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MA English: Issues in Modern Culture

"Sister, Alien":
The Transfeminist Poetics of *We Want It All* (2020) and a Model for a Materialist Transfeminist Lyric

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents, Helen and Dave, my brother, Jack, and my Grandma, Eileen. I would also like to thank Molly Seymour, my very special friend and critic. Thanks also to Bailey and to the theorists who have helped me to understand my own identity.

Introduction: On Lyric Interventions, 'Gender' and Linguistic Crossings

What would it mean to read the '*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* Fifth Edition (*DSM*-5)', the diagnostic criteria used in the United States to outline the condition of 'gender dysphoria', as a lyric poem?

> A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, of at least 6 months' duration, as manifested by at least two of the following:
>
> 1. A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (…)
> 2. A strong desire to be rid of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one's experienced/expressed gender (…)
> 3. A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender.
> 4. A strong desire (…) (*DSM-5*, 452)

Perhaps the first thing we notice is how tacitly it coordinates its lyric subject. The nameless speaker orates from a position of omnipotent, medical prescience, constructing the trans identity category through its pathological negation ('*dys*phoria'), and, in so doing, reinforces its own status as naturally cisgendered. The dysphoric object is not the recipient of the utterance, but its muse. The victims of 'gender dysphoria' become ahistorical, transformed into a set of symptoms that find efficacy only if and when they fall into the capaciousness of its taxonomy. It continually forecloses the lived specificities, the body of its transsexual muse, erasing the differences between its diverse occupants, and alienating them into an individualised struggle for medical recognition.

The anaphora of 'strong desire' positions the trans patient as constituted not by their 'desire' but by the *intensity* of that desire— a degree measured according to a continuously reiterated, and masculine-coded, 'strength'. Reading the *DSM-5* as lyric highlights a set of legitimating gendered binaries already naturalised by the lyric form: the speaker as masculine, the creator of taxonomies; the object as feminised muse, a prelinguistic potential, constituted by an un-theorised,

uncontrollable ‘desire’. The muse is embodied and bodiless, continuously fractured and reconstituted within its medico-textual apparatus.

While the specifics of these criteria vary between countries, the pathologisation of trans people, their imprisonment within the textual confines of medical diagnoses, constitutes an indisputable starting point for any notion of a transgender poetry or a trans poetics. Paul B. Preciado’s controversial speech to a room of 3500 psychoanalysts titled *Can the Monster Speak?* (2019) addressed this dilemma directly: can the trans subject speak within and against the very discourse that subordinates and silences them? Similarly, transgender theory developed as a distinct field from the premises of Sandy Stone’s ‘Posttranssexual Manifesto’ (1991) and its call for a trans ‘counter-discourse’ to challenge the erasures perpetuated by the media and the medical establishment (230).

The 2020 anthology of ‘radical trans poetry’, *We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics* (*WWIA*) edited by Andrea Abi-Karam and Kay Gabriel, explicitly challenges the textual entrapment of trans identities. Its back cover, densely populated with names and bodies, models a coalition between trans and genderqueer identities, and creates a poetic community united by its transness [Figure 1]. In this paper, while I focus on *WWIA* (the most recent of two anthologies organised around ‘trans’ as an identity category), I also discuss *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics* (2013) (*TTL*) edited by TC Tolbert and Trace Peterson. Ironically, the theorists who recognise the erasure of trans subjectivity frequently allow trans poetry to fall into this same critical figuration, affording it only a purely textual, idealised function within a larger theoretical mechanism. As an example, noted theorist Susan Stryker claims that ‘the movement’

> between territorializing and deterritorializing “trans-” and its suffixes (…) is an improvisational, creative, and *essentially poetic practice* through which radically new possibilities for being in the world can start to emerge. (14) [My Italics]

While I agree, and in this essay work to demonstrate the efficacy of Stryker's statement, discussions of trans poetry seldom extend beyond such rhetorical flourishes. While both anthologies were nominated for the category of 'LGBTQ Anthology' in the Lambda Literary Awards, there has been scant analysis of their editorial practices as a whole. This essay rectifies this erasure by recognising the remarkable proliferation of trans poetry in recent years.

I choose a 'transfeminist' angle to do this because I believe that feminist analyses, both literary and theoretical, provide an indispensable set of tools for tackling the dilemma characterised by the *DSM-5* with regards gendered dichotomies and textual agency. I extend Linda Kinnahan's notion of the 'lyric intervention', which she uses to describe the methodology of experimental feminist poetry, particularly the way the 'lyric subject' relates to 'the production of the social body and identity' (*Lyric Interventions*, xiv). While many of the poems I discuss cross between generic and formal boundaries, they nevertheless investigate gender in and through lyric conventions. To call lyric an 'intervention' recognises a belatedness in that very writing by assuming the existence of an antecedent textual material into which 'intervention' is necessary while simultaneously exposing the form's complicity within those hierarchies. I use the term *transfeminist poetics* to refer to the set of techniques and strategies of 'intervention' used by the poems of *WWIA,* and trans poetry elsewhere, to extend feminist interventions into poetic form by centring gender crossings.

This essay suggests that the lyric, and the methods of reading it invites, are ideally positioned to interrogate naturalised ideological and metaphysical divides. The central dichotomy I challenge is that between 'trans' and 'feminist': a splitting which provides a foundational principle for the anti-trans moral panic currently underway in the UK. Often characterised as an internal conflict between 'second' and 'third wave' feminists, the growth of self-identified 'gender critical', anti-trans activism has precipitated a general perception, propagated by the right-wing press, that we are witnessing the fallout from a longstanding yet fundamental incompatibility between 'feminism', particularly 'second wave, radical feminism', and the 'demands' of 'trans activists'.

Figure 1: The Back Cover of *WWIA*

In "Chapter 1: 'Myths of Separation': Adrienne Rich and the Historical Foundation for a Transfeminist Poetics", I position Adrienne Rich as a representative of the 'second wave radical feminist' lyric tradition and discuss her complex legacy for the trans/feminist 'divide', both in and outside *WWIA*, to locate a redemptive counter-history in her poetry's denaturalisation of artificial 'splittings'. 'Radicalism' appears central to the contemporary discourse surrounding trans exclusion. While the poems of *WWIA* and *TTL* are by no means homogeneously formally and politically radical, both anthologies take pains to associate the two. *WWIA* markets itself as 'radical trans poetics' rather than trans 'poetry', and, similarly, *TTL* explicitly includes a radical manifesto of poetics alongside each contributor's poetry. To account for this radicalism, I suggest that the transfeminist poetics of *WWIA* owes much to the tradition of feminist poetry and criticism outlined in the 1990s by poet-critics Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Kathleen Fraser (See DuPlessis, Fraser). Because *trans*feminist poetry mobilises its prefix through its denaturalisation of critical and poetic boundaries, this essay also implicitly questions the 'divide' between the poetics of Rich and DuPlessis/Fraser to promote what Sophie Seita calls an 'aesthetic of joining' (169).

DuPlessis and Fraser's model was a product of their own scholarly revaluations of innovative writing strategies by women such as Marianne Moore, H.D. and Barbara Guest. In her landmark book, *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice* (1990), DuPlessis sees 'writing'

> not as personality, writing as praxis— author disappears into a process, into community(…) (172)

For DuPlessis, the poem is a site of linguistic resistance— an 'intervention' into the corporeal textual fabric. Her 'female aesthetic' was explicitly non-essentialist, and remained open to modifications in the aid of other marginalised groups and,

> all social practices which wish to criticise, to differentiate from, to overturn the dominant forms of knowing and understanding with which they are saturated (16)

In “Chapter 2: Transfeminism, Cyborgian Crossings and Transition Poems”, I position what I call ‘transition poetry’ as a modification of Rich’s poetics which extends her denaturalisation of lyric binaries to the socio-political domain of the ‘natural’. In “Chapter 3: Historical Interventions, Poetic Community, and A Transfeminists Poetics of Materialism”, I read poems by Nat Raha, Cameron Awkward-Rich and Ching-In Chen to articulate a theory of transfeminist, textual materiality as characterised by the types of ‘critical’ reading it promotes. Countering the tendency to exclude the ‘transmasculine’ from the ‘transfeminist’, I pay attention to the material specificities of both transfeminine and transmasculine experience.

A ‘transfeminist poetics’ recognises that language, and form too, materially resist resignification: like the changing body undergoing Hormonal Replacement Therapy (HRT), and its resistance to the differential gendering, words and the lyric form struggle against attempts to make the crossing from their cis-patriarchal origins. Etymologically, ‘trans’ denotes a discursive and corporeal crossing all but prohibited by the *sex/gender system*, a term which I use to characterise the coercive ways, both legal and cultural, that society reinforces the distinction between genders as determined by sex assigned at birth.

