

McKenzie Wark  
**Trap  
Metaphysics**

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Trap Metaphysics

Supposing truth is a woman – what then?

– Frederika Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

We're at lunch in a Manhattan restaurant, seated at sidewalk tables. Everyone around us looks like they work in the information trades in some way or another. There are a couple of bros in suits peering at a spreadsheet on a laptop, but otherwise everyone is casually fashionable. Even the straight-acting cis men sport signature eyewear. Nearly all the patrons are white – or white-acting.

As are we, you and I. In a lot of ways, we fit right in. We have steady jobs in the information trades. Like the people around us, we're dressed with a certain level of professional intentionality. No business attire for us – we're not management. We're creative types. But not *too* creative, at least not in the workplace. We're not like those suits with their spreadsheet, but neither are we the woman alone at the bar in clashing colors who we speculate is a fashion blogger.

Service is slow, and we've both downed our first cocktail already, so we play the Crisp Game. I learned it from a brief encounter with the legendary Quentin Crisp, the former sex worker turned writer and performer.<sup>1</sup> To play, we put our senses to work, read the other patrons, and tell each other stories about which of them has been fucked in the ass, and by whom.

"The first one's too easy! That one's a chaser, already gave me the eye. Chaser who wants a trans girl to pop a dick pill to fuck him. And won't pay for it."

"That one is getting pegged on the regular by a cis woman – not his wife."

"That one, well, gay bottom. Obvious. We know, honey, we know!"

"That one, but he only did it in college."

"That one puts out for her boyfriend, but she doesn't like it."

"T-girl bottom wisdom: never let anyone fuck you in the ass who has not themselves been fucked in the ass – and enjoyed it."

"You should tweet that."

So it goes, until our food arrives. The Crisp Game lets us mark ourselves off from our cis peers. It creates a little trans-for-trans space of communication, just for the two of us. It's a self-defense for the inevitable moments in which the tolerance we have been so graciously extended reveals its limits, as it does, every fucking day.

This game is also a reminder. Nobody is what they appear. Well, of the two of us, I'm more of the easily clockable kind. You are so much



*MADemoiselle de BEAUMONT, or the  
CHEVALIER D'EON.  
Female Minister Plenipo. Capt. of Dragoons &c. &c.*

*Mademoiselle de Beaumont or The Chevalier D'Eon*, 1777, engraving. Published the month after the Chevalier d'Eon's departure from London for France, this print appeared in "The London Magazine," xlvii, 443 and illustrated an article titled "Memoirs of Mademoiselle D'Eon de Beaumont." The image sums up the public debate over the Chevalier's sex which had overshadowed d'Eon's life in London since 1771. Following several years of betting, during which d'Eon refused to comment on the matter, a case was brought to the court of the King's Bench in summer 1777. The Court was asked to rule definitively on whether d'Eon was a man or a woman, for the purposes of settling the many outstanding bets. At the London Guildhall on 2 July 1777, the judge Lord Mansfield ruled that d'Eon was a woman.

closer to the model of feminine beauty. Have to be, to keep your dysphoria from ruining your life.

Like most trans women, we have appraised each other from the point of view of some model of feminine form. Everything I can see about you is beauty, but the one thing I know that you feel doesn't pass is your hands. You wear no rings, have clear lacquered nails. My nails are purple with sparkles, and I wear the big silver fly ring Kathy Acker gave me. My hands are about the only thing that does pass.

One corner of our friendship rests on my wanting to be seen in public with you because of your elegance. Also: your willingness to be seen with me even though it means that because of me you'll get clocked. This generosity affirms your strength of character as a trans woman, which is gratifying in itself, and is a gift to me, the awkward stepsister.

Not much is going to happen to us, today at least, even if the cis sniff us out. Privilege – particularly as white New Yorkers with excellent manners – lets us do this. We can be out as tranny freaks and be insulted or scorned by the world we move in – but not beaten or killed (probably).

We talk about this. "I've still been called a trap," you say.

