

INTRODUCTION

Disjunction and Conjunction

Thinking Trans through the Cinematic

In one continuous motion, my idea of myself and who I am turns inside out, like a pond that flips upside down in the spring, when the cold winter water slides under, and the earth-warmed bottom water rises. The underlife comes to the surface. All those years I was no obedient asexual girl, but a restless lover searching for the lost garden, that place of male woman and female man. The mythic place before the Fall, before Adam was shaped from clay by Lilith, and Lilith chased out and forgotten, before Eve was torn from Adam's side and forced to lie down under him. From the beginning I have wanted you. I have wanted to sit beside you on our bed, touch you, feed you the jewels of pomegranate torn from the flesh of our lives. I have wanted to walk with you in that place where we are both at once, to lie down with you under the trees that have not yet begun to flame with the dividing sword, by the water that shimmers with heat rising, risen to the light.

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT, *S/He* (1995)

Cinema's greatest power may be its ability to evacuate meanings and identities, to proliferate resemblances without sense or origin. [. . .] There is no structuring lack, no primordial division, but a continuity between the physiological and affective responses of my own body and the appearances and disappearances, the mutations and perdurances, of the bodies and images on screen. The important distinction is not the hierarchical, binary one between bodies and images, or between the real and its representations. It is rather a question of discerning multiple and continually varying interactions among what can be defined indifferently as bodies and as images: degrees of stillness and motion, of action and passion, of clutter and emptiness, of light and dark.

STEVEN SHAVIRO, *The Cinematic Body* (1993)

It started when I tried out the words “trans lover” in my mouth, feeling them roll around, and hoping they would dissolve and absolve. I wondered whether this phrase would be a solution, perhaps not permanent, but would at least neutralize becoming caught between the sexual identity labels that rely on stabilizing the gender of myself and my intimate. As Minnie Bruce Pratt in *S/He* and many others attest, I was not the first, and surely will not be the last, to come up against desire’s constricted grammar, or the “dividing sword.”¹ I sought out film images that conveyed what I was experiencing in aesthetic terms, and in doing so, reveled in what Steven Shaviro sees as cinema’s greatest power to give pleasure despite—and even in the evacuation of—meanings and identities.² Of course cinema tells moving stories in documentary and fiction about people I projected to be like myself, yet something else can be at play, which I seized upon. Gilles Deleuze expressed it thus: “the most complete examples of the disjunction between seeing and speaking are to be found in the cinema.”³ Cinema as a discrete aesthetic form presents a golden opportunity for staging disjunction, for experimenting with how bodies and images are seen and articulated, often in startling ways. Cinephiles might be defined by their desire to seek out novel ways of perceiving the world, intimately attached to cinema’s world-making power.⁴ In this way, cinephilia models an intensified mode of trans-loving and trans-becoming.

With *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change*, I venture that the cinematic cuts and sutures between the visual and the spoken, between frames, and between genres are delinking and relinking practices of transfiguration. I offer a cinematic philosophy of transgender embodiment through deep consideration of the ways that film constitutes a medium for transitioning, thereby eliciting modes of perceiving disjunctions that are advantageous to trans studies. *Transgender* need not refer to one particular identity or way of being embodied, Susan Stryker asserts, but rather offers “an umbrella term for a wide variety of *bodily effects*” that disconnect a series of “normative linkages.”⁵ Strung together, these linkages are the assumed coincidence of one’s anatomy at birth with an assigned gender category, the psychological identifications with sexed body images and/or gendered subject positions, and the performance of gendered social, sexual, or kinship functions. Like in the cinema, one’s perception of seeing and speaking can become disrupted by the disjunction between what one thinks they see

(on a body) and how that body speaks (its subjective identification). And, in both cases, the resulting bodily effects can register in a range of affects. Engaging with cinematic aesthetics brings into my frame of analysis how transgender embodiment, whether on-screen or off, takes shape in the proliferating interchanges of seeing and speaking that, for some, create a shimmer of heat rising.

If I was a trans lover, then, this relation would not just speak to my own sense of transness, or deep affinity with people who might provoke delinking bodily effects, but also extend to loving how cinema engenders similarly novel transversals of sensory perception. In this regard, I examine the striking similarities within the aesthetic forms of cinema and transgender embodiment to understand their force of expression, forming and differing the body. The analogical thinking I engage in here is a trans studies strategy to explicate the potential—what if—relations between film and trans embodiment. This book's argument is built, therefore, upon an ampersand, first hypothetically conjectured but then pursued in great, literal detail through the corpus I've collected here. I concede that by pushing beyond simple comparisons, and inevitably invoking the generalization of change as trans aesthetics, I risk rendering trans or the cinema a mere rhetorical device for the sake of producing a metaphoric comparison of each in relation to the other.⁶ To avoid this figure of speech, my method involves following parallel tracks between individual films and trans embodiments, between sound and image, form and content as they intersect in each of my cases. I do so to identify how their complex relationships inspire a shimmering specific to the context in which they appear, whether conjoined, tangential, or adjacent to each other. It is my hope that readers invested in the discipline of cinema studies will find their own ampersand constructions in which affective shimmering and cinematic shimmers can be excavated to bring new conceptualizations to form-content relations. Although my stake in transgender studies pushes a particular political agenda to defend an inclusive understanding of trans-and-cinema, I can imagine other projects developing with many other audiovisual image examples attuned to the ways the form and content of differentiated bodies are made to shimmer.

I intervene polemically in the rich history of feminist film theory to suggest a correction to its foundational claim of the sex/gender binary structuration: film's potential for thinking/feeling in a nonbinary way in shimmers recasts the assumptions of a strict male or female grammar for

subjects on-screen and off. Contrary to Laura Mulvey, who considers the female spectator as a psychically cross-dressing woman in her spurious concept of “trans-sex identification” detached from any real understanding of transvestism or transsexuality, I see that a “cross-identification” is less uncommon, possibly open to anyone.⁷ Even at the heart of psychoanalysis, *sex* is an unsettled marker: Mulvey’s concept of identification is taken from Lacan’s discussion of the mirror stage in which it is developed as a bodily transformation occurring on the threshold of the visible world.⁸ In fact, should we want to continue down the path of psychoanalysis (which I mainly won’t throughout the course of the book), Kaja Silverman and others demonstrate how multiple and complex forms of identification are just the normal course of (un)becoming a visible, sexing subject.⁹ The difference I wish to make in the field of transgender studies is that a theory of shimmering images renders viable more, if not all, possibilities of threshold embodiments groping their way toward social identities. Regrounding the world-making practice of film in the transfeminist perspective of shimmering opens a line of escape from thinking in set binary oppositions by grasping the ongoing event of differential becomings.

