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A new materialist approach to transmasculinity.

Bodies, acts, and objects.

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Abstract

This study explores a transmasculine embodiment through bodies, acts, and objects, from a new materialist perspective. The study is situated within the field of transgender studies, and the research question, ‘how can transmasculine embodiment through the materialities of the body and everyday acts and objects be understood through new materialism’, is answered through an autoethnography. Key findings are that a) a trans-becoming emerges through the phenomenon of meeting someone’s eyes, b) through material-discursive practices transmasculine people work with and against the body, and c) onto-epistemologies of race and gender emerge through the interplay of temporal, spatial, and corporeal processes.

Keywords: new materialism; transmasculinity; agential realism; transgender studies; autoethnography

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I would not have been able to write my thesis, was it not for an array of elements in intra-action with each other. From a new materialist perspective, the vast amount of components that effect and affect my life and decisions are overwhelming and limitless. However, I would like to highlight some.

I am indebted to various trans communities, activists and people, for inspiring, listening, challenging, and accepting me. Especially to the five participants of this study, I hope I do justice to your stories.

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1. Introduction

My thesis focuses on a theoretical approach of new materialism to transmasculine embodiment, through the materialities of bodies and seemingly small everyday acts and objects. I argue that such a perspective can lead to new and more complex understandings of the experienced corporeality of transmasculine people. I use the concept of corporeality to point towards the physicality of the body, the sense of bodily boundary, and a sense of what parts of the body are doing (Scully, 2012). The research question I have formulated to aid me in this research is, ‘how can transmasculine embodiment through the materialities of the body and everyday acts and objects be understood through new materialism?’ My project has a deductive approach, in the sense that through my research I illustrate the effective use of the theory of new materialism.

1.1 Starting point

The cultural turn, also referred to as the linguistic turn, has initiated a focus on cultural meanings of social interactions within social sciences. This turn has led to a move away from material, fearing this would lead to the trap of essentialism or naturalism (Lane, 2016). Within the social sciences, poststructuralism (as a philosophy of social science) has dominated the discourse on gender and sexuality, influenced by the work *Gender Trouble* (1990/2007) by Judith Butler and *The History of Sexuality* (1979/1997) by Michel Foucault. However, some have argued that the focus on culture has downplayed the importance of matter and materiality (Barad, 2003; Coole & Frost, 2010; van der Tuin, 2011), summarised in the popularised saying within a new materialist discourse of ‘matter matters’.

I focus on the embodiment of transgender people, because it is my personal experience that the discussion of our/their materiality and corporeality is often avoided, due to a legitimate fear of essentialism, which to this day stands at the core of the erasure and denial of our identities and existence. This mechanism is especially evident in the denial of access of trans women to traditional women’s spaces, as is apparent in the case of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, where trans women were excluded from participation and attendance (Williams, 2013). It

is my experience, however, that my corporeality matters a great deal in relation to my embodiment of gender and of race. However, at the same time, it is very difficult to talk about this topic, especially within trans activist spaces. I link this to the dominant discourse of the importance of culture in discussions of gender. Through this research, I will aim to challenge and soften this taboo around the materiality of trans bodies, by approaching the topic through the theoretical framework of new materialism.

Though there has been research conducted on specific arenas of transmasculine embodiment, less attention has been granted to the everyday acts and objects through which we embody our identities (Vaccaro, 2010). Therefore, I will focus on seemingly small everyday acts and objects, on the premise that these small things have a big impact, and might act as a base of our relation to our corporeality. My main focus is on *acts*, and not *interactions* as microsociology might suggest in the exploration of everyday human life (Corbetta, 2003), because I am especially interested in the acts that happen in absence of people who might Other¹ us based on those acts. Examples might be, going to the toilet, drinking a hot beverage, or sitting on the couch.

I will focus on the materialities of everyday acts, objects and bodies. By embracing all three, I aim to subvert the seemingly clear distinctions between them, as understood from a postmodernist or poststructuralist standpoint. Rather than approaching acts as a doing – as part of the realm of temporality – objects as physical things or passive matter, and the body – according to a Cartesian dualism – as the vessel of our mind, I approach acts, objects and bodies as constituting and forming each other. This understanding is based on an agential realism that new materialism has put forth (Barad, 2003).

Within the focus of the research question, ‘how can transmasculine embodiment through the materialities of the body and everyday acts and objects be understood through new materialism,’ I find it important to not fall back into

¹ Through the process of Othering those who are perceived to differ from a dominant norm are identified, it often (re)produces power relations of domination and subordination.

explaining our experiences and existence only through the notion of misery. Recently, I attended a meeting with other trans people (identifying both within and outside the gender binary), in which it was voiced that the recent media attention on trans lives has had a predominant focus on transgender misery. Our lives are understood through this discourse of misery – e.g. born in the wrong body, gender dysphoria, violence, and discrimination – and though these are all legitimate expressions and experiences of trans people, I argue that a focus solely on misery limits our scope of understanding of ourselves, but equally important of cis people’s understanding of us. Within trans meetings, as well as in online community spaces, there has been a growing call for a focus on positive aspects of our lives, this has been typified through the concept of gender euphoria, as an antonym to gender dysphoria. The notion of gender euphoria is therefore an important approach for my thesis project, as well as a personal driving force.

Structure

In this first chapter, I discuss my own positionality in relation to my research, followed by an introduction to the field of transgender studies. The second chapter elaborates on the genealogy and context of new materialism, and lays the foundation for my third chapter. In this, I give an elaboration and deeper exploration of new materialism in relation to my research focus, and explain concepts and notions I use in my analysis. In the fourth chapter, I assess different methodological approaches relevant for my research design. This chapter also contains my ethical considerations and reflections. I give a new materialistic analysis and discussion of the collected data in dialogue with autobiographical material in the fifth chapter. The final chapter gives a conclusion on this work.

1.2 My position

Starting with my own positionality in relation to my research, it is tempting to give you a list of my social positions and call it that, but as feminist scholars have argued, positionality should go beyond the static and performative listing of intersections (Haraway, 1988; Raun, 2014). To move away from confessional reflexivity and

towards accountability, I need to be proactive, I need to reflect and actively learn more about my positions and privileges and incorporate the outcomes of these reflections in my own knowledge productions. Simply stating a list with my varying positionalities would be unfair to myself, would reproduce identity politics, but would also not improve my writing. My being is complex, ambiguous, and contradictory, and in my writings I have also chosen to not be visible in all my complexities. Being visible in itself, would not improve my knowledge production, it is through an incorporated accountability that I keep pushing to learn more and give voice and space to marginalised voices. All while keeping Spivak's (1988) warning against epistemic violence towards the Other in mind.

When writing about my trans experience, it is important to note that my experiences are not universal for others, no matter how much we are alike. There is no homogeneous trans experience, not even among transmasculine people. Dean Spade, professor of Law and trans activist, argues in the context of intersectionality, that for every gain or inclusion that is made, someone who already had to deal with more oppression will be left behind (D. Spade, personal communication, May 26, 2016).² An example is the bathroom panic, that has recently been making waves in the United States. As binaohan (2014) argues, it is not about who gets to use which bathroom, rather it is about access to shelters and safe places for indigenous and/or people of colour (IaoPoC). By reframing the issue to only that concerning bathrooms, the narrative is whitewashed and 'masc washed'³ (binaohan, 2014).

Terminology

For the dimension of race I use Indo for myself, referring to my mixed heritage of Indonesia and Dutch colonialism. (I will elaborate upon this in the analysis.) When talking in more generalised terms I have used people of colour (PoC), IaoPoC, and

² Throughout this paper I have made a few references to personal communication I had with Dean Spade and Lann Hornscheidt. These conversations took place during the three-day PhD course *Trans Studies & Intersectional Activism*, which took place in Stockholm from May 25-27, 2016.

³ binaohan uses the notion 'masc washed' in addition to whitewashed, indicating a dominant norm of and focus on masculinity.

black people as dimensions of race. I lend the term IaoPoC from binaohan (2014), in which they include black people as well. I like the terminology, because it demands attention to the role of colonialization within racialisation. At first I only read its meaning as US based, thinking of the indigenous people of the Americas, but my understanding of it now incorporates indigenous people throughout the colonised world.

In this paper I have used the term trans and transgender as interchangeable, to refer to a gender experience which differs from one's assigned gender/sex at birth. Moreover, a gender transition⁴ is not necessary for a trans experience. In the introduction to the field of transgender studies I elaborate on the different usages of terminology to refer to trans phenomena.

As a general rule, I keep any identity labels people have taken for themselves, unless they have asked me to leave them out. For example, someone might have been comfortable sharing experiences and ideas with me due to a shared dimension of oppression, but have asked me to leave it out of my text. This also applies for the pronouns people use for themselves. For example, this paper includes the use of singular they as a gender neutral pronoun.⁵

Political activism and academic knowledge production

My political activism and academic knowledge production overlap, they shape one another, are entangled and inseparable. Next to this, the majority of the respondents of my research are people I know from activist circles, and/or are my friends. I elaborate on the specific ethical considerations this brings along in the fourth chapter. As Spade argues, ethical scholarship is not about distance, rather it should be closely linked to activist communities (D. Spade, personal communication, May

⁴ It is common to distinguish between different forms of transition, e.g. social or medical transition. However, from a new materialistic perspective gender transition can be seen as material-discursive practices. Thereby blurring any distinct line between cultural and biological changes and transitions. See my elaboration on new materialism in the second and third chapters.

⁵ For a grammatical account of the use of singular they see for instance the Oxford Dictionaries at <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/he-or-she-versus-they>, accessed August 7, 2016.

25, 2016). Linked to this, as well as the used methodology of autoethnography, the academic language used in this thesis might in places be more informal than others. However, this does not make my thesis automatically accessible to the activists and friends on whom I rely on for creating this work. Therefore, I have chosen to follow this thesis up with a more informal dissemination and am thinking about the use of zines, blog entries, and workshops.

1.3 The field of transgender studies

Before I position my project within the body of research of new materialism, I will put it in context of the history of transgender studies. Therefore, this subchapter contains a chronological overview of how transgender phenomena have been approached in the past.

In order to firmly situate my research in light of the history of transgender studies, I will highlight some of the important factors that led to the change of approach in the 1990s, the emergence of transgender studies as an academic research field, and introduce the dominant approaches of the field. This is followed by an exploration of the different terminologies that have been used throughout the years, and how I use different terminologies in light of these developments. Subsequently, I will situate my focus on transmasculinity within the field of transgender studies.

Pre 1990s

The field of transgender studies as it is known today emerged in the 1990s (Elliot, 2010; Stryker & Aizura, 2013b). This is not to say there has been no previous research conducted on transgender phenomena. Before the 1990s this body of research mainly focused on “psychology and medicalization of transsexualism” (Whittle, 2006, p. xii). For example, Richard van Krafft-Ebing categorised so called ‘psychosexual diseases’, which was published in his work *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1877. Krafft-Ebing’s assumption was that anything deviating from procreative heterosexuality was either an emotional or physical disease. In his work,

homosexuality was conflated with what would be – from the 1950s onwards – referred to as transsexuality (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p. 21).

Another highly influential, but in contemporary discourses contested work, is by John Money, who was a psychologist and sexologist. Money coined the term *gender* in 1957, which he used to refer to a psychological sex (Preciado, 2013). Money became most known for his claim of psychosexual neutrality of young children, the idea that a child will adapt well to a different gender through the use of socialisation and surgeries, and develop normally (Butler, 2006, p. 184). To prove his claim, Money studied David, whose genitals were mutilated at eight months old. Money recommended his parents to raise him as Brenda, socialise him as a girl and hide the fact he was assigned male at birth. Money castrated the child as a preliminary surgery for vaginoplasty and wrote many articles in which he claimed the case was a success, and validated his claim that gender was based on nurture, not nature. However, as was later shown, David never felt at home in his assigned female gender, started to resist the medical and psychological team and at the age of fourteen started to transition back to his assigned male gender at birth. Later on, Money's work has been used by critics as proof against the 'gender is all nurture' claim, and instead used it to claim gender is all nature (Butler, 2006).

In their introduction of *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura characterize the pre-1990s discourse as “the *performance* of certain objectifying and minoritizing ways of understanding trans phenomena [...] which understood itself as constituting a *science* of the sexed and gendered self” (Stryker & Aizura, 2013b, p. 2). The discourse of the pre-1990s was situated in a field which was dominated by a positivist understanding of science, i.e. measuring and indexing of trans phenomena.

