

Row Sullivan

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Unghosting Trans Worlds: The Political Implications of Trans Specters

Jaques Derrida in Specters of Marx introduces the philosophical field of hauntology. Using and expanding on Derrida's framework, this paper seeks to demonstrate that trans-aligned bodies occupy a specter-like existence in modern Western society, posing a threat and striking fear into the patriarchal elite, while also being denied their place and power in the political system. Trans bodies face the struggle of being both too visible and not visible enough, leading to a denial of their existence and being. Using their positionality as specters as a framework, this paper looks at strategies of unghosting and creating permanence within trans communities. This includes tearing down- or destructing- the artificially constructed differences between men and women, world-traveling following the framework of Maria Lugones, and viewing ethics and care ethics as an inherently political and personal act. Through these strategies, trans bodies can place themselves on a path toward trans liberation and altering the framework of society for the better.

Introduction

A ghost is a figure entranced between two states. Existence and non-existence. Permanence and impermanence. Visibility and invisibility. In a patriarchal, heteronormative, imperialist society, trans people are ghosts. Trans people have existed for as long as humanity has, but at the same time, society erases and denies that existence at every corner and rejects giving trans people a tangible body. Do you have permanence if there is no spot for your being or becoming? We (trans people) have fought to gain visibility, to escape our temporal malaise, to be liberated from a cisnormative patriarchal prison. We exist as a pawn, a specter,¹ for the threat we pose to the power the patriarchy holds over us and the other despite not having the power to overthrow it purely on our own volition (which is to say allyship is important).

¹ Derrida *Spectres of Marx*

In this space between existence and non-existence, visibility and invisibility, our lives have been made political. With due regards to Aristotle², we are only political animals because we have been denied the ability to live lives outside the political arena. In being ourselves, we haunt a society that we do not belong in, and in doing so carve out our lives in the nooks and margins of the world going on around us: holding on to a feeling of yearning for the living in our moments of invisibility, threatened to be demonized in our moments of visibility.

In this patriarchal society, it is impossible to be non-political when inherent being has been made to be political. Trans and non-binary communities are tasked to find a way out of this world and into one where we are no longer ghosts, where there is visibility without threat, and permanence that is permanent, in words- trans liberation. (In this way it is not so much that trans bodies are ghosts, but rather that the patriarchal society treats us like them). This journey to liberation happens both in a micro- and macro- sense. In the micro sense, we have methods of gaining permanence within certain trans worlds³, while still dealing with the attitude of impermanence from society as a whole. We build kinships and ethics of care with our chosen families of fellow trans bodies, marginalized others, and dedicated allies to get people to recognize our visibility and existence person to person. In a macro sense, these ethics of care and kinship can have a snowballing effect where the effects of these efforts are compounded and built upon, across months, years, and generations. It is easy to forget how far the queer and trans liberation movements have come, and how much permanence we have gained, even as queer and trans individuals themselves are still painfully aware at how far away the quest for full liberation still remains.

² Aristotle *Politics*

³ Lugones *Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception*

While casual supporters of trans and queer liberation should by no means be made the enemy, it should also be clearly stated that the unghosting of trans bodies requires systemic and by many means radical changes. In a society where our lives have been made out to be political, there is no room for political moderation (as defined by the patriarchal society) in the quest for trans liberation, just as there is no room for political moderation in the quest for black liberation, feminist liberation, liberation of the proletariat, and the liberation of every group separated to be the other.⁴ Politics are a moral choice, especially when it comes to the politics of the other, and not being politically aligned with the politics of the other either out of ignorance, indifference, or malice is an act of moral deficiency. Even if well-meaning, the liberation of the other is also harmed by those who may casually support the movement themselves, but attempt to deemphasize the moral implications of politics in order to be blind to the harm that their social relationships and affiliations may be doing to trans communities and communities of the other. This isn't necessarily a judgment on a person's moral character overall, as the teachings of the patriarchy are institutionalized within them at all, but in order to support the people in their lives that are members of the other, they are morally responsible for overcoming these ignorances, indifferences, and/or feelings of malice.

In this paper, I seek to demonstrate the ways that trans worlds are seen as ghosts, specters, and shadows on society through the way that they are perceived in their existence of visibility. This includes the ways that trans worlds are seen as a threat to cisheteronormative and patriarchal worlds despite holding little substantive power to combat them. Not falling into the patriarchal box of gender is an infringement against the system that leads to the denial of trans existence.

