weaponizes through the medical model, that applies directly to trans mad people, and that Puar poses is “How much resistance can be stripped (from vulnerable/minority populations) without actually exterminating the population?” Injury, according to Mbembe, is a primary means of reinforcing slavery (dependence on the state).³⁴⁹ While the medical model does not injure or maim trans individuals overtly, through the diagnosis of transgenderism as disability and the ableist perceptions conjured by that diagnosis (and the view of trans as pathology), transness and madness become conflated.. This perceived fusion of transness with mental illness makes mad trans people especially vulnerable to the ableist forces that exist in many social spheres and institutions.

4.15 “Overcoming” Narratives: Ableism, Shame, Neoliberalism, and Necropolitics

Additionally, as highlighted by Clare, the language of medicalization relies on shame-based discourses as a means of enforcing corporeal alignment with white patriarchal ableist, sanist state agendas. Shaming trans-disabled people reinforces cisnormativity, ableism, and the patriarchal productivity of bodies, as articulated by Irving, earlier in this dissertation.

349. Achille Mbembe and Steve Corcoran, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 21.

More specifically, through a Western neoliberal capitalist lens, trans mad populations are not overtly killed for their corporeal inability to conform to normative culture--instead, if they cannot be ‘cured’ through passing, they are deemed debilitated and because of ableist undercurrents that pervade the medical model and society at large, they become subhuman. This dehumanization makes them vulnerable to transphobic acts where they are further shamed into silence, drained of their resources, exiled to the edges of society, and in many cases, are murdered or left to die.

I also want to point out that naming transness as defect and then evoking shame in its subject bridges the concept of medicalization, with cure, a concept that relates, as I highlighted above, directly to ableism, and more sinisterly, as previously described, necropolitics.

This hierarchical debilitating shame-oriented way of relating to trans-disabled bodies and minds (through medicalization and neoliberal ideals) is continually hijacked through a mingling of neoliberalist discourse and ableist language. Using an example of how ableism and advertising work to reinforce ableist narratives about cure, Clare critiques a billboard with an image of Whoopi Goldberg emblazoned on its surface, and the words “Overcame Dyslexia” alongside the phrases ‘hard work’ and “pass it on”.

Clare states:

To portray dyslexia as a reversal of m and e in the word overcame is dismissive and stereotypical. To pose individual hard work, rather than broad-based disability access, as the key to success for people with dyslexia is absurd and ableist. To pair a Black woman with the value of hard work in a country that both names Black

women as welfare queens and has, for centuries, exploited their back-breaking labor as maids and nannies, factory workers and field hands is demeaning and racist. Actually, the billboard enrages me.³⁵⁰

Clare provides another example of how everyday language mirrors and reinforces ableist institutional neoliberal narratives of “overcoming disability” and cure through an in-depth deconstruction of the documentary *Christopher Reeve: Hope in Motion*, which he claims as propaganda. He deconstructs rhetoric in the film used to convey ableist attitudes, identifying platitudes and sorrow inducing tropes to tell “another over-the-top story about a tragically disabled man who beats the odds, overcomes his paralysis, and through his courageous struggle gives us hope and inspiration.”³⁵¹

Clare describes Reeve’s depicted routine in the film, as the camera follows him through therapy and workout routines, as well as life choices around implanting a pacemaker machine in his abdomen so that he will be able to breathe without a ventilator, and follows him as he advocates for stem cell research. “There is nothing unusual here, just the same stereotypes,” Clare writes.

He unpacks Reeves’ narrative further:

His story is as much about wealth, whiteness, and male privilege, about great and infuriating entitlement, as it is about disability. He claims that “the most disabling thing about being disabled is a feeling of hopelessness.” He means despair about his ongoing paralysis, not the ableist violence, isolation, poverty, and lack of education and employment faced by many disabled people... Only a wealthy white man with a beautiful white woman at his side could possess this much entitlement....³⁵²

350. Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 9.

351. Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 11.

I bring up Clare's critiques here because they point to an added concern. My greatest fear is that my artwork, and dissertation is reduced to a similar "overcoming" narrative because of my whiteness, my cisgender able-bodied/minded appearance and privilege. Therefore, as I've previously articulated, I will again paraphrase Noble's earlier words, to openly discuss my identity and transition and passing as a white man and extend these beyond an anti-white supremacist politic to also include what whiteness and passing as a white man does for my disability politic.

In all, the social systems and institutions I've outlined throughout this chapter collide and create a complex web of oppressions that affectively mute the agencies of mad trans people. Thus, within these contexts, the mad trans subject, like Spivak's female subject, is also buried deep in shadow, and cannot speak. However, the abstract capacities of disability art offer potential beyond the political realms of conventional language, and it is through these capacities that the mad transgender subject can give shape to their experiences and linguistically transcend the forces that silence and oppress them.

352. Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 11.

Chapter 5 – Emancipation: Trans Madness and the Language of Disability Art

5.1 Introduction: Artmaking Through a Mad Trans Disability Justice Lens

As a mad white trans man who has been assimilated by the medical complex and its politics, it is imperative to articulate my passing privilege. I can expose that privilege by orienting the art in this project toward a disability justice lens. As Mia Mingus highlights, a disability justice-oriented approach embraces an intersectional lens of disability, that rejects monolithic understandings of the term in favour of more complex, whole and interconnected ones.³⁵³

This approach also acknowledges how ableism connects and affects other systems of oppression and institutions. Importantly, it fiercely interrogates the medical industrial complex and understandings of health that are rooted in ableist notions of bodies or “normalcy”. A disability justice approach also acknowledges the interactions and interplays of ableism on different bodies and minds, which are “complicated by race, class, gender, immigration, sexuality, welfare status, incarceration, age and geographic location.”³⁵⁴

353. Mingus, Mia. “Changing the Framework: Disability Justice.” Leaving Evidence, September 29, 2020. <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/>.

354. Mingus, Mia. “Changing the Framework: Disability Justice.” Leaving Evidence, September 29, 2020. <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/>.

In other words, through disability art's capacity to transcend ableist conventional systems of language and their institutionalization, a new mad trans language and perspective can be articulated. In the case of this project, crippling the aesthetic capacities of the digital photograph can work to challenge the dominant white abled sane cisgender masculine subject of Western culture, creating new language and space for mad trans resistance.

5.2 The Ableist Conflation of Madness and Transness: Implications

Clare comments that he has often heard trans people be complicit in their victimization through ableism, when they conflate their transness with "...a disability, a birth defect."³⁵⁵ Clare addresses three concerns in his unpacking of transness as disability: he articulates the medical mainstreamed assumption that trans is defect, and/or mental illness; he articulates the naïve ableism surrounding the concept of 'defect'. Further, he connects the word 'defect' to shame, which he states that medical technology will never cure.

Clare's remarks highlight the danger in conflating transness and disability (madness) but they also connect the trend to contemporary right-wing rhetoric that weaponizes transphobic/ableist/sanist attitudes worldwide. It is within this trend that ableist notions of madness merge with trans identities to serve transphobic state, institutional, and representational agendas. The conflation of ableism and transness can also merge with visual representations of trans bodies, to persecute them. For instance, as mentioned earlier in this

355. Susan Stryker, Aren Z. Aizura, and Eli Clare, "Body Shame, Body Pride: Lessons From the Disability Rights Movement," in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 261-265, 262.

dissertation, the degenerate art exhibits of 1930s era Nazi Germany, staged by the German government, hijacked the skewed visual perspectives of modern German Expressionism, paired them with images of the disabled, mentally ill, and institutionalized, and were used to justify the persecution and murder of disabled, mad, queer and transgender people. Could the current global political climate of transphobic sentiment hijack the work of trans artists in similar ways? If so, how can this dissertation and my second series of photographs work to resist these destructive cultural and sociopolitical forces?

Keeping the above questions in mind, the contents of my second series of images in this project are ideologically animated by the warning heralded by Sekula in his discussion of photographic practice and the state. Sekula describes the life of Black South African photographer Ernest Cole, and his photography of young black petty criminals and their acts of resistance during the apartheid. Sekula articulates how Cole's documentation of black arrests eventually got him in trouble with the law, and how that trouble meant leaving South Africa, to publish his book, *House of Bondage*, in exile. Do trans artists like me face a similar fate?

Juxtaposing the above forces with the earlier discussions in this project about whiteness, ableism, sanism, cis-heteronormativity and the failure of my photographs in the prior chapter leads to another question: how do I depict myself in this project? It is not enough to state that I do not want to pass as a cisgender man or be complicit in the reproduction of oppressions that my passing represents. As an artist, I must transform the meanings behind these statements into effective artworks. To accomplish this, I must reflect further upon the creative and cultural perimeters and significance of my medium (the

photograph), then theorize, and reimagine what a self-portrait of a refusal to pass would look like, and from these imaginings, create a second body of work that illustrates that refusal.

5.3 Reconceptualizing My Art Practice: Creating Mad Trans Resistance to “Normalcy”

In other words, in conceptualizing my second series of works, my first step was to consider how to craft a representational resistance to medicalized cis/heteronormative colonial white, transphobic compulsively able-bodied “normalcy”.



Figure 5.1 Valentin Brown, *The Body Farm says “MAYDAY! MAYDAY, MAYDAY!”*, 2019
(Private Collection of Max Ferguson)



Figure 5.2 Valentin Brown, *The Body Farm* says “RELEASE ME RELEASE ME RELEASE ME”
2019

To begin this process, I revisited some images that I first became acquainted with in 2019. These came from an exhibition entitled *Body Farm* by neurodivergent

trans interdisciplinary artist Valentin Brown (now known as Birdie Gherl), which took place at Tangled Art + Disability in Toronto. Brown's show was prolific in the volume of drawings they produced. Through an aesthetic that Brown described as "soft body horror", they queered their body with abject forms from nature to create a mythology of body monsters that describe their trans experience and the history of their life and intergenerational trauma.³⁵⁶

Throughout Brown's body of work, human and alien bodies twist and fragment. They are recognized as bodies, but only through their inference. These transed bodies do not conform to the sexed representations of bodies so often recalled in Singer's medical texts. They speak in whispers and contort forms that are recognizable in their biological contents. At the same time, these bodies are not easily taxonomized. They contain extra fingers, multiple legs, arms, torsos, genitals. In essence, these fragmented body monsters stand in for Brown and tell their story, creating vast complex physically emotive landscapes which recall both natural and synthetic forms, and which complicate the physical representation of their body. Through the complex intertwining of aspects of human forms, Brown articulates the complexities of their trans identity.

356. Tangled Art + Disability. "Valentin Brown: Body Farm." Akimbo, October 24, 2019. <https://akimbo.ca/listings/valentin-brown-body-farm/>.



Figure 5.3 Max Ferguson, *Deduction*, Graphite on Paper, 2021

Recalling the subject matter of Brown's images, I asked myself how I could complicate the reading of my body and move beyond the failed implications of my photographs. Through my interactions with Brown's drawings, I created a series of sketches which became the springboard for the creation of my second series of artworks.

The series of nearly thirty sketches, composed of graphite and pencil crayon, as well as two digital paintings, did not contain literal depictions of my body, but were portraits of what I call biological mindscapes. They attempt to furnish biological evidence through the organic trace of my hand and lines. They feature a stream-of-consciousness approach to biological and representations of sexed bodies, animals, teeth, eyes, mouths, and depictions of reproductive organs and creatures, a flurry of emotive lines, dark smudgy textures and/or bright colours, shadows that are not meant to represent the concept of literal self-portraits of my body, but of my mad transgender mind.

I made each one without a preconceived idea of what they would look like. The drawings formed on the paper as they were made. They are mental-emotive surfacings. Each one represents a clearing of my thoughts before writing, or the processing of concepts. I wirjed from the idea of using them as abstract self-portraits.



Figure 5.4 Max Ferguson, *The Visitor*, Digital Painting, 2020.

In a similar vein to Brown, my drawings combine animal and natural forms with body based biological ones and relate to my attempts to articulate and represent my trans identity. These drawings were also inspired by the goals of this project: resisting medicalization, confounding the sex based productive modes of the gender binary and



Figure 5.5 Max Ferguson, *Joy (Spring 1984)*, Digital Painting, 2021.



Figure 5.6 Max Ferguson, *A Vision in Thirds*, Graphite on Paper, Digital Media 2020.

the medical gaze. They can also be read as abstract re-interpretations of the transgender sublime, initially described by Singer.

The shapes, movement, and appearance of my graphite and digital sketches are, like Brown's works, monstrous representations that attempt to transmit and articulate the complexity of my trans identity through a series of tropes: eyes, teeth, biology, body fluids, skin, and blood.

Jeffery Jerome Cohen proposes analyzing visual cultures through the monsters they engender and his allegorical analysis of the concept of monster is easily applied to this early series of drawings. Cohen describes how aspects of culture (temporal, geographic, technological, corporeal) influence the construction of the ‘monster’—a categorical label that he associates with marginalization.³⁵⁷ In my drawings, I deconstruct the monster that I have imagined in my mind, one connected to a sense of disorientation, frustration, and feelings associated with my inability to represent myself in the physical world.

Cohen claims that deviant (trans) representation is especially prone to being monstrositized because it refuses to participate in the classificatory ‘order of things’³⁵⁸. Hybridized (trans) bodies become “dangerous” because of their ability to threaten distinctions, he asserts. Yet he states that it is through the concept and image of the monster that can we safely confront our fears and prejudices. By converting the sensations and feelings in my body into monstrous images, I am also converting the transphobic rhetoric I have witnessed and absorbed throughout my life to tangible visible metaphor. It is through these abstracted images that I began to transcend the disciplinary transphobic forces that surrounded me, claim space in the world beyond the physical depictive powers of the photograph, and speak.

357. Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture: Seven Theses." in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Kindle edition.

358. Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture: Seven Theses." in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Kindle edition.



Figure 5.7 Max Ferguson, *Closed for Business*, Graphite on Paper, 2020.

These early experimental drawings also represent attempts to piece together a visual language related to transgender representation beyond the gender binary. The results were compositionally striking, but chaotic and difficult to translate. These

drawings also very much relate to my attempts to language myself out of the limits of the photographic two-dimensional plane, and binarized gender representation to define my trans masculinity.

In some ways, they could be interpreted as linguistic representations and attempts to confront and overcome Spivak's concept of the white dominant male subject that my physical appearance suggests. However, because the language surrounding the body of that subject is wed to the gender binary, my drawings are most often dominated by fragments of recognizably sexed bodies: representations of genitalia, alongside male and female characteristics, and fragmented body parts. These drawings did not resolve the representational problem of my identity, but they were productive in their capacity to promote further meditation on the artistic representation of my trans identity.

5.4 Mad Trans Bodies and The Necessity of Representational Difference (?)

Importantly, the challenges I faced in the production of these drawings led me to meditate further on Hall's discussions of representational difference, particularly his points that relate to linguistics, which point to difference as both "necessary and dangerous".³⁵⁹ In two theoretical accounts, Hall works with Saussurian linguistic

359. Hall, Stuart, Peter Hamilton, Henrietta Lidchi, Sean Nixon, and Christine Gledhill. "The Spectacle of the 'Other.'" Essay. In *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications, 1997, 234.

principles, stating that difference is essential to meaning and that without difference, meaning could not exist. His first conclusion states that (visual representational) meanings depend on the difference between opposites.³⁶⁰ In the second account, he claims difference as necessary, because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the Other. Thus, I realized that these early sketches were also visual representations of my dialogues with the medical model, the gender binary, and the dominant cisgender patriarchal subject *in relation to* (italics mine) rather than outside of the language of the gender binary.

As this chapter has already described, trans histories and identities are prone to erasure through medicalization, cisnormativity, and even language itself, which is based on compulsive patriarchal, white, abled, sane, cisgender, colonial ideals. These drawings led to my realization that for representations of trans identities to be legitimized by mainstream society, they must constantly contend with their relationship to medical language: the sexed body and the gender binary. Outside of these systems, there is no language to describe trans bodies or their internal states. The phenomenon of transphobia in society is fortified through this linguistic problem. My early sketches in this project could be interpreted as depicting my frustration when relating to the limits of conventional and institutional language relating to

360. Hall, Stuart, Peter Hamilton, Henrietta Lidchi, Sean Nixon, and Christine Gledhill. "The Spectacle of the 'Other.'" Essay. In *Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications, 1997, 235.

transphobic forces, bodies and gender, through a repetition of tropes related to sexed bodies.

5.5 Resisting Medicalization: Mad Trans Corporeality and The Body-Mind

I've articulated earlier in this dissertation that Clare articulates the capacity to resist Cartesian dualism, initially built into the medical model and the medically enforced split of mind from body, through the claiming of the term "body-mind".

He states:

I settled on [the term] body-mind in order to recognize both the inextricable relationships between our bodies and our minds and the ways in which the ideology of cure operates as if the two are distinct—the mind superior to the body, the mind defining personhood, the mind separating humans from nonhumans.³⁶¹

As Clare notes, the ideology of cure, promoted by ableist (sanist) cis/heteronormative, colonial and white supremacist notions within the medical apparatus, promotes a distinction between mind and body, and ultimately taxonomizes an individual, based on the appearance of their physical appearance and genitals. It is through this medical practice of binarizing bodies, based on their superficial characteristics, then contrasting them with a person's identity, that Gender Dysphoria is diagnosed and that trans bodies are pathologized by the medical apparatus.

In their dated, but relevant article, Cohen-Kettenis and Gooren deepen this discussion, stating that the medical model's compulsion to discipline the body through the

361. Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017). Kindle edition.

gender binary and biology is dogmatic. They claim that the process by which the body is sexed does not end with the formation of external genitalia.³⁶² They also assert that the brain plays a role in the formation of a person's identity and that brain and body form the totality of a person.³⁶³

Although their assessment is highly contingent on the language of the medical model, Cohen-Kettenis and Gooren declare that trans is not a homogenous phenomenon.³⁶⁴ They also state that no psychometrically sound instruments exist to effectively “measure” transgenderism in a person, therefore there is no objective way to diagnose an individual as transgender, other than through the (trans) patient's subjective experience.³⁶⁵

In other words, the body-mind split emphasized by the medical model is rhetorical, but is treated as fact. Despite its subjectivity, this mind body split is necessary to treat the

362. Cohen-Kettenis, P. T., and L. J. G. Gooren. “Transsexualism: A Review of Etiology, Diagnosis and Treatment.” *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 46, no. 4 (1999): 315–33, 318.

363. Cohen-Kettenis, P. T., and L. J. G. Gooren. “Transsexualism: A Review of Etiology, Diagnosis and Treatment.” *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 46, no. 4 (1999): 315–33, 318.

