“A White, Middle-Class, White Club”: Trans Feminist Clashes Over Race and Class

Beth Elliott is a trans lesbian feminist, today remembered for her violent exclusion from the West Coast Lesbian Conference, a lesbian feminist gathering held in California in 1973, for her status as a pre-operative[1] transsexual woman. In the intervening years, Elliott’s name has become synonymous not only with the trans exclusivity of some lesbian feminist spaces, but also with the possibility of living a trans feminist life, as even after her traumatic experience at the conference she continued to publish in feminist publications and take part in women’s communities.

However, nearly thirty years after her infamous expulsion from the conference, she and four other signatories penned a controversial open letter advocating for the exclusion of all pre-operative transsexual women from the prominent Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. This seeming betrayal of her former self reveals that trans feminism may not have ever been a monolithic or all-inclusive movement, and speaks to a notable exclusion marring this history—that of women without the means to pay for surgery.

Histories of trans feminism have been around for roughly as long as trans studies has existed as a field. Sandy Stone’s 1987 essay “The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” originally intended as a response to the work of Janice Raymond, a prominent transphobic feminist, has by some accounts become the founding document of trans studies. In this sense, the relationship between “trans” and “feminism” is a story as old as the field itself.

What can be said about this relationship? In her 2007 essay “Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question,” Susan Stryker, whose field-defining work has formed the backbone to trans studies, firmly takes the position that trans feminism is a third wave

[1] Someone who has not yet undergone sex reassignment surgery

movement, "largely in response to the utterly inexcusable level of overt transphobia in second wave feminism."[2] In the years since, however, a number of scholars have begun to question this characterization of trans feminism. In my oral history interview with Sandy Stone, in response to a question I posed about the degree to which transphobic feminists were active in the second wave, Stone quickly replied:

> It was never the dominant force, they were just loud and nasty, but they were never, ever, the dominant force, their numbers were never greater or even near the number of people who were trans accepting; they were just loud and ugly, and they didn't play by the rules.[3]

Similarly, in Finn Enke's influential 2018 article on 1970s feminisms, they write that

> historians had barely begun to scratch the surface of 1970s feminist history before an ever-evolving set of binary characterizations started to eclipse feminisms' multivocal and multivalent complexities. In less than one generation, the "second wave" became aka "white feminism" and "trans-exclusionary feminism," and now, *1970s feminists* is often used as a shorthand genealogy of today's racist and trans-exclusionary feminists (TERFs).[4]

Other scholars, including Emma Heaney, Cristan Williams, and Em Cousens, have joined Enke in pointing out that, in solely considering trans feminism to be a third wave movement, we may be ceding too much ground to transphobic feminists and overlooking the many trans people and their allies whose work made up the body, and whose bodies made up the work, of the second wave.[5] While this is a valuable approach to trans history, it has the downside of reading

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[2] Susan Stryker, "Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question," in *When Monsters Speak: A Susan Stryker Reader* (Duke University Press, 2024), 102.
[3] Sandy Stone, Oral History Interview with Sandy Stone, interview by Leah Long, May 15, 2024.
[4] Finn Enke, "Collective Memory and the Transfeminist 1970s: Toward a Less Plausible History," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (February 1, 2018): 10, https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-4291502.
[5] Emma Heaney, "Women-Identified Women: Trans Women in 1970s Lesbian Feminist Organizing," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1–2 (May 1, 2016): 137–45, https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3334295; Cristan Williams, "Radical Inclusion: Recounting the Trans Inclusive History of Radical Feminism," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1–2 (May 1, 2016): 254–58, https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3334463; Cristan Williams, "The Ontological Woman: A History of Deauthentication, Dehumanization, and Violence," *The*

side-by-side figures with notably different ideologies and backgrounds, such as lesbian feminist Beth Elliott, street transvestite revolutionary Sylvia Rivera, and transsexual activist Riki Anne Wilchins. The reasons for this approach are understandable, as by laying all of our cards on the table at once we hope to counter the total separation between "trans" and "feminism" that has often been presumed to be the case. However, this kind of storytelling flattens the real and pressing conflicts, schisms, and exclusions that are ever present in the history of trans feminism.

In addition, trans feminism has frequently been read alongside Black feminist theory and practice. This includes the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement, which contains a warning against lesbian separatism: "As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic."[6] While these readings are useful in highlighting the relationships between racism, colonialism, and cisness, they can also obscure noteworthy instances of racism and classism in trans feminist history, such as Beth Elliott's call to exclude less privileged women from a prominent women's space.

This paper will ask: How present were racism and classism in trans feminist history, and to what extent can trans feminism be said to have been a cohesive movement with a single genealogy? To answer these questions, I will depart from two primary moments in North America at the latter half of the twentieth century that prior scholars have recognized as trans feminist, those being Beth Elliott's work within lesbian feminist spaces and Sylvia Rivera's mutual aid activism, as these stories have often been read together in narratives of both feminist

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Sociological Review 68, no. 4 (July 1, 2020): 718–34, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120938292; Emily Cousens, *Trans Feminist Epistemologies in the US Second Wave* (Springer Nature, 2023).

[6] Combahee River Collective, "Combahee River Collective, 'A Black Feminist Statement.' Boston, Massachusetts; April 1977," in *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader*, by Penny A. Weiss (NYU Press, 2015), 273.

inclusion and exclusion. In doing so, I will investigate whether this parallelism has obscured important differences between the two women's lives and activism.