⁴ King Jr *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*

This semi-permanence continues through the lens of visibility, where trans bodies both simultaneously need visibility to be seen for their true being, but also need invisibility, and to have a cloak of anonymity in a world that is too often dangerous for trans bodies. From this state of spectral semi-permanence, I will then examine strategies that trans philosophy and liberation movements can take to begin unghosting trans worlds. First, I look at gender through a deconstructionist lens, looking at the Derridean difference between men vs women and further looking to destruct that difference altogether. I then look at world traveling, as formulated by Maria Lugones, as a method of coalition building and bridging intersection gaps in queer and trans philosophies and liberations. I finally build upon world traveling by advocating for a necessarily political and radical ethics of care as a means of trans survival. While a continual and unending process, these strategies can help unghost trans identities and help promote trans bodies having a permanent, thriving, place in society.

Being Perceived (as Political)

The first thing that nearly any philosophy student will be introduced to is Plato, so much so that some people believe that after covering Plato everything is a mere footnote.⁵ Plato has his cave, the imperfect projections of a perfect world that exists somewhere beyond our comprehension.⁶

The world of forms is suffocating. A world where a perfect version of something exists is a world without expression, creativity, or individuality. Trans people don't exist in a world where our being can fit into a neat binary definition of either man or woman. There are people, of

⁵ Pigliucci

⁶ Plato *Republic* 515e

course, that attack us on these grounds making trans people the projections, shadows, specters on the cave wall, a particularly imperfect deception of the world of forms that is leading society astray from the true reality of binary gender preventing the discovery of the true world of forms.

Trans and queer people do not fit into how the patriarchy would like us to believe the world of forms exists, and so we exist in the margins, useless to their idea of society, existing “otherwise”.⁷ The shadows on the cave wall only serve to prevent people from learning the real truth, but if they broke free there would be no running back into the cave too afraid to confront reality, there would only be the truth that the world of forms was the deception. In the tsunami of anti-trans rhetoric a phenomenon exists where defenders of “traditional” values or other “anti-woke” ideologies will convince themselves that we’ve been living in the cave and they are part of the few who have set themselves free.⁸ Or, in an adjacent analogy, they have taken the red-pill and escaped the matrix, no longer bound to the toxic manipulative ideology being peddled by a shadow-figured elite. Ironically, it is often the elite themselves that believe they have escaped even though they have also crafted the illusion of a world of forms or matrix,⁹ a world of forms that trans people as the shadows and specters that haunt it have to learn to deconstruct, escape, and regain our autonomy from. Only there is no cave, and there is no matrix. The shadows, made specters by the belief they were shadows, were who and what they said they were all along. And *The Matrix* was written by two trans women.¹⁰

⁷ Hall *Queering Philosophy* 12

⁸ Madison

⁹ Bey *Cistem Failure* XI

¹⁰ Wachowski, *The Matrix*

(Non) Existence

Trans People exist. Hopefully, this truth has already been made apparent, but it creates a line to not cross in the unghosting/unshadowing of trans lives. Tallia Mae Bettcher attempts to lay foundations for trans philosophy by setting trans philosophy up as a tool for trans and queer liberation. It cannot be merely a defense of the validity of our identities or else “The question, ‘Why do people want to kill us?’ will likely not appear on the radar.¹¹” It is not the goal, therefore, to defend the existence of trans people as valid because that is a given. Trans identities have existed across time¹² and culture,¹³ of course those lives have been valid and worthy.¹⁴

It is an aim, however, to ask why some attempt to have that existence denied. The denial of existence takes many forms, for example the purposeful and malicious misgendering of trans individuals, or the recent wave of legislation seeking to effectively ban trans identities through the denial of gender-affirming care or the banning of drag and cross-dressing. Each form takes on the similar goal of creating the non-existence of trans people.

The motives for this denial become clear when examining gender as a political tool of power to the patriarchy. Binary gender is constructed to make men superior to women and give them a political advantage. In the cisheteronormative system, men control capital and power over women. He, in a system he created, enjoys unequal standards and higher positions that he created. In an argument for the total abolition of gender, Marquis Bey argues that “Gender *is*

¹¹ Bettcher *Trans Philosophy* 16

¹² Including Jack Bee Garland (Awkward Rich *She of the No Pants and No Voice* 24-27)

¹³ Pyle *Naming and Claiming*

¹⁴ “Trans lives are liveable because they’ve been lived” Maltatino *Trans Care*

the harm; what is sexism, discrimination, and assault along gendered lines but the *committing* of gender?" Bey poses the question of what is gender beside the gender roles and "boxes" that gender *enforces* upon us. "*Oppression* created the class of women, not the other way around.¹⁵" Gender is used as a form (abuse) of power in the same way that race, class, and other artificial boxes have been created for a white supremacist imperialist patriarchy to maintain the power they hold over the marginalized other, with Bey drawing a strong connection between the antigender movement that they champion with antiracist and anticapitalist ideologies.

