

Transfeminist Kill/Joys

Rage, Love, and Reparative Performance

T. L. COWAN

Abstract This paper considers recent transfeminist critical creative work through an affective trope contingently named here as that belonging to the “transfeminist kill/joy,” after Sara Ahmed’s framing of the “feminist killjoy.” The trope of the transfeminist kill/joy can be read as a set of proliferating dialectics expressed as the rage that comes into being through living the violent effects of transphobia and trans-misogyny and through the practice of transformational love as a struggle for existence. The texts under consideration here work both to spoil feelings of political and social well-being or pleasure that are contingent upon the tacit absence or explicit exclusion of trans women in feminist conceptual and physical spaces and to re-structure, claim, and repair feminist happiness as a reparative impulse that holds these political affects in tension as creative potential.

Keywords transfeminism, feminist killjoy, political affects, reparative reading, transgender cultural and performance studies, dialectical criticism, cabaret studies

How do we create a culture where we love trans women?

—Laverne Cox, “Remixing the Trans and Hip Hop Conversation”

Love as a social movement is enacted by revolutionary, mobile, and global conditions of citizen-activists who are allied through the apparatus of emancipation.

—Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*

I love your big hands and your busted teeth.

—*The Fully Functional Cabaret*, “I Want It All”

This essay considers an affective trope that I have come to recognize as “the transfeminist kill/joy”: a set of proliferating dialectics expressed as the rage¹ that comes into being through living the violent effects of transphobia and trans-misogyny and the practice of transformational love as a struggle for existence.² While the transfeminist kill/joy might certainly be understood as a politicized

aesthetic and form of social action that extends well beyond (cis)gender feminist politics and social life,³ here I read for the poetics of killing trans-absent or trans-excluding feminist joy. In this discussion of recent transfeminist critical creative work, I trace how the transfeminist kill/joy works both to spoil feelings of political and social well-being or pleasure that are contingent upon the tacit absence or explicit exclusion of trans women in feminist conceptual and physical spaces *and* to restructure, claim, and repair feminist happiness through what Chela Sandoval (2000: 180) has called “a hermeneutics of love.”

In my framing of the “transfeminist kill/joy,” I hope to signal, as does Sara Ahmed (2010) in her original framing of the feminist killjoy, that the mere presence or arrival of perceived difference can be understood as “threaten[ing] the social bond” (68) within privileged feminist scenarios.⁴ While Ahmed frames the killing of feminist joy (67) mostly in terms of women of color in white feminist spaces, and certainly racism and transphobia and trans-misogyny are not interchangeable,⁵ I suggest that trans-absent or trans-excluding feminist political and social scenarios can be understood to experience a similar threat to the “organic enjoyment and solidarity” (67) of the (perceived homogeneity of the) group when forced to deal with the presence or proximity of trans women, since this arrival “exposes not only the unreliability of the body as a source of their identities and politics, but also the fallacy of women’s universal experiences and oppressions” (Koyama 2006: 704). Put in the terms of Ahmed’s earlier work (2006), the transfeminist kill/joy is an assemblage of affects that reorients feminist happiness *toward* rather than against trans women,⁶ and uses anger and love to resist a feminism designed exclusively *for* non-trans women, not necessarily feminism *by* all non-trans women.⁷

Central to my exploration of the transfeminist kill/joy are the following questions: How do I (or can I) inhabit a transfeminist criticality without falling into the patriarchal trap of “recycling the most threadbare of clichés: the angry, man-hating lesbian” (Salamon 2008: 125)?⁸ Is it possible to inscribe the trope of the transfeminist kill/joy without reinscribing the trope of the straw feminist as demonic other? Rather than holding steady in a paranoid position, assured that “no time could be too early for having-already-known, for its having already-been-inevitable, that something bad would happen” (Sedgwick 2003: 132), can this essay, along with the work of the kill/joys I study here, imagine a different inevitability, a reparative temporality constituted by the hopeful inevitability of love?

