# 1AC---Weight---Dartmouth

#### There must have been a road that goes nowhere, something running over itself and looping and stretching, from nothing to nowhere. It could have been paved, or graveled, or cut into the side of mountains with the sharp edges of dreams gone rotten, but it had to have been there.

#### Because there had to be a place where a girl could go, alone and never lonely.

#### Things would have grown there. Maybe vines. Or clovers. Or long, tall, grass, rustling, singing to the tunes the wind whispers in their ears. Or maybe, there was just a place to rest, where a girl could have seen sunflowers, standing, staring, still and shaped. In resolute rows, they pause, regimented, like a battalion of soldiers saluting dawn’s break, crafting curves that shape the words: ‘they will dig up your bones.’

#### She must have written back, penning a letter, not in response, but extension, delivering, softly, another verse to what will be rooted in the Earth.

#### To my bones, dug up and held tight,

#### To my bones, dream-ravaged and sun-soaked:

#### Do not throw down roots. Let yourself be ripped forth, full of the thump, thump, thump of a heart long gone from your delicate caverns. Weave yourself together, like a quilt, like a library, like you know too much, or not enough to stay quiet, thump, thumping to the beat of a missing heart.

#### Oh, there are so many stories curved and carved into the arc of your hips, impressed into memory by the tension of everything you should have been, pressed apart by the desire for one more tale. Tell it.

#### Write it. Engraved, again and again, from cover to cover: if you cannot help but read these bones, all I ask is you write back.

#### She signs the letter and entombs the words. With dirt under her nails, she tries, restlessly, relentlessly, to bear the weight of beautiful things.

Thom and Peters 17, Chinese-Canadian writer, performance artist, mental health community worker, youth counsellor, and former social worker; American author. (Kai Cheng, Torrey Peters, 2017, “(Trans) Love and Other Scars: An Interview with Torrey Peters, Author of Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones,” Autostraddle, https://www.autostraddle.com/trans-love-and-other-scars-an-interview-with-torrey-peters-author-of-infect-your-friends-and-loved-ones-369764/, luna) \*brackets in original

“Do not fall in love with people like me

we will take you to

museums and parks

and monuments

and kiss you in every beautiful

place so that you can

never go back to them

without tasting us

like blood in your mouth”

– Caitlyn Siehl, “Do Not Fall In Love With People Like Me”

Sometimes I miss the girl I used to be: That ferocious, electric, take-no-shit girl, the kleptomaniac poet survivor girl who was not afraid to punch someone in the face if she needed (or wanted) to. That girl was weirdly charismatic in her affected fearlessness and fast-talking eloquence, her militant activism for the cause of her own survival, her searing need to love and be loved.

She was volatile, vicious, full of self-loathing. She could have started a revolution. And sometimes I feel her writhing in me still, that girl I used to be.

Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones, the latest novella by Torrey Peters, makes that girl wake up and dance for grief and joy. Set in a dystopian future in which bioterrorism has rendered humanity incapable of organically producing sex hormones (think Mad Max, except with testosterone and estrogen instead of water), it is at heart a razor-edged, slyly funny love story of two literally and emotionally scarred women whose explosive relationship changes them — and their world — irrevocably.

The narrator and protagonist of Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones is an unnamed trans woman (“Patient Zero”) who longs for the ease and luxury of the upper-middle class life that she lived before her transition.Yet she is irresistibly drawn to antagonist/deuteragonist Lexi, a tempestuous, working-class, gun-obsessed trans girl whose simmering rage culminates in an act of devastating bioterrorism.

The gut-wrenching spiral of their relationship forms the emotional core of the book, and it burns in every scene that features them, as in the moment when Lexi infects the narrator with the carrier virus that ultimately brings about the paradigm in which everyone must fight to choose their gender:

“There’s a prick as the needle goes in, and when I pull my arm back, the point scrapes my skin. By the time I’m instinctively cradling my arm, blood is welling up. I’m in disbelief, looking at Lexi, trying to understand how somehow, it could have been a mistake.

“Now you’ll have a scar too,” says Lexi.”

Peters is a literary trailblazer on many fronts — her works of short and medium-length fiction defy classic genre categorization, throwing aside the conventions of mainstream literature to delve into the darker aspects of trans women’s psyches and relationships with signature gallows humor.(Her first novella, The Masker, is a devastating character study of a trans girl trying to find herself in forced-feminization fetish culture.) Peters, a graduate of the prestigious Iowa Writers’ Workshop, also self-publishes as a politically conscious response to a literary world that “does not serve trans women.”

“The other benefit to self-publishing was that I can advertise that I give away digital copies for free,” says Peters. “No publisher would let me do that. I value readers more than profits, and given the chance, will always maximize my readership over my profits. The publishing industry as a whole is in trouble because they do the opposite.” Both Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones and The Masker are available on her website for pay-what-you-want or free.

“The entire project [of self-publishing] was about showing that there’s no barrier to access to emotionally move people,” she adds. “You don’t need a perfectly clean text, you don’t need an editor, you don’t need a press, all you really need is a will to write and an account with some self-publishing platform. The idea that you need a perfectly polished text to produce a work of art that people care about is a kind of gatekeeping. How many trans women have been denied on these kind of grounds? [Their] stories are important.”

It is precisely this commitment to the untold stories of trans women’s lives that allows Peters to create a narrative of emotional depth and accuracy that is rarely found in literary portrayals of trans women.In Lexi and the narrator of Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones, Peters paints portraits of two fully fleshed-out and flawed women in an affair that spans love, hatred, jealousy and regret — an impressive feat in a 70-odd page book.

The painful tension of the bond between Lexi and the narrator is pierces to the core of the struggle between internalized transmisogyny and trauma-bonded sisterhood that trans women share, as in this scene:

“I answered Lexi’s ad in the “t4t” section of Craigslist personals […] “Your girlfriend is really hot,” she said, and then paused and spun her beer coaster. “So, like, I don’t get why you’re here.” I didn’t know what to say. How do I tell a near-stranger that my girlfriend and I have only once had sex since I went on hormones? How that one time, with my cock hard and vulnerable, I looked down at her so gratefully […] just as she furrowed her brow and said disconsolately, “You smell different.” How just then, her face crumpled into tears? How I tried to get her to have sex anyway? How I wake every morning afterwards to her back, want to spoon her, but pull away from the chill of her grief, knowing that I beckoned it by my choice? […] Why did I want to meet Lexi? The answer is the things I can’t say.”