Gender exists to enforce an artificially constructed world of forms onto us and sort us into categories of power and subjugation, a process by which is inherently political. The construction of gender does not solely exist to deny the existence of trans identities (which may try to fit in with the expectations of binary gender) and non-binary identities (which are inherently incompatible with the patriarchal construction of gender), but also (especially non-white) cisgender individuals who have had their definition of gender constructed by a white imperialist patriarchy. A central point in Bey's work is to examine how these constructions of gender (and what it means to be *cis*-gender) interact with race. Black women are treated as masculine or "not-really" women because the definition of womanhood is constructed by white, not black, culture."Black gender is always gender done *wrong*, done dysfunctionally, done in a way that is not 'normal.'... This is why Black boys are hyper-criminalized just as Black girls and other Black non-male children are made invisible when talking about the issues of black children.¹⁶" The white patriarchy is able to use gender

¹⁵ Bey *Cistem Failure* 131

¹⁶ Bey *Cistem Failure* 23

as means of political control over cis and trans individuals alike by maintaining an intersection of white and male power structures.

In this way, the existence of trans people poses a threat to the illusion of the world of forms the patriarchy creates. Argentine trans activist Lohana Berkins in a 2000 interview explains that “Men feel that travestis¹⁷ are traitors to the patriarchy, because having a penis, that symbol, we have renounced power.¹⁸” Transfeminine individuals threaten the patriarchy because they challenge the notion that manhood and masculinity is inherently more desirable than womanhood and femininity. Often, for example when it comes to allowing trans women to use women’s restrooms, transfeminine individuals are accused of still holding the power of a man and being ignorant (or maliciously aware) of the power- and therefore threat- they hold over cis-women. Transmasculine individuals, on the other hand, are interpreted as cheats to the system, attempting to claim a privilege that under the patriarchy is not theirs to claim, and nonbinary identities-and those who don’t attempt to adhere to the binary at all- threaten the entire logic of the system to collapse altogether. If we don’t have to fill the roles that we are predestined to play

Because of the systemic threat trans people hold over the patriarchy, the patriarchy responds by painting trans people with a shade of non-existence. We are denied the validity of our identity, made the shadow, the ghost, the specter. We don’t exist when it comes to gendered restrooms, sports, or the state of Florida¹⁹, except as a threat to the perfect world of forms the patriarchy

¹⁷ “Transvesti” is a gender identity/descriptor in Latin America commonly used to refer to people assigned male at birth who take on a more feminine gender identity

¹⁸ Berkins *Selected Writings* 11

¹⁹ Tennessee, Texas, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, West Virginia, Indiana, Kansas, South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Ohio, Missouri 2023 [Anti-Trans Legislation Tracker](#)

seeks to uphold. We cannot fully emerge from the shadows without radically undermining the system and overthrowing the patriarchy.

(In)Visibility

Visibility in recent years has played a key role for the mainstream LGBTQ+ movements, as well as other movements promoting the other. Representation in the media and in the workforce is treated as a benchmark for the progress of equality and liberation. Being seen (being visible) is a recognition of one's validity and proof of one's existence. Visibility comes with many benefits and wins for the trans movement. Many trans people suffer an epistemic injustice²⁰ in their journey to self-discovery, lacking access to the concept and existence of transness through their adolescence and at times into early adulthood. In this way, visibility is vital to the trans movement because it facilitates the transfer of knowledge from one generation of queer trans people to the next, bridging the epistemic injustice making the path to self-discovery earlier and (hopefully) a little easier. In a similar way, visibility can also build allyship. Seeing trans people on television and in media, interacting with trans people in real life, and being exposed to the challenges facing the trans movement gives trans people a layer of permanence that helps unghost trans people in the eyes of the casual ally. Thus, people outside the trans movement are able to more easily world travel²¹ to trans worlds and emphasize with the struggle for trans liberation. However, queer and trans people have a tumultuous history with visibility and being seen dealing with the pressure to "pass" as one gender or the other and dealing with conservative backlash to how we express our gender and sexuality.

²⁰ Fricker *Epistemic Injustice*

²¹ Lugones *Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception*

Cleo Hazard is a hydrologist who takes special care to look at ecologies from a queer/trans perspective. He presents a practice of *underflows* as a “practice, an orientation, and an invitation to attend to hidden flows and their movements, excesses, and relations. The underflows method is of and for movements that protect and strengthen well-being in the face of settler state violence, which attempts to erase ways of living otherwise.²²” The underflows method makes a connection between the ecological underflow of a river current and the practice of queer and trans way of life and justice and they’re overall beneficial impact on society as a whole.

The sciences are a field that is overwhelmingly white cisheteronormative, leading sciences such as ecology to be seen as fields where scientists are performing their work and experiments with a goal of presenting the truth of the world in one, straight forward, indisputable way. Hazard, a trans man, brings in an artistic element to his work that goes against (underflows) the typical narratives in his field by challenging how science and scientific questions are typically thought about by studying ecology “from the margins.”

