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Concealing Gender Non-Conformity: A Trans Phenomenology of Disability[1]

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ABSTRACT: Cissexist perception involves a prejudicial judgment and an unmediated affective response, such as that of disgust, directed at the gendered aspects of another person. In this paper, I advance a view of how cissexist perception harms disabled people. On this view, there at least two morally problematic aspects of cissexist perception: that it has painful effects, and that it restricts bodily agency. I defend this claim through an analysis of a double bind faced by people subjected to cissexist perception: on the one hand, such individuals are pressured into avoiding certain environments to dodge dangerous predicaments that can arise on behalf of looking different from others; this constitutes unfair exclusion from an environment and under some conditions causes pain. On the other hand, to avoid dangerous predicaments, targets of cissexist perception are pressured into concealing their gender non-conformity to fit into certain environments; concealing frustrates their bodily agency. I conclude with remarks about how trans-affirming artwork may have the capacity to interrupt cissexist perception.

KEYWORDS: disability; cissexism; cissexist perception; gender transition

Cissexism, fundamentally, is a form of discrimination that construes a trans person's gender as less legitimate than the gender of cis people. For example, individuals, organizations, and governments may refuse to respect trans people's lived experiences in certain ways such as preventing trans people from obtaining legal documentation that contains the correct sex marker or restricting their access to gendered spatial locations (Serano 2013, 45; see also Serano 2016). Cissexist perception is a mode of perception that involves a prejudicial judgment and an

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unmediated affective response, such as that of disgust, directed at the appearance or behavior of the gendered aspects of another person (see Bettcher 2007; Al-Saji 2014; Salamon 2018; Zurn 2021a). Yet, this mode of perception harms many people, including people who do not identify as trans and who would not describe themselves as transitioning, and its impacts are e*specially sensitive to and intersect* with other forms of discrimination, such as ableism and racism. While the intersections of cissexist perception with other forms of discrimination is receiving increasing attention in critical phenomenology, it is still relatively underexplored (see Zurn 2021a). In this paper, through reflection on my own experiences as a disabled trans woman, I advance a view of how cissexist perception harms and shapes the lives of disabled trans people.[2]

I structure this paper through an exploration of a double bind, which is a technical term employed to refer to a situation where, because of unjust social conditions such as cissexism, all options for acting involve costs or harms (Bateson et al., 1956). I explore the double bind of cissexism by developing a trans phenomenology of disability.[3] On the one hand, trans individuals are pressured into avoiding certain environments to dodge dangerous predicaments that can arise on behalf of looking

[2] I am approaching transness through the lens of disability, which is referred to as a 'disability politics of transness.' Eli Clare (2013) coined the phrase "disability politics of transness" in his work on gender dysphoria. Clare, entering a debate about whether gender dysphoria constitutes a physical disability, argues that conceiving of gender dysphoria as a physical disability covers over the experience of disabled trans people who experience gender dysphoria. Clare writes: "I often hear trans people—most frequently folks who are using, or want to use medical technology to reshape their bodies—name their trans-ness a disability, a birth defect" (262). The framing of gender dysphoria as a physical disability, though, has been politically problematized for reinforcing ableism and alienating disabled people in trans communities (Puar 2014, 78). As Jasbir Puar (2014) understands this complexity, the disabled body must become exceptional to overcome its limits, whereas the trans body, through medical procedures, can be (is seen to be able to be) rehabilitated (77).

[3] The trans phenomenology of disability I develop here is somewhat distinct from what others have called a *crip* phenomenology. Kim Hall (2021) distinguishes her crip phenomenology from a phenomenology of disability in such a way to further current understanding of how ableism and heteronormativity mutually reinforce one another in addition to other structures of violence, "to shape experiences at the edge of ability and disability and the possibility of queer crip movement in and through worlds" (1). My approach is not necessarily interested in compulsory heterosexualism, nor queer embodiment, but we both are interested in how social conditions that intersect with ableism structure the possibilities for certain individuals to move through the world. I am specifically bridging phenomenology of disability, which describes the common lived experiences of becoming disabled, or common bodily reconfigurations related to living with a disability in an ableist society, with my approach to trans phenomenology, which I use to describe the lived experience of medical and social gender transition as well as the experiential results of such transition. Hall concludes with a critique of how compulsory heterosexuality intersects with ableism, whereas my approach concludes with how cissexism intersects with ableism. I am not claiming to uncover an entirely distinct critique of oppressive social conditions. A crip phenomenology and a trans phenomenology of disability should be read alongside one another since many trans people are, in fact, queer, and many queer people are, in fact, trans.

different from others, like violence and harassment; this constitutes unfair exclusion from an environment and under some conditions can directly cause pain. On the other hand, to avoid such dangerous predicaments, trans individuals are pressured into concealing their gender non-conformity to fit into and access certain environments; this concealing frustrates bodily agency (cf. Frye 1983) and can frustrate gender transition as well.[4] That cissexist perception can restrict bodily agency means that it can constrain how those whose gender presentations do not match societal standards can move in and through the world, inhibiting possibilities to act upon certain intentions and desires. Yet, cissexist perception not only oppresses by constraining bodily movement, but by causing pain. An example of this pain is when to avoid harassment trans people withhold themselves from using gendered public bathrooms, which can lead to health issues (Bagagli et al., 2021). Axiomatic to this paper is a normative claim that people ought to have the freedom and opportunity to pursue gender transition goals absent these harms.[5]

I am interested in issues related to pain, ableism, and cissexism because of my own lived experience as a disabled trans woman. I am diagnosed with a disorder that causes GI bleeding as well as with a rare disorder termed Median Arcuate Ligament Syndrome (MALS). MALS consists of the compression of the celiac trunk by the median arcuate ligament and is found in 2 out of 100,000 patients (Grotemeyer et al., 2009). It is most diagnosed in young females, occurring in a female to male ratio of 4:1. Its symptoms include bloating, abdominal pain, weight loss associated with food avoidance due to pain caused by eating, nausea, and vomiting. The abdominal pain associated with MALS is intense and is thought to be neurological or caused by the median arcuate ligament pinching the celiac plexus nerves over the celiac artery. The sensation of the pain is often described as similar in nature to the pain in the hands of a patient with carpal tunnel syndrome: intermittent shock-like, burning stab, aching sensations. Suffering from this kind of long-term pain can disrupt a person's pursuit of her life projects by restricting bodily possibilities for acting in the world.