The texts and performances that I think about here—Ryka Aoki’s short story “To the New World”; Mirha-Soleil Ross’s one-woman show, *Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thought from an Unrepentant Whore*; and the collaborative *Fully Functional Cabaret* with Star Amerasu, Ryka Aoki, Annie Danger, Red Durkin, Bryn Kelly, and Shawna Virago—foreground potentiality in the forms of rage and

love, recalcitrance and hope, and resist what Eve Sedgwick called “paranoid reading,” in favor of what I am calling “reparative performances” that “succeed in extracting sustenance from the object of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them” (Sedgwick 2003: 149). They live in the mobile tension between *kill* and *joy*: between the rhetorical, economic, and physical violences and killing logics of coercive gender norms in mainstream US and Canadian cultures and the exclusions and attacks practiced by some feminist communities against trans people, and against trans women especially, and the willfully resistant joy, thrill, love, and hope offered by transfeminist aesthetics, politics, and knowledge production, which make new cultures and sustain living through experiments in polemical sociality.⁹

Scenario 1: The Farmers Market

Dammit—I thought Asian hair was supposed to be easy!

Millie Wong was on the verge of tears. *Tangled and frizzy . . . shouldn't it be long and straight?* She yanked at her brush. Maybe it was some hidden genetic female thing: her sister had perfect hair, and her mother, too. *You're so stupid! You don't even pass to your own hair! You clumsy tranny freak . . .*

—Ryka Aoki, “To the New World”

In her short story “To the New World,” Ryka Aoki introduces readers to our heroine, Millie Wong, whose day begins with her “on the verge of tears,” unable to get her “tangled and frizzy” hair to cooperate and become “perfect hair,” which she figures as “long and straight” like her sister’s and mother’s hair. Millie wonders if the problem with her hair is “some hidden genetic female thing.” Millie chastises herself as a “clumsy tranny freak,” who can’t even pass to her own hair. This introduction sets up the scenario in which Millie gradually forgives her hair, remembering that she “slept with wet hair, that’s all,” and she sets out into the world—after a session with the straightening iron—with “hair like shimmering ribbons,” to the farmers market to find some food to celebrate her dearly departed grandmother’s birthday (Aoki 2012: 53).

On this first half-page of the story, Aoki (2012) creates a scenario in which Millie’s hair stands in at once for her ethnicity (“Asian hair was supposed to be easy!”), for her failed “female thing,” and for the successful intervention of self-administered technology (the straightening iron) to set things right. And although the LA winter drizzle quickly “spoils all the work she had put into her hair” (54), the attentions of a tow truck driver make Millie smile. This transaction, like her hair battle, inspires a reflection on her “transness,” but this time on its

success. Victor Wong was invisible, but Millie Wong gets attention, even objectification. And even though the attention she receives might be conditioned by a sexist, racist conception of “Suzie Wong and *Memoirs of a Geisha*” (55), Millie appreciates the attention. This interaction with the tow truck driver prompts her to ask, “After a life of being ignored, was it wrong to like people being *nice* to you?” (55).

The narration of the story continues with a paragraph about how Millie observes other women, how they move and talk, followed by a paragraph on a “poofy loaf of bread” like the kind her grandmother had loved. The story builds a scenario that conjures the multiple and conflicting discourses at play in Millie’s world, all within the framework of a simple, quotidian experience of going to the market, which is, for the most part, fairly pleasurable, now that the hair problem has been resolved for the moment. But turn the page and *boom!* Enter Sierra, an Asian-stereotype-wielding lesbian transphobe. Millie tells the story of meeting the very loud, very buff Sierra, who had cooled to Millie when she “decided to confess that she was trans” (Aoki 2012: 56). Aoki positions Sierra as the arbiter of femaleness, who “pronounced Millie was okay, because she didn’t feel that male energy come off her” (56), but also, importantly, Aoki positions Sierra as Millie’s “friend.” Sierra coaches Millie in “what it meant to be a socially and politically responsible woman” (57), which leads Millie to feel “sad that she had been born with male privilege and, maybe by becoming vegan, in some way she could be closer to the woman she wanted to be. A caring woman. A strong woman. A *vegan* woman” (57). Aoki has Millie *confess* her transness, and then she gets “*caught with non-vegan bread*” (57; emphasis added) when she runs into Sierra at the market, thereby positioning Millie as existing in a perpetual state of turpitude. The forces conspire to make Millie feel bad: her transness; her Asian parents, who had already taught her to “avoid large groups of drunken white men” (57), thus rendering redundant Sierra’s coaching in appropriate woman-ness; and then the non-vegan bread, about which Sierra pontificates, connecting the slaughter of dairy cows with the oppression of Tibetan women, all teach Millie how wrong she is. The story continues with Millie unable to interrupt or correct Sierra for fear of being accused of acting with male privilege as Sierra rants randomly about Asian men, a girlfriend “who went and transitioned on me,” and a Zen garden that is “very feng shui” but is a women-only space, for “*women-women*” (58), and referring to her “trans man ex, as a trans woman” (58). Ultimately, the interaction with Sierra lasts less than three pages, and yet the brute force of her willful ignorance is overwhelming. This is a spoof, of course, a caricature of the lesbian, feminist, gender-assigned essentialist, who refuses to learn about transness but understands herself as doing a pretty bang-up job at being politically munificent.¹⁰ The story ends with Millie digging some pork buns from her freezer and