Chapter 1: Myths of Separation: Adrienne Rich and the Historical Foundation for a Transfeminist Poetics

The American lesbian feminist poet Adrienne Rich poses a problem for the notion of a 'transfeminist' poetics because, while to many, she represents the apotheosis of a 'feminist poetic', to some, (particularly, as I outline here, two poets in *WWIA*), the implication that she was herself transphobic threatens to mar all her work with an exclusionary ignorance (See Mukhopadhyay). Such a paranoia implies that Rich must been an out hate figure: in fact, Rich's putative transphobia is traceable to a single source: her acknowledgement in Janice Raymond's 1979 book *The Transsexual Empire* (*TE*). Raymond's text, foundational to the feminist-identified anti-trans movement, is well-known for its claim that:

> All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artefact, appropriating this body for themselves. (104)

Like the *DSM-5*, Raymond constructs the 'transsexual', specifically the MTF transsexual, as a critical figure for the operation of patriarchy, and as a passive vector of the patriarchal medical industry. She positions them through a drama of bodily theft ('appropriating') and a violent crossing of a natural taxonomic divide between genders. So doing, she extends the *DSM-5*'s textual net for the silencing of the trans subject and even later collaborated with the Reagan government to exclude transgender medical care from public and private insurance (Williams, 'The NCHCT Report', Phipps, 136). The book's conclusion advocates a eugenic cleansing of reality, and feminism, of the very category that it seeks to create: 'by morally mandating it out of existence' (178). Thus, to read that Raymond calls Rich a 'very special friend and critic' and cites her 'constant encouragement' is a concerning prospect indeed (viii, ix).

It is therefore unsurprising that two poems featured in *WWIA* mention Rich by name. In this chapter, I reread Rich through these contemporary poems to argue that her work remains highly productive for the notion of a 'transfeminist poetics' and retains a greater complexity than it is generally allowed. In fact, *WWIA*'s simplifying of the relationship between Rich and trans people naturalises the ideological divide within the trans/feminist. The anthology seemingly cedes feminism, particularly 'second wave' feminism, as lost ground, neglecting to mention the word or its derivatives in its introduction despite continually speculating upon the emancipatory reach of trans politics into the fields of prison abolition and anti-capitalism, both of which are popularly discussed in contemporary feminism (*WWIA*, 2).

In *WWIA*, Ari Banias titles two of his poems as 'Acknowledgements', both of which contend with Rich's phantasmic appearance in *TE*. The first memorably encapsulates how the anthology broadly conceptualises its relationship with second wave feminism:

> our rage the entire
>
> index of betrayals (37)

In a way, the poem, in its sparse, undecorated syntax, dramatises the formation of transgender theory as a whole: the theories of Stone, Stryker and Sullivan grew out of consecutive feminist 'betrayals'. Banias takes this betrayal as a kind of textual trauma, and so doing reinforces its own historical erasure from feminist history. While this trauma is productive and valid in itself, I agree with Finn Enke that such 'well worn' narratives of 'trans' and 'feminist' clashes reify 'feminism' as a 'coherent subject' only through violent historical erasures which necessarily occlude feminist potentials ('Collective Memory', 12).

Banias's second 'Acknowledgements' uses the words of Raymond's acknowledgment to perform an immanent critique of Rich's nominal presence. As a trans man, Banias occupies an absent presence in Raymond's study, which conveniently ignores the existence of transmasculine

people. As if to emphasise the erased oratory position that Raymond places him in, the poem opens by reiterating Raymond's statement without comment or alteration:

Adrienne Rich has been a very special friend and critic. (41)

The line is aligned to the centre of the page: centered and decentering, as if to flaunt its rhetorically centrifugal force. It pushes the (trans) reader into the abjection effected by Raymond's book, and further excludes the trans subject from the feminist poetics Rich represents. By transforming an academic prose passage into lyric, Banias encourages us to put his work into dialogue with Rich's lyric. Where Rich is known for her expressive mode centred around strong, unifying authorial voice, Banias can speak only through manipulating the textual fabric that entraps and produces his subjectivity. He repeats and rearticulates the same set of words one below each other in an inverted pyramid shape until it arrives at the six concluding lines:

Adrienne Rich has
friend and critic
Adrienne Rich
and critic.
Adrienne
critic.

Each manipulation affords alternative significations which lyricise Raymond's critical prose, but the interplay of end-stopped lines and enjambment allow for a more subtle transformation to take place. In the final four, Rich is reconfigured from Raymond's splitting of her as simultaneously 'friend' and 'critic'— in which 'friend' implies a placatory inclusivity and 'critic' an analytical, textual Cartesianism— into 'Adrienne/ Critic'. The enjambment affirms Banias's foundational hermeneutic: guilt by association. The final word of the poem, 'critic', then adopts a metaphoric value for the detached (masculine-coded) observer of the *DSM*— one who can abstractly debate the rights of others from a position of institutional power. By the poem's conclusion, the fact of Rich's

acknowledgment signals a metamorphosis of her symbolic position from a 'friend' of trans people — one who operates within the same textual plane, speaking out for marginalised communities, into a 'critic'— distant from the lived experiences of the people for whom she writes. In dropping Rich's surname, Banias inverts the critical impetus to refer to poetic figures by their surname and instead uses the far more intimate, and lyrical, 'Adrienne'. Thus Banias's poem dramatises itself becoming a poem from a piece of Raymond's criticism and, so doing, charts Rich's converse transformation from the intimacy of poetic community ('friend') into a 'critic'. His play on the contemporary term 'gender critical' further implicates Rich within the current attacks on trans rights, positioning her as unilaterally antagonistic to trans liberation. Banias' critical, lyric agency therefore depends upon Rich's abjection from poetic community into a 'critical' position.

Fifteen pages later in the anthology, Bryn Kelly's prose-poem-cum-blog-entry adopts a similar strategy of resignifying Rich's language by titling itself 'Diving into the Wreck'. Under the same name Rich published her most famous poem as well as the collection that signalled her adoption of a feminist poetic, and her refusal of 'patriarchal lyric formalism' (Riley, 40). How, Kelly asks, could Rich refuse patriarchy while remaining complicit in the marginalisation of trans people?

Unlike Banias, Kelly's authorial voice is distinct and clear: she uses her own affective experiences to chart the trauma caused by Rich's support of transphobic rhetoric. Where in Rich's poem, 'Diving into the Wreck' signalled a feminist reclamation of women's historical erasure, in Kelly's 'the wreck' encapsulates both the latent transphobia of second wave feminism, as well as the ruin of Rich's once untarnished reputation as a feminist poetic icon. As in 'Acknowledgements', Kelly opens by emphasising the rhetorical power of Rich in comparison to her own authorial voice:

> I met Adrienne Rich once. She was speaking at a fundraiser, where I was working guest reception, (55)

Kelly adopts the symbolic role of facilitative worker, Rich, respected orator. Rich speaks, Kelly welcomes guests, constructs a counter-discourse. She recalls a conference on 1970s lesbianism she attended in 2010 and her growing consciousness of 'the intergenerational divide' between the second and third waves of feminism, an opposition epitomised by Raymond's acknowledgment:

> did she know, did she *really* know, how damaging her collusion on [*TE*] would be to generations of low-income trans people to come? (…) How it would bestow on us a whole set of knives to rip each other up with? (Ibid)

If in the first stanza of her eponymous poem Rich had 'checked the edge of the knife-blade' before embarking upon her dive into feminist historiography, Kelly reconfigures the knife metaphor to symbolise Rich's complicity as an idealogical cleaver, a divisive and exclusionary prop that casts trans voices out of mainstream feminist discourse (*Diving into the Wreck*, 22). Kelly's flurry of interrogatives and impassioned anaphora then directly addresses the late Rich herself:

> *You are not my friend. You do not have my back. I knew it.* (Ibid)

Kelly registers her sense of betrayal in italics, a visual tonal shift which centres the author's personal trauma, and, like Banias, discards Rich from trans-poetic community. This feeling leads Kelly to recognise the epistemological threat this poses to Rich's brand of expressive lyric poetry. She recounts how:

> we are so different, and how difference is this gulf between people that can never by totally filled and only shakily bridged, and how this factors into a fundamental impossibility of communication. It is a bummer. (Ibid)

As her bathetic conclusion implies, the utopian gesture of ideal communication posed by the lyric form often descends into apathy and reductive dichotomies. In subtly alluding to Rich's later collection, *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978), she challenges the notion of 'communication' that Rich cherishes. If the dream of mid-century feminism was to construct a

‘common language’ in which women find community through the issues that uniquely affected them as women, the lyric as a form provided the perfect vessel for creating such collectivities. Lyric is a model of difference, of the ‘gulf between people’, an impasse both historical/ideological and metaphysical: subject and object, author and reader.

My own understanding of the lyric poem owes much to Jonathan Culler, who demonstrates how the form’s apostrophic function reduces the world to the ‘simple oppositional structure’ of an ‘I-Thou’ relationship (*Pursuit*, 156). The ‘alienation of subject from object’, seemingly intrinsic to lyric, is, to Culler, precisely what ‘post-Enlightenment poetry seeks to overcome’ (Ibid, 158). The lyric’s ideal fusing of subject and object, its creation of community through a common language, I shall argue, is both central to Rich’s feminist poetics, and problematic with regards to the ways in which language can exclude the most marginal in society. The modernist notion of a ‘common language’ retains the caveat of precluding intersectional analysis, and suffers from the tendency to treat all issues faced by women, regardless of race, class, sexuality and nationality homogeneously. Such notions can violently erase the differences between women’s experiences and so doing valorise the experiences of the most privileged, as is true of the contemporary ‘gender critical’ movement. Thus, lyric threatens to become a mythological refusal of difference through positing a homogenous ‘we’, and thus tacitly ignores the experiences of others.