"Me too. And this is what's strange: even an obvious trans woman such as me gets called a trap. The cis who call us that think the essence of our being is nothing more than a failure to deceive them."

"If trans women are traps, it's because everyone is," you declare.

"Oh really? How do you arrive at that?"

"Nobody is ever quite what they appear. Take the Crisp Game we just played. Our surmises could be wildly off."

"It's more fun that way," I interject.

"... But there's always *something*. Maybe suit-guy over there," you gesture with your clockable hand, "isn't getting pegged – but instead has a stash of shemale porn."

"There's always a gap between the representation and what it presents. That's how all communication works," I declare.

"What does *that* mean?" Well, you asked for it. We're going to play the Theory Game.<sup>2</sup> Since we're settling in, you order more drinks.

"There's always a difference between the sign of the thing and the thing itself. How I appear isn't all of me. A representation is always different from the thing it represents. Perception always has an element of deception."

"There's something rather irksome, but also delicious, about that," you say, with a glint in your eye.

"Particularly in an economy that runs on signs." I guess at where your saucy bent will take

this game, but I'm in a more philosophical mood. "Judging by their appearances, all the patrons in this restaurant looks like they work with signs and do pretty well at it. Everyone looks prosperous, successful, capable. It's unlikely that they all are."

"That girl's shoes, for example," you tilt your hand to guide my eye again. Cracked leather, worn heel.

I can play this game, too. "That one over there, leaning in, a bit too overeager – is asking for money." Not everyone is here, as we are, at leisure. There's a lot of hustling going on.

"Everyone is always concealing something," you say. Maybe you're onto my less-than-frank dishing from my own recent adventures. It's not like I'll tell this gossipy bitch everything.

"We're always differing from the signs we make. It might be a specifically Western-culture kind of hang-up, but there's a nervousness about this gap between sign and thing."<sup>3</sup>

"Which is why they," you gesture at the cis around us, "want to stick it to trans women – as traps."

"In Plato's philosophy" (I'm getting pretentious and I know it, but you like it when I play the Theory Game, and it will seduce you away from what I'm not telling you about my life), "it's not just that the sign of the thing falls short of the thing itself.<sup>4</sup> The thing itself also falls short, in turn, of the pure idea or form of the thing. Behind appearances are things. But things, too, are just a kind of mere appearance: behind things are their forms. These cannot be touched, or tasted, or seen. They are knowable only to thought itself."<sup>5</sup>

"But who cares about Plato?" You dismiss him with a wave.

"Well, Nietzsche saw what was up with Platonism and its influence on Western thought. He called Christianity 'Platonism for the masses.'<sup>6</sup> In Christianity too, appearances are suspect – are now the work of the devil. Actual things are not to be trusted either, particularly if those things are bodies. These are corrupt flesh, condemned to die. What is real is something, once again, invisible, untouchable – pure spirit. If spirit refuses to be corrupted by appearances or by the pleasures of the flesh, it can join God in eternity."

"So, have you been having any pleasure of the flesh lately ... with anyone I know?" You are on to me, I suspect. So I better try to hold your attention by throwing a conversational curveball.

"Secular Western culture inherited a residue of Platonism via Christianity. Even some kinds of Marxists imagine a world of false appearances. For them, it's capitalism. The overthrow of capitalism restores 'man' to the possibility of an authentic life: no more

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advertising, good riddance to fashion, and bye-bye to alienation. Man is restored to himself as himself.”<sup>7</sup>

“Men. Hmph. I don’t know what I see in them.” I’ve distracted you from the distraction. I’ll have to get us back on track. I have a preference for trans women, you for trans men. Our gossip crosses party lines between trans universes.

“I said ‘man’ here intentionally, because what these Marxists find suspect has a certain femininity to it. On the one hand, the feminine gets too close to the world of commodities through the desire to appear pretty. On the other, femininity, as a handful of signs for sex, beauty, and youth, is deployed deceptively to sell products.”<sup>8</sup>

“It’s hard to be soft, to be femme. People think there’s nothing firm there, that they can just push us around.” This, I know, is a subject upon which you’ve made yourself an authority, one from which I’ve much to learn.

