

Transfeminist Kill/Joys

Rage, Love, and Reparative Performance

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Abstract This paper considers recent transfeminist critical creative work through an affective trope contingently named here as that belonging to the “transfeminist kill/joy,” after Sara Ahmed’s framing of the “feminist killjoy.” The trope of the transfeminist kill/joy can be read as a set of proliferating dialectics expressed as the rage that comes into being through living the violent effects of transphobia and trans-misogyny and through the practice of transformational love as a struggle for existence. The texts under consideration here work both to spoil feelings of political and social well-being or pleasure that are contingent upon the tacit absence or explicit exclusion of trans- women in feminist conceptual and physical spaces and to re-structure, claim, and repair feminist happiness as a reparative impulse that holds these political affects in tension as creative potential.

Keywords transfeminism, feminist killjoy, political affects, reparative reading, transgender cultural and performance studies, dialectical criticism, cabaret studies

How do we create a culture where we love trans- women?

—Laverne Cox, “Remixing the Trans and Hip Hop Conversation”

Love as a social movement is enacted by revolutionary, mobile, and global conditions of citizen-activists who are allied through the apparatus of emancipation.

—Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*

I love your big hands and your busted teeth.

—*The Fully Functional Cabaret*, “I Want It All”

This essay considers an affective trope that I have come to recognize as “the transfeminist kill/joy”: a set of proliferating dialectics expressed as the rage¹ that comes into being through living the violent effects of transphobia and trans-misogyny and the practice of transformational love as a struggle for existence.² While the transfeminist kill/joy might certainly be understood as a politicized

1 aesthetic and form of social action that extends well beyond (cis)gender feminist
 2 politics and social life,³ here I read for the poetics of killing trans-absent or trans-
 3 excluding feminist joy. In this discussion of recent transfeminist critical creative
 4 work, I trace how the transfeminist kill/joy works both to spoil feelings of political
 5 and social well-being or pleasure that are contingent upon the tacit absence or
 6 explicit exclusion of trans- women in feminist conceptual and physical spaces *and*
 7 to restructure, claim, and repair feminist happiness through what Chela Sandoval
 8 (2000: 180) has called “a hermeneutics of love.”

9 In my framing of the “transfeminist kill/joy,” I hope to signal, as does
 10 Sara Ahmed (2010) in her original framing of the feminist killjoy, that the mere
 11 presence or arrival of perceived difference can be understood as “threaten[ing]
 12 the social bond” (68) within privileged feminist scenarios.⁴ While Ahmed frames
 13 the killing of feminist joy (67) mostly in terms of women of color in white feminist
 14 spaces, and certainly racism and transphobia and trans-misogyny are not inter-
 15 changeable,⁵ I suggest that trans-absent or trans-excluding feminist political and
 16 social scenarios can be understood to experience a similar threat to the “organic
 17 enjoyment and solidarity” (67) of the (perceived homogeneity of the) group when
 18 forced to deal with the presence or proximity of trans- women, since this arrival
 19 “exposes not only the unreliability of the body as a source of their identities
 20 and politics, but also the fallacy of women’s universal experiences and oppres-
 21 sions” (Koyama 2006: 704). Put in the terms of Ahmed’s earlier work (2006), the
 22 transfeminist kill/joy is an assemblage of affects which re-orient feminist hap-
 23 piness *towards* rather than against trans- women,⁶ and uses anger and love to
 24 resist a feminism designed exclusively *for* non-trans women, not necessarily
 25 feminism *by* all non-trans women.⁷

26 Central to my exploration of the transfeminist kill/joy are the following
 27 questions: How do I (or can I) inhabit a transfeminist criticality without falling
 28 into the patriarchal trap of “recycling the most threadbare of clichés: the angry,
 29 man-hating lesbian” (Salamon 2008: 125)?⁸ Is it possible to inscribe the trope of
 30 the transfeminist kill/joy without reinscribing the trope of the straw feminist as
 31 demonic other? Rather than holding steady in a paranoid position, assured that
 32 “no time could be too early for having-already-known, for its having already-
 33 been-inevitable, that something bad would happen” (Sedgwick 2003: 132), can this
 34 essay, along with the work of the kill/joy I study here, imagine a different inevi-
 35 tability, a reparative temporality constituted by the hopeful inevitability of love?

36 The texts and performances that I think about here—Ryka Aoki’s short
 37 story “To the New World”; Mirha-Soleil Ross’s one-woman show, *Yapping Out*
 38 *Loud: Contagious Thought from an Unrepentant Whore*; and the collaborative *Fully*
 39 *Functional Cabaret* with Star Amerasu, Ryka Aoki, Annie Danger, Red Durkin,
 40 Bryn Kelly, and Shawna Virago—foreground potentiality in the forms of rage and

1 love, recalcitrance and hope, and resist what Eve Sedgwick called “paranoid
2 reading,” in favor of what I am calling “reparative performances” that “succeed in
3 extracting sustenance from the object of a culture—even of a culture whose
4 avowed desire has often been not to sustain them” (Sedgwick 2003: 149). They live
5 in the mobile tension between *kill* and *joy*: between the rhetorical, economic, and
6 physical violences and killing logics of coercive gender norms in mainstream US
7 and Canadian cultures and the exclusions and attacks practiced by some feminist
8 communities against trans- people, and against trans- women especially and the
9 willfully resistant joy, thrill, love, and hope offered by transfeminist aesthetics,
10 politics, and knowledge production, which make new cultures and sustain living
11 through experiments in polemical sociality.⁹

12 13 **Scenario 1: The Farmers Market**

14
15 Dammit—I thought Asian hair was supposed to be easy!