When I refer to disability, I am referring to the lived experience of bodies marked against culturally situated ideals of able-bodiedness or bodily abilities referred to when marking a body as a 'normal,' 'typical,' 'standard,' 'average,' or 'healthy' body. These cultural ideals are often referred to in disability studies vis-à-vis the *normate* (Garland-Thomson 2017; Reynolds 2019; see also Clare 2017). Disability, then, is the lived experience of nonnormate bodies. Importantly, not all disabilities involve pain or suffering. Understanding this is crucial to defeating the long-held belief that

[4] While there is an asymmetry to the double bind insofar as pain may seem more harmful than a frustration to gender transition or a restriction to bodily agency, the point of a double bind is that there is no exit from the situation. One will be harmed either way.

[5] My claim is not that disability ought to be prevented. My focus is on the social conditions which could be ameliorated to create a more accessible world for disabled trans individuals.

disability, by definition, involves pain and suffering; this is a portion of what Reynolds (2022) terms the 'ableist conflation' in philosophy, which obscures the concept of disability (see Reynolds 2022, 12). Further, in this paper, I am not making any metaphysical claims about the relationship between 'disability' and 'trans.' However, as many disabled trans authors have argued, trans lived experience is intimately entangled with disabling social conditions (Awkward-Rich 2022; see also Clare 2013; Puar 2014, 2017; Baril 2015a, 2015b; Cavar and Baril 2022). Both disability and trans experience are better understood through an analysis of disabled trans experience; there are gendered dimensions to ableism, and ableist dimensions to cissexism. A disabled person with a bodily impairment might experience her impairment as more burdensome after initiating a gender transition due to cissexist social conditions, such as how gendered spaces can become more difficult to access, or how experiencing gender identity harassment in the workplace can cause financial and economic struggles.[6] An otherwise healthy trans individual may experience disabling social conditions such that she becomes disabled, like developing a physical impairment or a mental illness as a result of transphobic violence. Or an autistic woman who does not identify as trans but whose gender presentation does not match cissexist societal standards may nevertheless be harmed by cissexist perception.

In section 1, I offer a self-actualizing model of the relationship between gender transition and pain. In section 2, I defend the first half of the double bind, showing various ways that cissexist perception functions to exclude trans people. In section 3, I defend the second half of the double bind through an analysis of common bodily reconfigurations performed in response to safety demands to conceal gender non-conformity from cissexist perception. I conclude with remarks on how trans-affirming artwork may have the capacity to interrupt cissexist perception.

§1 A Self-Actualizing Model of Gender Transition

In this section, I offer a self-actualizing model of gender transition, i.e., I give a definition of such transition in part drawing upon my own lived experience. Identifying common structures of the lived experience of gender transition puts me in a position to discuss the double bind that is the focus of this paper, though I do not take my phenomenology to be a universal explanation of transgender experience. My account of gender transition, which I refer to as the self-actualizing model of gender transition, has three relevant features: (1) gender transition is a process of bringing greater alignment between one's gendered embodiment and gender goals;

[6] Kafer (2013, 154–7) argues that bathrooms in particular are sites for coalition building among disabled and trans individuals. I am thankful to a reviewer for bringing this point to my attention.

(2) the pursuit of gender transition goals is not a linear process with determinate endpoints, but is a complex life project frequently disrupted by social conditions; and (3) self-understanding of oneself as having a particular gender identity is not a necessary component of a gender transition.

With respect to the first feature of the self-actualizing model of gender transition, Merleau-Ponty's work on the concept of the body schema as well as body image has been employed to describe some common aspects of the embodied experience of a gender transition. For the purposes at hand, I understand "body schema" to refer to a person's bodily possibilities for movement in and through the world and to her embodied habits related to those possibilities (Kimoto 2018, 17; see also Merleau-Ponty 2012, 142–143; Gallagher 1989). "Body image" refers to the subject's conscious reflection upon her possibilities for movement in and through the world and upon her embodied habits (Ibid.). These concepts have been used to discuss how trans subjects "mobilize around their body image to sustain their life projects" (Rubin 1998, 271; cf. Bettcher 2020). On this view, gender transition is a process of bringing greater alignment between gendered aspects of one's body schema and body image. More succinctly, I define gender transition as a process of bringing greater alignment between one's gendered embodiment and gender goals.[7]

While Merleau-Ponty's concepts of the body image and body schema have been helpful for describing gender transition, it is important to highlight that this method has been critiqued for providing an abstract account of the body that decenters the role of race in embodiment. Tamsin Kimoto (2018) offers reflections on this by turning to Fanon's account of the historico-racial schema as a "correction of the relatively abstract body in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account" (2018, 18; see Fanon 1986, 111). This historico-racial schema draws attention to how Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body schema assumes a body that lives in a pre-reflexive harmony with its surroundings. One insight from Fanon's discussion of the historico-racial schema is that objects or spaces which may appear accessible can suddenly become inaccessible or problematic when subjected to, for example, the white gaze.[8]

The second feature of the self-actualizing model of gender transition is that this model does not depend upon a notion of gender identity. I am following the prevailing view in trans theory, which is that trans is a movement or an experience. As Susan Stryker explains, trans is "movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place" (2017, 1; see also Heidenreich 2020, xix–xx). Trans is a noun-rooted verb; "it is a concept that concerns the treacherous pursuit of gender transgressive desire" (Dembroff *forthcoming*, 4). When I use the term gender

[7] The habits of gendered embodiment are both social and individual. Gendered embodiment can refer to the gendered dimensions of how others treat the person or to the shape and style of the body itself.

[8] I expand upon the racialized aspects of trans lived experience in section 2 of this paper.

transition, then, I am not using it just in reference to individuals with a transgender identity, but to people who can be described as performing "costly and willful gender deviance" (Ibid.). Crucially, since gender transition does not depend on gender identity, the self-actualizing model of gender transition accommodates a diverse range of people who engage in willful gender deviance[9] but who may refuse to be categorized as having a transgender identity.[10] Regarding the concept of gender transition, it is important not to reduce gender transition to a static property in the mind of an individual such as framing it as a process of pursuing a gendered embodiment that 'fits' one's gender identity, since not every person who engages in the willful pursuit of gender transition goals identify as trans (see Dembroff forthcoming).[11] Any attempt to reduce gender transition to a concept of gender identity

[9] Dembroff (*forthcoming*) specifically argues that trans experience is a costly and willful pursuit of gender deviance since they are offering an ameliorative analysis of trans experience. However, I am dropping the condition of trans experience being costly because I am not offering an ameliorative account of trans experience and because, on my view, a gender transition does not necessarily entail a painful or costly experience.