Change

Susan Stryker (2006) illustrated, that the times that led up to the paradigm shift of the 1990s were filled with complexities.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union, the end of the cold war, the rise of the United States as a unipolar superpower, the development of the European Union as the first multi-national state, and the elaboration of new global forms of capital during these years precipitated a pervasive, deeply motivated, critical re-examination of various conceptual binaries. Sex/gender systems, like other cultural constructs, deformed and reformed in tandem with new material circumstances. (Stryker, 2006, p. 8)

Besides this, she notes, is the tense relationship of the parallel emergence of transgender studies and queer studies. The two fields are overlapping, but a distinction can be made in that queer studies has its focus on deviant sexualities, and its strength was often based on an essentialist division between sex and gender (Stryker, 2006). The tension can be appointed to different feminisms who were challenged in their essentialists ideas of what it means to be a women, through a focus on transgender phenomena (Stryker, 2006). Stephen Whittle – a trans activist and legal scholar on transgender law – noted the important factor of the upcoming queer/trans community to the paradigm change of the 1990s. Adding, that the rising community activism moved away from the earlier views that trans was a mental and medical disorder (Whittle, 2006). Another addition is made by sociologist Patricia Elliot, who notes that the discourse and paradigm shifted with Sandy Stone’s publication of *The Empire Strikes Back*, in 1991 (Elliot, 2010). This manifesto was a response to the book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of The She-Male* by Janice Raymond in 1979. In this work, Stone was personally attacked for appropriating and invading women only spaces as a trans woman, through a dismissal of her womanhood. Stone’s (1991/2006) manifesto called for different representations of womanhood and transsexual lives from the standpoints of trans people.

Post 1990s

Transgender studies, as a contemporary field of study, emerged in the 1990s. In response to modern epistemology – “that treats gender merely as a social, linguistic,

or subjectively representation of an objectively knowable material sex” – it has embraced the postmodern philosophical strands of social constructionism and poststructuralism (Stryker, 2006, p. 8). In contrast to earlier work, the field is highly interdisciplinary, with input from the humanities, psychology, arts, social sciences, and physical sciences (Stryker, 2006). Another clear distinction is that the knowledge production on trans phenomena after the 1990s is increasingly produced by trans people themselves, and is in this sense using a Foucauldian notion of subjugated knowledge in practice (Stryker, 2006).

In *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, which followed the first volume seven years later, Stryker and Aizura (2013a) divide the field of transgender studies (post 1990s) in two eras, the first is coined posttranssexual, the second as postposttranssexual or transgender studies 2.0. Posttranssexual – inspired after the foundational work of Sandy Stone – since the works of trans scholars and activist at that time, imagined new categories of identity and analysis (Stryker & Aizura, 2013a). The second era in the post 1990s, emerged with a generational shift of perspective, at the time when millennials replaced the Generation X. In the context of post 9/11, global economies and ecological crises, transgender studies 2.0 was in critique and reaction to the dominant whiteness and US centred focus of the earlier work post 1990s (Stryker & Aizura, 2013a). In context of the neoliberal environment of academia and its focus on publishing quota, the transgender studies 2.0 also called for caution to not appropriate the lived lives of trans people (Stryker & Aizura, 2013a). Within this study I will refer to the field of transgender studies as it emerged in the early 1990s, without making a distinction between posttranssexual and postposttranssexual.

Terminology pre and post 1990

Something that is a recurring theme in any marginalised group trying to gain recognition, is the political use of language. To claim and reclaim a label for oneself is to (re)claim a space. It is without surprise that there seems to be a continuing struggle around terminology within trans communities. Without trying to come to a fixed conclusion, or a definite and objective look at the past, of which I was not

part of, I will try to give a short overview of the main language used to explain ourselves and each other. My choice of terminology will with no doubt be coloured by my generational position, as well as my Western upbringing and positionality. This overview will not go further than to aid in the understanding of this thesis, to aim otherwise would be to write a separate thesis on the topic.

Terminology	Time	Elaboration
Transvestite	1910	This term was coined in 1910 by sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, and it was initially used as an umbrella term to indicate towards a range of gender variant identities and behaviours (M. A. Adams, 2015; Stryker, 2008). However, as Mary Adams (2015) notes, after the introduction of the term transsexual it was solely used for cross dressers. Stryker (2008) adds to this that the term was also mainly used to refer to men who cross-dressed for erotic pleasure.
Transsexual	1950	The term transsexual was popularised in the 1950s, and it indicated a gender identity that differed from one's biological sex (M. A. Adams, 2015; Stryker, 2008). Hill (2013) concurs that during the 1960s and 70s the distinction between transvestite and transsexual was that the latter obtained a 'sex reassignment surgery', now preferably referred to as sex re-affirmative surgery (SRS).
Cross-dresser		The term cross-dresser is used instead of the term transvestite, which is considered to be derogatory, it also does not have the same erotic connotation as transvestite might carry (M. A. Adams, 2015; Stryker, 2008).

MTF / FTM		MTF (male-to-female) and FTM (female-to-male) are used in relation to respectively trans women and trans men who have undergone SRS (M. A. Adams, 2015). Within online trans communities, I have personally experienced a distancing of the need of SRS to use the label MTF/FTM.
Gender dysphoria	1980	The American Psychiatric Association (APA) recognised gender dysphoria as a psychiatric condition in 1980, and was subsequently included in the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</i> (DSM) (M. A. Adams, 2015). It indicates a feeling of disconnection and/or distress between one's gendered body and identity (M. A. Adams, 2015; Stryker, 2008).
Gender Identity Disorder (GID)	1980 - 2013	The DSM referred to GID as a mental illness, of which gender dysphoria was a symptom (M. A. Adams, 2015; Stryker, 2008). The inclusion of GID in the DSM was highly contested in trans communities, it gave trans people medical legitimacy to access health care, while at the same time pathologising them and labelling their identity as an disorder (Stryker, 2008). In 2013, the category of GID was removed from the DSM and replaced with gender dysphoria (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
Transgender	1980	According to Mary Adams (2015), the term transgender emerged in 1980 to function as a universal label, similar as transvestite was meant in earlier times. Stryker (2008), argues that though the term gained popularity since the turn of the millennium, it has a longer history. In general

		it is used as a "movement away from an initially assigned gender position" (Stryker, 2008, p. 19).
Trans*	1980	Trans* has also been used since the 1980s, and though it is short for transgender, it was meant to be more inclusive (M. A. Adams, 2015). In 2013, I observed a short lived revival of the term, and its argument to be more inclusive than transgender. However, many people, especially trans women and nonbinary people, have stressed that the term is not more inclusive, and that by claiming a need for the term trans*, the terms transgender/trans become less inclusive (Serano, 2015).
Trans		Mary Adams (2015) notes that trans is used as prefix, e.g. transwoman. However, I use this term as short for transgender, and not necessarily as a prefix, rather as an adjective.
Cisgender	1944	Cisgender has been coined by biologist Dana Leland Defrosse in 1944 (Adams, p. 178), as the antonym of transgender it indicates a nontransgender identity and is used to highlight the unmarked nontransgender status of words such as man and woman (Stryker, 2008).
Genderqueer	1990	Stryker (2008) point out that the term genderqueer has been in use since the early 1990s. Similarly as queer, it indicates a political orientation, and includes people who resist gender norms without SRS (Stryker, 2008).

Mary Adams (2015) illustrates that from the early 21st century, there has been a growing number of gender identity labels to distance and specify gender experiences, e.g. agender and bigender. Agender indicates a lack of gender, while

bigender points to an identity and experience that fluctuates between two or more genders (M. A. Adams, 2015). Hill (2013) notes there was also a wide range of gender identity labels in use during the 20th century, which I have chosen to omit in this text.

In my text I have chosen to use both transgender and trans as umbrella terms, including both people who do and do not want SRS. I would also like to point out, and move away from the unmarked status of binary gender of the term transgender. As the labels agender and bigender indicate, a transgender identity and experience can go between and beyond the dichotomous genders of male and female.

1.4 Transgender studies, transmasculinity, and my research.

My research topic of the embodiment and corporeality of transmasculinity has been well established in the last two decades. It is a popularised assumption that there has been a strong focus on trans women, with little room from trans men. However, Stryker and Wittle (2006, p. 40). 40) pointed out that it was not until 1952 that the focus shifted towards trans women, due to sensational publicity around the SRS of Christine Jorgensen (a trans woman). Before 1952, Stryker and Wittle (2006) argued, there was a high interest in women with deviant gender performances and identities, something we might now categorise under transgender men. The focus changed again with the more recent paradigm change of the 1990s, with a (returned) interest in transgender men. This can be illustrated by a special section in the first *Transgender Studies Reader*, which contained 85 pages devoted solely to articles on transgender masculinities, without an equivalent for transgender femininities, let alone transgender androgyny. However, Henry Rubin argued that the rise of a more visible FTM population began in the 1970s, due to “identity work in the lesbian community” (Rubin, 2003, p. 64).

Postmodernity, influenced by the linguistic turn, gave way for contemporary ways to explore gender. One leading example is Judith Butler’s conceptualisation of gender as performative (1990/2007). However, Henry Rubin (2003) illustrated in his book *Self-Made Men*, that the experiences of the people he had interviewed

did not fit easily within the theories of social constructionism. He found that the bodies of FTM people mattered to them, and argued that "bodies are a crucial element in personal identity formation and perception" (Rubin, 2003, p. 11). He critiqued social constructionist theories on gender, for a lack of understanding of the importance of the body for people who are routinely misrecognised, and whose bodies caused gender dysphoria (Rubin, 2003). Salamon's book *Assuming a Body: Transgender And Rhetorics of Materiality* (2010), also puts emphasis on the body through which it is argued that masculinity is felt and expressed. In light of these works, an exploration of the use of new materialism in relation of transmasculinities, can be seen as a continuation of interest focus on the linkage between materiality and trans experiences.

2. Emergence of new materialism

In this chapter I will lay the foundation of my theoretical approach of new materialism. I will introduce main scholars – such as Karen Barad, Diana Coole, Samantha Frost, and Mel Chen– and will give a brief overview of their main theoretical arguments in the field of new materialism. I start with sketching a brief genealogy of new materialism, since a more thorough look into its history and genealogy would acquire a profound knowledge of wide ranging philosophical strands, as well as a deep understanding of different disciplines within natural sciences. Something which I have not acquired in my studies, as well as something that this thesis does not give space for. Rather, I have chosen to position different leading scholars and point towards their different starting points. This will be followed by an elaboration on more specific research projects which have combined the fields of transgender studies and new materialism.

2.1 Historical context and genealogy

New materialism departs from the premises that nature and culture are not dichotomous to each other, in fact, it tries to dismantle an array of dichotomies, such as body – mind, human – nonhuman animals, technology – nature, and ontology – epistemology. In this sense it aims to bridge, blur, fold, mystify, blend, and destroy hegemonic ideas and assumptions about these dichotomies, and in this sense of our lives. New materialism emerges from different departure points and focusses, for which multiple categorisations have been proposed. What is important to know, however, is that new materialism is not a continuation of Marxist historical materialism and its study of modes of production (Jagger, 2015). Rather, new materialism departs from an ontological exploration of possibilities of materiality. Understanding matter as something less fixed and determined, and more ambiguous and complex, it uses this notion to bridge cultural and biological understandings of life.

It can be argued that there is not something inherently new to new materialism (Ahmed, 2008; Hemmings, 2009; van der Tuin, 2008). New materialism is not new

in the sense that science, or even specifically social sciences, has never before looked at the materiality of things or its relation to human culture. However, there is a clear ontological distinction which compasses new materialism, which is not always understood as merely a continuation of previous strands of materialism or feminism. As Noela Davis (2014) argues, new materialism should not be understood as a distancing or disavowal of previous feminist theorizing, rather, new materialism can be understood as a renewed interest in matter and materiality.

Tracing the materialist roots of new materialism back to predating modernity, Barad (2003), and Coole and Frost (2010) reference Democritus, René Descartes and Isaac Newton, as highly influential for contemporary western understanding of materiality and its relation to human culture. Democritus was a Greek philosopher in the 5th century B.C.E. and proposed that everything in the world is built from the same smallest material, termed atoms (Barad, 2003). René Descartes was influenced in his understanding of matter by Democritus, and defined matter as “corporeal substance constituted of length, breadth, and thickness; as extended, uniform, and inert” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p.7). In this sense, matter was understood as passive, contrary to the cogito (I think), leading to the Cartesian dualism of body-mind. From a western perspective, Isaac Newton laid the foundation of modern physics in the 17th century, and in turn was influenced by Descartes’ understanding of matter.

More recently, historical materialism, influenced by Marxism, has focused on the modes of production to understand mode of relations. For this, a Cartesian-Newtonian understanding of matter was used. Within poststructuralism, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler were among others who created space to the importance of the materiality of the body. However, within these endeavours, matter has always been rendered inert and passive (van der Tuin, 2011), and culture and performativity were understood to be more important than materiality. This has led to different critiques from a transgender perspective. Stryker and Whittle argue that:

For many transgender readers, Butler’s insistence that gender is always ultimately about something else devalues their experience of gender identity’s

profound ontological claim – that it is precisely about the realness and inalienability of that identity, rather than about anything else. (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p. 138)

In contrast, new materialism understands materiality as “always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 9). It is also on this understanding that my use of materiality is based.