Women-Identified Women

Beth Elliott, a white transsexual woman born in 1950 in Vallejo, California, entered the Bay Area lesbian feminist scene in the early 1970s when her soon-to-be-nemesis Beverly invited her to a Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) party in Walnut Creek.[7] The Daughters of Bilitis was a lesbian organization founded in 1955 by four lesbian couples in San Francisco. It was established as an alternative to lesbian bar culture, which was unwelcoming to many lesbians because of its propensity for police raids and harassment, as well as its reliance on butch–femme couplings. As the organization branded itself as a corrective to the bar scene, DOB was mostly comprised of middle-class white women, and Elliott fit the bill.[8]

Having just left her parents' home after a fight with her father, Elliott was drawn in by the warm welcome extended her way by the women in DOB, and quickly became involved with the organization.[9] In late 1971, she ran for Vice President, campaigning on her belief "that love must prevail," as well as notions of "the sisterhood of all women,"[10] a common white feminist talking point which ignored other intersections of power and oppression, notably racism and classism.[11] Elliott was elected Vice President[12] and became a fierce political voice in Bay Area radical circles, publicly critiquing attempts by anti-war organizers to co-opt the women's

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[7] Beth Elliott, Interview with Beth Elliott, interview by Mason Funk, August 12, 2021, The Outwords Archive, https://theoutwordsarchive.org/interview/beth-elliott/.
[8] Daughters of Bilitis, "Daughters of Bilitis, 'Mission Statement.' San Francisco, California; 1955," in *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader*, by Penny A. Weiss (NYU Press, 2015), 209–11; Elliott, Interview with Beth Elliott.
[9] Elliott, Interview with Beth Elliott.
[10] "Elections," *Sisters*, September 1971, Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, MN.
[11] Kyla Schuller, *The Trouble with White Women: A Counterhistory of Feminism* (PublicAffairs, 2021).
[12] "Table of Contents," *Sisters*, November 1971, Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, MN.

movement and blaming the Vietnam war on "typical male thinking."[13] That same year, she attended the Gay Women's Conference in Los Angeles, where she made allies in the LA branch of DOB and the Orange County Dyke Patrol.[14] Those allies would prove to be crucial, as Elliott's transsexuality increasingly became an issue in San Francisco. While Elliott was never secretive about her identity and the women in DOB had never taken issue with it, the composition of the organization was changing, owing to the emergence of a new generation of politicized lesbians.

At the Second Conference to Unite Women in 1970, a group of women who called themselves the "Lavender Menace" (but would later rebrand as the Radicalesbians) staged a "zap" action in response to lesbophobia in the feminist movement. They first shut off the lights and microphones, so that the speakers would abandon the stage, then surrounded the audience, commandeered the microphone, and began explaining the importance of lesbians to the feminist movement. Importantly, the Radicalesbians introduced a new definition of *lesbian*. In their view, the notion of lesbianism as "a sexual 'alternative' to men"[15] was still male-centric, and so they sought to redefine "lesbian" as a woman whose primary political and emotional commitment was to other women.[16] These new "political" lesbians grew in number and influence over the course of the 1970s, and their heightened radicalism and commitment to the "right political line,"[17] spelled trouble for women like Beth Elliott.

For these new members of the San Francisco DOB, who called themselves "Lesbians for Lesbians," transsexuals were "men who want to be women and call themselves lesbians."[18]

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[13] "Gays Liberate Mason St.," *Berkeley Barb* (Berkeley, CA: Max Scherr, October 15, 1971); "Nov. Events," *Sisters*, November 1971, Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, MN.
[14] Elliott, Interview with Beth Elliott.
[15] Radicalesbians, "Radicalesbians, 'The Woman-Identified Woman.' New York, New York; May 1, 1970," in *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader*, by Penny A. Weiss (NYU Press, 2015), 224.
[16] Radicalesbians, "Radicalesbians, 'The Woman-Identified Woman.' New York, New York; May 1, 1970."
[17] Elliott, Interview with Beth Elliott.
[18] Sheri et al., "Transsexuals/Trojan Horses," September 1972, Gender.Network, https://gender.network/work/we-here-generally-are-well-versed-concerning-transsexualism.

Because political lesbianism demanded that women create their own communities and spaces devoid of men, the presence of someone who was once seen as a man in a prominent lesbian organization was seen as a problem. The women who made up the anti-Elliott faction considered themselves accepting of transsexuals, but maintained that "we want DOB to ourselves, to relate to women in our own special environment."[19] In their view, transsexuals (by which they only meant transsexual women), because they were not born or raised as women, were unable to fully understand women's shared experiences. This claim relied on notions of non-transsexual women's universal sameness, ignoring the fact that minority women's experiences often diverge significantly from that of middle-class white women.

Amidst a new opposition to her presence, Elliott had many supporters. When the New Jersey chapter of DOB got wind of the controversy brewing in San Francisco, they wrote a letter to Lesbians for Lesbians expressing support for Elliott, feeling that "as long as Beth feels, dresses and lives as a woman, she is not a man."[20] Julie, the secretary of NJ DOB, wrote personal letters to both Elliott and Del Martin—one of the founders of San Francisco Daughters of Bilitis—expressing a similar sentiment.[21] When Elliott's membership in DOB was eventually put to a vote in November 1972, a group of women wrote a statement arguing that "we won't solve DOB's problems by barring transsexuals. Instead we should deal with the women who are uncomfortable with transsexuals."[22]

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[19] "The Case Against Transsexuals in DOB," September 1972, Gender.Network, https://gender.network/work/we-here-generally-are-well-versed-concerning-transsexualism.
[20] DOB N.J., "Letter from DOB N.J. to Lesbians for Lesbians," April 12, 1972, Gender.Network, https://gender.network/work/we-here-generally-are-well-versed-concerning-transsexualism.
[21] Julie, "Letter from Julie to Del Martin," April 17, 1972, Gender.Network, https://gender.network/work/we-here-generally-are-well-versed-concerning-transsexualism.
[22] Lyndall, Maxine, and Karen, "Transsexuals in DOB," September 1972, Gender.Network, https://gender.network/work/we-here-generally-are-well-versed-concerning-transsexualism.

