“STARE BACK!”: Trans/Queer Countervisuality and the Possibility of Looking Otherwise

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This thesis works across a variety of objects in order to theorize the political potentiality of trans/queer countervisuality. I draw from and expand upon Nicholas Mirzoeff’s concept of countervisuality as a contestation of the dominant ordering and visualization of history, and I consider the specifically trans/queer instances and possibilities of this notion of countervisuality. The first two sections consider two traditionally modernist novels, Herman Melville’s *Typee* and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, parsing the texts for the ways in which acts of seeing constitute or contest relations of power and subjectivity. I then briefly consider infamous exploitation film director Andy Milligan’s 1989 camp comedy *Surgikill* and put the film’s thematic of unintelligibility in conversation with a few comics appearing in the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, theorizing the film and comics as gesturing toward what we stand to gain from embracing forms, appearances, and desires which are unstable and unintelligible to the normative order of gender. I finally turn to early 20th century archives and contemporary visual art to more explicitly put forward a theory of how rejection of the demand to be visible as gendered subjects within racial capitalism might function as both a counterposition as well as a nonnormativity—after Marquis Bey—in that trans/queer countervisuality rejects the logics of visuality and visibility of what Jules Gill-Peterson calls “the cis state,” but does so without necessarily reproducing or replacing the oppressive logics of its gender normativity. I borrow the phrase “stare back” from an illustration and injunction appearing in the 1997 trans punk zine *Unapologetic*, and I theorize staring back as a trans/queer practice which might allow us to both

resist and imagine outside of the hegemonic visuality of gender. This theory of trans/queer countervisuality attempts to partially answer the provocative question Eric Stanley poses to the demand for trans recognition and visibility: "how can we be seen without being known, and how can we be known without being hunted?"[1]

[1] See Stanley 87.

Table of Contents

Preface

This thesis is the culmination of a long and atypical undergraduate career. Across three institutions, seven years, and countless hours spent navigating a path forward from failing out of college entirely, it truly takes a village, and consequently I have many people to thank.

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1.0 Introduction

As the drag queen Willow Pill duckwalks down the runway during her finale performance on the 14th season of *Rupaul's Drag Race*, she begins to lip sync the last refrain of the song's chorus, mouthing the words "I hate" before the sentence is sharply cut off by four percussive beats. Within the brief space of these wordless four beats, the drag queen, already sporting two replicas of her own head which sit directly above either shoulder, swiftly hops up from her squatted position and dramatically reaches for and grabs the fringed hem of her ruffled beige dress, the front of which hangs just above her knees. In the place of a fifth beat, there is a pause as she mouths the final word of the ballad, "people," and Willow Pill unflinchingly lifts her dress up to her torso, revealing a fourth and final replica of her own face gazing forlornly out from between her thighs. She has, put more bluntly, another face on her crotch. Then, on the last beat of the number, Willow sassily pops her hip, striking a confrontationally fierce pose, and while still holding up her dress, the song comes to its swift and dramatic conclusion as all four of Willow Pill's heads stare back at the audience.

In the middle of a drag queen's thighs may seem an odd place to begin a work at the conjunction of visual, literary, and trans/queer studies, but Willow's reveal surprisingly, through the very fact of its surprise, provides an opportune moment from which to clarify the conjuncture at which this investigation of trans/queer countervisuality lies. I want to use Willow's reveal as a metaphor, then, for the kinds of possibilities of trans/queer refusal this thesis explores; more precisely, refusals of dominating forms of visibility, such as visibility within surveillance apparatuses or the gender intelligibility required and enforced by the state. A close reading of Willow's reveal allows for a simultaneous "reveal" of my own, then, of the methodologies I use

to explore such instances in literature, art and archives. Allow me, then, to guide you through a brief investigation of a crotch in order to elucidate certain claims and questions coalescing around visuality, gender and the production of the normative.

I here read Willow Pill's fourth head as responsive to the normative biopolitical power which Michel Foucault famously describes in *The History of Sexuality*. Before explaining how sex in modernity functions discursively, Foucault briefly mentions how in earlier epochs "prohibitions bearing on sex" required and produced an essentialist notion of "nature" which itself acted as "a kind of law" (38). Intersex people were once legally outlawed, he points out, because their existence "confounded the law that distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union" (38). The mechanisms surrounding sex have since shifted, he argues, from focusing on the natural toward a constant incitement to discover and speak sex, toward a "will to truth" (79). Thus there has been a continuous cultural and biopolitical insistence on producing sex and sexuality as knowable and definitive discourses governing the body. In producing these discourses and/as areas of scientific knowledge, they then enter into, intensify and expand the domain of certain biopolitical institutions—such as the medical industry, prisons, and schools. Sex, figured as a primary way of knowing and making legible the body, in this way becomes a modality of politics—biopolitics—the "power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (*HoS* 138). Since sex/sexuality for Foucault are inexplicable from the politics of "the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life," the processes of administration and management rely upon and instantiate an order of visuality, or an ordering of visuality, as a crucial way of maintaining this politics of life (*HoS* 140). More simply put, the biopolitical ordering of sex requires certain ways of seeing bodies to prevail over others. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault elaborates on this concept of disciplinary force as a modality of biopolitical

ordering which "produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile bodies'" through "a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour" (138). Indeed, in *Birth of the Clinic* Foucault explicitly notes the role that seeing and in/visibility play in constructing the power of the medical gaze. He writes:

> One of the tasks of medicine, therefore, is to rejoin its own condition, but by a path in which it must efface each of its steps, because it attains its aim in a gradual neutralization of itself. [...] Hence the strange character of the medical gaze; it is caught up in an endless reciprocity. It is directed upon that which is visible in the disease—but on the basis of the patient, who hides this visible element even as he shows it; consequently, in order to know, he must recognize, while already being in possession of the knowledge that will lend support to his recognition. (9)

The medical gaze authorizes itself, then, by invisibilizing itself, by deferring or delegating its way of seeing into the patient it produces and requires. Extrapolating from the contexts of the clinic which Foucault explores in *Birth of the Clinic*, I read in the disperse and various processes of construction of the trans/queer subject the very same biopolitical strategies of in/visibilation; although the medical industrial complex is in and of itself a highly relevant context to explore the normative production, discipline and erasure of trans/queer people, I place the medical gaze as but one of a larger panoply of hegemonic visual processes, gazes, and visualities. Trans/queer subjectivity is in these ways enmeshed in an array of modes of visualizing the body, modes which implicate the performance, discipline, and appearance of bodies in nexuses of power *via* the visual and attempt to produce and enforce livable and unlivable ways of doing and seeing gender.

Let's return for a moment then to Foucault's definition of biopolitics as the "power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death." In a contemporary context, trans studies scholar and historian Jules Gill-Peterson throughout her work calls attention to the biopolitical efforts the modern state undertakes to categorically disallow and disappear trans lives. Dubbing this project of erasure the "cis state," Gill-Peterson implicitly elaborates upon Foucault's concept of the power to disallow life to the point of death by highlighting the ways contemporary racial capitalism seeks to eradicate trans/queer existence. In fact, in her article "On Killing Trans Children," Gill-Peterson conceptualizes this power relation, as it seeks to disallow the existence of trans children in particular, in terms which directly echo Foucault's definition of biopolitics. Gill-Peterson writes:

> This [transphobic] rhetoric, literalized by bills that materially immiserate trans children by depriving them of education and healthcare, shares in a darkly modern mode of killing: *letting die*. Rather than exercising the brute violence of the state that would kill them outright, this logic would instead reduce their life chances to as close to zero as possible by depriving them, as a population, of the material means to survive.

When Willow Pill reveals her fourth head, then, I read the crotch-face as staring back at and refusing the gaze which authorizes itself as a hegemonic form of visuality in service to "the cis state," the gaze which is both literalized and expanded by anti-trans "eugenics bills" which seek to enforce the eradication of trans life. Incidentally, this effort to disallow often relies on rhetoric which insists that gender and sex are indistinguishable, and further that gender, as one transphobic saying goes, is "what's in your pants." I see Willow Pill's crotch-face as a refusal of this logic, a challenge to the equation of genitals or biology with truth (an equation which paints trans people as deceptive or artificial as opposed to the purported self-evidence and realness of

cisness or "natural" sex/gender). If the truth of gender is what's in your pants, and furthermore if a whole array of biopolitical apparatuses demands access, surveillance, and violent enforcement of that truth, then I position Willow's reveal as daring to ask what happens, then, when what's in your pants is another face. What new modes of existence and experience can be glimpsed at through negating gender intelligibility altogether? Further, what does intentionally exceeding, or to borrow phrasing again from Foucault, "confounding" modes of recognizability offer as a way of generative critique of gender categories? What does the act of looking defiantly back reveal about the ways of looking the act refuses? These are the central questions I seek to tease out in this thesis. Rather than continuing a queer theoretical tradition, though, of "reducing trans people and, especially, women to a figuration that places a question mark over their material being and its power as a so-often erased source of knowledge," I want to explore, through literature, what new modes of material being and power are glimpsed at through trans/queer (counter)visual practices which work against exactly such a conceptualization of trans people as de facto figurations of doing gender otherwise (Benavante & Gill-Peterson 24). Against thinking trans *qua* proof of gender's constructedness, I want to draw attention instead to countervisual practices, both explicitly trans/queer and not, that offer ways of thinking and seeing against and beyond the hegemonic constructions of history and the present. If Walter Benjamin sees in Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus" a figure who can see in ways we cannot—who sees the past as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet"—then I similarly see in Willow Pill's fourth face a trans/queer way of looking of which we are not yet capable (257)

Following Gill-Peterson's belief that in/as a subjectless trans critique, "reading for the particular is a much more accountable project than reading for the universal," I see Willow Pill's

reveal as a dramatic and deliberate refusal to be legible as a definitively sexed subject, as a Foucauldian confounding of the law of nature ("Thinking" 130). Willow's move, in this reading, offers a moment of destabilization of the cis state's need to see the "truth" of bodies; it turns on its head the ways of seeing which uphold the category of "biological sex" as immutably binary and irrefutably self-evident. In *Bodies That Matter,* Judith Butler examines how "the criteria of intelligible sex operates to constitute a field of bodies," and how these processes of constitution intertwine materiality with its conceptual-linguistic formation (55). Summarizing Foucault's treatment of subjectivization and power, Butler explains:

> The prison comes to be only within the field of power relations, but more specifically, only to the extent that it is invested or saturated with such relations, that such a saturation is itself formative of its very being. Here the body is not an independent materiality that is invested by power relations external to it, but it is that for which materialization and investiture are coextensive. (34)

Willow Pill's fourth face reflects and refracts these coextensive operations of materialization and power investiture as they are conducted through recourse to the visual or visible. By looking back at those who would look under the hem of her dress for the purportedly immutable materiality of her sex, Willow's crotch-face reveals not only a destabilization of the category of intelligible sex but so too reveals and refuses the "field of power relations" which compels the very expectation of visible, intelligible sex *qua* truth.

If the state, as Gill-Peterson argues, is "trying to become cisgender" through a hegemonic conceptualization of the materiality of the sexed body (the conceptualization which Butler seeks to untangle), a dominant strategy of this violently anti-trans/queer effort of the state is surveillance. Although far from a new phenomenon, the contemporary right frequently targets

trans identities and practices, scapegoating and painting trans as predatory and unnatural. Indeed, in an interview with Jules Joanne Gleeson, Butler minces no words in describing this transphobic uptick as "one of the dominant strains of fascism in our times" ("Rethink Gender"). How, then, does this strain of transphobic fascism operate through and in relation to the visual?