[10] For example, consider travesti identification. Travesti, a Spanish term that comes from the verb *travestir* or 'to cross-dress,' has no universal meaning, but Machuca Rose (2019) describes one way the term is used in the context of Argentinian people assigned male at birth: "The travesti is the body that cross-dresses and becomes a type of person, the travesti subject. Travesti is not woman and is not trans. Travesti is classed and raced: it means you do not present femininely all of the time because you cannot afford to. . . . Travesti is the refusal to be trans, the refusal to be woman, the refusal to be intelligible" (242–243). Importantly, travesti identification refuses disarticulation from the multiple ways in which gender transition intersects with race, class, ability, and other forms of difference (Rizki 2019, 148; see also Wayar 2018). I have left the term travesti untranslated because, as Santana (2019) explains: "if we want to decolonize trans studies, it is important to understand that the resistance of translating travesti to just 'trans woman' in English without contextualizing it comes with the risk of erasure of that history of fight in that part of the trans and black diaspora that is indexed by that term. It is also an invitation to think in which extent we are talking about *trans*, *trans woman*, and *gender nonconforming*, for instance, which are grounded in a local and Anglophone context, as reference of universality and unquestioned translation" (213). My model of gender transition affirms this concern by defining gender transition at the level of lived experience and refusing to think in terms like gender identity. As a refusal, travesti identification "is a negation of an imposed dominant expectation of womanhood that centers on people who are cisgender, heteronormative, able-bodied, elitist, and white" (Santana 2019, 213). Rizki (2019) further explains that travesti identification operates as a politics, a critical mode, and an epistemology: "As a politics of refusal, travesti disavows coherence and is an always already racialized and classed geopolitical identification that gestures toward the inseparability of indigeneity, blackness, material precarity, sex work, HIV status, and uneven relationships to diverse state formations" (2019, 148; see also Wayar 2018).

[11] The self-actualizing model of gender transition neither reduces transition to an inherently political act of subverting gender norms, nor to a notion of gender identity. Such an approach "does not judge any project or lifework to be more subversive or valuable than any other . . . all [trans] lived experience [is] worthy" (see Rubin 1998, 271). Avoiding the use of terminology like "gender identity: helps account for a notion of gender expression and transition that does not reify concepts that fail to describe trans people who take hormones but do not consider themselves as having a gender identity, perhaps because they have never even heard of the term 'transgender identity' (see Valentine 2007; Dembroff *forthcoming*). The self-actualizing model can accommodate the notion of a gender identity, but it is not a necessary condition.

would elide important differences in how a gender transition is shaped and contextualized by many factors beyond having a gender identity.

With respect to the final feature of the self-actualizing model of gender transition, the pursuit of gender transition goals is a non-linear process. This stands in direct contradiction to the view of gender transition espoused by Raymond (1979) and gender critical feminists. Raymond argues that gender transition is a linear movement from one form of gendered embodiment to another (see Raymond 1979). Call this the *rehabilitation* model of gender transition.[12] Gender critical feminists employ the rehabilitation model to argue that gender transition, or a process of bringing one's gendered embodiment into alignment with a transgender identity, is anti-feminist because it reproduces[13] sexist gender norms and reinforces the fabric of a patriarchal society.[14] Yet, gender transition is not a linear process with determinate endpoints, but is a complex, constantly shifting process (see Serano 2013, 121).

Puar (2017) offers an important discussion of this latter point and its relationship to disability and race. As she explains, "trans becoming masquerades as a tele-

[12] The view of transition that Raymond holds is a medicalist view of transition, and it is situated within an ideology of cure—in other words, transitioning, on Raymond's view, is merely the cure for gender dysphoria (see Clare 2017). Responses to views like Raymond's prevalent in 90's trans activist movements reframe transness solely in political terms rather than terms like gender identity (Serano 2013, 126). Critiques of views like Raymond's involve arguments that trans individuals, rather than reinforcing the gender binary, subvert the binary gender system. See, for example, Stone (1992), Bornstein (1994), Feinberg (1996), and Wilchins (2013). In response to Stone (1992), who argues that transsexuals should forgo the attempt to 'pass' as cisgender to perform the political task of subverting the gender binary, see Snorton (2009). Reducing transness to a political project of subverting the gender system produces cissexist double binds that harm trans individuals. For example, the notion that trans individuals subvert the gender system feeds into the "expectation that trans people must actively refuse to identify within the male/female binary and must constantly make [their] gender incongruity visible in order to be viewed as sufficiently feminist" (Serano 2013, 127). This is a cissexist double bind: Trans women who adopt more normative presentations of femininity are seen as not sufficiently feminist or as reproducing sexist heteronormative gender norms, but trans women who do not pass as a cis woman or are visibly gender non-conforming are exposed to higher rates of cissexist discrimination.

[13] It should be noted that the very idea that transitioning is anti-feminist because it reproduces sexist gender norms is a double standard. Valerio (2002) redirects this idea toward cis people: "Do you . . . monitor your actions and thoughts to prevent slipping up and 'buying into the bipolar gender system?' Probably not. Then why expect me or any other transsexual to?" (Valerio 2002, 245–246; quoted in Serano 2013, 122). Valerio, a transsexual man, asks whether cis individuals do not also reproduce sexist heteronormative gender norms when, for instance, doing something stereotypically feminine. In other words, it is a double standard that cis individuals somehow cannot problematically reproduce sexist heteronormative gender norms, but transsexuals can.

[14] The capacity for a body to be integrated into society through piecing can be understood by turning to the concept of gender dysphoria, the diagnosis of which trans individuals require to access hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in the U.S. Gender dysphoria is defined as an incongruity between one's assigned gender at birth and their perceived or expressed gender identity that causes significant distress to one's social or occupational functioning. HRT is framed, in medical settings, as a therapy that alleviates gender dysphoria and enables one to return to normal levels of social or occupational functioning (see Ashley 2019, 2021).

ological movement. Trans is often . . . mistaken for becoming trans as linear telos, as a prognosis that becomes the body's contemporary diagnosis and domesticates the trans body into the regulatory norms of permanence" (56). On Puar's account, the rehabilitation model of gender transition is described phenomenologically as 'piecing,' which refers to a process of 'passing' as a cis person in society or what is sometimes referred to as 'going stealth.' Piecing involves one's capacity to recover from an apparently previously torn or dismantled transgender state, the cure being rehabilitation to multiple social norms, especially white, heteronormative norms (Puar 2017, 43). Piecing, as Stryker and Sullivan (2009) describe, refers to "the ability of the body to be *integrated*" into a capitalist society, where the 'ability' to piece is impacted by how capitalist societies set limits, especially racialized limits, upon which bodies can access medical and legal accommodations like gender-affirming surgeries (61). For example, trans women of color and trans women who are disabled have vastly disproportionate access to trans care compared to able-bodied and white trans women (Spade 2015).