Iris van de Tuin uses a new materialist approach to understand the genealogy of new materialism. She argues “it is still unclear *how* new materialism is new” (2011, p. 276), and argues a new materialist understanding of quantum leaps could be used to understand its genealogy. Instead of looking at new materialism as a paradigm shift or a move away from the linguistic turn, she argues new materialism can be seen as a leap into the future. For this, she uses Barad’s explanation on the notion of quantum leaps. In Barad’s words,

Quantum leaps aren’t jumps (large or small) through space and time. An electron that ‘leaps’ from one orbital to another does not travel along some continuous trajectory from here-now to there-then. [...] What makes a quantum leap unlike any other is that there is no determinate answer to the question of where and when they happen. The point is that it is the intra-play of continuity and discontinuity, determinacy and indeterminacy, possibility and impossibility that constitutes the differential space-time mattering of the world. (Barad, 2007, p. 182)

Through this notion, new materialism can be seen as inevitable step, while at the same time queering the linear understanding of its genealogy and future possibilities.

Leaving behind van der Tuin’s understanding of the emergence of new materialism, the more general understanding is that new materialism is a reaction to the cultural and linguistic turn (Barad, 2003; Coole & Frost, 2010), though

Bennet places new materialism in relation and reaction to environmentalism (Bennet, 2010). Both understandings, however, can be read as a reaction to the use of matter which has been rendered as mere passive and immutable (Barad, 2003). Through new materialism, matter and materiality is brought to the foreground again. Coole and Frost (2010) argue that matter is everywhere, we are immersed in it, and in light of this, the power of matter cannot be ignored. Bennet (2010) argues for a vitality of matter, a so called vibrant matter, and inspired by her, Chen (2012) argues for the animacy of matter, which is used as a critical move instead of terms such as life and liveliness.

More detailed, Coole and Frost (2010) point to three elements to which new materialism has been a reaction. Firstly, advances in natural sciences, especially that of particle physics and chaos and complexity theory, have given new light to sociomaterial⁶ processes. Following, in light of these recent developments, sociomaterial processes should be understood as part of a “wider natural environment” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p.13). For instance, Barad argues that representationalism is intrinsically embedded within Western culture, meaning that representations are understood as ontologically distinct from what they represent (Barad, 2003). Barad traces this representationalism back to Democritus’s atomism, in which he proposed that all matter is built from the same small units, namely atoms (Barad, 2003). This notion has been used to come to an understanding of matter as fixed and stable, since everything is built from the same fixed and stable atoms. However, the discovery of electrons, neutrons, and protons – the building stones of atoms – has radically changed this understanding. Neutrons and protons are built from quarks, which are elements that cannot be understood as fixed or passive, they jump in and out of existence, radically altering our previous understanding of all matter being fixed. Barad explains that while electrons defy the previously presumed clear cut ontological distinction between particles and waves, being both and neither at the same time (van der Tuin, 2011). This leads to

⁶ I understand sociomaterial processes as processes concerning simultaneously material and sociological realities.

a contradicting ontology, since a particle is a localised entity, and characteristic of it is that it cannot be at the same place at the same time as another particle. However, waves can occupy the same place at the same time, think for instance of waves created by two pebbles in a pond. In light of these new discoveries, the ontology of matter has changed, and new materialism thus argues that sociomaterial process should therefore be understood through these recent developments (Coole & Frost, 2010).

Secondly, Coole and Frost (2010) point to the ethical and political concerns linked to the advances in natural sciences. This can be linked to posthumanist endeavours in explorations and elaborations in matter and living matter. In contemporary times, boundaries and dichotomies between human and nonhuman are blurred, leading to new ethical and political concern. Think for instance of cases where people are kept alive in a comatose state, unable to live without the active impulses of machinery. These technological advances have pushed our understanding of the boundaries between living and dead, and with it comes a whole set of ethical considerations. The third element to which Coole and Frost (2010) point, is the exhaustion of “radicalism of the dominant discourses which have flourished under the cultural turn”, leading to a material realist approach (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 6).

2.2 Relation between new materialism and posthumanism

I read new materialism and posthumanism as two distinct, yet overlapping fields of knowledge production. From a new materialist stance Karen Barad argues that “theories that focus exclusively on the materialization of ‘human’ bodies miss the crucial point that the very practices by which the differential boundaries of the ‘human’ and the ‘nonhuman’ are drawn are always already implicated in particular materializations” (Barad, 2003, p. 824). Therefore, a dichotomy between human and nonhuman animals makes no sense in light of new materialism, linking it to the scholarly advances of posthumanism (Barad, 2003). At the same time, Haraway’s

influential article⁷ to posthumanism, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, And Socialist-Feminism In The Late Twentieth Century*, analyses “embodiment, identity, and desire: the boundaries between humans and nonhuman animals, between organisms and machines, and between the physical world and immaterial things” (Haraway, 2006, p. 103). This in turn could be read as a new materialistic endeavour. I have not come to a clear understanding of the differences between the two fields, as there also may not always be a clear distinction between new materialism and posthumanism. For this project I choose to focus on new materialism and its project to disrupt clear ontological distinctions of aspects that constitute our world and lives. I have omitted posthumanism from my literature review to limit the scope of this research.

2.3 Different streams of materialism

There are different ways to distinguish materialist discourses. A broad distinction can be made between feminist materialism and material feminism (also referred to as new materialism), and is based on how matter is approached and defined. *Feminist materialism* is inspired by Marxism, and is focused on “women’s material living conditions” (Hird, 2009, p. 329). This branch of materialism is influenced by historical materialism and examines the ways in which material and one’s access to material relates to class and modes of relations. In contrast to this, *material feminism* is a philosophical approach to matter, which questions the hegemonic ontological understanding of matter. Hird and Roberts describe material feminism as “a critique of the ontological conditions that separate nature from culture” (Hird & Roberts, 2011, p. 211), thus questioning what matter is and can be. Feminist materialism and material feminism can therefore be understood through their differences in ontological understandings of matter.

Within new materialism, different streams are created through the differentiation of a philosophical focus of analysis. My theoretical understanding of new materialism is inspired as an ontological exploration of materiality, blurring

⁷ First published in 1983.

the lines between ontology and epistemology, and moving towards onto-epistemology. The notion of onto-epistemology has been coined by Barad and understands matter and meaning as “immanently enfolded and transitional” (van der Tuin, 2011, p. 58), leaving epistemology and ontology intrinsically enmeshed together.

Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010) distinguish three core themes within new materialisms, or what Hird and Roberts refer to as material feminism (though different understandings exist, making the two not directly interchangeable). These three themes can be traced back to the previously mentioned three elements to which they believe new materialism has been a reaction to. Coole and Frost’s three themes are; 1) ontological reorientation of materiality, which focuses on “new scientific conceptualizations of matter”; 2) biomaterialism, which elaborates on biopolitical and bioethical considerations and “challenges to understandings of life and human condition”; 3) and critical materialism, which critically reengages political economy, by exploring “the material details of everyday life and broader geopolitical and socioeconomic structures” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 7). I position my research project within the first and third theme. After a close elaboration of the ontology of matter, I will apply a new materialistic perspective to the materialities of bodies and everyday acts and objects of transmasculine lives.

2.4 Transgender studies and new materialism

Many trans scholars and their studies are rooted within poststructuralism. On this topic Sari Irni reflects that, “the interesting point for a reader such as myself, who is academically schooled under the influence of post-structuralist teachers and text, is how to think about *realism* precisely *without* resorting to such ‘facts of matter’” (Irni, 2013, p. 45). Kathleen Lennon notes in her entry in *Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, that “if gender becomes a matter of bodily style and performance”, as suggested by poststructuralists such as Judith Butler, “then there is no necessary link between gender and any particular bodily shape” (Lennon, 2014, paragraph 4.1). However, such performative account of sex and gender does not explain how materiality and the sense of self are in interplay. As stated before, within

poststructuralism, the imaginary of materiality differs from that of new materialism. Illustrative, Butler understands matter as “*a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*” (Butler, 1993, p. 9). Riki Lane (2009) argues that new materialism opens up possibilities to different understandings of trans, instead of a social constructionist approach to the biological body as passive and fixed, he argues that new materialism focusses on the intra-actions between biological and social processes, something I will elaborate upon in the following chapter.

Before I elaborate on specific studies that combine new materialism and trans phenomena, I want to point to three distinct groupings I encountered during my literature review. First, are studies within transgender studies which are situated in either social constructionism or poststructuralism, and focus on different types of materiality in relation to trans realities.⁸ These works do not use new materialistic approaches and understandings, and are therefore not included in this paper. Second, are studies – either situated in poststructuralism, posthumanism, or material feminism – that use a more open imaginary of materiality, one that can be interpreted as a new materialistic one, or one that could be read as such.⁹ Third, are the studies that explicitly situate themselves within new materialism, deriving their theoretical framework from previous new materialist scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz and Karen Barad. I situate my own study in the latter category, and thus this text is mainly focused on studies with this similar framework, but will also, to a lesser account, include studies which can be placed in the second category.

⁸ See for instance: Zimman, L. (2013). Hegemonic masculinity and the variability of gay-sounding speech: The perceived sexuality of transgender men. *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 2(1), 1-39.; Moody, C., Fuks, N., Peláez, S., & Smith, N. G. (2015). 'Without this, I would for sure already be dead': A qualitative inquiry regarding suicide protective factors among trans adults. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 2(3), 266-280. doi:10.1037/sgd0000130; and Bolger, A., Jones, T., Dunstan, D., & Lykins, A. (2014). Australian trans men: Development, sexuality, and mental health. *Australian Psychologist*, 49(6), 395-402.

⁹ See for example: Baril, A. (2015). Needing to acquire a physical impairment/disability: (re)thinking the connections between trans and disability studies through transability. *Hypatia*, 30(1), 30-48.

Examples of theoretical new materialistic elaborations on trans phenomena are the works by Mel Chen (2012), Reese Simpkins (2016), and Riki Lane (2009). Chen (2012) and Lane (2009), both through their own merits, argues that trans identities cannot be seen as a determinate space. Chen comes to this conclusion through a critique to the imaginary of gender as a dichotomy between “two monolithic, autonomous poles, as for example, ‘female’ and ‘male’” (Chen, 2012, p. 136). Instead, she argues that *trans*- indicates a more emergent space, which intervenes with other categories. In this, her argument for a more profound intersection of race, sexuality, and disability is embedded. Lane (2009) compares the approaches of social constructionism and new materialism, and theoretically and philosophically rethinks trans phenomena and ‘gender/sex’. He argues in favour of new materialistic understandings, arguing that the conceptualisation of intra-actions, opens up possibilities to different understandings of trans. In light of this, trans can then be understood as an intra-action between biological and social processes. (I will elaborate on the notion of intra-activity in the following chapter.) Simpkins’ (2016) work can also be read as a theoretical and new materialist exploration of trans phenomena. Through an understanding of trans materialities as a *movement*, he elaborates on intersectionality and focusses specifically on trans embodiment and materiality. Simpkins’ understanding of trans embodiment is developed through the affective possibilities of geographical and social space, which he derives from the work of Eva Hayward (2010).

Examples of explorations of specific (inter)sections of transgender phenomena, often through the use of original empirical data, are the works of Hayward (2010), Irni (2013; 2016), and Ah-King and Hayward (2014). Eva Hayward’s (2010) – partially autoethnographic – work uses the spatial location of the city in combination of the metaphor of the spider as a departure to elaborate on a transsexuality which is “relational in terms of social, economic, and political milieus as well as spatial, affective, and speciated registers” (Hayward, 2010, p.225). Following Barad’s (2003) notion of material-discursive apparatus¹⁰, Irni

¹⁰ An elaboration and explanation of the material-discursive apparatus is given in the next chapter.

(2013; 2016) explores the affective possibilities of sex hormones, such as testosterone. She argues that the effects of hormones become knowledgeable within the reading of specific apparatuses. Following, that “sex hormones, for example testosterone, may also be active in society in other ways than having chemical effects” (Irimi, 2013, p. 48-49). Ah-King and Hayward (2014) also focus on hormones, but through the framework of toxicity and endocrine disruptions. In this work, they argue that sex is responsive, instead of resistant to ‘bio-industrial-chemical advances’ (Ah-King & Hayward, 2014, p. 7). This line of thinking (sex is responsive) can be continued, following that materiality and culture are intrinsically mashed with a sexed becoming, on which I elaborate in the next chapter.

3. Theory of new materialism

In this chapter, I will go deeper into the theory of new materialism. Through the previous chapters I situated my work within the field of transgender studies, and elaborated on the emergence of new materialism. To recap my project, through this study I explore how new materialism can be used for a theoretical analysis of transmasculine embodiment. For this, I have conducted an autoethnography. This chapter will continue with an argumentation on why I have chosen new materialism, followed by an exploration of the main notions and concepts that new materialism has put forth, as well as an elaborate how they can be used to understand transmasculinity.

3.1 Why new materialism?

As human beings we inhabit an ineluctably material world. We live our everyday lives surrounded by, immersed in, matter. We are ourselves composed of matter. We experience its restlessness and intransigence even as we reconfigure and consume it. At every turn we encounter physical objects fashioned by human design and endure natural forces whose imperatives structure our daily routines for survival. Our existence depends from one moment to the next on myriad micro-organisms and diverse higher species, on our own hazily understood bodily and cellular reactions and on pitiless cosmic motions, on the material artifacts and natural stuff that populate our environment, as well as on socioeconomic structures that produce and reproduce the conditions of our everyday lives. In light of this massive materiality, how could we be anything other than materialist? How could we ignore the power of matter and the ways it materializes in our ordinary experiences or fail to acknowledge the primacy of matter in our theories? (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 1)

This paragraph resonated with an uneasy feeling I have had for a couple of years. Three years ago, and at the eve of the start of my master in gender studies, I came

out to friends and family as transgender. After reading more and more queer and feminist theories and moving into the field of transgender studies, I also started to analyze my own existence on an academic level. Within my master's degree I have been mainly educated in social constructionism and poststructuralism in context of feminist and queer theories. The euphoric feeling of using a Foucauldian notion of power wore off, and Butler's exploration of gender as performative gave an unfulfilling feeling. It gave me a limited explanation of gender and it felt to me that the theories I read missed something profound, something in hind sight was so obvious: the role of matter.