In *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices,* Toby Beauchamp argues that surveillance in the United States is not a peripheral phenomenon to the workings of normative gender and sexuality, but surveillance is rather "a central practice through which the category of transgender is produced, regulated, and contested" (2). These processes, which cannot be divorced from the contexts of racial capitalism, are what I imagine Willow Pill's crotch, and this thesis, responding to—the "perceived deception underlying transgressive gender presentation" that surveillance mechanisms, both state and civilian, official and extralegal, produce (9). In the face, excuse the pun, of the disperse and hegemonic demands to be surveilled and thus constructed and visualized as a transgressive subject, Willow Pill's crotch-face evades and supersedes the confines of gender intelligibility. Though the act of revealing a face in place of genitals goes further than an act of substituting for a purportedly irreducible marker of "truth"— it looks back. A face lies where the supposed biological burden of visible "proof" of sex ought to be, looking back defiantly at the forces which command its very visibilization.

Pill's performance functions, then, as a specifically queer instance of what visual studies scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff in *The Right to Look* calls a practice of "countervisuality:" a contestation of "the law that sustains visuality's authority in order to justify its own sense of 'right'" (25). Mirzoeff clarifies his understanding of "visuality" not as a general or totalizing collection and process of imagery, but as the hegemonic "visualization of history" (2). Visuality,

as Mirzoeff theorizes it, reifies history and "manifest [its owns] authority" through the "ability to assemble a visualization," which "requires permanent renewal in order to win consent as the 'normal'" (2). Countervisuality and "the right to look," on the other hand, oppose the hegemonic processes of in/visibilization which visuality employs in order to reproduce its dominating version of the reality of the historical moment. While Mirzoeff assembles an ambitious and enlightening history and critique of visuality's order in *The Right to Look*, he largely does so through a genealogy of the optic strategies of military and police apparatuses. If Beauchamp's work can then be thought of as responsive to or extending Mirzoeff's analysis of hegemonic visuality to the specific contexts of gender non/conformity and state surveillance, then I situate this thesis as further building upon this intersection by theorizing with and through instances of trans/queer countervisualities, or the trans/queer right to look.

Anti-trans/queer violence, a sign under which I would include surveillance apparatuses, is a foundational "atmosphere," as Eric A. Stanley theorizes it in *Atmospheres of Violence*. It demands one's sex/gender to be always binary, stable, intelligible and able to be made visible to the forces which demand it, and often under the guise that subjection to this demand is for the public good. Writing on the 2008 CCTV footage of Memphis police officer Bridges McRae brutally beating Duanna Johnson, a Black trans woman in the jail's intake area, Stanley writes: "...we must insist that the filmic is always in relationship to the entire apparatus of viewing—its formalistic qualities, historical referents, techniques of production, dissemination, exhibition, as well as the psychical formations that build the social as such. The image is not simply viewed by us, it also produces the viewer in the process—the image looks back" (*AoV* 74). For Stanley, the footage of Johnson's beating produces her as a kind of "(non)subject," a (non)positionality which is at once "the negation of the human" and a "(non)position from which a counterattack is

launched" (74). I theorize the various visual acts of demanding, searching, surveilling, and attempting to "prove" sex/gender as functioning similarly to how Stanley conceptualizes the inherent racial and gendered stakes of the image. In this light, I interpret Willow's performance as refusing the intelligible form which anti-trans/queer violence and surveillance expect and produce. By looking back, the crotch-face also calls attention to the very processes of subject non/production Stanley describes in their treatment of the Johnson footage.

The crotch-face thus begets the questions which this thesis attempts to untangle. Although I engage with concepts and material from the fields of gender and sexuality studies, trans studies, archival studies, philosophy, and media/cultural studies, I primarily employ the methodology of close reading in order to trace a non-exhaustive, deliberate archive of both hegemonic visuality and trans/queer challenges to the demand of visibility. Drawing upon examples of archives, art and literature, I ask after how visuality in relation to gender is constructed, and how forms of trans/queer countervisuality might act as and mobilize new forms of critical being and seeing.

The form this project takes is that of an assemblage. While each section revolves around an analysis of visuality as embodying and deploying forms of biopower, the ways in which individual sections take up this task differ greatly. In the first two sections, I conduct a more traditional literary analysis of Herman Melville's travel/adventure narrative, *Typee*, and Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Although the crux of these two sections does not explicitly deal in transness nor queerness, I draw on these modernist texts to tease out the importance that seeing (or not seeing) invests and is invested in the reproduction of social power in relation to colonialism (Melville) and the dominant ways of viewing temporality (Woolf). Section four marks the thesis's shift from literature proper toward popular culture, visual art and archival

material. Section four specifically theorizes with "low culture," performing analyses of Andy Milligan's trash horror-comedy *Surgikill* and a comic appearing in the pulp *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Section five, then, serves as the touchstone of this thesis, theorizing more fully and explicitly how the politics of visuality come to bear on trans/queer bodies and how the order of the visual might be refused altogether. I subdivide this section in two parts, one which explores early 20th century news reportage around "revealing" trans embodiment to the American public, and one which thinks with (post)modern 20th and 21st century visual art as a way to conceptualize what forms of resistance against, and existence in nonrelation to, visuality's omnipotence might take.

2.0 "Strange Visions of Outlandish Things": Seeing and/as Colonialism in Herman Melville's *Typee*

"The spectacle," writes Guy Debord, "is not a collection of images," but rather "it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images" (2). In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord puts forth a theory of visuality and visual culture, arguing that what he calls the "the spectacle" is not just a prominent extension of modern society, but an "objective reality" itself, a world of images and visuality which creates false consciousness through its constant sensorial mediation (2). The notion of modern life being articulated through the domination of a falsified spectacle provides an insightful opportunity to parse texts which deal heavily with gazes, images and power relations. Herman Melville's *Typee* is just such a text. At the beginning of the work, our narrator Tommo receives the news that the ship of which he is a crewman, the Dolly, will be soon arriving at the Marquesan islands after six months without seeing land: "The Marquesas!" he thinks, "What strange visions of outlandish things does the name spirit up" (5). In his reaction, Tommo depicts the function of the rest of the text: conjuring and constructing colonial images. *Typee* functions through and as image: its obsession with the visual, seeing, and the narrative construction of the Other both critiques and reproduces imperialist modes of constructing native islanders. *Typee* works, as Douglas Ivison notes, toward an "anti-imperial critique," but is "ultimately imbricated with imperial hegemony" (115). The narrator Tommo's relaying of his experience in the Marquesas registers as an extended attempt, I argue, of creating a spectacle of colonial social relations: a complex act of construction which tries to hide itself behind the notions of objectivity and the natural. Tommo's narrativization of his experience in terms of visual spectacle, especially in relation to the native islanders, in this reading is

understood as an arm of the apparatus of the colonial spectacle, which in purporting to see and describe is always also reifying and subordinating. While Ivison reminds us that *Typee* "recognizes its own implication in the imperialist-capitalist project that is the subject of its critique," I want to extend Ivison's situating of *Typee* to explore the ways in which the story engages visuality and modes of seeing in order to construct and critique its own colonial gaze (115). As part of the larger whole of this thesis, then, this reading of Melville's text allows a partial elucidation of how the regime of visuality constructs itself, specifically as in the production of the subjects and categories visuality surveils and oppresses.

As noted in the introduction, Nicholas Mirzoeff describes "the right to look" as opposed to the project of visuality; here, Mirzoeff takes visuality to mean the regime which contests, inhibits, and circumscribes one's right to look, to see. If the act of looking "requires permanent renewal in order to win consent as the 'normal' or everyday because it is always being contested," then *Typee's* narrator Tommo engages in an attempt at just such an "authorization of authority" both in the act and style of his narration (Mirzoeff 2). When Tommo, at the onset of the novel, explains that the then-hitherto lack of "insight into [the Marquesans'] peculiar customs and manners" is based on "fear of the natives," Tommo's story that follows, *Typee*'s narrative itself, is an attempt to fill in the gap he describes, to see what had up until then remained out of the imperial gaze (6). By framing his narration as making up for a lack of cultural insight, Tommo places and authorizes his story in the register of scientific rationality; an act which engages, as Ivison writes of the role of the generic travel narrative, in the "production and reproduction of the European consciousness" (116). Tommo's narration, read as Tommo's gaze, is then Melville showing the delimiting and authorizing mechanics of the colonial attempt to win consent as the 'normal.' In this reading, Tommo's language throughout the book surrounding the

native islanders serves as an attempt to force a seeing, to control the right to look at indigenous culture by constructing and critiquing a colonialist narrative. When Tommo describes "an irresistible curiosity to see [emphasis mine] those islands," he is implicating and authorizing the story that follows as within both the personal and the European right to look (5). Thus Tommo's urge to see and describe is also an urge toward the "discursive practice for rendering and regulating the real" (Mirzoeff 4).

In *Typee*, the body is a crucial site or canvas through which social relations are visually constructed. Further, Tommo's perception/description of gendered and sexualized facets of the islander body promulgate his construction of the exotic other; through visual description, Tommo reifies and confirms the "strange visions" which he anticipated before his arrival to the Marquesas (5). What Tommo sees in the course of *Typee* is then always already circumscribed by his urge to confirm his own "strangely jumbled anticipations" (5). This circumscribed field of vision, this narrative way of seeing as a reaffirmation of preconceived beliefs surrounding gender in *Typee*, parallels Laura Mulvey's explication of the filmic male gaze. Mulvey situates her project of feminist film criticism in a way I follow in my reading of *Typee*: she sets out to "discover where and how the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him" (803). Rather than focusing on film or attempting to locate a certain fascination within the reader or within Melville himself, I instead apply Mulvey's method to the gaze of our narrator Tommo as an attempt to throw into relief Tommo's limited and limiting subjectivity as a colonial subject. To illustrate this process, I turn first to Tommo's descriptions of islander women and femininity, and later turn to tattooing as a visual spectacle of Otherness.

Tommo's language around Marquesan women engages in a colonial mode of construction which functions by seeing the native women as mythological, as divinely and exotically feminine. When a number of young Marquesan girls swim "miles to welcome" the crewmen of the Dolly, for example, they are not, as Tommo's descriptions show, really human; they are variously described as "mermaids," "nymphs," "sylphs," and "creatures" (14-15). They are at once human and not human, "beautiful in the extreme" and outside of the normal; they are objectified sexually, and yet they are "as strange as beautiful" (15). Significantly, Tommo enjoins the girls' otherness to their beauty. The girls are even further described as at once "sparkling," but "with savage vivacity" (14). By insisting on the simultaneity of the girls' otherness and their sexual appeal, Tommo reconstructs the colonial way of seeing indiginous femininity, appealing to the sense of the native woman's exoticism which often accompanies exactly such a scene of "shameful inebriety" and "unlimited gratification" which Tommo purportedly contests (15). Tommo's seeing of his crewmates' sexual "debauchery" with the Marquesan girls reflects the tension between the colonial impulse to see the exoticized feminine body of the Other as both available sexual object and "poor savage" to be rescued, available for plundering yet in need of protection and preservation (15). The feminized Marquesan body is thus visualized as a site of conquest and a site of saviorism, a "strange vision" rendered real as the object which will satiate the European desire to see tantalizing strangeness in the Other, as well as to extend European sexual hegemony: "what a sight" indeed for "us bachelor sailors" (15).