Jesperson (2022) explains the importance of contextualizing the notion of piecing with specific reference to land and settler identity. Jesperson defines transnationalism as a term to capture a trans person piecing into the dominant U.S. body politic not just by investing into certain gender norms, but through investment in the nation. She argues that "trans [piecing] in the U.S. is mediated by racialized gender norms accumulated through the colonial regulation of trans indigeneity over time . . . efforts to [piece] into the national body politic must be theorized beyond a critique of the visual to consider how passing, as settlers, involves a specific set of nationalist convictions, gestures, and actions linked to the elimination of Indigenous peoples" (2022, 32). I highlight this here to defend the idea that gender transitions cannot be described in this teleological fashion. Concerns with the rehabilitation model of gender transition therefore include not respecting different gender systems in Indigenous cultures, and not considering how, for example, trans women of color experience disproportionate access to trans care and injustices like police brutality which interrupt the possibility of a linear movement from one gendered mode of embodiment to another.

While there are many reasons why a gender transition may not be teleologically oriented, because of my lived experience as a disabled trans woman living with MALS, I am particularly concerned with how gender transition is impacted by living in chronic pain. Pain can disrupt the intentional structure of the body schema, which can sometimes amount to disruptions in the pursuit of gender transition goals or the task of pursuing a particular form of gendered embodiment. Suffering from a physical impairment that causes pain alters a person's pursuits of her long-term life projects. This pain is unlike short-term pain. While short-term pain is noticeable, it does not fundamentally alter one's long-term life projects; it is regulative, meaning

it commands the subject to reorient herself in response to the disorientation of the pain. If I put my hand on a hot stove, the pain disorients me, and I reorient myself by pulling my hand away. Reynolds (2022) refers to this kind of pain as component pain (12, 51). When there is no discrete underlying cause of pain and there are thus no embodied responses to the pain that will straightforwardly diminish its effects, this is termed constitutive pain (50). Living in this pain amounts to disruptions to the pursuit of life projects because one's sense of future is fundamentally tied to being in pain. In the context of a gender transition, somedays a person living in pain cannot act upon her desires and intentions for her gender transition because of the constitutive pain she experiences.[15] As I will explain below, cissexist social conditions can exacerbate the constitutive pain some disabled trans people experience. Further, I will argue that able-bodied trans people and disabled trans people whose disabilities do not involve constitutive pain can experience pain that frustrates gender transition, such as pain caused by violence and psychological oppression.

Having argued that pain can disrupt life projects such as a gender transition, understood as an open-ended non-linear process of bringing one's gendered embodiment into greater alignment with one's gender goals, I now turn to analyze the double-bind of cissexist perception.

§2 Cissexist Perception: A Trans Phenomenology of Hesitation

In this section, I justify the first half of the double bind discussed in this paper, namely that trans individuals are pressured into avoiding certain environments to dodge dangerous predicaments and that this constitutes unfair exclusion, even causing pain under some conditions. I begin by reviewing accounts of misfitting and inhibited intentionality, which I then employ to develop a phenomenology of cissexist perception to disclose various ways cissexism functions to exclude trans people from certain environments.

Previous studies in philosophy of disability outline the meaning of concepts like fitting and misfitting. Garland-Thomson (2011) describes fitting in an environment as what "occurs when a harmonious, proper interaction occurs between a particularly shaped and functioning body and an environment that sustains that body" (594). Importantly, the achievement of fitting within an environment is productive of "material anonymity," which means when fitting in an environment, an individual can move and act freely in that space without disrupting socially dominant expectations and attracting unwanted attention on behalf of her appearance or behavior.

[15] See Ortega (2016) on how the self with multiple identities highlights her different identities in different spaces.

In contrast to fitting, *misfitting* is "when [an] environment does not sustain the shape and function of the body that enters it" (596).[16] Misfitting involves experiences of inhibited spatial or temporal intentionality, such as when inaccessible environments are too difficult to move within or access (Toombs, 1995; see also Reynolds 2022). Merleau-Ponty describes the body as the groundfloor of intentionality; consciousness, for Merleau-Ponty, "is originarily not an 'I think that' but rather an 'I can'" (2012, 139; see Moran 2018). This means that intention is embodied or related to bodily abilities. For example, if I want to enter an art studio to exercise my intention to paint, then if the studio does not meet my access needs and I therefore cannot enter the space, I experience inhibited intentionality (see Young, 2005).

Misfitting can also be used to describe the disorientation caused by social stress experienced on behalf of standing out or appearing different from others. Disrespectful staring can make individuals into misfits (Garland-Thomson 2011, 596; see also Reynolds 2022, 104). Being stared at in this way can amount to inhibited intentionality. The claim I defend in this section is that a particular kind of staring—cissexist perception—causes a misfitting that, under some conditions, functions to exclude trans people from certain environments and does so through racialized, among other, lines.

Certain prejudicial modes of staring cause the person being perceived to experience inhibited intentionality and a discontinuous unity with her spatial surroundings. The strongest case for this can be found in the work of Al-Saji (2014) on what she terms objectifying vision. On Al-Saji's account, vision makes things visible to us, but it does so differentially according to our individually acquired or sedimented habits of seeing (138). As Merleau-Ponty explains, "to learn to see colors is to acquire a certain style of seeing" (2012, 153). Vision often works in us without our conscious reflection. The visible of vision, or an object, seems to appear to a subject in an unmediated way, but it does so according to invisible structures of her vision, i.e., her acquired habits of seeing. Crucially, vision is sometimes habituated in prejudicial ways. Objectifying vision, according to Al-Saji, involves a prejudicial judgment and an unmediated affective response, such as that of disgust, directed at the appearance or behavior of another individual. Objectifying vision objectifies others by reducing the perceived person to a mere object and does so without appreciating the subjective constitution of vision. It is also important to note that objectifying modes of perception include modes of perception other than vision, such as the gendered and racialized dynamics regarding how we interpret each other's voices, smell, and so on.

[16] See also Flowers (2022) for a pragmatist account of how disability is not located in the biological properties of an individual, nor in the organization of culture, but in the transactions between the two.

To explain Al-Saji's notion of inhibited intentionality, which she refers to as hesitation, consider how trans individuals often experience what Garland-Thomson (2009) calls *staring as stigma assessment*. When performing staring as stigma assessment, the perceiver assesses another person's behavior according to a stigma, such as a Black man being perceived by a white person as a threat or criminal for simply walking down the street or standing in an elevator (see Yancy 2017). When directed at trans feminine people, staring as stigma assessment is a mode of objectifying vision that communicates a disrespectful attitude and a prejudicial judgment about the possibility that a trans feminine person has sexually predatory intentions (see Bettcher 2007; see also Salamon 2018; Zurn 2020, 2021b).[17] I refer to this kind of staring as transmisogynistic vision. Trans masculine subjects also experience staring as stigma assessment. As Beauchamp (2019) explains, the "surveillance of gender non-conforming people centers less on their identification as transgender per se than it does on the perceived deception underlying transgressive gender presentation" (9). In the case of trans feminine individuals, the thought is that biological males only dress in feminine ways to act on a sexual impulse such as to gain access to spaces like women's bathrooms, where they would then act upon sexually predatory desires (see Bettcher 2007).