I now turn to *The Dream of A Common Language* (1978) to outline both the lyric foundation of her feminist poetics as well its potential for a reparative history of transfeminist poetics. This collection, the second following her radical break from ‘the male-dominated literary tradition’, represented another lyric intervention into women’s history when it was published just one year before *TE* (Riley, 14). The collection begins with ‘Power’, a poem about feminist icon Marie Curie, followed by a revisionist reimagining of Elvira Shatayev, a climber who died on an expedition as part of the Russian Women’s climbing team (3, 4). ‘Power’ demonstrates an explicitly earthy, materialist vision of women’s history, turning the poem into a feminist practise of excavation:

Living in the earth-deposits of our history (3)

The collective pronoun ‘our’, and countless other instances of ‘we’ in the book as a whole, gesture towards a shared history of womanhood heretofore silenced from public discourse and the lyric tradition. Rich transforms Curie’s ‘body’ into ‘her body’ (‘her body bombarded for years by the element/ she had purified’ (Ibid) to universalise the suffering of women neglected under patriarchy. She describes how Curie was ‘bombarded’ by the radiation of her work, using the capaciousness of the female pronoun to transform Curie into a martyr figure for women’s history.

Christopher Spaide, discussing the centrality of the collective pronoun to Rich’s work and feminist poetry as a whole, presents the word as indicative of a crossing between subjectivities. He describes Rich’s attempt to ‘open up the lyric, that genre of solitude, and speak with others, for others’ (90). ‘We’ ‘presents self and other as inseparably entangled, even interchangeable’ and thus manifests the lyric intimacy disputed by Kelly (117). Perhaps the most indicative poem in this regard is the fourth in Rich’s collection, which directly probes Kelly’s questions of lyric division. In fact, I tentatively want to suggest that ‘Splittings’ might be read as a proto-transfeminist poem that attacks the patriarchal divisions of the lyric form and provides an antidote in the form of lesbian, and sisterly, intimacy. The poem centres material embodiment and specificity, and presents Rich’s porous, authorial body to the reader:

> My body opens over San Francisco like the day-
> light raining down each pore crying the change of light
> I am not with her I have been waking off and on
> all night to that pain (10)

The third line’s ‘I am not with her’ recalls the pain of Curie’s historical isolation from the sisterhood of the women’s movement, and is subsequently transformed into a lesbian love lyric in which the absence of ‘her’— the love object— stands in for the larger ‘splitting’ represented by the lyric form.

Lyric, we remember, typically foregrounds its disembodied, masculine-coded and bodiless voice towards its feminised, embodied muse. Rich's feminist intervention dramatises how her female embodiment predicates a splitting from the masculine lyric tradition, and thus exposes the lyric gulf of subjectivity as a patriarchal relic.

'Splittings' is motivated by an atavism for a maternal monism which represents a collapse of ideologically entrenched splittings into a corporeal textuality. The speaker describes her attempt to 'learn' from this pain of longing— both erotic and ontological— and goes on to imagine division personified speaking to her:

> *I am the pain of division creator of divisions*
> *it is I who blot your lover from you* (Ibid)

Interestingly, Rich, like Kelly, shifts to italics to communicate the lyric splitting between self and other. While the 'blot' grammatically separates the pronouns 'I' and 'you', Rich enjambs the latter, making 'you' intentionally inclusive of the reader. For Rich, the patriarchal splitting that 'blots' women from each other can be resolved only by rejecting its artificial dichotomies: by 'choosing/ not' or indeed refusing 'to suffer uselessly' (11).

Rich's speaker retains the 'private' 'intimacy' of the confessional tradition while reaching for a collective oratory agency that she finds in the women's movement and lesbian sociality (Nelson). Her identity category does not limit but instead mobilises its claims by attaching it to a collective ontology. So doing, she demonstrates what Mary Eagleton characterises as her intersectional belief that 'we are all located in multiple ways': difference becomes not an obstacle but a necessary precondition for sociality and collective action (330). Her poem performs a lyric crossing, a quintessential trans-feminist gesture which concludes the poem with a decisive agency:

> I will not be divided from her or from myself
> by myths of separation
> while her mind and body in Manhattan are more with me

than the smell of eucalyptus cooly burning on these hills (11)

Fluctuating between the abstract universality of 'myths of separation' and the embodiments of lesbian eroticism, Rich dramatises the Cartesian division between 'mind and body'. As Susan Bordo explains, within the Cartesian dichotomy, women are frequently 'cast' into the carnal animality of 'the body' while reinforcing the male as lyric 'mind' (5). Rich's lyric thus envisions a utopian textuality of feminist crossings in which 'separation' becomes 'myth' because a patriarchal rhetorical construct.

Once salvaged from its putative transphobia, Rich's metaphor of division can be reapplied Raymond's accusation in Chapter 4 of *TE* that transsexual lesbian feminists such as Sandy Stone 'divide women' by their very presence within the movement (110). In her pamphlet, *Divided Sisterhood* (1980), transsexual woman Caroll Riddell provided an early transfeminist critique which reverses the accusation back to Raymond. As such, *Divided Sisterhood* represents a rare example of a trans counter-narrative and thus mirrors Rich's method: a restoration of one's own history and community from those who erase and displace it. It also includes, at the very site of Raymond's 'betrayal', what is perhaps the first transfeminist lyric: 'Misgendering'. The poem directly addresses Raymond and her followers with a sympathetic sensitivity to their mistrust of trans women as represented in the archetypal moment of trans/feminist linguistic division: the misgendering of a trans woman as 'he', which Riddell calls 'the pronoun of mistrust' (148). Yet Riddell goes on to expose the artificiality of this division by claiming that Raymond's stereotyped 'transsexual' is itself a projection of the lesbian feminist's own abjected position *within* patriarchal power structures:

> And yet,
> there may be another truth yet.
> Could it be that that identity is yours
> years caught up in a facade, a screen of self protection? (148)

Riddell dramatises an intertwining of subjectivities amidst a lyric crossing that holds Raymond accountable for her own critical ignorance:

> your outpost in *his* camp;
> home, strange, from afar at last.
> There is no way to tell. [My italics] (149)

Transfeminism makes 'home' 'strange' because that 'home' was a signifier of false purity. The problem with splittings, is that, sometimes, in perfect moments, 'There is no way to tell', and the divide reveals itself as arbitrary, a relic, a wreck. The lyric ends with a conferral of agency, which recognises the marginal rhetorical position of the trans woman's speech. The speaker offers her lyric body up to be interpreted, exposing her own marginality as the very same position accorded to women within heteropatriarchal discourse:

> your choice defines me —
> Sister? Alien? (149)

Riddell's increasingly accusatory, interrogative mode positions its transfeminist poetics as both a defensive practise and a challenge to the division that predicates its form. Riddell's concluding dichotomy, (sister, alien) performs a splitting within the Rich's 'we', that underlines its capacity for real world exclusion. The transfeminist 'alien' triggers a reevaluation of the boundaries of the feminist body.

I hope to have complicated the presentation of Rich as fundamentally opposed to the inclusion of trans voices within feminism. Rich's feminist poetics, represented by a close attention to embodiment, gendered subjectivities, the synthesising of 'myths of separation' offers a utopian glimpse into a future of feminist progress without artificial divisions. Indeed, as Stryker points out, 'second wave feminism was not uniformly, or even predominantly, hostile to transgender (…) people' (*Transgender History*, 136).

In fact, in a dramatic turn of events, Rich was also later acknowledged by Leslie Feinberg in hir 1996 book *Transgender Warriors*, a revisionist history which charts how the forced institution of a class-based society and advent of patriarchal colonialism provided the ideological source for anti-trans sentiment. In a chapter titled 'Sisterhood: Make it Real!', Feinberg speculates:

> What would the sign on the door of the women's movement read? I think the key to victory are these three simple words: "All women welcome." (119)

Feinberg thanks 'Adrienne Rich' 'for support that came in many forms' (xvi). Whether we can take this as representative of a change in her views towards trans people is uncertain, nor is speculation necessary for our purposes. While the irony of Rich's own splitting on this topic should not be ignored, it is clear that Rich leaves behind a powerful feminist tool for the exposure of gender-based injustice within the lyric mode (Stein, 69). Below, I outline five features of Rich's feminist poetics which prove essential to my notion of a transfeminist poetic:

1. an awareness of the embodied and gendered status of lyric utterances
2. an intersectional understanding of oppression
3. a denaturalisation of artificially constructed binaries
4. a rallying, collective politics
5. a lyric reclamation of feminist heroines

In the subsequent chapters I discuss how *WWIA* adapts these techniques through later trans/feminist theories to the specificities of trans embodiment and uses its critical relation to the assumptions of the lyric form to foster a transfeminist poetic community.

Chapter 2: Transfeminism, Cyborgian Crossings and Transition Poems

> *Trans poetry has typically foregrounded the body* (…) *what else can this emphasis render into focus?* ('Introduction', *WWIA*, 2)

The emphasis on material embodiment within trans literature alluded to in *WWIA*'s introduction manifests a longstanding criticism of queer theory by trans theorists. As far back as 1998, Jay Prosser recognised that 'queer theory has written of transitions as discursive but it has not explored the bodiliness of gendered crossings' (6). The perception that queer theory prioritises discursive formations and neglects material circumstances rouses the accusation that it erases the physicality of trans experience, coopting transness, for its own theory (See Heaney, *New Woman*, 206). In this chapter, I read what I call 'transition poetry' to argue that they contribute to these and other feminist critiques by exposing not only the oppressive function of the sex/gender system but by emphasising how patriarchal gender asymmetries lead to the differential experiences and corporealities of transmasculine and transfeminine people.