Tommo's later attraction to Fayaway is described through similar language which objectifies and realizes the extra-humanness of Fayaway's beauty/non-European femininity; Fayaway possesses, much like the young Marquesans who approached the Dolly at the novel's

beginning, “extraordinary beauty” (108). Tommo’s attraction to Fayaway differs from his typical sexual gaze, however, as Fayaway, purportedly unlike other women of the Marquesas, is “singularly expressive of intelligence and humanity” (108). Tommo sees Fayaway as impossibly both the exception and the rule to the colonial feminine Other: exotic and extraordinary, yet unexpectedly (for Tommo) human. Tommo seeing “intelligence and humanity” in Fayaway functions then as both humanizing and dehumanizing. She is humanesque, which is attractive to Tommo, but her ability to be seen as fully human is foreclosed by Tommo’s ultimately colonial gaze. This gaze functions then by proclaiming insight into the Other, by projecting onto the Other. When Tommo constructs a vision of Fayaway as a Marquesan woman who is uncharacteristically “compassioned” and sympathetic, he does so through his own interpretation of the “expression of her face,” of “her countenance” (108). He does not have access to Fayaway’s consciousness, but narrates for her, sees into and onto her through her body: “In this amiable light did Fayaway appear in my eyes” (108). Similarly, when Tommo describes the scene of the islander girls applying “fragrant oil” to his “whole body,” he describes the girls yet again as “nymphs,” and follows by noting that their “bright eyes are beaming upon you with kindness” (110). Simultaneously, the femininity of the Other is non-human and is accessed and assessed by Tommo’s gaze; Tommo sees and therefore constructs their kindness in and onto their bright eyes. For Tommo, to see Marquesan femininity is to project onto these women and foreclose for them certain modes of subjectivity. This colonial gaze functions similarly to how medical perception functions for Michel Foucault; in *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault argues that the clinical gaze authorizes itself, as it “must reproduce in its own operations what has been given in the very moment of composition” (108). In other words, the gaze is tautological or logically circular in the sense that it must always reproduce itself and its functions in what it

claims merely to observe. Such is the function of Tommo's way of seeing vis-à-vis narrating and describing the feminine. When Tommo swims with Marquesan girls, who yet again are described in terms of the non-human—as "nymph-like," as "amphibious young creatures," as "like a shoal of dolphins," as if to be among them was to be " in the land of spirits"—he describes, tellingly, the girls as "supernatural visions dancing before [his] eyes" (132). This phrase echoes and reifies the initial "strange visions" of Tommo's speculation, harkening directly back to and reconfirming what he has already hoped to see. Tommo's narrative gaze thus authorizes itself, acting as a "manifestation of things in their truth, a form of initiation into the truth of things" (Foucault 115). As Ivison points out, in the European travel narrative the "Other is always already judged to be inferior" through the colonial gaze, and through his gaze's eroticization and exoticization of the feminine, Tommo both "exposes the erotic desire that is implicit in colonial discourse and participates in it" (117, 119).

The function of projection is critical to the dynamics of seeing and visuality in *Typee,* and especially so when considering moments in which looks and glances themselves are returned. Interestingly, the self-authorizing nature of the gaze is something which Tommo notices in the Marquesans, but not in himself. When Tommo and Toby first encounter the Typees, he describes how the islanders are "eager to behold" Toby and himself, and further that "every item of intelligence appeared to redouble the astonishment of the islanders, as they gazed at us with inquiring looks" (70). There is a certain irony here as Tommo pays sharp attention to the processes and significance of the gaze of the Other; the Typee's fascination is both sparked and "redoubled" by the objects (Tommo and Toby) upon which they gaze. Here, through Tommo, Melville seems to critique the ironic limitedness and blindness of the colonial gaze which purports to see merely and objectively. Frederico Bellini similarly ascribes to the "vantage point"

of melancholy in *Typee* the simultaneous status of "a product of Western culture" and a way to conduct "constructive criticism" of Western capitalist culture (5). In Chapter 29 of *Typee,* there is a symbolic moment of projection of a limited and limiting gaze onto the Other as Tommo looks up and ponders colorful birds which fly above him and return his gaze. While Bellini takes this moment to cement the role of melancholy in the novel and to "symbolize the narrator's deep fascination for the culture of the Typees, while at the same time expressing his inability to actually be in communication with them," I read this scene as deeply significant to the thematic of seeing as constructing (13). When Tommo gazes at the birds and feels "almost inclined to fancy that they knew they were gazing upon a stranger, and that they commiserated my fate," the birds, as Ivison notes, are symbolic of the Marquesans, but in a way more directly and more related to the power of seeing than Ivison takes up (216). Tommo's language when describing the birds echoes his description of the Typees interrogating him and Toby in Chapter 10: "never before had I been subjected to so strange and steady a glance; it revealed nothing of the mind of the savage, but it appeared to be reading my own" (71). The function of colonial projection shifts amidst these two scenes of looking; Tommo projects the sympathetic but ultimately inaccessible Other onto the birds above him, and onto the Typees he sees "strangeness" and threat because of the Other's inaccessibility. Thus claiming to seeing how the Other sees, to understand the Other's mode of perception, becomes really a projection and a self-authorization, a claim to the Other's view which speaks over and denies voice to said Other's reality.

Tattooing in *Typee* provides insight into the interrelation in the text between visuality, seeing, and colonialism. Tommo's description and reaction of Marquesan practices of tattooing provide a way of explicating the links between these dominant thematics. In the much-cited passage of Chapter 30, an island tattoo artist propositions Tommo, desiring to tattoo Tommo's

face, at which Tommo is “horrified at the bare thought of being rendered hideous for life,” and subsequently flees from the artist (219). John Evelev reads Tommo’s refusal to be tattooed as “a rejection of Typee culture,” as a “sublimated and displaced textualization of Melville's own concern about being inscribed within the marketplace's demands for objectified exchange” (21). Evelev links Tommo’s relation to tattooing in *Typee* to Melville’s complex relation as an author to the changing literary marketplace, shuttling between *Typee*, historical, and biographical contexts to evidence his claim. Just as Mulvey focuses on the imagined subject, Evelev’s focusing on Melville as a literal author in some ways limits or misses the potentiality of the reading of tattooing in *Typee*. While Evelev rightly notes that in *Typee*, “tattooing, like taboo, is a Typee system of ordering the world,” I read it not as “Melville's own struggle to understand what being initiated into the literary marketplace means,” but more potently as a way of reading onto non-European practices of visuality an innate difference and impossibility (28). When Tommo flees, there is an irony when he states, “this incident opened my eyes to a new danger” (219). For his “terror and indignation” at being “disfigured” is rather an act of ideological foreclosure; Tommo’s emotional response and his flight actualize a closing of his eyes to access or understanding of Typee culture (219). While in Tommo, the unnamed tattoo artist sees a potentiality as a site to perform tattooing as a form both of beautification and inscription of identity, this possibility, this way of seeing, is ultimately foreclosed and rejected by Tommo’s purportedly “unmolested view” of the situation (218). There are then competing worldviews, and in demonstrating the competition over ways of seeing through Tommo’s delimiting gaze and flight, Melville highlights the non-objectivity and the cultural power inherent to Tommo’s way of seeing and constructing the Marquesan Other. There is of course also the projecting of gaze at play again in this scene, as Tommo claims yet again insight into the Other’s field of vision:

"The idea of engrafting his tattooing upon my white skin filled him with all a painter's enthusiasm: again and again he gazed into my countenance, and every fresh glimpse seemed to add to the vehemence of his ambition" (219).

Tommo's description of the artist gazing upon him projects onto the artist a figure of punishment. Tommo reifies the visual act of tattooing, an act of inscription onto the body, as the threat of incorporation into the culture of the Other. Tommo's projection, interestingly, echoes Foucault again. In his genealogy of carceral and spectacular punishment in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes penal torture as an "organized ritual for the marking of victims and the expression of the power that punishes" (34). "The tortured body," he goes on, "is further inscribed in the legal ceremonial that must produce, for all to see, the truth of the crime" (35). Tommo's way of seeing, then, forecloses the possibility of tattooing as anything but gross disfigurement, but does so in the register of the European penal imagination. By imagining himself as potentially "disfigured in such a manner as never to have the face to return to my countrymen," Tommo figures his predicament as one in which he is the victim, the tortured body made into a spectacle and on display for his compatriots (219). Tommo's terror then lies not so much in the pain of being facially tattooed, but in being marked and consequently seen differently by his countrymen. In other words, what Tommo fears most about being tattooed is the inscription of the crime of his proximity or relation to the Other onto his body that would in turn affect his own relation to the European colonial gaze. Tommo's admission that tattooing "always appeared inexplicable to me" is a statement of his inability to fully "see" Marquesan culture, as well as a reification of the Marquesans' Otherness (221).

Ultimately, Tommo's narration of his own experience and his speaking for and over the Marquesan islanders points to the limitations of even the most sympathetic colonial discourse.

When Gayatri Spivak notes that "the concrete experience that is the guarantor of the political appeal of prisoners, soldiers and schoolchildren is disclosed through the concrete experience of the intellectual, the one who diagnoses the episteme," this schema holds up when we replace "prisoners, soldiers and schoolchildren" with "Marquesan" and when we replace "intellectual" with "narrator" (69). Tommo, in all his ways of seeing, projecting, visibilising, and blinding, through these processes engages in a diagnosis of an episteme of coloniality. Visuality and modes of rendering what is and isn't visible are critical functions of *Typee*. After all, when Tommo criticizes the French for their modes of colonization in the Marquesan islands, he objects that the French "sought to veil the enormity from the eyes of the world" (17). What Tommo finds reprehensible is not only the French's ostentatiousness, but their hiding of the Marquesas from other colonial powers—the robbing of what Tommo feels is his and his country's right to look. Although previously he decries his crewmates' sexual engagement with the native islanders as "polluting examples," Tommo still insists on the basis of their right to look, the very right to the possibility of pollution. Indeed, he feels a colonial "pang of regret that a scene so enchanting should be hidden from the world in these remote seas, and seldom meet the eyes of devoted lovers of nature" (4). By framing the right to see the Marquesas as belonging to "lovers of nature," Tommo eschews the colonial and political implications of the figure of the nature lover. In this move, Europeans, colonists, forces of imperialism are hidden behind the signifiers "lovers of nature" and "the world," and yet Tommo simultaneously decries the fact that this nature itself is "hidden." Through Tommo, Melville thus offers a reading of colonial seeing which points to the colonial imperial gaze as always enmeshed in the process of projection, foreclosure, and delimitation. In *Typee*, then, Melville investigates the far-reaching political implications that frame and contextualize Tommo's all but innocent "irresistible curiosity to see" (5).

3.0 "Creating It Every Moment Afresh": Seeing and Temporality in *Mrs. Dalloway*

"The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment."

-Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*

"Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house."