Hazard’s positionality as a trans man in his field exposes the complex relationship of (in)visibility when it comes to trans lives. Being visible and having his work spread brings queer trans philosophies and stories into daily discourse into fields that under the current patriarchal framework of society have little room except for the stories of straight white men. Visibility undermines the attempts of the patriarchy to erase the existence of trans lives and

²² Hazard *Underflows* 29

make them the ghost. The underflows method in some regards can be seen as striving for visibility.

Just as an underflow exists beneath the river's surface, trans lives exist underneath the general flow of society. Hazard examines the pressure of being a trans man in his area of study. Often, when out doing fieldwork, he discusses existing in the margins, but at the same time blending in with his colleagues on account of him passing as yet another cis male.²³

Invisibility, amounting to anonymity, is a sacred and sometimes rare resource when it comes to existing in a trans world. "Passing" as a binary gender is sometimes the difference between safety and being harassed in public, or the difference of being able to safely use the restroom in public. For the trans movement, visibility has as a whole dramatically increased the overall level of acceptance and inclusion of trans lives and rights for the average member of society, but at the same time that visibility has been used as a weapon to attack us, with a dramatic increase in anti-trans legislation and attempts to limit the existence of trans people in the face of their visibility over the last several years. It is the mixture of high visibility and yet denial of existence and power that combine to force trans people to occupy a ghost-like state in society.

Latisha King was a 15 year old trans woman when she was shot in the back of the head by a classmate in 2008. In the 2011 trial against her murder, the defense used a gay panic defense to claim that Latisha had provoked her murder, and in other words "was asking for it." Latisha's case drew national coverage and discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ hate crimes.²⁴

²³ Hazard *Underflows* 181

²⁴ Salamon *The Life and Death of Latisha King* 1-6

Latisha's case exists at the confluence of visibility being something that is both lacking and at the same time dooming. In some sense, the lack of visibility of her trans identity prevented her from ever receiving the justice she deserved. The media coverage surrounding her murder framed the case not as a matter of transphobia, but of homophobia, consistently framing Latisha as a gay man rather than a trans woman, and most modern media still alludes to Latisha by her birth name rather than her trans identity. Latisha was not seen for who she was, and her identity as a trans woman only showed through in her trial through, a Gayle Salamon examines in her book *The Life and Death of Latisha King*, only by the descriptions of her movement, attitude, and dress that it was Latisha's gender expression and not her sexuality that led her murder to feel provoked. This lack of visibility has kept her in a ghost-like state of not existing as Latisha, but having a layer of semi-permanence keeping her memory trapped in the cis-heteronormative world as someone she was not.

At the same time, it was Latisha's visibility, and her inability to pass amongst her classmates, that labeled her a problem and led her to being a victim of transphobia. Salamon comments that by carrying herself in a way that is gender-nonconforming, Latisha was stripped of her anonymity and safety. Salamon explains that "The role of common sense is to insist that this loss of anonymity was function of Latisha's own behavior. To assert, once again, that she was, once again, asking for it."²⁵ Thus, even before her death, Latisha was made to be a ghost by her classmates. She was seen, but she was seen as a specter to the natural order of society that tried to contain her to the gendered roles and expectations she was born with. A specter who held no real power over that natural order of society, did not actually provoke that society in anyway

²⁵ Salamon *The Life and Death of Latisha King* 134

except by existing as herself, and yet was seen as a threat to it so much so that she lost her life over it. Even past her death, Latisha is still trapped in this ghost-like existence, awaiting to be freed by being seen for who she actually was and not who she was made out to be.

Unghosting: Creating Permanence

If trans people are made to be a ghost haunting society, a goal of trans philosophy is to unghost, create permanence, and achieve trans liberation. I break the process of finding trans liberation into three basic parts: the deconstruction and implosion of the cisheteronormative patriarchal concept of gender, world building and traveling, and establishing an ethical system of care that rests on the acknowledgement that all politics are personal and serve as moral stances. Together, these steps provide a road map for granting trans bodies their rightful permanence, existence, and visibility within the fabric of society.

Deconstruction and Destruction

The comparison of trans people to ghosts in this essay stems from Jaques Derrida's creation of hauntology. Derrida examines Marxism as a specter over Western society: it has little real, physical, substantive power, and yet, the fear of what Marxism represents or could mean for the Western system of governance leads to Marxism as an ideology to be treated as an imminent threat that must be dealt with.²⁶ Marxism is a specter because it exists only as an idea, but what it is thought to represent poses an existential crisis of the legitimacy of power of the patriarchal systems that fear it. Trans people, in the ways so far presented, exist as a specter over the patriarchy.