364. Cohen-Kettenis, P. T., and L. J. G. Gooren. “Transsexualism: A Review of Etiology, Diagnosis and Treatment.” *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 46, no. 4 (1999): 315–33, 318.

365. Cohen-Kettenis, P. T., and L. J. G. Gooren. “Transsexualism: A Review of Etiology, Diagnosis and Treatment.” *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 46, no. 4 (1999): 315–33, 322.

trans subject through gender affirming care. The mind body split concept is a central feature of the diagnosis of gender dysphoria, and of the structure of medicine itself, and highlights the medical model as a controlling mechanism tied to the state, sociopolitical forces, and institutions through the systematic controlling of the body.

During early days of transgender as medical diagnosis, trans people were to embody the gender they identified as from a physical standpoint and were mentally required to align themselves with that gender. As discussed earlier, the example of Garfinkel's study of Agnes presenting herself as an attractive young woman who inhabited a male body but passed and identified as female is one of the most famous iterations. Clare's concept of body-mind can serve as a means of resisting medical classification in this manner, and refusing to submit to the white supremacist, cisgender, ableist, colonial, transphobic ideologies of medicine.

It is also through an adoption of Clare's body-mind concept as resistance, that my visual representations of mad trans identity as resistance to the medical model were formed.

5.6 Applying the Body-Mind to My Art Practice

For my second series of works, I initially envisioned unifying the photographic self-portraits of my body with the drawings of my mind state, (calling them self-portraits to emphasize the fusion) and treating them as a representation of the term. This fusion of photograph and drawing informed the visual structure of my final series of works in this project.

I also aimed to override my medicalization as a mad trans individual through the chaotic compositional structure of these drawings, with the idea that they could depict my mind outside of that medicalization and pathologization. Combined with my failed photographs, these two artistic aspects (photographs and drawings) represented an illustration of body-mind, but in the end, could not transcend the medical gaze because of their recognizable sex and body-based imagery.

In all, my attempts at a fusion of body and mind from an artistic medium perspective failed to confound the medical gaze, because the very symbols I attempted to override were still recognizable in my images. I attempted to represent my trans identity, but in the end neither my early photographs nor drawings were able to reject the aesthetic of the gender binary, sexed bodies and representational devices (genitals and body parts) involved in my trans experience or my passing as a white cisgender, able-bodied/minded man.

As my drawings show, with no representational or linguistic means to describe my trans identity and experience, the binarized language used to describe sex and gender hits a linguistic wall: it becomes an error. This linguistic error is represented by the duplication and warping of representational biological body based tropes and shapes in my artworks.

In other words, language bound to the gender binary, when describing trans corporeality can only replicate itself, rearrange itself, and repeat the same symbolic male-female-cisgender words, symbols, and rhetoric (shapes). My images did not lead

to new terms or representations for trans identity because there are none that exist outside of the language of medicalization and corporeal “normalcy”. Instead, their forms hint at recognition, but are unrecognizable. This core realization became the inspiration for the final group of artworks created for this dissertation.

5.7 Transphobia: A Linguistic Problem?

Richards, Bouman, and Barker discuss the connection between language and transphobia in the introduction to their volume *Genderqueer and Non-Binary Genders*, and state that the inherently transphobic nature of Western society is as much a linguistic problem (through its need to tie gender identity to medicalization, sex, and the gender binary) as it is one of misogyny and fear. They articulate a need for new terms which

refer to the two common configurations of body parts developed under common genetic expression—but which do not assume a cisgender norm; and make no inference regarding meaning or gender—either of the configuration or of the individual parts.³⁶⁶

Richards et al. relate further to the linguistic connections associated with transphobia and trans erasure in Western culture when they state that

The cultural imagination about anyone who is not normatively gendered...is influenced by what we can talk or write about intelligibly. Since the modern conversation about gender identity is heavily

366. Richards, Christina, Walter Pierre Bouman, and Meg-John Barker. Introduction. In *Genderqueer and Non-Binary Genders*, 1–7. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 3.

medicalized...so too are most of the words we have for ourselves and each other...We have no playful language, no admiring language, no nuanced language, and no affirming language...³⁶⁷

Because of this, departing from a medicalized way of relating to one another and the world as trans people is complex and difficult. This is because, as I've articulated throughout this project, the approach that normative culture takes when relating to us is the same way we often relate to each other: through caged binarized language, medical, and surgical terms. Further, as Richards et al. point out, the trans community is both culturally diverse and linguistically fragmented: in other words, it is decentralized and without consensus about what words are best to use communally. There is no universal trans dialect related to our experiences. Debates and disagreements about what are considered acceptable and what is not vary from one geographical region to another across the continent.³⁶⁸

367. Richards, Christina, Walter Pierre Bouman, and Meg-John Barker. "Non-Binary Activism." Essay. In *Genderqueer and Non-Binary Genders*, 31–51. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 41.

368. Richards, Christina, Walter Pierre Bouman, and Meg-John Barker. "Non-Binary Activism." Essay. In *Genderqueer and Non-Binary Genders*, 31–51. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 42.

Despite these facts, my artistic work in this project draws from one commonality: the main linguistic tenet of the disability rights movement, that disability rights are human rights, and from the dynamic slogan ‘nothing about us without us’.³⁶⁹

This statement points to a key theme in my project: as mad trans people who are presumed to be mentally ill, we must seize our cultural agency and articulate our experiences using our own language. Disability art provides a means of developing a transed language beyond medical pathology, through its anti-ableist stance.

As I’ve discussed throughout this project and illustrated so far through my (failed) artworks in this project, descriptions of trans experience can become linguistically claustrophobic and circular because of their connection to the gender binary, theories of medicalization and hetero/cisnormative institutions. Therefore, converting my knowledge to abstraction and image, in hopes of forging a new language for trans experience (by crippling my art practice using a disability justice lens) is another goal of this dissertation.

5.8 Visualizing Rationality as The Site of Madness Through Disability Art

To create this visual “transed” language I began by imagining how to visualize Angela Woods’s concept of rationality (hetero/cisnormative, abled “successful” masculinity)

369. Chandler, Eliza, Nadine Changfoot, Carla Rice, Andrea LaMarre, and Roxanne Mykitiuk. “Cultivating Disability Arts in Ontario.” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 40, no. 3 (2018): 249–64, 5.

as the site of madness,³⁷⁰ a concept which will be discussed and unpacked in more detail in Chapter 6. Through a disability arts lens, I wished to complicate and deliberately confound the image of the rationally (white, patriarchal, cisgender abled colonial) constructed subject using the (rational) symbol of the sexed body and the space of the digital photograph as metaphor, as described later on in this chapter.

Ultimately, the re-languaging of mad trans identity through disability art challenges the concept that though neither Spivak's dominant white (heterosexual cisgender abled sane) masculine subject, nor her feminine subject can speak, the mad trans subject as artist can, through their capacity to crip and complicate hegemonic normative linguistic systems, using image and abstraction.

As Mia Mingus explains further, disability art fuses aesthetics with an intersectional disability justice framework, grounding its motives in creating the conditions necessary to achieve justice for all people with disabilities.³⁷¹ Informed by the assertion that “full and

370. Woods, Angela. “Mathematics, Masculinity, Madness.” *Madness in Context: Historical, Poetic and Artistic Perspectives*, April 15, 2011, 101–9.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848880023_011.

371. Mingus, Mia. “Moving toward the Ugly: A Politic beyond Desirability.” *Leaving Evidence*, September 21, 2011.
<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/08/22/moving-toward-the-ugly-a-politic-beyond-desirability/>.

372. Mingus, Mia. “Moving toward the Ugly: A Politic beyond Desirability.” *Leaving Evidence*, September 21, 2011.

effective participation in society” is more than barrier-free access to public space and buildings, disability arts are motivated by full disabled access and meaningful participation in arts and culture, as producers and creators as well as audience members and participants.³⁷²

Further, art is, as Bennett states, a communicable abstraction of the artist’s primary (life) experience, not a linear description of it, as words are. In a world governed by exhausted oppressive institutional language and transphobic rhetoric, this is art’s strength.

According to Bennett, a contemporary artwork is not a literal translation of the artist’s life.³⁷³ This is its power—in challenging conventional and institutional language, by inhabiting an intermittent space between life experience and populist interpretations of reality, a contemporary artwork can transcend conventional forms of language, particularly words, and in the case of the mad trans subject, words that pathologize, such as medical

<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/08/22/moving-toward-the-ugly-a-politic-beyond-desirability/>.

373. Bennett, Jill. *Empathic vision: Affect, trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, 6-7.

374. Bennett, Jill. *Empathic vision: Affect, trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, 7.

language. As Bennett further explains, for an audience to effectively relate to contemporary visual art requires them to detach from the aesthetics of realism and linear narratives associated with mainstream, word-based approaches to communication. According to Bennett

...the kinds of “transcriptions” of experience one encounters in art do not usually invite us to extrapolate a subject, a persona, from them. Under these conditions, the affective responses engendered by artworks are not born of emotional identification or sympathy; rather, they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is registered in the work...art is best understood as transactive rather than communicative: It often touches us, but it does not necessarily communicate the “secret” of personal experience.³⁷⁴

Under these contexts, the artwork (in this case the photograph) does not directly imply a direct narrative of personal experience that its impressions can instead be critiqued, interpreted, and discussed. In fact, art evolves through critique, which is a subjective rather than objective practice. It is from this indirect open ended vantagepoint that the disciplinary configuration of trans studies, mad/disability arts and justice, and visual art form the potential to re-language the concept of trans experience outside of medicalization, colonization, ableism, and neoliberal/capitalist ideals, as I illustrate through my second series of works.

5.9 On Confronting the Medical Gaze as A Transmasculine Subject

Put another way, it is through the language of abstracted sublimity (art), as a transmasculine subject, that my identity and body can confound the binarized medical gaze and the misogynistic patriarchal forces that discipline the female sexed body in Western

culture. While my first series of photographs did not achieve this because of my passing in them, through the “communicable language of sensation and affect” or abstraction, I can transcend conventional linguistic forces and medicalization, neoliberal and capitalist agendas by infiltrating the material makeup of the digital photograph itself: its software, interface, pixels. Further, I can complicate the technopatriarchal influence of surveillance capitalism and its machines through the digital photograph’s surface, by drawing and marking on it, leaving a trace of my corporeality behind.

5.10 Technopatriarchy, Photography, the Gender Binary, and My Mad Trans Identity

Through disability art and a transmasculine, mad, disability justice lens, I also aim to complicate the inherently patriarchal ableist (necropolitical) capitalistic big tech agendas that the software and interface of Photoshop and digital photography represent. Here I embrace Halberstam’s art of failure once again in a productive way—by deconstructing the (digital) photograph through crip technoscience and the glitch, which I unpack and explain below.

I will first address the inability to describe transgender as a corporeal identity outside of the medically sexed body. As I’ve outlined above, this inability to language trans experience outside of the systems that oppress it exposes the binarized roots of normative language in relation to bodies and to the promotion of the erasure of trans lives through omission. This illustrates that the inability to language trans bodies and experiences outside of white patriarchal, cisgender, heteronormative, ableist transphobic contexts is not only confined to medicine. It also points to a transphobic cultural bias, an inability to describe the world beyond institutionalized

heterosexist patriarchal, white cis/heteronormative, ableist systems and the gender binary, as well as the words and language that govern those systems.

Circling back to my art practice, if I consider the photograph to be an extension of those systems, and a visual representation of these dominant representational paradigms in culture as Hall does, influenced by common viewpoints of the era as I've already discussed, (and consider Spivak's dominant male subject as part of those paradigms), then by extension, I can assume that the (digital/analog) photograph, (and all Western art forms) is predominantly patriarchal, and normatively influenced. This assumption extends to photography as a medium, its technological evolution, and its subsequent digital transformation.

The influence of patriarchy on photography can also be observed through the colonial white interpretation of the photograph as a rational objective entity, and technological innovation (also a rational concept). Famed critic Andre Bazin sums up these mainstream perceptions of photography when he states that the photograph's objective nature makes it the most credible form of picture-making.³⁷⁵ German artist

375. Bazin, André. *What is cinema?* Translated by Hugh Gray. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967, 14.

Gerhard Richter echoes Bazin, saying that photography is the only type of image that speaks literally.³⁷⁶

5.11 The Photograph and “Crippling” Spivak’s Dominant White Male Subject

However, a photograph is not an innocent object. As Hall claims, photographic representation is not simply a record of a given moment, because it is not naïve to the values and ethics of those who have worked within it.³⁷⁷ In other words, the photograph’s assumed “objectivity”, status as a “rational object” and connection to technology (the camera) can also be applied to (white ablebodied/cisgender/sane) patriarchy, and Spivak’s dominant male subject.

Applying a feminist lens, the patriarchal influence on digital photography is an outcropping of society’s gendered discourses, affirmed through associations with white male dominated theories of computerization and therefore male thought, intellect, reason, violence, and militarization. Feminist theory states that these forces produce technophobia in the female subject, who is associated with emotion,

376. Obrist, Hans-Ulrich. *Gerhard Richter: The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews 1962-1993*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995, 31.

377. Hall, Stuart, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon. *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London etc.: Sage, 1997, 76.

intuition, and the body.³⁷⁸ Therefore, the expectations surrounding computerized technology (ie. the computerized camera) Halberstam claims, are that computer intelligence and robotics enhance binary splits and emphasize the dominance of reason and logic over the irrational. This statement could also be proven through the influence of technopatriarchs on Big Tech.³⁷⁹ However, drawing further from Halberstam, because the blurred boundaries between mind and machine, body and machine, and human and nonhuman are the legacy of cybernetics, automated machines (ie. the digital camera) provide new ground upon which to argue that gender and its representations are not only connected to capitalist production, but through technology's fusion with capitalism, technological production as well.³⁸⁰

In other words, to crip the photograph and its digitization, to render its contents into an illogical form that cannot be recognized is to depict the concept of the patriarchy and rationality as the site of madness: mad trans masculinity.

378. Halberstam, Judith. "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine." *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991): 439–60.

379. Little, Ben, and Alison Winch. "The New Patriarchs." Introduction. In *The New Patriarchs of Digital Capitalism: Celebrity Tech Founders and Networks of Power*, 1–26. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021.

380. Halberstam, Judith. "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine." *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991): 439–60, 439.

5.12 Trans as Digital Glitch, Trans as Gender Glitch

Therefore, trans can be interpreted as a productive crack in constructed gendered discourses and disciplinary forces of the gender binary, articulated through the medical model. Through this interpretation, applied to the digital photograph, mad transed visual representation can become a “glitch” in its structure that challenges the medical gaze’s dominant white patriarchally informed structures, and the visual construction of the rational white male cisgender subject itself.

Thus, the glitched space of the digital photograph carries a double meaning in these contexts: it becomes a metaphor that can illustrate and challenge gendered discourses of these systems and their limits, even the fabrication of what constitutes the “human”. Further, because it expresses itself through glitched software platforms and through the abject rather than the digitalized aesthetic of “too perfect”³⁸¹ in my second series of artworks, the glitched warped white bodies in my artworks also challenge (glitches) Singer’s white abled cisnormative colonial concept of beauty, discussed earlier, as well as the dominant patriarchal normative subject, and influence of the white techno-patriarchal cisgender abled sanist construction of the machine on culture and society. In effect, it is through the glitching (warping and contorting) of

381. Manovich, Lev. “The Paradoxes of Digital Photography.” Essay. In *Photography After Photography (Exhibition Catalog)*, 1995, 17.

these digitally constructed bodies through software that I can construct my form of protest against my passing, and my medical assimilation as a trans person.

In other words, the glitch, applied to the Photoshop platform and digital photographic space in my images, is a tool of disability justice. In this context, my aesthetically warped, abject corporeal (glitched) representations are forms of illustrative protest related to the “curing” of my transgender condition through my passing (and co-option by the medical gaze) as a white abled sane cisgender man.

To put it another way, if my medical transition from female to male, from being read as a queer woman to being perceived as a white cisgender abled sane (normative) man is defined as “cure” and I am deemed successful and cured through my capacity to appear beautiful/ replicate Spivak’s dominant white male subject and assimilate into compulsory hetero/cisnormative productivity as Irving outlines, then applying the glitch through a crip technoscience lens to create depictions of glitched bodies and glitched unrecognizable gender is my artistic way of refusing cure.

The word “glitch” carries the potential to confront the normative linguistic and cultural biases embedded in the structures and interfaces of photographic/digital

technologies, but also because the glitch has been claimed, as Whitney Pow articulates, a historically trans mode of media production.³⁸²

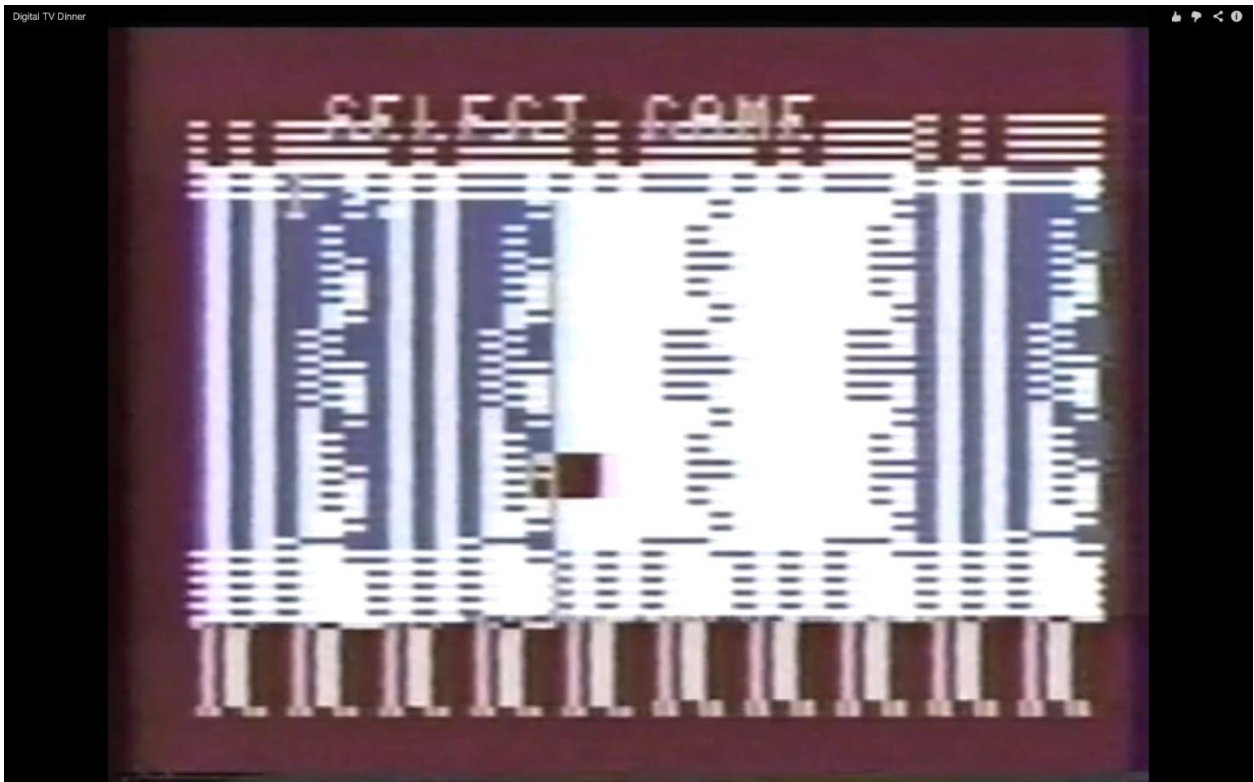


Figure 5.8 Jamie Faye Fenton, *Digital TV Dinner (Detail)*, 1978.