Anybodys

One of this book project’s crucial moments of theoretical and corpus formation occurred during the heat of August 2004, inside a dusty studio in Brooklyn. I sat with multimedia artist Tobaron Waxman, poring over his personally assembled video and film collection. We were preparing a presentation of clips from the female-to-male transsexual (FtM) erotic archive called “GenderfluXXXors Uncoded: A FtM *Supornova*.” The title was a mouthful, but we sought to raise awareness of the breadth of imagery that spoke of, or struggled with, trans eroticism. The emphasis on FtM or trans men characters was to counter the common assumptions that trans people are mainly trans women and that trans eroticism is limited to the sexual niche of commercial “she-male” porn. Also, it was familiar territory, as both of us had created videos about transmasculinity and desire.

We looked outside of what might constitute a trans cinema canon, such as *The Crying Game* (1992), *Ma Vie en Rose* (1997), and *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999). I wanted to show films that avoided the cinematic shock device known as “the reveal,” which Danielle M. Seid describes generally

as a moment “when the trans person is subjected to the pressures of a pervasive gender/sex system that seeks to make public the ‘truth’ of the trans person’s gendered and sexed body.”¹⁰ In the dominant “natural attitude about gender,” this bodily truth is that genitalia are the essential determinants of sex, which in turn determine gender.¹¹ Though naïve, this genital epistemology plays a structuring role in the film audience’s reductive knowledge of a transgender life. The device of exposure goes beyond use as a plot twist in film and literature to frame news headlines and potentially to erupt anytime the trans body becomes subject to discovery, as with a doctor visit, a police arrest, a border crossing, or playing sports. The harmful stereotype of trans people as “evil deceivers and make-believers” stems from this kind of pretheoretical common sense about the anatomical reality of gender, as Talia Mae Bettcher powerfully argues. Bettcher explains the double bind of a conflated gender presentation (appearance) and sexed body (reality) as locking a trans person in to being either visible as a pretender, or invisible and risk forced disclosure; either way, she states, “we are fundamentally viewed as illusory.”¹²

Though the filmic reveal is often played for comedic laughs or light drama, it actually stages a forced, violent moment of physical disclosure that undermines a trans character’s understanding of themselves. The reveal enacts a struggle over the body’s meaning, but one the trans person always loses. As a reparative narrative technique for this losing battle, Jack Halberstam’s “transgender gaze” describes the cinematic structure in which a presumably cisgender spectator’s identification aligns with the doubled trans figure; they are shown looking at each other in shot and reverse-shot in this moment of crisis.¹³ Using *Boys Don’t Cry* as his prime example, in a scene of abject dismissal of Brandon Teena’s masculine presentation by stripping their clothes off, the cisgender spectator is made aware most of all of how the reveal feels, rather than how it feels to be trans.¹⁴ In addition to this limited version of transgender looking that hinges on experiencing secondhand debasement, I find it restricting to assess trans cinema on the basis of how films that figure a trans protagonist or character deal with the reveal and the logic of being illusory. Given the groundwork laid already in this research area, it is not compelling—nor necessary—for me to write a history of the changing or static representation of trans* people in visual media.¹⁵ The corpus of trans cinema might instead be circumscribed by the challenge of understanding trans forms of life as truth outside of the visual reveal (trans-cinema epistemol-

ogies) alongside describing trans lived experience outside of the dualist terms of mind/body, man/woman, true/false, and so on (trans-cinema ontologies). The sheer popularity and volume of trans cinema begs a fresh take on its appeal to a wide-ranging audience and as material for filmmakers; consider the mushrooming trans film festivals from Amsterdam to Beirut, Seattle, Sydney, Los Angeles, Bologna, Toronto, London, Quito, Munich, and so on.¹⁶

Shimmering Images offers the perspective that transgender and cinematic aesthetics alike operate through the bodily practice and technological principle of disjunction. More radically, within practices of filmmaking delinking and relinking across the cuts, gaps, fissures take place in the normal course of cinematography, rather than being exceptions. This makes it the art form most suited to a politically advantageous comparison with transgender forms of embodiment. Moreover, approaching embodiment through film reroutes the emphasis on sex/gender difference through aesthetics. What if trans embodiment is not primarily about sex or gender, but about experimenting with the aesthetics of corporeality in terms of efficacy and political purchase? My formal inquiry of how disjunction and conjunction occur is deeply interwoven with the political urgency of how degrees of difference, incoherence, and oscillation are expressed as viable. As an example, the 1961 film version of the musical *West Side Story* negotiates how normative linkages limit gendered and erotic visibility both specific to and beyond transgender bodies.¹⁷

West Side Story features the character Anybodys, who wants to be in the Jets gang composed of white youth, the fierce rivals of the Sharks, who are all Puerto Rican. Gangs are made up of boys and their girls. Anybodys wants to be accepted as one of the (white) boys, but is rejected throughout the film and told to “put on a skirt.” The phrase tells Anybodys that s/he can only be a Jet if s/he tries to be one of the girls. The script describes Anybodys as a tomboy, a girl who refuses to express female identification through girl gender presentation. For this refusal, and for expressing a gender-nonconforming identification, Anybodys is called a freak. In the character of Anybodys we can find anybody and nobody: everyone and no one. Any and all bodies are subject to the enforcement of a normative gender presentation in alignment with their raced sex. Any body that cannot or does not have a recognizable gender expression as a boy or a girl becomes a *no body*, a presumably inconsequential body within this highly segregated social scene.¹⁸ Moreover, this social scene of gangs

organizes around a heterosexual scheme of boys and their girls. Where might a transmasculine body fit into this erotic script?

At a crucial point in the film, the character Anybodys is consequential because of what s/he knows. The gang's fighting has escalated and Tony, the leader of the Jets, has disappeared to hide from his crime. Everyone wants to find him and find out what he will do next, but he could be anywhere in the boroughs of New York City—a needle in a haystack. The Jets gang walks through the dark streets trying to figure out how to locate their leader. Lacking a socially normative body, Anybodys says that s/he slips in and out of the shadows, “like wind through a fence.” Only this trans character can move between the barriers erected between the racial and geographic territories of the rival gangs to see and hear things others cannot. Stretching back to the Greek character Tiresias, gender-ambiguous and gender-changing figures are often the “knowers” of special secrets. Anybodys might be understood as another one of these fictional invocations connecting gender-variant embodiment with special knowledge. When a gang member says, “Ah, what's the freak know,” Anybodys retorts, “plenty.”