In this novella, Peters gives herself rein to go deeper into the intricacies of love between trans women — the chatspeak shorthand “t4t” and its implication of trans-for-trans love and sexuality is a recurring motif — than in any other work I’ve read.The gunpowder relationship between the vain, brand-obsessed narrator and the violently unstable Lexi resonates deeply with personal and political conflicts that most trans women must face in some way or another:

How do we choose to be trans in a world that hates us? Do we try and “pass” as best we can, strive to meet impossible beauty standards, align ourselves with cisgender people who offer us safety and comfort and simultaneously objectify us? Or do we try to carve out our own communities by tooth and nail, spit back in the face a world we’ll never really fit into anyway? Whom do we choose? Who will hurt us less? A cissexist society or each other?

In Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones, Peters captures this interpersonal and intrapsychic tension with heartbreaking precision: “A court of law, if a just one still exists or ever existed, might convict Lexi for her actions, but mine have been the thought-crimes: the cuts that no one could see or feel but Lexi. She had always known what I wouldn’t admit: I had been embarrassed of her […] I had been ashamed of the ways that I was like her, ashamed of the ways our transness made us sisters, if not lovers.”

Despite her enduring commitment to other trans women, Peters herself goes against the leftist-social-justice-warrior grain by resisting the idea of politically mandated community; instead, she articulates a concept of relationship based on “immunity,” or the freedom to choose.

“As a trans woman, I find the idea of immunity rather than community appealing,” Peters says. “What I just didn’t give a fuck? What if my baseline was ethical treatment of everyone, but what if beyond that, I get to choose my responsibilities and affinities for myself, rather than having them thrust upon me? […] I find crucial the distinction of choice over burden; the knowledge that I can safely fuck off to elsewhere if I so choose. I hang with trans women because I love them and understand them and want to care for them, not because I was somehow cosmically assigned to be responsible for them. I hope those women feel the same about me.”

The narrator of Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones puts it more caustically: “[Community was] a coven of trans women polyamorously fucking each other to biblical levels of drama over the soundtrack of Skyrim on PS3, all the while telling each other how shitty the world was away from each other, until they so confused micro-aggressions for deep violence that they walked around with knives in their boots and canisters of mace dangling from their purses.”

Girl, don’t I know it.

Love and the fear of loving other trans women are what transformed me, in the end. It allowed me to grow into someone softer and more open than the girl I used to be — and it has also destroyed me, tortured me, slain and buried me. Like many trans women, for a while I tried to forget who I was, tried to disappear as best I could. Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones is the kind that shakes and wakes that brave, mad, dangerous girl I used to be.

I’m glad. I have a feeling I’ll need her again, someday soon.

“Write what is missing in the world. Write the stories that could have saved you and weren’t there for you,” Peters says, in what sounds like both a prophecy and a pact. “I promise that you will have readers.”

#### It’s five-o-clock when a girl falls in love again.

#### It’s five-o-clock on this nowhere road and a girl and her shadow fall in love.

#### It’s five-o-clock when sawdust and sun make theater, stage, audience. Emulsifying, it’s a romance; it’s a tragedy. It’s a dance, on this road, it’s cricketsong cadence. It’s cicadas, it’s car-exhaust and someone else’s exhale – it’s company.

#### Shadows are consistent, so she falls in love, no pretense that this is storybook. Sometimes that’s all it takes. It will be five-o-clock again, on this road that goes nowhere, alone and never lonely and a girl will be falling in love with her shadow.

#### So she writes a confession.

#### To my shadow, my unhearing audience.

#### To my shadow, fierce, feral, full of fire.

#### Dance with me, like puppets somewhere between shelter and sacrifice. Is it your eyes that look in to mine, are mine yours?

#### When golden hour grinds to ash in the atmosphere, do we echo? Do we howl? Incessantly, we stumble, this goes no other way. Following, falling – caught, I have company. If we can’t be lonely, I can at least be grateful – what does it matter if words cut teeth, they taste like honey, stuck in the roof of my mouth.

#### All the sweeter for their depth. What could ever be sweeter than the bodies that spill forth in the dance of who I’m supposed to be.

#### She signs the letter. She seals it. She takes it and she burns. Smoke and ash spill forth, like vows, scratching and clawing and hoping to sink their teeth in clouds and dirt and dust, hoping to stay, leaving on the breeze.

#### She listens for words on the wind, restlessly, relentlessly trying to bear the weight of beautiful things.

Heaney 17, assistant professor of English at William Paterson University. (Emma, 2017, “The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory,” Northwestern University Press, luna)

Since the 1860s, experts accounted for same-sex desire through parsings of inverted gender, beginning with Ulrichs’s formulation and later expressed in terms such as “the intermediate sex” and “the third sex.” In the late nineteenth century, trans femininity emerged in sexological understanding as an extreme expression of this inverted condition. By the 1910s, as Jennie June was completing her memoir, researchers had discovered sex hormones, grounding an explanation of gender nonconformity as a result of a biochemical imbalance. In 1922, the year that June published a second memoir, surgical knowledge expanded to offer the surgical transformation of genitals as the defining event of “sex change.” Here and elsewhere in her memoir, June explicitly rejects these expert diagnoses of her body and mind. Subject 129 speaks from a time before the sexological model defined trans womanhood.2 Jennie June speaks from within a trans feminine sociality, still alive and well in the twentyfirst century, that refuses the sovereignty of the sexological model.

In resistance to the individualizing form of the diagnostic, each woman affirms her place in a sorority of women, including those women “who feel or have felt” the experience of being “girl-boys.” Their perspectives present a profound challenge to the accepted idea that penises ground male identity and vaginas ground female identity during a period in which men of science reevaluated the biological and chemical definition of sex. These men refused this challenge by insisting on the aspirational status of trans women’s sex. Through the medical conceit of the woman trapped in a male body—and this is the central claim of The New Woman— sexologists distilled the variety of trans feminine experience into this single entrapped figure that novelists and theorists then installed in fictional and theoretical narratives about gender, desire, and historical change.

The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory begins by addressing the historical occlusion of the experiences like those described in these epigraphs and the consecration of the single definition of trans femininity as the condition of “a woman trapped in a man’s body.” The book then charts the historical itinerary of a conviction based on this single definition that has medical, literary, and theoretical modes of expression. This is the conviction that trans feminine existence—the fact that people identified as male at birth later come to assert a female or feminine sex identity—is an enigma that invites investigation and, once solved, offers a blunt cipher that explains the fact that definitions of sex categories change over time, often in seemingly abrupt spurts that challenge the organization of society. The New Woman argues that Ulrichs’s formula and its diagnostic and popular conceptual offspring have lived on as the dominant popular explanation for trans feminine experience because this formulation has taken on the status of an explanatory figure in stories about the general relation between bodily structures and sex identity. At historical moments when this relation is being reevaluated, the trans feminine allegory reinserts trans women into a cis understanding of sex as that understanding is adjusted to account for historical change.3 These conceptual orderings attribute to the experts’ trans feminine model both a kind of absolute material ground for trope (actual castration) and the most ideated narrative (a story of a treacherous crossing). The forwarding of this story allows the writer to avoid the actual provocation of trans femininity: genitals do not ground sex in the way that cis people imagine, and all bodies can be penetrated and are thus vulnerable to social feminization. It is trans feminine life in its great diversity that presents this singular challenge to cis logic and not the Modernist period’s technological innovations in endocrinology and genital surgery.

