

Trans*Unbehagen: What is Trans*Psychoanalysis?

Tracy Morgan

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Beginning with a quote, a talisman perhaps, from the brilliant critic Maggie Nelson: "One form of self deception: to offer reversals that have rhetorical impact but crumble when pressed for meaning." I have to be honest, vulnerable, clear, so cut me to the quick if you must: she might be describing what I am here doing. When asked to speak this evening I said, "yes, sure", and then ruminated: am I the right girl for the job? What do I know?

Being post-surgery in thinking about all of this has been full of plusses and minuses.

Now let me say that the feeling I have had while writing what follows is that I want this night to be over with, that there is a feeling of being undone, of coming apart at the seams and not wanting to lose my mind, my terra firma, my man, myself and so yes Griff Hansbury is onto something. I have not been in the consulting room, working for years with a transitioning analysand, just been reading and thinking for 2 mere weeks and I am spatchcocked.

In the intro to the Psychoanalytic Dialogues trans issue, Virginia Goldner captures a certain something, "For anyone doing gender studies, trans is gender theory on speed." I never liked speed. I did women's studies--the s/lowest on that totem pole.

When a patient produces a feeling that she is in a hurry, I become cautious, wondering what might we be skating over, the ice striated ready to split?

My clinical cri de coeur tends to be "what is the rush?" I know about rushing.

Since being invited to speak, most mornings I woke my mind full of ideas but as I had surgery was unable to write without physical distress. So my thoughts, bottled up and coagulated, admixed and transformed waiting for the pain to get less. I will say I found myself feeling sad—that was the emotional motif--my thoughts, unwritten, led me, to the well of sadness.

I have also been to the well of loneliness, myself a failed lesbian, with butch lovers with whom I walked the streets of fair Gotham a rock hitting my head drawing blood more than once was the price paid, dragged down subway stairs by a small gang of boys when with Heidi, her hair shorn short, they whipped us about by the straps of our Manhattan Portage bags, F train station, 23rd and Sixth Ave, 9pm, a weeknight, before cellphones, no one took pictures--everyone

simply watched, mesmerized. We pressed charges and the boys' (all white, from Long Island) attorney built a case claiming something akin to homosexual panic: "because we were lesbians we started it". They got community service. When asked about what service they might perform, should I have my druthers, I said, "clean the subway tracks they threatened to throw us on."

Everyone I knew was dying—it was 1989--and perhaps I just wanted to die with them.

My flight to lesbianism was borne of the way men treated me, and a desire for love and sex.

Theoretically I can separate gender and sexuality—doing so initially felt like patting my head and rubbing my belly at the same time—hard on the physical apparatus of the brain but an accomplishment when I could do it.

I wrote an unsent email to Aleksandra Woods the other morning having read about the woman card and hate tweets sent to female sportscasters:

"Dear A,

I try to forget this stuff but sometimes it rains down so hard. I think about gender and its relationship to sexuality and I think about my retreat into lesbianism in my twenties to shield myself from ongoing harassment, attempts at sexual assault, the man who tried to push his way into the bathroom on an international flight filled with sleeping passengers, the being grabbed--ass, breasts, crotch--on the streets of NYC, "smile honey it is not so bad", the being humored, the being cornered, and the fear, the never ending fear. Then I recall the life in my family: my younger brother was allowed more physical freedom than I was, allowed to come home later and to do more and then off to college—at last--where I was able to be free of that family and sitting in an Intro to Psychology class where, at semester's end, the professor let's us in on a secret: "all that we have studied the last three months has been about men, and so all hypotheses about human development and so forth are about men" and next thing I knew I was running down that stadium sized classroom aisle towards the professor—stopped just short of careening into him-- asking him to repeat himself for "I must have misheard you professor", and he repeated the hard facts to me and I became very upset: there was no enlightenment. It disoriented me.