celebrating the memory of her grandmother, a woman who also emerged into a new world, “full of people who would call you brave, people who would call you crazy, and people who would never call you again” (62). As she eats the pork bun, Millie considers calling up Sierra and imagines that she “could tell her the difference between trans women and trans men” (62), leaving the story on a note that some readers might experience as hopeful.

Aoki’s narration provides access to only Millie’s interiority, centering her experience of Sierra’s ignorance, leading the reader to experience the story from Millie’s perspective. This perspective is one that I identify as structured by a transfeminist kill/joy impulse: Aoki’s narration of an experience that is supposed to be pleasant—a morning at the farmers market—is complicated by the presence of the oafish lesbian feminist, who is oblivious to and unaccountable for her own bad politics, and the rage of the text coded within this encounter. This representation of the lesbian feminist who enjoys trans-excluding spaces for “women-women,” while pretending to herself that she’s a pretty good friend to Millie, a trans woman, might hit a little close to home for some readers, might ruin their Sierra-like oblivious pleasures.¹¹ Additionally, Aoki writes Sierra as a racist know-it-all, which is a bold narrative move and serves to link transphobia and racism as mutually informing paradigms. While Millie’s narrative ends with some happy thoughts toward transformation—explaining to Sierra the difference between trans women and trans men—the force of Aoki’s narrative structure creates a lasting impression that ruins the pleasure of any reader who might see in Sierra a bit of herself. This pressure between hope and ruined pleasure—the hope offered by ruined pleasure—is a transformative pressure that transfeminist narration of the quotidian details of transphobia and racism can offer. Indeed, Stryker ([1994] 2006: 253) identifies transgender rage as produced through the impossible impositions of the “highly gendered regulatory schemata that determine the viability of bodies,” which “furnishes a means for disidentification with compulsorily assigned subject positions.” Like Aoki shows us here, “through the operation of rage, the stigma itself becomes the source of transformative power” (253).

Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore have called for expanding the concept “trans-” to include “Trans: -gender, -national, -racial, -generational, -genic, -species” (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 2008: 11). I want to add *transformational* to this list.¹² The crossing implied by *transformational* is the crossing between structures, between systems, between selves. Rather than showcasing trans women’s bodies and experiences as a set of illuminating concepts, or as figural models in pursuit of a radical theory of gender,¹³ the transfeminist kill/joy offers a critical orientation that promises to accommodate the proliferating dialectics of contemporary revolutionary struggles and centers *trans* as a reparative impulse. Transfeminist reparative knowledge production takes on

received feminist politics and values as part of a culture that is, as Sedgwick (2003: 149) puts it, “inadequate or inimical to its nurture.” As a mode that is “additive and accretive,” a reparative transfeminist impulse “wants to assemble and confer plentitude on an object [feminism] that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self” (149). While some readers might interpret Millie’s hopeful temporality as a bit delusional, I want to suggest that she makes a transformational political choice in the interest of reparative potentiality.

Scenario 2: “The Circle of Victimization”

