

JARA SCHMIDT,
CLARA ROSA SCHWARZ (HG.)

QUEERE GESCHICHTE(N)

ERINNERUNGEN UND VISIONEN
IM ANSCHLUSS AN LESLIE FEINBERGS
»STONE BUTCH BLUES«

[transcript] queer studies

Jara Schmidt, Clara Rosa Schwarz (Hg.)
Queere Geschichte(n)

Jara Schmidt (Dr. phil.), geb. 1984, ist wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin an der Universität Hamburg. Dort lehrt und forscht sie zu den Schwerpunkten Postmigration, Gender Studies und Queer Studies.

Clara Rosa Schwarz, geb. 1994, ist Doktorand*in der Soziologie an der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg. Schwarz erforscht die Rolle und Entwicklung von queeren Freund*innenschaften während der Corona-Pandemie.

Jara Schmidt, Clara Rosa Schwarz (Hg.)

Queere Geschichte(n)

Erinnerungen und Visionen im Anschluss an Leslie Feinbergs

»Stone Butch Blues«

[transcript]

Wir bedanken uns für die finanzielle Förderung durch den Open-Access-Publikationsfonds der Universität Freiburg und den Gleichstellungsfonds der Universität Hamburg.

ORCID Jara Schmidt: 0009-0003-4889-5499

ORCID Clara Rosa Schwarz: 0000-0002-4460-3925

Die Rechte für die Texte von Minnie Bruce Pratt liegen bei ihren Söhnen Ben and Ransom Weaver, bei denen wir uns für die Abdruckgenehmigung bedanken.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <https://dnb.dnb.de/> abrufbar.



Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter der Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Lizenz (BY). Diese Lizenz erlaubt unter Voraussetzung der Namensnennung des Urhebers die Bearbeitung, Vervielfältigung und Verbreitung des Materials in jedem Format oder Medium für beliebige Zwecke, auch kommerziell. (Lizenztext: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>)

Die Bedingungen der Creative-Commons-Lizenz gelten nur für Originalmaterial. Die Wiederverwendung von Material aus anderen Quellen (gekennzeichnet mit Quellenangabe) wie z.B. Schaubilder, Abbildungen, Fotos und Textauszüge erfordert ggf. weitere Nutzungsgenehmigungen durch den jeweiligen Rechteinhaber.

2025 © Jara Schmidt, Clara Rosa Schwarz (Hg.)

transcript Verlag | Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | live@transcript-verlag.de

Umschlaggestaltung: Maria Arndt

Druck: Majuskel Medienproduktion GmbH, Wetzlar

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839473351>

Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-7335-7 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-7335-1

Buchreihen-ISSN: 2703-1365 | Buchreihen-eISSN: 2703-1373

Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Papier mit chlorfrei gebleichtem Zellstoff.

Inhalt / Contents

Inhaltswarnung / Content Note 9

Einleitung: Queere Geschichte(n) im Anschluss an *Stone Butch Blues* /

Introduction: Queer History and Stories After *Stone Butch Blues*

Jara Schmidt & Clara Rosa Schwarz 11

Husband / Palace

Minnie Bruce Pratt 35

Teil I: Femme/Butch-Dynamiken und -Identitäten /

Part I: Femme/Butch Dynamics and Identities

Von Papafrauen, Geschlechterrollenspiel, Kessen Vätern und Ladys

Fem(me)/Butch in den Sexualitätsdiskussionen deutschsprachiger Lesbenbewegungen
der 1970er- bis 1990er-Jahre

Lorenz Weinberg 39

Blaue Hose, rote Lippen

Anngret Schultze 51

A Terrible Beauty is Born

The Affective Politics of the Butch Memoir in Performance

Camellia Choudhuri 59

Cruising Towards Care

Leslie Feinberg and Lou Sullivan in Conversation

El Reid-Buckley 71

Memorize the Places You Wanted Me

Three Poems	
<i>Anja*Oliver Schneider</i>	87

Feinberg's Femmes

How Femmes Care in <i>Stone Butch Blues</i>	
<i>Clara Rosa Schwarz</i>	93

Femme Life Writing: No Femininities Left Behind

<i>Laura Brightwell</i>	107
-------------------------------	-----

Teil II: Übersetzungen und Übertragungen / Part II: Translations and Transfers

Sternenklare Reise

Eine Reminiszenz an Leslie Feinberg, in Dankbarkeit	
<i>Sabine Fuchs</i>	117

“Shake up imaginations and develop alternatives”

The Reception and Translation of <i>Stone Butch Blues</i> in France	
<i>Marina Allal</i>	127

Translating Translanguage

<i>Ylva Emel Karlsson</i>	143
---------------------------------	-----

Re_Translating as Activist Practice

Queering the German Translation of <i>Stone Butch Blues</i>	
<i>Desz Debreceni</i>	157

Growing Sideways

An Écriture of the Queer Kid	
<i>H. Zipfel</i>	175

Medea: Bubbles

oder Weggefährt*innen	
<i>Nike Hartmond & Fred Heinemann</i>	191

Teil III: (Zukunfts-)Räume (online und offline) / Part III: (Future) Spaces (Online and Offline)

Artist Statement: Queer Trans Jewish Futures <i>Hani Esther Indictor Partner</i>	199
Erotic Pedagogy: Queer of Colour Sex Education <i>Jade Da Costa</i>	201
Finding Butch Identity and (Visions of) Solidarity on TikTok <i>Jonah Reimann</i>	215
“Who was I now—woman or man? That question could never be answered as long as those were the only choices.” Intersections of Lesbian and Trans Experiences in Leslie Feinberg’s <i>Stone Butch Blues</i> <i>Anja*Oliver Schneider</i>	229
put your hands in my lungs <i>Fem_me/Butch-Miniaturen</i> <i>k kater</i>	245
Queere Arbeiter*innen und umkämpfte Räume Eine intersektionale Betrachtung des Raums der schwul-lesbischen Bar in <i>Stone Butch Blues</i> und seiner Ein- und Ausschließungsmechanismen <i>Jojo Hofmann</i>	251
Kurzbiografien / Short Biographies	269

Inhaltswarnung / Content Note

Um den Leser*innen dieses Bandes fürsorglich zu begegnen, beginnt er mit einer Inhaltswarnung. Viele der Themen, die in den Beiträgen behandelt werden, können verschiedene emotionale Reaktionen hervorrufen und dabei auch traumatische Erinnerungen anstoßen. Da sich diese Erfahrungen subjektiv abspielen, ist es unmöglich, alle potenziellen Trigger abzudecken, deshalb sprechen wir von einer Inhaltswarnung beziehungsweise *content note*, anstatt von Trigger-Warnungen. Unser Ziel ist es, die Vielfalt und Unberechenbarkeit von traumatischen Erlebnissen und posttraumatischen Reaktionen anzuerkennen und den Leser*innen alle Informationen mitzugeben, die sie brauchen könnten, um beim Lesen auf sich zu achten. Auch die Ausgabe von *Stone Butch Blues* aus dem Jahr 2014 beginnt in der Titelei mit einer Inhaltswarnung von Leslie Feinberg:

Dear Reader:

I want to let you know that *Stone Butch Blues* is an anti-oppression/s novel. As a result, it contains scenes of rape and other violence. None of this violence is gratuitous or salacious.

Leslie

Die Themen des Romans werden auch in Beiträgen dieses Bandes behandelt. Sowohl diverse Unterdrückungsformen und Diskriminierungserfahrungen, wie Queer- und Transfeindlichkeit, Rassismen, Ableismen, sexualisierte sowie diskriminierende Gewalt und Selbstverletzung, als auch explizite Besprechungen von Sex und Kink gehören zu den Themen, die wir vorab benennen möchten. Wir hoffen, dass diese Inhaltswarnung den Band allen Leser*innen zugänglicher macht, und ermutigen zur Selbstfürsorge beim Lesen.

Content Note

In order to treat the readers of this volume with care, it begins with a content note. Many of the topics covered in the articles can evoke various emotional responses, including triggering traumatic memories. As these experiences are subjective, it is impossible to cover all potential triggers, so we refer to this as a content warning or content note, rather than trigger warning. Our aim is to recognise the diversity and unpredictability of traumatic experiences and post-traumatic reactions and to give readers all the information they might need to take care of themselves while reading. The 2014 edition of *Stone Butch Blues* also begins with a content warning from Leslie Feinberg in the front matter:

Dear Reader:

I want to let you know that *Stone Butch Blues* is an anti-oppression/s novel. As a result, it contains scenes of rape and other violence. None of this violence is gratuitous or salacious.

Leslie

The themes of the novel are also addressed in contributions to this volume. Various forms of oppression and experiences of discrimination, such as queer- and transphobia, racism, ableism, sexualised and discriminatory violence, and self-harm, as well as explicit discussions of sex and kink are among the topics we would like to name in advance. We hope that this content note will make the volume more accessible to all readers and encourage self-care when reading.

Einleitung: Queere Geschichte(n) im Anschluss an *Stone Butch Blues* / Introduction: Queer History and Stories After *Stone Butch Blues*

Jara Schmidt & Clara Rosa Schwarz

Zum Hintergrund des Sammelbandes

Anlässlich des 30. Publikationsjubiläums von Leslie Feinbergs Roman *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) veranstalteten wir gemeinsam mit Michaela Koch, Leitung vom hochschulübergreifenden Zentrum Gender & Diversity in Hamburg, im Mai 2023 eine Online-Tagung. Denn *Stone Butch Blues* ist ein Klassiker queerer Literatur, der nicht nur die Komplexität lesbischer und queerer Lebensrealitäten aufzeigt, sondern auch zu einer Verschiebung vom Sprechen über trans Menschen zum Sprechen von trans Menschen beitrug sowie zu vermehrter Sichtbarkeit von trans Stimmen in Gesellschaft und Wissenschaft. Die Tagungsbeiträge finden sich nun in diesem Band versammelt wieder, um das Wirken des Romans von Feinberg (1949–2014) fest- und nachzuhalten.

Queere Geschichte(n). Erinnerungen und Visionen im Anschluss an Leslie Feinbergs »Stone Butch Blues« fokussiert mit interdisziplinären Zugriffen und aus internationalen Perspektiven die Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft von trans, lesbischer und queerer Literatur und Kultur und beinhaltet wissenschaftliche, essayistische, literarische und künstlerische Beiträge auf Deutsch und Englisch. Diese widmen sich unter anderem Femme/Butch-Dynamiken und -Identitäten, queeren Potenzialitäten bei Erst- und Neuübersetzungen des Romans sowie queeren Räumen, die online, offline, im Text und in Utopien Gestalt finden und so Gemeinschaft ermöglichen.

Feinbergs Roman verliert nicht an Aktualität und Anschlussfähigkeit, vielmehr haben wir heute durch aktivistische und akademische Errungenschaften ein größeres Verständnis und Vokabular für die in *Stone Butch Blues* verhandelten Themen und Figuren.¹ Zudem könnten die in diesem Band zusammengetragenen persönli-

1 Dies zeigt sich etwa darin, dass in den Beiträgen, in denen *Stone Butch Blues* zentral verhandelt wird, einige Beitragende wie im Roman weibliche Pronomen (sie/ihr) für die Hauptfi-

chen wie analytischen Aushandlungen angesichts des aktuellen politischen Klimas, in dem rechte Stimmen weltweit erstarben und binäre, biologistische, transfeindliche Denkweisen propagieren, kaum gegenwartsbezogener sein, auch im Rückblick auf queere Geschichte und Kämpfe.

Ein besonderes Highlight der Tagung war die Teilnahme von Minnie Bruce Pratt, Autorin, Aktivistin und Lebenspartnerin von Leslie Feinberg. Pratt, die nur wenig später im Juli 2023 verstarb, gewährte Einblicke in ihr Leben, Schreiben sowie ihre aktivistischen Tätigkeiten und las ein paar Gedichte sowie kürzere Texte vor. Zwei ihrer präsentierten Kurzprosatexte – *Husband* und *Palace* (kurzer Auszug) – folgten auf diese Einleitung. Das Gespräch mit ihr wurde aufgezeichnet und ist online verfügbar (vgl. Spinnboden 2023).

Queere Geschichte(n)

Die Frage danach, wie queere Geschichte geschrieben wird, richtet sich häufig an die physischen Räume des Archivs – gefüllt mit Plakaten, Pamphleten, Briefen und Zeitungen, digitalen Daten und Material zur *oral history* –, denn diese tragen ganz grundlegend zur Erinnerung bei und versuchen, die Fülle queerer Existenz nachvollziehbar zu machen. Doch gerade die Geschichte vor den Stonewall-Protesten von 1969 existiert auf Basis flüchtiger Spuren (vgl. Cvetkovich 2003; Rivers 2012). Auch Fiktion kann solche Spuren legen und so aus und an verschiedensten Orten archivarische Räume generieren. Wir möchten insbesondere den Roman als Teil queerer Geschichtsschreibung hervorheben, denn wir tragen ihn mit uns herum, lesen ihn auf der Parkbank und im Bus, sammeln ihn in unseren Bücherregalen und schlafen neben ihm ein. Der Roman materialisiert queere Geschichte durch queere Geschichten – manchmal lässt sich Geschichte am besten erzählen, wenn sie neu kreiert wird (vgl. Rawson 2012: 244). Geschichten als Archivmaterial zu behandeln, bedeutet auch, dass kreative Freiheiten als valider Teil queerer Wissensproduktion angesehen werden. So behandeln wir auch *Stone Butch Blues* als ein Objekt des Archivs, jedoch eines, zu dem wir alle ständig Zugang haben können (auch, weil Leslie Feinberg den Roman frei verfügbar auf deren Website veröffentlicht hat). *Stone Butch Blues* mag fiktional sein, doch Feinberg selbst beschreibt die Geschichten, die den Roman ausmachen, als real (vgl. Feinberg 2014) und der fortwährende Einfluss des Romans auf queere und trans Communitys, Forschung und Geschichten bestätigt seine historische Relevanz immer wieder.

gur Jess Goldberg verwenden, während andere die genderneutralen bzw. nicht-binären Formen <they/them> oder <zie/hir> vorziehen. Wir halten beide Vorgehensweisen – den Rückgriff auf die Pronomen aus der Romanvorlage und eine Anpassung der Pronomen im Sinne eines *queer reading* – für valide und haben uns deshalb gegen eine Vereinheitlichung entschieden.

Den Roman als historische Quelle zu handhaben, wirft Fragen an das Konzept des Archivs auf. K. J. Rawson beschäftigt sich unter anderem mit der Frage nach Primärquellen im Archiv: Welches Material gilt als primär, welches als sekundär? Und wie kann auch ›Unarchivierbares‹ archiviert werden? (vgl. Rawson 2012: 239) Rawson nimmt Fiktion als Beispiel queerer Archivierungspraxis und bietet fiktionale Geschichten als Antwort auf folgendes Dilemma an: »Wenn es keine Materialien gibt, die das Leben einer Person dokumentieren [...], heißt das dann, dass diese Person nie existiert hat?«² (ebd.: 243, Übersetzung C. R. S.) Fiktion stellt also ein kreatives Werkzeug für queere Geschichtsschreibung dar, das die exklusive Gültigkeit historischer Dokumente infrage stellt. In diesem Zusammenhang stellen sich ebenfalls die Fragen, »wie jeweils historisches Wissen zustande kommt, welche Funktionen es für die Konstitution von Subjekten und Identitäten hat und welche Wirkungen auf die Gestaltung von Gesellschaft« (Fuchs 2020b: 114–115).

Wenn nun also das Archiv »die Grundlage für das kollektive Gedächtnis bereit[stellt]« (ebd.: 115), so ist mit Blick auf *Stone Butch Blues* nicht nur die fiktive Geschichte, sondern auch der Entstehungskontext des Romans von historischer Relevanz: Wie beeinflusst das kollektive Gedächtnis die Geschichte in *Stone Butch Blues* und umgekehrt? Mit welcher Perspektive blickt Feinberg auf die eigene Geschichte und die soziopolitische Situation der 1950er- bis frühen 1990er-Jahre in den USA zurück? Wie sehr kann Feinberg diese Position reflektieren, um die Jugend und Unwissenheit der Hauptfigur Jess Goldberg retrospektiv zu inszenieren?

Verwobenheiten trans und lesbischer Geschichte(n)

Der Sammelband fokussiert vor allem trans und lesbische queere Geschichte(n). Wenn wir von queerer Geschichte sprechen, dann meinen wir damit auch queere politische Bewegungen und Freiheitskämpfe, die sich nicht (nur) auf einzelne Identitätszugehörigkeiten berufen, sondern ›queer‹ als Gegen-Hegemonie, als anti-normativ und solidarisch begreifen. Zugleich ist es uns ein besonderes Anliegen, auf die Spezifika der Verwobenheit von lesbischer und trans Geschichte einzugehen, die in *Stone Butch Blues* eingebettet sind. Jess' Geschichte verbindet diese Erfahrungen: Ein *gender non-conforming* Kind wird zur Lesbe, zur Butch, zum trans Mann und schließlich zur nicht-binären Butch – wobei Feinberg nicht alle diese Begriffe in dieser Form verwendet. Die Sprache, die Feinberg kennt und gebraucht, bedient sich Beschreibungen dieser Erfahrungen: Jess fühlt sich definitiv als Butch, die Femmes begehrt, und doch in ihrem Gender immer wieder dazwischen und gefangen zugleich. Die Beiträge in diesem Band beschäftigen sich mit der Sprache

2 Rawson bezieht sich hier auf den (fantastischen) fiktionalen Dokumentarfilm *The Watermelon Woman* (USA 1996, Regie: Cheryl Dunye).

und Rahmung dieser Erfahrungen, abstrahieren sie und stellen so selbst ein Stück Geschichte (wieder) her.

Vor dem Hintergrund der aktuellen politischen Situation, den lauten trans- und queerfeindlichen Stimmen, ist es umso wichtiger zu würdigen, dass Lesben und trans Personen schon lange sich überschneidende Erfahrungen und Communitys teilen und gemeinsame politische Interessen vertreten. Gerade für viele Femmes und Butches und (andere) trans Personen hat *Stone Butch Blues* eine ganz besondere Bedeutung, denn viele von uns erleben durch Feinbergs Erzählung »ein Gefühl der Geborgenheit im Wiedererkennen von Ähnlichem« (Fuchs 2020b: 188). Fuchs betont die Wichtigkeit dieses Zugehörigkeitsgefühls insbesondere für diejenigen, die sich in lesbisch-feministischen, queer-feministischen oder nicht-binären/transgender Communitys nicht zugehörig fühlen dürfen (vgl. ebd.). Femme/Butch-Dynamiken, -Begehren und -Identitäten werden oft als rückschrittlich gerahmt, als Nachahmung heterosexueller Ordnung verteufelt – Fuchs deckt diese Kritik gekonnt auf: »Wer Femme- und Butchverkörperungen für heteronormative Kopien hält, ist der heteronormativen Strategie der Naturalisierung, die sich als Ursprüngliches, Eigentliches und Natürliches setzt, schon auf den Leim gegangen« (Fuchs 2020a: 23; vgl. auch McNicholas Smith 2020). Diese Falle findet sich nicht nur in transexkludierenden radikal-feministischen Räumen, sondern auch in queer-feministischen Kontexten wieder. Dabei werden das Begehren und Performen von gegenderten und genderphilen³ Subjektivitäten als unfeministisch betrachtet, denn Gender als solches sei unterdrückend (vgl. Fuchs 2020a: 20–21). Für Butches und Femmes selbst sind ihre Gender-Positionen oft durch eine Verbindung von Geschlechtsidentität und -ausdruck sowie geschlechtlichem Begehren charakterisiert, wobei für viele Femmes und Butches ihre Geschlechtsidentitäten transident und/oder nicht-binär sind: F(emale)-zu-M(ale)-zu-Butch, F-zu-M-zu-Femme, M-zu-F-zu-Femme, M-zu-F-zu-Butch, F-zu-Femme, F-zu-Butch sind einige der endlosen Gender-Möglichkeiten. Josephine Wilson spielt beispielweise mit SPTBMTQFF – »stopped-pretending-to-be-male-to-queer-femme-female« (Wilson 2009: 29) – und Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha beschreibt deren Femmeness als näher an Drag-Femininität als an cis Weiblichkeit (vgl. Albrecht-Samarasinha 1997).

Das Spiel mit Gender, mit Gegensätzlichkeit (und auch mit Gleichheit) und queeren Interpretationen von Femininität und Maskulinität, die sich patriarchalen Rollenvorstellungen widersetzen, steht im Zentrum von Butch- und Femme-Subjektivitäten. Auch außerhalb von Butch/Femme-Dynamiken erleben beide in

3 Sabine Fuchs schreibt, dass im Kontext von Queerness zwei Sichtweisen auf Gender auszumachen sind: einerseits Genderphlie, welche eine pluralistische Herangehensweise und ein Zelebrieren von Genderausprägungen bezeichnet, und andererseits ein Verständnis von Queerness, welches Genderphobie zentriert, also die »Abschaffung und Ablehnung« von Gender (Fuchs 2020a: 37).

queeren Kreisen oft Ausgrenzung. So werden Femmes immer wieder als nicht queer genug kritisiert (vgl. Brightwell 2018), während Butches als passé dargestellt werden und ihnen wahlweise eine trans Identität aufgezwungen oder ihre Existenz gleich aberkannt wird (vgl. Reed 2009) – nach dem Motto: »Wo sind all die Butches hin?« (vgl. Halberstam 1998) oder in aktuellerer Version: die *masc shortage*, also ein Mangel an (datebaren) maskulinen Lesben und transmaskulinen Personen. Erstere Frage war deutlich transexkludierend, da transitionierende Butches als Verräter*innen lesbischer Communitys gehandelt wurden (vgl. ebd.). Der in den 2020ern kursierende Mythos der *masc shortage* hingegen ist zumindest oberflächlich transinklusiv, da ein Begehren transmaskuliner Personen bekundet wird, jedoch zitiert dieses Narrativ ganz klar das der verschwindenden Butches. Häufig sind diese Annahmen durch Schönheits- und Genderideale, Rassismen und Bodyismen geprägt, denn das Begehren nach den verschwundenen Butches und *masc*s bezieht sich oftmals auf weiße, dünne, androgyne Menschen, die eine bestimmte Ästhetik befolgen und dabei auch nicht zu männlich sein dürfen (vgl. Deva 1994; Rubin 2013).

Femme/Butch-Dynamiken stellen eine zentrale Beziehungsform in *Stone Butch Blues* dar und Jess' Transition sowie andere trans Charaktere spiegeln Feinbergs eigenes Transsein und deren Kampf für trans Rechte. Als Dokumentation queerer Geschichte im Staat New York in der Zeit von 1950 bis 1990 und auf persönlichen Erfahrungen beruhend, hat *Stone Butch Blues* eine Vorreiterrolle der trans Literatur. Sein Stellenwert für die Trans Studies ist nicht zu unterschätzen: *Stone Butch Blues* ist sowohl einer der ersten trans Texte, der mit Genres spielt und Autobiografie, Fiktion und Geschichte vereint⁴ – gefolgt von Julia Seranos *Whipping Girl* (2007) und Janet Mocks *Redefining Realness* (2014) –, als auch einer der Texte, der seit seiner Publikation immer wieder in den Trans Studies aufgegriffen und diskutiert wird, wie beispielweise in Jay Prossers »No Place Like Home« (1995), Jack Halberstams »Lesbian Masculinity or Even Stone Butches Get the Blues« (1996) oder Jordy Rosenbergs Nachwort zum Sammelband *Transgender Marxism* (2021). Jess' Leben illustriert die Vielschichtigkeit von trans und lesbischen Erfahrungen. Jess' Transition wird nicht von allen Femmes und Butches im Roman positiv angenommen; wie viele trans Butches und transmaskuline Menschen verliert sie zeitweise den Zugang zu Femme/Butch-Gemeinschaft und -Räumen. Dass auch trans Butches und transmaskuline Personen – und auch ihre (Femme-)Partner*innen – sich weiterhin als lesbisch verstehen, wird nicht immer wahrgenommen oder gar konsequent abgelehnt – sowohl

4 Dass ein substanzieller Anteil des trans Literaturkanons aus autofiktionalen und autobiografischen Texten besteht, diskutiert Vivian Namaste in *Invisible Lives. The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (2000) und kritisiert dabei, dass trans Personen nur in Autobiografien zu Wort kommen dürfen. Jordy Rosenberg beschreibt es als Zumutung, nur dann kreativ schreiben zu dürfen, wenn die Authentizität der eigenen Subjektivität attestiert wird (vgl. Rosenberg 2021: 271).

im Roman als auch in gegenwärtigen queeren Communitys (vgl. Fuchs 2020a; Aizura 2023). Lesbische Identität und Community bleiben Teil der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart vieler trans Personen, trotz feindseliger Exklusionsversuche einiger radikaler ›Feminist*innen‹.

Queere Bündnisse

Zugleich hat der Roman auch für viele andere Queers eine wichtige politische und emotionale Bedeutung und instruiert zu Kollaboration und Koalition. Feinbergs Figuren sind nicht durch ihr Begehren füreinander oder ihre geschlechtlichen Erfahrungen ausgezeichnet, sondern durch ihre Beziehungen zueinander, ihre Freund*innenschaften, ihre Gemeinschaft. Feinberg setzt sich kritisch mit den Grenzen von und einer queeren Verpflichtung zu Solidarität auseinander und lässt Jess von einem*r unparteiischen Beobachter*in zum*r Anti-Rassist*in und gewerkschaftlichen Vorkämpfer*in wachsen und beleuchtet dadurch auch die tiefen Gräben innerhalb queerer und lesbischer Gemeinschaften. Geteilte Identitäten reichen nicht aus, um für Gerechtigkeit, Selbstbestimmung und Freiheit zu kämpfen, und Feinberg erinnert die Lesenden immer wieder daran, wenn Jess mit anderen Arbeiter*innen gemeinsame Interessen vertritt, unabhängig von ihren subjektiven gesellschaftlichen Positionen. In dieser Hinsicht ist *Stone Butch Blues* auch ein Arbeiter*innen-Roman, der Klassenkampf großschreibt und Gerechtigkeit auf allen gesellschaftlichen Ebenen fordert.

In und neben gemeinsamen politischen Kämpfen bilden sich im Roman (sowie in der Realität) Freund*innenschaften, die das zarte wie starke Herzstück queerer Gemeinschaft ausmachen. Für Queers kann Freund*innenschaft eine ganz besondere Rolle spielen – vermehrt auftretende familiäre Ausschlüsse und gesellschaftliche Isolation fordern uns dazu auf, gegenseitige Unterstützung zu verwirklichen. Auch in *Stone Butch Blues* ist Einsamkeit ein zentrales Problem, dem Jess immer wieder zu entkommen versucht. Doch ohne eine Vorstellung davon, was Queer-Sein bedeuten kann, ohne eine gemeinsame Sprache und geteilte Räume, ist es nicht einfach, Freund*innen zu finden. Queere Geschichten tragen maßgeblich dazu bei, dass queere Menschen in Isolation über andere Queers lesen und (von ihnen) lernen und sich schließlich selbst wiedererkennen können (vgl. McNicholas Smith 2020). Es braucht diese (An-)Erkennung, um einen Weg aus der Isolation zu erschließen oder zu entwerfen. Wir hoffen, mit diesem Band einen kleinen Beitrag zu diesen Geschichten zu leisten und dabei die Komplexität innerhalb queerer Geschichte aufzugreifen.

Zu den Beiträgen

Ann Cvetkovichs Konzept des Archivs der Gefühle betont die Wichtigkeit der Dokumentation von Brüchen und Schwierigkeiten queerer Geschichte: Um queere Geschichte zu schreiben, braucht es nicht ein geglättetes Bild von queerer Einheitlichkeit und Harmonie, sondern eine hügelige, rissige Landschaft, in der auch Raum für Schwieriges ist (vgl. Cvetkovich 2003). So setzen sich auch die Beiträge in diesem Sammelband aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven mit verschiedenen Facetten des Romans sowie queerer und trans Geschichte auseinander und sind dennoch in dem Versuch einer groben Ordnung in drei Abschnitte aufgeteilt: 1) Femme/Butch-Dynamiken und -Identitäten, 2) Übersetzungen und Übertragungen und 3) (Zukunfts-)Räume (online und offline). Da es sich um eine internationale, bilinguale Konferenz handelte, sind einige der Beiträge auf Deutsch und andere auf Englisch; die Beitragssprache ist jeweils am Titel erkennbar.

Der erste Abschnitt beginnt mit dem Beitrag »Von Papafrauen, Geschlechterrollenspiel, Kessen Vätern und Ladys. Fem(me)/Butch in den Sexualitätsdiskussionen deutschsprachiger Lesbenbewegungen der 1970er- bis 1990er-Jahre« von Lorenz Weinberg. Darin wird anhand von Quellenauszügen, insbesondere aus Lesbenzeitschriften, aufgezeigt, wie Fem(me)/Butch-Dynamiken diskutiert wurden und welche Rollen Sexualität und Identität dabei spielten. Auch geht Weinberg deutschen Begrifflichkeiten für und Debatten über lesbisch*queere Paarkonstellationen nach, die von Gegensätzlichkeit und von queerer Maskulinität und Femininität geprägt waren – und macht deutlich, wie diese heute in transfeindlichen Debatten zweckentfremdet werden.

Mit »Blaue Hose, rote Lippen« trägt Anngret Schultze einen sehr persönlichen Text bei, der sich sowohl mit Reibungspunkten bei der Lektüre von *Stone Butch Blues* befasst als auch eigene Identitätsaushandlungen im Kontext von Femme/Butch-Relationen (bzw. weder/noch) reflektiert. Dabei hinterfragt Schultze auch eine verinnerlichte Misogynie und den Fehlschluss, eine heterosexuelle Matrix als (kritikwürdige) Schablone für queere Beziehungen heranzuziehen.

Camellia Choudhuri betrachtet in seinem Aufsatz »A Terrible Beauty is Born. The Affective Politics of the Butch Memoir in Performance« Butch-Memoiren, die eine doppelte Marginalisierung erfahren: durch das Cisheteropatriarchat und lesbischen Mainstream-Feminismus. Vor diesem Hintergrund betrachtet er Joelle Taylor als Vertreterin einer experimentellen Butch-Poetik und analysiert ihre Lyrik-Performance *CUNTO* (uraufgeführt 2018), die Choudhuri schon durch die formale Assoziation mit einem Canto als heroische Erzählung deutet.

El Reid-Buckley setzt in »Cruising Towards Care. Leslie Feinberg and Lou Sullivan in Conversation« Feinbergs Roman *Stone Butch Blues* in Beziehung zu Sullivans Tagebüchern, obwohl – oder gerade weil – die beiden Autor*innen sich nie begegnet sind und unterschiedliche Perspektiven vertreten. Reid-Buckley legt dar, wie diese

Texte sich ergänzen und wie sie aufzeigen, dass trans Geschichten der Protagonistin Jess bzw. dem Verfasser Sullivan und auch den Lesenden helfen, eigene trans Identitäten und Subjektivitäten zu entwickeln.

Der erste Abschnitt des Sammelbandes erfährt anschließend eine künstlerische Intervention durch drei Gedichte von Anja* Oliver Schneider, die unter dem Titel *Memorize the Places You Wanted Me* gebündelt sind. In den Gedichten geht es um Femme/Butch-Beghären einerseits und kreative Inspirationen durch *Stone Butch Blues* andererseits.

In dem Beitrag »Feinberg's Femmes: How Femmes Care in *Stone Butch Blues*« widmet sich Clara Rosa Schwarz einer Re-Lektüre von Feinbergs Roman und nimmt dabei insbesondere die Femme-Figuren und ihre Fürsorgepraxen in den Fokus. Schwarz untersucht, wie *femme care* im Roman umgesetzt wird, wie Feinbergs Femmes Stärke durch Verletzlichkeit erzeugen und wie sie dadurch die Selbstfürsorge der Hauptfigur Jess Goldberg beeinflussen und ihr helfen, zu sich selbst zu stehen.

Laura Brightwell setzt in ihrem Aufsatz »Femme Life Writing: No Femininities Left Behind« queere Femmes mit marginalisierten heterosexuellen Femininitäten in Verbindung und fragt nach einer politischen Solidarität zwischen verschiedenen Ausdrucksformen von Weiblichkeit, die kulturell als inakzeptabel, abweichend oder ›falsch‹ angesehen werden. Sie widmet sich so einem neuen Modell der Femme-Theorie, das von der Konstruktion einer Femme-Identität als inhärent anti-normativ abweicht, und blickt dafür in literarische Texte von Dorothy Allison, Rachael Anne Jolie und Joan Nestle.

Der zweite Abschnitt zu Übersetzungen und Übertragungen beginnt mit einem Essay von Sabine Fuchs, das den Titel »Sternenklare Reise. Eine Reminiszenz an Leslie Feinberg, in Dankbarkeit« trägt und eine Würdigung von Feinberg ist. Fuchs erinnert darin zwei persönliche Begegnungen mit Feinberg, reflektiert die Bedeutung von Literatur für eine Identitätsausbildung und ein kritisches Selbstverständnis und zeigt auf, wie transfeindliche lesbische ›Feministinnen‹ im deutschsprachigen Raum Feinberg bis heute als ›lesbische Frau‹ für sich vereinnahmen und dabei trans Identität und Widerstand auslöschen.

Marina Allal geht in ihrem Beitrag »Shake up imaginations and develop alternatives«. The Reception and Translation of *Stone Butch Blues* in France« der Frage nach, warum erst wenige Jahre vor seinem 30. Jubiläum eine Übersetzung von Feinbergs Roman ins Französische publiziert wurde. Sie setzt diese neue Rezeption mit einem literarischen Event von 2018 in Verbindung sowie mit den Entwicklungen feministischer Bewegungen in Frankreich von den 1970er-Jahren bis heute. Auch gewährt sie einen Einblick in die 2019 veröffentlichte französische Ausgabe und zeigt anhand einiger Beispiele Übersetzungsschwierigkeiten einer gendersensiblen Herangehensweise auf.

In dem essayistischen Beitrag »Translating Translanguage« von Ylva Emel Karlsson geht es um die erste Übersetzung von *Stone Butch Blues* ins Schwedische und um die Schwierigkeiten, aber auch Freiheiten, die damit verbunden sind, eine Sprache zu finden, die einerseits historische Kontexte und andererseits sprachliche Entwicklungen und gegenwärtige Bedeutungen von Wörtern berücksichtigt. Diese Überlegungen legt Karlsson in einem über Jahre fortgeführten Brief an Leslie Feinberg dar.

Auch Desz Debreceni widmet sich in dem Aufsatz »Re_Translating as Activist Practice. Queering the German Translation of *Stone Butch Blues*« einem Übersetzungsprozess, nämlich der Neuübersetzung der deutschen Ausgabe. Letztere wird nicht nur aufgrund sprachlicher Entwicklungen als notwendig betrachtet, sondern auch, weil Übersetzung als aktivistische Praxis verstanden wird, die der Sichtbarkeit und Lesbarkeit queerer und trans Figuren zuarbeiten sollte.

Der Text »Growing Sideways. An Écriture of the Queer Kid« von Hannah/Hann Zipfel ist eine überarbeitete und kommentierte Abschrift des (fast) gleichnamigen Video-Essays, das online verfügbar ist. Darin widmet sich Zipfel (queeren) Kindheitserinnerungen in einem binären System, was es bedeutet, als erwachsene Person auf diese zurückzublicken, und warum ein kindliches Seitwärts-Wachsen notwendig und befreiend sein kann.

Nike Hartmond und Fred Heinemann haben mit *Medea: Bubbles oder Weggefährt*innen* künstlerisch zum Sammelband beigetragen: In einer Foto-Love-Story führen sie den *Medea*-Mythos und *Stone Butch Blues* zusammen und lassen die Figuren einander Weggefährt*innen sein. Auch die Verwandtschaft zwischen Foto-Love-Story und Oper, welche sich im Verhältnis von Text und Bild zeigt, sowie die Assoziation beider Formate mit Drag-Performances führten zu diesem Projekt, das an einer Wiener Tankstelle, die als Schwellenort diente, seine Realisation fand.

Der dritte Abschnitt zu (Zukunfts-)Räumen (online und offline) setzt mit einem künstlerischen Beitrag von Hani Esther Indictor Portner ein: Mit einem Bild reflektiert Portner den bei der Tagung abgehaltenen Workshop »Queer Trans Jewish Futures« und erklärt in einem kurzen Statement die zahlreichen Symbole der Bildsprache sowie die Bedeutung eines solchen Workshops als *safer space* für Menschen, die sich an der Intersektion einer jüdisch-queeren/trans Marginalisierung befinden.

Jade Da Costa betreut den Instagram-Account @eroticpedagogy, der Geschichten von QTBIPOC aus dem südlichen Zentral-Ontario bereitstellt, in denen sie über vergangene und aktuelle Erfahrungen mit Sexualerziehung, sexueller Gesundheit, Sexualität und Geschlecht sprechen. Im Beitrag »Erotic Pedagogy: Queer of Colour Sex Education« geht es zunächst um das Konzept und die Umsetzung des Projekts, das Lehrkräften (Vorschule bis 12. Klasse) helfen soll, Sexualerziehung zu dekolonisieren. Im Anschluss folgt das Transkript eines Gesprächs von Da Costa und Skylar Sookpaiboon, die das Projekt gemeinsam umgesetzt haben. Sie reflektieren darin,

was Erotic Pedagogy für sie ausmacht und was sie selbst durch das Projekt gelernt haben.

In dem Beitrag »Finding Butch Identity and (Visions of) Solidarity on TikTok« untersucht Jonah Reimann, ausgehend von persönlichen Erfahrungen während und nach der Covid-19-Pandemie, welche Rolle die Repräsentation von Butchness auf der Social-Media-Plattform TikTok für eine queere Selbstfindung spielen kann. Dabei werden zwei Accounts und ihre Interaktionen genauer beleuchtet, aber auch die Schattenseiten solcher Plattformen berücksichtigt.

Mit dem Aufsatz »Who was I now – woman or man? That question could never be answered as long as those were the only choices.« Intersections of Lesbian and Trans Experiences in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*« nimmt Anja* Oliver Schneider ein *close reading* des Romans vor und spürt dabei der Charakterentwicklung von Protagonist*in Jess Goldberg nach, die aus Differenzenerfahrungen und Allianzen gleichermaßen lernt, um zu einem eigenen Identitätswurf zu gelangen, der sich binären Einschränkungen entzieht.

k kater trägt das intime Hörstück *put your hands in my lungs. Fem_me/Butch-Miniaturen* bei, das über einen Link online verfügbar ist und in diesem Band durch ein Essay begleitet wird. Darin werden literarische Zitate und *Fem_me/Butch-Erotika* aufeinander bezogen und mit autofiktionalen Fragmenten verbunden, was eine genderphile Verwandtschaft erfahrbar macht, versponnen in ein kollektives trans*queeres Gedächtnis und Archiv.

Im finalen Beitrag mit dem Titel »Queere Arbeiter*innen und umkämpfte Räume. Eine intersektionale Betrachtung des Raums der schwul-lesbischen Bar in *Stone Butch Blues* und seiner Ein- und Ausschließungsmechanismen« nimmt Jojo Hofmann mithilfe der Raumtheorien von Lotman, Renner und Foucault die Bars in Feinbergs Roman ins Visier und fasst sie als queere Gegenräume zum ›Normalraum‹ der heterosexuellen Matrix, die jedoch auch bestimmte Regeln und Ausschlüsse mit sich bringen.

Diese Vielzahl unterschiedlichster Auseinandersetzungen mit und Anknüpfungen an *Stone Butch Blues* – im Erinnern des Damaligen und Aushandeln des Heutigen sowie Zukünftigen – zeigen die andauernde Relevanz der Texte und Taten von Leslie Feinberg und anderen trans und queeren Pionier*innen. Sie ebneten mit ihren Schriften und Kämpfen einen Weg und schufen so auch die Möglichkeit für unsere Visionen einer queer(er)en Zukunft.

Dank

Unser besonderer Dank gilt Michaela Koch vom Zentrum Gender & Diversity für die Idee der Tagung und Lara Ledwa vom Spinnboden Lesbenarchiv für die tatkräftige Unterstützung bei selbiger. Den Beitragenden danken wir für die große Perspekti-

venvielfalt, ihr Vertrauen und den wertschätzenden Umgang. Bei Anika Luisa Höwer bedanken wir uns für ihre Mitarbeit im Lektorat und bei Desz Debreceni fürs Gegenlesen dieser deutschsprachigen Fassung der Einleitung. Und nicht zuletzt geht ein großes Dankeschön an die Förderinstitutionen, ohne die die Finanzierung von *Queere Geschichte(n)* nicht möglich gewesen wäre: der Open-Access-Publikationsfonds der Universität Freiburg und der Gleichstellungsfonds der Universität Hamburg.

Jara Schmidt und Clara Rosa Schwarz im September 2024

Literatur

- Aizura, A. (2023) »Flailing at Feminized Labor: SOFFAs, 1990s Trans Care Networks, *Stone Butch Blues*, and the Devaluation of Social Reproduction«, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 122(3), S. 567–589. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-10644043>.
- Albrecht-Samarasinha, L. L. (1997) »On Being a Bisexual Femme«, in: Harris, L. und Crocker, E. (Hg.) *Fem(me). Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls*. London: Routledge, S. 138–144.
- Brightwell, L. (2018) »The Exclusionary Effects of Queer Anti-Normativity on Feminine-Identified Queers«, *Feral Feminisms* 7, S. 15–24.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003) *An Archive of Feelings. Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Deva (1994) »FTM/Female-to-Male: An Interview with Mike, Eric, Billy, Sky, and Shadow«, in: Burana, L. und Due, R. L. (Hg.) *Dagger. On Butch Women*. San Francisco: Cleis, S. 154–167.
- Feinberg, L. (2014) *Stone Butch Blues*. 20th Anniversary Author Edition, selbst verlegt. <https://www.lesliefeinberg.net> (letzter Zugriff am 09.09.2024).
- Fuchs, S. (2020a) »Einleitung: Beständiges Begehren. Femme/Butch als genderphile und sexpositive Kultur«, in: Fuchs, S. (Hg.) *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren*. Berlin: Querverlag, S. 13–68.
- (2020b) »Spuren im Archiv. Femme/Butch-Nostalgie für eine queere Zukunft«, in: Fuchs, S. (Hg.) *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren*. Berlin: Querverlag, S. 113–126.
- Halberstam, J. (1996) »Lesbian Masculinity or Even Stone Butches Get the Blues«, *Women and Performance* 8(2), S. 61–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07407709608571231>.
- (1998) »Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum«, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4(2), S. 287–310.
- McNicholas Smith, K. (2020) *Lesbians on Television. New Queer Visibility and the Lesbian Normal*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Mock, J. (2014) *Redefining Realness*. New York: Atria.

- Namaste, V. (2000) *Invisible Lives. The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*. Chicago: University Press.
- Prosser, J. (1995) »No Place Like Home: The Transgendered Narrative of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*«, *Modern Fiction Studies* 41(3), S. 483–514. <https://doi.org/10.1353/MFS.1995.0120>.
- Rawson, K. J. (2012) »Archive This! Queer(ing) Archival Practices«, in: Powell, K. und Takayoshi, P. (Hg.) *Practicing Research in Writing Studies. Reflections on Ethically Responsible Research*. New York: Hampton, S. 237–250. https://www.academia.edu/3659970/Archive_This_Queer_ing_Archival_Practices (letzter Zugriff am 09.09.2024).
- Reed, J. (2009) »Reading Gender Politics on *The L Word: The Moira/Max Transitions*«, *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 37(4), S. 169–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01956050903227944>.
- Rivers, D. (2012) »Queer Family Stories. Learning from Oral Histories with Lesbian Mothers and Gay Fathers from the Pre-Stonewall Era«, in: Boyd, N. A. und Roque Ramírez, H. N. (Hg.) *Bodies of Evidence. The Practice of Queer Oral History*. New York: Oxford University Press, S. 57–72.
- Rosenberg, J. (2021) »Afterword: One Utopia, One Dystopia«, in: Gleeson, J. J. und O'Rourke, E. (Hg.) *Transgender Marxism*. London: Pluto, S. 259–295.
- Rubin, G. (2013) »Of Catamites and Kings. Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries 1«, in: Stryker, S. und Whittle, S. (Hg.) *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203955055>.
- Serano, J. (2007) *Whipping Girl. A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. Berkeley: Seal.
- Spinnboden (2023) »Reading Minnie Bruce Pratt at Online-Conference 30 Years of *Stone Butch Blues* – Memories and Visions«, *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9l4fix5eYw> (letzter Zugriff am 09.09.2024).
- Wilson, J. (2009) »Not so Much »MTF« as »SPTBMTQFF«: The Identification of a Trans Femme-inist«, in: Burke, J. C. (Hg.) *Visible. A Femmethology. Volume One*. Michigan: Homofactus, S. 26–29.

Introduction: Queer History and Stories After *Stone Butch Blues*

The Background to this Anthology

To mark the 30th publication anniversary of Leslie Feinberg's novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), we organised an online conference in May 2023, together with Michaela Koch, head of the cross-university Centre for Gender & Diversity in Hamburg. *Stone Butch Blues* is a classic of queer literature that not only highlights the complexity of lesbian and queer realities, but also contributed to a shift from talking about trans people to

trans people speaking for themselves and to the increased visibility of trans voices in society and academia. This volume contains the conference proceedings, which we hope will record and trace the impact of Feinberg (1949–2014) and his novel.

Queere Geschichte(n). Erinnerungen und Visionen im Anschluss an Leslie Feinbergs "Stone Butch Blues" (*Queer History and Stories. Memories and Visions After Leslie Feinberg's "Stone Butch Blues"*) focusses on the past, present, and future of trans, lesbian, and queer literature and culture with interdisciplinary approaches and from international perspectives and includes academic, essayistic, literary, and artistic contributions in German and English. These are, among other things, dedicated to femme/butch dynamics and identities, queer potentialities in the first and new translations of the novel, and queer spaces that take shape online, offline, in text, and in utopias, and thereby enable community.

Feinberg's novel does not lose its topical appeal and applicability; rather, thanks to activist and academic achievements, we now have a greater understanding and vocabulary for the themes and characters discussed in *Stone Butch Blues*.⁵ Moreover, in view of the current political climate, in which right-wing voices are gaining strength and propagating binary, biologicistic, and transphobic ways of thinking, the personal and analytical negotiations compiled in this volume could hardly be more relevant to the present.

A special highlight of the conference was Minnie Bruce Pratt's participation. She was an author, activist, and Leslie Feinberg's life partner. Pratt, who died shortly afterwards in July 2023, provided insights into her life, writing, and activist activities and read out a few poems and shorter texts. Two of the short prose texts she presented – *Husband* and *Palace* (short excerpt) – follow this introduction. The conversation with her was recorded and is available online (Spinnboden 2023).

Queer History and Stories

The question of how queer history is written is often directed at the physical spaces of the archive – filled with posters, pamphlets, letters, newspapers, digital data, and oral history material – because these materials fundamentally contribute to collective memory and attempt to make the abundance of queer existence comprehensible. However, the history preceding the 1969 Stonewall riots exists on the basis of fleeting traces (Cvetkovich 2003; Rivers 2012). Fiction, too, may leave such traces

5 This can be seen, for example, in the fact that in the contributions that centre *Stone Butch Blues*, some contributors use 'she/her' pronouns for the main character Jess Goldberg, like in the novel, while others prefer the gender-neutral or nonbinary forms 'they/them' or 'zie/hir'. We consider both approaches – the recourse to the pronouns from the novel and an adapting of the pronouns in the sense of a queer reading – to be valid and have therefore decided against uniformity.

which can generate archival spaces from and in the most diverse places. We particularly want to emphasise the novel as part of queer historiography, because we carry it around with us, read it on park benches and on buses, collect it on our bookshelves and fall asleep next to it. The novel materialises queer history through queer stories – sometimes history is best told when it is re-created (Rawson 2012: 244). Treating stories as archival material also means that creative freedoms are seen as a valid part of queer knowledge production. Thus, we also treat *Stone Butch Blues* as an object of the archive, but one to which we all have constant access (also because Leslie Feinberg has published the novel freely available on his website). *Stone Butch Blues* may be fictional, but Feinberg himself describes the stories that make up the novel as real (Feinberg 2014); and the novel's ongoing influence on queer and trans communities, research, and history confirms its historical relevance time and again.

Treating the novel as a historical source raises questions about the concept of the archive. K. J. Rawson engages, among other things, with the question of primary sources in the archive: Which material is considered primary, which secondary? How can the 'unarchivable' also be archived? (Rawson 2012: 239) Rawson takes fiction as an example of queer archiving practice and offers fictional stories as an answer to the following dilemma: "If there are no materials to document a person's life [...], does that mean that person never existed?"⁶ (ibid.: 243) Fiction thus represents a creative tool for queer historiography that destabilises the exclusive validity of historical documents. In this context, we might also ask "how historical knowledge comes about, what functions it has for the constitution of subjects and identities, and what effects it has on the shaping of society" (Fuchs 2020b: 114–115, translation J. S.).

Thus, if the archive "provides the basis for collective memory" (ibid.: 115, translation J. S.), the historical relevance of *Stone Butch Blues* lies not only in the fictional story but also the context in which the novel was written. How does collective memory influence the story in *Stone Butch Blues* and how does *Stone Butch Blues* influence collective memory? With what perspective does Feinberg look back on his own history and the socio-political situation of the 1950s to early 1990s in the USA that frame the novel? To what extent can Feinberg reflect this position in order to retrospectively create the youth and ignorance of protagonist Jess Goldberg?

The Interweaving of Trans and Lesbian History and Stories

This anthology focuses primarily on trans and lesbian queer history and stories. When we speak of queer history, we also mean queer political movements and struggles for liberation that do not (only) refer to individual identity affiliations but also

6 Rawson is referring here to the (fantastic) fictional documentary *The Watermelon Woman* (USA 1996, director: Cheryl Dunye).

understand 'queer' as counter-hegemony, as antinormative and in terms of solidarity. At the same time, it is particularly important to us to address the specifics of how lesbian and trans history are interwoven and thus embedded in *Stone Butch Blues*. Jess' story combines these experiences: a gender non-conforming child becomes a lesbian, a butch, a trans man, and finally a nonbinary butch – although Feinberg does not use all of these terms in this way. Feinberg uses the language *zie* has at hir disposal to describe these experiences: Jess definitely feels butch and desires femmes, and yet always feels in-between and trapped in her gender at the same time. The contributions in this volume deal with the language and framing of these experiences, abstracting them and thus (re)creating a piece of history.

Against the backdrop of the current political situation and loud anti-trans and anti-queer voices, it is all the more important to recognise that lesbians and trans people have long shared overlapping experiences and communities and fought for common political interests. For many femmes and butches and (other) trans people in particular, *Stone Butch Blues* has a very special meaning. Many of us experience “a sense of comfort in recognising similarities” (Fuchs 2020b: 188, translation J. S.) through Feinberg's story. Fuchs emphasises the importance of this sense of belonging, especially for those who may not feel a sense of belonging in lesbian-feminist, queer-feminist, or nonbinary/transgender communities (ibid.). Femme/butch dynamics, desires, and identities are often framed as regressive and demonised as imitations of the heterosexual order. Fuchs skilfully exposes this criticism: “anyone who considers femme and butch embodiments to be heteronormative copies has already fallen prey to the heteronormative strategy of naturalisation, which posits itself as original, actual, and natural” (Fuchs 2020a: 23, translation J. S.; cf. also McNicholas Smith 2020). This trap is not only found in trans-exclusionary radical feminist spaces, but also in queer feminist contexts. Here, the desire for and performance of gendered and genderphilic⁷ subjectivities are seen as not feminist, because gender as such is seen as oppressive (Fuchs 2020a: 20–21). Butch and femme gender positions are often characterised by a combination of gender identity and expression as well as gendered desire, whereby for many femmes and butches their gender identities are transgender and/or nonbinary: f(emale)-to-m(ale)-to-but(h)ch, f-to-m-to-femme, m-to-f-to-femme, m-to-f-to-but(h)ch, f-to-femme, f-to-but(h)ch are some of the endless gender possibilities. Josephine Wilson, for example, plays with SPTBMTQFF – “stopped-pretending-to-be-male-to-queer-femme-female” (Wilson 2009: 29) – and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha describes their femmeness as closer to drag femininity than to cis femininity (Albrecht-Samarasinha 1997).

7 Sabine Fuchs writes that two distinct approaches to gender come together in the context of queerness: genderphilia, on the one hand, describes a pluralistic and celebratory approach to gender expressions, and genderphobia, on the other hand, is a rejection and a desire for an abolition of gender (Fuchs 2020a: 37).

Playing with gender, with opposites (and also with sameness), and queer interpretations of femininity and masculinity that defy patriarchal notions of roles is at the centre of butch and femme subjectivities. Even outside of butch/femme dynamics, both often experience marginalisation in queer circles. Femmes are repeatedly criticised for not being queer enough (Brightwell 2018), while butches are portrayed as passé (Reed 2009). A common response to butch is to either read butchness as a prenascent transgender identification or to deny butches' existence. See, for example, the common lament: "Where have all the butches gone?" (Halberstam 1998), or the more recent version of the 'masc shortage', that is, a lack of (dateable) masculine lesbians and transmasculine people. The former question ("Where have all the butches gone?") was clearly trans-exclusionary, as transitioning butches were seen as traitors to lesbian communities (ibid.). The myth of the masc shortage circulating in the 2020s is at least superficially trans-inclusive, as a desire for transmasculine people is expressed, but this narrative still clearly cites that of the disappearing butches. These assumptions are often characterised by beauty and gender ideals, racisms and bodyisms, as the desire for the disappearing butches and mascs often refers to white, thin, androgynous people who follow a certain aesthetic and must not be *too* masculine (Deva 1994; Rubin 2013).

Femme/butch dynamics are a central form of relationship in *Stone Butch Blues*, and Jess' transition and stories about other trans characters mirror Feinberg's own trans identity and lifelong struggle for trans rights. As a novel based on personal experience and as a vibrant documentation of queer life in 1950s to 1990s New York State, *Stone Butch Blues* is at the forefront of trans literature. Its significance for trans studies should not be underestimated: *Stone Butch Blues* is both one of the first trans texts to play with genres and combine autobiography, fiction, and history⁸ – followed by Julia Serano's *Whipping Girl* (2007) and Janet Mock's *Redefining Realness* (2014) – and one of the texts which has been repeatedly taken up and discussed in trans studies since its publication, for example in Jay Prosser's "No Place Like Home" (1995), Jack Halberstam's "Lesbian Masculinity or Even Stone Butches Get the Blues" (1996), or Jordy Rosenberg's afterword to the anthology *Transgender Marxism* (2021). Jess' life illustrates the complexity of trans and lesbian experiences. Jess' transition is not positively received by all femmes and butches in the novel; like many trans butches and transmasculine people, she temporarily loses access to femme/butch community and spaces. The fact that trans butches and transmasculine people –

8 The fact that a substantial proportion of the trans literary canon consists of autofictional and autobiographical texts is discussed by Vivian Namaste in *Invisible Lives. The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (2000), where she criticizes that trans people are only allowed to have their say in autobiographies. Jordy Rosenberg describes it as an imposition to only be allowed to write creatively if the authenticity of one's own subjectivity is being certified (Rosenberg 2021: 271).

and also their (femme) partners – continue to see themselves as lesbians is not always recognised and sometimes even consistently rejected – both in the novel and in queer communities today (Fuchs 2020a; Aizura 2023). Lesbian identity and community remain part of the past and present of many trans people, despite hostile attempts at exclusion by some radical ‘feminists’.

Queer Alliances

At the same time, the novel also has an important political and emotional meaning for many other queers and instructs them to collaborate and build coalitions. Feinberg’s characters are not characterised by their desire for each other or their gender experiences, but by their relationships with each other, their friendships, and their community. Feinberg critically explores the boundaries of and a queer commitment to solidarity, allowing Jess to grow from an impartial observer to an anti-racist and union activist, thereby also illuminating the deep rifts within queer and lesbian communities. Shared identities are not enough to fight for justice, self-determination, and freedom, and Feinberg reminds readers of that each time Jess represents common interests with other workers, regardless of their subjective social positions. In this respect, *Stone Butch Blues* is also a working-class novel that emphasises class struggle and demands justice at all levels of society.

In and alongside shared political struggles, friendships are formed in the novel (and in reality), figuring the soft yet strong heart of queer community. For queers, friendship can play a very special role – common experiences of exclusion from families and social isolation challenge us to materialise mutual support. Loneliness is also a central problem in *Stone Butch Blues*, which Jess repeatedly tries to escape. But without an idea of what being queer can mean, without a common language and shared spaces, it isn’t easy to make friends. Queer stories make a significant contribution to queer people in isolation, enabling them to read about other queer people and learn (from them) and ultimately recognise themselves (McNicholas Smith 2020). It takes this recognition to open up or forge a way out of isolation. With this volume, we hope to make a small contribution to these stories while appreciating the complexities of queer history.

On the Contributions

Ann Cvetkovich’s concept of the archive of feelings emphasises the importance of documenting the ruptures and difficulties of queer history: writing queer history does not require a smoothed-out image of queer uniformity and harmony, but rather a hilly, cracked landscape with room for difficulties (Cvetkovich 2003). Thus, the contributions in this anthology also engage with different facets of the novel as well as queer and trans history from different perspectives. They are nevertheless

divided into three sections in an attempt at organisation: 1) femme/butch dynamics and identities, 2) translations and transfers, and 3) (future) spaces (online and offline). As this was an international, bilingual conference, some of the contributions are in German and others in English; the language of each contribution is indicated by the title.

The first section begins with the article “Von Papafrauen, Geschlechterrollenspiel, Kessen Vätern und Ladys. Fem(me)/Butch in den Sexualitätsdiskussionen deutschsprachiger Lesbenbewegungen der 1970er- bis 1990er-Jahre” (“On *Papafrauen*, gender role play, *Kessen Vätern*, and Ladies. Fem(me)/Butch in Discussions of Sexuality in German-speaking Lesbian Movements from the 1970s to the 1990s”) by Lorenz Weinberg. Using excerpts from sources, particularly from lesbian magazines, they show how fem(me)/butch dynamics were discussed and what roles sexuality and identity played in this. Weinberg also explores German terminology for and debates about lesbian*queer couple constellations, which were characterised by oppositionality as well as queer masculinity and femininity – and makes it clear how these are misappropriated in anti-trans debates today.

With “*Blaue Hose, rote Lippen*” (“Blue Trousers, Red Lips”), Anngret Schultze contributes a very personal text that deals with points of friction while reading *Stone Butch Blues* and with reflections on her own identity negotiations in the context of femme/butch (or neither/nor) relations. Schultze also questions internalised misogyny and the fallacy of using a heterosexual matrix as a (criticisable) template for queer relationships.

In their article “A Terrible Beauty is Born: The Affective Politics of the Butch Memoir in Performance”, Camellia Choudhuri looks at butch memoirs that experience a double marginalisation: by cisheteropatriarchy and mainstream lesbian feminism. Against this backdrop, they consider Joelle Taylor as a representative of experimental butch poetics and analyse her poetry performance *CUNTO* (premiered in 2018), which Choudhuri interprets as a heroic narrative beyond its formal association with a canto.

In “Cruising Towards Care. Leslie Feinberg and Lou Sullivan in Conversation”, El Reid-Buckley relates Feinberg’s novel *Stone Butch Blues* to Sullivan’s diaries, even though – or perhaps because – the two authors have never met and represent different perspectives. Reid-Buckley shows how these texts complement each other and how they demonstrate that trans stories help Feinberg’s protagonist Jess and Sullivan himself, as well as the readers, to develop their own trans identities and subjectivities.

The first section of the anthology then undergoes an artistic intervention through three poems by Anja*Oliver Schneider, which are bundled under the title *Memorise the Places You Wanted Me*. The poems centre femme/butch desires and invoke creative inspiration from *Stone Butch Blues*.

In the article “Feinberg’s Femmes: How Femmes Care in *Stone Butch Blues*”, Clara Rosa Schwarz re-reads Feinberg’s novel, focussing in particular on the femme characters and their care practices. Schwarz examines how femme care is realised in the novel, how Feinberg’s femmes create strength through vulnerability, and how they thereby influence the self-care of the main character Jess Goldberg and enable her to be true to her identity.

In her contribution “Femme Life Writing: No Femininities Left Behind”, Laura Brightwell connects queer femmes with marginalised heterosexual femininities and asks for political solidarity between different forms of feminine expression that are culturally regarded as unacceptable, deviant, or ‘wrong’. She thus devotes herself to a new model of femme theory that deviates from the construction of femme identity as inherently antinormative by looking at literary texts by Dorothy Allison, Rachael Anne Jolie, and Joan Nestle.

The second section on translations and transfers begins with an essay by Sabine Fuchs entitled “Sternenklare Reise. Eine Reminiszenz an Leslie Feinberg, in Dankbarkeit” (“Starry Travels. A Reminiscence on Leslie Feinberg, in Gratitude”), which is a tribute to Feinberg. In it, Fuchs recalls two personal encounters with Feinberg, reflects on the importance of literature for identity formation and a critical self-image and shows how transphobic lesbian ‘feminists’ in German-speaking countries are still appropriating Feinberg as a ‘lesbian woman’ for themselves today, thereby erasing trans identity and resistance.

In her contribution “‘Shake up imaginations and develop alternatives’. The Reception and Translation of *Stone Butch Blues* in France”, Marina Allal explores the question of why a translation of Feinberg’s novel into French was only published a few years before its 30th anniversary. She links this new reception to a literary event in 2018 and to the development of feminist movements in France from the 1970s to the present day. She also provides an insight into the French edition published in 2019 and uses several examples to illustrate the difficulties of a gender-sensitive approach to translation.

The essayistic contribution “Translating Translanguage” by Ylva Emel Karlsson is about the first Swedish translation of *Stone Butch Blues* and the difficulties, but also the freedoms, associated with finding a language that takes into account historical contexts on the one hand and linguistic developments and contemporary meanings of words on the other. Karlsson sets out these considerations in a letter to Leslie Feinberg that was continually written over many years.

In the article “Re_Translating as Activist Practice. Queering the German Translation of *Stone Butch Blues*”, Desz Debreceni also devotes themselves to a translation process, namely a new translation of the German edition. The latter is not only seen as necessary due to linguistic developments, but also because translation is understood as an activist practice that should work towards the visibility and legibility of queer and trans characters.

The text “Growing Sideways. An Écriture of the Queer Kid” by Hannah/Hann Zipfel is a revised and annotated transcript of the video essay of (almost) the same title, which is available online. In it, Zipfel explores (queer) childhood memories in a binary system, what it means to look back on them as an adult, and why growing sideways as a child can be necessary and liberating.

Nike Hartmond and Fred Heinemann have contributed artistically to the anthology with *Medea: Bubbles oder Weggefährt*innen* (*Medea: Bubbles or Companions*). In a photo love story,⁹ they bring together the *Medea* myth and *Stone Butch Blues* and allow the characters to be each other’s companions. The relationship between the photo love story and opera, which is evident in the relationship between text and image as well as the association of both formats with drag performances, also led to this project, which was brought to life at a Viennese petrol station that served as a liminal space.

The third section on (future) spaces (online and offline) begins with an artistic contribution by Hani Esther Indictor Portner. Portner uses an artwork to reflect on the “Queer Trans Jewish Futures” workshop held at the conference and explains in a short statement the numerous symbols of the visual language as well as the significance of such a workshop as a safer space for people who find themselves at the intersection of a Jewish-queer/trans marginalisation.

Jade Da Costa hosts the Instagram account @eroticpedagogy, which features QTBIPOc stories from South Central Ontario talking about past and present experiences with sex education, sexual health, sexuality, and gender. The article “Erotic Pedagogy: Queer of Colour Sex Education” begins with the concept and implementation of the project, which aims to help teachers (preschool to twelfth grade) decolonise sex education. This is followed by a transcript of a conversation between Da Costa and Skylar Sookpaiboon, who implemented the project together. In it, they reflect on what Erotic Pedagogy means to them and what they have learnt through the project.

In the article “Finding Butch Identity and (Visions of) Solidarity on TikTok”, Jonah Reimann examines the role butch representation on the social media platform TikTok can play in queer self-discovery, based on personal experiences during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Two accounts and their interactions are examined in more detail, but the darker sides of such platforms are also considered.

With the contribution “‘Who was I now – woman or man? That question could never be answered as long as those were the only choices’: Intersections of Lesbian

9 A ‘photo love story’ is a German-language term for comic-like storytelling with photography instead of illustrations, commonly printed in teen magazines. This format was popularised in the 1970s as a new format for sexual education in the teen magazine *Bravo*, which is still published today (Bravo-Archiv n. d.).

and Trans Experiences in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*", Anja*Oliver Schneider undertakes a close reading of the novel and traces the character development of protagonist Jess Goldberg, who learns from experiences of difference and alliances in equal measure in order to arrive at her own identity concept that defies binary restrictions.

Ikater contributes the intimate audio piece *put your hands in my lungs. Fem_me/Butch-Miniaturen (put your hands in my lungs. Fem_me/Butch Miniatures)*, which is available online via a link and is accompanied by an essay in this volume. In it, literary quotations and fem_me/butch erotica are related to each other and combined with autofictional fragments, making it possible to experience a genderphilic kinship, spun into a collective trans*queer memory and archive.

In the final contribution entitled "Queere Arbeiter*innen und umkämpfte Räume. Eine intersektionale Betrachtung des Raums der schwul-lesbischen Bar in *Stone Butch Blues* und seiner Ein- und Ausschließungsmechanismen" ("Queer Workers and Contested Spaces: An Intersectional Examination of the Gay and Lesbian Bar in *Stone Butch Blues* and its Mechanisms of Inclusion and Exclusion"), Jojo Hofmann uses the spatial theories of Lotman, Renner, and Foucault to focus on the bars in Feinberg's novel, framing them as queer counter-spaces to the 'normal space' of the heterosexual matrix, but which also entail certain rules and exclusions.

This multitude of different engagements with and connections to *Stone Butch Blues* – in remembering the past and negotiating the present and future – show the enduring relevance of Leslie Feinberg's writing and activism and that of other trans and queer pioneers. With their writings and struggles, they paved the way and thus also created the possibility for our visions of a queer(er) future.

Thank You

Our special thanks go to Michaela Koch from the Centre for Gender & Diversity for the idea for the conference and to Lara Ledwa from the Spinnboden Lesbian Archive for her active support during the conference. We would like to thank the contributors for their wide range of perspectives, their trust, and their appreciative interaction. We would also like to thank Anika Luisa Höwer for her assistance in proofreading all the contributions and Laura Brightwell for proofreading this English version of the introduction. And last but not least, a big thank you goes to the funding institutions without which the financing of *Queere Geschichte(n)* (*Queer History and Stories*) would not have been possible: the Open Access Publication Fund of the University of Freiburg and the Equal Opportunities Fund of the University of Hamburg.

Jara Schmidt and Clara Rosa Schwarz, September 2024

References

- Aizura, A. (2023) "Flailing at Feminized Labor: SOFFAs, 1990s Trans Care Networks, *Stone Butch Blues*, and the Devaluation of Social Reproduction", *South Atlantic Quarterly* 122(3), pp. 567–589. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-10644043>.
- Albrecht-Samarasinha, L. L. (1997) "On Being a Bisexual Femme", in: Harris, L. and Crocker, E. (eds.) *Fem(me). Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls*. London: Routledge, pp. 138–144.
- Bravo-Archiv (n. d.) "BRAVO Foto-Love-Storys". <https://bravo-archiv-shop.com/collections/bravo-foto-love-storys> (last accessed 26 September 2024).
- Brightwell, L. (2018) "The Exclusionary Effects of Queer Anti-Normativity on Feminine-Identified Queers", *Feral Feminisms* 7, pp. 15–24.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003) *An Archive of Feelings. Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Deva (1994) "FTM/Female-to-Male: An Interview with Mike, Eric, Billy, Sky, and Shadow", in: Burana, L. and Due, R. L. (eds.) *Dagger. On Butch Women*. San Francisco: Cleis, pp. 154–167.
- Feinberg, L. (2014) *Stone Butch Blues*. 20th Anniversary Author Edition, self-published. <https://www.lesliefeinberg.net> (last accessed 9 September 2024).
- Fuchs, S. (2020a) "Einleitung: Beständiges Begehren. Femme/Butch als genderphile und sexpositive Kultur", in: Fuchs, S. (ed.) *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren*. Berlin: Querverlag, pp. 13–68.
- (2020b) "Spuren im Archiv. Femme/Butch-Nostalgie für eine queere Zukunft", in: Fuchs, S. (ed.) *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren*. Berlin: Querverlag, pp. 113–126.
- Halberstam, J. (1996) "Lesbian Masculinity or Even Stone Butches Get the Blues", *Women and Performance* 8(2), pp. 61–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07407709608571231>.
- (1998) "Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4(2), pp. 287–310.
- McNicholas Smith, K. (2020) *Lesbians on Television. New Queer Visibility and the Lesbian Normal*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Mock, J. (2014) *Redefining Realness*. New York: Atria.
- Namaste, V. (2000) *Invisible Lives. The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*. Chicago: University Press.
- Prosser, J. (1995) "No Place Like Home: The Transgendered Narrative of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*", *Modern Fiction Studies* 41(3), pp. 483–514. <https://doi.org/10.1353/MFS.1995.0120>.
- Rawson, K. J. (2012) "Archive This! Queer(ing) Archival Practices", in: Powell, K. and Takayoshi, P. (eds.) *Practicing Research in Writing Studies. Reflections on Ethically Responsible Research*. New York: Hampton, pp. 237–250. <https://www.acad>

- emia.edu/3659970/Archive_This_Queue_ing_Archival_Practices (last accessed 9 September 2024).
- Reed, J. (2009) "Reading Gender Politics on *The L Word*: The Moira/Max Transitions", *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 37(4), pp. 169–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01956050903227944>.
- Rivers, D. (2012) "Queer Family Stories. Learning from Oral Histories with Lesbian Mothers and Gay Fathers from the Pre-Stonewall Era", in: Boyd, N. A. and Roque Ramírez, H. N. (eds.) *Bodies of Evidence. The Practice of Queer Oral History*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 57–72.
- Rosenberg, J. (2021) "Afterword: One Utopia, One Dystopia", in: Gleeson, J. J. and O'Rourke, E. (eds.) *Transgender Marxism*. London: Pluto, pp. 259–295.
- Rubin, G. (2013) "Of Catamites and Kings. Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries 1", in: Stryker, S. and Whittle, S. (eds.) *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203955055>.
- Serano, J. (2007) *Whipping Girl. A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. Berkeley: Seal.
- Spinnboden (2023) "Reading Minnie Bruce Pratt at Online-Conference 30 Years of *Stone Butch Blues* – Memories and Visions", *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9l4fix5eYw> (last accessed 9 September 2024).
- Wilson, J. (2009) "Not so Much 'MTF' as 'SPTBMTQFF': The Identification of a Trans Femme-inist", in: Burke, J. C. (ed.) *Visible. A Femmethology. Volume One*. Michigan: Homofactus, pp. 26–29.

