Future Fatigue

Trans Intimacies and Trans Presents (or How to Survive the Interregnum)

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Abstract This essay explores the ways that teleological narratives of transition come coupled with corresponding affective narratives that frame life "pre" transition as characterized by a reductively bleak emotional surround and cathect life "post" transition to a bright-sided promise of social ease, domestic comfort, and existential peace. Building on Lauren Berlant's theorization of cruel optimism and the work of Tobias Raun and Laura Horak on video narratives of hormonal and surgical transition, I position the figuration of futurity in these narratives as generative of a form of intense anticipatory anxiety in the present, one that may actually impede the flourishing of trans subjects, particularly those who encounter difficulty accessing technologies of transition. These teleological affective narratives generate an inhabitation of the present as a dwelling in lag—a form of being out of temporal sync, left behind, with the life one desires deferred (perhaps perennially). As an ameliorative to the effects of such cruelly optimistic futural narratives, I theorize a trans for trans (t4t) praxis of love, drawing on the fantastic and dystopic imaginaries at work in the fiction of Kai Cheng Thom and Torrey Peters to account for the creative and caring acts of trans intimacy that render life in the interregnum—in the moments during transition, which may very well not have a definite end—not only livable but also, sometimes, joyous.
Keywords trans temporalities, trans embodiments, cruel optimism, negative affect, t4t, medical transition

Lag: Rethinking the Affective Temporalities of Transition

What makes a future bleak? Is it a question of one's orientation to futurity? Is a future bleak because of the anticipation, anxiety, and fear that imbues one's relationship to it? Is it a failure of ability to envision oneself happy in one's projections of the future? Or a failure to envision oneself in any kind of future at all?

Sometimes, perhaps, what makes a future bleak is also that which makes it promising. This is the key insight of Lauren Berlant's (2011) theorization of cruel optimism, her name for the affective complex that occurs when that which you

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profoundly desire is also that which inhibits your flourishing, when that which you imagine to one day deliver happiness, security, comfort, or joy actually wears you down and out through your attachment to it.

This essay interprets certain visions of the future that circulate in hegemonic narratives of medicalized transition as generative of a form of cruel optimism that stems from the affective promises they offer. These narratives emanate from diverse sites. Sometimes, they are framed and marketed by medical specialists addressing trans folk as a surgical niche market. Other times, they are produced within DIY spaces of trans cultural production that document medical transition. In this essay, I focus specifically on the futural narratives at work in the genre of trans vlogs concerned with documenting the impacts of transition produced by folks residing in the United States. These vlogs fulfill a crucial function for trans folks and communities, making specialized medical information accessible across disparate healthscapes, offering interactive forums for communication about experiences with hormones and surgery, and documenting the corporeal and affective changes that accompany medicalized forms of transition. They are a critical stopgap in the notoriously uneven terrain of trans health care access in the United States, one shaped by a long legacy of rigorous and problematic gatekeeping, a historic and ongoing dearth of insurance coverage, high out-of-pocket fees, and a metro-centricity that makes it quite difficult for trans subjects in rural areas and small towns and cities to access transition-related care (as well as trans-competent medical care, broadly construed). The folks composing, editing, and posting these vlogs are engaged in forms of care labor for, and on behalf of, trans communities, documenting their own experiences to educate and potentially mitigate feelings of isolation and anomie. They perform, with a much wider reach, the work of trans community newsletters and magazines like *Chrysalis*, *AEGIS News*, the *Erickson Educational Foundation Newsletter*, and *Transgender Tapestry* that circulated throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, informing scattered and disparate trans subjects and communities of developments in transition-related health care and giving advice on how to navigate a too-often byzantine and difficult process.

However, the crucial care labor of these vloggers is frequently shaped by an affective orientation to futurity that I interpret as a trans-specific, biomedicalized variant of the much-criticized "It gets better" genre of inspirational, affirmative messaging. The It Gets Better Project was initiated by gay journalist Dan Savage and his partner Terry Miller in 2010 as a social media campaign to address high instances of depression and suicidality among LGBTQ youth, a public response to the highly publicized suicides of teenagers like Billy Lucas and Tyler Clementi who were bullied for being—or suspected of being—gay. The project seeks to offer hope to LGBTQ adolescents and teens with the repeated assurance that "it"—

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one's life and life chances, the degree of discrimination one encounters— improves significantly as one ages. This project was roundly critiqued by many prominent North American queer academics and activists almost immediately for failing to grapple with questions of intersectionality. Jasbir Puar (2010) penned a paradigmatic editorial in the *Guardian* that succinctly outlines the prevailing grounds for such critique, highlighting how "many . . . have been struck with how these deaths have been made to serve the purpose of highlighting an exceptional class of aspirational gay citizens at the expense of others. Part of the outrage and upset generated by these deaths is precisely afforded through a fundamental belief that things *are* indeed, better, especially for a particular class of white gay men."

Unlike the initial, official iterations of the It Gets Better campaign, these vlogs are geared specifically toward trans folks who are contemplating or in the midst of transition, offering palliative reassurances that once one moves through the process of medical gatekeeping and accesses the forms of medical transition that make up the normative ensemble of interventions, life improves on most all registers: economically, romantically, in terms of body image and self-esteem, social belonging, mental health, and so forth. Like the It Gets Better Project they seek to offer reassurances and support in the face of high rates of depression and suicidality. The promise implicit in these narratives is that, as one takes steps to bring their embodiment in line with their gender identity, a radical metamorphosis takes place that makes the rhythms and patterns of everyday life easier, more bearable, and less traumatic. Insofar as vloggers proffer this affective narrative, they echo and enhance the promissory narrative of transition articulated by trans-specialized medical professionals, whose practices and reputations rely on such repetitions and amplifications, especially in the form of patient testimonials. Trans vloggers working in this genre are positioned proximally to the medical industry, radically lacking institutional power and authority but able to harness their communal social credit to attest to the promise of (and, sometimes, to critique) trans medical practice.