In her 2002 one-woman show, *Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thoughts of an Unrepentant Whore*, sex worker and transsexual cultural activist Mirha-Soleil Ross stages a cabaret-style performance in seven monologues that transverse genres from talk show to academic lecture to confessional and more. What I want to pay particular attention to here are the ways that Ross performs perhaps the ultimate transfeminist *kill*, by equating within the structure of her piece the violence done by antiprostitute (and antitrans) feminists—“feminist-identified feminist” (Ross 2002b: 8), Bridge It Taylor!, and “Women’s Sciences” (17) graduate student Judy Cuty Q—with the violence done by the Whore Hunter, a serial killer who targets prostitutes. Within the seven-part structure of the performance, these are the only times when Ross is not playing herself, “Mirha-Soleil Ross” (Salah 2007: 65). These three figures, then, are performed as threats to prostitutes, and especially to transsexual prostitutes, and by framing the performance in this way, Ross draws attention to the killing logics of antitrans and antiprostitute feminisms, which contribute to the carceral culture in which, to use Cox’s terms, “trans women are being stigmatized and then ultimately criminalized and murdered” (Hill et al. 2013). In similar ways to Aoki’s playing of Sierra as *all wrong* and violently repressive because of her transmisogyny and racism, Ross’s staged “feminists” devalue the lives of prostitutes, especially transsexual women working as prostitutes. For example, Bridge It Taylor! presents a talk called the “Sleazy Business of Getting Whores Out of Business,” animated by three blow-up dolls as her “victims of prostitution.” As she narrates the story of the third blow-up doll—a transsexual woman named Xtazeee, who appears in a cage—Bridge It Taylor! revels in heavy-handed rhetoric:

Xtazeee was his or “her” name when he got arrested on several pending prostitution-related charges and forced into our program by a Human Rights’ court order that declared that a transsexed man’s access to women only services was more important than maintaining the safety and dignity of women who have been sexually abused by men. . . . We had to fight tooth and nail in order to obtain an injunction that would allow us to put him in a cage to protect both our staff and

our participants. . . . He has, from a very early age, internalized the notion that sexual abuse, violence, and platform heels are essential and defining experiential aspects of femininity and of a woman's identity.

The daily intake of dangerous dosages of hormones, the regular shooting up of [an] industrial quantity of industrial quality silicone, the multiple mutilating surgeries performed on his face, his chest, his penis are just some of what he actually enjoyed subjecting himself to in order to satisfy his clients' desire for a grotesque deformation of a male body that they could use without having to call into question their masculinity and male sexuality. (Ross 2002b: 11–12)

Here, Ross ventriloquizes and embodies the canonical texts of antitrans feminism in which transsexual people are always already figured as both predatory (*killers*) and the victims of (medicalized gender normative) violence (*killed*) as a way to maintain assigned-essentialist logics, adding new density to a transfeminist kill/joy practice.¹⁴ As Bridge It Taylor!, she does the work that Stryker, Currah, and Moore called for in the then-emerging field of transgender studies: to produce “new epistemological frameworks, and new representational practices within which variations in the sex/gender relationship can be understood as morally neutral and representationally true, and through which anti-transgender violence can be linked to other systemic forms of violence such as poverty and racism” (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 2008: 10).

Making fun of but not making light of these feminist violences, Ross concludes Bridge It Taylor!'s speech with “The Three F's: Forget where you come from. Forget who you love. Forget who you are” and dictates the following “empowering radical feminist concepts”:

We teach them that there is no such thing as agency, informed consent, the ability to control one's own body. . . . We force them to get in touch with their own experiences of rape, molestation, sexual degradation, and battery. And when they cannot see how these factors have made them vulnerable to recruitment for prostitution, we make a drawing for them and give it a glamorous title: the circle of victimization [she shows a picture of a frowny face]. (Ross 2002)¹⁵

Yapping Out Loud highlights the ways that abolitionist/savior feminist and religious-based organizations get precedence in the fight for the decriminalization of sex work.¹⁶ It also unsettles the (moral) certainty of abolitionist feminism through the spoofing of feminist zealots and by foregrounding trans and sex-worker love as a sustaining reality—an inconceivable (or inconvenient) reality in the righteous savior imaginary. In a monologue by “Mirha-Soleil Ross” midway through the performance, Ross speaks with tenderness and compassion about her clients and