With respect to inhibited intentionality, internalizing transmisogynistic vision produces hesitation and a discontinuous unity with one's spatial surroundings. Objectifying vision, as Al-Saji writes, can be "epidermalized" into the self, forming a split sense of the body as subject and as object, as a locus of intentionality and as a mere thing to be gazed upon by others (2014, 153). The logic of transmisogynistic vision dismisses the subjectivity of the trans person being stared at because it objectifies her body, reducing her to a merely sexually defined object, instead of viewing her as a person, a subject, a locus of intentionality. When trans people internalize cissexist perception such as transmisogynistic vision, they can experience a freezing hesitation, an inhibited intentionality.[18] They may hesitate to dress in certain ways,

[17] Talia Mae Bettcher has produced significant analyses of the idea that trans women are 'evil deceivers' (see Bettcher 2007). Zurn (2021b) offers an analysis of how *staring as stigma assessment*, when targeting trans individuals in order to determine whether they are evil deceivers, is an objectifying and dehumanizing curiosity about the trans individual.How these messages are communicated to individuals deserves some philosophical attention. One way to justify this view might be informed by work in philosophy of microaggression. Microagggressive behavior when directed at marginalized individuals—like staring as stigma assessment—may send a message which implies some meaning or prejudicial belief to an individual even if it is not the intention of the person staring (Perez Gomez 2021; see also McTernan 2018).

[18] What I mean by a freezing hesitation is an experience of the body's nervous system locking up and preventing the subject from actualizing her desires or intentions. This is a learned response that the body performs in reaction to a fearful situation. Young (2005) builds on Merleau-Ponty's notion of intentionality to describe this experience of internalizing objectifying vision. On her view, feminine subjects experience an inhibited intentionality which involves the self simultaneously reaching toward some projected end through the 'I can' but withholding full bodily com-

or to access gendered spatial locations, out of fear of harms that can arise on behalf of how others will perceive their body. Iris Marion Young, discussing femininity in relationship to patriarchy, explains how such hesitation can cause a discontinuous unity with one's spatial surroundings:

> In feminine existence there is a double spatiality, as the space of the "here" is distinct from the space of the "yonder." [There is a] distinction between space that is "yonder" and not linked with my own body possibilities and the enclosed space that is "here," . . . The space of the "yonder" is a space in which feminine existence projects possibilities in the sense of understanding that "someone" could move within it, but not I. (Young 2005, 40–41)[19]

In other words, when experiencing inhibited intentionality, an individual, though she intends to access some space, becomes anchored in the space of the 'here.' This constitutes a discontinuous unity with one's spatial surroundings, or a double spatiality. For example, a feminine subject may withhold herself from walking alone down a dim-lit alleyway at night.

Trans individuals, especially Black trans women, often cannot walk down a public street without being verbally, sexually, and physically abused. Consider the experience of 'walking while trans.' Historically, the term walking while trans refers to anti-loitering and prostitution laws that permit law enforcement to profile and

mitment to that end by way of a self-imposed 'I cannot' (36). Young locates the source of this inhibited intentionality, specifically for feminine people, in the body's habituation within a patriarchal society. More succinctly, she argues that inhibited intentionality is habituated through positive reinforcement like how from a young age the feminine person is taught to view her body as fragile, and through reinforcement caused by the threat of objectifying vision and the threat of one's personal space being invaded by being sexually touched or raped by others (39–45). Therefore, the root of inhibited intentionality for Young is the systematic positioning of the feminine body in patriarchal society as merely a sexual object to be gazed upon or touched by others, and not a locus of subjectivity and intentionality (see also Al-Saji 2014, 151).

[19] Al-Saji argues that hesitation or inhibited intentionally is not as dichotomous as Young describes. There is a possibility for a productive account of hesitation. Importantly for Al-Saji (2014), the dichotomous split Young presents with her notion of inhibited intentionality is an "artificial" choice between an "unwavering seamless habit, on the one hand, and paralyzing hesitation, on the other" (153). There is an alternative form of hesitation that breaks out of this dichotomy: The "cycle of paralyzing hesitation can . . . be broken through a critical and responsive form of hesitation" which "creates possibilities that have been hitherto foreclosed" and opens the body to a future action that is "yet to be created" (154). In other words, the first form of hesitation, the paralysis of the I cannot, can be transformed into a critical awareness. More specifically, "instead of being caught in a cycle of hesitation and self-blame, hesitation can . . . [create] the possibility of critical awareness" and even if I cannot perform the task related to the first hesitation, like in the case of a trans person accessing some gendered spatial location, "I can act differently" and engage in activism motivated by my experience of oppression and othering, specifically through, for example, writing and producing artwork (155; see also Ortega 2016).

arrest trans individuals on grounds of suspicion that they are engaging in unlawful sex work (see Snorton 2017). For example, in 2021, a walking while trans law was repealed in the state of New York. The law was put on the books in 1976 with the intent to prohibit loitering for the purpose of prostitution, but it has been historically used to justify arresting transgender individuals because of their gender non-conforming appearance and behavior. In other words, the law permitted the harassment and criminalization of transgender individuals by way of gender surveillance practices (see Beauchamp 2019). Before the repeal, 262 arrests between 2012 and 2021 occurred in New York, the vast majority impacting Black trans women. The state of New York's walking while trans law is just one of the many laws put into place to police the presentation of trans individuals, cross-dressers, and other gender non-conforming individuals.[20] I take it that being able to live a trans life relatively worry-free regarding such laws constitutes what Jesperson describes as transnationalism, or piecing in the context of the U.S., as discussed in section 1.

The experience of walking while trans is such that trans people are subjected to a gaze that systematically tracks the trans body's movement in and through the world, causing constant cycles of disorientation and reorientation.[21] One cumulative effect of this experience is that a trans person may withhold herself from accessing certain spatial locations to avoid the harms of cissexism.