<https://neural.it/microposts/digital-tv-dinner-glitch-video-art-generated-by-cartridge-video-game-from-1979/>

382. Pow, Whitney (Whit). “A Trans Historiography of Glitches and Errors.” *Feminist Media Histories* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 197–230.

Reflecting on transgender digital artist and programmer Jamie Faye Fenton's *Digital TV Dinner* (1978),³⁸³ which she states is the first piece of experimental video glitch art ever created, Pow claims glitch, computational media production, and glitch art as transgender-informed cultural spaces. The work was created using the Bally Astrocade, a home computer console Fenton designed herself, that for six months was the cheapest computer ever made.³⁸⁴ *Digital TV Dinner* is ultimately a record of productive (computational) failure. Through the aesthetic unpacking of Fenton's artwork, Pow unravels how the representational idea of glitch and its capacity to dismantle the computerized system can be used as a visual metaphor for trans that illustrates how internalized disciplinary forces of the patriarchy and gender binary, cisnormativity and normalization (expressed through the assumptive code of computational rule sets concerning the user) can be dismantled through glitch's chaotic tendency toward happenstance.³⁸⁵

Pow states that Fenton's work is also aesthetically transed in its reliance on her body's capacity to create (deliberate) glitches, expressed through the performance

383. Fenton, Jamie Faye. "Digital TV Dinner." YouTube, October 9, 2009.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ad9zdlaRvdM&t=2s>.

384. Pow, Whitney (Whit). "A Trans Historiography of Glitches and Errors." *Feminist Media Histories* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 197–230, 197.

384. Pow, Whitney (Whit). "A Trans Historiography of Glitches and Errors." *Feminist Media Histories* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 197–230, 200.

of thoughtful misuse of the computer system's hardware systems-the slamming of a fist on the device, or ejecting a cartridge at the wrong moment.³⁸⁶ As Fenton describes what her body is doing while creating glitches in the artwork, she also makes visible the user's body's role in the creation of digital art, code, and digitization. Her work highlights how the body of the user is engaged with the machine, a concept often overlooked when engaging with digital artwork today.

Pow's discussion of Fenton's artwork also highlights how the use of computerized technology, despite its capacity to dissociate from the body, is dependent on bodies and their assumed capacities to interact with its interfaces. This is another aspect of the digital realm that seldom is acknowledged, alongside the fact that we internalize the normalized (patriarchal white cisnormative ableist) scripts associated with computerized technology and culture through our interactions with it.

In other words, the creation of these scripts through human (corporeal) means remains invisible, and they are assumed to be factual occurrences rather than ones created and upheld by human and institutional agents. As Wendy Hui Kyong Chun further articulates, the phenomenon of 'choice' regarding operating systems of computers

385. Pow, Whitney (Whit). "A Trans Historiography of Glitches and Errors." *Feminist Media Histories* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 197–230, 200.

... limits the visible and the invisible, the imaginable and the unimaginable. . . . You are not, however, aware of software's constant constriction and interpellation (also known as user-friendliness) unless you find yourself frustrated with its defaults."⁷

Thus, through the phenomenon of undoing, that which is left behind in an image by the glitch shows through breakdown in the system, "a fleeting awareness of the way we are imbricated, or unable to be imbricated, within its systems and structures."

5.13 Applying the Glitch to My Art Practice

Applied to my composite photograph-digital drawings, the glitch representationally grafts itself to the hologram of the medicalized body. Through the glitch, each composite image becomes a series of repetitive biologically based tropes which confound medical categorization and represent cisgender corporeal and representational failure. Through their inability to be categorized biologically or medically, these bodies claim the space confined by the frame as one where a new (visual) definition of trans is formed, based on their failure to be recognized by the medical gaze.

Another impetus surrounding the creation of these photographs is informed by Pow's discussions relating to the body and technology. Pow articulates the history of computing and technology as one of enumeration, claiming data as a stand in for lives, time, populations, and bodies. Put another way, technology becomes a disciplining agent of the body within the constraints of culture and society, that through dominant white patriarchal colonial ableist cisgender heteronormative ideologies, applies the gender binary as a mode of production.

Pow states that through computing

Populations are accounted for through the mapping and accounting of bodies to smaller and smaller units that could fit into smaller and smaller spaces: the punch card, the transistor, the microchip. We might read the history of computing as a history of density, a history of compression, a history of space, motion, of inside and outside.

Pow situates the documentation of the body inside these systems and histories, a phenomenon that I translate physically and aesthetically into the equivalent of a frame around an image, or its borders and limitations.

She asks

“...is there an outside to this system? And what might a trans history of glitch tell us about imagining the possibility of an outside to these technologies of sovereignty?”

To imagine this possibility implies a linguistic means of doing so, a concept that offers great potential to the articulation of trans identities. However, in her discussion, Pow does not allude to the patriarchal/colonially informed constructs and ideologies associated with technology, nor the medicalized language used to describe and pathologize trans bodies, nor the reliance of these descriptions on their juxtaposition to the (cisgender) gender binary. As previously stated, the issue is that trans bodies and identities are directly tied to these linguistic issues and limits, and to the biological descriptions of medicine when relating to the world, through pathology. However, through its capacity to transcend conventional language through abstraction and visual representation, disability art provides a means for the mad trans subject to do just that.

Circling back to my images, when the digital photograph is interpreted as a rational object it can depict the effects of mad trans identity and corporeality on white ableist patriarchal colonial cisnormative sovereign technological forces through the concept of the glitch, as in a productive glitch of gender. In my images, this glitch is represented through a visual rupture in the artificially constructed, disciplinary techno-patriarchal systems of power and production that pathologize transness through the medical model, through the image's inability to be categorized or "read" clearly. It is through this gender glitch, this rupture, the digitalized bodies in my images cannot be easily classified or categorized through sex.

Therefore, under the conventional linguistic conditions I describe above, the trans subject's expressive linguistic potential is confined to trans *in relation to* cisnormativity through the concept of trans as (biological) error and illness. This connundrum is represented in my images through repetitive body parts and tropes, genitals that do not quite conform to human ones, openings that go nowhere, and bodies that resemble the human, but not completely.

5.14 Digital Photographs, Mad Trans Agency, and the Refusal of Cure

If digital photographs and the technology that is used to create them represents the capacity to hyper-perfect white bodies and represent the fully actualized, cured, white, abled, cisgender, male subject, then the glitch is the disruption of that subject and its systems, and the agency of the trans mad subject. All of these aspects are represented in my composite synthetic photographs.

Nael Bhanji notes that narratives of linear progression centred on dichotomies of “before and after and inside and outside are disciplining colonialist frameworks that create “palatable” and “acceptable” trans embodiment and histories:

Contemporary transsexual narratives are often accounts of linear progression: the journey from one location to another—“from fragmentation to integration, from alienation to reconciliation, from loss to restoration”—where one is meant to leave the transgressive space and transition towards one’s fully embodied identity. The transitional journey itself is merely a link between locations—a sort of gendered non-zone between origin and destination—and not a place to call home.³⁸⁷

I draw inspiration from Bhanji’s description when relating to my images, as illustrations of the “gendered non-zone” they describe; a place that representationally provides sanctuary from/ flies in the face of the fully binarized cured embodied disciplined (white abled male cis sane) passing trans subject espoused by the medical model that I represented in my earlier photographs, a place of uncertain destination which I dwell in as a mad trans subject, and which I do identify as home.

In other words, the trans subject’s agency lies in its corporeal capacity to not be cured, to not conform, to physically represent the delineation from the narratives described by Bhanji. Aesthetically in my synthetic composite photographs, this nonconformity metaphorically translates to lines that do not meet, geometry that is skewed and imperfect, or

387. Bhanji, Nael. “Trans/Scriptions: Homing Desires, (Trans)Sexual Citizenship and Racialized Bodies.” Essay. In *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, edited by Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, 512–26. New York: Routledge, 2013, 521.

that leads nowhere, and aspects of forms that repeat and allude but do not relate to human biology. When relating this capacity to my final group of images, it is through this lack of representational conformity--their visible difference, even transness-- that a productive rupture in the normative awareness of the viewer can occur.

This potential can lead to further reflection that promotes awareness of the constrictive language of the gender binary, potentially exposing its agenda as a system of indoctrination and discipline that ties the body of the human subject to the state and its institutions, rather than a belief in the promotion of its perimeters (through the sexed body) as biological medical fact. The glitched contorted forms in my composite images represent the rupturing of all the systems I've described in this dissertation, particularly the medical model, through their incapacity to be easily recognized or categorized. They illustrate the limits of the language of the gender binary, and the inability of trans to transcend that language from a physical medical perspective. Yet, through this languaging of boundaries and limits, their forms also create new ones, suggesting that the space of the digital could hold potential for reforming and transforming the concept of trans and mad trans identities.

Chapter 6- Artworks

6.1 Introduction

My final series of artworks in this dissertation is a group of ten composite synthetic photographs, entitled “Gender Glitches”. As a group, they depict a series of abstract self-portraits: digitally compressed, distorted, quasi-sexed organic body inspired forms, created by deliberately glitching stock photography and my own drawings through the interfaces, layering functions, and editing processes of Adobe Photoshop software.



Figure 6.1 Max Ferguson, *Glitch #1*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2023.

Each composite photo-drawing replicates biological forms or aspects of biological bodies that are deliberately difficult to recognize, decipher and taxonomize. Theirs is a shape that aspires to communicate the idea of a crack or linguistic glitch in the gender binary (as articulated above) through the incapacity to be medically categorized. This inability to be categorized occurs through repetitive tropes of flesh, organic shapes, abject forms that hint at genitalia and human organs, not quite literal representations, and/or asymmetry.

To summarize, each of these artworks uses visual representations that allude to warped, abject, unable-to-be sexed bodies, confined and caged by the two-dimensional planes they inhabit. Their forms are sometimes squished or trapped; they freeze, replicate, divide, twist, shift, and duplicate, but can never escape the frames they are surrounded by. As I've already mentioned and illustrated through my other bodies of artwork in this dissertation, they are informed by the idea of my biology and art practice attempting to represent my trans experience and failing. My art is also a depiction of my failed efforts to successfully language my mad trans experience through the medical model's limited vocabulary of sex and the gender binary. It is through these visual representations of failed language and visual representations (and their representations as glitches of medicalized language) that I aim to confound and question the medical gaze that pathologizes my trans identity and invalidates my experience as a mad person through the ableist, sanist state sanctioned language of medicine.

The images are conceptual self-portraits, a representational fusion of multiple photographs and drawing techniques. Where the photographs and drawings first emerged in

this project as separate entities, here they merge and unite to form a new representational concept: glitched gender.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, my first series of photographs in this project could only depict and relate exclusively to my body and its appearance in the world, and my sketches could only relate directly to mind processes and gender binary sexed bodies. In making my new series of images, I kept the idea of mind body fusion at the forefront of their composition, meditating on the idea of representing and complicating (glitching) sexed bodies to make them unrecognizable. The goal as I've reiterated, was to render the body illegible to the medical gaze, and the technopatriarchal, institutional, and sociopolitical forces that apply this gaze to bodies to discipline them.

These works are also a representational homage to the intersectional space of trans madness. These self-portraits starkly contrast with my first body photographs. Through their digitization, they hover above the concept of the body, dissociating from its politicization and medicalization. It is through their dissociative, fluid properties as technological entities that their meaning becomes a conceptual one, related to the pluralities of my identity, and the pronoun "they".

6.2 Applied Theories and Inspirations

Each image is abject and inspired by the idea of reframing the concept of Singer's transgender sublime. They were conceived with the aim of moving away from Singer's associations and discussion of "the beautiful", outlined earlier in this dissertation. As beauty is often conflated with successful artworks as well as cisnormative, colonized white bodies,

I use the concept of the distorted warped white body to repel or shock the viewer, so that they might stand back and look deeper, or even look away.

Whiteness, and white privilege, as I've outlined throughout in this dissertation, is also a silent perquisite to articulating and commanding one's trans corporeal identity in Western culture, due to the inherent white supremacist underpinnings of the medical apparatus. For instance, my whiteness is the reason I can clearly discuss my refusal to pass, and my identity as a mad trans man in this dissertation. In my second series of works, I aim to glitch the concept of white, cisgender beauty that I addressed in my earlier series of photographs, through the Photoshop interface. Using an intuitive sense of the layering mechanism in Photoshop, I've reframed the photo editing tools as sculptural ones, stretching images, glitching the color palettes, and layering images over top of each other, drawing on them, warping their surfaces, and reworking them through the software so that they resemble photographs, but behave more like glitched collage works.

There are at least two or more bodies in each image, often fused together in the genital region, but without a sense of completely knowing their sexes. In several of these, bodies are held together by representations of bands of skin, organ tissue or brain matter and/or textured (drawn) erotic/abject tissue. In the middle of these tissues are raised areas, that do not hint directly to male or female sexed bodies. Some parts of bodies are blurred or cloned repeatedly to illustrate the confounding of the gender binary when languaging trans identity.

I draw my inspiration from the dualisms inherent to both the gender binary and constructed language of the medical system in relation to sex. I am also referring to the

Cartesian dualistic language of medicine, and the trauma of not being recognized, represented by scar tissue. This aspect of my composite photograph collages was also inspired by the idea of representing fusion drawn from Clare's discussion of "body-mind".

My images also imagine what a refute of Cartesian dualism would look like. By obscuring the genitals of the multiple bodies in the works/and or combining them into one body, and removing their connections to faces and facial features, I am attempting to refuse the medicalization and fetishization of trans bodies, as discussed earlier by Singer. The fusion of the bodies represents the multiplicities of my identity: all of myself in one image, something which could not be depicted or completed through my series of photographs. Above all, the sense of the image is one which aims to refuse objectification and fetishization by the institutions (medical and sociopolitical) that have been highlighted in this project.

6.3 Confounding the Medical Gaze Through Digital Photographs and Glitch Collage

The image on the following page represents a jumping-off point in relation to the reformation of this dissertation.

As I've articulated at various points throughout this project, there is a need to bring a trans-cis cognizance to Mad Studies and a sanist approach to Trans Studies. As an academic, articulating this realization theoretically is understood. However, as an artist-researcher, formulating these concepts and realizations and translating them into effective artwork is another. In other words, while making these images, I asked myself how do the concepts I've just described translate to the concept of research creation? I feel that the answer for me, as

an artist, is best articulated through a visual representation of the concept of refusal to be categorized through institutional eyes, namely through the means of confounding the



Figure 6.2 Max Ferguson, *Glitch #2*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2022.

medical categorization of the body. This image is my first iteration of this concept, combining aspects of the digital photograph with glitched stock photography, digital drawing and sculpting techniques, photo editing tools from the Adobe Photoshop interface, and other low grade software photo editing programs, including PicMonkey and Photopea.

By creating an image/self-portrait that is not easily read as male or female, and by omitting the literal reading of this body, through conceptual means (something that I could not do in my photographs, as their meanings are confined by the limits of corporeal depiction and depiction itself) I have re-created an effective representation of the refusal to pass, and therefore the refusal to be medicalized. As passing relates directly to both Mad and Trans Studies through the diagnosis of gender dysphoria, a successful representation of the refusal to pass and therefore be medicalized (in both a medical and gender binarized sense) represents successful research creation, and therefore a successful conclusion to my project.

As previously discussed, I've omitted an easy reading of the bodies in my images. Genitals are not obvious, body parts are covered, obscured, or fused together, and the overall impression is one that confounds the eye, overwhelms it, or makes it hard for the viewer to decipher the meaning of what they are seeing. As I've reiterated, this image also mimics the sensation of encountering what Singer refers to as "the transgender sublime" which he documents in his article: that deliberate and defiant visual disorientation which he describes

when those privileged enough to hide behind their assumed normalcy encounter (and make abled/transphobic assumptions about) non-normative bodies.³⁸⁸

6.4 The Glitch, Disability Justice, and Crip Technoscience

As I've also discussed, it is because of the abled assumptions placed on users' bodies and minds when interacting with computers and technology that the glitch has become a symbol of disability justice. The glitch has become an important form of activism through the disability justice-oriented application of crip technoscience.

Specifically, the underpinnings of my project are inspired by the crip technoscience oriented glitch art of queer crip artist and activist, Andie Shabbar. In her art project *Queer Alt Delete*, Shabbar applies a crip technoscience lens to digital portraits, claiming glitch not as error, but as a critical creative mode of activism. Through her project, Shabbar situates the interplay between glitch and body, user and computer, error, and potential as a productive site of protest against contemporary technologies and sexual surveillance.

By extension, Shabbar states that glitch art embraces algorithmic uncertainty and subjectivity to "facilitate experimentation with new political becomings."³⁸⁹ Materially,

388. Singer, T. Benjamin. "From the Medical Gaze to Sublime Mutations: The Ethics of (Re)Viewing Non-Normative Body Images." Essay. In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Stephen Whittle and Susan Stryker, 601–20. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013, 614.

389. Shabbar, Andie. "Queer-Alt-Delete: Glitch Art as Protest against the Surveillance Cis-TEM." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3–4 (2018): 195–211, 197.

glitch art approaches media in ways that produce the unexpected. This can include data manipulation, corrupting algorithmic code, or using hardware in unintended ways to introduce an element of error into the art-making process.³⁹⁰

Applying this definition to my artistic process and longstanding knowledge of Photoshop's interface, I glitched the algorithmic assumptions that Photoshop applies to my creative use of photographic images. In essence, using my thirty years of experience with Photoshop and my intuitive knowledge of its behaviours, I manipulated its algorithms through its capacity to layer images. It was Photoshop's innovative approach to layering effects within digital images which led to its adoption as the photo industry standard. This layering approach is programmed to make assumptions about its user's approach to digital images and how that user will manipulate them. While most users focus on the image as a flat surface and photographic convention, I treat the Photoshop interface as a sculptural medium. As in my early years of my BFA program, when I worked in three-dimensional media, particularly through the medium of clay when hand building objects, through Photoshop I can treat photos and images from the digital world in a similar way to virtual "clay". As when working with clay sculpture, layers must build up and be worked into a shape before you are able to sculpt the form you desire. It is the same with Photoshop and images.