²⁶ Derrida *Specters of Marx* 5

Derrida coined the term ‘differance’ as a means of deconstructing language, theorizing that the meaning of a word or concept is dependent on how we understand it in relation to other concepts, for example the differences in meaning of the words “house,” “condo,” and “apartment.”²⁷

Viewing binary gender through a deconstructionist lens, the concept of what a “man” versus a “woman” relies strictly on our understanding of what sets them apart, their differance. A deconstruction of gender will reveal that a patriarchal society artificially adds to this difference between a man and a woman by constructing a set of gender norms and roles that each must strictly follow. There can be no concept of a “woman” without “man,” nor can there be “man” without “woman.” Gender roles form in an effort to adequately define this differance. Different expectations in fashion styles, household chores, career paths, and social behaviors and cues form out of a desire for the patriarchy to create differance between “woman” and “man” and give meaning to the words. Without these distinctions, “man” and “woman” begin to lose their meaning and with it the power gap between “man” and “woman” diminishes.²⁸

I do not wish to simply *deconstruct* gender, but rather to *deconstruct* gender as a structure that in effect only seeks to uphold systems of power. Simone de Beauvoir in her foundational text *The Second Sex* asserts that “one is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one” in an effort to demonstrate that the common expectations of femininity and gender roles of women exist not as an innate biological ambition, but as something taught and learned during her upbringing.²⁹

²⁷ Derrida *On Grammatology* 6

²⁸ An earlier form of this paragraph appeared in *Feminist Specters* for a final paper on “Derrida and Buddhism”

²⁹ de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* 283

Under de Beavoir's framework and the concept of difference, gender becomes something that is constructed to represent the wills of the patriarchy, and if something can be constructed, so can it be destructed. Opposed to deconstruction, *destruction* takes the added step of imploding gender's role in society rather than simply using difference to understand what a patriarchal society views as separating a man from a woman. If, as Bey claims, gender is an ideology that is *enforced* upon us, then the abolition of gender, the destruction of gender, becomes "a move toward something like freedom."³⁰ The imagined world of forms, created out of perceived *difference* defining men and women is the prison that enforces gender upon us. Trans liberation begins by destructing the world of forms that make us the shadows and ghosts to a society trapped by gender. Trans liberation begins by destructing difference when it comes to our understanding of gender. By dissecting the way in which we define gender: whether that's by a swish in a walk or click of a shoe,³¹ or by the tasks and duties assigned to us by our perceived gender, we are able to throw out and destroy the linguistic authority of that definition.

By destructing the definition of gender, we gain a recognition of existence as a body that never fit into gender's fragilely constructed difference, and we earn a right to bodily autonomy to present ourselves as we please, undefined by a pre-existing gender-role. Destruction removes all expectations of gender, importantly including the pressure and expectation of trans people to "pass" as one gender or another in their appearance. Destruction creates permanence through impermanence. Rather than creating a spot at the table for trans and non-binary tables, it eliminates the table, eliminates the need to have been "born this way" or have "always known,"³² or to have chosen to undergo some gender-affirming treatments but not others.

³⁰ Bey *Cistem Failure* 137

³¹ Salamon *The Life and Death of Latisha King* 33, 56, 153

³² Bey *Cistem Failure* 17

Destruction allows for fluidity because rather than containing expression in a confined box (gender), removing the difference and trace of gender allows it to be free-flowing and ever-changing. In the words of Bettcher, “trans names a project of undoing (gender, disciplines, selves), a project that cannot be haunted because it never tries to build a house.³³” Trans liberation seeks only the destruction of the difference of gender. In pursuit of liberation, it is not the goal to construct new norms or differences in the absence created by destruction.

Destruction does not happen overnight. The concept of gender and the difference of “man” and “woman” are too ingrained in our culture and the everyday understanding of the world to undo every trace of gender instantaneously. Thus, it is not a goal in advocating for destruction to suggest that we are in a state that it is beneficial to move beyond labels for identity.³⁴ While maybe being less effective at permanently unghosting trans bodies, language, including the words “trans,” “cis,” “non-binary,” and even to an extent “man” and “woman” and their respective difference have the role of allowing us to communicate the effect of gender on our individual bodies and shape how we are perceived in relation to the patriarchal binary. I support Bey’s ambition of gender-abolition, but at the same time I think one must envision themselves as Sisyphus in the struggle.³⁵

World Building

Maria Lugones, a decolonial feminist philosopher, constructed the concept of traveling to others’ worlds as a means of understanding them and loving them. Lugones uses

³³ Bettcher *Trans Philosophy* 833

³⁴ Though this paper does, of course, enthusiastically support individuals attempting to live without labels for their identity

³⁵ “One must imagine Sisyphus happy” Camus *Myth of Sisyphus* 123

world-traveling as a “concept for analyzing and thinking with survival strategies of those who are oppressed, how one can be oppressed and privileged in different worlds, possibilities of solidarity across difference, and ‘ontological confusion’ of multiple selves, selves who belong in, are undone by, and are at the edges of various worlds of sense.”³⁶ World traveling seeks to build a coalition not only within the trans community, but across other coalitions of groups that have been similarly othered by a white supremecist cisheteronormative colonial patriarchy.