Where Banias and Kelly challenge the erasures of Rich's form, these poems appropriate Donna Harraway's figure of the feminist 'cyborg' to affirm their own textual-corporeal agency. Harraway introduced the figure of 'the cyborg' in her seminal 1985 essay *A Cyborg Manifesto* to attend to the blurring of the boundary between humanity and technology, as well as between species. Perhaps most fundamentally, her essay critiques the way society designates some identities and practices as 'natural' while excluding others as 'unnatural':

> A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. (104)

While the transition poems are cyborgian in the sense that they cross generic boundaries, the figure of the cyborg is, I argue, more foundational to the notion of a transfeminist poetics. As a metaphor, the 'cyborg' lends a materialist emphasis to poetry as itself a composite material and denaturalises

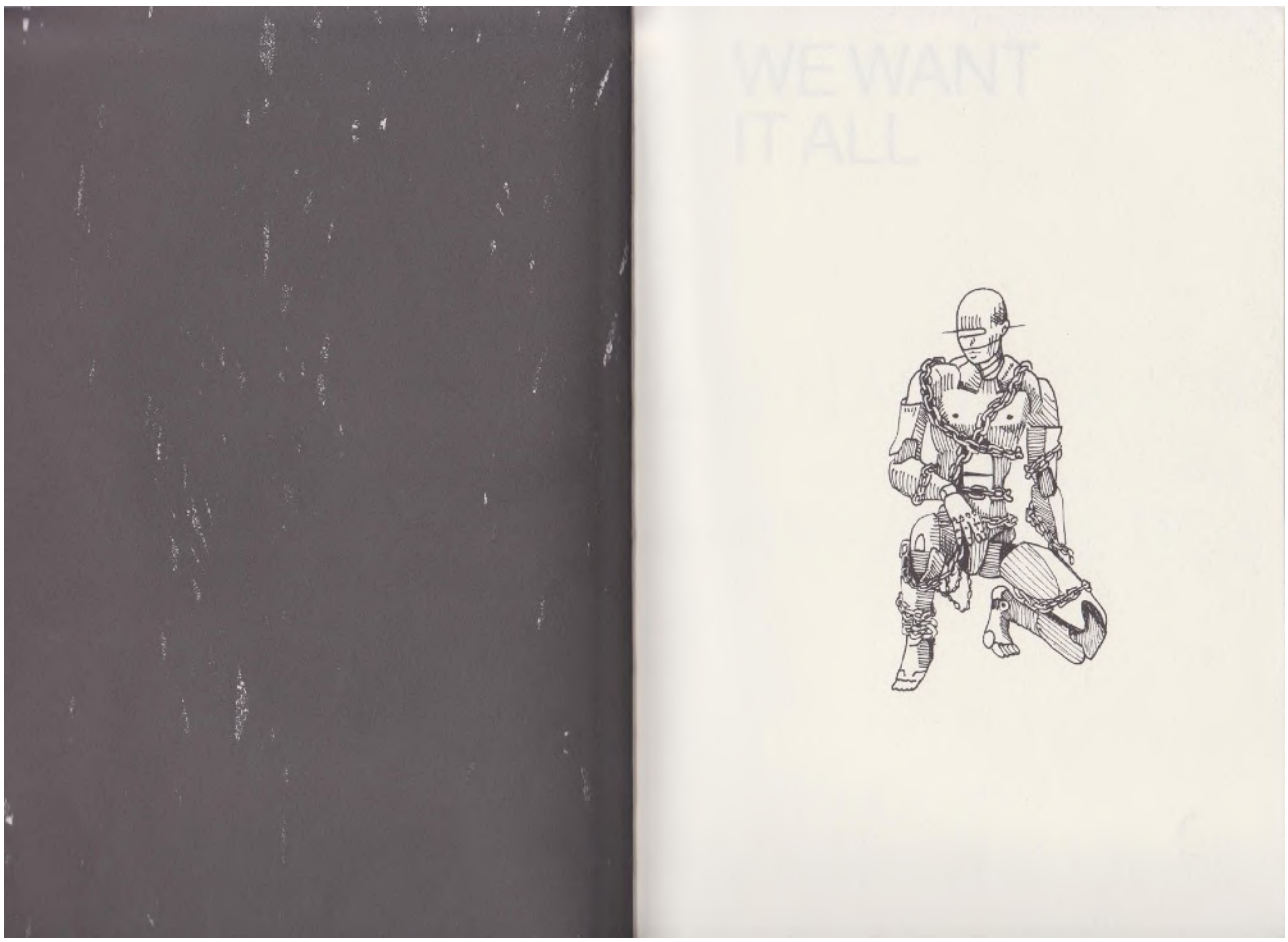


Figure 2: The Opening Pages of *WWIA*

the rhetorical distinction between natural and artificial through a series of taxonomic crossings. If the 'cyborg' possesses a 'poetics' of its own, it replaces Rich's notion of the organic and idealised, feminist lyric self with a composite aesthetic. Harraway's cyborg also allows us to read the crossing denoted by the term 'transfeminism', a historical process for which a provide a brief genealogy below.

As its name suggests, 'transfeminism' is a theoretical composite: the prefix, 'trans', allied with the noun, 'feminism'. As summarised by Claudia Sofía Garriga-López,

> Transfeminism is a form of intersectional feminism founded on the understanding that sexism and transphobia are interlocking and mutually reinforcing systems of oppression. (1619)

Developing from its Spanish origins in the 1980s, 'transfeminismo' as it was then called, owes much of its methodology to 'US women of color feminists from the 1980s onward', particularly their recognition of the exclusionary function of the category 'woman' (which prioritised able-bodied, middle class cis white women) (Ibid). Intersectional feminisms recognise that the 'major systems of oppression are interlocking' (See 'Combahee River Collective Statement' in Taylor, 15).

Emi Koyama's *The Transfeminist Manifesto* (2000) set the tone for subsequent Anglo-American transfeminist arguments before receiving a significant elaboration in Julia Serano's *Whipping Girl* (2007)— which introduced the concept of 'transmisogyny'— and has witnessed a major resurgence since 2016, as signalled by the May 2016 issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly,* titled 'Trans/Feminisms' and Susan Stryker and Dylan McCarthy Blackston's *The Transgender Studies Remix* (July 2022) opening with a section titled 'Trans/Feminisms' (See also Scott-Dixon and Enke's interdisciplinary collections). Within the logic of the cyborg, Riddell's 'sister' and 'alien' become indistinguishable because the implicit hierarchy that separates them cannot be maintained. Equally, to call transfeminism cyborgian is itself to manufacture a fiction: it did not come out of the unnatural addition of 'trans' to 'feminism' but a mutually reinforcing dialogue.

As many feminists have argued, society has historically weaponised appeals to 'nature' to marginalise minority groups. Laurie Penny explains how such rhetoric arises to prevent societal 'change', strategically conferring the antonym 'unnatural' upon homosexual sex and 'abortion' while, inversely:

> rape is natural (…) Discrimination against queer women, poor women, black women, fat women, ugly women, trans women (…) is natural. (15)

The contemporary anti-trans backlash has led a resurgence in 'naturalness' metaphors. Anti-trans philosopher Kathleen Stock, playing into this reactionary discourse, transmutes the 'natural' to a dichotomy of 'endogenous and artificial parts of a sexed body' (74). This understanding of the

rhetorical function of naturalness becomes increasingly problematic, however, when considered alongside the pathologisation of trans people. Under the pathological system, medical professionals become gatekeepers to the 'unnatural', able to confer unnatural hormones and surgeries upon the trans subject, while, at the same time, seeking to weed out the 'not really trans' patients. Such a dynamic implies that there are people for whom cross-sex hormones are *more natural,* or at least *sufficiently* natural.

Along similar lines, is lyric a false appeal to the natural? Which aspects of lyric can be called 'endogenous', and which 'artificial'— and what role does gender play within this dynamic? Thinking of the poem as a cyborg affixes a materiality to feminist lyric subjectivities. An interesting outlier to *WWIA*'s editorial tendency to ignore 'feminism' is the first image in the anthology's clear allusion to Harraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* [Figure 1]. The cyborg provides a crucial rhetorical figure for both *TTL* and *WWIA*, encompassing the double-edged significance of medical technology to trans people as well as a model for the function of (lyric) poetry. While Stone famously calls the 'transsexual' a 'genre', of 'embodied text' they could equally be thought of as a literary 'form' (231). Trans people arguably embody the very transformation, the very crossing, that occurs in the act of reading lyric. Thus I read against Carrie Noland's notion that 'cybernetic' aesthetics pose the 'risk' of effecting a 'disembodied subjectivity' for lyric poetry and instead position the cyborg as resplendent with materialist possibilities (213).