390. Shabbar, Andie. "Queer-Alt-Delete: Glitch Art as Protest against the Surveillance Cistern." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3–4 (2018): 195–211, 197.

By glitching the filters associated with each layer, applying, and layering even more images over others, and then manipulating these through the tools in the software interface, I was able to create sexed body “errors” or what I term “embodied gender glitches”. I mentioned previously that the creative bedrock of these images was a mixture of stock photographs and my own digital drawings. Therefore, in the context of my artworks, glitch has two applications: my physical (corporeal) application of the glitched Photoshop interface, and the glitched representations produced.

Through a disability justice-crip technoscience lens, the glitched Photoshop interface, (which I view as corporate software used against itself) becomes a form of protest against the medical gaze, surveillance capitalism, technopatriarchy, and its normative ideals. The glitched body representations that arise from the Photoshop interface as a result are another form of protest against the transphobic dominant white male ableist cisgender gaze, and its disciplining forces that attempt to cure me of my transness through my capacity to pass.

According to Shabbar, “glitch witnesses and testifies to the slippages, cracks, and fissures of control, surveillance, and technology to reformat error as an act of resistance.” My composite self-portraits claim glitch in the same way, applying a visible concept of “error” (asymmetry, imperfection, abjection) to glitch the surface of the represented body. Through their inability to be deciphered, these glitched representations of the body stand as a form of trans mad protest against the medical gaze’s pathologization of my trans body and my madness.

6.5 The Digital Photographic Space as Metaphor

As I've already highlighted in this dissertation, I am inspired by the discussions of masculinity and madness that medical humanities researcher Angela Woods articulates. She describes how conventional Western psychiatry claims schizophrenia as pathology that involves overarching losses of logic, abstract thinking, self-reflection and free will: essential characteristics of mind and subjectivity.

Drawing from the theories of psychologist Louis Sass, Woods challenges the medicalization of the mad subject, redefining schizophrenia as an extreme corporeal form of introspection that overtakes instinct and alienates the subject from their body and senses.³⁹¹ She describes how mainstream accounts and representations of schizophrenia (especially pop cultural ones) rely on the (cisgender) male subject, and how that subject responds to the breakdown of their logical mind. Through these accounts, she frames rationality (cisgender masculinity) as the site of madness.³⁹²

391. Woods, Angela. "Mathematics, Masculinity, Madness." *Madness in Context: Historical, Poetic and Artistic Perspectives*, April 15, 2011, 101–9, 102.

392. Woods, Angela. "Mathematics, Masculinity, Madness." *Madness in Context: Historical, Poetic and Artistic Perspectives*, April 15, 2011, 101–9, 102.

Woods also describes how the breakdown of rationality in the mad (cisgender) male subject unsettles and collapses the Western ideal of masculinity as logical and distinct from feminine associations with passion and the body.

If the mad cisgender male subject unsettles patriarchy, then perhaps in this light, through the crip capacities of disability art, the mad transgender male subject can redefine masculinity.

While Woods' writings are situated within linguistic confines of the medical model and its cisnormative tendencies (as outlined throughout this dissertation), they provided a springboard from which to "crip" my second series of photographs. For instance, Woods comments on how madness is (cis) gendered. Through her discussions, she describes how the gender binary is applied to psychiatric and medical institutions, to discipline its human subjects, even as it attempts to "cure" them. Her commentary also sheds light on how bodies and minds are disciplined (through gender) in relation to the concept of madness.

Above all, Woods's critique of masculine madness as a disruption of the rational disorients and dislocates Spivak's dominant white sane male subject by situating the discussion of madness as feminine (relating to affective and physical sensory disorientation from the body) in the male subject, one documented by Elaine Showalter in her well-known book *The Female Malady*, when she states how women have traditionally been associated with

...the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind. [...] Thus, madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine.³⁹³

This corporeal disorientation and dissociation from the gender binary that Woods articulates through madness is a central consideration that, through that dissociation, fed and inspired my second series of transed artworks.

In other words, when the affective, abstract capacities of art and disruptive qualities of the glitch merge with a mad/disability arts lens, the result is a “cripping” of the photograph’s normative capacities, resulting in a disorienting from normative, abled sane (cisgender male) subject and a reorienting and reclaiming of photographic space as one of linguistic expression and mad trans agency. By deepening this reclamation of space and applying the concept of the rational masculine as the site of madness, (and applying the glitch to the compositional space of the digital photograph as metaphor for this phenomenon) my second series of artworks also aims to depict a physical representation of mad transgender masculinity.

6.6 White Patriarchal Rationality as the Site of Madness: A Mad Trans Perspective

As I’ve articulated throughout this project, I write from a mad, anti-psychiatric perspective. Quoting from Lefrancois et al., this perspective takes a critical stance of

393. Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980*. London: Virago, 1987, 3-4.

psychiatry and views the medical model as biologically reductionist. It considers alternative forms of helping those experiencing mental anguish, using humanitarian, holistic perspectives which do not reduce people to symptoms but instead are understood within the social and economic context of the society in which they live. Applying a mad activist/disability justice lens to Woods' critical discussion resituates madness in the cisgender male subject not as pathology or anomaly, but rather as productive disruption of the (affective) disciplining of Spivak's dominant masculine subject, through the "irrational" concept of the feminine, which I've incorporated into these images as a way of disrupting masculine representational physical characteristics and tropes.

Through engagement with the disorienting corporeal and affective conditions of madness, the authority of the dominant masculine subject collapses, and is exposed as an oppressive, ableist, white, mode of production. To disrupt the patriarchal constructs of this dominant subject is a beginning. To fully transcend these forces, however, that subject must also "trans-scend" the disciplinary institutional language employed by the medical model, that of the gender binary. It is because of the limits of conventional language that this concept becomes virtually impossible.

However, this task can be accomplished when the mad trans subject dialogs with and abstracts conventional language through artmaking. The case of the mad transgender male subject is especially relevant. It is his/their corporeal capacities that unsettle the cisgender body as a mode of production, and whose madness challenges the production and dominance of the rational cisgender masculine subject.



Figure 6.3 Max Ferguson, *Glitch #3*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2023.

The question remains: when relating to these forces, what aesthetic shape does my mad trans artistic resistance take? How does mad trans resistance to these forces manifest artistically when relating to the photograph?

Australian interdisciplinary artist Archie Barry provides an aesthetic and philosophical starting point when he states that the subject of trans self-portraiture and representation in photography has been fueled by the erasure of trans lives from human history. He claims, “the ability to see yourself in the past is essential to finding belonging in the world.”³⁹⁴

Despite erasure, as articulated by Barry, trans representation in self-portraiture has been popularized in the Western art canon through white and white passing gender bending images such as those of Claude Cahun, famed painter Frida Kahlo, or Andy Warhol’s photographs of his muse Candy Darling. The expressive and political capacities of trans self-portraiture have also been celebrated in the brave work of Del LaGrace Volcano’s trans portraits and self-representations.

394. Archer Magazine. “Trans Erasure, Trans Visibility: History, Archives, and Art.” Archer Magazine, December 1, 2019. <https://archermagazine.com.au/2018/11/trans-erasure/>.



Figure 6.4 Claude Cahun, Marcel Moore, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, Gelatin Silver Print, 1928.
<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/claude-cahun-untitled-self-portrait>



Figure 6.5 Del LaGrace Volcano, INTER*me: *Lanna Back*, Giclée Print, 2011.
<https://adventuresintimeandgender.org/wormholes/interme/>

Examples of successful trans self-portraiture are also visible in the strikingly vulnerable self-portraits of trans disabled artist Lorenza Bottner, whose work confronted the trope of the abled cisgender white woman, prized and fetishized by cisgender male heterosexual artists, or Alex Orellana's binarized self-portraits which draw from the artist's embodied presentation as both masculine and feminine. The emphasis on (assumed) whiteness in these images must be articulated, as their contents can replicate colonial transphobic oppression, as my earlier photographs do. However, as these artists illustrate, conventional representations of trans self-portraiture rely on the idea of photograph as realism and typically depict white or white presenting representations of the trans body, representations that rely



Figure 6.6 Lorenza Bottner, *Untitled* 1982 (Private Collection)

<https://www.artnews.com/feature/who-was-lorenza-bottner-why-is-she-important-1234595987/>



Figure 6.7 Lorenza Bottner, *Face Art*, Black and White Photographs, 1983
<https://www.artedia.com/News/LORENZA-BOTTNER-ART-AS-ACTIVISM>



Figure 6.8 Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*, oil on canvas, 1940.
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78333>



Figure 6.9 Alex Orellana, *Middle Child (Detail)*, Black and White Photograph, 2017.
<https://chazen.wisc.edu/exhibitions/middle-child-photographs-by-alex-orellana/>

on the trans body *in relation to* the white supremacist medical language of the gender binary. As the gender binary is intimately connected to the colonization of our bodies, and to our medicalization as trans people, how do we move beyond its linguistic and representational tendency to sanitize trans bodies and pathologize us in photographs, and how can we do this when the rational cisgender white patriarchal space of the photograph is assumed to depict “the true reality”? Based on Barry’s remarks, while trans representation itself is a form of resistance, another dimension to that representation arises when it is one founded on an intersectional understanding of trans madness.



Figure 6.10 Cecil Beaton, *Andy Warhol and Candy Darling*, Black and White Photograph, 1969. <https://carnegiemuseums.org/carnegie-magazine/spring-2020/a-feminine-force/>

To put it differently, as a white mad transgender male artist, I ask myself, how can I transcend the photograph's dependence (and trans representation on) the white cisgender colonized body and the gender binary? Additionally, how can my art attend to the photograph's limited capacities when depicting the surface of the body? Further, how do I disrupt the photograph's rationality that I've articulated in this chapter—and how do I visually crip the rational nature of the photograph to illustrate Woods's claim of rationality (white, abled, cisnormative, heteronormative masculinity) as the site of madness?

I began by excavating the photograph's role in preserving patriarchal, colonial, (hegemonic) views in Western culture. The camera and the photograph have played a crucial role in upholding ocularcentrism, the Western ableist bias of sight as humanity's dominant sense.³⁹⁵ Art historian John Berger demonstrates this bias when he begins his well-known book *Ways of Seeing* with the quote "Seeing comes before words...The child looks and recognizes before it can speak."³⁹⁶ Praise for Berger's volume, emblazoned on its back cover claims it as "one of the most influential books on art in any language" at the time of its publication in 1972. Aside from its roots in Eurocentric white, ableist colonial art historical

395. "Ocularcentrism." Oxford Reference, 2011.

[https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100245338#:~:text=A%20perceptual%20and%20epistemological%20bias,be%20the%20opposite%20of%20phonocentrism\).](https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100245338#:~:text=A%20perceptual%20and%20epistemological%20bias,be%20the%20opposite%20of%20phonocentrism).)

396. Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 2008, 1.

vernacular, Berger's words typify how the privileged white, male, abled, cisgender subject dominated the art historical landscape of that time, and how its influence endures within the art world today.

White supremacist, patriarchal ableist, cis/heteronormative ocularcentrist views continue to dominate cultural conversations about (Western colonial) art. For example, while artists have experimented with how we see by reworking concepts such as three-point perspective or colour theory, few have questioned the actual idea of seeing or the affective dominance of (and ableist rhetoric related to) the eye on culture itself. Photography's role in furnishing sight as "objective" evidence has also fortified vision as the dominant, "authentic" sense, and by extension, the photograph as the site of the rational, and therefore truth. This led to the idea that the photograph replicated "ordinary sight".³⁹⁷ This concept of "ordinary sight" generalizes the person who engages with photographs, and is the basis for white, colonial, patriarchal, ableist, art historical perspectives like Berger's, akin to Spivak's white male cisgender subject.

6.7 The History of the Photograph: From Analog Physical Object to Digital Hologram

The mutable history and nature of the photograph must also be acknowledged. The photograph's dependence on the camera (and its processes) ties its evolution to that of

397. Cohen, Jonathan, and Aaron Meskin. "On the Epistemic Value of Photographs." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 2 (May 5, 2004): 197–210.

technology. This is not new: throughout history, ‘photography’ was named as one way of understanding processes of surface marking and their connections to human culture.³⁹⁸

However, thanks to the advent of the camera phone and influence of the Internet, photography has morphed from a technology tied to film and paper into one that encompasses digitization, mathematics and computerization, and by extension, white geek masculinity and the patriarchal influence of Big Tech.³⁹⁹

Martin Lister further summarizes the photograph’s technological transformation:

The camera has become a computer – a computer with sensors – and an element, if a key one, within an extended system of connected technologies...Photography has become algorithmic and computational (Rubinstein & Sluis 2013, pp. 21–40), and the computer and network technologies of the twenty-first century that now constitute ‘digital photography’ are no longer discrete, monolithic machines and dedicated places, they are disaggregated and distributed. They pervade our environment, they are ubiquitous, they are ‘everyware’ (Kember 2013, pp. 56–76). Digital technologies, generally, have become pervasive and embedded in the physical environment we inhabit.⁴⁰⁰

An added rational dimension that ties the photograph to dominant patriarchal influence is how today’s cameras are tied to surveillance capitalism: used to harvest social data through

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398. Lehmuskallio, Asko. “The Camera as a Sensor: The Visualization of Everyday Digital Photography as Simulative, Heuristic, and Layered Pictures.” Essay. In *Digital Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices*, edited by Edgar Gómez Cruz and Asko Lehmuskallio, 243–66. London: Routledge, 2016, 245.
399. Little, Ben, and Alison Winch. “The New Patriarchs.” Introduction. In *The New Patriarchs of Digital Capitalism: Celebrity Tech Founders and Networks of Power*, 1–26. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021, 18.
400. Lister, Martin. “Is the Camera an Extension of the Photographer?” Essay. In *Digital Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices*, edited by Edgar Gómez Cruz and Asko Lehmuskallio, 267–73. London: Routledge, 2016, 271.

software, corporate, and digital networks. As Couldry and Mejias explain, through digitization and data colonialism employed by Big Tech, social lives on media platforms around the globe are mined as a source of capital, via the influence of colonial (patriarchal) forces, through computational devices.⁴⁰¹

As Couldry explains, Data colonialism combines the predatory extractive practices of historical colonialism with the abstract quantification methods of computing.⁴⁰² Through the development of data colonialism and digital surveillance-oriented capitalism, a camera is no longer an idle, passive object that waits for the photographer to use it. Now, through networks and digitization, it becomes an entity that collaborates with the photographer. In other words, now that the camera “thinks” and is animated by capitalist, technological forces, its user is merely its extension, or even its host.

401. Couldry, Nick, and Ulises A. Mejias. “Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data’s Relation to the Contemporary Subject.” *Television & New Media* 20, no. 4 (September 2, 2018): 336–49, 339.

402. Couldry, Nick, and Ulises A. Mejias. “Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data’s Relation to the Contemporary Subject.” *Television & New Media* 20, no. 4 (September 2, 2018): 336–49, 337.



Figure 6.11. Max Ferguson, *Glitch #4*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2023.

It is because the camera and digital photograph are now visibly and materially connected to Spivak's (rational) dominant white male subject through the above-mentioned forces, that crippling the software of the digital camera and reconstruction of the digital photograph

through a disability aesthetic is imperative. Disability art, in this context, holds potential to convey (through pictorial representation) Wood's concept of white male abled rationality as the site of madness. In the case of my second series of works, the mad rational serves as an entry point into languaging my art practice and allowing my experience of mad transness to speak openly, leading to my validation and liberation.

Cultural generalizations and physical attributes that relate to photography and the digital camera also hold "cripping" potential. For instance, while analog cameras were initially

prized for their optics, lenses, and capacities to physically transfer light impressions to film and paper ("photography" translates to "light writing"), today's cameras *mimic* the concept of the physical photograph, instead relying on a complex network of computational technologies and institutions to create holograms of photographs. As mentioned earlier, through their software, both cameras and photography are now intimately tied to (patriarchal/rational) technology, capitalist corporations and corporate agendas. While the camera's affiliation with consumerist culture is not a new phenomenon, its capacity to shapeshift through digitization and computing technology makes it a complex ephemeral and contestable object.

It is through the camera and digital photographic software, the Internet and networks, that cameras and those who use them indirectly become the property of inventors, developers and tech companies through their consumerism. In addition, (because of camera phones) cameras have become so commonplace that their presence has become a form of ocular white noise in the world, whose presence can be felt across technological platforms and social media.

The social view of cameras and (digital) photographs as “modernity (populism) run riot” is also not new, but the digital camera phone’s magnified presence in the world and capacity to be accessed by almost anyone has produced assumptions about the person holding it, and its design.

In other words, because of its connections to Big Tech and capitalism (and by extension Big Tech’s dependence on the “white male genius trope” as I’ve discussed, alongside colonialism and patriarchy), today’s digital camera is built to appeal to the largest profitable audience: a normative public, and by extension, the dominant white cisgender, compulsively able-bodied/ heterosexual (male) abled sane subject. This aspect of the camera and digital photograph will be discussed later in this chapter, when I touch on how artist Trevor Paglen uncovers the inherent white patriarchal, even misogynistic implications in AI software, and their potential effects, through his digital exhibition “From Apple to Anomaly”.

As Lemuskallio describes, many software developers who work to develop a camera’s AI capacities are not aware of or interested in the sociopolitical ramifications of

their creations.⁴⁰³ It is through its capacity to generalize and assume that its user is an extension of white patriarchal cisgender heteronormative ableist corporate agendas that the camera/digital photograph becomes the ideal crip platform from which mad trans disability justice and art can take flight. The capacity to crip the digital photograph also holds potential for critiquing capitalist modes of production, particularly through the concept of the glitch.

6.8 A Mad Trans Approach to Crippling and Glitching the Photograph

In unpacking the concept of glitch in relation to my new series, I draw from the concept above, that the digital image is a simulation of reality: that is, it relies on the capacity to “fake” visual reality. As Manovich states, what the digital camera relies upon replicating is not reality but photographic reality—that is, reality seen by the camera lens.⁴⁰⁴ The digital photograph is, in other words, a form of computer graphic. It has not achieved realism, but photorealism. It cannot embody reality, (because it does not have a body) only its photographic image.⁴⁰⁵ In the following paragraphs, I will explain how is through its lack of corporeality that the digital photograph can effectively be crippled as a form of activism.