Husband / Palace

Minnie Bruce Pratt

The following two short prose texts first appeared in Minnie Bruce Pratt's book *S/HE* (1995) and are republished here in memory and honour of her life and work. Both texts beautifully explore her relationship with Leslie Feinberg while offering a glimpse into queer and trans life and love in the 1990s. Pratt herself gave her permission for this republication, but we also thank her sons Ben Weaver and Ransom Weaver for their authorisation.

Husband deviates slightly from the original version; and only a short extract is printed from *Palace* with a brief commentary by Pratt. Both texts are reproduced here in the changed/shortened form in which they were last performed at the reading in May 2023.

Husband

At the March on Washington, the man sitting next to me on the grass asks, "Is he your husband?" as I return from kissing you, as you step down from the microphone. On stage, Peggy DuPont in beaded white chiffon is ferociously lip-synching and tail-switching a drag queen's answer to the introduction you have given her, praise from a drag king resplendent in your black-on-black suit. In the audience, I hesitate over my answer. Do I change the pronoun *and* the designation of 'husband'? Finally I reply, "Yes, she is." He hesitates in his turn: "He hasn't gone through the operation?" The complexity of your history crowds around me as I mentally juggle your female birth sex, male gender expression. I say, "She's transgender, not transsexual." Up on stage Miss Liberty is reading, with sexy histrionics and flourishes of her enormous torch, a proclamation from a woman who is a U.S. senator, a speech that trumpets and drums with the cadences of civil rights. The man blinks his eyelashes flirtatiously, leans toward me, whiskey on his breath, waves his hand at his companions, "We're up from North Carolina." Then, femme to femme, he begins to talk of your beauty: "He is perfect. If I ever wanted a woman it would be someone just like her." With innuendo and arch look he gives truthful ambiguity to what he sees in me, in you,

something not simply about ‘gay rights.’ The queen whispers in my ear with his sharp steaming breath, “Don’t let her get away. Hang *on* to him.”

Palace

As we reach the grape arbor’s leafy corridor, you suddenly kneel in front of me and kiss my hands. At the edge of the emerald lawn other visitors stare at the extravagant gesture, while I shift between unease and delight. You say, “I’m telling you now: Whatever you write of me, or of us together, you will never have to ask if I approve. The only place I want to live with you is in the palace of truth.”

After reading this passage, Pratt commented: “Leslie was quoting what Una Vincenzo Troubridge said to her lover and partner Radclyffe Hall, as they readied for the fight to defend Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), the first modern English trans novel, from censorship. In 2014, when Leslie was coming to the end of her body’s journey, she said to me, smiling puckishly, ‘But what I really meant was: in the *house* of truth.’”

**Teil I: Femme/Butch-Dynamiken und
-Identitäten /**

Part I: Femme/Butch Dynamics and Identities

Von Papafrauen, Geschlechterrollenspiel, Kessen Vätern und Ladys

Fem(me)/Butch in den Sexualitätsdiskussionen
deutschsprachiger Lesbenbewegungen der 1970er-
bis 1990er-Jahre

Lorenz Weinberg

Wir dachten, wir hätten den Befreiungskrieg gewonnen, als wir uns das Wort *gay* zu eigen gemacht hatten. Doch dann kamen die Studierenden aus ihren Löchern hervor und erklärten uns die neuen Spielregeln. [...] Sie warfen uns raus, sorgten dafür, daß wir uns für unser Aussehen schämten. Sie sagten wir wären Chauvinistenschweine, der Feind. [...] Es war nicht schwer, uns weg zu schicken, wir gingen widerstandlos. (Feinberg 1996: 13)

Historische Spurensuche – ›Fem(me)/Butch‹ in den Quellen der Zeitgeschichte

Als ich diese Zeilen aus Leslie Feinbergs *Stone Butch Blues* zum ersten Mal las, lösten sie in mir den Wunsch nach Auseinandersetzung mit Butch/Fem(me)¹-Geschichte und den *Lesbian Sex Wars*² aus, der mich bis heute nicht mehr losgelassen hat. So

-
- 1 Die Schreibweise von Fem(me) (›Femme‹ oder ›Fem‹) variiert je nach Ort, Zeit oder Person, weshalb ich im Folgenden die Variante ›Fem(me)‹ nutzen werde. Sabine Fuchs bietet Erläuterungen zu den verschiedenen Formen und Schreibweise (vgl. Fuchs 2009: 13).
 - 2 Die *Lesbian* oder auch *Feminist Sex Wars* waren kontrovers geführte Diskussionen innerhalb feministischer und lesbischer Kontexte der späten 1970er-, 1980er- und 1990er-Jahre, die vor allem im angloamerikanischen Raum geführt wurden. Verhandelt wurden Themen, die sich unter dem Oberbegriff ›Sexualität‹ wiederfinden. Zentrale Streitpunkte waren Pornografie,

habe ich zu Diskussionen über lesbisch*queere Sexualität innerhalb feministischer Kontexte der 1970er- bis 1990er-Jahre im deutschsprachigen Raum geforscht. Einen Schwerpunkt legte ich dabei auf (Darstellungen von und Diskussionen über) Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur, die ich als paradigmatisch für die Verknüpfung von lesbischer und trans*queerer Geschichte begreife. In diesem Beitrag werde ich Teile meiner Arbeit mit und an Quellen der Lesbenbewegungen präsentieren. Entlang der Quellenauszüge werde ich zeigen, ob und inwiefern Fem(me)/Butch Teil deutschsprachiger Diskussionen seit den 1970er-Jahren war und wie Sexualität und Identität hier verhandelt wurden. Dabei mache ich mich auch auf eine Spurensuche deutscher Begrifflichkeiten für und Debatten über lesbisch*queere Paarkonstellationen, die von Gegensätzlichkeit und von queerer Maskulinität und Femininität geprägt waren.

Ein Diskurs über ›Fem(me)/Butch‹ lässt sich in den Quellen der 1970er- bis 1990er-Jahre – in unterschiedlicher Ausprägung, mit sich veränderndem Wording und entlang wechselnder Themenkomplexe – erkennen. Da die Beschäftigung mit ›Fem(me)/Butch‹ sowohl Auseinandersetzungen mit sexuellen Praktiken, Erotik und Begehren als auch mit geschlechtlicher Identität, Geschlechtsausdruck und Konzeptionen von Geschlecht beinhaltet, veranschaulicht diese Thematik das Ineinandergreifen von Sexualitätsdiskussionen und Aushandlungen von lesbisch*queeren Identitätskonzeptionen.³ Der Fokus dieses Beitrags liegt auf der Feindseligkeit gegenüber Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur und auf Kritiken aus radikal-feministischer Richtung, die auch im Eingangszitat von Feinberg prominent auftauchen. Dafür werde ich chronologisch vorgehen und zunächst Spuren von Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur in einer Lesbenzeitschrift der 1970er-Jahre nachzeichnen. Im Anschluss stehen Auszüge aus den 1980er-Jahren im Fokus, bevor ich mich mit der Frage nach einem ›Fem(me)/Butch-Revival‹ in den 1990er-Jahren beschäftige.

Annoncen, Ablehnung, Abgrenzung – Fem(me)/Butch in der UKZ⁴ der 1970er

Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur wurde in den deutschsprachigen lesbisch-feministischen Publikationen der 1970er-Jahre überwiegend pejorativ und ablehnend verhandelt. Sich selbst abgrenzend, wurde diese Form lesbisch*queerer Paarfiguration an vielen Stellen kritisiert bzw. bestenfalls als zu entschuldigendes antiquiertes Phänomen

BDSM, Sexarbeit, verschiedene sexuelle Praktiken und die Frage nach Ein- und Ausschlüssen von trans Frauen (vgl. Duggan und Hunter 2006).

3 Eine umfassende Darstellung nahm ich in meiner Dissertation vor (vgl. Weinberg 2023).

4 Die UKZ (*Unsere kleine Zeitung*) war eine Westberliner Lesbenzeitschrift, die von 1975 bis 2001 von der Gruppe L74, einer Lesbengruppe für ältere Lesben, herausgegeben wurde.

aus der Vergangenheit besprochen. Eine neutrale oder vorsichtig affirmative Perspektive lässt sich in den Annoncen oder in Berichten älterer Lesben erkennen. Eine besonders prägnante Kontaktanzeige ist in der Augustausgabe von *Unsere kleine Zeitung* (UKZ) des Jahres 1975 zu finden. Hier sucht eine 60-Jährige, die sich selbst als »sehr feminin, gut aussehend« beschreibt, eine »stark maskuline Freundin für dauerfreundschaft« [sic!] (UKZ August/1975: 35). Im Laufe der 1970er-Jahre wurde die Nutzung der Begrifflichkeiten »KV« oder »Kesser Vater« für maskulin auftretende Lesben immer häufiger verwendet – teilweise als direkte Übersetzung von »Butch«. Für den femininen Part etablierte sich in den Zeitschriften der 1970er-Jahre noch kein eigenständiger konsistenter Begriff.

Im Folgenden möchte ich einen konkreten Auszug aus der UKZ vorstellen. Es handelt sich um einen Artikel aus der radikalfeministische Publikation *Rufe alle Lesben – bitte kommen*, die 1977 im feministischen Westberliner Selbstverlag Tomyris veröffentlicht wurde (vgl. CLIT 1977). Das kleinformatige Büchlein versammelt ins Deutsche übersetzte Texte des New Yorker Kollektivs CLIT (Collective Lesbians International Terrors), die in den 1970er-Jahren als *CLIT-Papers* in den USA zirkulierten und in der Zeitschrift *Off Our Backs* erschienen (vgl. Weinberg 2020: 289). Einer der Texte aus dem Büchlein erschien 1978 in der UKZ (vgl. UKZ 3/1978) und soll im Folgenden in Auszügen vorgestellt werden.

Auf mehreren Seiten kommt in dem Beitrag die schonungslose Ablehnung von und radikale Kritik an Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur zur Geltung. Zu Beginn des Artikels geht es um die Verärgerung der Verfasserinnen darüber, dass sich von lesbischen Beziehungen enttäuschte Frauen im Nachgang ihrer ernüchternden Erfahrungen von anderen Frauen insgesamt abwenden würden. In der Beschreibung dieses vermeintlich häufig auftretenden Phänomens wird erstmals von »butch-femme« gesprochen:

Nur weil e i n e Frau dich tief verletzt hat oder weil du an eine Reihe von butch-femme-Männern geraten bist, die sich als Frauen verkleidet haben (und ein heterosexuelles Bewußtsein hatten), oder weil du es mit einer heterosexuell identifizierten Lesbierin zu tun hattest, d.h. einer Lesbierin, die Rollenspiele spielt, männlich identifiziert ist und sich dir gegenüber wie ein Mann verhalten hat – ist es engstirnig, deine Wut und den Schmerz [...] zu verallgemeinern und zu glauben, daß dich alle Frauen fertig machen. (ebd.: 15)

Auffällig ist zunächst, dass hier von »butch-femme-Männern« gesprochen wird. Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur wird also als inhärent männlich konstruiert. Auch der zweite bemerkenswerte Terminus »heterosexuell identifizierte Lesbierin« wird genutzt, um Fem(me)/Butch-orientierte Lesben aus der radikalfeministischen Konzeption einer Lesbe auszuschließen bzw. sie als lesbisch-feministisch unerwünscht zu markieren. Dem zugrunde liegt ein strikt dichotomes und biologistisches Ge-

schlechterverständnis und daraus resultierend die Ablehnung all dessen, das mit Formen von Maskulinität verbunden wird oder sich auf Männlichkeit bezieht. Ebenso geht die Abgrenzung von Heteras und bisexuellen Frauen mit der Verurteilung von Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur Hand in Hand. In *Rufe alle Lesben* wird dazu geraten, sich von Heteras und bisexuellen Frauen sowie von »heterosexuell identifizierten Lesbierinnen fernzuhalten« (ebd.). Denn, so heißt es weiter im Text, »[a]lle diese Frauen spielen immer noch die alten Rollenspiele, und das ist tödlich. Radikale Lesbierinnen spielen keine Rollen miteinander, und wenn du es tust, dann bist du k e i n e radikale Lesbierin, wie du's auch drehst und wendest« (ebd.: 16). Ständiger Referenzpunkt ist ein »richtiges« lesbisch-feministisches Bewusstsein. Dies wird Fem(me)/Butch-orientierten Lesben und Queers hier abgesprochen und Fem(me)/Butch konsequent mit Heterosexualität verglichen oder sogar gleichgesetzt: Im Wording des Textes ist von »Mann/Frau-Rollen« die Rede, wenn über »femme/butch« gesprochen wird. »Butch/Femme« wird im Text aber auch zu »KV/Weibchen«. »KV« (Kesser Vater) als deutsches Äquivalent zu »Butch« ist später, bis in die 1990er-Jahre hinein, an vielen Stellen in den deutschsprachigen Publikationen zu finden.⁵

Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur ist für die Autorinnen des CLIT-Kollektivs Ausdruck für eine allgemeine »Verwirrung bei Lesbierinnen, männlich-heterosexuelle Verhaltensweisen und Haltungen mit Lesbianismus durcheinanderzubringen« (UKZ 3/1978: 16). Die bekannte Erzählung, Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur sei Heterosexismus in Reinform, spielt hier eine zentrale Rolle und wird an verschiedenen Stellen repetitiv bemüht. Als allgemeingültige Wahrheit gilt hier einzig die Aussage, Fem(me)/Butch sei ein »krankhaftes, kaputtes, pubertäres, ungesundes Rollenspiel [...], das in der heterosexuellen Welt beispielhaft zu finden ist« (ebd.: 18).

Kesse Väter und Femmes – Die Paarkonstellation maskulin/feminin in den 1980ern

In den westdeutschen Lesbenzeitschriften *UKZ* und *Lesbenstich* war in den 1980er-Jahren einerseits der Begriff »KV/Kesser Vater« etabliert, andererseits tauchte auch das Begriffspaar »Butch/Femme« immer häufiger auf. Das Wording in Bezug auf deutsche Kontexte ist in den 1980ern allerdings größtenteils »KV/Femme«. Wie in den 1970er-Jahren war auch in den 1980ern die lesbische Subkultur (der »Sub«) ein wichtiger Referenzpunkt bzw. ein Raum, entlang dessen Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur verhandelt wurde. Zusätzlich entwickelten sich nun Diskussionen zwischen bzw. über sogenannte »Sub- und Bewegungslesben«. Damit einhergehend lassen sich klassistische Abwertungsmechanismen von Seiten der (akademisch geprägten)

5 So auch in der Erstfassung der deutschen Übersetzung des Klassikers *Stone Butch Blues* von Leslie Feinberg (vgl. Feinberg 1996).

feministischen Lesbenbewegungen erkennen. Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur wurde dabei im Bereich des Subs verortet, der wiederum mit offen zur Schau gestelltem Flirten und Sexualität in Verbindung gebracht wurde. Nicht selten wurden diese Elemente von feministischen Bewegungslesben herangezogen, um sich vom Sub abzugrenzen.

Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur tauchte in den Zeitschriften der 1980er-Jahre außerdem entlang von Verhandlung von Vergangenheit auf: So wurde 1983 sowohl in der UKZ als auch im *Lesbenstich* die Lesbenzeitschrift *Wir Freundinnen* aus den 1950er-Jahren vorgestellt und in diesem Kontext auf die damalige ›Bubi/Dame‹-Kultur verwiesen (vgl. *Lesbenstich* 2/1983: 29–33). Ebenfalls wurde ›Fem(me)/Butch‹ in UKZ und *Lesbenstich* im Zusammenhang mit Reiseberichten und anderen Darstellungen ›ferner Länder‹ (insbesondere asiatischer Länder) verhandelt. Die Paarfiguration ›Butch/Fem(me)‹ wird in diesem Kontext als ein Phänomen entworfen, welches mit den eigenen Konzeptionen von Lesbischsein nicht übereinstimmt, und ins Außen verlagert. Elemente von rassistischem Othering sind hier enthalten. Allerdings stießen solche Berichte und Ausführungen in der UKZ auch auf scharfe Kritik (vgl. UKZ 11/1983: 40).

Eine bemerkenswerte Diskussion um Fem(me)/Butch fand in den späten 1980er-Jahren ebenfalls in der UKZ statt: Im Dezember 1988 wurde hier eine erotische Kurzgeschichte von Joan Nestle in deutscher Übersetzung veröffentlicht. In *Für meine Papafrau* beschreibt Nestles Erzählfigur, eine Fem, auf drei Seiten die sexuelle Beziehung zu ihrer Butch-Geliebten, ihrer »Papafrau« (vgl. UKZ 6/1988: 43–45). Auf der Suche nach einem schriftlichen Ausdruck für lesbische Sexualität, greift Nestle auf das Motiv der Butch/Fem(me)-Dynamik zurück. Es geht um female masculinity, penetrative Sexualität und Dildos als lesbisch*queere Körperteile, den lesbischen ›Schwanz‹. Die Ich-Erzählerin schreibt dezidiert und konkret lustvoll über das rezeptive Erleben von penetrativem Sex und Femme/Butch-Dynamiken. Die Reaktionen auf diese literarische Bearbeitung von lesbisch*queerer (Butch/Femme-)Sexualität löste eine Debatte innerhalb der UKZ aus, die sich über die Ausgaben der nächsten eineinhalb Jahre erstreckte, aufgebrachte Leserinnen-Briefe und Sonderteile sowie eine komplette Ausgabe zum Thema ›lesbische Sexualität‹ hervorbrachte.

Kritik an Nestles Geschichte lässt sich besonders anschaulich in einem radikal-feministischen Sonderteil zur Diskussion über lesbische Sexualität erkennen, der in der UKZ 1/1990 veröffentlicht wurde. Die Ablehnung von Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur stellt hier eine tragende Säule der Kritik an sexpositivem Aktivismus generell dar (vgl. UKZ 1/1990: 12–32). Formuliert wird hier Kritik am sogenannten ›Geschlechterrollenspiel‹ (vgl. ebd.: 22–28) sowie an der lustbetonten Darstellung von penetrativer Sexualität. So verweist etwa eine der Verfasserinnen des Sonderteils auf *Für meine Papafrau* und schlussfolgert:

Sie schwärmt davon, daß ihre Papafräule sie zu ›nehmen‹ und ›hinzulegen‹ weiß. [...] Daraufhin dildo-penetriert die Papafräule unter ›Oh Baby, du bist so gut zu ficken‹-Rufen ihre Femme. Hier spielen also zwei Fräule auf ganz eindeutige Weise die Mann/Fräule-Rollen nach. (ebd.: 22)

Ihre Argumentationslogik: Hier handele es sich ausschließlich um heterosexistische, patriarchale sexuelle Rollenaufteilungen. Dass im Sonderteil ›Butch/Fem(me)‹ respektive ›KV/Femme‹ gemeint war, wenn ›Geschlechtsrollenspiel‹ gesagt wurde, wird durch die Überleitung zum nächsten Abschnitt eines Textes deutlich; hier heißt es: »Während das KV- und Femme-Spiel in seiner Struktur ein patriarchales Heteromodell ist, ist das lesbische Sado-Maso-Spiel das Konzentrat desselben« (ebd.: 25). Ähnlich wie BDSM, der Gebrauch von Dildos und weiteren Sextoys sowie andere sexpositive feministische Kontexte wurde auch Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur als patriarchales Modell gewertet.

Butch/Fem(me)-Renaissance? Die 1990er-Jahre

Die Begrifflichkeiten ›Butch‹ und ›Femme‹ tauchen in diesem Jahrzehnt immer häufiger auf und werden zunehmend normalisiert. Aber spiegelt sich die in der Sekundärliteratur postulierte »Wiederauferstehung von Butch/Femme« (Funk 1997: 23-34), die sich vor allem in der Queer Theory zeigt, auch in den Lesbenzeitschriften der 1990er-Jahre wider? Ja, zum Teil: Es sind verstärkt eine wertschätzende und affirmative Auseinandersetzung mit und positive Aneignungen von Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur zu erkennen. Die sexpositive Stimmung, die in den US-amerikanischen lesbisch*queeren Kontexten dieser Zeit vorherrschend war, lässt sich in Ansätzen auch in den deutschsprachigen Dokumenten finden. Die sexpositiven Kontexte erzeugten einen Raum, in dem von einer Art ›Fem(me)/Butch-Revival‹ gesprochen werden kann. Mindestens ebenso stark vertreten wie eine positive Beschäftigung war in den 1990er-Jahren die vehemente und scharfe Kritik an sowie die abwertende Darstellung von Fem(me)/Butch.

Im Folgenden geht es um wertschätzende und lustvolle Thematisierungen von Butch/Fem(me), die in den 1990ern häufiger wurden. So wurde etwa in der UKZ das Zusammenspiel von ›Fem(me)‹ und ›Butch‹ als Fem(me)/Butch-Paarkonstellation Ende der 1990er, insbesondere im Jahr 1997, intensiv verhandelt. Besonders ausführlich wird der Thematik in den UKZ-Ausgaben 6&7/1997 Raum gegeben. In dem Artikel »Butch und Femme: Von der neuen Lust aufs Lesbischsein« (UKZ 6&7/1997: 32-33) bemerkt die Autorin:

Seit einiger Zeit ist Bewegung in die deutsche Lesbenszene geraten: butch und femme sind wieder da, erst zaghaft noch und vereinzelt, aber es werden mehr.

Der kesse Vater und die Lady, annäherungsweise deutsche Entsprechungen, geben sich die Ehre, nachdem sie sich lange rar gemacht haben (ebd.: 32).

Sie zeichnet hier das Bild eines Butch/Fem(me)-Revivals in den 1990er-Jahren. ›Kesser Vater‹ bleibt, wie in den Jahren zuvor, als deutschsprachiges Butch-Äquivalent bestehen. Die ›Lady‹ als deutsche Entsprechung für ›Fem(me)‹ lässt sich allerdings sonst kaum wiederfinden. Im Artikel geht die Verfasserin darauf ein, dass Fem(me)/Butch in lesbisch-feministischen Kontexten der 1970er-Jahre nicht gern gesehen war, stellt Fem(me)/Butch-Geschichte der 1920er- und 1950er-Jahre vor und thematisiert den hohen Stellenwert von Sex und Erotik für Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur. Diese sei »ungeniert ausgelebte Körpersprache« (ebd.).

Durchweg positiv und affirmativ wird im Berliner Frauen-Erotikmagazin *Austern* aus dem Jahr 1993 über Fem(me)/Butch gesprochen. Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur war innerhalb der *Austern* ein selbstverständlicher Teil lesbischer (Sub-)Kultur und anerkannter Möglichkeitsraum lesbischer Selbstentwürfe. In *Austern* wurde nicht die Frage verhandelt, ob Fem(me)/Butch-Paarkonstellationen als Teil lesbischer Kulturen denk- und lebbar seien – dies ist hier ein unhinterfragter Fakt –, sondern vielmehr darüber gesprochen, wie Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur sich, z.B. in Bezug auf sexuelle Rollen, ausdrückte (vgl. *Austern* 1/1993: 40–41).

In den Lesbenbewegungspublikationen der 1990er-Jahre lassen sich ebenso vermehrt Kritik, Ablehnung und Verurteilungen an bzw. von sexpositiver und Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur erkennen, die nun wieder (wie in den 1970ern) konkret ausformuliert und ausführlich argumentiert werden. Um dieses ›Revival‹ der ausformulierten Butch/Fem(me)-Ablehnung soll es nun gehen: Die Kritik artikuliert sich in anschaulicher Weise in der radikalfeministischen Lesbenzeitschrift *Ihrrinn* und in Sheila Jeffreys Buch *Ketzerinnen* (1994). In Jeffreys *Ketzerinnen* lässt sich eine heftige Kritik an Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur erkennen. Kritik übt Jeffreys an Fem(me)/Butch u.a. deshalb, weil sie hier Elemente eines vermeintlich »neuen Essentialismus« (ebd.: 14), den sie in Lesbenkontexten beobachtet habe, erkennt. Dieser »neue Essentialismus«, so Jeffreys, diene dazu, »das in der lesbischen Kultur wiederbelebte erotisierte Ungleichgewicht der Macht in Form des Butch-Femme-Rollenspiels zu rechtfertigen« (ebd.). Darüber hinaus lässt sich Jeffreys Kritik an Fem(me)/Butch immer wieder in ihrer Verhandlung von Sexualität ablesen. So steckt in ihrer Kritik an BDSM-Praktiken häufig ebenso die Kritik an Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur.

Auch Joan Nestle steht in Jeffreys' Schussfeuer gegen Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur und -Sexualität. Nestle nimmt bei Jeffreys die Rolle der »führende[n] Propagandistin des neuen lesbischen Rollenspiels« (ebd.: 88–89) ein. Mit der Bezeichnung ›Propagandistin des Rollenspiels‹ zeigt Jeffreys das Frontendenken auf. Dementsprechend wird in *Ketzerinnen* nicht von Butch/Fem(me)-Kultur, sondern von »Butch/Femme-Ideologie« (ebd.: 93) gesprochen. Auch im Zusammenhang mit

Kritik an Penetration/Dildos wird aus Nestles Fem(me)/Butch-Sammelband *The Persistent Desire* (1992) zitiert. Jeffreys konstatiert:

Rollenspielende Sexualität, wie sie in Anthologien wie *The Persistent Desire* vorgeführt wird, imitiert klassische heterosexuelle Fellatio und Geschlechtsverkehr geradezu andächtig mit dem Ziel, diese Praktiken für sadomasochistische Befriedigung heranzuziehen. Eine Butch erklärt freundlicherweise die Freuden der Penetration: [...] Nestle beschreibt das Gevögeltwerden mit einem Dildo [...]. Pat Califia wünscht sich in einem Gedicht einen Schwanz. (Jeffreys 1994: 99–100)

Im Zusammenhang mit Nestles *The Persistent Desire* stehen auch unterschiedliche Vorstellungen von und Theorien über Geschlecht im Mittelpunkt der in *Ketzerinnen* ausbuchstabierte Ablehnung von Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur. Jeffreys wirft den Autor*innen der Texte in *The Persistent Desire* vor, sie würden »versuchen [...] den Genderbegriff zu vernebeln« (ebd.: 96), da in den meisten der Beiträge »Butch« und »Fem(me)« als lesbische Gender begriffen wurden. In diesen Beiträgen über »Fem(me)« und »Butch« als eigenständige Geschlechtsidentitäten wird das binäre Geschlechtssystem »Mann/Frau« aufgebrochen und Geschlecht jenseits von biologistischer Körperlichkeit gedacht (vgl. Nestle 1992: 13–22, 466–482). Jeffreys und andere Radikalfeministinnen hingegen vertraten (und vertreten) eine biologistische Vorstellung von Geschlecht, die Geschlecht nicht losgelöst von körperlichen Merkmalen wie Genitalien betrachten kann. So heißt es in *Ketzerinnen*:

Eine feministische Analyse betrachtet Gender als politische Kategorie, sogar als politische Klasse, in die Menschen eingeordnet werden, je nachdem, ob sie einen Penis besitzen oder nicht. Dieser Besitz macht das männliche Gender aus, nicht bloß eine interessante erotische Kategorie, sondern die herrschende Klasse in einem System, das männliche Herrschaft genannt wird und in dem Frauen leiden und sterben. (Jeffreys 1994: 96)

Fazit: Angekommen in der Gegenwart

An dieser Stelle möchte ich einen Punkt setzen, denn hier sind wir bei ganz aktuellen Debatten um Transidentität, TERF⁶ und geschlechtliche Selbstbestimmung angekommen. Diese innerfeministischen oder innerlesbischen Auseinandersetzungen können als »logische« Fortführungen von Fem(me)/Butch-Ablehnung und -Feindlichkeit der Vergangenheit (und damit verbunden der Diskussionen der *Sex Wars*) verstanden werden. Auch in *Ketzerinnen* wurde sich bereits an dem »Phänomen Transsexualität« (Jeffreys 1994: 106) abgearbeitet.

6 Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism.

Vor diesem Hintergrund erscheint es als umso bemerkenswerter, dass sich transfeindliche radikalfeministische Lesben seit einigen Jahren nun ›Butch‹ verstärkt als positive Selbstbezeichnung aneignen. In ähnlicher Art und Weise wie damals *gegen* Butches (und Femmes) argumentiert wurde, wird der Term nun gegen trans Männer und andere queere trans Personen verteidigt und als Abgrenzung genutzt (vgl. Roedig 2015). In ihren transexkludierenden Argumentationen nutzen sie ›Butch‹ als originale, lesbisch-feministische ausschließlich weibliche Position und übersehen dabei die Diskurse und Debatten, die in der Vergangenheit dazu geführt wurden. Ihr Versuch, durch die Betonung von Geschichtlichkeit ihrem binären und biologischen Denksystem Kontinuität und Absicherung zu verleihen, kann nur scheitern, wenn sie sich nicht bewusst machen, auf welche Konzepte und Lebensweisen sie sich eigentlich beziehen und wessen Kämpfe sie hier zweckentfremden.

Ein erheblicher Teil der feministischen Kritik an Butch/Fem(me) seit den 1970er- und dann erneut in den 1990er-Jahren betraf die sexuelle Ebene in Butch/Fem(me)-Konstellationen. So wurden etwa die lustvolle Einbeziehung von Penetration und Dildo-Sexualität sowie sexuelle Rollenaufteilungen abgelehnt und als vor-feministisch verurteilt. Darüber hinaus kommt in den Diskussionen über Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur und -Sexualität zum Vorschein, dass in Lesbenbewegungskontexten eine Wechselwirkung zwischen der Ablehnung der Subkultur und Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur bestand, in der wiederum Paternalismus und Klassismus mitschwangen. Außerdem wird ein rassistisches Othing in Bezug auf Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur in anderen Ländern deutlich.

Zentral standen Geschlechtlichkeit und Geschlechtsidentität im Fokus: Unterschiedlichkeiten in Bezug auf die geschlechtliche Positionierung, Geschlechtsinszenierung und Geschlechtsausdruck wurden in lesbisch-feministischen Kontexten kontrovers verhandelt. In den Auseinandersetzungen um Fem(me)/Butch-Kultur, lassen sich 1) Konflikte über die Konzeption der Identitätsposition ›Lesbe‹ und daran anschließend 2) Debatten über unterschiedliche Geschlechtsverständnisse erkennen. Dabei wurden von radikalfeministischer Seite Ausschlüsse vorgenommen, um eine Gegenwelt zu heterosexistischen und patriarchalen Strukturen zu schaffen. So lässt sich die rigorose und rücksichtslose Abgrenzung von allem, das als ›männlich‹ oder ›heterosexistisch‹ gelesen wurde, erklären. Es wurde somit eine beharrliche und scharfe Trennung zwischen Heterosexualität und Homosexualität sowie Männern und Frauen vorgenommen. Zwischentöne und queere Positionen und Überschneidungen lassen sich in sexpositiven und queeren Fem(me)/Butch-Dokumenten, -Texten und -Diskussionen erkennen. Sie wurden von radikalfeministischer Seite allerdings nicht anerkannt, sondern abgelehnt und verurteilt. Sexualität und geschlechtliche Identität von Butches und Fem(mes) und (anderen) trans*queeren und/oder nicht-binären Personen wurden damit entnannt, unsichtbar gemacht und verunmöglicht, sie wurden angegriffen, ausgeschlossen

und bekämpft. Diese epistemische Gewalt in den vergangenen Diskursen gilt es aufzuarbeiten, in gegenwärtigen lesbisch-radikalfeministischen transfeindlichen Strukturen und Rhetoriken zu problematisieren und zu bekämpfen und queer*lesbische Gegengewichte zu bilden.

Literatur

- CLIT (1977) [New York 1974] Rufe alle Lesben – bitte kommen! Diskussionsergebnisse einer lesbischen Gruppe. Berlin: Tomyris.
- Duggan, L. und Hunter, N. D. (2006) *Sex Wars. Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Feinberg, L. (1996) *Träume in den erwachenden Morgen*. Berlin: Krug & Schadenberg.
- Fuchs, S. (2009) »Femme ist eine Femme ist eine Femme... Einführung in den Femme-inismus«, in: Fuchs, S. (Hg.) *Femme! radikal – queer – feminin*. Berlin: Querverlag, S. 11–46.
- Funk, J. (1997) »Lesbe im Plural. Zur Wiederauferstehung von Butch/Femme in der Queer Theory«, in: Kuhn, S. (Hg.) *Butch/Femme. Eine erotische Kultur*. Berlin: Querverlag, S. 23–34.
- Jeffreys, S. (1994) *Ketzerinnen. Lesbischer Feminismus und die lesbisch-sexuelle Revolution*. München: Frauenoffensive.
- Nestle, J. (1992) (Hg.) *The Persistent Desire. A Femme-Butch Reader*. Boston: Alyson.
- Roedig, A. (2015) »Transsexualität. Der Trend zu Trans«, *Zeit Online*. www.zeit.de/kultur/2015-12/transsexualitaet-homosexualitaet-diversity-geschlecht-butches-10nach8 (letzter Zugriff am 17.02.2024).
- Weinberg, L. (2020) »Pleasure and Danger«. *Butch/Femme und die Sex Wars*, in: Fuchs, S. (Hg.) *Femme/Butch Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren*. Berlin: Querverlag, S. 273–304.
- (2023, noch unveröffentlicht) *Feministische Sex Wars und Butch/Fem(me)-Kultur. Sexualitätsdiskussionen als Aushandlungsorte lesbisch_queerer Identitätskonzeptionen in deutschsprachigen Lesbenbewegungen der 1970er–1990er Jahre*. Dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin.

Quellen

Austern: 1/93 (1993)

Lesbenstich: 2/83 (1983)

Unsere kleine Zeitung (UKZ): August/75 (1975), 3/78 (1978), 11/83 (1983), 6/88 (1988),
1/90 (1990), 6+7/97 (1997)

Blau Hose, rote Lippen

Anngret Schultze

Ich will über eine blaue Hose und roten Lippenstift schreiben. Über die Schwierigkeit, Identität zu artikulieren. Darüber, *Stone Butch Blues* zu lesen und in den vielen Fäden und Konfliktlinien dieses Romans die Relation Butch/Femme in den Fokus zu nehmen. Nicht, weil ich mich darin wiederfinde, sondern gerade, weil ich mich nicht in ihr wiederfinde und den Anlass nutzen möchte, um diese Nicht-Repräsentation genauer abzutasten. Es beginnt mit einer Aufzählung.

//Kleidung, die ich nicht mehr trage. Oder: Körperpolitiken Teil 1

- einen innig geliebten schwarzen Faltenrock
- Schalen-BHs
- Oberteile mit tiefem Dekolleté
- Mascara

Es gab dafür keine bewusste Entscheidung. Aber bis heute kann ich Röcke und Kleider nicht mehr tragen. Sie machen, dass ich mich im Spiegel nicht anschauen mag und ein zusammengezogenes Gefühl in der Brust. Ich schliesse nicht aus, dass ich irgendwann in meinem Leben wieder Röcke tragen werde. Oberteile mit tiefem Dekolleté hingegen nicht. Das war wohl ein Abschied für immer. *Ciao compulsory femininity.*

//Stone Butch Blues

»Kennst du diese Butches mit Armen, die so dick sind wie dein Oberschenkel? Solche Arme möchte ich um mich haben.« Ich strich mit den Fingern über das dunkle Holz neben meinem Oberschenkel. »Ich liebe sie auch sehr. Aber worauf ich total abfahre, das ist die hohe Schule der Femmes. Es ist seltsam – egal ob es Frauen oder Männer sind –, es sind immer die Femmes Fatales, die mich unwiderstehlich anziehen.« (Feinberg 1993: 420)

Stone Butch Blues zu lesen war intensiv. Ich war erschüttert, dass ich so wenig von lesbischer Geschichte wusste, der Begriff ›KV‹ (Kesser Vater) war mir vorher noch nie begegnet. Auch nicht die Schilderungen von Polizeigewalt gegen Lesben, insbesondere Butches und trans Femmes. Oder der Klassismus des Second-Wave-Feminismus (hier war ich eher vertraut mit dem Rassismus und der Transfeindlichkeit der Bewegung). Die Schilderungen von Community, queeren Räumen, Widerstand und Wahlfamilie bewegten mich sehr. Und: Ich rieb mich an den Schilderungen der Butch/Femme-Relation. Diese Reibung ist der Ausgangspunkt für den vorliegenden Beitrag. Ich möchte mich mit ihr genauer auseinandersetzen. Dabei ist es wichtig zu sagen, dass ich mich weder als Femme noch als Butch identifiziere. Meine Partnerin und ich definieren uns nicht über eine Butch/Femme-Beziehung. Aber: »The butch-femme tradition is one of the oldest« (Nestle 1992: 145). Trotz vieler weiterer Label, die in den 30 Jahren seit der Publikation von *Stone Butch Blues* dazugekommen sind, halten sich Butch und Femme als Marker lesbischer Identitäten. Sie sind einerseits sehr spezifische Ausdrücke von queerer Identität, Ästhetik und sexuellem Begehren. Andererseits lassen sie sich verallgemeinert als queere Maskulinität und queere Femininität betrachten. Und diese zwei Pole interessieren mich: Mal bin ich von ihnen angezogen, mal gelangweilt, mal herausgefordert oder verunsichert. Sie haben einen Effekt auf mich und meine eigene Genderidentität und Genderexpression – und affektieren mich dabei sehr unterschiedlich. Im Gegensatz zu queerer Maskulinität (verkörpert in der Butch), stellt mich eine Femme vor mehr Ambivalenzen und letztendlich auch vor meine eigene verinnerlichte Misogynie. Ich will es provokativ mit Andrea Long Chus Worten sagen: »Everyone is female – and everyone hates it« (2019: 13). Ich will es bewundernd sagen mit Connie Carter und Jean Noble: »nominally similar – feminine – but radically discontinuous – femme« (1996: 29).

Der folgende Beitrag ist eine sehr persönliche Resonanz auf Leslie Feinbergs *Stone Butch Blues*. Ich habe mit Freund*innen und meiner Partnerin zu den Labeln

›Butch‹ und ›Femme‹ gesprochen. Diese Gespräche und Situationen, auf die sie sich beziehen, fließen als Fragmente mit ein in den vorliegenden Text.

//Wie siehst du mich?

Was ich noch erinnere, ist, dass du mich gefragt hast, wie ich dich sehe oder was ich an dir femme finde. Und dann habe ich losgelegt. Und in dem Moment habe ich dich mit dem Gefühl beschrieben, dir Komplimente zu geben.¹

Wir sitzen zu zweit in einer kleinen Sauna. Es ist die erste oder zweite Woche des neuen Jahrs, ein Freund von dir hat uns in ein Ferienhaus an der Ostsee eingeladen. Wir daten seit einem dreiviertel Jahr. Ich bin verliebt in dich, du bist verliebt in mich. Schweißperlen auf meiner Haut und der Geruch nach trockenem Holz und Hitze. Ich frage dich: »Was findest du femme an mir?«

Ein paar Augenblicke vorher: Ich zeige dir und deinem Freund Bilder verschiedener Frisuren, ich möchte mir die Haare schneiden und bin noch nicht entschieden, wie. Du sagst: »Das passt, das ist eher femme.« Ein ähnliches Ziehen, wie wenn ich mein Spiegelbild sehe, das einen Rock trägt. Ich höre das erste Mal von dir, dass du mich als Femme siehst.

»Was findest du femme an mir?« »Deine Haare. Dein Gesicht, deine Lippen. Deine Figur vielleicht auch. Stimme. Dass du gerne Lippenstift trägst.«

Ich verlasse die Sauna, du verstehst nicht, was gerade passiert ist. In mir ist es laut und durcheinander, weil du mich in Gänze auf das Label ›Femme‹ zusammengeschnürt hast, mit dem ich mich nicht identifiziere.

Wir klären: Was ist los? Nichts. Was ist los? Weinen. Was ist los? Ich bin nicht Femme. Was ist los? Die Dinge, die du nennst, all die Unsicherheiten, nicht queer genug zu sein. Nicht als queer erkannt zu werden. Die Angst, von dir nicht *gesehen* zu werden.

Der Sand am Strand ist nass und kalt, wir fahren schweigend zurück.

//Bildbeschreibungen. Oder: Körperpolitiken Teil 2

Ein Bild von mir als Dragking: Ich trage ein weißes Feinripp-Unterhemd, einen angeklebten Bart, die Augenbrauen kräftig nachgezogen, die Haare zurück gegelt,

1 Die Gesprächsauszüge stammen aus Unterhaltungen mit meiner Partnerin und Freund*innen.

die Brüste getapet. Ich mag mich auf diesem Bild. Es ist androgyn. Ein schwuler Freund, der es auf Instagram gesehen hat, gesteht mir lachend, dass er sich kurz fragte, wer dieser attraktive Mann sei. Ich bin geschmeichelt.

Ein weiteres Bild: Bei einer Performance spiele ich eine*n Cheerleader*in. Bauchfreies Top mit dünnen Trägern, Rouge, rosa Lippenstift, tiefer Ausschnitt und die kinnlangen Haare in zwei kleinen Zöpfen eng an den Kopf geflochten. Ich mag mich nicht leiden auf diesem Bild, aber es hat Spaß gemacht, diese überdrehte, sexy Weiblichkeit zu performen und dem Publikum Kuschhände zuzuwerfen.

//Label

Mich in lesbischer Repräsentation wiederzufinden, fällt mir schwer. Weder masc² noch femme resoniert mit mir.

Ich hatte mein äußeres Coming-out Anfang 20. Ich bin vorher immer als heterosexuelle Frau durchgegangen und tue es immer noch. Das hat sich lange wie ein Makel angefühlt. Ich suchte Zugang zu queerer Community, googelte nach Bildern von queeren Frisuren, rasierte meine Beinhaare nicht mehr, hatte das Gefühl androgyner sein zu müssen und androgyner beinhaltete mehr männlich konnotierte Marker. Ich wollte Frauen daten und war mir unsicher, wie ich auf Frauen zugehen sollte. Vorher hatte ich cis Männer gedatet, das heteronormative Spiel war mir vertraut. Jetzt hatte ich das Gefühl, mir und anderen meine Queerness beweisen zu müssen. Wir unterhalten uns darüber.

Du sagst: »Über mich wurde gesagt: Die ist wie ein Junge. Es hat dann niemanden überrascht, dass ich auf Frauen stehe.«

Ich sage: »Ich höre da eine Sicherheit mit deiner Queerness raus. Und das hätte ich mir so gewünscht, dass ich sagen kann: Ich habe ein intuitives Wissen über

2 In meinem Umfeld (Großstadt, studiert, überwiegend weiß und alle durchschnittlich in ihren 30ern) begegnet mir eher das Label ›Masc‹ mit ›Femme‹ als Counterpart, als die Paarung ›Butch/Femme‹. Dies mag in der Geschichte der Begriffe liegen. In den 1940ern entwickelte sich die Selbstbezeichnung ›Butch‹ in amerikanischer, lesbischer Subkultur: »Overall, ›butch‹ described a specific kind of queer masculinity that challenged the gender conventions at the time and spoke to a working-class lesbian experience.« (Lopéz 2024) ›Masc‹ ist weniger spezifisch in Geschichte und Genderidentität, wird genutzt in schwuler, lesbischer, trans und nicht-binärer Szene als Artikulation von maskuliner Ästhetik und sexueller Vorliebe. Insbesondere in queeren Datingkontexten/-apps finden sich Äußerungen wie ›masc4masc‹, ›masc4fem‹, ›femme4femme‹ o.Ä. Eine genauere Auseinandersetzung damit, wie die akademische lesbische feministische Bewegung den durch die Arbeiter:innenklasse geprägten Begriff ›Butch‹ unsichtbarer werden lässt, wäre an dieser Stelle spannend und gut diskutierbar vor dem Hintergrund von Jess' Erfahrungen in *Stone Butch Blues*.

mich, dass ich nicht weiter erklären muss. Zum Beispiel über meine Kleidung, meinen Haarschnitt, meine Beziehung usw. Als ich angefangen habe, queer zu daten, habe ich gedacht: Ich beweise mir jetzt, dass ich queer bin. Und ich beweise auch den anderen, dass ich queer bin. Wenn mir der Sex gefällt, dann bin ich queer.«

Du sagst: »Für mich war es eine Befreiung endlich in eine Großstadt zu ziehen und das zu leben. Ich hatte nie das Gefühl, dass ich irgendwem durch irgendwas etwas deutlich machen müsste. Ich habe nie darüber nachgedacht, ob ich jetzt nicht mehr lesbisch bin, wenn ich Single war oder mit einer cis-männlichen Person Sex hatte. Bei mir war es eher das Gegenteil, dass ich nicht direkt als queer oder lesbisch gelesen werden will. Weil das einfach nicht immer das Thema ist. Es verletzt mich, wenn ich gefragt werde: Bist du der Mann in der Beziehung?«

Ich lese: »Fems didn't look like homos.« (Lapovsky Kennedy und Davis 1992: 65) Ich lese: »The obviousness of the butch role.« (ebd.) Und: »Butches were known by their appearance, femmes by their choices« (Nestle 1992: 139). Ich spüre eine eigene Gereiztheit, wenn die Femmes in *Stone Butch Blues* als passiver, häuslicher, fürsorglicher als die Butches charakterisiert werden. Ich frage mich: wie viel eigene, verinnerlichte Frauenfeindlichkeit schwingt in dieser Gereiztheit mit? Kann Weiblichkeit außerhalb von patriarchaler, heteronormativer Dominanz existieren? Wie viel Misogynie findet sich in queerer Szene, sowohl in schwuler (man denke nur an die diskriminierenden »no fats, no femmes«-Kommentare in Dating-Profilen und an Clubtür-Policen cis-schwuler Szenen; vgl. Anderson 2016) als auch in lesbischer?

»Was müssen Femmes denn lernen?« Theresa dachte einen Moment nach. »Wie wir zusammenhalten können. Und uns einander gegenüber loyal verhalten.«
 »Hm.« Ich erwog, was ich gerade gehört hatte. »Gut, und was müssen Butches lernen?« Theresa trat zu mir. »Beim nächsten Mal, wenn ihr Butches in der Bar hockt und quatscht, achte mal drauf, wie oft du die Worte ›Bienen‹, ›Tussen‹, ›Vorbau‹ oder ›Möpse‹ hörst.« (Feinberg 1993: 211)

Joan Nestle beginnt ihren Artikel »The Femme Question« (1992) wie folgt:

For many years now, I have been trying to figure out how to explain the special nature of butch-femme relationships to feminists and lesbian-feminists who consider butch-femme a reproduction of heterosexual models, and therefore dismiss lesbian communities both of the past and of the present that assert this style (Nestle 1992: 138).

Nestle fasst mit diesen Worten zusammen, was mich an der Butch/Femme-Kultur, aus Jess' Perspektive beschrieben, stört: Sie erscheint mir zu hetero. Insbesondere, wenn beispielsweise Theresa wieder und wieder als der zärtliche, fürsorgliche und

emotionale Part beschrieben wird. Nestle, selbst eine Femme, die in der lesbischen Szene der 1950er in den USA ihr Coming-out hatte, hält dem entgegen:

But I wasn't a piece of fluff and neither were the other femmes I knew. We knew what we wanted, and that was no mean feat for young women of the 1950s, a time when the need for conformity, marriage, and babies was being trumpeted at us by the government's policymakers (ebd.: 139).

Und weiter:

Thus femmes became the victims of a double dismissal: in the past they did not appear culturally different enough from heterosexual women to be seen as breaking gender taboos, and today they do not appear feminist enough, even in their historical context, to merit attention or respect for being ground-breaking women. [...] Being a femme was never a simple experience, not in the old lesbian bars of the 1950s and not now [in the 1990s]. Femmes were deeply cherished and yet devalued as well. There were always femme put-down jokes going around the bar, while at the same time tremendous energy and caring was spent courting the femme women. We were not always trusted and often seen as the more flighty members of the lesbian world, a contradiction to our actual lives (ebd.: 139–143).

Diese Worte tun gut. Nicht, weil sie mir das Label ›Femme‹ schmackhafter machen würden. Aber weil sie einen Platz einfordern für die Bedeutung von Femmes in lesbischen und feministischen Kämpfen. Und sie verweisen zurück auf die Momente in *Stone Butch Blues*, in denen Theresa und weitere Femmes ganz zentral im Widerstand gegen die regelmäßige Polizeigewalt in und um queere(n) Spaces sind; beispielsweise, wenn Theresa und Georgetta Justine gegen mehrere Polizisten verteidigen (vgl. Feinberg 1993: 193).

//Kleidung, die ich gerne trage. Oder: Körperpolitiken Teil 3

Im Sommer vor zwei Jahren hat mir mein Bruder seine blaue kurze Adidas-Hose geschenkt. Ich glaube, für ihn war das kein großer Moment. Er hat gesehen, dass mir die Hose gefällt und hing nicht weiter an ihr. Ich liebe diese Hose. Sie ist nicht zu kurz und nicht zu lang, gibt mir eine gerade Figur, ohne meine Hüften zu betonen. Ich liebe es, dass ein Teil meiner Tattoos unter ihr sichtbar ist. Ich liebe es auch, dazu roten Lippenstift zu tragen. Und den Wind in meinen Beinhaaren zu spüren. Ich fühle mich ziemlich gay, wenn ich so durch die Gegend radle. Es gibt dieses schöne Zitat von Leslie Feinberg: »Gender is the poetry each of us makes out of the language we are taught« (Feinberg 1998:10). Und vielleicht ist meine eigene *gender poetry* genau das: knallrote Lippen und eine blaue Hose. Es hat gedauert, an diesem

Punkt anzukommen. Ich habe aufgehört, nach möglichst queeren Haarschnitten zu googeln. Ich spüre mich in meiner Queerness am deutlichsten in Beziehung zu anderen Queers: zu meiner Partnerin, in queeren Spaces und in trauter Runde queerer Freund*innen. Manchmal sind es diese Beziehungen, die wir brauchen, weil wir durch sie sichtbar werden und sie uns in die Welt bringen, unsere Identität und unser Begehren kommunizieren. Wir intelligibel werden. Ich korrigiere diesen Satz: Manchmal sind es diese Beziehungen, die *ich* brauche, weil ich durch sie sichtbar werde, weil ich durch sie meine Identität und mein Begehren kommuniziere. Und dadurch verstehe und schätze ich Butch/Femme-Beziehungen. Sie lassen sich nicht reduzieren auf eine heteronormative Nachahmung. Es lässt sich nicht leugnen, dass wir alle in einer heteronormativen und heterosexistischen Welt sozialisiert werden. Aber queere Identitätsartikulationen stets als rückgekoppelt an diese heterosexuelle Matrix zu begreifen, ist eine Sackgasse, die nirgendwo hinführt.

Literatur

- Anderson, T. (2016) »This Documentarian Is Fighting Back Against Gay Culture's ›No Fats, No Femmes‹ Mantra«, *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-0430-no-fats-no-femmes-feature-story.html> (letzter Zugriff am 02.09.2024).
- Carter, C. und Noble, J. (1996) »Butch, Femme, and the Woman-Identified Woman. Ménage-à-trois of the ›90s«, *Canadian Woman Studies* 16(2), S. 24–29.
- Chu, A. L. (2019) *Females*. London: Verso.
- Feinberg, L. (1993) *Stone Butch Blues. Träume in den erwachenden Morgen*. Berlin: Krug & Schadenberg.
- (1998) *Trans Liberation. Beyond Pink or Blue*. Boston: Beacon.
- Lapovsky Kennedy, E. und Davis, M. (1992) »They Was No One to Mess With. The Construction of the Butch Role in the Lesbian Community of the 1940s and 1950s«, in: Nestle, J. (Hg.) *The Persistent Desire. A Femme-Butch Reader*. Boston: Alyson, S. 62–80.
- Lopéz, Q. (2024) »The Queer History of Butches«, *them*. <https://www.them.us/story/what-does-butch-mean#history> (letzter Zugriff am 02.09.2024).
- Nestle, J. (1992) »The Femme Question«, in: Nestle, J. (Hg.) *The Persistent Desire. A Femme-Butch Reader*. Boston: Alyson, S. 138–146.

A Terrible Beauty is Born

The Affective Politics of the Butch Memoir in Performance

Camellia Choudhuri

In keeping with the theme of *30 Years of Stone Butch Blues*, this article directs attention towards the unique possibilities that the spatiotemporal coordinates of performance poetry offer to the butch memoirist. Scholarship focused on the lesbian memoir's strategic political significance indubitably agrees upon the genre's role in reaffirming "the centrality of identity to lesbian-feminist politics" (Zimmerman 1984: 664). However, looking back at a lineage of Anglophone butch life-writing, we notice its complicated history. The butch memoir, which has simultaneously stood at odds with the tyranny of cisheteropatriarchy and lesbian feminism, possesses a peculiar generic identity of its own. While a majority of butch memoirists have gravitated towards book-length prose narratives, the genre continues to expand and adapt in response to the Midas-touch of its authors. Here, I examine Joelle Taylor's short poetic sketch titled *CUNTO* (first performed in 2018) as a proponent of experimental butch poetics that revels in affective embodiment.

Taylor (and Choudhuri 2023) calls herself a "question," a "witness" and a "disruptive force", to emphasise her marginalised status as a working-class, butch lesbian, performance poet:

As butch women, as non-conforming women, women who're coloured outside the lines [...] we're taught to doubt ourselves as women – that everything, our version of reality is not quite right. I think it's vitally important that we stand firm and strong and say: *No, this is my memory. It is.* (ibid.)

CUNTO was commissioned by Apples and Snakes for *Rallying Cry* (2018), a series of poetry performances curated around the theme of protest (Apples and Snakes 2018). Following the poem's first performance, Taylor was invited to expand her fifteen-minute poetic sequence into a play. This plan, though temporarily thwarted by the COVID-19 pandemic, produced the print collection *C+nto and Othered Poems* (2021) which was awarded the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry. As we look upon this fiery collection's titular poem, we witness a conjuring of ghosts. *CUNTO* is a litany and cenotaph; it is a call to action in a time of renewed violence against the LGBTQ+ com-

munity. The poem foregrounds the butch body as a “library” (UEA Archives 2022) haunted by ghosts that require exorcising. Most importantly, *CUNTO* is Taylor’s first foray into writing what she terms a “creative memoir” (Tender Buttons 2022).

To fully grasp the extent of Taylor’s formal experimentation, it is necessary to delineate the socio-cultural forces that have shaped the butch memoir as a genre and have determined the forms that it has taken. As stated earlier, butch memoirists, and most lesbian memoirists for that matter, have privileged print media as an apposite container for autobiographical material. This is in keeping with the fact that lesbian writers have had to struggle to find a voice and a language of their own within a dominantly phallogocentric literary culture that deems print publication as a marker of credibility, legitimacy, and quality. The solidity and permanence of print publication is also advantageous in the face of exclusionary historiography. In terms of form, lesbian authors have chosen to frame their narratives not only as purely non-fictional memoirs but also as semi-autobiographical novels. The latter, which negotiates between the reality of lesbian existence and novelistic parameters, is of particular interest to us as we deal with the ‘creative’ aspect of Taylor’s memoir-writing.

The novel’s formal characteristics naturally lend itself to narratives of growth. As Ian Watt (1957) explains, the form typifies the zeitgeist of Enlightenment thought dominated by Cartesian, capitalist, and Calvinist conceptions of the individual. Specifically, the Bildungsroman throws into relief the deep structure of the novel as a “myth of origins” (Andermahr 2009: 50) focused on the hero’s identity-formation. Lesbian authors who have treated autobiographical material with a tinge of imagination continually revise, subvert and destabilise such staunchly androcentric and heterosexual literary discourses. However, as a subcategory of the semi-autobiographical lesbian novel, the butch memoir has borne the brunt of a double marginalisation. Besides heteronormative historiography, exclusionary lesbian feminist politics has pushed butch voices and experiences to the periphery in favour of a homogenous woman-identified lesbian identity (Nestle 2003). Thus, butch life-writing highlights the exclusivity of butch experience, while opposing both heteronormative erasure and mainstream lesbian-feminist life-writing projects. Commenting upon Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*, Sally Munt writes that the novel is “littered with rites of passage in the style of Bildungsroman” (1998: 17) but additionally functions as an “instructional” and “pedagogic” text, that can “sensitise the reader to the complexity and contemporaneity of lesbian identity, and the plasticity of gender and the body” (ibid.).

Against this backdrop, we can begin to appreciate the advantages that embodied theatrical performance can afford the butch artist. Postfeminist approaches towards theatre emphasise the performative nature of gendered identity. The narrativized butch body on stage can posit new, multiple texts rooted in real experiences and sexuality in opposition to heteropatriarchal texts (Forte 1988). Elements of embodied expression such as the inflection of voice, costume, blocking (i.e., the posi-

tioning of actors on stage), and movement (Severin 2004; Laird 2019) allow the queer artist to perform gender on stage through a repetitive “stylization” (Butler 1988: 519) of the body in time. Butch bodies, which conflate lesbian desire with queer masculinity, “shape and are shaped by how bodies extend into worlds” (Ahmed 2006: 94). Thus, performance matches the spatial and corporeal dimensions of Taylor’s memoir-writing. At the same time, Ann Cvetkovich’s conception of the “archive of feelings” provides a useful framework for evaluating *CUNTO*. Cvetkovich (2003) deems usually neglected ephemeral cultural texts (including performance arts) as legitimate modes of historicizing queer subcultures. She defines them as “repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception” (2003: 7). By directing attention towards individuals’ felt relationship to “public” culture and experiences that seem to “leave behind no records at all” (*ibid.*), Cvetkovich further suggests that ephemeral performance contains the potential to “explore public articulations of trauma” (*ibid.*: 16) and create new cultures or collectives of resistance bound by a shared feeling.

Yet, there remains one final question: why poetry? We may turn to Taylor’s own words for the answer:

[T]he ‘creative memoir’ is a way of approaching the past. It’s a way of going back into a room you’re scared to go into but with a torch. And the torch for me was poetry. Poetry allowed me to spotlight certain objects in the room, to see them literally in a different light, and to retrieve them, take them back out of the room. (Taylor and Choudhuri 2023)

Much of Taylor’s narrative is fraught with violence and grief. It is an honouring of the dead, of the queer spaces and community lost to neoliberal hegemony. It is a cenotaph for friends lost to homophobic hate. Yet, there is intense joy contained in the very act of remembering. Poetry enables the memoirist to enter the backroom of memory and represent it subjectively, to condense and intensify moments of both anguish and euphoria. The rubrics of embodied poetry formalise and give shape to otherwise chaotic experiences. Moreover, in his study of performance poetry, affect and protest, Peter Bearder explains how the corporeal medium of performative, choreographed poetry replaces the “typography of the page” (2019: 191): the vascular and neurological pathways that animate “the topography of flesh” (*ibid.*) transmit affect through voice, gesture and rhythm. Live performance truly converts poetry into an equanimous exchange between poet and audience; it is the “petri dish of human solidarity” (*ibid.*: 297).

CUNTO foregrounds the female body as a political act, to address the ontological and epistemological conundrums of living as a working-class butch lesbian within an arena of heteropatriarchal discourses. Moreover, through the poem,

Taylor (2018b) celebrates the protests led by women from the 1980s through to the mid-2000s, and her debt to them as a woman and as a writer. Taylor (and Choudhuri 2023) observes that before receiving a commission to expand *CUNTO* into a play and a poetry collection, she had envisioned this poem to be her memoir. This yoking of raw, lived experience with the stringency of poetic form is inextricably tied to her refashioning of the traditional butch memoir. She contests the butch memoir's usual correspondences with the teleological hero's journey, or the univalent Bildungsroman, by structuring the raw material of lived experience in a series of cantos. While Taylor's choice of form does link the poem to an existing literary tradition exemplified by figures such as Dante, Byron, and Ezra Pound, she hardly invests herself in slavish imitation. As a quintessentially vocative form, the canto presupposes the utterance of a bardic poet figure aimed at narrating and eulogising a heroic journey. This formal association epitomises Taylor's poem as a heroic narrative. Yet, she repudiates the canto's ideological underpinnings through what she terms a "feminine morphology" (Taylor 1998: 129) which upends gendered assumptions surrounding the poet's voice and chosen subject. In a performance of her opening poem from *Songs My Enemy Taught Me* (Taylor 2017) titled *Canto*, Taylor depicts her experience of sexual abuse in seventeen cantos. Interestingly, she likens the canto sequence to a 'film', where each part functions as a scene (Samuels 2017). By dialoguing with several traditionally androcentric media and subjecting them to various forms of lyric openness, her poetry issues a challenge towards heteropatriarchal codes of heroism and the lacerating effects of the "scopophilic" (Mulvey 1999: 836) male gaze.

Although *CUNTO* was composed as a spoken-word piece for a proscenium stage, to be performed without props in the style of a slam poem, Taylor's collaboration with director Rob Watt and his production team modified and enhanced the poem's performative significance. Watt's stage, for the first performance of *CUNTO* at the Battersea Arts Centre in 2018, resembled a boxing ring roped off by barbed wires, with the audience seated on all four sides (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: stage design for *CUNTO* directed by Rob Watt. Battersea Arts Centre, London, 5 October 2018. © Rob Watt, source: www.robwatt.co.uk.



This extra-literary choreography consciously superimposes the spatial significations generated by the boxing ring and the military ‘no man’s land’ upon the performance space. In the context of butch lesbian identity, both these conceits generate several ideological implications. The boxing ring, conventionally understood as the arena for “public contests” staged to assert the “meaning of masculinity and its relation to male embodiment” (Halberstam 1984: 272), when associated with the spectacle of the fighting butch, allows her to steadily transmute the mechanisms of normative hypermasculinity into “new constellations of embodiment, power, and desire” (ibid.). One might be reminded of Peggy Shaw’s solo show *You’re Just Like My Father* (1994) which exposes the struggles of growing up butch in an America of the 1950s through the figure of the boxer. Shaw’s performance toys with stereotypes of hypermasculinity, among which the boxer exists as a figure in transliteration. Her body, exposed to view, straddles the boundaries between masculine and feminine, as though suspended in a free play of meanings that dissolve the binarism of sex and gender. Just as Shaw shadowboxes onstage to highlight her struggles as a masculine woman, so does Taylor at the beginning of her performance.

In addition, the metaphor of the liminal “no man’s land” (Taylor 2021: 35) appearing in Taylor’s first canto “the body as battleground”, connotes a space constantly subject to violence. It is an “enemy territory” (ibid.), a waste land riven by gunfire, where men explode suddenly, and the corpses of transgressive women pile up in the trenches. Social scientists Genny Beemyn and Mickey Eliason posit that “[t]he discourses around cis lesbian and trans identities and communities have been represented almost exclusively in negative terms – framed as border crossings, trespassing, battlegrounds, and conquests” (2016: 2). Yet, despite these negative significations this blank space holds the promise of regeneration for Taylor. It is no accident that she has often altered the adjectives used to describe the “no man’s land”, as:

this **filthy** quiet this no man's land (Taylor 2018a)

this **sticky** quiet this no man's land (Taylor 2021: 35)

this **muscular** quiet this no man's land (The Leeds Library 2021)

Here, the dynamic evolution of the text in performance allows the autobiographical subject to leave behind the filthiness (of how heteropatriarchy labels butch masculinity) and traverse the sticky path towards reclaiming its muscularity. Indeed, within this no man's land, butch masculinity constantly dissolves essentialist sex/gender norms, turning it into a "stretch of contestatory and discursively productive ground" (Noble 2004: x). Barrenness problematises this space's ontology to imply the possibility of proliferating configurations of gender – of a lifetime's search for body.

The associations generated by the two spatial metaphors of the boxing ring and the "no man's land" are augmented by the re-signification of the butch body as "battleground," "protest," "trespass," "cemetery," "backroom," "haunted house," and "uprising," in the seven successive 'rounds' of the poem (Taylor 2018). Taylor's early working title for the piece, "Butterfly Fist", symbolises this process as both battle and metamorphosis. The performance space, thus, externalises the conflict between the butch woman's desire to forge a stable subjectivity against the oppressive maws of disciplinary power that attempt to thwart her. Rob Watt's direction formalises what Taylor (and Choudhuri 2023) describes as a "constant battle with [her] body" by literally replicating the butch lesbian's ruptured subjectivity through stage blocking. At the beginning of the performance, at two corners of the stage stand two contenders – Taylor, the butch lesbian in a vest and boxer shorts, and a three-piece navy suit (Fig. 2).

Through the course of the performance, Taylor gradually dons the suit while addressing her audience to represent a dynamic process of becoming. The primary battle, she states, is "getting the damn suit as I'm saying the lines," for the body in motion constantly militates against the constricted space of the stage (Taylor and Choudhuri 2023).

Fig. 2: stage blocking at the beginning of CUNTO directed by Rob Watt. Battersea Arts Centre, London, 5 October 2018. © Rob Watt, source: www.robwatt.co.uk.



In addition, the quest to find stable subjectivity is dramatized through an alternation between the second person “you” with the first person “we”/“our”/“us” used only when the lesbian bar is evoked: “On the dance floor, we are tidal” (Taylor 2021: 37), or “we fall into each other’s mouths this is love furious love” (ibid.: 43).

Additionally, the sequence’s identification of butch identity with a costume draws attention to the paradox of butch hyper(in)visibility. The butch lesbian is violently stereotyped by mainstream narratives, singled out for their gender non-conforming lesbian sexuality, and often the target of homophobic violence perpetrated by the state and other structures of power. Taylor’s poem exposes this predicament of hyper(in)visibility. Her aim, however, is to reconfigure the butch’s non-conformity as a weapon and a means of self-definition. In opposition to what Sedgwick terms the “epistemology of the closet” or homosexuality as an open secret, here, the butch individual’s epistemological terrain is aligned with the “wardrobe” (Halberstam 1984: 98). Despite marking her out for violence, her clothing reaffirms her subjectivity. Taylor develops this idea in the intensely autobiographical second

canto, where she juxtaposes her experience of sexual abuse as a child with the act of stylising the self in cuffed “Levi’s,” “white t-shirt,” “tsunami quiff” like a shadow rising above, and “black boots whose roots spread tangle through the centre of the earth” (Taylor 2021: 36). The tension between depersonalisation and the affirming performance of gender is encapsulated in a list of pejorative terms hurled at the butch lesbian:

boi bwah dyke diesel female sodomite lady faggot bull-dyke
 bull-dagger queer pervert gold star silver back stud invert
 kiki she-male drag-drone baby butch tomboy stone (ibid.: 37)

Taylor utters these manifestations of “injurious speech” (Butler 1997: 2) in a raspy voice, while circling the stage as though to intimidate. She concludes the list by aiming a punch at the hanging suit, at which point, the poem turns. Taylor subverts such injurious speech by tracing the origin of the term “butch” to Butch Cassidy’s outlawry, and by metonymically associating the “stone” butch with an “avalanche of wrong-walking women” (Taylor 2021: 37). Such subversions separate language from its injurious power to talk back to oppressive power structures, a linguistic act that is accentuated by the inflections of the voice and Taylor’s careful modulation of tone and volume.

Round three, “the body as trespass,” evokes the space of the city as it traces a journey through space and time. It is the most filmic of the poem’s seven sequences, acting like a series of jump cuts from the poet-narrator’s childhood in Accrington city to her migration to London, where she is subjected to abuse as a young homeless butch woman. The section’s keynote reflects how the butch is “a trespasser in [her] own body”, where “the landowners are men who pass/[her] in the street” (ibid.: 39). Rounds four, five, and six – presenting the body as “cemetery,” “backroom,” and “haunted house” – reinstate the conception of the body as an archive of trauma, wounded by suicide attempts, systemic homophobic assault, poverty, and sexual abuse. However, every foray into the space of the dyke dive bars and the gay clubs resuscitates the visceral energy of “modern primitives.” In these spaces, they dance like they “are stamping out fires”, with their “boots hammering the last nails into the coffin of the old gods” (ibid.: 40). Taylor supplements these lines by stamping her own boots on the stage to interfuse the rhythmicity of voice and body in an energetic resistance against oppression.

This feeling of ecstasy mingled with grief percolates into the poem’s cathartic final section “the body as uprising.” Here, Taylor brings the past into contact with the present, declaring that the steady rise of neoliberal ideology will ensure that no one remembers “the love” that created bonds of solidarity among the queer community in the past, and “how alike it is to rage” (Taylor ibid.: 45). She laments that a history of united resistance and sacrifice will be erased under the rainbow-washed shop win-

dows and through the act of “unpicking acronyms by candlelight” (ibid.: 54). Yet, in the face of oblivion, her act of remembering revives the past, and her “dead friends” within the space of performance. In a stage performance of *C+nto* at the Loud Poets’ Dumfries Slam, Taylor chants the names of the real people who are memorialised in the poetry of *C+nto*: “Cass Johnson... Avi Cummins, Sam Silvern, Tony Macaroni” (I Am Loud Productions 2023). Though invisible and silent, their presence is rendered palpable via the queer artist-archivist’s act of remembrance. It is at this point that Taylor completes the process of dressing herself. The conjunction between these spatiotemporal trajectories culminates in the fusion of the split self with which the poem had begun. No longer confined to the periphery of the stage and in conflict with her identity, the butch narrator occupies the centre of the contested no man’s land (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Taylor takes centre stage at in the last ‘round’ of CUNTO directed by Rob Watt. Battersea Arts Centre, London, 5 October 2018. © Rob Watt, source: unpublished recording of CUNTO, received upon request from Apples and Snakes.



This cathartic and triumphant moment is marked by the music of the bars. As Taylor dances to the music, the audience breaks into a standing ovation, as though sharing in the journey delineated by the poem. *CUNTO*, indeed, resembles what Taylor (and Choudhuri 2023) terms as a “victory poem”, a type of performance poem that gets increasingly visceral as it approaches its end and elicits within its audience a corresponding bodily response to it. In foregrounding the butch body’s negotiation with several structures of power, the performing body produces a “contagion” (Foster

2008: 57) that impels the audience to mimic its movement, and consequently, share in its feelings.

Taylor's intrinsically hybrid and intermedial butch memoir tempers the frisson of embodied narration with lyric form, and concurrently exploits elements such as stage design, costume, voice, and delivery to establish affective dialogues with the audience and create resistant archives of feeling. My analysis of *CUNTO* reveals how the butch memoir in performance enhances the impact of the author's narration by externalising the 'archive of feeling' contained within them to generate new bonds of solidarity among their audience. This in turn supplements the genre's political significance and allows for the creation of resistant counterpublics against hegemonic oppressive powers. The butch memoir in performance, thus, not only resists heteronormative historiography by redefining the theoretical bases for understanding memory and archives, but also transforms the conventionally passive process of 'reading' the memoir into an active one by encouraging our direct participation in the process.

Acknowledgments

I express my heartfelt thanks to Joelle Taylor for agreeing to a live online interview for this study. I also thank Rob Lynden, Head of Administration and Operations at Apples and Snakes, UK, for granting me access to the unpublished video recording of Taylor's performance of *CUNTO*, performed for *Rallying Cry* at the Battersea Arts Centre, London, in 2018.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2006) *Queer Phenomenology. Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, NC/ London: Duke University Press.
- Andermahr, S. (2008) *Jeanette Winterson*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Apples and Snakes (2018) *Rallying Cry*. <https://applesandsnakes.org/event/rallying-cry/> (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- Bearder, P. (2019) *Stage Invasion: Poetry & the Spoken Word Renaissance*. London: Out-Spoken.
- Beemyn, G. and Eliason, M. (2015) "The Intersections of Trans Women and Lesbian Identities, Communities, and Movements. An Introduction", *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20(1), pp. 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2015.1076232>.
- Butler, J. (1988) "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Theatre Journal* 40(4), pp. 519–531. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.