Trans bodies, like other groups existing in the margins, naturally travel between worlds due to the phenomenon of double perception³⁷: we exist in our own world, in a trans world, but we are also aware of how we perceive and exist in the cis world. On the other hand Jacob Hale warns cis writers to “Ask yourself if you can travel in our trans worlds. If not, you probably don't get what we're talking about. Remember that we live most of our lives in non-transsexual worlds, so we probably do get what you're talking about.”³⁸ Double perception means that trans people are well versed in non-trans worlds because we are forced to live in non-trans worlds, but non-trans people need to be careful to travel to trans worlds lovingly, and to truly listen and live in a trans world when world-traveling rather than trying to speak on behalf or about trans people.

The failures of cis people to travel to trans worlds is a fundamental roadblock to trans liberation. This includes potential allies who struggle to make the final step: those who may be generally supportive, but commit microaggressions with mixing up name changes and pronouns and complaining that it is a hard change while not adequately traveling to trans

³⁶ Hall *Queering Philosophy* 107

³⁷ Awkward-Rich *Reading Like A Depressed Transsexual* 836

³⁸ Hale *Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Trans*

worlds to recognize that the change is inevitably harder for trans people themselves. Assuming these failures are in good faith- meaning that the people failing to world travel do mean well in supporting trans individuals but lack the conceptual ability to world travel, these roadblocks are productive areas to work for the trans liberation movement. In these cases, strategies such as increased visibility by way of telling trans stories, cis people being exposed to trans friends and colleagues, and advocacy for trans issues go along way in helping cis allies better world travel to trans worlds and be better at being a productive ally to trans causes.

Conversely, a non-productive roadblock exists among non-allies refusing to world travel, or doing so unlovingly.³⁹ The state of trans discourse in conservative media and legislation today consists of cis actors claiming to be acting for the protection of children and trans people without having any understanding nor will to understand trans worlds. These actors fail to understand the difference between having feminine or masculine traits that go against the stereotype of their assigned gender and the implications of actually being trans. Often, though not always, those who straight up refuse to world travel, or world travel with malice, are the same actors who benefit from the white cisheteronormative power structure or alternatively perceive themselves as benefiting from it, theorizing about trans people rather than with trans people.⁴⁰

Those who refuse to world travel outright rarely change their minds, thus when it comes to achieving trans liberation attention is better pointed at those who are perhaps misguided in world traveling rather than unwilling. Just as Martin Luther King Jr. pleaded with the white

³⁹ Lugones *Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception*

⁴⁰ Hale *Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals*

moderate for success in the civil rights movement,⁴¹ the cis-moderate plays the largest role in changing the material conditions and unghosting trans lives.

The comparison to Martin Luther King Jr. is intentional. The powers that be preventing black liberation are by and large the same powers that be that are preventing trans liberation. The white moderate that King derides as inhibiting is largely the same white moderate that is inhibiting trans liberation. This is to say that just as one can not be moderate in the antiracist movement (you are either racist or antiracist), you can not be moderate in the movement for trans liberation.⁴²

The biggest advantage of world-traveling when it comes to world traveling is through the traveling of worlds to other groups that have been othered. Queer and trans philosophy, while a philosophy from the margins, sometimes struggle from being white washed and ignorant of economic politics on account of largely originating as a study from work within universities.⁴³ This sometimes leads to queer/trans individuals who live in multiple worlds (ie queer black lives and queer disabled lives) from being overlooked. It also limits the ability of the trans liberation movement to build coalitions with the liberation movements of other others. Being more intentional about amplifying class, race, and ability conscious queer stories and traveling to other marginalized worlds within queer and trans philosophy is an essential step in achieving trans liberation because it reveals common systems holding each world from achieving its liberation. Bey argues that “gender abolition would just as readily urge an antigender disposition as it would urge, like many already do, an antiracist and anticapitalist

⁴¹ King Jr. *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*

⁴² Hall *Queering Philosophy* 33

⁴³ Hall *Queering Philosophy* 40-41

disposition.”⁴⁴ Trans liberation is black liberation is disabled liberation is class liberation is the liberation of women. Just as much as deconstruction/destruction and world-traveling can help unghost trans people, the same strategies can and are used to untether other worlds that exist in the margins from being the shadows in the world of forms. Just as one works to be antiracist, one must work to be antitransphobic,⁴⁵ antiableist, anticlassist, or antisexist. The exact struggles and the degree vary across worlds and across movements, but fundamentally all seek to rebel against a white heteronormative imperialist patriarchy that benefits from their marginalization. Berkins recognizes this in her show of solidarity between trans identities and cis-women who have in other ways been oppressed by recognizing that “We have a common enemy: the patriarchal system.”⁴⁶

Liberation for one does not exist without liberation for all. If destruction is breaking down the theories and rationales for the systems of oppression, world traveling is one of the first and biggest steps in a practical application of building coalitions and allies that can diminish and take the system out of power.