16
17 Millie Wong was on the verge of tears. *Tangled and frizzy . . . shouldn't it be long and*
18 *straight?* She yanked at her brush. Maybe it was some hidden genetic female thing:
19 her sister had perfect hair, and her mother, too. *You're so stupid! You don't even*
20 *pass to your own hair! You clumsy tranny freak . . .*

21 —Ryka Aoki, “To the New World”
22

23 In her short story “To the New World,” Ryka Aoki introduces readers to our
24 heroine, Millie Wong, whose day begins with her “on the verge of tears,” unable to
25 get her “tangled and frizzy” hair to cooperate and become “perfect hair,” which
26 she figures as “long and straight” like her sister’s and mother’s hair. Millie
27 wonders if the problem with her hair is “some hidden genetic female thing.” Millie
28 chastises herself as a “clumsy tranny freak,” who can’t even pass to her own hair.
29 This introduction sets up the scenario in which Millie gradually forgives her hair,
30 remembering that she “slept with wet hair, that’s all,” and she sets out into the
31 world—after a session with the straightening iron—with “hair like shimmering
32 ribbons,” to the farmers market to find some food to celebrate her dearly departed
33 grandmother’s birthday (Aoki 2012: 53).

34 On this first half-page of the story, Aoki (2012) creates a scenario in which
35 Millie’s hair stands in at once for her ethnicity (“Asian hair was supposed to
36 be easy!”), for her failed “female thing” and for the successful intervention of
37 self-administered technology (the straightening iron) to set things right. And
38 although the LA winter drizzle quickly “spoils all the work she had put into her
39 hair” (54), the attentions of a tow truck driver make Millie smile. This transaction,
40 like her hair battle, inspires a reflection on her “transness,” but this time on its

1 success. Victor Wong was invisible, but Millie Wong gets attention, even objec-
2 tification. And even though the attention she receives might be conditioned by a
3 sexist, racist conception of “Suzie Wong and *Memoirs of a Geisha*” (55), Millie
4 appreciates the attention. This interaction with the tow truck driver prompts her
5 to ask, “After a life of being ignored, was it wrong to like people being *nice* to
6 you?” (55)

7 The narration of the story continues with a paragraph about how Millie
8 observes other women, how they move and talk, followed by a paragraph on a
9 “poofy loaf of bread” like the kind her grandmother had loved. The story builds a
10 scenario that conjures the multiple and conflicting discourses at play in Millie’s
11 world, all within the framework of a simple, quotidian experience of going to the
12 market, which is, for the most part fairly pleasurable, now that the hair problem
13 has been resolved for the moment. But turn the page and *boom!* Enter Sierra, an
14 Asian-stereotype-wielding lesbian transphobe. Millie tells the story of meeting the
15 very loud, very buff Sierra, who had cooled to Millie when she “decided to confess
16 that she was trans” (Aoki 2012: 56). Aoki positions Sierra as the arbiter of fema-
17 leness, who “pronounced Millie was okay, because she didn’t feel that male
18 energy come off her” (56), but also, importantly, Aoki positions Sierra as Millie’s
19 “friend.” Sierra coaches Millie in “what it meant to be a socially and politically
20 responsible woman” (57), which leads Millie to feel “sad that she had been born
21 with male privilege and, maybe by becoming vegan, in some way she could be
22 closer to the woman she wanted to be. A caring woman. A strong woman. A *vegan*
23 woman” (57). Aoki has Millie *confess* her transness, and then she gets “*caught with*
24 *non-vegan bread*” (57; emphasis added) when she runs into Sierra at the market,
25 thereby positioning Millie as existing in a perpetual state of turpitude. The forces
26 conspire to make Millie feel bad: her transness; her Asian parents, who had
27 already taught her to “avoid large groups of drunken white men” (57) thus ren-
28 dering redundant Sierra’s coaching in appropriate woman-ness; and then the
29 non-vegan bread, about which Sierra pontificates, connecting the slaughter of
30 dairy cows with the oppression of Tibetan women, all teach Millie how wrong she
31 is. The story continues with Millie unable to interrupt or correct Sierra for fear
32 of being accused of acting with male privilege as Sierra rants randomly about
33 Asian men, a girlfriend “who went and transitioned on me,” and a Zen garden
34 that is “very feng shui” but is a women-only space, for “*women-women*” (58), and
35 referring to her “trans man ex, as a trans woman” (58). Ultimately, the interac-
36 tion with Sierra lasts less than three pages, and yet the brute force of her willful
37 ignorance is overwhelming. This is a spoof, of course, a caricature of the lesbian,
38 feminist, gender-assigned essentialist, who refuses to learn about transness but
39 understands herself as doing a pretty bang-up job at being politically munifi-
40 cent.¹⁰ The story ends with Millie digging some pork buns from her freezer and