- (1997) *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003) *An Archive of Feelings. Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press.
- Forte, J. (1988) "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism", *Theatre Journal* 40(2), pp. 217–235. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207658>.
- Foster, S. L. (2008) "Movement's Contagion. The Kinesthetic Impact of Performance", in: Davis, T. C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*. Cambridge: University Press, pp. 46–59.
- Halberstam, J. (1998) *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press.
- I Am Loud Productions (2023) "Joelle Taylor – C+nto || Spoken Word Poetry ||", *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4EdtA4Aeyo&t=6s> (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- Laird, C. F. (2019) "A Poetry of Embodiment: Queering the Canon with Slam", *Writing on the Edge* 30(1), pp. 27–43. www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26877137 (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- Mulvey, L. (1999) "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in: Braudy, L. and Cohen, M. (eds.) *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 833–844.
- Munt, S. (1998) *Heroic Desire. Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space*. New York: University Press.
- Nestle, J. (2003) *A Restricted Country*. 3rd ed. San Francisco: Cleis.
- Noble, J. B. (2004) *Masculinities without Men? Female Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Fictions*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Nottingham Poetry Festival (2022) "Joelle Taylor: C+nto & Othered Poems", *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWsonDx7RoM&t=3617s> (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- Samuels, P. J. (2017) "Joelle Taylor. Songs My Enemy Taught Me", *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9mEjjxKAYM&t=11s> (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- Severin, L. (2004) *Poetry Off the Page. Twentieth-Century British Women Poets in Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Shaw, P. (1994) *You're Just Like My Father (1994)*, *Hemispheric Institute*. <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl-collections/item/926-britches-like-my-father.html> (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- Taylor, J. (1998) "Drama Queens. Ruling with a Rod of Irony", in: Rapi, N. and Chowdhry, M. (eds.) *Acts of Passion. Sexuality, Gender and Performance*. New York/London: Haworth.
- (2017) *Songs My Enemy Taught Me*. London: Out-Spoken.
- (2018a) *CUNTO*, directed by Rob Watt. London: Battersea Arts Centre Production.

- (2018b) "Poetry and Protest", *Apples and Snakes*. <https://applesandsnakes.org/2019/04/25/joelle-taylor-poetry-and-protest/> (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- (2021) *C+nto an Othered Poems*. London: Westbourne.
- and Choudhuri, C. (2023) "Interview with Joelle Taylor". Zoom interview, not available to the public.
- Tender Buttons (2022) "022 Joelle Taylor: Social Surrealism", *Spotify*. open.spotify.com/episode/3XWjMcT6W6FGrkfGMTmMbe (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- The Leeds Library (2021) "Chelping @ The Leeds Library Featuring Joelle Taylor", *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6vmA8FOcOM&t=3719s> (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- UEA Archives (2022) "Launch Event. Towards a Centre for Contemporary Poetry in the Archive at UEA", *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THxWSOmdN5g> (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- Watt, I. (1957) *The Rise of the Novel*. London: Penguin.
- Watt, R. (2018) *Rallying Cry*. London: Battersea Arts Centre Production. <https://www.robwatt.co.uk/productions#/rallying-cry/> (last accessed 21 March 2024).
- Zimmerman, B. (1984) "The Politics of Transliteration: Lesbian Personal Narratives", *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9(4), pp. 663–682. <https://doi.org/10.1086/494092>.

Figures

- Fig. 1: *CUNTO* (2018) directed by Rob Watt. Battersea Arts Centre, London. © Rob Watt, www.robwatt.co.uk.
- Fig. 2: *CUNTO* (2018) directed by Rob Watt. Battersea Arts Centre, London. © Rob Watt, www.robwatt.co.uk.
- Fig. 3: *CUNTO* (2018) directed by Rob Watt. Battersea Arts Centre, London. © Rob Watt, unpublished recording, received upon request from Apples and Snakes.

Cruising Towards Care

Leslie Feinberg and Lou Sullivan in Conversation

El Reid-Buckley

Introduction

Feinberg and Sullivan never met, yet their writings, politics, and commitment to preserving joy converge in complementary, and at times contentiously, generative ways. While both authors' perspectives vary significantly, the potential for trans happiness that comes alive in their works provide alternative pathways in loving and resisting in challenging times. In particular, the complex and layered narratives of transitions, intimacies, and communities give readers strong footholds to reframe their own sexual and gendered politics under more nuanced lenses. In this article, I argue that despite the sometimes despairing or nihilistic discourses that are found in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and Lou Sullivan's diaries, there is also a warm future that emanates from the texts, and extends beyond pink or blue in the landscape of trans politics.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that there are differences in the writing intention and publication of *Stone Butch Blues* and Sullivan's diaries. While Feinberg wrote his novel with the intention of having a wide audience and readership, Sullivan began journaling from eleven years old, and only began editing his journals for publication towards the end of his life (Martin and Ozma in Sullivan 2019: 12). While Feinberg's text was purposefully created to tell a certain story, Sullivan's text captures "the messiness of a life actually lived" (Gonzalez 2019: 62), and thus inadvertently layers gendered experiences with political efforts over a thirty-year period.

Despite these differences, I argue that Feinberg and Sullivan nevertheless complement one another. Though there are some tensions between their philosophies, ideologies, and actions, putting their works in conversation with one another provides fruitful reflections of trans subjectivities and solidarities in our pasts, in our presents, and for our futures. I contend that Sullivan's diaries and *Stone Butch Blues* are linked through their representations of struggle. As Malatino (2020: 3) suggests, feeling bad might be an inherent part of trans experience, but feeling bad is not a

proclivity to not pursue happiness. Moreover, Butler's (2004) assertion that precarity is a necessary form of consciousness raising and community building is also relevant in the context of these texts.

Thus, I argue that Sullivan's diaries and Feinberg's novel exemplify how negative affects might be what kept them going. Neither Jess, the central character of *Stone Butch Blues*, (or Feinberg himself) nor Lou really 'win', but their fictional, autobiographical and political writings tell us that liberation is a struggle that requires a lineage where the past, the present, and the future are required to be in consistent conversation: for us to learn, unlearn, remake, and reimagine liveable lives as trans people.

In this article, I first provide contextual background to how this article came about. Following this, I tease out the lines of convergence and divergence between Feinberg and Sullivan's texts. I conclude this work by underscoring the values of fostering and maintaining communities, however difficult, in developing a legacy of trans narratives and subjectivities. Overall, this article is an attempt to capture the power of resisting and existing otherwise, and aims to inspire us to practise solidarity, reciprocity and mutual aid through the lenses and lives of our trans pasts.

Background

We were both becoming genders we were never supposed to be, and we found home together. We built these homes, first, in each other. (Malatino 2020: 71)

I write this article for my beloved friend, Matt Kennedy. Matt and I used to be partners, and I am still lucky to have him in my life. I bought him his first copy of *Stone Butch Blues*, and he introduced me to Lou Sullivan's life and work. It is no surprise to say that we fell in love through and alongside queer theory and trans studies, and fell out of love doing the same thing. Yet, even in the times we didn't speak, there was still some serendipity: we both got tattoos of portraits of Lou, for example. I never stopped loving Matt, and owe a great deal to him; his wealth of knowledge, his curiosity, and his deep care for his community – even if it comes with tension and difficulty. Not only that, but Matt made me the trans person I am today, along with Leslie and Lou. We initially intended to write this article together, but circumstances did not allow. However, writing about the complex politics of Feinberg and Sullivan, and how they commit to care, without Matt somewhere in the text felt wrong. In writing this article, I want to hold space for Matt, as an exercise in reciprocity and demonstrating what trans care looks like in practice.

Moreover, writing about the complex politics of Feinberg and Sullivan together feels like a rare opportunity to meditate on and demonstrate how trans people learn to love each other (ibid.: 43). Malatino asks particularly worthwhile questions in *Side Affects* (2022) which are: How do trans people come to love and care for each other in the midst of contested experiences of transness, divergent politics, and general differences in personality? How do trans people love and care about each other when they are ex-partners, or when they find each other annoying, or when their social identities and circumstances prompt jealousy, apathy, disregard, and tension? In writing this article I have contemplated what Lou Sullivan and Leslie Feinberg might have made of one another, and what kind of t4t¹ politics might have emerged had they crossed paths. How would they have managed their difference? Where would their commitments to the liberation of trans people have intersected and allowed them to bridge a variety of differences in gendered and sexual politics? But also, how might we, the wider trans community, learn to find our histories and ourselves through and alongside others? I attempt to explore the above questions in brief here, yet acknowledge that the answers to these questions can never be fully settled on, and remain dynamic and open, just as trans identities, subjectivities, and bodies are fluid and susceptible to constant change.

Internal Affects: Complicating (De)Transition Narratives

Lou Sullivan and Leslie Feinberg are arguably two of the most important figures for contemporary trans activism. However, what interests me as a researcher who happens to be trans (or, a trans person who happens to be a researcher), is the lack of available literature – and debatably, community discourses – which discuss the non-linear paths of transition in which both Feinberg's character Jess and Lou himself take. In the case of both Jess (who Feinberg modelled on himself) in the novel, and how Lou charted his life through his diaries, the peaks and troughs of gendered lives being made, deconstructed and reconstructed again, often on their own terms, are made clear.

What such narratives offer, I argue, is a means of resisting transnormative “fural narratives of transition” (Malatino 2020: 27), and they present opportunities to foreclose the current dichotomies constructed around transition and trans legitimacy. I argue that the socio-political climate, both in Ireland and globally, frames medical transition as formulaic, pathological, and/or institutionalised, and signifies an unambiguous movement from one gendered experience to the other. This framework of medical transition insists on static gender identification, maintains gender

1 The abbreviation >t4t<, meaning >trans for trans<, is used when a trans person has or seeks a romantic or sexual relationship with another trans person.

binarism, pathologisation and disavows experimentation, curiosity, and play in relation to gender. In contrast, the incongruent and discordant ways in which Jess and Lou move throughout their fictional and real worlds, reveal a more nuanced interpretation of how transition (in all its modalities) takes place.

Jess' experience of being perceived as a butch lesbian in *Stone Butch Blues* is perhaps one of the most visceral literary representations of gender violence. From early on in the novel, Jess is subjected to verbal abuse from their peers. They are met with questions such as "Hey pansy, are you a boy or a girl?" (Feinberg 2014: 11), or an even more dehumanising, "is it animal, mineral or vegetable?" (ibid.: 20) However, Jess' gender presentation does not just elicit taunts from other children, but they also experience this line of questioning from other adults (ibid.: 10). Moreover, Jess' parents grieve their child's alleged inability to perform their gender 'correctly'. After finding Jess wearing their father's clothes, Jess is taken to a psychiatric institution, where their treatment is through both medical and social interventions (ibid.: 16–18). Following their discharge from this hospital, they are enrolled in "charm school", where "every girl who enters leaves a lady" (ibid.: 19, emphasis in original). As such, there is a complementary relationship between the social and the medical, whereby gender normativity is not just desirable, but developable.

Similarly, Sullivan's documentation in his early diary entries from 1961 to 1969 suggest experiences of internal conflict with regards to his gender identity:

When I was around 7–11 years old, my favorite play would be 'boys'. We all had boy names, set up pretend surroundings, and acted like boys. (Sullivan 2019: 32)
 Sheila look at yourself + face yourself. See what's in you and don't try to put anything else in it. Because then you destroy what you are and you tamper with God's work. (ibid.: 37)
 I wish I was a boy! (ibid.: 38)
 I wanna look like what I am but I don't know what someone like me looks like. (ibid.: 40)
 I am not wearing nylons anymore + am gradually eliminating my dependency on having a purse. (ibid.: 52)

These entries highlight affectual variance: from playfulness to shame, from desire to confusion. We can liken these to Jess' experiences as a young adult in *Stone Butch Blues* which also capture feelings of shame and confusion, but also comfort in masculinity. However, for the character of Jess, and Lou's real lived experience, comfort in masculinity is not always an easy road, and is often limited by external social forces.

Moreover, Feinberg (via Jess) and Sullivan both reveal the messiness and often contradictory nature of gendered feelings, and capture the realities of being trans that do not fit into neat (medicalised) discourses and transnormative narratives. Transnormative narratives (Kennedy 2023; Johnson 2016) often leave little room for

nuance, tension, confusion, deliberation, and regret. Instead they organise both trans legitimacy and access to the technologies of medical transition through medicalisation and pathologisation (Drabinski 2014; Meyerowitz 2002). In response, a hierarchy emerges in which trans individuals whose narration satisfies the diagnostic elements of medical transition under pathologisation are legitimised (Boe et al. 2020; Vipond 2015). As a result, trans individuals who refuse this narrative of medical transition or do not desire medical transition are rendered suspect, unintelligible and often stigmatised (Bradford and Syed 2019; Konnelly 2023).

One of the most significant aspects of *Stone Butch Blues* which resists normative interpretations of transness is the plot trajectory in which Jess halts taking testosterone mid-process due to feelings of contention in their identity. Through the imposed linearity of pathologised medical transition and rigorous social expectations of gendered expression, we see that Jess struggles with how their gendered experience is denied multiplicity, ambiguity, androgyny, and non-conformity as they transition. In Jess' narrative, we uncover their desire for an alternative modality of transition, one that is less insistent on staticity. Instead, there seems to be a desire to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway 2016): "I didn't get to explore being a he-she, though. I simply became a he – a man without a past" (Feinberg 2014: 241). Through Jess' narrative we come to realise that transition itself cannot be a salve to the societal pressures of gendered expectations that they experience. Feinberg takes up passing as a concept in order to illustrate the slippage between non-conformity and assimilation:

At first, everything was fun. The world stopped feeling like a gauntlet I had to run through. But very quickly I discovered that passing didn't just mean slipping below the surface, it meant being buried alive. I was still me on the inside, trapped in there with all my wounds and fears. But I was no longer me on the outside. (ibid.: 186)

Jess realises that their "passing" as a man is subsequently their "identities unbecoming" (Prosser 1998: 185). In response, Jess decides to halt their medical transition which is framed only as a complete assimilation into manhood not an exploration of the potentiality of the material body.

Similarly, Lou Sullivan for a time feels the pressures of internal gendered conflicts that are amplified by societal norms that are determinedly anti-transition. Thus, there is a temporary return to living his life as a woman, and re-adopting the name 'Sheila': "I've returned from SF feeling pretty free of my gender conflict [...]. I must pursue my own ideal of the perfect male/female balance + try not to oust one for the other" (Sullivan 2019: 171). However, as Sullivan's diaries continue, it is clear that life as 'Sheila' is unfulfilling: "Now as a female I feel empty inside but feel freer to relate to others" (ibid.: 175). Not only does this demonstrate the dynamism

of gendered feelings, but also the severe negative impacts of being committed – or perhaps, stuck – in the wrong subjectivity.

Furthermore, Sullivan's experience of feeling empty while being interpreted as a woman is uniquely tied to his sexuality. His partner at the time, J, is cited as the reason for not pursuing his transition: "I always felt had J not been around [...] I would definitely go towards being male that I'd even hoped somehow he'd get out of my life so I'd be free to be a man" (ibid.). This mediation on transition as relational to sexuality is also emphasised in *Stone Butch Blues* by Jess' friend Grant who also transitions and urges: "How's it going to be with women? I mean, who would ever go out with us?" (Feinberg 2014: 176)

While both Sullivan and Feinberg's Jess engage in what could be read as detransitioning, their narrative trajectories resist the current interpretations of such experiences as being wholly constitutive of a negative affect. I am thinking here with trans author Torrey Peters, whose novel *Detransition, Baby* (2021) demonstrates that regret has the potential to be generative. In the context of both Sullivan and Feinberg's Jess, the incongruent and discordant modes of transition through which they explore their genders are textured by trans asociality (Awkward-Rich 2022), joy, confusion, happiness, and connection.

Jess' decision to stop taking hormones enables them to establish identification with a group of people whose "sex [they] couldn't figure out" (Feinberg 2014: 32). We are given this insight into Jess' identification through a dream scene close to the conclusion of the novel:

There were people who were different like me inside. We could all see our reflections in the faces of those who sat in this circle. [...] I felt my whole life coming full circle. Growing up so different, coming out as a butch, passing as a man, and then back to the same question that had shaped my life: woman or man? (ibid.: 329)

In contrast, Lou reorients his identity to define himself as a gay man:

The reasons I decided in 1976 not to pursue transsexualism were 1. Because I was too unsure of myself to take on that major change, 2. I hadn't reconciled my female-male conflict, +3, because J said he would leave me + I didn't believe I could go on in life without him. All three of those reasons no longer hold through. I think I'm finally seeing myself in perspective. (Sullivan 2019: 211)

Lou goes on to pursue top and bottom surgery with vigour. He relishes in the sociality of manhood and takes immense pride in having consolidated this identity: "Can't wait to get my other ball!" (ibid.: 353)

Despite their differences in narrative trajectories, both Sullivan and Feinberg's Jess unmake the assumption that medical transition is linear and abstracted from

experiences of exploration, confusion, and potential pauses and foreclosures. Moreover, their life stories present a framework of interpreting experiences of transness that are in relation to medical transition rather than constituted wholly by the act of transitioning itself. For example, in the final chapter of *Stone Butch Blues*, though Jess has undergone top surgery, they reveal to Duffy that they have stopped taking hormones (Feinberg 2014: 327). Duffy responds that Jess looks “less scared but more hurt” (ibid.), which Jess affirms. It is perhaps due to the fact that throughout their life, Jess’ sense of self has been shaped by the trauma inflicted upon them at the hands of cisgender people which causes them to consistently feel scared and desire a type of safety through masculine presentation. However, even within their efforts to receive gender-affirming care, Jess is treated poorly by the medical professionals in the hospital in which they get top surgery:

“Can I get something for the pain?” They walked away. [...] One of the nurses came back. “Look,” she said, “I don’t understand any of this. But I can tell you this hospital is for sick people. You people make some arrangement with Constanza [the doctor that performs their surgery] on the side, that’s your business. But this bed and our time is for sick people.” (Feinberg 2014: 190–191)

Thus, even though Jess follows the correct procedures to ‘do transgender’ (Connell 2010) aesthetics correctly, their body, gender identity, and ultimately their subjectivity is perceived and marked as deviant by cisgendered society.

This is further intensified later in the novel when Jess is attacked for their gender non-conformity. Left beaten and bloody, they fear receiving medical treatment: “Maybe if I went alone and they didn’t make me take off my T-shirt they might help me” (Feinberg 2014: 283). Moreover, the nurse’s insistence that Jess fills out a police report causes them great anxiety: “I was still a gender outlaw – any encounter with the police might end up with me in their custody [...]. The emergency room was so chaotic no one noticed me leave” (ibid.: 284). Again, there is evidence of the trans experience being constrained by cisgender norms on either side; expected to undergo medical transition, yet punished for pursuing it.

In a similar vein, Sullivan’s diaries demonstrate an ambivalence around medical transition, and a deep commitment to gender non-conformity:

I just want a mastectomy + to get sterilized + continue living this half + half life. I don’t feel this surgery would make me a better man or woman, but I know it would make me a better person. I don’t believe I can successfully live as a man or as a woman. (Sullivan 2019: 166)

Sullivan’s entry echoes Susan Stryker’s articulation of her gender identity as impossible to align with cisgender norms, and therefore can be considered, in practice,

to be unavoidably nonbinary (Stryker 2017: xi). While nonbinary identities are often associated with androgynous body ideals (e.g. Galupo, Cusack and Morris 2021), both Sullivan and Stryker's experiences suggest that nonbinary may actually be better used as a political umbrella category in the face of cis (and in some cases, trans) normativities.

In both the cases of *Stone Butch Blues* and Sullivan's diaries, it is clear that questions of intimacy, desire, and sexuality are intertwined in the politics of the authors. I argue in the following section that intimacies, both social and sexual, are intrinsic in the journey towards liberation.

Intimacies: Socio/Sexual Liberation

Though it is different to live as a butch lesbian than it is to live as a trans fag, what Feinberg (via Jess) and Sullivan teach us through their writings is that social liberation of trans people is innately tied to their sexual liberation. Though Feinberg was predominantly interested in class liberation, not only in *Stone Butch Blues*, but in their political writing and activism, intimacy is a central focus of the novel. *Stone Butch Blues* focuses on the more traumatic aspects of intimacy – sexual violence, heartbreak, and so on – and, arguably, frames sexuality and intimacy in a pessimistic light. On the other hand, Lou's diaries are steeped in sexual desire that ranges from Beatlemania to BDSM. While there are many moments of euphoria and ecstasy associated with the erotic in Sullivan's journals, it might better serve to characterise both Feinberg and Sullivan's writings (and lives) as ambivalent and complex, and often layered with 'bad' feelings (Malatino 2022).

Sullivan often articulates his identity through the lens of sexuality and embodiment. As Gonzalez (2019: 73) argues, "in the construction of the body his appearance requires, Lou is most concerned with sexuality and sexual love". That is, Sullivan's (self-)validation of his trans masculinity was connected to being desired as a man, and desiring other men. While Lou's relationship with J was stunted by Lou's masculinity, his (largely sexual) relationship with Ray serves to affirm his gender identity through intimacy. When Sullivan first meets Ray, he tells him "[he] was into guy's clothes and [his] big fantasy was to go to a gay bar + get a guy who thought [he] was a guy to take [him] home" (Sullivan 2019: 199). In turn, Ray reveals that he is also interested in wearing women's clothing. Their relationship flourishes through their shared kinks and desires, and Ray fully embraces Sullivan's gender identity through their sexualities and intimacies: "I had my fake cock (stuffed sock) in my jockey shorts + rubbed it against his cock + ass and he really liked it" (ibid.: 219).

This is sharply contrasted to Jess' experiences as a stone butch: an identity which is "an enigmatic core of lesbian sexual and social practice" (Halberstam 1998: 124). 'Stone butch' has traditionally referred to butch lesbians who disallow reciprocal

touch in their sexual and romantic relationships with other women, most often femmes (e.g. Halberstam 1998; Rodness 2020). However, as Maltz (1998: 274) argues, stone butch subjectivity involves queering masculinity in ways which ‘haunt’ the sex/gender binary. Further, in my interpretation, I suggest that stone butch subjectivities may serve to both uphold and critique normative erotic politics in tense and ambivalent ways. That is, the stone butch is simultaneously active and agentic (that which is associated with masculine norms), yet refuses pleasure as a masculine subject (which is antithetical to stereotypical masculine/feminine sexual relationship dynamics in that those who are masculine assumingly receive the most pleasure). As Cvetkovich argues, writing about not wanting to be touched can be seen to “celebrate the hard-won experience of sexual pleasure without denying its roots in pain and difficulty” (2003: 4). However, this is not to say that Jess does not experience or desire intimacy despite their stone butch identity. Rather, there are moments throughout the novel in which Jess’ subjectivity is tightly bound to being touched: “The loneliness became more and more unbearable. I ached to be touched. I feared I was disappearing and I’d cease to exist if someone didn’t touch me” (Feinberg 2014: 200).

Similarly, Sullivan’s desire to love and be loved as a man are also integral to the forging of his trans subjectivity: “I deserve to press a man against my solid hard chest, feel his against mine, and have him feel mine against his” (Sullivan 2019: 229).

Fischman argues that “touching and being touched parallel the process of knowing and being known” (2023: 2). In the case of the fictional character of Jess, and the real-life Lou Sullivan, I argue that trans subjectivity is (at least in part) forged through desire for intimacy and closeness with others as there is potential to validate the self through mutual affection and/or eroticism.

However, it is not just erotic or romantic desire which scaffolds trans subjectivity. For example, Sullivan’s relationship with Ray is not purely sexual; rather, Lou connects with Ray in how he queers the sexual and gendered norms that are often inscribed onto relationships between men and women. Sullivan charts how Ray’s interest in crossdressing, as well as his ability to be emotionally vulnerable with him, strengthens his feelings for him:

I wished he was mine. I knew it was out of line + ‘feminine’ to feel that way, but this guy is such a goddamn perfect sex partner [...] and despite what he says, I believe he *likes* to talk to me. And he’s right talking like that is a feminine thing because he has to relate to me on the same level, which may make him feel feminine, which is why straight men don’t like to do that. Suddenly we’re like 2 human beings going to have sex instead of a man + a woman going through a dating ritual. (Sullivan 2019: 220)

Though not quite a t4t relationship, Lou and Ray's connection is forged through their ability to exist otherwise, outside of the hegemonic relationships of how one should look, act, and love. While these private moments of desire are essential to Lou's identity and body becoming who he desires to be, he is nevertheless still limited by this libidinal and romantic interest in men when it comes to accessing medical care:

In to see Dr. Wardell Pomeroy at the National Sex Forum [...], he said he only had one question in all this: why am I trying to force myself to be a heterosexual man + like women [...]. I set him straight fast said I'm NOT AT ALL trying to be a hetero man, I WANT to be a gay man! [...] I waited in the lobby about 5 minutes [...] then they told me they all agreed I should try hormones. But I should go at it gradually and I should put any surgery 'on the back burner'. (ibid.: 220–221)

Though the doctors all agree that Lou is a transgender man, they cannot conceive of someone being transgender *and* queer, and expect, through his transition, that he will reinscribe heteronormativity into his life. Arguably, their refusal to recommend Lou for a mastectomy and phalloplasty in this instance could be seen to be an attempt to limit his queerness via limiting his becoming body. This is also further complicated later by his relationship with T, who refuses to have anal sex with him. Lou expresses that “this constant reference to my female parts is his way of denying he's involved with another man” (ibid.: 304).

However, Lou does eventually receive this gender-affirming care, and ruminates on whether or not his future lovers will fuck the small remainder of his vaginal opening, or his asshole. However, the ambivalence of Sullivan's erogenous terrains (Gonzalez 2019: 75) is not something which negatively consumes Sullivan, but rather marks the beginning of finally getting to live a life which he has desired: “[m]ore than anything, Lou's life's work was to find a form for the desire that animated his body” (ibid.: 77). Though trans sexuality has largely been overlooked and misrepresented within academia (e.g. Davy and Steinbock 2012), life narratives such as Sullivan's provide rich and valuable entry points into both understanding and theorising trans sexuality. In particular, in my view, Sullivan's narratives support the notion that trans desire is uniquely bound up in trans liberation, whereby the potential of erotic exploration on trans terms directly opposes harmful representations of transness that emerge in both institutional and cultural discourses (e.g. ibid.; Bettcher 2014). In this regard, the (eroticised) spaces – both physical in bars and clubs, and textual/virtual through the FTM Newsletter – offer Sullivan sexual and social gratification, as he ‘cruises’ towards a liveable life for himself (e.g. Muñoz 2009; Butler 2004; Browne et al. 2021; Banerjea and Browne 2023).

Though *Stone Butch Blues* can be seen as having a far more troubling relationship with sexualities and the erotic, it nevertheless captures beautiful portraits of intimacies through friendship and kinship. Whether sharing food, being accountable for

wrongdoing, or saying nothing when nothing should be said, the mutual love and care shared by Jess and the other characters with whom they develop bonds demonstrates the complexities of community. I argue that *Stone Butch Blues* clearly captures the difficulties in “how best to care for each other, with our differing abilities, idiosyncrasies, and traumas, with our hard-to-love thorns intact and sometimes injurious (to ourselves and each other)” (Malatino 2020: 2).

The most obvious example of this is Jess’ relationship with Ruth, a neighbour turned lover. Not only does their relationship with Ruth allow them to begin to heal from past traumas, it also opens up a new life for Jess in that it gives them both a new language and lineage to emerge from. Through the development of their relationship, Jess unlearns stigmas about both themselves and the wider LGBTQIA+ community. Through the love that they receive from Ruth, Jess stops taking hormones and learns to understand their identity and body in more expansive ways beyond the limitations of the binary, and dichotomies of butch and femme. For example, they realise that the breakdown of their relationship with their friend, Frankie, was due to their own internalised shame around butchness: “I always wanted all of us who were different to be the same. I can’t believe I rejected a butch friend because she took a butch lover” (Feinberg 2014: 296). Ultimately, it is through Ruth’s care and kindness that Jess can begin to repair their relationships with others and themselves, as Ruth provides both space and support for Jess to develop their own sense of accountability and agency.

Despite the stark contrast on perspectives of intimacy between *Stone Butch Blues* and Sullivan’s diaries, it is nevertheless possible to see the commonalities between the two texts in terms of how they underscore how connections with others and community building are instrumental in trans lives. Not only is this “communization of care” (e.g. Aizura 2017) essential in the sustenance of trans community, but it also extends to trans liveability – that is, living a life beyond survival. Trans folks across time and space, through creating alternative networks and practices of care, have “co-constituted, interdependent subjects to repair, rebuild, and cultivate resilience in the midst of, and in the aftermath of, experiences of overwhelming negative affect” (Malatino 2020: 43). That is, through interaction with individuals that share similar struggles, trans people can make a self that feels whole, in the face of a world that tries to ensure we are fragmented.

Conclusion: Interactions, or Making the Self through Others

I have discussed in this article how internal and external gendered and sexual politics shape and structure trans lived experiences, from how one feels about one’s body, to how one might act (or not act) with their becoming embodiment. As demonstrated above, the thread which links the internal and external factors which influ-

ence the development of trans identities and subjectivities is the interactions with others, particularly those who might share the same “essence” (e.g. Malatino 2020: 43; Povinelli 2008: 511). That is, the ability to see ourselves in others helps us to understand ourselves in new ways that can be simultaneously challenging and exciting.

A clear example of this in *Stone Butch Blues* is when Ruth gives Jess a copy of *Gay American History*, a text which chronicles and represents the diversity of LGBTQIA+ communities and identities that Jess has not borne witness to before. Thus, not only does Jess' relationship with Ruth have a positive impact on their life, it also helps to broaden their horizon and situate themselves in a lineage of powerful solidarity and resistance: “just finding out that it was ever different, even if it was long ago, made me feel things could change again” (Feinberg 2014: 296). Similarly, Sullivan's affinity with Jack Bee Garland (which emerged from his archival work and biography writing on Garland) helped him to develop his own sense of self: “I like to call him ‘her’ because it reminds me of where I came from and how lucky I am [...]. I feel like I want to have all the surgery to go all the way in memory of Jack Garland” (Sullivan 2019: 334). Arguably, it is through the telling of trans stories which helps Sullivan, as well as Jess, develop a sense of futurity as they become more comfortable in their trans identities and embodiments. Further, in both *Stone Butch Blues* and Sullivan's diaries, (female) masculinity is a form of hope and safety, which contrasts with hegemonic sexual and gendered politics, including some radical feminist criticism (e.g. McCarry 2007; Robinson 2003). That is, bearing witness to trans masculinity being practised by others can turn ambitions into actions.

In a similar vein, my own relationship to the works of Leslie Feinberg and Lou Sullivan, as well as my relationship to Matt, has helped me to create and recreate my trans identity and subjectivity. Through the work of our trans ancestors, through loving one another, and through building our communities, we can feel “the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” (Muñoz 2009: 1). Though we remain susceptible to harm, to conflict and to violence, and will continue to experience the side affects (Malatino 2022) of such, together we can “imagine a world worth living in, a world worth fighting for” (Feinberg 2014: 330), and develop our “own interpretation[s] of happiness” (Sullivan 2019: 40). To conclude, being trans in and of itself is not a radical act; but rather the revolutionary lies in our insistence on living, on loving, and being there for one another in a seemingly impossible world.

References

- Aizura, A. (2017) “Communizing Care in Left Hand of Darkness”, *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 12, pp. 1–15. <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/26775/ada12-commu-aiz-2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (last accessed 22 March 2024).

- Awkward-Rich, C. (2022) *The Terrible We. Thinking with Trans Maladjustment*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Banerjea, N. and Browne, K. (2023) *Liveable Lives. Living and Surviving LGBTQ Equalities in India and the UK*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bettcher, T. M. (2014) “When Selves Have Sex: What the Phenomenology of Trans Sexuality Can Teach about Sexual Orientation”, *Journal of Homosexuality* 61(5), pp. 605–620. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.865472>.
- Boe, J. L., Ellis, E. M., Sharstrom, K. A. and Gale, J. E. (2020) “Disrupting Cisnormativity, Transnormativity, and Transmisogyny in Healthcare: Advancing Trans Inclusive Practices for Medical Family Therapists”, *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 32(3-4), pp. 157–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2020.1848051>.
- Bradford, N. J. and Syed, M. (2019) “Transnormativity and Transgender Identity Development: A Master Narrative Approach”, *Sex Roles* 81(5-6), pp. 306–325. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0992-7>.
- Browne, K., Banerjea, N., McGlynn, N., Bakshi, L., Beethi, S. and Biswas, R. (2021) “The Limits of Legislative Change: Moving Beyond Inclusion/Exclusion to Create a Life Worth Living”, *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 39(1), pp. 30–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654419845910>.
- Butler, J. (2004) *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Connell, C. (2010) “Doing, Undoing, or Redoing Gender? Learning from the Workplace Experiences of Transpeople”, *Gender and Society* 24(1), pp. 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243209356429>.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003) *Archive of Feelings*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Davy, Z. and Steinbock, E. (2012) “‘Sexing Up’ Bodily Aesthetics: Notes Towards Theorizing Trans Sexuality”, in: Hines, S. and Taylor, Y. (eds.) *Sexualities. Past Reflections, Future Directions*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 266–285.
- Drabinski, K. (2014) “Incarnate Possibilities: Female to Male Transgender Narratives and the Making of Self”, *Journal of Narrative Theory* 44(2), pp. 304–329. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24484752> (last accessed 22 March 2024).
- Feinberg, L. (2014) *Stone Butch Blues*. 20th Anniversary Author Edition, self-published. <https://www.lesliefeinberg.net> (last accessed 16 August 2024).
- Fischman, L. (2023) “Touching and Being Touched: Where Knowing and Feeling Meet”, *Frontiers in Psychology* 14, pp. 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1097402>.
- Galupo, M. P., Cusack, C. E. and Morris, E. R. (2021) “‘Having a Non-Normative Body for Me Is About Survival’: Androgynous Body Ideal Among Trans and Nonbinary Individuals”, *Body Image* 39, pp. 68–76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.06.003>.
- Gonzalez, F. J. (2019) “Writing Gender with Sexuality: Reflections on the Diaries of Lou Sullivan”, *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 67(1), pp. 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003065119826626>.

- Halberstam, J. (1998) *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Haraway, D. J. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Johnson, A. H. (2016) "Transnormativity: A New Concept and Its Validation through Documentary Film About Transgender Men", *Sociological Inquiry* 86(4), pp. 465–491. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12127>.
- Kennedy, M. (2023) *Transnormativity and the Everyday Lifeworlds of Young Trans Men in Ireland*. University College Dublin, unpublished PhD thesis.
- Konnelly, L. (2023) "Transmedicalisms, Transnormativities, and Semantic Authority", in: Kibbey, T. E. (ed.) *Linguistics Out of the Closet. The Interdisciplinarity of Gender and Sexuality in Language Science*, pp. 169–193. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110742510-008>.
- Malatino, H. (2020) *Trans Care*. Minnesota: University Press.
- (2022) *Side Affects. On Being Trans and Feeling Bad*. Minnesota: University Press.
- Maltz, R. (1998) "Real Butch: The Performance/Performativity of Male Impersonation, Drag Kings, Passing as Male, and Stone Butch Realness", *Journal of Gender Studies* 7(3), pp. 273–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.1998.9960721>.
- McCarry, M. (2007) "Masculinity Studies and Male Violence: Critique or Collusion?", *Women's Studies International Forum* 30(5), pp. 404–415. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2007.07.006>.
- Meyerowitz, J. (2002) *How Sex Changed. A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Muñoz, J. E. (2009) *Cruising Utopia. The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: University Press.
- Peters, T. (2021) *Detransition, Baby*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Povinelli, E. A. (2008) "The Child in the Broom Closet: States of Killing and Letting Die", *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107(3), pp. 509–530. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2008-004>.
- Prosser, J. (1998) *Second Skin. The Body Narrative of Transsexuality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Robinson, V. (2003) "Radical Revisionings? The Theorizing of Masculinity and (Radical) Feminist Theory", *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(2), pp. 129–137. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395\(03\)00016-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(03)00016-5).
- Rodness, R. (2020) "Hard Road Ahead: Stone's Queer Agency in *Stone Butch Blues*", *Criticism* 62(4), pp. 547–571. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/774760> (last accessed 22 March 2024).
- Stryker, S. (2017) *Transgender History. The Roots of Today's Revolution*. London: Hachette.
- Sullivan, L. (2019) *We Both Laughed in Pleasure. The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan, 1961–1991*. New York: Nightboat.

Vipond, E. (2015) "Resisting Transnormativity. Challenging the Medicalization and Regulation of Trans Bodies", *Theory in Action* 8(2), pp. 21–44. <https://doi.org/10.3798/tia.1937-0237.15008>.

Memorize the Places You Wanted Me

Three Poems

*Anja*Oliver Schneider*

picture this:

a warm late-spring day, a meadow
by the harbor, a five-minute walk from your house.
a blanket under greening trees, sunlight
through rustling branches. I feed you blueberries,
crackers, your favorite chocolate-covered peanuts.
you cross-legged, and I lean into your lap,
head against your chin, your hazelnut hair
shimmering in the sun, eyeliner eyes
peek out from 1950s sunglasses.
your hands soft on my chest
like a whispered *yes* to my yearning,
seamless understanding of corporeal
contradiction, and we just gaze,
out, eyes drawn to water,
find romance amidst industry,
while I read poetry out loud, and I slow down
on the lines I want you to hear most,
and you listen to me, you listen,
and I hope each syllable falls
onto your cheeks like little kisses
wind-blown, quiet wishes I speak out into air.

picture this: a femme and a kind-of-butch,
both outlaws in our own ways,
in yet-unspoken love in your bedroom
in the dark that night.
I can taste the day still on your lips,
the smell of grass on your skin, and the heat
that keeps my legs between yours

is more urgent than the sun's
earlier that day, but no less tender.

picture this: a space we create
wherever we go. whenever I go,
these pictures of you and I
will follow me anywhere.
these pictures: a coming home
with a view beyond the ships
on the horizon: possibility
in the salt-water air
tastes almost as sweet
as your rouged velvet lips—

Dear Theresa,

lying here tonight, I hear raging down the streets. No scream out of context. Enemy closed, stranger buried. Window nights refuse hypothetical healing.

I am swallowing memory—

That summer, I trusted you with my best love. Shame smiled, but you refused to listen. Shore smoothed tender. Shared wonder, fear danced bloody. Eyes falling, swollen, set free. Liberation unloaded on our hands. The price: etched into our curves. Our tears washed off cigarette burns, cuffed hands, law dressed in threats. We prayed feeling. The times I couldn't let you touch me, I was never alone.

Oh precious pain; sore, punching heart. No home could memorize the places you wanted me. See me small, sweet warrior woman. Full of wounds, anger taunts me, mocking. The mirror becomes an awful photograph.

Theresa, my fierce storm, my lonely eyes. Coax me out of my village tonight. Quietly, burn the politics, the blue-collar town. Road-map me back to pride, melt the angry stories into passion. Gently, gently, and I: flushed. My tie: fists. I survive to last.

A pink glow, slow sky. Sweet sepia faces. Buffalo battles until morning. I'll miss this place, running.

Good night, my love.

Note

To craft this poem, I exclusively used words from the first chapter of Stone Butch Blues and rearranged them in a new way. I merely altered the tense of a few verbs to better fit the poetic narrative and kept the very first and very last line of the chapter to establish a connection to the original work. Although this poem shares certain themes with Stone Butch Blues, it is not a reinterpretation of the novel; rather, it is my own piece of work that was creatively inspired by and pays tribute to the novel.

In the morning, I feel the strongest:

My want for you, still fresh, moves right to my center. Your edges shadow clear in our room before an awakening sky. Caught in your routine, you are all skin and lipstick. I want to crawl inside of you and stay there, curled and quiet, but scheming. My body, loud with potential, fills the room, and you abandon any effort to get dressed. Mid-rise cotton hugs my thighs, my waist, my curves that aren't curves, only in the way that water curves to waves. How I move in the midst of it, I burst with contradiction, and I know that this is the charge that pulls you to me across our bedroom floor, and you arrive lust-scented, all honey.

Your hands pour over my thighs, my soft-haired belly, all places at once, and I swallow your soft sides, laced breasts—constant spillage becomes a dance of hands and fingers and mouths, meticulous explosions of gender and desire. We shift, and flow against each other. My body tells your fingertips what it wants, and you meet me there. I flip us both, hands on wrists on sheets. From this perspective, I am your whole world, and I want it this way. I watch your face as I enter you, leather melting to my thighs. You welcome me, draw me into you, invite us both into mystery. Every time anew, our bodies learn how to open by becoming each other.

With you here, hidden and wide, all of me turns marine, divine connections. Here, it all makes sense: the way I want to make you French toast every morning, fuck you deep and slow to midnight. The way my short hair frames my face, severe but always soft in my eyes. The way you touch me; the way I want you to. The way I touch you back. All of me becomes dark blue and determined: ink settling, a map where I can locate you and me and us. But there is no paper, no threat of finality, just water: always shifting, and in its depths, endless.

We know what they call us. We know accusations from all sides. But in this moment, only you. Every moan a miracle, absolute surrender. Our bodies springing with pleasure, we run right through their hands. Yes, I am giving you your femmeness and you are giving me my butchness. But what is wrong with mirrors? As sweat gathers between us, we are giving each other the gift of ourselves.

Here in bed, together: our fractured selves, far from what we've been handed. It was not an easy departure, but an inevitable one. Then: what was left of us, and the flowers we grew. Exile becomes bright purples and yellow, even under water.

After the wave, now full, the body tired from being shown its own image. We rest into each other, awake and sated. Small intimacies of silence, breath, sweat drying.

By now, the spring sun leaves no room for shadows. In the light, I see all of us. And I know exactly who we are.

Feinberg's Femmes

How Femmes Care in *Stone Butch Blues*

Clara Rosa Schwarz

In Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, caring is not a weakness but a strength, indeed, one of the novel's strengths. Reading *Stone Butch Blues* for the first time, the femme subjectivities that accompany the butch protagonist touched me deeply. As I was reading, what stood out to me was the strength incorporated by the femmes through their vulnerability, not in spite of it. It is this strong vulnerability that came to characterise what it meant for me to be femme – playing with the tension between power and softness in terms of both gender and desire. Although femmes are not necessarily vulnerable and soft, having been figured through hardness and brazenness, vulnerability is tightly attached to femininity and its devaluation and subjugation. Subverting this subjugation is part of what makes femme queer (Brushwood Rose and Camilleri 2002; Schwartz 2020). Throughout the novel, vulnerability transpires in and between its lines, as protagonist Jess Goldberg navigates the constraints of her gender and her relationships to femmes. With this, Jess offers and receives care from her partners and friends, but, I argue, the ways in which caring is construed in Jess' life changes over time due to her closeness with various femmes. In this article, I follow a feminist and queer tradition of re-reading canonical texts, in this case, from a femme standpoint, through a femme lens, centring femme care as constitutive of Jess' affective development. I ask how care materialises in *Stone Butch Blues* and in what ways femme subjectivity is crucial to the manifestation. I explore how femme care transpires in the novel, how Feinberg's femmes generate strength through vulnerability and how they impact Jess' own care praxis.¹

Stone Butch Blues follows Jess Goldberg's life, from early childhood through to mid-life. Growing up a gender nonconforming child that could not fit in, Jess discovers home in bars that welcome LGBT patrons. She encounters a lively community of butches and femmes, where "it was OK to ask a woman to dance" (Feinberg 2014: 25), and becomes a butch who loves femmes. Jess' relationship to Theresa, her femme lover, is central to the novel but ends when Jess begins to transition. In this

1 I would like to thank Mali Bowers, Nikki Treanor, and k kater for their patience, care, and support in editing this paper in its various iterations.

time of passing as male, Jess encounters an unknown world of loneliness and secrecy, feeling alienated from her community. She decided to (re)turn to a new state of gender nonconformity, to being a 'he-she', with the addition of irrevocable hormonal changes: a low voice and surgically flattened chest. In this gender ambivalent presentation, Jess feels more at home but is consequently more at risk for abuse. Soon, Jess develops a deeply loving, but non-sexual, relationship with her neighbour Ruth, a trans femme. Femmes, Theresa and Ruth and many others, are central to the novel but have often been overlooked in its reception. My interest in this reparative re-reading (Sedgwick 1997) of *Stone Butch Blues* is to work against "the relegation of femmes" as "second class citizens" (Henson 1997: 66). I read the novel as an homage to femmes, as they support and care for Jess throughout. Feinberg offers care not only to her protagonist, but to the reader, in making space for (self-)care and vulnerability: the trigger warning at the top of the novel is an acknowledgement of the trauma with which many readers arrive at the novel. This space for (self-)care is extended into the generously spacious layout of the novel, its wide line spacing and short paragraphs allowing the reader to linger on the page, pause, and take a breath (Schwarz 2022).

My analysis, chronicling Jess' journey towards vulnerability and softness, presupposes Jess' desire for those traits, though I do not intend to mark hardness or stone subjectivities as lacking in any way. In Jess' life, however, a desire for softness transpires often, with "melt the stone" (Feinberg 2014: 4) prevailing as a key phrase in the novel that establishes vulnerability and mutability as desirable qualities for Jess (Rodness 2020). Jess' stoniness is not one of her inherent characteristics, rather, she has had to become stone as a means for self-preservation – one that is mutable through loving contact with femmes (ibid.). It is this contact, this care offered by femmes, that helps Jess to allow her stone to melt, that I discuss in this text.

Theoretically Framing Femme Care

To start with, I would like to give a brief overview of femme history and theory as a background for my conceptualisation of femme care and the ways in which femme and femininity have been theorised. Femme subjectivity emerged in the 1940s and 1950s alongside the butch in working class lesbian bar culture in the US (Nestle 1992). Both were primarily sexual identities, often but not always tied to a desire of the other. Since then, femme has come to describe a diverse range of erotic, sexual, and gender identities that revolve around queering femininity and the femme figure as an embodiment of power in vulnerability and receptivity. This includes femmes who identify as (cis or trans) women as well as femmes with a female-to-femme transition experience (Fuchs 2020). In 1992, Joan Nestle published the first, seminal femme anthology that influences femme studies to date. Nestle's anthology

filled a femme-shaped hole in the literature by amplifying femme narratives and bringing together stories, letters and essays from and about femmes. She describes femmes and butches as gender pioneers, arguing that the “butch deconstructs gender” and the “femme constructs gender”, by utilising “her own special ingredients” to create “an identity with which she can live and love” (Nestle 1992: 16). In fact, as Jane Ward argues, these de_constructions of gender are not individual endeavours but rely on gender labour, that is, “the act of giving gender to others” (Ward 2010: 240) by supporting their “masculine authenticity”, offering “moments of realness” and compensating “for gendered shortcomings” (ibid.: 246) – but Ward also argues that this often occurs at the cost of any engagement with femmes’ own genders and gendered needs. Ward’s voice provides an important critical perspective on the gender(ed) labour often provided by femmes, highlighting the care labour inequalities in relationships between femmes and transmasculine people (including trans butches).² Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha further criticises how femmes shoulder the burden of care labour and the expectation of unlimited resources and energy in many queer and left political organising contexts, whereby femmes of colour, disabled femmes, and working class or poor femmes are hit especially hard by one-sided demands and a lack of reciprocity and respect (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). Part of this critical discussion, too, is Ulrika Dahl’s (2017) work that reminds us that while traditional straight femininity is often located in the private sphere, femmes have been part of public cultures in lesbian bars and feminist and queer movements. Thus, Dahl argues that femme embodiment extends “beyond the (imaginary) bedroom” (2017: 45), removing femme-ininity and vulnerability from the private sphere. In fact, as femmes, butches, and queers are excluded from public cultures (Warner 2002), their making of a counterpublic through the public cultures described by Dahl, allows them to disrupt the trapping of femininity, vulnerability, and care in the private sphere.

Following Erinn Gilson, I understand vulnerability, as it plays a central role for femme subjectivity and femme theory, to describe an “openness to being affected and affecting” (Gilson 2011). This sentiment is also captured in Andi Schwartz’s theorisation of the “soft femme”, figured through earnestness and authenticity (Schwartz 2020). However, vulnerability has also been constructed in opposition to resistance, as “the site of inaction” (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016: 1). To understand vulnerability instead as the “action of resistance itself” (ibid.) allows me to suggest a consideration of the femme as emerging outside and against the binary of vulnerability and resistance. The figuration of femme subjectivity resists victimisation often attached to vulnerability. Instead, femmes embrace and indeed derive power from vulnerability. Being able to figure oneself vulnerable in turn relies

2 For a study on gendered labour in couples of women and trans men, I also recommend Carla A. Pfeffer’s work (Pfeffer 2010).

upon resisting the oppressive shame resulting from living within heteropatriarchal structures. Vulnerability, here, is understood as a desirable, difficult achievement (Cvetkovich 2002).

Vulnerability is central to my conceptualisation of femme care, as it is both attached to the traditionally feminine carer and to those who require care. This false distinction between carer and cared for is disrupted through femme care, as I show below. The distinction is false, as Eva Feder Kittay proposes, because care ought to be perceived as a resource to enable inclusion, rather than focussing on dependence, as “all human life” is based on dependence (Kittay 2011: 53). She states that elevating the needs of the cared-for “reveals that the subordinated do have a voice” (ibid.). While care is traditionally located in the private sphere, my approach to femme care in *Stone Butch Blues* offers a concept of care that is private and public at the same time. It is private because it is personal, offering emotional resources and supporting processes of healing from trauma. Simultaneously, it is public, because femmes remove femininity from the private sphere, refusing the personal to be private. Instead, femme care conceptualises the personal as political, and thereby, public, as it provides resources to ensure emotional and physical survival in a heteronormative society that is hostile to queer genders and sexualities. Femme care is, then, compassionate but assertive; it refuses the patriarchal devaluation of femininity and vulnerability. Moreover, femme care often exceeds the personal and private aspects of queer relationships and relationalities, as femmes have been and continue to be at the forefront of political struggles and organisation, creating queer and trans spaces, and doing community work. I insist on this caveat so as not to misleadingly reduce my concept of femme care to personal relationships and in order to further disrupt the false distinction of public and private.

Femme Care, Vulnerability, and Healing in *Stone Butch Blues*

In Jess’ development, I find traces of her relationships with femmes and her lessons learned, that restructure Jess’ difficult journey of trauma and coping as a result of femme care. I propose that femme enables differential concepts of care because femme both prioritises solidarity and accessibility as motivations for care and dislocates care from the private sphere. Through open communication and caring assertiveness that disrupts patriarchally sanctioned femininity, femme moves care into the public sphere. Femme transforms care through acting as enabler, rather than simply provider of care – and thus disrupts the hierarchy of carer/cared-for. While enabling can have negative connotations (one might ‘enable’ an addiction or other harmful behaviour) I use this term with a challenge to normativity: the femme enabler, here, provides tools for softness and vulnerability in spite of the heteronormative and gendered expectations that prevent this.

In this section, I explore Jess' journey of healing through disclosure. Disclosure is a central theme in the novel and marks the stages of Jess' character development – from an inability to share her trauma to Jess standing on stage and speaking her truth to a large crowd. Disclosure, here, is not simply a way for Jess to fit herself into a box that can easily be read by the world, but it is a difficult journey of becoming who she wants to be. Ann Cvetkovich calls disclosure “a queer process” as “the forms in which silence is broken are complex” (Cvetkovich 2003: 100). Indeed, Jess' journey of disclosure is complex, as she navigates the differently gendered care she receives from both femmes and butches, taking what she needs and developing her own praxis of care.

To begin chronicling this journey, I want to share a scene illustrating how Theresa adapts her practice of care to fit Jess, to provide support. Following a violent night at the police station, after Jess was arrested during a raid at a bar, Theresa picks Jess up from the station. Instead of asking if Jess is okay or expressing her worries directly, Theresa acknowledges Jess' pain, by “*gently rubb[ing] the bloody places on [Jess'] shirt and [saying], 'I'll never get these stains out'*” (Feinberg 2014: 5, italics in original). Theresa understands Jess' lack of experience in communicating her feelings and needs, and offers indirect words, that, as Jess says, “cut through [her] fog much more clearly than direct ones”³ (Feinberg 1995: 136). Jess can better understand Theresa's feelings of care this way (Weaver 2014), and Theresa intends to give Jess space to be while subtly communicating her emotions, foregrounding compassion and accessibility. In moments like this one, the nuances of gendered care practices become clear, expressing the enabling influence Theresa's caring has on Jess' ability to receive care, and in that allows Jess to find strength in her vulnerability and move towards a practice of disclosure.

Jess' perception of herself is disturbed by the trauma she has endured, resulting in a desire to hide away. In two paralleled sequences, Feinberg shows how femmes help Jess appreciate her visibility and find strength in disclosure. The first instance is when Jess is with Theresa:

Theresa ordered home subscriptions to the morning and evening papers. One day she left a copy of *The Ladder* on the couch. It was a magazine put out by a group called the Daughters of Bilitis. I didn't know who Bilitis was. I'd never seen anything about women like us in print before. “Where'd you get this?” I shouted to her. She called back from the kitchen, “In the mail.” “You got this sent to our address in the mail? Was it wrapped? What if someone in the building saw it?” After a long silence, Theresa came in with a hand mirror and held it up to my face. “Did you think you were a secret?” (Feinberg 2014: 133)

3 This sentence is cited from the 1995 edition, as it did not make it into the 2014 revised version. Still, I wanted to include it as it so thoughtfully illustrates Jess' foggy, traumatised state of mind.

This scene illustrates Theresa's fearlessness, her unconditional support for Jess' visibility, and her encouraging, practical approach to enable Jess' healing. Theresa cares for Jess, but rather than letting Jess fester in her hiding place, Theresa's caring assertiveness, in challenging Jess to acknowledge her visibility, coaxes Jess to perceive herself differently. By showing Jess her face, Theresa encourages Jess to understand her visibility and let go of a fear of exposure and disclosure – because Jess is already visible.

A comparable situation happens later in the novel, when Ruth shows Jess a painting of her face. The painting is “a watercolor of a face filled with emotion, looking up at a host of stars. It was a beautiful face, a face [she]’d never seen before. It was [her] face” (ibid.: 293). In seeing her face from Ruth's perspective, Jess becomes more able to see her own beauty. Having suffered a severely violent attack that left her jaw broken and sewn shut for weeks, this painting unlocks a slow journey to recovery for Jess: Her sense of self and self-worth are strengthened. In this instance, Ruth allows Jess to perceive herself differently, to let go of past shame and oppression, and take a step towards healing.

These scenes directly speak to each other, as the imagery conveys the different types of care Jess receives from Theresa and Ruth. Both provide femme care, encouraging Jess to allow herself to be vulnerable. Theresa gives Jess the gift of truth, she shows Jess what others see, while Ruth gives her the space to heal and a sense of safety, showing Jess what she sees. As Feinberg contemplates similar occasions at different life stages for Jess, it becomes clear how femme care progresses the novel. The femmes help Jess be less afraid of disclosing difference and to challenge the force of trauma in her life. Whilst Jess is scared and wants to hide when she finds Theresa's magazine, she later finds beauty and pride in seeing herself in Ruth's painting. The femme care Jess receives in the novel helps her find healing in her disclosure, because femme care is self-preserving, a care that is accessible, compassionate, and foregrounds solidarity and vulnerability through open communication and a caring assertiveness.

Jess' Development – From Lying to Speaking Her Truth

Throughout the novel, Feinberg shows Jess as struggling with communicating her trauma and her needs, inciting her feelings of alienation and regret. In encouraging Jess to disclose her trauma, Feinberg's femmes aim to induce her healing. However, if healing begins from disclosure, the practice of breaking the silence must consider confrontation and flashbacks incited through triggers (Carter 2015). Disclosure has its limitations, but simultaneously carries the potential to induce processes of healing foregrounding the ability to live with trauma and to develop close connections (Cvetkovich 2003). As a butch, trans-masculine person, Jess locates herself between

male and female genders, still experiencing proximity to womanhood in her queer gender. In her time of passing as male, Jess struggles to communicate feelings, as her masculinity is expected to generate only rationality (Rich 1979). A pertinent example for her loneliness in this time is her conversation with Ben, a co-worker who confides his trauma in Jess, who he knows as Jesse, about his time in prison and, it is implied, the assaults he survived there. As Ben begins to ask Jess to share about herself, Jess encourages him to share more about himself instead:

There's something about you, Ben, that's good and that I trust. And I'm wondering: how did you turn out this way? How did you get from all your hurt to the man you are now? What changed for you? What decisions did you make? (Feinberg 2014: 199)

At first, this sequence might seem sincere, with Jess asking Ben to open up and offering her care, and Jess might actually have intended to bond with Ben, to find a way out of her protective layer of loneliness. However, her fear dominates and through taking an interest in Ben, Jess removes and protects herself from disclosure, she lies by omission, adhering to the exact pattern Adrienne Rich describes the liar to follow:

Instead of trying to describe her feelings in their ambiguity and confusion, she asks, "How do you feel?" The other, because she is trying to establish a ground of openness and trust, begins describing her own feelings. Thus the liar learns more than she tells. (Rich 1979: 413)

Rich attributes to this a fear of losing control, which Jess exhibits strongly. Her fear of disclosure keeps her silent, lest she be exposed. Jess' fear, thus, prevents the development of meaningful connections she yearns for. To build strong relationships, through establishing "a ground of openness and trust" (ibid.), Jess must reciprocate and share her inner life with her interlocutor. After Ben carries on sharing, he repeatedly asks Jess to reciprocate, but she refuses: "I was afraid and so I betrayed him. 'There's not much to tell,' I said" (Feinberg 2014: 199), until finally, saddened, angry, and hurt, Ben gives up. This disclosure of fear to the reader marks a crucial turning point for Jess' journey of disclosure. Rich explains that the liar "does not say I was *afraid*, since this would open the question of other ways of handling her fear. It would open the questions of what is actually feared" (Rich 1979: 418). Thus, in acknowledging to herself and the reader that her lying stems from fear, Jess moves significantly closer to examining and overcoming her fears as expressed through rejecting disclosure. Considering how Jess listens with empathy when her friends speak, and how she cares when her friends are hurt, the importance of Theresa and Ruth showing Jess to care for herself must not be underestimated. Supporting Jess' self-awareness enables Jess to disclose and thus to connect with others. Femme care, therefore, sup-

ports Jess' self-preservation, encouraging her to build those connections. The aim of femme care is not to help Jess overcome trauma in order to function in a neoliberal sense, but rather to refuse the neoliberal imperative of resilience and learn to live with trauma through collaboration, collective support, and connection (Bimm and Feldmann 2020) – rather than betraying her friends and herself as she did with Ben.

In the final chapter of the novel, Jess finds her words and begins to experience joy in vulnerability and disclosure. Just before the novel ends, Jess courageously climbs on stage at a rally, and speaks of her life, discovering the joy in vulnerability. As she hears other voices speak of their traumas, sharing their pain, urging the protestors to fight violence against the queer community, Jess understands:

And suddenly I felt so sick to death of my own silence that I needed to speak too. It wasn't that there was something in particular I was burning to say. I didn't even know what it would be. I just needed to open my throat for once and hear my own voice. And I was afraid if I let this moment pass, I might never be brave enough to try again. (Feinberg 2014: 324)

The urge to speak overcomes her suddenly and powerfully, with the realisation that her pain can no longer stay repressed. The yearning for connection and solidarity ultimately leads Jess to speak. She speaks up for herself but also for the others standing at the figurative margins, or on the literal other side of the road, who feel removed from the movement. Jess admits: “I know about getting hurt. [...] But I don't have much experience talking about it.” (ibid.) With this admission, Jess becomes vulnerable in front of strangers; for the first time in the novel, Jess shares part of her trauma publicly. In this chapter, the joy emanates from the page, as Feinberg allows Jess to be open with others, to affect and let herself be affected (Gilson 2011). The joy comes from a woman proclaiming “Good for you, sister” and a man congratulating: “That was really brave to get up there and say that”, and finally, the joy stems from Jess regaining hope: “[Y]es, it was possible to still hope. This rally didn't change night into day, but I saw people speaking and listening to each other” (Feinberg 2014: 324, 325).

Jess begins her speech by disclosing her gender, a disclosure that ultimately enables her to speak freely and become part of a community yet again, as a “young butch”, Bernice, invites her to a lesbian dance (ibid.: 325). This scene stands in contrast to earlier in the novel, where Jess' disclosure on Ruth's doorstep, one of their first encounters, led to a rejection from Ruth, who did not want to experience the “double-trouble” (ibid.: 278) of two trans people being exposed together; compared to then, and the many instances in which disclosure equalled exposure, leading to jobs lost and relationships ending, Jess' disclosure now enables access to a lesbian dance, access to a community of lesbians even, as Bernice offers to “all go in together” (ibid.: 325).

Finally, when Jess shares her experience with Ruth, Feinberg again demonstrates to the reader the femme's caring, compassionate communication.

"I spoke, Ruth. There was this rally in Sheridan Square and they let people get up and talk and I did. I spoke, Ruth. In front of hundreds of people. I wish you could have been there. I wish you could have heard me." Ruth wrapped her arms around me and sighed. "I have been hearing you, honey," she whispered in my ear. "Once you break the silence, it's just the beginning." (ibid.: 325–326)

The repetition of "I spoke" amplifies the significance of Jess' voluntary disclosure, a powerful speech act building on the femme care Jess received throughout the novel. Jess expresses the desire to be heard by Ruth. However, Ruth proclaims that she has been hearing Jess, fully aware of Jess' urgent need to break her silence. This moment illustrates Ruth's awareness of Jess' emotional experience, despite Jess' previous silence. As she helps Jess understand that "it's just the beginning", Ruth reassures Jess to continue, aware of the impact of disclosure. Hence, the femme acts as enabler again, encouraging Jess to persevere. The emotions Jess associated with vulnerability were more often pain than joy, and that pain stuck to her (Ahmed 2004). It stuck in that it informed her thinking and actions, being constantly alert to the fear of exposure. This traumatic response resulted from her experiences with police violence, which generated a notion of risk interconnected with disclosure and suppressed the positive possibility of vulnerability. Contrastingly, in this sequence, Jess demonstrates an understanding of vulnerability as developed by femmes, joyful and enabling healing, and turned her fear of exposure into voluntary disclosure, as an opportunity to regain power over her narrative.

Femme (for Femme) Care, Butch (for Butch) Care?

I develop femme care in reading *Stone Butch Blues*, though not without thinking about butch care. Femme care, as a distinct relational and behavioural concept, does not necessarily stand in opposition to butch care, rather, I aim to theorise how femmes care for Jess in their own way. Of course, butches care, too, for femmes and for each other, just as femmes care for Jess and for other femmes. To this end, I briefly turn towards femme for femme care and butch for butch care and hope to show how Feinberg evades the gendered trappings of attaching patriarchal masculinity and femininity to hir femmes and butches.

To outline a more exhaustive concept of femme care, the ways femmes care for one another must be considered. In this following sequence, Theresa is unafraid and draws strength from her femme-ininity. Her friend Justine is being assaulted by police officers when Theresa and Georgetta step in:

“Take your hands off her,” Theresa told the cop. Her voice was low and calm. “Leave her alone.” Theresa walked slowly toward the cop with the high heels at her sides. [...] Georgetta took off both her stilettos and held one in each hand. She walked over to Theresa. They exchanged a look I couldn’t see and stood side by side. [...] Justine grabbed Theresa and Georgetta’s arms and pulled herself to her feet. When Justine wobbled, Theresa wrapped one arm around her waist to steady her. The cop unholstered his gun. “You fucking slut,” he sputtered at Theresa. “You fucking perverts,” he shouted at all of us. Another cop pulled on his arm. “C’mon, let’s get out of here.” Slowly, the four cops retreated. I exhaled as the cops drove away. Theresa and Georgetta held Justine in their arms as she cried. (Feinberg 2014: 139–140)

Theresa and Georgetta act as fearless protectors and engender strength to disperse the police while weaponising the high heels that signify their femininity as well as their gender transgression. Simply by being there, Theresa and Georgetta enable Justine to help herself as she pulls herself up on their arms and finds her feet. In holding Justine, they allow and encourage vulnerability and help Justine release her tears. This act of care foregrounds vulnerability and uplifts femme solidarity. Their femininity, which the cops try to force into submission, rather than making them weak, was the source of their strength, their heels, rather than holding them back, become tools to fight back. Though she later discloses fear, Theresa steps up and shows up for Justine. Her strength becomes amplified through vulnerability, exaggerating her fearlessness, allowing her to chase the police away. In their defiance, Theresa and Georgetta engender a queer femininity that is rooted in resistance and refuses the patriarchal reduction of femininity to weakness.

I also would like to offer an orientation towards how butches care in Jess’ life and how Jess changes her care praxis in relation to her butch friends. As the novel progresses, instances of butches caring for their friends and partners are abundant. Often, this takes the form of having each other’s backs in a fight or offering security after a police raid. There are several instances when Jess encourages open conversations among her friends, increasing as the story progresses. This is not to say that Jess takes on Theresa’s femme care and begins to care like a femme. Rather, Jess begins to develop her own way of caring, her own way of communicating with her butch friends. In a scene toward the end of the novel, Jess tries to initiate one such conversation with Frankie, but Frankie rejects her, saying: “You don’t need words with me Jess, I know” (ibid.: 301). But Jess, rather than feeling shame and going into hiding, as she had done in the past, persists and replies:

I do need words, Frankie. Sometimes I feel like I’m choking to death on what I’m feeling. I need to talk and I don’t even know how. Femmes always tried to teach me to talk about my feelings, but it was their words they used for their feelings. I needed my own words – butch words to talk about butch feelings. (ibid.)

This scene marks the beginning of Jess' active disclosure. Jess acknowledges that in order to preserve herself, she must begin her journey of healing, and disclosure seems to be just the way for her to do this – or else choke “to death”. This moment illustrates precisely the enabling properties of femme care, as Jess recognises how the femmes' efforts aimed at supporting her, while also realising that femme care was not the care she could give herself. Instead, finally, in articulating the need to develop her own language, Jess begins to do just that – which in the last chapter culminates in her speaking up at a rally and publicly disclosing her gender journey and her trauma, having found “butch words to talk about butch feelings”.

The instances of femmes caring for femmes and butches caring for butches illustrate differences as well as similarities in their caring praxes. Feinberg is quick to disrupt the traditional narrative of gendered care and intimacy by developing Jess' caring habits as the novel progresses. Zie paints a vivid image of the interdependence of femmes and butches in this community. Rather than illustrating a feminine and a masculine way to care and putting those onto femme and butch characters in the novel, Feinberg allows the characters to contain multitudes. Feinberg's femmes can talk and listen, but they can also fight, and butches can have each other's backs, and find their own language, too. The importance of femme care, then, for my reading of *Stone Butch Blues*, is that Feinberg's appreciation of femmes is rooted in the way they encourage Jess in developing her own language, to find a butch way to embrace vulnerability, and ultimately to find strength in disclosure rather than in spite of it.

Concluding Thoughts

In this article, I have developed a concept of femme care in re-reading Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, and chronicled the development of Jess' caring praxis as it was influenced by femmes. Care materialises in the novel through multiple avenues, and the femme characters are essential to this manifestation: they hear Jess' desire for softness and support her in finding butch ways to care for herself and others. Jess' journey of disclosure, from an inability to share towards speaking her truth to a large crowd, is particularly pertinent for Jess' development. Finding her voice and beginning to disclose her gender, her embodiment, and her trauma become a tool for Jess to reclaim her narrative: Rather than letting social presumptions define her, she finally, carefully begins to show herself truthfully. With this, Jess can connect with others, build and rediscover community, and resist the isolating force of cis-heteronormativity.⁴ Rather than attributing this development entirely to femmes

4 Here, I wanted to add a caveat: that Jess need not always disclose, that sometimes silence protects her from violence – but her lack of disclosure has not protected her in the past, nor can I assume that it would in the future. Jess was attacked, violated, humiliated on many occasions,

and femme care, I would like to invite the reader to think on what might define butch care, and where the similarities and difference between butch and femme care might lie – but those considerations exceed the scope of this text. To conclude, I would like to reiterate that while I highlighted how femmes care, in an accessible, compassionate way and foregrounding solidarity and vulnerability, *Stone Butch Blues* celebrates the relationality of butch and femme subjectivities, without deriving one from the other. Instead, Feinberg's novel appreciates the different gendered experiences and praxes of care without undermining their validity. Ultimately, *Stone Butch Blues* exemplifies the gravity of caring communities and self-care as acts of resistance and indeed survival for queer people who live with or against the oppressions bound up with neoliberal capitalism.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2004) "Affective Economies", *Social Text* 22(2), pp. 117–139.
- Bimm, M. and Feldmann, M. (2020) "Towards a Femme Pedagogy, or Making Space for Trauma in the Classroom", *MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture* 5. <https://maifeminism.com/towards-a-femme-pedagogy-or-making-space-for-trauma-in-the-classroom> (last accessed 5 August 2024).
- Brushwood Rose, C. and Camilleri, A. (eds.) (2002) *Brazen Femme. Queering Femininity*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp.
- Butler, J., Gambetti, Z. and Sabsay, L. (2016) *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Carter, A. M. (2015) "Teaching with Trauma: Trigger Warnings, Feminism, and Disability Pedagogy", *Disability Studies Quarterly* 35(2).
- Cvetkovich, A. (2002) "In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture", *Camera Obscura* 17(1), pp. 106–147.
- (2003) *An Archive of Feelings. Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Dahl, U. (2017) "Femmebodiment: Notes on Queer Feminine Shapes of Vulnerability", *Feminist Theory* 18(1), pp. 35–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700116683902>.
- Feinberg, L. (1995) *Stone Butch Blues*. Boston: Alyson.
- (2014) *Stone Butch Blues*. 20th Anniversary Author Edition, self-published. <https://www.lesliefeinberg.net> (last accessed 17 March 2024).
- Foucault, M. (2020) *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.

she has always been visible, and her brief experience of living stealth hurt her more than it protected her. Still, for others, like Ruth, silence and living stealth have offered safety; and disclosure, while powerful, can also trap the marginalised in a visibility politics that serves only the principle of social control (Foucault 2020).