Politics as an Ethic

Trans existence is political. It is impossible, to my chagrin, to do trans philosophy without being political. It is impossible to do any philosophy for that matter without being political. Trans existence does not have a choice whether to be political, it can not claim to be non-political. It can not claim to be indifferent to who wins and loses when trans rights has been made a political question. All philosophy is personal; all politics are personal.

⁴⁴ *Bey Cistem Failure* 143

⁴⁵ Hall *Queering Philosophy* 33

⁴⁶ Berkins 6

I subscribe to the idea that trans ethics are an ethics of care. To survive as specters in the patriarchal world, trans worlds have unique needs that can't be met in 'traditional' ways. Hil Malitino lays the foundation for a system of trans care as a decentralized web. He explains:

*“This queer and trans care web has no center, but in some significant ways it has emerged because of the way the normative and presumed centers of a life have fallen out, or never were accessible to or desired by us in the first place. So many estranged and tangential relationships to birth or adoptive families, skepticism and proverbial allergies to normative familial structures, interpersonal, institutional, and professional shunning, exclusion, and ostracism. This is not the only synopsis I could provide—there’s plenty of joy. But it would be foolish to deny that some of what binds us to one another is directly tied to the affective and practical disinvestment of the people and institutions we’ve needed—or been forced—to rely upon for survival. We have learned to care for one another in the aftermath of these refusals.”*⁴⁷

Trans care does not follow a hierarchy, does not have a set difference between those receiving and those providing care. It's rather a care of filling in the gaps, finding a way to bridge and create worlds where we are safe from the worlds that are attacking us. Trans care is intersectional. It seeks to provide care across worlds, and it builds new worlds of care and family in unconventional ways. Trans care ghosts trans bodies- at least within its own created world- by creating a space where trans bodies simply are. Not a mirage, not a peculiarity, only existing, and being, and seeming to provide the subsistence needed for continued existence and being.

⁴⁷ Malitino *Trans Care*

Trans care needs to be radical because all philosophy is political and all politics are personal. Hi‘ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese argue for a radical care that “engages histories of grassroots community action and negotiates neoliberal models for self-care... Rather than romanticizing care or ignoring its demons, radical care is built on praxis.... Radical care provides a roadmap for the otherwise.”⁴⁸ Hobart and Kneese explain that radical care is a reaction against “the patriarchal bedrock of capitalism.” Trans care is a reaction against the world of forms, a reaction against the politics of the worlds that don’t want us to exist. Trans care is political.

I spent a lot of my time during undergrad trying to escape politics only to be continually drawn back in, not because I want to, but because it is the only moral choice. Speaking on American politics, the stranglehold of the patriarchy exists on both sides of the aisle. A philosophy of the other addresses issues with the system, and the system is broken. That cannot be an excuse to become apolitical. It cannot be an excuse to not participate in the political sphere because politics have all too material consequences both for trans worlds and worlds adjacent to trans worlds.⁴⁹ Everyday, the number of anti-trans bills and legislation grows, and the attacks on trans communities worsens. No complex ethical system is needed to understand that the Republican Party is not compatible with trans care, nor trans worlds. The system is broken, to be sure, and the effort Democrats are putting into being allies to trans worlds is marginal at best, but in real world application it is one party that are actively inhibiting them. There is no way to ethically identify with the Republican Party when the Republican Party seeks to inhibit trans care by preventing access to gender affirming care, drag bans that aim at preventing