1 celebrating the memory of her grandmother, a woman who also emerged into a
 2 new world, “full of people who would call you brave, people who would call you
 3 crazy, and people who would never call you again” (62). As she eats the pork bun,
 4 Millie considers calling up Sierra and imagines that she “could tell her the dif-
 5 ference between trans women and trans men” (62), leaving the story on a note
 6 that some readers might experience as hopeful.

7 Aoki’s narration provides access to only Millie’s interiority, centering her
 8 experience of Sierra’s ignorance, leading the reader to experience the story from
 9 Millie’s perspective. This perspective is one that I identify as structured by a
 10 transfeminist kill/joy impulse: Aoki’s narration of an experience that is supposed
 11 to be pleasant—a morning at the farmers market—is complicated by the pres-
 12 ence of the oafish lesbian feminist, who is oblivious to and unaccountable for her
 13 own bad politics, and the rage of the text coded within this encounter. This
 14 representation of the lesbian feminist who enjoys trans-excluding spaces for
 15 “women-women,” while pretending to herself that she’s a pretty good friend to
 16 Millie, a trans- woman, might hit a little close to home for some readers. Might
 17 ruin their Sierra-like oblivious pleasures.¹¹ Additionally, Aoki writes Sierra as a
 18 racist know-it-all, which is a bold narrative move and serves to link transphobia
 19 and racism as mutually informing paradigms. While Millie’s narrative ends with
 20 some happy thoughts toward transformation—explaining to Sierra the difference
 21 between trans women and trans men—the force of Aoki’s narrative structure
 22 creates a lasting impression that ruins the pleasure of any reader who might see in
 23 Sierra a bit of herself. This pressure between hope and ruined pleasure—the hope
 24 offered by ruined pleasure—is a transformative pressure that transfeminist nar-
 25 ration of the quotidian details of transphobia and racism can offer. Indeed, Stryker
 26 ([1994] 2006) identifies transgender rage as produced through the impossible
 27 impositions of the “highly gendered regulatory schemata that determine the via-
 28 bility of bodies,” which “furnishes a means for disidentification with compulsorily
 29 assigned subject positions.” Like Aoki shows us here, “through the operation of
 30 rage, the stigma itself becomes the source of transformative power” (253).

31 Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore have called for
 32 expanding the concept “trans-” to include “Trans: -gender, -national, -racial,
 33 -generational, -genic, -species” (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 2008: 11). I want to
 34 add *transformational* to this list.¹² The crossing implied by *transformational* is
 35 the crossing between structures, between systems, between selves. Rather than
 36 showcasing trans- women’s bodies and experiences as a set of illuminating con-
 37 cepts, or as figural models in pursuit of a radical theory of gender,¹³ the trans-
 38 feminist kill/joy offers a critical orientation that promises to accommodate the
 39 proliferating dialectics of contemporary revolutionary struggles and centers *trans-*
 40 as a reparative impulse. Transfeminist reparative knowledge production takes on

1 received feminist politics and values as part of a culture that is, as Sedgwick (2003:
2 149) puts it, “inadequate or inimical to its nurture.” As a mode that is “additive
3 and accretive,” a reparative transfeminist impulse “wants to assemble and confer
4 plentitude on an object [feminism] that will then have resources to offer to an
5 inchoate self” (149). While some readers might interpret Millie’s hopeful tem-
6 porality as a bit delusional, I want to suggest that she makes a transformational
7 political choice in the interest of reparative potentiality.
8

9 **Scenario 2: “Circle of Victimization”**

10 In her 2002 one-woman show, *Yapping Out Loud: Confessions of an Unrepentant*
11 *Whore*, sex worker and transsexual cultural activist Mirha-Soleil Ross stages a
12 cabaret-style performance in seven monologues that transverse genres from talk-
13 show host to academic lecture to confessional and more. What I want to pay
14 particular attention to here are the ways that Ross performs perhaps the ultimate
15 transfeminist *kill*, by equating within the structure of her piece the violence done
16 by antiprostitute (and antitrans) feminists—“feminist-identified feminist” (Ross
17 2002b: 8), Bridge It Taylor!, and “Women’s Sciences” (17) graduate student Judy
18 Cuty Q—with the violence done by the Whore Hunter, a serial killer who targets
19 prostitutes. Within the seven-part structure of the performance, these are the only
20 times when Ross is not playing herself, “Mirha-Soleil Ross” (Salah 2007: 65).
21 These three figures, then, are performed as threats to prostitutes, and especially to
22 transsexual prostitutes, and by framing the performance in this way, Ross draws
23 attention to the killing logics of antitrans and antiprostitute feminisms, which
24 contribute to the carceral culture in which, to use Cox’s terms, “trans women are
25 being stigmatized and then ultimately criminalized and murdered” (Hill et al.
26 2013). In similar ways to Aoki’s playing of Sierra as *all wrong* and violently repres-
27 sive because of her transmisogyny and racism, Ross’s staged “feminists” devalue
28 the lives of prostitutes, especially transsexual women working as prostitutes. For
29 example, Bridge It Taylor! presents a talk called the “Sleazy Business of Getting
30 Whores Out of Business,” animated by three blow-up dolls as her “victims of
31 prostitution.” As she narrates the story of the third blow-up doll—a transsexual
32 woman named Xtazeee, who appears in a cage—Bridge It Taylor! revels in heavy-
33 handed rhetoric:
34