Ultimately, a majority of women voted against welcoming transsexuals into DOB, and Beth Elliott was cast out of the organization.[23] Following a reprinting of the collective's decision published in the LA-based magazine *Lesbian Tide*, the editors advertised that "if [transsexuals] are not welcome in the liberal city of San Francisco, they are most welcome in the city of Los Angeles."[24] Having burned many of her bridges in the Bay Area, Elliott fell back on the connections she made at the Gay Women's Conference the previous year, some of whom were in the process of organizing a major lesbian conference, one that could "begin to unify lesbians, not just in California, but in the whole country."[25] Elliott would serve on the steering committee for what became known as the West Coast Lesbian Conference—set to be held in April 1973—and was one of the names scheduled to perform, alongside feminist writer Kate Millett and lesbian poet Robin Morgan.[26]

It was the first night of the conference, and Beth Elliott, known to many attendees as a lesbian folk singer-songwriter, took the stage to perform. Suddenly, a small group of women rushed the stage, took the mic, and shouted that Elliott was a transsexual, demanding that she not be permitted to perform. One woman accused Elliott of trying to rape her four years prior to the conference, an accusation that Elliott vehemently denied but could never be verified or disproven, and which would kick off the "transsexual rapist" trope utilized by later transphobic feminists. These women, one of whom was Elliott's old friend Beverly, belonged to a Berkeley lesbian separatist group called the Gutter Dykes, who in a similar fashion to the Lesbians for Lesbians in DOB, regarded Elliott as "a biological (as well as emotional and spiritual) male."[27]

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[23] Jeanne Cordova, "D.O.B. Says No," *The Lesbian Tide*, December 1972.
[24] "A Collective Editorial," *The Lesbian Tide*, December 1972, 29.
[25] Barbara McLean, "Diary of a Mad Organizer," *The Lesbian Tide* (Los Angeles, CA: Tide Publications, May 1, 1973), 16.
[26] McLean, "Diary of a Mad Organizer."
[27] Gutter Dyke Collective, "The Non-Beneficial Mutation," *Dykes & Gorgons* (Berkeley, CA: Dykes & Gorgons, May 1, 1973), 9.

They passed around a two-page statement to audience members and conference officials, which claimed that there was a "new trend of men that are invading and draining our lesbian community…men with xy chromosomes and 'normal' male hormones who decide they are actually women, even though they have been socialized to be oppressive heterosexual men."[28] The conference organizers, like the women at DOB, put Elliott's attendance to a vote, to which the audience overwhelmingly insisted that Elliott perform. She began to play, but was drowned out by boos from the "small but vocal anti-Beth group."[29] A second vote was taken, which one of the conference organizers recorded as "3 to 1 in favor of Beth."[30] Traumatized and shaking, Elliott went on to perform, and much of the fervor died down for the evening.

The next day, Robin Morgan took the mic to deliver her scheduled keynote speech on the topic of unity, the theme of the conference.[31] Morgan took the audience by surprise, though, with a ninety-minute monologue trashing "male transvestism" (by which she means drag queens), Beth Elliott, and the conference organizers.[32] Making use of a classic white feminist analogy between race and sex, she compared drag to "when whites wear blackface."[33] She then referred to Elliott as "an opportunist, an infiltrator, and a destroyer—with the mentality of a rapist,"[34] further solidifying the association between transsexual women and rape in lesbian feminist circles. Morgan's speech left the organizers, who assumed that the earlier conflict in the San Francisco DOB was merely a "power struggle,"[35] in a state of shock.

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[28] McLean, "Diary of a Mad Organizer," 37.
[29] McLean, 37.
[30] McLean, 37.
[31] McLean, "Diary of a Mad Organizer."
[32] Robin Morgan, "Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?," *The Lesbian Tide* (Los Angeles, CA: Tide Publications, May 1, 1973).
[33] Morgan; For more on white feminist race/sex analogies, see Schuller, *The Trouble with White Women*.
[34] Morgan, "Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?," 32.
[35] McLean, "Diary of a Mad Organizer," 37.

After everyone went home, *The Lesbian Tide* ran an issue dedicated entirely to women's reactions to the conference. Some were confused, including one person writing under the name "Any Woman," who said that she "did not have all the information about the transsexual who stimulated such anger in some women."[36] Barbara McLean, an organizer of the conference, was enraged, writing that "[Elliott has] written some far-out feminist songs. That's why she's here. No. We do not, cannot relate to her as a man."[37] Others pointed out Elliott's surgical status, with one woman writing, "this person is pre-operative, and therefore technically male."[38] Elliott herself was among the contributors to this issue, defending herself in a desperate plea to save her credibility. Admitting that she was "a transsexual, a pre-operative one at that,"[39] she went on to explain that her biology, according to the doctors overseeing her transition, was "a woman with a defective body, for all practical purposes."[40] Unfortunately, it would be no use. Public opinion eventually sided with Robin Morgan and the Gutter Dykes, resulting in Elliott's blacklisting from Bay Area lesbian feminist spaces and publications for the next decade.[41]

Queens in Exile

As Elliott is dealing with the fallout of the conference, on the other side of the country Puerto Rican street queen Sylvia Rivera is suffering from a similar lesbian feminist bashing. Born in New York City in 1951, Rivera left home at age ten, to survive off of hustling and sex work. According to an interview conducted by Leslie Feinberg, Rivera came out as a drag queen in the late 1960s.[42] In reality, Rivera identified with a lot of different terms over the course of her

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[36] any woman, "Any Woman Feels," *The Lesbian Tide* (Los Angeles, CA: Tide Publications, May 1, 1973).
[37] McLean, "Diary of a Mad Organizer," 37.
[38] Ann Forfreedom, "Lesbos Arise!," *The Lesbian Tide* (Los Angeles, CA: Tide Publications, May 1, 1973), 5.
[39] Beth Elliott, "Of Infidels and Inquisitions," *The Lesbian Tide* (Los Angeles, CA: Tide Publications, May 1, 1973), 15.
[40] Elliott, 26.
[41] Elliott, Interview with Beth Elliott.
[42] Leslie Feinberg, "In the Spirit of Stonewall," in *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (Beacon Press, 1999), 106.

life—gay, transvestite, drag queen, street queen, *et cetera*—this lack of fixity owing to her race and class. As trans historian Jules Gill-Peterson explains,

> for many street queens, the philosophical difference between being gay and trans was irrelevant. As noted above, they were too poor to afford medical transition; they also likely would have been turned away from any of the doctors prescribing hormones in New York. More importantly, the concrete conditions of their lives weren't organized around a difference between gender and sexuality. Cross-dressing was illegal, and so was sex work—and both were based entirely on public perception. The police didn't much care whether someone identified as a woman or a gay man; in jail, they would be treated horrifically either way. As such, it didn't much matter how they felt on the inside, or what words they used to describe themselves.[43]