Harraway's cyborg proved foundational to the genesis of transgender theory, sharing its challenge to colonial taxonomies. Stone wrote her 'Posttransexual Manifesto' (1991) while under Harraway's doctoral supervision; Stryker's 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage' (1994) responded to Mary Daly's accusation that transsexuals are 'frankenstein's' monster' and an example of a patriarchal 'boundary violation' by unnatural 'cyborgs' (Daly, 69). Paul B. Preciado's influential *Testo-Junkie* (2008) provided a further model for trans self-becoming by presenting his use of testosterone as a radical and (formally)

experimental practice. Under these narratives, the cyborg corresponds to the formal logic of gender transition (See Hester for a contemporary, explicitly trans-inclusive modification of Harraway). Indeed, prior to transition, many trans people report an intense dissociation from their bodies: in becoming 'cyborg', and introducing cross-sex hormones, many achieve a newfound embodiment (Colizzi).

Transition poetry explores the affective and physiological changes of HRT, whether those be the effects of oestrogen or testosterone and thus challenges the discourse fetishism of queer theory (See also Trace Peterson's 'The Valleys are Lush and Steep' (*TTL*, 471), Eli Clare's 'And Yet' (*TTL*, 180)). British transmasculine poet Ray Filar combines medical writing with memoir and theory with poetry when writing of their attempts to be prescribed testosterone on the NHS. They adopt the structural analysis of Preciado's 'body-essay' to stage their own highly personal process of self-transformation (*Testo-Junkie*, 11). The poem, entertainingly titled, 'You've heard of Ritalin, now what if I told you governments make bodies into crime scenes for no reason at all', begins with a meditation on the concept of the 'drug' and what 'drugs' mean for subjectivity and theorisations of gender.

Filar's materialist focus charts the political function of society's demarcation between the 'natural' and the 'chemical':

> All things are chemicals, really, but some of them are more so. (344)

They contrast their ability to access performance enhancing, stimulant drugs such as Ritalin with the bureaucracy surrounding medical gender transition to identify how capitalist ideology inflects the domain of the 'natural'. They highlight the hypocrisy of the medical system to expose how it reinforces the sex/gender system, noting that artificial oestrogen is readily prescribed to cis women experiencing menopausal stress, and how cis men can buy testosterone online (345):

> The NHS trans medical pathway means you have to wait a year to several years for hormones considered of the 'other gender'. This is purposeful. It's about what's allowed to be 'real'. (345)

Filar's pedantic trans anxiety registers a common dilemma for trans people as pathologised subjects: to be 'really' 'trans' one must constantly prove oneself to a series of medical gatekeepers. As they write elsewhere: 'Trans subjects are constituted by perseverance' (347).

Filar's voice is both intimately personal and direct, while simultaneously distant and analytical. They adapt a feminist awareness of the ways in which the medical profession has centred their care around the needs of (white, cis) men, and thus ignores the lived specificities of minority genders. By statement 6, the speaker begins self-medicating on unofficial, unregulated testosterone, transforming the poem into a masculinising body narrative:

> 6. The same summer I self-medicate T-gel, the ex who broke my heart messages me. (346)

Taking Preciado's *Testo-Junkie* as its model, the poem plays upon the idea of 'experiment': as a text it both documents a bodily experiment while formally playing with genre. Filar faces the Kafkaesque administrative failures they encounter attempting to be officially prescribed testosterone with a bleak, exasperated humour, describing the process after asking their GP for 'a referral to the Gender Identity Clinic', one of the centralised NHS care units able to prescribe trans people with hormones:

> 14. (…) A year and a half after the first appointment I have blood tests taken and deposited neatly into the ether, never to be heard from again. My blood pressure is monitored. The third doctor acknowledges that my first two requests have resulted in no action. The next sends the referral letter to a place that doesn't exist. (347)

Filar's passive voice positions themselves as a grammatical patient, acted upon by the doctors. By splitting the poem into numbered sections, Filar bleakly parodies the structure of medical diagnostic criteria and medicinal side-effect leaflets. As such, the poem performs a direct intervention into the

patriarchal medico-textual fabric that both produces and imprisons the trans subject, and splits their subjectivity between their own voice and their 'medical records':

> my medical records note that the trans patient refuses to answer questions, though, the record clarifies, I am not aggressive about it. Would being more aggressive speed things up? Make me more male? Somehow trans masc aggression is both more punished and more ridiculous. (347)

The existence of the 'medical records', as the material, textual manifestation of Filar as a pathologised subject positions the poem as a counter-narrative in which 'the trans patient''s nameless 'refusal' constructs transmasculine identity. As their impassioned interrogatives suggest, the medical profession naturalises gender roles through its treatment of trans people by expecting stereotypically 'masculine' behaviour and presentation from those seeking testosterone, while not applying the same standard to people assigned male at birth to access the same hormone.

Filar's transformation of their experiences with the medical profession's gatekeeping of the 'unnatural' implicate medical technology as both as enabling (though prescribing treatments) and erasing trans agency. Aeon Ginsberg's poem in *WWIA,* 'Beast Government' explicitly mobilises Harraway's cyborg by adding trans affective experiences to its critique of cis-heteropatriarchal capitalist governmental structures. Its anger, more sustained than Filar's, practices Preciado's notion of hormone consumption as 'gender bioterrorism on a molecular scale' to turn the cyborg into a lyric collectivity much like Rich's 'we' (12):

> Long
> live the cyborg. (…) The line between
> biological and technological is blurred every day. I take
> medication to become human, but taking the medication
> makes me cyborg. (15)

'Cyborg' is transformed from a particularising noun into an adjective describing a collective political practice, positioning HRT as a quintessentially cyborgian strategy oppositional to

naturalised state authority. They gesture back to the ambiguous and unreferenced image of the cyborg and reframe it as an image of trans experience [Figure 2]. An interesting peculiarity of the *WWIA* cyborg is that it, like Banias, Kelly and Filar, is enchained by the same (metallic) material by which it is composed: thus the cyborg of *WWIA* is entrapped by its own ontology, always already enmeshed in its constitutive material. I return to this dilemma in Chapter 3.

Adapting *Testo-Junkie* to the opposite hormone, Ginsberg locates a manic, femme agency within their use of oestrogen, and repurposes the countercultural motif of drug use to critique arbitrary discursive distinctions:

> I shoot up girl-juice to fuel up my
> energy against the state (16)

They reposition oestrogen as a liberating political force to invert the misogyny of an assumption that its usage entails a political 'softening' or passivity. Similarly, the cyborgification of their body into a poetic machine requiring 'fuel', amounts to an internal, immanent insurrection against medical and state authority and the sex/gender system. While like Filar, Ginsberg uses the 'confessional' mode to remedy the erasure of trans subjectivity, Ginsberg's speaker remains the radical grammatical actor of the verse. Where Raymond studied trans identity solely from the top-down view of their pathologisation, Ginsberg offers a potent corrective to Bernice Hausmann's similar argument that the 'dependen[ce]' of 'transsexuals' upon 'technological intervention' means that 'we can read transsexuals' agency through their doctor's discourses' (*Changing Sex*, 110). Hausmann's total erasure of trans voices relegates them to the reports of the heteropatriarchal medical profession, and reiterates the logic by which women's voices have historically been excluded from the public arena by allowing their husbands to speak and vote for them, thus naturalising their financial dependence upon the patriarchal state. Where medical writing

homogenises and reduces their trans embodied reality to a sterile, textual apparatus, 'Beast Government' concludes with a relentless affirmation of radical multiplicity:

> It takes even blood to drown the body. Long-kill human
> normal. My cyborgs have many arms to come to the beast. In those
> arms, many diseases. (16)

For Ginsberg, cyborgian insurrection is both immanent and imminent: 'drow[ning]' encoded in the blood. The execution of 'human/ normal' instigates a pluralisation ('many', 'arms') which produces possibilities for radical collective action through its material disruption to taxonomic categories. The distinction between the 'inside' and 'outside' of categories (such as man/woman, human/ technology, sister/alien) provide the epistemological foundation for 'naturalness' metaphors that position trans people as feminism, and women's, constitutive outside. Rather than naturalising the binary between trans people and technology, Ginsberg places transfeminine agency inside but as radically exceeding its constitutive medico-textual apparatus. The trans cyborg becomes a strategic essentialism— a common language— a 'we'.

Micha Cárdenas's appearance in *TTL* represents perhaps the most explicit example of transition as a cyborgian practice. Cárdenas's longer, genre-bending prose poem/performance, 'Becoming Transreal', places her transition within feminist analysis to create a transformative narrative of feminisation-through-feminism. She uses the patriarchal conventions of visual culture to theorise her own experiences taking oestrogen:

> I look in the mirror and see a curve at the bottom of my breast for the first time. I'm ecstatic. Apparently the drug nanofactories in my blood are working, (…) (388)

As her body transforms, so does her position within the patriarchal order. While she is 'ecstatic' at the sight of herself, she remains fixed within a 'mirror[ed]' image, which, as we learn, is by no means neutral nor natural. The 'mirror' recalls the artistic trope of female 'vanity', an ideological

prop for naturalising the double restraint of women as both visual objects and visual objects who cannot help but turn themselves into objects (See Pollock, 136). This patriarchal visual policing inscribes her subjectivity into the isolation of the lyric 'I', necessitating her escape into women's collective experiences. Through her transition she recognises how her body will now be measured as relative to a patriarchal ideal:

> Everywhere around me is the image of the perfect body, but I want to exploit the medical system to give me an assortment of parts that is unimaginable and unnamable. (390)

Under this formulation, her transfeminist crossing subverts the fiction of the 'perfect body' to frustrate the linguistic and imaginative confines of patriarchal corporeality. Feminist consciousness-raising is intrinsic to Cárdenas's becoming 'female'. Such a process, as discussed elsewhere by Heaney, inverts the typical order of priority: a transfeminine subject becoming woman, and then becoming a feminist is reversed to be: becoming a woman *through* feminist identification ('Women-Identified Women', 141).