Tobias Raun (2015: 702), in an examination of trans male vloggers on the "digital *Wunderkammer*" of YouTube, understands this genre as offering a "database for the display of everyday trans life" (703). What strikes him, however, is how redundant this database is, establishing and reifying specific generic conventions in performances of trans masculine self-making. Raun provides an account of the specific tropes that shape the genre, including titling and cataloging vlogs by the number of months one has been on testosterone and assiduously detailing the transformations wrought by testosterone injections, a process through which testosterone becomes the "structuring principle" (704) of the genre. Raun highlights the ways in which "the drug and the camera are mutually constitutive, instantiating and confirming maleness, thereby allowing the vlogger

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and the viewer to witness the process (documenting effects) while also being a site for staging what and how to witness (performative effects)" (705–6). More than a visual record of transition, these videos also have a pedagogical or coaching function, directing the viewer's attention, establishing zones of corporeal significance (facial hair, the postsurgical chest), and showing us how to gaze, what to notice. This visual coaching does, indeed, do more than document the effects of transition—it also teaches us what constitutes the transition process. Raun concludes that "while trans male vlogs manifest potentials—and possible futures—they also create norms for how trans men look, feel, and talk about their transition, and how they vlog about it" (707), operating as both "commencement and commandment" (707). These vlogs are part of a cultural ensemble that installs narratives of transnormativity, teaching viewers what transition is supposed to look like, what they might one day look like, operating as a visual litmus test against which one might measure their "progress" and gauge what the process and the "post" of transition might be. Inevitably, this entails self-objectification and anxiety, as it invites a practice of corporeal comparison (will my chest hair grow in like his? Will my top surgery scars heal that well?) that, while undergirded by the hope of inhabiting something closer to one's corporeal ideal, hinges on an uncertain and projected future that may very well not turn out to be what one wishes. The affective surround produced by this kind of media is one of anticipation, in all its tense complexity, with all the desire, hope, fear, and dread that anticipation entails.

Jordan F. Miller (2018: 822) comments on the transnormative assumptions that circulate in the trans vlogosphere, writing that many vlogs reflect the "mainstream media portrayal of trans people" insofar as they focus on "documenting the changing body during the early stages of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or after various gender-affirming surgeries" (822) and frame medical intervention "as a life-or-death step to achieving happiness" (821). In doing so, they fail to reflect the diversity of trans subjects and communities. Miller writes that "the privileging of such a limiting narrative has, among other negative outcomes, created damaging expectations for trans people who identify outside of a male/female binary or do not desire medical intervention" (8), as well as those subjects who encounter substantial difficulty accessing the forms of medical transition they do desire, given that such access is intensively stratified. This surfeit of transnormative narratives makes it difficult, Miller argues, to locate trans vlogs that offer alternative and critical accounts of trans experience, particularly those that foreground questions of race and racism in relation to trans identity and the politics of transition, refuse to overemphasize physical transformation, or depict nonbinary and/or nonmedically transitioning trans experiences. Though the trans vlog archive is vast, the most popular and readily

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accessible vlogs tend to reiterate, rather than destabilize, transnormative tropologies, producing a misleading sense of coherence that can result in viewers assuming, as Miller did early in his research, that trans YouTube is almost exclusively informed by the perspectives of class-privileged, white, straight, and binary trans subjects (5).

By highlighting this, I don't mean to dismiss the crucial world-building work done by even the most ostensibly transnormative vlogs. In a fundamentally transphobic institutional, political, and cultural environment, providing digital community and transition-related support is both radical and necessary. I call attention to the limits of these narratives only because I believe that other, additional forms of support, solidarity, and intimacy are needed to grapple with the all-too-common experience of lag—a form of being out of temporal sync, left behind—and the negative affects associated with it. This is especially so because the shape of most trans lives doesn't mimic the progressive teleological contours of such narratives, and the ascendancy of these narratives has been far from frictionless, with a well-articulated trans critique of transnormative teleologies of medical transition dating back at least to the work of Sandy Stone in her foundational essay "The *Empire* Strikes Back" (1991) and continuing through the present, with important contributions from Dean Spade (2003), Julian Carter (2013), Julian Gill-Peterson (2017), C. Riley Snorton (2017), and others. Rather, transnormativity and trans exceptionalism are aspirational fantasies that very, very few trans subjects are able to live out phenomenologically. Because the embodied reality of living in and through forms of transphobic violence is so often articulated with the indignities, harms, and aggressions that characterize poverty, disability, and debility; the inhabitation of perceptually queer forms of embodiment; and the differential and compounded violence that attends processes of racialization as nonwhite, the number of trans subjects who live in any kind of comfortable proximity to transnormativity is slim indeed. If there is a phenomenon that cross-cuts much of trans experience—in this moment, in those zones of dispossession, extraction, expropriation, and brutal reterritorialization that some of us call North America—it is the experience of "near life," what Eric Stanley (2011: 15) refers to as "that which emerges in the place of the question of humanity," a term that indexes the experience of living with one's humanity withheld, insistently interrogated, rarely ever assumed.

Laura Horak (2014: 580) builds on Raun's scholarship, unpacking the temporality of these narratives structured around hormonal transition, which she refers to as "hormone time." She writes that "hormone time is linear and teleological, directed toward the end of living full time in the desired gender. It borrows a Christian temporal structure—time begins with moment of rupture and points in a particular direction. . . . While hormone time is not as grandiose, it also

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points toward a utopian future, in which the subject experiences harmony between the felt and perceived body" (580). Hormone time is both teleological and utopian. The future is always better than the present, a site of promise, deliverance; transition is framed as a period of trial and potential duress that is rewarded with the experience of harmony, good feeling, corporeal comfort, and ease when navigating everyday social interactions. For this reason, Horak links hormone time to "straight time," writing that "it appropriates the 'straight' temporality of progress for radical ends—proving that trans self-determination is not only possible but viable and even joyful. Unlike 'straight' time, the goal is not children or the future of the nation but expansive trans subjects and communities" (581). Hormone time is quite distinct from reproductive futurism—a politics molded by a heterocisnormative investment in providing a better future for the child (Edelman 2004)—but nevertheless appropriates a teleological utopian temporality to provide hope to trans subjects and communities. The futural horizon, the promised telos, is, as Horak (2014: 580) writes, the moment of "harmony between the felt and perceived body."

The trouble is that this horizon sometimes seems to be infinitely receding. When is one "post" transition? Who experiences such unity between feeling and perception, given how radically thrown—nonsovereign, out of one's control—modes of intersubjective corporeal perception are? Is there ever an experience of subjectivity-in-sociality that isn't, to some (significant) extent, shaped by dissonance and misrecognition, particularly if, as Berlant (2011: 26) reminds us, "recognition is the misrecognition you can bear"? Is there ever a moment when we are—transparently, in all our complexity, intuitively and deeply—known by those others we share space with? Where those others understand our bodyminds in precisely the ways in which we desire them to? Even if such moments are possible, or at least feel possible, that doesn't erase the prior years of consistent dissonance, misgendering, and misrecognition, nor does it easily transform the anxiety and fear that one cultivates as a product of living through such (routine, quotidian, incessant) moments.