“In all these versions of Platonism, it’s the *femme* that’s most suspect, where femme might stand for all the signs and attributes of femininity that point to their bearer being a woman. To have started life with M stamped willy-nilly on our birth certificates, to transition – at some moment or other, to some point outside of masculinity – is then extra suspect. The femme is that which deceives, but ‘woman,’ ironically enough, in all these Western discourses, deceives about everything *but itself*.”

“You say I deceive about everything but myself?” You pretend to be offended, but I can see from that little smile that you like this idea.

“Femme signs supposedly deceive about a lot of things, but not about the fact of the womanhood of those who produce such signs.”

“Nobody accuses a cis femme of not being a woman,” you add, crossly. The gap between them and you is, I know, a sensitive subject. I think before I speak, but I want to press you a little further. “This is what is different about the figure of the transsexual woman in this Platonist universe. It is not a femininity deceiving about something else. It is deceptive *about femininity*. In cis metaphysics, you and I are a special kind of deceiver.”

“So ... we’re not women who as women are deceivers, we are deceivers about being women at all. Sort of like double deceivers? Super-femmes!” You crack us both up.

“Precisely. You see, previously there was what’s true, which is Plato’s ‘idea’; and two fallen states, short of what’s true, which are the thing; and then even more fallen – the representation. The idea embodies truth for the Platonist. God and communism do it for Christians and Marxists, respectively. What is true is identical to

itself. It allows no gap between itself and any aspect of itself. It is incapable of making a mere sign of itself. It is pure – and unrepresentable.”

You get your faraway look, and say, to the air more than to me: “Sometimes I feel like the woman I’m trying to be is an impossible idea. That no matter how much I try to be her, already am her really, the farther away it seems. I think it hurts us, your Platonist idea of woman, and not just us. All those cis feminists who hate us struggle with her too.”

“Yes!” I hadn’t thought of this part. “They have to hate us as bad simulacra of the idea of ‘woman’ so they don’t have to deal with their own failure as representatives of that idea.”

“It’s a hierarchy, a chain of being, from most to least, where we’re always at the bottom.” I can see that look of yours that signals a low mood. I have to get on to the crux of this argument, the part that for us invokes a T4T world of possibility. That’s the objective of this game: to arrive at ourselves, at our existence, by making the weaker case appear the stronger.

I launch another move: “Okay, so this is also how a certain brand of feminism thinks about the figure of woman. She just *is*. There’s hand-waving about biological chromosomes, but those are things that are outside the everyday realm of human perception. Woman is a Platonic ideal that ‘real’ women just embody by default as variations upon perfection. They then inevitably join misogynists in their distrust of femme signs as deception, and the trap as the lowest deceiver of all.”<sup>9</sup>

“That’s fucked up,” you say.

“Agreed. In this Platonic world, no sensible thing can do justice to the pure realm of the true. No readable representation can do justice even to things, let alone to the pure and true idea. Instead, appearances are seducing you: away from philosophy in Plato, away from God in Christianity, away from revolution in Marxism, away from the essence of woman in feminism. In all cases, these appearances get coded all too often as femme. It’s men who have reason, faith, the power to exclude from purity, revolutionary fidelity.”

“Or, oddly enough, feminists who claim such Platonic big-dick energy by holding the line against us traps.”

“Yes. Femme signs are suspect, but not suspected of pointing to their bearer being anything other than a woman. Then: along come you and me. We’ve fallen even below the most fallen. We are as far as you can get from the pure idea.”

“We’re all in the gutter, but some of us are falling through the grate.”<sup>10</sup>

“We are far from even the imperfect embodiment of the idea in a thing. We are not the

even more imperfect embodiment of the thing or idea in a representation. In this metaphysics, you are not even that which truly makes deceptive signs with my femininity. You are *deceptively* making deceptive signs – as a trap.”

“Fuck you too, hun.”