Having explained transmisogynistic vision in detail, it is important to explain how race further problematizes trans embodiment. Racism and transmisogyny interact in important ways (see Krell 2017). In the U.S., ideas and ideals of feminine and masculine behavior are grounded in dominant ideals of Whiteness, heteronormativity, and class privilege, which means that gender surveillance practice depend upon racial, cultural, economic, and even religious expectations of gendered behavior and appearance (Beauchamp 2019, 39). Beauchamp (2009) writes, "concealing gender deviance is about much more than simply erasing transgender status. It also necessitates altering one's gender presentation to conform to white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual understandings of normative gender" (357; see also Krell 2015; Snorton 2017). The capacity to fit oneself into these expectations of gendered behavior and appearance is impacted by the fact that trans people of color and disabled trans people have vastly disproportionate access to trans care (Spade 2015). Furthermore, there are normative structures of citizenship that factor into which subjects count as legitimate subjects within the visual domain. For example, a Latino

[20] See Sears (2015) for an historical analysis of over forty laws put into place in U.S. cities for the purpose of policing gender transgressions. See also Zurn (2021a) for a critical phenomenology of walking, which further discusses the case of Latisha King and the phenomenon of walking while trans.

[21] On the disorienting effect of feeling social stress on the body on behalf of being stared at, see especially Fanon (1986), Ahmed (2007), and Yancy (2017).

transmasculine individual being perceived as an 'illegal immigrant' can cause him to be even more subjected to gender surveillance practices and he might be systematically inhibited from obtaining the required legal documents to access gender-affirming medical care (see also Leo 2020).

Phenomenologically, whiteness functions as a background condition in predominantly white spaces and structures the possibilities for acting and appearing in that context; whiteness thus legitimizes the effects of racialized perception (Ngo 2017; Yancy 2017). As Alcoff (2006) argues, race, although not real in a biological sense, becomes real through the effects of acts of "habitual [racialized] perception" (194).[22] To elaborate on the structuring of possibilities afforded by whiteness, Ahmed (2007) offers an apt description of whiteness in her phenomenological exploration of racialized embodiment. She describes whiteness as an orientation device that effects how bodies function and take up space in predominantly white spaces by claiming that such bodies trail "behind" their actions (156). Such bodies fit the environment because they are fluent in the accepted, dominant norms for behaving and appearing in that context. For people that do not meet the criteria of whiteness, the "'body' itself [becomes] the 'site' of social stress," or the body, instead of trailing behind the actions of the individual, is brought to the foreground and becomes especially relevant to how others perceive their actions (161; see also Fanon 1986; Yancy 2017). As Ahmed explains, when a group of Black women enter a public venue for an academic conference, their arrival is distinctly noticed (157). When racism and transphobia intersect, misfitting brings greater risk of, for example, arrests in the case of the 'walking while trans' laws, but also, importantly, greater risk of violence

Having demonstrated how trans subjects internalize cissexist perception such as transmisogynistic vision, I will argue that the cissexist perception can have painful effects. Consider again my own lived experience with MALS. The pain of my physical impairment requires me to have access to public bathrooms to manage my symptoms. Yet, I have also been receptive of demeaning stares from others and have internalized the meaning of those stares to the point that I experience a freezing reaction or inhibited intentionality when I am in certain situations. For example, in spaces that lack all-gender bathrooms, which are environments within which I am a misfit because such environments do not support my bodily shape and functioning, I hesitate and withhold myself from accessing a bathroom even if I need to purge the painful buildup of blood in my GI tract caused by my physical impairment. This is

[22] Further, Fielding (2015) writes that "racialized perception belongs to the imposition of representations and structures on our encounters with others, which means we do not actually engage with who or what is there" (282). The "we" Fielding refers to "is a general "we" that belongs to a dominant world and coexists with particular worlds sometimes paradoxically and often painfully" (282). See also Weiss (2002 192–94) and Rawlinson (2006).

because I am stuck with an impossible choice: risk harassment in a gendered public bathroom or inhibit myself from using a bathroom until I can get to somewhere that has accessible all-gender bathrooms. Since I require access to public bathrooms to sustain my bodily health and functioning, if I opt for the latter choice and withhold myself from using the public bathroom, this can exacerbate the constitutive pain I experience. Therefore, cissexist social conditions sometimes exacerbate the pain some disabled trans people experience, since without the risk of transphobic violence and harassment, I could use a public bathroom and avoid the pain of withholding myself from using the bathroom.

Moreover, even able-bodied trans people or disabled people who do not experience constitutive pain on behalf of their physical impairment can experience pain on behalf of cissexist perception. One example is how, as Bagagli et al. (2021) write, trans people can experience health issues related to "failing to go to the bathroom when necessary" which "is one of the risk factors for urinary tract infection, which can affect the bladder, ureters, urethra, and kidneys," and, is "associated with mental health problems, conditions related to stress, and increased levels of suicidal thoughts and behavior" (see also Herman 2013). The high-effort coping required to survive a cissexist society has physiological effects, such as the wearing down of the body through a phenomenon called 'weathering.' Weathering is the gradual erosion of the body's systems due to cumulative exposure to the stress of psychological oppression, making the body more prone to aging, disease, and chronic health problems (Geronimus et. al, 2006). This weathering is a form of constitutive pain that can disrupt one's pursuit of her life projects, such as a gender transition (Al-Saji, *work in progress*).

As these cases demonstrate, trans individuals may intend to access some public space but hesitate from achieving that end because of the threat of harassment or violence. Yet this constitutes exclusion from environments and results in a lack of participation in exchange of social and material goods, or participation in the shared and interdependent aspects of human life (see Malatino 2022).[23]

§3 Concealing: A Trans Phenomenology of Fitting

I now turn to analyze the second half of the double bind. Sometimes safety demands related to cissexist social conditions are such that trans people must perform bodily reconfigurations to conceal their gender non-conformity, and these reconfigurations often impact bodily autonomy and involve frustrations to life projects related to gender transition. My aim is to disclose the effects of the restriction on trans bodily agency caused by constantly being beholden to threats of violence and harassment,

[23] It could be helpful to extend this analysis to how trans individuals, especially those early in medical transition, tend toward withdrawing from *all* public spaces (see Malatino 2022).

and the following analysis will focus largely on the intersection of gender transition and disability.