35 Xtazeee was his or “her” name when he got arrested on several pending prosti-
36 tution-related charges and forced into our program by a Human Rights’ court
37 order that declared that a transsexed man’s access to women only services was
38 more important than maintaining the safety and dignity of women who have been
39 sexually abused by men. . . . We had to fight tooth and nail in order to obtain an
40 injunction that would allow us to put him in a cage to protect both our staff and

1 our participants. . . . He has, from a very early age, internalized the notion that
2 sexual abuse, violence, and platform heels are essential and defining experiential
3 aspects of femininity and of a woman's identity.

4 The daily intake of dangerous dosages of hormones, the regular shooting
5 up of [an] industrial quantity of industrial quality silicone, the multiple mutilating
6 surgeries performed on his face, his chest, his penis are just some of what he
7 actually enjoyed subjecting himself to in order to satisfy his clients' desire for a
8 grotesque deformation of a male body that they could use without having to call
9 into question their masculinity and male sexuality. (Ross 2002b: 11–12)

10
11 Here, Ross ventriloquizes and embodies the canonical texts of antitrans feminism
12 in which transsexual people are always already figured as both predatory (*killers*)
13 and the victims of (medicalized gender normative) violence (*killed*) as a way to
14 maintain assigned-essentialist logics, adding new density to a transfeminist kill/
15 joy practice.¹⁴ As Bridge It Taylor!, she does the work that Stryker, Currah, and
16 Moore called for in the then-emerging field of transgender studies: to produce
17 “new epistemological frameworks, and new representational practices within
18 which variations in the sex/gender relationship can be understood as morally
19 neutral and representationally true, and through which anti-transgender violence
20 can be linked to other systemic forms of violence such as poverty and racism”
21 (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 2008: 10).

22 Making fun of but not making light of these feminist violences, Ross
23 concludes Bridge It Taylor!'s speech with “The Three F's: Forget where you come
24 from. Forget who you love. Forget who you are” and dictates the following
25 “empowering radical feminist concepts”:

26
27 We teach them that there is no such thing as agency, informed consent, the ability
28 to control one's own body. . . . We force them to get in touch with their own
29 experiences of rape, molestation, sexual degradation, and battery. And when they
30 cannot see how these factors have made them vulnerable to recruitment for
31 prostitution, we make a drawing for them and give it a glamorous title: the circle of
32 victimization [she shows a picture of a frowny face]. (Ross 2002)¹⁵

33
34 *Yapping Out Loud* highlights the ways that abolitionist/savior feminist and reli-
35 gious-based organizations get precedence in the fight for the decriminalization of
36 sex work.¹⁶ It also unsettles the (moral) certainty of abolitionist feminism through
37 the spoofing of feminist zealots and by foregrounding trans- and sex-worker love
38 as a sustaining reality—an inconceivable (or inconvenient) reality in the righteous
39 savior imaginary. In a monologue by “Mirha-Soleil Ross” mid-way through the
40 performance, Ross speaks with tenderness and compassion about her clients and