Over the course of this paper, I will refer to Rivera as a street queen, to emphasize her simultaneous identification with and stigmatization within the gay community. As opposed to drag queens, whose drag was a form of professional performance and came off the moment they exited the stage, street queens lived in drag. As anthropologist Esther Newton observed in *Mother Camp*, her 1972 ethnography of the drag scene, drag queens' gender performance was celebrated by the gay world, while street queens' gender performance was heavily stigmatized, often mirroring the treatment of trans women. If there is an analogue of trans womanhood in the gay world, it is the street queen, not the drag queen.[44]

Today, Rivera is known for founding a mutual aid organization for street people called Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) alongside her longtime friend and mentor Marsha P. Johnson. The idea for STAR originated from a sit-in at New York University's Weinstein Hall, after the venue canceled a dance upon realizing the dancers were homosexual.[45]

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[43] Jules Gill-Peterson, *A Short History of Trans Misogyny* (Verso Books, 2024), 111–12.
[44] Gill-Peterson, *A Short History of Trans Misogyny*.
[45] Arthur Bell, "Sylvia Goes to College: 'Gay Is Proud' at NYU," *The Village Voice*, October 15, 1970, Gender.Network.

The sit-in was held by the Gay Liberation Front, the Radicalesbians, and a group of street people, Sylvia Rivera included.[46] While Weinstein's residents were supportive of the sit-in, NYU Chancellor Allen Carter declared that "The residence halls have never had the authority to rent out facilities to outside groups." The police shortly arrived and gave the protestors ten seconds to evacuate the premises, which they did, with the exception of Rivera and her friends from the streets, who stayed and held a demonstration in front of Weinstein that same evening.[47] Frustrated with the gay and lesbian response to the cops' arrival, Rivera and her circle drafted and circulated a pamphlet entitled "Gay Power: When Do We Want It? Or Do We?" In it, they lambasted gay liberationists for leaving "upon request of the Pigs," writing that "the next demonstration is going to be harder, because they now know that we scare easily." The pamphlet was signed "Street Transvestites for Gay Power," a collective that would soon become STAR.[48]

Historians have rightly recognized STAR as a trans feminist movement, among other things. In a manifesto that circulated in the early 1970s, STAR argued that the "oppression against transvestite of either sex arises from sexist values," and called for the right to bodily autonomy, an end to police harassment of "transvestites and gay street people," and the right of transvestites to obtain identification as the opposite gender, to name a few.[49] The members of STAR lived collectively, at first in a parked trailer in a Greenwich Village parking lot. Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson took in younger queens and street people, and hustled by themselves to provide for these queens while keeping them off the streets. Upon returning home one day and discovering that the trailer was being driven away by a trucker, they decided they

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[46] Leslie Feinberg, "Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries," *Workers World* (blog), September 24, 2006, https://www.workers.org/2006/us/lavender-red-73/.
[47] Bell, "Sylvia Goes to College."
[48] Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, "Gay Power: When Do We Want It? Or Do We?," 1970, Digital Transgender Archive, https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/3r074v20x.
[49] Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, "Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries Manifesto," circa 1970, Digital Transgender Archive, https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/fj236244p.

needed a more permanent solution.[50] On November 21, 1970, STAR held a dance with the Gay Liberation Front, where they raised enough money to begin renting a house for their organization, which would come to be known as STAR House.[51] Rent would remain a problem, though, and by July 1971 the queens, having exhausted their funds, were forced to pack up and leave.[52] Nevertheless, they continued to meet at Johnson's apartment every Friday, and remained active in organizing for gay liberation.[53]

STAR had always held tenuous relationships with the gay and lesbian movements, with the increasingly masculine and assimilationist former not wanting to associate with them on account of their unapologetic femininity, and the latter beginning to regard their gender performance as sexist. Similarly to Beth Elliott, street queens like Rivera and Johnson had been welcomed by the lesbian community in the late 1960s and the first few years of the 1970s. In an interview conducted around 1972, Johnson remarked that "Once in a while, I get an invitation to Daughters of Bilitis, and when I go there, they're always warm."[54] Rivera made a similar recollection in an essay published toward the end of her life: "Oh, yeah, we mixed with lesbians. We always got along together back then. . . . I've been to many a dyke party."[55] This support was already waning in 1971, when an article was published in *The Gay Liberator* reading, "The Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries with its transsexual caucus has come out with nothing

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[50] Feinberg, "Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries."
[51] "GLF & STAR Dance," November 1970, Gender.Network, https://gender.network/work/glf-star-dance; Transsexual Action Organization, "Trans Liberation News Letter," November 1970, Gender.Network, https://gender.network/work/trans-liberation-news-letter.
[52] Leo Skir, "Street Transvestites on the Air," *GAY*, August 30, 1971.
[53] Sylvia Rivera, "Transvestites: Your Half Sisters and Half Brothers of the Revolution," *Come Out!* (New York, NY, January 1, 1972).
[54] Marsha P. Johnson, "Rapping with a Street Transvestite Revolutionary: An Interview with Marsha P. Johnson," in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle* (Untorelli Press, 2011), 23, https://untorellipress.noblogs.org/files/2011/12/STAR.pdf.
[55] Sylvia Rivera, "Queens in Exile, The Forgotten Ones," in *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle* (Untorelli Press, 2011), 49–50, https://untorellipress.noblogs.org/files/2011/12/STAR.pdf.

less than a counter-revolution on sexism."[56] Just as it did in San Francisco, solidarity between these two groups began to falter as political lesbians gained in influence.

The death knell of the organization would come on the fourth anniversary of Stonewall, shortly after the West Coast Lesbian Conference. The theme of 1973's Christopher Street Liberation Day—an annual commemoration that we now know simply as Pride—was "entertainment, bars and baths." Many lesbians were unhappy with this focus, which skewed toward activities associated with gay men. According to a reporter for *The Gay Liberator*, roughly one-fifth of the marchers were women, and some women organized a separate Lesbian Pride Week.[57] After a couple of drag queens were disallowed from performing, due to concerns of sexism from some of the lesbian feminists in attendance, Sylvia Rivera fought her way onstage and delivered a scathing critique of the gay and lesbian movements.[58] "I've been trying to get up here all day, for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail," she began.