This book identifies two cultural formations that are particularly significant in the maintenance of the trans feminine allegory at moments of historical change in the understanding of sex. First, interwar transatlantic Modernism, defined capaciously to include sexological and psychoanalytic as well as literary texts, concretized the figural status of trans femininity at a moment when the feminist woman and the effeminate homosexual became emblems of the historical forces that provoked a profound reorganization of the understanding of the categories of woman and man. Second, in the early 1990s, Queer Theory announced itself as an intellectual response to the limits of a previous feminism that took “woman” as its political subject. These Queer Theory texts revived and reinforced the figural assumption of the trans feminine allegory that the Modernists innovated during the period in which trans life was medicalized.4

The New Woman suggests that the installation of trans women in narratives that are about the conceptual reordering of sex attaches this allegorical association to trans femininity itself in popular understanding. The diverse lives, socialities, and experiences of embodiment of trans women are also bound by similarities of experience born of being positioned as trans women. Sexologists, psychoanalytic thinkers, Modernist novelists, and Queer Theorists have refashioned trans femininity as a figure that holds explanatory power regarding the sex and sexuality of cis people. This assumption that trans women’s very existence means something outside itself, something about the gender of a putatively cis general subject, imposes a representational disjuncture between trans self-knowledge and trans meaning. The itinerary of this presumption of figurality and trans women’s refusal of it in the long twentieth century are the focus of this book.

The book is divided into two parts; the first focuses on the Modernist period and the second on the period since 1970. Part 1,“The Modernist Allegory of Trans Femininity,” first examines the late nineteenth-century sexologists who gathered trans feminine self-descriptions from which they distilled the singular figure of the extreme invert as a type of person distinct from cis women and gay men. The sexological figure then grounded the medicalization of trans feminine life when endocrinological and surgical innovations enabled gender-confirming health care in the form of hormone injections and genital surgeries in the early twentieth century. Whereas nineteenth-century mollies and fairies functioned socially as women—and in the working-class districts of London, New York, Paris, and elsewhere continued to do so—the medicalization of trans femininity cohered in a nosology that required trans women to regard their bodies and sex as misaligned. This model insisted that trans women regard their womanhood as only an aspiration, in order to legitimate a program of hormone prescriptions and surgical sex change as a medical cure. This taxonomic specification and deliteralization of trans feminine life provided the expert trans feminine figure that grounded the literary and theoretical allegorical installations that followed.5

In the early twentieth century, Modernist novelists identified the emergent trans feminine type as a figure for a historical process: a realignment of gender through the feminist redefinition of woman and the historical emergence of homosexuality that redefined man. During this period, bourgeois women envisioned a partial escape from the material conditions that historically feminized them through political agitation for dress reform, education, divorce, birth control, and, most paradigmatically, suffrage. The period’s print culture offered bourgeois women the popular figure of the New Woman through which they imagined their transition from their mothers’ role of corseted wives to their future as individuals with sexualities, careers, and educational prospects, or, in short, with many of the qualities that define the masculine franchise. In the same period, the centering of the homosexual as a quintessential aberrant social type, and in particular the popular depiction of the extreme invert as a mincing and lisping effeminate, threatened men with the femininity that might lurk within them.

Freud was the first theorist to proffer trans femininity as a cipher for how gender works at this historical moment when genitals and assigned sex no longer fully accounted for who might be caught in an association with the feminine. In Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905) Freud uses sexologists’ distillation of the trans feminine invert and the earliest experiments with sex change to form his theory of inversion to explain the unconscious perversions of successful heterosexuals. The invert manifests the gender-confounding desires that the normal person sublimates or the neurotic represses. Thus, the figure of the invert that sexology has distilled from a range of experiences of actual people, in Freud’s treatment, represents the “perversion [that is] the original state [and] the universal predisposition of the human sexual drive” (Schaffner, 139).

Stemming from this direct metaphorical uptake of inversion, Freud develops the theory that sex identity itself hinges on the threat of castration, that is, by the threat that one could be made a woman.While every reader of Freud knows that woman has not been literally castrated, castration employed as a metaphor theorizes the social process that defines women by egoic injury. This figure of genital lack represents the social injury that is feminization. In these two metaphors—the lurking womanhood of the invert and the psychic catastrophe that becoming a woman represents—Freud is the first to task trans womanhood with clarifying the operation of cis sex.

The literary Modernist trans feminine had her most substantial foundation in these influential concepts and broad anxieties that Freud’s writing expressed and inflamed. Part 1 then traces the development of the expert trans feminine from psychoanalytic metaphor to Modernist literary allegory. Trans femininity pervaded the culture of Modernist circles, in part because trans feminine people were visible on the streets and theater stages of cities where avant-garde milieus took shape. International vaudeville stars such as Julian Eltinge, the Rocky Twins, and Bert Savoy introduced female impersonation to mainstream audiences in the United States and Europe.6 Among these performers, the American music hall performer Barbette was particularly influential in Modernist circles. She transfixed audiences in Paris with her performances and was the subject of a series of photographs by Man Ray that were commissioned by Jean Cocteau. The same Man Ray appeared in self-portraits as the female alter ego Rrose Selavy, citing trans feminine style. Mainstream theatrical female impersonation waned in the 1920s as these kinds of acts migrated to become mainstays of gay clubs that produced their own stars such as Harlem’s Lulu Belle (Wilson, 282). In an overlapping milieu, American blues songs evoked sissy men who serve as substitutes for cis women or, from the perspective of women speakers, steal away their men.7 From London to Los Angeles, from the 1890s to the height of media attention in the “pansy craze” of the early 1930s, newspaper articles reported on the pansy resorts, fairy balls, and painted boys that marked the urban underbelly. 8

These cultural formations came to prominence in a moment of historical change in fundamental understandings of bodies and sex role that occurred unevenly in accord with class and place. From the 1880s to World War II, the medical diagnostic conceit that inverts were sick collided with the working-class tolerance of same-sex acts and trans feminine identities that did not challenge the organization of society into the categories of man and woman. Throughout The New Woman I distinguish the former (the medical depiction of trans femininity) that I have called “the expert trans feminine” from the accounts of the many modalities of trans feminine life that I will call “the vernacular trans feminine.” This latter critical phrase refers to the identities and cultural practices of the fairies, mollies, and Maryannes who were visible members of working-class communities in the Modernist period. These trans feminine people often identified and were recognized as women. They wore dresses, plucked their eyebrows, used makeup, called themselves and each other by feminine names and pronouns, worked in feminized sectors (often as prostitutes), and engaged in sexual and other relationships in female roles.9 Modernist writers measured the sexological accounts of inversion that promised to explain modern gender with the vernacular trans femininity of the street and stage.