1 turns the tables on abolitionist feminists, whose lack of tenderness and com-
2 passion are the subtext of *Yapping*: “For the most part, it is their courage to see me,
3 a transsexual woman, again and again, because yes, in this culture, it takes courage
4 for a man to get so close, so intimate with an individual whom a large portion of
5 the population considers a freak” (Ross 2002b: 15). This transfeminist kill/joy
6 affect might be understood as a trans-(re)structuring or disorienting affect, as it
7 holds anti-trans and anti-sex-work feminists accountable for the violences and
8 lack of love of their politics, while offering a repaired love as a model of trans-
9 formative resistance and demanding that audiences feel implicated in this ten-
10 sion and feel the potential of rage *and* love not as irreducible affects, but as a full
11 politics. Koyama (2006: 702) notes, “It is not the lack of knowledge or infor-
12 mation that keeps oppression going; it is the lack of feminist compassion, con-
13 science and principle.” And in her exploration of transformational feminism, bell
14 hooks (1989: 26; emphasis added) writes, “In reconceptualizing and reformulating
15 strategies for future feminist movements, *we need to concentrate on the politici-*
16 *zation of love, not just in the context of talking about victimization in intimate*
17 *relationships, but in a critical discussion where love can be understood as a powerful*
18 *force that challenges and resists domination.* As we work to be loving, to create a
19 culture that celebrates life, that makes love possible, we move against dehu-
20 manization, against domination.” The kill/joy affect of *Yapping Out Loud* offers
21 an opportunity to politicize love and joy, to politicize *jouissance*, as a critical
22 framework and methodology. As Chela Sandoval (2000: 140) argues, taking up
23 Roland Barthes, “The act of falling in love can thus function as a ‘punctum,’ that
24 which breaks through social narratives to permit a bleeding, meanings unan-
25 chored and moving away from their traditional moorings.” We can “understand
26 ‘love’ as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all
27 citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of con-
28 sciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement”
29 (139); love is a methodology through which we become that “drifting being . . . where
30 political weapons of consciousness are available in a constant tumult of possi-
31 bility” (140). As an expression of love and pleasure, Sandoval reinscribes jous-
32 sance as a political position: “It is coming to a utopian nonsite, a no-place where
33 everything is possible—but only in exchange for the pain of crossing” (140).
34 Ross’s *Yapping Out Loud* performs this pain of crossing, reveals the political
35 damages of denied love and unanchors the possibility for love and pleasure as a
36 social-justice methodology.

37 Stryker has emphasized the importance of understanding transgender
38 studies as knowledge production, and I want to make a connection here between
39 Stryker’s vision and Audre Lorde’s (1984: 53) understanding of love, joy, and the
40 erotic as knowledge production, as a “source of power and information within

1 our lives” and anger, which she figured similarly as “loaded with information and
 2 energy” (127).¹⁷ Stryker (2006: 8–9) writes, “Epistemological concerns lie at the
 3 heart of transgender critique, and motivate a great deal of the transgender
 4 struggle for social justice. Transgender phenomena, in short, point the way to a
 5 different understanding of how bodies mean, how representation works, and
 6 what counts as legitimate knowledge. These philosophical issues have material
 7 consequences for the quality of transgender lives.” The dialectical structure
 8 of transfeminist kill/joy scenarios that call out the ways in which we “partici-
 9 pate, knowingly or otherwise, in [our] sister’s oppression” (Lorde 1984: 128) and
 10 acknowledge anger, love, joy, and the erotic as transformative sources/sites of
 11 power and knowledge, creates the possibility for change and reminds us that we
 12 are not stuck in current conditions.¹⁸ Significantly, these transfeminist moments
 13 of joy are not examples of what Ahmed (2010: 84) would call the obscuring act of
 14 *taking cover* “by looking on the bright side . . . to avoid what might threaten the
 15 world as it is” but, rather, this is love as resistance tactic, performing the powerful
 16 material consequences of loving trans- women.

17 Scenario 3: Love Letters

18 The performance at which the penny dropped for me about the transformative
 19 complexities of transfeminist kill/joy expressive culture was *The Fully Functional*
 20 *Cabaret*, which I saw at Barnard College in April 2013. The opening scenes of the
 21 cabaret are led by the show’s Ring Mistress/Emcee (Annie Danger), who asks the
 22 audience,
 23

24
 25 Are you ready for some SECRETS? Are you ready for some THRILLS?! Did some
 26 of you just come to find out *what the fuck’s going ON down there?! Yes you did!* And
 27 we here at *The Fully Functional Cabaret* refuse to disappoint! . . . We know what
 28 you want. Any trans show worth its salt has a *fantastic* reveal scene. And I want you
 29 to know we’re serious about these secrets so we’re going dessert first, ladies and
 30 shentlemen! (Amerasu et al. 2012b: 2)

31
 32 The Ring Mistress then sets the stage for a small-town–beauty-pageant-meets-
 33 Vaudeville burlesque and introduces *The Fully Functional* cast by their showgirl
 34 names, Vanessa DeCamp (Star Amerasu), Selina (Ryka Aoki), Cookie (Shawna
 35 Virago), and Teddie (Bryn Kelly), telling us that these ladies are about to show off
 36 what they *have to reveal*. This opening scene is a kill/joy moment: it promises the
 37 *big reveal*, both naming and rendering ridiculous the cultural power of this
 38 expectation, making an absurdly extended joke about what each cast member is
 39 hiding. This scene plays up a hybrid magic trick/striptease, riffing on the pervasive
 40 motif that trans- women are hiding something.¹⁹ Each performer in turn reveals

1 her pubic puppet—her “fish stick,” her “stick pussy,” her “lady finger,” her
 2 “Neovagina . . . [with all] its bells and whistles” (Amerasu et al. 2012b: 4)—while
 3 the Ring Mistress calls for cheers and applause, forcing the spectators to demand
 4 what they know they are not supposed to want. Indeed, the show is a manifes-
 5 tation of all the “Don’ts” in a Trans 101 seminar, and many audience members
 6 know it. In the first moments of the show, the Ring Mistress explains to the
 7 spectators that “this ride requires a special T-ticket for full permission to come see
 8 the funny trannies,” but then she corrects herself: “Oop! Hilarious trans wome-
 9 n”(Amerasu 2012b: 1). Like Ross’s *Yapping Out Loud*, *The Fully Functional Cabaret*
 10 performs the pedagogical function of the political cabaret form—a proliferating
 11 dialectic produced through repetition, this scene teaches (indeed, most of the
 12 scenes teach) by bad example. And like Aoki’s caricature of Sierra, this perfor-
 13 mance cultivates a renewed, if discomfited, self-awareness among spectators.