As a special agent for the Jets, Anybodys becomes more important to them, as indicated in one scene by becoming more visible, moving from the darkness behind the gang, yelling, “hey buddy boys!” to the side, hissing “listen, *listen!*” Finally, Anybodys arrives at the center of the group, and under the bright studio lights delivers the news that Chino of the Sharks has a gun. The gang takes in this vital knowledge and searches for Tony, while the new leader Ice tells Anybodys to go back to darting in and out of the shadows. From start to finish, this scene associates Anybodys with shadows. Living in an undetectable space, however, does not mean Anybodys is invisible to all. Ice alone seems to be able to acknowledge Anybodys: he says, “you done good, buddy boy,” rhetorically making Anybodys one of the buddy boys s/he wants to be. This validation includes Anybodys in the Jets gang and, perhaps more importantly, in the social gang of boys. Anybodys wistfully responds, “Thanks Daddio.” A quiet exchange that speaks volumes, this is the only point in the script that Anybodys is not denigrated, the one time that s/he is acknowledged with a grateful smile.

This fragment about the seemingly inconsequential character of Anybodys in *West Side Story*, and, moreover, his/her cinematographic rendering, is emblematic of my project. Anybodys, slipping in and out of

shadows, moves into and out of the light, becoming a shimmer of a body, difficult to grasp perceptually. And, as the film suggests through dialogue, plot, and style, shimmers are difficult to grasp as knowable entities. We might also say that in general, like *Anybodies*'s darting movements, the image is in fact constantly changing: the flickering of frames with black space between, or of pixels, generates a sense of movement. Yet, these changing forms of the image can appear consistent due to the viewer's persistence of vision that maps onto an acculturated perceptual schema. At issue is not why impressions shimmer, for they do so continuously, but rather how the identity of emergent or in-flux entities becomes stilled into a unit and fixed with meaning. This is to say that shimmering directs me to think about the patterning of light. Patterns emerge not just from regulated practices of looking, but from what Sean Cubitt calls "practices of light" that become modulated via visual technologies.¹⁹ Light falls on a surface, but light is also captured, distributed, controlled. Prisms, kaleidoscopes, phantasmagoria, Chromoscope, and the "Shirley" card for white skin tones all represent proto-cinematic visual technologies for controlling light. In stressing the movement of shimmering, I pressure those stultified historical optics for perceiving gender *like this*, race *like that*, beauty *here*, desire *in situ*. Shimmering images come with components, requiring at least surface, light, a lens apparatus. I argue that cultural makers, like trans people, and certainly like the trans* cultural producers whose work I study in this book, have experimented with changing around the components to literally create new images that reintroduce shimmering into our line of vision.

Shimmering is my concept for change in its emergent, flickering form. What might this insight from cinema studies offer to transgender studies: that film consists in formal possibilities for grasping change within degrees of stillness and motion, of action and passion, of clutter and emptiness, of light and dark? In these pages I articulate a theory of the shimmering image that *Anybodies* forms in the stylized aesthetic of light and shadows and erotic script of longing in *West Side Story*. Any body becomes somebody to those like myself who desire to see across the disjunction, who trace the wavering oscillation. Our carnal vision affirmatively perceives what to others is a blind spot, seems inscrutable, or, worse, seems simply illusory. Drawing on cinephilic practices of looking to build new a conceptual model for trans desire—for transition and for those in transition—I make my way across the water that shimmers with heat rising.

Counting Past Two:

An Inventory of Shimmers

From 1997 to 1999 and again in 2002 in Toronto, Canada, Mirha-Soleil Ross co-organized the “Counting Past 2” trans film and art festival that winked at the necessity for learning more genders and genres.²⁰ Taking inspiration from her approach to trans as multiplicity, I collect and collate the promiscuous notion of shimmering. Iterations of the shimmer in the writings of philosophers and of trans and film scholars, including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Susan Stryker, and Steven Shaviro, employ *shimmer* as a noun akin to sparkle or flash, the verb *to shimmer* sometimes translated as scintillate or glimmer, or *shimmering* as a modifier to describe change in its alluring, twinkling, flickering form. The various expressions of a shimmering quality confound distinctions in their writing between subject/object, thinking/feeling, and sight/touch. In due course I will discuss them all in detail, but for now let me attend to Roland Barthes, who most succinctly brings together the aesthetic, affective, and politically urgent character of the shimmer that pinpoints how it breaks with binary and dialectical thinking. My reading of Barthes is indebted to Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg’s methodological explication of how to outplay the paradigm of binary thinking in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, entitled “An Inventory of Shimmers,” that enters here as a companion text.²¹

In his 1977–1978 course at the Collège de France, Barthes introduced figures, traits, or twinklings (*scintillements*) of the Neutral, selecting “that which outplays [*déjoue*] the paradigm,” or better, “everything that baffles the paradigm.”²² Following Saussurean linguistics, the paradigm is formed of oppositional terms that produce discursive meaning when one term is actualized; hence, meaning is produced in conflict (“the choice of one term against another”).²³ Barthes hits on the idea of a structural creation to break the implacable binarism: the Neutral being an amorphous third term that can parry meaning that suspends the conflictual basis of discourse. Though a nonexhaustive exercise to find examples of the neutral, I feel Barthes’s commitment in the assertion that “‘To outplay the paradigm’ is an ardent, burning activity”; moreover, the methodological analysis of the Neutral is a manner in which to present the struggles of his time.²⁴ For my purposes, I locate the Neutral in the struggle to outplay the binary oppositions that structure the paradigm of sex-gender-sexuality,

loosely distinguished by social and cultural movements concerned with trans* politics, intersex rights, and their complex and sometimes vexed relations to feminist and queer theory, what Judith Butler coins the “New Gender Politics.”²⁵ Of particular interest—no surprise—is the trait of the Neutral that Barthes names “the shimmer,” but also the figure of “the androgyne,” which exposes the Neutral’s gendered facet.²⁶ Combined, these twinklings bring out the sexual basis of the Neutral/Neuter while pointing to ways that Barthes’s ultimate dream of having “an exemption from meaning” can be found in the cinema.²⁷