-José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

"But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her"

-Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Mrs. Dalloway explores the politics of the moment, asks what could be offered, lost, or refused by refusing the past and future and instead figuring the present as the highest form of time. Through the constant narrative attention paid to "the moment" and the emotions and events surrounding and encompassed by it, the novel presents an ambivalent temporality of the ever-present. Here I aim to analyze briefly the novel's presentation of temporality, chiefly through the character of Clarissa Dalloway, in order to argue the importance of the ways in which the novel envisions together acts of seeing and looking and notions of temporality. Put differently, *Mrs. Dalloway* insists on an interconnection, an inextricableness between ways of seeing and experiences of time. Further, this conjunction presents complex, conflicting relations to and modalities of doing and being in time, and in doing so traces the ways in which the political forces of visuality relate to temporality. Through this reading of Woolf's text, I thus aim to ask after and partially trace this relationship, interrogating how visuality and temporality constitute, enforce, or possibly betray each other, and what political stakes lie at this theoretical intersection.

Through Clarissa's eyes, the past and all its politics are relegated, erased, and/or subjugated under the supremacy of "the moment." The past, as moments which are no longer, cannot fully figure into Clarissa's reality which centers around and is structured almost exclusively by the "here, now, in front of her" (18). By contrast, the there, the not-now, the distant and the out of sight, can be for Clarissa imperceptible. This is not to say that Clarissa does not conceive a sense of past at all- memory serves as a dominant force for Clarissa's self-understanding throughout *Mrs. Dalloway*. What Clarissa's relation to this past presents, though, is a conceptualization of the past as exclusively linked to the present experience of its remembrance. In other words, the not-now becomes perceptible only in terms of the now in which it is re-experienced. For example, when Clarissa thinks of World War I, an event of horror, inhumanity, and indelible political and economic ramifications, she does not conceive of the War as such because it belongs to the past. It is, simply, not now: "it was over; thank Heaven—over" (8). This phrasing is echoed throughout the novel- significantly when Clarissa experiences a not-quite-epiphany, "an illumination," in which "an inner meaning [is] almost expressed" (53-54). At the conclusion of this illumination, the narrator summates: "It was over–the moment" (54). The narrator elaborates: "against such moments…there contrasted (as she laid her hat down) the bed and Baron Marbot and the candle half-burnt" (54). There is in this moment, then, an immediate juxtaposition of and contrast between the experience of remembering and the reality of the present narrative moment- the bed, the memoire, the candle immediately within Clarissa's sight. Both instances, the remark of the War and of the moment of recollection being "over," suggest, ironically, both the literal impossibility of their continuance and the assurance that the fact of their happening will affect and bleed into the present. In other words, the repeated declaration that things are in fact over bespeaks an urge to put the past into discourse as a way of refusing or

hoping against its effects on the present- an effort to keep the then and there away from the here and now which Clarissa holds as the pinnacle of experience. Elsewhere our narrator comments more explicitly on Clarissa's troubled relation, or rather nonrelation, to the world and the complexities of the past as a phenomenon: "She knew nothing; no language, no history" (17). Although referencing on one level Clarissa's unfamiliarity with non-English languages and in-depth world historical knowledge, this phrase, when placed within the analysis of the past as the unreachable then, seems to figure Clarissa's not-knowing as a sort of counter epistemology. Clarissa's refusal or inability to conform to the stuffy, exclusive tradition of the Oxford man, is in this reading an alternative way of knowing and experiencing. Coupled with her love for the moment, which I will analyze more in depth later, Clarissa's constant re-experiencing of the past as memory-sequence throughout the novel and the simultaneous insistence on declaring the past "over" evoke an attempt at contesting or refusing traditional discourses and modalities of experiencing temporality and history.

Turning to the novel's obsession with Clarissa's experience of the moment, the present functions both as an object of desire and the modality of its own construction. To evidence and explain what I mean by this, it is worth attending to a moment in the text in which Clarissa ponders the concept of Heaven, the moment, and the way even "the most dejected" of people also embrace the moment of life: "For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries[…]do the same[…]they love life" (8). Heaven and life are then, for Clarissa, intertwined with and composed of the moment; the syntax of the phrase "creating it every moment afresh" suggests not just the constant, ever-present need for the creation of "Heaven," but also the creation of Heaven *as* moment. The moment is then

something that must be made up, built "round one," created "afresh" in order to be experienced, desired, loved. This scene of Clarissa's observation concludes, tellingly, with the linkage of present experience with desire: "the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June" (8). What Clarissa loves is the quotidian, the everyday, or rather the every-moment. "Life" and "this moment" are for her the same. While various characters at times dismiss Clarissa's appreciation for the moment as frivolous, womanly, or un-intellectual, the novel presents a more ambiguous view of Clarissa's way of conceptualizing time. Not a simple, immature inability to understand the traditions of history and time, Clarissa's experience of and desire for the moment is a way of rejecting the present as "a prison house" (Muñoz 1). Instead, Clarissa offers an alternative, counter-traditional sort of temporality, one which resists and rejects rigid frameworks of time and instead, like J. Jack Halberstam's conceptualization of queer time, attempts to "expand the potential of the moment" (Halberstam 2). Thus, while for José Muñoz the present is something to be imagined beyond, and for Halberstam the present is something to be emphasized as a site of potentiality, Clarissa's temporality imagines the present moment as itself the achievement and means of desire. When Clarissa remarks, then, that there is "something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument[...]could register the vibration," she is not attempting to seize the moment in order to stuff as much experience as she can into it, but rather Clarissa points to the "fulness" of the single instance as beyond traditional scientific understanding (30). For Clarissa, the moment's way of resisting or exceeding measure and knowledge is what marks the moment as desirable.

The moment as desirable for its immeasurableness is linked also to the novel's fascination with ways of seeing and in/visibility. Seeing time differently, as I have analyzed, is a

distinguishing trait for Clarissa, but so too is her, and the novel's, ability to see into, beyond, and despite: "[Clarissa] would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on" (17). Clarissa's vision is paradoxically exacting, piercing, and unable to penetrate- both cutting and incapable of fully seeing the internality of that which is external to herself. Clarissa is keenly aware of this conundrum, as it is the reason she then refuses to figure or fix anyone, to say "that they were this were that" (17). Her heightened sense of seeing allows her to see its own limitation; the gift of sight also in this sense envisions its own circumscription. Her appreciation for "this, here, now, in front of her" is then again structured by or founded in opposition to those internalities of character and consciousnesses which Clarissa exists "outside" of, those to which she is "looking on" (17-18). When Clarissa recalls her kiss with Sally, she describes the process of "plung[ing] into the very heart of the moment, transfix[ing] it, there–the moment of this June morning" (59). The desirability of the moment is again paradoxical- for just as the moment's incalculability makes it desirable, so does the fact that the moment, unlike the past or future, can be transfixed, plunged into, sliced through.

A way of transfixing the moment, the narrator and Clarissa show us, is by continuing to speak it, to put it into discourse as a way of preserving it: Clarissa's kiss with Sally, then, is not framed as Clarissa's favorite *memory*, but rather as "the most exquisite moment of [Clarissa's] whole life" (58). The insistence on the phrase "the moment" when narratively shifting into a sequence of memory or flashback suggests a refusal to conceptualize the past as entirely distinct from the present, and furthermore foregrounds the contemporaneity, the now-ness of the act of looking at/into the past as opposed to figuring the past as outside of the acts of its recollection.

Turning then to the moment's relation to futurity, moments in *Mrs. Dalloway* are both "buds on the tree of life" and located among a "secret deposit" which "one must pay back" (50). Interestingly, these metaphors of the moment have two significantly similar features. In both cases, moments are multiple and dispersed, they inhere within a panoply of other moments, among the tree, the deposit. Second, moments are constructed as potentialities- buds which will eventually blossom, currency with which one will eventually pay life back. What these metaphors offer through and for Clarissa is a way of understanding the future as a continuation of moments, or rather as the addition of moments to the existing assortment of moments that comprise the past and present- an expanded tree or deposit.

The act of looking in *Mrs. Dalloway* is figured, just as the moment is, as both a socially constructed and constructing act, an act which does not purport to be definitive but rather suggestive; an act of both contesting and creating realities. While mentions of acts of seeing and looking abound throughout the text, as a shorthand for one of the overall functions of looking, I examine the sky-writing scene. While Merve Emre notes in her footnote to the passage in the annotated version that the scene has been in/famously subject to "many rich and contradictory interpretations," I turn to the scene for its relation to world seeing as world building (38). The various characters, watching as the airplane creates letters out of the smoke it emits, interpret the letters in different ways. I argue that the acts of interpretation here go further than mere musing but register as what JL Austin famously describes as "performative utterances," speech acts which "in saying" their action "actually perform" them (Austin 235). The narratorial shifting of gazes emphasizes this function:

> "'That's an E,' said Mrs. Bletchley—
>
> or a dancer—

'It's toffee,' murmured Mr. Bowley—" (38).

The three different interpretations are declarations, and significantly, the second, "or a dancer," is rather ambiguous as to who the utterance belongs to- the narrator? Mrs. Bletchley or Mr. Bowley? A bystander? The ambiguity here suggests, I argue, the constant and socially informed and informing nature of constructing reality. Seeing reality is not observing, but creating. When Septimus is then overwhelmed by the "beauty" of the same skywriting, it is significant that he muses that he is being rewarded "for nothing, for ever, for looking merely" (39). Far from a neutral performance, looking is in this instance an act which overwhelms, and an act with consequences. When Septimus is on the verge of being mentally overtaken by the scenes before him, his internal thoughts confirm the linkage of sight and construction: "But he would not go mad. He would shut his eyes; he would see no more" (39). Against Rezia's insistent cries for him to look, Septimus's refusal bespeaks a refusal to adhere to or admit a reality which he knows would lead to madness. If *Mrs. Dalloway* lays bare the processes of temporality and seeing as complex, paradoxical, and nonlinear, the novel also points to the ways in which refusing to see is a refusing to create: shutting one's eyes allows, to a certain extent, a foreclosure of unwanted potentialities just as shifting one's eyes, directing one's gaze allows for the construction of desire, of the moment.

4.0 Queer Trash: Un/Intelligibility & Low Theory

In a 1975 issue of the pulp *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, there is a comic strip, penned by illustrator Gahan Wilson, depicting three men in vaguely Roman Classical attire, walking along some steps. Two of the men walk in a pair, toward the left side of the panel, chasing after carrots on sticks fashioned to their heads. They are positioned a step above the third man, whose expression, unlike those of the sneering men above him, is dreamy, dazed as he walks toward the right side of the panel. Fashioned to this man's head-stick is not a carrot, but a flower. One of the men above him, disgusted at this fact, speaks the dialogue that serves as the panel's caption: "Must be some kind of queer!" Queerness here registers as a subjugated form of looking, desiring. I gesture toward this comic strip as a way to ask: when the object of one's desire is unintelligible within the rigid imagination of the carrot and the stick, discipline and reward, what alternative forms of being can queer desiring, looking, and imagining generate? In a project of theorizing how visuality and the production of gender interrelate, this section briefly considers some lowbrow visual material in order to open up, and allow to stay open, the question of how alternative looking and appearing might be mobilized against the demands for visibility and coherence.