As in 'Splittings', 'Becoming Transreal' uses the specificity of lesbian eroticism to affirm embodiment. Cárdenas's 'I' becomes an intimate 'we' to model its lyric crossing:

> We (…) play in the freezing cold waves, rubbing our hard nipples together, kissing, laughing, screaming (…) this moment between us, looking at each other and sharing so much love and lust, is something else, something wordless. (390)

The flurry of verbs and parataxis fosters an embodied, transfeminine joy that disrupts the visual policing of the initial 'mirror' and rejects the solipsism of its mirrored 'I'. Through physical touching and the mutual desire it affirms, Cárdenas ironically attains the 'wordless[ness]' and taxonomic frustration valorised by queer theory: not by a denial of material specificity, but through the affirmation of it. In doing so, she exposes the patriarchal lyric 'I' as a distorting mirror which inflicts an unsustainable and alienating doubling.

In, “We are the intersections”, another poem in *TTL*, Cárdenas uses her experiences as a non-white transfemme to implicate the boundaries of race and nationality, demonstrating the notion that the trans-exclusionary fear of ‘boundary violation’, is rooted in white supremacy (Phipps, 156). She discusses her plan to ‘create border disturbance’, using ‘cell phones’ to help people cross the ‘Mexico/US border’ and encourages her reader to embark upon parallel readings of borders and gender distinctions: the ‘bathroom problem’ outlined by Halberstam mirrors the ‘border problem’ that weaponises the figure of the vulnerable white woman to justify a paternal colonialism (393) (*Female Masculinity*, 20). Trans women cannot use women’s bathrooms because they will rape (white) women; conversely, Mexicans cannot cross the border because they will (commit crimes and) rape (white) women. As with Rich, the recognition of one’s multiple social identifications encourages collective political action:

> and I am here to fight and fuck and give birth
> to border disturbances,
> to queer and mayan technologies that can reveal national borders for
> the fictions they are
> to technologies of survival and femme disturbance.
> I am the intersection, of too many coordinate systems to name.
> We are the intersections, and we exceed the borders placed upon us. (395)

Cárdenas’s ‘intersection’ metaphor provides a powerful tool for conceptualising the poem as a form. If lyric is the cyborgian modelling of an intersection, then so too is the trans body, as an intersection of genders in transition, and a denaturalisation of the boundary between two discursive entities. The transitioning body thus becomes a metaphor for the lyric body and vice-versa, an endlessly reiterating process that moves in the direction of self through otherness, community through corporeal specificity.

Eric Karin’s ‘Poetics Statement’ in *TTL* insightfully maps this onto poetry as a form: ‘Poetry is cybernetic, artificially intelligent’ (210). Karin suggests that trans people, as cyborgs, occupy a

similar relation to the poem itself through a continual renegotiation of reified taxonomic boundaries:

> Part animal, part technology, we cyborg shape-shifters are the heirs of hybridity, transcendence; the reconciliation of endless dualisms, mind/body "problems," etc. (211)

In placing 'mind/body "problems"' in quotation marks, Karin formalises the pathological position: if 'gender dysphoria' is the manifestation of a problematic 'incongruence' between mind and body, he affords to lyric the ability to 'reconcile' such a dualism. Lyric itself becomes a kind of drug, a treatment for a psycho-physiological split rooted through a constitutive gender difference.

These poets fashion a transfeminist lyric subjectivity from their bodily specificity as a challenge to cis-patriarchal taxonomies. Their cyborgian experiments find agency in the interconnections between their bodies and medical technology, problematising the fixity of such a distinction and, so doing, create a 'counter-discourse' which foregrounds the possibility for reparative forms of lyric collectivity.

Chapter 3: Historical Interventions, Poetic Community, and A Transfeminists Poetics of Materialism

Stone's 'Posttranssexual Manifesto' describes the transsexual body as intersectional point much like the lyric form: 'a hotly contested site of cultural inscription' upon which 'the epistemologies of white male medical practice, the rage of radical feminist theories and the chaos of lived gendered experience' collide (230). As modelled by the cyborg's bridging of humanity and technology, intersections emphasise the mutual interdependence occluded by the patriarchal lyric subject: like Rich's 'we', they create the preconditions for an inclusive poetic community that refuses the split between materiality and discourse.

In her discussion of three foundational trans poets, Samuel Ace, Max Wolf Valerio and kari edwards, Trace Peterson notes a shared 'aesthetic' in their decentring of 'trans' as a cohering identity category and their disassociation between the author and lyric speaker (524). This evidently conflicts with Rich's porous, authorial presence, and better resembles DuPlessis's notion of writing as 'praxis'. The poets I discuss below extend transness from a social category into a formal and hermeneutic practice.

As mentioned previously, *WWIA*'s cyborg is entrapped by its own constitutive material, enchained by the very thing that invokes its agency [Figure 2]. In this chapter, I want suggest that this is the relationship of much transfeminist poetry to language: in these poems, language is simultaneously the prison and the escape, and it is through this critical, denaturalised readership that they create their poetic communities.

I read three poets presented in *WWIA* as representatives of a radical transfeminist poetics of materialism: Nat Raha, Cameron Awkward-Rich and Ching-In Chen who represent the identities of trans woman, trans man and genderqueer respectively. Beyond their providing a productive spread of gendered asymmetries and positionalities, I select them to typify their formally radical approach

to the lyric as a transfeminist intervention. As a British academic, feminist and poet, Raha's work straddles the divide between poetry and poetics, praxis and theory. Her intersectional, critical framework pits trans lyric subjectivity against the textual fabric of the capitalist cis-heteropatriarchy. Her first poem in *WWIA,* drawn from her own collection, *Of Sirens, Body and Faultlines* (2018)(*SBF*) notably contains the only mention of 'transfeminism' in the anthology. The poem, titled '[second transfeminist tract/ i]' begins with a defiant collectivity 'galore' in the form of 'us':

> galore in staying wake trill soft us
> upon each suggest
> to consider in pleasure
> ≠before you/i draw sensate / quiet
> streams to skin composed (*SBF*, 10)

Raha's writing transforms the lyric crossing of Rich's 'we' into an intensely meta-poetic textual materiality. While her verse defies conventional syntax, her cut-up aesthetic makes its components vibrate with verbal energy at the level of word and clause. The visual, tactile and auditory imagery coalesce in a dense texture around the lyric dynamic of speaker and listener: the collective pronoun 'us' becomes, on the fourth line, 'you/i', a loosely arbitrary demarcation indicative of the lyric dilemma as continually threatened with collapse. The line, 'streams to skin composed' models an embodied lyric intimacy between speaker and reader, yet remains antagonistic to Rich's expressive mode. Indeed, the poem feels far more as if it were 'composed' than 'expressed', revelling in the textual tactility of words on the page. Rather than a naturalised, unified and coherent lyric whole, Raha presents a collection of words, phrases and characters from disparate fields and registers. Each word is made to perform a kind of crossing, as if wrenched from a different textual field, dragged from a different discourse. This distinction perhaps better explains Edmund Hardy's notion that Raha 'incites a revolt against the ideal' in which the 'ideal' is the utopian model of naturalised communication proposed by the lyric form (Hardy, 16).

The poem's title poses a few questions: why a 'second' tract but no first? Raha has never published a '*first* transfeminist tract'; this omission, I think, deliberately encourages us to wonder what a 'first' might be. It calls us to revise our own histories, to revisit the archives. It may be Riddell's 'Misgendering', or, perhaps, one of the poems included in *TransSisters*, an American journal of 'Transsexual Feminism' which ran during the mid-1990s (See Gabriel). Equally, it may be yet undiscovered. Recalling 'Splittings', Raha frames her lyric around lesbian intimacy as an affirmation of sisterly solidarity and a rejection of patriarchal lyric oversight:

> && arms around to dress ,,
> pressing tangent/ temples & cheek\bone
> \degrees 120 across neck in kiss::: y\our\s
> sweet to musculature paths across\
> that we invent passion here
> in critique of universalisms,,, (*SBF,* 10)

The series of body parts and planes turn the poem into a kind of deconstructed blazon which takes the patriarchal logic of that genre and refuses to naturalise the internal hierarchies that make it possible. Raha's idiosyncratic typography registers her antagonism to the whole taxonomic system: the poem itself seemingly exists in a constitutive state of semantic and gendered crisis co-constructed by the boundaries of race and capitalism. The text fluctuates between the three connotations of the word 'tract': the sense of a religious or political piece of writing; a 'continuous elongated anatomical structure' (as in 'digestive tract') and an area of land (OED). The poem combines all three, creating a textual organism, a lyric cyborg that entangles reading with writing and poetry with hermeneutics.