The political will of the Neutral is found in aesthetics. In reflecting on a spilled ink bottle for the pigment color “neutral,” Barthes considers the opposition between colorful and colorless.²⁸ In the subsection on “Shimmer,” the monochromatic schema found in the paintings of gray shades, or *grisaille*, substitutes for the idea of a stark opposition paradigm—that of the overall slight difference, or the effort for difference, expressed in the term *nuance*.²⁹ The etymology of *nuance* is from *nuer* (“to shade”) and from *nue* (“cloud”) and shows how its meaning of slight difference or shade of color exists in the miniscule gradations and degrees of intensity. Barthes concludes, “this integrally and almost exhaustively nuanced space is the shimmer [. . .] whose aspect, perhaps whose meaning, is subtly modified according to the angle of the subject’s gaze.”³⁰ If trans is not identified as either/or, but depends on the “angle” of the subject’s gaze emerging in different contexts, then the slight modifications of gender could be likened to the nuanced space of the shimmer. The Latin root of *nuance*, *nubes*, meaning “a cloud, mist, vapor,” suggests the diffuse character of the shimmer’s inchoate aesthetic. The subject in Barthes’s quote above is a spectator gazing upon a visual text of some kind. (His examples for color contemplation are a self-portrait by Lao-tzu and Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.) I would, however, like to leave open how the gaze adjusted to a trans angle might also open up a nuanced space that subtly modifies vision. The shimmer might not lie (solely) in the text, but (also) in the subject’s angled gaze. Sara Ahmed tells us that “what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival,” an embodied point of view in the affective atmosphere.³¹ How then might we become receptive to shimmers, or cultivate a practice of seeing its more-than-stereo optics?

Barthes describes the Neutral as having a state of *to pathos*, Greek for what one feels, that escapes the opposition of what one does or the pas-

sive state of *hè pathè*.³² Thus, he suggests that to pathos (both active and affected, withdrawn from the will to act but not from passion) describes the “shimmering field of the body, insofar as it changes, goes through changes.”³³ Dropping into one’s own shimmering field induces what he calls the strongest minimal existence: “the passion of difference” after Blanchot.³⁴ The starting point to outplay the paradigm of oppositions and negations is attending to the shimmers of a process of change, not the positioning. Perhaps I sense some humor in his imagining of a future “science of shimmers,” but he has also demonstrated a serious, long-standing practice to listen and watch for shimmering nuance.³⁵ This Barthes calls “the inventory of shimmers, of nuances, of states, of changes (*pathè*)”; he cheekily dubs it “path-ology” not to raise it to a metadiscourse but instead to nominate a Neutral power of being affected akin to Ahmed’s “what we may feel.”³⁶ Later he returns to how a path-ology might be practiced by situating the analysis within his own sense of calmness, a paradox of “emotive hyperconsciousness of the affective minimal.”³⁷ The consciousness of the smallest shifts “implies an extreme changeability of affective moments, a rapid modification, into shimmer.”³⁸ Shimmering affectivity confounds distinctions between from within or from without.

Barthes, writing on the shimmer, conveys a baseline ontology by proposing a primal form of affectivity that “oscillates between irreducible individuality and endless differentiation,” as Laura Wahlfors describes it.³⁹ Available to anybody, trans modifications highlight this zero-degree ontology (as in a state of being) experienced as stable and fluid: stillness located in flux. Although the leading edge of transgender studies uses *trans**, *trans-*, or *transing* to resolve the now outdated alignment of transgender with fluctuating gender identity and transsexual with a fixed gender identity, there has not been as yet a sustained investigation of this proposed trans ontology of change that might depart from an anthropocentric realm into aesthetics.⁴⁰ Combining Alfred North Whitehead’s philosophy that the “adventures of ideas” reveal the history of the variety of human mental experience and Mieke Bal’s interdisciplinary practice of “traveling concepts” that experiments with tracking the circulations of a concept, this book privileges the adventure of thinking the shimmer for the new understandings it offers of trans onto-epistemologies as emergent, affective, and processual.⁴¹

The neutral twinkling of the shimmer breaks with algebraic mathematical beginning and end points to consider “only intervals”: the rela-

tion between moments, spaces, or objects, that which is in play.⁴² Broadening Spinoza's definition of the body in terms of its *ability* to enter "relations of movement and rest," Brian Massumi writes that the "'relation between movement and rest' is another way of saying 'transition.'" ⁴³ A body's ability as a power (or potential) to affect, or be affected, means that it is one with its transitions; and each transition is accompanied by a variation in capability that marks the degree to which a body tends to move toward a present futurity.⁴⁴ Such intervals of movement–rest form the basis of gender transitions, which are usually thought of only in terms of the takeoff and landing points of the crossing, as in male-to-female. The greater challenge of transgender studies would be to stay with the indefinite period or moment in suspension from the gridded paradigm, while fully acknowledging a tendency or intensity that suggests direction, location, context. With a gender transition comes a potential bodily change through self-multiplication across the shimmering passage of unresolvable disjunction in which we all live and breathe. For example, Eva Hayward writes from her trans-sexing perspective, but offers this advice to anyone: "Moving toward your self through your body is less about a horizon in which change stops than about how to embrace the endless process of change."⁴⁵

Trans ontologies are process-oriented, rather than object-oriented. An appropriate trans method would centralize the pulses of affect guiding ontological movement and change. Seigworth and Gregg's "An Inventory of Shimmers," their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, offers a highly useful guide to tracking the bombs, blips, and blooming of affect. The title clearly signals how they seek to harness Barthes's critical inventorying practice to an affect studies methodology in which research "becomes force then a matter of accounting for the progressive accentuation (plus/minus) of intensities, their incremental shimmer: the stretching of process underway, not position taken."⁴⁶ This practice of elucidating the glimmers of gradation is *trans*-oriented, not determination-oriented, in so far as it attends to the tendencies of transitions between movement and rest, "not position taken." Affect studies offers the richest set of vocabularies for describing "swarming, sliding differences," or "what so often passes beneath mention," as Seigworth and Gregg write.⁴⁷ Like the neutral seeking to outplay the paradigm, trans ontologies deflect the demand for definitive meaning of differences, showing this demand to be an offensive or misguided side effect of the "'fascism' of language."⁴⁸