We live in an age of "big data," an age in which certain algorithmic technologies border upon eugenicist projects[2], where logistics and forms of legibility rely always on what they can measure, process, and compute. By contrast, this section proposes, queerness as a form of

[2] For a fuller exploration of how data produces and marginalizes racial categories, see Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's *Discriminating Data: Correlation, Neighborhoods, and the New Politics of Recognition.*

unintelligibility might disrupt, reject, and reconceptualize modes of intelligibility, desire, and governability. In their analysis of an archive of trans/queer deaths, Eric Stanley points to the delimiting nature of statistics as an epistemological project, as a project in service of ostensibly progressive queer politics. Data analysis, as a way of combating hate crimes/violence against queer people, is as an epistemology already circumscribed by historically contingent, stabilizing notions of identity. "What we need," Stanley reminds us, "is not new data or a more complete set of numbers," but rather "our task…is to radically resituate the ways we conceptualize the meaning of violence as fundamental…to our current condition" (31). By digging through an archive of materials from the 1970's through the 1980's—a time which Patricia Ruelke in *Ruse of Repair* reminds us was marked by both the initiation by the United States of "the neoliberal phase of racial capitalism" and the operation of broadly reparative political aesthetics—this section deliberately draws upon bad, marginal, trashy texts to investigate how they offer exactly such ways of resituating and reimagining as Stanley has called for (19). Working with the ill-reputed horror/sexploitation film queer filmmaker Andy Milligan, as well as with a Gahan Wilson comic appearing in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, this essay explores what these unlikely texts offer by way of theorizing queer ontologies which dare to throw into relief the politics which contemporary data culture relies so heavily upon—namely, state sanctioned, rights-based modes of intelligibility. Put differently, in sifting through this gross, uncouth, and comical archive, we can glean other ways of being and knowing, alternative (and in this way queer) ontologies and epistemologies which dare to imagine outside of, in opposition to, and beyond that which can be quantified and rendered as data. Instead, this essay explores alongside an eclectic archive and through queer theoretical methodology, im/precisely what it means, and what it promises, to be unrenderable.

My approach toward assembling this hodgepodge combination of materials draws upon a methodology articulated by Halberstam. In his essay "Silence, Stillness, and Collapse," Halberstam coins the term "the accidental archive" to describe a "non deliberate archive" which "resists easy connections or family resemblance - it creates new sounds, resonances, dissonant echoes and, every now and then, it unpicks the tight mesh of disciplinary knowledge" (3). Such an archive "arrives by chance and creates its own ecologies of encounter and of separation" (3). My archive of exploitation horror and lowbrow comic strips arrived to me through chance, and by meshing and analyzing them together I hope to demonstrate how embracing this queer approach to the archives is worthwhile as well as show how such an approach itself resists easy codification under the signs or processes of data.

I first became aware of these materials through a visit to the University of Pittsburgh's Archive and Special Collections through Dr. Julie Beaulieu's fall 2021 semester course, "Gender, Sexuality, and the Archives." During our class visit, librarian archivists had assembled an array of archival materials related to gender & sexuality studies, from underground queer periodicals to gay porn comics, and we were invited to browse and sift through the materials. I was of course drawn to the more nontraditional archival pieces: the dirty comics, a pulp novel depicting a future planet of only lesbians, the homophobic pulp *The Homosexual Generation* which decried the rise of homosexuality as an impending, world ending threat. Sorting through this queer trash, so to speak, I was inspired to stay a while and theorize with this cultural ephemera. I soon after applied and was accepted into the Archival Scholars Research Award program, where I worked with librarian archivist Ben Rubin, whose expertise in horror studies led me to work with a rare original annotated director's copy of the script to *Surgikill*. In these ways, the archives of queer trash found me, so to speak, and after Halberstam, I attempt not to

draw direct, linear, or relational comparisons between them but rather to "allow [these] archival pieces to bump into each other" and to theorize what their bumping might articulate (3).

4.1 Trash, Horror: Andy Milligan's *Surgikill*

The script of Andy Milligan's *Surgikill* begins with a contrast between the frantic rush of navigating bodily crisis and the mundane, bureaucratic governing logics of institutional biopolitics. That is to say it begins with a campy chase scene in a hospital. We immediately meet a nameless woman, running and "screaming for her life" as her husband, on crutches, chases after her with murder in his eyes. "He's going to kill me! Help! Help! Someone help me! Save me!" she cries. The character written in the script, aptly, as "Nurse Boobs," responds dryly to the wife in distress: "Have you tried marriage counseling? Second floor, get off the elevator and two doors to the right." The screaming woman runs off, her husband in pursuit, and hilarity, for the viewer, has ensued. While such tongue in cheek humor is astoundingly eye-roll inducing, there is, I'd argue, a certain significance in its punchline. Similar scenes of individuals afflicted with outrageous or fantastical maladies being humorously overlooked, ignored, or misdiagnosed repeat throughout the film. Likewise, the main plot, if one can be generous enough to identify one within the film, is a clumsy whodunnit: a surgical masked killer in scrubs is murdering patients left and right, and it is up to the quirky hospital staff to discover and seize the titular surgikiller. Just as Robert Craig, in the introduction to his collection of critical essays on Milligan's films, writes that these films "[fall] through the cracks of any definable film category" (7). *Surgikill,* I argue, is fascinated with exactly such identities and ontologies which fall through the cracks of definition or category. Indeed, Craig asserts that Milligan's films' refusal to

"align…with the traditional horror genre of the day" is what has caused them to "[fall] by the wayside" (7). *Surgikill* revels in this wayside, perhaps even offering an ontology of the cracks it falls through, this wayside it inhabits. Even within Milligan's own repertoire, *Surgikill* generically resists; the only ostensible Milligan comedy as opposed to Milligan's vast filmography of exploitation horror.

Above all, *Surgikill* is, undoubtedly, a bad movie. So why write about it? In short, to highlight the cultural and political importance of theorizing trash, theorizing the everyday, the lows of low theory. In a footnote, Craig describes his own project of criticism as one simply grounded in standard film critique. Interestingly though, he writes that although outside the scope or interest of his own project, "...a discussion of Milligan via queer theory might be advantageous for some intrepid author" (9). While I won't claim this project as necessarily intrepid, I think the work of digging through the trash, the gutter, the cracks which *Surgikill* embodies may very well prove advantageous by way of offering a critique of the stability and intelligibility which contemporary politics of both data and identity rest upon.

In terms of resisting and refusing intelligibility, the various patients of *Surgikill's* hospital encapsulate the humor, absurdity, and possibility of experiences which cannot be labeled, administered, or visibilized by a biopolitical regime of normativity. In this way, their extraordinary maladies literally exceed the ordinary but also the definable. Take the earlier scene of the screaming wife, chased by her murderous husband and told to try marriage counseling, second floor. Take also one individual admitted to the hospital in *Surgikill* who emits smoke from his orifices, and after several complaints of not feeling too "hot," sneezes flames onto an unwitting nurse. This silly, stupid, campy running bit throughout *Surgikill* of fantastical, untreatable ailments points to certain possibilities (and certain impossibilities) of experience. The

data for such medical cases, one might say, does not exist, and similarly such cases resist datafication. There is after all no protocol, diagnosis, or prescription readily available for one who finds themselves suddenly breathing flames. Significantly, then, there is also no way of easily absorbing such identities or experiences into hegemonic modes of expression and being. What the flame sneezer offers us is the queer possibility of imagining outside of and against that which can only be produced and legible through the narrow and limiting systems of intelligibility. In applying this to contemporary queer politics, it is worth asking after what we stand to gain from approaching queer liberation from a perspective other than the one which stabilizes, codifies, and relies upon identity. What possibilities are opened up if we instead think as fire sneezers, if we ask after shattering the systems of stable sexual and juridical identity production rather than attempting to be properly diagnosed?

4.2 Desiring Carrot: Thinking with Gahan Wilson Comic Strips

Turning back to Gahan Wilson's untitled comic, I want to juxtapose this strip with another, strikingly similar Wilson comic panel. Again, in this other comic, there are two parties differing in their relation to the carrots that dangle by a stick in front of their faces, and again, we are confronted with a question of the politics of desire. In this other comic, though, one figure asks the other, "now what are you going to do?", referencing the fact that the other figure has evidently just eaten his carrot. Both comics, the one with a flower substituting for the carrot and the one in which the carrot has been eaten, display a grappling with forms of desire which are not readily or easily intelligible by the normative forces which shape them. By portraying a mode of

looking toward the flower, an object which falls outside the standard mode of desiring, the first comic suggests that an alternative object of desire threatens to destabilize or at least make uncomfortable the regime which prescribes the carrot as the normal and normatively desirable object. No wonder, then, that our flower-chaser is labeled "some kind of queer"; queerness, this strip shows, can operate as a beautiful rejection, or rejection of the beautiful. What the second comic then points to is the threat and power of satiating a forbidden and structuring desire. The carrot in this strip reads as a symbol of desire itself, and the man who eats his carrot elicits a cartoon expression of sudden awareness, sudden shame as he is called out by the man next to him. While our carrot-eater's face looks exasperated, this frozen, seemingly simple moment points to the complex mechanics of desire and shame and the ways they might be critiqued or reformulated; the man who shames and questions creates and polices the carrot-eater's shame through verbalization, putting this shame into power through discourse. One wonders if the act of eating the carrot, not without a witness but without the deployment of the discursive register of shame, would elicit any shame at all. Indeed, the deployment of this shame through its discursive social reinforcement constructs it entirely, and since its perpetuation relies on individuals enforcing it, the instance of having one's carrot and eating it too is not, after all, an impossibility.

5.0 “STARE BACK!”: Art and Archives Against Gender Fascism

As Clarissa Dalloway muses about the commotion of a motorcar crash in *Mrs. Dalloway*, her thoughts join other London onlookers and passersby in speculating on the seemingly royal identity of the person hidden inside the car. As the crowd gazes, the novel’s narrator notes, “Even the sex was now in dispute. But there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within; greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street” (29). The assumed royalty of the motorcar’s exterior, coupled with the inaccessible truth, the denied admission, of its interior passenger’s identity, are elements, I argue, of a similar and related gaze, namely the gaze as it is structured around visibilizing sex and gender. More specifically, what the onlookers’ desire to know—and this desire’s constitutive forms of knowing—illustrate are the ways in which the act of seeing a body or bodies is always structured by and within a hegemonic and normative regime of the visual. This structuring visual regime, which Nicholas Mirzoeff names as visuality itself, produces ways of seeing race, gender, sexuality, class, and identity in general which are equated to knowing these same categories. In the instance of looking at someone, and in the consequent speculation when a body does not visibly cohere with the preconceptions which surround it, when a person’s legibility is thrown into question, and when that instability is ostensibly stabilized through recourse to the “truth” of sex and the refolding of that truth back into the stability of the visual order, the possibility of queerness haunts. More narrowly, what I am concerned with in this section are, firstly, the specific ways that seeing is always a reading and surveilling of and against the category of trans, or the ways that perception of gender, as Gayle Salamon highlights, “figure us in a spectatorial relation” to gender transgressive subjects and, secondly, what forms resistances to and ruptures of this gaze might take (26).

I want to trace, then, an archive of clocking. The term "clocking," a transitive verb, means to recognize, typically through the physicality of the body, that someone is trans, that a trans person does not successfully pass as cisgender. To be "clockable," it follows, is to be easily read as trans, to be "obviously" not cisgender. Clocking can be thought of as a process existing at the blurry conjecture of epistemology, phenomenology, and the biopolitical. Eric Stanley argues that clocking "is most readily deployed against a person's identity as an attempt to destroy their/our coherence. Clocking adheres with the gripping force of catastrophe by recasting the violent act of misgendering as the ability to name the Other out of existence" (86). Here I want to prod and expand this notion of clocking as it relates to how transgender embodiment exists in relation to the biopolitics of visuality.