turns the tables on abolitionist feminists, whose lack of tenderness and compassion are the subtext of *Yapping*: “For the most part, it is their courage to see me, a transsexual woman, again and again, because yes, in this culture, it takes courage for a man to get so close, so intimate with an individual whom a large portion of the population considers a freak” (Ross 2002b: 15). This transfeminist kill/joy affect might be understood as a trans (re)structuring or disorienting affect, as it holds antitrans and anti-sex-work feminists accountable for the violences and lack of love of their politics, while offering a repaired love as a model of transformative resistance and demanding that audiences feel implicated in this tension and feel the potential of rage *and* love not as irreducible affects but as a full politics. Koyama (2006: 702) notes, “It is not the lack of knowledge or information that keeps oppression going; it is the lack of feminist compassion, conscience and principle.” And in her exploration of transformational feminism, bell hooks (1989: 26; emphasis added) writes, “In reconceptualizing and reformulating strategies for future feminist movements, *we need to concentrate on the politicization of love, not just in the context of talking about victimization in intimate relationships, but in a critical discussion where love can be understood as a powerful force that challenges and resists domination*. As we work to be loving, to create a culture that celebrates life, that makes love possible, we move against dehumanization, against domination.” The kill/joy affect of *Yapping Out Loud* offers an opportunity to politicize love and joy, to politicize jouissance, as a critical framework and methodology. As Chela Sandoval (2000: 140) argues, taking up Roland Barthes, “The act of falling in love can thus function as a ‘punctum,’ that which breaks through social narratives to permit a bleeding, meanings unanchored and moving away from their traditional moorings.” We can “understand ‘love’ as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement” (139); love is a methodology through which we become that “drifting being . . . where political weapons of consciousness are available in a constant tumult of possibility” (140). As an expression of love and pleasure, Sandoval reinscribes jouissance as a political position: “It is coming to a utopian nonsite, a no-place where everything is possible—but only in exchange for the pain of crossing” (140). Ross’s *Yapping Out Loud* performs this pain of crossing, reveals the political damages of denied love, and unanchors the possibility for love and pleasure as a social-justice methodology.

Stryker has emphasized the importance of understanding transgender studies as knowledge production, and I want to make a connection here between Stryker’s vision and Audre Lorde’s (1984: 53) understanding of love, joy, and the erotic as knowledge production, as a “source of power and information within

our lives,” and anger, which she figured similarly as “loaded with information and energy” (127).¹⁷ Stryker (2006: 8–9) writes, “Epistemological concerns lie at the heart of transgender critique, and motivate a great deal of the transgender struggle for social justice. Transgender phenomena, in short, point the way to a different understanding of how bodies mean, how representation works, and what counts as legitimate knowledge. These philosophical issues have material consequences for the quality of transgender lives.” The dialectical structure of transfeminist kill/joy scenarios that call out the ways in which we “participate, knowingly or otherwise, in [our] sister’s oppression” (Lorde 1984: 128) and acknowledge anger, love, joy, and the erotic as transformative sources/sites of power and knowledge, creates the possibility for change and reminds us that we are not stuck in current conditions.¹⁸ Significantly, these transfeminist moments of joy are not examples of what Ahmed (2010: 84) would call the obscuring act of *taking cover* “by looking on the bright side . . . to avoid what might threaten the world as it is,” but rather, this is love as resistance tactic, performing the powerful material consequences of loving trans women.

Scenario 3: Love Letters

The performance at which the penny dropped for me about the transformative complexities of transfeminist kill/joy expressive culture was *The Fully Functional Cabaret*, which I saw at Barnard College in April 2013. The opening scenes of the cabaret are led by the show’s Ring Mistress/Emcee (Annie Danger), who asks the audience,

Are you ready for some SECRETS? Are you ready for some THRILLS?! Did some of you just come to find out *what the fuck’s going ON down there?! Yes you did!* And we here at *The Fully Functional Cabaret* refuse to disappoint! . . . We know what you want. Any trans show worth its salt has a *fantastic* reveal scene. And I want you to know we’re serious about these secrets so we’re going dessert first, bladies and shentlemen! (Amerasu et al. 2012b: 2)

The Ring Mistress then sets the stage for a small-town–beauty-pageant-meets-Vaudeville burlesque and introduces *The Fully Functional* cast by their showgirl names, Vanessa DeCamp (Star Amerasu), Selina (Ryka Aoki), Cookie (Shawna Virago), and Teddie (Bryn Kelly), telling us that these ladies are about to show off what they *have to reveal*. This opening scene is a kill/joy moment: it promises the *big reveal*, both naming and rendering ridiculous the cultural power of this expectation, making an absurdly extended joke about what each cast member is hiding. This scene plays up a hybrid magic trick/striptease, riffing on the pervasive motif that trans women are hiding something.¹⁹ Each performer in turn reveals

her pubic puppet—her “fish stick,” her “stick pussy,” her “lady finger,” her “Neovagina . . . [with all] its bells and whistles” (Amerasu et al. 2012b: 4)—while the Ring Mistress calls for cheers and applause, forcing the spectators to demand what they know they are not supposed to want. Indeed, the show is a manifestation of all the “Don’ts” in a Trans 101 seminar, and many audience members know it. In the first moments of the show, the Ring Mistress explains to the spectators that “this ride requires a special T-ticket for full permission to come see the funny trannies,” but then she corrects herself: “Oop! Hilarious trans women” (Amerasu 2012b: 1). Like Ross’s *Yapping Out Loud*, *The Fully Functional Cabaret* performs the pedagogical function of the political cabaret form—a proliferating dialectic produced through repetition, this scene teaches (indeed, most of the scenes teach) by bad example. And like Aoki’s caricature of Sierra, this performance cultivates a renewed, if discomfited, self-awareness among spectators.