Guiding my chapters are the twin invocations of shimmering in relation to an incipient subjectivity and specific cinematic images that emphasize incremental shimmer within the frame or between frames. In terms of making an inventory, I conduct a formal analysis of shimmering affectivity in and between the bodies of viewer/analyst and film. It is an idiosyncratic method related to my cinephile practice of registering the continuous, shimmering gradations of intensities; or, I could say, of Shaviro's degrees of stillness and motion, of action and passion, of light and dark. As Elspeth Probyn writes, rapping her reader on the knuckles but kindly, "A general gesture to Affect won't do the trick. If we want to invigorate our concepts, we need to follow through on what different affects do, at different levels" to our bodies, our theory, our writing.⁴⁹ Eugenie Brinkema agrees, adding that Deleuzian fetishizing of affect's *potentiality* for its own sake often commits "the sin of generality"; in its place we need to get specific about how different affects become bound up in specific forms, in dense details, in order to access a vocabulary for articulating those many differences.⁵⁰ My writing oscillates between an empirical registering of the felt reality of relation that builds on (new) feminist materialisms and a formalist analysis of affects that brings me closest to aesthetics and its tradition of close reading. A theory of shimmering images uses concepts associated with formal, bodily aesthetics in place of less precise identity terms, such as male/female, masculine/feminine, man/woman, which fall short of grasping movement and cause "grid lock," to borrow a pun from Massumi.⁵¹

This is not to say gender does not play a role—not at all—only that to get at its affective hold I necessarily need to set aside the fetishes of Man and Woman that cover over the gendering process that is underway. Barthes again proves prescient in that he turns to linguistic formations of the Neuter in which it essentially refers to the inanimate and/or nongendered.⁵² It interests him how the Neuter has faded away in Indo-European languages and now, "faced with a ruling lack of the Neuter (of language), discourse [. . .] opens up an infinite, shimmering field of nuances, of myths, that could allow the Neuter, fading within language, to be alive elsewhere. Which way? I would say, using a vague word: the way of affect: discourse comes to the Neuter by means of the affect."⁵³ Might the Neuter's affective liveliness show up in the animated field of disjunction and conjunction? In this sense might cinema be an elsewhere for the Neuter, "not what cancels the genders, what combines them, keeps them

both present in the subject [film], at the same time, after each other”?⁵⁴ The Neuter slips into the Neutral figure of the Androgyne that follows, a figure who for Barthes baffles the genital paradigm through presenting a complex degree of mixture.⁵⁵ Operating in an other-than-binary mode, the Androgyne’s masculine and feminine fluctuation is taken by Barthes in a specific, limited way that I cannot follow further: “man in whom there is feminine.”⁵⁶ In his concluding course lecture he apologizes for how poorly explored this final figure of Androgyne is, but at least his notes on the Androgyne do attempt to comprehend how a trans bodily effect, gender combination, or nonbinary gender gradient operates in a shimmering field of nuance. Although still a half-thought how to think the Neutral and Neuter in the Androgyne figure, in the years since transgender theories have come to offer a much more satisfying en fleshment of this figure modelled in posttranssexual embodiment, transgender politics, and the practice of transing.

At the heart of Sandy Stone’s ground-clearing essay from the late 1980s, “The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” lies a theory of posttranssexual embodiment as that which refutes the binary imposition of a defined gender by activating a nonbinary, or combinatory, gradient of lived gender.⁵⁷ Stone’s manifesto calls for making use of one’s trans-embodied agency to bring forth all the territories between two unambiguous personae in a transsexual’s history: the assigned gender that after transition typically becomes erased by the self-determined gender wrought through medical, legal, and/or social transition. Stone proposes that gender consists in visible signs that people read; therefore transsexuals are a genre, “a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire” has not yet been explored.⁵⁸ A strict binary gender identity and the corollary mandate of an *undisruptive* transsexual expression become rewritten by those bodies that refuse to, or simply cannot, fit into the order of signs that conceal transsexual meaning. Thus announcing a self as posttranssexual means becoming a walking, talking sign of gender excess, showing off an overfull, fluctuating gender embodiment. Stone is emphatic that transsexuals “must take responsibility for all of their history” in order to reappropriate difference and to reclaim the power of the refigured and reinscribed body as a space of authentic nuance.⁵⁹

Although the complexities and ambiguities of lived trans experience

may to some seem to be false or unintelligible, I wager that cinematic aesthetics of the shimmer pattern the affective space of posttranssexual embodiment. My inventory of trans shimmerings seizes on filmic materials that productively disrupt structured sexualities and spectra of desire through cinematographic delinking and relinking. An inventory will always remain incomplete. Instead of working exhaustively, each chapter tracks the scintillations of trans-embodied “texts” within key episodes of experimentation in cinematic history: early trick films, docu-porn, and multigenre avant-garde flicks. Thus, next to and alongside the inventory of trans shimmerings runs a counter-history of cinema as a machinic linking and delinking of embodiment, morphology, and sexuality. In the next section I sketch the ways that a trans approach to film studies can open up the field to a radical revisioning of cinema’s power to fascinate, radiate, and enliven.

Animating Trans-Inter-Queer

Shimmering Images follows the axiom that film is a subset of animation broadly construed. But *how* cinemas bring depicted and viewing bodies into animate and lively being is under investigative pressure. The writings of Alan Cholodenko argue that film “as such” is a form of animation, not only graphic art or digital film, but even live action, for “animation is the endowing with life and the endowing with motion” to the stillness of individual frames through the (artificial) movement of the projector or other animatic apparatus.⁶⁰ In other words, an animated image has a life cycle of movement and rest, stirrings and diminutions. To be clear, Cholodenko states, “Animation is the first, last and enduring attraction of cinema, of film.”⁶¹ Our attachment to the (non)human life of a film—neither dead nor alive, both dead and alive, confounding all either/or-isms—ruptures the proper hierarchies of intimacy. Film’s shimmering pulses, flickering from dark to image to dark, death to life to death, bring us to the affective core of ontological enquiry.⁶² If film operates as an apparatus for the animation of the body, cinema itself seems inversely to be animated by the morphing qualities of bodies. For trans subjectivities, film’s challenge to bodily autonomy and affective sovereignty has special valence. The ability to animate and become reanimated lies at the heart of transition narratives that follow a trajectory of dying and being reborn,

mapping onto the affective states of suffering body dysphoria and becoming happy through surgical and hormonal intervention, forming what some have called the dominant transsexual narrative.⁶³

Stone's appraisal of the published autobiographies and personal files from trans women reminds us to consider not by whom, but *for* whom "the transsexual" was constructed: a fictitious character who goes from unambiguous albeit unhappy man, to unambiguous (presumably happy) woman.⁶⁴ Of course it is possible that the felt reality of one's self may relate to a singular binary identity: that of an unambiguous man or woman who orientates heterosexually before and after transition. However, for those who do not, their dramas of redemption nevertheless must comply with medical/psychological texts that determine the permissible range of expressions of physical sexuality and correct gender role presentation. Anything less than ideal femininity or masculinity would be grounds for disqualification from treatment. Early trans memoirs such as Jan Morris's *Conundrum* (1974) display this revitalization trope by drawing gender conversion scenes starring a God-like surgeon-creator/rescuer, who is inevitably a heterosexual male that validates straight female identity. Setting the standard in film narratives, Doris Wishman's "transploitation" documentary *Let Me Die a Woman* (1978) stages an elaborate surgical scene glorifying medical expertise, curiously undercut by the sequences with trans women interviewees who explain that to access surgery one must dress the part of an appealing, young heterosexual woman. But we can also cycle back further into the Western cultural imaginary to find trans figures addressing godly parental figures that bring them to life.