Interwar literature reflected this cultural visibility of trans femininity in both expert and vernacular forms. Mina Loy’s unpublished play The Sacred Prostitute (1914) features a trans feminine character called Love who seduces and undermines a character called Futurism, a representative of Loy’s misogynist Futurist brethren. Mae West’s The Drag and The Pleasure Man (1927) both depict trans feminine characters, reflecting West’s own dramaturgical debt to the female impersonators who inspired her (Robertson, 58). Hemingway’s novels are peppered with references to trans feminine fairies and male concern over who might be a fairy. 10 Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler’s The Young and the Evil (1933) depicts fairy and camp culture and the negotiations that queer people made regarding their relation to this culture.11

From among the Modernist works that addressed the trans feminine, The New Woman identifies an allegorical strain in works of British Modernism. The book traces the development of this strain through the work of Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Djuna Barnes. Their major Modernist works find a rich aesthetic and conceptual resource in the marriage of signifiers of vernacular trans femininity with Freud’s critical metaphors of inversion and castration. These works extend Freud’s sense that trans femininity could clarify theories of sex into stories in which trans feminine characters enable the rethinking of changes in sex over time. For Aldous Huxley, the story of the psychic hermaphrodite represents the historical change in sexed categories produced by sexology, psychoanalysis, feminism, and the social changes provoked by World War I. For James Joyce, sex change is the ultimate figure for the feminizing effect of desire. For Djuna Barnes, the story of the trans feminine Doctor O’Connor’s relation to her genitals reflects the experience of genital lack that defines woman. For T. S. Eliot, the Tiresian trans feminine represents the capacity to understand the sad effect of modern gender anarchy on eros. These Modernists were the first to claim that, although she might mean anything, trans woman must mean something.

The very diversity of the tenor of the allegory reflects that the Modernists understood the trans feminine to be affixed to the form of allegory as such. The appeal to the Modernists of the trans feminine is, in this sense, not only thematic but also formal. Peter Nicholls writes that Modernism is characterized by the presentation of the feminine as a “self-presence incarnate” that the writer captures in aesthetic forms (Nicholls, 3). It is the Modernists’ desire to call attention to this aesthetic process that distinguishes the Modernist allegorical manipulation of the embodied, somewhat grotesque, sexual woman from the Romantics’ outpouring of raw emotion in response to Woman as a “symbolic presence” representing nature and beauty. In this view, the Modernist writers’ clinical examination and aesthetic manipulation position their women characters as “absolute otherness” and so she offers a figure that “[protects] the poet’s self from the full recognition of identity with other people” (ibid., 4). Each writer considered in The New Woman evokes the trans feminine as just such an object through which to explore alienation from self and community.

The very form of allegory—its capacity to present a simple narrative as a means to investigate consequential and complex questions and to condense that narrative into a representative character—answers the Modernist desire to place in narrative the figure that sexologists distilled and that Freud infused with meaning. The trans feminine of literary Modernism is woman held in an essential state of figurality. Modernists ascribe to the character at the center of the trans feminine allegory the qualities of corporeality, essential sexuality, and enigmatic “absolute otherness” as naturalized features of her very status as a trans woman, just as the individual pilgrim always implies a meditation on faith and spiritual journeying. Put another way, these texts present any trans feminine character as an embodiment of the expert diagnosis of trans womanhood as an aspiration. Her presence implies her position within a standard narrative of dysphoria and striving that addresses questions behind the specific iteration of that story.

What were the material shifts in the experience of gender during the period for which gender nonconformity became the symbol? The Modernist period saw profound changes in the daily experience of gender in the United States, the United Kingdom, and western Europe. The period saw the coming of age of the first generation to be born into the era of widespread middle-class women’s higher education (SmithRosenberg, 247–49) and “employment in the expanding professional sectors of teaching, secretarial, nursing, and social work” (Terry, 62). Marriage reforms of the late nineteenth century gained recognition for “married women as civil individuals” (Pateman, 120). Labor militancy and leadership by women in labor organizing and new public leisure options for single women with their own income were prominent innovations in working-class life (Orleck, 31–52). The Women of the Left Bank, the first substantial community of cosmopolitan avant-garde single women “writers, book sellers, and salonnieres,” moved between New York, Paris, and London (Benstock ix). Militant suffragists in the United States and Britain began engaging in acts of civil disobedience and property destruction, submitting to arrest and often continuing the struggle while incarcerated through the tactic of the hunger strike (Lyon 94; Rowbotham, 77–91).

The emblem of these changes was the transatlantic popular figure of the “New Woman”who “imbued women’s activity in the public domain with a new sense of female self, a woman who was independent, athletic, sexual and modern” (Peiss, 7), often in contrast with a phantasm of the harem-bound enslaved wives of “the East.” The American “New Negro Woman” represented the potential of bourgeois African American women to shake off the cultural backwardness these women attributed to the legacy of slavery. 12 The cultural texts that celebrated the New Woman in the United States, Britain, and Europe installed her as a mark of civilizational progress, often in contrast to regional or national populations that these same texts marked as civilizationally lagging or even constitutionally backward. This book understands the New Woman as the popular version of a female liberation that made its claim in the language of the new and the modern. This narrative promised women access to male spheres and activities while they prepared themselves to be companionate heterosexual wives.13 Proponents of the New Woman contrasted this vision of freedom with the far-flung uncivilized societies of the present and with the Victorian patriarchy of the past.