What hormone time does—and what related futural narratives of medicalized transition do, such as those that prioritize top or bottom surgery (or both) as the sine qua non of a "completed" transition—is position biomedical intervention as necessary and fundamental to securing the future one desires, to achieving the promised moment of harmony between the felt and the perceived body. I want to push against this promissory narrative for a few different reasons. First, it encourages trans subjects to cathect hope for a more livable life to a for-profit medical industry that, too often, lacks empathy and sensitivity and treats trans subjects as a niche market rife for economic exploitation. This means that doctors become saviors, capable of enabling or disabling the possibility of a better

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future for trans subjects. It also means that the politics of access to forms of medical transition—which are simultaneously geographical, economic, racialized, and gendered, not to mention contingent on questions of employment, insurance, citizenship, and carceral status—aren't significantly engaged, and those that experience compromised access are encouraged to understand this as tantamount to a foreclosed future. If one is unable to access, or has compromised access to, the large ensemble of transition-related technologies, they are placed in a position of lag, their desired future deferred, perhaps perennially. Lag shapes the experience of saving up for transition, putting away a little bit of money each paycheck for specialist appointments not covered, or only partially covered, by insurance (if one has it). Economic considerations aside, the experience of lag structures transition at least as much as transition-related technologies themselves, manifesting in the days, months, and years before one takes steps toward transition and shaping the experience of waiting for each new appointment, each treatment, each follow-up visit. The tropic conventions of hormone time that shape the narratives of transition critiqued by Horak and Raun tend to downplay the affects that correspond to the temporal experience of lag. Lag often comes coupled with an experience of repeated, persistent, and dogged misrecognition and allied forms of transphobic hostility operative at both macro and micro levels. This misrecognition wears away at the resilience of trans subjects and makes the daily arts of living more difficult—in other words, it produces fatigue. I think, largely, we invest in the promises of hormone time because we hope, sincerely, that one day this fatigue will lessen, subside, surcease.

Hormone time and related futural narratives are undergirded by the promise of a time (not yet, but someday) when the relation between one's gendered sense of self and the way that self is perceived socially are aligned. Within this alluring future vision, recognition is conferred explicitly through social interaction, which is understood in a bifurcated manner—either folks get it right or get it wrong, and what they get right or wrong is explicitly linked back to questions of medical access, binary understandings of gender, and the gender-ideal aesthetic "success" of trans subjects. My concern with this understanding of the conferral of gendered recognition is that the granting of legibility lies solely with the perceiver, rather than with the subject being perceived. If we take seriously the fact that access to technologies of transition is shaped by multiple, intersecting vectors of privilege (not to mention differing degrees of interest in and desire for medical transition), and that, both because of and despite this, many trans subjects experience "passing" only in discontinuous, situationally dependent ways, a teleological account of transition that ends with an experience of "harmony between the felt and perceived body" is radically inadequate; it doesn't begin to dignify the complexities of trans experiences of gendered

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(mis)recognition and the complicated interplay, linkages, and feedback loops that inform the relationship between the "felt" and "perceived" body.

The desire for this experience of harmony between the felt and perceived body is common to trans and cis folks alike—it undergirds all efforts to acquire and inhabit a body unlike the one inhabited at any present moment. I don't mean to suggest that an investment in the promise of experiencing such harmony is the province of trans folks exclusively, though the stakes of such hopes are often much higher for us. The experience, however durable or fleeting, of being recognized in gendered ways that resonate with how we understand ourselves is a form of legibility that isn't only pleasurable but quite crucial to survival, and this is true for both our own perception of our bodies and the ways in which others perceive them. What I am trying to think, however, is how trans subjects might (and do) cultivate forms of self-regard and intracommunal recognition that bolster our ability to see ourselves—and love ourselves, and each other—even as crucial forms of intersubjective gendered recognition are withheld, even as we don't pass as cis, even as we're deprived of the forms of social mooring that gendered legibility and recognition provides, even as we inhabit lag time.

I am accompanied by the work of Gayle Salamon (2010) as I think through the interrelation of trans recognition and livability. She draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of perception and embodiment to develop the idea that perception is fundamentally relational, and that, on account of this, the reality of the perceived body is always situationally coproduced. Therefore, the "reality" of the body always lies "'further on' than any objective perception" (62)—which means that the conferral of gendered recognition never lies solely with an external perceiver. She goes on to clarify what this means for trans and gender-variant bodies:

> What one might read from the contours of the body is something less than the truth of that body's sex, which cannot be located in an external observation of the body, but exists instead in the relation between the material and the ideal, between the perceiver and the perceived, between the material particularity of any body and the network of forces and contexts that shape the material and the meaning of that body. (62)

The task, for Salamon and for me, is how to develop relational ways of witnessing and perceiving trans and gender-variant bodies regardless of their relation to, positioning within, or investment in medicalized teleologies of transition.

Further, I want to suggest that, despite the proliferation of temporally linear, progressive, transnormative narratives, it would be deeply misleading to understand them as offering nuanced experiential accounts of transition or trans

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experience. They move quickly to affirm an affective experience of embodiment characterized by comfort, joy, recognition, and pleasure, and they tarry with negative affect only insofar as they work to reassure subjects who might be dwelling in an existential space saturated with such affect that it will one day improve, especially if they heed the hegemonic pedagogy of transition offered. I think these narratives, while seeking to provide hope—to trans folk beginning to consider medical transition but also, perhaps, to cis audiences grappling with the affective politics of the transition of a loved one—also (albeit unintentionally) shut down possibilities for empathic identification across and exploration of the more difficult affective experiences of trans becoming—becomings that are often shaped by a dwelling in lag time, and that are no stranger to ensembles of negative affect that manifest in both routine and unpredictable ways.

I prefer to use the language of becoming rather than being because it offers a way of understanding trans experience that exists to the side of (though not incompatible with) hegemonic understandings of transition. Borrowing the term from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's account in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), and drawing on its history of deployment within trans studies scholarship (see Crawford 2008; Sullivan 2006), I understand becoming as the unfolding of difference in time, as an experience of ontological shifts that don't necessarily cohere as shifts in identity at the level of representation. Rather, becoming undermines the fixed, stable terms that give shape and sense to the taxonomies of identity offered up within a given milieu; as philosopher and Deleuze scholar Todd May glosses (2003: 150), "to become is to be part of a process by which the stable identities—the majorities—are dissolved in creative acts in which more fluid 'identities' are created, but only as the by-products of the process itself." Placing emphasis on becoming enables me to think through some of the aspects of transition that fall to the wayside when the focus is solely on questions of representation, identity, and social legibility. This is not to suggest that political and scholarly emphasis on representation and recognition isn't important, only to call attention to the fact that these terms don't do justice to the affective textures of trans experience. Identity is a (very important) part-object in a broader ensemble of relations, and it shouldn't be taken as coidentical or coterminous with transness—or, rather, trans-ing.

Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore propose the concept of trans-ing in the introduction to a 2008 special issue of *WSQ* titled "Trans-" and concerned with the concept of transition, broadly conceived. They write that

> rather than seeing genders as classes or categories that by definition contain only one kind of thing (which raises unavoidable questions about the masked rules and normativities that constitute qualifications for categorical membership), we

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> understand genders as potentially porous and permeable spatial territories (arguably numbering more than two), each capable of supporting rich and rapidly proliferating ecologies of embodied difference. (12)

The understanding of gender fleshed out here shifts our attention away from questions of identity constitution ("classes or categories that by definition contain only one kind of thing") and towards questions of becoming. If gender isn't an identity, but rather a territory that supports "rapidly proliferating ecologies of embodied difference," then "trans" names not a specific entity, but a process; it is not a noun, but an adjective. Trans-ing, then, "is a practice that takes place within, as well as across or between, gendered spaces . . . a practice that assembles gender into contingent structures of association with other attributes of bodily being, and that allows for their reassembly" (13).

Thinking of transition as a practice of "trans-ing" allows one to focus on how gender is a practice of assembly and reassembly, a process without a delimited outcome. I find this shift in perspective helpful when trying to think slantwise in relation to the emphasis on surgical and hormonal outcomes and normative gendered legibility that forcefully structures transnormative teleologies of transition. To think transition otherwise, especially to think through the aporias produced by such hegemonic accounts of transition, an emphasis on assemblage, process, and practice is key.

Another way to put this: I want to focus on transition as a journey, rather than a destination, and a particularly unpredictable journey at that—one with shifting itineraries, detours, roadblocks, and breakdowns; comprising various speeds and slownesses; with no given return "home," and no guarantee that home might not be profoundly changed if and when one does return. I want to focus on trans lives in interregnum, in the crucial and transformative moments between past and future, between the regime of what was and the promise of what might be. I don't understand the interregnum as the midpoint of a linear temporal narrative, however. It is a kind of nowness that shuttles transversally between different imaginaries of pasts and futures and remains malleable and differentially molded by these imaginaries. Typically understood as a moment between state regimes, or the moments between state failure and the installation of a new system of power, the meaning of the interregnum shifts if we refuse to place emphasis on what was and what might be, and instead focus on the pause, the interim, as a moment of foment, generation, complexity, and fervor, rife with unexpected partnerships, chance events, and connections fortuitous and less so—a space of looseness and possibility, not yet overcoded and fixed in meaning, signification, or representative economy. What possibilities open up when we cease to run toward promissory futures from pasts that we're (sometimes, literally) dying to leave behind?

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What I'm proposing is a trans-specific reconsideration of queer theorizations of temporal drag: the refusal to embrace narratives of queer modernity and the attendant march toward ever-increasing progress on account of a stubborn attachment to an often-traumatic past, what Heather Love (2007: 9) has called a "history of queer damage [that] retains its capacity to do harm in the present." Like Love, I'm calling for a necessary grappling with the negativity that doesn't ever seem to stay planted firmly in the past, and the affects allied to the forms of social marginality and abjection that suffuse trans experience regardless of how passable-as-cis one may be in the wake of transition.

This isn't the same as an embrace of a queer temporality of developmental lag that solidifies through being positioned askew in relation to heteronormative reproductive time. This queer embrace of arrested development, articulated by Jack Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) and trenchantly critiqued by Julian Carter (2013: 142), is the kind that refuses to grow up in order to embrace, instead, a form of not-quite-adulthood that "opens the space for same-sex bonding and polymorphous perversity," but also shuts down "the space for becoming-trans." The inhabitation of the interregnum entails not the refusal to grow up but instead an approach to temporality that understands it as multiply enfolded, rather than merely delayed or deferred. This is how Carter envisions what he calls "transitional time" (142), writing that the folding of such time may produce a sense of lag, but it also might "heighten a body's sensitivity, invaginating it so that it touches itself in several different moments at once" (142), and that these temporal "pleats may propel the body forward . . . toward an embodied future, even as that future is summoned into being in and through a body that does not yet exist, and while the body that does exist in the present is the medium for the future body's becoming-form" (142). Such an enfolded temporality is inevitably affectively complex, with traumas residual and fresh existing alongside—rather, knotted together with—moments of joy, hope, and recognition. As Gwen Benaway (2018) writes, in a beautiful essay on surgical transition and the long process of coming home to one's body, "the events that surround our becoming leave an imprint on us." The memories of these events are carried with us and come to help constitute our divergent and overlapping experiences of embodiment. Meditating on the complexities of the relations between trans embodiment, selfhood, and temporality, and figuring her self and her body as a "we" in negotiation, Benaway (2018) offers the following account: "Together, we imagined a possibility instead of an ending. This is the real story of bodies. Movement, joy, and release into new configurations. Our bodies do not need to be perfect or exactly as they were when we were born. We are not ruled by the shape we arrive in. We adapt, heal, and expand. Our bodies are not an ending, but a beginning. This is a truth I am willing to die for." While transnormative futural narratives

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envision the time of posttransition as characterized by the structure of feeling associated with domesticity—comfort, ease, happiness, safety—and are underwritten by the promise of finally feeling at home in one's skin, this affective narrative of what the body as home feels like belies the complex temporalities of transition. Benaway points out the ways that such a coming home involves moving through trauma, grappling with the enormous existential difficulties and forms of violence, both structural and interpersonal, that attend processes of trans becoming. She argues that these experiences leave an imprint, that the traces of these events are, following Carter, always temporally enfolded within, part and parcel of, the experience of embodiment.

Some of the difficulties that attend affective experiences of transition have to do with the forms of disconnection, withdrawal, and dissociation that often accompany it. As trans scholar Atalia Israeli-Nevo (2017: 38) writes, in a meditation on her own (slow, circuitous) transition process,

> as trans subjects in this transphobic world, we are encouraged and forced into a position of not being present. We are dissociated from our bodies, our loved ones, and our general environment. This dissociation throws us into a far future in which we are safe after we have passed and found a bodily and social home. However, this future is imagined and unreachable, resulting in us being out of time.