The example is, then, in *Frankenstein*, James Whale's 1931 film adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel, where I find godly parental figures. The scene of the doctor bringing his patchwork creature to life most prominently sets the pattern for trans narratives that co-opt the surgeon's maniacal creative powers.⁶⁵ Although most Frankenstein scholarship focuses on how this unborn monster is an Other projected from the human psyche, the tale is also clearly one about the dangerous powers of animation. Dr. Frankenstein brings his creature to life on the operating table using a projector that he claims shoots out a "ray [that] endows the body with life." In a reverse anatomical theatre dissection, this re-vivisection galvanizes life as it shoots through the body. Is this not an apt metaphor for cinema's animating power and, equally, a vision of trans-sexing practices? The figures of scientist, surgeon, and filmmaker enfold in an or-

chestration of animating the light bodies—each can claim, in the voice of Dr. Frankenstein, “I made it with my own hands,” but also the anxious declaration of “it’s alive!”

Trans cinematic space offers a material means of achieving embodiment through cut and sutured images that are shot through with projections of desire. The critical move, I want to assert, is to understand that the animated trans body calls into question the naturalistic effects of biomedical technologies by comparing them to cinematic special effects.⁶⁶ A founding text of transgender studies, Stryker’s “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” asserts, “As we rise up from the operating tables of our rebirth, we transsexuals are something more, and something other, than the creatures our makers intended us to be.”⁶⁷ This claim to animating agency (heard in “rise up”) returns in her more recent scholarly and artistic work on the first globally mediatized transsexual icon, Christine Jorgensen. Stryker describes her filmmaking practice for this experimental documentary as exploring the *cinematic logic of transsexual embodiment*.⁶⁸ Before transition Jorgensen had professional experience in the cutting room of a film production unit that Stryker conjectures helped Jorgensen to imagine how a surgical (cutting) room would similarly operate for her personally. In both cases, Stryker explains, the cutting of the physical medium of the image, the splicing together of images in new ways, the projection of the medium so that it becomes a public way to tell a story through those constructed images altogether form her practice of reassembly. This “cinematic logic” follows from the ways in which trans bodily practices are situated on what Stryker calls “the shimmering boundary between the real and virtual, the fantasized and the actualized.”⁶⁹ I want to underline that the shifting scintillations of the shimmering boundary refuse to settle embodied or cinematic images into the diction of true or false, fantasy or actuality. The radical antistatic status of shimmering suggests a suspension of being either really there or not there, of being fully graspable. To become situated, or to situate oneself, in the shimmering of these boundaries opens up another way of knowing that does not rely on visual certainty. Shimmering suspends epistemological disbelief.

Navigating the fluctuations of the visual field as transgender, intersex, or queer comes with great risks, but also potential gain. For instance, consider the tremendous number of video blogs (vlogs) on YouTube that

document and discuss physical, social, and emotional dimensions of gender transition. The start of one's transition on a trans vlog initiates being born as a media-body, which leads scholar Tobias Raun to dub them "screen-births."⁷⁰ Vlogging engenders the ongoing process of gender materialization by providing tools to dismantle and reassign certain gendered signifiers. Raun explains its appeal in that it promises (like transition itself) to make visible the identity that often begins as imperceptible.⁷¹ This mediatization practice enables the vlogger to experience the image as an embodied subject, to locate their voice within the discourses of transitioning, and to connect with a greater community. Becoming seen or read makes it harder to be ignored, so the practice of visibility can be productive as a politics of interrupting dominant ways of categorizing corporeal selves. This rests, though, on the promise that increased visibility equals increased power in some direct way.⁷² The result could equally be in shoring up the assumption that all real identities are visibly marked, which Peggy Phelan calls "the ideology of the visible" that as well expunges the power of the unmarked, unspoken, and unseen.⁷³

Identity politicking that adheres to this ideology ignores at its peril psychoanalytical and deconstructionist explanations of how visibility is a trap. Phelan warns that it "summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession."⁷⁴ You don't have to go in for deconstruction or psychoanalysis to see how it could be smart to make being unmarked and opaque your modus operandi, as decolonial scholars equally champion.⁷⁵ The ideology of the visible undergirds the natural attitude about gender, with its narrow belief in genitalia determinism from birth. Whether one wills it or not, transgender, intersex, and queer subjects are sometimes caught up in the trap of visibility, marked or read with the difference that makes a difference. Attention to the oscillations in shimmering reveals how and when subjects come to be marked and unmarked, which forms of recognition produce being seen or what optics render viability. *Shimmering Images* thus places *visuality* itself in the position of being the primary object of study, a move suggested by Mieke Bal.⁷⁶ For Bal, "visual essentialism" plagues studies of visual culture, assuming it already knows what is visual and what is not, forgetting the profoundly impure act of looking: rife with interpretative framing, complexly mixed-media, soliciting synesthetic sense perceptions, and bursting with affect.⁷⁷ Investigating *visuality* thus demands an analysis of the material, the affective *and* the epistemological conditions

of vision. I bring forward this awareness of multiple levels to visuality in my analytical approach to the domain of trans cinema.