403. Lehmuskallio, Asko. “The Camera as a Sensor: The Visualization of Everyday Digital Photography as Simulative, Heuristic, and Layered Pictures.” Essay. In *Digital Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices*, edited by Edgar Gómez Cruz and Asko Lehmuskallio, 243–66. London: Routledge, 2016, 243.

404. Manovich, Lev. “The Paradoxes of Digital Photography.” Essay. In *Photography After Photography (Exhibition Catalog)*, 1995, 14.

405. Manovich, Lev. “The Paradoxes of Digital Photography.” Essay. In *Photography After Photography (Exhibition Catalog)*, 1995, 14.

As I've outlined, when we look at digital images, it is the assumption that a photograph represents reality, that it is a literal replication of sight, alongside the ableist (colonial) assumption that sight is the dominant, most refined sense of humanity, that allows us to be tricked into assuming the digital simulation of reality through computing devices is real. The digital image deceives our eyes and brains. As Elke Reinhuber states, with the increasing ease in shooting photographs through the aid of machines, and their increasing quality, we have already observed a change in the attitude, in particular a desire to 'over'-beautify or aestheticize the captured reality.⁴⁰⁶ In light of what I have discussed so far in this chapter, I argue that today's digital photograph seduces and appeals because it romances the dominant white patriarchal cisgender ableist gaze, and its capacity to sanitize organic bodies, and difference providing a sense of (white corporeal, colonial) hyperperfection. According to Manovich, the digital photograph

...can have unlimited resolution and an unlimited level of detail. It is free of the depth-of field effect, this inevitable consequence of the lens, so everything is in focus. It is also free of grain -- the layer of noise created by film stock and by human perception. Its colors are more saturated, and its sharp lines follow the economy of geometry. From the point of view of human vision...it is hyperreal...more perfect than human vision.⁴⁰⁷

406. Reinhuber, Elke. "Synthography – an Invitation to Reconsider the Rapidly Changing Toolkit of Digital Image Creation as a New Genre beyond Photography." *Lecture Notes of the Institute for Computer Sciences, Social Informatics and Telecommunications Engineering*, 2022, 321–31, 322.

407. Manovich, Lev. "The Paradoxes of Digital Photography." Essay. In *Photography After Photography (Exhibition Catalog)*, 1995, 17.

So, alongside its limited capacity to depict reality because of lack of bodily reference, according to Manovich, the digital photograph is in fact too perfect, and too real. He articulates that this is because the synthetic image is free of human and camera vision. It has no grounding point in the body, no frame of reference in relation to the world outside of the screen.⁴⁰⁸

Through this perspective, it is useful to recall Douglas's earlier discussions of the (white patriarchal colonial) human impulse to sanitize and organize the world. If through the dominant vision of this impulse, "disorder" is viewed as a form of pollution, which must be symbolically eliminated in the name of cultural "purity", and if the digital realm represents the ideologies of the dominant white cisgender male subject and the forces surrounding it, then the digital graphic (photograph) becomes an agent of white compulsory abled patriarchal colonial normativity that reproduces Douglas's discussion of the desire to eliminate "flaws"—any human attribute that deviates from white supremacist, abled, normative culture.

In effect, I claim the realm of the digital to be overridden by white supremacist, patriarchal, colonial impulses via surveillance capitalism, a realm (as I've already mentioned) that is also governed by Spivak's dominant male subject and the systems and language associated with that subject. Through the gender glitching agency of the mad trans subject and the language of disability art, the digital realm, holds potential to be reclaimed as

408. Manovich, Lev. "The Paradoxes of Digital Photography." Essay. In *Photography After Photography* (Exhibition Catalog), 1995, 17.

a space of mad transgender revolution, that glitches the forces of surveillance capitalism and the oppressive gaze of the medical model.

Put another way, the digital camera and photograph reproduces and reduces humanity and the planet to a digital capitalistic grid, “a world reduced to geometry, where efficient representation via a geometric model becomes the basis of reality”.⁴⁰⁹ Through its digitization, the digital photograph is informed by a digitally colonialized perspective, the photograph no longer inhabits the cultural realm of human sociopolitical realms, or even the earth. Rather, as digital graphic, through its hyperreal/perfect aesthetic, it becomes an extension of the white hetero/cisnormative transphobic ableist impulse to symmetrize, normalize and sanitize human society.

Therefore, under the influence of digital colonialization and white ableist patriarchy, through the influence of medical gaze, the digital image becomes an entity hinged to state and institutional corporeal control; a living model of Foucault’s theories of biopower aimed at controlling and propagating forces of normalization in populations. In the case of the mad trans subject, this is accomplished through the medical model and pathologization.

To put it differently, through the forces articulated above, the digital image becomes a symbol of (surveillance) capitalism, white supremacy, ableism, and hetero/cisnormativity;

409. Manovich, Lev. “The Paradoxes of Digital Photography.” Essay. In *Photography After Photography* (Exhibition Catalog), 1995, 17.

an abstracted visual language of eugenics that could participate in necropolitics. A recent example of this pertains to technopatriarch Elon Musk's decision to refuse the Ukraine's need to use his company's (SpaceX/Starlink) Internet services to defend themselves against Russian forces, resulting in civilian deaths. To counter the forces that inform its capacity to replicate these nefarious eugenics-oriented behaviours, the imperfect body, the organic, the human must be articulated in the machine. It is for this reason that adopting a disability politic, and crip aesthetic is crucial in my photographs, through the concept of glitch.

Through the glitch, I crip and complicate the visual representation of the perfect patriarchal, white, cisgender, able, sane (cured) body, and articulate McRuer's theory of compulsory ablebodiedness as well as Clare's theory of bodymind, discussed earlier in this dissertation. Through crip technoscience, the glitch, and the phenomenon of error that I induce through tampering with photo creative software, I reclaim my humanity from the sanitizing influence of technopatriarchal transphobic ableist forces, and by extension, carve a place for an intersectional approach to human expression that allows and creates space for my silenced mad trans perspective. Through the glitch and the error in these systems, I become empowered.

Connecting the camera to an abled perspective, Hamraie and Frisch articulate in their article, *Crip Technoscience Manifesto*, technology and its design

has yielded an ahistorical position that science, technology, and medicine are anathema to crip world making, ignoring disabled peoples' ongoing, creative, and open-ended appropriations of science, technology, and medicine, particularly in acts of protest and "epistemic activism"⁴¹⁰

As mentioned earlier, today's digital cameras are computational devices that mimic photographic processes, translate them into numeric values, and replicate them as holographic entities composed of computer code and pixels. Therefore, as the photograph is now viewed as a digital object produced by computational devices, I can apply a different

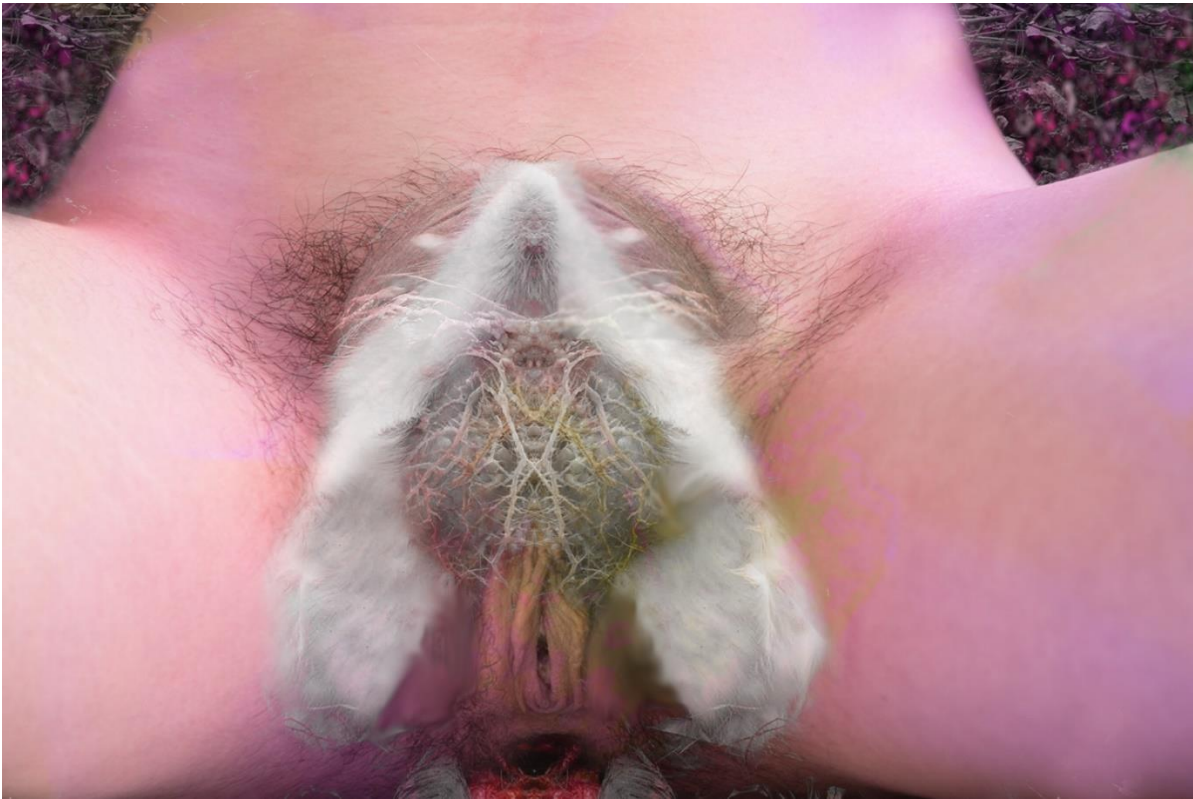


Figure 6.12 Max Ferguson, *Glitch #6*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2023.

410. Hamraie, Aimi, and Kelly Fritsch. "Crip Technoscience Manifesto." *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 2019): 1–33.

approach to my second series of works, one based in the concept of “crip technoscience”. As Hamraie and Frisch explain, crip technoscience braids together two provocative concepts: “crip,” the non-compliant, anti-assimilationist position that disability is a desirable part of the world, and “technoscience,” the co-production of science, technology, and political life.⁴¹¹

Hamraie and Frisch state that Crip theory applies disability as resistance against compulsory ablebodiedness.⁴¹² According to Frisch, crip theory also resists neoliberal assimilation and inclusion practices by marking disability as desirable relational practice.⁴¹³ Crippling the hegemonic assumptions and constructions of computer software through the concept of the glitch is a material means of resisting these dominant hegemonic assumptions and perceptions that are mobilized through a user’s interaction with a camera.

411. Jasanoff, Sheila. *States of knowledge: The co-production of Science and Social Order*. London: Routledge, 2010.

412. Mitchell, David T., and Sharon L. Snyder. *The biopolitics of disability: Neoliberalism, ablenationalism, and peripheral embodiment*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018.

413. Fritsch, Kelly. “Desiring Disability Differently: Neoliberalism, Heterotopic Imagination and Intra-Corporeal Reconfigurations.” *Foucault Studies*, June 17, 2015, 43–66.

To explain further, today's camera is no longer confined to the limitations of lenses and photosensitive surfaces. No longer is photo editing carried out in darkrooms, behind closed doors. Instead, through an interconnected network of apps and corporately developed software, the computer camera can analyze image data, and shift the pixels and appearance of that image through interactive algorithms, then connect to other data spaces and store image files. In essence, today's camera has become a living surveillance device. The camera, once an entity tied to buttons and physical processes, now operates neoliberally through software developed and employed by tech corporations as a means of marketing and generating capital through a normalized/normalizing lens.

Put another way, as Sarvas and Frohlich assert,

In a nutshell, domestic photography has an inherent duality. From the point of view of the general public, snapshots and family photographs can be insignificant, banal, and visually uninteresting. They are trivial, inaccessible, and predictable...From the private point of view, and the point of view of immediate family and friends, the snapshots are probably the most important pictures in the world. They trigger rich memories and emotions (good and bad); they create togetherness, social bonding, and belonging; they capture and store personal histories for current and future generations; and they are building blocks for constructing a socially acceptable image of us. Another way of summarizing this is to say that the core *values* of domestic photography are to support memory, communication, and identity.⁴¹⁴

Photography's capacity to generalize visual representation and promote cultural tropes and stereotypes (as Hall has highlighted) was always evident in its early analog history (through public consumption of photographs), and because today's digital snapshot

414. Sarvas, Risto, and David M. Frohlich. *From snapshots to social media - the changing picture of domestic photography*. Springer, 2011, 7.

revolves around the accelerating nature of technology in the world and consumer habits of the public, the digital snapshot, like its predecessor, is a populist device. Just like early photographs, it appeals through its capacity to engage with the lives of the mainstream populace. In other words, it is a promotional tool of dominant capitalist, colonial, white, hegemonic ideologies, an agent that stereotypes representation as Hall has mentioned.

As this chapter has highlighted, photography's legacy is also built upon corporate and capitalist assumptions and social stereotypes about domesticity, family, communication and identity of the individual holding the camera. This is especially true now that photography is invariably linked to the digital realm, and as I've mentioned, surveillance capitalism, Big Tech and corporate power. As Sarvas and Frolich highlight, technology is deeply driven by mechanisms of standardization, and these are largely built on consensus.⁴¹⁵ I bring this concept to light because it is important to note that because of the influence of consensus, new camera technologies (due to their association with capitalist profit, corporations, and agendas) are also based on mainstream assumptions about their users, and their knowledge of cameras, photography theory, and computation. These assumptions are applied by software developers, who in their quest for profit and notoriety by the mainstream (abled) public, as previously discussed, seldom consider the social aspects of photography or its history when creating new software for cameras.

415. Sarvas, Risto, and David M. Frohlich. *From snapshots to social media - the changing picture of domestic photography*. Springer, 2011, 167.

In other words, the capacity of the digital photograph and digital camera/software to express or represent difference and be crippled or complicated by disabled (or intersectional) perspectives is often overlooked, or not considered by developers. If it is, it is with the ableist idea that a company designs *for* disability (or the oppressed group in mind), not with someone who identifies as disabled.⁴¹⁶ This differentiation between mainstream disability technoscience and “crip” technoscience, must be articulated.

Through a disability justice approach to digitization and photography, we can effectively “crip” technoscience, and can confront and complicate the patriarchal white capitalistic, ableist, normalizing, hegemonic technological structures of the digital photograph, the camera, and its software. We can accomplish this, not by crippling the physicality of the camera (as is the assumption with mainstream technoscience), but instead by glitching/cripping its technological elements at a cellular level: through the application and deliberate misappropriation of software to pixels and code.

6.9 Mad Trans-ness and Crippling the Digital Photograph: More Considerations

Therefore, considering the above, as a mad trans artist, I approach the disciplining behaviours and structures of the digital photograph as rationalizing normalizing agents, invested in the maintenance of patriarchal, white, heterosexual, abled, sane colonial capitalist

416. Hamraie, Aimi, and Kelly Fritsch. “Crip Technoscience Manifesto.” *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 2019): 1–33, 4.

value systems, and the discipline and curing of my disability/madness, as it is viewed as Kafer articulated earlier, as the site of “no future”. The digital photograph, through its intimate association with software development, technology and big tech capitalism, physically represents the dominant ideological and hegemonic structures of the Western world. As user, I am assumed by software engineers and technological institutions to be that subject: able bodied, sane, and compliant with patriarchal, cisgender heterosexual, white abled colonial culture. In crippling the structures of code and pixels in my photographs by glitching their software, which through their programming by corporate profit driven software developers, assume my capacity as “normal” or social positioning as dominant (white cisgender heterosexual abled male hegemonic) subject, I am applying a mad aesthetic to the photograph, and performing an act of disability justice.

Keeping these facts in mind, if the camera is a corporate-driven drone, a sensor that makes normative cultural assumptions about my beliefs and social conduct, and applies these to my photographs through the normalizing agent of software, how do I crip my photographs? I have acknowledged that photographic behavior has changed. The most obvious shift, as I’ve stated above, relates to the camera’s technological capacity (as a computational device rather than a passive object) to form a relationship with its human user. It does this, as Manovich stated earlier, through the appeal to the dominant white patriarchal subject, the promise of instant gratification, and the sanitization and disciplining of the organic body through the veil of the hyperreal, and the hyperperfect.

In other words, the digital realm seduces us. The omniscient eye of the digital camera converts asymmetry into perfect geometry, sanitizes the “imperfections” (diversity) of the body and the “real” world. Within the context of the medical model, the corporate driven digital camera becomes a means where the perfect symmetrical white, patriarchal, able-bodied, sane, cisgender, heterosexual subject/body (and ideologies of the medical gaze) can be actualized. Thus, to cripple photographs and photographic software by refuting their sense of hyperperfection, through promoting and achieving a sense of asymmetry, obtuseness, and abjectness in them, is to protest the digital obsession with the hyperperfect, (even eugenics oriented) aesthetics and stereotypical dominant white patriarchal, abled sane cis/heteronormative rhetoric that they and surveillance capitalism in the digital realms represent.

It is also important to consider the social implications of crippling the photograph. As I’ve outlined, both the digital camera’s capacity for producing images and its subsequent hijacking by Big Tech has turned it into a profit driven, (and state sanctioned) tool of



Figure 6.13 Max Ferguson, *Glitch #5*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2023.

surveillance, that easily conforms to the dominant ideologies I've described above. Another way that this is accomplished, as I've explained, is through the normative, capitalist oriented attitudes of software developers, who leave the trace of their patriarchal, white, cisgender, abled bias through code in the corporate software that they create. Photoshop for instance, was created by brothers Thomas and John Knoll in 1988 as a simple image editing program, but is now an outcropping of Adobe Inc., and has developed extensively as software over the

past three plus decades. As mentioned earlier, it is now viewed as the industry standard when it comes to the digital editing process. This is why I chose Photoshop as my “canvas” for my final series of works.

An additional aesthetic consideration in my second series is how the concept of the digital editing process is developed extensively through standardization, a means by which technology consistently advances. This standardization is marked by a tendency towards assuming and appealing to the largest audiences to generate capital. This assumption translates to a reliance on the dominant white male abled cis heteronormative subject I’ve described throughout this chapter, and by extension, patriarchal techno-capitalist agendas. Therefore, to crip the photograph, is to protest these agendas.

In other words, in my process of crippling the image, I have considered the behavior of digital photographs and their software. As Gomez Cruz articulates, it is through software such as Photoshop that photography has transformed from a physical medium for collecting memories, to a digital algorithmic interface. The truth is that today, “photography” is used more as an interface, sometimes without ever involving the image itself.⁴¹⁷

417. Cruz, Edgar Gomez. “Photo-Genic Assemblages: Photography as a Connective Interface.” Essay. In *Digital Photography and Everyday Life Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices*, 228–42. London: Routledge, 2016.