Following the pageant scene, the show continues with a series of collaboratively written scenarios, including a clever skit full of double entendres featuring Dr. Harry Benjamin (Red Durkin), infamous for his research with “live transsexuals,” and another in which Corporeal Hegemony (Shawna Virago), a figure reminiscent of a debutante coach, works to create/discipline a (non)passing trans woman’s (Bryn Kelly) body. The cabaret moves through increasingly bleak terrain, staging enactments of dating violence and medical violence, all of which challenge the received notions and expectations that circulate about trans women’s bodies, desires, and surgical status and, again, seem pedagogical in intention. Early in the show, the Ring Mistress foreshadows this turn to “the real” by telling her audience,

You can laugh now, you may not be [laughing] later. For the transwomen in the audience and maybe for other people as well we have written this show to get very real. And if it should get so real that you need to take care of yourself—get a drink of water, take a walk in the lobby, take a deep breath, find a friend, find a hug—we very strongly encourage you to do so. And regardless of your experience this evening, in that sense, we hope that you have an amazing time. (Amerasu et al. 2012a)

As the violence on stage becomes more and more “real,” the audience becomes increasingly uncomfortable. Rather than a joke about what may or may not be between their legs, *The Fully Functional Cabaret*’s “big reveal” exposes the violence in trans women’s lives. The joke is played and then taken away, like a dirty, broken toy. The show “refuses to convene” (Ahmed 2010: 65) over laughs.

In the last scene of *The Fully Functional Cabaret*, by far longer than any of the other segments of the show, the kill/joy manifestation of love “breaks through social narrative” (Sandoval 2000: 140). “Love Letters” is a spoken-word piece performed by the ensemble cast, as they gather around each other, hugging,

holding each other—a dramatized version of mutual care and solidarity—each cast member wearing a variation of the same fabulous gold lamé fabric, each cataloging the things they love about trans women. The letter begins “Dear You,” (Amerasu et al. 2012) and continues:

ANNIE: I see you around walking around the street. . . .

Oh, how I adore the fact that you are living. . . .

RYKA: Dear transwomen yet to come . . .

RED: I love you because sometimes you’re weird looking the way that I am weird looking and you understand that weird looking and bad looking are not the same thing. . . .

RYKA: You see, belief is something we transwomen can do like no one else. With everything, everyone out there doubting us, we are given a belief that can create worlds, make what is impossible real. Remember, in everything you do, to believe in yourself. Your belief is your greatest gift and power, and magic. Like nobody else when you, my future, believe—you love. And I believe in you. . . .

RED: I love you because you’re beautiful, not in a “we are all the special and perfect creations of a loving god,” kind of way. You’re beautiful in a “crawled out of the muck and evolved,” kind of way. I love you because you’re loud and shy and glamorous and plain. I love you because you’ve got swagger, because you’re clumsy, because you’re delicate, angry, imposing and gracious. (Amerasu et al. 2012a)

The scene ends as Star Amerasu straps on an acoustic guitar and the cast reassembles and re-embraces for their closing song, “I Want It All,” a transfeminist anthem if ever there was one, a demonstration of the restructured affective politics of the kill/joy:

I la la la love you. ×3

Every part of you.

Every single part of you.

Your worst and your best.

I want it all ×4

.....

I love you when you’re graceful and when you’re mean.

I love your big hands and your busted teeth.

(Amerasu et al. 2012b: 35)

“Love Letters” and “I Want It All” are meditations on love as what Sandoval (2000: 139) calls a “system of signification capable of evoking and puncturing

through to another site, to that of differential consciousness”; these scenes bring the cast and audience together in a shared moment/feeling of creating change.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have tried to identify, through the affective orientations of the transfeminist kill/joy, how holding rage and love simultaneously as a structural and narrative tension is characteristic of what might be called reparative-pedagogical transfeminist expressive culture. The transfeminist kill/joy works as political methodology, as epistemology, and as aesthetic; it is, I believe, indicative of an impulse to not give up on a feminist transformational politics. The transfeminist kill/joy slips anger through and into hope, joy, and love and holds them in tension as creative potential.