In the determination of my filmic corpus comprising “trans cinema” I am guided by Helen Hok-Sze Leung’s philosophical summary of its potential dimensions: Does trans film feature self-identified trans characters, or ones that a viewer might recognize as trans? Should it be made by or starring trans people regardless of content? Must it be meant for a trans audience, have a trans aesthetic, or be open to trans interpretations?⁷⁸ She notes that the denomination itself is revealing, for “when and why a film is talked about as a ‘trans film’ tells us a lot about the current state of representational politics and community reception as well as trends and directions in film criticism.”⁷⁹ Hereto queer’s dominance as *the* optic for seeing disorder in visual culture at large (and within the New Queer Cinema specifically) has masked the uneven status of various gender and sexual categories that describe gender nonconformity, particularly as they intersect with racial categories.⁸⁰

More generally, transgender studies reclaims space from gay and lesbian studies that often co-opts representations of gender variance (e.g., tomboy and sissy) into discrete categories of sexual identity. Gender identity runs along another axis than sexual identity; but sometimes they transect when one’s embodied masculinity and/or femininity enables one to become erotically visible. Eve Sedgwick calls this a pleasurable clicking into visibility, into the grid of a certain optic (lesbian, gay, bisexual, hetero, etc.).⁸¹ Nevertheless, queer theory that mobilizes the analytic of sexual identity can reductively render “queer” code for lesbian or gay, and deprive other ways of differing from heteronormativity found in “atypical” forms of embodiment such as transgender and intersex.⁸² What should be avoided is the flattening of these diverse experiences through “saming,” which is just as dangerous as othering these categories of experience.⁸³ To describe these complex affiliations in and out of visual culture, I borrow the aggregation trans-inter-queer from the Berlin-based political action and cultural empowerment group Trans-InterQueer, or TriQ.⁸⁴

The chapters in this book pivot on the interstice of trans-inter-queer in order to address the political tensions and coalitions between these bodies, movements, and theories, specifically in terms of their visual politics. I do so foremost by electing in my analysis of selected filmic works to focus on the portrayal of the disjunctions and conjunctions between

embodiment (highlighted by trans), *morphology* (at stake in inter), and *sexuality* (taken up by queer). The films carry out an operation of assembly that enables some bodies to appear animate and have a recognizable life of their own; the specific genres, styles, cinematography, and, moreover, gender conventions provide the support structures. Paisley Currah, Susan Stryker, and Lisa Jean Moore conceptualize such a “transing practice” as that which “assembles gender into contingent structures of association with other attributes of bodily being, and that allows for their reassembly.”⁸⁵ I interrelate the various trans-inter-queer reassemblages through how they challenge the regulatory forces that abet and maintain what Mel Chen identifies as a hierarchy of “animacy.”⁸⁶ In Chen’s hands, the linguistic concept of animacy is drawn into the biopolitical realm to describe the affective forces and tendencies that map racialized live and dead zones, broadening the field of (non)human life.⁸⁷ But crucially, animacies, in plural, in action, also displace the false binary of life and nonlife at the heart of humanism with an affective politics of ascribed orders and proper intimacies. Transing practices within filmmaking seize on this displacement of the life and nonlife binary at work in all cinema to access a contingent, provisional modus for depicting trans animacies. Despite spanning eras from the 1890s to the 1990s, the various shimmerings upon which I meditate critique the gendered and sexual terms by which life is constrained. Structurally the book comprises three chapters that highlight different modes of shimmering that occur episodically in experimental cinema cultures by independent filmmakers and artists: the shimmering of *phantasmagoria*, where it is located in the trick technology of mechanical reproduction; of *sex*, where it occurs on the surface of performing bodies through the generic framings of pornography and documentary; and of *multiplicity* that references dada techniques and cyborg politics in avant-garde affective forms.

The Moves:

Three Conceptual Models

In this book’s chapters I offer three models for thinking “trans” based on lived experiences of transitioning that conceptually interconnect with cinematic practices for disjunction and conjunction. Each conceptual model is accented and highlighted by a typographic sign, namely, the cut of the forward slash (/), the suture of the hyphen (-), and the multi-

plier of the asterisk (*). These punctuation symbols forge new conceptual armature that I proffer as cinematic modes for thinking about the capaciousness of gender and as transgender models for transdisciplinary film analysis. In the cascade of three chapters, which flow across time periods, genres, and styles, I invite the reader to experiment with the affective and transformative qualities engendered by the cine-typographic technologies in Trans/Cinema/Aesthetics (chapter 1), Trans-Sexualities (chapter 2), and Trans*Form (chapter 3). Grammatically the symbols are a divider, connector, and multiplier. In the annals of transgender-related activism the symbols all have specific genealogies: the forward slash echoes with queer deconstruction moves; the hyphen, with hybrid culture and sexed identities; and the more recent asterisk, with digital inclusion through profusion. The cutting motion in the backward or forward slash in chapter 1 indicates a leap in transition time made possible through technological reproduction, and the ostensibly foundational aesthetic of surgical sex change. The hyphen in chapter 2 sets off a tentative modifying difference while also indicating a binding that draws together seemingly disparate or wounded parts. It develops from the investigation in chapter 1 of how cuts have been made, and to what effect, which may require practices of suturing through cinematographic means, erotic identification, or forms of disidentification. Uptake of the paratactical stickiness of the asterisk in chapter 3 references the (im)possible holding together of multiplicity, foremost of embodied identities, but also of affective forms present in filmic structures. Each chapter also draws on varied inflections of the shimmer, shimmering, and shimmerings that contour how cinematic creations negotiate perceived divided embodiment, illegible sexualities, and indistinct morphology—all persistent, unavoidable, stigmatizing tropes that negatively affect trans-inter-queer lives.

I begin with a consideration of how various cut and suture technologies, which bring together the medicalization of trans and intersex forms of life, can be reframed in terms of filmic techniques. Chapter 1, “Shimmering Phantasmagoria: Trans/Cinema/Aesthetics in an Age of Technological Reproducibility,” examines the ways that the cinema of attractions, like new surgical procedures for “changing sex,” reorders the sensible in an age of technological reproducibility. The model of cinema-as-surgical theatre bears out surprisingly literally in the practice of early filmmaking, flipping Stryker’s insight into the “cinematic logic of transsexual embodiment” into a confirmation of the *transsexual logic of cin-*

ematic embodiment at work since its inception. I use the method of media archaeology to recover what Deleuze calls the “first light” of an era that creates the aesthetic possibility for something to appear as a shimmer, flash, or sparkle. The chapter proceeds by locating the “first light” of the phantasmagoria in a cultural series that includes the popular trick films of Georges Méliès (1890–1920) that vanish, substitute, and generally explore the changeability of the human body and the cultural text of “Lili Elbe,” whose confessions *Man into Woman* (1931) were collectively assembled by her doctor, friends, and wife, montaging not only before-and-after personal photographs but also points of view. In particular I discuss the book’s use of the third person, which positions the reader/viewer in alignment with a “machinic eye” to take in the astonishing facts of Lili’s transition narrative that she acknowledges casts her as a shimmering phantasmagoria in the sense of a divided presence/absence. At the close, I examine how a set of contemporary trans artists practice a reparative form of temporal drag with the outmoded cultural imaginary of transitioning as an instant sex change. Zackary Drucker and A. L. Steiner’s photographic collaboration “BEFORE/AFTER” (2009–ongoing) reweaves the phantasmagoric affect of surprise into temporally disjunctive before-and-after shots in order to resequence trans histories. The 911 photographs of Yishay Garbasz’s “Becoming” (2010), which comprise a two-year documentation of her nude body before and after her gender clarification surgery, were transformed into the proto-cinematic animation of a handheld flipbook and into a life-sized zoetrope that highlights the trope of a divided being with overwhelming evidence of differential becoming. With their throwback phantasmagoric aesthetics these artists foreground the presentation of an optical trick to the viewer, to effectively tickle their desire for optical mastery while withholding a full reveal.