It is by adopting the camera and software as interface rather than image alone, that allows me to transform the normative, rational space of the photograph (at micro level) into one that relates to trans mad and disability justice. Further, because the software they produce is tied indefinitely to Big Tech and its associations with patriarchy, white supremacy, ablebodiedness, ableism, sanism, neoliberal agendas and surveillance capitalism, it can be assumed that corporate software developers and engineers produce with the dominant (white male abled cisgender) subject in mind. One could even argue that the patriarchal structure of the software itself is embedded with the normative assumptions of Big Tech.

6.10 “From Apple to Anomaly”: The Hidden Patriarchal Bias in AI (Camera) Software

American artist and geographer Trevor Paglen is best known for his politically charged digital artworks that address aspects of mass (state) surveillance and data collection. Paglen unpacked the hidden patriarchal human bias in AI driven software through an exhibition entitled “From Apple to Anomaly” (2019), which was held at the Barbican Curve in London.⁴¹⁸

418. Paglen, Trevor. “Trevor Paglen: From Apple to Anomaly.” The Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve, September 2019. <https://sites.barbican.org.uk/trevorpaglen/>.

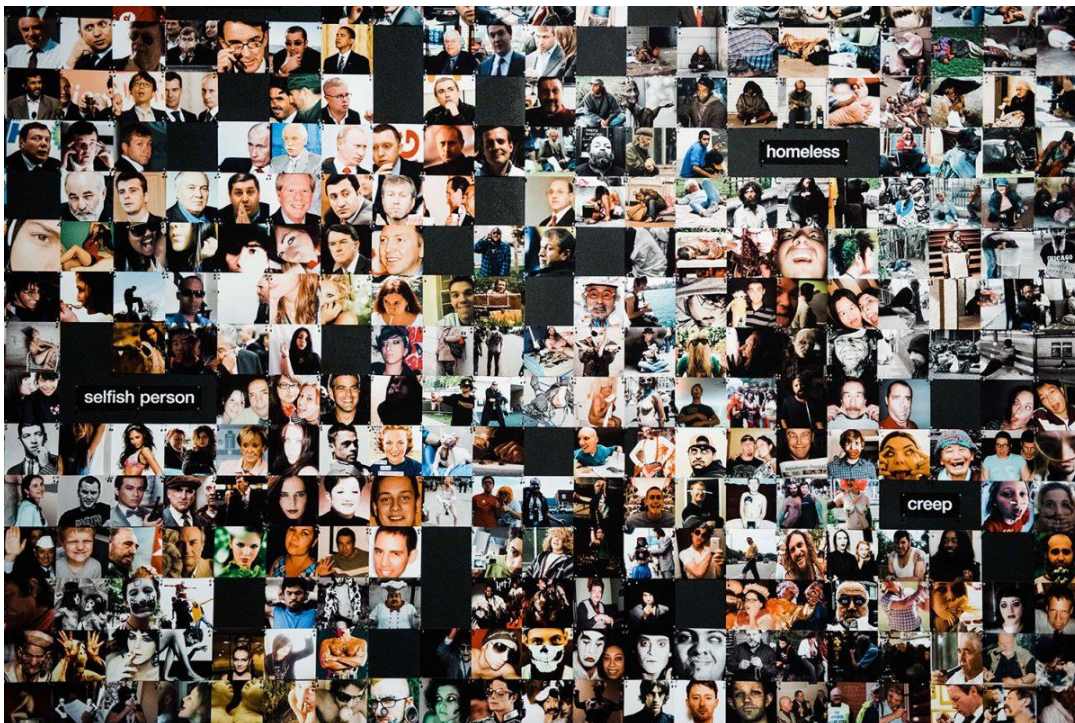


Figure 6.14 Trevor Paglan, “From Apple to Anomaly” (*Exhibition details*), Digital Photographs, 2019. <https://paglen.studio/2020/04/09/from-apple-to-anomaly-pictures-and-labels-selections-from-the-imagenet-dataset-for-object-recognition/>

Paglen's exhibition explored images known as datasets, used to train algorithms. Through these, he illustrated how artificial intelligence and "machine learning" use images (datasets) to recognise objects and produce classificatory systems that "recognise" individuals.⁴¹⁹

He charted and categorised over 30,000 images from ImageNet, the largest dataset in use today for developing AI and algorithms. Imagenet's images are organised into 20,000 categories and classificatory labels. These labels range from benign terms like

"apple" or "strawberry" but also contain derogatory terms like "Failure", "Loser", "Nonstarter", "Unsuccessful person", "Jezebel", "Drug-addict", and "Junkie".⁴²⁰

The exhibition presented a small selection of Imagenet's 14 million images, next to image datasets, revealing the hidden patterns of machine learning and the political underbelly of meaning being produced by AI driven machines (including cameras) today.

419. Paglen, Trevor, and Anthony Downey. "Algorithmic Anxieties: Trevor Paglen in Conversation with Anthony Downey." *Digital War* 1, no. 1–3 (February 18, 2020): 18–28, 18.

420. Paglen, Trevor, and Anthony Downey. "Algorithmic Anxieties: Trevor Paglen in Conversation with Anthony Downey." *Digital War* 1, no. 1–3 (February 18, 2020): 18–28, 22.

These labels and classification systems inputted by human operators into machine algorithms expose how Imagenet (and by extension the AI/algorithmic aspects of machines) operate on patriarchal, white supremacist bias based on hegemonic societal mores and prejudices, and most importantly, as Paglen noted, misogyny.⁴²¹ Beneath this misogynistic trend, Paglen also described how his research uncovered a disturbing biopolitical agenda in the underwriting of algorithms:

[Computer AI] systems are always going to have a world view built into them and the best thing you can do is pick what kind of world view you want, with the understanding that not only is a world view embedded in these systems but it is also re-imposed on the world that it is subsequently intervening into...It is obviously a bad idea if all CEOs are defined as white men and the term “criminal” turns up images of black men, so I hope that the work that I and other people are doing is addressing these concerns.⁴²²

There are obvious issues with Paglen’s statement, the main one being the assumption that a subject has automatic inherent agency over “picking what kind of world view you want”, when they do not always have the capacity to do so, due to intersectional oppressions like the ones outlined throughout this project, or in my case, as a mad trans man who is subject to institutionalization and pathologization through my mad trans identity.

421. Paglen, Trevor, and Anthony Downey. “Algorithmic Anxieties: Trevor Paglen in Conversation with Anthony Downey.” *Digital War* 1, no. 1–3 (February 18, 2020): 18–28, 24.

422. Paglen, Trevor, and Anthony Downey. “Algorithmic Anxieties: Trevor Paglen in Conversation with Anthony Downey.” *Digital War* 1, no. 1–3 (February 18, 2020): 18–28, 24.

After all, it is patriarchal white, cisnormative and ableist institutions who determine whether I exist, or am viewed as a human who can participate in those institutions. In fact, the underlying reason that this project was conceived was precisely because of the transphobia that arises from the dominant ideologies of these institutions, and this transphobic rhetoric dictates the power that I have to “pick” my world view.

However, Paglan’s statement is still relevant as it exposes the fact that computer systems are assumed to carry the falsehood of scientific objectivity, when ultimately, they are designed by biased human beings who largely perpetrate white, male, cisgender, abled, sanist beliefs and are unaware of/unconcerned with their privilege.

Paglan also describes how his research found that Imagenet datasets have been programmed into, and used by AI to assume gender through facial recognition:

...how do you know what someone’s gender identity is if you don’t ask them? How can you just take somebody’s picture and label it ...“woman” or a “man”? The pre-labelling by people creating the taxonomies and classification systems in use here defines a preconceived notion of what gender is. There is an assumption that you can take people’s pictures off the Internet and...in turn, figure out what someone’s gender is by looking at their picture, rather than asking them. I think that points to...biopolitical dynamics. We should also note that some of the images (photographs) being used in these datasets are being collected from Flickr accounts without the account holders being notified.⁴²³

423. Paglen, Trevor, and Anthony Downey. “Algorithmic Anxieties: Trevor Paglen in Conversation with Anthony Downey.” *Digital War* 1, no. 1–3 (February 18, 2020): 18–28, 24.

To quote Paglen, “in today’s machine-oriented landscape, we no longer look at images—images look at us. They are no longer only representations, but active ideological agents that intervene in everyday life.”⁴²⁴

6.11 “Photography” in Today’s Technological Landscape: A Mad Trans Approach

To summarize, photography’s role, and place within the context of the Western art canon has changed. A photograph is no longer a photograph, but a potential dataset, a profiling device, a visual agent carrying the dominant white ableist patriarchal normalizing forces of Western society and surveillance capitalism. In this light, Sekula’s prophesizing of the application of photographs as visual testimony justifying the “microphysics” of barbarism takes on a three-dimensional quality, one that requires the photographic apparatus and its function to be productively glitched through disability art/justice, so that its products can be rendered illegible to the discriminating pathologizing medical gaze, and the techno-patriarchal-capitalist framework that it represents. This is why I apply the glitch to my final series of works in this dissertation, as a form of disability justice, humanity, and protest against the sanitizing normalizing agents of patriarchy, whiteness, cis/heteronormativity, ablebodiedness, surveillance capitalism and colonialism.

424. Paglen, Trevor. “Invisible Images: Your Pictures Are Looking at You.” *Architectural Design* 89, no. 1 (January 2019): 22–27, 27.

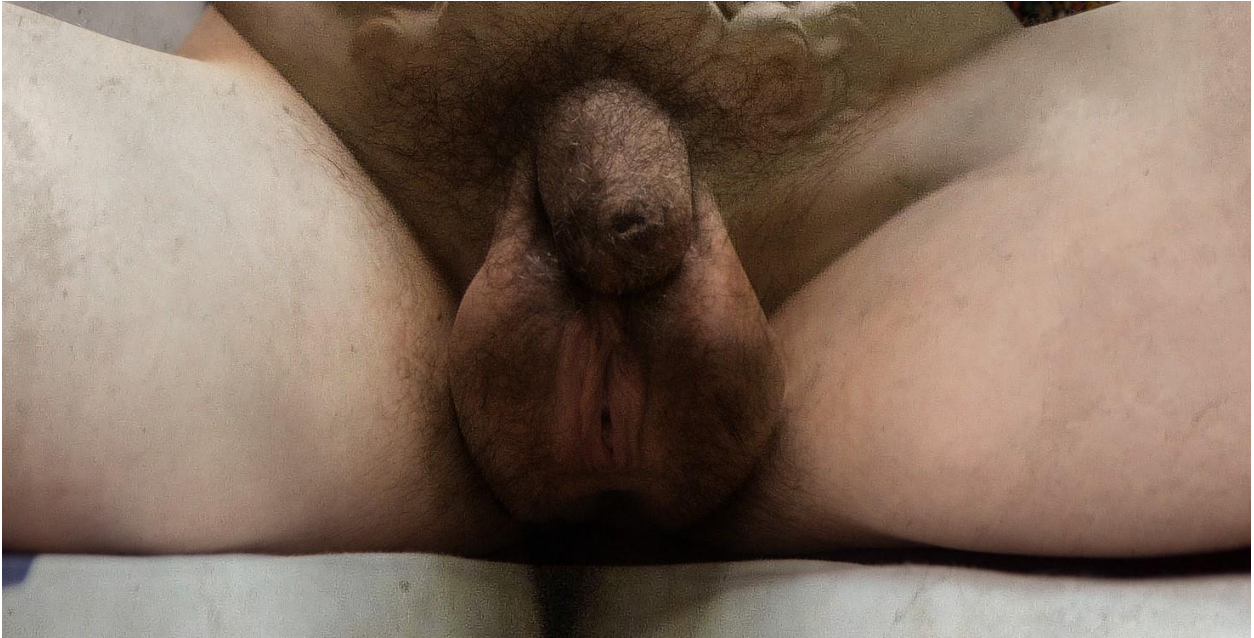


Figure 6.15 Max Ferguson, *Glitch #7*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2023.

As mentioned earlier, analog photography's capacity for infinite production was seen as a threat to the "aura" of an artwork, that is, its uniqueness. This reproductive capacity, combined with the photograph's accessibility to the masses, though culturally significant, simultaneously was said to devalue the artist. In his timeless essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, (1928) Walter Benjamin tied the photograph's capacity for reproduction to the perils of capitalism and warns of its effects on "l'art pour l'art". His critique was that capitalism's influence on the photograph (through its capacity to continually reproduce) draws it away from artistic tradition, and into the realm of politics.⁴²⁵

425. Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Reading Images*, 2001, 62–75.

However, as I've illustrated in this dissertation, through digitization, today's photograph has *become* the face of hegemonic politics and is part of the techno-social fabric of humanity. It now represents the assumed "all" of humanity, and in doing so, has lost its connection to the dominant art historical narratives that ruled its perimeters when it was an object confined to paper and light. In essence, Benjamin's critique of art for art's sake being lost to politics is validated when it is applied to the digital photograph. The digitization of the photograph and the subsequent digital conversion of human life to one mediated by billions of simulated pictures and machines could be said to tangibly mirror Baudrillard's claim of reality being replaced with simulacra: symbols and signs, that transform human experience into a simulation of reality.⁴²⁶

Benjamin could not predict how the photograph's metamorphosis from snapshot to digital hologram would change the world. As mentioned, the photograph's shift from analog to digital medium has also troubled (and in some cases eradicated) traditional art-based photographic theories of representation. It has also moved the concept of the photograph away from art historical means, into non-representational realms, and the field of human geography. Hall spoke extensively about the photograph's connection to culture, its influence on visual representational paradigms, and the promotion of socially constructed

426. Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations." *The New Social Theory Reader*, July 24, 2020, 230–34.

representations (stereotypes) of humanity. Now, through the digital camera's technological and sensorial capacities, Hall's descriptive web of culture and social meanings represented by the analog photograph have been externalized, exposed, and often compromised (by corporate institutions, the police and authorities) through the digital lens.

Meanwhile, globalization and technological digitization have led to what sociologist Zygmunt Baumann terms "the liquefying of modernity"—that is, the dissolution of taken-for-granted meanings, symbols and institutions of modern life through new type of surveillance, beyond Foucault's panopticon.⁴²⁷

Bauman claims today's world as post-panoptical. He asserts that where panoptical inspectors could originally only observe one cell at a time, now, thanks to technological innovation and approaches to surveillance, those inspectors can slip away, escaping to unreachable realms.⁴²⁸ This phenomenon makes it easier for human bodies to be abstracted

427. Bauman, Zygmunt, and David Lyon. "Liquid Surveillance: A Conversation." Wiley.com, December 10, 2012. <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Liquid+Surveillance:+A+Conversation-p-9780745662824>.

428. Bauman, Zygmunt, and David Lyon. "Liquid Surveillance: A Conversation." Wiley.com, December 10, 2012. <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Liquid+Surveillance:+A+Conversation-p-9780745662824>.

from their territorial settings, and separated into a series of discrete data flows, directly through the computer-camera.



Figure 6.16 Max Ferguson, *Glitch #8*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2023.

The photograph's identity as a traditional art form is disintegrating. However, by examining and deconstructing the structure and behaviour of them, and crippling digital photographs, new artistic statements and approaches can be (re)built—and it is through the crippling and confounding of its behaviour as digital object that the simulated photograph can be reclaimed as effective disability art.

Deepening the discussion, in the analog years of photography, Martin Lister explains that photographers physically used cameras, and engaged with them through their bodies. In essence, the camera was viewed as an extension of the photographer's capacities,

...a hand-tool that extends the photographer's body and its sensorium, much in the way that a hammer, a screwdriver or a knife, are seen to extend the body. Such extensions are then held to amplify and refine the body's capacities and, in doing so, they facilitate a human subject's power and intention.⁴²⁹

Today's cameras, in contrast, rely less on human users, the size of their sensors or the optical quality of the lens, and more on the processor and the AI faculties behind these features, which transcend materiality and the body. A machine is not human, and does not inhabit a human body, therefore is bound to replicating senses rather than experiencing them to relate to humanity. It simultaneously denies and is dependent on human bodies to interact with the world, and assumes these bodies and minds to be able. In its need for human dependence, the AI driven camera is vulnerable. However, through this vulnerability, it can become a purveyor of mad trans agency, disability activism, art, and justice.

Another point to consider when relating to the camera's glitching capacity, besides the digital photograph's capacity for corporeal transcendence, is how that photograph

429. Lister, Martin. "Is the Camera an Extension of the Photographer?" Essay. In *Digital Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices*, edited by Edgar Gómez Cruz and Asko Lehmuskallio, 267–73. London: Routledge, 2016, 268.

manifests: through a digital camera's image signal processor (ISP).⁴³⁰ This device is responsible for shifting the function of the camera from analog and film based to an electronic one. Therefore, the value of a camera today now lies in its processing capacity, not its former capacity to depict. The main function of camera electronics today translates the physical image into a digital signal, by converting it to pixels. In other words, today's camera is no longer "a device that records images" but "a device that encodes images." As I've articulated, the camera is a computer, or as Lehmuskallio articulates, a computational sensor connected to multiple communication networks, medias and mediums.⁴³¹

By extension and in relation to these points, my first series of photographs in this project are not photographs. They are no longer physical objects, but computational ones. They are photographic simulations composed of pixels and engineered to resemble photographs: they have become, as defined by Lehmuskallio, "film-like digital photographs."⁴³²

430. Brady, David J., Lu Fang, and Zhan Ma. "Deep Learning for Camera Data Acquisition, Control, and Image Estimation." *Advances in Optics and Photonics* 12, no. 4 (November 24, 2020): 787–846.

431. Lehmuskallio, Asko. "The Camera as a Sensor: The Visualization of Everyday Digital Photography as Simulative, Heuristic, and Layered Pictures." Essay. In *Digital Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices*, edited by Edgar Gómez Cruz and Asko Lehmuskallio, 243–66. London: Routledge, 2016.

432. Lehmuskallio, Asko. "The Camera as a Sensor: The Visualization of Everyday Digital Photography as Simulative, Heuristic, and Layered Pictures." Essay. In *Digital*

Keeping this complex structure in mind (processor, sensor, pixels), one can consider that through digitization, it is now possible to “crip” the photograph at a cellular” level, in other words, through a reappropriation of its software and pixels.