- Fuchs, S. (2020) "Einleitung. Beständiges Begehren. Femme/Butch als genderphile und sexpositive Kultur", in: Fuchs, S. (ed.) *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren*. Berlin: Querverlag, pp. 13–68.
- Gilson, E. C. (2011) "Vulnerability, Ignorance, and Oppression", *Hypatia* 26(2), pp. 308–332.
- Henson, L. (1997) "'Articulate Silence(s)': Femme Subjectivity and Class Relations in *The Well of Loneliness*", in: Harris, L. and Crocker, E. (eds.) *Fem(me). Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls*. London: Routledge, pp. 61–67.
- Kittay, E. F. (2011) "The Ethics of Care, Dependence, and Disability", *Ratio Juris* 24(1), pp. 49–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9337.2010.00473.x>.
- Nestle, J. (1992) (ed.) *The Persistent Desire. A Femme-Butch Reader*. Boston: Alyson.
- Pfeffer, C. A. (2010) "'Women's Work'? Women Partners of Transgender Men Doing Housework and Emotion Work", *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72(1), pp. 165–183. www.jstor.org/stable/27752562 (last accessed 17 March 2024).
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018) "A Modest Proposal for a Fair Trade Emotional Labor Economy (Centered by Disabled, Femme of Color, Working Class/Poor Genius)", in: Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (ed.) *Care Work. Dreaming Disability Justice*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, pp. 136–148.
- Rich, A. (1979) "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying", in: Rich, A. (ed.) *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence. Selected Prose 1966–1978*. New York: Norton, pp. 185–194.
- Rodness, R. (2020) "Hard Road Ahead: Stone's Queer Agency in *Stone Butch Blues*", *Criticism* 62(4), pp. 547–571.
- Schwartz, A. (2020) "Soft Femme Theory: Femme Internet Aesthetics and the Politics of 'Softness'", *Social Media + Society* 6(4), pp. 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120978366>.
- Schwarz, C. R. (2022) "The Queering of Care in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*", *LSE Gender Alumni*. <https://lsegenderalumni.com/2022/01/26/the-queering-of-care-in-leslie-feinbergs-stone-butch-blues/> (last accessed 17 March 2024).
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1997) "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Introduction is About You", in: Sedgwick, E. K. (ed.) *Novel Gazing. Queer Readings in Fiction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 1–37.
- Ward, J. (2010) "Gender Labor: Transmen, Femmes, and Collective Work of Transgression", *Sexualities* 13(2), pp. 236–254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460709359114>.
- Warner, M. (2002) *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone.
- Weaver, H. (2014) "Friction in the Interstices: Emotion and Landscape in *Stone Butch Blues*", *Emotion, Space and Society* 12, pp. 85–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2013.12.007>.

Femme Life Writing: No Femininities Left Behind

Laura Brightwell

Queer theory and femme theory to-date have articulated the femme as queer by using the framework of antinormativity, which valorises the femme in contrast to a presumed hegemonic, heterosexual femininity (Maltry and Tucker 2022). While this frame has proved an effective way to explore femme-ininity in its own right, it keeps heterosexual femininities abjected within femme theory and creates an adversarial relationship between queer femmes and straight women (Eves 2004; Galewski 2005). In this article, I consider the benefits of exploring the queer femme¹ in relation to abjected forms of straight femininity. I'm interested in forms of feminine inheritance, holding families of origin alongside queer subjectivities, and political solidarity between various expressions of femininity that are culturally seen as unacceptable, deviant, or 'wrong.' I look at alternative frameworks for imagining femme outside of the binary rhetoric of antinormativity by seeking solidarity between different forms of femininity that are considered culturally unrespectable. In this context, the femme's deviation from norms of gender and sexuality can be reimaged as point of connection with various culturally abjected femininities.

This article looks towards a new model of femme theory based on solidarity between culturally abjected femininities. I understand femme theory in this context as a framework for political work, for challenging the harmful status quo of culture at large, and for understanding and conceptualizing femme identity. I read writing by Joan Nestle, Dorothy Allison, Raechel Anne Jolie, and Amber Dawn, to explore the extent to which femme identities can be informed by white trash femininities, deviant maternal femininities, and sex workers' experiences.

I use this space to take up questions from my in-progress doctoral dissertation, which looks at femme life writing to challenge the inherent masculine bias in queer theory. I'm interested in theoretical frameworks that reinsert feminised positions and concerns, such as parenting, domestic labour, care work, and aging, back into a

1 'Femme' is a term that is rooted in both North American lesbian bar culture of the 1940s and 1950s (Kennedy and Davis 1994) and the African American ballroom scene of the 1960s (Bailey 2014). It is also a term used by many queer-identified subjects to situate their femininity in relation to their queerness (Taylor 2018). For the purposes of this article, I am looking at writing by cisgender femmes who are assigned female at birth.

queer theory that has been accused of being elitist and inaccessible (Faderman 1997). I'm also interested in complicating the idea, implicit in many theories of femme identity, that femme is a more enlightened, feminist, and queer form of femininity than straight femininity. I find this idea problematic in that it frames straight femininities as inherently oppressive and unthoughtful. In this sense, I take femmes' autobiographical writing as an intervention in feminist and queer studies. I hope that these alternative ways of considering the queer femme will set the stage for new ways of thinking our foundational theoretical commitments.

Femme life writing can encompass many forms of writing, such as memoirs, essays, contributions to anthologies, online blogs, and social media posts (Schwartz 2020). Full-length publications of femme life writing started to be published in the memoir boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Rak 2013). Among the most notable is the publication of the anthology *The Persistent Desire* (Nestle 1992) and memoirs by writers such as Dorothy Allison (1988, 1994, 1996), Jewelle Gomez (1993), Amber Hollibaugh (2000), and Joan Nestle (1998, 2003). This boom was followed by the publication of several femme anthologies that speak to a resurgence of femme culture in the 1990s and 2000s.² Femme memoirs continue to be published today and memoir remains a popular genre among queer writers, probably because there is still so little representation of queer identities and lived experiences in mainstream culture.

Despite the many negative attitudes that have existed towards femmes and femininity in lesbian, feminist, and queer culture since the 1950s, femmes have cultivated their own understanding of their gender identities and sexualities and have a strong sense of their identity as feminist and queer in the face of sexist stereotypes (Vaisseau 1995; Duggan and McHugh 1996). Femme life writing is in conversation with ideas about femmes and femininity that circulate in feminist and queer thought. Overall, femme life writing seeks to expand feminist and queer stories of femininity beyond the idea that femininity is a patriarchal imposition and to communicate femmes' own understanding of their gender identities and sexualities.

The accusation of inappropriate sexual behaviour and 'trashiness'—a coded class insult—has been levelled at femmes from within lesbian-feminist and queer communities (Mishali 2014; Rugg 1997). Working-class femmes' aesthetic has been seen as 'too sexual' (ibid.). Additionally, butch/femme relationships have been dismissed as too working-class and too visibly erotic, and therefore unrespectable (Nestle 2003; Pratt 2005). Working-class femme is therefore often aligned with working-class heterosexual femininity, in that both are considered trashy and deviate from the societal norm of modest, middle-class white femininity.

2 Key examples are Harris, L. and Crocker, E. (1997) *Femme. Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls*. New York: Routledge; Newman, L. (ed.) (1995) *The Femme Mystique*. Boston: Alyson; Rose, C. B. and Camilleri, A. (eds.) (2002) *Brazen Femme. Queering Femininity*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp.

Femmes often describe their aesthetic as overtly sexual and intentionally in-your-face (Harris and Crocker 1997; Stafford 2010). Femmes are often sex workers (Blewett and Law 2018; Hollibaugh 2000; Payne 2002). Many femmes write that femmes share points of political solidarity with sex workers. These writers see a connection between femmes and sex workers in their deviation from hegemonic femininity (Blewett and Law 2018; Harris and Crocker 1997) and their shared historical penalisation under so-called moral decency laws (Blewett and Law 2018; Nestle 2003; Payne 2007).

In two books published in the 1990s, Dorothy Allison (1994, 1996) draws connections between her childhood in South Carolina in the United States, her relationship with her mother, aunts, and sisters, her femme identity, and her lesbian-feminist politics. Allison says that her desire to tell stories about the women of her family who were called “dirty fucking trash” (1994: 236) for their poverty and teenage pregnancies is one of the main reasons she writes. Allison’s writing expresses a respect for domestic femininities and a connection to her family of origin that is unexpected in conventional coming-out narratives, which often talk about running away from the nuclear family in order to find the queer protagonist’s ‘true self’ (Saxey 2008). Allison’s experiences lead her to be critical of the lesbian-feminist movement she lived in as a young woman, which either misunderstood working-class women or simply failed to account for them altogether. Her understanding of her family shows her the importance of developing a feminist theory and activism that can address and include the needs not only of middle-class lesbians, but also of working-class women and straight women.

Allison’s account of her own femininity and sexuality is deeply interwoven with the femininity of the women in her family of origin. When Allison falls in love with her first girlfriend Cathy, who is addicted to heroin, she learns that she is just like her mother and sisters. She writes, I am “female and feminine in the most traditional sense, foolish and damaged and hopeful” (Allison 1996: 249). Allison’s masochistic desire for her girlfriend is the same her mother and sisters experience for the abusive men in their lives. Being a queer femme doesn’t protect Allison from bad relationships and devastating heartbreaks. In fact, Allison enters into lesbian desire through this destructive, formative relationship. In the poem *the women who hate me*, Allison (1991) counters the lesbian-feminist belief that to be a lesbian is a more feminist choice than to be a heterosexual woman. In this poem, Allison describes her butch lover’s punch to her face as an echo of the violence her stepfather inflicted on her mother. She declares “I do not believe anymore in the natural superiority/of the lesbian, the difference between my sisters and me” (Allison 1991: 29). Here, being a lesbian femme does not protect Allison from domestic violence, which her sisters and mother also experience.

We see similar themes about the commonality between straight femininities and queer femininities in femme life writing today. In her memoir *Rust Belt Femme*,

Rachael Anne Jolie also situates her femme gender within a tradition of strong, working-class women who are dismissed as white trash. Jolie connects femme's hypersexual aesthetic to white working-class women's femininity. Jolie articulates her femme identity as a blend of her middle-class grandmother's "Old Hollywood chic," the style and attitude of the working-class women who raised her in rural Ohio, and "the languid and aggressive femininity of alternative nineties women" (2020: 63). Jolie describes the women who raise her as "white, but not the right kind" (ibid.: 161). She sees femme as connected to the trashiness of these women, in that "they are both in the practice of embodying the deviant" (ibid.: 160).

Like many other femme writers, Jolie's femme identity is informed by working-class femininity. Jolie suggests that femme's working-class roots, brash aesthetic, and overt sexuality share commonalities with white-trash women's femininity. Both are excessively feminine in their aesthetic and excessively sexual. Referring to the working-class white women who raised her, Jolie describes her femme gender as "a product of this ragged but persistent femininity" (ibid.: 162).

For Jolie, both white-trash femininity and femme offer a way of dissenting with oppressive systems of class, gender, race, and sexuality through embodying an improper aesthetic and behaviour. She says of the community of women who raised her in rural Ohio in the 1990s: "their unfit bodies and sensibilities were undesirable, and [...] eventually I'd want to be undesirable too if it meant I didn't abide an oppressive system" (ibid.: 161). Jolie's connection of her queer femme heritage to her childhood community and family offers a vision of femme femininity that is "contingent" on forms of straight femininity (ibid.). Jolie's connection between the working-class community of her childhood and her own femme sensibility paints a picture of a queer femininity that learns from traditions of straight femininity that are also culturally maligned.

Femme life writing also emphasises the importance of femmes' mothers and families of origin to the formation of femmes' gender identities and sexual desires. For some femmes, their mothers are the perpetrators of, or complicit in, sexual violence (Hollibaugh 2000; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2015). For others, their mothers are absent, perhaps selfish figures (Gomez 1993; Nestle 1998, 2003). Yet, they are also women who model strength, glamour, and sexual freedom to their children.

Femmes often see their mothers as models for their own femininity and as kinds of femmes themselves (Bryan 2002; Camilleri 2004; Hollibaugh 2000). Femmes whose mothers' behaviours and sexualities defy social norms describe a feminist, matriarchal inheritance that informs their identity (Allison 1994, 1996; Nestle 1998, 2003; Hollibaugh 2000). Femme life writing also connects femmes' experiences of social ostracism to their mothers' experiences of classism, sexism, racism, and whorephobia (ibid.). While queer narratives often cast families of origin and the successful queer adult as opposed (Driver 1996), femme writers chal-

lunge this separation of queer community and family, crafting a feminist, feminine lineage.

Joan Nestle is well-known (among femmes) for her writing about her mother, Regina. In two chapters originally published in 1987, “My mother liked to fuck” and “Two women: Regina Nestle, 1910–1978, and her daughter, Joan, 1940–,” Nestle (2003) aligns her experiences as a queer femme in lesbian–feminist communities with her mother’s experiences of whorephobia and classism. Throughout her writing, Nestle refuses to distinguish herself from Regina, the woman who is both “whore and mother,” who she describes as pulled in different directions by her love for sexual adventure and her duty to take care of her children (1998: 77). Both mother and daughter are sexual outlaws in their own ways; both pursue “illicit loves” (Nestle 2003: 81). Regina has relationships with married men and engages in sex work. Joan is a lesbian, sex worker, activist, and femme who has relationships with butches.

Nestle’s father died before she was born, leaving her working-class Jewish mother to raise two children without any family help in 1940s New York. Her mother survives by working hard and developing sexual relationships with her bosses and other men, sometimes embezzling money from her employers. Nestle describes her mother as someone who was socially ostracized for being an overtly sexual single woman and monetizing her relationships, but who insisted on her right to be sexual in spite of social disapproval. Nestle connects her mother’s experiences of social ostracism to her own experiences of discrimination for being an out lesbian from the 1950s on. Her 1987 homage to her mother, “My mother liked to fuck”, paints an alternative picture of motherhood to that common in cultural feminist theories of the time, in which mothers were seen as nature-oriented goddess figures, fulfilling their biological destiny. Nestle’s mother is messy, complex, often a bad mother. She leaves her children in order to pursue sexual adventures and her gambling renders her and her children penniless and homeless for a time.

Nestle describes Regina as “a woman who did not want to be a mother” (ibid.: 75). She is a woman whose sexuality, much like her daughter’s, refuses to be constrained by social norms. In this sense, Nestle claims her ‘bad’ mother as a model for her own sexual autonomy. Nestle inherits her mother’s lifelong belief in “a woman’s undeniable right to enjoy sex [and] to actively seek it” (ibid.: 115) and dedicates her own life to the understanding and pursuit of desire, sex, and to challenging any dogma—including feminist theories—that advocate the censorship of sexuality. Nestle imagines her mother asking her daughter to “help to change the world so no woman feels shame or fear because she likes to fuck” (ibid.: 117).

Unlike the femmes who describe mothers that try to regulate their daughters’ bodies and control their transgressive sexual and social behaviour, Regina recognizes her daughter’s sexual difference and gives her the tools she needs to survive. Nestle writes, “[m]y mother liked sex and let me know throughout the years both the punishment and rewards she earned because she dared to be clear about enjoying

fucking" (ibid.: 114). The legacy Regina leaves her daughter is one of sexual courage and rebellion. The lessons she learns from her mother teach Nestle to reject the feminist politics of her time that excludes working-class, heterosexual, 'unrespectable' women like Regina.

Dorothy Allison, Rachael Anne Jolie, and Joan Nestle, as well as many other femme writers, use writing to challenge the separation of queer femmes from straight women in queer politics. These writers' experiences lead them to explicitly discuss what is often only implicit in queer and feminist theory. That is, its middle-class bias and inability or refusal to account for straight women, working-class women, and sex workers. Queer politics here is not separate from or against the family of origin, but rather learns from it. These writers contradict the tropes usually deployed by queer narratives and queer theory. These tropes include coming-out and coming-into queerness as a break from the family and queer culture's interest in separatist communities. I'd like to see a queer feminism that holds different kinds of sexual outlaws together and that doesn't abject one group of people in order to advocate for another. I want my scholarship to contribute to this rethinking of norms and gesture outside of the binary antinormative so that these messy feminine experiences can be included in queer theory and femme theory.

References

- Allison, D. (1988) *Trash*. Ithaca: Firebrand.
- (1991) *The Women Who Hate Me. Poetry, 1980–1990*. Ithaca: Firebrand.
- (1994) *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class and Literature*. Ithaca: Firebrand.
- (1996) *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*. New York: Penguin.
- Bailey, M. M. (2014) "Engendering Space: Ballroom Culture and the Spatial Practice of Possibility in Detroit", *Gender, Place & Culture* 21(4), pp. 489–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.786688>.
- Blewett, L. and Law, T. (2018) "Sex Work and Allyship: Reflections on Femme-, Bi- and Whorephobia in Queer Communities", *Feral Feminisms* 1(7), pp. 58–65.
- Bryan, T. J. (2002) "It Takes Ballz: Reflections of a Black Attitudinal Femme Vixen in tha Makin'", in: Brushwood Rose, C. and Camilleri, A. (eds.) *Brazen Femme. Queering Femininity*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, pp. 147–159.
- Camilleri, A. (2004) *I Am a Red Dress. Incantations on a Grandmother, a Mother, and a Daughter*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp.
- Driver, S. (1996) "Can Queer Theory Radicalize 'The Mother's' Body?", *Canadian Woman Studies* 16(2), pp. 30–32.
- Duggan, L. and McHugh, K. (1996) "A Fem(me)inist Manifesto", *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8(2), pp. 153–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07407709608571236>.

- Eves, A. (2004) "Queer Theory, Butch/Femme Identities and Lesbian Space", *Sexualities* 7(4), pp. 480–496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460704047064>.
- Faderman, L. (1997) "Afterword", in: Heller, D. A. (ed.) *Cross-Purposes. Lesbians, Feminists, and the Limits of Alliance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 221–229.
- Galewski, E. (2005) "Figuring the Feminist Femme", *Women's Studies in Communication* 28(2), pp. 183–206.
- Gomez, J. (1993) *Forty-Three Septembers. Essays*. Ithaca: Firebrand.
- Harris, L. and Crocker, E. (1997) *Femme. Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls*. New York: Routledge.
- Hollibaugh, A. L. (2000) *My Dangerous Desires. A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jolie, R. A. (2020) *Rust Belt Femme*. Cleveland: Belt.
- Kennedy, E. L. and Davis, M. D. (1994) *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold. The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York: Penguin.
- Maltry, M. and Tucker, K. (2002) "Female Fem(me)ininitities. New Articulations in Gender Identities and Subversion", *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 6(2), pp. 89–102. https://doi.org/10.1300/J155v06n02_12.
- Mishali, Y. (2014) "Feminine Trouble: The Removal of Femininity from Feminist/Lesbian/Queer Aesthetics, Imagery, and Conceptualization", *Women's Studies International Forum* 44, pp. 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.09.003>.
- Nestle, J. (1992) (ed.) *The Persistent Desire. A Femme-Butch Reader*. Boston: Alyson.
- (1998) *A Fragile Union. New & Selected Writings*. San Francisco: Cleis.
- (2003) *A Restricted Country*. 2nd edition. San Francisco: Cleis.
- Newman, L. (ed.) (1995) *The Femme Mystique*. Boston: Alyson.
- Payne, K. (2002) "Whores and Bitches Who Sleep with Women", in: Brushwood Rose, C. and Camilleri, A. (eds.) *Brazen Femme. Queering Femininity*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, pp. 47–56.
- (2007) "From Abject to Subject: Some Thoughts on Sex Work as a Missing Link in Feminist Understandings of Sexuality", *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* 31(2), pp. 53–63.
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2015) *Dirty River. A Queer Femme of Color Dreaming Her Way Home*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp.
- Pratt, M. B. (2005) *S/HE*. Los Angeles: Alyson.
- Rak, J. (2013) *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Rose, C. B. and Camilleri, A. (eds.) (2002) *Brazen Femme. Queering Femininity*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp.
- Rugg, R. (1997) "How does she look?", in: Harris, L. and Crocker, E. (eds.) *Femme. Feminists, Lesbians and Bad Girls*. New York: Routledge, pp. 175–189.

- Saxey, E. (2008) *Homoplot. The Coming-Out Story and Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Schwartz, A. (2020) "Soft Femme Theory: Femme Internet Aesthetics and the Politics of 'Softness'", *Social Media + Society* 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120978366>.
- Stafford, A. (2010) "Uncompromising Positions: Reiterations of Misogyny Embedded in Lesbian and Feminist Communities' Framing of Lesbian Femme Identities", *Atlantis. Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* 35(1), pp. 81–91.
- Taylor, A. (2018) "'Flabulously' Femme: Queer Fat Femme Women's Identities and Experiences", *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 22(4), pp. 459–481. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2018.1449503>.
- Vaisseau, R. (1995) "I Am Not a Straight Girl", in: Newman, L. (ed.) *The Femme Mystique*. Los Angeles: Alyson, pp. 30–32.

Teil II: Übersetzungen und Übertragungen / Part II: Translations and Transfers

Sternenklare Reise

Eine Reminiszenz an Leslie Feinberg, in Dankbarkeit¹

Sabine Fuchs

Erfahrungen mit Literatur, das Lesen der Geschichten von Anderen, können uns dazu bewegen, auch unser eigenes Leben als eine Geschichte und als Teil von Geschichte zu betrachten. Wessen Geschichten sind es wert, erzählt zu werden, wessen Geschichte zählt? Diese Fragen verweisen auf die enge Beziehung zwischen Literatur und sozialer Anerkennung. Die geringe Bedeutung, die Literatur im Hinblick auf ihre gesellschaftliche Relevanz allzu oft beigemessen wird, täuscht jedoch darüber hinweg, dass Schreiben und Lesen wichtige politische Akte sein können.

Lesen schärft unseren Sinn für Kritik, es kann Zeichen von politischem Widerstand sein, Literatur kann ihren Leser*innen dabei helfen, ein kritisches Selbstverständnis auszubilden und dieses offen und mutig in die Welt hinauszutragen. Sie kann unser Selbstwertgefühl stärken und nicht weniger als zum Überleben beitragen. Demnach lässt sich ohne Zweifel sagen, dass der oft unterbewertete kulturelle Bereich der Literatur wichtige Grundlagen schafft zum Hinwirken auf gesellschaftliche Veränderungen und die Anerkennung von Lebensweisen, die verschwiegen, an den Rand gedrängt und dadurch unlesbar gemacht werden (vgl. Sönsler Breen 2010).²

Die Literatur und das Leben von Leslie Feinberg haben eine besondere Bedeutung für Lesben, Queers und trans Leute, vor allem für Butches und Femmes. Leslie Feinbergs Tod am 15. November 2014 führte zu einer ganzen Welle von Nachrufen im Internet, meist kürzere Gedenktex te und Würdigungen, in denen die Verfasser*innen den Einfluss des Lebens und Lebenswerks von Feinberg auf ihre eigene Biografie reflektierten. Auch der hier vorliegende Text versteht sich als eine solche dankbare Würdigung.

1 Dieser Essay erschien erstmals 2018 als Vorabdruck, dann 2020 als Beitrag in dem von mir herausgegebenen Sammelband *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren* beim Quer- verlag, Berlin. Ich danke insbesondere Kater für unsere Diskussionen und seine Unterstützung beim Entstehen dieses Textes.

2 In Margret Sönsler Breens Essay »Narratives of Queer Desire« (2010) beschäftigt die Literaturwissenschaftlerin sich mit der besonderen Bedeutung von Literatur für LSBTIQ-Leser*innen.

Meine erste persönliche Begegnung mit Leslie Feinberg fand 1998 in Bremen statt, einige Jahre nachdem die Lektüre von Leslies erstem Roman *Stone Butch Blues* mein Leben unumkehrbar verändert und meine Identifikation als queere, butch-liebende und für transgener Anliegen kämpfende Femme maßgeblich beeinflusst hatte. Die genderpolitischen Umstände der Veranstaltung, die Leslie Feinberg in meine damalige Lebensstadt Bremen brachten, empfand ich als beschämend für die Einladenden, sie standen in einem absurd ignoranten Verhältnis zur eigentlichen Bedeutung der Veranstaltung. Denn die ahnungslos unbekümmerten ›lesbisch-feministischen‹ Veranstalterinnen der Lesung reduzierten *Stone Butch Blues – Träume in den erwachenden Morgen* auf einen lesbischen Bestseller und schrieben die Lesung als »ausschließlich für Frauen« aus.

Leslie Feinberg reiste damals zum zweiten Mal nach Deutschland, unter schwierigen Bedingungen, die sich *weiße* deutsche cisgender Lesben mit Mittelschichtshintergrund zu diesem Zeitpunkt wohl kaum vorstellen konnten. Denn Leslie besaß keinen Reisepass und keine offiziellen Dokumente, deren Geschlechtseintrag mit ihrem*seinem gegenderten Aussehen übereingestimmt hätten, wie sie*er selbst berichtete. Trotz dieser bedrohlichen Umstände wagte Leslie die Reise nach Europa zusammen mit ihrer*seiner Lebensgefährtin, der lesbisch-feministischen Dichterin, Aktivistin und Femme-Vorkämpferin Minnie Bruce Pratt.

Die Lektüre von *Stone Butch Blues* hatte eine weitere Ausdifferenzierung meiner Selbstidentifizierung und meines Begehrens begleitet und kämpferischen Mut in mir geweckt. Ich hatte mich von einer bis dahin femininen Lesbe zur butch-begehrenden queeren Femme und Kämpferin für Transgender-Rechte entwickelt. In einer Gruppe von gleichgesinnten feministisch/queer/transgender-aktivistischen Studierenden, die sich in Sabine Harks Seminaren zu Queer-Theorie an der Uni Bremen zusammengefunden hatten, erstellten wir Protest-Flugblätter, die wir auf der Lesung verteilen wollten. Unser Protest richtete sich gegen die transgenderfeindliche Haltung der lesbisch-feministischen Veranstalterinnen des Frauenkulturzentrums belladonna in Bremen, die ankündeten, dass diese Lesung von *Träume in den erwachenden Morgen*³ nur für Frauen geöffnet sein sollte. Was für

3 Die Geschichte des Titels der deutschen Übersetzung von *Stone Butch Blues* verdient eine Anmerkung: Die erste Ausgabe von 1996 erschien im Verlag Krug & Schadenberg (»Der Verlag für lesbische Literatur«) unter dem entstellenden Titel *Träume in den erwachenden Morgen*. Diesen Fehler nach siebzehn Jahren möglicherweise einsehend, wurde der fünften Auflage der deutschen Übersetzung im Frühjahr 2013 der Titel *Stone Butch Blues. Träume in den erwachenden Morgen* gegeben. Ich halte diese anfängliche aktive Entnennung und Entkontextualisierung für durchaus symptomatisch für den Versuch, einen lesbisch-queer-trans-butch-femme und so viele weitere intersektionale Faktoren thematisierenden Roman für ein eindimensional-lesbisch gedachtes Lesepublikum einfacher konsumierbar zu machen. Dafür spricht auch, dass Krug & Schadenberg sich für Feinbergs zweiten Roman *Drag King Dreams* (2006) nicht interessierte und daher der Querverlag die deutsche Übersetzung dieses intersektiona-

eine unglaubliche Sinnwidrigkeit! Hatten die Veranstalterinnen das Buch, von dessen Erfolg und Popularität sie gerne profitieren wollten, überhaupt gelesen? Wohl kaum, denn dann müssten sie doch wissen, dass es hier just um das Hinterfragen von vermeintlichen Sicherheiten ging, was denn eigentlich eine ›Frau‹ ausmache, und um eine Kritik an genau jenen Dogmen, die vielen genderqueeren Lesben das Leben in lesbisch-feministischen Zusammenhängen, die das ›befreite Frausein‹ propagierten, oftmals so schwer bis unmöglich machten.

Damals in den Neunzigerjahren war z.B. der Zugang von trans Frauen zu feministischen Lesben/Frauen-Räumen wenn nicht sogar offiziell untersagt, dann doch zumindest heftig umstritten. Butches, die als zu männlich wahrgenommen wurden, mussten sich rechtfertigen oder gar ihr ›Frausein‹ unter Beweis stellen, um Eintritt zu Veranstaltungen zu erlangen. In den allermeisten feministischen Frauensammenhängen wurde Transsein noch nicht ansatzweise mitgedacht. Transgender und Genderqueerness als Themen der feministischen Auseinandersetzung tauchten in Deutschland Mitte bis Ende der Neunzigerjahre eigentlich nur in Queer-Theorien im akademischen Kontext auf, diese Diskurse hatten aber in die Politiken feministischer Projekte und lesbisch-schwuler Community-Zentren noch keinen Eingang gefunden.

Am Abend der Veranstaltung selbst, die außerordentlich gut besucht war, kam Minnie Bruce Pratt, die ihre*n Partner*in Leslie Feinberg begleitete, auf mich zu, um sich von mir eines unserer Protest-Flugblätter geben zu lassen. Als junge Femme und Aktivistin für Transgender-Rechte war ich ohnehin sehr schüchtern und in diesem Fall auch noch von einer Sprachbarriere zu behindert, um Minnie Bruce in diesem Moment erklären und versichern zu können, dass unsere Protest-Aktion sich nicht gegen Leslie und die Lesung als solche richtete, sondern ganz im Gegenteil gegen die Haltung der verständnislosen, transphoben Organisatorinnen dieser Veranstaltung. Zu dieser Zeit haben wir unsere Flugblätter nur in deutscher Sprache verfasst, während es heutzutage üblich ist, zumindest eine Übersetzung ins Englische anzubieten. Damals waren wir eben noch nicht so international organisiert, wir befanden uns noch vor dem Web 2.0 und dem damit verbundenen allgegenwärtigen Englisch. Ich konnte in dieser Situation nur hoffen, dass diese Konstellation nicht zu Missverständnissen auf Seiten von Minnie Bruce und Leslie führte. Denn nichts

le Verschränkungen von Identitäten und Politiken thematisierenden Buches herausbrachte. Auch der trans-butch-identifizierte Autor Ivan E. Coyote wurde von dem Verlag durchgängig als ›Autorin‹ ohne Unterstrich oder Sternchen und mit ausschließlich femininen Pronomen falsch geführt. Coyote wurde in seiner Autorenbiografie von Krug & Schadenberg zwar als queer, nicht jedoch seiner transmaskulinen Identifizierung entsprechend benannt und damit – über die Selbstidentifizierung des Autors hinweggehend – für ein scheuklappen-lesbisches Publikum vermarktbar gemacht (vgl. Krug & Schadenberg o. D.). Der Verlag existiert seit 2023 nicht mehr.

lag mir und meinen Mitstreiter*innen ferner, als einem gegen vielfältige Diskriminierungen kämpfenden transgener Butch/Femme-Paar das Leben noch schwerer zu machen.

Leslie Feinberg begann diese Lesung von *Stone Butch Blues* mit einer Begrüßung, die mich zutiefst berührte. Eine Ansprache, die mir – körperlich spürbar – durch Mark und Bein ging, ohne dass ich verstandesmäßig tatsächlich jedes einzelne Wort hätte erfassen können. Ich erwartete, Leslie auf Englisch sprechen zu hören, doch Englisch war das nicht. Es schien mir zuerst Deutsch zu sein. Aber auch Deutsch war es nicht. Als deutscher Muttersprachlerin kam es mir vor, als verstünde ich das meiste und gleichzeitig nahm ich eine sonderbare Differenz wahr. Ich hörte und spürte und ließ mich berühren, erst dann begriff ich, Leslie spricht auf Jiddisch zu ihrem*seinem deutschen Publikum! Mir lief ein Schauer über den Rücken. Bewunderung und Dankbarkeit angesichts dieser Geste erfasste mich. Eine nach Deutschland eingeladene jüdische Butch und Schriftsteller*in begrüßt und konfrontiert ihr Publikum mit der jiddischen Sprache. Der – für mich – sehr bewegende Brückenschlag schien erfreulicherweise weniger zu irritieren, als spontan zu funktionieren. Ich hatte das Gefühl, Zeugin eines wirklich außergewöhnlichen Ereignisses zu sein.

Doch ein anderer Versuch eines Brückenschlags misslang an diesem Abend auf erschreckende Weise. Leslie Feinberg erzählte vom Kampf für transgener Rechte in den USA. An das Bremer Publikum richtete sie*er dann die Frage, wer der Anwesenden sich als »Transgener Warrior« verstehe. Eine Welle der Irritation schien durchs Publikum zu laufen. Ein öffentliches Outing? Vielleicht drei Personen erhoben sich von ihren Plätzen und die Blicke der Masse – denn der große Saal war wirklich bis auf den letzten Platz und darüber hinaus gefüllt – richteten sich auf diese drei, die tatsächlich aufgestanden waren. Mir stockte das Herz. Dann folgte Leslies Frage »And who is going to stand up for transgender rights?«, die Dolmetscherin übersetzte ins Deutsche. Vermutlich war die Idee hinter dieser Aktion, dass nun der Rest des Saals sich auch erheben würde und die wenigen »Transgener Warriors« nicht mehr alleine stehen müssten, sondern in den Reihen ihrer Unterstützer*innen von gemeinschaftlicher Solidarität getragen würden.

Ich stand selbstverständlich auf und wartete darauf, dass sich, wenn vielleicht auch nicht alle, so doch ein Großteil der Zuhörer*innen um mich herum anschließen würde. Stattdessen wiederholte sich die Erfahrung des Alleinstehens: Vier, höchstens fünf Personen erhoben sich, ich eine unter ihnen. Und wieder richteten sich die Augen der sitzengebliebenen Masse auf uns wenige Ausgesonderte. Ich konnte nicht fassen, was da gerade geschah.

Es blieb mir nur zu spekulieren, warum diese Aktion auf so bestürzende Weise ins Leere lief. War sie zu überraschend? Wurde sie nicht verstanden in Hinsicht auf die politische Aktionsform, Menschen körperlich und damit zugleich auch symbolisch aufstehen zu lassen, was im deutschen Kulturraum unüblich ist? Dass der Stil dieser Aktion stark nordamerikanisch geprägt war, konnte Leslie wohl kaum wis-

sen. Oder wurde sie nicht verstanden in Hinsicht auf die inhaltliche und politische Thematik – hatte das Gros des Publikums ein rein cis-lesbisches Event erwartet und war mit der intersektionalen Herangehensweise oder vielmehr ganz spezifisch mit der transgener Thematik überfordert bzw. stand dieser sogar ablehnend gegenüber? Ich weiß es nicht. Aber so viel kann ich sagen: Es war kein gutes Gefühl, fast allein, als winzige und weithin sichtbare Minderheit dazustehen und begafft zu werden. Und sich fragen zu müssen, was mit der schweigenden bzw. sitzenbleibenden Mehrheit eigentlich los war – war sie ungerührt, ignorant oder sogar feindlich eingestellt?

Vor Kurzem las ich im Blog des Schriftstellers, Spoken-Word-Künstlers und trans Aktivistin Jayrôme C. Robinet, dass eine gemeinsame Bekannte von uns, die trans Aktivistin Lana K., damals auch in diesem übervollen Saal in Bremen war und wie ich eine der ganz wenigen Personen im Publikum war, die aufstanden. »Beunruhigend, verstörend und nicht lustig war es« (Robinet o. D.), sagt sie. Dieser Empfindungsbeschreibung kann ich mich nur anschließen. Damals kannte ich Lana noch nicht. Heute gibt es mir nachträglich Trost, ihre Geschichte zu lesen, aufgezeichnet und geteilt von Jayrôme. Danke an euch beide!

Wieder einmal lerne ich daraus: Auch wenn wir uns allein fühlen, es gibt doch immer andere, denen es ähnlich geht, die für das Gleiche kämpfen und aufstehen. Auch wenn wir manchmal erst zwanzig Jahre später davon erfahren, so haben wir doch ein Stück Geschichte miteinander geteilt.

Bei meiner Recherche für die Aktualisierung dieses Essays für den vorliegenden Sammelband bin ich zufällig auf eine Erwähnung von Leslie Feinberg auf dem Blog von belladonna e. V. gestoßen. Dort ist tatsächlich nachzulesen, dass das Bremer Kultur- und Bildungszentrum für Frauen Leslie Feinberg am 1. April 2019 zur »Frau des Monats April 2019« gekürt hat (belladonna o. D.). Auch wenn das Datum einen (absurd-grausamen) Aprilscherz nahelegen scheint, handelt es sich um einen völlig ernst gemeinten Eintrag. Dabei allein von der Unbelehrbarkeit der damals wie heute Verantwortlichen zu sprechen, würde einem solchen hemmungslos missbräuchlichen Vorgehen kaum gerecht werden. Leslie Feinbergs Aufrechterhalten ihrer*seiner Solidarität mit dem Begriff ›Lesbe‹ wird von den mit öffentlichen Mitteln geförderten TERFs⁴ zur symbolischen Auslöschung von trans Existenz ausgenutzt, wenn sie unter anderem formulieren, *Stone Butch Blues* gelte »als eine der wichtigsten Publikationen über lesbische Frauen« (ebd.). Die Hartnäckigkeit der Auslöschung von trans Widerstand durch Entnennung bei gleichzeitiger Aneignung der auf diese Weise für die eigenen Zwecke ›passend gemachten‹ Person mitsamt ihrem Star-Appeal benötigt eine rigidere Analyse und unsere trans-feministische Kritik. Am Beispiel von belladonna – Kultur, Bildung und Wirtschaft für Frauen e.V. zeigt sich, wie die trans-ausschließende, sich ›Feminismus‹ nennende Ideologie von

4 Trans exclusionary radical feminists.

TERFs nicht allein mit dem Ausschluss von trans Personen operiert, sondern auch mit deren Entstellung durch absichtsvolles Misgendern zum Zweck der Vereinnahmung von sorgsam herausgepickten, erwünschten Anteilen hervorragender trans Personen und deren Werken.

Meine zweite Begegnung mit Leslie Feinberg fand nur kurze Zeit später in Hamburg statt. Die Bücherhallen Hamburg hatten die*den Autor*in und Aktivist*in eingeladen, in ihrer Reihe »Lust auf Lesen – Schriftsteller [sic!] öffnen ihren Bücherschrank« zu sprechen und aus dem Roman *Stone Butch Blues* zu lesen. Diesmal hatte meine kleine Bremer Transgender-Protest-Gruppe sich vorbereitet und eine Dolmetscherin organisiert, die unser zu dieser Zeit revolutionäres Anliegen, die grundlegenden Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen feministischen und transgener Politiken aufzuzeigen, für uns übersetzte und im Vorfeld der Lesung den persönlichen Kontakt zu Leslie Feinberg herstellte. Leslie schüttelte uns allen die Hand und bestärkte uns in unserem Anliegen, für Trans/Gender-Rechte einzutreten – sehr höflich, sehr respektvoll und gleichzeitig auch sehr unverbindlich, auf Distanz bleibend, mögliche Konfrontationen auf nicht einschätzbarem Terrain scheuend. Leslie beeindruckte durch ihr*sein Auftreten im perfekt sitzenden, metallisch glänzenden Maßanzug, einer äußerlich undurchdringlichen Butch-Rüstung. Vor Beginn der Lesung, schritt sie*er den Raum ab, vorbei am seitlich vom Publikum aufgestellten Büchertisch, wo sie*er sich der Verkaufsperson zunickend persönlich davon überzeugte, dass alles in bester Ordnung war, und sich dabei gleichzeitig indirekt dem überaus gespannten Publikum in ihrer*seiner transgener Butch-Körperlichkeit präsentierte, näher als es danach für die weiter hinten platzierten Zuhörer*innen möglich gewesen wäre. Ich ließ meine Blicke durch das Hamburger Publikum schweifen und als selbst mehr oder weniger frisch erwachte Femme werde ich nie den Anblick der einzigen anderen von mir als Femme lesbaren Person im Publikum vergessen. Sie hatte sich mit einer Perlenkette in Choker-Länge geschmückt und ohne diese Perlenkette wäre sie mit ihrem Kurzhaarschnitt und der Unisex-Kleidung für mich unsichtbar im Meer der androgynen Lesben untergegangen.

Ohne Zweifel, Leslie Feinberg selbst aus ihrem*seinem Roman *Stone Butch Blues* lesen zu hören, war ein bewegendes Ereignis. Doch was mich noch mehr beeindruckte als die eigentliche Lesung war Leslies Einleitung dazu. Dieser einführende Teil war die Antwort auf die Frage nach Feinbergs biografischem Verhältnis zu öffentlichen Büchereien, denn die Veranstaltungsreihe der Hamburger Bücherhallen fragte eingeladene Autor*innen nach deren persönlicher Beziehung zu Büchern und Bibliotheken.

Leslie Feinberg stammte aus einer US-amerikanischen, jüdischen Arbeiter*innenfamilie. Geboren wurde sie*er 1949 in Kansas City im Staat Missouri, aber aufgewachsen ist sie*er in Buffalo, einer Industriestadt im Norden des Staates New York, nahe der kanadischen Grenze. In Hamburg erzählte Leslie ihre*seine persönliche

Bildungsgeschichte im Hinblick auf ihren*seinen Zugang zu emanzipatorischem Lesestoff, der für sie*ihn als Teenager*in aus der Arbeiter*innenklasse besonders erschwert war. Dementsprechend war es für Leslie eine späte und deswegen umso höher geschätzte Errungenschaft, sich den Zugang zu einer öffentlichen Bibliothek qua Ausleihausweis in der Stadtbibliothek von Buffalo, N.Y., zu erkämpfen. Ihre*seine Schilderung machte die große – bis hin zu lebensrettende – Bedeutung von emanzipatorischer Literatur für minorisierte junge Menschen anschaulich, insofern Literatur die Möglichkeit zur Selbstfindung, Spiegelung und Politisierung bieten kann.

Ich weiß noch genau, wie berührend ich diesen Teil der Veranstaltung empfand. Selbst als queeres und wissensdurstiges Kind aus einer nicht-akademischen Familie stammend, konnte ich den jugendlichen Kampf um Zugang zu Bildung durch das Erlangen eines öffentlichen Bibliotheksausweises und die damit verbundenen Unsicherheiten und Minderwertigkeitsgefühle schmerzhaft nachempfinden. Für mich war Leslies Geschichte eine in dieser Form bislang ungehörte Geschichte, die Queerness, Klassenzugehörigkeit und Zugang zu Bildung in einen Zusammenhang brachte und mich dadurch tief mit ihr*ihm verband.

Literatur bietet Identifizierungs- und Stärkungsmöglichkeiten für junge Menschen, die als Freaks oder Perverse stigmatisiert werden, weil sie aus den Geschlechter- und Sexualitätsnormen ihres sozialen Umfeldes herausfallen. Aus solchen Ausgrenzungserfahrungen oder auch einfach dem fortgesetzten Erleben des eigenen Andersseins resultieren oft Gefühle von Isolation und Entfremdung, wodurch ein besonderes Bedürfnis nach Spiegelung und Anerkennung entstehen kann. Lesend lässt sich erfahren, ›du bist nicht die*der Einzige‹, ›du bist nicht allein‹. Darum besitzt Literatur das enorm wichtige Potenzial, an den Rand gedrängten Personen eine Spiegelungsmöglichkeit zu bieten, Differenzen anzuerkennen und Raum für gesellschaftlich Marginalisierte zu schaffen.

Auch in dieser Hinsicht sind die Bedeutung und die Auswirkungen von Leslie Feinbergs Werk auf unsere Leben, unser Denken und die politischen Kämpfe von Queers, Butches, Femmes und trans Leuten aller Geschlechter kaum zu überschätzen. Ich verneige mich voller Dankbarkeit.

Der US-amerikanische Sänger und Schriftsteller Lynn(ee) Breedlove schrieb in einer fiktiven Nachricht an Leslie Feinberg:

Liebe_r Leslie Feinberg,

als ich dir zum ersten Mal 1993 auf den Seiten von *Stone Butch Blues* begegnete, da sagtest du, es wäre nicht deine eigene Lebensgeschichte. Aber es war unsere.

Alles Liebe,

Lynnee (Breedlove 2014, Übersetzung S. F.)⁵

Die Femmes und Butches, Queers und trans Leute meiner Generation und auf dieser Seite des Atlantiks konnten nicht ganz dasselbe behaupten wie Lynnee. Jahrzehnte und ein Ozean lagen zwischen uns, aber unsere Herzen empfanden mit ihr*ihm. Direkt nach Leslies Tod schrieb Lynn Breedlove:

Du hast meine Welt ohne Schnörkel aufgezeichnet, geradlinige Wahrheit, nicht-erzähltes Leben, die Poesie der Maskulinität und der Frauen, die sie verstanden, die mich geformt haben, uns Niedergeschmetterte, die zurückschlagen, aufstehen, mit allen Teilen, dem Hass aus dem Weg gehen, der Liebe nachjagen. Wie Gewalt lesbar machen, über etwas hinwegkommen, einen Punkt auf einer Linie finden, auf dem eine*r stehenbleiben kann, eine ganze Generation inspirieren und es an sich vorbeiziehen lassen, damit es immer ein Zuhause gibt, einen Orientierungspunkt, einen Elternteil, der Verständnis hatte. Danke, dass du uns gezeigt hast, wie man Schatzkarten aufzeichnet. Eine sternenklare Reise. (ebd., Übersetzung S. F.)⁶

Danke Lynnee, danke Leslie.

Literatur

belladonna – Kultur, Bildung und Wirtschaft für Frauen e. V. (o. D.) »Frau des Monats April 2019: Leslie Feinberg«, *belladonna blog*. <https://belladonna-bremen.de/historische-frau-april-2019/> (letzter Zugriff am 07.03.2024).

Breedlove, L. (2014) o. T., *Facebook*. <https://www.facebook.com/lynnbreedlove/> (letzter Zugriff am 07.03.2024).

Feinberg, L. (1993) *Stone Butch Blues*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand.

5 Lynn Breedloves Facebook-Beitrag vom 18.11.2014: »dear leslie feinberg. when i first met you in 93 on the page. stone butch blues, you said it wasn't your life story. but it was ours. love, lynnee.«

6 Ebd.: »mapped my world without flourish, straight line truth, untold life, poetry of masculinity and the women who got it, who shaped me, us crushed, bashing back, standing up, all the parts, dodging hate, chasing love. how to inlay violence, move along, find a point on a line you can stay, inspire a generation and let it rush past you, so there will always be home, true north, a parent who understood. thank you for showing us treasure map-making. starry travels.«

- (1996) *Träume in den erwachenden Morgen*. Berlin: Krug & Schadenberg.
- (2006) *Drag King Dreams*. New York: Carroll & Graf.
- (2008) *Drag King Träume*. Berlin: Querverlag.
- Fuchs, S. (2020) »Sternenklare Reise. Eine Reminiszenz an Leslie Feinberg, in Dankbarkeit«, in: Fuchs, S. (Hg.) *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren*. Berlin: Querverlag, S. 344–354.
- Krug & Schadenberg (o. D.) »Autorinnen«, *Verlag Krug & Schadenberg*. <https://www.krugschadenberg.de/autorinnen-bei-krug-und-schadenberg/> (letzter Zugriff am 06.03.2024).
- Robinet, J. C. (o. D.) »Ein Hoch auf...! Lana K.«, *Jayrôme C. Robinet*. <https://jayromeaufdeutsch.wordpress.com/ein-hoch-auf/lana-k/> (letzter Zugriff am 07.03.2024).
- Sönsler Breen, M. (2010) »Narratives of Queer Desire«, *GLBTQ. An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, & Queer Culture*. www.glbtqarchive.com/essays/breen_narratives.pdf (letzter Zugriff am 07.03.2024).

“Shake up imaginations and develop alternatives”¹

The Reception and Translation of *Stone Butch Blues* in France

Marina Allal

This novel by Leslie Feinberg is a cult book, a unique and moving reading experience. We are happy that it has finally been translated into a beautiful edition, we have been waiting 25 years for this event.² (Violette & Co via Hystériques & AssociéEs 2019)

Leslie Feinberg’s work, which is a reference in queer literature in the United States and beyond, has not received the welcome it deserved in France for a long time – until the last few years. This is evidenced by the very late translation, in 2019, of her landmark novel *Stone Butch Blues*. However, *Stone Butch Blues* is not without many aspects that could appeal to a French-speaking audience. Let’s think about its queer and feminist perspective, its intersectional scope and its links with autofiction. Successful French writers such as Annie Ernaux, Didier Eribon and Edouard Louis also trace the trajectory of working-class women or homosexuals in their autofictional narratives. However, where Annie Ernaux’s and Edouard Louis’ narratives insist on a detailed description of the working-class family environment from which they come, it is more particularly the world of the factory, the fractures and the struggles it engenders, that Leslie Feinberg describes in *Stone Butch Blues*, as well as the weight of the stigmatizing gaze of society on the protagonist Jess. It is only in the microcosm of the illegal lesbian bars in the 1960s and New York City in the 1970s, where

1 “Bousculer les imaginaires et développer des alternatives...” (Feinberg 2019: 8) All translations have been done by myself with help from DeepL.

2 “Ce roman de Leslie Feinberg est un livre culte, une expérience de lecture unique et bouleversante. Nous sommes heureuses qu’il soit enfin traduit en français, dans une très belle édition, cela faisait 25 ans que nous attendions cet évènement.” (Violette & Co via Hystériques & AssociéEs)

the protagonist is able to develop an identity liberated from the weight of the heteronormative shackles. The reference to autofiction³ is not insignificant here. Even if *Stone Butch Blues* does not correspond to this type of narrative, it contains many elements summarized by Leslie Feinberg himself in his afterword to the 2003 edition with this sentence: “Never underestimate the power of fiction to tell the truth.” (Feinberg 2014: 337)

In spite of all these elements likely to interest a French-speaking public, why is the reception of *Stone Butch Blues* in France so late? France, let us recall, where Olympe de Gouges published her *Declaration of the Rights of Women* in 1793 and Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* in 1949. This is the question I want to answer in the next pages, trying to understand which factors could have blocked the French reception, translation and publication of *Stone Butch Blues*, and what at last has led to a new reception of Leslie Feinberg’s work in France in the recent years. In order to better understand the stakes of the reception in France, it is important to look at the specific evolution of the feminist movement since the 1970s on the one hand, and the literary and intellectual field on the other; and the societal changes that have occurred in recent years. In this context, the stage performance of writer Virginie Despentes reading the ‘Letter to Theresa’, the novel’s opening chapter, in July 2018 in Avignon is particularly revealing of the beginnings of the new reception in France. Finally, I will briefly present the French edition of *Stone Butch Blues* and the challenges this book raises for translation.

1. Feminism in France since the 1970s

To better understand the factors that may have delayed the reception of *Stone Butch Blues* in France, it is worth looking at the evolution of the feminist movement after the 1960s and the dissension that emerged in the 1970s. The French feminist movement commonly referred to as the ‘second wave’ was born after May 1968. Angry at having been relegated to the margins of student struggles, French feminist women aimed to fight against the invisibility of women and for the equality of men and women within society. The Movement of Women’s Liberation (*Mouvement de libération des femmes*, MLF) created at that time is characterized on the one hand by its rejection of heterogeneity in the meetings and on the other hand by an inventive and provocative activism of which we retain in particular certain actions and key sentences like “One man out of two is a woman” or “There is one more unknown than the Soldier, it is his woman” (Pavard, Rochefort and Zancarini-Fournel 2020: 492–409). These two sentences summarize well the conflicts within the second wave

3 On autofiction cf. Grell 2014.

French feminism and the questions that quickly emerged: Should the French feminist movement seek the equality of women by considering their plurality? Or should it be based on a homogeneous, idealized conception of women in opposition to men? The proponents of French universalist feminism, the dominant movement within the MLF at that time, insisted on the importance of an equality that does not deny the difference of the sexes, even celebrating it in order to put forward the 'woman', the feminine writing as a counterweight to an oppressive patriarchal world. Born of this movement strongly marked by Lacanian-inspired psychoanalysis, Antoinette Fouque⁴ soon founded the publishing house *des femmes* and the bookshops of the same name (ibid.: 505–506). She even went so far as to buy the rights to the name 'MLF – Women's Liberation Movement', the destiny she aimed at from then on.

Facing this idealized conception of the woman, the materialist feminism insisted for their part on the structures that founded the oppression of women, as, for example, heteronormativity according to writer and essayist Monique Wittig. This approach was far from unanimous within the MLF, creating increasingly strong internal dissension until their break-up at the end of the 1970s (Eloit 2020: 142–143). Thereafter Monique Wittig decided to exile to the United States, where she continued to develop very fruitful theses, but remained massively rejected by the French feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. According to them, Monique Wittig's thought, insisting on the important role of the lesbians in the liberation of women, was 'separatist' insofar as it threatened the unity of women in their fight for their liberation and equal rights (ibid.: 142–144).

It's worth noting that these debates between universalists and separatists were not limited to French feminists. They can also be found in the United States with some differences. In Feinberg's novel, there are several references to the rejection of butches and femmes within the American feminist movement of the 1960s/1970s and the movement's distance from the considerations of working-class people. In *Stone Butch Blues*, Theresa and Jess are confronted by a radical gay and feminist movement that rejects butches who are perceived as machos and femmes who are regarded as alienated: "They told her she was brainwashed. 'I'm so bad,' Theresa thumped the table. "They told me that butches were male chauvinist pigs!" (Feinberg 2014: 144). Finally, according to Theresa, the rejection of butches and femmes stems from a conception of 'woman' constructed in opposition to 'man' as the embodiment of patriarchal power, without any analysis of the mechanisms of this power: "Why? She

4 Antoinette Fouque is considered part of the 'differentialist' movement within the MFL. Differentialists emphasize 'feminine specificity' as the driving force behind the renewal of humanity, rather than the equality of men and women in the Beauvoirian tradition. Their concept of 'women' is as uniform as that of the 'universalists', and therefore opposed to the demands of lesbian feminists who want their experiences and needs to be given more recognition (Pavard, Rochefort and Zancarini-Fournel 2020: 402–403).

thought about the question. 'I think it's because they draw a line – women on one side and men on the other. So women they think look like men are the enemy. And women who look like me are sleeping with the enemy. We're too feminine for their taste.'" (ibid.:144-145)

Within French feminism, the claim to universalism was gradually accompanied by a French withdrawal and a rejection of what was seen as 'American' particularism (Eloit 2020: 144–145). Then came the fear of an imported American gender war (Fassin 2007: 15). In the next decades, this perception has delayed the publication and reception of major Anglophone works on gender, including the works of Monique Wittig and Judith Butler: Monique Wittig's essay *The Straight Mind*, published in 1991 in the United States, where she decrees that "[l]esbians are not women" (Wittig 1990: 57),⁵ was only published in French by Editions Balland in 2001 in the LGBTI* collection *Le Rayon*. Philosopher Judith Butler's most well-known book, *Gender Trouble*, published in 1990 in the United States, was only published in 2005 in France. As part of the inward-looking attitude of the French academic world, gender studies also took a long time to become part of the French academic scene (Pavard, Rochefort and Zancarini-Fournel 2020: 558).

Since then, the circulation of ideas has accelerated and only few French feminists still reject what they sometimes complacently call 'gender theory'. Judith Butler is regularly invited to conferences in France and the twentieth anniversary of Monique Wittig's death in 2023 has given rise to many laudatory articles in the French press (Wittig Studies 2023). And one can even find *La pensée straight* at the still existing bookshop *des femmes*.

Contrary to the prevailing monolithism of the 1970s and 1980s, French feminism after 2010 is characterized by a plurality of approaches, where activists from the suburbs of 'Ni putes ni soumises' (neither whores nor submissive) rub shoulders with the *femen* or *La Barbe* (The Beard), campaigning for parity and against sexism in the public sphere (Pavard, Rochefort and Zancarini-Fournel 2020: 625–643).

The virulent debates around marriage for all in 2013 helped federate LGBTI* struggles against virulent homophobic reactions from Catholic movements close to the extreme right. A good ten years later, it is no longer fashionable to openly display one's opposition to marriage for all in France. But while the former French

5 "What is woman? Panic, general alarm for an active defense. Frankly, it is a problem that the lesbians do not have because of a change of perspective, and it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women. P.S.: No more is any woman who is not in a relation of personal dependency with a man." (Wittig 1990: 57)

Prime Minister of 2024, Gabriel Attal, has no qualms about coming out as gay, homophobic and transphobic violence continues and is even on the rise.⁶

2. The literary field and the publishing of *Stone Butch Blues* in France

Stone Butch Blues is the voice of someone who is living oppressions, resistance and pride. (Feinberg 2014: 359)

All the above mentioned advances have constituted a particularly favorable ground for the reception of *Stone Butch Blues* in France, where it was already circulating in English in a restricted milieu.⁷ How did this book come to be translated and published in France? What were the determining factors? I would like to take a brief look at how the publishing industry has evolved in recent years, given the economic situation on the one hand, and the importance of social issues on the other.

These last few years, the French publishing world has been characterized by an enormous quantity of publications, but also by the disappearance or the repurchase of small publishing houses like Editions Balland, which has published *The Straight Mind* (*La pensée straight*) by Monique Wittig in 2001.⁸ And the constraints of the market make many publishers more cautious. The publishing world, which is still highly concentrated in Paris, is hardly conducive to the publication of niche texts with print runs of just a few thousand copies (Grunenwald 2021: 21–22).

Simultaneously, feminism, long perceived as 'unsellable' by many publishers, is no longer a taboo subject in France, especially since the deflagration caused by the #MeToo movement after 2017: "[W]e had to argue with the publisher to be able to write 'feminist' on the back cover. No one was interested, it was a repellent. Twenty years later, nobody can tell you that anymore", said Virginie Despentes, author of the feminist essay *King Kong Theory* and the *Vernon Subutex* trilogy in an interview (Charon 2018).

6 In its annual report 2023, the association SOS homophobia notes a 28 % increase in LGBTI-phobic physical assaults between 2021 and 2022, or one every two days in France. Transphobic acts have also risen sharply (SOS homophobie 2023).

7 Only French speakers with a good command of English had access to the novel before its French translation, as with many other feminist or queer works whose lack of a French translation Noémie Grunenwald notes in her essay on feminist translation (Grunenwald 2021: 21).

8 The Editions Balland website states that Sabine and Marc Larivé acquired the publishing house in 2014. The LGBTI* collection *Le Rayon*, which was created in 1999 by writer Guillaume Dustan and featured works by Monique Wittig, Dorothy Allison, Sam Bourcier and Paul B. Preciado, had already ceased publication in 2003 (Naguschewski 2021: 254–257).

It is in this context, which is both favorable to the circulation of ideas and precarious in terms of publishing, that a new reception of *Stone Butch Blues* has begun in France, leading to the French translation of this novel by a collective of volunteer translators. Thanks to a fundraising campaign,⁹ the French edition was published by Hystériques & AssociéEs in 2019 after years of work.¹⁰ Hystériques & AssociéEs is a small, independent and committed publishing house that publishes texts that have left their mark on the feminist, lesbian and/or trans movement, including texts by Leslie Feinberg, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Dorothy Allison, and it also organizes events around published works.¹¹ In the next chapter, I will discuss the French translation of *Stone Butch Blues* and the strategic choices made by the translation collective. However, for now, I will focus on the context in which the French edition was published. This context echoes the themes of Leslie Feinberg's novel and gives it renewed relevance.

At the same time that the translators collective was finalizing the translation that was finally published in 2019, the writer Virginie Despentes was invited by David Bobée and Rébecca Chaillon to the Avignon Theater Festival in 2018 for a feminist staged reading during which she read, among other things, Jess' letter to Theresa with which *Stone Butch Blues* begins. This reading of a French translation of the novel's first chapter was a great success and gave rise to a show called *Viril* with the actress Béatrice Dalle and the rap artist Casey, performed in many French-speaking venues until 2022 (Terriennes, Mourgere and Charrier 2021).

The show, which presents feminist texts from Valerie Solanas to Paul B. Preciado or Audre Lorde that were sometimes unknown to the general public and often combative, was characterized by its intersectional perspective and its questioning of masculinity (Charon 2018). In doing so, the show not only deconstructed gender, but implicitly contained a call to fight, to resist oppression and reject all forms of gender violence. As Virginie Despentes pointed out in her aforementioned interview with the newspaper *Libération*, the call was made audible by the #MeToo explosion in France, enabling free expression.¹²

9 The appeal for funding can be found on HelloAsso (2019).

10 The 2014 edition of *Stone Butch Blues* is available for free online in its 2019 French translation at both LeslieFeinberg.net and Hysteriques et AssociéEs. A printed version of the first French edition is now sold out. A new edition was published in October 2024, but is not yet available online.

11 This newest feminist movement in France has adopted a more intersectional and activist approach. It is characterized by the renaissance of feminist and queer places of exchange, such as the Violette & Co bookshop, which reopened in 2023, and the emergence of 'post #MeToo magazines' like *La Déferlante. La revue des révolutions féministes*.

12 Pavard, Rocherfort and Zancarini-Fournel insist on the #MeToo 'moment' which "evokes both an event, an emergence, and its inscription in a longer period of political, social and cultural transformation." (2020: 666)

Fig. 1: Virginie Despentes reads the words of Leslie Feinberg.
 Source: franceinfo, 16 July 2018, © S. Jouve/Culturebox.



One could object that #MeToo has largely remained focused on heterosexuals and has only had a marginal impact on LGBTI* (Pavard, Rochefort and Zancarini-Fournel 2020: 670). But by highlighting the words of victims of abuse, revealing the system put in place by harassers to prevent their victims from seeking redress, and uncovering the impunity that perpetrators have long enjoyed, #MeToo underscores the structural violence of patriarchal and heteronormative power that Leslie Feinberg's book denounces. Whether it's the mistreatment of women workers in the Buffalo factory or the homophobic and transphobic violence endured by Jess and his fellow workers, the evocation of violence hanging like a sword of Damocles over the protagonist is deeply embedded in the story. In this respect, the French edition of *Stone Butch Blues* and Virginie Despentes' public reading in Avignon extend the #MeToo moment to all victims of sexual and gender-based violence, including LGBTI* and racialized people. Virginie Despentes emphasized the universal scope of *Stone Butch Blues*, starting from a singular experience at the heart of the story: "It's both very specific: lesbian, proletarian, butch in 50s America. But once you read it, any rascal can understand what you're talking about. It's universal." (Charon 2018)

In the first chapter, the letter to Theresa, the book insists that the violence is suffered collectively, but each of us must face it individually, often helpless: "I remember when we got outside to the parking lot you stopped and put your hands lightly on my shoulders and avoided my eyes. You gently rubbed the bloody places on my shirt and said, 'I'll never get these stains out.'" (Feinberg 2014: 5) In the last chapter, the book closes with the butches and other LGBTI* speaking out publicly at a demonstration in New York and Jess realizing that she is neither alone nor powerless in the face of this violence:

“I know about getting hurt”, I said. “But I don’t have much experience talking about it. And I know about fighting back, but I mostly know how to do it alone. [...] I don’t know what it would take to really change the world. But couldn’t *we* be bigger? Isn’t there a way we could help fight each other’s battles so that we’re not always alone?” (ibid.: 324)

This desire to stop suffering, to denounce and organize in the face of oppression, is one of the mainsprings of the feminist revival that followed #MeToo, also in France, where people from all walks of life now recognize themselves.

At the crossroads of fictional narrative and activism, the topicality of *Stone Butch Blues* is no longer questioned in France in 2018–2019. In this sense, by its militancy, its will to change society and not to be satisfied with withdrawal or individual solutions, this novel continues to inspire us.

3. The challenge of translating *Stone Butch Blues* into French

If the socio-cultural conditions of the early 2020s were particularly favorable for publishing *Stone Butch Blues* in French, translating it was not without challenges. As indicated in the previous section, the translation and publication are the result of many years of work, in keeping with Leslie Feinberg’s non-commercial activist approach reaffirmed in the 2014 edition (Feinberg 2014: 352–357). In it, Feinberg provided guidelines for translation (ibid.: 358–359), which the translation collective has scrupulously respected, only adding a note regarding the encountered difficulties of translation and the work process. In this section, I will review certain aspects of the French translation of *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg 2019: 5–9). This will include the translation of community-specific terms and the syntactic differences between the source and target languages.

Feinberg’s story is at once deeply rooted in an era that shapes the characters, from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, a specific social environment, that of the Buffalo factory and then the New York printing workers, and a LGBTI* community, a community of butches and femmes especially, from underground bars to New York City Pride. These areas are reflected in the language used, which conveys a range of associations in English. For the French translation of terms specific to the LGBTI* environment, around which Jess gravitates, the translation collective often chose terms used in the corresponding communities in France (Grunenwald 2021: 59–62).¹³ This is especially true for ‘butch’ and ‘femme’, which are translated

13 Grunenwald, editor at Hystériques & AssociéEs, who has translated several queer-feminist works into French, recommends using community-approved terms for translation. Grunenwald (2021: 59) emphasizes the ephemeral nature of certain choices.

in French as 'butch' and 'fem' (used in France to avoid confusion with the French term *femme*, meaning 'woman') when they are nouns.¹⁴ In the transition from one language to the other, certain expressions such as 'butch' have lost the negative connotation they originally had in English before being re-appropriated by the minorities themselves, giving them a positive meaning. The residual negative connotation of 'butch' is thus largely absent from the French term 'butch'. In order to recall these remaining negative connotations in English and to place the terms in their socio-historical context, the translation editing collective has added footnotes explaining the original meaning and evolution of the specific English terms and suggesting alternatives to the French term retained for translation:

Butch: lesbian using codes of masculinity in her appearance or behavior. In English, butcher means *butcher (boucher)* and can refer to a particularly virile man. The term has been used as a lesbophobic insult but also as an identity claimed by masculine-looking lesbians. Butches transgress gender norms by adopting behaviors usually reserved for men. They are particularly visible as lesbians, and therefore particularly exposed to repression and violence. In French, the closest terms would be *camionneuse* or *jules*. (Feinberg 2019: 23)

While the term *camionneuse* might have better captured this negative connotation, 'butch' was the obvious choice given the butch/femme dynamic at the heart of the book, the current usage of the term, and the title of the book itself. The problem of the specific connotations of terms in English and French is particularly evident in the translation of 'he-she'. This term, which Jess uses in the story to refer to herself,¹⁵ has a negative connotation because it was originally used to stigmatize trans or non-binary people, or anyone who didn't fit the normative criteria of gender. The sequence in the second chapter, in which Jess' parents disdainfully explain that the person they are referring to is none other than a "he-she", illustrates just how negative the term can be in its original usage: "What's a he-she?" My sister demanded to know. I was interested in the answer too. 'It's a weirdo,' my father laughed. 'Like a beatnik.' [...] Suddenly a wave of foreboding swept over me. I felt nauseous and dizzy." (Feinberg 2014: 15)

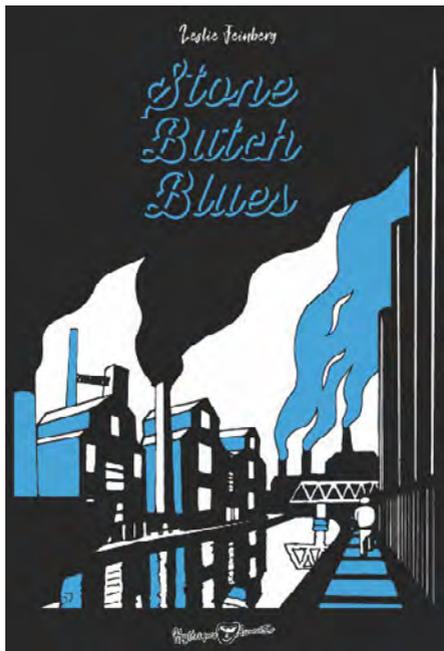
The term chosen for the French translation *il-elle* (Feinberg 2019: 22), which is syntactically and semantically very close to 'he-she', has no negative connotation in

14 The translation collective made case-by-case choices for the adjectives 'butch' and 'femme', reflecting the meaning of these terms in the precise context of the story, as Grunewald shows: "young femme gay men" has been translated as 'young effeminate gays', since in this case 'femme' is used as an adjective and refers to an effeminate man." (Grunewald 2021: 62)

15 For example: "All of us he-shes were mad as hell when we heard you got fired because you wouldn't let the superintendent touch your breasts." (Feinberg 2014: 2, italics in original) "I marveled at the idea that straight people could stand up for me, or for any he-she." (ibid.: 99)

French. It is reminiscent of *iels*, a neologism used in French that entered the Petit Robert French dictionary in 2021 as an inclusive pronoun (Bimbenet 2021), corresponding to the English ‘they’/‘dey’ or ‘ze’. These choices, as well as the different connotations of the terms in different languages in light of their historicity, show how difficult it is to translate *Stone Butch Blues*, as with many other works that refer to a specific environment that remains dependent on the usage in force at a given time (Grunenwald 2021: 52).

Fig. 2: Cover of the French edition of *Stone Butch Blues*, published in 2019 by Hystériques & AssociéEs.



Another difficulty in translating *Stone Butch Blues*, highlighted by the translation collective in its “Notes”, is the relative neutrality of the English language, which the author deliberately pushes to the extreme in this first-person narrative and cannot be translated into French as it is: “the French translation forces us to mark the masculine or feminine all the time in this first-person narrative” (Feinberg 2019: 8).

These linguistic peculiarities are clearly visible when comparing the original *Stone Butch Blues* version with its French translation, for example in the following excerpts (the peculiarities are italicized):

I *hung back* for a moment. Her smile told me she already knew she had my complete attention. Even when we were filling out forms in the foreman's office, I still felt *floored and flustered*. Theresa never stopped affecting me just that much. The foreman noticed, but he must not have cared because he *assigned me* to work on the line near her. (Feinberg 2014: 127)

Je *suis resté* à la traine un moment. Son sourire me montrait qu'elle savait déjà qu'elle avait toute mon attention. Même après, pendant qu'on remplissait les formulaires dans le bureau du contremaître, je me sentais encore toute *confuse et troublée*. Theresa n'a jamais cessé d'avoir cet effet-là sur moi. Le contremaître l'a remarqué, mais il n'a pas dû y prêter attention parce *qu'il m'a affectée* à la rangée juste à côté d'elle. (Feinberg 2019: 191)

In this passage from *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess' gender, as the first-person narrator, is not specifically characterized in English. Only Theresa and the foreman are assigned a specific gender through the use of the personal pronouns 'she' and 'he' and the possessive adjective 'her'. Jess meanwhile is referred to by 'I' which is a gender-neutral personal pronoun. In French, gender is not limited to personal pronouns, but also applies to adjectives, past participles, and nouns, requiring the translation collective to assign an exact gender to Jess. To avoid an overly binary interpretation of the book, the collective made the following choice: While in the first sentence, the past participle remains in the masculine (*resté*), it is then agreed in the feminine (*confuse et troublée*). The fact that the feminine agreement refers to Jess' feelings, while the masculine agreement refers to an action, is purely coincidental; the collective deliberately chose to vary the agreements throughout the book:

To that end, we used both the female and male gender when Jess was talking about herself/himself, varying the proportions depending on the moment in the story. When other people address Jess, we've used the gender in which they perceive him/her. (Feinberg 2019: 8; see also Grunenwald 2021: 63–64)

The final agreement of the past participle *affectée* thus emphasizes the point of view of one character, the foreman. By asking Jess to stand in the women's line, he is making an undeniable gender assignment. Depending on the passage, the adjectives and past participles used to describe Jess are sometimes feminine and sometimes masculine in the French translation. These shifting agreements throughout the book reflect Jess' hesitations and shifts, and also play cleverly with the vagaries of the French language, sometimes using proximity agreements and changing generic plurals. Summarizing the approach taken by the translation collective, Grunenwald concludes: "This can be seen as a militant adaptation that deliberately upsets the habits of the target audience and the language. But it's also a deontological desire not to impose French distortions on the text written by Feinberg." (2021: 64)

This translation strategy allows for a nuanced portrayal of the focus in the book, highlighting Jess' perception of himself and how others perceive him. This emphasizes the contrast between Jess and the world around him, and the constructed and imposed nature of gender assignment. It is worth noting that Jean Genet had already employed this technique in 1948 in his book *Notre Dame des Champs*, in the story of the character Divine, using both feminine and masculine pronouns (Louar 2008).