> They're writing me every motherfuckin' week and ask for your help, and you all don't do a god damn thing for them. Have you ever been beaten up and raped in jail? Now think about it. They've been beaten up and raped, after they had to spend much of their money in jail to get their self home and try to get their sex change. The women have tried to fight for their sex changes, or to become women of the women's liberation. And they write STAR, not the women's groups. They do not write women. They do not write men. They write STAR, because we're trying to do something for them . . . not men and women that belong to a white, middle-class, white club. And that's what y'all belong to.[59]

Rivera's speech was followed by a series of others, including Jean O'Leary, founder of Lesbian Feminist Liberation. "We were told that there would be no political statements read today," she

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[56] Ray Warner, "Shooting STAR," *The Gay Liberator*, January 1, 1971, 11, Digital Transgender Archive.
[57] "NYC Gay Pride," *The Gay Liberator* (Detroit, Michigan: Pansy Press, August 1, 1973).
[58] Rivera, "Queens in Exile, The Forgotten Ones."
[59] *L020A Sylvia Rivera, "Y'all Better Quiet Down" Original Authorized Video, 1973 Gay Pride Rally NYC*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb-JIOWUw1o.

began. “Because one person, a man, Sylvia, gets up here and causes a ruckus, we are now allowed to read our statement.” She went on to say that “When men impersonate women for reasons of entertainment or profit, they insult women,” a line not at all dissimilar from Robin Morgan’s terming of drag as “male supremacist obscenity.”[60] “We died in 1973,” Rivera would eventually write, crediting this moment with the death of STAR.[61] Following the parade, she would move upstate and take a job in food service.[62]

Histories of trans feminism tend to read Rivera and Elliott in parallel. This is either done through inclusion, as both were warmly accepted into community with lesbians before the advent of political lesbianism, or exclusion, owing to their near-simultaneous loss of their lesbian and feminist allies. However, this reading obscures the fact that Elliott was implicated by Rivera’s critique of the women’s movement as a “middle-class, white club.” When Rivera notes that her imprisoned sisters write to STAR instead of the women’s movement, she is directly critiquing a movement that Beth Elliott held dear. In Elliott’s eventual memoir, she spoke about the pressure she faced from “the new wave of trans advocacy” to denounce the community she was part of in the 1970s, writing that “I could not communicate to them that this community was my home, that I had helped to nurture and unbind it with all my heart, and that it still mattered to me.”[63] Indeed, Elliott did not leave the lesbian feminist community voluntarily, and re-entered it as soon as she was able. In the 1980s, she began writing for the lesbian newsletter *Telewoman* under Anne D’Arcy, whom she credited with pulling her off the blacklist.[64]

Reading the two as allies also ignores the ways in which Beth Elliott, over the course of her life, replicated standard lesbian feminist lines toward queens. In the midst of the AIDS crisis,

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[60] Morgan, “Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?,” 32.
[61] Rivera, “Queens in Exile, The Forgotten Ones,” 53.
[62] Steve Watson, “The Drag of Politics,” *Chicago Gay Life*, June 25, 1979, Gale Archives of Sexuality and Gender.
[63] Quoted in Heaney, “Women-Identified Women,” 142.
[64] Elliott, Interview with Beth Elliott.

Elliott began writing again for lesbian, feminist, and queer publications. In 1991, she penned a letter to the queer magazine *OUT/LOOK* in response to an article by Risa Denenberg about lesbians who struggle with drug use and their experiences with HIV. Denenberg profiles a Black butch/femme couple, a thirty-four year old Black attorney, two Puerto Rican sex workers, a sixteen-year old working class Irish girl, and an interracial couple, concluding from these women's stories that lesbians who use drugs can be shunned into silence about their serostatus, leaving them unable to seek help from their community.[65] Elliott, who a year prior had written a controversial article about the impossibility of lesbian sex transmitting AIDS,[66] responded with hostility to Denenberg's article, accusing her of not caring about the women's community. Elliott argued that the lesbian community would not be "enriched" by the inclusion of women who have "sex with men for drugs or money," or affiliate themselves with male drug users, johns, and "rip-offs."[67] By these criteria, Sylvia Rivera and the queens who comprised her circle—who affiliated themselves with men for reasons of necessity and solidarity with other street people—would not be welcome in Elliott's white feminist vision of lesbian community, regardless of sexuality.

When this critique is viewed in light of Elliott's own attack on the "Drag Establishment" in an article for the *Bay Area Reporter* in 1972, where she repeats the familiar line that drag "perpetuates sexist male stereotypes of what a woman is supposed to be,"[68] it is worth asking the following question: if Beth Elliott were in attendance at the 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day, would she have been one of the women accusing Sylvia Rivera of sexism? There is no easy

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[65] Risa Denenberg, "We Shoot Drugs, and We Are Your Sisters," *OUT/LOOK* (San Francisco, CA, April 1, 1991).
[66] beth elliott, "Does Lesbian Sex Transmit AIDS? GET REAL," *Off Our Backs* (off our backs, inc., 1991); Libby Smith, "Does Lesbian Sex Transmit Aids? View Irresponsible," *Off Our Backs* (off our backs, inc., 1992); Monica Pearl, "Safe Sex Facts," *Off Our Backs* (off our backs, inc., 1992).
[67] Beth Elliott, "Lesbian IV Drug Users?," *OUT/LOOK* (San Francisco, CA, October 1, 1991).
[68] Beth Elliott, "Re: Letters to the Editor," *Bay Area Reporter*, July 26, 1972, 11.

answer to this question, but based on the facts I have presented above, it is clear that Elliott and Rivera cannot be read as simple allies, and must instead be seen as representatives of divergent trans feminist movements that existed in constant tension over questions of race and class.