When Israeli-Nevo articulates being "forced into a position of not being present," she's referring to the ensemble of strategies that trans subjects cultivate in response to consistent misrecognition, phobic response, and shunning. One of these responses is social withdrawal: if one's appearance in a situation or social world is contingent on misrecognition and encounters with macro- and microaggressions, they may do their best to limit or altogether avoid—to the best of their ability—such situations. Another, related response is that of skepticism and mistrust. This entails a carefully considered curation of where and how one appears, among whom, in what kinds of built spaces. This means that any form of public or semipublic encounter is subject to premeditation and scrutiny with reference to the maintenance of one's physical and emotional well-being (though often one has very limited agency over whether to inhabit certain spaces and must appear in and engage ones they'd rather avoid). If "being present" means occupying space with a degree of un-self-consciousness, lack of anxiety, and without projections about what forms of violence might occur, then "being present" is a form of privilege that the majority of trans subjects lack. The word Israeli-Nevo gives to this complex experience is *dissociation*—detaching physically, psychologically, and emotionally from spaces, institutions, situations, relationships, and our own

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bodies, even as we must continue to inhabit them. In the midst of this dissociation, we are offered narratives about finding home and safety, but this is contingent on a process of medical transition that may be out of reach, differentially deferred, or not even desired; it is on this narrative that we are encouraged to pin our hopes and dreams. Even for those of us who are able to access medical technologies of transition, the experience of dissociation, once endured, remains pleated into the present moment, a memory imprinted, informing our relationship to our own bodies and the multiple milieus they move with and within.

#t4t: Trans Intimacies and Trans Presents (or How to Survive the Interregnum)

The form of futural imaginary I've been critiquing has trouble holding the complexities that attend the enfolded time of transition. It isn't adequate to the task of dignifying the ways in which past trauma emerges suddenly in a present moment, the ways that negative affect that we might be tempted to associate with a closeted past or the turbulence of transition persists and endures, resonating across life spans and irrefutably transforming the subjects so impacted. I have found, in the speculative dystopic trans fictions of Kai Cheng Thom (2018) and Torrey Peters (2017), disruptive reworkings of temporalities of transition that offer a more capacious frame through which to incorporate the ongoing lived effects of negative affect. The dystopic visions they offer resist the tendency to link joyful affect to futural hope, even as they vividly depict the scrappy inventiveness, creativity, and intimacy cultivated by trans folks to survive in radically imperfect, irreparably broken worlds.

Kai Cheng Thom's *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars* (2018) takes place in a fantastic fictional near future that very much mirrors the North American present. The narrator—who is never named—leaves home in her late teens, running from a city called Gloom where she has lived with her parents, both Chinese migrants, and a beloved younger sister named Charity, toward the City of Smoke and Lights, a place where "the streets are crooked, and the light is heavy, and the air is stained ash grey from the glamorous cigarette lips of hungry ghosts swimming through the fog"; a place where "anything can happen if you dream it," where "you can be anything you want" (20). She has moved to the City of Smoke and Lights to transition, to "become nobody" in order to "become someone else" (21). She finds the Street of Miracles, a vice district populated by trans femmes and queers and cops and johns, and is quickly taken in by a circle of trans women and placed under the protective wing of Kimaya, a trans elder whose smile is "ancient and battered and mysterious, punctuated by several cracked teeth . . . from getting hit in the face by her boyfriend ten years ago . . . from a police baton during a protest" (40). Kimaya's smile, which the narrator calls "bright and beautiful" (40), is a living testimonial to the forms of trans resilience in the face of

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trauma that the narrator is about to be initiated into. Over the course of the "confabulous memoir," she will fight (and kill) cops and johns to defend herself and her trans sisterhood, fall in love, navigate exploitative specialists in trans medicine, negotiate the difficulties of political solidarity through debates about the most effective modes of trans insurgency, struggle to find and afford a place to live, and cultivate strategies for ensuring her physical and emotional safety in situations of explicit transmisogynistic targeting.

Peter's novella, *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones* (2017), takes place in a dystopic near future in which an unnamed narrator negotiates the fallout wrought by a global "contagion" that comes about when her on-again, off-again girlfriend, Lexi, invents a new form of bacteria that prevents human bodies from responding to endogenous hormonal production, ushering in an era wherein everyone—cis and trans folks alike—must rely on exogenous hormones to manifest gendered embodiment in the ways they desire. Over the course of the novel, we shuttle back and forth in time, with the orienting event that structures before and after being "contagion." This contagion is both personal—the narrator is one of the first people infected, in a deliberate move by Lexi that would cease the narrator's biological responsiveness to androgens. She is also a Patient Zero figure, initiating global contagion. It tweaks the temporal function of hormone injection and ingestion in mainstream trans narratives, which, as Horak and Raun note, so often functions as a temporally structuring principle. In the novella, this moment is not individuated, not a tale of personal gender transformation, but an event of world-shifting magnitude; Peters even refers to trans folks in the novel as "antediluvian trans," situating contagion on par with the cataclysmic great biblical Flood. Because of the polysemy of the word *antediluvian*—which can also mean old-fashioned, behind the times—Peters also implicitly raises questions about how we might understand trans subjectivities in a near future in which everyone partakes of exogenous hormonal body modification. It's worth noting that this near future is very much like the present, insofar as cis and trans folks alike routinely utilize exogenous hormones for all sorts of reasons.

Both books are animated by the questions that Alexis Lothian (2016: 448) poses about the work of speculative dystopia, which she articulates as such: "A dystopian impulse leads us to ask: what do speculative narrative futures look and feel like without either a redemptive kernel of hope or an implicit acceptance of the way things are? And what pleasures . . . and politics grow from this kind of speculation"? In other words, how can we think futurity without acquiescing to the narrative lures of optimism, salvation, rebirth, and redemption? The genre of trans speculative dystopia, of which Peters and Thom are but two examples, offers us rich resources for envisioning such futures. They are part of a broader set of

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literatures theorized by Adrienne Maree Brown, Walidah Imarisha, and Sheree Renee Thomas (2015: 10) as "visionary fiction," a term they use to distinguish speculative fiction that "has relevance towards building new, freer worlds from mainstream science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power."