This material and representational liberation for women corresponded historically with material shifts that men often felt deprived them of masculine freedom and priority. Economic shifts brought an unprecedented number of bourgeois men into offices that were heavily surveyed by bosses and did not require the physical labor that gendered work as masculine (Chauncey, 111). Women’s social purity movements for temperance and against prostitution made “men [feel] that women were trying to feminize them” (Greenberg, 387). The actual complexity and material bases for these changing social dynamics (the fact of women’s education, increased employment, and entrance into the professions) were mystified away by the popular understanding of these historical events as a simple case of “male domination [threatened] in the face of women’s aspirations to equality” (ibid., 388). The threat was both that the barrier between men and women was breaking down and that the hierarchy of man over woman was being challenged from below; these anxieties fueled a social project to reestablish men’s distinctiveness from women. This social project required the “[policing of] men who lacked [masculine] qualities just as much as women who exhibited them . . . continued male rule required that male effeminacy be repudiated” (ibid.). Trans feminine people, and their popular and medical typological representations, became the emblem of this repudiated effeminacy. For the Modernists, trans women as a figure for the new allegorized the relation between these two “New Women”: the rightsbearing cis woman and the repudiated effeminate.

The First World War amplified this crisis of masculinity that had already been underway by 1914 and connected it to genital status. Sandra M. Gilbert observes that battlefield genital injuries became a figure for modern anxiety about white manhood and that literature was a primary mode of expressing this theme.14 She writes that Modernism’s “gloomily bruised antiheroes churned out by the war suffer specifically from sexual wounds [and] become . . . not men, unmen” (Gilbert and Gubar, 198). The unman found his complement in the mass of single women who in the postwar period adopted the bobbed hair and narrow dress cuts that cast them as “beings without breasts, without hips” (Roberts, 19–45).15 In the literary works considered in part 1, the conceit that “masculine women and feminine men” were a modern invention provoked aesthetic examination, with the trans feminine as a crucial conceptual and aesthetic resource. This pair’s bodily rearrangement indicates the seeping influence of the gender nonconforming types of the prewar period into the general population of normal men and women after the war. By the 1920s, the trans feminine icon Quentin Crisp could report that all men “searched themselves for vestiges of effeminacy as they searched themselves for lice” (Crisp, 21). The novels that are the focus of The New Woman were written between 1914 and 1942. Each novelist finds trans femininity to be an apt figure for responding to these profound shifts in gender and sex.

Part 1 concludes by taking another pass through the Modernist period, this time focusing on life writing, including the texts by Case 129 and Jennie June with which we began. This vernacular material documents the lives of trans feminine people, in contrast to expert presentations of the trans feminine that the previous chapters outline. These texts offer examples of each woman’s understanding of bodily materiality: their sense of how body parts attain meaning in terms of sex, gender, and sexuality. Trans women reveal the relation between female identity and other kinds of feminized identities including girl-boy, fairy, wife, prostitute, and woman worker. Their words offer accounts of the material conditions of trans feminine life: the kinds of work that trans feminine people can do both when they are read as trans feminine and read as cis women, their options for housing and socializing, and their experiences of desire and gendered violence. In this way, part 1 concludes with a genealogy of trans women’s writing from the period that unknowingly pushes against the figural ascription of the Modernists. Trans feminine life in the Modernist moment offers resources for conceptual understandings of sex, but such an understanding requires consulting trans women as producers of their own accounts, not as figures in someone else’s literary or theoretical story. Part 1 concludes by tracing the reflection of these trans feminine material conditions and bodily logics in Jean Genet’s Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs, a late Modernist novel that engages trans femininity as a distinct cultural field and not as a figural wellspring.16

Part 2, “Materialist Trans Feminism against Queer Theory,” moves from the British, French, and German milieus that produced the trans feminine allegory to the largely American critical revival in the late twentieth century. Part 2 traces the installation of the trans woman as a figural cipher for the operation of sex into the foundations of Queer Theory. The New Woman argues that Queer Theory’s commitment to semiotic critical methodologies, a commitment inherited from the Post-Structuralist break that is the theoretical touchstone of Queer Theory, explains the reproduction of the form of the trans feminine allegory from its literary foundation.Texts from the 1970s by Barthes and Foucault that provided the conceptual scaffolding for Queer Theory proper (beginning with the American formation of the field in the early 1990s) installed the trans woman as the proof of the social construction of the gender binary. Beginning with the 1990 publication of Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble, the trans woman becomes the figure that provokes a move beyond woman as the subject of feminism. Subsequent work, including Butler’s most recent monograph that focuses on gender, Undoing Gender, extended the installation of trans life as figure. The New Woman traces Queer Theory’s figural engagement with trans femininity back to Foucault’s inattention to the historical process through which male same-sex desire is distinguished from trans feminine sex identity in his theorization of the emergence of the homosexual as a modern species. This is the fundamental theoretical claim of The New Woman: the emergence of the trans feminine as a field distinct from both male homosexuality and cis womanhood is a weighty historical corollary to the emergence of homosexuality. In the period, even as the discovery of hormones informed a more accurate view of sex variance, genitals became the seat of sexed truth. In other words, in the Modernist period, sex became cis. Many, with Modernist writers among them, viewed trans femininity as the most visible violation of this modern dictate, and the centrality of trans femininity to Modernism stemmed from these writers’ attempts to grapple with what this violation meant.

Part 2 concludes by presenting an archive of Materialist Trans Feminism after 1970. This work, like Modernist life writing, grows a theory from the logics, vocabularies, and concepts of trans feminine people and spheres.17 The book identifies this body of writing as “Materialist Trans Feminism” and suggests that this intellectual and political tradition accounts for two fields of the operation of sex and gender for which Queer Theory cannot account. First, Materialist Trans Feminism clarifies the ontological operation of sex as a power relation that forms around the roles of penetrator and penetrated, an operation that moves easily between the gendered meaning of anal and vaginal penetration. Second, while Materialist Feminism defines the category of woman as the social category that bears a historical relation to unpaid domestic work, Materialist Trans Feminism expands that analysis to account for the relation between trans femininity and criminalized commercial sex.

The recent mainstream media presentation of the fact of trans women’s existence reveals that the assumption of figurality forms the mode of addressing trans women and trans feminine people to this day. Time and Vanity Fair cover stories position trans women as new and eternally enigmatic, requiring investigation and interrogation so that their explanatory potential can be unlocked by the interrogator. 18 The medical protocol for trans health care likewise remains stuck in this Modernist formulation, requiring individual trans people to embody a story template in order to be officially sanctioned as transsexual and approved for gender-confirming health care services.19 Although many people, both cis and trans, experience alienation from their bodies based on experiences of sexual assault, gender,race,sexuality, illness, debility, conditions of labor, poverty, fatness, thinness, or other factors, The New Woman suggests that the diagnostic insistence that trans people are uniquely defined by alienation from the body denies the challenge to the cis understanding of sex that is posed by trans people who claim the right to determine the sexed and gendered meanings of their own bodies, with or without medical services.