14 Following the pageant scene, the show continues with a series of collabo-
 15 ratively written scenarios, including a clever skit full of double entendres featuring
 16 Dr. Harry Benjamin (Red Durkin), infamous for his research with “live trans-
 17 sexuals,” and another in which Corporeal Hegemony (Shawna Virago), a figure
 18 reminiscent of a debutante coach, works to create/discipline a (non)passing trans-
 19 woman’s (Bryn Kelly) body. The cabaret moves through increasingly bleak terrain,
 20 staging enactments of dating violence and medical violence, all of which challenge
 21 the received notions and expectations that circulate about trans- women’s bodies,
 22 desires, and surgical status and, again, seem pedagogical in intention. Early in the
 23 show, the Ring Mistress foreshadows this turn to “the real” by telling her audience,
 24

25 You can laugh now, you may not be [laughing] later. For the trans- women in the
 26 audience and maybe for other people as well we have written this show to get very
 27 real. And if it should get so real that you need to take care of yourself—get a drink
 28 of water, take a walk in the lobby, take a deep breath, find a friend, find a hug—we
 29 very strongly encourage you to do so. And regardless of your experience this evening,
 30 in that sense, we hope that you have an amazing time. (Amerasu et al. 2012a)

31
 32 As the violence on stage becomes more and more “real,” the audience becomes
 33 increasingly uncomfortable. Rather than a joke about what may or may not be
 34 between their legs, *The Fully Functional Cabaret*’s “big reveal” exposes the violence
 35 in trans- women’s lives. The joke is played and then taken away, like a dirty,
 36 broken toy. The show “refuses to convene” (Ahmed 2010: 65) over laughs.

37 In the last scene of *The Fully Functional Cabaret*, by far longer than any of
 38 the other segments of the show, the kill/joy manifestation of love, “breaks through
 39 social narrative” (Sandoval 2000: 140). “Love Letters” is a spoken-word piece
 40 performed by the ensemble cast, as they gather around each other, hugging,

1 holding each other—a dramatized version of mutual care and solidarity—each
 2 cast member wearing a variation of the same fabulous gold lamé fabric, each
 3 cataloging the things they love about trans women. The letter begins “Dear You,”
 4 (Amerasu et al. 2012) and continues:

5
 6 ANNIE: I see you around walking around the street. . . .
 7 Oh, how I adore the fact that you are living. . . .

8
 9 RYKA: Dear transwomen yet to come . . .

10 RED: I love you because sometimes you’re weird looking the way that I am weird
 11 looking and you understand that weird looking and bad looking are not the same
 12 thing. . . .

13 RYKA: You see, belief is something we transwomen can do like no one else. With
 14 everything, everyone out there doubting us, we are given a belief that can create
 15 worlds, make what is impossible real. Remember, in everything you do, to believe
 16 in yourself. Your belief is your greatest gift and power, and magic. Like nobody else
 17 when you, my future, believe—you love. And I believe in you. . . .

18
 19 RED: I love you because you’re beautiful, not in a “we are all the special and perfect
 20 creations of a loving god,” kind of way. You’re beautiful in a “crawled out of the
 21 muck and evolved,” kind of way. I love you because you’re loud and shy and
 22 glamorous and plain. I love you because you’ve got swagger, because you’re clumsy,
 23 because you’re delicate, angry, imposing and gracious. (Amerasu et al. 2012a)

24
 25 The scene ends as Star Amerasu straps on an acoustic guitar and the cast reas-
 26 sembles and re-embraces for their closing song, “I Want It All,” a transfeminist
 27 anthem if ever there was one, a demonstration of the restructured affective pol-
 28 itics of the kill/joy:

29
 30 I la la la love you. ×3

31 Every part of you.

32 Every single part of you.

33 Your worst and your best.

34 I want it all ×4

35 . . .