Throughout this section, I employ my own lived experience to guide my discussion of gender transition and the bodily reconfigurations required to conceal gender non-conformity. Though my physical impairment causes constitutive pain, before I publicly began my gender transition, I experienced relative ease with respect to navigating whether environments met my access needs and could more easily manage my pain. Now, however, because of my gender non-conformity, my impairment is more burdensome than during my pre-transition life because accessing spaces like gendered public bathrooms is more difficult. My lived experience offers philosophical insight regarding the intersection of gender transition and disability. To demonstrate this, I will begin by exploring the account of gender transition I provided above in the context of recent developments in phenomenology of disability.[24]

A self-actualizing model of gender transition is particularly helpful for understanding how gender transition can be disrupted by cissexist social conditions, such as safety demands to conceal gender non-conformity. Concealing gender non-conformity involves three bodily reconfigurations which Reynolds (2022) defines in their description of a phenomenology of disability. These are attentional, personal-social, and existential reconfigurations. Attentional reconfigurations are when "the salience of an action, desire, or possibility shifts from one's body to the environment" (100; see also Carel 2013). An attentional shift, for example, would be how those who become disabled later in life must attend to the environment differently than before to ensure the space meets their access needs. Environments contain material and social dimensions. The material dimension of an environment refers to the physical features of the space. The social dimensions of an environment refer to the norms that are operative in the space. Specifically, these norms can include oppressive norms which function to exclude people, such as how hate speech can function to exclude people from a space (see Lajoie 2022; see also McGowan 2019, 2021; Maitra 2021). Personal-social reconfigurations include how in the process of becoming a disabled person one "is now regarded and judged by others as different, as nonnormate (Reynolds 2022, 104–105). Accordingly, "the sort of person one is and how one understands oneself and one's place in the world change" (Ibid.). In other words, being disabled subjects one to ableism, which, when internalized, can

[24] I do not take myself to be offering a universal account of, for example, a trans phenomenology of disability. As Reynolds (2022) explains, "there [cannot] be a phenomenology of disability as such . . . one of the upshots of work on 'nonnormate' or disabled phenomenology is that more attention is warranted concerning regional structures relative to certain forms and modes of life and less to structures that rise to level of human existence across the board" (94; see also Reynolds 2017). In other words, trans individuals have different lived experiences, and different phenomenological analyses of these lived experiences would uncover other structures of the lived experience of gender transition

alter one's self-conception. Finally, existential reconfigurations "(re)shape how one's life is *lived*" (106, emphasis is in the original). Existential reconfigurations refer to changes to the basic contours of lived experience, like one's sense of her future and her life goals.

In what follows, I employ the concepts of attentional, personal-social, and existential reconfigurations to describe the intersection of gender transition and disability. While I primarily focus on the spatial aspects of these bodily reconfigurations, these reconfigurations have a temporal component insofar as their performance contributes to the unequal time and energy expended by disabled trans people to access public environments.[25]

My lived experience will guide my discussion of trans bodily reconfigurations to conceal gender non-conformity. My bodily reconfigurations after beginning my transition disclose how trans bodies can be experienced as a burden in fundamentally cissexist social contexts. Trans people too often fail to achieve a pure fluid habitual acting in the world. Whereas many cisgender people can habitually use public bathrooms, perform gendered habits, and walk through the world without being exposed to cissexist perception or objectifying vision, trans people must act cautiously and constantly be on guard against the possibility of violence or harassment. Iris Marion Young (2005) describes achieving a pure and fluid habitual acting in the world as the body's *transcendence* (35–6; see also Merleau-Ponty 2012, 112–5). A trans person may strive to achieve a pure fluid habitual acting in the world, but as the body moves out toward the world it can fail to achieve transcendence because it must be protected and maintained from violence and harassment by way of explicit bodily reconfigurations. Trans people are too often stuck in ambiguous transcendence (Young 2005, 36).[26] In other words, in a cissexist patriarchal society, many trans bodies remain in immanence, failing to transcend to a comfortable and socially unproblematic form of gendered embodiment.

My attentional reconfigurations after beginning my gender transition involved a shift to whether I will be supported by the environments I intend to access. Because of my access needs, I must attend to material dimensions of environments, such as if the environment has accessible all-gender bathrooms, and to social dimensions of

[25] These reconfigurations contribute to what Baril (2015b) refers to as, inspired by the notion of crip time in Kafer (2013), trans-crip time. Baril (2015b) writes: "Like other disabled people who experience forms of crip time . . . that is, the 'extra' time often needed to perform certain tasks and the energy, emotional strain and temporal burden experienced in ableist societies, trans people experience 'trans-crip time' (e.g., time required to find information on surgical procedures, educate doctors and society, heal) and a financial burden that affects the whole of their lives, activities and opportunities. In addition to being sufficient to qualify . . . transness as a disability, these combined factors (to name only these) are also a source of suffering." (72).

[26] I am thankful to Gail Weiss and Gayle Salamon for making this point to me at the 2022 International Merleau-Ponty Circle Conference.

environments, like if cissexist gender norms are operative in the space. If I intend to access an environment that lacks accessible all-gender bathrooms, then to avoid cissexist harms I must spend an exhausting amount of mental energy attending toward how cisgender women appear, sound, and behave in that environment, including bodily comportments such as posture and style of movement. This is so that I can mirror those norms and conceal their non-conformity—so that I can pass—as a cisgender woman in that space. I must view myself through the cissexist perception of others in society to both determine how to pass and also to gauge whether they pass.[27] However, I still view myself in part through my own inner self-understanding, such as through the lens of my gender transition goals or even how trans cultural communities perceives my body. Autistic trans people especially experience this attentional reconfiguration as a burden.

The mental energy expended to dodge cissexist harms through concealing gender non-conformity can be intensified in the case of neurodivergent trans individuals. Consider an autistic trans person attending an academic conference who knows that not one all-gender bathroom will be available at the public venue. To conceal her non-conformity, she might mirror the appearance or style of someone of her preferred sex or gender and camouflage her autistic traits, for example, by stopping herself from engaging in calming repetitive motions. These reconfigurations risk autistic burnout, which is a symptom of autism resulting from prolonged life stress caused by a mismatch of one's abilities or needs and the expectations for how bodies should appear, act, and respond to stimuli in environments structured by neuronormativity.[28] Autistic burnout is characterized by pervasive, long-term (typically three or more months) exhaustion, loss of function such as diminished social skills, and reduced tolerance to stimuli.[29]

My attentional reconfigurations overlap with my personal-social reconfigurations, which involve difficulties such as how after beginning my transition, I experience harms related to both ableism and cissexism. For example, recall that

[27] Puar (2017) discusses passing, and its relation to piecing, in her chapter on becoming trans, or what she terms the experience of *trans becoming*. See also Díaz-León (2019) and Jesperson (2022). Passing as a term is also used to refer to the experience of a person of color passing as a white person such as by adopting a specific accent when speaking in predominantly white spaces (see Mallon 2004).

[28] Neuronormativity is "the prevalent, neurotypical set of assumptions, norms, and practices that construes neurotypicality as the sole acceptable or superior mode of cognition, and that stigmatizes attitudes, behaviors, or actions that reflect neuroatypical modes of cognition as deviant or inferior. Neuronormative assumptions, norms, and practices uphold standards regarding, for example, (what is neurotypically considered) appropriate eye contact, facial expressions, prosody, conversational flow, processing, and responsiveness—all of which can be difficult for autistic individuals to understand, sense, or apply, due to neurocognitive differences" (Catala et al. 2021, 9016).