Womyn-Born Womyn

The revival of Beth Elliott's writing career took place in the transsexual press as well, though under the pseudonym Mustang Sally.[69] In 1994 she became a staff writer for the publication *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*,[70] where she explained that, in the twenty years since the West Coast Lesbian Conference, her "old college friend" Beverly had been relentlessly trying to out her to any publication she wrote for under her real name, which gave her reservations about outing herself by writing for a transsexual publication without the safety of a pseudonym.[71]

TransSisters had been publishing since mid-1993, and was on its fourth issue by the time Elliott joined its staff. The publication was founded and edited by Davina Anne Gabriel, a white transsexual woman who, like Elliott, derived much of her politics from her involvement with lesbian feminism in the 1970s, citing her feminist convictions as part of her decision to undergo sex reassignment surgery. The goal of the journal, as she put it, was to create a "much needed counter-discourse rather than to continue to allow ourselves to be defined by the patriarchal medical establishment and the radical anti-transsexual fringe of the feminist movement."[72] She was not the first to call for this counterdiscourse, though, that being another white transsexual

[69] Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan, "'Mustang Sally' Outed," *Bay Area Reporter*, July 25, 1996, California Digital Newspaper Collection.
[70] "Meet the Staff," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Spring 1994.
[71] Mustang Sally, "Noms de Plume; Noms de Guerre: Pride and Privacy," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Spring 1994.
[72] Davina Anne Gabriel, "From the Editor," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, October 1993.

woman named Sandy Stone, who Gabriel explicitly credits as providing the initial spark for the journal's creation.

Sandy Stone became a controversial figure in lesbian feminist circles in 1977, when word got out that Olivia Records, a major feminist record label, employed a transsexual woman as a sound engineer.[73] The label soon received a barrage of letters from enraged members of the community, ranging from mere disappointment to threats against Stone's life.[74] One day, though, the collective received an unusual package from feminist ethicist Janice Raymond, containing a stack of papers that would become the fourth chapter of *The Transsexual Empire*, Raymond's 1979 book on transsexuality. The chapter, entitled "Sappho by Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian Feminist," picked up where Robin Morgan left off, proving to be a staple of transphobic feminist theorizing.[75] "All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact,"[76] Raymond argued, drawing on and further popularizing discourses of the "transsexual rapist" that played a role in Beth Elliott's harassment a few years prior. Raymond went on to attack Stone by name, claiming that her presence at Olivia "only serves to enhance his [sic] previously dominant role and to divide women, as men frequently do, when they make their presence necessary and vital to women."[77]

Eventually the controversy got to be too much and Stone stepped down voluntarily, both for her own safety and for the survival of the label.[78] Some years later, Stone entered the History of Consciousness program at UC Santa Cruz, and in her time there drafted a response to

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[73] Enke, "Collective Memory and the Transfeminist 1970s."
[74] Williams, "The Ontological Woman."
[75] Cameron Awkward-Rich, "Trans, Feminism: Or, Reading like a Depressed Transsexual," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 4 (June 2017): 819–41, https://doi.org/10.1086/690914.
[76] Quoted in Sandy Stone, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," 1987, 3–4, https://sandystone.com/empire-strikes-back.pdf.
[77] Quoted in Stone, 4.
[78] Enke, "Collective Memory and the Transfeminist 1970s."

Raymond, titled "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto."[79] Stone takes on both transphobic feminist constructions of transsexuality, typified by Janice Raymond, and medical constructions of transsexuality, both of which speak over transsexuals, treating them as male and intrusive in the former case, and pathological in the latter. She argues that "transsexuals have been resolutely complicit by failing to develop an effective counterdiscourse," in part due to the ways in which they are "programmed to disappear" by medicine—common advice for transsexuals transitioning with the help of medicine was to 'fade into the "normal" population' by moving to a new city, cutting off their transsexual friends, and fabricating a life story with no mention of their transition.[80] Clearly, if the situation of transsexuals was to improve, Stone argued, they would need to come together and begin to speak authoritatively and truthfully about their lives. This is the call that Davina Anne Gabriel answered with *TransSisters*.

With that being said, the choice to found a paper speaks to the material differences between Gabriel's situation and that of someone like Sylvia Rivera. As trans philosopher Em Cousens notes, "for poor or racialised trans people, many of whom worked as sex workers—shelter, safety and survival were far more of a priority than textual community and exchange." Likewise, the whiteness and affluence of *TransSisters* became evident over the short duration that the journal was in print.[81]

Before Elliott was brought on board, *TransSisters* concerned itself with a variety of topics, but one issue tended to stand out above all else: the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF), also known as Michfest. The MWMF was founded in 1976 as part of the women's music movement of the 1970s, and became an annual week-long tradition held every August in rural Michigan. Over the years, Michfest had been the site of many conflicts, including fights

[79] Awkward-Rich, "Trans, Feminism."
[80] Stone, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," 13.
[81] Cousens, *Trans Feminist Epistemologies in the US Second Wave*, 29.

over the practice of lesbian sadomasochism, what genres can be considered "women's music," and the attendance of transsexual women.[82] In 1991, white transsexual woman Nancy Jean Burkholder was expelled from the festival, apparently in violation of a policy stating that the MWMF was for "natural womyn-born womyn" only. When Burkholder inquired as to why this policy was not stated in any of the festival literature, she was told that "the issue of transsexuals had never come up as a problem before."[83] Her expulsion became the source of much discussion in the press, prompting a response from Michfest founders Lisa Vogel and Barbara Price, who clarified that "the Michigan Festival is and has always been an event for womyn, and this continues to be defined as womyn born womyn."[84]

Burkholder's treatment enraged the original editor and writers of *TransSisters*, who began planning ways to create a dialog about Michfest's exclusionary policy at the 1992 festival. That August, Davina Anne Gabriel and three of her nontranssexual friends—including Janis Walworth, who had written to the Michigan-based magazine *Lesbian Connection* the previous year to protest Burkholder's expulsion[85]—made the voyage to Michfest. They held two scheduled workshops on the topic of transphobia at the festival, and set up a literature table with materials related to Burkholder's story and the festival's "womyn-born womyn" policy.[86] One of the materials distributed was a survey which prompted festival attendees for their opinions about said policy. This survey, which asked: "Do you think male-to-female transsexuals should be welcome at Michigan?" received 633 responses, with 73% in favor of transsexual inclusion.