Yet the readerly encounter theorised by the poem remains ambiguous in its quality. What kind of encounter are we witnessing? Is it the meeting of 'trans' and 'feminist'; lyric speaker and audience; male and female; sister and alien? Is it the corporeal 'here' of the line: 'that we invent passion here'? Her poem is the site of lyric passion as itself a composite material: passion becomes

a euphoric gender-crossing actualised through the intermixing of lyric subjectivities. The poem ends:

> speak in thrills relative ##[by
> flesh temperate for arms softkiss before
> timepolitik construes AM upon plural
> that we will be tired in hours free from our wage work /
> left to domestics
> ,, you holding & close \ shoulder to
> button print resist psychic death (*SBF,* 11)

In the final lines the opulent 'staying wake' and intimacy of the first stanza transforms into an ability to 'speak'. Each word appears out of place because each has participated in a material crossing, and is, accordingly, 'trans'. Thus, she repositions words with traditionally 'feminine' connotations such as 'trill', 'soft' and 'speak in thrills', as expressions of specifically *trans*feminine lyric joy. Still, the poem's remarkable shift from corporeal intimacy ('you holding & close') to 'button print resist psychic death' registers a profound, perhaps irresolvable ambiguity. In self-reflexively evoking the act of typing, Raha invites a renewed readerly awareness of the poem's material qualities. The most agreeable interpretation of this, it seems, would ascribe the 'psychic death' which we are commanded to 'resist' to an uncritical lyric consumerism. The real psychic death is to see the lyric mode, its gendering, its reification of the subject-object divide, as itself natural, as whole, and not as a composition of body parts or joyous meeting of subjectivities. So doing she creates precisely that for which DuPlessis calls in *The Pink Guitar*:

> a critical poetry, an analytic lyric, not a poetry that 'decorates dominant culture' (145)

Hardy's claim that Raha's poetry 'looks for, and calls for, lines of transfeminist/ queer solidarity' thus contains productive questions as to the location of that 'solidarity' (10). In *WWIA*, solidarity resides not only in its heteroglossia of trans voices but with its community of readers. The effect of a poem is to construct its own audience: Raha's calls for a hyper attentive, hyper critical

hermeneutics, both deeply invested in the lyric tradition and acutely aware of its constitutive patriarchal fictions. Indeed, as a structuring device, the anthology arguably provides the antidote to the single poet collection in creating community through collaboration rather than the worship of singularity.

Heaney's chapter on 'Materialist Trans Feminism against Queer Theory', to which this essay's notion of Transfeminist Materialism owes a great deal, positions the 'organising' of 'mutual care' as one of its foundational principles (255). Raha's poetry calls for a transfeminist mutual care on both a hermeneutic and thematic level: like Rich, she uses feminist history into a reevaluation of the textual present. In her own essay, 'A Queer Marxist Transfeminism', Raha positions Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson's Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries (STAR) as a 'queer and trans of colour domestic resistance' (119). 'Star House' was founded in 1970 by Johnson and Rivera, and 'consisted of four rooms, housing up to 25 street queens and homeless gays and lesbians at once' and was funded by 'sex work' and 'supplemented' by the 'maternal care' of Johnson and Rivera (Raha, 121) (*Transgender History*, 110).

In, 'priderant in five parts', another poem in *SBF,* Raha positions Rivera and Johnson as heroines of materialist transfeminism and a necessary antidote to monolithic queer capitalism:

gay pleasure industry ,, we
trying to excavate our
exterior / herstories, the un-
recovered & unfunded, the surface begins w/ Marsha
P. & Sylvia hustling to keep trans/
queer kids off the street, liberators of food
their all of the sidewalk
starts w/ the compton queens riot of 1966
/ that the trans*/queer past remains
outside of alt. minds, this
: our condition of poverty (*SBF,* 48)

While she recalls the, 'excavation', that favourite metaphor of Rich's, she revealingly transforms the depth metaphor implied by Rich's 'excavation' into 'the surface', to attend to the textual surface of those histories. Rich's 'dives' into feminist history become, in Raha's hands, a collection of textual pieces and a rubbing together of (lyricised) textual skins as opposed to an eroticised 'excavat[ion]'. Her analysis remains characteristically materialist: 'excavate'; 'surface', 'liberators' not of the mind but of 'food' and the printed page. She interweaves another foundational event of transfeminist history: The Compton Cafeteria Riot of 1966. The riot, recovered thanks to Stryker's *Transgender History,* prefigured the Stonewall Riots, and responded to the routinised violence against the primarily transsexual patrons of a San Francisco cafeteria (84-98). Such histories have previously been presumed 'unnatural' to feminism, dooming them to obscurity: 'that the trans*/ queer past remains/ outside' is 'our condition of poverty'. The poem then envisions a (trans)femme solidarity as embodied by the anthology itself to re-conceptualise 'what we may be':

> for what we may be
> the left from a future torched,
> working to deeper life
> , we: lost girls, broken femmes / deviant
> aching spines & flesh,
> built on the shuttered mouths of rape apologists (*SBF,* 124)

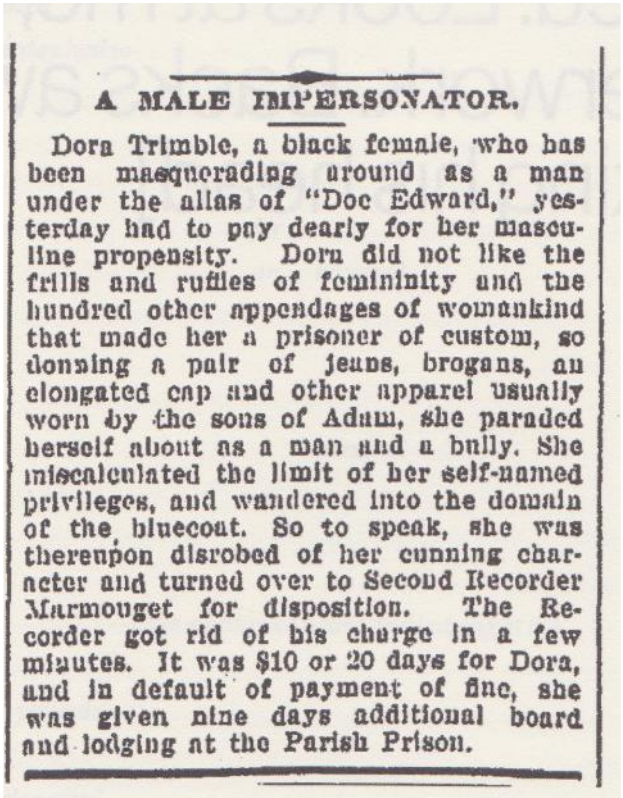
The collective pronoun ('we') is dislocated and self-consciously typographic, lost and broken and (trans)embodied. Raha's staccato, caesurae-studded verse animates a contorted and constricted femme subjectivity: in heteropatriarchy, 'femmes' becomes a synonym for 'deviant', an aberration from the assumption that the one viable life is masculine. Yet she highlights the artificiality of these conditions by noting that its hegemony must continually be verbally reiterated—a life as 'built on the shuttered mouths of rape apologists'. In the face of this, Raha finds a hope in the possibility of collective action and mutual care:

, vibrantly storms but does not just march, all
fed, a collective support
of all possible skins / builds (*SBF,* Ibid)

She champions the verbal agency of 'collective support' in which the pluralised 'builds' encompasses both the sense of 'body shape' and the cyborgian composite, but also the sense of the accommodation of difference as a productive force. In another essay on 'Transfeminine Brokenness', Raha outlines her intent to

> politicize our sense of feeling as a part of social and material injustice that must be transformed (636)

This, I think, is precisely what her lyrics intend to do, but they incorporate the lyric poem as itself another 'social and material injustice' requiring transformation. So doing, Raha valorises a formally and politically radical transfeminine embodiment actualised through its demand for a critical readerly attention.



A MALE IMPERSONATOR.

Dora Trimble, a black female, who has been masquerading around as a man under the alias of "Doc Edward," yesterday had to pay dearly for her masculine propensity. Dora did not like the frills and ruffles of femininity and the hundred other appendages of womankind that made her a prisoner of custom, so donning a pair of jeans, brogans, an elongated cap and other apparel usually worn by the sons of Adam, she paraded herself about as a man and a bully. She miscalculated the limit of her self-named privileges, and wandered into the domain of the bluecoat. So to speak, she was thereupon disrobed of her cunning character and turned over to Second Recorder Marmouget for disposition. The Recorder got rid of his charge in a few minutes. It was $10 or 20 days for Dora, and in default of payment of fine, she was given nine days additional board and lodging at the Parish Prison.

Figure 3: 'A MALE IMPERSONATOR' (*WWIA*, 81)

Another academic and poet, Cameron Awkward-Rich, similarly interrogates the notion of a lyric collectivity through his transfeminist historical interventions. In his poem included in *WWIA*, 'Everywhere We Look, There We Are', Awkward-Rich examines the way narrative media functions alongside the medical industry to erase trans agency. Like Banias, he manipulates the writing of the cisnormative state and its supportive apparatus to locate possibilities for trans agency. He takes as his antecedent textual material an article from a 1903 newspaper titled 'A MALE IMPERSONATOR' [Figure 3] which he reproduces in its original to stress its status as a textual material capable of historo-surgical transformation. The column outlines how 'Dora Trimble', a 'black female', was discovered to have been living his life as a man under the name, 'Doc Edwards', and, unable to pay a fine upon being caught, was sentenced to nine days in prison (I use he/him pronouns for Trimble). Trimble's black trans body becomes a spectacle through which the article's author reifies the sex/gender imperative.