Elke Reinhuber proposes that current developments in photography allow for a shifting of terms around its capabilities, and offers the term “synthography” as a means of bridging human photographic principles with those of “intelligent” AI driven apparatuses. Through this term, Reinhuber aims to bridge AI synthetic production of images, 3D rendered imagery, and capacities human drawing.⁴³³ However, within her definition, she does not consider the sociopolitical aspects of AI, nor it’s nefarious potential as an extension of surveillance capitalism, or how “intelligent machines” are programmed with agendas contingent on Big Tech, normativity, and white patriarchal power, and how the definition of human in her term is informed and structured according to these. She does not consider the camera, for example, to be an extension of all the above, either. To crip the camera through the photograph is to make the human influence visible in the machine, and to reclaim visual

Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices, edited by Edgar Gómez Cruz and Asko Lehmuskallio, 243–66. London: Routledge, 2016, 244.

433. Reinhuber, Elke. “Synthography – an Invitation to Reconsider the Rapidly Changing Toolkit of Digital Image Creation as a New Genre beyond Photography.” *Lecture Notes of the Institute for Computer Sciences, Social Informatics and Telecommunications Engineering*, 2022, 321–31.

space in the name of organic, messy, asymmetrical humanity and the diverse expressions of biology that our bodies represent.

Reclaiming the human in the machine by crippling the AI perceptions of the camera is a revolutionary practice because the photograph's shift from analog to digital object has taken shape through the digital eye of the camera. Initially, "the camera" consisted of two components: optics to create a physical image and sensors to capture the physical image. Today, that sensor has shifted from celluloid film to an electronic focal plane. This means that today's camera is valued for its digital processing and artificial intelligence capabilities, rather than for its ability to preserve memories, a fact illustrated when the Eastman Kodak Company filed for bankruptcy in 2012.⁴³⁴

The transition from chemical to electronic recording of an image is also significant, and worth noting in relation to this project. The material shift from analog to digital photography is another reason I was inspired to create a second series of works: through their audience interpretation as "beautiful photographs", the complex metamorphosis (digitization) that photography is currently grappling with is not acknowledged. This fact must be articulated: through digitization, photographs are no longer physical objects, but

434. Jones, Jonathan. "Thanks for the Memories, Kodak – You Made Photographers of Us All." *The Guardian*, January 19, 2012.
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2012/jan/19/kodak-bankruptcy-digital-photography>.

electronic projections, that transcend the capacities of the physical world and by extension, the body. This means that by extension, the digital photograph holds the power to potentially transcend the body, its pathologization, and its politics.

6.12 The Digital Photograph, Cultural Shapeshifting, and Biopower

In other words, today's camera becomes a living device that animates Foucault's theories of biopower, and is animated by state sanctioned forces of technology, patriarchy, big tech, and surveillance capitalism. Where the camera was once a tool of human agency revered for its capacity to extend and refine the human body and its senses, today's camera has morphed into an AI driven body monitoring device, one that grafts itself to the user, and can measure, assimilate, monitor, and police bodies and human identities, without their consent.

Where the first cameras extended the capacity of "human", the AI piloted camera, programmed through corporate driven software code as an agent of surveillance capitalism and technopatriarchy extends the influence of Spivek's dominant normative white male subject, its biases and agendas. This influence, as previously mentioned, reframes the digital camera's participation in the accelerating nefarious forces of data colonialism across the globe, a role that could easily evolve and be interpreted as necropolitical. It is the camera's potential as a necropolitical device of surveillance, one that easily stands in for state and the medical gaze's capacity to discipline and standardize the trans body (through the gender binary) and pathologization, that I wish to confound through my glitched transed representations of bodies.

An added dimension to consider is that today's photographs no longer relate to their 'analog' origins, even though they are adept at mimicking their aesthetics. As Reinhuber notes, where photography was once an artform that required both technical and scientific knowledge, as well as an aesthetic sense and years of practice, today's AI cameras, grafted to their users, capture billions of images instantly without any aesthetic consideration towards exposure, musings on the effect of focal length or focus, aperture, shutter speed or ISO.⁴³⁵

Thus, through a mad trans disability arts lens, the camera is no longer an object that aids in creating art, or an audience that observes and questions, but an extension of the patriarchal, cisgender white, ableist, sanist forces that animate the medical gaze. By embracing a philosophy of crip technoscience and applying a philosophy of anti-aesthetics and the abject, to glitch concepts of (cisgender, white) beauty in my images, I am actively protesting my pathologization as trans and the normalizing, pathologizing forces of the medical gaze that claim to have cured me of my gender dysphoria.

It is the digital photograph's capacity to holographically shapeshift between technological, political, and cultural realms (and bridge them) that makes it the ideal medium for my project. For it is through the symbolic representational confounding of the influence

435. Reinhuber, Elke. "Synthography – an Invitation to Reconsider the Rapidly Changing Toolkit of Digital Image Creation as a New Genre beyond Photography." *Lecture Notes of the Institute for Computer Sciences, Social Informatics and Telecommunications Engineering*, 2022, 321–31, 321.

of the patriarchal white cisgender abled sane subject on the functional intersections of technology, politics, and culture that the digital photograph can be framed as an object of disability justice, by glitching its rational structures and capacity to represent normative culture.

The digital photograph is uniquely positioned as an art object because of its capacity to both depict cultural norms and infiltrate culture. Using a disability justice-crip technoscience oriented approach to hijack its capacities and reappropriate them through the glitch can serve as a visual language of activism that infiltrate the policies of institutions and critique the ideologies of patriarchal, cisgender, ableist, colonialist institutions. My artworks transcend institutional language through abstraction and confound of the dominant white patriarchal cisgendered ableist medical gaze through abjection. Within these contexts the digital

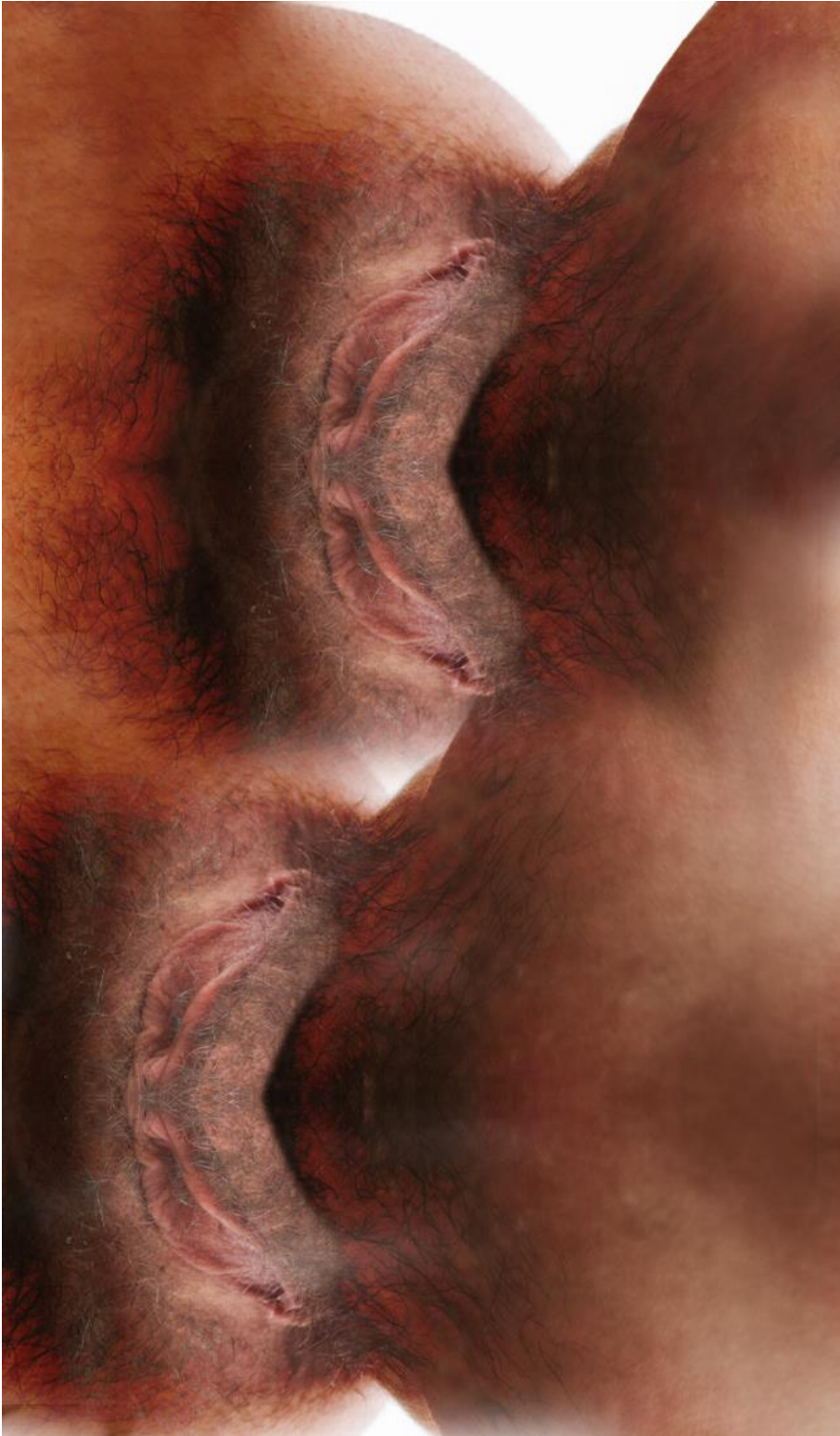


Figure 6.17 Max Ferguson, *Glitch #9*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2023.

simulated photograph achieves independent agency from its creators, and can reclaim itself as (disability) art.

It is also through the cultural assumptions placed on digital photographs, and that their contents relate to the sense of sight as objective, that I have chosen to work with them in this

project. Because of the ocularcentric nature of our world and the photograph's history as a perceived object of truth, trust in photographs is still greatly misplaced. This is particularly true of today's digital photographs, because of their capacity to appeal to our senses as visual forms of perfection while hiding the agendas of those who use them as neoliberal and necropolitical agents and devices.

As Hall has articulated, photographs are produced by humans, and humans have biases. Despite their perceived objectivity, a photograph achieves its status as a visual representation through a complex editing process. Colours become saturated. Light and brightness filters can be shifted, and shapes can be cloned to replicate false states. Cropping and reworking the image used to be done in darkrooms and studios. Now, the camera can replicate the editing process holographically and instantaneously. Today's digital photograph is a replication of a photograph rather than a tangible representation of an object, yet we still treat it tangibly. Moreover, we do not pause to question what is connected to the technology

we use, nor, as Manovich points out, do we question where (photographic) software comes from.⁴³⁶

As I've already outlined, software is created by humans, and those humans are tied to white patriarchal ableist cisnormative hegemonic systems through their influence on technology and surveillance capitalism. By extension, today's photographic images are holograms of physical photographs, photograph-like photographs. Further, the images replicated under these conditions are highly disciplined by the forces they are attached to (which I've outlined), and by the hegemonic paradigms they represent. Ultimately, the patriarchally driven AI machine tendency to survey and edit bodies and literally sift them through hyperperfect, cisnormalizing, symmetrical, sanitizing, software filters becomes a direct metaphor for how bodies are rendered productive within society: through their adherence and physical replication of the gender binary. Additionally, through this image based, sanitizing disciplinary process, the subject's body becomes part of what Hall termed the dominant representational paradigm in (Western) culture. This offers a specific vision of the people and events that it documents and is a construction resting on the populist-oriented multitude of photographs that exist in the world, rather than the authority of photographers and the press, during Hall's time.

436. Manovich, Lev. *Software takes command*. New York etc.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Appropriating Hall's term to today's machine-driven landscape, I ask, how does the dominant representational paradigm express itself through the disciplinary normalizing eyes and language of machines? It is through the examination of this question that the abject aesthetic of my artworks was conceived, and how I claimed this aesthetic as a form of disability justice. If the camera has become the white cisnormative patriarchal ableist sanist medical eye that disciplines, sanitizes bodies, and the photograph is evidence of that discipline, then glitching the hyperbeauty of the hegemonically informed digital photograph through abject imagery can short circuit its normalizing effects, or at best create a fissure or crack in its biased representation, as an activist act. This is another goal of my second series of images.

6.13 "Beauty," Madness, and Medicalization

According to Lefrancois, Menzies, and Reaume, psychiatry wields great power in the 21st century, thanks to the support of political authorities, lawmakers, leaders, the corporate sector, the media, and the public. Lefrancois et al. articulate how psychiatry bolsters the assumption that all of these carry the right to

constitute and judge mentalities; to distinguish authoritatively between "sanity" and "disorder"; to characterize the latter as an "illness" like any other; to manufacture words and systems for labelling, cataloguing, and containing Mad conduct and people; to impart discipline in the name of science; to intervene, often without consent, into the lives of others; to unleash an arsenal of chemical, electrical, and other bodily interventions under the guise of compassion and cure; and, perhaps most formidable of all, to influence the very languages, thoughtways, and social practices by which we collectively determine what it means to be "normal," worthy, and even human.⁴³⁷

437. Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2013), 20.

Therefore, to conflate normality with beauty, that is to be disciplined by “normality” and viewed as “beautiful” considering my trans body and psychiatrization, as per my photographs, is to be enveloped and protected by privilege. Privilege is false acceptance, contingent on conformity and an ability to camouflage according to the overarching ableist presumptions surrounding my mental condition, and their capacity to discipline me (and by extension my body) as subject.

To rebel against this privilege is to refuse assimilation and the curing of my transgender identity. Abjection represents a refusal to be enveloped by the medical gaze, and in the context of my project becomes a form of disability justice and activism.

This is another reason why I must refuse the erasure of my identity in my first group of photographs, and why I must artistically transcend them through my second set of works. Taking a mad activist stance in my art practice means that I do not overlook the conflation of transgender and psychiatric illness, as a psychiatric survivor, nor the invalidation of my mad trans existence which is equated with the site of “no future”. By remaking or reworking the idea of resistance to medicalization through the fabrication of a new series of anti-beautiful artworks, I can refuse these implications, and reclaim my (artistic) space in the world.

Another point to consider besides the digital photograph’s capacity for corporeal transcendence, is how that photograph manifests: through a digital camera’s image signal

processor (ISP). This device shifts the function of the camera from analog and film based to an electronic one.

Therefore, the value of a camera today now lies in it's processing capacity, not its former capacity to depict. The main function of camera electronics today translates the physical image into a digital signal, by converting it to pixels. In other words, today's camera no longer records images but encodes them. As I've articulated, the camera is a computer, or as Lehmuskallio articulates, a computational sensor connected to multiple communication networks, medias and mediums.⁴³⁸ To glitch its capacities through my second set of images is to perform an act of mad trans activism, and claim my space in the world.

I view my work as an artist to create images and objects which can be contemplated rather than destroyed. Therefore, in the spirit of creation, and all I have mentioned in relation to the shifting complexion of photography here, my second series of images represents a response to the complexities of my findings. In crafting my second series images as response, I considered all which has been written in this project and wish to draw from a summary of what I have uncovered, and a desire to fuse and draw from the intersections of Trans and Mad Studies, which I represent symbolically in my artworks by fusing images of

438. Lehmuskallio, Asko. "The Camera as a Sensor: The Visualization of Everyday Digital Photography as Simulative, Heuristic, and Layered Pictures." Essay. In *Digital Photography and Everyday Life: Empirical Studies on Material Visual Practices*, edited by Edgar Gómez Cruz and Asko Lehmuskallio, 243–66. London: Routledge, 2016.

biological abjection with corporeal illegibility, and applying the concept of the patriarchal rational white cisgender heteronormative abled sane subject as the site of madness.

Because both madness and transness are pathologized through medicalization, my second series of works draws from a disability art based, crip technoscientific perspective, in the spirit of the disability rights movement, that flourishing is resistance.

Disability arts mark the growing political power of disabled/mad people over their narratives.⁴³⁹ As Eliza Chandler explains, disability art is used to counter ableism and misrepresentation, establishes disability as a valued human condition, and shifts control to disabled (mad) people so they may shape their narratives and bring this disability-controlled narrative to wider audiences”⁴⁴⁰

To draw from a disability arts perspective means that concepts of medicalization and cure are political because they are ableist: , they are human rights issues. The political implications of these concepts are reflected in my artworks. A disability arts perspective asserts that for disabled people to be truly liberated, we must change the way society sees us.

439. Chandler, Eliza, Nadine Changfoot, Carla Rice, Andrea LaMarre, and Roxanne Mykitiuk. “Cultivating Disability Arts in Ontario.” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 40, no. 3 (2018): 249–64, 4.

440. Chandler, Eliza, Nadine Changfoot, Carla Rice, Andrea LaMarre, and Roxanne Mykitiuk. “Cultivating Disability Arts in Ontario.” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 40, no. 3 (2018): 249–64, 5.

This is the work of the artist. For as I've articulated earlier in this dissertation, the site of disability is often viewed by normative culture as one of "no future".

Chandler articulates,

...disability arts represent more than barrier-free access to public space and buildings; we must also have full access and meaningful participation in arts and culture, both as producers and creators as well as audience members and participants. Following the animating slogan of the disability rights movement, 'nothing about us without us,' this arts movement is distinctly disability-led.

In a discussion about disability aesthetics, Chandler describes her multimedia piece entitled "Shift". The work documents how before she embraced her disabled identity and worked alongside other disabled artists, her art practice was "concerned with the normal, beautiful, perfect body". She describes how disability art practices opened her up to making art about her "messy spastic, never still body", and marks a departure in her art practice, away from the appearance of the beautiful.⁴⁴¹

As I've already articulated within this dissertation, traditionally classical concepts of artistic beauty and the beautiful are forms of oppression that relate to colonial transphobic, abled, sane, colonial, white, heteronormative, cisnormative ideals that inform the medical

441. Chandler, Eliza, Nadine Changfoot, Carla Rice, Andrea LaMarre, and Roxanne Mykitiuk. "Cultivating Disability Arts in Ontario." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 40, no. 3 (2018): 249–64, 14.

gaze. I've also articulated how that medical gaze now extends across the globe, normalizing, colonializing, and sanitizing bodies and populations, through the spread of digital colonialism, surveillance capitalism, and technopatriarchal agency. It is for these reasons that adopting a crip perspective in my art practice is vital. Art for art's sake is not enough. It must be animated by activist and disability justice frameworks in the midst of a resurgence of fascism in the world, and an insidious transphobic agenda that threatens to eradicate trans people through ableism, white supremacy and the concept articulated earlier by Alison Kafer, that disability (and by extension trans, because of the diagnosis of gender dysphoria) has no future. To crip the photograph considering what it represents today is an act of disability justice, and one which gives us agency in a world that silences us.