“Hear me out, bb. You at least get to be a trap. *I’m not even that.* I am the figure who *fails* to make the deceptive signs of womanhood, a comical failure. You are the trap who succeeds, who is a dangerous deceiver.<sup>11</sup> The Platonic order of things makes me the failed version of you, while you are the failed version of the cis body, who is the failed version of the ideal.”

“Why do we buy into this stupid hierarchy where we’re always on the bottom!” This is irritating you. My play is that it will be irritating in a useful way.

“It’s such a temptation among trans women to buy into this hierarchy of signs, to rank ourselves against each other. You are my friend and dear to me because you refuse that. We both know what I am. I’m a brick. But you wouldn’t call me that – not to my face, at least.”

“I would *never* call you that!” I believe you. You’re touching my hand. I’m going to cry.

“It doesn’t matter. I really don’t care that I’m a brick. A lump of burnt dirt formed into shape – with feet of clay, women’s size nine.” Runway model size, handy for shopping at sample sales. I’m suddenly aware that you’re as sensitive about your feet as your hands. I didn’t mean to be catty. “Anyway, the only difference between us is the threshold of possible discovery. My picture on a dating app fools nobody. That chaser-guy over there,” I wave a slender finger, “giving me the eye knows I’m a tranny and is hoping there’s girldick under this Gogo Graham skirt.”

“Well he’s got that right.”

“Whereas you have found yourself in dangerous situations, particularly with men who are interested in you before they clock you, or before you decide – or not – to disclose.” I’m touching your hand now. I know those stories. I know this is hard. “There are special punishments for the trap. Hence cis men can still avoid conviction for killing us in most American states.<sup>12</sup> If they want to fuck us, and declare their desire, and only then find out we’re a trap – they can kill us. We fall that low in the scheme of things that approximate the true.”<sup>13</sup>

“We’re disposable. Not even things. Trash to them.” Your carefully coached voice cracks with restrained rage.<sup>14</sup> We touch each other’s hands for a moment. Make eye contact. Then look away.

A wave of feeling too intense to acknowledge passes over us and abates. When I feel the moment has passed, I take up the conversational play again. “There’s something inherently conservative in all these versions of

what we might rather casually label ‘Western metaphysics.’ Who decides on what is closest or furthest from the pure and true?”

“Not your transsexual ass, or mine!” You say it a little too loudly, a little too drunkenly, and not quite with your girl voice. Fashion blogger looks our way.

“This is why the Crisp Game is so delicious. We turn the cis gaze back on itself.”

Your mood brightens a little: “I just like to play it with you for shits and giggles.”

“Suit-guy thinks he gets to pass judgment on us. And he did, with that classic glance-and-glare. The glance is attracted by something: maybe my long, straight, bare thigh. Maybe your gorgeous tits.”

“I do have gorgeous tits ...” Looking at them, I concede this with a smile. I know where they stop and padding fills in the rest, from that time I took your bra off at that rave – but we never talk about that.

I pick up the thread again: “But then suit-guy clocks me, and we get the glare. It says: *You wasted a second of my life in which I might have eye-banged you, and you turn out to be nothing but a filthy transsexual, whose sight disgusts me. Or worse: attracts and disgusts me.* We play our little game as we know that everyone has secrets.”

You fill in the line of thought for me. “Everyone is a trap; nobody’s gaze is authoritative. Not even that suit-guy.”

“As it stands, to be a transsexual woman is to be the scapegoat of an order of representation in which someone has to be held accountable for the failure of signs to be adequate to things. In the cis world, we’re comprehensible only as the lowest kind of deceivers. To the cis, we are *choosing* to be female. But who would *choose* that? So we must be traps, deceivers. We are *even-worse* things in the world.”<sup>15</sup>

“Cheers to that!” You have decided we are to get hammered and order another round.

“Compared to most of our kind, we hold on to a few privileges, you and I. Since no one dares to use the word ‘class,’ let’s use polite words: ‘socioeconomic advantage.’ Your tech job and my teaching job will pay for our talents, and we can walk into a restaurant where the servers will assume that our credit cards at least are valid – ”

“You’re getting the check, right?”