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Acknowledgments

I offer my thanks to the many people who helped bring this paper into being: to two anonymous reviewers for their generous and thoughtful readings; to Jasmine Rault for ongoing feedback and discussion; to R. M. Kennedy for his attentive feedback late in the process; to Mirha-Soleil Ross for a memorable afternoon and for continually sharing her impressive archive with me; to Annie Danger for her multiple e-mail responses and for providing me with *Fully Functional* photographs and script materials; and to Trish Salah, Julian B. Carter, and David J. Getsy for their patience. And thanks to all the artists for their work.

Notes

1. Following Ahmed (2010), my analysis of rage as a political tool and form of knowledge production and transfer is indebted to the work of Audre Lorde (1984: 127), who reminds us that “every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change.”
2. Transgender activist Janet Mock explains that shifting the discourse to loving trans women is to insist on the existence of trans women: “We’re not supposed to be here. Men are not supposed to love us because we’re not supposed to exist” (Hill et al. 2013). While trans dyke existence is not accounted for in this discussion, I think we can extend Mock’s analysis to include lesbian/queer desire.
3. A. Finn Enke (2012a: 74) notes, “Cis’s peculiar ontology erases location and effects through time and space: To preserve the status of cis as non-trans, trans must never have

- been or become cis but instead be consistently trans across all time and in all spaces.” I use “(cis)” throughout this paper to signal the ways that feminists without transgender or transsexual experience have centered their own experiences of gender/sex at the expense of feminists who have trans experience, to de-center (cis), and to be conscious of the ways that “cis” functions “as a disciplinary tool [that] erases gender variance among all people” (11) and “shrinks awareness of transgender presence” (Enke 2012b: 6).
4. Diana Taylor (2003: 28) elaborates the concept of “scenario” as “meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments” and that “demands that we also pay attention to milieu and corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language.”
 5. Julia Serano (2007: 15) introduced the term *trans-misogyny* to account for the ridicule, exclusion, physical violence, sexual assault, and other “specific form[s] of discrimination” targeted at, and experienced by, trans women.
 6. Viviane Namaste (2000: 68) importantly points to the ways that “the programmatic call for including MTF transsexuals within lesbian and feminist communities . . . presupposes that the only communities that count as lesbian or feminist are those that designate themselves as such.” The broad range of performances and other scenarios that I consider here are meant to reflect Namaste’s call for “a broader range of cultural and institutional texts” (69), although the spaces I focus on here are predominantly lesbian, queer, and/or feminist designated spaces.
 7. I am borrowing here from BattyMamzelle’s 2014 analysis of “White Feminism” as “a set of beliefs that allows for the exclusion of issues that specifically affect women of colour . . . [as] a method of *practicing* feminism, not an indictment of every individual white feminist everywhere.” I am also extending TheWhistlingFish’s comment to BattyMamzelle’s blog post: “What people don’t seem to get is that ‘White Feminism’ is *feminism for white people*, and never exclusively *feminism by white people*. It’s more about who benefits exclusively than who is perpetuating it exclusively.” By “privileged feminist scenarios,” I mean social and political spaces, artist and activist scenes, and other affective and material resource-distribution infrastructures that are tacitly or explicitly organized *for* women who do not have transgender or transsexual experience, as well as *for* people whose privilege profile is additionally optimized by other factors including Whiteness; able-bodiedness; education; steady employment; secure housing; and/or settler, legal citizenship, or immigration status, thus excluding issues that specifically affect women outside of this/these privilege profile(s).
 8. As Emi Koyama (2003: 245) puts it in her “Transfeminist Manifesto,” transfeminism “stands up for trans and non-trans women alike, and asks non-trans women to stand up for trans women in return” and understand transfeminist liberation to be tied to all struggles against oppression; transfeminism is not limited to or for trans women.
 9. I borrow here from Jasmine Rault’s (2011: 239–40) conceptualization of the “political and ethical work of positive affect . . . as important media of communication for feminist queer efforts to resist, disrupt or simply survive the mundane and transnational violences of failed democracies, state-sanctioned homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, racialized poverty, financial terrorism and neoliberal homonationalisms.”
 10. My understanding of assigned-essentialist feminist logics is informed by Bobby Noble’s theory of feminist fundamentalism. I have shifted the terminology away from “fundamentalism” in response to R. M. Kennedy’s important intervention into this paper; Kennedy notes that the language of fundamentalism and an anticipated readership’s implied distaste for and resistance to it cannot be disentangled from homonationalist