Analyzing my own feelings, experiences and existence is difficult, if not impossible, if I would want to remain objective and sane. But feminism has taught me that objectivity is always already fraud. As feminist scholars have argued and illustrated, it would be presumptuous of me to assume my own objectivity in any study (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004). The complexities of oppressions and privileges that I embody in my every move are not neatly separated. On the notion of sanity, inspired by critical disability theories and activism, I gave up on being sane or achieving sanity a long time ago.

The mere cultural understanding of identity and gender, did not sit well with my corporeal experiences. Though I chose my own identity labels, I cannot escape the reality of others' judgement on me. I can uphold the fact that I am a guy, that I deal with chronic pain, and that I'm Indo, to give a few appropriate labels among many. But when somebody reads and approaches me as a woman, or even worse, a girl, who is in the peak of health and is not different from their mayonnaise bodies, what happens to me? Is the Indo trans guy with chronic pain still real? In this sense, my daily life is filled with various forms of me erasing others' views of me and others' erasing the view of myself. Is my body a static objective thing in between? A battlefield of notions of power? The body is not just a blank canvass on which I and others paint their realities on. It lives and has a certain agency of its own. Enriched with testosterone my body grows and shrinks, it more and more actively rejects others' notions of femininity, masculinity, even gender in general. In this

sense, the labels I chose for myself, and that others put on me blur, overlap, contradict and enmesh each other, while they form me at the same time.

To return to the quote and the posed question, “how could we ignore the power of matter”, such as testosterone, binders, packers, clothes, canes, bowl cuts, “and the way it materializes in our ordinary experiences or fail to acknowledge the primacy of matter in our theories” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 1)?

In discontent with the theories I was thought, I thus searched for something else, something more, something different. I might have found it in different forms of new materialisms. But in all honesty, it continues to be a learning process, similar to learning about a new lover’s body, character and specific quirks. I fell in love, been on honeymoon, and am slowly starting to come to a more down to earth view. While still in love, I am also still finding my way with it, excitingly discovering new things every day, while incorporating a feeling I could never get enough of it. In short, my words on new materialism are not objective either, and my understanding might be influenced by sheer optimism and enthusiasm. Not to discredit my own work, but to clarify and give transparency in my process and readings on the used theories and materials chosen for this work. Not only positioning myself in light of my data collection and relation to the participants of my project, but also to use Haraway’s (1988) work on standpoint theory and positionality in light of my theoretical framework.

3.2 New and renewed concepts of new materialism.

A trend many social scientist seems to embrace within the field of new materialism is the (over)use of metaphors. Take for example Vaccaro’s (2010) elaboration of felt, Barad’s (2015) experimental essay using lightning, and Hayward’s (2010) use of spiders. Another trend which new materialism can be accused of is what van der Tuin (2011) refers to as a “Baradian neologism” (p. 273). I agree that the amount of new terminology and concepts I encountered, while learning about the different strands of material feminisms, were baffling. Aware, and partly joining in van der Tuin’s critique, I have also found many exciting concepts which have (re)formed my understanding of materiality, embodiment, and transgender phenomena. As it

turns out, the majority of the used concepts for my analysis are based on notions and concepts put forth by Barad. In the next section I will elaborate upon these, and examine how other scholars have incorporated them in their research, and how I envision them in mine.

Agential realism

A highly influential philosophy of science within new materialism is Barad's agential realism, in which she combines insights given by social constructionism, postmodernism and poststructuralism (Hekman, 2008). Hekman writes that while

the traditional realism of modernism privileges matter, presupposing an independent reality about which we have knowledge. Discursive theories privilege language and deny the materiality of matter. Agential realism, in contrast, propose the 'intra-action' of matter and discourse - the inseparability of objects and agencies of observation. (Hekman, 2008, p. 104)

The following passage from Barad's own work describes what, to me, is the core of agential realism.

In summary, the universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming. The primary ontological units are not 'things' but phenomena – dynamic topological reconfigurations/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations. And the primary semantic units are not 'words' but material-discursive practices through which boundaries are constituted. This dynamism *is* agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world. (Barad, 2003, p. 818)

The concepts and notions of phenomena, apparatuses, intra-actions, material-discursive practices, and agency, are crucial in understanding this Baradian agential notion of realism. First of all, as Walker (2014) and Jagger (2015) note, Barad's understanding of *phenomena* is distinct from its use within phenomenology. Instead, Barad derives her understanding from the physicist and philosopher Niels Bohr, who sees phenomena as ontologically inseparable of objects and apparatuses

(Barad, 2003; Jagger, 2015; Loewen Walker, 2014). From this, Barad formulates phenomena as “the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting ‘components’” (Barad, 2003, p. 815). In this context, *apparatuses* point to the “particular physical arrangements that give meaning to certain concepts to the exclusion of others” (Barad, 2003, p. 819), and are simultaneously produced and part of phenomena. Irni (2013) gives the example of a hormone test result *and* the discussion of the results as one apparatus, arguing that through this particular apparatus the affective possibilities of hormones is made intelligible. Importantly, Irni (2013) also notes that the boundary of where an apparatus ends is always negotiable and never fixed in any spatiotemporal dimension. Jagger argues that “it is through material-discursive practices that particular boundaries come to be constituted” (Jagger, 2015, p. 329). *Material-discursive practices*, in turn, can be understood as an ontology of where the separation of materiality and discursiveness is given up (Barad, 2003; Irni, 2013; Jagger, 2015). In Barad’s words, “the point is not merely that there are important material factors in addition to discursive ones; rather, the issue is the conjoined material-discursive nature of constraints, conditions, and practices” (Barad, 2003, p. 823). Material-discursive practices, therefore, point towards the ways in which meaning is made through the intra-activity of materiality and discursiveness.

In light of an agential realist account of phenomena, Barad argues that “it is through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter—in both senses of the word” (Barad, 2003, p. 817). These *intra-actions* are understood in contrast to the usual *interactions*. Barad reasons, that while interactions presumes the existence of ‘independent entities’, intra-actions can be approached as a rethinking of the causal relations (Barad, 2003). Phenomena can then be understood to be produced through an ongoing and dynamic process of intra-actions (Jagger, 2015).

In short, agential realism understands phenomena to be produced through intra-actions of various components, which are made intelligible through specific apparatuses. Boundaries are constituted through material-discursive practices, which is not a mere connection of the words ‘material’ and ‘discursive’, but rather

indicates an ontology where the distinction between the two is given up (Barad, 2003; Irmi, 2013; Jagger, 2015).

Onto-epistemology

An agential realism also questions any clear distinction between ontology and epistemology. In other words, what we know is dependent on how we know. According to van der Tuin, this leads to a being and knowing that are indistinguishable from each other (van der Tuin, 2011), or what Barad calls a 'knowing in being' (2003). In light of this, Barad proposes the notion of onto-epistemology, arguing that

Practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather they are mutually implicated. We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because 'we' are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. (Barad, 2003, p. 829)

In this section Barad argues that the distinction between epistemology and ontology, in light of contemporary advances of physics, is based upon outdated understandings of matter. I find an onto-epistemological approach useful to relate to trans being and knowing; it gives space to theoretically discuss the ways in which corporeality matters in relation to embodiments of gender and race.

In light of onto-epistemology, knowledge is not obtain from a distance, but rather, in context and part of (Baradian) phenomena. Barad also argues that this leads to a different understanding of objectivity, stressing that objectivity "is about accountability to marks on bodies, and responsibility to the entanglements of which we are a part" (van der Tuin, 2011, p. 52). Objectivity is than not understood in relation to distance, but rather in relation to accountability, something feminist theorists have similarly argued for through standpoint theory.

3.3 Incorporation of concepts and notions

In this subchapter I elaborate on the use of new materialist notions and concepts in relation to transmasculinity.

New materialism and gender

Scholars working within new materialism differ in their ontological understanding of gender, in comparison to for instance postmodernists and poststructuralists. As Kathleen Lennon illustrates, poststructuralists, such as Judith Butler, explore gender from the standpoint that culture and performativity are dominant over materiality (Lennon, 2014, para. 4.1). However, as suggested earlier, such performative account of gender does not explain how materiality and the sense of self are in interplay. A new materialist account of gender disrupts the distinction between the social and biological body (Barad, 2003; Ah-King & Hayward, 2014; Vaccaro, 2010; Lane, 2009), and disrupts the notion that the social body is layered on top of the biological body (Vaccaro, 2010). Next to this, new materialism understands sex not as biologically given, but as a dynamic process and potential (Ah-King & Hayward, 2014; Barad, 2003). This ontological difference also leads to a different approach to trans phenomena. Vaccaro argues that “transgender subjectivity [is] not reducible to its location on or inside the body” (Vaccaro, 2010, p. 256). Myra Hird (2013) adds to this that trans phenomena is not exclusively a cultural or human phenomenon. Contrary, new materialism aims to return to a material heaviness in its understanding of trans phenomena, e.g. Hayward (2010) writes about a trans-becoming, which “considers how the transsexual emerges through the body’s own viscosity, through the energization of corporeal limits. The trans-body is a matrix through which sensations may be drawn back through the body” (Hayward, 2010, p. 238). Following this line, Lane (2009) argues that if gender is seen as a transformation of “intertwined biological and social processes” (p. 150), than gender variance, including nonbinary incorporations are seen as “healthy part of human variation, not as pathology or disorder” (p. 150). In short, gender cannot be understood as mere culture of nature, as new materialism argues,

gender is a dynamic process and potential in which culture and nature are in intra-action.

Materiality and agency

Within agential realism, agency is not to be understood to be characteristic of individual entities. Rather, agency is a process through which the causal intra-action of different parts of the world produce intelligible phenomena (Hames-García, 2008, 325). Therefore, I argue, it would be false to claim matter *has* agency – understood from a modernist and postmodernist stance – the radically different ontological approach to matter does not allow such understanding.

On an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity. (Barad, 2003, p. 822)

This notion of matter as something always in becoming can be understood in light of Barad’s elaboration on quantum leaps; never from a certain *there-then* to a certain *here-now*, not following a linear route, and without predictive outcomes (Barad, 2007).

Trans-becoming: embodiment and agential realism

Agential realism is useful to understand embodied selves to be not based in biology, but rather phenomenological (Lennon, 2012, p. 38). In the context of race, Hames-García argues that “the causal role of matter in the formation of racial meanings and phenomena” is crucial in understanding racial embodiment (Hames-García, 2008, p. 325). Related to this, within poststructuralism the notion of becoming has been fundamental, which has been continued within posthumanism and new materialism (Garner, 2014). Hayward (2010) applies the notion of becoming to transgender transitions, termed *trans-becoming*. It refers to “an emergence of a material, psychological, sensual, and social self through corporeal, spatial, and temporal processes that trans-form the lived body” (Hayward, 2010, p. 226). In this sense,

transgender is a becoming which emerges through intra-actions, fuelled by limitations of corporeality (Hayward, 2010). In my reading of Hayward, I find this exploration of trans-becoming to be limited in its imaginary of what motivates transgender transitions. In this critique, I fall back on what I posed in the introduction as an imaginary of trans lives through trans misery. To the contrary, I would argue that transgender transitions are fuelled not only by “corporeal limits” (Hayward, 2010, p. 238), but also by *possibilities* that are not only to be understood within the realm of corporeality, as indeed Hayward points to. I find Rachel Loewen Walker’s elaboration on becoming useful to consider. In this context, she argues that,

becoming constitutes more than an (anti-)identity claim; it expresses a temporality, a movement of an intra-active becoming, whereby rather than thinking about time as a chronological counting of moments—sets of before and afters that are progressively directed towards a future—an intra-active becoming illustrates that time is a durational succession of change which apprehends any distinct 'moment' or 'present' as a becoming that is co-determinate with a live temporal frame. (Loewen Walker, 2014, p. 50)

In addition to Hayward’s (2010) elaboration on trans-becoming, I find that this elaboration gives space to theoretically discuss trans-becoming in relation to (personal) histories, desires, limitations, and futures. While simultaneously, moving away from the popular frame of transitioning linear between two dichotomous genders (male and female), to an agential account of trans phenomena.

From this, I arrive to an understanding of trans-becoming as an intra-activity between material, spatial, and temporal components, through which a trans knowing and being emerges. I will continue this theoretical exploration in context of my autoethnography in chapter 5.2 *Transing Time*.