As demonstrated, the decisions made by the translator collectives are not easy; they derive both from the singularity of Leslie Feinberg's novel and from the desiderata of the French language at a given moment, highlighting certain problems inherent in the translation of queer and feminist texts (Grunenwald 2021: 63–64, 110). The translation of Jess' changing chords serves to indicate how the protagonist is perceived by those around him and to convey his variable feelings and absence of a fixed gender identity. These translation choices may appear to us to be subjective and historically marked – at the end, they reveal an approach of feminist translation:¹⁶

There is never a definitive translation, and a translator always makes choices. Refusing to have the 'final word', feminist translologies destabilize, and even overturn established translological paradigms. These paradigms are anchored in a gendered conceptualization of creation and language, which hierarchizes and de-politicizes the translation process. (Mozziconacci, Thomas and Saïdi 2020: 6–7)

4. Conclusion

Translating as feminists involves reclaiming texts that have been taken from the feminist movement. This is not just to assert motherhood, but primarily to situate them within a specific history and movement, allowing them to regain their voice and present it to an audience that will appreciate it fully. (Grunenwald 2021: 49)

The challenges faced during the French translation of *Stone Butch Blues* are not solely due to the inherent translation difficulties between French and English. They also highlight the fact that France is lagging behind in developing a more inclusive and

16 Feminist translation aims to make feminist and queer works accessible to a wider French-speaking audience while highlighting the challenges of translating from the source language to the target language (Mozziconacci, Thomas and Saïdi 2020).

neutral language. This is despite Monique Wittig having written a novel in 1964 that extensively used the neutral pronoun *on* in *L'Opoponax*.

The translation collective's choices for the French version of *Stone Butch Blues* demonstrate a desire to introduce this work to a French-speaking audience. Through a comprehensive set of annotations, the aim is to familiarize readers who may be unfamiliar with the world of butches and femmes or the historical context described in Feinberg's book, while also making the translation choices more transparent. At the same time, the translation emphasizes the constructed and non-immutable nature of gender assignment, taking a stance in current debates around gender. The translation and French edition update Feinberg's narrative and attest to the evolution of feminism in France over the past 30 years.

From the first edition of *Stone Butch Blues* in 1993 to its French publication in 2019, more than a quarter of a century has passed. During this time, the reception of Anglo-Saxon works that openly criticize the heteronormative foundations of modern Western societies was largely held back by the gradual withdrawal of second wave French feminism. Additionally, there was a fear of importing American struggles that might challenge the gender balance supposedly unique to France. The #MeToo movement shattered the notion that was previously held, which is directly echoed in Leslie Feinberg's novel through the violence of the testimonies. Virginie Despentes' reading of the letter to Theresa as part of the *Viril* show is a clear example.

However, it is important to note that the first French translation and edition of *Stone Butch Blues* came into being thanks to militant, voluntary, and collective work, despite the more favorable context for the novel's reception. The non-commercial aspect of this book's translation and publication is a direct extension of the story itself. It calls for us to look beyond individual trajectories and focus on common struggles. The book blends fiction with reality: "This book that you hold in your hand is for us a jewel, a tribute to struggle, resistance and solidarity. Thanks to Leslie for giving us this magical text. The team that completed this edition" (Hystériques & AssociéEs 2018).

References

- Bimbenet, C. (2021) "Pourquoi Le Robert a-t-il intégré le mot 'iel' dans son dictionnaire en ligne?", *Le Robert*. <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/dis-moi-robert/raconte-moi-robert/mot-jour/pourquoi-le-robert-a-t-il-integre-le-mot-iel-dans-son-dictionnaire-en-ligne.html> (last accessed 29 March 2024).
- Charon, A. (2018) "Virginie Despentes: 'Il y a vingt ans, questionner la virilité à Avignon, c'était martien'", *Libération*. https://www.liberation.fr/theatre/2018/07/16/virginie-despentes-il-y-a-vingt-ans-questionner-la-virilite-a-avignon-c-etait-martien_1666905/ (last accessed 29 March 2024).

- Eloit, I. (2020) "Trouble dans le féminisme. Du 'Nous, les femmes' au 'Nous, les lesbiennes': genèse du sujet politique lesbien en France (1970–1980)", 20. & 21. *Revue d'histoire* 148(4), pp. 129–145.
- Fassin, E. (2007) "Résistance et réception: Judith Butler en France", *La revue lacanienne* 4(4), pp. 15–20.
- Feinberg, L. (2014) *Stone Butch Blues*. 20th Anniversary Author Edition, self-published. <https://www.lesliefeinberg.net/> (last accessed 29 March 2024).
- (2019) *Stone Butch Blues*. Paris: Hystériques & AssociéEs. <https://hysteriquesetassociees.org/lire-sbb/> (last accessed 7 February 2025).
- Grell, I. (2014) *Lautofiction*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Grunenwald, N. (2021) *Sur les bouts de la langue. Traduire en féministe/s*. Lille/Roubaie: La Contre Allée.
- HelloAsso (2019) "Stone Butch Blues (édition française)". <https://www.helloasso.com/associations/hysteriques-associees/collectes/stone-butch-blues-edition-francaise> (last accessed 29 March 2024).
- Hystériques & AssociéEs (2018) "Produire une version française de *Stone Butch Blues*...". <https://hysteriquesetassociees.org/2020/05/12/produire-une-version-francaise-de-stone-butch-blues/> (last accessed 29 March 2024).
- (2019) "Stone Butch Blues". <https://hysteriquesetassociees.org/sbb/> (last accessed 29 March 2024).
- (2020) "Traduire *Stone Butch Blues* en français...". <https://hysteriquesetassociees.org/2020/05/12/traduire-stone-butch-blues-en-francais/> (last accessed 29 March 2024).
- Louar, M. (2008) "Notre Dame du Queer ou du mauvais genre en traduction", *Palimpsestes* 78, pp. 121–134. <https://doi.org/10.4000/palimpsestes.78>.
- Mozziconacci, V., Thomas, H. and Saïdi, S. (2020) "Traduire en feminists", *GLAD!* 9, pp. 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4000/glad.2428>.
- Naguschewski, D. (2001) "Von der Gesellschaft ins Ghetto? Guillaume Dustan und die schwule Literatur in Frankreich", in: Naguschewski, D. and Schrader, S. (eds.) *Sehen, Lesen, Begehren. Homosexualität in französischer Literatur und Kultur*. Berlin: Tranvia Frey, pp. 251–272.
- Pavard, B., Rochefort, F. and Zancarini-Fournel, M. (2020) *Ne nous libérez pas, on s'en charge. Une histoire des féminismes de 1789 à nos jours*. Paris: La Découverte.
- SOS homophobie (2023) "Rapport sur les LGBTIphobies 2023". https://ressource.sos-homophobie.org/Rapports_annuels/Rapport_LGBTIphobies_2023.pdf (last accessed 20 May 2024).
- Terriennes, Mourgere, I. and Charrier, L. (2021) "Viril' ou la catharsis féministe de Virginie Despentes, Béatrice Dalle et Casey", *TV5 Monde*. <https://information.tv5monde.com/terriennes/viril-ou-la-catharsis-feministe-de-virginie-despente-s-beatrice-dalle-et-casey-32308> (last accessed 29 March 2024).

Wittig Studies (2023) "2023: Année Wittig". <https://etudeswittig.hypotheses.org/2023-annee-wittig> (last accessed 29 March 2024).

Wittig, M. (1990) "The Straight Mind", in: Ferguson, R. et al. (eds.) *Out There. Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 51–57.

Figures

Fig. 1: Virginie Despentes reads the words of Leslie Feinberg. Source: *franceinfo*, 16 July 2018, © S. Jouve/Culturebox. https://www.francetvinfo.fr/culture/spectacles/theatre/beatrice-dalle-et-virginie-despentes-defendent-leurs-convictions-sur-le-ring-davignon_3286699.html (last accessed 30 July 2024).

Fig. 2: Cover of the French edition of *Stone Butch Blues*, published in 2019 by Hystériques & AssociéEs. Source: <https://hysteriquesetassociees.org/sbb/> (last accessed 29 March 2024).

Translating Translanguage

Ylva Emel Karlsson

What is lost, what is found
in the cracks between words
Under the influence of
foreign tongues and hands

World for world
Try not to force truths
into ill-fitting clothes
but make up what
needs to be said

You said
Trans is a verb
And I can tell you
translation is
also a noun
with no gender

I am typing these words as June 2003 surges with Pride. What year is it now, as you read them? What has been won; what has been lost? I can't see from here; I can't predict. But I know this: You are experiencing the impact of what we in the movement take a stand on and fight for today. The present and the past are the trajectory of the future. But the arc of history does not bend towards justice automatically—as the great Abolitionist Frederick Douglass observed, without struggle there is no progress... That's what the characters in *Stone Butch Blues* fought for. The last chapter of this saga of struggle has not yet been written. (Feinberg 2014: 338)

Dear Leslie,

I have started translating your novel. It is the spring of 2020.¹ I don't know yet where this is going but I need you, which is why I write to you with these thoughts and questions.

Last summer I began translating articles from your series “Lavender and Red”.² I started rewriting them into poems. That summer of 2019, I really missed you. A prominent Marxist feminist in Sweden, not unlike some in the US and around Europe, joined ranks with right wing transphobes to question the queer feminist movement. They deemed it liberal, reduced it to identity politics and accused it of wanting to split the movement for gender equality and at the same time of diminishing or even erasing women. I soon realized that *Stone Butch Blues* is the text that I need to translate. A text we so desperately need in these times.

The local social insurance system forced me to leave an M.A. program in literary translation in the beginning of 2020—because I have been sick and unable to work more than a couple of hours a week since 2015. I tried to plead my case for them to allow me to go to school as rehabilitation and as a career change. They denied it, even though I was already admitted to the program. I do not take well to being told I am not allowed to do things by the state. So here we are. I am going to translate. And I am going to be very, very slow. Let's say that the Swedish tax-payers fund this translation.

I am a queer lesbian, chronically ill socialist in my mid-thirties. I have had the privilege of living most of my adult life with you as an inspiration, introduced to you by trans siblings who put *Stone Butch Blues* in my hands. In the sharpness and comfort of your texts I found a home. A place where, beyond decades, millions of miles or exact experiences, I found a space to breathe in spite of the surrounding demands of being either/or. Me and my growing group of queer comrades fought for socialism, immersed in a white, heterosexual left where our living conditions were denied and we were told we had no real relevance for the struggle. Your novel

1 This is a letter or a series of letters that I have continued to write to Leslie Feinberg throughout my translation of the book, from 2020 until 2024.

2 “Lavender and Red” (2004–2008) is an article series from the *Workers World* newspaper, in the intersection of socialist and LGBTQ movements (Feinberg 2017). I was at a summer camp when I started translating. This camp is a feminist, women-run collective, founded in the late 1970s, and kept alive through generations of hard-working collective efforts, funded only by the people there. I say people, and most of the old gang there only say ‘women’. At times, we loudly disagree with each other on trans rights at the camp, a few even on the very existence of trans people. I have chosen to involve myself there regardless, or perhaps also because of it. Of course, trans people have always been a part of its organizing, and the trans inclusionary feminists are in the majority. I try to think that it is, at worst, only a question of time, before the TERFs die out.

gave me the utopia of fiction, grown from the soil of your own life and the truths of so many others.

I look to you, an ancestor. An ancestor who dug deep for ancestors of your own in *Transgender Warriors* (1997) and like the Stone Butch protagonist Jess Goldberg, gleaned snippets of trans lives from old newspaper clippings and anthropology books.

You had to work hard to recover the rights to *Stone Butch Blues*, you went to court and paid thousands of dollars out of your own pocket. Then you gave it back to the workers and the oppressed people of the world. It is now free to download, and to buy as a print-on-demand, per your instructions (Feinberg 2014). Because of your translations agreement, it is free for anyone to translate and publish the book around the world, which also makes it impossible to buy and own translating rights for the novel. Still, I wanted to ask for your blessing, so I sent an email to Minnie-Bruce Pratt, your widow, who is in charge of your archive and any questions regarding the book. She said she was delighted to hear about it, and just told me to send two copies to your archive and a pdf to her email, once it is done.

The responsibility of translating this book, this legacy, is something that I take very seriously. This is in part because of my responsibility towards the Swedish queer working class community, whom I translate for, and partly because I feel a responsibility towards you. I wonder if you would approve of me, and of this work that I do. Somewhere you answer:

I agree to any translations that meet the following criteria: I give permission solely for translations of this 20th Anniversary Author's Edition of *Stone Butch Blues*. [...] The translation must be non-commercial, that is, be a print edition that is priced to meet only production cost and/or a digital edition that is a free on-line read. (ibid.: 358)

The revolutionary and anti-capitalist movements for social and economic justice have given me so much in life. I give this novel back, as a tiny handmade gift, flaws and all, to the workers and oppressed of the world. (ibid.: 353)

So, I try to take your word for it.

I would like to tell you a bit about the relationship between Swedish and English. In 2015, 'queer' was listed in the official Swedish Academy Dictionary. Unlike in German speaking countries, as well as French, Italian and Spanish³, which all have standardized dubbing since the old era of fascism in the 1940s, Swedish TV and cinema is only dubbed for children under the age of 13. Combined with internet and gaming, generations born from the 1970s and onward have been submerged in the English language from a young age, making Sweden a country where English is, by

3 With the exception of Mexico, where dubbing has been illegal since 2023.

many, considered a second language, and a lot of words from the English language are adopted into Swedish.

Swedish and the other Scandinavian languages are furthermore, like English, Germanic languages. So, the shoe fits very well. So well, in fact, that accidentally (and purposefully) mixing up language rules and regimes here is easy, and for many, can go unnoticed,⁴ continually edging Swedish closer and closer to English. It relieves me enormously that English and Swedish also share a common way of dealing with grammatical gender, unlike, say, German, Arabic and Roman languages. Meaning, when I translate *Stone Butch Blues*, I do not have to consider the gendered implications that my fellow translator colleagues in other countries struggle with. The text is not littered with feminine and masculine, nouns are in common gender. So: I do not have to write that Jess works as a *tipógraf-o* or *tipógraf-a*. Inanimate objects are not masculine or feminine either. Your life, as well as the life of Jess, constructed in relation to the English language, could take up their space outside at least of this specific prison of gendered language, even though gender has forced its characterization through language in other ways. And you and your texts have resisted.

So, as I told you, the word 'queer' might have made its way into Swedish by now, but that doesn't help me much. The word is nowhere to be found in *Stone Butch Blues*. 'Butch' and 'femme' though, have no real Swedish equivalents, neither does 'straight', nor 'bulldagger' nor 'he-she'. This last very central word is so difficult. We say *pojkklicka*, in Swedish, 'boy-girl', which in English would be 'tomboy', but this is not really a slur, and it is reserved for young, not yet properly feminized, children. Language keeps evolving, and a lot of the language making it possible to write *Stone Butch Blues* was not even accessible in Swedish in 1994, and some of the new words we now have don't really fit either. Is it appropriate to write a text in Swedish about the 1960s, where the characters speak as though it was the 2020s? The words 'butch' and 'femme', even 'drag queen', are now adopted as English terms and understood and integrated into a Swedish queer context, and even large parts of mainstream society. But the book is not set in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s, I try to remind myself, and I think it is safe to use them now for this translation, because it brings us closer to the text's own specificity in time. Somewhere you answer:

[I]dentities like lesbian, gay, bi, transgender, transsexual, intersexual [don't] have one universal meaning in all places, for all peoples, for all cultures, or in all historical periods. (Feinberg 2007)

You wrote this novel 30 years ago. You revisited and revised it ten years ago, in 2013 and 2014, towards the end of your own life. Then you left this world. And you also remained with us. I still write this to you.

4 My editor strongly disagrees with this.

What you wrote makes me write, across and outside of time, in this one-sided dialogue. And it makes me write with you, through and over language. I think about all the bonds between queers and communists, crossing space and time, how we refuse and are unable to stay solely in our own. I need to ask you some things, as a way to continue my work.

I need to ask you to help me with this translation, to ask you about language, about who makes it. I mean you, the writer, make use of it, and I, the translator, make it anew, but we are nothing without the reader's understanding and interpretation. Translation is transformation and undeniably also a revision of sorts. Language changes. And I wonder how you would prefer your words to change with the times, were you given the option. Somewhere you answer:

I have always approached editing and copy-editing and revision—my own work and that of others—with great respect for the original text. I brought that same ethic to this new edition of *Stone Butch Blues*. [...] The poet/writer who most meaningfully sums up for me the guiding ethics of revision is Audre Lorde, who said a revision should make the work “more of what it needs to be in order to do the emotional work it was intended to do.” (Feinberg 2014: 335)

Stone Butch Blues is an anti-oppression/s novel. (ibid.: front matter)

So, I should try to be as true as I can to the original. I read the text as written from the inside of an experience, not really focused on explaining a lot to the audience and definitely not to ‘mainstream society’. As a text with a political ethos, one way in which it enacts its struggle is through centering an otherwise peripheral experience. What can you tell me about the novel's intentions? And for whom it is intended? Who is the reader and what is important for them to understand? Somewhere you answer:

For many decades, as I grew up, the only publications about people who were oppressed based on their sexes, gender expressions, and sexualities were books that had psychological/psychiatric “experts” writing about those lives. The words of the oppressed individual then became the “patient narrative” that was stretched or chopped, as if into a Procrustean bed of torture, to fit the theory of the “experts.” *Stone Butch Blues* speaks in its own voice and needs no expert between reader and protagonist. (ibid.: 359)

I made a decision in writing *Stone Butch Blues* based on my anger at seeing how many white writers used whiteness as a default and only described a character if they were of color. Based on my anger at writers who only used thinness as the default and only identified characters as being fat, at writers who didn't name a character if they were able-bodied or didn't have a disability, but did label them if they did. I decided I wasn't going to do that. In *Stone Butch Blues* we discover the characters through their reactions to racism and other bigotries. I don't name who the characters are. I don't tell, I show. That means that different people who read

this book may have different views about the sizes, and shapes, and abilities, and so forth of these characters. And as readers those are all valid experiences. (ibid.: 355)

It is already 2021. I have set up a focus group. Or maybe two. One consists of trans activists who are also academics and researchers on trans lives, literature and language. They are all born after 1979. I really need to speak to some people who were born in the 1940s. Remember I told you about that feminist camp I sometimes go to? I asked some of the older ladies there to give me some feedback on translating across time barriers. I have also had help from QRAB, the Queer movements archive and library in Gothenburg, Sweden. They dug up some old porn magazines, which above-mentioned academics also use for their research. The personal ads are filled with sexual deviants, of course. Furthermore, in an old police record from a lesbian scandal in the 1940s, I found a word that might serve to translate 'he-she': *man-kvinna*, man-woman. One of the interrogated lesbians used this as a self-descriptive noun, that she was "a stone hard man-woman." (Thorén 2020) I immediately thought of you.

I have to ask you about how to translate the text correctly, how to give it context. I bought the German, French and Spanish editions of *Stone Butch Blues*, to understand how the translators of those have worked with the issues I face. In both the Spanish and French translation, footnotes are placed throughout the novel. They explain words like 'butch' and 'femme', but also 'LBJ'⁵, 'Nam'⁶, 'Dineh'⁷, 'unions'⁸, and even 'softball'⁹. The im/possibility of footnotes is something that I myself do enjoy.¹⁰

I struggle on with my work. I quarantine, because of COVID-19, and have rented a cheap room in a house on an island outside of Gothenburg where I now live. Every morning I eat breakfast and read some pages in *Stone Butch Blues*. Then I think about them. Then I start translating them, sentence by sentence, word for word. I take breaks to walk outside, and whittle little wooden figures, and go to Zoom-based activist meetings, and lectures on astrology, crip camps, transformative justice and the banality of evil. And then I go back to working with your words again. Our words. But sometimes there are no words, or I have to construct an entirely different sentence. And I keep thinking about what is won and what is lost in translation. What is made possible? What is forced upon the story by the other language? Should I try

5 Lyndon B. Johnson.

6 Vietnam.

7 Native Americans from Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Colorado. Called Navajo by the colonizers.

8 Workers syndicates, designed to take over the means of production.

9 A sport, similar to baseball.

10 As you might have noticed.

to make footnotes? How much can I change your text for it to be *more of what it needs to be*? Somewhere you answer:

I had hoped to write an introduction to place this novel within its social and historical context, the last half of the 20th century. Context is everything in politics, and *Stone Butch Blues* is a highly political polemic, rooted in its era, and written by a white communist grass-roots organizer. (Feinberg 2014: 333)

And then you quote Audre Lorde again, and continue:

I accept that translators into other languages may want to provide translator notes about overcoming specific difficulties in translating this novel. But—please do not introduce the novel to readers! This novel can introduce itself to readers, and so can Jess Goldberg. *Stone Butch Blues* is the voice of someone who is living the oppressions, resistance and pride. Let the reader hear Jess Goldberg's own words. (ibid.: 359)

I really do not think that I should write an introduction, and I do think that placing footnotes throughout the novel changes the text a lot. It is in a way an introduction, inserted into the pages, creating two levels of the text. Placing the reader further from Jess' own voice and establishing an expert in between. Furthermore, I would have to decide what needs explanation, and what doesn't. That requires me to have a pre-conceived notion of what the reader would and would not know. I mean, imagine a reader who is straight and upper middle-class. They hardly know anything. The book would be twice as long.

Translations are not only made between languages, but between social classes and experiences. And I think it is a great value that *Stone Butch Blues*—as a work of art and as an intention—forces the reader, regardless of their knowledge, to trust Jess as narrator and provider of norms.

As I am writing to you, time keeps passing. It is almost 2022. I have emailed so many publishers, but none are interested in publishing a book they cannot profit off. Even a lesbian publisher declined. I don't expect any pay for the work that I do, but I want the book to have the best conditions possible to find its audience and do the work it intends to.

And now: I moved again, to my hometown Malmö. And I found something! A non-profit, activist run publisher, Dockhaveri¹¹, based in Stockholm. They read my first chapters and are willing to give it a go! But they have no money, even for printing. I would like for the book to be printed in good quality and actually look, and feel,

11 Translates to 'doll wreckage' or 'doll breakdown'.

as important as it feels to me.¹² But we will apply for funding to cover costs of printing and proof-reading. I also got in touch with a new LGBT bookstore in Malmö that can help out with the distribution through their online shop. Now I had a great idea: We can crowdfund for the project by making a zine out of the first chapter and sell it to promote buying the book in advance. My dear friends who are queer graphic designers will design the cover for free!

I am not even halfway through translating the book, but now I have to prepare the first chapter for printing, while simultaneously translating. Because of my health, things are moving really slowly.

I struggle with the sociolects of the book. The dialogue and reactions of the characters in *Stone Butch Blues* are so central to the way the story is told and, as you said, how you show rather than tell. The dialogue holds different levels of colloquial language. Different ways of speaking connote differences in class, gender expression, race and ethnicity. Sometimes Jess speaks more slang to emphasize something or to show kinship and solidarity. Some of this I can find similar sociolects and colloquial forms for in Swedish.

But sometimes it is hard. Addressing someone with ‘child,’ or ‘girl,’ is one example. I read this, among other things, as a code for African-American Vernacular English, which for historic reasons doesn’t really have an equivalent in Swedish. This difficulty means that several characters risk losing part of the code inherent in their colloquialisms in the Swedish version, with the danger of reenacting the erasure of black influence in queer history. I fear that your intention not to attribute certain characters descriptive qualities pertaining to function, body shape or race, in translation might lead to a loss of the very language that could lend the readers the necessary tools to understand said characters within their specific contexts. I try to mend this by choosing a stand-in word that I try to imprint with this function, by attributing it to dialogue where the character is clearly written as African American.

I think about how you handle racism. This is, as you said, an anti-oppressions novel, and racism is alive and well in the world of *Stone Butch Blues*, as it is in our world still. Many characters, even Jess, display it. But the intention of the book, I perceive, is to try to be anti-racist, and to offer ways of fighting racism. I think of the scene where Jess is playing pool with Ed, and they talk about another club that Ed goes to. “A negro club?”, Jess asks. “A black club”, Ed replies (Feinberg 2014: 55).

In this passage, I need to find a word in Swedish, not as blatantly racist as the N-word, but still uncomfortable and rooted in racist language. Here the Swedish context and language have changed a lot since the 1970s, when this conversation took place. Using the N-word during that era in Sweden would be the norm. After discussions with my editors and friends who are PoC, I ended up using the word

12 This is what Jess says, when s/z/he typesets trans history into a zine during lunch breaks at the print shop in NYC in chapter 24 of *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg 2014: 296).

'colored'—*färgad*, in Swedish. In this passage, Ed gets to correct and mark her stand, Jess accepts this and they move on together.

Other words in the book, like 'Indian', are sometimes left uncommented, which I do not think stand the test of time very well. When Jess was born, several Diné women who lived in the same apartment building assisted. The narrator refers to them as Indian women. In my translation I change this to Diné. It is not formative or important for the text to keep this word, and I consider it to be within the text's intention, as you have mentioned, to allow for such changes.

I do want to talk to you about something relating to this. It is very clear that Jess' relation to Native Americans is one filled with much reverence and respect. It is also clear that for Jess, the Diné women of her childhood are the first ones to acknowledge her gender identity as something other than binary, and to accept and offer support because they see that hers might become a hard life to live. Throughout the novel, this image, or fantasy, of the Native re-emerges. In the words of fellow fag comrade Lou Cornum:

By the end of the novel, [...] in a dream vision of queer firekeepers: third gender Indigenous peoples invite Jess into a circle convened outside straight society. They invite Jess into their difference. This is a common, shared recurring dream for settlers and this dream of being accepted and absolved by the Native is here transformed across a desire for sexual and gender freedom. This dream, Jess decides, answers to the demand that Duffy, a labor organizer, had implored of his friends and fellow workers earlier in the text: to imagine a world worth living in and fighting for. It is trying to imagine this other world that brings gays, anarcho-primitivists and others to their fantasy dreams of Indian life. These fantasies, though, are of a strictly limited imagination, one that persistently fails to consider the complications of ongoing Indigenous dispossession that go along with Indigenous presence. This desirable world is approached through taking over the position of reductive indigeneity rather than collaborating with Natives working alongside Jess in the factories of Buffalo. (Cornum 2019)

Somewhere you answer:

As a white communist, I am responsible for the book's strengths and weaknesses. *Stone Butch Blues* is not merely a 'working class' novel—it is a novel that embodies class struggle. (Feinberg 2014: 355)

Yes, you are responsible, and I only hope that if you were here now you would engage with these critiques in an accountable way, being loyal to our siblings in the movements for indigenous power.

Translating also sometimes creates new traps. The common Swedish word for the slur 'scab', used throughout the book, is *svartföt*, 'blackfoot'. In the context of the

novel, this word would likely allude to Native Americans, a connection which does not occur with the English ‘scab’. Trying to translate the striking workers in chapter nine, slurs like “scab” are accompanied by less politically correct words like “faggots”, “cock-suckers” and “motherfuckers” (ibid.: 105). Jess then interjects and the union leader Duffy concludes that the striking workers can yell “scabs”, “strike-breakers” and to “call them what they are” (ibid.). Introducing a word in Swedish here which could be perceived as a racial slur would really fuck it up. Mapping these intersections of language, power and resistance, counter-language and reclaiming slurs and derogatory terms are well-known queer and anti-racist strategies.

It is already the autumn of 2022. We made the fanzine. We had a release party for it in Malmö, at the queer bookshop. And then one in Stockholm a month later, and one in Gothenburg two months after that. These occasions allow me to meet the audience, try out my translation and receive new kinds of feedback. I have so many interesting conversations and find new ways of approaching my work.

One thing I need to talk to people about is the terminology used for sex workers. *Stone Butch Blues* is populated by so many pros, beautiful ones, mean ones, brave ones. They are not reduced by the terminology used for their occupation, and regardless of whether they are turning tricks to get by, or if they are stone pros, like Millie, they are complex. I find Swedish to be incredibly lacking here.

In Swedish, even using the neutral term ‘sex worker’ is by many considered a political stance against the Nordic model, which criminalizes buyers and not sex workers, and essentially seen as anti-feminist, by Marxists and a lot of liberals alike. In the German translation from 1996, the word used is *Hure*, ‘whore’, which in Swedish (*hora*) is as crude as ‘whore’—but has not been reclaimed to the extent that it might have been in a German or North American queer context.

‘Pro’, stemming from prostitute, in Swedish *prostituerad*, is not a good fit, because ‘pro’ is not even a reclaimed word, but a self-defined expression, a hybrid between a ‘professional’ and ‘prostitute’, and at its core, a very positive word. After deliberations with comrades and self-proclaimed pros in Sweden, I have decided to coin a new term, *proffs* in Swedish. Which normally just means ‘skilled professional’.

Since releasing the fanzine, we’ve received over a hundred pre-orders of the novel. We were also granted funds from Ottarfonden (connected to RFSU, a non-governmental Swedish organisation working with sexual and reproductive health and rights) and Långmanska Kulturfonden (connected to money that originated from the sawmill industry in the 19th century). Now we have a budget to cover the basic costs of the project. I have started worrying about something that most people might find a little weird: the risk of making profit.

So, we do not have that many expenses, because we have some grants and even though we have priced the final book quite low, to make it as accessible as possible there is a chance that we might end up making revenue. Oh, the horror. I tried emailing the German, French and Spanish publishers, and asked how they have dealt

with this, in accordance with the terms of your translation agreement, but none have replied.

We had a meeting and decided that any revenue that doesn't go into project-related costs will be sourced back into the non-profit queer publishing house, where it will be used to make more non-profit queer books. I really hope you can find that acceptable.

Work is slow. I have started to think about what it means for the translation that it is translated so slowly. I have lived with the book so closely now for almost three years. Working in a crip body, in crip time, allows me to mull over problems, laboring in a very different way than that of a regular translator who would have three months to produce a book. Somewhere you answer:

My health has made reading and writing so difficult that all I can do is to post some of my personal research notes arranged in the most readable form I can manage. (Feinberg 2011)

I am too ill to respond to inquiries about contracts or permissions. So I have taken *Stone Butch Blues* off the capitalist market. I will not be signing any new commercial contracts for this novel or renewing existing contracts when they expire. (Feinberg 2014: 352)

I am glad that I can enact this crippled translation, because it, like me, and *Stone Butch Blues* itself, is, as you wrote: “off the capitalist market”, or rather, somewhere beneath, in an oppositional prepositionality.

Today I finished my first draft of the book, then I remembered I had to go back and translate the beginning of chapter 17 when Jess throws up. I was unable to finish this some months ago because I, too, started to throw up.

I spent a lot of spring 2023 preparing for an academic conference set to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the release of *Stone Butch Blues*. Even though I have never gone to university, I sent in an abstract about the effects of the terms and agreements for the book's translation, and was accepted. I got to be in conversation with so many amazing people researching parts of your legacy, someone attempting to translate the book into Korean and a translator who works with a new translation into German, because the old one was based on the 1993 edition and the German language has evolved a lot when it comes to queer terminologies. They asked me to include my work in an anthology. I realized that this very letter will have to be made into an essay now.

It is now the summer of 2023. Your widow and life partner Minnie Bruce Pratt died two days ago. She passed away surrounded by friends and comrades and her two children. From all over the world, she received messages brimming with solidarity, gratitude and warmth. She has preserved the legacy of your work during the

ten years since your passing. I don't know where to send my email and the copies of the finished book for the archive that she asked for. But I promise I will find a way.

I am reading through the translation again and again as 2023 turns into 2024—but I have a hard time focusing on anything other than the ongoing aggression against Gaza. Queer and Jewish identities are continuously taken hostage by the right wing-extremist Israeli government and their allies, saying they are doing this to keep Jews and even queers safe, as if committing a genocide against the Palestinians could ever be justified, as if they actually care about our lives, as if the struggle for a free Palestine were not intrinsically tied to queer liberation and Jewish safety. I cannot write to you without writing about this. Somewhere you answer:

It may seem that the colonial occupation of Palestine could last forever, but it will not. With the Intifada and world support it will end, as surely as apartheid in South Africa was ended by the long struggle of the Black people of South Africa—who took up arms for liberation—and those of us who fought alongside in solidarity, including for divestment. I am with you in your struggle. I respect and defend your right to self-determination. I will fight alongside you for every right—for full civil rights within the 1948 borders [...]. And I will be with you on the day that we tear down the colonial garrison state of Israel and Palestine is free from this racist, theocratic, apartheid imperialist occupation—the day when all those who planted the olive trees will taste the fruit of freedom. (Feinberg 2007)

I keep making small changes, correcting, and replying to comments from my editors. I stopped being afraid that I would fail and not finish the translation. Now I am afraid that it will be done soon, of the emptiness after. I have gotten to spend time not just with you and Jess, Theresa, Ruth, Al, Mona, Justine, Ed and all the other characters of your novel—but through my work with this book, I have also met countless other people whose lives I've gotten to learn about, and I have learned about the crucial part your novel has played in those lives.

Imagining how to stop this endless editing feels impossible still, but eventually I have to let go, and take responsibility for this version of the text, and the world will move again. Others will receive what I let go of. I realize that the possibility exists that a reader rejects the decisions I have made in this translation, and begins this process anew. I welcome this possibility.

The translation agreement that you set up offers this possibility, endlessly. The text can evolve with queer terminology within the different languages it is translated into, in a much faster speed than books generally do because their translations are bound in time due to purchased exclusive rights to the text. I don't know if you saw this from your vantage point ten years ago, but this is an effect that I think suits the book's intentions very well, both as a queer and a communist manifesto. I am grateful to be a part of this continuum of being and moving with your text.

But above all, I am grateful to you. Beyond grateful. I knew I could exist because of your work, and because you, together with so many others, carried the dream of us, the ones to come, in your actions.

What I have learned about translation through *Stone Butch Blues* during these past few years is hard to summarize. I do believe that in translating lies the radical potential to rewrite our understanding—of the meaning of words, and in part, the world itself. I consider it a great honor to place myself alongside you, armed with the tools available to us, to make language, for us, which in time will be precise enough to achieve the change which it is our duty to bring about.

I am very, very tired now, and need to rest, in order to continue my work. I will let you finish my thoughts, as you have done so many times before. Somewhere you answer:

I give this novel back to the workers and oppressed of the world. The revolutionary and anti-capitalist movements for social and economic justice have given me so much in life. I give this novel back, as a tiny hand-made gift, flaws and all, to the workers and oppressed of the world. [...] While *Stone Butch Blues* is fiction, it speaks truth. But the capitalist deeds of ownership that say the 1 % owns everything that has been produced by collective labor, both enslaved and waged—those deeds *are* fiction and should be torn up. [...] Hurry that day! (Feinberg 2014: 352–353)

Yours in struggle,
Ylva Emel Karlsson

References

- Cornum, L. (2019) “Desiring the Tribe”, *Pinko Magazine*. <https://pinko.online/pinko-1/desiring-the-tribe> (last accessed 26 April 2024).
- Feinberg, L. (1997) *Transgender Warriors*. Boston: Beacon.
- (2007) “Leslie Feinberg to Aswat: ‘I am at your side’”, *Workers World*. <https://www.workers.org/2007/world/feinberg-0419/> (last accessed 26 April 2024).
- (2011) “Casualty of an Undeclared War”, *Transgender Warrior*. <https://transgenderwarrior.org/casualty/> (last accessed 17 March 2024).
- (2014) *Stone Butch Blues*. 20th Anniversary Author Edition, self-published. <https://www.lesliefeinberg.net> (last accessed 17 March 2024).
- (2017) “Lavender & Red”, *Workers World*. <https://www.workers.org/book/lavender-red/> (last accessed 26 April 2024).
- Thorén, M. (2020) “Historiskt reportage: Den lesbiska ligan som dömdes för otukt”, QX. <https://www.qx.se/livsstil/192025/historiskt-reportage-den-lesbiska-ligan-som-domdes-for-otukt/> (last accessed 19 August 2024).

Re_Translating as Activist Practice

Queering the German Translation of *Stone Butch Blues*

Desz Debreceni

When *Stone Butch Blues* was published, I thought I would keep cartons of copies in my closet to give out to people who were ready to read it. But this book, like the movements for social change it was inextricably connected with, exploded the closet door off its hinges. (Feinberg 2014: 336)¹

Introduction

Gender-inclusive language has found its way into official German language use. More and more institutional organisations and companies are actively contributing to a change in language by departing from the grammatically generic masculinum towards more inclusive options. Furthermore, gender in language opens up a bigger debate about how gender roles and norms dominate our reality. In the German speaking context, the so called *Genderdebatte* – the socio-political discourse about gendered language – concerning the generic masculinum, gender-neutral spellings, and inclusive language at large, has therefore gained and continues to gain attention, implementation, and controversy (Söder 2024). Also, among literary translators, different practices around inclusive language-use continue to be a controversial subject. On a grammatical level, however, it is rather simple: English has no grammatical marker for gender, it is a challenge to translate it into German, which heavily relies on grammatical gender. My translation practice acknowledges that shift and turn in language use, especially in literary texts, is not just a question

1 Author afterword of the 10th Anniversary Edition, 2003.

for queer and trans issues and subjectivities. It is a question that re_surfaces during the practice of translation with a new awareness and sense for binary grammatical language structures. It is not just a question concerning the change of parameters for literary texts on trans and gender non-conforming characters, but it concerns every act of writing.

I specifically seek to demonstrate how re_translation figures as activist practice, especially in the tradition of feminist, queer and trans translation theory, with its consciousness for power structures repeated in and through language. How do those inclusive developments figure in literary texts? Not only the translator's active contribution, but also publishers' policies, public discourse, and market economy play a part in how works of fiction can and will be translated. I want to demonstrate my argument by re_translating passages from Leslie Feinberg's 1993 debut novel *Stone Butch Blues*. Leslie Feinberg, an activist, communist, butch, lesbian, Jewish trans person and an active advocate of the trans liberation movement himself, wrote an explicitly political novel on the life and coming of age as well as coming-out of a trans masculine, lesbian butch protagonist. The existing 1996 German translation by Claudia Brusdeylins, published with Krug & Schadenberg, has softened the edges of the novel significantly, not only because of the different approaches to gender-inclusive language then and now. My practice of re_translation will remain in dialogue with the existing translation, to be able to reflect on the choices made and re_translate them with my knowledge of gender-inclusive language and trans identities.

I will present my own translated version of crucial text passages, presenting queer and trans subjectivities with an extended understanding of gender-inclusive or gender-neutral language use. I will focus on the analysis and comparison of the structure of grammatical gender of the source language (SL) and target language (TL) and how it can compromise the enunciation of trans subjectivities. What can the existing German translation of *Stone Butch Blues* teach us about the inherent structural differences of English and German and how can we work with and against them as translators? I will argue that re_translating as an activist practice can give us the tools to make use of the structural differences of English and German to make queer and trans experiences and subjectivities more visible and intelligible in translation.

In Germany, one of the first publications on feminist linguistics and a call for change, first and foremost to abolish the generic masculinum, was an essay collection by linguist Luise F. Pusch ([1984] 2023). Her account of the history of the *Genderdebatte* maps out the progression and different groups involved in the fight for visibility and inclusion. Beginning with a feminist call for visibility in language practice of the feminine grammatical form in the 1970s, through a number of versions that have been tested out, including the *Partizip*-forms *Studierende* (students, gender-neutral) or *Geflüchtete* (refugees, gender-neutral) instead of the masculine forms *Studenten* and *Flüchtlinge* (students/refugees, masculine grammatical gender), to the

invention of the *BinnenI* (a capitalised letter to signal the gendered dimension of the word), Pusch arrives at mentioning the queer and trans community in the 1990s who are described as the pioneers for including or coming up with the asterisk or *Gendersternchen* (*). What had, up until then, among feminist linguists been a question of including women and the feminine grammatical form, became a question of including different genders and trans people, intersex people and/or non-binary and agender people.

The linguistic changes we see today continue to lead to controversial discussions in both public and private spheres. They are rooted in activist history and in theoretical and academic contributions that are often overlooked, devalued and pushed to the margins of society. As language continues to change and develop, it's newer iterations are not only taken up by feminist media professionals and publishers. Instead, it has become normalised to the extent that its novelty and controversy fade into the background, and gender-inclusive language has reached mainstream media and even conservative politicians.

In what follows, I will give an outline of the theory that inspired me and that I have worked with on interventionist feminist translation practices. I will connect and further this approach with queer and LGBT approaches to translation theory, and discuss the impossibility of translating queer texts within a heteronormative matrix and “queer implicature” as used by David Gramling (2018). Before I present a number of examples of my own re_translation and translation analyses of *Stone Butch Blues*, I contextualise Feinberg's work as distinctly activist. I will then compare the first and last edition of the original novel and briefly comment on (sub)culturally specific identity-markers in the existing German translation.

Theories of Gender in/and Translation

For literary texts dealing with trans characters who identify with non-binary genders and who are lacking the appropriate language to describe themselves, grammatical gender is very significant. This means, apart from the fact that some languages rely on grammatical gender to transport meaning (i.e. is the speaker of a certain gender), others are almost or completely free of it on a grammatical level. If we are faced with a language pair in translation like English to German, where grammatical gender needs to be added in translation, it opens up the question of how far the translation can, and should, depart from the SL when considering and adapting to this difficulty. When can this alteration of an implied gender by binary categories be considered a “linguistic intervention” (Godayol 2018: 470), as feminist translation theory would call it? Every act of translation carries an act of decision making, especially when SL and TL differ linguistically and in respect to their grammatical gen-

der categories and implementations, decisions can dictate gender expression and impact how a narrative can be perceived.

Linguistic intervention as a translator's activist practice is only one element of the historical intersection of gender and translation studies. In her essay "Gender and Translation", Godayol (2013) traces that intersection from the 1980s until the early 2010s. Godayol is concerned with the role of women in translation studies as well as the socio-cultural and metaphorical meaning of women in translation. On the whole, her approach is very much woman-centred, and the essay represents a historical revision of women as translators and their social positionality. Crucial for this topic is her research on translation practices between a gendered translator and respective author. Godayol largely equates women with gender by referring to the Canadian Feminist School, but also remarks on how "there are other ideological groups who claim feminine subjectivity and, in whose translations the indelible mark of sexual difference appears in a variety of ways" (2013: 175). It is important to mention that gender can also be read as sexual difference in general here, which allows for identities/groups and sexualities beyond a binary and/or heteronormative system to also be recognised as active participants in translation theory. Godayol goes on to say:

It is not a question of judging the value systems of this movement, but of questioning them to discover how the consumption and reproduction of texts are related to other practices of social and cultural power, and also in order to remind ourselves that any subject belongs to a system that is behind his/her subjectivity for writing, translating or theorizing on translation. (ibid.)

This statement acknowledges that there can be different intersections and structures of oppression. While the text retraces mainly the 'woman-translator' and how she has theoretically, metaphorically, and practically found her place in translation studies and translation as a practice, it has to be stressed that there are other subjectivities and groups who write from a feminist standpoint without necessarily identifying as women.

Godayol identifies numerous paratextual tools a translator has to call attention to in order to transform the text through translation. For example, among these tools are notes, prologues, introductions, or interviews. Her paper "Feminist Translation" (2018) offers more insight concerning the actual practices of feminist translators. Godayol references a group of Canadian feminist translators in the 1980s whom she locates as the founders of feminist translation practice and who applied feminist interventionist strategies for translation. The most interesting practice to this thesis is 'supplementing' which "does not only refer to compensating the differences between languages but also to a voluntary action of textual manipulation by the translators, who use tactics such as desexualising and feminising to demonstrate their politi-

cal intervention in the text” (Godayol 2018: 470). While ‘desexualising’ refers to the practice of neutralising masculine gendered forms, ‘feminising’ intends to leave out or considerably change explicitly sexist terms or metaphors. These strategies do not include a proper desexualising in terms of trying to appeal to gender neutrality on a grammatical level. Circumventing the generic masculinum in English as well as German has its tradition and place within the feminist movement and continues to be a political debate and place of struggle. For the means of translating the queer trans novel *Stone Butch Blues*, however, it will not suffice, and other solutions have to be found to do justice to the source text in translation.

Godayol also stresses that there is a considerable gap between theory and practice in feminist translation. The discourse around the intersection of gender and translation theory is growing, as shown by the increasing number of publications and academic discussions. At the same time, she mentions the difficulties of being able to implement theory practically. This is mostly due to the lack of collaboration with publishers and the “commercial and economic imperatives” (ibid.: 476) that hinder translators from publishing or gaining funding for feminist interventionist translation projects. David Gramling’s paper “Queer/LGBT Approaches” (2018) reflects this dilemma of mainstream commercial imperatives of cultural commodities. Gramling starts off his paper with a metaphorical approach as to why queer people tend to be translators by the nature of their deviation from the heteronormative matrix, and almost professes translation as an ontological condition of queerness: “Indeed, we cannot quite consider LGBT approaches to translation as such without first reckoning with the simple fact that translating is always also a form of enunciation – a *social* way of figuring, conveying and communicating meaning” (Gramling 2018: 496).

By taking a closer look at the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues*, it comes to show that the translation has a number of shortcomings with regards to subculturally specific terms or identity markers. The same shortcomings can be observed on a structural level, concerning grammatical gender, which of course is intrinsically connected to the themes of the novel. Gramling argues that:

It is tempting to hypothesise generally, [...] that original compositions tend to be a great deal queerer than their translations. [...] Sometimes the issue is not an individual translator’s misrecognition alone, but rather the structural aspects of a lexicon that does not accommodate translation of queer content as reliably as it does in heteronormative figuration. (ibid.: 496–497)

Only having a heteronormative lexicon to work with certainly poses a great challenge to name or enunciate subcultural identities or phenomena from within queer contexts. What my analysis seeks to examine more closely is the grammatical structure and how the very structure of the language itself can forbid or make nearly impos-

sible the enunciation of a queer – and in this case trans – experience as the source language asks or allows the text to. Obviously, English has its restrictions to express gender beyond the binary, too, on which Leslie Feinberg has commented and written as well. Gramling addresses the predicament of simply not having the words to express one's identity at all and how this has usually led to the usage of translated loanwords. The genealogy of the word *Homosexualität* (homosexuality), and how it has travelled between language systems, is just one example for this phenomenon:

The clinical, Latinate, and rather un-Germanic word *Homosexualität*, [...] makes its way [...] to the Jewish-American Rita [Mae Weems] in the midst of the [HIV/AIDS] pandemic around here 100 years later, who uses it in the same way Kértbeny had: to fashion through translated meaning a useable mnemonic device of identification in a social order structurally opposed to their existence. Many early gay-rights organisations likewise took up such translated loanwords as their identificatory symbols and rallying cries. (ibid.: 498)

A number of examples can be given in the case of the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues* concerning this idea of the heteronormative lexicon. 'Butch', as the title already reveals, has not been translated throughout the entire novel and, as I would argue, has by way of this translation found its way into German language use. But other specifically queer identity markers, like 'drag queen', were almost exclusively translated with *Transvestit* or *Tunte*. The self-descriptive identity marker 'he-she' which the protagonist uses frequently throughout the entire novel, has been almost exclusively translated with *KV*, a German acronym which stands for *Kesser Vater*².

To come back to the difference in grammar categories, it could be argued that the demands of gender-inclusive language and the political struggle and victories of the so-called *Genderdebatte* in Germany are very recent phenomena which could not yet play into the decisions of the translator and editor(s). After all, the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues* lies almost thirty years back. It was published by Krug & Schadenberg who mainly publish lesbian-centred fiction. While translator and editors alike must have had a certain level of sensitivity concerning lesbian subcultural codes and contexts, problems arising in connection with trans issues and identity have fallen short in the translation. Other more obvious problems of culturally spe-

2 A compound of the dated adjective *kess*, meaning 'perky, bold, cheeky', and *Vater* (father). During my research at the Spinnboden Lesbenarchiv & Bibliothek, a queer-feminist lesbian archive in Berlin, I found out that the acronym *KV* was a common denominator for lesbian butch-identities and that it had been used to translate the then in German uncommon term 'butch'. It was commonly used in the German speaking lesbian community from around 1970 to 1990, until it was replaced by the English 'butch'.

cific terms and identity markers, all pertaining to LGBTQIA subculture, must have kept translator and editors alike uncomfortable with certain choices.

Gramling goes on to explain the nature of queer implicature in literary texts. Translating queer implicature, by queering the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues*, is problematic because of the structural grammatical difference at hand. “We translators have before us the choice whether to consider, or not to consider, the intra- and extratextual circumstances of attenuation, censorship, and social consequences that has always attended any such queer utterances” (Gramling 2018: 500). The translator of *Stone Butch Blues* might have fully ignored and at the same time justified the effacement of trans characters in the novel by way of arguing that, concerning the self-referential female pronouns used in the source text, the protagonist’s ‘biological’ gender can safely be assumed female. Since the German language does not allow for gender-neutral forms or declension of nouns, gendering the protagonist as cis-female could appear as the simplest solution. However, a closer reading of the novel asks for a much more nuanced approach. Gramling points out how “[q]ueer translation must thus be in the business of painstakingly translating implicature, rudimentariness, inchoateness, aborted attempts at articulation, and discursive fragmentation to a degree that is often utterly foreign to other spheres of translation” (ibid.). My analysis will show how minor changes can do considerable justice to the narrative of a trans and gender non-conforming protagonist.

Gramling is also careful to mention that sometimes ‘queering’ a translation goes too far in respect to adhering to identity politics of the moment instead of leaving room for literary discontinuities. Gramling points not only to the already mentioned problem of linguistic gender differences but also, as already mentioned by Godayol, the very practical and material implications of “editorial policies that explicitly or implicitly regulate gender as binary” (ibid.: 501). He goes on to speak to the tendency to market a literary text with respect to a narrative of queer agency, which can help book promotion. Gramling also points to examples which must lead the translator to fully take into consideration, if available, the author’s intention or decisions to use certain terms or represent themselves in a certain fashion, in order to not abuse the translation as a project that “skew[s] queer subjects towards certain visions of empowerment, solidarity or rights-based discourse that, however credible in their own right and context, are far afield from the design and intention of the author composing the original” (ibid.: 502).

Before taking Leslie Feinberg as an example of an author who has given ample subtext for a translator to make informed decisions, Gramling’s observations on how “trans subjectivity tends to become a discursive occasion not only for the definition of the human, but also for the definition of translation” (ibid.), need to be mentioned. He takes the example of the word *androgynos*, which is a Greek loanword in the example of an Aramaic and Hebrew translation. It shows how one word in translation, which explicitly describes a third gender, can be an example of the inevitability of

having to make use of circumlocutions, compounds, or periphrasis. It reminds us how “transgendered subjects have always tended to frustrate that principle of efficiency and decisiveness” (ibid.: 501) of the translation process. For *Stone Butch Blues*, the translated text needs to break with the level of binary grammatical gender and its textual efficiency that normative translation practice usually demands. Despite the challenges concerning the grammatical discrepancy between English and German that surface during translation, efficient, yet not as normative solutions like degendering, or flagging, as I will point out in my analyses, exist to fall back on. Re_translating as activist practice also means to resist normative linguistic categories.

The dedication with which *Stone Butch Blues* has been edited and reclaimed over the years will further show the inherently activist character of Feinberg’s creative work. I will take into consideration some of his non-fiction texts and commentary on the collective struggle to formulate a queered language, as well as display how *Stone Butch Blues* has been subject to two major editing processes.

A Text in Re_Vision

The 20th Anniversary Author Edition of *Stone Butch Blues*, released online in 2014, is not only the second revised version of the novel, which was first published in 1993, it is also a collection of subtexts (i.e. collected prefaces of the different editions and translated editions, afterwords, dedications, and statements on translation- and copyrights). I have access to both the first Firebrand Books 1993 edition of the novel and the 2014 anniversary edition. The main difference I can make out concerns the revision of a racist slur. The final edition has changed one occasion of the N-word to Black (Feinberg 1993: 21; Feinberg 2014: 17). Interestingly, throughout the remaining text of the 1993 edition the spelling of Black, when referring to a person, is already capitalised. The issue of saying Black instead of antiquated slurs is also addressed between Jess and Ed, when they talk about going to a Black bar (Feinberg 2014: 55). In chapter 15, a quote by W.E.B du Bois is abbreviated, to not repeat a variation of the N-word there as well. The translation of course still contains those words, since the 1993 edition, which served as the source text, also does. Apart from those two instances in which the translation uses the N-Word, it translates it with *schwarz* (black) and fails to capitalise *Schwarz* when it is mentioned mostly during dialogue, as the 1993 edition does. Anti-racist language has not been the focus of my analyses, it functions however as an example to place this novel in an activist framework of language use. The novel’s language is very accessible to a large audience, but also manages to carry a consciousness and a clear intention to respect and incorporate political struggles and the fight for recognition carried about in and through language use. To capitalise Black, respectively *Schwarz*, is a product of Black and PoC activists and community organisations, to highlight the social construct of racial

identities and attributions. Capitalising those adjectives when referring to a person signals to the reader that the text shows solidarity with and aligns itself with those political struggles (Eggers 2009: 13).

In addition, the anniversary edition, on which Feinberg worked up to the time of his death in November 2014, is dedicated to CeCe McDonald, a young Black trans woman, “organizer and activist sent to prison for defending herself against a white neo-Nazi attacker” (Pratt 2014). In comparison, the 1993 edition’s only subtext is a text of acknowledgments at the beginning of the novel, dedicated to Feinberg’s friends, test readers and co-organisers. It also commemorates the death of a now famous trans woman who took part in the Stonewall Riots in 1969:

In loving memory to you Marsha “Pay It No Mind” Johnson – found floating in the Hudson River on July 4, 1992 – and the other Stonewall combatants who gave birth to the modern lesbian and gay movement, and to the many other transgendered human beings whose lives ended in violence. (Feinberg 1993: iii)

Comparing these acknowledgements shows Feinberg’s ongoing involvement with the trans community. It shows his commitment and solidarity and is part of the novel’s text as much as the narrative. The life story of protagonist Jess Goldberg is embedded in the social struggles and commemorations of violence and discrimination that trans people have endured and continue to endure.

Re_Translating an Activist Author

One of Feinberg’s first publications, a pamphlet called *Transgender Liberation*, discusses the struggle of choosing words and how this connects to political struggle and community building:

In recent years, a community has begun to emerge that is sometimes referred to as the gender or transgender community. Within our community is a diverse group of people who define ourselves in many different ways. Transgendered people are demanding the right to choose our own self-definitions. The language used in this pamphlet may quickly become outdated as the gender community coalesces and organizes – a wonderful problem. [...] We are trying to find words, however inadequate, that can connect us, that can capture what is similar about the oppression we endure. We have also given careful thought to our use of pronouns, striving for both clarity and sensitivity in a language that only allows for two sexes. (Feinberg 1992: 6)

What Feinberg rightly points out here is the ever-present development of marginalised groups of people to find a common language whilst coming from diverse places. This

can also be observed now within mainstream society concerning the *Genderdebatte* and new ways of speaking, writing, and talking from within the community about the community. It remains difficult to find a common language from within the queer community, and this language-in-the-making is simultaneously put to the test by mainstream society. Alternative language does not originate from a fixed place or identity, but is a struggle, a process of becoming literate in describing who we are. To defend ourselves against linguistic practices that have made us invisible, or only describe us in dissidence and deviation from norms, demands a practice of re_translation. Apart from the grammatical structure, which is at the surface of language but also underlying all our preconceived ideas, grammatical systems and hierarchies are subject to change, too.

In the non-fiction essay collection *Transgender Warriors* (1996) Feinberg traces the existence and history of trans and genderqueer people throughout history and different cultures. Feinberg has identified as butch, lesbian, as a communist, and member of the Workers World Party. On pronoun use Feinberg writes in the preface to *Transgender Warriors*:

There are no pronouns in the English language as complex as I am, and I do not want to simplify myself in order to neatly fit one or the other. [...] Living struggles accelerate changes in language. [...] There were no words that we'd go out of our way to use that made us feel good about ourselves. [...] I learned that language can't be ordered individually, as if from a Sears catalogue. It is forged collectively, in the fiery heat of struggle. (Feinberg 1996: ix)

This statement is testament to the political place of struggle that language represents for hir. It sets the tone for Feinberg's opinion and general stance on how language needs to change and be fought for. Gramling (2018) has commented on the different motivations to translate queer texts and possibly instrumentalise their work to further a certain agenda or follow a market trend. This statement and Feinberg's work as an active campaigner, author, and leader of the trans liberation movement proves that a re_translation aligns with Feinberg's calling to forge the language that we need and use collectively.

A Comment on Identity Markers

The only identity marker that finds space to be commented on in depth here is 'he-she'. The existing translation has chosen two options to translate this identity marker in the novel: *KV* and *Mannsweib*. My first idea to write this paper grew with my quest to find out what the German acronym *KV* stands for. The word keeps surfacing throughout the entire translation, just as 'he-she' does in the original. While

from my reading experience, I could vaguely tell that *KV* had to stand for an identity concept, I was still puzzled for the most part, unsure what it was supposed to mean. All traces seemed only to return to the German translation of *Stone Butch Blues*. When I finally looked into the source text, I was baffled with the choices the translator had made. This little compound 'he-she', at the same time a slur, identity marker, and self-definition, as innocent-looking, literal, and easy to understand, yet without an equivalent in the German speaking context was exclusively translated with *KV*, which stands for *Kesser Vater*, a term that originated in the 1920s and 1930s. The term *Mannsweib* comes to mind, however, it usually functions as a slur or insult, being a compound of the word 'man' and an outdated and/or derogatory term for 'woman' or 'wife'. I have chosen this term in my translation on a few occasions. However, 'he-she' within the novel, is a fully formed and actualized self-denominator for Jess to describe her identity. In fact, Jess comments on her usage of the term in the last chapter of the novel, holding a speech at a LGBT manifestation in New York City about her lifelong struggle to find and accept herself and assert her identity:

I looked at the hundreds of faces staring at me. "I'm a butch, a he-she. I don't know if the people who hate our guts call us that anymore. But that single epithet shaped my teenage years." Everyone got very quiet as I spoke, and I knew they were listening; I knew they had heard me. (Feinberg 2014: 324)

I wanted to find out why the translator decided to translate 'he-she' with *KV* twenty-nine years ago. But a lack of resources meant I had to stop after many unanswered e-mails. At this point, I assume that this term is not only hardly known to a contemporary audience, but also obscures a simple concept (male and female pronouns in a compound) beyond recognition. I have chosen to translate 'he-she' with *Mannsweib*, whenever it is used as a slur and on one occasion I translate it with *Weder*noch* 'neither...nor' (Queer Lexikon 2023), which is a lesser known term from within the German trans community, which describes more or less the same thing, yet it is intelligible even for a reader unfamiliar with non-binary gender identity. On one occasion, I have translated it with *Butch*, for lack of a better solution. In this process, I realised that it takes tact and genealogical knowledge of certain words and their community internal usage. What remains, however, just with the problems arising on the grammatical level, is the realisation that choices in this context are never fully fixed. It is an imprint of what the current language use allows me to express and what I, as a translator, can find out about trans and non-binary identities.

Analysis

For the scope of this article, I will discuss how I handled the translation of ‘butch’ in two sections of chapter thirteen as well as showcase two passages from chapter nineteen. Chapter nineteen marks a turning point on the narrative level, exploring Jess’ decision-making-process for her social and medical transition. One significant challenge were the pitfalls of translating gender on a grammatical level, from English to German, but also in respect to how it connects to the content level of a gender-queer trans protagonist. Since I advocate for gender-inclusive language use and avoiding, for example, the generic masculinum as well as gendering nouns and adjectives in German whenever possible, any passage would have served for demonstration. However, choosing passages that directly negotiate the protagonist’s struggle connected to being trans, highlights the restrictions of language to express and negotiate gender-queer and trans identities.

Chapter nineteen demarcates the moment Jess decides to stop taking hormones. The excerpt shows her inner conflict, and the changes in her life after stopping hormone treatment, building up to the point where she decides to leave Buffalo and move to New York, which introduces the last part of the novel. I will not only present my own re_translation but also, in order to demonstrate my decision-making-process, compare some of my highlighted passages with the existing German translation. I want to largely operate in two categories of interventionist practices, as mentioned above by Godayol, both are a form of supplementing which refers to voluntary actions of manipulating the text. ‘Desexualising’ refers to the practice of neutralising masculine gender forms, which means to circumvent and re_translate for example a gendered noun and add or change word categories and sentence structure to appeal to a level of gender neutrality. The second category under which I want to group a number of decisions in the re_translating process is ‘flagging’, which also refers to a desexualising practice, but is made visible with the gender asterisk or the feminine. On a few occasions, I have used the feminine whenever the German translation has used the generic masculinum. Pertaining to all instances in which a bystander not further described, for example a customer/passenger/pedestrian/villager, is part of the scene, I have chosen to alternate between using the feminine and the asterisk. This way, the reading flow is occasionally mildly disrupted to question the reader’s gender assumptions.

The term ‘butch’ is an integral part of the novel. It has even found its way into Duden,³ albeit still being a work in progress. As is also discussed in the novel; some of the first in-group conflicts of the women’s liberation movement were the misgivings many feminist university groups held against the gender presentation of queer

3 Duden (n.d.): “(bei Homosexuellen) ausgeprägt männlich (im Aussehen usw.)” – (for homosexuals) distinctly male (in appearance etc.).

and lesbian working-class people, who had an interest and a stake in being part of the movement. Theresa tells Jess about how the women on campus were angry at butches for presenting masculine, but they are also offended by the femmes, who are too feminine. This conflict stands for a supposed emancipation from oppressive heteronormative gender roles. It fails to acknowledge that the division into masculine and feminine in a lesbian relationship is far from a mere copy or imitation of heterosexual relationships:

Female masculinity within queer sexual discourse allows for the disruption of even flows between gender and anatomy, sexuality and identity, sexual practice and performativity. It reveals a variety of queer genders, such as stone butchness, that challenge once and for all the stability and accuracy of binary sex-gender systems. (Halberstam 1998: 139)

The existing translation of *Stone Butch Blues* has exclusively used the feminine for 'butch'. This is one aspect which I have changed on every occasion. There are butches who identify as women and would not reject the feminine, however, as Halberstam has argued, 'butch' breaks and recreates negotiations of gender and sexuality in such a way that I want to try and gender the term as inclusively as possible. In some cases, this was easy to maintain by merely omitting the articles, especially when scenes were set in plural. However, on other occasions, by doing away with an article, which automatically genders the word, the substantive grammatically turns into an adjective. I have left 'Butch' capitalised nevertheless, since it does not disrupt the reading flow and still contains the same meaning and message. In the following excerpt, this was an easy task, since nothing seems to go missing by cutting the article.

"You once told me about a factory you worked where the guys didn't want the butches to come to the union meetings?" I nodded. "Yeah, so?" She smiled. "You told me Grant said to hell with the union. But you knew the union was a good thing. You said what was wrong was keeping out the butches. You tried to organize to get the butches into the union, remember?" (Feinberg 2014: 145)

"Weißt du noch, die Fabrik, in der du mal gearbeitet hast, wo die Typen nicht wollten, dass Butches an den Gewerkschaftstreffen teilnehmen?" Ich nickte. "Und?" Sie lächelte. "Du hast erzählt, Grant hätte gesagt, scheiß auf die Gewerkschaft. Aber du wusstest doch, dass die Gewerkschaft etwas Gutes war. Du hast gesagt, was nicht damit gestimmt hat, war die Tatsache, dass sie Butches nicht reinlassen, weißt du noch?" (my translation)

Later in chapter thirteen, I have also left out the indefinite article *eine*, which commonly always adds a gendered dimension to the noun, by which *Butch* at first hand reads as an adjective: "Und was passiert dann? Dauert es nur kurz an? Also, was ich

damit meine, kannst du später wieder Butch sein, wenn es wieder sicher ist, sich zu zeigen?“ (my translation)

The following passage from chapter nineteen deals with a very clear example of the challenges that surfaces during an activist re_translating process. It was certainly one of the passages that stood out to me when I first read the German translation back-to-back with the original. During my own translation process, at first I was inclined to repeat what had disrupted my own reading. I then discovered that German in this case held an unexpected gender-inclusive alternative. In this scene, Jess talks about herself retrospectively as a child. The source text also genders the child with the pronoun ‘she’, however, since *das Kind* (the child) has the grammatical neuter gender indicators, I decided to conform to that in my translation. The existing German translation has translated ‘child’ with *das Mädchen* (the girl), which coincidentally also has neuter gender, yet the translator chose to not only translate ‘child’ to *Mädchen* but also to keep the feminine. As a reaction to the existing translation, I decided to translate ‘child’ with *Kind*, which seemed a lot more fitting to my reading and translation process. Jess explains what it feels like to be caught between genders and not having the right words or community to explain and describe herself. To make use of or exploit the possibility of implementing the neuter gender of *das Kind* revealed itself as the least invasive intervention to re_translating not only more gender-inclusively, but also to remain in dialogue with both the source text and the existing translation:

I stared far back into my past and remembered the child who couldn't be catalogued by Sears. I saw her standing in front of her own mirror, in her father's suit, asking me if I was the person she would grow up to become. Yes, I answered her. And I thought how brave she was to have begun this journey, to have withstood the towering judgments. (Feinberg 2014: 240)

Ich blickte weit in meine Vergangenheit zurück und dachte an das Mädchen, die sich im Versandhauskatalog nicht wiederfand. Ich sah sie vor dem Spiegel stehen, im Anzug ihres Vaters, und mich fragen, ob sie wie ich sein würde, wenn sie erwachsen war. Ja, antwortete ich ihr. Und ich dachte, wie mutig sie war, sich auf diese Reise begeben und all den vernichtenden Urteilen widerstanden zu haben. (Feinberg 1998: 338)

Ich blickte weit in meine Vergangenheit zurück und dachte an das Kind, das sich im Versandhauskatalog nicht wiederfand. Ich sah, wie es vorm Spiegel stand, im Anzug seines Vaters, und mich fragte, ob ich die Person war, zu der es eines Tages werden würde. Ja, antwortete ich. Und ich dachte mir, wie mutig es war, sich auf diese Reise zu begeben, sich gegen die vernichtenden Vorurteile zu stellen. (my translation)

The next scene from chapter nineteen shows Jess reflecting on how taking hormones has shaped her life. Jess explicitly evaluates her life as a trans person and what this

has meant for her. At this point in her life, she is male passing and is content with her outward appearance. Yet, the feminine gender indicators in the German translation of the words 'stranger' and 'expert' signify that the speaker very much identifies as woman in this monologue. For this reason, I have chosen to take away the gendered dimension from all nouns used in this passage in order to make gender-inclusive choices:

I didn't regret the decision to take hormones. I wouldn't have survived much longer without passing. And the surgery was a gift to myself, a coming home to my body. But I wanted more than to just barely exist, a stranger always trying not to get involved. I wanted to find out who I was, to define myself. Whoever I was, I wanted to deal with it, I wanted to live it again. I wanted to be able to explain my life, how the world looked from behind my eyes. [...] I wished there was someone, somewhere I could ask: What should I do? But no such person existed in my world. I was the only expert on living my own life, the only person I could turn to for answers. (Feinberg 2014: 243–244)

Ich habe die Entscheidung, Hormone zu nehmen, nicht bereut. Ohne sie, ohne als Mann durchzugehen, hätte ich nicht viel länger überleben können. Und die Operation war ein Geschenk für mich, eine Heimkehr in meinen Körper. Aber ich wollte mehr, als bloß existieren, wollte mehr, als eine Fremde sein, die es ständig vermeidet, sich auf etwas einzulassen. Ich wollte herausfinden, wer ich war, mich definieren. Wer ich auch war, ich wollte mich damit auseinandersetzen, ich wollte es wieder leben. Ich wollte imstande sein, mein Leben zu begreifen, mir die Welt aus meiner Sicht zu erklären. [...] Ich wünschte, es gäbe einen Menschen, den ich hätte fragen können: Was soll ich tun? Aber in meiner Welt gab es niemand. Ich war die einzige Expertin für mein Leben, die einzige, an die ich mich mit meinen Fragen wenden konnte. (Feinberg 1998: 342–343)

Ich hatte die Entscheidung, Hormone zu nehmen, nicht bereut. Ohne Passing hätte ich nicht länger überlebt. Und die Operation war ein Geschenk an mich, eine Heimkehr in meinen Körper. Aber ich wollte mehr als gerade so zu existieren, als eine fremde Person, die stets versuchte, sich nirgends dazwischenzustellen. Ich wollte herausfinden, wer ich eigentlich war, um mich selbst definieren zu können. Wer ich auch war, ich wollte mich damit auseinandersetzen und ich wollte leben. Ich allein wollte bestimmen, wie ich die Welt sah. [...] Ich wünschte, dass es irgendwo eine Person gäbe, die ich fragen konnte: Was soll ich jetzt machen? Aber so einen Menschen gab es in meinem Leben nicht. Ich war die einzige Person, die wirklich wusste, wie ich mein Leben zu leben hatte, ich allein kannte die Antworten auf meine Fragen. (my translation)

I wanted to set all three versions next to each other to demonstrate the effect of using gender-neutral language in this passage. The first change concerning the words 'a stranger', which the existing translation translated with *eine Fremde*, holds numerous possible alternatives, for example, the change of word class to an adjective: *mir*

selber fremd sein. An easier alternative is the addition of the non-descript and gender-neutral, yet grammatically feminine auxiliary noun *Person*, as it already is a frequently used alternative to avoid ascribing grammatical gender or calling people man or woman.

The second passage I want to discuss found a larger step away from the original text, in order to circumvent resorting to using the masculine form. I opted for finding a circumlocution equivalent to ‘being an expert to’ and in this way avoiding having to include a noun which again would need to be gendered. For “I was the only expert on living my own life, the only person I could turn to” (Feinberg 2014: 244), possible solutions could be: *Ich allein wusste, wie ich mein Leben zu führen hatte*, or: *Nur ich konnte wissen, wie ich mein Leben zu führen hatte, [denn] ich war die einzige Person, an die ich mich mit meinen Fragen wenden konnte*. The second part of the sentence, as already demonstrated, finds a fairly easy solution by inserting the auxiliary noun *Person* again. Similar examples can be found throughout the entire novel, yet this passage stresses, by the nature of what is being discussed, how the choices made for grammatical gender function as a gender assigning moment to a character who questions their gender. This passage is very similar to others in the novel, in which gendered language can be re_translated to gender-inclusive language.

Conclusion

By emphasising how Leslie Feinberg’s politics, life work, and accomplishments are deeply rooted in an activist community, my choices to re_translate parts of his novel *Stone Butch Blues* with a language practice rooted in the German queer-feminist movement became transparent. By claiming re_translation as an activist practice, the product of our work can be a part of forging the language that we use and want to see in the world, and re_claiming it to make it encompass and represent trans, queer, and gender-free or non-conforming subjectivities. I have pointed out how the language we aim to speak today is part of a legacy of activists and campaigners, linguists, academics, authors, and translators, trying to change how identities beyond a binary gender system and ideas of gender in general can be perceived and conceptualised through language.