That I had stumbled across Marilyn French's novel The Women's Room that past August and that it spoke volumes to me, laying out truths known but not articulated primed me to take the next step, in a fit of hot rage and sorrow, and

also in a rush, I declared my major Women's Studies. This led me to have to take classes with incredible butch thinkers—it took two classes to know one professor had a vagina--and to begin to feel that sleeping with men was in fact sleeping with the enemy and why would I do that? Worse, how could I do that, knowing what I know, to myself?

I threw it all overboard and chose to be kissed by a brilliant butch who wore suit jackets, her hair clipped short, and scared me a little with her knowledge of Latin and Greek; next thing I knew I had fallen off the edge of the earth and forever. All steps outside the norm give us this feeling I think; I used to say it was as if I woke up black.

Taking refuge meant losing privilege so there was no refuge: I have had my knees knocked out behind me walking down stairs with a woman's hand in mine, falling. I have been refused service at restaurants, had doors closed in my face, been slapped, followed, threatened, and of course my parents refused to pay for college upon hearing my "news". But I know I was trying to escape from a rapaciousness that came my way. Once a homecoming queen, I was pretty and insecure and a target; I knew that fighting back aroused more ire and also blame. And so my gender prompted this flight into the arms of women, enraging men more.

I haven't been with a woman in twenty years and change. I discovered there was nowhere to hide. I aged out of being harassed. The dismissals became normative. I developed a thicker skin. I compartmentalized. Who fucking knows? When I read, "Two sports journalists decided to publicly address the vile messages they receive on social media, comments like "please kill yourself I will provide the bleach" I felt forced to remember.

Love, Tracy"

The phrase, "the end of women" has been reverberating within me. I have a green plastic bag here that I am tempted to put over my head and just lay inert for my time on the panel. As if finally these other six boys on the Path train when I was 19 and tried to put a bag on my head, also as people watched, had won. I found myself thinking where do I fit in? Is the transman making an understandable flight from womanhood and all the baggage that goes with being a woman? Should I say "chapeau?" And is the transwoman supplanting the likes of me but doing it better? Is a woman with a penis more loveable? I do know men who prefer a woman with a penis. I can understand that. I can imagine the relief: who wants to fuck the origin of the world anyway?

I am already a walking human rights emergency—you know the stats: every twenty seconds a woman (trans cis) is being beaten by a loved one in

America...that I could feel myself being superceded by a transwoman before that was brought to an end? I guess I feel outraged about that.

When I say this I am referring to having lived in this body, in this category, very much so I am *that* name, forever and so how do I feel when let's say a person with a penis wants to go my way, a person with a vagina wants to leave the once shared premises? Fast forward to the Interminable essay: I do believe in penis envy as much as I believe in anything and I don't think I see it that often. More fundamental to my thinking are Freud's ideas on masculine protest: "What they reject is not passivity in general, but passivity towards a male. In other words, the 'masculine protest' is in fact nothing else than castration anxiety." I would not seek to legislate my feelings but yes if more men were more comfortable with depending on men I think my quality of life would improve—just a hunch—but what does all this mean for my clinical work?

As an analyst how do I listen to the young person who enters my office and tells me there is a man inside of her that she wants to unleash? Good question. Does she need to be a man to unleash him? What is the purpose of this man she tells me about? Ends up he is a killer, he is the voice of rage—she calls him, having read much (too much?) pomoqueertheoryetcetera, her "man aspect". Silently I wonder, is this a fad, her speech, like cutting, everybody's doing it, a way to speak symbolically/obliquely, in the terms allowed by the culture so not

genuine or helpful but rather entrapping? Still listening, I find myself intimidated by her though she walks into my office covered in lacerations from the beatings she is taking and asks for. What is being beaten to a pulp? The man.

Melanie Suchet writes on working with a F2M transitioning patient: "To be female is linked with vulnerability and the danger of sexual abuse. In addition, it is as if girl is a container, a receptacle for unwanted and hostile projections, whereas male offers protection from that which is thrust into her, including maternal projections." Run, run, run...