3.4 Strengths and weaknesses of new materialism

In conclusion, new materialism can be understood as an ontological rethinking of matter and materiality. I base my new materialist understanding within a Baradian

approach of agential realism and onto-epistemology. As Irni (2013; 2016) illustrates, doing so gives space to go beyond the biological effects of testosterone and consider affective possibilities of matter in relation to transgender lives. Within this lays arguably the strength of new materialism, its philosophy not only relies on cultural or biological explanations, but on an intra-action of culture and nature. Coming from a postmodern discourse, this approach gives weight again to matter, while not falling back in biologism.

A limitation of the use of new materialism might be its highly theoretical and philosophical approach. For instance, its radically different understanding of materiality might be difficult to grasp at first, as Coole and Frost note, the “brute ‘thereness’” of matter is accepted as common-sense (2010, p. 7). Moreover, Sara Ahmed insists that new materialism forgets that feminist theorists have always already engaged with biological factors in their theorisations of culture, and that new materialism is wrongly presented as a gift to feminism (Ahmed, 2008). However, in reaction, Noela Davis debates this reasoning by highlighting the different approach of new materialism to biology and matter, accusing Ahmed of a reluctance to understand the ontologically different starting point of new materialism (Davis, 2009).

4. Methodology

In the first part of this chapter, I will give some background and context to my methodological choices. I will briefly revisit the research problem and give an outline of the research methods that could be used for this study. Further, I provide the rationale behind choosing the specific methodology for this study. This is followed by an overview of the limitations of this study. The latter part of this chapter contains a description of how I have used the method autoethnography, my ethical considerations and a description of how I have approached the analysis.

The aim of my research is to deepen and understand the complexities of transgender lives. For analytical purposes, I will only focus on transmasculine people in my research, though it is my expectation that the findings could be able to shed light on other transgender experiences. I use the theory of new materialism to analyse how transmasculine people relate to everyday acts and objects.

4.1 Various methodological approaches

In the beginning stages of my project I had considered various methodological approaches. After refining my research statement and question, I explored different research designs and made a shortlist of four methodological approaches to compare to my research needs. At this stage, I considered using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), discourse analysis, life history research, and autoethnography as qualitative methods for my research.

The first method I considered was interpretative phenomenological analysis. A phenomenological approach aims to understand “how individuals make sense of the world around them” (Bryman, 2012, p. 714). Interpretative phenomenological analysis focuses on a particular case, using a small sample size, and its data collection is based on semi structured interviews (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Overall, this approach seemed appropriate for my research. However, IPA is used as an “examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). In the context of my research, realising that you are trans can be a major life event, but it is certainly not to everyone. Also, it is not my main focus to explore a coming out or coming to terms with one’s gender identity. In

addition, the different usage of the concept of phenomenon within phenomenology and new materialism would clash and would most likely pose difficulties in combining method and theory.

The second methodological approach I considered was life history research, which would direct my project towards a biographical research. Life history research is used to document individual biographies and “emphasizes the inner experience of individuals and its connections with changing events and phases throughout the life course” (Bryman, 2012, p. 712; Jupp, 2006). This would not have been the best approach to gather the data that I wanted to collect for this research. For the purpose of gathering specific accounts of embodiments of transmasculine people, this approach was too general, and focused on larger structures throughout one’s life.

The third method I considered was discourse analysis. I was interested in this approach, because it would give space for a more abstract and theoretical approach to the ideas and concepts I wanted to incorporate. I explored critical discourse analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA). The first aims to examine discursive practices that uphold unequal power relations, and is therefore considered to be politically invested (Jupp, 2006). The latter uses a Foucauldian notion of power to examine power relations and social practices. As Zitz et al. note, “within FDA, language is constitutive, constructive of psychological experience and linked to social practices” (Zitz, Burns, & Tacconelli, 2014, p. 220). This epistemological underpinning clashed with my new materialistic approach, which advocates an onto-epistemology. It also did not fit with my general critiques on modernist and poststructuralist trend to render matter as less important than culture. I was also looking for a methodology that would lend itself to combine with explorations of my own personal experiences.

4.2 Autoethnography

After careful considerations, I chose autoethnography, combined with data collection through focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and autobiographical material. As Lann Hornscheidt pointed out during the course *Trans Studies &*

Intersectional Activism, the methodological use of focus groups can be used strategically to empower members of activist and social groups (L. Hornscheidt, personal communication, May 25, 2016). Coming together to talk about sensitive topics that are sometimes regarded taboo, breaks silences and can open fruitful dialogues. In addition to the focus groups, I have conducted semi-structured interviews, to go more in depth on the topics that were brought out in the focus groups. It also gave space for people to talk about topics that were not touched upon in the focus groups.

The chosen biographical approach also reflected my stance on reflexivity and transparency. As Jupp (2006) noted, an autoethnographic approach argues that an awareness about and reflexivity of one's position and research situation, rather than a denial or erasure, is key to knowledge production and does not oppose validity or forms of 'truth'. It also fits well within the feminist approach of standpoint theory, in which I situate my work in. Next to this, it also gives ample space to combine my own experiences with those of others.

As T. E. Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis summarise, autoethnography connects "personal (insider) experience, insights, and knowledge to larger (relational, cultural, political) conversations, contexts, and conventions" (T. E. Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p.25). The methodological approach also attends to ethical implications of doing research for myself, my participants, and the readers (T. E. Adams et al., 2015). This feeds back in my earlier noted reflections on my position as both an academic and an activist, linked to who I do my research for. In addition, my training in Social Work and its focus on reflexivity is convenient for this methodological approach, and not surprisingly, autoethnographic work is often regarded as relevant to social work, due to its emotional engagement (Carey, 2012).

During the process of this project, various people had expressed concern for my choice of methodology, and feared for my vulnerable position within my own work. From the start, I have been aware of and shared this fear. However, while reading the work of Tony Adams et al. (2015), I found inspiration in their description to carry out autoethnographic work. As they highlight, a fundamental

reason to do autoethnography is “to embrace vulnerability” and “to disrupt taboos, break silences, and reclaim lost and disregarded voices” (T. E. Adams et al., 2015, p. 36). This fits seamlessly with my aim to soften the taboo around materialities of trans people’s bodies and embodiments, and I use my vulnerable position within my research to situate myself in relation to my participants.

Tony Adams et al. (2015) describe four different kinds of representational forms, which are used in autoethnographies: realism, impressionism, expressionism, and conceptualism. In my writing I have employed both realism and expressionism as main forms. The majority of my analysis is written in a realist manner, meaning that the text separates experiences and analysis (T. E. Adams et al., 2015). Also fitting under a realist approach is the use of my own experiences to “complement, extend, and/or contextualize fieldwork, interviews, and analysis” (T. E. Adams et al., 2015, p. 85). I have chosen this angle to put focus on the stories of my participants.

An example of an expressionist deployment can be found in my reflection on race (see chapter 5.2). Through the presentation of my personal experiences with racism, I express my internal feelings and emotions from an inherently subjective perspective. As Tony Adams et al. argue, this type of writing is used “to examine and move through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty with the goal of making life better” (T. E. Adams et al., 2015, p. 87). It is in light of this driving force, that my text can be read.

Standpoint theory argues that social locations and political struggles are important in the search of knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004). Moreover, Haraway (1988) suggests that all bodies are already marked bodies, following that there is no objective perspective possible. Rather, she argues that to claim objectivity would likely lead to a so called gaze from nowhere, one that is assumed white and male. It is through critical positioning, that the standpoints of subjugated positions gain validity (Haraway, 1988). In light of this understanding of subjectivity and objectivity, my position as a trans person within my research on transmasculinity is not necessarily in conflict with a notion of validity.

As Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield (2000) argue, autobiographical work disrupts clear distinctions between “fact and fiction, the personal and the social, the popular and the academic, the everyday and the literary” (Cosslett et al., 2000, p. 1). This disruptive characteristic is overlapping with that of new materialism, which, as mentioned before, disrupts a multitude of (ontological) dichotomies. Which makes autoethnography as a methodological approach seem even more fitting to my project.

In reference to my autoethnographic methodology, I have been inspired by the works of Ulrika Dahl (2011), Joe Macdonald (2013), Jin Haritaworn (2008) and Bob Pease (2012). In their work, they reflect on the specific ethical considerations of autoethnography (Macdonald, 2013; Pease, 2012), it also guided the process on how to approach autoethnography from a queer/trans position (Haritaworn, 2008; Macdonald, 2013), and highlighted different writing styles (Dahl, 2011; Pease, 2012).

4.3 Standpoint theory and intersectionality

Apart from new materialism, my research is also guided by feminist theories of standpoint theory and intersectionality. These theories support my main theoretical approach, and underpin the framework of my project. In this I am inspired by the works of Donna Haraway (1988), Sandra Harding (2004), Jin Haritaworn (2008), Patricia Hill Collins (1997), Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), Jasbir Puar (2005), and Leslie McCall (2005). Standpoint theory is focused on the hidden power relations that influence knowledge production, and examines the underlying role of gender (Collins, 1997; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1997; 2004; Haritaworn, 2008). Intersectionality focuses on the intragroup differences, and opposes a single axis analysis, leading to the dynamic interaction of identity categories (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). In their research, Haritaworn (2008) explored the benefits of sharing a social position with research participants, while acknowledging the differences between them and their interviewees, and argued a shared position could give an epistemic advantage. In light of this theoretical framework, Dean Spade argued in a discussion on intersectional scholarship and practice, on the importance of the

following points. He stressed that intersectional scholarship and practice is: 1) deeply rigorous and difficult; 2) not attached to the term, but to the work that is done; 3) rooted in black feminism, to claim otherwise would be racist; 4) asking what the unmarked category is; 5) closely linked to activist communities; 6) asking what is at stake for people of colour, migrants, people with disabilities, and colonised people in my project; and 7) a reflection on how the systems, institutions, and arrangements that are studied cultivate life for some populations, while letting others die (D. Spade, personal communication, May 26, 2016).

Following this discussion, my reflections on intersectionality and positionality are woven into the whole text, rather than concentrated in a single location. Much of the work done on making my scholarship and practice more intersectional, has been part of the preparations and framing of my project. However, intersectionality is understood not as something that is obtained, rather, it should be approached as an ongoing reflexive practice. In this light, my intersectional work for this project would not finish after handing in this thesis, but will be continued through the thesis defence and connected side-projects.

4.4 Ethical considerations and reflections

General ethical concerns, as Somekh and Lewin (2011) note, include informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, pre-publication access and influence, and situated ethics. Due to the sensitive topics I address in this research, I decided on a minimum age of eighteen, this is also in line with the guidelines from the department of social work at Lund University (J. Magnusson, personal communication, February 29, 2016). Before their participation, I informed people of the aim and approach of my research, and participants signed an informed consent form and I guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. After finishing the first version of the analysis, I gave the participants the option to read and give feedback on my work.

Somekh and Lewin (2011) argue that feminist research is distinct in its ethical considerations, with its move to relational ethics. Linked with the discourse on social justice and redistribution of power, relational ethics are concerned with the

unique complexities that specific research context produce (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). My research interest is fuelled by my own experiences of different marginalised social positions, and as a result my research is positioned within social structures and groups that are part of my everyday life. Therefore, it is important to reflect on questions surrounding distance and proximity of (potential) participants of my research; working with pain of others, as well as that of my own; researching within activist spaces that I may or may not share; a potential detachment from groups I belong to; doing research within a small community; and friends being part of my participant pool and the inherent dynamics of relationships and power. These ethical concerns are more specific to my autoethnographic work, and are interlinked to sharing experiences of marginalisation.

First of all, participants of this study also include some of my friends, and while sharing my personal stories within conversations can mean a growth in friendship, my position as a researcher, receiving their knowledge and using it in my analysis, can potentially counter this. This concern is underpinned with the question to who I am and feel accountable to. Therefore, I have worked actively on letting participants guide the discussed topics and focus of the focus groups and interviews. For example, I did not suggest specific acts or objects to be discussed, instead I have asked participants for things that were important to them and their embodiment. When asked for clarification by a participant, I explained the term ‘thing’ as acts and objects, without a clear distinction between them. Allowing the participants to choose the acts and objects to be discussed, also had its downside. For instance, the participants were more likely to refer to things that were important to them at a specific spatiotemporal location. This gives an eclipsed view of potential important acts and object relevant to other transmasculine people, and highlights that my research does not lend itself for generalisations.

Another aspect I would like to reflect on, is the autobiographical nature of autoethnography. This means that through my research and writing I ‘come out’ towards my participant and readers, for instance as being transgender. In the context of coming out, I decided to uphold different boundaries for myself. Meaning that though I might have openly and actively shared marginalised positions with the

participants of my research, I have decided to stay invisible with some of them in my writing. To start with, it would be impossible to state a complete list of all my varying positionalities. It would be unfair to myself and the complexities I embody, it would reproduce identity politics, and it would also not necessarily improve my writing. Though my participants gained some freedom through the guaranteed anonymity, I cannot benefit from that myself. Meanwhile, I do have full agency in what to include and exclude, and even though I promise a similar agency to my participants, it is possible that they feel restricted within the specific power dynamics of researcher and participant, or by being a friend.