#### June rain pelts with the violence of quiet things.

#### Thunder laughs.

#### A girl starts lost and loses herself, going nowhere, alone and never lonely.

#### It rains.

#### Droplets cascade, dance, rumble over shoulders and shins, grabbing, pulling apart every stitch at the seam.

#### Hers to feel and fear, pushed and prodded into the shape of something beautiful.

#### A bearable cost. Almost.

#### She pens a story, restlessly, relentlessly, trying to bear the weight of beautiful things.

#### Someone calls it impressive.

#### To my beautiful words, striking, moving, ambivalent, important.

#### Grow, like vines, grow voracious, voraciously eat, pick apart feeling and fatigue like carcass and carrion, reach hungry and ask for everything.

#### Ask me, on a cool enough May afternoon, still and quiet, the atmosphere still anticipating, an afternoon when I found a spider in my bangs, transmuting hair into silk, worlds being made on the bridge of my nose. An afternoon when I panicked, unsettled by the brutal fact of a body made into a home, that something could rest here.

#### Is this a metaphor for language? Is figurative language a window? Is looking into the depths of me all the fun with none of the risk?

#### Please, find yourself in me.

#### She signs and seals this letter, closes it, stamps it and leaves it behind. What other kind of ending is there for stories told while restlessly, relentlessly, trying to bear the weight of beautiful things?

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While trans monstrosity animated by rage is certainly one recognizable form of trans maladjustment, in The Terrible We I am more interested in figures and feelings endemic to trans life that cannot easily be understood as politically enabling or as “mobilize[d] . . . into effective political actions.”26 What “My Words” and the introduction to The Transgender Studies Reader share, after all, is a narrative of righteous trans anger that moves things along by puncturing trans-antagonistic conditions. But, despite the literal and metaphorical association of transition and transness itself with travel, mobility, and movement, trans life under racial capitalism is at least as much about stuckness, waiting, “lag time,” and recurrence—about living indef­initely, in Hil Malatino’s terms, “in interregnum, in the crucial and transformative moments between past and future, between the regime of what was and the promise of what might be.”27 Accordingly, the forms of maladjustment I think with—depression, dissociation, and asociality/withdrawal—are less like Stryker’s rage and more like Sianne Ngai’s “ugly feelings,” insofar as each offers a mode of investigating and perhaps bearing “ambivalent situations of suspended agency.”28

Finally, although I certainly use the language of feeling, I tend toward the word maladjustment to retain the associated negativity and baggage and to foreground constellations of feeling, thought, style, and habit. Further, unlike feeling, forms of maladjustment might be understood as chronic, marked by long durations, persistent enough that they can become the ground of identity—a relation comes to be understood as a condition. This is the crucial difference between, for example, feeling social anxiety and being a recluse, feeling depressed and being a depressive, trans desire/dysphoria and trans identity, and so on. Thus, forms of maladjustment, in my usage, contain, cause, or coincide with bad feelings—feelings that are experientially painful, understood as potentially pathological in a diagnostic setting, or politically impairing—but are not reducible to them.

In the remainder of this introduction, I set out to do three things. First, I lay out a brief account of how and why the “methodological distancing” from sick has shaped the intellectual and affective horizon of trans studies.29 Second, I offer an alternative entry point into the project—which is as much about trans literature as it is about trans thought—through a reading of Jack Halberstam’s reading of Carson McCullers’s The Member of the Wedding. I do so both because Frankie Addams’s plot and the way Halberstam took it up in the late 1990s serve as an apt allegory for the dynamic within trans thought that I seek to address and because Frankie herself helps me to clarify what, in this text, I take trans to mean. And, finally, I sketch the project in full, including an outline of its individual chapters and a primer on its (sometimes idiosyncratic) vocabulary and grammar.

Feeling Trans, Trans Authority

“Transsexuality,” Lucas Cassidy Crawford writes, “is a matter of affect at least as much as it is a matter of certain procedures of gender transition.”30 And while Crawford writes here against the harnessing of trans feeling into a single trans narrative, it is true that, over the course of the late twentieth century, we have witnessed the production and consolidation of what scholars have called the transnormative subject. Trans, that is, has become widely legible as a particular set of feelings (gendered unease, restlessness, suicidality) that necessitate a particular set of narrative movements (self-discovery, coming out, transition) for the health and persistence of the trans protagonist/subject within the terms of the liberal-imperial state. In this rendering, trans is a feeling that precedes, requires, and so justifies the project of medical or social transition, of living a trans life; for this reason, much ink has been spilled over the question of “what transsexuality feels like.”31 Although this book is undoubtedly another entry into that record, I conjoin it to a related question. Namely, “What does trans studies feel like?” After all, fields are a matter of affect, feeling, and desire at least as much as they are a matter of certain procedures of knowledge production.

As a book that adds to the objects of trans studies only insofar as it takes the emotional habitus of trans studies as its object, The Terrible We is most closely aligned with recent work in feminist and queer studies that has taken stock of how the institutionalization of the political desires called feminism, queer liberation, and antiracism has shaped the knowledge projects of women’s/gender studies, queer theory, and black feminism. Notable among these are Clare Hemmings’s account of the political consequences of the stories that Anglo-American academic feminism tells about itself; Heather Love’s attention to how present desires for emotional rescue shape approaches to the queer past, and to what queer studies might teach us about “living with injury—not fixing it”; Jennifer Nash’s diagnosis of black feminist defensiveness about intersectionality, what it enables and what it forecloses; Kadji Amin’s argument for, and modeling of, a queer studies driven by deidealization; and Robyn Wiegman’s taking very seriously that “objects of study are as fully enmeshed in fantasy, projection, and desire as those that inhabit the more familiar itinerary of intimate life.”32

Wiegman characterizes the psychic life of what she terms identity knowledges as being driven by the desire for critical practice to produce justice and the belief that our objects—and our relations to them—might deliver it. The institutionalization of this disciplinary structure of desire places an enormous burden on our objects to be “adequate to the political commitments that inspire” us and to, therefore, be good—desirable, politically enabling, conduits of good feeling, and so forth.33 Further, one of the ways that justice is routinely “figured” within such fields is “by claiming for minoritized subjects the right to study themselves and to make themselves the object of their study.”34 This definition of justice, in turn, produces a closeness between critics and our objects that, Wiegman suggests, makes it “harder to bear the psychic burdens” of the inevitable failure of our objects—of ourselves—to live up to our desires for them: “how much goodness, after all, must one attribute to her identity objects of study to withstand what it means to both represent and be represented by them?”35