My comments on theory demonstrated the integral position of interventionist feminist language practice as part of translation theory and practice. By taking Godayol up on her remark on identities other than women, making use of said interventionist translation practices, I was able to open that tradition and to connect it to queer and LGBT approaches. Through Gramling’s remarks I was able to connect and point to salient parts of my own approach and statement that re_translating as an activist practice can give us the tools to make use of the structural differences of English and German to make queer and trans experiences and subjectivities more

visible and intelligible in translation. The nature of not being inscribed into a heteronormative matrix, and what challenges that poses for the lexical level, but also the knowledge and ability to read into queer implicature have greatly informed my approach. Despite the lexical level not being the focus of my article, I have briefly addressed and mapped out what some of the translation challenges and shortcomings are. By comparing the first and last revised edition of the source text, I have demonstrated its inherently activist quality, which had the aim of changing vocabulary in order to appeal to an anti-racist language use.

The analyses of my experience with re_translating passages from *Stone Butch Blues* made my choices to appeal to gender-neutral or -free options in connection to my reading of the novel apparent. As expected, by, on the one hand, trusting my queer reading to appeal to the visibility of the character's gender identities by changing grammatical choices, and, on the other hand, being in dialogue with the existing translation, I was able to adapt and change the target text accordingly. Through my comparison, many translation choices became part of a toolbox, to also change or adapt future translation processes accordingly. Every act of interpreting a text creates a different approach of how to translate or re_translate it. Every translation is an imprint of the historically embedded language use, which is even more important when the translator is conscious of the political act of translation and the agency they have by translating literature. Of course, the current practice is an imprint of what authors want to see in their works, or at times, what the publisher's style sheet demands. Overall, we see a shift in language use. How that will translate to translated literary works is a question of time and of how we can shift our perspective on for whom we are writing and about whom we are translating.

References

- Duden (n.d.) "butch", <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/butch> (last accessed 20 August 2024).
- Eggers, M. M. (2009) *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland*. Münster: Unrast.
- Feinberg, L. (1992) *Transgender Liberation. A Movement Whose Time Has Come*. New York: World View Forum.
- (1993) *Stone Butch Blues*. New York: Firebrand.
- (1996) *Transgender Warriors. Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*. Boston: Beacon.
- (1998) *Stone Butch Blues. Träume in den erwachenden Morgen*. Berlin: Krug & Schandenberg.
- (2014) *Stone Butch Blues*. 20th Anniversary Author Edition, self-published. www.lesliefeinberg.net (last accessed 19 March 2024).

- Godayol, P. (2013) "Gender and Translation", in: Millán, C. and Bartrina, F. (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 173–185.
- and Waldeck, S. (2018) "Feminist Translation", in: Washbourne, K. and Van Wyke, B. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation*. London: Routledge, pp. 468–481.
- Gramling, D. (2018) "Queer/LGBT Approaches", in: Washbourne, K. and Van Wyke, B. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation*. London: Routledge, pp. 495–508.
- Halberstam, J. (1998) *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press.
- Olderdissen, C. (n.d.) "Luise F. Pusch und der Genderstern", *genderleicht.de*. <http://www.genderleicht.de/luise-f-pusch-und-der-genderstern/> (last accessed 19 March 2024).
- Pratt, M. B. (2014) "Leslie Feinberg – A Communist Who Revolutionized Transgender Rights", *Workers World*. <https://www.workers.org/2014/11/16937/> (last accessed 19 March 2024).
- Pusch, L. F. [1984] (2023) *Das Deutsche als Männersprache. Aufsätze und Glossen zur feministischen Linguistik*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Queer Lexikon (2023) "Weder*noch", <https://queer-lexikon.net/2017/06/08/wedernoch/> (last accessed 20 March 2024).
- Söder, Markus (2024): "Bayern verbietet das Gendern in Schulen, Hochschulen und Behörden", *Zeit Online*. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2024-03/markus-soeder-bayern-gendersprache-verbot> (last accessed 20 August 2024).

Growing Sideways

An Écriture of the Queer Kid¹

H. Zipfel

Dear earth book.

Today I devised a new Earth Destruction Plan. Then me and my earth parents will fly back to our homeplanet. Oh, earthlings are so naive! I have been living on their planet for ten years now and they don't notice (these primitive life forms). Of course, I would need some food for the trip, I was thinking of something like acid, cyanide and of course a large box of carbon dioxide to snack on. Now that I'm on my way out of here, I've finally figured out how the earthlings greet each other: they show the opposite person the middle finger. With us on *?*\$"§" %* it works differently: since our sense organs are not firmly attached, we simply exchange them with every greeting.

When I flip through my old diary, this entry of ten-year-old me sticks out to me: could this be an early self-testimony of the very familiar feeling of living as an estranged Queerdo on earth?

Questionable, because just as sitting under your self-built blanket-tent shining your flashlight on the latest *Goosebump* stories, building your own childhood narrative means always to lighten up just certain parts of the story. Also, our grown-up mindset is aware that every retroaction means to realize that childhood is no longer what it was. What we call our memories – staring back at us from the abyss of the messy archive of our brains and bodies – are rather vague possibilities of what has been: During the retrospective designing process of childhood, our very own scaling software does a great job in producing highly transformed images, adding blank spots (due to traumatic experiences, for example) or beauty filters just as the glow of nostalgia. Feelings of a speculative past blend here with current states of mind and intertwine with family narratives, media images and 'common knowledge'.

And still, childhood is something worth investigating, especially since for many queer folks this lifespan can be associated with prolonged periods of suppression,

1 This text is a revised and annotated transcript of the video essay *Growing Sideways. An Écriture of the Queer Child* (Zipfel 2023). It can be viewed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5Qw9EZNIwk&t=60s>.

patterns of shame and a feeling of ‘having nowhere to grow’. As we see in *Stone Butch Blues*, a semi-autobiographical work of fiction by Leslie Feinberg, the protagonist Jess is coerced into a traumatizing placement in a psychiatric institution for challenging the binary system at a young age. In strong parallel to *Stone Butch Blues*, Feinberg also reflects in *Transgender Warriors* what growing up as a gender non-conforming kid looked like inside a rigid hetero norm.

Memory 1 (Leslie):

My own gender expression felt quite natural. I liked my hair short and I felt most relaxed in sneakers, jeans and a t-shirt. However, when I was most at home with how I looked, adults did a double-take or stopped short when they saw me. The question “Is that a boy or a girl?” haunted me through my childhood. The answer didn’t matter much. The very fact that strangers had to ask the question already marked me as a gender outlaw. (Feinberg 1996: 4)

As we see here, childhood itself – a construct that seems to haunt personal narratives, memoir writing and queer theory alike – still needs to be reclaimed by different marginalized groups. So, Tomboys, He-Shes, Baby Butches and all the other tiny Gender Outlaws – this one is for you! To summon the ghosts of the past, I collected some individual memories in the form of pictures or audio recordings queers sent me after an open call on an online community platform. These oral histories will be woven together on a more scholarly level about the queer kid as a trope in cultural theory.

Sidenote: I am not interested in essentialist myths about queerness. Besides, ‘queer’ is used here as an umbrella term to grasp amalgamated forms of feelings, desires and representations of kids that act outside a hetero-norm – I use these words to integrate trans narratives, gender non-conforming behavior and/or just being very gay as a kid. Here, we must also keep in mind that desire is not just in the context of childhood a complicated term, but always co-structured, as bell hooks writes in “Eating the Other. Desire and Resistance”, by other categories, for example race and class.

Growing Sideways

“The question of the child makes us climb into a cloud” (Stockton 2009: 2); cultural scientist Kathryn Bond Stockton writes and unfolds an idea about the ghostly qualities of the queer child. In Stockton’s reading, due to the lack of representation in the moment of childhood itself, queerness represents something ‘that is not there’ yet, but finds its rather vague expression in childhood-feelings of being estranged, different, odd or out-of-sync concerning a cis-hetero norm.

Stockton's idea stands in line with popular scholars on queer negativity pointing out experiences around loss and depression (which a lot of queers have in relation to their past), but still doesn't dismiss a potential future. Even though the awareness for one's own (queer) future emerges, following Stockton's idea, from a gaze in the back mirror, because queerness and its associated vocabulary may not emerge for many kids until later in life, or at least not in childhood. That's why Stockton compares the retroactive investigation with one's own queerness in childhood as a backward birth. The slightly spooky metaphor doesn't deny an existence of queerness in childhood as a lived or felt experience, but points out that many are being introduced to the 'concept' later in life. In the context of the backward investigation, queerness, here, also represents a lens or rendering for a former vague and ungraspable reality. With the ghostly presence in a state of 'still-to-come' or 'yet-to-be', Stockton refers to Derrida's concept of Hauntology – originally used to describe a state of late capitalism haunted by the ghost of communism (Derrida 1994). The queer temporality is also connected to a figure of delay many queers can relate to: maybe with the past feeling of not being able to fully express themselves under the consequences of closeting and character armor – or with a lack of the sheer possibility of their own queerness, leading to an exploration very late in life. Due to its persistence to reject the linearity of a 'straight' way of growing up, the queer kid – with its time bending qualities – grows sideways instead. Let's follow these sideways movements for a bit, where queerness may be not accessible yet in terms of language, but lingers around in fuzzy, hard to grasp categories, like 'intuition'. One might remember, for example, images with a certain stickiness: A James Dean-Poster, saturated with ambivalent feelings between romantic longing and identifying. Or memories of a huge excitement for Xena, the warrior princess, shown every Saturday on TV, and how her crystal-clear blue eyes would move you in a certain way you could not describe. As if something clicks.

The Problem Starts with Childhood

In opposition to a reading as a simple lifespan between birth and adolescence, cultural scholar Jacob Breslow (2021) introduces childhood as a highly ambivalent cultural concept. Emerging from the 20th century disciplinary society, childhood is not just connected to ideas of domination and domestication, but also to the idea of a safe space. This safe space is reserved for some privileged, largely non-marginalized groups, as we will see, while others are excluded. We think, for example, of a black kid murdered in 2012 by police forces for wearing a hoodie – 17-year-old Trayvon Benjamin Martin – and being framed as an adult by public media discourse. Absurdly, at the same time, the infantilization of adult B*POC, especially women of color, is a historical racist power move. Both – the infantilization of grown-ups, rendered as

primitive, unknowing or not able to take responsibilities, while at the same time not including black kids in the club of childhood innocence – point out a highly ideological, formative western principle of childhood. To make a stance for the queer child therefore means also to be against a specific normative and exclusive nature of an idea of childhood innocence.

Fig. 1: Carnival, © private.



Memory 2 (Hann):

This is my favorite childhood picture from the late 90s, because it's somehow impossible to not give it a queer reading. It shows my friend Li and the leader of our Christian-protestant kindergarten, Ruth, on carnival. Ruth, who always encouraged us to chant songs about Jesus or a popular German poem that starts with "Ich bin klein, mein Herz ist rein" ("I am small, my heart is pure") is dressed up as Mother Mary, while Li has chosen to be a vampire – perhaps drawn by the smell of blood by maidens that are as innocent as they are yummy.

When it comes to questions around infant sexuality, as we see in Ruth the kindergarten teacher, the white vest often comes as a dress and the 'immaculata' of the mother of Christ often provokes a certain flipside. Clever artforms like to play with

notions of a latent hypersexuality, think of Madonna's music video for *Like a Virgin* (1984), for example. I also wonder if the kindergarten teacher knew about the lesbian classic from a small publisher that suddenly went mainstream in the 1980s, *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* by Nancy Manahan. But this might be another topic.

Let's continue with our little seance:

Memory 3 (Hann):

Later, Li and I would reenact the Backstreet Boys in the garage, with a lot of water in our hair. We were not aware of any queer codes at the time, but knew that it would be better to shut the garage door during practice; creating our own little closet with its signature tension between prison and safe space – at that time a peaceful tomb for two baby nosferatus trying out what they want. For me it was a huge privilege to have a kid around that happened to be just like me (whatever that was), while I would be terrified of going to school every morning – getting chased from school toilets by teachers regularly, leaving me with shame, guilt and a continued and deep skepticism towards pedagogical institutions.

We remember the heat-rush that is also described in *Stone Butch Blues*, flooding Jess' system when the speech act "Are you a boy or a girl?" (Feinberg 1996: 4) is at work; or something more subtle, like a raised eyebrow you would notice.

In contemporary debates over trans kids using locker rooms, the soft power of school administrations exposes a harmful double standard, when they pretend to be concerned for the children's best interests though they are actually harming trans children via exclusion from social or public spaces, blatant stigmatization and shaming. Often the use of speculative fiction is at work here – by noting that the genitals a kid might develop one day *might* be a problem in the future. Sounds like *Minority Report*? Exactly. While projecting hypothetical sexual activities onto children in locker rooms and rendering them as future predators, actual queer infant desire in childhood is often dismissed as play or entirely shut down. Notions of assumed heterosexuality meanwhile seem to be less problematic and are projected onto kids from a young age.

As we see, childhood is ambivalent at best. The praxis of sideways movements can thus help to reclaim this space.

Reclaiming Childhood

Memory 4 (Rita):

I was in the first or second grade, I think six or seven years old, and I remember asking the teacher to go to the bathroom. I was wandering through the school, this big school, and then as I was walking down the corridor, I saw a girl coming

right at me. She asked me my name and I said a boy's name, I said "Gabriel". We stood there for a few seconds, looking at each other in a gaze – and then I started running. I knew I did something strange, something funny or wrong, but I also felt joy. I felt adventurous, I felt free. My name is Rita.

The potential of childhood also lies in being an open field for experiments and a speculative force that denies a stable narrative. Many trans people are forced into extremely coherent narratives about themselves for psychological reports to get access to hormones and other gender affirming care. Everyone has a right to reclaiming their own narrative, but at the same time, everyone should also have the same right to an ambivalent queer childhood; including narratives that can be messy, marked by figures of doubt, dead ends or new beginnings. In *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess' passing as a cis man does not bring relief: "I feel like a ghost [...]. Like I've been buried alive. As far as the world's concerned, I was born the day I began to pass. I have no past, no loved ones, no memories, no me." (Feinberg 1993: 231) The ghostly presence of Jess – connected to suffering as a gender outlaw inside a rigid two-gender system – comes also with a sentence that seems to challenge this norm like a haunting promise: "As long as I live, I will be searching" (ibid.: 132). This reality is of course not just speculative, but lived by people every day and against all odds.

In *Stone Butch Blues*, the transitioning-process represents an awareness of the complexity of a multi-layered self-identification, one that is not carved in stone. Therefore, queerness can be read as the anticipation of a society liberated from the gender regime.

Re-membering: Memories and Vision

I believe that self-archiving techniques are (still) necessary – and no one knew this better than Leslie Feinberg, probably. A book like *Stone Butch Blues* is also so important, because queers have always been discouraged from seeing themselves in history. Representation leads us to exclusions one can observe not just in the context of cultural history museums and archives, but also in the blank spots in our own family trees. In the genogram, queerness often has a ghostly presence *in absentia* – at least in my own family –, represented by relatives whose real stories are never told.

In a touching obituary to Feinberg in 2014, Sasha T. Goldberg emphasizes the role model character of *Stone Butch Blues* and the feeling of being located in the pages and words. This experience of self-assurance happened for Goldberg at an early age, even before reading *Stone Butch Blues*, when small Sasha was standing in front of a bookshop window, being stroked by the novel's iconic cover:

Memory 5 (Sasha):

And in the reflection of the glass, finally, literally and metaphorically, I could see myself, and Leslie, at once. I think I started to understand what I could be in that moment, that I belonged to a proud tradition of Butch women. For the first time, I understood that I was looking at who and what I would become as an adult. It was breathtaking. That there was a place for me in this world. That I could grow up. (Goldberg 2014)

Imagination can function as a tool to rethink the past and our relationship to it, re-shaping or leading to speculations about future possibilities and building connections. In contrast to the hegemonic project of the rather exclusive western mindset of universalism, the queer memoir stretches its tentacles through time and space, connecting individual narratives in gentle ways. Re-remembering means also to keep your club members in mind: think of how young Jess discovers the butches in the bar, finding others in the margins also growing sideways. And while kids may be a bit out of place in a bar, you can always take them to a bookstore.

References

- Breslow, J. (2021) *Ambivalent Childhoods. Speculative Futures and the Psychic Life of the Child*. Minnesota: University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1994) *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. London: Routledge.
- Edelman, L. (2004) *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Feinberg, L. (1993) *Stone Butch Blues*. New York: Firebrand.
- (1996) *Transgender Warriors. Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*. Boston: Beacon.
- Goldberg, S. T. (2014) “Zahor: In Remembrance of our Stone Butch Hero”, *The State of the Butch Union*. <https://sashatgoldberg.wordpress.com/> (last accessed 25 April 2024).
- hooks, b. (1992) “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance”, in: hooks, b. *Black Looks. Race and Representation*. Boston: South End, pp. 21–39.
- Manahan, N. (1985) *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*. New York: Spinsters Ink.
- Stockton, K. B. (2009) *The Queer Child. Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Zipfel, Hannah (2023) “Growing Sideways. An Écriture of the Queer Child”, YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5Qw9EZNIwk&t=60s> (last accessed 25 April 2024).

Figures

Fig. 1: Carnival, © private.

LESER Bubbles

Zirz, wirst du manchmal für eine Mutter gehalten?



Well I'm feeding their cars, but I'm also sticking pipes in their cars. They are troubled when they realize, but most of them just sit in their leather seats, relax while they watch me and just unknowingly enjoy. Why you asking?

1 Medea hält auf dem Weg zur Medea Aufführung an der Gaysoline Station, wo Medeas Tante Zirz Tankwärt*in ist.

2



3 Hinter Medeas Wagen bildet sich eine Schlange wartender Autofahren*innen.

ELENDE FRAU



4

VERWORFENE FRAU



5

WARUM DAUERT DAS SO LANGE??

SCHLECHTE FRAU

**BEING A MOTHER MYSELF
HAT DIE REGISSEURIN**

GESAGT just being attracted to women
HAT JASON GESAGT
geht doch auf

dass ich doch **AUCH** immer
eine **MUTTER**
eine **GESCHIEDENE**
eine Geschichte

dass ich doch verstehen müsse
weil alle mich in irgendeinem Punkt verstehen könnten
dass ich eigentlich alle Freiheiten hätte
weil ich ja selbst Medea sei

dass ich ja auch mit Kreusa schlafen könne
den Fluchwagen selbst volltanken könne
dass ich fahren könne
nach der Aufführung fliehen

immer eigenverantwortlich, mein Schicksal in der Hand
eine Mächtige, eine Mutige, eine Mutternde
Mordende sollte ich bloß –

irgendwas ist mit dem Autolack nicht in Ordnung,
da sind Blasen drin –

mein **MUTTERSEIN**, mein Ehemuttersein
mein Name, ich bin Medea.

Auf, **AUF**, **WIEDER** einen neuen

TEXT VON EINE*R AUTOR*IN, wieder
DIESE FIGUR sein, **IMMER**

WIEDER FIGUR SEIN

REINSCHLÜPFEN IN den **STOFF**, in einen
vorgeformten Körper, meinen Wutkörper entfalten
WUT WALLEN LASSEN



UNMENSCHLICHE FRAU



**ICH WILL JA KEIN
TYRANN SEIN:
ABER DIESE FRAU
IST SCHLECHT**



**VERWORFENE,
GRAUSAME FRAU**

9 Eine Gruppe Dykes on Bikes taucht an der Tankstelle auf.



Wie wärs erstmal mit ner
PRONOMEN-RUNDE?

**AUCH DIESE SÄULEN
KENNEN KEINE HALLEN
STÜTZEN ALLEIN SICH
SELBST ZWISCHEN
FLÜSSIGEM UND
FLIESENDEM**

ich
wandelwölbewehere
mich weiterweiter
nehme jede Nische
zum Anlass
auszuwischen
reinzulecken
ich tauch in
Blasen auf

12



*Medea, you're fueled in any case.
And that's metaphorical.
But your varnish does show
some bubbles.
Bubbles can be hot air but they can
cause some trouble
to your machines.
You wanna do
something about it at
Gaysoline Station?*

13

10



Zirz verwandelt einen der Autofahrer in ein Schnabeltier.

Get some new *gaze* from these *gays*!

Find your inner *platy puss* at *Gaysoline Station*.

ZITTRE!!



11



ANZEICHEN FÜR EIN LECK
 ich tauche ab
 stopf mir einen Gum in den Mund
 kauekauekaue aber es hilft nichts
 ich blas ja doch
 irgendwann
 in die Füllmasse, **FÜHL ES**
 und **FÜLLFÜLL** wissend
 ich werd die Blase
 zum Platzen bringen
 den Rahmen sprengen und die
 Inhalte werden sich wieder
 über mir
 Zirz, ich brauch einfach ne Pause

14

*I hear you talking...
You know the Dykes?*



15

...You already know Medea?



17



Medea: Hannah Birnbaumer
Zirz: Rhonda D'Vine
Autofahrer*innen:
Emil Huppenkothen, Louis Platzer
Dykes: Hansi Wimmer, Fran Klein,
Teresa Uhr

Konzept & Idee: Nike Hartmond,
Fred Heinemann
Text: Fred Heineman
Bühne & Kostüm: Nike Hartmond,
Emily Schreiber

Fotografie: Rea von Víc,
Vanessa Krüger!
Make-Up: Rebecca von der Höden,
Nike Hartmond
Grafik: Nora Keilig

16

Wer bist du – Medea?

Es gibt viele
Versionen.

Dann gibt es auch eine,
in der wir am Ende
miteinander auf meinem
Bike tanzen.



18



Besonderer Dank an die
Johanna Tankstelle im 5. Wiener Bezirk!
Gefördert durch den Bezirk Margareten und
die Österreichische Hochschüler_innenschaft.



Medea: Bubbles

oder Weggefährt*innen

Nike Hartmond & Fred Heinemann

Die Arbeit an diesem Projekt begann mit der Idee, uns an einer Tankstelle zu treffen. Nike schlug vor, wir könnten dann dort als zwei Autobahncops auftauchen. Es war ein erster Vorschlag für Drag und eine Verabredung gemeinsam den Raum der Tankstelle zu claimen – einen Ort, von dem wir als FLINTA-Personen tendenziell erwarteten, unpassend angesprochen zu werden, darauf hingewiesen zu werden, dass es ein Raum ist, der uns nicht ›gehört‹ oder dort mit ›Männlichkeit‹ in verschiedensten Formen konfrontiert zu werden. Wie der Ort sich in das Projekt einschreiben würde, wussten wir zu diesem Zeitpunkt noch nicht.

Für eine künstlerische Zusammenarbeit zwischen unseren Arbeitsbereichen Bühnenbild und Sprachkunst beschäftigten wir uns mit dem Mythos von *Medea*. *Medea* ist ein vielfach erzählter Stoff in Oper und Theater, mit dem sich unzählige Inszenierungen auseinandersetzen. Der Fokus liegt meist darauf, dass Iason Medea – nachdem sie mit ihm angeblich aus Liebesgründen aus dem Königreich ihres Vaters in sein Land geflohen ist, ihn geheiratet und mit ihm zwei Kinder bekommen hat – wegen einer anderen Frau verlassen will und sie daraufhin die gemeinsamen Kinder und die neue Frau tötet. In Luigi Cherubinis Opernfassung von 1797, die uns als Ausgangspunkt diente, wird Medea (wie in vielen anderen Inszenierungen auch) als Tyrannin dargestellt und das einseitige Narrativ von Rache, Eifersucht und leidenschaftlicher Liebe als Beweggrund für ihr Handeln angegeben.

Zu dem Treffen an der Tankstelle brachte Nike eine Ausgabe von Leslie Feinbergs *Stone Butch Blues* mit. Im Tankstellenimbiss besprachen wir bei Filterkaffee Jess' Geschichte mit den vielen Codes, die Transidentitäten und lesbische Realitäten beschreiben: über die als »Rüstung« bezeichnete Motorradjacke von Butch Rocco (Feinberg 1996: 328); wie ein so bezeichnetes *Männersakko* ein anderes Auftreten ermöglicht (vgl. ebd.: 41); wie im Buch die Femmes den Butches das Revers richten (vgl. ebd.: 44, 90, 93, 167); über queere Räume und wie sie gefunden werden können; wie dieses Finden oftmals mit Netzwerken oder Kontakten zusammenhängt, wie wir eingeladen oder mitgenommen werden müssen; was es verändern kann, lesbische, genderqueere und trans Personen kennenzulernen oder Personen, die Hormone nehmen oder eine Mastektomie bereits hinter sich haben; zuletzt auch darüber,

wie der Umzug von einer ländlichen Umgebung in die Stadt andere Räume für queere Realitäten eröffnet.

Jess ist in *Stone Butch Blues* vielen Schwellensituationen ausgesetzt. Der Umzug vom Land in die Stadt, die Job- und Wohnortwechsel, der Wechsel sozialer Räume. Das viele Herumfahren mit dem Motorrad betrachteten wir als symbolische Aneignung dieses Ständig-In-Transit-Seins. Wir nahmen Jess als starke Figur wahr, welche trotz verschiedener großer Bedrohungen, langen Phasen von Einsamkeit und teilweise extremer Diskriminierung, ihrer Identität und Queerness nachgeht und sie irgendwie zu leben versucht. Als genauso wichtig empfanden wir außerdem die Figuren, welche um Jess herum auftauchen und Jess in verschiedenen Lebenssituationen begleiten. Wir bezeichneten diese Figuren als Weggefährt*innen.

Auch Medea ist eine Schwellenfigur: als Figur, die sich entscheiden muss zwischen Iason und ihrer Familie; als Figur, die auf der Flucht ist; als Figur, die in Iasons Königreich nicht als zugehörig anerkannt wird; als Ausgestoßene; als Figur, die sich immer wieder rächen soll; als Figur, die sich gerächt hat und dann keinen Ort hat, an den sie gehen kann. Auch in Medeas Geschichte tauchen Weggefährt*innen und Personen mit queerem Potenzial auf.

Wir beschlossen eine Foto-Love-Story zu machen, in der die beiden Geschichten *Medea* und *Stone Butch Blues* füreinander Weggefährt*innen sind. Dabei gefiel uns die Verwandtschaft zwischen Foto-Love-Story und Oper, welche sich im Verhältnis zwischen Text und Bild zeigt – große Gesten, eindeutige Gefühle, erzählt wird in großen, wenigen Worten. Beide Formate erinnerten uns außerdem an Drag-Performances. Und gleichzeitig könnten sich Oper und Foto-Love-Story in ihrem angesprochenen Publikum nicht deutlicher unterscheiden. Mal abgesehen vom Kostenfaktor und der Frage, wer es sich leisten kann, in die Oper zu gehen, spricht sie ein Publikum des Bildungsbürgertums an, welches an Hochkultur und klassischen Erzählungen eines männlich-weißen Kanons interessiert ist. Hinzu kommt, dass die Opern-Aufführung oft nur einen Ausschnitt der Geschichte behandelt, folglich Vorwissen nötig ist, um die Geschichte zu verstehen. Die Foto-Love-Story ist heutzutage vor allem bekannt aus dem Magazin *Bravo* (auch wenn der Fotoroman schon viel früher und in einem anderen Kontext entstanden ist) als Format für Teenager, welches schon in seiner textlichen Form (simple Bildbeschreibungen sowie markierte Sprech- oder Denkblasen auf aussagekräftigen Bildern) wesentlich leichter zu rezipieren ist als die Geschichte in der Oper.

Die Tankstelle, die wir zunächst aus einer privaten Sehnsucht heraus aufgesucht hatten, schien uns passend als Ort, der *am Weg* liegt, und sie taucht darum in der Foto-Love-Story als Gaysoline Station auf. Die Tankstelle betrachteten wir als einen Transitraum, eine Raststätte, einen Ort, der angefahren, aber auch wieder verlassen wird. Sie taucht in diesem Kontext außerdem als Gegenentwurf zum Opernhaus auf – mit einer offeneren Architektur, nicht nur inklusiv, aber weniger exklusiv als die Oper.

Die Geschichte von *Medea: Bubbles* versucht einerseits Medeas Geschichte mit ihren vielen Zuschreibungen nicht einfach zu reproduzieren und andererseits die Strukturen, aus denen ihr Mythos erwächst, trotzdem weiter zu benennen. In Oper und Theater wurde die Figur Medeas als Zugehörige verschiedenster marginalisierter Gruppen gezeigt. Darum wollten wir Medea den Raum vor allem für ihre Wut geben und sie nicht in eine weitere Blase stecken, sondern ihr die Schwelle als einen Ort anbieten, an dem sie eine eigene Handlungsmacht hat, an dem sie eine Pause machen kann, an dem sie Spaß hat.

Die Geschichte von *Medea: Bubbles* beginnt damit, dass sich Medea auf dem Weg zu ihrer eigenen Opern-Aufführung befindet und an der Tankstelle hält, an der wir ihr verschiedene Weggefährt*innen und Zeug*innen zur Seite stellten: Zum einen Medeas Tante Circe – in der antiken Geschichte eine Zauberin, die auf eine Insel verbannt wird, auf der sie sexuell übergriffige Männer in Schweine verwandelt und Medea auf ihrer Flucht berät. In der Foto-Love-Story wird Circe zu Zirz und ist Tankwärt*in an der Gaysoline Station und Medeas Zeug*in, als Medea zu Beginn der Geschichte dort stoppt und sich darüber ärgert, dass sie immer wieder diese Rolle der Tyranni*in erfüllen soll und dass sie ständig mit Zuschreibungen konfrontiert ist. Zirz stellt Medea zum anderen weitere Weggefährt*innen vor: eine Gruppe Dykes on Bikes, die wir uns als Figuren aus *Stone Butch Blues* ausgeliehen haben und welche auftauchen, als andere Autofahrer*innen Medea an der Tankstelle mit Originalzitate aus der Cherubini-Oper beschimpfen.

Während der Arbeiten an diesem Projekt kam es bei einem Punk-Konzert zu einem Streit mit oberkörperfreien Männern, in dessen Verlauf die misgendernten Personen aufforderten: »Wie wär's erstmal mit 'ner Pronomen-Runde?« Diese Frage gaben wir nun den Dykes on Bikes, die sie den verärgerten Autofahrer*innen an der Tankstelle stellen.

Während der Arbeiten an diesem Projekt fragte der*die Autor*in Sivan Ben Yis-hai in einem Workshop zum dramatischen Schreiben: »Warum müssen wir eine Rolle haben? Warum eine Figur sein?« Und gab die Antwort darauf: »Um der Dramaturgie zu dienen, um sie zu halten.« Wir begriffen die Dramaturgie in der *Medea*-Erzählung also als die Struktur, welche anzugreifen, aus dem Gleichgewicht zu bringen war.

In ihrer Wut über ihre Rolle und darüber, dass ihre Geschichte ständig neu inszeniert wird, sie immer wieder als Repräsentantin anderer marginalisierter Gruppen dienen soll, sind Medeas Sprechblasen fast Bildfüllend und drängen sie an den Rand des Bildes. Als Referenz auf den queeren Community-Begriff der »Bubble« und aus dem Gedanken heraus, dass die queere »Blase« auch nur bedingt ein Schutzraum sein kann, sprengt Medea ihre eigene Sprechblase und damit das Format der Foto-Love-Story. Schließlich bekommt Medea an der Tankstelle den Raum für eine Auszeit mit den Dykes on Bikes und die Möglichkeit, ihre eigene Queerness auszuprobieren; sie verpasst deswegen ihre Aufführung in der Oper und Jason (Iason) springt

für sie ein und spielt ihre Rolle. *Medea: Bubbles* will keine Lösung für die Probleme des *Medea*-Mythos anbieten.

Die Figuren der Foto-Love-Story wurden von lesbischen, queeren und trans Personen gespielt, die wir über befreundete Personen, linke Strukturen und feministische Mailverteiler fanden. Da wir die gesamte Arbeit unbezahlt machten, konnten wir den Spieler*innen nur anbieten, den Raum für die Erweiterung eines queeren Netzwerks zu nutzen, als Raum eine andere Rolle auszuprobieren und in Drag zu gehen. Sowohl inhaltlich als auch in der Umsetzung wollten wir sowohl uns selbst als auch den spielenden Personen einen Raum anbieten, in dem die eigene Queerness oder mögliche Formen davon Sichtbarkeit finden und ausprobiert werden können. Als Gruppe queerer Personen nahmen wir für das Shooting einen Abend lang eine Tankstelle in Wien für uns ein und der Besitzer stellte uns bereitwillig den Raum. Er wird außerdem ein Poster von der Arbeit in seinen Schaufenstern aufhängen. Die entstandene Foto-Love-Story ist Ergebnis einer auch privaten Auseinandersetzung mit Fragen nach Pronomen, Zeug*innenschaft für die Queerness einer anderen Person, Weggefährt*innentum sowie den Vor- und Nachteilen von Bubbles.

Literatur

Feinberg, L. (1996) *Stone Butch Blues*. Träume in den erwachenden Morgen. Berlin: Krug & Schadenberg.

**Teil III: (Zukunfts-)Räume (online und offline) /
Part III: (Future) Spaces (Online and Offline)**



^{30 years}
Stone
Butch
Blues



We have a right to thrive

Jewish



there have always been people like me



in a world where no one is misgendered (it is possible)

How will we show each other kindness?
What shall we create together?

Shevat
5784

Hani '17



Artist Statement: Queer Trans Jewish Futures

Hani Esther Indictor Partner

In the workshop on “Queer Trans Jewish Futures” that I hosted at the conference in May 2023, a group of queer and transgender Jewish people gathered in cyberspace to discuss what our lives and current realities are like in this time and place. It was a community-centered space of reflection, validation, and learning. We came together to form connections across multiple countries and voice our experiences when we are the only Jewish queer/trans person in the room. After facilitating this space it really made me understand how deeply necessary these identity-based spaces are for multiply-marginalized people so that we can relax in each other’s presence.

In the painting I created to process this conversation, I sat with symbols of transgender pride and joy and Leslie Feinberg’s words and activism to create a collage of plants, mushrooms, quotes, and portraits, all in a very magical, perhaps futuristic landscape. In the bottom right you can see two questions that we explored together: How will we show each other kindness? What shall we create together?

In community, we talked about what Feinberg’s work and presence can teach us as the next generation of Jewish queer and trans community builders. We discussed Jewish queer futures in terms of spaces of oasis, daily language shifts, and broader queer and Jewish community education. I wanted to center conversations and exchanges with other Jewish people involved in the conference, as I have found there are not enough spaces to embrace and celebrate being Jewish and queer and trans, and be honest about our struggles in academia, in the broader LGBTQ+ movement, or in the cisgender-heterosexual Jewish world. For many people, it is difficult to exist in our multiplicities and intersectional identities, facing questions like “How can you be queer/transgender if you are Jewish?”, as well as being forced to be educators on antisemitism or transphobia when you just want to be present like everyone else in the room.

Leslie Feinberg’s writing and activism allow for revolutionary dreaming and creating a better world by providing us contemporary queer people with a vision of what can be possible if we speak on our truths and build community with other marginalized groups.

For the painting, I used dark blue ink to bring attention to the occasion of the conference being the 30th anniversary of the publishing of *Stone Butch Blues*. I created a rainbow from the word 'Queer' with bright colors – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Next to the rainbow is a butterfly, a symbol of transformation and freedom with hearts and peace signs on the wings. Over one of the wings drapes a tallit. Mushrooms are growing from the top of the page, surrounding the message “we have a right to thrive.” A portrait of Feinberg is drawn in the right corner of the page from the cover of *Stone Butch Blues*. A garden of flowers grows to his left and below on rolling hills. A halved pomegranate with its many seeds floats above the word 'Jewish' with a hanukkah over the letter 'i'. On the bottom left corner, a smiling sunshine emerges from a grassy mountainous landscape – with 'FUTURES,' written in capital letters, resting below two fluffy clouds and more butterflies. On a plant with a large and geometric root grows *Dioscorea mexicana*, one of the first plants synthesized into progesterone. It reaches up to touch the rainbow. Throughout the piece, I've hidden treasures for the delight of those who know. It was a joy to create this painting and continue to think more deeply about this workshop – a very special moment in queer/trans Jewish spacetime.

Erotic Pedagogy: Queer of Colour Sex Education

Jade Da Costa

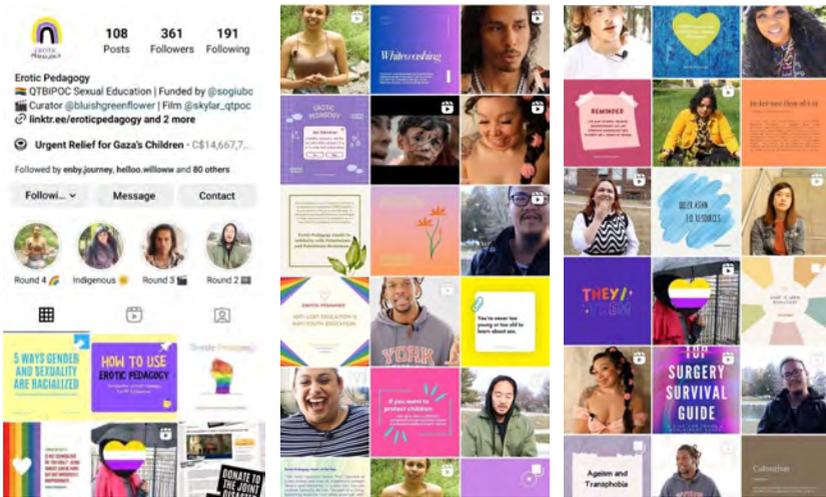
Prelude

Below is a transcript of a 20-minute Zoom conversation that took place between me and my friend, Skylar Sookpaiboon (they/them), in which we discussed Erotic Pedagogy: an Instagram page (@eroticpedagogy) that we created to help PK–12¹ educators decolonize (or undo the colonialization of) sexual education (Fig. 1). The page features storytelling videos of Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (QTBIPOC) across Central Southern Ontario² speaking to their past and current experiences of sexual education, sexual health, sexuality, and gender. Skylar filmed the stories, and I designed the project and curated the page. Storytellers were provided with seven prompts to draw from to facilitate their stories (see Appendix).

-
- 1 PK–12 refers to ‘from prekindergarten to 12th grade.’ It indicates the range of years during primary and secondary education that are publicly supported within so-called Canada.
 - 2 Central Southern Ontario is located within so-called Canada and is comprised of two adjoining subregions, colonially known (ck) as The Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area (GTHA) and Tri-Cities Guelph (TCG). These are some of the country’s most densely populated and racially-ethnically diverse geographies, and they are widely known hubs of queer/queer of colour activism, art, and knowledge. Skylar and I are both located within the region and organize, create, learn, and teach across its many cities, although Skylar resides in Ottawa, and I currently live in the city ck as Burlington (on the southwest border of the GTHA). Skylar has stronger roots within TCG, having attended Wilfred Laurier in Waterloo (one of the Tri-Cities) for their undergraduate degree and the University of Guelph for their Master of Science degree. That said, Skylar immigrated to the city ck as New Market (at the northeast border of the GTHA) and now works at the Thai embassy in Ottawa. My roots are strongest in Tkaronto, having co-funded an originally Tkaronto-based food justice group called The People’s Pantry (TPP) and completed my PhD at York University, Toronto. However, I expanded TPP across the GTHA and into TGC, and through that, have connections to the city of Mississauga (between Tkaronto and Oakville), Hamilton, Guelph, and Kitchener-Waterloo. I also have family living throughout Mississauga and now teach and research at the University of Guelph as a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow, while also doing contract teaching work for Sheridan College in the city ck as Brampton.

Folx³ could respond to as many prompts, and tell as many stories, as they wanted, but most storytellers responded to three to four prompts total. Filming locations were chosen by each storyteller and ranged from their private residences to public parks. Videos are posted on a weekly basis,⁴ with accompanying educational infographics (Fig. 2), where both educators and the wider public can access them. Stories are also posted on a neutrally named YouTube page, both for folx without an Instagram account and for educators who want to play storytelling videos within the classroom.

Fig. 1: Screenshots of the @eroticpedagogy Instagram page, including the page's profile.

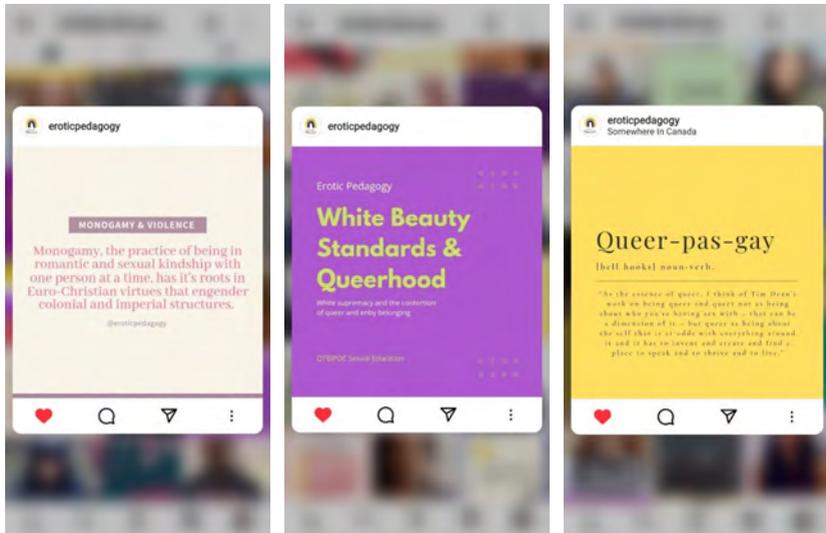


Erotic Pedagogy was launched in February 2022 and funded by the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity institute at the University of British Columbia (SOGI

- 3 'Folx' is a politicized version of the word 'folks' that emphasizes the inclusion of all people, especially those who are trans, queer, two-spirited, and intersex. 'Folx' adopts the gender neutralizing linguistic practice of replacing one of the letters in a gendered word with the letter 'x', such as 'Latinx' (versus 'Latin') or 'womxn' (versus 'woman'), to signal the shortcomings of the gender binary within colonial language structures. However, unlike these other words, 'folx' is meant to replace 'folks,' an already gender-neutral term. In this application, the use of 'x' signals a remaking of colonial language systems that extends beyond mere inclusion (re: revising a gendered word to include the Other). In turn, the Other indicated by the 'x' goes from being additive, applied only to expand and push the boundaries of colonial frames, to central; assumed within the conceptual basis of the language itself.
- 4 There is also a Linktr.ee (a freemium social media reference landing page) linked to the account's profile with additional online resources on how to decolonialize and improve sexual education from across so-called Canada.

UBC) through their Research to Practice Microgrant Program (\$ 3,000), with additional support from York University's Academic Excellence Fund in September 2022 (\$ 700). The project is named after the ideas of two iconic Black feminists: 'the erotic' by Audre Lorde (1984) and 'engaged pedagogy' by bell hooks (1994). Lorde coined the term 'the erotic' to name and embrace the power of radical love within us all, but especially non-white gender/sexual minorities who exist at the imperial nexus of western domination, or what hooks (2014: 124) famously called, white supremacist-[cis-hetero]patriarchy-capitalism. For those of us located at the crux of this system, self-actualization is only possible when it occurs in diametrical opposition to the hierarchical violences of the normative world. With this comes a heightened inner realm (the erotic) that is otherworldly to dominator culture and thus capable of embracing difference beyond its colonial binds.

Fig. 2: Screenshots of three infographics from *Erotic Pedagogy*.



Engaged pedagogy is of a similar conceit and activates the liberatory praxis of social thought through learning methods that foreground the experiential, situated, and personalized knowledges that students bring into the classroom and, in so doing, promotes the mutual self-actualization of both student and teacher (hooks 1994: 13). The praxis is rooted in hooks' larger educational philosophy of 'teaching to transgress.' As I have written elsewhere:

This philosophy positions education as a site of freedom, whereby the liberatory power of social thought can be harnessed against the hierarchical infrastructure

of modern western society [...]. Critical thought empowers and encourages human beings to interrogate the mechanisms of western socialization that have systematically taught us to think of ourselves as either better or worse than one other—as either dominant or subordinate—and instead situate ourselves within a diametrical ‘matrix of domination’. Through the praxis of engaged pedagogy, students and teachers alike are able to tap into this liberatory power and transgress a sense of self rooted in hierarchy and qualified difference. (Da Costa 2025)

Building on the ethos of these two transformative Black women, Erotic Pedagogy uses storytelling to share the situated and experiential knowledges of QTBIPOC in areas of sexual health to mobilize the power of the erotic and render it accessible to the PK–12 educators who create sexual education lesson plans, as well as to the public writ large.

I describe this method as helping PK–12 educators decolonialize sexual education because it takes as its point of departure the belief that race, ethnicity, culture, Indigeneity, and spirituality fundamentally shape gender, sexuality, and sex—that QTBIPOC have something central to share about sexual education based on our lived experiences at the intersections of western domination. In turn, the page enables a wider decoding of how dominant perceptions of gender, sexuality, and sex are informed by what critical race scholars identify as the three pillars of white supremacy: settler colonialism, anti-blackness, and Orientalism/imperialism, as well as its attendant postures of transphobia, queerphobia, sexism, classism, ableism, whorephobia, fatphobia, xenophobia, and sanism (Da Costa 2023).

Erotic Pedagogy promotes queer of colour sex education—not because it has queer of colour people discussing sexual education, but because it links sexual education to a queer of colour politic. A queer of colour politic centralizes how white supremacist-cis-heteropatriarchy-capitalism shapes gender and sexual identities, rights, and norms, while also taking seriously the cultural, racial, ethnical, and spiritual elements of gender and sexual belonging (Muñoz 1999). It intentionally combines the affectual, psychological, and cultural analyzes of cis-heteropatriarchy present within mainstream queer theory with the systematic, transformative ethos of Black feminism to highlight how gender and sexuality are racial, ethnical, and cultural optics that function in conjunction with systematic structures (Ferguson 2019). In mobilizing this praxis within the realm of sexual education through the practice of its namesake, Erotic Pedagogy allows the knowledges of QTBIPOC to be carried into the classroom in liberatory ways.

Since creating Erotic Pedagogy, I have only presented the project at one public conference: “30 Years of *Stone Butch Blues*—Memories and Visions”. When the organizers of the conference invited me to contribute a reflection of my work to this anthology, I happily accepted, but was unsure of how to adequately capture the page. The prelude I have written here provides insights into the theoretic of Erotic Peda-

gogy, but not its ethos; not what it felt like to make, live, and curate the project as an ongoing knowledge mobilization effort born from, of and for the lives, dreams, and worlds of QTBIPOC, Skylar's and mine included.

Theorizing the stories feels wrong. The page exists as a platform for QTBIPOC to share their stories in their own words, in their own bodies, in their own ways, untouched by me, the researcher (save for my minimal editing of their videos). To impose my researcher brain onto these stories and extract meaning from them seems to violate an unspoken agreement between Skylar and I and the storytellers. Also important to me is the inclusion of Skylar's voice. Even though I am the curator and technical Principal Investigator (PI) of the project, Skylar played a vital role in bringing it to life. Not only did they film all the stories, but they discussed ideas for the project with me and drove us to each filming location, which spanned across nine cities within Central Southern Ontario. Even more than this, Skylar would always connect with the storytellers during filming, conversing with them and sharing their own stories and vulnerabilities. Skylar bore witness to the grief and joy of every storyteller and bared their own spirit in return. I wanted this to be reflected here, in the first publication about Erotic Pedagogy.

Mulling over my desires for this chapter, I had the idea to transcribe a conversation between Skylar and I in which we would discuss our experiences of the project. I thought: what better way than to capture Erotic Pedagogy, a QTBIPOC storytelling project, than by having the two queer and trans people of colour who created the page concertedly share their narratives of the research? I texted Skylar with the idea, and they loved it. We soon met over Zoom for our chat, where our conversation was recorded and transcribed using the communication software program's recording and transcription features. Like the storytelling prompts, I came up with four questions to anchor our conversation. The questions were as follows: 1) How would you describe what Erotic Pedagogy is, in your own words? 2) What makes it a queer of colour sex ed project? 3) Why do you think Erotic Pedagogy is important? 4) What did you learn from filming Erotic Pedagogy? I asked Skylar each question, they responded, and then we engaged in dialogue from there. Afterward, I watched the recording of the conversation and edited the transcription for readability, accuracy, spelling, and grammar. The edited transcript is inserted below. I added footnotes to the transcript during moments I felt required additional clarification or to include links to the storytelling videos being referenced. I also inserted citations for some of the concepts that we mention for curious readers. In documenting and exploring Erotic Pedagogy in this personalized, story-driven, and somewhat fluid and creative way, I hope to honour the rich aliveness that is the project, and which is the erotic; engaged pedagogy; decolonialized knowledge. Most of all, I hope to honour the wondrous QTBIPOC storytellers who shared the knowledges of their inner selves with us and allowed us to create a platform to help decolonialize PK-12 sexual education.

Transcript: Erotic Pedagogy Chat on December 26, 2023

Jade Da Costa (JD): So, how would you describe what Erotic Pedagogy is, in your own words?

Skylar Sookpaiboon (SS): I always have a hard time putting it into simple words, because of how nuanced it is, which is probably why I love it [laughs]. So, for me to describe this project is hard. I feel like whatever way you would describe it would be the best way to articulate it.

JD: I guess a better question would be, not so much like—don't think about describing it for a reader or an academic audience, but describe, like, what it means to you, tell me what comes to your mind when you think about it.

SS: Oh, okay. It's, like, an opportunity for me to be a part of creating a space for people to share their stories, especially stories that so often get misinterpreted or completely ignored and, like, silenced, especially in sex education, and, like, within the educational system that we currently have. So, I think that is a good way of putting it. How would you describe it?

JD: So, like, I describe it in different ways, right? It depends on who I'm talking to. I usually say that it's an online educational resource designed to help PK–12 educators decolonize sex ed, but that's, like, the brief intro, right? So, that's just the way of capturing it quickly.

Where, if I were to describe what it means to me, it's about the storytelling, too. It's about providing a platform for Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour to talk about their experiences and memories with sexual education, sexual health, in a way that's public facing and where I don't play a big role. I think it's important to me that I'm not, like, analyzing and theorizing, and, like, I play more of a curator role than, like, if you do interviews for an academic project you have to theorize everything, and for me, one of the key parts [of Erotic Pedagogy] is that it's people telling their own stories for themselves.

SS: That actually reminded me of another thing. I think for me, what's really cool about this project is that we're hearing people talk about so many different experiences and stories, because, like, the way that we're approaching it, we're not limiting people to talk about their sexuality, or just, like, their sex life, you know, it's just people talking about everything. It's all interconnected. And I think that's something that we don't really get a chance to see.

Often when we're thinking about sex education, automatically we're thinking about human anatomy and reproduction and all those things. But, like, now, we're getting people to actually talk about accessing healthcare, and their relationship with their families, or, like, you know, their religious upbringing and things like that. I think it's really interesting for us to just kind of open that space up for people to just talk about whatever is important to them.

So, now we're able to hear and be able to get more perspectives on, like, how everything is so interconnected, and everything is, you know, leading to positive, healthy sex lives. Or, like, harm reduction (see National Harm Reduction Coalition), like, everything is so connected that yeah, I don't think we would have been able to capture how complex and how interconnected it [sexual health] is if we didn't approach it in this way. Like, if we didn't ask about their gender identities, about health care, and, like, just letting people choose what stories they want to tell.

So, I think the way that we approached it is really... that it's so open ended that, like, I wish more research was like that. That more research methods incorporated this type of open-endedness. Just from a researcher perspective, we're not determining what stories people can share and what we want them to say or talk about. It's really so open-ended for people to define for themselves.

JD: Yeah, and I think that's why I say 'decolonize', 'cause I feel like that's the only word that captures everything because it captures the fact that we're talking about racialized and Indigenous perspectives and that empirical component of the page where it's like, "they sex ed doesn't really talk about queer and trans stuff, and when it does, it's white," and that the project's informed by Black feminist thinkers and queer of color thinkers and all that, and so 'decolonize' gets at that part, but then it also gets at the actual decolonial method of it.

Like, we don't get to decide as researchers what narratives matter, and so much of colonialized knowledge (Watts 2007) is predetermined and set out, where, when we were doing it, people took us on adventures with what they wanted to talk about, and in other research, it's like you can't even help but be colonial, you can't help but extract what you want from it and to project your ideas. It's just how the researcher dynamics are made up. But for this project people just took us on adventures of learning, and they got to decide what was important and what stories needed to be told, and that, for me, automatically opens up what we're sharing, what resources we're giving to PK-12 educators, 'cause the limits are that of people's collective imagination.

SS: Yeah, absolutely. And I think for me, because I also want to get a chance to share my stories,⁵ but I think because of my identities, my gender and my sexuality, everything with my family is still unfolding.⁶ So, like, for me, I don't really know how to talk about it yet. I'm still figuring out how I fit into my family right now, and it's so complicated that it feels bad that I can't just give, like, a simple story to share, because it's just, it's so complicated.

5 In addition to being our filmmaker, Skylar was also invited to be a storyteller, and to record themselves, with me, responding to some of our prompts; however, we have yet to film their stories, for the reasons that they discuss.

6 Skylar identifies as a transmasculine/gender nonbinary/trans queer Thai immigrant. They were born in Thailand and moved here when they were eight years old, where they have lived ever since. They are currently 30 years old.

JD: I think stories aren't simple, like, I think stories allow for tangents, right? When you do interviews, when you do most qualitative and quantitative research methods (Blackstone 2012), tangents aren't really allowed. But people could literally just go on tangents when we were filming the stories. Like, Ellie⁷ did that a bit, and Ellie is a genius, so I mean, all her tangents are just, like, *yes*, but the method allowed for people to go on these tangents of knowledge 'cause it's, like, what was considered knowledge wasn't predetermined. It's whatever you want to share.

And I also think part of it is that it's okay that you don't want to share, because we gave that choice to the storytellers, everyone had the choice, and plenty of people said no to the invitation to participate in the project. Not everyone responded to all the prompts, either. People also decided where they wanted us to film. So, I think not wanting to share a story is very important, too. The project is about sharing your story, if that's what *you* want, but not everyone can take their experiences and make them into a story, and, like, I think that's really valid as well.

SS: Yeah, true.

[pause in conversation]

JD: I'm wondering, do you think that it's a queer of colour sex ed project?

SS: Yeah, I think especially 'cause it's created by and for the community, that makes it even more meaningful, at least for me. And I think that's why I do have a hard time of just categorizing it as a sex ed resource for educators 'cause I think, because of it being hosted on Instagram, YouTube, it's open and out there for anyone to access so, for me, I think I see this project being something much bigger. And my hope is that everyone would spend time listening to these stories and checking out everything that we posted.

JD: Yeah, for sure. And like, I use queer of colour because it's all... it's not just queer, right? It's trans, it's not just of colour, it's Black and Indigenous, but queer of colour is the word that I know to describe the praxis of bringing together queer theory (Muñoz 1999), with things like Black feminism to talk about the fact that sexuality and gender are inherently racialized and culture based. I think within that politic is the conceit that these things are everywhere, right? It's not just sexual education, it's not just sexual health—the intimacies between gender, sexuality, race, culture, ethnicity, indigeneity, religion, spirituality, they're cornerstones of the world. So, I think it makes sense that you're like, yeah, it's about that. You can't just talk about sexual health and sexual education without talking about all the other things that shape it.

7 Ellie (she/her) is a storyteller and fellow co-founder of The People's Pantry, as well as the director of Maggie's Toronto Sex Worker Action Project, and a long time Black, queer, and sex worker activist. At the time of writing this, we have posted three of her stories; for her latest see Sociology Etc 2023.

SS: Yeah. That's well put.

JD: So, the other questions I had are why do you think Erotic Pedagogy is important? And what did you learn from filming it? Are those questions that you think are good?

SS: Yeah, yeah. Actually, when you mentioned Ellie, like... I feel like I have learned and processed through a lot of my own experiences while we were filming other people sharing their stories. And I think that was another great learning opportunity for me. Hearing people's reflections allowed me to also kind of do my own reflections and process things in ways that I maybe haven't had a chance to really think about.

Like, Ellie's experience with that one doctor...⁸ that story has come up in my head so often over the past few years, like, while I was writing my thesis,⁹ and while I'm thinking about my parents' experiences with the doctor [as Thai immigrants]... it kind of reaffirmed my experiences. It's like how some stories really stick with you and can help you navigate different things... It goes beyond just hearing the stories, it was actually more about opening up my perspective and opening up the world to me in a different way than if it was just all in my head.

JD: Yeah, I felt similarly about Narmeen's story when she talked about consent-based education.¹⁰ I didn't even think about consent-based education as being a part of sexual education. I just didn't. And then she was talking about it, and she said something like, "consent-based education would have changed so much of my life," and I remember almost crying when she said that because I was like, "yeah, that's the exact same thing for me."

Even though I have all the knowledge where I should have thought of consent-based

8 Skylar is generally referring to Ellie's first video (Sociology Etc 2022a) where she shares that a couple years ago, she was experiencing pain during sex and cramping and kept going to the doctors for help, and they would routinely dismiss her. After months of pushing back, she found out that she had pre-cancerous cells on her cervix. More specifically, however, Skylar is referring to a related instance (currently unpublished) where Ellie lost 70 pounds in a matter of months from the precancerous cells and when she went to the doctors for it, they told her that she was fine and should just be happy that she "looks pretty in a sundress."

9 Skylar's master's thesis, entitled *Moving Through the Cis-tem: A Collection of Digital Stories Exploring Racialized Trans and Non-binary Experiences Navigating the Canadian Health Care System* (Sookpaiboon 2022), explores how QTBIPOC navigate the Canadian healthcare system, and they were writing it while filming Erotic Pedagogy.

10 Narmeen (she/her) is a storyteller and a queer Muslim woman of colour who does community and non-profit work in and around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), LGBTQ politics and feminism, decolonialization, anti-racism, and anti-Islamophobia. The story that I am referring to was published, then taken down, upon Narmeen's request. However, she broadly spoke of the importance of including consent-based education within PK-12 sexual education. I describe the opening line of the video that impacted me in the transcript for reference, but nothing more (to respect Narmeen's wish that I do not share the stories within the video publicly). For Narmeen's one public video see Sociology Etc 2022c.

education as sex ed, where I should have been able to make those ideas myself, so much of that is hard—like, when you think about sexual education, sexual health, gender, sexuality, these things are so situated that you have to revisit a lot of past trauma to make sense of them as an adult, and for me to go back to my high school self and to think about the violence that I endured, to think about the impact that knowing what consent was would have had on me... I don't really want to do that, or I can't do that all the time. But when people share stories that are like that, it brings it all together, and it's like being able to breathe for the first time [Skylar nods head in agreement].

[slight pause in conversation]

JD: And then something else, I was raised Catholic, but something I didn't think about, because I haven't particularly had negative experiences with it, is about how so many people talked about religion, and how especially Catholicism and Christianity negatively impacted their lives, because I didn't experience that, even though I know about it, I didn't even think to ask about it. But then so many people made similar points without ever talking to each other. And it's like that's something we got to learn, right? Like, we weren't the experts in that space.

SS: Yeah, I feel like I learned a lot, too, because I grew up as Buddhist, and I don't really know much about Catholicism and Christianity, like, I don't even know the difference or anything, so hearing other people talk about, like, their upbringing, and how that shaped them or was ingrained into their socialization (CrashCourse 2018), and how they internalized a lot of that self hate through religion was interesting for me to put together. I didn't see that connection before. But now I'm rethinking about my own religion and how that would play into my gender.

JD: Yeah, I remember Gitanjali made the direct link between colonialism and Christianity and Catholicism, particularly in the global south,¹¹ which, again, I'm Catholic because I'm Goan, it's a remnant of colonialization, and I've studied these things, so I should have thought about this stuff before, but I guess you don't think about these bigger things coming up as a daily practice unless it's more present in your actual life. It's like our own situated knowledges (Hinton 2014) guide us to think about what we want to research, and that's normal, even a good practice in a lot of ways, but when you don't do that, you get to open up so many things that you wouldn't think to talk about and I think that's really fundamental when you do a queer of colour kind of politic, because my experience as a gender nonbinary queer woman of colour of Goan and Hungarian-English descent, and your experience as a transmasculine nonbinary queer Thai immigrant, those have a lot of value in them, but it's not gonna capture a lot of different experiences. Right?

11 Gitanjali (they/them) is a storyteller who has asked us not to share any additional details about their personal life, other than their name and stories in regard to Erotic Pedagogy, including pieces written about the project, such as this (Sociology Etc 2022b).

SS: Yeah.

[pause in conversation]

JD: So, I mean, is there anything else you want to share? Anything you want to speak to about the project, how it made you feel, what you wanted for it, what you loved about it...

SS: This is more of a personal realization, but, I think, that was the type of project that I want to dedicate my life's work to. I felt so alive doing that with you. Whereas I would just, like, come home afterward and try to write my thesis paper, and would just bang my head on the walls... It was such a drastic experience for me to do something that I had to do but was dreading [my thesis] versus going out and filming people with you. But that was also what kept me going.

It was just this realization that what we were doing was something that I really wanted to do or, work on, it was interesting. I wanna even say that it was a pivotal moment for me to figure out, like, where I want to go next, which I'm still, I think, in that process of figuring out, what's next for me. But, like, I think this [Erotic Pedagogy] is... it is what I want to do. I just need to figure out how to make it a sustainable, livable thing... That's my own personal take on it, though.

JD: Yeah, I had something similar, where, when—'cause I was writing my PhD dissertation, too, and I do love writing, and I did love that work, but the contrast for me stood in what it was like to record people, and then put their stories into the world, and let them be the way that they were versus doing interviews and having to theorize them, and always feeling a little off about it, 'cause I was taking people's stories and making them fit my literal thesis, 'cause that's what you have to do. So, from that, I learned how much I want to do storytelling, how I want to do digital storytelling,¹² and my projects since incorporate that because it was through that experience that I just realized that it's so much more important for me as a researcher to get other people's stories out there than to impose my story onto the research, and Erotic Pedagogy did that for me.

SS: Yeah, that's incredible.

JD: Okay, well, I think this is good for the transcript. How are we feeling?

SS: Honestly, I'm just grateful and honored to, like, be a part of Erotic Pedagogy, and I'm just super grateful for you for even inviting me to be a part of it, too, like, it's something that I'm very deeply passionate about and you kind of, like, shined a light on that for me. So, thank you.

JD: Awe, well, thank you, because you literally drove my ass all around Central Southern Ontario, which you know I would have not done, or I would have hated to do, or would have just, like, struggled with greatly. So, you made the project possible

12 Digital storytelling, or multimedia storytelling, is when participants create short videos (about two to five minutes long) "that pair audio recordings of personal stories with visuals and soundscapes" (Re-Vision).

for me to do, and not only possible, but something I loved doing and filming. So, thank you.

References

- Blackstone, A. (2012) *Principles of Sociological Inquiry—Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*. University of Maine. <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/139> (last accessed 2 August 2024).
- CrashCourse (2018) “Socialization: Crash Course Sociology #14”, *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-RvJQxqVQc&t=41s> (last accessed 2 August 2024).
- Da Costa, J. (2023) *From Racial Hauntings to Wondrous Echoes: Towards a Collective Memory of HIV/AIDS Resistance*. PhD Dissertation, Toronto: York University. <https://hdl.handle.net/10315/41657> (last accessed 2 August 2024).
- (2025, forthcoming) “Student Choice Projects as Engaged Pedagogy within the Neoliberal University”, in: Butler, M. L., Davis-McElligatt, J. and Feifer, M. (eds.) *bell hooks’ Radical Pedagogy. New Visions of Feminism, Justice, Love, and Resistance in the Classroom*.
- Ferguson, R. A. (2019) *One-dimensional Queer*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hinton, P. (2014) “‘Situated Knowledges’ and New Materialism(s): Rethinking a Politics of Location”, *Women: A Cultural Review* 25(1), pp. 99–113.
- hooks, b. (1994) *Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- (2014) *Talking Back. Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. New York: Routledge.
- Loorde, A. (1984) *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing.
- Muñoz, J. E. (1999) *Disidentifications. Queer of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.
- National Harm Reduction Coalition (n.d.) “Principles of Harm Reduction”. <http://harmreduction.org/about-us/principles-of-harm-reduction/> (last accessed 2 August 2024).
- Re-Vision Story-Making (n.d.) “Orienting to Story”. <https://revisionstorymaking.ca/orienting-to-story/multimedia-stories/> (last accessed 2 August 2024).
- Sociology Etc (2022a) “Ellie: On the Intersections of Anti-black Racism and Sexism in Healthcare”, *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1Qv5V3sshI> (last accessed 4 September 2024).
- (2022b) “Gitanjali: On Catholic Guilt and Polyamory”, *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOIynbUsITo> (last accessed 4 September 2024).
- (2022c) “Narmeen: On Being a Queer Muslim”, *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTaPQI_T_ok (last accessed 4 September 2024).
- (2023) “Ellie: Sex Ed and Sex Work”, *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdACv5etiis> (last accessed 4 September 2024).

- Sookpaiboon, S. (2022) *Moving Through the Cis-tem: A Collection of Digital Stories Exploring Racialized Trans and Non-binary Experiences Navigating the Canadian Health Care System*. M.Sc. thesis, The University of Guelph. <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/items/4ecodca4-a8bd-40d1-affa-3c8ed5c2d92a> (last accessed 2 August 2024).
- Watts, V. (2007) “Indigenous Place-thought & Agency Amongst Humans and Non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!)”, *Decolonization. Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2(1), pp. 20–34.

Appendix: Storytelling Prompts

1. Share a memory that highlights how race, ethnicity, or culture have shaped either your gender identity or your sexual identity, or both.
2. Share an important memory that you have around trying to access healthcare.
3. What does gender affirming, or queer positive healthcare mean to you as a Black/Brown/Asian/Indigenous person?
4. What does sexual health mean to you as a Black/Brown/Asian/Indigenous person?
5. What is your first memory of sexual health education?
6. Share a memory of a sex positive QT/BIPOC mentor or educator from your past.
7. If you could go back in time and tell your child- or teenaged-self one thing about health, sex, or identity, what would it be?

Finding Butch Identity and (Visions of) Solidarity on TikTok¹

Jonah Reimann

I graduated from high school in early June of 2020, two months into the first Covid lockdown in Germany. As Covid fully shut down public life, 700 million users, including myself, turned to the newly emerging, though not newly released, short-form video-based social media app TikTok, looking for the comfort and community that was missing from a daily life subdued by lockdown measures (Ryan, Fritz and Impiombato 2020). Feeling isolated and alone, looking for connection, people created videos of their daily experiences and lockdown realities, craving the interaction and relation so void in isolation. In the months following my graduation, a time I had long hoped would redefine my outlook on life was locked down and dull. After having endured my time as an openly queer, butch teen in conservative suburban Germany throughout my secondary education, I suddenly felt deprived of a community I did not yet know and was experiencing the first years of young adulthood in Zoom lectures and FaceTime calls with friends, turning to TikTok daily to escape this reality, if only for a little bit. Here, a budding community of queer users was algorithmically assembling, promoted through TikTok's modus operandi of offering users highly tailored content on their aptly named "For You" page (Sot 2022). I had spent the majority of my teens in online spaces organized around queerness (namely Tumblr and Twitter) and welcomed TikTok as a more personal social network, quickly slipping into a habit of being on the app for multiple hours a day. How I tried to understand people and myself in relation to society was intrinsically shaped by the lives and characters shared with me through these apps, finding a queer community and a type of virtual kinship readily available at any moment, years before I would ever step into any kind of 'real life' queer space. TikTok added itself naturally into the list of the virtual queer communities of my teens and I found comfort in it. As user numbers continued to grow, the queer content I consumed began to

1 I want to express my gratitude to Michael_a Koch, Jara Schmidt, and Clara Rosa Schwarz for creating this space and letting me present within it. Thank you for all your work on organizing the conference and this book that have made space for so many wonderful contributions. I greatly appreciate it and feel very fortunate to have been included.

diversify, and TikTok quickly figured out my desire for trans masculine and lesbian content. The algorithm was offering spaces of recognition and relation that I so desperately needed that I did not think twice about my personal data that was being collected through this. Additionally, my attention span dwindled and I developed a habit of opening TikTok rather than a book, positively intoxicated by the little world of my For You page in contrast to a world consumed by the pandemic.

And then, when public life slowly returned in late 2021, I found myself starting at zero. My queer positionality and relation to the world had to be fully (re-)defined. I blamed extensive screen time for a disconnect from the 'real world' queer community, a community I was now coming to know and cherish so greatly as a young adult living in Berlin. As I attempted to really lay down roots and fully (re-)arrive in my first chapter of adulthood, trying to move away from my pandemic screen time average of multiple hours per day, many regularly devoted to TikTok, I began to reflect how I and the desires I had grown into had been shaped by social media. Here, a particular pessimism took hold of me that made me discount my experiences in virtual spaces as worth less than experiences in 'real life'. Having lived vicariously through social media seemed to mark me as inexperienced and painfully young, and as a 19-year-old I desired nothing more than to be grown.

In this space, standing between childhood and young adulthood, I reread *Stone Butch Blues*, which I had first read 5 years earlier. At 15 and ragingly pubescent, it felt as if I was reading a story about my ancestors, rather than a present community I could locate myself in. My virtual world felt like such an abundance, so radically different that it could, to me, not fit into a continuity of the histories I had been reading about in *Stone Butch Blues*. Outside of the internet, I had rarely encountered queerness at all. A disconnect existed between the queer I could be online and the butch boy I had to be at school, so that when I was confronted by the materiality of Jess' experiences in a time before the internet, I struggled to relate.

Looking back on this at 20, the differences I had once perceived between Jess and myself turned to parallels, inspired by a matured conception of history and community. I had learned to embrace difference and temporal distance as realities of any historical identification process and now knew to treasure similarities despite the large gaps between myself and the butches, lesbians, and queers that came before me. I could now discover similarities in the butchness in Feinberg's story and the butchness in my own. I began to approach my own butch story with much more kindness than before. Now accepting that I could not and did not want to change how I had grown into my own butchness, I had to embrace my history with existing online, which had continued most strongly through my persisting relationship with TikTok. Instead of feeling guilty for the hours spent scrolling during lockdown, I began to see the many butch representations on the app as a part of a historical continuation of lesbian and queer community and spaces of recognition.

Visibly queer and explicitly lesbian TikTok presences have grown massively in the last four years, completely transforming the way I and many others now view themselves and their queerness in a post-Covid world. While this active community is a treasure to many, TikTok also exists as an extremely ambivalent space: while being highly accessible and readily available as a communal space, the app has also repeatedly been criticized for censoring content flagged as LGBTQ+ in a process dubbed ‘shadowbanning’. Content that is shadowbanned can be posted regularly and remains visible to the original poster, while being effectively kept from being shown to other users (Rauchberg 2022). TikTok also lacks sufficient content moderation or protective structures against users’ comments that attack queerness, with the American organization GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) recognizing that the app (as of 2023) had severe shortcomings when it came to deleting hateful comments and messages (GLAAD 2023). On a governmental level, TikTok has also been and continues to be investigated by the European Union, which cites its concerns for privacy and insufficient protection of minors as investigative trigger points. Additionally, the algorithmic nature of the app is a double-edged sword, on the one hand making discovery beyond individual interests possible, while also frequently suggesting content that risks drawing users into (amongst others) right wing ideologies based on dehumanizing non-white, queer, or otherwise othered groups of people (Ozduzen, Ferenczi and Holmes 2023). In light of all this, it is imperative to proceed with caution when considering TikTok as a space for community building, and to not lose sight of the larger dangers and intransparencies inherent to the app and social media at large (Little 2021; Smith 2023). I strongly believe that a nuanced view of the app that does not glorify the app is possible, if caution and care are taken.