The fact that Thom calls *Fierce Femmes* a "confabulous memoir" highlights the limitations of traditional (linear, redemptive) narrative strategies of trans memoir. Unpacking the portmanteau *confabulous* means, first, grasping that it is shaped by confabulation, an unintentional memory error that takes the form of fabricated or distorted retellings of experience; second, that it takes part in a process of fabulation, a postmodern narrative form emerging out of resistance to the conventions of both realism and romanticism, one that we most readily associate with magical realism in its combination of the mundane and the fantastic; and third, that such forms of revised and invented narratives are fabulous. A "confabulous memoir" offers us a way of getting at both the mundane and extraordinary valences of trans experiences and can be enacted only by leaving behind the dominant temporal and affective tropes of trans memoir. As Thom (2017) comments in an interview with *Teen Vogue*, the book is

> a struggle to break out of the memoir genre that trans women have been relegated to for a really long time, this idea that we are only important or readable as objects to study, as objects to be used as titillation for a cisgender audience. [This narrative of] us explaining our life story of being born in the wrong body and being oppressed and overcoming it and then assimilating into a happy cis-passing straight life. That is not the reality of the vast majority of trans women I know.

The book begins with a critique of this narrative, opening with the narrator watching a wealthy white trans woman—a thinly veiled proxy for Caitlyn Jenner—who has just gotten "The Surgery" (Thom 2018: 2) receive an "Upstanding Good Samaritan Pillar of the Community Award for, like, being brave or whatever" (2).

> What really works me up is the *way* that this whole story is being told: Everyone look at this poor little trans girl desperate for a ~~fairy godmother~~doctor to give her boobs and a vagina and a pretty face and wear nice dresses! Save the trans girls! Save the whales! Put them in a zoo!
>
> It's actually a very old archetype that trans girl stories get put into: this sort of tragic, plucky-little-orphan character who is just supposed to suffer through everything and wait, and if you're good and brave and patient (and white and rich) enough, then you get the big reward . . . which is that you get to be just like

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> everybody else who is white and rich and boring. And then you marry the prince or the football player and live boringly ever after. We're like Cinderella, waiting to go to the ball. Like the Little Mermaid, getting her tail surgically altered and her voice removed, so that she can walk around on land. Those are the stories we get, these days.
>
> Or, you know, the ones where we're dead. (2–3)

The character slippage Thom's narrator highlights—between fairy godmother and doctor—highlights the messianic temporal structure that tends to characterize transition, shifting the register to a princess narrative, which (like narratives of being saved by religion) charts a move from wretchedness and despair to effulgence and fulfillment. Thom's narrator also raises the question of deservedness: Who is a good trans person? Who is an ideal candidate for transition? The long history of medical gatekeeping around transition is the obvious target of commentary here, with the "~~fairy godmother~~doctor" the arbiter of whether one might become what they so desire. The proper affective disposition in relation to this phenomenon is one of deference and hope—one is exhorted to fulfill the role of the "tragic, plucky-little-orphan character" or the rare and endangered species in need of rescue ("Save the trans girls! Save the whales! Put them in a zoo!"). The orphan, the endangered species: both are figures of severely curtailed agency, victims of their environment almost entirely dependent on the good will, grace, and assistance of others. Importantly, in the case of the endangered species, these others are often precisely those who did the harm in the first place. These metaphors suggest that trans girls are radically unable to save themselves, though desperately in need of saving. What Thom's narrator insinuates here is that trans girls are consistently framed as both radically vulnerable and incapable of saving themselves—a disempowering, deleterious, and limiting trope if ever there was one. Further, she suggests that the possibility of rescue is not just predicated on the successful performance of deference, desire, and gratitude but also explicitly tied to racial and economic privilege (being "good and brave and patient (and white and rich) enough"). One is worth saving only if they already bear certain markers of existential value, only if they are already, in Foucauldian terms, counted as part of the population conceptualized as worthy of life, rather than cathected to the slow process of neglect that so profoundly shapes his articulation of biopolitics as "the power to 'make' live and 'let' die" (Foucault 2003: 239). Thom's narrator highlights the radically bifurcated mainstream narratives of trans femme existence; they vacillate between princess narratives and accounts of brutal homicide, and the difference between the two hinges on questions of racial and economic status. Temporally speaking, this is a vacillation between the brightest of futures and no future, between hope and the radical

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negation of hope. Both of these temporalities yoke (and reduce) the complexities of trans experience to a future, either promised or foreclosed. Both temporalities place trans *presents*, and trans presences (the forms in which we manifest here, now, whatever those may be) under erasure.

What Thom's (2018) novel does, instead, is radically refuse a futural narrative of redemption by grounding the story in the complicated intimacies of a group of trans femmes living and loving alongside one another, supporting each other, arguing with each other, forming an "all-trans girl vigilante gang" (178) with each other, making love, breaking up, and reconciling. We shuttle to the past from time to time, through memory narratives offered by several different characters, but the bulk of the book takes place in a now wherein the narrator is learning, gradually, hard lessons about self-care and the importance of trans communality in a broader necropolitical context wherein violence is routinized, normalized, and rarely contested unless by trans subjects themselves. At the conclusion of the book, the narrator even explicitly refuses attachment to a fairy tale ending: the arrival of her prince. She meets and falls for a trans guy named Josh, a graduate student from a wealthy family who is kind, generous, and committed to building a future with the narrator; he invites her to move into his (extraordinarily fancy) condo, bankrolled by his family, and encourages her to go to college and take writing classes. While discussing this turn of events with her elder protectress Kimaya, she pauses to envision their future together:

> And now I'm going to move in with him, and he keeps on saying I should think about auditing classes at the University and probably I could get a scholarship and what a great writer I could be with my "gift for storytelling." And then I'll get published and become a super-famous Transgender Writer and we'll get married and be a Transgender Power Couple and have Transgender Children and raise them on a cloud of Transgender Happiness™.
>
> And the thing is, I *want* that. I want it so, so bad. (178–79)

But she also senses that Josh is pushing her toward this fairy tale ending, toward the fulfillment of their promise as a Trans Power Couple; she resents this projection while also being lured by it. She then turns to Kimaya and asks, "What do you think the difference is between hunger and love?" (179). Kimaya responds, after some deliberation: "Hunger is a story you get stuck in. Love's the story that takes you somewhere new" (180). Thom gives vivid shape here to both the absolutely understandable lure of transnormative futural narratives—framing them as informed by a deep yearning for something better—and the danger of such futural attachments, manifest in the ways they produce a certain stuckness. This stuckness is precisely what Berlant notes as integral to cruel optimism,

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insofar as it produces difficulty improvising in the context of an ever-shifting present because of fidelity to a particular cluster of futural promises about what constitutes the good life. A practice of love is proposed, in the place of such hunger, as that which might transform the conditions of the present; Berlant (2011: 262) calls this "solidarity," which, she writes, "comes from the scavenging for survival that absorbs increasingly more people's lives." The most profound love that we witness in Thom's work is that between the trans women who dwell, scavenging for survival, in the Street of Miracles; and it is the practice of love cultivated there that enables each of them to not get stuck in a story, to go "somewhere new." Thom's narrator rejects the scripted futures on offer, choosing instead the sustaining unpredictability of a praxis of love. Thom's work helps us explore the affective structures of trans presents, which are always more nuanced, more variegated, than the Janus-faced structure of conventional narratives of trans futurity would have us believe.