36 I love you when you’re graceful and when you’re mean.

37 I love your big hands and your busted teeth. (Amerasu et al. 2012b: 35)

38
 39 “Love Letters” and “I Want it All” are meditations on love as what Sandoval
 40 (2000: 139) calls a “system of signification capable of evoking and puncturing

1 through to another site, to that of differential consciousness”; these scenes bring
2 the cast and audience together in a shared moment/feeling of creating change.
3

4 **Conclusion**

5 In the preceding pages I have tried to identify, through the affective orienta-
6 tions of the transfeminist kill/joy, how holding rage and love simultaneously
7 as a structural and narrative tension is characteristic of what might be called
8 reparative-pedagogical transfeminist expressive culture. The transfeminist kill/joy
9 works as political methodology, as epistemology, and as aesthetic; it is, I believe,
10 indicative of an impulse to not give up on a feminist transformational politic. The
11 transfeminist kill/joy slips anger through and into hope, joy, and love and holds
12 them in tension as creative potential.
13

14
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18 *Quarterly*, Spring/Summer 2014) and is currently completing her book manuscript titled,
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20
21

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28 and script materials; and to Trish Salah, Julian Carter and David Getsy for their patience. And
29 thanks to all the artists for their work.
30

31 **Notes**

- 32 1. Following Ahmed (2010), my analysis of rage as a political tool and form of knowledge
33 production and transfer is indebted to the work of Audre Lorde (1984: 127), who reminds
34 us that “every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those
35 oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused
36 with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change.”
- 37 2. Transgender activist Janet Mock explains that shifting the discourse to loving trans-
38 women is to insist on the existence of trans- women: “We’re not supposed to be here.
39 Men are not supposed to love us because we’re not supposed to exist” (Hill et al. 2013).
40 While trans- dyke existence is not accounted for in this discussion, I think we can extend
Mock’s analysis to include lesbian desire.
3. A. Finn Enke (2012a: 74) notes, “Cis’s peculiar ontology erases location and effects
through time and space: To preserve the status of cis as non-trans, trans must never have

- 1 been or become cis but instead be consistently trans across all time and in all spaces.” I use
 2 “(cis)” throughout this paper to signal the ways that feminists without transgender or
 3 transsexual experience have centered their own experiences of gender/sex at the expense
 4 of feminists who have trans- experience, to de-center (cis), and to be conscious of the
 5 ways that “cis” functions “as a disciplinary tool [that] erases gender variance among all
 6 people” (11) and “shrinks awareness of transgender presence” (Enke 2012b: 6).
4. Diana Taylor (2003: 28) elaborates the concept of “scenario” to address “meaning-
 7 making paradigms that structure social environments[,] . . . narrative and plot, but
 8 demands that we also pay attention to milieu and corporeal behaviors such as gestures,
 9 attitudes, and tones not reducible to language.”
 5. Julia Serano (2007: 15) introduced the term trans-misogyny to account for the ridicule,
 10 exclusion, physical violence, sexual assault and other “specific form[s] of discrimination”
 11 targeted at, and experienced by, trans- women.
 6. Viviane Namaste (2000: 68) importantly points to the ways that “the programmatic call for
 12 including MTF transsexuals within lesbian and feminist communities . . . presupposes that the
 13 only communities that count as lesbian or feminist are those that designate themselves as
 14 such.” The broad range of performances and other scenarios that I consider here are meant to
 15 reflect Namaste’s call for “a broader range of cultural and institutional texts” (69), although
 16 the spaces I focus on here are predominantly lesbian, queer, and/or feminist designated spaces.
 7. I am borrowing here from BattyMamzelle’s 2014 analysis of “White Feminism” as “a set of
 17 beliefs that allows for the exclusion of issues that specifically affect women of col-
 18 our . . . [as] a method of *practicing* feminism, not an indictment of every individual white
 19 feminist everywhere.” I am also extending TheWhistlingFish’s comment to Batty-
 20 Mamzelle’s blog post: “What people don’t seem to get is that ‘White Feminism’ is *fem-
 21 inism for white people*, and never exclusively *feminism by white people*. It’s more about
 22 who benefits exclusively than who is perpetuating it exclusively.” By “privileged feminist
 23 scenarios,” I mean social and political spaces, artist and activist scenes, and other
 24 affective and material resource-distribution infrastructures that are tacitly or explicitly
 25 organized *for* women who do not have transgender or transsexual experience, as well as
 26 *for* people whose privilege profile is additionally optimized by other factors including
 27 Whiteness; able-bodiedness; education; steady employment; secure housing; and/or
 28 settler, legal citizenship, or immigration status, thus excluding issues that specifically
 29 affect women outside of this/these privilege profile(s).
 8. As Emi Koyama (2003: 245) puts it in her “Transfeminist Manifesto,” transfeminism
 30 “stands up for trans and non-trans women alike, and asks non-trans women to stand up
 31 for trans women in return” and understand transfeminist liberation to be tied to all
 32 struggles against oppression; transfeminism is not limited to or for trans-women.
 9. I borrow here from Jasmine Rault’s (2011: 239–40) conceptualization of the “political and
 33 ethical work of positive affect . . . as important media of communication for feminist
 34 queer efforts to resist, disrupt or simply survive the mundane and transnational violences
 35 of failed democracies, state-sanctioned homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, racialized
 36 poverty, financial terrorism and neoliberal homonationalisms.”
 10. My understanding of assigned-essentialist feminist logics is informed by Bobby Noble’s
 37 theory of feminist fundamentalism. I have shifted the terminology away from “funda-
 38 mentalism” in response to R. M. Kennedy’s important intervention into this paper;
 39 Kennedy notes that the language of fundamentalism and an anticipated readership’s
 40 implied distaste for and resistance to it cannot be disentangled from homonationalist