“ – and yet we are still seen as a lesser kind of being by many of these other diners around us, including some who would likely patronize us with the muggy embrace of their liberal acceptance. They feel like they stand in the position of authority, as representatives of the idea of gender, gifting us our humanity.”

“Fuck that!”

“Fuck that!” I raise my glass to your glass.

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Clink. “There’s something suspect about taking intangible ideal forms of anything as the most real, including ideas of gender. I’d rather delight in the tangible play of appearances than buy into this whole hierarchy of truth and being, that places us at the bottom. Nietzsche was wrong about more than a few things, but – ”

“He was an egg,” you interject. Detecting eggs is one of your other favorite games. “He didn’t just want to write like a woman, he was one. He just hated the kind of woman that men oblige women to be.”<sup>16</sup>

“Becoming woman, as he only dreamt, but as we attempt, is to escape the hierarchy of the true and the false.”<sup>17</sup>

“To do otherwise is just boring,” you say. “It’s to just take the order of things for granted.”

“Seeing appearances as the shortcomings of a prior state of true being is indeed boring, I agree.” “Warmed by the drinks, I’m warming to my theme. “Let’s work the surfaces, change the signs, fashion the possibility of a kind of being to come! We are not fallen imitations of cisters. We are prototypes of the bio-hacked beings to come! We add to the range of things that humans already edit about their bodies.<sup>18</sup> We do it with the latest techniques, the latest information, in all fields. We are among the avant-garde of possible future humans. What if a world existed that could answer to the desires of our bodies?”

“I want to live in that world.”

I’m drunk and on a roll: “Maybe that’s utopian. In the meantime, girls like us pursue an irrepressible desire to transition, to bend information and technique to finding forms in which we might abide. Maybe that’s another reason we become scapegoats. Trans people make themselves over, in the here and now, as bodies, not ideas. And we do it together. We make another little world, tenuous and compromised and fractious as it is – inside and yet apart from the cis world. They think they know our little secret, but we have information about being that they will never know.”

“Speaking of secrets, didn’t I see you with what’s-her-name last night at the Bluestockings reading? What the fuck?”

I was hoping to distract you from that. “Our secret is that there isn’t one. We don’t know anything about the true, hidden nature of gender and neither do the cis. All trans girls have is the evidence of our dysphoric senses and a will to create a femininity with which to live. And it’s better if we do it together.”

“Your whole theory is to explain to yourself why you think trans girls are hot.”

“Maybe,” I concede. “But it could be something else as well. Maybe what I’m talking about is our *femmunism*.”

“Our what?”

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“Our femmunism. Not a communism, premised on a truth to come once the false, alienated commodified world is overthrown. Our femmunism: a world of appearances made real, in the here and now, signaling possibilities to each other. A T4T that’s not all fucks and fights and inevitable disappointments. That’s made together knowing only that we have nothing in common.<sup>19</sup> That the nothing is what’s common, or what’s *femmon*, rather.”

“You lost me there, but I like it.”

“The common, the community, communication, communism, all derive from the *munus*, which to the Romans was both a gift and a burden, a favor and an obligation, both public works and spectacle. Rather than what’s *co-munus*, the shared as if it was universal, I’m talking about what’s *fe-munus*, just between us. Not the abstract, timeless public sphere that is supposedly for all but really just for cis white men ...”

“Oh, I see what you did: you’re saying the liberal notion of the ideal public sphere and its model speech acts is a Platonist universal masking the particulars of a commonality that excludes us ...”

“You caught me out. Instead of which a femmunism without governing ideals, that is sensual, actual, particular.”

“Kiki as utopia,” you say, in an almost dreamy tone.<sup>20</sup>

“It’s self-centered, because it makes us the best thing in the world. The trans woman as the femme who is the false maker of the false. Truth as a woman. We are those whose unbidden desires make everything. And to the extent that everyone turns their desires into signs of something other than an approximation to a nonexistent ideal, not only is everyone femme, everyone is a trans woman. Everyone is a trap. The only difference is that we know it. We’re ahead of the game!”