I turn now to the dystopian trans alter-world on offer in the work of Torrey Peters as it deals directly with questions of negative affect, grappling with the way the everyday is shot through with traumas residual and fresh, which make themselves more or less available within the present, depending on conjuncture, chance, affinity, and trigger. Crucially, however, these traumas are positioned not as wounds to be healed, finally sutured in some future-perfect. Rather, the narrative—like Thom's—is resolutely irresolute, refusing to wrap up loose ends, refusing the lure of the palliative gestures of happily ever after, yet offering glimmers of possibility for living otherwise, in and through trauma, and maybe perhaps beyond it. These glimmers are routed through trans-for-trans (t4t) love, affection, and intimacy, presented as simultaneously radically difficult and radically transformative.

The central love story—if one can call it that—in Peter's novella *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones* occurs between trans folk, between the narrator and Lexi, another trans woman. This fact alone merits pause. Peters, through this narratological decision, renders a world that actively decenters cis subjectivities, perceptions, and erotic economies of meaning, recognition, and validation. Emphasis is placed on t4t circuits of recognition, attraction, solidarity, and support, and a central animating question emerges: how can trans folk learn to love each other? In exploring the dynamics of t4t intimacy, Peters intentionally performs a radical revision of the meaning of the acronym.

T4t began its life as a category within the personals section of Craigslist (a regionally tailored online version of classified advertisements), one of the handful of options that enabled folks to search through online personals by gender identification. I consider the intimacy elaborated in Peters's work a détourned take-up of the t4t acronym. Détournement—a tactic developed by Guy Debord

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(2000) (and affiliated with radical French Lettrists) in the 1950s and later taken up by the Situationist International—is most easily understood as the appropriation and repurposing (rerouting, hijacking, derailing) of an existing media artifact in a manner that troubles, subverts, or resists the intended messaging of the original artifact. Understanding the détournement t4t undergoes in Peter's work begins with admitting the obvious transphobic logic that undergirds the initial iteration of t4t: it sequesters trans folks from Ms and Ws (as in M4M, W4W), partaking of the kind of trans-exclusionary (not to mention cisnormative and homonormative) logic that misconstrues trans as a sexualized gender category unto itself. As Susan Stryker (2008: 148) clarifies in her critical rereading of the importance of trans exclusion for the emergence of homonormative political/communal forms,

> As a sexual orientation category, trans appears as a desire, akin to kink and fetish desire, for cross-dressing or (more extremely) genital modification. The "T" in this version of the LGBT community becomes a group of people who are attracted to one another on the basis of enjoying certain sexual practices—in the same way that gay men are attracted to gay men, and lesbians are attracted to lesbians, on the basis of a shared desire for particular sexual practices.

When the digital architectonics of Craigslist partake of this logic, misinterpreting trans identity as kink—and drawing on a long history of such problematic interpretations, ranging from John Money and Margaret Lamacz's (1984) writing on gynemimetophiles to the work of J. Michael Bailey (2003) and beyond—they also deploy "T" as an insulating function, intending to prevent trans-identified individuals from cropping up in the rest of the personals. As Stryker (2008: 148) clarifies, "Trans thus conceived of does not trouble the basis of the other categories [M, W, hetero, homo]—indeed, it becomes a containment mechanism for 'gender trouble' of various sorts that works in tandem with assimilative gender-normative tendencies within the sexual identities." It also derealizes the authenticity of trans gender identifications, partaking of the double bind Talia Mae Bettcher so eloquently parses in "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers" (2007), in which trans folk can only be perceived within cisnormative framings as "fooling" cis folks—particularly in intimate/sexual contexts—or "pretending" to be the gender that one is; it is implicit in the structuring logic of Craigslist personals that trans folks are sequestered precisely to guard against cis experiences of ostensible deception.

However, the designers of Craigslist personals also unintentionally produced a kind of proto-trans-separatist space with the invention of t4t, and it is this by-product, this form of alternative usage, that is taken up by contemporary

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manifestations of the acronym, both as a hashtag and a descriptor of intimacies extant and desired. T4t is a form of contingent, strategic separatism that Chela Sandoval (2000: 57) usefully glosses as a mode of oppositional consciousness that is initiated "to protect and nurture the differences that define its practitioners through their complete separation from the dominant social order." It is in the tradition of other forms of politicized and eroticized separatism, echoing Marlon Riggs's assertion in *Tongues Untied* (dir. Marlon Riggs, 1989) that "black men loving black men is *the* revolutionary act," and resonating with the formulation of lesbian separatism as a praxis engaged by "woman-loving women" (Radicalesbians 1970) to invent modes of life beyond the stranglehold of interlocking (male, heterosexual, white) supremacies. T4t emerges from a recognition that trans subjects, too, might benefit from a severing of ties to cissexist modes of interpellating trans bodies (as failures, fakes, inorganic, inauthentic), and, moreover, that such strategic separatism might be one of the most direct routes toward cultivating self-love, self-regard, and self-care, especially because it confronts and disrupts the assimilationist logics that structure the limiting forms of individuated futural aspiration already discussed. The hope is that, in community with one another, insulated—however temporarily—from cissexist modes of perception, some significant healing might be possible.