[29] For a comprehensive overview of how these mental struggles relate to social injustice, see Piling (2022) on queer and trans Mad Studies.

navigating public bathrooms is a dangerous predicament for them that can lead to several harms like violence and harassment. This means that I must grapple with both the ableist prejudicial judgments of others and the cissexist prejudicial judgments of others, such as being perceived as a sexual predator when entering specific gendered spatial locations (see Bettcher 2007; Cavanagh 2010; O'Dowd 2018, 1224). The way my personal features such as my voice, style of dress, appearance, and bodily posture are socially perceived radically changed after beginning my gender transition, altering my social positionality and even my own very self-understanding. By this I mean that I internalize the feelings of being treated as 'lesser' than others, and especially feel as though I am 'less' of a woman than cisgender women. By 'less' of a woman, I mean, for example, that a non-passing trans woman may internalize a feeling of inadequacy that corresponds to her lack of an ability to 'pass' or accomplish the culturally dominant standards of femininity or what makes a woman a woman (Hernandez 2021, 11).

My existential reconfigurations after beginning my gender transition relate to how my life projects are restricted by cissexism and their experience of pain. One example is how I may once have been an active participant in the interdependent aspects of human social life, but now I withdraw from social spaces and experience social isolation (see Malatino 2022).[30] I have been treated adversely in my workplace, leading to unequal opportunities to pursue my career goals. For my purposes here, the most important existential reconfigurations relate to the safety demands to conceal gender non-conformity from cissexist perception, and how those reconfigurations disrupt the task of pursuing a gender transition.[31]

When I know that no all-gender bathrooms will be available at a public avenue that I must attend, I might dress in such a way that deviates from my gender transition goals to match the appearance of others in that space and avoid cissexist harms. Recall from section 2 that internalizing the cis gaze produces a hesitation. One way this hesitation manifests is by preventing oneself from dressing in certain ways. This is a tradeoff: instead of risking the possibility of harassment or violence in gendered public bathrooms, I may instead choose to conceal my gender non-conformity by presenting as a man in that environment to gain easier access to gendered public bathrooms. Presenting as a man involves styling the body through habits and norms like speaking in a deeper voice or wearing masculine clothing that do not correspond to my gender transition goals. This causes a misalignment between my gendered

[30] Voluntary withdrawal from environments may prevent trans people from spending unfair time, energy, and distress caused by the experience of cissexist harms, but still leads to social isolation if the trans person does not have access to accepting communities. See Basevich (2022) on voluntary self-separation out of self-respect in the context of racism.

[31] Concealing gender non-conformity constitutes what Garland-Thomson (2009) calls a "stigma-dodging maneuver" (131). It is a reconfiguration at the level of the body performed to avoid being perceived in a stigmatizing way, such as being perceived as a sexual predator.

embodiment and my gender transition goals. The need to conceal gender non-conformity to avoid the harms of cissexism can disrupt the life project of self-actualizing around gender transition goals or bringing greater alignment between gendered embodiment and gender transition goals. Importantly, when cissexist perception intersects with racism, these safety demands become far more burdensome. Cissexism and its intersections with ableism shape the contours of how disabled trans people live their lives.

§4 Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that cissexist perception constrains bodily agency to the point of having painful effects. To conclude, I want to explore the possibility of seeing differently. Future work on trans phenomenology can turn to how trans-affirming artwork can disrupt cissexist perception by motivating a seeing-with others which reminds the viewer that there is a self who is involved in the act of perception.

Sometimes, art has the effect of causing the perceiver to hesitate and question the unmediated nature of her affective reactions. Hesitation can open a space for critical participation in activism motivated by one's experience of oppression and othering, especially through writing and producing artwork (Al-Saji 2014, 155; see also Ortega 2016). Artwork enables a glimpsing of the social and historical institution of vision—the invisible structures or habits of vision—and a remembering of an alterity whose invisibility objectifying vision takes for granted (see Al-Saji 2009, 2014, 161; Fielding 2015, 2021; Ortega 2019). This is what Al-Saji refers to as cultivating *critical-ethical vision*. When viewing an inspiring artwork, the viewer might experience a kind of hesitation that involves adopting a critical stance toward one's previously engrained habits of perception. This hesitation, and the artwork being viewed, can be visual, auditory, or tactile in nature. Critical-ethical vision, Al-Saji argues, can enable others to perceive the structural injustices faced by marginalized individuals. Moreover, the cultivation of such vision can go beyond mere perceptual changes. For example, one might be inspired to engage in material acts such as affirmative use of gender ascriptions (see Hernandez 2021; Hernandez and Crowley 2023).

Like Al-Saji's view, Fielding (2015) argues that "phenomenally strong artworks have the potential to anchor us in the world and to cultivate our perception" (280; see also Fielding 2021). What Fielding means by the anchoring effect of artwork is explained through Merleau-Ponty's discussion of 'leveling.' Consider how when a person moves from a dark room to a well-lit room, her eyes adjust to the new lighting level. Levels are what are established by the situations our bodies enter: leveling is thus the phenomenon that occurs when our bodies adjust and achieve equilibrium within distinctively new environments or when changes within current

environments interrupt a previously established harmony between the body and its surrounding. It is in this way that in a person's visual encounter with artwork, one does not merely look at the work, but perceives "according to" it; in other words, one can level with the artwork (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 164, quoted in Fielding 2015, 283). Once such levels are established, they tend to retreat into the background of our experience and are carried with us when navigating the world (see Fielding 2015, 283; Merleau-Ponty 2012, 253–62). Importantly, these levels become a part of a person's embodied history and shape how she encounters new aspects of the world.

For Fielding (2015), objectifying modes of perception belong to a "more general epochal level" that privileges racialized, (cis)sexist, ableist, and heteronormative understandings of the world (283). The anchoring and cultivating effect of phenomenally strong artwork that interrupts objectifying modes of vision can be understood, then, as when a person's equilibrium within the general epochal level of objectifying perception is interrupted, and a harmony whereby the subject perceives according to the level of the artwork begins to establish. As Fielding explains, "the artwork becomes a kind of participation in the material, significatory, sensible, and affective texture of the real, creatively contributing to opening up this texture or fabric in new ways and helping us to rethink what we mean by reality" (283). Artwork therefore has political and social implications: since people carry their embodied history and levels with them as they navigate the world, by participating in or becoming on level with certain artworks, a person can embody new habits for perceiving and interpreting the world. Artwork thus can inspire more than just empathy toward marginalized individuals; by developing new embodied habits and comportments toward the world, a subject can become motivated to engage in actions geared at the disruption of material harms (see also Mingus 2017; Kizuk 2020).

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