“You’re so pretty when you go off like that,” you tease.

“‘Pretty’ is an interesting word. The pretty is different to the beautiful.”

“If you’re fishing for compliments, I can say you look beautiful.”

“I’m not fishing, but I like to be pretty. Pretty, not beautiful. It’s not that the pretty is different to the beautiful in degree, as if it was further from an ideal, had lesser being. It’s different in kind.”<sup>21</sup>

“Aha! Platonism again! It’s like your game today is to show that everything has the same metaphysics, where there’s a form or idea, that’s what’s really true and everything falls short of it by degrees.”

“You twigged to my little game,” I concede. “Trap metaphysics. But let me put in a word for

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this other way of being in the world, and why trans girls are already doing it, and know it, whether we *know* we know it, or not.”

“Do tell.”

“The word evolved from German and Dutch, from words that suggested the brisk, the clever, the tricky. Over centuries it became connected to femininity, to smallness, weakness, getting by on wits and wiles. To being crafty and to crafting appearances. Where beauty clads the pure form it approximates, the pretty can be a bit of a ruse, a decoy. The pretty is suspect in an era of commodity culture. It hides a defect.”

“The defect that we’re traps. That while we can be bred, we can’t breed. No wombs.” You gesture to your own delightfully curved belly.

“We’re traps for male desire. The ideal of womanhood we supposedly fake is a reproductive one. Platonist metaphysics is all about paternity. Copies are judged as more or less proximate progeny of a timeless idea. The illegitimate copy, transposed in from elsewhere, has to be detected and rejected. Fuck that though. What if what was pretty could lead desire astray in more interesting ways. Out of the reproduction of boredom. Toward forms of being that are no longer copies of an impossible, nonexistent original. Which are rather variations upon variations, a femmunism of experimental forms, whose existence attains being only in relation to each other. Let the sensuous tell us what is, and what’s possible. Well, that could be us, babe. That could be trans women. That could be our T4T world.”

“What about trans men?”

“I don’t know, hun. I leave it up to them to create their own T4T utopia. I expect you’ll find it if they do.”

“What about nonbinaries?”

“A nonbinary utopia is neither here nor there.”

“Don’t tweet that.”

“A nonbinary undoing of the Platonic metaphysics of the hierarchy of being would be different again. We can each have our own critique of the universality of Platonist metaphysics and our own particular universal alternative. Made in their here and now, out of whatever practice emerges out of the gap between our own being with each other and the world that denies that being.”

“So your little game is that for trans women, we take the idea that we are traps and turn it inside out, to make not being a proper cis copy of some impossible ideal woman a positive value. What about cis women?”

“We are living proof that it’s possible to be women without reference to the reproduction of an ideal of a woman. I think a lot of cis women want that too, even though some resist the

possibilities we embody. But I am in a sneaky way making us trans women, not an ideal at all, but more like a possible avant-garde of another kind of femininity when we make our being together with reference only to each other.”

“Speaking of trans women: I saw you leave the Bluestockings reading with that doll last night. You know the one. What the fuck, honey?”

I catch the server’s eye and hastily gather the check.

x

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1  
I really did meet Quentin Crisp, of all places at the Australian Consulate in New York, at a reception for the artist known as Pope Alice. We really did play the game. Later, he accompanied us to a Chinese restaurant and regaled us with stories and scarfed down a huge meal, until he went strangely silent and then threw the whole lot up. Pope Alice simply covered it with a tablecloth and asked for the check. His best-known book is Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant* (Penguin Classics, 1997).

2  
See Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming* (University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

3  
See Byung-Chul Han, *Shanzhai: Deconstruction in Chinese* (MIT Press, 2017). But the problem of naming an outside to Western metaphysics is that it too often becomes its other and mirror image.