Peters's (2017) work fleshes out this détourned reinvention of t4t for the purposes of trans intimacy. She is quite explicit about her reconceptualization of it: the acronym appears on the cover of *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones*, is spoken as a secret code of care and solidarity at crucial points in the novella, and appears as a stick-and-poke tattoo on Lexi, one of the central characters (the former/maybe future lover and complex frenemy of the narrator). Lexi and the narrator also met through the t4t personals, where the narrator answered Lexi's ad, despite being in a sexless relationship with her current girlfriend (whom she started dating prior to transition) and already involved in clandestine Skype and phone-sex hookups with random men. She wants to meet Lexi, though not necessarily for sex: "Why do I want to meet Lexi? The answer is things I can't say. That I can barely think" (25). The narrator's desire to reach out to another trans woman is opaque, oblique, ineffable—not predetermined, scripted, or prefigured, but an opening to possibilities not yet articulable or even quite imaginable. For me, this admission of uncertainty raises several significant questions: What does it mean that the narrator—and perhaps, by extension, many other trans folk—lack scripts, expectations, and assumptions for t4t intimacy? What possibilities inhere in the space of such unscriptedness? What might t4t intimacy enable in a world less overcoded by forms of genital-centricity that naturalize linkages between morphology and intimacy?

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Peters builds such a world in *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones* and does this by, first, making everyone trans. Lexi and her trans girl gang concoct a contagious bacteriological infection (derived from agricultural research on pigs) that "causes a body's antibodies to bind to gonadotropin (GnRH)"—as the narrator explains, "the hormone that signals the production of all sex hormones in mammals" (28). This means that the antibodies then attack GnRH, resulting in "a complete cessation of the production of all sex hormones" (28). What this contagion effectively ushers in is a near-global reliance on exogenous hormones—an intensification of what Paul Preciado (2013: 23) has called the "pharmacopornographic era" and a quite literal reimagining of Halberstam's (1994: 226) early-career assertion that "we are all transsexuals. There are no transsexuals." While we certainly live in a world that is (albeit discontinuously) biomedicalized and in bodies, whether cis or trans, that are deeply imbricated with and reliant on all sorts of exogenous hormones—whether we're on birth control, supplementing ostensibly "low T," on hormone replacement therapy to mitigate menopause, or taking hormones to transition—Peters removes the question of agency, establishing a new biological baseline that asks everyone to choose, and thus to deal with questions of access, scarcity, and gatekeeping the way trans folk have had to for the last several decades.

In the postcontagion world that Peters (2017) constructs, where the body modified by exogenous hormones has become a general ontology, where one's intentional relation to practices of biomolecular modification must be grappled with and there is no recourse to a purportedly "natural" form of biological dimorphism, the phrase "antediluvian trans" (52) comes to mark a difference of identity and agential relation to transition that might otherwise be lost in a world of "auntie-boys" and "T-slabs" (the names Peters gives to folks accessing exogenous estrogen and testosterone postcontagion). The register of trans identity thus shifts, as does the meaning of trans solidarity. What differentiates "antediluvian trans" folk from others has to do primarily with shared desires and affective orientations, rather than access to technologies of transition. In Peters's world, hormones are scarce, subject to a black-market economy, and liable to be tainted with harmful chemicals. Transition-related surgeries have ceased to be available; in a world increasingly given over to scarcity and subsistence, the market for such technologies has dried up. Nevertheless, the networks that trans women had formed before contagion persist, shaped by a t4t praxis of love.

Explicating the meaning of this praxis, Zoey—a member of a trans femme separatist farmhouse on the plains—says, "It's a promise. You just promise to love trans girls above all else. The idea—although maybe not the practice—is that a girl could be your worst enemy, the girl you wouldn't piss on to put out a fire, but if she's trans, you're gonna offer her your bed, you're gonna share your last

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hormone shot" (54). The narrator responds that this sounds like "some kind of trans girl utopia," to which Zoey laughs and clarifies: "Do you think the words trans women and utopia ever go together in the same sentence? Even when we're not starved for hormones, we're still bitches. Crabs in a barrel. Fucking utopia, my ass" (54). And finally, closing the scene, Zoey drives the point home: "We aim high, trying to love each other and then we take what we can get. We settle for looking out for each other. And even if we don't all love each other, we mostly all respect one another" (54).

T4t, in Peters's work, is many things: an ideal, a promise, an identifier, a way of flagging an ethic of being. It is antiutopian, guiding a praxis of solidarity in the interregnum; it is about small acts guided by a commitment to trans love, small acts that make life more livable in and through difficult circumstances. It has no truck with cruel optimism, with the attachment to a toxic present because of a promised future that wears you down and out. It is cynical, skeptical; t4t is set up to fail, about aiming high and taking what one can get. It embraces ethical imperfection and complexity. It dwells in difficulty without the expectation that such difficulties will cease by and through a t4t praxis of love. It is about being with and bearing with; about witnessing one another, being mirrors for one another that avoid some of the not-so-funhouse effects of cisnormative perceptive habits that frame trans folk as too much, not enough, failed, or not yet realized. Nevertheless, it doesn't rely on a frictionless and easeful understanding of trans relationality; it hinges on the admittance that trans people often have a very, very difficult time with one another. Appearing together in public might increase the likelihood of being clocked; dwelling in intimate spaces with one another might render one's home places more difficult, rather than less, as trans-related trauma is shared and thus, perhaps, affectively amplified rather than diminished (a phenomenon that is not bad, per se, just complex and—sometimes—tiring). Then there are those other dynamics Zoey obliquely references with the phrase "crabs in a barrel"—the forms of envy, annoyance, jealousy, and judgment borne out of survival struggles and economies of scarcity, an emotional ensemble shorthanded by Zoey in one word: *bitches*, a word that is simultaneously an indicator of relational difficulty and a badge of honor, a sign of tenacity, bull-headedness, ambition, and brassiness. Not to mention competing and sometimes incompatible personalities, politics, expectations, and assumptions.

To recall Eve Sedgwick's (1990: 22) very first axiom: (trans) people are different from one another. T4t is inevitably a difficult practice of love across difference in the name of coalition and survival, and it thus can't presuppose or predicate such love on identitarian or subjective sameness. Too often, "trans folk/people/communities" gets deployed as an abstract and overcoded monolith, coming to signify for diversely stratified communities. When used monolithically,

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trans coheres in ways that minimize colonial and racial differences and operates as implicitly white and settler, presuming a form of trans belonging sutured through the experience of "trans" as a single-axis form of minoritization. A t4t praxis of love enables and elicits more finely grained attention to differences between and among trans folk, with all the dissonance and difficulty engaging such differences entails. In this movement toward one another, this contingent separatism, space is made to signify and be understood differently, in greater complexity, in excess of reductive cis- and transnormative interpellations of trans subjects. Ultimately, what a t4t praxis of love does is offer a blueprint for surviving lag time, for getting by in the interregnum, which may end up being the only time we have.

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