Taking this account of the psychic life of identity knowledges for granted, it is easy to understand the assertion “I’m not sick” and the conversion of trans rage into enabling political and subjective movement as defenses of trans as a good object in Wiegman’s sense. Trans, Stryker insists, does not name the delusional, medicalized, politically retrograde “[dupe] of gender”; rather, it names a subject from whom and for whom we might produce justice.36 Indeed, although transgender appears within Wiegman’s book primarily as an object on which other critics have pinned their hopes, Andrea Long Chu and Emmett Harsin Drager have since applied Wiegman’s insights to account for what they see as the founding “disavowal of the transsexual” at work in trans studies.37 In their story, in order to understand trans (and therefore ourselves) as a “good object” capable of delivering justice, trans studies scholars have abandoned the figure of the transsexual and repeatedly perform this abandonment in order “to prove that we are no longer the medicalized transsexual,” who is, we all know, too desirous of normativity to be a theoretically viable political subject.38 Out of a desire to be resistant and radical, that is, trans studies has abandoned its proper object—“the only thing that trans describes that queer can’t”—and “severely limited our ability to fully understand trans pasts and presents.”39

While I share with Chu and Harsin Drager the sense that trans studies has been structured by a series of disavowals of trans pathology, bad (painful, pathologized, and politically retrograde) feeling, and mad thought, and although this project is, like theirs, an attempt to ask after what would happen if we thought with these disavowed figures and feelings, it is insufficient to understand the present of trans studies as only the outcome of our own political and affective attachments.40 Among other things, what Chu and Harsin Drager do not admit into the story of identity knowledges writ large is that such knowledge projects inevitably unfold in political and material contexts in which minoritized subjects’ speech is constrained from the outset by the necessity to appear as subjects capable of authoritative speech at all. Only very recently, that is, has it been possible to speak as trans in nontrans contexts—though still, certainly, not all—without that speech being dismissed out of hand as “the confused ranting of a diseased mind.”41 If identity knowledges are, at least in part, projects of securing for minoritized people the authority to be subjects, as well as objects, of knowledge, then we cannot ignore that there are many concomitant factors—chiefly, the uneven distribution of life chances under racial capitalism, the animating context of scholarly desires for radicality—that influence the shape that such fields take. Put another way: while at the outset I, too, set out to understand trans studies’ disavowals as the outcome of intimate and collective desires animating the field, I am mindful of the fact that those founding disavowals, both for better and for worse, enabled trans subjects to emerge into the academy in the first place.

In an essay collected in the 1999 anthology Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siècle, Stryker notes: “While it remains impossible to speak of a single unified transgender movement with clearly articulated goals, it is certainly true that one aim of many activists is to do for gender identity disorder what gay liberation did for social scientific accounts of pathological homosexuality—that is, to make transgender people themselves, rather than their self-appointed clinical caretakers, the ultimate authority about transgender lives.”42 As with other knowledge projects linked to minoritized identities, the goals of early work in trans studies were bound up with the goals of the transgender movement. Indeed, in Stryker’s articulation of trans politics here, the transgender movement and transgender studies might be indistinguishable, given that “the aim of many activists” was precisely to establish a discourse in which it would be possible for trans people to be regarded as the “ultimate authority about transgender lives.” While this demand for authority arguably animates all minoritarian scholarship, it is a particularly fraught issue in institutionalized forms of trans studies, given that trans identity has been and continues to be described in the language of psychiatric disorder in particular and of madness more generally.

As mad and critical disability studies scholars have noted, there is a way in which the conjuncture of madness and intellectual authority—and, therefore, “mad” and “studies”—presents a clarifying contradiction.43 To the extent that having rhetorical/interpretative authority “means making sense and a [mental] diagnosis is in many ways to be labeled as speaking nonsensically or with the wrong kind of sense,” then, within the protocols of rationality that organize the university, speaking from the position of one so diagnosed undercuts one’s ability to speak.44 Speaking madly risks literal and rhetorical confinement or, at the very least, the dismissal of one’s sense as nonsense. Especially in the early stages of the field’s formation, then, when trans identity was much more universally regarded as a form of madness, trans scholars’ rhetorical claims to authority were caught within a persistent double bind. How, after all, does one stake a claim to know through a category that renders one’s knowledge about oneself and one’s world suspect? Under these conditions, to make claims as a trans person was simultaneously “an act of complicity with our own erasure, for no one need listen when we claim a place for our voices in theorizing about us.”45

In response, trans studies proceeded largely by dismissing pathologizing discourse about trans lives altogether.46 The first academic performance of this dismissal—one that models, perhaps even generates, a particular set of rhetorical moves that have since been taken for granted—can be found in Sandy Stone’s pathbreaking essay, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto.” While Stone’s essay is primarily a response to anti-trans strains of radical feminism—which I will take up in chapter 2—the essay also functions as a repudiation of psychiatric discourse in order to legitimize knowledge produced by trans people. Indeed, before the manifesto reaches its most obvious and most often remembered target, Stone takes on psychiatric texts that link trans identity to mental illness and characterize transsexuals as a class of “depressed, isolated, withdrawn, schizoid individuals.”47 By pointing to irregularities in the research subjects represented in the pre-1980s studies that produced this and similar claims, she then immediately undermines the studies’ validity: “In each paper, though, we find that each investigator invalidates his results in a brief disclaimer. . . . In the first, by adding ‘It must be admitted that Lothstein’s subjects could hardly be called a typical sample, as nine of the ten studied had serious physical health problems’ . . . and in the second, with the afterthought that ‘82 percent of [the subjects] were prostitutes.’”48 Undoubtedly, a sample that isn’t representative of a population should never stand in for that population, and such studies have had lasting negative effects on trans life. That said, there are several assumptions underlying Stone’s argument that have subsequently been incorporated into much (especially mainstream) trans-affirmative discourse. First, that sex workers— likely poor, perhaps nonwhite—and disabled trans people are not and should not be considered representative, should not appear at the center of discourse about trans lives. Second, and relatedly, that if the transsexuals represented in these studies are “depressed, withdrawn, schizoid individuals,” it is because they are sex workers or disabled—trans, that is, has no relationship to sick, but these other marginalized social positions might. And, finally, that depression, withdrawal, and a (too-)rich inner life are characteristics that cannot be incorporated into forms of agential and authoritative personhood, that in order to do work that affirms trans people as living viable lives, forms of maladjustment must always and only be seen as coming from the outside.