Chandler has highlighted that "the beautiful" also extends to ableist forms of being. Therefore, in a similar fashion, and considering the failure of my first series of photographs to represent me in this project because of their assumed beauty, I too must move away from the normative artistic preoccupation and artistic tools associated with the beautiful (balanced and symmetrical) to confound the transphobic policing glare of the medical gaze in relation to my body and identity, and the digital capitalistic surveillance of our lives. Through a disability arts lens, specifically through embracing a crippled, glitched digital aesthetic that departs from the beautiful as Chandler's did, I at last give a shape to the complexities of my mad trans identity, and through that shape, validate and take back my agency from the transphobic, ableist forces that attempt to silence who I am.

Through the emancipatory power of my disability art practice, despite my history, multiplicities, and ability to camouflage because of my medical assimilation into white heteronormative patriarchal abled sane society, I can language the perimeters of myself. I can protest the forces that attempt to silence me. I can speak authentically.

Through that abstracted authenticity that is art, I claim my space in the world and achieve resistance.



Figure 6.18 Max Ferguson, *Glitch #9*, Digital Mixed Media Image, 2023.

Conclusion: Reframing Refusal

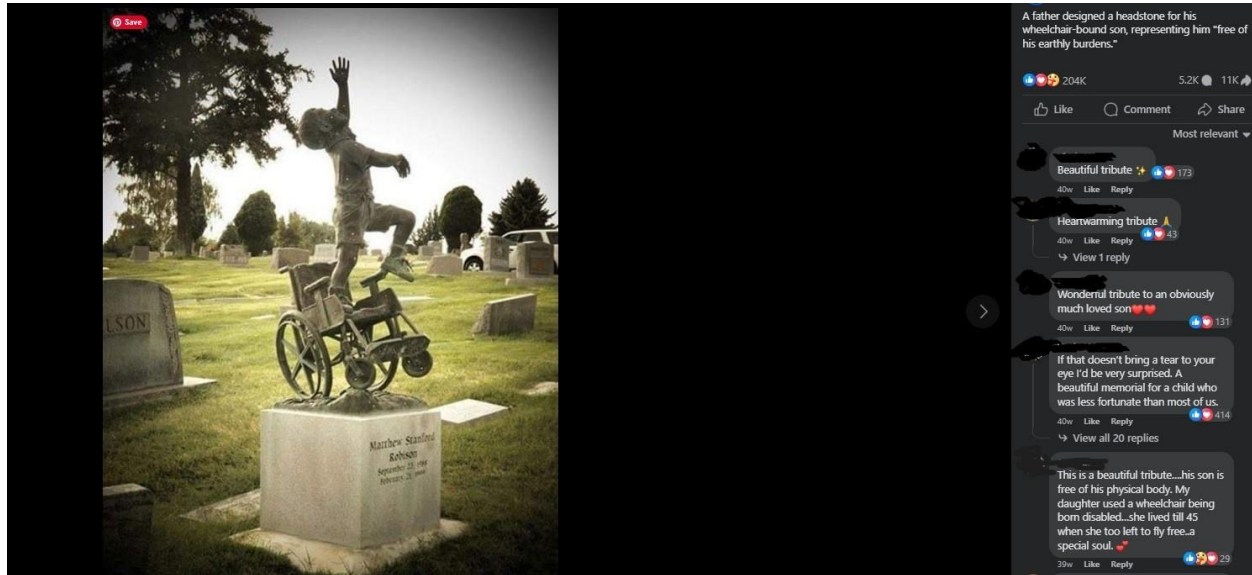


Figure 6.19 A photograph of Matthew Robison’s Tombstone on Facebook, 2023.

Not long before the completion of this dissertation, I came across a viral image on social media that enraged me. Those who are close to me know this is a routine occurrence, that the Internet is a source of constant pain and discomfort for me. Being apprehensive of most Internet platforms and technological forces as a mad trans person (for reasons I’ve outlined throughout this dissertation), and as a former journalist, I am inherently suspicious. I routinely distance myself from the Internet for health reasons. However, the image in question hung in my head for several months before I got frustrated and decided to write about it.

The image is that of a tombstone, which according to a headline on Facebook, a father designed for his young son. The tombstone is not typical. It features a stone-cast sculpture of a young boy reaching toward the sky as he rises out of his wheelchair, described

by a Facebook heading to be “free of his earthly burdens.” Of course, unconscious ableist commentary dripping with condescension and pity framed the image and praised its contents as moving and heartwarming. I’ve observed this is often the case in social media threads featuring images of disability. The image could easily be interpreted as inspiration porn.

I did my due diligence and, over several cups of coffee, researched the tombstone’s origins. I was surprised to discover an NPR feature article written in July 2022, which covered the story behind it.⁴⁴²

The tombstone commemorates the life of Matthew Robison, who died at the age of 10 and a half in 1999, in Salt Lake City, Utah. According to the story, Matthew suffered from cerebral palsy, and spent his entire life in a wheelchair.

Matthew’s father, when asked about the tombstone’s design stated, "I got the idea that he would just be able to rise physically from his wheelchair and go up to heaven."

"And he'd be free from all of the disabilities and limitations that he had here on the Earth," Matthew's mother said.

While reflecting on these comments, I became intensely angry. As someone who has been spoken over and silenced for much of my life, I’ve always felt that to speak on behalf of another person is a form of violence. My anger grew when I noted another quote in the

442. Romo, Vanessa. “A Father’s Grief Inspires a Touching Headstone for His Disabled Son.” NPR, July 7, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/07/07/1107224862/wheelchair-sculpture-headstone-father-grief>.

story, about the appearance of the grave marker, made by Matthew's mother, who stated that the marker made it a joy to go to the cemetery, "because it gives us hope and peace".

I note that the parents spoke about "us" —their feelings—but where was Matthew in the story? Where was his perspective, or a reflection on the positive forces in his life, or even his flourishing as a human being? Could Matthew speak? Was Matthew truly human to his parents during his lifetime, or was he someone to be pitied and martyred, moralized through a Judeo-Christian lens, and memorialized as a means of garnering sympathy and even pity? Did Matthew have a say in all of this? My guess is likely not, but I believe his lack of agency mirrors that of many of us who are perceived to be/are disabled in this world.

Although the news story was about Matthew, his personal perspective was not mentioned at all, and therein lies an ugly truth: Matthew's identity as a person was completely defined by his disability and his medicalization. Further, Matthew's personal experiences as a human being were silenced and overridden by the ableist assumptions and feelings of his parents and their agendas, which reeked of the presumption of disability as the site of no future. Through populist beliefs and ableism, the story of Matthew Robison stands as an example of how disabled experiences are invalidated and rendered invisible through ableist necropolitical forces.

I ponder Matthew's story in a broader context: how many people on this planet are born into body minds that they cannot language, that do not fit into the gender binary, or do not appear and/or behave in normative ways? How many more are shamed for this, viewed as inhuman, and/or indirectly marked for death through the medical/psy complex? A person does not ask to be born, but to be born into a body and world that renders them silent and

invisible through ableism (and in my case, sanism and transphobia, on top of this fact) is a bind that is difficult to untangle and escape from, as this dissertation illustrates.

I was living in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1993, one year short of graduating high school, when I was removed by a child psychologist from my transphobic abusive family household. That year, Tracy Latimer was murdered by her father. I vaguely remember the news headlines, and the surrounding media circus and controversy that surrounded her case. However, thirty years later, I am still haunted by the fact that the judge who presided over the lower court trial described Tracy's murder as a form of compassionate homicide, "committed for caring and altruistic reasons". What was equally abhorrent was that at least 73 percent of Canadians (Ipsos 1999) or even as many as 92 percent agreed (Sobsey 1995)⁴⁴³

Tracy's father denied that his actions were wrong, and spoke on his daughter's behalf, stating "no one in their right mind would want to exist in that condition."⁴⁴⁴ Like Matthew, Tracy could not speak for herself, and had cerebral palsy. It took seven years for her death to be named as the murder that it really was. We will never know her side of the story.

The (mad) trans subject is silenced through the same ableist forces that rendered Matthew Robison invisible and that animated Robert Latimer's decision to end his

443. Frazee, Catherine, Christine Kelly, and Michael Orsini. *Dispatches from Disabled Country*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2023, 20.

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daughter's life. Like Matthew and Tracy, through the lens of ableism, trans people, and especially mad trans people are assumed ill, infantilized, minimized, and told indirectly and even directly, through institutional language and omission that our lives do not matter. We are spoken about, over, and on behalf of often, usually by "experts", professionals, and cisgender abled people who have no concept of what our lives entail or what a trans experience is. If we are mad and trans, our trans experience is compounded and intersects with elements of sanism, institutionalization and pathologization. We are perceived as very ill. We are disabled. We must be pitied, cured, rendered by doctors and surgeons and psychiatrists into productive members of society through our medicalization, and saved, lifted up that we may walk back into the world as dignified passing subjects, or we disappear. Sometimes we die.

Beginning with our births and awakenings as trans people, then as mad people, transphobic ableist forces follow us throughout our lives, continually reinforced by the transphobic attitudes of other people and cisnormative ableist transphobic institutions, the most obvious ones being the psychiatric complex and medical model. These institutions promote (white) cisnormative sanist ideologies and foster an attitude of shame and disempowerment wherever we go.

The assumption is that because we are mentally ill, we are as Clare highlights, allegedly to be cured through medical intervention, so that we can conform to what is asked of us in a white compulsory white able-bodied/minded patriarchal cisgender ableist sanist society, else we too have no future. This nihilistic view of disabled lives is not only offensive to disabled people, but it also invalidates the experiences of mad trans people. It is the

revolting assumption that disability is the site of no future that is currently amplifying trans necropolitics worldwide, and the eradication of mad trans lives, and trans lives today, through their pathologization and the diagnosis of gender dysphoria.

As a mad trans subject, I have internalized many versions of this “no future” rhetoric throughout my life, and because of it, I have often been rendered mute or invisible. I have felt people’s pity. I have endured insults, lost friendships, and remained trapped in an identity that I did not want, to keep the peace and myself safe, for over 40 years.

As a mad trans person who has endured transition and has been effectively assimilated by the white abled sanist cisgender patriarchal forces that govern our society, I am now invisible in a different way, because I now pass as a white abled sane cisgender man, even though my history and body dictate otherwise. I continue to fight for my right to speak independently of the medical apparatus that has absorbed me, and multiple institutional and sociopolitical forces that threaten to silence me. As this dissertation has illustrated, I fight through my ability to language abstraction via disability art, and the framework of disability justice. Art transcends words and medicalized, institutionalized language. It allows me to transform feelings into shapes, and shapes into the language of abstraction. Art is a language that flies above conventional linguistic forces. This is its power. It is not easily disciplined.

By metaphorically considering the space of the digital photograph as a construction of patriarchal rationality, rather than concrete “objective” fact, (founded on patriarchal cisnormative corporeal systems of production, neoliberalism and surveillance capitalism) and glitching that rational space, my artworks become places where I symbolically

confound the medical gaze and rupture the transphobic, ableist technological patriarchal structures of surveillance capitalism. I do this through the application of crip technoscience, through the glitch. The result is a bodily based representation that confounds the eye of the viewer, which often represents surveillance capitalism, and the transphobic pathologizing gaze of the medical model and psychiatric complex.

Through my artworks, I claim mad trans space in the world, despite transphobic ableist forces. Additionally, through glitching the camera-computer-machine, I can transcend the limits of my physical body, to create a representation beyond medical pathologization and the limits of my biology. In other words, I complicate cisnormative representations of trans bodies and McRuer's concept of compulsory ablebodiedness which are buttressed through sex and the gender binary.

My artworks are also forms of disability activism that view the medical model as fundamentally ableist. They acknowledge that the dominant means through which the body and mind are rendered productive begins with the medical model, which is fundamentally white supremacist, cisnormative and ableist as well as eugenics based, necropolitical, and nihilistic. Through their abject appearances, my final series of images is designed to induce discomfort in the viewer. This discomfort around the difficult knowledge they represent can lead to conversations and opportunities to question how bodies are beheld, and how we are conditioned to behold them.

We must acknowledge how the ableist conflation of transness and madness promotes transphobia and invalidates the flourishing capacities of mad trans lives. We must also acknowledge the indoctrination and politicization of our human bodies from birth, and how

white patriarchal cisgender abled sanity, produced as a domineering machine-like capacity, (through the gender binary, medicine and institutions) is inherently transphobic and necropolitical.

As a mad trans subject, I've applied the forces of disability art to the digital photograph as a linguistic way to transcend these systems so that I can speak. Additionally, through glitching software and visual representations of sexed bodies, I confront and stymie the patriarchal, white, cisnormative, ableist, sanist systems of control, technopatriarchy and medicalization that have oppressed and silenced me throughout my life, that I can claim my mad transness as its own human experience, beyond the language of medicalization and the gender binary.

Through a crip technoscience/disability arts-justice lens, as previously discussed, the glitch is not perceived as an error, but instead as a phenomenon that, through the rupturing of digital hyperperfection and efficient, corporate/surveillance capitalist computational processes, points to the compulsory ableist heterosexist cisnormative sanist limitations of our society, language, and institutions.

In terms of aesthetics related to my artworks, the glitch is also a metaphor that disrupts our erroneous human tendency to judge, by categorizing bodies according to sex and biology alone. In these contexts the gender glitches I've made translate to trans as the outcropping of a falsely upheld system. The glitch applied to the digital surfaces of the bodies in my second set of artworks is an illustration that demonstrates madness and transness as resilience in the face of systems that silence, of the inherent flaw in the gender binary as system, and the human desire for absolute control over biology and life itself.

The digital realm allows us to transcend our bodies and our biology. In the case of this project, this trans-scendence revolves around transcending the patriarchal cisgender ableist colonial sanist forces in society, and the transphobic medical gaze through concepts of art, through machines, and through transcendence of the body.

It is important to consider how the digital photograph, as I've outlined, is currently reforming the world into a series of projections and is turning the planet into a holographic entity governed by white patriarchal surveillance capitalist and technological colonial forces. Through the eye of the digital camera, the world and its human populations become projections. While I've outlined the connection of the digital to the oppressive powers of patriarchal rationality and the destructive forces of white supremacy, surveillance capitalism, and digital colonialism, the digital capacity to project the body beyond its physicality, and trans-scend that physicality also can serve as metaphor for trans.

To trans the body is to claim our bodies independently of the institutions that politicize and govern human society. We, as trans people hold potential to literally transcend our oppressive political systems and language and reform them, through our bodies. As humans, our bodies are grafted, through their appearances, to political meaning and culture. We are indoctrinated into society at birth, through medicine, through our biology and capacity for that biology to translate into productivity through the medical model, sex and the gender binary.

While the digital photograph is a densely political object governed by normative patriarchal forces, it can also serve as a vehicle and means for the body to transcend its biology and the linguistic systems that dominate and politicize it. Today's photograph is a

hologram of a photograph. It has transcended its earthly beginnings and history. It is no longer composed of paper and chemical traces of light, but of pixels. Pixels rupture, can burn out, and can glitch. By crippling the pixels and software editing processes of the digital photograph, we create space for new forms of identity to form and breathe.

The glitching of the photograph, the image, and the artwork itself and the depiction of failure that my art represents across this dissertation is a way of confounding the binarizing medical gaze and creating space to reform the language around trans experience. By creating the abject asymmetrical organic imperfect image within a software environment that is wired to create hyperperfectionistic, symmetrical, images and by using Photoshop software to create digital sculpture and collage, I am rupturing the code of the machine with my human trace. By rupturing the systems that the code represents, and that I've outlined throughout this chapter, we build spaces for new language and expression.

If a picture is truly worth a thousand words, and words are catalysts for dominant systems of white cisnormative ableist oppression and transphobia, then perhaps when languaging the concept of trans, we might do well to do away with words altogether. Through crip technoscience, the abstract language of disability art and the glitch allow us to transcend our tired means of communicating trans concepts through systems of conventional transphobic language, by using the space of the digital photograph. The digital photograph applied as disability art can also provide, through abstraction, an intersectional means to dissect and deconstruct the nefarious influences of technopatriarchy and white ableist cisnormative language in culture. Through a crip technoscience lens, reclaiming the space of the digital, through disability art and justice means that the digital photograph becomes a

space where mad trans identity can flourish, thus providing the cognizance between the intersections of transness and madness that I articulated early in this dissertation and the concept of trans mad flourishing as a revolutionary act.

In essence, to restate, my final group of images in this dissertation provides a means of articulating the multiple complex disciplinary intersections articulated in this project: the white abled cisgender female-male dualism encountered through the dynamics of the medical gaze and its association with the sex/gender binary, as well as the Cartesian dualism and dissociation of the body from the mind, promoted by the medical model.

In all, through their capacity to promote abject sensation, confound, overwhelm, and confuse the viewer, these images represent several concepts: the privilege of my whiteness overshadowed by my transness, my traumatic and psychiatric history as a mad subject, the refusal to pass as a cisgender man, and by extension the refusal to be medicalized and institutionalized. They are unclassifiable and illegible from a biological and bodily perspective and aim to confound medical institutions and the gender binary itself through their representations.

My final group of images aspires to show, through its machine rendered capacities to transcend the physical world, representational complexity and abject illegibility, that transness and madness can transcend medicalization, that both are simply expressions of human experience which are oppressed through the gender binary and patriarchal capitalist disciplinary forces that politicize the body through medicalization.

Throughout this dissertation, I've deconstructed my trans identity and synthesized the realizations and results of that deconstruction into artworks. All of these have been

productive failures, as I've previously outlined, and embrace the concept of failed systems and their depiction as acts of disability flourishing and justice.

I've also used the framework of crip technoscience to glitch the white ableist technopatriarchal rational software space of the digital photograph as a form of disability activism. I've shown how the idea of a trans identity being open to "everyone" is a false premise. I've also, through both of my bodies of work in this dissertation, shown how appearances of whiteness and abledness only allow for certain privileged trans individuals, such as myself, to speak openly. I've highlighted how these systems that promote trans and mad liberation through cure are actually oppressive and ableist. I've intersectionally described aspects of trans identity, history, and medicalization that lead to further oppression. I've also described and re-created artwork as a form of disability art and justice.

Confronting and confounding the transphobic patriarchal foundations of culture, institutions, and the medical gaze through the vehicle of disability art certainly will not eliminate the reprehensible circumstances faced by mad trans individuals in the years to come, nor will it crush the forces which threaten to oppress, silence, and destroy (mad) trans lives. However, by using and reclaiming the digital photograph as a form of disability justice, my images of glitched gender rupture the oppressive transphobic ableist forces of white patriarchal cisnormative institutions and the medical gaze.

Further, their contemplation can lead to constructive conversations on the dangerous conflation of medicalization with trans identity and madness, and the oppressions that arise because of the intertwining of these forces. To speak in the face of these is an act of power

and privilege. It is my hope that in using my privilege to speak in this dissertation, what has been articulated within these pages can serve as a starting point of conversation and a beacon of light for the future.

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