4.5 Data collection

I started looking for participants within my own network of friends and activists, and employed snowball sampling approach. For the focus groups I made a public Facebook event, in order to reach more people. Due to the sensitive nature of my topic, I constructed the text of this event carefully. For example, it could be the case that people are not out as transgender in every aspect of their life, and being invited to a public Facebook event that is specifically aimed towards trans people, would have been problematic. Another aspect was my specific call towards transmasculine people. In my description I made it clear that I invited a range of people to the event, regardless whether they were trans, or specifically transmasculine, in the hope that they could spread the event to potentially interested people. I chose this approach to make clear that by inviting people, I did not automatically assume a trans status, or an identification with transmasculinity. I felt this was especially important for nonbinary people, as well as those who might not want to be identified with (trans)masculinity. While trying to be as clear as possible within my call for participants, I was also conscious about my choice of wording around materiality and bodies, due to the earlier explained taboo within trans communities surrounding bodily materialities.

I conducted two focus groups in March 2016, Malmö (Sweden). The aim was to have five to seven participants per focus group. However, both focus groups were

smaller than I initially aimed for. The first focus group consisted of three participants, the second of two. It can be argued that the size of my focus groups was too small to effectively call them focus groups, and not for instance group interviews. However, the structure of the focus groups was aimed to motivate group discussions, something characteristic to focus groups, and not group interviews (Bryman, 2012). After a reflection on the first focus group, I slightly adjusted the second focus group; I reformulated some questions to prevent ambiguous interpretations, asked for more specific and concrete examples, and adjusted my own behaviour during the second focus group. (See appendix A and B for comparison.) Though the second focus group was smaller than the first, I feel that the second was more useful, due to the made adjustments.

The two interviewees were selected from the focus groups, and also took place in the same month in Malmö. There was a potential third interviewee, who I was not able to interview. This was especially unfortunate because the participant would mean including an important nonbinary point of view. The semi-structured interviews were based on answers given in the focus groups, information gathered through the demographic forms, and guided by the topics the interviewees wanted to talk about within the context of my research theme.

The collection and production of autobiographical material has been a parallel endeavour, that I started in February 2016 and continued until July 2016. I have collected personal diary entries and texts written for spoken word performances, and have written reflections on emotional events. From this, I selected texts that complemented and extended the material I had gathered through the focus groups and interviews.

The three conducted forms of data collection (focus groups, interviews, and autobiographical material) all had a specific aim that differed from each other, and when put together in the research framework complement each other. The aim of the focus groups was to collect a range of everyday acts and objects that were important to the participants. The posed questions all derived from the overarching question, ‘What are everyday acts and objects to you, and how do they influence your life?’ The aim of the interviews was to get a deeper understanding of the

specific relation to one's body, as well as everyday acts and objects. While the aim of the focus groups was to collect input, the aim of the interviews was to go in-depth into the topics derived from the focus groups. In addition, the aim of the autobiographical data collection was to link personal experiences to larger overarching social structures, and give additional insider knowledge. The selection of autobiographical material was based on the compatibility with the data collection from the focus groups and interviews, in other words, I have prioritised the voices of the participants, and selected the autobiographical material based on their focus.

4.6 Dialogical narrative analysis

Autoethnographic research can take various forms, and the stories that emerged from the focus groups and interviews can be analysed in several ways. Tobias Raun – a trans scholar in the field of communication studies – criticises the trend in queer and cultural theory to use trans narratives to expose heteronormative structures, arguing a ‘dialogical interaction’ with the narratives of the participants is needed (Raun, 2014). Hence, for this particular research I am inspired by sociologist Arthur Frank and his book *Letting Stories Breathe*. In this work, Frank (2010) develops a dialogical narrative analysis. It assimilates a hermeneutic interpretation, which teaches us that someone else's stories are only understood within the horizon of our own knowledge (Frank, 2010). A dialogic narrative analysis aims to ‘study up’, and approaches participants as experts of their own lives (Frank, 2010). It incorporates a semantic shift from ‘research subject’ to ‘research participant’, not to give a more politically correct impression, but to underpin the agency and participation of research participants. The main focus of dialogical narrative analysis is to not finalise any narrative that emerges from the research (Frank, 2010; Raun, 2014). It highlights the temporary and material-semiotic nature of stories (Frank, 2010), in which I read a potential for a new materialistic understanding. As Frank argues, research is “an ongoing dialogue between participants’ meanings; the meanings that researchers attribute to their words, their actions, their lives, and their stories; and how participants change in response to researchers’ responses” (Frank, 2010, p. 99). Inspired by this elaboration, I formed a new materialistic understanding of my

research, the emerging narratives, and my analysis of it, as an academic becoming through intra-actions.

Frank's (2010) dialogical narrative analysis does not give strict analytical tools and techniques, rather it presents ways to approach the analysis of data in order to let the stories of one's participants breathe. Thus, with a dialogical narrative analysis in mind, I created a narrative from the stories of the participants, and while doing so, I have attempted to give room for marginalised and/or silenced voices. For example, Ebbe remained relatively quiet during the focus group, they were also the only one in the group who actively denounced any experience of gender (which might potentially be read as being nonbinary), while also identifying with transmasculinity. Since I was not able to interview them, I chose to start the analysis with their words.¹¹

During the first reading of the transcripts of the focus groups and interviews I collected reoccurring and emphasised topics. After grouping the various topics in overarching themes, I reread all transcripts and located relevant passages (see appendix E). In the next step I grouped relevant passages from the focus groups and interviews together within their related themes, from which the presented narratives in the next chapter emerged. In the final step I selected the themes 'meeting someone's eyes', 'working against the body', and 'transitioning', to start a deeper analysis. This selection emerged in intra-action with the selected concepts and notions from the theoretical framework of new materialism, meaning that neither the chosen concepts and notions for the analysis, nor the used themes were selected first, but emerged in relation to each other.

Having chosen a realist approach in presenting the gathered material, I decided to keep the narratives of the participants and myself separate. Inspired by T. E. Adams et al. (2015) and Frank (2010), I place parts of the narratives of participants in dialogue with each other. This means that not all presented narratives took place in the exact linear timeline as they are presented in the analysis or within

¹¹ They were interested in being interviewed, but were out of the country during the period I held my interviews.

the same spatial dimension. However, I put them within the same context that they emerged in dialogue with other participants. In doing so, I aim not to finalise the stories of the participants.

In short, my work is an autoethnography, and its research design is influenced by the feminist theories of standpoint theory and intersectionality. I have gathered data through two focus groups, two semi-structured interviews, and autobiographical material. For the analysis of the collected material, I am inspired by dialogical narrative analysis, as put forth by Arthur Frank.

5. Materialities and transmasculinity

In this chapter I will elaborate on three themes that emerged from the conversations I had with participants of the focus groups and interviews. I have grouped the first two themes under ‘corporeality in intra-action’, pointing to the different intra-actions through which transmasculinity is always in becoming, as Hayward (2010) also pointed to. Within this theme I focus on meeting people’s eyes, and working with and against the fleshy materiality of the body. The third theme, ‘transing time,’ explores new materialist understandings of corporeality, temporality, space and matter.

5.1 Corporeality in intra-action

To analyse transmasculine experiences, embodiments, and practices, I link my own experiences to that of Ebbe, Larcan, Gregg, Emmet, and Rick. Ebbe is a nonbinary person, who also experiences a link to transmasculinity. Larcan, has lived stealth¹² abroad before going on testosterone. He told us he had never before been in conversation with other (known) trans people in real life, though he has met other trans people on the Internet. Gregg migrated from the United States to Sweden, he lives with chronic pain and mental health issues. Emmet works as a teacher, and had top surgery before going to the gender team to start the ‘gender investigation process’ⁱ. Rick lives a mainly stealth life as man, and explained his gender experience as being landed and concerning other focusses than people who might have recently realised they were trans.

Meeting someone’s eyes

A returning theme in both focus groups and interviews was the phenomenon of meeting someone’s eyes, and the various things that happen in that moment. Strongly linked to this situation, was often a feeling of anxiety and nervousness.

¹² Living stealth refers to not disclosing one’s trans status to others. It should not be understood as a fixed position, i.e. people might be stealth in some contexts, implied trans in other, while actively visible as trans in yet others.

What follows is the narrative that emerged from the compilation of different conversations, as elaborated upon in the previous chapter.

Ebbe: “I think I have stopped looking into people’s eyes as I walk down the street or when I’m out in public. I think that might be not wanting to see people looking at me. And I think I stopped doing that, and I have stopped thinking about doing that.”

Gregg: [Sounds of agreement.] “It has become a habit now.”

Emmet: “Taking the bus and walking outside, I’m always aware of how people look at me, in the mall, in the shop, or when I show my ID to someone, or when you meet people who work with your health in the hospitals or the clinics, like everything. How you deal with how people look at you, like when you see when they try to categorise you, they will most likely do it either way. It’s weird, but I’m super aware of it.”

Lorcan: “I guess you do wonder, yeah. It has gotten a lot better since I started on hormones. I feel a lot more comfortable. You don’t worry about your voice so much, which is like the biggest thing. But it’s still that constant thing in your head, like that one thing is gonna set them off. Or that one thing is going to make them wonder and that sucks.”

Emmet: “I think that in the future I might not care so much about that, because now it’s more important to how I am read as a person, and how you pass. [...] If others see and read me in a way I don’t want, it’s just more important that you can go under the radar. Making yourself more neutral, or trying to make yourself more invisible. And you think about the small things more often.”

Lorcan: “And especially if you are a person that they already can’t really place. Then they are going to start looking for everything as well. And the most common thing is when people say, ‘oh don’t care about what other people think.’ But you DO care, because that’s exactly what other people are doing. So maybe that one Tuesday you were wearing too many rings, or a t-shirt wasn’t quite so fitting as it should have been, or those pants were a little bit too anything.

Anything like that, people will clock it¹³, if they're already questioning it. And that nervousness, having to check yourself constantly. You can't just leave the house, because you're going to the store for ten minutes and wear some pants and a tank top. You're really worried, and it's a nervousness that I hope will disappear.”

The experiences described by the people above, as well as those of my own, is that the phenomenon of meeting someone's eyes in public, often leads to a stream of thoughts, feelings, acts, and emotions, that are *specific* to a marginalised position. I argue, it is not the same as feeling insecure about one's looks, or not being confident enough (whatever that might mean), while fitting within hegemonic norms of being white, able bodied, thin, cisgender and sane. In the context of the dialogue above, the participants were reflecting on the specific experience of being trans, and as Ebbe and Gregg articulate, not wanting to meet people's eyes is something that has not always been part of them, and has started in relation to embodying a trans identity. This can be seen in the quotes “I have stopped” (Ebbe) and “It has become a habit now” (Gregg). As Emmet points out, meeting someone's eyes is experienced as related to being categorised. And in reaction to this, people have figured out different strategies, acts, and behaviours. Returning elements that have been highlighted where “the small things” as Emmet put it, the kind of shoes you wear, whether or not you have facial piercings, the choice of jewellery, whether you shave, how the shape of your chest is formed through the use of binders, underwear and loose fitting t-shirts or two pocket button down shirts, the use of make-up, the specific haircut you chose for yourself, and many more. I have witnessed similar experiences being voiced in trans communities, both online on

¹³ Within trans communities the verb ‘to clock’ means to be recognised as trans, while trying to blend in as cis. As Ennis (2016, para. 17) describes, the verb is used “to explain the crushing disappointment they feel, usually when cisgender people clock them, but also when someone trans does it.”

websites such as Tumblr – which holds a strong and diverse range of trans communities – as well as in real life.

From a new materialist perspective, meeting someone’s eyes could be read as a phenomenon in a Baradian sense. Jagger’s definition is then particularly fitting, he describes phenomena as “interactions of what amounts to practices of knowing and seeing and being” (Jagger, 2015, p. 327). And it is these “practices of knowing and seeing and being”, that I would like to highlight. From both sides – the trans person’s and the Other – the ‘practices of knowing, seeing and being’ emerges through intra-actions of glances, hormones, and physical attributes. For instance, Lorcan found that in this context his voice is the biggest thing, and after it got deeper as an effect of testosterone, he felt a lot more comfortable. Within the phenomenon of meeting someone, *being* became slightly easier, when his deeper voice is in intra-action with others. And as is illustrated in the above dialogue, there is not one thing that can be seen as the source. Rather, I pose that through the various elements that are in intra-action, a *trans-becoming* is emerging through the phenomenon of meeting someone’s eyes.

In my conversation with Gregg, he reflected on meeting cis men’s eyes, his own safety, and his love and use of make-up.

“Lipstick is where the line gets drawn. Seriously, because that is too obvious. You know what I mean? [...] Either I go with nothing or chap stick, or like a really deep red. So I almost never wear lipstick [...] for safety’s sake, 'cause my analysis of it is, that if heteronormative transphobic homophobic men notice that I have makeup on, but it’s not so obvious that they’re completely sure, then they don’t want to out themselves as looking too much to my face. You know what I mean? Then they’re just like, I’m going to pretend that I don’t have. [...] And I think that one of the things that is most upsetting to heteronormative cis men, is anything that would make them attracted to another man. So I think that is something like, ‘oh god he’s pretty, I don’t know what that means, am I gay?’”