The next chapter continues an investigation into how trans subjects have negotiated the sex reveal specifically in pornography, where genital optics is closely tied to the documentary authenticity of the sexual performance and the performer’s gender identity. Both kinds of sex reveals greatly risk the illegibility of the trans person performing for the camera’s eye, and in extension for the viewer of docu-porn. Chapter 2, “Shimmering Sex: Docu-Porn’s Trans-Sexualities, Confession Culture, and Suturing Practices,” wrestles with the scientism of observation that echoes in the filmic rhetoric of “to see is to know.” The aura of visual transparency

aids in producing an effect of the real within pornography and documentary genres. I open with Joan Scott's reading of Samuel R. Delany's autobiographic *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988) that describes "the saturation that was not only kinesthetic but visible," suffusing his sexual experiences in bathhouses. Scott, though rightly wary of the metaphor of visibility as literal transparency in the historical domain, undervalues the evidence and authority of experience as it is *felt* kinesthetically even as it is processed visually as the shimmerings of light beings, rebounding off watery surfaces. Likewise, the hyphenated trans-sexualities on screen (bi-trans, or trans-dyke, trans-fag) tend to only be appreciated for how they satisfy the terms of visual essentialism or mobilize the mimetic medium of film and genres with a history of scientism to represent identities of desire. The essentialism of the image seems to carry over into the essentialism of the identity represented therein. This generic framing accomplishes much for the activism-bent trans porn searching for ways to correct the record, for sexuality has been largely a no-go area within the respectability politics of trans communities, but it miscalculates the pernicious effects of a "permissible range of touch" enforced by sexological narratives of transsexualism as deviant desire. I thus analyze ways that docu-porns present "a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire," in Stone's words. This approach brings new insights into how experimental erotic videos from Mirha-Soleil Ross (1997–2003) and mainstream porn features from Buck Angel (2004–12) critically, and affectively, put the sex back in transsexual. At stake in these works are not only a visible but also a kinesthetic saturation of sexual acts that I argue produces what Foucault calls the "shimmering mirage" of sex. Sexualities are also disrupted through porn innovations: the early hybrid docu-porn *Linda/Les, and Annie: The First Female-to-Male Transsexual Love Story* (1989) with Annie Sprinkle eroticizes the productive failures of hetero trans-sex coupling, while more recently the racial realism in *Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papí and Wil* (2007) by Morty Diamond pries "nasty" from damaging affective economies of race, sexuality, and gender. Last, I consider the various videos for how they underscore the importance of sexual experience in trans "bodily aesthetics," in which a felt sense of one's body can become sutured into an imperfect, wavering w/whole, not reducible to genital fragmentation.

Leaning on the previous chapters' assessment of film's animating power to reassemble on-screen bodies through recourse to genre and gender/race conventions, next in chapter 3, I consider how two films operate as cyborgian cinematic bodies with the potential to delink and relink or even explode perceptual circuits. In this final chapter, "Shimmering Multiplicity: Trans*Forms in *Dandy Dust* and *I.K.U.* from Dada to Data to D@D@," the philosophy of images proposed by Henri Bergson and extended by Kara Keeling, in which images are not purely visual but a complex of affectivity, informs my reading of two multigenre cult flicks: *Dandy Dust* (1998, dir. Hans Scheirl) and *I.K.U.* (2000, dir. Cheang Shu Lea). Both millennial films deal narratively with collecting memory data (of other genders, of sexual climaxes) while materially exploding with rage, lust, fluids, noise, and genre twists. The multiplicity within their presentation of trans bodies in chimeric switch-forms is based on the partiality, but also the mutability, of the cyborg. Hence, I argue that trans*forms in these films are explicitly invoked in the image of the feared and desired cyborg, who appears cinematographically in odd composite images, fragmented and reworked through orgasms, code, memory, and in the shadow of an evil state apparatus. In *Dandy Dust* the titular trans protagonist racially morphs depending on his/her age, but also appears as a time-traveling mummy and a talking flame on the run from a mother's genetic engineering program, threatening twin siblings, and an incestuous father. In *I.K.U.* shape-shifting occurs mainly through seven forms of the replicant Coder "Reiko," but the narrative is also anchored in the FTM Runner character "Dizzy"—played by the African American actor Zachary Nataf, the only non-Asian person of color in the film—who works for the Genom Corporation and directs Reiko's orgasm collection mission. Closely reading the ways that these dark techno-porno films operate through puzzling and dada-inspired audiovisual special effects, I argue for how the cinephilic analyst must adopt a scanning gaze to be able to track the shimmering nuances of the affects built into its film form. Steven Shaviro singles out one quality of the image most responsible for filmic fascination, that is, the image's appeal to touch with its simultaneous exclusion: "I cannot take hold of it in return, but always find it shimmering just beyond my grasp." The elicited endless groping toward these film bodies resituates curiosity as a critical affective mode for bodies in transition. I propose that through curiosity one accesses the ability to break through habituated perceptual circuits, in short, to

think otherwise. At the same time, a resituated curiosity responds to the rage of being made a mute curio or, perhaps worse, made vulnerable to transphobia that excludes monstrous trans bodies from the perceptual schemata for the human. Against the backdrop of shimmering boundaries used against trans bodies to discount their legibility, distinctness, and wholeness, the embrace of shimmering images by these films seizes the stigma as a source of personal and political transformative power, a survival technique for inventing livable conditions.

Shimmering Images brings the aesthetics of change into the glimmering limelight by attending to the role of affect in outplaying the paradigm in order to understand anew how surprise, suspense, disgust, fascination, rage, love, and curiosity parry our transitions forward into the nonbinary fixated politics of the Neutral. To the reader, I bid you repose in the intervals between movement and rest. If my writing as a trans lover has any impact, I'd wish for it to be so that you too can feel for the gradations, blooming, and bursts in your qualitative transformation, and hence the potential for change that lies at the heart of both transgender embodiment and cinematic experience.