⁴⁸ Hobart and Kneese *Radical Care* 142

⁴⁹ Queer worlds, black worlds, disabled worlds, abortion-needing worlds, socioeconomic worlds, the worlds of the othered

presenting or identifying as a body other than the box that was enforced on at birth, and complicating the ability of trans bodies to live a public life through legislation of bathrooms, sports, and education. Even if identifying with an organization like the Republican Party for reasons other than gender politics, you can't love, care, or be an ally for trans worlds while being complicit in their oppression.⁵⁰ The patriarchal society in particular has a habit of preaching political toleration. Political toleration is not an unworthy goal, but it cannot fully be a goal until trans worlds and the worlds of the marginalized are fully removed from the political sphere. Trans care must be undertaken with "an overarching aim of exposing and combating trans oppression, of illuminating and enacting a kind of trans resistance."⁵¹ This makes trans ethics inherently political and ties care to political boundaries. Care is political. Philosophy is political. Politics are personal. Hall in her examination of trans ethics as an ethic of care reaches the conclusion that depoliticization of trans care is ultimately impossible and finds it "undermines efforts to think and work in multidimensional ways, or in an alliance and solidarity with other movements against oppression."⁵² Trans lives in being made a specter were made political, and an attempt to overlook the political nature of trans worlds and identities sabotages the ability of the movement to reach a state of liberation. The unghosting of trans bodies and worlds is ultimately a political endeavor, and needs to be recognized and treated as one.

~(In)Escape, a brief note on suicide~

⁵⁰ I want to draw a distinction that, again, the problem is the system, and in this context the problem is the organization. People who identify as Republicans are victims of the system as well, but at the same time all members of society need to reach a place where they can take ethical ownership over all their actions and politics, whether intended or unintended, and those morally at odds with one's actions can recognize the ways in which that they might too be a victim, while also not ethically tolerating them in their personal life

⁵¹ Bettcher *Trans Philosophy* 5

⁵² Hall *Queering Politics* 125

Trans people are painted as a specter on society, when too often it is trans worlds themselves that are haunted by the specter of suicide when the web of trans care proves inadequate. As high as 40% of trans youth have gone as far as attempting suicide.⁵³ Suicide exists as a dark consequence of the moral failure of politics and the denial of care- whether in the form of insufficient support groups, trans hostility, or denial of gender-affirming care. Suicide is the dark political consequence that the cisheteronormative patriarchy refuses to own.

At the same time, trans depression and suicide as a result of dysphoria is one of the most commonly cited reasons by supporters of the trans cause to keep gender-affirming care accessible. Related, trans people are pressured to feel that they have always known intuitively from birth in order to feel legitimate enough to be worthy of receiving care⁵⁴. Depression and suicide are matters of consequence that should be held against the powers that weaponize and deny trans existence, especially for political gain. However, I'd like to lightly push back on the argument that depression and suicide are the reasons that trans bodies should have access to affirmative care because I think that misses the point of trans liberation.

Gender-affirming care and trans care in general needs to be accessible to all who seek it out because we have a right to bodily autonomy, as all members of society have a right to bodily autonomy. Yes, there is a slightly deeper conversation to be had when it comes to the care of trans bodies not yet fully capable of providing informed consent, as there would be with any form of medical care, but as a whole trans liberation is about autonomy, about not having to live within boxes and prisons of gender, and emerging from the shadows. I hope that my

⁵³ Austin et al

⁵⁴ *Bey Cistem Failure* 17-18

discussion in this paper on existence, visibility, deconstruction/destruction, world-traveling, and politics has helped illuminate the inherent quality of that autonomy.

Conclusion

I have sought to outline the state of trans liberation through the examination of trans worlds and bodies as a specter over a cisheteronormative patriarchal power of society. Trans world exists as ghosts as a result of a semi-permanent quality of their existence and visibility as a result of trans bodies being seen, rightfully so, to the patriarchal construction of gender. Trans people are seen as cheating the world of the class of power they were assigned to either by being a traitor to the patriarchy (transfeminine identities) or allegedly trying to gain the advantages of the patriarchal power (transmasculine identities) despite having no substantive patriarchal power at all, causing trans worlds to be a specter over the patriarchal construction of gender similar to the way that Derrida saw Marxism as a specter over Europe. The consequences of being seen as a ghost can have dangerous and dehumanizing effects for the trans community as a whole.

Thus, I seek to examine strategies of unghosting trans worlds and bringing them into a state of permanence. Using Derrida's principles of differance, gender can be deconstructed in its patriarchal form to reveal the artificial ways in which it has been propped up to create an artificial difference between men and women. This deconstruction of gender should furthermore be destructed, which is to say that the traces and differance that forms our understanding of gender should be undone and thrown out entirely with a goal of creating an understanding of gender that allows for full autonomy and an absence of preassigned roles.

Aiding in the destruction are philosophies of world-traveling and care ethics. World-traveling can have the effect of building coalitions and solidarity by building bridges between trans worlds and other worlds that exist in the margins, in turn also aiding the process of non-marginalized worlds to world-travel as well. World traveling can be built upon to create an ethics of care. Trans care ethics function as a web of mutual support and is also inherently political in nature. Politics are both a moral stance and personal, and the toleration of trans worlds being a subject of political debate goes against just ethics of trans care. The combination of destruction, world traveling, and politically conscious care ethics form three major steps that trans philosophy can grow upon to unghost trans worlds and give them permanence.

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