This section illustrates that through the ‘practices of knowing, seeing and being’ – that constitute phenomena – both the trans person as well as the Other is formed in intra-action of each other. Jagger argues that like human bodies, sexual differences do not “preexist their discursive production but are intertwined with it”, both are a product of “boundary-making practices in the intra-action between the material and the discursive rather than an ontological or metaphysical difference with roots outside the material-discursive relation” (Jagger, 2015, p.337). It can then be argued, that through Gregg’s use of make-up, he becomes potential desirable to heteronormative cis men, and through the intra-actions within this phenomenon, the material-discursive practices demarcate sexuality.

Working against the fleshy body

In the conversations I have had with the participants, the different practices of working with and against the fleshy materiality of one’s body was also highlighted. On a personal account, the affective practice of my body became very apparent to myself when I saw my own reflection for the first time in the mirror, when I wore a binder. Embodying this new or alternative reality of having a flat chest invoked an overwhelming feeling of gender euphoria in me. When I reflected on this in the first focus group, Gregg responded with, “I remember that very clearly, first time I ever turned to the side of to the mirror and I had a flat chest. That is amazing.” These shared experiences made me think of the *affective* potential of things like binders, packers, but also hormones and the “corporeal limits”, to quote Hayward (2010, p. 238). When I asked Emmet whether he used any objects to make himself more comfortable, he answered as follows.

Emmet: “Yeah, before it was my binder, before I had my breast removal. I wore a binder every day for over a year. [...] And I thought I will have these on, on special occasions... [starts to laugh] Special occasions turned out to be every
--

fucking day. For far more hours than was recommended.¹⁴ So in the beginning I let people try them out, and they'd be like, 'how do you get these on, it's so hard!' I mean, I had one of these that you pull on over your head, with no zippers, no nothing. I really liked them, but in the beginning I couldn't, I could barely breathe, and it felt as if I couldn't move. Every single night when I took them off, I could feel my back and my shoulders just like relaxing. Like, finally. It was nothing compared to what I felt when I had my... I even couldn't wear even a bra or a sports bra. Even that felt like I would accentuate that I had boobs. Either I had to just leave them there, doing nothing about it, or I needed my binder. [---] It felt like it was part of me, the binder. I was actually a little bit sad when I had my mastectomy¹⁵. Afterwards, I felt like I was never going to wear my binder again. It sounds really horrible, but I had a very deep relationship with my binder. It did so much for me to make me feel comfortable with myself in public. Even when people tried to scan my chest for something that was like popping out, they couldn't see anything, and I was like 'ha-ha, you can look as much as you want, but you won't see anything! There is nothing there to see for you!' So yeah, the binder."

Approaching this account from agential realism, the binder can be understood to have an affective agency. Barad (2003) claims that elements that are in intra-action within phenomena do not have a distinct ontology prior to intra-acting with and within particular apparatuses. The material-discursive meaning of the binder emerges *through* its use by a trans person, and in intra-action with things as fleshy materiality, glances, and testosterone. Thus, agency is not an attribute of the binder,

¹⁴ The recommended period of wearing a binder ranges somewhere between five and seven hours, with a generally accepted hard limit of eight hours. This recommendation is to make sure the ribs are not permanently damaged and reshaped, that the body receives enough oxygen, and the body is given enough time to recover before the next day.

¹⁵ A mastectomy, also often referred to as 'top surgery', is the operation to flatten the chest and (often) reshape it in a masculine manner.

rather its agency is a process through which the phenomenon is made differentially intelligible (Barad, 2003; Jagger, 2015). The affective agency of the binder emerges through intra-actions that constitute phenomena, such as the phenomenon of meeting someone's eyes.

The examples that the participants used were not limited to the use of binders. To my surprise, not many people actually talked about the use of binders, which within popular media, discussions, and representation, has become somewhat of a trope. Instead, the participants discussed the importance of clothes, what kind of clothes they would ideally wear and which made them feel most comfortable. These clothes were often very difficult to find in the right sizes. As Gregg articulated, "size has been a big issue, for example shoe size 39. My body... these clothes are not made for me at all." In the context of going stealth Lorcan thought out loud;

If you were completely comfortable, I think about this often, if I would be completely comfortable, my clothing and dressing style would look so different. If I could wear what I would want, I would actually be stylish like you guys. Or I wouldn't need to wear that baggy t-shirt, because I don't really like it, but it does the job with things like that¹⁶. Or I could wear converse sneakers, I would not need the extra heal for my height, and things like that. The way I would look would probably be very different.

To elaborate his choice of shoes Lorcan said, "I have so many Doc Martens, because they... well, just that extra five centimetres makes all the difference you know." Rick had a slightly different view on the matter, when he realised he could not wear the clothes that he wanted in a way that would make him feel comfortable, he decided on "making my body fit the clothes instead of the other way around. Working out became important part of my life to maintain that." Rick worked actively to gain muscle mass, but as he reflected on himself, this is not always an option for everyone, and it is important to keep an intersectional perspective and reflect on matters such as class, (dis)ability, size, and race. The instances mentioned

¹⁶ Lorcan refers here to the shape of his chest.

by the participants illustrate the discursive-material nature of practices through clothes and working out.

In this subchapter I have analysed transmasculine experiences, embodiments, and practices, through the phenomenon of meeting someone's eyes, and the practices of working against the fleshy body. Based on agential realism as put forth by Barad (2003), and Jagger's (2015) elaboration on phenomena, the first part argues that a trans-becoming emerges through the phenomenon of meeting someone's eyes. Next to this, through different material-discursive practices, both the trans person and the Other are formed in intra-action of each other. The second part highlights the ways in which the participants negotiated their corporeality, and points towards the affective and agential potential of materiality, such as a binder.

5.2 Transing time

In this subchapter I highlight the ways in which temporal, spatial, and corporeal processes are in interplay when forming different onto-epistemologies of gender and race. Inspired by the various ways that queer studies has queered knowledge production, I pose transing time to point towards a trans onto-epistemology of corporeal spatiotemporality.

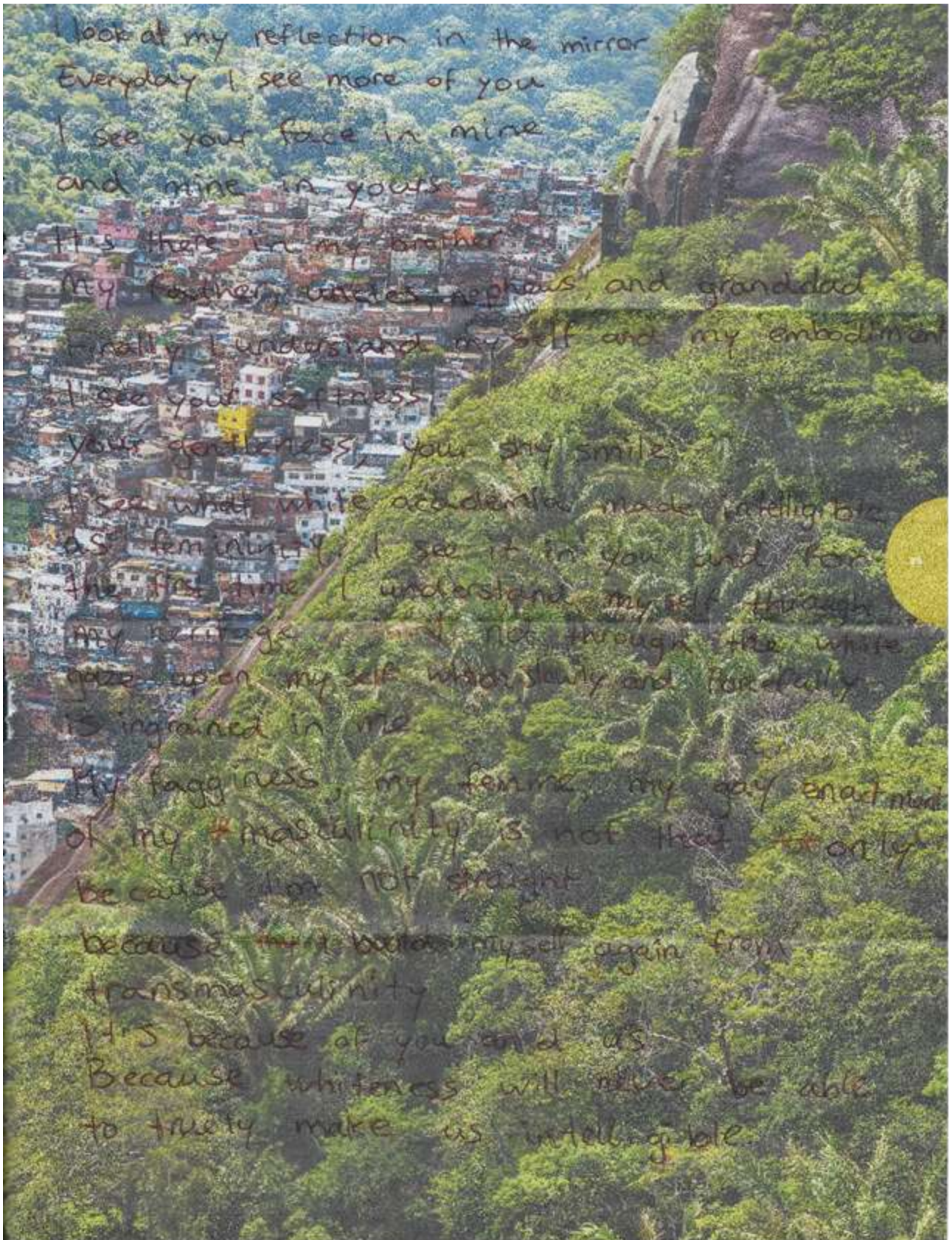


Figure 1 – Heritage.

(Transcript provided on next page.)

Transcript figure 1, Heritage.

Heritage

I look at my reflection in the mirror // Everyday I see more of you // I see your face in mine // and mine in yours // It's there in my brother // my father, uncles, nephews, and granddad. // Finally I understand myself and my embodiment // I see your softness // Your gentleness, your shy smile // I see what white academia made intelligible // as femininity. I see it in you and for // the first time I understand myself through // my heritage, not through the white // gaze upon myself which slowly and forcefully // is ingrained in me. // My fagginess, my femme, my gay enactment // of my masculinity is not that only // because I'm not straight // [or] because I build myself again from // transmasculinity. // It's because of you and us // Because whiteness will never be able // to truly make us intelligible.¹⁷

I wrote this text on the train back to Utrecht. I had just spent my day for the very first time within a QPOC-only¹⁸ space. Connecting with other people and talking about our experiences of race, ethnicity and queerness, while at the same time decentring whiteness, felt hugely empowering to me. Sharing stories, being in the same space, watching performances and feeling each other's anger and pain, made me able to connect dots between topics which beforehand I was thinking about as separate concepts, and which I tried to link in the above text.

I grew up in the Netherlands, where I experienced countless moments of microaggressions¹⁹ in response to my hair, skin colour and shape of my eyes. About three years ago something changed and the microaggressions stopped, without me

¹⁷ I have copied the text without editing out spelling oddities.

¹⁸ QPOC is an abbreviation of Queer People of Colour. In Dutch its common pronunciation is *kju-pok*, though in English the letters are often pronounced separately.

¹⁹ Sonny Nordmarken explains microaggressions as “commonplace, interpersonally communicated, ‘othering’ messages related to a person’s perceived marginalised status” (2014, p. 129), which are “verbal, nonverbal, and environmental” (2014, p. 129-130).

being able to pinpoint why. Strangely, the lack of these microaggressions made me feel alienated from my Indo identity and my appearance. One might expect a feeling of relief and victory, but rather I felt confused and at unease. I figured that since the microaggressions were such an ingrained part of my life, I internalised them into my being which made me feel empty and bare without them. Around that time, there had been many changes in my life, which made it impossible to point to one source; I started to present myself in a more masculine way, I moved to another country, and depression hit me again. I wondered whether the male privileges I gained daily, went hand in hand with white passing privilege? Maybe people in Sweden had a more inclusive perception of what Dutch can be, than the white people living in the Netherlands? Or had my depression stripped away such a big part of my social interactions, that there was simply no room left for microaggressions? Maybe it was everything and nothing at the same time?

Recently, things have changed again. It was a couple of months ago that I looked at my reflection in the mirror and recognised the faces of my male relatives from my father's side, who have their roots in colonial Dutch East Indies, now part of Indonesia. In the conversation with Gregg, we talked about our overlapping but opposite experiences of moving between either being racialised or not. When I asked him about intersections of his identity that were important to him, he told me that being racialised in Scandinavia, while being white in "the deep south of the US" was one of them.

Gregg: "I grew up in a family that is not racialised in the US. So they're considered white. I grew up with a shitload of white privilege [...] But it became very clear to me, but it is hard to put my finger on how, but as soon as I moved to Sweden it became very clear to me that people are reading me as Middle Eastern. [...] I noticed that a lot of people that I read as Middle Eastern would give me this acknowledging greeting on the street. And I also noticed that a lot of white Swedes, especially older ones, looked at me as if I was going to kill

them. This kind of fear in their eyes. Or this combination of fear and hatred. And I was just like, I'm not white anymore. It was a weird realisation.”