- 1 anti-Islam rhetorics. However, Noble's (2012: 54) formulation of this form of feminism as
 2 having "moral panics about transgender bodies," driven by a fervent belief in sex-
 3 assigned-at-birth as the holy truth of a person's life-long gender is what I mean by "assigned-
 4 essentialist" feminisms. Trish Salah's (2011) "Backlash to the Future: Screening Transsexuality
 5 as Fundamentalism," takes up the link between feminist and Islamic fundamentalism.
- 6 11. On the topic of a transfeminist kill/joy response to "women-women's" spaces, see Red
 7 Durkin's (2013) "Indigo Girls and Other MichFest 2013 Performers: Boycott MWMF until
 8 the Organizers Fully Include Trans Women." Durkin performs the kill/joy impulse by
 9 signaling the damage done by Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's trans-exclusive
 10 "intention" *and* communicating a hope and plan for a future in which trans- women are
 11 "welcome" at the MWMF as "festies" and musicians.
- 12 12. Bobby Noble (2012: 53) also makes this call, following Robyn Wiegman.
- 13 13. Viviane Namaste (2009) has observed that while transness figures heavily in Anglo-
 14 American feminist theory of the past two decades, more often than not, feminist theory
 15 instrumentalizes transsexual and transgender bodies to "ask [their] own epistemological
 16 questions" (12).
- 17 14. Stryker ([1994] 2006) has noted how Mary Daly "characterized transsexuals as agents of a
 18 'necrophilic invasion' of female space" (Daly qtd. in Stryker [1994] 2006: 248); more
 19 recently, in her essay "Keeping Queer Queer," Cherríe Moraga (2011: 186, 189) refers twice
 20 to trans men as "surgically scarred" and worries that butch lesbians are becoming a
 21 "dying breed, headed for extinction." Moraga is by far not alone in these sentiments and,
 22 as I indicate in my review of her book (Cowan 2013: 429), in this chapter she makes some
 23 gestures toward a change of heart. Julia Serano (2013: 302) provides "an overview of
 24 feminist anti-trans sentiment" in a footnote.
- 25 15. Arguably the most visible trans-excluding space in Canada is Vancouver Rape Relief
 26 (VRR) and Women's Shelter. In 2013, in honor of December 6, Canada's Day of Action
 27 and Remembrance on Violence Against Women, VRR hosted *Transsexual Empire* author
 28 and infamously antitrans and anti-sex-work feminist, Janice Raymond. As if reviving
 29 Ross's Bridge It Taylor!, Raymond gave a talk entitled "Prostitution: Not a job, not a
 30 choice," which detailed "her efforts to abolish sex work, which included advising the
 31 [Canadian] federal government's legal team defending antiprostitution laws during the recent
 32 Supreme Court *Bedford v. Canada* hearings" (Allen 2013). See also Namaste's "Inclusive
 33 Pedagogy in the Women's Studies Classroom: Teaching the Kimberly Nixon Case" (2013).
- 34 16. After decades of sex-worker advocacy and activism by people like Ross, the Supreme
 35 Court of Canada struck down the three remaining laws that criminalized activities
 36 necessary for sex work in their December 2013 *Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford* ruling.
 37 (*Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford*, [2013] 3 S.C.R. 1101, 2013 S.C.C. 72 (CanLII)).
- 38 17. Likewise, Stryker's ([1994] 2006: 254) transsexual "monster" wishes, "May your rage
 39 inform your actions and your actions transform you as you struggle to transform your
 40 world"; and Kate Bornstein (1994: 81) has noted that "our anger is a message to ourselves
 that we have to get active and change something in order to survive."
18. Not all feminist love serves transformational antiracist politics. See, for example, Ortega
 (2006), in which she identifies a "loving, knowing ignorance—an ignorance of the
 thought and experience of women of color that is accompanied by both alleged love for
 and alleged knowledge about them" (57).
19. In her introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Stryker (2006: 11) writes, "Those
 who commit violence against transgender people routinely seek to excuse their own

1 behavior by claiming they have been unjustly deceived by a mismatch between the other's
 2 gender and genitals." We see cultural representations of this phenomenon in, for
 3 example, Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992), Duncan Tucker's *TransAmerica* (2005);
 4 even Paul Abbott's recent *Hit or Miss* (2012) reproduces this trope, which has been
 5 sustained and sensationalized by the TV talk show "shocker" genre. In addition to *The*
 6 *Fully Functional Cabaret*, see Sherilyn Connelly's "The Big Reveal" in Bergman and
 7 Bornstein's *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* (2010) for a welcome subversion.

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