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[82] Elizabeth Currans, "Transgender Women Belong Here: Contested Feminist Visions at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," *Feminist Studies* 46, no. 2 (2020): 459–88.
[83] "A Kinder, Gentler Festival?," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, December 1993, 4.
[84] Lisa Vogel and Barbara Price, "Michigan and Transsexuals," *Off Our Backs* (off our backs, inc., 1992).
[85] "Festival Forum," *Lesbian Connection*, February 1992, Tretter-51, Lesbian Connection (Michigan) Publications, Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, MN.
[86] "Mission to Michigan," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, December 1993.

While the four women acknowledged that a slight selection bias was likely, this was still a staggering discovery, and was treated as such.

However, this survey would eventually become the source of much controversy among trans feminists. When it was first written about in *TransSisters*, Janis Walworth took the results to 'strongly suggest that the majority of Festigoers would support a "no-penis" policy that would allow postoperative male-to-female transsexuals," despite the original question not specifying surgical or genital status. While forty-eight respondents specified that "only those who have had genital surgery should be welcome," they represent a small sample of the whole, and it is difficult to determine whether their opinions should be generalized to the majority of those in favor of transsexual inclusion.[87] That being said, it is possible that Walworth reached this conclusion because of the fact that postoperative status was implied within virtually all of the materials distributed by the *TransSisters* women. These included an open letter to the festival organizers by Lesbians for Justice, which disapproved of the "policy of excluding *post-operative* male-to-female transsexuals from attendance" (emphasis my own).[88] Despite an inability to conclude with certainty that the majority of festival attendees would support a "post-ops only" policy, as well as the fact that such a policy would discriminate against transsexual women without the means to pay for sex reassignment surgery, Walworth, Gabriel, and many others would hold steadfastly to a policy of specifically post-op inclusion.

A version of this debate would play out across the pages of *TransSisters* in 1994, but with the New Woman Conference (NWC), rather than the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, as its subject. Advertised in *TransSisters*' classifieds section, the New Woman Conference was an

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[87] "Results of 1992 Gender Survey Conducted at Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, December 1993.
[88] "An Open Letter to the Organizers of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, December 1993, 6.

annual retreat for transsexual women who had either undergone sex reassignment surgery recently or years or even decades ago.[89] While the Conference had a clear *de facto* policy of pre-op exclusion, being an event dedicated to the lived experience of genital surgery, it was also standard policy to deny admission to pre-operative trans women. This angered many women, both pre- and post-operative, who wrote to *TransSisters* with the hope of opening up the Conference to all transsexual women.

Opposition to the New Woman Conference's exclusion of preoperative transsexual women was led by white transsexual women Riki Anne Wilchins and Denise Norris, who co-founded the protest group Transsexual Menace in New York City.[90] Wilchins penned an open letter announcing her intention to show up to the Conference with a group of pre-operative transsexual women and attempt to register. If turned away, she planned to leaflet, confront, and educate attendees about what she referred to as the Conference's "separatism."[91] For her part, Denise Norris mailed a letter to NWC attendees decrying the "elitist position" of some post-operative transsexual women, referring to the surgical hierarchy as a "caste system,"[92] and the Conference policy as "classism."[93]

While the alleged classism and elitism of pre-op exclusion was not central to the reasoning of all opposed to the policy, Norris was not alone in making this charge. In an article by Lynn Elizabeth Walker, she laments that the exclusion of those who, "for economic, medical or other reasons do not (or can not) have surgical experience" has come to be seen by some as a

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[89] "What Is the New Woman Conference?," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Spring 1994.
[90] Riki Anne Wilchins, "Why Post-Op Transsexual Women Should Not Be Allowed at Michigan," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1994; Denise Norris, "Let Our Sisters Attend," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1994.
[91] Riki Anne Wilchins, "An Open Letter to the Membership of the New Woman Conference," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1994.
[92] Norris, "Let Our Sisters Attend," 43.
[93] Norris, 47.

"necessary evil." She notes that these attitudes result in "delaying the attainment or accomplishment of others until a more opportune or enlightened time, or sacrificing them altogether."[94] This critique is very similar to one made by Sylvia Rivera, who was often told by other gay liberationists, "Oh, let us pass our bill, then we'll come for you," said with no clear intention of safeguarding trans rights after having attained their own.[95] Not everyone in opposition to the policy directly made the connection to class. Christine Beatty, a staff writer at *TransSisters* who chose not to disclose her surgical status[96] and who had written for a previous issue about the elitism of some post-op transsexuals,[97] wrote in again, and while she still critiqued the "elitist decisions being made," she did not mention class outright.[98] Another article, written by Merissa Sherrill Lynn, took issue with this language altogether. "Caste system? Classist and Elitist?" she writes. "It sounded like text from *The Communist Manifesto*."[99]

Understandably, it was tempting to compare the New Woman Conference to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. This was the framing used by Riki Anne Wilchins, who wrote a satirical article criticizing the NWC's policy entitled "Why Post-op Transsexual Women Should Not Be Allowed at Michigan."[100] However, this argument left many unimpressed, who found the analogy between the two events to be lacking. Rachel Pollack writes that "The MWMF claims to be for all women and then excludes a particular group of women on the grounds that the festival organizers consider them to be men," but that "The NWC does not claim to exist for

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[94] Lynn Elizabeth Walker, "What Precisely Is a New Woman?," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1994, 38.
[95] Rivera, "Queens in Exile, The Forgotten Ones," 51.
[96] "Meet the Staff"; Christine Beatty, "None of Your Business," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Spring 1994.
[97] Christine Beatty, "What Sex Are You?," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Summer 1994.
[98] Christine Beatty, "The New Woman Conference Is Hypocritical," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1994, 46.
[99] Merissa Sherrill Lynn, "All In the Family," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1994, 35.
[100] Wilchins, "Why Post-Op Transsexual Women Should Not Be Allowed at Michigan."

all transsexual women."[101] This stance was seconded by Davina Anne Gabriel, who said that the two events were "clearly not equivalent," and that Michfest's policy "has the effect of marginalizing a particular group; whereas [NWC's] does not."[102] While Gabriel is correct that the two policies are not directly comparable, she seems to overlook that her own advocacy for a "no-penis" policy at Michfest can also be said to have "the effect of marginalizing a particular group" of women, despite the festival claiming to be for all women.