In this context, Hames-García's (2008) text is helpful in his analysis of the multiplicity of race in cultural studies. Approaching race as a Baradian phenomenon, and seeing human material differences such as skin tone, eye shape and hair texture as intra-active components, gives space to understand race as emerging within specific spatial and temporal dimensions. Subsequently, he argues that “the significance of those bodily differences changes and is not always even present when the concept of race emerges” (Hames-García, 2008, p. 326). When following Barad's reasoning, the stabilising and destabilising material-discursive practices of bodily features of Gregg and me do “not take place in space and time but in the making of spacetime itself” (Barad, 2003, p. 817). I would like to link these experiences of race to the notion of trans-becoming, which inspired by Hayward (2010) and Loenen Walker (2014), I understand as an intra-activity between material, spatial, and temporal components, through which a trans knowing and being emerges.

(Trans)gender transitions are difficult to understand in a linear time frame. It is not always from a clear fixed point (e.g. female), to a fixed end point (e.g. male), or as Barad (2007) would argue, from there-then, to a here-now. Furthermore, coming out is also not a one-time event, but a doing and redoing in different spatiotemporal settings. In light of this, I suggest a trans-becoming in intra-action with history, present, and future. For instance, when I grew up I understood myself as female, but if I would talk about my child-self now, I would often reshape my own history and talk about myself as Max, sometimes going as far as appropriating the memories of my brother as reference point of possible experiences.

Bowl-cuts

I decided on a new hairstyle, the traditional bowl-cut. Well, traditional for boys, at least in the context I grew up in. In reality, this would be the first time I would sport such a hairstyle. Sitting in the barber stool, I discussed my wishes with the hairdresser. “Oh, I love a traditional bowl-cut”, the hairdresser exclaimed, “did you also have that when growing up?” I thought back to my younger self. My long, thick and wavy hair hung till my waist, but my brother went through a long period of home cut bowl-cuts. Looking back, I felt jealous of this potential history, and in the spur of the moment I appropriated it as my own. “Yeah, my mother would always cut mine.”

In this context, a trans-becoming emerged from an intra-activity of different material, spatial, and temporal components, such as memories, desires, hair, scissors, ideas, assumptions and mirrors. In reshaping my own history, I reshaped the way I look at myself, and how the hairdresser might have looked at me, and in doing so I (arguably) reclaimed visions of gender and race. My hair is not only a statement of gender, but of a self that emerges from an intra-action of race and gender.

Returning to the title of this sub-chapter. With *transing time*, I point to the non-linear experience of temporal realities that is experienced on the borderlands of race and gender; going back and forth, and in-between of realities, possibilities, and desires.

6. Conclusion

My thesis explores how transmasculine embodiment can be understood through the use of new materialism, and focuses on the materialities of bodies, and everyday acts and objects. My research is positioned within the field of transgender studies, in which the materiality of trans bodies has previously been used to highlight problems of postmodern theorisations of gender. However, new materialism is distinct from previous forms of materialism, such as historical materialism, in its ontological understanding of matter and materiality. As Coole and Frost argue, new materialism understands materiality as “always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 9), and it departs from the premises that nature and culture are not dichotomous to each other. My understanding of new materialism is based on Barad’s agential realism and onto-epistemology (2003). Agential realism gives a framework to approach social practices, through discursive and material practices. Onto-epistemology is used to approach knowledge production from a ‘knowing in being’ (Barad, 2003), disrupting the clear distinction between ontology and epistemology.

I use the onto-epistemology of new materialism to theoretically approach transmasculine embodiment, in order to come to deeper understandings of the experienced corporeality of transmasculine people. In the context of new materialism, gender is then understood as a dynamic process and potential in which the clear distinction between culture and biology is disrupted (Ah-King & Hayward, 2014; Barad, 2003). Related to this, the notion of trans-becoming is used to the emergence of a trans knowing and being, through the intra-activity between material, spatial, and temporal components (Hayward, 2010; Loewen Walker, 2014).

I have conducted an autoethnography, in which I combine data collection through focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and autobiographical material. The methodological framework of this study is inspired by feminist theories of standpoint theory and intersectionality. Furthermore, the analysis of the collected material is based on Arthur Frank’s (2010) dialogical narrative analysis, and

presented in a realist manner, meaning that the narratives are separated from the analysis.

Returning to the research question, ‘how can transmasculine embodiment through the materialities of the body and everyday acts and objects be understood through new materialism’, three broad themes emerged from the analysis. First, I propose that through the phenomenon of meeting someone’s eyes, a trans-becoming emerges in light of the various elements that are in intra-action with each other. Likewise, though the material-discursive practice of demarcation, the Other is constituted.

Secondly, transmasculine people in this study use different strategies to work with and against the fleshy materiality of the body, in which clothes play an important role. From an agential realist perspective the material-discursive meaning of clothes, such as the binder, is understood to emerge through intra-action with other components, such as the fleshy materiality of the body. It is through this process that agency, of for instance the binder, emerges. In this context, agency is than not understood as an attribute, but is understood through its affective and agential potential to meaning-making (Barad, 2003; Jagger, 2015).

Thirdly, the analysis indicates that an agential realist approach to various positions on the borderlands of mixed race and transgender identity, gives space to explore corporeal spatiotemporal practices. In doing so, a linear imaginary of time is given up, and instead understood as an intra-action of history, present, and future. Thus, the findings of this study provide insights for ways to understand transmasculinity through new materialism, illustrating that from such a perspective, transmasculine embodiment can be understood with the use of Baradian phenomena, material-discursive practices, and an onto-epistemological approach. Further research could usefully explore how the theoretical approach of new materialism can shed light on the complexities of nonbinary gender identities, the experience of history, present, and future in relation to ones gender identity, or the specific position of marginalised trans people.

As indicated earlier, my intersectional work for this project will not finish with the finalisation of this paper, but will be continued with subsequent side-projects in which I will share elements of this thesis with activist communities.

Endnote

ⁱ The standard route for trans people seeking medical and/or juridical recognition in Sweden can be summarised as followed. 1) Get a *remiss* (referral) from a general practitioner, psychologist, or psychiatrist. 2) Apply to one of the six “gender investigation teams” (*utredningsteam*) in Sweden and present them the *remiss*. 3) Wait. The waiting list ranges from a few months to a year, depending on the chosen team. 4) Have a first meeting with the psychiatrist and psychologist, they will judge whether you are eligible for the so called *gender investigation*. 4) Be on the waiting list for the *kurator* (something between a social worker and a psychologist), this can take either weeks or months. 5) Have three to four meetings with the *kurator* discussing your life experiences and traumas, this also includes a meeting with family members and partners. The meetings are spread with a month in-between them. 6) Be on the waiting list for the psychologist, again this can range between weeks and months. 7) Submit to a range of psychological tests and surveys, addressing topics such as personality, intelligence, and body image. The tests are spread over three to four meetings, again with one month in between them. 8) Be on the waiting list for the second meeting with the psychiatrist, again ranging from a few weeks to months, but not earlier than one year after the initial meeting. 9) Show your knowledge on the effects of testosterone on the ‘female’ body and mind, and indicate your wishes concerning hormone treatment and/or SRS. The psychiatrist will give you a green light to start hormone treatment. 10) Six months later there is a check-up with the psychiatrist. If SRS is desired, you will be put on the waiting list, which depending on the chosen hospital ranges from four to eight month till the first conversation with the surgeon. 11) From point four there is a parallel path with meetings with the speech therapist to record your voice, and the endocrinologist to test hormone levels. (This summary is based on my own experiences, as well as that of other transmasculine people in Sweden. For simplicity I have illustrated the standard route for binary masculine presenting trans people who do not have a visible and/or registered mental illness.)

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Appendix A – Focus group 1, guide

March 12, 2016. Malmö

Research question:

How can transmasculine embodiment through day-to-day acts be understood through new materialism?

Aim:

To explore how transmasculine people embody their identity through day-to-day acts and objects.

Introduction:

- Personal
 - o MA Social Studies of Gender
 - o Transmasculine (masculinity as anchor in a gender void)
- Thesis
 - o Explore new ways to understand transmasculine embodiment

Questions:

Intro

1. In general, what is your favourite thing?
 - a. Write down 1, explain.
2. Name 3 objects that are important to you.
 - a. Explain (related to trans?)
3. In general, when do you feel most comfortable?

Define

4. What are small day-to-day acts to you?
 - a. Write down on post-its.

Describe

5. When do you become aware of your gender identity?
6. Are there moments your trans identity does not play a role?
7. Are there day-to-day acts that make you aware of your masculinity?
8. Are there day-to-day acts that make you uncomfortable?
9. How would you describe gender euphoria?
10. If you experience gender euphoria
 - a. Is your gender euphoria linked to specific things, if yes what?

Appendix B – Focus group 2, guide

March 21, 2016. Malmö

Research question thesis:

How can transmasculine embodiment through day-to-day acts be understood through new materialism?

Aim of the focus group:

To explore how transmasculine people relate to day-to-day acts and objects.

Overall question of the focus group:

What are day-to-day acts and objects to you, and how do they influence your life?

Material needed:

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| - Name tags | - Fika | - Pens |
| - Consent forms | - Voice recorder + | - Vignette |
| - Demographic forms | charger | |
| | - Post-its | |

Focus group guide:

Introduction at the start of the focus group:

Personal

- MA Social Studies of Gender
- Transmasculine

Thesis

- Explore new ways to understand transmasculine embodiment.

Focus group

- To explore how transmasculine people relate to day-to-day acts and objects.
- They will do the talking.
- Anonymity in my research.

- There are no right or wrong answers.
- It will be voice-recorded.

A. Things and objects:

- In general, what is your favourite thing?
- In general, name 3 objects that are important to you.
- As a trans person, what is an important thing/object to you?
- In general, when do you feel most comfortable?

→ Collect post-its in a pool at the centre of the table.

- Why have you chosen these things?
- How do you relate to the other things posted?

B. What are small day-to-day acts to you?

- Look at your own life and write down 5 small day-to-day acts.
 - *Try to be as concrete as possible. E.g. instead of 'commuting', write down the way of transport.*
 - *Write each act on a new post-it and put it in the middle of the table.*
- Why have you chosen these acts?
- How do you relate to the other acts posted?
- As a trans person, are there day-to-day acts that make you uncomfortable?
- As a trans person, are there day-to-day acts that make you feel good?

C. Introduce vignette/picture

- What do you think about men taking up space?



Closing

- Are there any things we have not covered, that you find important?
- Additions / suggestions

Thank you for participation.

Ask for email address, if they want to receive the paper.

Appendix C – Interview 1, guide

Aim

- Depth and detail
- Explore new ways to understand transmasculinity.

Research question

- How do transmasculine people relate to day-to-day acts and objects?

Intro

- Tell me more about yourself
- How would you describe your gender identity?
 - o Fluid/fixed?
 - o Binary/nonbinary/other?
- Age
- What does (trans)masculinity mean to you/your ID?

Focus group

- Came up with more things?
 - o Elaborate

Surgery

- Which surgery
- How did you come to the decision to do it outside the gender team?
- How did you feel about your chest before/now?
- day-to-day acts that are more comfortable now than before
- objects?
 - o Do you use different things after your (top)surgery?

Trans objects

- Do you use/have used objects to feel more comfortable with your gender ID?
- Could you describe the feeling?
- Effect on masculine feeling?

Appendix D – Interview 2, guide

Aim

- Depth and detail
- Explore new ways to understand transmasculinity

Research question

- How do transmasculine people relate to day-to-day acts and objects?
-

Intro

- Tell me more about yourself
- How would you describe your gender?
 - o Fluid / fixed / binary / nonbinary / other
- What does (trans)masculinity mean to you/your ID?

Focus group

→ Other important parts of your ID (demographic form)

- “physical and mental disability” → elaborate
- “racialized in Scandinavia but white where I come from” → elaborate

Trans objects / acts

- Do you use / have used things to feel more comfortable with your gender ID?
- Could you describe the feeling(s)?

Body and objects/acts

- Body changes over time
- Day-to-day acts that are more comfortable now than before
- Day-to-day objects that are more comfortable now than before

Closing

- Add/elaborate after focus group / our talk now

Appendix E – Code chart

#	Theme	Location
1	Meeting someone's eyes	FG1.2, 5-7; FG2.6, 9-14; G.9, 14; E.2, 5,13
2	Make-up	FG1.5; G.6, 13, 14, 16; E.6;
3	Race	G.9, 10, 14
4	Anxiety	G.; E.10, 11, 12, 16; FG2.8, 10, 14
5	Taking up space	FG2.12; G.14, 15; E.2
6	Clothes	FG1.2, 3-4; FG2.10, 14, 15; G.7, 13, 16; E.7, 12, 13
7	Drag	G.6; E.5, 6, 7; FG1. 3, 4
8	Working against the body	FG1.2, 4; FG2.6, 15; E.2, 6
9	Transition	FG2.7, 8; E.2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 15

FG1: focus group 1

FG2: focus group 2

G: interview with Gregg

E: interview with Emmet