4  
The key work of Plato for media theory, and hence for this dialogue, is *Phaedrus*. See Plato, *The Collected Dialogues* (Princeton University Press, 2005). See also Darren Tofts, *Memory Trade* (Craftsman House, 1998).

5  
This reading borrows freely, and not faithfully, from Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," *October*, no. 102 (Winter 1983). All of the readings in this text are unfaithful, of course, to remain true to its method.

6  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, from the Preface.

7  
This is a potted version with some modifications of the Nietzschean critique of Marxism in Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* (Verso, 2021) and Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (Indiana University Press, 1993) and my own *A Hacker Manifesto* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

8  
On which see Ann K. Clark, "The Girl, a Rhetoric of Desire," *Cultural Studies* 2, no. 2 (1987).

9  
Here I wonder if we can't improve on Jay Prosser's critique of Judith Butler in *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (Columbia University Press, 1998). The norms around which performances of gender oscillate, a copy without an original, nevertheless have as their strange attractor the negative of a Platonic idea or form.

10

With apologies to Oscar Wilde. The original line is from *Lady Windemere's Fan*, but *The Decay of Lying* is the more obvious influence on this essay. Both in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Harper Perennial, 2008).

11  
Julia Serrano, *Whipping Girl* (Seal Press, 2007).

12  
"LGBTQ+ 'Panic' Defense," National LGBT Bar Association, 2019  
<https://lgbtbar.org/programs/advocacy/gay-trans-panic-defense/>.

13  
See Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," *Selected Writings*, vol. 1 (Harvard University Press, 1996). This text makes two points pertinent here. Firstly, that violence installs and affirms the law, so law alone won't save us. Secondly, that in nonviolent forms of being together – Benjamin's example is the conference – there is no sanction for lying. Which is extendable into the concept that there's no idea regulating the nonviolent communal form that would require sanction.

14  
Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein," *Gay Liberation Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (1994). Stryker builds from the rage of feeling treated as monstrous to an affirmation of the monstrous. We are going to take a slightly different path here, starting from the figure of the trap rather than the monster.

15  
See Andrea Long Chu, *Females* (Verso, 2019). I'm rather turning the tables on sister Andrea, making being female the second-best thing in the world and being a trans woman the best thing in the world, as she who in actively shaping a response to the unbidden desire to transition can escape the order of truth and posit a new value.

16  
Willow Verkerk, *Nietzsche and Friendship* (Bloomsbury, 2019) has a rather more careful reading, informed by trans studies, of Nietzsche on gender.

17  
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Their figure of becoming-woman is an elaboration of Nietzsche by way of Judge Schreber.

18  
Susan Stryker, "Transgender Studies Today," *boundary2 online*, August 20, 2014  
<https://www.boundary2.org/2014/08/transgender-studies-to-day-an-interview-with-susan-stryker/>; Eva Hayward, "More Lessons from a Starfish," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Fall–Winter 2008).



Stryker's concept of the cut as an edit to the body, further elaborated by Hayward, points towards an anti-Platonist metaphysics of the corporeal edit.

19

Sheri Hoem, "Community and the 'Absolutely Feminine,'" *Diacritics* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1996) picks up the thread of a game among the bros of postwar theory – Bataille, Blanchot, Nancy – as to what a community could even be that had nothing in common, and how Duras interrupts them. It's maybe no accident that Kathy Acker was reading some of these texts at the time she was finishing *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (Grove Press, 1996) – a book which one could read as a theory of femmunism, of the being-together of femmes who approximate no idea, who do not police each other's differences, who have nothing in femmon.

20

See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2019). The insufficiency of that utopia for trans women comes up via Muñoz's treatment of Kevin Aviance, and the problem of femme expression in gay male spaces, where it might be better to say it is all too often concentrated into the figure of the drag performer so it can be disavowed. But rather than a critique of Muñoz, a differentiation, a different utopia, neither more nor less.

21

See McKenzie Wark, "Femme as in Fuck you," *e-flux journal*, no. 102 (September 2019) <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/102/282888/femme-as-in-fuck-you/>.

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