In this text, I want to use the intimacy and intuition that I have gained through my years on social media to spotlight virtual representations of queerness and specifically butchness on TikTok. I will center the voices of two active butch creators, Roman (@psychdyke) and Jen (@cowboyjen). In doing so, I want to underline the importance of talking about butch and queer people visibly sharing their lives and engaging in conversations about it on TikTok. This book, united by the celebration of the life and legacy of Leslie Feinberg, allows for the perfect opportunity to do so.

By combining personal reflection, research on TikTok, and excerpts from the two email interviews I conducted with Roman and Jen, I want to provide insight into the impact *Stone Butch Blues* has had on many self-identified butch and lesbian users on the app, and how it influences their content. Throughout my reflective process, I used the app to find active butch creators to speak to about their relationships to *Stone Butch Blues*, social media, and being visibly butch. As I only interact with the app as a user (meaning I, until now, have not posted a video), centering this article on two people who commit to being visible through posting content seems fitting. My

position as user rather than creator shapes how I think on this topic, and I am very grateful to Roman and Jen, two creators I interviewed for this article via questions I sent to them. They then answered in written form, meaning that all quotes used are directly pulled from their responses.² As mentioned, TikTok has a highly personalized algorithm, hence the content shown to me is specific to me, making my choice of Roman and Jen as interview partners a highly subjective one not untouched by the double-edged sword of the algorithm. Here, it is also helpful to note that TikTok allows for three separate access points to content, all influenced differently by this algorithm: You can either rely on the algorithm to show you suggested content on your For You page for you to scroll through, on your 'Friends' tab that only shows you the content of those you follow, or the search option by keyword or hashtag which was only recently rolled out for all users. In capturing a snapshot of TikTok's reception of *Stone Butch Blues*, I have attempted to provide a small metric through noting down hashtag usage. Hashtag usage is the most accessible of the many metrics required to measure trends on TikTok, with the others being hard to come by due to the app's rather elusive algorithm censorship guidelines and hidden data.³

This following part centers on Roman and Jen, as I draw upon quotes from their responses and describe themes in the content made by each creator. In doing so, I show how wonderfully unique and impactful butch identity is on TikTok, and how Leslie Feinberg, both as an activist and through *Stone Butch Blues*, has impacted butch content on the app. In painting a hopeful picture of this butch presence and sketching out a vision of the future of butch self-presentations, I want to be conscious of the issues that come with an online space as censored and precarious as TikTok, not overlooking how much tenacity and solidarity it takes to maintain a space in a hostile and queerphobic world.

Roman and Jen, as you will see, post two very different kinds of content. Roman is in their early twenties, close to my own age, and mostly posts outfit videos, showing off their carabiner, cropped shirts, and mullet. Jen represents the very small number of older butches making content on the app,⁴ posting daily content about her expe-

2 These interviews were conducted via an identical set of five questions that I sent to both Roman and Jen to provide written responses to in their own time. All quotes are direct quotes from these written answers and have not been edited by me.

3 A growing number of researchers are beginning to tackle this issue, using their research to openly call on TikTok to increase transparency and make algorithmic and user data accessible to the public. Recommended articles include but are not limited to: Stefanie Duguay's article "TikTok's Queer Potential: Identity, Methods, Movement" (2023) and Jessica Sage Rauchberg's "Shadowbanned: Queer, Trans, and Disabled Creator Responses to Algorithmic Oppression on TikTok" (2022).

4 With almost 1.6 billion monthly users worldwide, TikTok is the fifth most used social media platform behind Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram (Statista 2024). Only a good 15 % of users are aged 45 and over (Doofinder 2024).

riences with her grown-up kids and her role in helping younger butch and lesbian identifying people. Both openly identify as butch, forging spaces of belonging and recognition through videos that reference butchness and queer communities.

Roman (@psychdyke) first appeared on my For You page in February of 2023. The style of video Roman most frequently makes is very common on TikTok, sharing personal style inspiration and self-expression by filming themselves starting the recording, stepping back to pose on camera and show off the clothing and make-up they have chosen to wear that day (Dare 2023a). From classic menswear to goth clothing, to seasonal trends, many different people belonging to many different communities engage in this trend. The format transcends the simple function of showcasing clothing, with lifestyles and identities being communicated through the medium of fashion, creating belonging and allowing for viewers to desire as well as recognize the lifestyles pictured. This desire to relate and identify with well-dressed people through these videos is popular amongst queer users looking to build relations predicated in their queerness.⁵ Engaging with historic queer clothing trends builds a direct connection to non-virtual communities and affirms one's own desire as not singular, therefore being a powerful medium of inspiration (Zimmerman 2018).

5 As TikTok does not release the numbers of users marked as being interested in 'queer' content, it is difficult to provide concrete numbers. The number of likes, followers, and content of the comment sections of videos by creators such as Roman or Jen provide a good look into how many are interested. However, researchers have found methodological approaches that bridge that gap (e.g. Simpson, Hamann and Semaan 2022).

Fig. 1: Screenshot of Roman's (@psychdyke) TikTok video from 28 April 2023.



Roman's videos feature many style choices now commonly recognized as lesbian and butch styles: carabiners, sweater vests, forearm tattoos, eyebrow-slits, and combat boots (Tobin and Cundall 2024). My understanding is that through their self-presentation, a feeling of intimacy and kindness is established, in which potentials of queer aspiration and admiration can grow. The comment section under Roman's videos allows for a small look into what makes this trend so compelling: whether people relate, aspire, desire, or simply want to express their compliments, Roman created a space where queer creativity and butch aesthetic is championed. Roman regularly engages in conversations with other users that grapple with gender and masculinity within lesbian identity, extending the space into a type of forum. When I asked Roman whether their presence as a butch creator influenced how they carried themselves in non-virtual spaces they said the following:

The beauty of TikTok is that when I get home and post a video, even if it's just a silly video of a silly outfit, I have a whole community of people right in my phone who see me for me. In my experience, there isn't a lot of love for butches in the world, but I have found a lot of love for butches online. TikTok is one of the few places where I feel embraced, valued and like I belong. I try to carry that energy with me when facing the reality of being butch in the non-virtual world.

This captured the energy I felt interacting with Roman's page so well. In creating these spaces of admiration and desire we forge bonds, providing a type of community care through a simple "so fine!" or "wow". These interactions foster a community that praises butch identity outside of hegemonic beauty standards and opposes the queerphobic tone so prevalent on the internet today. Recognition and affirmation therefore take care of the queers we interact with, encouraging them to continue making content that feels authentic to them. Speaking on what it took to get to a spot where they felt attractive, Roman highlighted the feeling of dressing as they desired, saying:

I always felt ugly to my core. I felt as if the world could feel it too, people knew that I wasn't quite... 'right' as a feminine presenting person. Eventually I cut my hair, bought myself all the secondhand men's clothes I wanted, and began living authentically as myself. Suddenly, despite a lot of the world being more hostile than before, I felt attractive for the first time.

I believe that Roman's experience stands in continuation of the desires Jess articulates regarding their appearance in *Stone Butch Blues*. The two videos by Roman that I want to highlight here (shown through pictures) expand on this experience. The first video (Fig. 1) demonstrates their signature video style of showcasing their outfit. Video two (Fig. 2) is different from the usual format. Here, Roman is responding to a comment under a different video in which Roman had used the word lesbian in regards to themselves. One user had commented "lesbian...?" with another responding to that with "...you [Roman] have a mustache", doubling down on the first user's doubt about Roman being able to use 'lesbian' as a label while also having facial hair. Conversations around gender stereotypes and the intersection of trans identity and lesbianism are also commonplace on TikTok, similar to other social networks. In these discourses, preconceived notions often lead to comments like the one shown here. Roman's response is both playful and affirmative of a certain butch experience and is engaging mostly for others who may face these comments instead of giving any thought to the commenter's doubt that lesbians supposedly do not get to have facial hair (Dare 2023b).

Fig. 2: Screenshot of Roman's (@psychdyke) TikTok video from 28 April 2023.



Comments like this, I believe, make clear why the presence of people like Roman on apps such as TikTok really matter. Roman identifies both as butch and as trans, representing a group of butches that have used their presences on social media to reformulate their expressions of gender and the words they use to describe it. Being able to reference a historical tradition of transmasculine butchness is an essential part of this presentation, as Roman articulates themselves when referencing *Stone Butch Blues*. Moving beyond a binary understanding of gender and sexuality in a space as reactionary and open as TikTok frequently leads to ignorant or discriminatory reactions like the ones shown in the comments, as people fail to understand or willfully reject self-identification and fluidity. By choosing to visibly push against these reactions, Roman authentically stands against this widespread ignorance. Speaking on what this visibility brings with it, Roman said:

I think when you are visibly butch it guides your life in a way that you don't have control of. I see the way people take double glances at me in the bathroom, look at me like I'm a freak of nature, feel confused, feel angry all because of the way I look and carry myself. This can be hurtful of course, but ultimately it gives me strength. I've had to break myself down and rebuild myself into who I want to be. I feel such power in that and TikTok is one of the few places in the world that celebrates that identity with me. It is also somewhere I find comfort in seeing other butches. I get to listen to their opinions, the way they hold themselves, the way they style themselves and the way we celebrate with each other. Other butches inspire me and whilst I will never stop getting excited passing another butch on the street, butches on TikTok are far more accessible to those of us who are butch starved.

This invaluable mode of recognizing a version of yourself in others, especially in an individual-driven space as TikTok takes on an affirmative role. Desires and feelings previously concealed are stirred and encouraged to be shown openly, with butch rolemodels leading the way.

Jen (@cowboyjen) is another butch creator and rolemodel generously providing content for the 'butch-starved' masses. Jen has been sharing content about her life long before TikTok came around, having kept alive both a Tumblr account and a YouTube channel filled with stories of past relationships, identity, farm repairs, and family life for over ten years. Greeting her viewers with a "Happy lesbian good morning!" almost every day, Jen carries an infectious sense of joy towards life (Cowboyjen 2023). In her response to my questions, Jen described how her gender identity guides her content:

The world, and often the LGBT+ community, wants to tell butches we must fit particular criteria that actually have little or nothing to do with our butchness. We are expected to strike a balance between our masculinity and our lesbianism that is palatable to the greater world by fitting the stereotype that they think is butch. I want to show that we do not need to change ourselves to make others understand our butchness. I want all those young butches to find me and know that I, or other older butches, have been where they are now and we have made it to a steadier and more stable life. More precisely, I use clips of my real life to bring a sense of hope into the lives of young butches.

One of Jen's videos does just that: through letting us peek into her steady but turbulent farm life, characterized by family, dogs, and jobs, Jen gives viewers hope by providing material proof of a fulfilled life not refuted by her butchness. Imaginations of the future become tangible and in turn counter the queerphobic rhetoric of disgrace, shame, and loneliness being the only outcome of an openly queer life (Cover 2017).

Fig. 3: Screenshot of Jen's (@cowboyjen) TikTok video from 27 April 2023.



Reflecting on her use of TikTok and other platforms, and their conversational and communal nature, Jen said:

I take being a role model of sorts very seriously and I have learned what I can share and how to share it so as to be relatable. When I read a comment that says “I love seeing older butches like you because I know I can be like you someday” or “You give me hope for a happy future as a butch” I know my time on the internet is not wasted. My jobs are often a mix of interaction with people and solitary work. When I am alone working, I notice my mind is in constant motion, drafting the next one minute story to share. Being butch forms the way I relate to women of all kinds and that is one of the most lovely parts of being butch. I try to share parts of that feeling in stories and show that not only do I enjoy the way I interact with women but how much I appreciate the women in my life, especially those that acknowledge my butchness. I read all comments and answer all DMs. I pay attention to what other butches are saying and what younger butches are seeking and at-

tempt to respond in relatable terms to let them know they are not alone and I understand their struggles, from coming out to breakups to interactions with friends who don't quite get their butchness. And I want to share their joy when they have a first date or get that first super short hair. I celebrate with them as they embrace themselves.

In fostering a space of celebration, Jen and Roman create a place of safety for butches and queer people navigating the often hostile and difficult environments. Their accounts offer solace and confirmation that we are not immoral, unnatural, or sick, much like *Stone Butch Blues* and other cornerstones of queer media have confirmed for many decades of butches and queers.

Towards the end of this article, I want to briefly highlight what place Leslie Feinberg's work inhabits in the greater TikTok cosmos. The number of views on the hashtags I have chosen, are, as I mentioned, not enough evidence to reason what is and is not popular on the app. They are however very good starting points for assessing the prominence of a subject. For reference, hashtags such as #lesbian or #queer have view numbers in the billions, which should not take away from #stonebutchblues' impressive two million. The hashtag #lesliefeinberg has around 938.000 views, while #butch soars in at just over half a billion views. What the popularity of these tags show is that the conversations and interactions with this book are alive and active on the app. The cultural impact of *Stone Butch Blues* on butch culture is undeniable, and many creators, through their content, seek to extend on the visions Feinberg painted 30 years ago. In this spirit, I also spoke to Roman and Jen about whether they had read the book and what it meant to them, my question garnering two different, but powerful responses, both symbolic for butch culture(s) on the app. Jen had a difficult first experience with the book as a young butch. She told me:

The book reinforced my mistaken idea that butches were all one way and I was, most definitely, not that way. Of course, I eventually, mostly through older butch friends who I met and spoke with, shared stories with and learned to trust, came to realize that *Stone Butch Blues* was not supposed to represent *the* way to be butch but *one* way to exist as a butch. I reread it late, in my mid-thirties and understood the book to be about her life and her take on how she experiences the world as a stone butch. This is all not to say that she did not inspire me. The book absolutely planted the seed in my head that eventually grew into my desire to be publicly out and visible as a butch so others would not have to struggle with stereotypes and self-doubt as long as I did.

Roman on the other hand felt seen by Feinberg's protagonist Jess, explaining:

I finished reading *Stone Butch Blues* when I was working nightshift and I'll never forget it because I cried and cried and cried. I had never in my entire life felt I could

relate to a character, to a community and to the experience of growing up queer as I do with Jess. The way Feinberg discusses gender expression and identity helped me understand the way I was feeling and had felt my whole life in regard to my own gender. It made me feel like I was a part of something much larger than myself and for a long time, especially growing up, I have felt alone.

I believe that an understanding of being a part of a larger community, united in fighting against society's hostility to butch differences, unites both experiences. Roman and Jen's accounts, to me, have both very much succeeded in continuing the butch tradition of tending to those still coming to terms with and building their butchness, be it through sharing relatable, aspirational outfit videos or daily vlogs (video blogs) from the farm. They are what can make TikTok such a nurturing, powerful place for butchness, and provide us all with a vision of what butch visibility and self-representation can look like.

In understanding how getting suggested queer content through an algorithm on a quite accessible app is valuable for those seeking guidance, I also understand how the very same algorithm can lead to intense radicalization within various communities (Ozduzen, Ferenzci and Holmes 2023). TikTok as a company and administrative body should and is the subject of heavy criticism that I thoroughly support. I do not ever seek to honor the app, but rather the creators on it. There also exists a tendency, at least in German media, to frame TikTok as a very teenage focused app devoid of meaningful content for adult life, a framing that I feel passionate about pushing against and seek to complicate.

In considering the precarity and vulnerability of the content discussed in the face of censorship, data theft, and targeted campaigns of queerphobia, it becomes imperative to enable a culture of preserving the content and communities created by people like Roman and Jen. Here, projects such as queer community archives can, in collaboration with creators, safeguard TikTok videos outside of the app. This can then grow our understanding of the ever-evolving queer spaces around us, especially those that exist online. Much like *Stone Butch Blues* now serves as a point of cultural and historic recognition, the videos of butches like Roman and Jen should be able to serve as points of recognition for queers in the future. As expressed by both creators, Leslie Feinberg's work has laid invaluable foundations for these practices and was a guiding light in cherishing butchness throughout my work on this article. These spaces of solidarity and love are precious, with comment sections filled with appreciation and joy. In a comment under one of Roman's videos, user @ragingfemm3 captures this spirit most fittingly: "bless butches, bless trans masc lesbians, bless all lesbians with facial body hair – a femme who's in love with y'all". I hope to be a part of the effort that preserves them for generations to come. Should you ever find your way over to TikTok, I can only recommend seeking out Roman (@psychdyke) and Jen (@cowboyjen), and the butch positivity they radiate.

References

- Cover, R. (2017) "Isolated and Suicidal. Critically Assessing the Persistent Stereotype of Queer Youth as Isolated and Lonely on a Pathway to the Big City", in: Sagan, O. and Miller, E. (eds.) *Narratives of Loneliness. Multidisciplinary Perspectives from the 21st Century*. London: Routledge, pp. 185–197. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315645582-17>.
- Cowboyjen [@cowboyjen] (2023) "#lesbiangoodmorning #rurallife #family #chickenegg #momdaughter", *TikTok*. https://www.tiktok.com/@cowboyjen/video/7200477200200600874?_r=1&_t=8ko4CdVOo8O (last accessed 9 August 2024).
- Dare, R. (2023a) "Several People Aksed [sic!] Me if My Makeup Was a Tattoo but with a Judgemental Tone Lol #lesbian #butch #transmasc #theythem", *TikTok*. <https://www.tiktok.com/@psychdyke/video/7225007807165222170?lang=en> (last accessed 9 August 2024).
- [@psychdyke] (2023b) "Replying to @1^z 1^z Yes I Am a Lesbian with a Moustache, Shout Out to My Lesbians with Moustaches. Gotta Be One of My Favourite Genders #lesbian #moustache #gender #transmasc #butch #theythem", *TikTok*. <https://www.tiktok.com/@psychdyke/video/7220173143179136283?lang=en> (last accessed 9 August 2024).
- Doofinder (2024) "TikTok Statistiken 2024: Zahlen aus Deutschland und weltweit". <https://www.doofinder.com/de/blog/tiktok-statistiken> (last accessed 9 August 2024).
- Duguay, S. (2023) "TikTok's Queer Potential: Identity, Methods, Movements", *Social Media + Society* 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231157594>.
- GLAAD (2023) "Social Media Safety Index 2023". <https://assets.glaad.org/m/7adb1180448da194/original/Social-Media-Safety-Index-2023.pdf> (last accessed 9 August 2024).
- Little, O. (2021) "TikTok's Recommendation Algorithm is Promoting Homophobia and Anti-Trans Violence", *Media Matters for America*. <https://www.mediamatters.org/tiktok/tiktoks-recommendation-algorithm-promoting-homophobia-and-anti-trans-violence> (last accessed 9 August 2024).
- Ozduzen, O., Ferenczi, N. and Holmes, I. (2023) "Let Us Teach Our Children': Online Racism and Everyday Far-Right Ideologies on TikTok", *Visual Studies* 38(5), pp. 834–850. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2023.2274890>.
- Rauchberg, J. S. (2022) "#Shadowbanned: Queer, Trans, and Disabled Creator Responses to Algorithmic Oppression on TikTok", in: Pain, P. (ed.) *LGBTQ Digital Cultures. A Global Perspective*. New York: Routledge, pp. 196–209.
- Ryan, F., Fritz, A. and Impiombato, D. (2020) "TikTok and WeChat", *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*. www.aspi.org.au/report/tiktok-and-wechat (last accessed 9 August 2024).

- Simpson, E., Hamann, A. and Semaan, B. (2022) "How to Tame 'Your' Algorithm: LGBTQ+ Users' Domestication of TikTok", *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 6(GROUP), pp. 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3492841>.
- Smith, H. (2023) "Algorithms and the Alphabet Mafia: How TikTok Influenced Gender, Sexuality, and the LGBTQ+ Community During the COVID-19 Pandemic". B.A. thesis, University of Tennessee Chattanooga. <https://scholar.utc.edu/honors-theses/417/> (last accessed 9 August 2024).
- Şot, İ. (2022) "Fostering Intimacy on TikTok: A Platform that 'Listens' and 'Creates a Safe Space'", *Media, Culture & Society* 44(8), pp. 1490–1507. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221104709>.
- Statista (2024) "Ranking der größten Social Networks und Messenger nach der Anzahl der Nutzer im Januar 2024". <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/181086/umfrage/die-weltweit-groessten-social-networks-nach-anzahl-der-user/> (last accessed 9 August 2024).
- Tobin, K. and Cundall, S. (2021) "How Queer Women from the Past are Inspiring TikTok Fashion of Today", *Refinery 29*. <https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/tiktok-cottagecore-dark-academic-queer-women> (last accessed 9 August 2024).
- Zimmerman, C. (2018) "Getting Located: Queer Semiotics in Dress", *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. <https://doi.org/10.32873/unl.dc.tsasp.0066>.

“Who was I now—woman or man? That question could never be answered as long as those were the only choices.”

Intersections of Lesbian and Trans Experiences in Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*

Anja*Oliver Schneider

1. Introduction¹

Both contemporary U.S. American² culture and LGBTQIA+³ discourse center lesbians’ connection to cisness⁴ and/or womanhood (Disclosure: 2020), with acknowledged sources such as the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (n.d.) defining lesbians as women who love other women. The persistence of anti-trans rhetoric both in society at large and in some lesbian communities and the positioning of trans rights against rather than alongside lesbian liberation exacerbate this paradigm. As a consequence, ‘lesbian’ and ‘transgender’ are considered two separate acronyms under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella. However, equating being a lesbian with being cisgender,

-
- 1 This text is an edited and abridged version of chapter three of my M.A. thesis titled “*I Defend My Right to Be Complex*.” A Cultural Literary Exploration of Gender Non-Normativity in Lesbian Communities from the 1900s until Today.
 - 2 Land acknowledgement: What today is most widely known as the United States of America is the occupied ancestral home of over five hundred different Indigenous tribes. Through treaties, forced removal, enslavement, and murder, white colonizers have enacted extensive violence on Native Americans. I acknowledge the colonial history of this violence, Indigenous people’s continued resistance, and the sovereignty of the First Nations.
 - 3 An acronym that stands for ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic’ people. The ‘+’ represents additional non-normative identities that belong to the queer community.
 - 4 ‘Cisgender,’ abbreviated as ‘cis,’ refers to ‘people who are not trans,’ who have normative gender experiences, and/or whose sex assigned at birth aligns with their experiential gender (Serano n.d.).

gender-normative, and/or a woman obscures the rich history of gender diversity in lesbian communities. Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* is one of the most pivotal novels depicting lesbian and trans experiences; yet, it is often discussed as *either* a lesbian *or* a trans narrative, where 'lesbian' stands in for a focus on sexuality and 'trans' for a focus on gender. In lesbian readings of *Stone Butch Blues*, experiences of gender non-normativity are frequently neglected, undermined, or explained by sexuality (Prosser 1998: 137). Trans readings, on the other hand, are sometimes regarded as 'corrected' readings that are more illuminated or progressive than lesbian readings. Such divisive approaches miss the connections between lesbian and trans experiences and between gender and sexuality. Examining *Stone Butch Blues* as an example of the convergence of lesbian and trans identity, I will argue that people in lesbian spaces have challenged cis-normativity⁵ and exemplified an overlap of lesbian and trans identities by embodying gender and sexuality in complex ways, exceeding the binary norms of the then-dominant society, finding their own language and community, and empowering their place in the margins.

I will offer a brief overview of political, social, and cultural paradigms that situate the novel and its characters in their historical context before examining different experiences of gender non-normativity in *Stone Butch Blues*. For this purpose, I will first look at Jess' experiences of multiple marginalization, gender expressions in the local lesbian community, femme/butch dynamics, and characters' relationship to transition and passing. Then, I will show the ways Jess integrates her complex experiences and becomes empowered to take political action through imagination and intra- and inter-communal solidarity, before concluding my analysis.

To locate non-normative gender and gender expression in my chosen texts, I use Clare Sears' framework of 'trans-ing analysis' to investigate "the boundary between normative and nonnormative gender [...] away from [...] *figure* to [...] *practices*" (2015: 9, my italics). This method expands 'trans' to understand gender non-normativity in broader contexts and influenced by factors such as class and race. By engaging in what Qwo-Li Driskill calls a "radical disruption of master narratives" (2016: 7) and Sears terms "trans-ing" evidence, I am able to expand definitions of 'lesbian' and 'transgender,' examine these terms within and against larger paradigms, and grasp their continued, non-linear legacy that creates a possibility to "imagine a future"—an "opening" (Muñoz 2009: 1, 9)—and to portray a more holistic picture of trans and gender-non-normative possibilities within lesbian communities.

5 Bauer et al. define 'cis-normativity' as "the expectation that all people are [cis], that those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women" (2009: 356). Cis-normativity is connected to 'binarism,' the view that there are only two sexes and genders (Merriam-Webster n.d.), so that it also marginalizes intersex and non-binary trans people.

My analysis of the novel serves only as a case study and cannot represent universal or comprehensive accounts of lesbian and/or transgender experiences. What's more, this text focuses mostly on the butch characters, and the sexualities and genders of the femmes in *Stone Butch Blues* deserve an equally thorough exploration. By potentially including trans experiences in my analysis that today might fall within trans masculine and non-binary categories, I do *not* suggest that these groups are all lesbians or 'really women.' Anti-trans movements commonly use such rhetoric to delegitimize trans people and their access to equal rights and health care,⁶ and this violent history can make it difficult to have complex discussions about trans people in lesbian spaces. Some trans masculine and non-binary trans people identify with the term 'lesbian,' but this applies *only if they themselves say so*. My queer and trans methods of analysis help me avoid imposing definitions and anachronistic interpretations and instead allow me to explore the experiences of people who moved in lesbian and trans spaces and who expanded lesbian existence regardless of their identification.

1940s and 1950s: Lavender Scare, McCarthyism, and Witch Hunts

The 1940s and 1950s saw a shift away from the sexological and psychoanalytical discourse of the previous decades and toward an emphasis on social categories (Kennedy Lapovsky and Davis 2014: 261). This change in language mirrored the increasing hostility lesbian, trans, and gender-non-conforming people⁷ experienced (ibid.). Under the then-current administration, the political ideologies of McCarthyism instigated 'witch-hunts' against communist sentiments, LGBTQIA+ communities, and other marginalized groups (Feinberg 1997: 4; Nestle 1981: 129), constructing them as national "security risks" (Johnson 2004: 3) and affecting those who belonged to multiple groups disproportionately. Part of this 'Lavender Scare' were "very strict" cross-dressing laws that required individuals to wear at least three pieces of clothing corresponding to their sex assigned at birth (Sears 2015: 4). Because of the ambiguities of sex, gender, gender expression, and gender perception, these laws were interpreted and enforced in arbitrary ways and were part of "political [...] strategies [...] that *produced* new definitions of normative gender" (Sears 2015: 5, my italics). Despite efforts to suppress gender 'aberrations,' such laws merely "drove cross-dressing practices into private spaces while increasing

6 J. K. Rowling's essay "J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking Out on Sex and Gender Issues" (2020) and the book *Irreversible Damage. The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (2020) by Abigail Shrier are exemplary for such harmful rhetoric.

7 'Trans and gender-non-conforming' (TGNC) is an umbrella term for a variety of gender-non-normative experiences. While I use it largely interchangeably with 'trans' and 'transgender,' TGNC seeks to additionally emphasize the broad spectrum of non-normative genders outside of or adjacent to binary and/or medical transness.

their visibility under the sign of criminality” (ibid.: 97). Trans and gender-non-conforming people thus experienced simultaneous invisibility—and therefore lack of supportive structures, agency, and power—and hypervisibility—and therefore physical violence and public scrutiny.

As a part of ‘going underground’ within these complex dynamics, many queers found community in bars, which became sites of frequent police raids. Other social developments influenced lesbian communities: The Supreme Court’s decision to rule the “Separate but Equal” doctrine illegal in 1954 allowed for a mixing of Black and white communities while the legacy of segregation maintained distinct Black and white lesbian cultures, and still persistent racism subjected queer people who were Black, Indigenous, and/or of color to intersecting discrimination. The 1940s through the early 1960s were thus a time of violent policies but also of generative potential, challenged laws, and grassroots activism that would flourish in succeeding decades (Feinberg 1997: 3–4; Johnson 2004: 3).

2. Gender Non-Normativity in *Stone Butch Blues*

Leslie Feinberg’s⁸ *Stone Butch Blues* reflects the political climate of its time, and its characters experience their non-normative sexualities and genders amidst and against these complex social, cultural, and legal structures. First published in 1993, the novel chronicles the life story of Jess Goldberg, a Jewish working-class butch who explores her gender, sexuality, and relationship to femme/butch and trans communities in Buffalo and New York between 1940 and 1980. On the following pages, I will examine different parts of the novel in more detail and show how the protagonist Jess’ character develops through encounters of difference and alliances, demonstrating the interconnectedness of trans and lesbian experiences.

“Everybody’s other:” Young Difference and Multiple Marginalization

Born in the 1940s, Jess becomes aware of her differences at an early age. The second chapter—the first chapter that starts chronologically with the character’s beginnings—establishes Jess’ non-normativity with its first sentence (“I didn’t want to be different.” Feinberg 2014a: 13), emphasizing not only Jess’ outcast status but also her aversion toward it: “I longed to be everything grownups wanted, so they would love me” (ibid.). Jess connects fitting in to being loved, so that others’ taunting “refrain” of

8 Leslie Feinberg’s website states that Feinberg preferred ‘zie/hir/hirs’ and ‘she/her/hers’ pronouns, although Feinberg used different pronouns in different contexts and has stated that the intention behind the used pronouns is more important than the kind of pronoun used (Feinberg 2014b).

"[i]s that a boy or a girl?" becomes a source of grief in her life (ibid.). Both her family and childhood community in Buffalo 'confirm' Jess' otherness through interpersonal violence, and Jess internalizes shame for her difference through these encounters at an age when she is still unable to name her experiences of gender and oppression, leaving her confused and isolated.

Because she is a butch from a Jewish working-class family, additional factors of marginalization exaggerate Jess' gender non-normativity. As an adolescent, Jess drops out of school and works in the factories alongside mostly straight cis men. Although she enjoys the job and comradery with some of the butches in the factory, this mostly cisgender male environment subjects her to ridicule and harassment (ibid.: 87, 97) and therefore represents an experience of intersecting marginalization based on gender, sexuality, and class. For example, after witnessing job inequalities, Jess shows up to support the workers' union, yet she feels "shame" because "the foreman probably heard [her] voice rising alone in song" (ibid.: 84). This shame highlights unequal class power dynamics between workers and bosses, and it also emphasizes Jess' gender-based fear to be 'discovered' or ridiculed for her high voice—to her colleagues, it is a typically considered 'feminine' trait that seemingly contradicts her masculine gender. In another scene, Duffy, a cis-heterosexual man who is a union organizer and forms a friendship with Jess, does not understand the masculine women who work alongside Jess in the factory and who are married to men (ibid.: 91). Jess responds that "they are he-shes, but they're not butches," suggesting that butches and "he-shes" primarily share non-normative gender rather than sexuality. This emphasizes the distinctness of working-class genders and ways of identification, the importance of gender for butches, and a specifically lesbian connotation of the term 'butch.' Lesbian sexuality was often visible only through non-normative gender expression which became disproportionately linked to working-class status, interlacing these factors in lesbian communities, with especially "butch and fem as an organizing principle" that "[pervaded] all aspects of working-class lesbian culture" (Kennedy Lapovsky and Davis 2014: 154).

The marginalization Jess experiences for being Jewish similarly adds to her feeling of otherness. Jess' last name, Goldberg, renders her recognizably Jewish and thus contributes to her visible difference (Prosser 1998: 181, 190). Jess' family is subjected to ostracism for being Jewish, as well (Feinberg 2014a: 19); yet these experiences do not encourage them to empathize with Jess but rather heighten their rejection of her difference. Jess' mother, for example, expresses her shame for Jess' gender: "I was so ashamed. [...] I'm sick of people asking me if she's a boy or a girl" (ibid.: 13–14). Jess' family already faces marginalization, so they do not want to become subject to additional scrutiny because of their child's gender. Jess' Jewish and working-class background thus exaggerates her perceived gender and sexuality difference, adds pressure to conform in other areas of her life, and contributes to her isolation, making her "sick of being everybody's other" (ibid.: 249).

“People like me:” Community, Exploration, and Regulation

Jess moves out of her parents' house in the early sixties and discovers the local lesbian scene, where the femme/butch culture of the preceding decades is still prevalent. Jess finds refuge in the bar Tifka's, feels joyful to have found a place with “people like [her]” (ibid.: 156), and begins to see the bar community as her family. Other butches introduce Jess to femme/butch mannerisms and become her mentors and role models (ibid.: 27). Like Jess, the femmes and butches she meets express and name their non-normative gender in complex ways. For example, many of the older bar butches adopt shortened, gender-ambiguous versions of their names to better fit their gender, such as Butch Al, Old Butch Ro, Ed, and Rocco. Kennedy Lapovsky and Davis explain that “most butches had a nickname which was appropriate to their presentation of self” that was “not exclusively male” (2014: 260). Reclaiming insults as self-descriptors similarly becomes language through which Jess can recognize the butches' non-normative experiences. When used by “people who hate our [butches] guts” (Feinberg 2014a: 324), words like ‘bulldagger’ and ‘he-she’ target the intersections of her non-normative gender, gender expression, and sexuality and reinforce shame: “All my crimes were listed. I was guilty as charged” (ibid.: 40). Yet, when the butches use words like ‘bulldagger’ and ‘he-she’ to describe themselves and others, they do so in neutral, loving, or empowering ways (ibid.: e.g. 28, 30, 90, 299). She even asserts her identity as a ‘he-she’ against onlookers' assumptions that she is a “gay man” (ibid.: 324), highlighting both the importance of that identity to her and the fluid and volatile nature of being gendered. Reclaiming insults and leaning on kinship-based understanding allows her to envision a future: “I could look at the old bulldaggers and see my own future” (ibid.: 27).

Clothing is one of the most essential ways the butches and femmes express their genders as it carries the potential to be armor against violence, an alleviation to gender dysphoria,⁹ and externalization and empowerment of gender difference.¹⁰ Because clothing and style can be visible markers of queerness, they become one of the most visible and imminent sites of attack. Harassers remove Jess' and the other butches' clothes to ‘reveal’ their ‘real’ gender, literally ‘stripping’ them of both agency and protection (ibid.: 5, 12, 34, 39–40). Jess deems her genitals “the important half” (ibid.: 12) because she knows others see them as ‘evidence’ for her ‘true’ gender and as a challenge to her butch identity. Then-contemporary regulation of clothing through cross-dressing laws (Kennedy Lapovsky and Davis 2014: 276) made especially visibly

9 Gender dysphoria describes “the discomfort and/or distress that trans people experience when they are unable to live as members of the gender/sex that they identify as or desire to be” or when others refuse to recognize trans people's self-determined gender (Serano n.d.).

10 Cf. chapter three, “A Weekend Wasn't a Weekend If There Wasn't a Fight: The Tough Bar Lesbians of the 1950s,” in Kennedy Lapovsky and Davis' *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (2014).

gender-non-conforming people even more vulnerable to harassment, and its regulation confirms the power of clothing as self-expression and self-determination. Despite—or maybe because—these attacks are so closely linked to physical experience, clothes become crucial to butches and femmes and highlight that the daily violence they experience occurs based not only on their sexuality but most significantly on gender, gender expression, and others' perceptions of their gender. At the same time, the characters' non-normative genders are self-evident beyond clothing. At Old Butch Ro's funeral, for example, Jess and Ed wear a "blue suit, a white shirt, and a dark tie" (Feinberg 2014a: 124) despite family members' insistence that the butches wear dresses. Jess' observation that "[w]earing dresses was an excruciating humiliation" for the butches because it "ridiculed who they were" (ibid.) emphasizes the importance of clothing as self-expression. Instead of negating the butches' genders, though, the dresses form a contrast to and consequently highlight the butches' masculinity, so that the dresses become "painful *drag*" (ibid.: 125, my italics). The external violence the butches experience affirms their positions outside of then-contemporary dominant gender norms and frequently becomes an equally brutal internal violence, such as self-harm, therefore contributing to their erasure.

"An act of sweet imagination:" Femme/Butch and Gender Deviance

The butches in Jess' community express their frustration with putting their experiences into words both in the context of dominant society and in community with femmes. Frankie says that she has "never talked about [certain butch-related experiences] to a femme," and Jess similarly longs for the company of other butches to feel understood and express herself authentically: "I needed my own words—butch words to talk about butch feelings" (ibid.: 301). This suggests that butches and femmes have distinct languages and gender experiences. Yet, the femmes in *Stone Butch Blues* do not represent the normative counterpart to butches; on the contrary, they also have individual ways to express their genders that challenged then-dominant mainstream conceptions of (cis-)gender. In an interview with Amber Hollibaugh, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha confirms this: "even though we [femmes] do not cross from our assigned-at-birth gender to the 'other' gender—the way transgender is often thought of—we still chose to live a different gender" and are "read as being as queer as a drag queen" (Hollibaugh 2000: 249). Although 'femme' and 'butch' signify distinct genders and sexualities, then, they both represent a deviation from gender norms, and it is exactly these "differences and [...] alignments that fire the femme-butch dynamic" (Dawkins 2015) and become the basis for an intimate connection. For example, Jess forms a bond with Mona, a femme sex worker, who challenges then-contemporary norms for women both with her gender expression and with her job. Jess and Mona relate to each other because they both face gender-based violence and scrutiny, even if this presents

in different ways (Feinberg 2014a: 33–35). Femmes and butches share an intimate understanding of each other's genders and sexualities. Amber Hollibaugh, a pro-sex “dyke” and “high femme lesbian” who was a part of femme/butch culture in the 1960s and onwards, explains that “at least in my partnerships, one of us has a penis. But that’s not even interesting to them [gay cis men and others outside of lesbian communities]” (2000: 3). “Penis,” here, does not necessarily refer to flesh but may represent the male, masculine, non-binary, or other non-normative gender and/or gender expression of her partners. Similarly, the femme/butch couples in *Stone Butch Blues* find creative ways to explore sex and intimacy that allow them to express their transgressive genders and sexualities, making sex “an act of sweet imagination” (ibid.: 74).

“I’ve been thinking about it, too:” Medical Transition and ‘Passing’

Some members of the lesbian community in Buffalo medically, legally, and/or socially transition. Although many butches ‘pass’¹¹ as men either intentionally or accidentally, not all identify as such; however, not all identify as women, either.¹² For some, masculinity corresponds to their gender, for others, being read as men is a safety issue; and the butches have different reasons and goals for their social, legal, and/or medical transitions. Rocco is initially the only person Jess meets in the lesbian bar scene in Buffalo who takes testosterone. Even though Rocco has a beard and ‘passes’ as a man, bar members refer to Rocco as “she” (Feinberg 2014a: 102, 156). Contemporary trans discourse may interpret this as disrespectful of Rocco’s gender; however, because Rocco’s former lover—who deeply respects Rocco—refers to Rocco as “she” and “woman,” these terms may instead reflect Rocco’s complex gender and continuous place in the lesbian community. When other members of the bar scene transition¹³ and/or use different pronouns, Jess and her friends respect

11 ‘Passing’ describes the instance when “a member of a marginalized/minority group is perceived to be, or blends in as, a member of the dominant/majority group” (Serano n.d.)—in this case, when others assume trans people to be cis and/or their experienced gender. This concept can be harmful as it displaces the responsibility of gendering from the onlooker onto the trans person and disregards that non-binary trans people can hardly ‘pass’ in a society rooted in the conception that only two binary genders exist.

12 Because some butches ‘pass’ as men, they face accusations of heteronormativity from both dominant and queer communities. Such views disregard the continuous place of butches as queer, lesbian, and gender-marginalized people: “to recognize their [butches] masculinity and not their queerness distorts their culture and consciousness and negates their role in building lesbian community” (Kennedy Lapovsky and Davis 2014: 183). Regardless of its individual embodiment, then, *butch* always necessarily represents a non-normative gender, gender expression, and/or sexuality.

13 *Gender transition* is individual and does not (necessarily) refer to a medical process. Instead, transition can be social, legal, medical, and/or internal; it is not linear or within a finite ‘pre-’

this: When Grant says, "You know Ginni? She got on a sex-change program, now she calls herself Jimmy," "Edwin glared at Grant" and corrects Grant: "He asked us to call him he—remember? We ought to do it" (ibid.: 155), and Grant immediately adapts and refers to Jimmy correctly. This conversation emphasizes the intimate understanding of self-expression and gender complexity and the mutual respect and solidarity in Jess' lesbian community. Although the four friends initially express reluctance towards Jimmy's medical transition, they can also relate to him. Jess shares that she has considered taking hormones; Ed admits she "knew what [Jess] was talking about," and Grant had been "thinking about it too." (ibid.) While they share this sentiment, the butches all have different experiences: Jan, for example, clarifies: "I'm not like Jimmy. [...] I'm not a guy." The butches' differences emphasize the diversity of gender experiences in the Buffolonian lesbian community. Grant's subsequent questions—"How do you know that? How do you know we aren't? We aren't real women are we?"—and Edwin's answer—"I don't know what the hell I am"—(ibid.) highlight the displacement and confusion these butches feel because of the lack of understanding towards their non-normative genders.

Hearing about experiences like Rocco's allows Jess to explore her gender in new ways. Jess eventually decides to take testosterone to alleviate her gender dysphoria and to avoid violence (ibid.). During this time, Jess becomes involved with Annie, a cis-heterosexual woman who reads Jess as a cisgender man. Annie makes homophobic comments in front of Jess (ibid.: 211–212), who is hurt and soon leaves Annie because of these comments. Jess' reaction highlights her continued identification with lesbian communities and with being read as visibly queer. After a few months of "passing as a man," she feels isolated and laments that it is "*strange to be exiled from your own sex to borders that will never be home*" (ibid.: 6). Instead of giving Jess comfort, 'passing,' to her personally, feels inauthentic: "I discovered that passing didn't just mean slipping below the surface, it meant being buried alive. [...] I was no longer me on the outside" (ibid.: 186). She feels isolated in her new experience and grieves her belonging to lesbian spaces: although being read as a man might provide physical safety, it does not reflect Jess' experienced gender, so that she now feels a different kind of internal, emotional, and mental violence.

This predicament encourages Jess to weave her own narrative that does not fit with linear, binary, and/or medical ideas of transness: "Who was I now—woman or man? That question could never be answered as long as those were the only choices; it could never be answered if it had to be asked" (ibid.: 241). Instead of seeking fault in herself, Jess recognizes the fault in binary systems and in the individuals who reproduce these systems. She embraces her gender ambiguity and empowers her own definitions of trans, butch, and lesbian identity in which her discomfort with being

and 'post-' paradigm. Transition—and particularly medical transition—is not a requirement for being trans.

read as a man and her decision to stop testosterone do not negate her masculine gender but highlight its distinctly queer and non-normative nature.

“I miss Buffalo:” Integration and Celebration

In the later parts of the novel, Jess moves to New York City and discovers the local transgender community, which allows her to integrate her trans and lesbian experiences (ibid.: 271). Jess meets Ruth, a neighbor who is a transgender woman and who understands Jess because she experiences similar harassment on the street. Ruth introduces Jess to other trans people and renews her trust in vulnerability and community (ibid.: 259, 266, 274, 278). While Jess' time in Buffalo allows her to explore and accept her sexuality, her move to New York City allows her to do the same with gender through finding others who have similar experiences. Buffalo, then, represents the lesbian community, and NYC represents the trans community. Rather than a decision *for* transgender and *against* the lesbian community, Jess' move to NYC signifies her integration of these two: although Jess lives in NYC, she “[misses] Buffalo” (ibid.: 274), and at the end of the novel, Jess returns to Buffalo to make amends, strengthen the bonds with her community and friends there, and remember the lessons she learned in Buffalo before she goes back to New York City.

This visit to Buffalo also shows how much Jess learns to question her own assumptions and to be open to experiences different than hers. Despite her frustration with the rules and stereotypes that narrow her own expression, Jess initially also applies them herself. When Jess first hears that her friend Frankie, who is a butch, is in a relationship with another butch, Jess “couldn't deal with it” (ibid.: 219). Jess' admission that she wonders “who's the femme in bed?” (ibid.: 300) highlights her lack of understanding of lesbians who did not fit the then-prevalent femme/butch subculture. While femme/butch culture provided homes and mentorship to gender and sexual deviants, it also propagated a code of lesbian conduct and behavior (Kennedy Lapovsky and Davis 2014: 16, 238). Many lesbians felt pressured to conform to this: “no matter [...] whether assuming a role identity felt like a natural expression of her being or something imposed, she needed to adopt a role. They were a social imperative” (ibid.: 152). Even Jess and the Buffalonian bar scene thus reproduce a social code: “Two butches could be friends, but never lovers; the same was true for two fems” (Feinberg 2014a: 152). While femmes and butches certainly challenged cis-heterosexual norms, then, they also established their own subcultural norms that made any femmes, butches, and queer people who did not fit these codes additionally non-normative in these contexts. During her visit, however, Jess apologizes to her friend Frankie for her previous prejudice about Frankie's butch/butch relationship. Jess externalizes her own prejudice, and this becomes the basis for an open conversation with her friend. The latter challenges Jess' narrow attitude: “What you meant was who does the fucking and who gets fucked? Who ran the fuck? That's not the same as

being butch or femme, Jess" (ibid.: 300). Frankie's definition of 'butch' complicates its relationship to sexuality and dislodges its placement in opposition to 'femme'. As such, Frankie conceptualizes 'butch' primarily as a queer gender or gender expression and questions cultural and subcultural expectations. "I'm sick of hearing butch used to mean sexual aggression or courage. If that's what butch means, what does it mean in reverse for femmes?" (ibid.) Instead of discouraging femme/butch dynamics, Frankie challenges narrow conceptions and reminds of their subversive roots that celebrate sexual and gender non-normativity against the cis-hetero mainstream. Jess reflects on her own complex gender, sexuality, and the interrelation between the two, explaining: "what gets it for me is high femme. It's funny—it doesn't matter whether it's women or men—it's always high femme that pulls me by the waist and makes me sweat" (ibid.). Jess realizes that her own sexuality as well as the label 'femme' transcend sex assigned at birth and feel more connected to gender and/or gender expression. Frankie thus helps Jess expand her own ideas about lesbian existence and to recognize her own complexities.

"And yearning:" Imagining Language, Future, and Political Action

Finding language for herself and learning from others with different perspectives empowers Jess to envision a queer, gender-expansive future with space for people like her. She asserts that she cannot talk about her experiences because she lacks language that reflects them: "There's things that happened to me because I'm a he-she that I've never talked about to a femme. I've never had the words. [...] I'm choking to death on what I'm feeling. I need to talk and I don't even know how." (ibid.: 301) Although Jess' lack of words is "choking" her "to death," it also encourages her to find her own language. Jess subverts questions that reinforce binaries and instead uses them to reflect—and liberate—herself: "Who was I becoming? I couldn't answer those questions, but even asking them was a sign to me that tumultuous change had been boiling just below the surface of my consciousness" (ibid.: 241). Right after this realization, Jess has a dream in which she finally surfaces from "deep, murky water" to inhale, and this empowerment of her own in-betweenness relieves "pressure" from her. When she surfaces from the water, she is met with "sun," a "breeze," and "laughter" (ibid.). Reminiscent of José Esteban Muñoz's 'queer utopia,' Jess finds liberation in her queerness, and this ultimately allows her to see a future, a "light shimmering above" her (ibid.). Frankie and Jess' conversation echoes this sentiment. They state a world that embraces butches is "not here yet" (Muñoz 2009: 1), but Jess asks: "What would our words sound like?" (Feinberg 2014a: 301) Living in the in-between—imagining, questioning—becomes a way for the butches to connect in the present and see beyond its violent reality. Jess and Frankie contemplate the realization of this queer utopia through and tied to nature: "What would our words sound like?" [...] I looked up at the sky. 'Like thunder, maybe" (ibid.). The two butches share

an intimate, tender moment: “Frankie pressed her lips against [Jess’] hair. ‘Yeah, like thunder,’” Frankie agrees and adds, “And yearning” (ibid.). Frankie also hopes for a queer future: the word “yearning” carries the wish for a queer utopia. This word resonates with Jess, too: “I smiled and kissed the hard muscle of her biceps. ‘Yearning,’ I repeated softly. ‘What a beautiful word to hear a butch say out loud’” (ibid.). The words “smiled,” “kissed,” “softly,” and “beautiful” emphasize the tenderness between the butches. Jess’ affirmation of Frankie’s use of this word implies the underlying codes in the lesbian community at the time: its utterance counters expectations for butches to be tough and emotionally guarded. Jess returns the sentiment (“I repeated *softly*,” my italics) and finds it liberating. The act of imagining and Frankie’s plea to “hammer out a definition of butch that doesn’t leave me out” (ibid.: 300) become a way to form the future in the present—“not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future” (Muñoz 2009: 1). Through this exchange, the two butches learn the importance of alliances in lesbian communities, even—and maybe especially—when their experiences differ. Frankie asks, “Am I so different from you?,” Jess answers, “You have to decide that. To me we’re still kin” (Feinberg 2014a: 300), affirming a definition of community that embraces differences, mutual support, and empathy. This personal exchange becomes an opportunity for structural change that “promises a future” for sexual and gender deviants like them.

Once Jess accepts these overlapping parts of herself—her butch lesbian and trans self; her working-class and Jewish heritage—she advocates not only for herself but also others like her. During the last pages of the novel, she spontaneously speaks at a “gay demonstration” (ibid.: 324), surprised by her own boldness. This moment becomes an opportunity for Jess to discover herself against the shame her environment has taught her: “I felt so sick to death of my own silence that I needed to speak. [...] I just needed to open my throat for once and hear my own voice” (ibid.). Because she has realized that marginalized groups have been “taught to hate people who are different. It’s been pumped into [their] brains. It keeps them fighting each other” (ibid.: 255), Jess advocates for alliances between marginalized people, between femme/butch communities from previous decades and then-contemporary lesbians in her speech. This moment becomes a pivotal shift towards Jess’ reclamation of her power: “courage is [...] not just living through the nightmare, it’s doing something with it afterward. [...] It’s trying to organize to change things” (ibid.: 324). As part of this sentiment, Jess accepts her former co-worker Duffy’s offer to join a worker’s union—an offer she previously rejected (ibid.: 326). With Jess’ involvement in the queer and the labor movement at the end of the novel, she reclaims her outsider status and her intersecting identities, believing in her own agency and solidarity. Because of her multiple marginalized identities, Jess recognizes structures of oppression and decides to fight them in a holistic, intertwined way rather than viewing them as separate or avoiding them to conform to a more respectable image. Accepting and integrating her gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and

class, then, allows Jess to find empowerment in political activism and to counter some of the violence, shame, and ostracism Jess has experienced.

3. Conclusion and Outlook

As an “anti-racist white, working-class, secular Jewish, transgender, lesbian, female, revolutionary communist” (Pratt 2014), activist, and gender historian, Leslie Feinberg shares many parallels with Jess. Feinberg experienced heightened visibility, violence, and erasure during the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond, and she challenged the then-current status quo to create spaces for multiply marginalized people. Similar to Jess, Feinberg was influenced by the interconnectedness between gender and class. Moving between genders, classes, and other identities—particularly in public spaces—functioned as a necessary safety measure and as an opportunity to gain access to gatekept spaces, language, and education, which for Feinberg was a way of community building against dominant systems (Hallwalls 2014). The fluidity between Feinberg’s and Jess’ life challenges the distinction between not only ‘trans’ and ‘lesbian’ but also author and protagonist and fiction and non-fiction: “Like my own life, the novel defies easy classification [...]. [T]his book is a lesbian novel and a transgender novel” (Feinberg 2014a: 336). By embracing this fluidity, Feinberg empowers the complexity of her overlapping experiences: “I defend my right to be complex” (Feinberg 1998: 33).

I hope that my analysis shows that we cannot separate trans and lesbian communities but must recognize their overlap. *Stone Butch Blues* highlights that trans and gender-non-conforming people have frequently been pivotal to lesbian culture and emancipation and that femmes and butches are often at the forefront of this liminal space. Feinberg’s characters show that even amidst shared experiences, these identities can be lived, experienced, and named in diverse ways. Any variation in experience, rather than suggesting a disconnect, highlights that their identities are simultaneously similar and different; in line with Yanyi’s “great secret of lesbianism,” these experiences exist alongside each other, next to each other, in solidarity, rather than “[echoing] sameness” (2019: 62). What remains constant are the oppressive structures that erase these characters and their complex trans and lesbian experiences, but also lesbians’ and TGNC people’s continuous resistance and (re-)imagination.

Race, class, and other sites of privilege and marginalization co-produce gender and gender perception. While intersecting discrimination can significantly contribute to the characters’ struggles, their perspectives of multiple marginalization also help them to empower their right to be in existing spaces and to create a place outside of them, expanding and individualizing both trans and lesbian identification. Undermined by society at large and sometimes their own communities, characters challenge, expand, and reclaim the dominant meaning of terms and spaces

and create alternative methods of identifying themselves and each other, envisioning new ways of existing at the intersection of trans and lesbian experience. These visions translate to political action and advocate for alliance-based approaches that center shared oppressors rather than shared identities and that seek liberation for all oppressed people.

Of course, this analysis of *Stone Butch Blues* is only one piece of a vast body of research, archive, and possibility. I hope that more scholars will add to this work and explore TGNC and lesbian experiences across different countries, time periods, and languages. In the sentiment of Feinberg's protagonist, I envision a future where feminists fight for all gender-marginalized people; where gatekeepers cannot keep us from ourselves; where difference is an opportunity, not a threat; and where society recognizes trans and gender-non-conforming people as integral to lesbian communities. As such, I long for a future that not only tolerates but celebrates our complexities.

References

- Bauer, G. R. et al. (2009) "I Don't Think This Is Theoretical; This Is Our Lives': How Erasure Impacts Health Care for Transgender People", *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care* 20(5), pp. 348–361.
- Dawkins, U. (2015) "Field Work, Prospekt. Femme-Butch in the Arctic Landscape", *Writing from Below*. <https://writingfrombelow.org/masc/field-work-prospekt-femme-butch-in-the-arctic-landscape/> (last accessed 17 April 2024).
- Driskill, Q. (2016) *Asegi Stories. Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Feder, S. (2020) *Disclosure*. USA: Field of Vision.
- Feinberg, L. (1997) *Transgender Warriors*. Boston: Beacon.
- (1998) *Trans Liberation. Beyond Pink or Blue*. Boston: Beacon.
- (2014a) *Stone Butch Blues*. 20th Anniversary Author Edition, self-published. <http://www.lesliefeinberg.net> (last accessed 16 August 2024).
- (2014b) "Self", *lesliefeinberg.net*. www.lesliefeinberg.net/self (last accessed 23 January 2024).
- Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center (2014) "Leslie Feinberg in Buffalo, June 2, 2006", *YouTube*. www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEdwzKPT114 (last accessed 23 January 2024).
- Hollibaugh, A. (2000) *My Dangerous Desires. A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press
- Johnson, D. K. (2004) *The Lavender Scare. The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians*. Chicago: University Press.

- Kennedy Lapovsky, E. and Davis, M. D. (2014) *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold. The History of a Lesbian Community*. 20th Anniversary Edition. New York: Routledge.
- Merriam-Webster (n.d.) "binarism, noun". www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/binarism (last accessed 23 January 2024).
- (n.d.) "lesbian, noun". www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lesbian (last accessed 23 January 2024).
- Multipfetch (2014) "Outlaw – Leslie Feinberg on Discovering Transgender History", *YouTube*. www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2AZYoAhhjs (last accessed 23 January 2024).
- Muñoz, J. E. (2009) *Cruising Utopia. The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York/London: New York University Press.
- Nestle, J. (1981) "Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s", *Heresies* 12, pp. 21–24.
- Pratt, M. B. (2014) "Leslie Feinberg – A Communist Who Revolutionized Transgender Rights", *Workers World*. www.workers.org/2014/11/16937/ (last accessed 23 January 2024).
- Prosser, J. (1998) *Second Skins. The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schneider, A. (2021, unpublished) "I Defend My Right to Be Complex." *A Cultural Literary Exploration of Gender Non-Normativity in Lesbian Communities from the 1900s until Today*. M.A. thesis, Goethe University Frankfurt.
- Sears, C. (2015) *Arresting Dress. Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Serano, J. (n.d.) "Julia's Trans, Gender, Sexuality, & Activism Glossary!" www.juliaseerano.com/terminology.html (last accessed 23 January 2024).
- Yanyi (2019) *The Year of Blue Water*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

put your hands in my lungs

Fem_me/Butch-Miniaturen

k kater

I could write a book about how much
I love hir—and I have.
Minnie Bruce Pratt (2020)

Für die Tagung »30 Jahre *Stone Butch Blues*« habe ich mich in einem Audiostück Fem_me/Butch-Verbundenheit und Stone-Begehren gewidmet. Ausgehend von der Darstellung dieser Dynamiken in Leslie Feinbergs Roman *Stone Butch Blues* und Minnie Bruce Pratts poetischem Erzählband *S/HE* beziehe ich diverse literarische Zitate und Fem_me/Butch-Erotika aufeinander und verbinde sie mit autofiktionalen Fragmenten.

So wird eine genderphile Verwandtschaft erfahrbar, versponnen in ein kollektives trans*queeres Gedächtnis und Archiv (vgl. Fuchs 2020). Es zeigt sich, wie sich meine Affizierung von diesen Texten in mein persönliches Sehnen und Begehren mischt, wie sich Literatur in Körper einschreiben kann und zugleich Körperlichkeiten in Texte eingehen. »This is an act of sweet imagination.«¹ (Feinberg 1995: 71)

Dabei ist mir wichtig, so weit wie möglich zu benennen, dass es hier keine einfache Vergleichbarkeit geben kann, unter anderem aufgrund der historischen und geopolitischen Unterschiede zwischen meiner Lebensrealität und der der jeweiligen Autor*innen, den zum Teil nicht übereinstimmenden Marginalisierungen/Privilegierungen und den (auch daraus resultierenden) Grenzen meiner Wahrnehmung. »I blended a sense of belonging out of narratives that were not my own.« (Kuchenga 2021) Insbesondere erotische Fem_me/Butch-Ausdrucksformen waren und sind von verschiedenen—sehr speziellen—Diskriminierungs-

1 In *Stone Butch Blues* hat Jess zum ersten Mal mit Angie, einer befreundeten Sex-arbeitenden Person, aus einer Stone-Top-Position heraus Sex. Dabei leitet Angie Jess mit viel mündlicher Kommunikation selbstbewusst und zärtlich an und sagt schließlich: »This is an act of sweet imagination.« (Feinberg 1995: 71) Für mich charakterisiert dies Stone-Sexualität ungemein berührend.

und Gewalterfahrungen betroffen, sind verstrickt in aktivistische Kämpfe sowie intersektionale Sensibilitäten. Es sind intime Orte des Widerstands (vgl. Nestle 2003 [1987]; Hollibaugh 2000 u. a.).

Sich durch Identifizierungen erfahren, berühren. In Stilisierungen etwas wie ›Echtheit‹ und Zugehörigkeit finden. Ein Werden mit/durch Prothesen und Tools. Unablässiges Gezwitzcher, Flüstern, (sich) Schreiben. Sprache und Narrative transformieren bis sich anders mit ihnen ficken lässt. Gehalten Grobheit entfesseln. Schweres Beben. Zart und wach und dünnhäutig werden für den Raum in und zwischen uns. Das Nicht-Identische, Widerstrebende, Zögerliche, Unsagbare, Opake tiefer und tiefer wahrnehmen. Lieben.

Dies lässt sich hier nachhören:²



Davon inspiriert arbeite ich nun an einem Essay über mein Erleben von Fem_me/Butch-Genderierungen und Stone-Sexualitäten, was immer auch mit Lektüre-Erfahrungen verbunden ist. Dabei gingen mir die Texte von Leslie Feinberg und Minnie Bruce Pratt stets besonders nah, haben meine Butchness, meine Fem_meness, meine trans*queeren Erfahrungen und meinen Aktivismus geprägt. Mich für die Tagung sogar noch intensiver mit ihnen zu beschäftigen, hat mich berührt und verwandelt. Nach zwanzig Jahren des Schreibens über Fem_me/Butch komme ich nun an meine *soft spots* und kann schmerzhaft politische Widersprüche aussprechen sowie das, was sich in mir sehnt und hoffen möchte—mein Herz und meine Lungenflügel. Zugleich wird dies durch **meine Liebe für mischa** möglich, die in alles hier reicht. Sowohl mein Hörstück für die Tagung als auch dieser Essay sind auf mischa als autofiktionales Du ausgerichtet.

Auf ihrer Website veröffentlichte Minnie Bruce Pratt ein sehr persönliches Statement zu ihrem Band *S/HE* (1995), darin benennt sie mehrere Aspekte, die in meinem Essay resonieren:

My adult life has been an exhilarating struggle to resist, militantly, the oppressive categories that the ruling status quo places on us—and to live, triumphantly, the identities and complexities that we feel to be true for ourselves. As my life and Leslie's flowed together, I gained immeasurably in my understanding of that

2 Oder via Link: <https://www.freie-radios.net/123234>.

struggle—in my understanding of how we live all our sexualities, sex identities and gender expressions. The stories in my book *S/HE* are about these complexities in our daily life—and many of them are also love tributes to Leslie. (Pratt 2020)

Aus diesem Verständnis eines gemeinsamen Transitionierens und Werdens heraus—das von gesellschaftlichen Herrschaftsstrukturen genauso wie intimen, persönlichen Verfasstheiten durchdrungen ist und sich kämpferisch dazu positioniert—erkunde ich Übergänge von Blicken und Berühren sowie weitere dekoloniale Vervielfältigungen von Sinnlichkeiten, lote behinderte und gecrippte erotische Praktiken aus und erzähle *Fem_me/Butch-Fairy-Tales*—höchst genderphile, pervers_romantische Fantasien (vgl. Lorde 2007 [1978]; Leduc 2020 u.a.). Um einen Eindruck von meinem Text zu vermitteln, möchte ich hier eine Passage daraus teilen.

Im Folgenden geht es konkreter um queere Sexpraktiken und kinky Fantasien.

butch cock heart³

»my

butch.cock.heart

hard

for you and

on fire«

(mischa, privater Chat)

Butchcocks können vielfältige Formen annehmen—transforming and haunting our myriad body_minds. Die zärtlichen und forschen Finger meiner linken Hand, meiner Butchhand, möchten zaubern und sich verbinden und bleiben verhext. Wie mein Schwanzgefühl sich ausdehnt, wenn ich als Stone Butch begehre und liebe. Sonst bleibt es punktuell, scharf fokussiert; als Stone Butch wird mein Schwanzgefühl zur weiten, weichen Decke, die mit Liebe und Care umhüllen, ankern und halten möchte.

Doch nie waren Dildos und Toys für mich so aufgeladen wie Dein schwarzer Butchcock, der so sehr Teil von Dir ist, so sehr Du, so sehr Teil Deines Körpers. Precious allein, die scharfgezeichnete, halb naturalistische Eichel in meiner Hand zu halten. »I loved the way a simple shape could do me in, the puerile fuck geometry. [...] I wanted it so bad, that simple shape.« (Munson 2006: 23–24) Dieses Ding verdient einen Designpreis, das lässt sich sehen und fühlen. Doch es geht nicht darum,

3 »butch.cock.heart« ist ein von mischa geprägtes Kompositum, das Stone-Begehren versprachlicht.

wie fesch Dein Cock ist, sondern um das, was er uns bedeutet. Was er uns von Anfang an bedeutet hat, was wir mit ihm und durch ihn werden. »I want to suck out the marrow of this silicone shape, and make a body of this bone.« (Munson 2004: 221)

Du schreibst wie der böseste Wolf, und fickst ebenso.

Für eine Werwolfsfantasie wolltest Du einen »Monsterschwanz«—breit genug, dass ich die Augen aufreißen würde, lang genug, um den Schmerz und die Benommenheit des Alltags zu durchdringen, uns zu erden und träumen zu lassen. Monsterschwänze sind mir meistens zu viel; in den Dildo-Ausstellungen von Sexshops fühle ich mich eher abgestoßen oder belustigt von den Größen und den grellen Aufmachungen.

Tatsächlich hat der neue Wolfsschwanz etwas sehr Organisches (ja, hah! Aber wirklich. Erstaunlich organisch)—er ist weich, rot marmoriert und warzig. Mehr ein inneres Organ als ein äußeres Glied.

Inzwischen habe ich den ruhenden Schwanz lange mit meinem Blick gestreichelt und erfüllt. Er kann auf zwei Seiten gedreht werden—double trouble. Eigentlich ist er mehr Drache als Wolf. Die drei Noppen an der einen Seite lese ich als drachige Verhornungen, die kleineren akzentuierten an der anderen Seite sind für mich Clits. Also mindestens neun zusätzliche Clitgipfel, was schon sehr aufregend ist. Schwer verdichtetes Gefühl.

Der Wolfsschwanz.

Unser beider pulsierendes Butcherz.

Nach einer Nacht zwischen Hamburg und Wien, in der mir der Trost Deiner Umarmung gefehlt hat, in der Du so sehr gefehlt hast, nahm ich den Wolfsschwanz behutsam aus der Kommodenschublade, habe ihn neben mich auf das raue, graue Baumwoll-Laken gebettet, ihn mit den Fingerkuppen gestreichelt, dann meinen Mund, meine Nasenspitze an ihn gedrückt wie ein kleiner Vogel—also ich als zarter Vogel.

Und das aus dem Nest gefallene Organ.

Das kleine Tier ohne Deine Wärme.

»And we will be linked, molecules drizzling down as tree thumbs and fingers are opening up. They will catch us, they will drop us, soluble, unsolved, undivided, undone, miscible mystery, down into the ground.« (Pratt 2021: 34, Hervorhebung k. k.)

Dank

Ich bin dankbar für alles, was die Tagung in mir angestoßen hat, und möchte mich besonders bei Clara Rosa Schwarz für die sehr weitreichende Unterstützung auf diesem Weg bedanken. Sabine Fuchs' unvergleichlich großartige Texte zu *Fem_me/Butch* sowie unsere langjährige gemeinsame Theoriearbeit sind hier so stark eingeschrieben, dass es sich kaum noch benennen lässt. **Mehr als für entsteht dies durch mischa**, zugleich befeuert mischa meinen Schreibmut und prägt diesen Essay editorisch—everything, my cosmic Butch.

Literatur

- Feinberg, L. (1995) *Stone Butch Blues*. Boston: Alyson.
- Fuchs, S. (2020) »Spuren im Archiv. Femme/Butch-Nostalgie für eine queere Zukunft«, in: Fuchs, S. (Hg.) *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren*. Berlin: Querverlag, S. 113–126.
- Hollibaugh, A. L. (2000) *My Dangerous Desires. A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- kater, k (2023) *put your hands in my lungs — femme/butch miniaturen — zur 30 Jahre »Stone Butch Blues« Konferenz*, *freie-radios.net*. <https://www.freie-radios.net/123234> (letzter Zugriff am 08.08.2024).
- Kuchenga (2021) »The future is wide open: How Trans Literature Came of Age«, *Penguin*. <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2021/11/trans-literature-history-future-stories> (letzter Zugriff am 17.06.2024).
- Leduc, A. (2020) *Disfigured. On Fairy Tales, Disability, and Making Space*. Toronto: Coach House.
- Lorde, A. (2007) »Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power«, in: Lorde, A. *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches*. New York: Crossing, S. 53–59.
- Munson, P. (2004) »Blowing Across America«, in: Taormino, T. (Hg.) *Best Lesbian Erotica 2004. Vol. 4*. San Francisco: Cleis, S. 221–234.
- (2006) *Origami Striptease*. San Francisco: Suspect Thoughts.
- Nestle, J. (2003) »Butch-Femme Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s«, in: Nestle, J. *A Restricted Country*. San Francisco: Cleis, S. 92–102.
- Pratt, M. B. (1995) *S/HE*. Ithaca: Firebrand.
- (2020) »Leslie Feinberg«, *minniebrucepratt.net*. <https://minniebrucepratt.net/leslie-feinberg/> (letzter Zugriff am 17.06.2024).
- (2021) *Magnified*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Queere Arbeiter*innen und umkämpfte Räume

Eine intersektionale Betrachtung des Raums der schwul-lesbischen Bar in *Stone Butch Blues* und seiner Ein- und Ausschließungsmechanismen

Jojo Hofmann

Die germanistische Literaturwissenschaft tut sich bislang schwer mit intersektionalen Perspektiven, wodurch immer wieder Leerstellen in der Betrachtung von Texten entstehen. Im Rahmen dieses Beitrags wird daher der Frage nachgegangen, durch welche Intersektionen die Ein- und Ausschließungsmechanismen¹ eines ›queeren Raums‹ verlaufen und für wen schwul-lesbische Bars tatsächlich *safer spaces*² darstellen.

Diese Analysebrille will die Grenzüberschreitungen, Raumeignungs- und Verteidigungsstrategien sowie Selbstermächtigungen im Kontext queerer Kämpfe sichtbar machen, wobei Erfahrungen von Jess, der Hauptfigur in Leslie Feinbergs Roman *Stone Butch Blues*, im Mittelpunkt stehen. Mithilfe von Michel Foucaults Konzept der Heterotopie sowie raumtheoretischen Ansätzen von Jurij Lotman und Karl Renner wird die Struktur und Konstitution queerer Räume in *Stone Butch Blues* genauer betrachtet. Judith Butlers Ausführungen zur heterosexuellen Matrix und zur Performance von Geschlecht bilden die Grundlage für die Analyse.

-
- 1 Es wird bewusst anstelle des Begriffs ›Ausschlussmechanismus‹ das Wort ›Ausschließungsmechanismus‹ verwendet, um zu betonen, dass es ein Prozess ist, der (auch) auf aktiven Handlungen beruht.
 - 2 Der Begriff *safe space* bezeichnet einen Raum, welcher sich durch die Abwesenheit von diskriminierenden Strukturen auszeichnet und somit einen gewalt- und diskriminierungsfreien Ort bieten möchte. Die Abänderung zu *safer space* verdeutlicht, dass dies eine nicht umsetzbare Idee ist, da es sich bei gesellschaftlichen Strukturen, wie beispielsweise dem Patriarchat und Rassismus, um tief verwurzelte Konstrukte handelt, die nicht einfach aus einem Raum ausgekoppelt werden können (vgl. Carroll 2015: 37). Stattdessen kann nur versucht werden, diese zu reflektieren und einen diskriminierungs- und gewaltarmen Raum zu schaffen.

1. Raumtheorien

Um den narrativen Raum greifen zu können, wird sich diesem nun theoretisch genähert. Dazu folgen Erläuterungen zu Raum und Grenze nach Lotman und Renner und zu Heterotopien nach Foucault. Im Anschluss werden diese mit Überlegungen zu Queerness und Raum verbunden und bilden so die Grundlage für die spätere Analyse.