When one is clocked, as Jack Halberstam notes, one "is both failing to pass and threatening to expose a rupture between the distinct temporal registers of past, present, and future" (*Queer Time* 77). If being clocked is the *moment* of recognition, what spatio-temporal milieu, what forms of looking or non-recognizing precede and follow the moment of the clock? What are we to make of moments when trans people are clocked in or after death? To clock, much like the time-telling device with which the act shares a name, is an act of reifying temporal relations, conducted through an ordering of the visual. Both "recognizing" transgender as Other and the employing of a physical representation of time rely upon a constant and totalizing insistence on the ontological difference between the past, the present, and the future. Rather than explicating how being clocked exposes a temporal rupture, what this section instead asks after is how clocking constitutes a visual-temporal regime of gender and how, rather than through representation or embodiment, thinking against the regime of representation, embodiment, and visibility through the lens of trans countervisuality proves an urgent political project.

Clocking, although not always necessarily referred to as such, is a topic that both queer theory and trans studies have treated at great length. In his chapter "The Transgender Look," in *In a Queer Time and Place,* Halberstam famously explores trans representations in film in order to track media's treatment of "the transgender gaze" which "depends on complex relations in time and space, between seeing and not seeing, appearing and disappearing, knowing and not knowing" (78). What trans filmic representations might offer, Halberstam argues, are "new forms of heroism, vulnerability, visibility, and embodiment" (96). While Halberstam does important work here in theorizing transgender possibility, what I want to trace through an archive of clocking, and gazes of refusal, are contestations of the regime of the visual altogether. In her foundational piece, "The Empire Strikes Back," trans scholar and activist Sandy Stone considers the limitations of passing as praxis. Passing, Stone argues, "forecloses the possibility of a life grounded in the intertextual possibilities of the transsexual body" (166). This section attempts to untangle the question of how clocking in turn structures, delimits, rubs up against such visual "intertextual possibilities." Second, I turn to contestations to the demand of visibility in order to tease out what a trans/queer "nonnormativity," after Marquis Bey, might offer by way of theorizing against the hegemony of gendered visuality.

By staying with moments of clocking in order to theorize against them, this section explicates the ways in which we might reconsider clocking not as a singular moment in time but rather as a hegemonic structuring of time itself. In both choice of object and methodology, this project most closely aligns with trans & queer archival practices. Following and in conversation with such works as Stanley's archive of anti-trans/queer violence, Halberstam's archive of the discursive aftermath of the murder of Brandon Teena, Salamon's archive of reportage and legal discourse surrounding the murder of Latisha King, Simone Browne's archive of racializing

surveillance practices, and Toby Beauchamp's archive of US anti-trans surveillance practices, here I queerly assemble a small and deliberate archive of various moments of "revelation" or "discovery" of (trans)gender embodiment in the 20th and 21st centuries, largely through the digitized resources available within the invaluable *Digital Transgender Archive*. I explore in this assemblage of reportage the ontological implications and troubles clocking presents to queer and visual studies. In the second section, I turn to a much different archive. There I engage in close readings of visual art which I take to be responsive to and offering possibilities against the hegemonic forms of seeing for gender which clocking generates and reinforces. This latter section attempts to offer a partial answer to the question Stanley poses: "How can we be seen without being known, and how can we be known without being hunted?" (87).

5.1 Seen & Produced: Early 20th Century Cross-Dressing Reportage

In 1910, the *Los Angeles Herald* ran an article under the headline "Mob Pursues Man in Woman's Dress." Worth noting are the article's three subheadings: "Walter Waller, Ticket Agent, Has Exciting Experience on the Streets at Night," "Companion Makes Escape," and "Masquerader, After Arrest, Tells Police He Took Sister's Clothes for Joke" (*Herald*). We are left, perhaps unsurprisingly, with no account of Walter Waller's relationship to gender from Walter himself. Rather the story revolves around, and reifies, transgender embodiment as spectacle and illustrates the ethical and political stakes of seeing and visuality as processes embedded within and constituting the surveillance of gender normativity.

Although early 20th century American gender discourse of course did not include the contemporary term transgender, the haunting queerness, the threat of sexual and gender inversion or deception, still operated and can be read in the *Herald*'s own taxonomy. In this sense, the reportage and violence which surround Waller and Ferrell produce them as deviant threats, in a way not dissimilar to contemporary discourses on transgender "bathroom bills" which attempt to justify the enforcement of what Gill-Peterson calls "the cis state." Such bills often function by positing the allowance of trans existence as a slippery slope to sanctioning sex crimes. Toby Beauchamp notes how such legislature rhetorically "signifies not only the deviant or deluded transgender-identified person, but also the perverse and threatening non-transgender perpetrator who—in a fantasized reversal—falsely puts on a transgender identity as a strategy to avoid scrutiny" (79). This contemporary rhetoric finds resonance, then, with the *Herald*'s reportage. The *Herald* article's unnamed author claims that "several men" yelled at Waller: "show no mercy!" and "tear off his clothes and we will show such persons how to mislead gallant young men" ("Mob"). How did Waller mislead? Or rather, a more productively precise question: how does the framing of Waller's cross-dressing as deliberately misleading operate?

> When questioned by the detectives, Waller declared that he took his sister's clothes and donned them to have a little fun with Tom Ferrell, who also secured a full outfit of feminine attire. He declared to the officers that this was the first time he ever attempted to masquerade as a woman. ("Mob").

The impetus to speak here must first be read as an official repudiation of guilt, as Waller's statement comes to us in the context of interrogation. Waller's explanation, as an attempted redress, tellingly links temporality and visuality as they relate to the "crime" of his cross-dressing. Insisting for the detectives that this was his first time cross-dressing reads as an attempt

to mollify the severity of the "crime," and thus performs the significant implication that if it were *not* one's first time publicly cross-dressing, there would be a greater degree of guilt or criminality able to justified. In the visual register of genders outside the binary ones which the cis state enforces, repetition here is figured as guilt. Since it was Waller's first time, the threat of his trans-ness might be dampened—he and Ferrell were only having "a little fun." The unspoken flipside haunting the more acceptable momentariness of Waller and Ferrell's cross-dressing, then, is trans life which endures. My point here is not to place judgment on Waller's rhetorical attempt at navigating the horrific situation he confronted, a minor publicly subjected to the trauma of both state and extra-juridical violence under the hegemony of gender surveillance, but rather, by analyzing the logics his testimony deploys I seek to partially untangle the ideological workings of the gazes—the crowd's, the detective's—which enable the very violence to which Waller is forced to respond.

In *The Life and Death of Latisha King*, Gayle Salamon conducts an analysis of the ways the court makes use of the visuality of a dress gifted to Latisha King during the trial for King's murder. For the court, Salamon argues, the dress was able to "confer gender, to enact gender, to become gender itself" (136). For the defense attorneys in particular, the dress acts as "an object that names Latisha as a culpable subject, announcing her perversion" (137). Similarly, objects become enactments of gender and culpability in the *Herald* piece. The rhetorical spectacle of Waller's cross-dressing that is produced for the reader is almost entirely conducted through recourse to the materiality not of Waller's body but to his "feminine attire." Indeed, the article's first sentence foregrounds the objects which produce Waller and Ferrell as spectacles: "Attired in handsome hobble gowns, stylish black hats and dainty patent leather shoes, two young persons attracted much attention at the Los Angeles-Pacific depot near Fifth and Hill streets last night"

("Mob"). The *Herald* notes further that the individual who initially clocked Waller "seized [Waller's] pretty blonde curls." Waller, described as "the masquerader," then "screamed as the black velvet turban and the wig parted." Following Salamon's method of critical phenomenology, I here read the various objects of "feminine attire" in the *Herald* article as assuming the role of evidence in a regime of clocking which figures transness as aberration.

Writing on the ungendering of Blackness foundational to contemporary concepts of race & gender in *Black on Both Sides,* C. Riley Snorton turns to the archive of Mary Jones, a 19th century Black trans sex worker. Snorton notes that for both Jones and the men with whom she was intimate, "the practice of 'cross-dressing,' a process without a stable gender referent, created an imaginative context" (63). In turn, "the ungendering of blackness created a space for emergence within dynamics of political, economic, and cultural modes of exchange" (63). Turning back to Waller, the *Herald* reportage is sure to point out that Waller and Ferrell "visited a dance hall, dancing several times with different young men." What the *Herald* article, as a moment of clocking, thus simultaneously reveals and condemns is the imaginative gender context Waller and Ferrell were able to briefly afford. This context, through its exposure, is shown by the mob to be deceitful and deserving of punishment for the threat it poses to white masculinity. Cross-dressing, as a shorthand for visual or visible transness, is presented as something that "mislead[s] gallant young men," and as such, something that lurks, something that must be exposed or revealed in order to be eviscerated. The article's rhetoric is adamant in framing cross-dressing as both a criminal and public matter, and the piece ends with the listing of Waller's home address: "Waller is 17 years old and lives at 1005 West Eighth Street." Considered, then, as a matter of both reporting and inciting surveillance, the *Herald*'s treatment

of this incident of cross-dressing works to "produce the very categories and figures of gendered deviance that [it] purport[s] to simply identify" (Beauchamp 11).

The fact of the appearance and circulation of the article, and the scores of early to mid-20th century American reportage on similar moments of shocking and deceitful revelation of transness, act as one of the disperse power mechanisms of the panoptic regime of gender surveillance. As such, articles like the 1908 *Philadelphia Inquirer* headline "Shot Female Impersonator: Negro in Woman's Garb Slashes Policemen and Is Killed" produces telling rhetorical linkages. In works such as *Going Stealth* and *Atmospheres of Violence*, trans studies scholars like Beauchamp and Stanley have done crucial work in explicating how non-white trans identities are surveilled and produced in the United States as threats. What the *Inquirer* piece might show us when read in light of the analysis of surveillance technologies and practices in relation to the racialized gender non-conforming subject, is how the visuality of gender always "emerge[s] and proliferate[s] in relationship to racism, colonialism, and border anxieties" (Beauchamp 14). There is, in other words, no sex, gender, nor mode of visuality that is not always already racialized. The article sensationalizes and circulates the fact that an unnamed, visibly trans Black person was "garbed in women's clothes" and "slashed [Philadelphia police officer George Thompson] across the throat," linking Blackness and transness with criminality and violence. Perhaps unsurprisingly unmentioned in the article is why this person was "attempting to escape," or why, to begin with, Thompson was "making the arrest." Although the connotation of "slashed" implies severity, Thompson's injury, according to the article, was minor. What the article names and what it does not name, then, function together to drum up a discursive panic or paranoia that could read as in line with Simone Browne's concept of "racializing surveillance," which Browne describes as "when enactments of surveillance reify

boundaries along racial lines, thereby reifying race, and where the outcome of this is often discriminatory and violent treatment" (8). Although this person is not named, what the article does name is their racial and gender transgressiveness. Thinking with Beauchamp and Browne together sheds light on how surveillance of the visible body, and rhetoric around any transgression of normativity, reify both Blackness and transness and promulgate their status as threatening subject positions. Turning to such "historical figures who were not recognized as trans because they did not inhabit whiteness," in turn might function, Aizura argues, as "a form of care and recovery rooted in Black trans and trans of color dialogues and archival practices" ("Thinking with Trans Now" 127). In this way, I want to think with the archive of this unnamed person as a way of critically reading the ways they were robbed of name, voice, and memory via discriminatory and violent ways of being seen by an agent of the racial capitalist state.