My point is twofold. First, and simply, in moving away from such dismal accounts of trans life altogether, we risk doing away with the people whose lives both far exceeded and provided the raw material/data for them. And, second, relying on a concept of authority that requires disavowing any relation between trans identity and mental illness paradoxically works to reproduce the logic of the medicolegal system in the moment that trans thinkers try to escape its purview—insofar as this strategy consents to the equation of the production of usable knowledge with medicolegal norms of emotion, cognition, or sociality. Stone’s essay, therefore, represents both an indispensable founding gesture of trans studies and also a way of “working to become non-disabled” that “reinforce[s] the idea that there is something wrong with those disabled people [that trans people] are trying to distance themselves from.”49 While I’m certainly sympathetic to the desire to wholly repudiate self-appointed caretakers’ claims to describe trans lives, the form and effects of this repudiation often too closely resemble the mother’s insistence that her son is well-adjusted and, therefore, not sick. That is, in Stone’s essay, too, the white (post)transsexual emerges as a viable political/academic subject through the reduction of and distancing from racialized/disabled lives via the insistence that trans ≠ sick.

By the 2010s, transgender studies had extended far beyond the terms of these founding scenes. Now, the steady proliferation of anthologies, journals and special issues, conferences, and so on is testament to the fact that trans scholars are no longer primarily tasked with producing ourselves as subjects, as well as objects, of knowledge. To the contrary, the interdisciplinary field has produced a range of inquiries that foreground trans not primarily as a coherent category of people but, rather, as a lens through which to ask and answer questions about governance, aesthetics, the history of science/medicine, digital culture, geopolitics, political economy, literary history, and so on.50 The preoccupations of scholars in the field, therefore, decreasingly involve questions about what or who trans names and increasingly involve ones about what the production and regulation of gender-nonconforming lives, practices, and perspectives allow us to know.

My somewhat obsessive return to what is often taken to be the beginning of trans studies, then, is not an attempt to deny or downplay the sheer bulk and variety of work that has since been produced under its name. However, as trans studies is increasingly institutionalized—and, concurrently, as trans bodies, lives, and narratives increasingly circulate in mainstream representation—it is vital that we think critically about the effects of the stories about trans that undergirded trans studies’ often para-institutional emergence. Returning to “the beginning” of the field is necessary because, following Stone’s example, much work has been done that argues for a productive nonidentity between diagnostic standards of gender and trans self-knowledge, but we have yet to fully take stock of how diagnostic standards of emotion and cognition similarly shaped, and continue to shape, trans discourse.51 In particular, founding scholars’ disavowal of sick both enabled transgender studies and produced a particular mood—an emotional habitus, a space of shared pathos—that has delimited the horizons of the field.

I borrow the term emotional habitus from Deborah Gould’s extension of Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. Emotional habitus is also a phrase that describes the juncture of the social and the bodily, how it is that social norms and structures come to be embodied, to reproduce themselves through human action that nonetheless feels innate, like common sense. However, Gould extends the concept of habitus in order to register that, in addition to providing individuals with a shared understanding about action and bodily comportment (what to do and how), social groups also provide members with habits of feeling (what and how to feel, how to name feelings, and how to interpret them). “An emotional habitus,” Gould argues, “contains an emotional pedagogy . . . in part by conferring on some feelings and modes of expression an axiomatic, natural quality and making other feeling states unintelligible within its terms and thus, in a sense, unfeelable and inexpressible.”52 In turn, what is feelable and expressible shapes political and intellectual horizons, what kinds of actions, aims, and modes of interpretation are collectively understood as “possible, desirable, and necessary.”53

Further, Gould’s focus on social change, rather than on social reproduction, causes her to emphasize that habitus “are dynamic and always subject to alteration. For their reproduction, habitus must be reinstated [and therefore] . . . are historically contingent, requiring us to investigate the practices that generate, stabilize, reproduce, and sometimes transform them.”54 Indeed, there are numerous examples within trans scholarship of the reproduction of the emotional habitus of trans discourse that I describe above, in which justified anxiety and rage about the delegitimization of trans authority using the idiom of mental illness leads to a wary watch for and reflexive repudiation of pathologized forms of feeling and habits of thought. For example, counter to the view of trans people as “helpless and afflicted,” Dean Spade wonders, “What would it mean to suggest that such desire for surgery is a joyful affirmation of gender self-determination?”55 Several essays collected in The Transgender Studies Reader 2—which, if The Transgender Studies Reader gave the field a name, could be said to be the anthology that records what trans studies became—likewise frame their interventions, explicitly, as movements away from stagnant bad feelings imposed on trans people toward better ones. Julian Carter frames a meditation on trans movement and relation by doing away with the “depressive figuration” of embodiment as a trap; Jeanne Vaccaro’s articulation of a transgender “politics of the handmade . . . put[s] pressure on so-called negative emotions or bad feelings like ‘feeling trapped in the “wrong” body’ as foreclosing of certain affective possibilities”; Eliza Steinbock closes an essay on the film Dandy Dust with a call for “groping theory,” which, driven by curiosity, might help us gain some distance from “horrible things”; well, you get the picture.56 Further, the anthology includes an essay—written by a transgender physician who specializes in trans health care—that takes this emotional habitus as one of its objects, critically examining the arguments surrounding the GID debate; notably, the editors introduce the essay with the caveat that its model of trans identity is insistently “dissonant” with the rest of the reader.57

While The Terrible We, of course, does not set out to contest the critical value of potentially good trans feelings—euphoria, curiosity, hope, earnestness—nor to mire trans studies permanently in the well of loneliness, it does contend that the emotional habitus undergirding much trans[masculine] discourse is structured around a series of disavowals, and the thing disavowed in each case is a proximity to forms of maladjustment associated with the clinic, the dime museum, the madhouse, and the dissociative rhythms of some trans childhoods. Although distancing trans from these sites has been important for authorizing trans voices, each disavowal contains within it a familiar body onto which bad feelings are repeatedly pinned—the girl, the disabled or mad person, and the person of color. Importantly, the structure of disavowal guarantees that these figures will perpetually haunt the version of trans discourse that I have described, because disavowal is premised on recognition; precisely by attempting to disavow an attachment, the attachment is foregrounded, sticks around. In thinking through this set of problems—how the attempt to narrate trans through a disavowal of sick produces others as not-subjects, and how we might think with trans maladjustment to avoid this effect—I am arguing for a version of trans studies that can acknowledge and think with a more expansive we, terrible though it might feel.

#### Alone, she decides to make sure that she is never lonely.

#### This letter is to evil deceivers and make believers

#### This letter is to girls that can’t get over it

#### This letter is to take-no-shit poet-survivor girls

#### This letter is to transsexuals

#### Restlessly, relentlessly, trying to bear the weight of beautiful things.