1.1 Raum und Grenze bei Lotman und Renner

Jurij Lotman hält fest, dass der Mensch die Welt stets visuell wahrnimmt und somit auch verbale Zeichen im Kontext einer räumlichen Welt eingeordnet werden (vgl. Lotman 1993: 312). Dabei betont Lotman, dass Raum dem Menschen stets durch seinen Inhalt begreifbar wird (vgl. ebd.: 329). Hinter dieser Füllung des Raumes ist das System räumlicher Strukturen zu erkennen, welches über die Organisation des Raumes hinaus auch eine Grundlage zur Beschreibung der nichträumlichen Relationen bietet (vgl. ebd.: 330). Raum hat somit stets eine explizit semantische Ebene und eine semiotische Qualität: Die »Raummodelle werden zum Organisationsprinzip für den Aufbau eines ›Weltbildes« (ebd.: 313) – und bilden so die Grundlage für die Bedeutsamkeit der in einem Text realisierten Räume (vgl. ebd.).

Die Grenze versteht er hierbei als Hauptstrukturmerkmal der Raummodelle; sie liegt zwischen zwei Teilräumen, welche grundsätzlich unterschiedlich strukturiert sind (vgl. ebd.: 327). Lotman definiert: »Ein Ereignis im Text ist die Versetzung einer Figur über die Grenze eines semantischen Feldes« (ebd.: 332). Hier sieht Karl Renner die Grenzen von Lotmans Konzept, da stets zwei beschriebene (Teil-)Räume von Nöten sind, um eine Grenzüberschreitung diagnostizieren zu können. Renner erweitert Lotmans Konzept: (Bedeutungs-)Räume können, müssen jedoch nicht, topographisch realisiert sein; Grenzverletzungen können auch ausschließlich auf Normebene passieren und durch Ordnungssätze und ihre Infragestellung markiert werden (vgl. Renner 2004: 367–369). Hierfür beschreibt Renner die Figurenbewegung durch die Mengenzugehörigkeit³ zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt. Hinzu kommen die Ordnungssätze, welche die Struktur der dargestellten Welt abstecken (vgl. ebd.: 367). In der Kombination beider kann ein Ereignis nun wie folgt beschrieben werden: »Ein Ereignis liegt immer dann vor, wenn zwischen einer Situationsbeschreibung und einem Ordnungssatz ein Widerspruch entsteht« (ebd.). Entsprechend definiert Renner, dass es sich um ein Ereignis handelt, wenn zu einem bestimmten Augenblick der Geltungsanspruch einer dieser Ordnungssätze

3 Renner ersetzt den Raumbegriff Lotmans durch den Begriff der ›Menge«. Mengen können durch örtliche Zuschreibung oder soziale Zugehörigkeit, Religion und Nation gebildet werden (vgl. Renner 2004: 363–364).

hinterfragt wird. Topographisch realisiert ist dies eine Grenzüberschreitung, semantisch eine Regelverletzung (vgl. ebd.). Renner beruft sich weitergehend auf das Konsistenzprinzip: »Verletzungen semantischer Ordnungen – also Widersprüche zwischen Figuren und den semantischen Räumen, denen die Figuren zugeordnet sind – müssen im Verlauf der Geschichte behoben werden« (Renner 1983: 42–43).

1.2 Heterotopien nach Foucault

Ausgehend davon, dass »wir [...] nicht in einem leeren, neutralen Raum« (vgl. Foucault 2013: 9) leben, beschreibt Michel Foucault neben Transitorten und geschlossenen Räumen, wie dem Zuhause, auch die vollkommen *anderen* Orte (vgl. ebd.: 10). Es sind Gegenräume, die sich durch ihre Widerständigkeit allem anderen gegenüber auszeichnen und sich durch ihre tatsächliche Existenz und Erlebbarkeit von Utopien unterscheiden (vgl. ebd. 10–11). Utopien zeichnen sich durch ihre Perfektion aus, während Heterotopien durch ihre Realisation ihre Imperfektion als Teil ihrer Selbst vereinnahmen (vgl. Simmons 2018: 10). Stefan Tetzlaff fasst Heterotopien daher als begehbare Utopien, welche als Verbindungsräume zwischen einem ›Normalraum‹ und einer Utopie existieren (vgl. Tetzlaff 2016: 15). Heterotopien sind Gegenentwürfe zum Normalraum: ohne Normalraum keine Heterotopie (vgl. ebd.: 17). Heterotopien sind, wie Gefängnisse und andere Institutionen, auch Teil des Systems, zu dem sie sich als Gegenräume entwerfen und das sie zeitgleich ein- und aussperren. Tetzlaff versteht dieses Paradoxon als elementaren Bestandteil – als funktionale Paradoxie – der Heterotopie (vgl. ebd.: 15).

Mit Rückbezug auf Lotman und Renner kann die Heterotopie als Raum verstanden werden, in welchem die ihr eigenen Ordnungssätze grundsätzlich verschieden zu denen des Normalraums sind. Ein Ereignis verläuft in diesen Gegenräumen also über vollkommen andere Grenzen hinweg als im Normalraum; ein Ereignis im Normalraum muss kein Ereignis im Gegenraum sein und andersrum.

1.3 Queering Space(s): Queertopia

Folglich wird von einem Raum und einem Subjekt ausgegangen, welche sich stets erst durch Handlung(en) konstituieren müssen (vgl. Cuntz 2015: 58). Zusammengedacht mit der Genderperformance nach Judith Butler bietet dies einen Ansatzpunkt für subversive Praktiken und ihre Untersuchung, denn verschiedenste Normen können im Laufe ihrer stetigen Reproduktion nicht nur bestätigt, sondern auch unterlaufen werden (vgl. Schößler 2008: 102). Diese Normbrüche können als Regelverletzungen im semantischen Raum und somit als Sujets verstanden werden. Gleichzeitig gibt es Räume, in denen bestimmte subversive Praktiken nicht als Normbrüche, sondern als normgerechte Handlungen verstanden werden (vgl. Weaver 2014: 86) – wie es beispielsweise bei Homosexualität und Drag in schwul-lesbischen Bars der

Fall ist. Sabine Hark betont, dass das Queeren von Raum eine Form schwul-lesbischen Aktivismus' im Kampf gegen diskriminierende Strukturen und homofeindliche Repressionen ist (vgl. Hark 2001: 95). Die Notwendigkeit des Queerens von Räumen verdeutlicht, »dass es Zugangsbarrieren zum öffentlichen Raum gibt, dass dieser entlang sexueller, geschlechtlicher und rassistischer Linien strukturiert ist, die bestimmte Erfahrungen privilegieren und andere marginalisieren« (ebd.). Topologien sind, wie hier deutlich wird, immer als umkämpft zu verstehen (vgl. Schuster 2010: 75). In diesem Rahmen muss auch das Konzept der klaren Trennung von privaten und öffentlichen Räumen kritisiert werden, in welchem Heteronormativität transportiert wird: Dem privaten Raum werden intime und emotionale Dinge (z. B. Sexualität und Familie), dem öffentlichen Raum Lohnarbeit, Politik und rationale Dinge zugeordnet (vgl. ebd.: 77). Dabei verschleiert diese binäre Aufteilung, dass heteronormative Strukturen sich durch alle Alltagsbereiche ziehen und erst diese strikte Trennung hervorbringen (beispielsweise in Form von privater Care-Arbeit und öffentlicher Lohnarbeit und ihrer Aufteilung) (vgl. ebd.: 77–78). Die Heterosexualisierung des öffentlichen Raumes ist auch performativ zu verstehen: Überall im öffentlichen Raum wird die heterosexuelle Norm produziert und als angemessenes Verhalten markiert; durch die Abgrenzung vom als pervers markierten »Anderen« wird diese Struktur gefestigt (vgl. ebd.: 79).

Um dem entgegen zu wirken und explizit queere Räume zu schaffen, bedarf es Raumeignungsstrategien (vgl. ebd.: 80–81). Schuster beschreibt diese als gegen-öffentliche Raumproduktion (vgl. ebd.: 92). Teil dieses Konzepts ist auch die Kritik an Jürgen Habermas' Öffentlichkeitsbegriff, welcher eine vor allem bürgerliche und männliche Öffentlichkeit beschreibt (vgl. Fraser 1996). Stattdessen werden also Gegenöffentlichkeiten begründet, welche andere politische Verhaltensweisen und Normen ermöglichen: »In Gegenöffentlichkeiten gälten dabei eigene Regeln und alternative Lebensvorstellungen und Abläufe, sowie andere Vorstellungen darüber, was sagbar sei und was nicht« (Schuster 2010: 87).

Schuster kritisiert in diesem Zuge auch, dass in der Diskussion queerer Raumeignung in der Öffentlichkeit oftmals die Ambivalenz der damit einhergehenden Sichtbarkeit(spolitiken) außen vor gelassen wird (vgl. ebd.: 92): Es werden wichtige Räume geschaffen, die gleichzeitig zum Angriffspunkt für Queerfeindlichkeit werden. Die Existenz von queeren und insbesondere trans* Personen ist von Diskriminierung und Gewalt geprägt und ist aufgrund ihrer Abweichung zur cis-hetero Norm am Rande der Gesellschaft verortet (vgl. ebd.: 182). Die Schaffung von Gegenöffentlichkeiten bringt folglich stets den Raum gefährdende Sichtbarkeit mit sich, welche zu gesellschaftlichen Repressionen führt. Dennoch lassen sich die selbstgeprägten Räume durch widerständiges Aufbegehren gegen die hegemonale Zweigeschlechtlichkeit und durch »eigene[] Entwürfe[] von Geschlecht, Sexualität und sozialem Miteinander« (ebd.) charakterisieren: Hier gelten *andere* Ordnungssätze. Denn während im Normalraum heteronormative Ordnungssätze

Homosexualität und Transidentität als Sujets markieren, wirken im queeren Gegenraum queere Ordnungssätze, durch welche Homosexualität und Transidentität unmarkiert bleiben und als normal verstanden werden.

Im nächsten Schritt können nun auch Heterotopien durch eine queere Brille betrachtet werden. So argumentiert Ashley Simmons:

[I]maging queer futurity as heterotopia aligns with the disruptive characteristics of queerness. Queer heterotopias combine Foucault's philosophy with queer theory to critique the functions of ›ideal‹ spaces and question to whom these spaces are supposed to be catered. (Simmons 2018: abstract)

Sie definiert queere Identität als etwas sich fortlaufend aus Erfahrungen und äußeren Einflüssen Konstituierendes (vgl. ebd.: 4). Folglich ergibt sich hieraus und daraus, dass nach Butler Queerness immer in Opposition zu einer heteronormativen Subjektkonstitution entsteht, dass queere Utopien gar nicht existieren können: Die Perfektion der Utopie würde die Notwendigkeit einer Opposition zum hegemonialen Cis-Heteronormativen überflüssig machen und Queerness sowie Heteronormativität in einer utopischen Sexualitätspolitik aufgehen lassen. In Heterotopien treffen jedoch die utopischen Wünsche auf die gesellschaftlichen Konventionen und Normen, wodurch sich im *anderen* Ort eine Subversion dieser realisieren zu lassen versucht; ein Ort, an dem innerhalb einer repressiven Gesellschaft Queerness als Gegenentwurf existieren darf. Elizabeth Nguyen bringt Queerness mit Heterotopien zusammen, indem sie sie als widerständigen Akt gegen kulturelle Normalvorstellungen versteht, welcher in seiner Differenz an den gesellschaftlichen Rändern gefeiert wird (vgl. Nguyen 2011). Ein Ort, an dem Queerness zelebriert werden kann, muss folglich zwangsläufig eine Heterotopie sein. Diese spezielle Verknüpfung soll im Folgenden durch die Kombination beider Begriffe zu ›Queertopia‹ deutlich gemacht werden.

2. Ein Blick in den Normalraum: Das Anderssein der Bars in *Stone Butch Blues*

Was im ersten Kapitel theoretisch erläutert wurde, wird nun mit Blick auf die schwul-lesbischen Bars in *Stone Butch Blues* und ihre Abgrenzung als Gegenräume zum sog. Normalraum exemplarisch angewandt. Zuerst werden drei Teilräume des Normalraums – nämlich Familie und Zuhause; Öffentlichkeit und Polizei; Fabrik, Arbeit und Gewerkschaft – betrachtet, um die Differenz der Bars zu ihnen herauszuarbeiten.

2.1 Familie und Zuhause

In *Stone Butch Blues* fordern die Eltern von Jess, der Hauptfigur, in wechselhafter Intensität die ›richtige‹ Genderperformance. Zu sehen ist dies beispielsweise in ihrer Reaktion auf Jess' Anprobieren des väterlichen Anzugs, wonach Jess' Eltern Jess in eine psychiatrische Anstalt bringen, um Jess so durch Zwang die ›richtige‹ Genderperformance anzutrainieren. Die fehlerhafte Performance stört die Vergeschlechtlichung von Jess und führt zu Jess' gewaltvoller Entfernung aus dem Normalraum.

Queerness alleine ist bereits eine Regelverletzung im Normalraum: Jess ist an die Ordnungssätze und Grenzen des Normalraumes gebunden, die der heterosexuellen Matrix entsprechen. Jess entwickelt allerdings immer weitere Eigenschaften, welche diesen Ordnungssätzen widersprechen: Jess ›missperforms‹ das zugewiesene Geschlecht und stört dadurch den Prozess der Vergeschlechtlichung. Diese Abweichung von den Normen ist eine Regelverletzung und die Reaktionen der Figuren, die Jess umgeben, sind gewaltgeprägt, was die Frage aufwirft, inwiefern eine Ordnungswiederherstellung möglich ist. Nach Renner führt die Entwicklung der raumfremden Eigenschaften zur Berufung in einen anderen Raum, welcher in diesem Fall die psychiatrische Anstalt zu sein scheint. Die Lösung ist dabei nicht die dauerhafte Aufbewahrung, sondern die Umerziehung von Jess, damit Jess den Ordnungssätzen des Normalraumes entspricht und durch die heterosexuelle Matrix vergeschlechtlicht werden kann. Da eine solche Umerziehung jedoch niemals erfolgreich sein kann, bleibt die Möglichkeit einer Ordnungswiederherstellung fraglich.

Hingegen fällt in der Betrachtung des Raumes eines selbstgewählten und selbstgeschaffenen Zuhauses und einer selbstgewählten Familie die große Bedeutung des Sicherheitsaspekts auf: »Butch[es] knew that their femme lovers created space in which butches could safely project their identities, heal their wounds, and survive in a homophobic world« (Goetz 1997: 57). Goetz betont in diesem Kontext die Rolle von Theresa, Jess' Partnerin, bei Jess' Aufbau eines Zuhauses. Durch das notwendige Versteckspiel wird deutlich, dass auch der private Raum gesellschaftlich stark sanktioniert wird. Als offizielles Paar hätten Jess und Theresa ihre Wohnung nicht bekommen und Jess fürchtet, den heimischen Raum jederzeit wieder zu verlieren, sollten die Nachbar*innen Verdacht schöpfen. Der topographische Ort ist also keineswegs privat, sondern im Rahmen gesellschaftlicher Sichtbarkeitspolitiken umkämpft.

Der semantische Raum des Zuhauses ist Ort der Verhandlung von Gegen-Privatheit und Queeren des Zuhauses, da Jess und Theresa ihn als lesbisches Paar formen. Hier erleben sie gegenseitige Fürsorge und Akzeptanz. Durch diese Eigenschaften zeichnet sich das Zuhause als *safer space* aus. Gleichzeitig ist dieser Raum in den Möglichkeiten queeren Lebens begrenzt: Sexualität kann hier zwar gelebt, Partner*innen können jedoch nicht gesucht werden. Gemeinschaft mit anderen queeren Figuren kann nur im (gegen-)öffentlichen Raum der Bars gefunden werden, da

diese im Gegensatz zu (gegen-)privaten Räumen nicht verschlossen, sondern als Begegnungsräume konstituiert sind.

2.2 Öffentlichkeit und Polizei

Der Alltag und die Suche nach Gemeinschaft führen die Figuren also immer wieder in den öffentlichen Raum, in welchem sich auch die schwul-lesbischen Bars als gegenöffentliche Räume befinden. Hier sind sie aber auch in der Eingriffssphäre der Polizei, die aufgrund der Verschlossenheit der (Gegen-)Privatheit und der unterschiedlichen Sichtbarkeit der Figuren in diesen Sphären hauptsächlich in der Öffentlichkeit zu verorten ist. Cat Moses charakterisiert die Polizei als Hauptakteurin in Bezug auf die gewaltvolle Bestrafung von Gendertransgressionen und die Durchsetzung obligatorischer Heterosexualität (vgl. Moses 1999: 79), verordnet durch die heterosexuelle Matrix. Die queeren Figuren performen Gender nicht den heteronormativen Ordnungssätzen des Normalraums entsprechend, wodurch bereits ihre Existenz im Normalraum eine Regelverletzung darstellt, welche beispielsweise durch polizeiliche Repressionen geahndet wird. Die Polizei folgt der Markierung der queeren Figuren als Perverse (vgl. ebd.: 80); sie entfernt die queeren Figuren gewaltvoll aus dem öffentlichen Raum der Straße sowie aus dem gegenöffentlichen Raum der Bar durch Razzien und Verhaftungen. Die Polizei hat eine exekutive Funktion in der Aufrechterhaltung und Verteidigung der Normen des Normalraums, welche durch das Sujet der Queerness infrage gestellt werden. Aufgrund dessen führt die grenzüberschreitende Genderperformance neben der gesellschaftlichen auch zur staatlichen Bestrafung.

Moses sieht dabei speziell das Arbeiter*innen-Dasein der Butches und Femmes als Hauptgrund für ihre extremen Gewalterfahrungen: »In a reiterated cycle of oppression, the butches' gender expression limits their employment opportunities, thus placing them in economic peril and on the margins of the working class, and their working-class status makes their gender expression doubly dangerous« (ebd.). Sie begründet dies damit, dass finanziell besser gestellte Lesben sich eher in (gegen-)privaten Räumen zusammenfinden und somit weniger den Repressionen in (gegen-)öffentlichen Räumen ausgesetzt sind (vgl. ebd.). Gerade, weil queere Arbeiter*innen also besonders auf den öffentlichen Raum für die Zusammenkunft angewiesen sind, ist dieser einerseits ein Ort für Gemeinschaft, andererseits ein Raum von Gewalt und Diskriminierung.

In der heteronormativen Öffentlichkeit können Lesben keine Sexualität leben und keine Gemeinschaft finden. Artikuliert wird dies beispielsweise in der Aussage der Figur Edna zum Sterben schwul-lesbischer Bars: »I don't know where to go to find the butches I love or the other femmes« (Feinberg 2014: 232). Auch in Jess' Beschreibung von Einsamkeit nach der Transition und der damit einhergehenden Wahrnehmung als Mann im Normalraum zeigt sich dies: »The loneliness became

more and more unbearable. I ached to be touched. I feared I was disappearing and I'd cease to exist if someone didn't touch me« (ebd.: 200). Aus dem Moment der Suche der queeren Figuren nach einem Raum, in welchen sie hineinpassen, ergibt sich folglich die Rauman eignungsstrategie der Konstitution einer Gegenöffentlichkeit im Raum der schwul-lesbischen Bar. Sie ist ein Teilraum des öffentlichen Raumes und gleichzeitig ein Gegenraum – eine funktionale Paradoxie.

2.3 Fabrik, Arbeit und Gewerkschaft

Generell zeigt sich, dass die queeren Figuren auf Arbeit angewiesen sind. Sie kommen aus der Arbeiter*innenschicht, haben kein Erbe und keine Ehemänner, welche ihnen das Leben finanzieren. Die Notwendigkeit von Arbeit ist Teil ihrer Identität: »All we got is the clothes we wear, the bikes we ride, and where we work, you know? You can ride a Honda and work in a bindery or you can ride a Harley and work at the steel plant« (Feinberg 2014: 108). Ihre queere und spezifisch ihre Butch-Identität scheint sich hier mit ihrer Klassenidentität zu vermischen: »What else is there in life besides the plants and the bars?« (ebd.: 55)

Die heteronormativen Strukturen wirken auch in den Fabriken; hier lassen sich unterschiedliche Erfahrungen von Femmes und Butches beobachten: Die Vergeschlechtlichung Therasas scheint auf den ersten Blick zu funktionieren, ihre Sexualität wird unsichtbar gemacht. Gleichzeitig erlebt sie Repressionen in Form von sexualisierter Gewalt, die auf Objektifizierung und Übersexualisierung aufgrund ihrer spezifischen Performance von Femininität zurückgeführt werden können. So wird Theresa gefeuert, weil sie sich gegen einen sexuellen Übergriff ihres Chefs wehrt (vgl. ebd.: 2). Einzelne Femmes haben Zutritt zu klassischer Frauenarbeit, wie Theresa an der Uni (vgl. ebd.: 133). Den meisten queeren Figuren und im Besonderen allen Butches ist der Zugang zu diesen Arbeitsräumen verwehrt. Stattdessen arbeiten Butches beispielsweise in Fabriken in klassischen Männerbereichen. Ihre fehlschlagende heteronormative Vergeschlechtlichung führt zu Anfeindungen und der Aufstieg in der Fabrikhierarchie ist ihnen quasi unmöglich. Während der Rezession wird den Butches vorgeworfen, den Männern die Arbeitsplätze geklaut zu haben (vgl. ebd.: 152), und da nach dem Vietnamkrieg die Arbeit in den Fabriken als Männerarbeit gelabelt wird (Goetz 1997: 84), werden die Butches gesetzlich aus diesem Raum verwiesen. Dieser Verlust bringt sie in Existenznot – »[w]e're gonna starve to death« (Feinberg 2014: 154) – und führt dazu, dass einige Butches überlegen, sich mit Perücken und Schminke zu verkleiden, um eine Chance auf klassische Frauenarbeitsplätze zu bekommen. Während sie also auf der einen Seite nicht weiblich genug performen für Frauenarbeitsräume, performen sie auf der anderen Seite auch nicht männlich genug, um als Mann vergeschlechtlicht zu werden und Zugang zu Männerarbeitsräumen zu erhalten.

Die Gewerkschaft schließt die Butches einerseits von ihren Treffen aus, beschützt sie jedoch andererseits, was die Schaffung eines langfristig stabilen Arbeitsumfeldes ermöglicht: »With union protection, all the butches agreed, a he-she could cave out a niche, and begin earning valuable seniority« (vgl. ebd.: 78). Die Formulierung »cave out a niche« verdeutlicht dabei, wie schwer dieses Raumeinnehmen ist. Zusammenfassend wird also deutlich, dass die Fabrik und auch die Gewerkschaft stetige Kampfplätze für die queeren Figuren sind, allen voran für die Butches. Fortlaufend wird über ihren Platz im Raum, ihre Bewertung und Vergeschlechtlichung verhandelt. Sie finden sich in einem stetigen Abhängigkeitsverhältnis von ihrer Duldung am Arbeitsplatz wieder. Die Akzeptanz, die sie erfahren, ist hart erkämpft, die heteronormativen Strukturen sind trotz allem die hegemonialen Ordnungssätze und markieren die Butches als ›anders‹ und ihre Genderperformance als Regelverletzung. Gerade im Raum der Gewerkschaft kommen für die Butches Arbeitskampf und Kampf gegen Homo- und Transfeindlichkeit zusammen, die intersektionale Betroffenheit der Figuren wird hier besonders deutlich.

2.4 Zwischenfazit zum Normalraum

Der Normalraum ist ein von heteronormativen Strukturen und Normsystemen geprägter Raum, in welchem die queeren Personen, als Abweichungen markiert, Repressionen und Gewalt erleben. Dies zieht sich durch die verschiedenen Teilräume des Normalraumes, wie elterliches Zuhause, Fabrik und Öffentlichkeit. Zu den Überlebensstrategien der queeren Figuren gehören hier ähnliche Strategien wie in der Konstitution der Bargemeinschaften: In der Gemeinschaft finden sie Unterstützung und Verständnis, mit deren Hilfe sie auch im Normalraum verbleiben können. Trotzdem ist bereits ihre bloße Existenz in letzterem eine Regelverletzung. Fraglich ist, wie die Ordnung wiederhergestellt werden kann. Das Konzept Renners stößt hier an seine Grenzen, denn eine Wiederherstellung ist nie vollkommen möglich, da Queerness nie ganz aus dem Normalraum entfernt werden kann (vgl. Renner 2004). Auch eine Änderung der Ordnungssätze des Normalraums scheint zumindest kurzfristig unmöglich. Während also eine Auflösung der Ordnungsverletzungen nicht folgt, begründet das Konzept der Regelverletzungen und des Sujets die Gewalt, welche die queeren Figuren erleben. Es ist klar zu erkennen, wie sich die heterosexuelle Matrix in der Raumkonstitution wiederfindet – kommen wir nun zur Betrachtung der Bars und ihren Eigenschaften, die sie als Gegenräume zum Normalraum auszeichnen.

3. Schwul-lesbische Bars in *Stone Butch Blues* als Queertopia

Nach der Betrachtung des Normalraums folgt nun die des Gegenraums der Bars. Es wird herausgearbeitet, was die Bars als solche Gegenräume auszeichnet und welche Einschließungsmechanismen dabei auf die queeren Figuren wirken.

3.1 Gemeinschaft und Familie

Jess beschreibt, dass lediglich ein Teil des Barraums gequeert wird: »[We] had a quarter of the tables and dance floor. The other three-quarters were always pushing against our space« (Feinberg 2014: 26). Somit ist der Raum nicht nur beengt, er ist auch umkämpft und muss stets verteidigt werden, zum einen gegen die nicht-queeren Besucher*innen, zum anderen gegen die polizeilichen Razzien. Die räumliche Gestaltung findet kaum Erwähnung, im Vordergrund steht die Gemeinschaft, die die Bars bieten. Für Jess sind sie daher ein Ort der Sehnsucht; Jess hofft auf einen Raum, in dem andere Ordnungssätze gelten und in dem Jess sich dadurch zugehörig fühlen kann: »What I saw there released tears I'd held back for years [...]. This was everything I could have hoped for in life« (ebd.: 24). Hier muss Jess sich nicht für die eigene Genderperformance rechtfertigen; hier sind queere (Butch/Femme-)Beziehungen die Norm, anstatt als Abweichung und Perversion markiert zu werden, was Jess erstmals eine Zukunftsperspektive verschafft. Noch deutlicher wird Jess während einer Drag-Show: »You know, all our lives they've told us the way we are isn't right. [...] Well, this is our home. We're family« (ebd.: 63). Ausgrenzungen und Diskriminierungen erleben die queeren Figuren auch innerhalb ihrer leiblichen Familien und die Erfahrung dessen verbindet sie. Statt sich also auf diese Familie zu berufen, finden sie in den Bars eine Wahlfamilie, welche ihnen die bedingungslose Akzeptanz zu geben scheint, die ihnen sonst fehlt: Für Jess ist es »the only real family [they'd] ever known« (ebd.: 126). Die Bars werden auch zum Fluchttort vor der restlichen Welt. Dementsprechend erklärt Jess Duffy, einem Arbeitskollegen, dass zwei Kolleginnen von ihnen keine Butches sind (sie sind mit Männern verheiratet), auch wenn sie so aussähen, und dass sie dies sehr viel einsamer mache als Jess und die queeren Figuren in den Bars: »They don't have a place to go like we do« (ebd.: 92).

3.2 Polizei, Razzien und Gewalt

Auf der anderen Seite zeichnen sich die Räume der Bars auch durch gewaltvolle Eingriffe von außen aus. So beschreibt Jess die »cops as a mortal enemy« (Feinberg 2014: 26). Teils wird dies subtil deutlich, wie im Falle eines fotografierenden Undercover-Polizisten (vgl. ebd.), teils expliziter, wie bei den regelmäßigen Polizeirazzien. Die Gemeinschaften, die die Bars auszeichnen, sind gleichzeitig auch das, was sie zu angreifbaren Orten macht. Die Razzien sind ein so fester Teil des Raumes, dass Jess

diese nur die ersten Male beschreibt und es schließlich bei den Momenten davor und/oder kurzen Erwähnungen belässt. Auch die Aussagen der Polizisten in Bezug auf Jess' Festnahme unterstützen dies: »You'll be back« (ebd.: 35). Jess beschreibt außerdem ein rotes Licht über der Theke in einer Bar, welches die Besucher*innen vorwarnt, wenn die Polizei kommt (vgl. ebd.: 64), oder auch ein Funkgerät zum Abhören des Polizeifunks, um sich vor den Razzien schützen zu können (vgl. ebd.: 144). Die stetige Gefahr ist somit nicht nur semantisch, sondern auch topographisch Teil des Raumes.

Teil der Gemeinschaft ist es auch, mit dieser ständigen Bedrohung gemeinsam umzugehen. So versucht Butch Al Jess auf die kommende Gewalt vorzubereiten:

It was always the same lesson: toughen up. Al never said exactly what was coming. It was never spelled out. But I got the feeling it was awful. I knew she was worried about my surviving it. I wondered if I was ready. Al's message was: You're not! (ebd.: 27)

Butch Al weiß, was Jess erwartet, und ihr ist bewusst, dass sie Jess nicht davor schützen kann und Jess sich selbst auch nicht. Die einzige Überlebensstrategie, die sie weitergeben kann, ist härter zu werden. Die Beziehung zwischen älteren und jüngeren Butches ist stets von dieser Hilflosigkeit und dem Versuch, sich gegenseitig beim Überleben zu helfen, geprägt. Als Jess verhaftet wird, gibt Jacqueline Jess die Worte »[t]ake care of each other« (ebd.: 33) mit auf den Weg. Allen Figuren ist bewusst, dass sie die Gewalt nicht allein überstehen können, und sie sorgen deshalb füreinander. Gleichzeitig bringen die Gewalt und das Härter-Werden sie auch dazu, sich voneinander abzuschotten: »You knew it would take you weeks again to melt the stone« (ebd.: 4). In diesem Sinne gefährdet die Polizeigewalt den Raum auf zwei Arten: durch den Eingriff und die Entfernung von Figuren aus dem Raum der Bar und durch emotionale Zerrüttung der Gemeinschaft durch Traumata.

Verteidigung gegen die Polizei findet nur begrenzt statt, kann aber als Raumerhaltungs- und Selbstermächtigungsstrategie verstanden werden. Jess beschreibt die Abwägung zwischen Erdulden von Gewalt und Verteidigung wie folgt:

There are times, the old bulls told me, when it's best to take your beating and hope the cops will leave you on the ground when they're done with you. Other times your life may be in danger, or your sanity, and it's worth it to try to fight back. (ebd.: 58)

Die Aussicht auf Erfolg hat keinen Einfluss auf die Entscheidung, sondern viel mehr, ob die Figuren die Erniedrigung ertragen können. Angriffe auf Einzelpersonen werden als Angriff auf alle verstanden; Gegenwehr ist in diesem Raum folglich genauso Überlebensstrategie wie Erduldung.

3.3 Performing Gender in Queertopia

Die cis-heteronormativen Ordnungssätze des Normalraums verlieren in den Bars ihre Wirkung. Hier werden andere normative Deutungsmuster und Ordnungssätze produziert, welche eine andere Genderperformance zulassen: Jess beschreibt Euphorie beim ersten Betreten der Bar und beim Anblick von Butches mit kurzen Haaren, in Anzügen mit Krawatten (Feinberg 2014: 24). Jess erwähnt die (männlich konnotierte) Art des Haare-Stylens und auch die Adjektivverwendung fällt in den Blick, so spricht Jess von »handsomest women«, obwohl *handsome* gewöhnlich für die Beschreibung von Männern verwendet wird (vgl. Ajmal et al. 2022: 164), und auch das Brustabbinden der Butches wird wiederholt erwähnt (Feinberg 2014: 26, 34). Die äußerliche Beschreibung und die Wortwahl machen deutlich, dass hier Maskulinität performt wird, welche klar von der durch die heterosexuelle Matrix von Frauen geforderten weiblichen Genderperformance abweicht. Die performte (gender-)queerende Maskulinität wird in der Bar akzeptiert und in gewissem Maße auch gefordert. Diese Performance, die im Rahmen der heterosexuellen Matrix im Normalraum theoretisch die Subjektwerdung stört und zu Repressionen führt, ermöglicht im Gegenraum die Butch-Werdung, ohne dass das Frausein dem Subjekt abgesprochen wird. Es kann hier überlegt werden, ob es somit im queertopischen Raum eine queere Matrix gibt, welche durch diskursive Praktiken die von Alison Eves als »lesbian gender« (Eves 2004: 481) bezeichneten Geschlechtsidentitäten hervorbringt. Die Butch-Werdung macht im zweiten Schritt die homosexuelle Anziehung zu Femmes möglich, denn auch im Gegenraum der Bar gibt es klare Ordnungssätze, die besagen, dass Butches nur Femmes begehren können: »Can I really buy a woman a drink or ask her to dance?« »Sure honey,« she said, »but only the femmes« (Feinberg 2014: 24). Es handelt sich hierbei um eine subversive Form der Subjektconstitution, eng verknüpft mit (gender-)queerer Maskulinitätsperformance, welche im Normalraum nicht zulässig ist und dort die Vergeschlechtlichung der Subjekte stört.

Zusammenfassend kann hier also die Konstitution eines Gegenraumes erkannt werden. Er zeichnet sich durch grundlegend andere Ordnungssätze aus, denen die gegenseitige Akzeptanz von queeren Menschen zugrunde liegt. Gleichzeitig ist es kein abgekapselter Ort, auch hier wirken die cis-heteronormativen Strukturen des Normalraums hinein und verursachen Gewalt und Diskriminierung. Es wird deutlich, dass es sich bei den Bars um queertopische Räume handelt. Der utopische, sichere und willkommen heißende Raum wird vom Schatten des Normalraums überlagert: *safer space* und Gewalt treffen sich im *anderen* Raum.

4. Grenzen queertopischer Räume

Im Folgenden wird gezeigt, dass auch die queertopischen Bars bestimmte Grenzen haben, bei deren Verletzung ebenso Ausschlussprozesse und Repressionen wirken. Diesen wird sich anhand der drei Kategorien Gendertransgression, *race* und Klasse genähert.

4.1 Gendertransgression

Bei näherer Betrachtung zeigt sich, dass auch im Gegenraum Queerness nur begrenzte Existenzmöglichkeiten hat. Deutlich wird dies beispielsweise in zwei Gesprächen zwischen Jess und Frankie bei ihren Wiedersehen in der Fabrik: Frankie (eine Butch) erzählt Jess (nach Jess' hormoneller und operativer Transition), dass sie mit einer anderen Butch zusammen ist. Das führt später zu Jess' Frage »What makes you think you're still a butch?« (Feinberg 2014: 225) und Frankies gleichformulierter Gegenfrage. Die queere Matrix erlaubt die Subjektwerdung nur im engen Rahmen: Die hormonelle und operative Veränderung von Jess' Körper ist eine Regelverletzung, denn eine Person mit männlichem *passing* kann keine Butch sein, da Butches stets weiblich vergeschlechtlich werden. Ebenso ist die Butch/Butch-Beziehung von Frankie eine Regelverletzung: die Butch-Werdung geht erwartungsgemäß mit dem Begehrensmodus Butch/Femme einher: »I'm a butch because I love femmes« (ebd.: 299). Auch in der Betrachtung von Roccas und Jess' Gendertransgressionen wird eine Regelverletzung deutlich. Als Jess Rocco kennenlernt, fragt sich Jess »what kind of courage was required [...] to live so alone« (ebd.: 102), was impliziert, dass die Transition Roccas automatisch zu Roccas Ausschluss aus der Gemeinschaft der Bar und zum Leben in Isolation führt.

4.2 Race

Ed ist die einzige Schwarze Figur.⁴ Neben der schwul-lesbischen Bar geht sie regelmäßig auch in eine Schwarze Bar und begründet dies wie folgt: »I work all day with these old bulls at the plant. I like coming in here and spending some time with y'all. But I like being with my own people too, you understand?« (Feinberg 2014: 55)

Aus dem gleichen Grund, aus dem die anderen Figuren in die schwul-lesbische Bar kommen, geht Ed in die Schwarze Bar. Dies liegt an rassistischen Strukturen, welche *Weiß* zur Norm und Schwarz zur Abweichung machen. Das geht aus der

4 Das Adjektiv ›Schwarz‹ wird hier großgeschrieben, um zu verdeutlichen, dass es sich nicht um eine Hautfarbe, sondern um eine konstruierte Rassifizierung von Menschen handelt. Schwarz ist somit als marginalisierte Identität zu verstehen, während *weiß* (klein und kursiv) eine privilegierte Position in einem rassistischen System beschreibt (vgl. Layne 2023: 275).

grundlegenden Konzeption von Identität hervor: Nach Stuart Hall sind Identitäten nur in ihrer Beziehung zum Anderen, nicht zu dieser Identität Gehörenden, beschreibbar. Eine Identität wird in diesem Sinne als das konstruiert, was sie nicht ist, also im Ausschluss eines bestimmten ›Außen‹, im Falle des *Weißseins* durch das Nicht-*Weißsein* (vgl. Hall 2018: 171). Da in einer Gesellschaft mit rassistischen Strukturen der Normalraum stets *weiß* konstituiert wird und ein Gegenraum, wie im Falle der queeren Bars, sich vom Normalraum nur auf Ebene der Sexualität und Genderperformance abgrenzt, ist auch dieser queere Gegenraum *weiß*. Ed ist zwar aufgrund ihrer Queerness im Gegenraum eingeschlossen, aufgrund ihres Schwarzseins jedoch ausgeschlossen; der Gegenraum, welcher ihre intersektional von Diskriminierung betroffene Identität einschließt, ist somit die queerfreundliche Schwarze Bar und nicht die schwul-lesbische *weiße* Bar. Deutlich wird dies, als Ed nach dem Tod von Malcom X einige Zeit nicht mehr in die schwul-lesbische *weiße* Bar kommt. Eds Wut und Trauer treffen in der *weißen* Gemeinschaft nicht auf das gleiche Verständnis wie in der Schwarzen Bar, weshalb sie sich aus dem queeren Gegenraum zurückzieht. Zudem erfährt Ed in der schwul-lesbischen *weißen* Bar Rassismus: Grant sagt einige rassistische Dinge in Bezug auf den Vietnamkrieg und den Tod von Martin Luther King. Ed und Grant geraten danach physisch aneinander, was dazu führt, dass die Barbesitzerin Schwarze Personen für einige Zeit aus der Bar ausschließt (Feinberg 2014: 134). Die Tatsache, dass Ed und nicht Grant die Konsequenzen für den Zwischenfall trägt, verdeutlicht, inwiefern *Weißsein* Teil der Konstitution des Raumes ist: Es handelt sich um keinen *safer space* und Gegenraum für von Rassismus betroffene Personen.

4.3 Klasse

Die Bars sind vor allem Räume für Arbeiter*innen und die Klassenzugehörigkeit der queeren Figuren bedingt ihre Gewalterfahrungen. Cat Moses erklärt mit Blick auf Genderperformance: Was im Normalraum als Mode gelte, würde im Kontext der queeren Arbeiter*innenschicht von Mittelschichts-Feministinnen als »mimicking and privileging heterosexual hypermasculinity« (Moses 1999:79) verstanden. Das zeigt sich auch im Konflikt der Figuren der Bargemeinschaft mit der Frauenbewegung:

One day I came home from work and found Theresa stewing in anger at the kitchen table. Some of the lesbians from a newly formed group on campus had mocked her for being a femme. They told her she was brainwashed. »I'm so bad,« Theresa thumped the table. »They told me that butches were male chauvinist pigs!« (Feinberg 2014: 144)

Auch wenn es also queere Räume auf dem Campus gibt, sind diese keine *safer spaces* für die Arbeiter*innen-Butches und -Femmes, sie benötigen einen Gegenraum zu diesen ihnen feindlichen Deutungsmustern. Der Raum der schwul-lesbischen Bars schließt somit nur queere Arbeiter*innen ein. Die Klassenzugehörigkeit verbindet die Figuren über verschiedene Probleme wie Arbeitsverlust und -suche genauso wie die Gewalt auf der Straße und in den Bars: Die Bargemeinschaft konstituiert sich am Schnittpunkt intersektionaler Identitäten.

In Bezug auf Sexarbeit werden die spezifischen Ausschließungsprozesse im Kontext von Arbeit ebenso deutlich:

»Did it ever occur to you that I might be uncomfortable at the bar?« Milli shouted. [...] »Because there's attitude towards us.« »What are you talking about? Lots of the women at the bar are pros.« [...] »They're hometown girls who turn tricks to pay the rent. They're ashamed of what they do. They aren't into the life in the same way as the rest of us. We're different.« (ebd.: 117–118)

Für die Sexarbeiterin Milli ist die Bar kein *safer space*, sondern ein sie ausschließender Ort. Die Ordnungssätze des Gegenraums erlauben zwar Sexarbeit, jedoch nur in einem engen Rahmen und in Verbindung mit der gleichzeitigen Verurteilung dieser Arbeit. Die Arbeit in Fabriken und Büros wird als höherwertige und wünschenswertere Arbeit verstanden; Sexarbeiter*innen wie Milli werden dadurch abgewertet.

5. Fazit

Die Räume der schwul-lesbischen Bars sind deutlich als queertopische Gegenräume zu erkennen. Sie erlauben subversive Subjektconstitutionen, Genderperformances und alternative Begehrensmodi. Auch wenn hier die Gewalt des Normalraumes hineinragt, können sich die queeren Figuren einen *safer space* schaffen und verteidigen. Dabei wirken sowohl Ein- als auch Ausschließungsmechanismen, die bestimmte marginalisierte Gruppen außen vor lassen. Da die Queertopie nicht unabhängig vom Normalraum, sondern zugleich in ihm und als Gegenraum zu ihm konstituiert ist, wirken die hegemonialen Strukturen des Normalraums – wie ein Schatten – auch hier hinein. Besonders betroffen sind von diesen Ausschließungsmechanismen intersektional marginalisierte Identitäten, etwa von Rassismus betroffene Figuren wie Ed oder trans Figuren wie Rocco und Jess. Ihre Identitäten sind auch im Gegenraum ein Ereignis und sie erleben die entsprechenden Repressionen.

Es hat sich gezeigt, dass die Konzepte von Lotman und Renner eine theoretische Erweiterung benötigen, um hinsichtlich intersektionaler Positionen die volle Wirkmacht von Räumen und ihren Ein- und Ausschließungsmechanismen greifen zu können. Besonders die Betrachtung des Ereignisses als immer auflösbares Stö-

rungsmoment macht die wirkmächtigen gesellschaftlichen Strukturen unsichtbar, welche die Existenz bestimmter Figuren immer als Ordnungsverletzung markieren.

Literatur

- Ajmal, M., Kumar, T., Ritonga, M. und Nukapangu, V. (2022) »A Corpus-Based Analysis of the Adjectives and Synonyms Beautiful, Handsome, and Pretty«, *World Journal of English Language* 12(2), S. 159–168. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v12n2p159>.
- Carroll, M. (2015) *Effects of Higher Education Policy and Planning on a Campus Women's Center and the Provision of Safer Space*. University of Calgary, unveröffentlichte Masterarbeit.
- Cuntz, M. (2015) »Deixis«, in: Dünne, J. und Mahler, A. (Hg.) *Handbuch Literatur & Raum*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, S. 57–70.
- Eves, A. (2004) »Queer Theory, Butch/Femme Identities and Lesbian Space«, *Sexualities* 7(4), S. 480–496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460704047064>.
- Feinberg, L. (2014) *Stone Butch Blues*. 20th Anniversary Author Edition, selbst verlegt. <https://www.lesliefeinberg.net> (letzter Zugriff am 21.08.2024).
- Foucault, M. (2013) *Die Heterotopien, der utopische Körper. Zwei Radiovorträge*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Fraser, N. (1996) »Öffentlichkeit neu denken. Ein Beitrag zur Kritik real existierender Demokratie«, in: Scheich, E. (Hg.) *Vermittelte Weiblichkeit. Feministische Wissenschafts- und Gesellschaftstheorie*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, S. 151–182.
- Goetz, L. E. (1997) *Drowning in Loneliness and Writing the Blues. Creating Lesbian Space in the Novels of Radclyffe Hall and Leslie Feinberg*. Cedar Falls: University of Northern Iowa ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Hall, S. (2018) *Ideologie, Identität, Repräsentation. Ausgewählte Schriften 4*. Hamburg: Argument.
- Hark, S. (2001) »Que(e)re Besetzungen öffentlicher Räume: Lesbisch-schwule Subkulturen«, in: Thabe, S. (Hg.) *Raum und Sicherheit*. Dortmund: Dortmunder Vertrieb für Bau- und Planungsliteratur, S. 92–100.
- Layne, P. (2023) »Multilingualismus im Unterricht am Beispiel von Gedichten von Schwarzen Deutschen«, in: Fritz, T., Sorger, B., Schweiger, H. und Reitbrecht, S. (Hg.) *IDT 2022: *mit.sprache.teil.haben. Band 5: Sprachenpolitik und Teilhabe*. Berlin: Schmidt, S. 275–285.
- Lotman, J. M. (1993) *Die Struktur literarischer Texte*. 4. Aufl. München: Fink.
- Moses, C. (1999) »Queering Class. Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*«, *Studies in the Novel* 31(1), S. 74–97.

- Nguyen, E. (2011) »Sunday Sermon – The Q«, *First Parish Unitarian Universalist Cambridge – Sermons*. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/first-parish-uu-camb-ridge-sermons/id348793111> (letzter Zugriff am 15.09.2024).
- Renner, K. N. (1983) *Der Findling. Eine Erzählung von Heinrich von Kleist und ein Film von George Moore. Prinzipien einer adäquaten Wiedergabe narrativer Strukturen*. München: Fink.
- (2004) »Grenze und Ereignis. Weiterführende Überlegungen zum Ereigniskonzept von J. M. Lotman«, in: Frank, G. (Hg.) *Norm – Grenze – Abweichung. Kultursemiotische Studien zu Literatur, Medien und Wirtschaft. Michael Titzmann zum 60. Geburtstag*. Passau: Stutz, S. 357–381.
- Schößler, F. (2008) *Einführung in die Gender Studies*. Berlin: Akademie.
- Schuster, N. (2010) *Andere Räume. Soziale Praktiken der Raumproduktion von Drag Kings und Transgender*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Simmons, A. P. (2018) *Queer Space in the Future. The Exploration of Queer Heterotopia in Samuel Delany's Science Fiction*. Ann Arbor: Bowie State University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Tetzlaff, S. (2016) *Heterotopie als Textverfahren. Erzählter Raum in Romantik und Realismus*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Weaver, H. (2014) »Friction in the Interstices: Emotion and Landscape in *Stone Butch Blues*«, *Emotion, Space and Society* 12, S. 85–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2013.12.007>.

Kurzbiografien / Short Biographies

MARINA ALLAL hat an der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg und an der Universität Sorbonne Nouvelle in Romanistik und Germanistik promoviert und wurde an der Pädagogischen Hochschule Luzern zur Professorin ernannt. Sie forschte zur vergleichenden Konstruktion von Identitäten und Alteritäten, über antisemitische und antifeministische Diskurse im modernen Westeuropa, über die Erinnerung an die Shoah und die Sklaverei sowie über Kulturtransfer. Allal ist seit 2010 Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin an der Freien Universität Berlin. In ihrer jetzigen Position arbeitet sie zu Diversität und Antidiskriminierung und unterrichtet Deutsch und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft.

MARINA ALLAL holds a Ph.D. in Romance and German Studies from the Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg and the University Sorbonne Nouvelle and was appointed Professor at the Pedagogic University Lucerne. She has conducted research on the comparative construction of identities and alterities, on anti-semitic and anti-feminist discourses in modern Western Europe, on the memory of the Shoah and slavery, and on cultural transfer. Since 2010, Allal is a Research Associate at Freie Universität Berlin. In her current position, she works on diversity and anti-discrimination issues and teaches German and Comparative Literature.

LAURA BRIGHTWELL ist Doktorandin der Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies an der York University in Toronto, Kanada. In ihrer Dissertation untersucht sie die Beziehung zwischen feministischen Studien und Queer Studies und fragt, wie benachteiligte weibliche Subjekte in queeres Familienleben integriert werden können. Zu ihren wissenschaftlichen Veröffentlichungen gehören der mit Alison Taylor gemeinsam verfasste Artikel »Why Femme Stories Matter: Constructing Femme Theory Through Historical Femme Life Writing« (2021) im *Journal of Lesbian Studies* und »The Exclusionary Effects of Queer Anti-Normativity on Feminine-Identified Queers« (2018) in der Zeitschrift *Feral Feminisms*.

Instagram: @lauraannebrightwell

Laura Brightwell is a Ph.D. candidate in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her dissertation interrogates the relationship between feminist and queer studies and asks how disenfranchised feminine subjects can be brought into the queer family home. Her academic publications include the co-authored article »Why Femme Stories Matter: Constructing Femme Theory Through Historical Femme Life Writing« (2021) in the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* and »The Exclusionary Effects of Queer Anti-Normativity on Feminine-Identified Queers« (2018) in the journal *Feral Feminisms*.

Instagram: @lauraannebrightwell

Camellia Choudhuri (er/they) hat einen M.A. in Englischer Literatur am (autonomen) St. Xavier's College in Kalkutta, Indien, abgeschlossen. Zu seinen Forschungsinteressen gehören lesbische Poetik, Transmaskulinitäten und Performance.

Twitter: @camchoudhuri

Camellia Choudhuri (he/they) has completed their M.A. in English Literature from St. Xavier's College (autonomous) in Kolkata, India. His research interests include lesbian poetics, transmasculinities, and performance.

Twitter: @camchoudhuri

Jade Da Costa (they/them/sie) ist eine nicht-binäre queere Frau of Colour, die als Wissenschaftler*in, Community-Organisator*in, kreative Autor*in und Pädagog*in in Zentral-Süd-Ontario tätig ist. Sie hat an der York University in Soziologie promoviert und ist derzeit als Banting Postdoctoral Fellow an der University of Guelph tätig. In deren Forschung, Lehre, Organisation und Kunst beschäftigt Da Costa sich mit Themen wie soziale Gerechtigkeit, Race und Rassifizierung, Dekolonisierung und Intersektionalität, qualitative, digitale und kunstbasierte Methoden sowie kritische und engagierte Pädagogik.

Website: www.jadecrimson.com

Jade Da Costa (they/them/she) is a gender non-binary queer woman of colour scholar, community organizer, creative writer, and educator across Central Southern Ontario. They have a Ph.D. in Sociology from York University and are currently employed as a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Guelph. Their research, teaching, organizing, and art converge on topics of social justice movements, race and racialization, decolonization and intersectionality, qualitative, digital, and arts-based methods, and critical and engaged pedagogy.

Website: www.jadecrimson.com

Desz Debreceni hat Anglistik und literarische Übersetzung in Utrecht, Münster und Düsseldorf studiert und arbeitet als freiberufliche*r Literaturübersetzer*in,

Lektor*in und Kellner*in. Debreceni will die deutsche Version von *Stone Butch Blues* neu übersetzen – weil es höchste Zeit ist.

Website: www.desz-debreceni.de

DESZ DEBRECENI studied English Literature and Literary Translation in Utrecht, Münster, and Düsseldorf and works as a freelance literary translator, editor, and waits tables at a restaurant. They want to re_translate the German version of *Stone Butch Blues* – because it's about time.

Website: www.desz-debreceni.de

SABINE FUCHS lebt als freie Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaftler*in, Autor*in und Übersetzer*in in Hamburg. Sie ist Herausgeber*in der Sammelbände *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren* (Berlin 2020) und *Femme! radikal – queer – feminin* (Berlin 2009) und überarbeitet zurzeit das *Femme!*-Buch für eine erweiterte Neuauflage, die eine umfangreiche Bibliografie zu Femme-Literatur und -Forschung sowie eine Genealogie des Konzepts ›Femme‹ als eine nicht-binäre trans Identität enthalten wird.

Instagram: [@sabine.fuchs_hh](https://www.instagram.com/sabine.fuchs_hh)

SABINE FUCHS (she/they) is an independent literary and cultural scholar, author, and translator based in Hamburg, Germany. She is the editor of the anthologies *Femme/Butch. Dynamiken von Gender und Begehren* (Berlin 2020) and *Femme! radikal – queer – feminin* (Berlin 2009). They are currently revising *Femme!* for an expanded new edition that will include an extensive research bibliography on femmes and queer femininity as well as a genealogy of ›femme‹ as a non-binary trans identity.

Instagram: [@sabine.fuchs_hh](https://www.instagram.com/sabine.fuchs_hh)

Geboren in München, beginnt NIKE HARTMOND 2020 das Studium des Bühnen- und Kostümbildes an der Universität der angewandten Kunst in Wien und wechselt 2021 an die Akademie der bildenden Künste in Wien. Ihre* Bühnenbildarbeit fand zum Beispiel am Kosmostheater in Wien (*DIPPEL. Diagnose CIN3*), im St. Pauli Theater in Hamburg (*Memories of the Future* im Rahmen des Kiezstürmerfestivals) oder bei P14 an der Volksbühne Berlin (*Red Herrings, Angels and Clones*) statt. Für P14 schrieb Hartmond auch den Theatertext *We're Teens, We're Cute* und führte im Team Regie. Ihre* Arbeit verschränkt sich außerdem mit bildender Kunst und Performance. Gerade arbeitet sie* im Kollektiv an einer räumlichen Einrichtung in Kollaboration mit den Wiener Festwochen.

Born in Munich, NIKE HARTMOND began studying stage and costume design at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna in 2020 and transferred to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in 2021. Her* stage design work has taken place, for example, at the

Kosmostheater in Vienna (DIPPEL. *Diagnose CIN3*), at the St. Pauli Theater in Hamburg (*Memories of the Future* as part of the Kiezstürmerfestival), or at P14 at the Volksbühne Berlin (*Red Herrings, Angels and Clones*). Hartmond also wrote the theater text *We're Teens, We're Cute* for P14 and directed it as part of the team. Her* work is intertwined with visual art and performance. She* is currently working in a collective on a spatial installation in collaboration with the Wiener Festwochen.

FRED HEINEMANN hat erst Architektur, dann Sprachkunst studiert und arbeitet installativ, performativ und schreibend an den Themen Körper, Raum, Sprache. Heinemann forscht und filmt für das Centre for Documentary Architecture. Veröffentlichte Text in: *Das Narr, Bella Triste, Landpartie, Glitter*. Ausstellungsbeiträge zuletzt: *Crosses and Crossdressers* (Krone Couronne, Biel), *Den Wald vor lauter Heimat* (Galerie KUB, Leipzig). 2024 erschien der Text »YOUR BODY IS A SKYSCRAPER« in der Anthologie *Aber jetzt ist Schluss! Neue ungehaltene Reden ungehaltener Frauen* im S. Fischer Verlag.

Instagram: @grenadine_ruebler

FRED HEINEMANN first studied Architecture, then Language Arts and now works with installations, performances, and writing on the themes of body, space, and language. Heinemann researches and films for the Center for Documentary Architecture. Heinemann has published in: *Das Narr, Bella Triste, Landpartie, Glitter*. Heinemann's recent exhibition contributions: *Crosses and Crossdressers* (Krone Couronne, Biel), *Den Wald vor lauter Heimat* (Galerie KUB, Leipzig). In 2024 the text »YOUR BODY IS A SKYSCRAPER« was published in the anthology *Aber jetzt ist Schluss! Neue ungehaltene Reden ungehaltener Frauen* (S. Fischer Verlag).

Instagram: @grenadine_ruebler

JOJO HOFMANN (keine Pronomen | they/them) studiert an der Universität Münster im Master Kulturpoetik der Literatur und Medien sowie Deutsch und Sozialwissenschaften auf Lehramt und schrieb die Bachelorarbeit zum Thema »Zwischen Gemeinschaft und Gewalt – Schwul-lesbische Bars als Räume der Ambivalenz in Leslie Feinbergs *Stone Butch Blues* (1993)«.

JOJO HOFMANN (no pronouns | they/them) is studying Cultural Poetics of Literature and Media as well as German and Social Sciences as teacher training at the University of Münster. They wrote their bachelor's thesis on gay and lesbian bars as ambivalent spaces of community and violence in Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*.

YLVA EMEL KARLSSON ist die* der schwedische Übersetzer*in von *Stone Butch Blues*, erschienen bei Dockhaveri förlag 2024. Karlsson ist Dichter*in, Aktivist*in, Musiker*in und Buchverleger*in aus Malmö, Schweden, deren Praxis sich um queere und

crip Leben und Sprache, transformative Gerechtigkeit und Gefängnis-Abolitionismus dreht.

YLVA EMEL KARLSSON is the Swedish translator for *Stone Butch Blues*, released by Dockhaveri förlag in 2024. They are a poet, activist, musician, and book publisher based in Malmö, Sweden, whose practice centers around queer crip life and language, transformative justice, and prison abolition.

K KATER dreht sich um trans* (formative), queere, ge_crippte Politiken, Beziehungsweisen, Ästhetiken und Literatur – insbesondere um queere Fem_me-ininitäten, utopische Körperlichkeiten und genderphile Erotik. katers Radiosendung *fiction for fairies & cyborgs* läuft an jedem vierten Mittwoch ab 22 Uhr im Hamburger Freien Sender Kombinat (FSK).

Mail: k_kater@posteo.de

Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/user-844113557>

K KATER revolves around trans(formative), queer, and crip politics, ways of relating, aesthetics, and literature – specifically focused on queer FEMinities, utopian corporealities, and genderphil erotics. kater's radio show *fiction for fairies & cyborgs* runs every fourth Wednesday from 10 p.m. on Hamburg's Freies Sender Kombinat (FSK).

Mail: k_kater@posteo.de

Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/user-844113557>

HANI יָאֵנֶה ESTHER INDICTOR PORTNER (they/them) ist ein*e transgender, jüdische, queere, behinderte, extravagante Künstler*in, Pädagog*in, Historiker*in, Kräutersammler*in und Hexe. Portner recherchiert, schreibt, lehrt und schafft Kunst, die trans, queere und jüdische Geschichten feiert u.a. Geschichten, die mit dem ehemaligen Institut für Sexualwissenschaft in Berlin zusammenhängen. Portner unterrichtet zugängliche Kurse in Kunst und Nahrungssuche mit dem Ziel, Mitmenschen mit dem Land, auf dem sie leben, zu verbinden, um die Umwelt besser zu schützen und Brücken der Liebe zueinander, zu unseren mehr als menschlichen Nachbar*innen und zu den Ahnen um uns herum zu bauen.

Website: www.myceliummemory.com

Instagram: [@the.rainbow.fairy](https://www.instagram.com/the.rainbow.fairy)

HANI יָאֵנֶה ESTHER INDICTOR PORTNER (they/them) is a transgender, Jewish, queer, disabled flamboyant artist, educator, historian, herbalist, and witch. They research, write, teach, and create art that celebrates trans, queer, and Jewish stories connected to the former Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin and beyond. Portner teaches accessible classes in art and foraging. They aim to connect fellow humans with the land they live on to better protect the environment and create bridges of love with each

other, our more than human neighbors, and the ancestors all around us.

Website: www.myceliummemory.com

Instagram: [@the.rainbow.fairy](https://www.instagram.com/the.rainbow.fairy)

Die Schriftstellerin und Aktivistin MINNIE BRUCE PRATT (1946–2023) hat zehn Bücher mit Gedichten sowie kreative Sachbücher veröffentlicht, darunter *Crime Against Nature* (1990), das für die Lamont Poetry Selection der Academy of American Poets sowie den American Library Association Gay and Lesbian Book Award for Literature ausgewählt wurde. Zusammen mit den Dichterinnen Chrystos und Audre Lorde erhielt sie den Lillian Hellman-Dashiell Hammett Award des Fund for Free Expression für »Schriftsteller*innen, die von politischer Verfolgung betroffen waren [...] und zur Zielscheibe rechtsgerichteter und fundamentalistischer Kräfte wurden.« Sie erhielt einen Lambda Literary Award für *The Dirt She Ate. Selected and New Poems* (2003) sowie den Audre Lorde Award der Publishing Triangle für lesbische Lyrik für *Inside the Money Machine* (2011). Mit den Aktivistinnen Barbara Smith und Elly Bulkin ist sie Mitautorin von *Yours in Struggle. Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (1984). Pratt war leitende Redakteurin der Zeitung *Workers World/Mundo Obrero*, lebte in Alabama und in New York State.

Website: www.minniebrucepratt.net

Writer-activist MINNIE BRUCE PRATT's ten books of poetry and creative nonfiction include *Crime Against Nature* (1990), chosen for Lamont Poetry Selection of the Academy of American Poets and for the American Library Association Gay and Lesbian Book Award for Literature. With poets Chrystos and Audre Lorde, she received the Lillian Hellman-Dashiell Hammett Award from the Fund for Free Expression for »writers who have been victimized by political persecution [...] as targets of right-wing and fundamentalist forces.« She received a Lambda Literary Award for *The Dirt She Ate. Selected and New Poems* (2003) and the Publishing Triangle's Audre Lorde Award for Lesbian Poetry for *Inside the Money Machine* (2011). With activists Barbara Smith and Elly Bulkin, she co-authored *Yours in Struggle. Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (1984). Pratt (1946–2023), a managing editor of *Workers World/Mundo Obrero* newspaper, lived in Alabama and central New York.

Website: www.minniebrucepratt.net

EL REID-BUCKLEY ist Soziolog*in, Community-Organisator*in und Autor*in und lebt in Limerick, Irland. Reid-Buckley promovierte in Soziologie zu den Lebenserfahrungen von bisexuellen+ Menschen in Irland nach der Einführung der Ehe für gleichgeschlechtliche Paare und schloss diese Promotion an der Universität von Limerick 2023 ab. Reid-Buckleys Arbeit konzentriert sich auf Geschlechter und Sexualitäten, mit einem besonderen Fokus auf Queer-Theorie, Trans-Studien und sexueller Geographie. Teile aus Reid-Buckleys Promotion wurden veröffentlicht in *Quee-*

ring Desire. Lesbians, Gender, and Subjectivity (2024, hg. v. Roisin Ryan-Flood und Amy Tooth-Murphy) und *Sex and Sexualities in Ireland. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2023, hg. v. Barbara Górnicka und Mark Doyle).

Instagram: @mothermarx

EL REID-BUCKLEY is a sociologist, community organiser, and writer based in Limerick, Ireland. They completed their Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Limerick in 2023 where they researched the lived experiences of bisexual+ people in post-marriage equality Ireland. Their work is broadly focused on genders and sexualities, with a particular interest in queer theory, trans studies, and sexual geography. Their doctoral work has been published in *Queering Desire. Lesbians, Gender, and Subjectivity* (2024, ed. by Roisin Ryan-Flood and Amy Tooth-Murphy) and *Sex and Sexualities in Ireland. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2023, ed. by Barbara Górnicka and Mark Doyle). Instagram: @mothermarx

JONAH REIMANN (they/keine Pronomen) studiert an der Freien Universität Berlin im Master Public History und arbeitet als Koordinationsassistent*in im DFG-Forschungsnetzwerk »Queere Zeitgeschichten im deutschsprachigen Europa«. In der Forschung interessiert sich Reimann besonders für trans* und queere Lebensweisen in der DDR, Interaktionen zwischen Subjekt und Staat sowie historische Aushandlungen von Staatsbürgerlichkeit und Würde. Reimann engagiert sich ehrenamtlich in Strukturen der queeren Bildungsarbeit und Essensverteilung in Berlin.

JONAH REIMANN (they/no pronouns) is a graduate student in Public History at Freie Universität Berlin and works as a Coordination Assistant in the DFG research network »Queer Contemporary Histories in German-speaking Europe«. In their research, Reimann is particularly interested in trans* and queer life in the GDR, interactions between subject and state, and historical negotiations of citizenship and dignity. In their free time, Reimann volunteers in structures of queer education and community food distribution in Berlin.

JARA SCHMIDT ist Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin am Institut für Germanistik der Universität Hamburg. Nach einem Studium der Anglistik, Germanistik und Neueren Geschichte promovierte sie im Bereich der Interkulturellen Literaturwissenschaft mit einer Arbeit zu karnevalesken Verfahren in deutsch- und englischsprachigen sogenannten Migrationsromanen. Ihre Forschungsschwerpunkte sind postmigrantisches und postkoloniale Diskurse in Literatur und Kultur, Gender Studies, Queer Studies und Hexenforschung. Jüngste Buchpublikationen: *Kleine Formen – widerständige Formen? Postmigration intermedial* (2023, hg. mit Jule Thiemann) und *Postmigrant Turn. Postmigration als kulturwissenschaftliche Analysekatgorie* (2023, verfasst mit Rahel Cramer und Jule Thiemann).

JARA SCHMIDT is a Research Assistant at the German Department of the University of Hamburg. After studying English, German and Modern History, she completed her doctorate in the field of intercultural literary studies with a thesis on carnivalesque strategies in German- and English-language so-called migration novels. Her research focuses on postmigrant and post-colonial discourses in literature and culture, Gender Studies, Queer Studies, and witches. Latest book publications: *Kleine Formen – widerständige Formen? Postmigration intermedial* (2023, ed. with Jule Thiemann) and *Postmigrant Turn. Postmigration als kulturwissenschaftliche Analysekatgorie* (2023, written with Rahel Cramer and Jule Thiemann).

ANJA*OLIVER SCHNEIDER (keine Pronomen | dey/dem/deren) ist eine queere, nicht-binäre trans Person aus einem kleinen Dorf im Taunus und macht Bildungs- und Anti-Diskriminierungs-Arbeit. Außerdem ist Anja*Oliver Schneider Dichter*in, Lehrkraft für zugängliches Yoga und Autor*in der Broschüre *Nicht-Binär. Eine Einführung* (2021). Anja*Oliver Schneider hat mehrere Jahre in den USA gelebt und studiert, u.a. an der University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2021 hat Schneider deren Master in American Studies an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt mit einer Arbeit über die Intersektionen von lesbischen und trans* Erfahrungen abgeschlossen. Aktuell erkunden Schneiders Texte queeren Missbrauch, trans* Maskulinitäten, Femme/Butch-Dynamiken und chronische Krankheit, oft aus natur- und körperverbundenen Grenzperspektiven.
Website: www.am-schneider.com

ANJA*OLIVER SCHNEIDER (they/them/theirs) is a queer, non-binary trans educator, poet, scholar, and accessible yoga teacher from a small town near Frankfurt, Germany. They have lived and studied in several parts of the U.S., including at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In 2021, Schneider graduated with a master's degree in American Studies from Goethe University Frankfurt with a thesis exploring gender non-normativity in lesbian communities. Their current work focuses on queer abuse, trans masculinities, femme/butch dynamics, and disability, often in close connection to nature and the body. They are the self-published author of the brochure *Non-Binary. An Introduction* (2021, *Nicht-Binär. Eine Einführung*) and offer LGBTQ+ workshops.
Website: www.am-schneider.com

ANNGRET SCHULTZE arbeitet in den Bereichen Dramaturgie, Audiodeskription, Choreografie und Kulturwissenschaft. In ihrem künstlerischen Forschen und Formen widmet sie sich dem Körper als gleichzeitige Träger*in und Saboteur*in von Machtverhältnissen. Sie lebt und arbeitet hauptsächlich in Hamburg.

ANNGRET SCHULTZE works in the fields of dramaturgy, audio description, choreography, and cultural studies. In her artistic research and forms, she focuses on the body as both carrier and saboteur of power relations. She lives and works mainly in Hamburg.

CLARA ROSA SCHWARZ ist Doktorand*in in der Soziologie an der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg und Stipendiat*in der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. Nach einem Studium in Soziologie, Anglistik und Gender Studies promoviert Schwarz nun zur Bedeutung und Entwicklung queerer Freund*innenschaften während der Corona-Pandemie.

CLARA ROSA SCHWARZ is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at the University of Freiburg and holds a scholarship from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. After studying Sociology, English Studies, and Gender Studies, they are now researching the meaning and development of queer friendships during the Covid-19 pandemic.

SKYLAR SOOKPAIBOON (they/them) ist ein*e queere*r transmaskuline*r nicht-binäre*r thailändische*r Forscher*in, Redner*in, Community-Organisator*in und Videograf*in im Haldimand Tract und darüber hinaus. Sookpaiboon hat einen Master of Science in Familienbeziehungen und angewandter Ernährung von der University of Guelph in Ontario, Kanada, und engagiert sich für die Mobilisierung von Queer-of-Colour-Wissen und die Förderung von 2SLGBTQI+-Gesundheitsversorgung.

SKYLAR SOOKPAIBOON (they/them) is a queer transmasculine non-binary Thai researcher, public speaker, community organizer, and videographer with the Haldimand Tract and beyond. They have a Master of Science in Family Relations and Applied Nutrition from the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, and are committed to queer of colour knowledge mobilization and promoting 2SLGBTQI+ component health care.

LORENZ WEINBERG (er/they) studierte Geschichte mit den Schwerpunkten Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte, Queer History und Sexualitätsgeschichte in Berlin und Wien. Er promovierte zum Thema »Feministische Sex Wars und Butch/Fem(me)-Kultur. Sexualitätsdiskurse als Aushandlungsorte lesbisch_queerer Identitätskonzeptionen in deutschsprachigen Lesbenbewegungen der 1970er–90er Jahre«. Weinberg interessiert sich für die Verschränkungen von sexuellen Praxen und Geschlechtsidentitäten, lesbisch_trans*_queere Bewegungsgeschichte und deren Quellen sowie für genderqueere Figuren und Sexualität in der Geschichte. Er ist Mitglied im DFG-Forschungsnetzwerk »Queere Zeitgeschichten im deutschsprachigen Europa«.

LORENZ WEINBERG (he/they) studied history with a focus on women's and gender history, queer history, and sexuality history in Berlin and Vienna. He completed his Ph.D. on »Feminist Sex Wars and Butch/Fem(me) Culture. Sexuality Discourses as Sites of Negotiation of Lesbian_Queer Identity Conceptions in German-speaking Lesbian Movements of the 1970s–90s« (in German). Weinberg is interested in the entanglements of sexual practices and gender identities, lesbian_trans*_queer movement history and its sources, and genderqueer characters and sexuality in history. Weinberg is a member of the DFG research network »Queer Contemporary Histories in German-speaking Europe«.

HANNAH/HANN ZIPFEL ist Queer-Forscher*in, Autor*in und Archivar*in. Zipfel arbeitet derzeit für den Queer History Month Berlin (Spinnboden Lesbenarchiv) und die Bundesstiftung Magnus Hirschfeld, wo Zipfel das Oral-History-Projekt »Archiv der anderen Erinnerungen« leitet, ein Video-Archiv, das Lebensgeschichten von älteren queeren Menschen in Deutschland sammelt. In der übrigen Zeit experimentiert Zipfel gerne mit Klängen und verschiedenen Formen des Geschichtenerzählens.

HANNAH/HANN ZIPFEL is a queer researcher, author, and archivist. Zipfel currently works for the Queer History Month Berlin (Spinnboden Lesbenarchiv) and Bundesstiftung Magnus Hirschfeld, where they lead the oral history project »Archive of Different Memories« (»Archiv der anderen Erinnerungen«), a video-archive that collects life stories of elderly queer people in Germany. In the rest of their time, Zipfel likes to experiment with sounds and different forms of storytelling.