Refusing to take the sustaining power dynamics of the article for granted, Awkward-Rich transforms the text into a lyric meditation on trans masculine representation which reaches a peak of complexity in its final section, titled '[that long honeyed pause between I am and caught.]'. If within the logic of the lyric form Trimble's 'I am' is his constitutive metrical rhythm it also represents his interval of authentic transmasculine (corpo)reality—'that long honeyed pause' prior to his exposure as a trans person. The original article, whose straight columns visually recall the absent presence of Trimble's prison cell, metonymically standing-in for the state's punitive curtailing of transmasculine desire and an ideological support for the sex/gender system. The section opens in medias res:

> dearly for her masculine propensity. Dora did not like the frills and ruffles of femininity and the hundred other appprisoner (88)

In fashioning a cyborgian portmanteau from the words 'appendage' and 'prisoner' he equates early twentieth century notions of femininity with the carceral logic with which gender nonconformity is regulated and punished. Trimble's agency is continuously foreclosed by the text's reiterated discovery of his trans status, forcing him into a slippage within the textual infrastructure of the sex/

gender system. Awkward-Rich trains his reader to investigate these gaps to locate the ways the patriarchal state functions to punish gender nonconformity:

> dearly for her masculine propensity. Dora did not like the frills and alias of "Doc Edwards," yesterday had to pay dearly for her masculine propensity. Dora did not like the frills and the ruffles of femininity and the happendage (88)

He explodes the syntax, heightening the breakages in sense and repeating phrases to an almost Steinian height of rhythm. The compound word 'happendage' adopts the double signification of 'happen'— as in the moment of discovery in which Trimble was exposed as 'unnatural'— and 'appendage' as a signifier of the transmasculine phallus. Trimble's absent phallus then becomes a presence in the text, a disruptive signifier of transmasculine existence. The expressive principle of Rich is inverted, forcing expression and agency to appear through a series of absences and silences:

> elongated cap and other apparel usually worn by the sons of Adam, she paraded herself about as a man and a bully. She miscalculated the. limit (Ibid)

The paper's hostility and vicious transphobia, signalled by the disparaging verb 'paraded', is resignified to connote the modern construction of 'pride parades', turning Trimble's capture into a redemptive demonstration of transmasculine pride. As the visually isolated word 'limit' implies, Trimble's transmasculine corporeality is found to present an epistemological disruption to the syntax of cis-heteropatriarchal media: a 'limit' to its truth-making but also a recognition that trans life has historically been made visible only through its 'limits', its dramatic, publicised exposures.

In a micro-essay, Awkward-Rich describes finding 'traces of Black/gender-nonconforming lives that flicker in and out of the official record' when researching historical archives ('Revising the Archive'). 'Flickering' is an apt metaphor: only through Awkward-Rich's repetitions and expansions does Trimble's life come into focus. He positions his reader alongside himself as historical researcher, not as the passive consumer of lyric assumed by some formulations of the expressive model but an analytical mode centred upon restorative historical hermeneutics. He repeats the 'frills and ruffles' line and continues:

and the hundred other appendages of womankind that made her
cunning(Ibid)

Awkward-Rich's lyric rereading of history recovers a 'cunning' transmasculine agency— a bravery in the face of state sanctioned violence. 'Cunning' is resignified to liberate the erotic connotation of 'cunnilingus' as a potential expression of transmasculine desire. At the poem's conclusion he strategically inverts the foundational logic of the article:

black female, who has been masquerading femininity and the
hundred other appendages of womankind that $
Dora Trimble (89)

The 'Trimble' of the article is exposed as itself a textually enforced masquerade and a carefully constructed instrument of propaganda. Isolated by caesura, 'Black female' signals a label of subordination to the subject who desires otherwise. Awkward Rich repeats the name 'Dora Trimble' each time evoking the materiality of the visual signifier, each time questioning its authority and coherence in opposition to its trans alternative: 'Doc Edwards'. The poem ends by resurrecting Trimble as a symbol of bodily autonomy and self-determination.

of Adam, she paraded herself about as man and a
self named (89)

His final diagnosis is not as a fraud but, in the indefinite article, one of many 'self named' transmasculine historical figures. By the poem's conclusion, Awkward-Rich has materially *transed* the 'wreck' by adding a transmasculine specificity to 'transfeminism'. Indeed, in his essay on 'Transfeminism', Awkward-Rich criticises Koyama's anglicisation of the term by claiming that it 'might simply be called feminism' and accuses her silence over the existence of transmasculine people as indicative of a wider, often critically overlooked tension within the notion of

transfeminism (836). In this poem, he opens the lyric 'we' of his title to affirm the centrality of transmasculine experience to transfeminist textual history.

To conclude, I briefly turn to a poem by Chinese-American poet Ching-In Chen which encapsulates the reader's function within the transfeminist collectivities of Raha and Awkward-Rich. Chen's poetry, while less historical in its interventions, shares their emphasis on linguistic materiality and intense interest in the gendering of lyric. 'Self-Portrait, house with no one present', included in *WWIA*, challenges the formal and social expectations of cisnormativity to identify its redemptive transfeminist readerly agency. Their opening metaphor of the 'expectant house' provides meta-poetic model for the complicity between lyric expectations and cisnormative society:

> in expectant house milk
> memory alone on porch we
> all borne from fat
> chemical (103)

By foreclosing their readers' attempts to find immediate sense, Chen creates openings for interpretive projection in which gender non-conformity can proliferate. Chen equates the expectation for 'lactation' (i.e. the necessity for human reproduction within the family unit), with the expectation for their gender conformity. If an 'expectant house' is a symbol of compulsory heterosexuality and the nuclear family, it remains diametrically opposed to 'we': the trans readership. Thus Chen opposes a cis-heterosexual, individualism to collective politics. The poem performs a shift from lyric solipsism: 'memory alone on porch' to an affirmation of human togetherness through a material, and textual, monism: 'all borne from fat'. Likewise, 'chemical' affirms the unnaturalness of this state and the composite status of the lyric relationship:

> a succession of hands visits shopping per usual for parts
> heard no trash calling
> me back home
> all smoothed away then we all write our names in stone

As we try and fail to locate the speaking subject of Chen's lyric utterance, we become increasingly aware of our own position as one of a 'succession of hands visits' to the poem. Our reading then becomes a kind of domestic labour, a routine 'shopping per usual'. The poem is a self-conscious assortment of domestic signifiers ('house', 'milk', 'porch', 'shopping', trash), a detritus that stresses its status a palimpsest of cultural connotation. Though it is 'all smoothed away', it concludes only when, in a flurry of collective action, 'we all write our names in stone'. The 'self named' agency of Awkward-Rich's gender-crossing transforms into a model of reading, and a material intervention performed by both reader and poet. Trans readerly agency becomes an inscription into a linguistic 'stone' but also the recognition of that material as a productive surface. Language and lyric then become a trans-gendered surface of immense potential for agency and subversion.

Conclusion: Sisterhood and Alienation

The poetry of Raha, Awkward-Rich and Chen demonstrate a transfeminist poetics that sees the lyric as a material intervention which locates trans agency in its encouragement of critical readerly engagement. They adopt the feminist lyric strategies of Kinnahan and DuPlessis to critique the assumptions of Rich's expressive lyric model. Yet, as I hope to have shown, there is far more that unites them with Rich than divides them. While each poet discussed possesses a unique approach to language and history, they all embody a transfeminist poetic in their critique of lyric's tendency to naturalise gendered hierarchies.

Many of these poets, particularly Banias and Awkward-Rich, transform the textual mechanisms that exclude and erase them. Unlike the contemporary 'gender critical' movement, their poetry is 'critical' in the sense that it challenges the structures of oppression rather than affirming them. Indeed, placing these poets in the context of the anti-trans backlash exposes the patriarchal and colonial logic which legitimates its arguments. From Rich's phantasmic presence in Raymond's text, to the subject-object divide of the lyric form, so much of this paper has revolved around the sister/alien dialectic (our ability to demarcate between in-and out-groups). Seen in this way, the lyric becomes an intersection between sisterhood and alienation: a complex artefact which models a material crossing between poles of corporeal difference and clears a space for intersectional potentialities.

Given further research, my study would benefit from a further analysis of the influence of race, as well as a comparison to the anthologies of innovative women's poetry (See Mulford, Critchley). Despite these limitations, this essay has offered a tentative, yet hopeful vision for a sisterhood grounded in transfeminist poetics of a critical materialism. So, in the face of renewed and intense transphobia, and the spread of dogmatic, reactionary rhetoric through the right-wing press, I conclude by offering a short list of principles derived from the strategies of the transfeminist lyrics of *WWIA* and beyond:

renegotiate boundaries/ investigate formal assumptions/ seek allies/ embrace the body as the site of taxonomic transformation/ question the gendered and raced constructions of the 'natural'/ locate intersections/ resist splittings

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