5.2 Death Reveals: The Necropolitics of Clocking

Under the search topic "death & dying" in the *Digital Transgender Archive*, at the time of this writing in 2022, there are 156 results. Amongst these various digitized archival materials, mostly consisting of newspaper reportage, periodicals, and underground press, a certain theme features prominently. Across numerous American newspaper headlines, spanning roughly from the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries, there is a fascination with the reveal—the "reveal" to readerships of someone's transness through autopsy and death, or in other words, postmortem clocking. Drawing attention to and working with such materials figures this project within the realm of trans necropolitics. "To write of queer or trans necropolitics," writes Aren Aizura, "marks a moment in which intersectional analyses reveal…how the state's institutions appear to

eagerly consign queer and trans populations to disposability" (130). Here I follow Aizura's analysis of the ways in which, after Butler, trans and queer lives are structurally rendered ungrievable and unlivable, specifically as in how popular discourse, as espoused through reportage, marks trans people as subject to, and in need of, gender surveillance not only in life, as explored in the previous section, but in and after death. In this way I attempt to take up, through a trans/queer approach to visuality and clocking in and after death, the task of necropolitics which Achille Mbembe has famously set out: "imagining politics as a form of war, we must ask: What place is given to life, death and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?" How indeed, I attempt to partially answer, is the trans body, in its revelation-cum-death, inscribed in the order of power? What place is given to trans life in this archive of narratives of trans death? In close reading a few of the scores of newspaper articles which attempt to reveal (produce) trans lives as pure spectacle, I seek to parse how the forced visibilizing of trans lives through their deaths attempts to figure transness as inescapably subject to the hegemony of gendered visuality.

The title of this section, "Death Reveals," draws meaning from the word "reveals" as both a verb and plural noun. Borrowing from a 1928 headline in Washington D.C. newspaper *Evening Star*, "Death Reveals 'Woman' Cue Champion Was Man," I think with the phrase "death reveals" as an opportunity to investigate the epistemologies immanent in and mobilized by such reportage. In doing so, I engage the ways discourses operationalize trans embodiments as ostensibly fair game for the act—the verb—of public revelation in/after death, and in turn I think of "death reveals" as an undertheorized and not insignificant genre of reportage and discourse during the modernist period in America. This genre, I argue, aided in the reification of gender and sexuality categories and exacerbated the ways in which trans visibility becomes a

"trap door". In attending to the ways transness is implicated in the field of visuality during this period, however, I want to simultaneously distance this project from one which in "emphasizing only the violence of representation risks impoverishing our sense of the past as a field of possibility, plurality, and difference" (Mills 541). Instead, I try to answer the questions Robert Morris frames in his analysis of "trans before trans" in Medieval artistic representations of cross-dressing saints:

> Under what circumstances, historically, has gender's multiplicity and transformability been rendered visible? When does the idea of crossing, implied by the prefix trans, come into view as a facet of gender? And how is queer, itself implicated in notions of moving across, represented visually? (542)

In 1906 in Phoenix, Arizona, Nicholai De Raylan died of tuberculosis. In Eugene de Savitsch's 1958 sexological work[3], *Homosexuality, Transvestism, and Change of Sex*, de Savitsch writes a brief account and analysis of De Raylan's life, noting the "testimony of friends and neighbours that [De Raylan] led a gay life, drank, smoked and was well known to chorus girls" (6-7). According to another more infamous midcentury sexologist, Havelock Ellis, Nicholai De Raylan "made careful arrangements to prevent detection of sex after death" (248). Despite De Raylan's purported wishes, his death made dozens of headlines across the U.S. for its "revelation" of De Raylan's sex, or rather for clocking De Raylan as trans. Through the circulation of such reportage, consent is manufactured, or perhaps completely disregarded for De Raylan as his transness was not only revealed but has subsequently come to be the fact of most

[3] I owe my encounter with both de Savitsch's and Ellis's accounts of De Raylan to Jonathan Ned Katz's archival work on De Raylan, as published in Katz's *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*

interest in accounts of his life. Death ostensibly offered a bypassing of De Raylan's consent for all those who made the circulation of his clocking possible, from whatever path information of De Raylan's sex took from the coroners to the press.

Here I am interested in something else that De Raylan's autopsy revealed, namely the gender epistemologies the autopsy and its popular accounts mobilized. One headline in *The Morning Astorian* is telling. In huge, blocky font and in all caps, this 1907 headline announces succinctly: "Absolutely Identified." The subheading: "Nicolai de Raylan Was a Woman." Another headline, appearing in *The Los Angeles Herald* in the same year, reads "Corpse Is That of a Female." Returning to Mbembe's urge for analysis of how the dead body is inscribed in the order of power, such headlines as these, I argue, attempt to reify through death the impossibility of trans life outside notions of masquerade and artifice. In this way, the visuality of De Raylan's corpse is deployed as a vehicle for establishing and reifying the absolute "truth" of his gender, and in so doing forcibly rewrites how his life becomes visible at all. Although the contemporary terminology of "transgender" nor "cisgender" did not exist in early 20th century discourse, the various accounts of the De Raylan reveal attempt to establish De Raylan as "absolutely" female while purporting to only be reporting. In other words, in purporting to only name, the De Raylan reportage reifies. For example, the *Los Angeles Herald* piece states that "the inquest establishes beyond a doubt the identity of the corpse, as the body of De Raylan and that the person was a female." Another 1906 newspaper article in the *Arizona Republican* claims "death…laid bare the remarkable secret of N. De Raylan," and further that the truth of De Raylan's identity "turns out to the astonished eyes of an undertaker to be a woman." The *Minneapolis Journal* makes clear, unintentionally but aptly, the very process of reification this type of reportage engages in: "the coroner's jury declared [De Raylan] to be a woman." In echoing and publicizing the coroners'

declaration, then, such reportage registers transness in a temporality of eternal susceptibility to clocking, forced visibilizing, and othering, temporally circumscribing transness and queerness in a necropolitics of clocking, transphobia, and violence.

5.3 "STARE BACK!": Trans Nonnormativity and the Politics of the Visible

If the visuality of gender acts through normative ways of seeing and appearing, here I want to theorize ways in which such a gaze might be contested. What can be learned, then, in acts such as closing one's eyes, disappearing, or staring back? A trans way of seeing is, as Nadja Eisenberg-Guyot maintains, "the labor required to sustain the lines of sight that allow us to see each other while preserving forms of opacity that enable trans survival in a transphobic world" (278). This seeing, Eisenberg-Guyot argues, is also "a doing" (278). This concept resonates with Jacques Rancière's understanding of aesthetics practices, which he describes as "'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (13). I want to think of trans staring back, as an ontological as well as, after Rancière, an aesthetic practice. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière outlines his concept of aesthetics as:

> a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (13)

I quote Rancière at length here because I want to superimpose onto it, or combine it with, trans staring back. Theorizing together trans refusal of hegemonic forms of visuality and the politics of aesthetics, trans staring back can be thought of as an intervention within and against the specifically gendered distribution of the sensible. What trans staring back works against, then, could be thought of as the distribution of the genderable- the politics of "what can be seen and what can be said about it" where to be seen means always to be gendered and racialized. Elaborating upon the idea that a trans seeing is a doing which enables survival, I propose the concept of a trans staring back. To stare back, I propose, is not limited to a sousveillance practice or returning the gaze, but is any counterposition to the hegemony of gendered and gendering visuality. Trans staring back, as I will show, may take the form of refuting any intelligible way of appearing at all. It might be a refusal to see, or a deliberate *un*seeing. I do, however, want to distinguish the trans stare back from *only* the enactment of a counterposition, and theorize it as also a movement toward what Marquis Bey in *Black Trans Feminism* posits as "nonnormativity." Nonnormativity, Bey maintains, is distinct from "'counter' or 'the oppositional'" inasmuch as counterpositionalities, albeit not incapable of enacting important political change, ultimately reinforce the logics of "the very framework sought to be done away with" (39). The nonnormative of gender, on the other hand, "will be what gender might be and become were it not for Gender, what we emerge into when we are not nonconsensually given an ontology of gender" (40). Trans staring back, I argue, exists as the blurry conjecture of the counter and the nonnormative. It is a practice or positionality, but also one that must always be thought of as aspiring toward the nonnormative. It is a way of seeing that is also a doing and imagining, a seeing otherwise.

To theorize trans staring back, I engage an archive of visual and performance art. First, I look at illustrations appearing in a 1997 trans punk zine, *The Journal of Irresponsible Gender*. The anonymous illustrator and creator of the zine, operating under the moniker Anne Tagonist, refuses a world in which to be trans is always to be subject to the violence of clocking. Secondly, I turn to the work of queer visual artist Zach Blas. Specifically, I investigate Blas's 2012 work, *Fag Face Mask,* a wearable piece created in part through the collection of biometric data from queer participants. Third, I briefly consider the work of trans experimental musician SOPHIE, theorizing her song and music video "Faceshopping" as gesturing toward a trans hyperreality.

5.3.1 Anne Tagonist's *Unapologetic: The Journal of Irresponsible Gender*

Zines, that staple of underground publication, are "self-published magazines," predominantly created for and by punk audiences, and as such "act more as a social and cultural network" than as autonomous pieces of writing (Regales). Zines are, as media scholar Stephen Duncombe posits in his foundational text *Notes from the Underground*, "scruffy, homemade little pamphlets. Little publications filled with high weirdness and exploding with chaotic design" which often serve, through both their content and their DIY publication and circulation practices, to theorize and model "a radically democratic and participatory ideal of what society and culture might be…*ought* to be" (6-7). Queer zines, then, are "a subculture within a subculture," suturing the political projects and aesthetics of punk and queer cultures and, in so doing, often offering specifically queer iterations of anticapitalism (Regales). This is the cultural context within which it is important to place this section's first object of analysis, the inaugural issue of 1997 zine *Unapologetic*: *The Journal for Irresponsible Gender*, archived digitally through the *Queer Zine Archive Project*. Authored by the anonymous, transsexual-identifying

Anne Tagonist, *Unapologetic* is explosive in its form and content. Perhaps literally, as the cover image depicts prominently a hand drawn illustration of a vial of HRT as a molotov cocktail, its lid open and spewing flames. In conjunction with the visible explosiveness of the visual metaphor of gender affirming hormones-as-weapons, the text on the vial's label also offers, after Duncombe, what a trans, radical, participatory society might be. The top of the label reads "Jo Mone's Shop." On one hand a lowbrow play on the word "hormones," the nonchalance this suggests of hypothetically being able to easily purchase a bottle of hormones at an institution called "Jo Mone's Shop" is also politically aspirational. "Jo Mone's Shop" reads as a counterposition to the enmeshment of access to trans medical care within the privatized medical industrial complex of the racial capitalist state. As many of us know, and as the humor in the simple pun points toward, the reality of obtaining HRT is far from a quick trip to old Jo Mone's. The next line of text straightforwardly embodies the ethos and politics of Anne Tagonist, *Unapologetic,* and, after Stanley, a different end of the world. Taking up by far the most space on the vial, the text reads, in all capital letters, "AGAINST GENDER FASCISM." Underneath, in smaller font, "use as necessary." Anne Tagonist's illustration encapsulates perfectly the radical potentiality of the politics that *Unapologetic* aspires toward. In the opening editorial, aptly titled "What the fuck is this zine and why did I write it," Tagonist tells us that "it comes down to anger" (4). Yet, simultaneously, *Unapologetic*:

> isn't about pain. It's about laughing and hugging and then turning around and raising holy hell and fighting back…It's about having more fun than the fusties who think girls should look like girls and boys should be well hung…It's about molotov cocktails made from hormone vials…It's about just being queer and living day to day in a fucked up

> world, and its about overblown principled manifestoes. What the hell else is there to write about anyway? (Tagonist)

"What the fuck" *Unapologetic* does is what queer theory, argue Jules Gill-Peterson and Gabby Benavente, neglects. That is, in the visuality across image and text of her zine, Tagonist enacts "careful attention to making imaginative and rigorous theoretical and analytic interventions through the material experience of the embodied self" (Gill-Peterson & Benavente 24). Put differently, *Unapologetic* refuses to consider trans people solely or primarily as means to theoretical arguments' ends, a reductive queer theoretical tendency which Emma Heaney contests in *The New Woman*. There, Heaney elucidates the significant role literary modernism and sexology played in evacuating transfemininity of actual transfeminine voices and lived experiences. Heaney's, and I argue Tagonist's, work reconceptualizes trans people "as producers of their own accounts, not as figures in someone else's literary or theoretical story" (13). In close-reading Tagonist's text, then, I want to show how attention to such voices as Tagonist's offers productive ways of thinking with trans, ways that loudly recenter, disrupt and fight back. Page 13 of *Unapologetic* consists of four black and white illustrations: a naked feminine (I use this as shorthand, of course, fully realizing the irony in description here) figure with long hair, whose genitals are covered by the chainsaw they hold in front of themself. Another drawing depicts a punk with tattered clothes holding a grenade which has just been lit, preparing to throw the explosive directly at the viewer. Another naked figure, with breasts and a penis, stands flexing a bicep, encircled by large blocky text which reads: "I'm no mistake! I am all of who I am! Rawr!!" The fourth drawing is text-based, featuring two blaring words, the first in white text amid a black background and the second the reverse. It reads "STARE BACK!" In smaller text along the border, appears another incitement: "STOP @ NOTHING 2 SURVIVE"

While all four of these incendiary images are ripe for analysis, here I want to focus solely on "STARE BACK!" Essential to the context of these images is Tagonist's handwritten note on page 14: "So my current plan when this is finished is to teach myself screen printing. Hopefully I'll make the stuff on page 13, the cover, and drawings here [on page 14] into patches. Write me and see what I've come up with! Make patches or stickers yourself!" (14). The ways these illustrations appear to the viewer, then, holds significant value. Here, after Rancière, there is an attempted re-distribution of the sensible. In encouraging both direct action as well as the circulation of radical transpunk imagery against gender fascism, *Unapologetic* links aesthetic practice and politics, and speaks, or rather stares, back at the visual order of "the fucked up world" which (re)produces the logics of transphobia. Tagonist's engagement with the politics of visibility, then, is not one which resonates with contemporary efforts by queer or trans communities to claim mainstream representation in the culture industry or within establishmentarian party politics. Instead, in the DIY, participatory ethos of the queer punk subculture, Tagonist reframes visibility as something which should loudly trouble and reframe the normative. Staring back, stopping at nothing to survive, encapsulates a radical trans form of politics which is then both a counter and a nonnormativity. Rather than aiming for inclusion within the confines of the respectable, the "journal of irresponsible gender" seeks to simultaneously survive within and forcibly dismantle the social which necessitates transphobic violence, while also trying to see a world otherwise. In *Queer Embodiment*, Hil Malatino argues that in Foucault's famous reading of the life of intersex person Herculine Barbin, Foucault attempts to imagine a space wherein "intersex and otherwise queer bodies might experience pleasures beyond the forms of embodied desire currently legible, beyond the categorical forms of gender and sexual identity currently on offer" (42). This is exactly the space I argue Anne

Tagonist strives to imagine and explosively force into being through her practices of transpunk countervisuality. Perhaps another image attests to this praxis, one which appears on the cover of *Unapologetic*. Reminiscent of typical public restroom signage, a stick figure is framed within a plain black rectangle. Unlike typical bathroom signs, however, this stick figure has large, spiky hair standing straight up and they wear what resembles a skirt only on half of their lower body, while the other leg remains unadorned. While one stick-arm rests to the figure's side, the other arm bends at a right angle, the forearm raised upright, giving anyone who stares at the figure a resounding middle finger.

5.3.2 Zach Blas's *Fag Face Mask*

Staying with the ethos of queer middle fingers, I now turn to the work of Zach Blas. The 2012 piece I investigate here, *Fag Face Mask*, comes as part of Blas's larger project, *Facial Weaponization Suite,* a series of sculpted masks created from 2011 through 2014 as statements against the array of ways surveillance technologies collect and deploy biometric data of the face. *Fag Face Mask,* the first mask in the suite and the one I focus on here, was created as a response to "scientific" publications which have attempted to "connect the identification of sexual orientation to facial recognition technologies" (Grønstad 164). Blas created the mask by scanning the faces of participating queer men and then aggregating this data into an amorphous pink form, one which intentionally refuses detection from facial recognition technologies. In her essay on Blas's *Suite*, art historian and theorist Lila Lee-Morrison reads Blas's masks "as taking the output data from an algorithm and projecting it on to its front end. It is like an algorithmic mirror in which the algorithm cannot recognize itself or what it has produced. It is as if the algorithm cannot read its own form of representation" (156). Put a different way, the masks stare

back; they propose a form of countervisuality, via opacity and reflection, and in so doing dare to imagine a nonnormative visuality, a non-regime in which recognition, detection, and visibility are no longer trap doors or enablers of subjugation. *Fag Face Mask* asserts that to be deliberately visually illegible or unintelligible, or as A.S. Grønstad theorizes, "phenomenologically indistinct," is to work against an ordering of visibilized identity wherein "identity is downgraded to data and capitalized" (156). Or as Chase Joynt and Emmett Harsin Drager think with Blas, "a failure to be recognized or captured" is thus "charged with political potential," and further, that "working against representation…and identification is a new and necessary mode for minoritarian-group power and survival" (8). Joynt and Drager's reading of Blas finds an echo in Ann Tagonist's call to stare back and stop at nothing to survive. While Blas's work has already received extensive critical attention, I turn to Tagonist's *Unapologetic* and Blas's *Fag Face Mask* alike as a way of exploring the nonnormative ideal of trans countervisuality, from both the underground of transpunk subcultural production and the more widely circulated cultural production of the contemporary art world.

5.3.3 Faceshopping: SOPHIE and the Trans Hyperreal

The political ethos of Blas's masks resonates with the lyrics and visuality of legendary electronic pop artist and producer SOPHIE. SOPHIE, who we tragically lost in 2021, began her music career in her home country of Scotland in the early 2000's. Even throughout years of attracting international attention, she was adamant in hiding her identity from her work, foregoing official appearance in any of her album artwork or visuals, and using vocal samples instead of contributing her own voice to tracks. It wasn't until 2017 with the release of the music video and single "It's Okay to Cry" that she featured herself in a music video and contributed

vocals to a song. After the single's release, SOPHIE also became more open about being a trans woman. One song on the album, "Faceshopping," explores the notions of artifice, authenticity, and faciality in the age of social media and constant digital visualities. In an interview with *Jezebel*, SOPHIE is asked if the lyrics are meant literally, to which SOPHIE replies "Oh yeah, because we need hard words, but also words are weapons" (Juzwiack). Over harsh instrumentals which sound almost like the melodic banging of pots and pans, collaborator Cecile Believe sing-speaks the chorus of the song: "My face is the front of shop / My face is the real shop front / My shop is the face I front / I'm real when I shop my face" (SOPHIE). In the "Faceshopping" music video, the literalness of this refrain is made visible, as a 3D animated model of SOPHIE's face, amidst jarring jumpcuts and flashes to things like sets of makeup or a full screen of raw meat, is jarringly manipulated. Her face is at different points rubbery, inflated, evenly vertically sliced into pieces, crumpled, twisted, deflated, smushed. Clearly, between the chorus and the extreme imagery of the music video, "Faceshopping" is concerned with the idea of the production of the real, especially as that is visibilized and projected onto the face. "'I'm real when I shop my face…'" SOPHIE recalls in the *Jezebel* interview, "What is real? Being trans" (Juzwiack). "Faceshopping" offers a trans critique of the real in its embracing of the hyper-artificial of contemporary online culture. In alluding to the facial touch-up or digital enhancement technology of software like Adobe Photo Shop or Facetune, the line "I'm real when I shop my face" embraces the trans possibilities such technological manipulation might afford for the exploration and production of gender done otherwise. Rather than chide the widespread bodily image-editing phenomenon, "Faceshopping" asks after a trans way of seeing manipulated faciality as perhaps not manipulative at all, but rather a surreal or hyperreal contestation of notions of gendered "truths" as they relate to the face's appearance—what is "real," we might

learn from SOPHIE, is in fact *not* the unaltered. Rather, as the language of her interview response speaks to, what is real about trans embodiments is a "being" which is rendered more, not less, real when explored through modes of visuality which unlink the real from the hegemonic. Intentionally unintelligible, this trans hyperreality stares back at the wreckage of visuality and sees ways of appearing we have yet to achieve. SOPHIE's politics of the face, then, might function as an angel of trans visuality, offering us the possibility of imagining as a form of resistance and as a mode of thinking outside of, a seeing beyond limitation. Here I want to conclude by once again repeating the late SOPHIE's words, now imagined as responsive to the visual regime this thesis has articulated and contested: "What is real? Being trans."

I end with this analysis of SOPHIE's articulation of realness and want to now position her assertion against the anti-trans/queer violence of our contemporary historical moment, violence which posits transness and queerness as unnatural and seeks to outright disallow or eliminate our existence, our reality. I revise and finish this thesis mere weeks after Anderson Lee Aldrich opened fire on patrons of the queer bar Club Q in Colorado Springs, cutting short the lives of Daniel Aston, Derrick Rump, Kelly Loving, Raymond Green Vance, and Ashley Paugh, and injuring 17 others. Such violence, as Eric Stanley argues, is not anomalous to the racial capitalist project of the United States, but structures it, is foundational to it. I write about trans/queer countervisuality, and I want to emphasize that I do not posit countervisuality as merely or primarily a practice of hiding or avoiding violence, although sometimes we must do exactly that to survive—indeed Anne Tagonist's urge to "stop @ nothing 2 survive" still loudly resonates with current moment. Rather, I want to imagine countervisuality as pointing to both the horrific and the mundane forms of anti-trans/queer violence which structure our current historical juncture, exposing the ways these forms of violence dictate specific, stable, and visible forms of

gender intelligibility. Trans/queer countervisuality gestures toward a world in which to be visible is no longer a susceptibility, where the very categories of transness and queerness become redundant because they no longer refer to ontological differences mediated by the visual, where visibility is no longer a trap door, where the cis state has been burned down by a Molotov cocktail in a vial of estrogen, where the injunction to stare back no longer has meaning because there is no longer a racial capitalist visuality of gender to reflect or rupture. I evoke the recent tragedy at Colorado Springs not to fashion its horrific violence into a narrative of repair, but rather I want to iterate that the fascist logics of transphobia, of the cis state, which allow for and necessarily lead to such tragedies are exactly the logics to which this thesis responds and hopes to work against. I want to stay with and stare back at this violence, then, in hopes of mobilizing trans/queer resistances which strive toward a social in which appearing otherwise no longer registers us as targets, but rather, to echo José Muñoz, appearing otherwise might allow us to strive toward the horizon of queerness.

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