Knock comes on the consulting room door and a man who is struggling with being a man, a man who wants to quit the whole thing and become a woman, a man who puts that into words, I want to see if he feels the need to act. After all what he does outside of my office is not my business. What is it about being a man that troubles him? That it is an ongoing project and an ever failing one—and here I am with Chodorow not Freud and find evidence everywhere that boys start out life as girls, something that drives the repudiation of femininity that just won't stop—that is what he tells me: can't make enough money, women find him disappointing, his sexual prowess is not as it should be. I think of a joke my very first analyst told me: A woman brings her baby son to Freud and says, "Dr. Freud, my son's penis is too small" to which Freud replies, "Too small for who?"

I reveal myself here to be working with something akin to a deficit model. I see it secures normativity.

Maggie Nelson, married to a transman, asks some good questions—though meant for her discussion of cruelty in art, the work of Chris Burden specifically—that I think are questions for those of us who get paid to listen: “When and how (if ever) is it anyone’s business to mandate what we do with our bodies in our lifetimes? Does anyone “have” the power, or is it always a means of asserting it, seizing it, inventing it?” But she ends this paragraph with a question that undoes what she just put forth: “In what sense, under what conditions, can we say that a body knows what it wants?”

You know how we spend forever washing our mothers off of us? We scrub and scour. No matter how hard we try, we are dirty and mother made us so. Those enigmatic messages so popular of late sound beautiful, even symphonic, compared to the reality of afterbirth and the wish to repudiate that we emerge from a bloody mess.

How to make our flesh serve us asks Anzieu?

Speaking of things imbrued, I am suspicious of what looks like a rapid embrace of transgender issues all the while abortion remains impossible in America—I credit Paisley Currah for moving this thought through me—Paisley used to be a fab butch who transitioned, as have many of the butch academics I came of age with, presented at conferences with—Jay nee Amanda Prosser and I, 25 years ago read in a group *Gender Trouble* together when she threw in her butch towel and became a transman. Did she do what I did? Did we say through our gestures: I can't take the fucking heat, or is the better word hate, so I will take action?

Am I nostalgic? Yes & I know nostalgia is certainly a resistance, made of diamonds and rust. What is it I don't want to feel?

Suchet tells us when her patient changed his name, from Rebecca to Raphael: "I practice the name quietly to myself. I feel the new syllables and sounds swirl around. I want it to flow out of my mouth in an easy, uncomplicated manner. It lodges in my throat. I question myself. What's in a name? So what if Rebecca identifies as a man? What does it mean to me? ... Why am I getting stuck? I think of analogies—if Rebecca came to me as a heterosexual and then came out as gay, or vice versa, I would make the shift without hesitation. So I ponder, what is it about male and female?" What is Suchet, and yes, what am I choking on?

Freud tells us about bisexuality being our lot. We want our mothers and fathers so when a patient tells me he has sexual feelings for a man it is not a crisis for me as an analyst. Why does it feel more like a crisis when a patient tells me she wants to be a man? Is it just a matter of time and I will get used to this?

Perhaps that is so.

If we go back to the 14c, maybe we can see ourselves more clearly. In Lacqueur's Thinking Sex: Body, Sex and Gender from the Greeks to Freud, he says a most mind rearranging thing—that men and women were seen as different not on the basis of genitalia but rather on the basis of body heat—I think men were cooler and women warmer--and that there was understood to be a no big deal symmetry between fallopian tubes and vas deferens and vaginal canal and penis, and testicles and ovaries—and this just gave me cause to pause--how did we come to let genitals reign as the sign of difference?

Freud, not at all answering this question five centuries later tells us, in 1937, in the interminable essay, "Something which both sexes have in common has been forced, by the difference between the sexes, into different forms of expression."

But what if this difference were understood in terms of heat—how would we attend to a need to cool or to warm and how would a person who feels born in

the wrong body under the heat and cool regime go about remedying their wrong
bodiedness?

Thanks for listening.