- anti-Islam rhetorics. However, Noble's (2012: 54) formulation of this form of feminism as having "moral panics about transgender bodies," driven by a fervent belief in sex-assigned-at-birth as the holy truth of a person's life-long gender, is what I mean by "assigned-essentialist" feminisms. Trish Salah's "Backlash to the Future: Screening Transsexuality as Fundamentalism" (2011) takes up the link between feminist and Islamic fundamentalism.
11. On the topic of a transfeminist kill/joy response to "women-women's" spaces, see Red Durkin's (2013) "Indigo Girls and Other MichFest 2013 Performers: Boycott MWMF until the Organizers Fully Include Trans Women." Durkin performs the kill/joy impulse by signaling the damage done by Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's trans-exclusive "intention" and communicating a hope and plan for a future in which trans women are "welcome" at the MWMF as "festies" and musicians.
 12. Bobby Noble (2012: 53) also makes this call, following Robyn Wiegman.
 13. Viviane Namaste (2009) has observed that while transness figures heavily in Anglo-American feminist theory of the past two decades, more often than not, feminist theory instrumentalizes transsexual and transgender bodies to "ask [their] own epistemological questions" (12).
 14. Stryker ([1994] 2006) has noted how Mary Daly "characterized transsexuals as agents of a 'necrophilic invasion' of female space" (Daly qtd. in Stryker [1994] 2006: 248); more recently, in her essay "Keeping Queer Queer," Cherríe Moraga (2011: 186, 189) refers twice to trans men as "surgically scarred" and worries that butch lesbians are becoming a "dying breed, headed for extinction." Moraga is by far not alone in these sentiments, and as I indicate in my review of her book (Cowan 2013: 429), in this chapter she makes some gestures toward a change of heart. Julia Serano (2013: 302) provides "an overview of feminist anti-trans sentiment" in a footnote.
 15. Arguably the most visible trans-excluding space in Canada is Vancouver Rape Relief (VRR) and Women's Shelter. In 2013, in honor of December 6, Canada's Day of Action and Remembrance on Violence Against Women, VRR hosted *Transsexual Empire* author and infamously antitrans and anti-sex-work feminist Janice Raymond. As if reviving Ross's Bridge It Taylor!, Raymond gave a talk titled "Prostitution: Not a Job, Not a Choice," which detailed "her efforts to abolish sex work, which included advising the [Canadian] federal government's legal team defending antiprostitution laws during the recent Supreme Court *Bedford v. Canada* hearings" (Allen 2013). See also Namaste's "Inclusive Pedagogy in the Women's Studies Classroom: Teaching the Kimberly Nixon Case" (2013).
 16. After decades of sex-worker advocacy and activism by people like Ross, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the three remaining laws that criminalized activities necessary for sex work in their December 2013 *Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford* ruling. (*Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford*, [2013] 3 S.C.R. 1101, 2013 S.C.C. 72 (CanLII)).
 17. Likewise, Stryker's ([1994] 2006: 254) transsexual "monster" wishes, "May your rage inform your actions and your actions transform you as you struggle to transform your world"; and Kate Bornstein (1994: 81) has noted that "our anger is a message to ourselves that we have to get active and change something in order to survive."
 18. Not all feminist love serves transformational antiracist politics. See, for example, Ortega (2006), in which she identifies a "loving, knowing ignorance—an ignorance of the thought and experience of women of color that is accompanied by both alleged love for and alleged knowledge about them" (57).
 19. In her introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Stryker (2006: 11) writes, "Those who commit violence against transgender people routinely seek to excuse their own

behavior by claiming they have been unjustly deceived by a mismatch between the other's gender and genitals." We see cultural representations of this phenomenon in, for example, Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992), Duncan Tucker's *TransAmerica* (2005); even Paul Abbott's recent *Hit or Miss* (2012) reproduces this trope, which has been sustained and sensationalized by the TV talk show "shocker" genre. In addition to *The Fully Functional Cabaret*, see Sherilyn Connelly's "The Big Reveal" in Bergman and Bornstein's *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* (2010) for a welcome subversion.

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