This argument would continue, eventually taking place at Michfest. In 1994, *TransSisters* announced that the protest against the festival's policy would continue, but that rather than entering the festival, they would hold their protest across the street from the main gate.[103] This action, which would come to be known as Camp Trans, had its origins in the 1993 protest, where four transsexual women, including Gabriel and Burkholder, were once again expelled from the festival, leading them to launch a small protest outside the festival gates.[104] Despite the disagreement brewing between a faction led by Davina Anne Gabriel who supported a "post-op only" policy and a faction led by Riki Anne Wilchins who was critical of such a policy, this conflict was not foregrounded at 1994's Camp Trans. This was likely a strategic move to keep the focus of the protest on the festival's existing policy, as the guidelines distributed to Camp Trans attendees asked protesters to make clear when their opinions are their own and not the official positions of Camp Trans, including "whether preops should be allowed in the festival."[105]

By some accounts, the highlight of Camp Trans was a speech given by Leslie Feinberg, a white butch communist and one of the pioneers of the transgender movement, called

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[101] Rachel Pollack, "The NWC and Its Critics," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1994.
[102] Davina Anne Gabriel, "Let NWC Be NWC," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1994, 50.
[103] "Protest Against Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's Exclusionary Policy Will Continue This Year," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Summer 1994.
[104] "Mission to Michigan II: Exiles at Mecca," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, December 1993.
[105] "Guidelines," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Winter 1995, 35.

"Sisterhood: Make It Real!" Feinberg loudly supported an "all women welcome" policy—at Michfest and within the women's movement in general—with no emphasis on surgical or genital status. She also took on white feminist notions of safety, arguing that it was more pertinent to "go after high-risk behavior, behavior that's threatening to women," including "overt racist behavior by white women towards women of color," than it was to claim erroneously that transsexual women are a danger to the women's community.[106] This speech was the most well-attended event at Camp Trans that year, attended by an estimated one hundred and fifty people.[107]

Toward the end of the week, Camp Trans was visited by the Lesbian Avengers, a protest group from New York City. One of the Avengers recognized fellow member Riki Anne Wilchins, and invited her to their scheduled meeting, to be held inside Michfest on Saturday. Wilchins, who was openly and loudly transsexual and would likely have encountered trouble entering the festival under normal conditions, joked that she would attend their meeting if they sent a contingent to escort her inside. To Wilchins' surprise, the Avengers took this suggestion seriously, offering to send people to the gates shortly before the meeting. Camp Trans attendees quickly realized that this could be their vehicle to enter the festival. On Saturday, a small group of protesters, including Wilchins, Gabriel, and Feinberg, approached the box office, asking to buy tickets and declaring that every member of their group interpreted the "womyn-born womyn" policy to include themselves. Everyone in their party was sold a ticket, and the protesters proudly entered the festival and marched toward the Avengers' meeting.[108]

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[106] Leslie Feinberg, "Excerpts from 'Sisterhood: Make It Real!,'" *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Winter 1995, 25.
[107] "Transsexual Protesters Allowed to Enter Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1994.
[108] "Transsexual Protesters Allowed to Enter Michigan Womyn's Music Festival"; Davina Anne Gabriel, "Mission to Michigan III: Barbarians at the Gates," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Winter 1995.

While this was taken as a victory by Camp Trans activists, others were not as happy. In an article published in *Transsexual News Telegraph*, Lofofora Contreras found that the term "womyn-born womyn" was "anti-transsexual in conception and nature" and advocated against its use by transsexuals.[109] Contreras also did not consider Michfest to be a worthwhile investment, calling it "a counter-culture manifestation of whites," which "does not challenge racial and class forms of oppression, which ethnic Transsexual and genetic women are subjected to," and ultimately "poses no challenge to the patriarchal power structure."[110] It wasn't just Contreras, there was an increasing sense that Camp Trans protesters—whether in Gabriel's or Wilchins' camp—were spending too much time on the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Christine Tayleur, a trans activist from the Bay Area, wrote to *TransSisters* to call Camp Trans "a waste of time, energy and money."[111] It was no secret that these protests, taking place every year, required several thousand dollars to succeed.[112] Tayleur expressed that she wanted to see more coverage on trans sex workers, among other issues, including police harassment, racism, poverty, and immigration rights. She went on to accuse Camp Trans protesters of "bourgeois elitism, never venturing out from their cozy, safe, middle-class environments to tackle the real issues," a charge quite similar to Rivera's critique of the women's movement as a white middle-class club.[113]

The brewing conflict between Davina Anne Gabriel and Riki Anne Wilchins came to a head at the 1995 MWMF protest, as Wilchins intended to bring a preoperative transsexual woman into the festival, a move that Gabriel staunchly opposed.[114] Gabriel chose to go her own

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[109] Lofofora Contreras, "Inclusion and Limitations of Inclusion," *Transsexual News Telegraph*, Summer/Autumn 1995, 17, Gender.Network.
[110] Contreras, 16.
[111] "Letters to the Editor," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Summer 1995, 4.
[112] "Protest Against MWMF's Exclusionary Policy Will Continue This Year," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Spring 1994.
[113] "Letters to the Editor," 4.
[114] "Camp Trans -- 20th Annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," *Transsexual News Telegraph*, Summer/Autumn 1995, Gender.Network.

way, and searched around for both postoperative and nontranssexual women with an interest in 'conducting an action inside the festival that would have as its goal the adoption of a "no penis" policy.'[115] Gabriel was convinced that the majority of Michfest attendees were in support of this policy, which in her eyes had less to do with social class and more to do with "objective and verifiable criteria as to what is a woman."[116] Sensing the limitations of her previous survey to deduce that the majority of festival goers would agree with such a policy, she planned on conducting a second survey that specifically distinguished between preoperative and postoperative transsexuals. However, owing to burnout, a lack of resources, and the tightening of festival policies—Lisa Vogel had apparently directed festival staff to disallow any materials that disagreed with festival policy from being displayed at the literature tables—neither Wilchins' nor Gabriel's actions took place.[117] That being said, Gabriel remained convinced, based on her interactions with Michfest attendees over multiple years, that the majority of festival goers would be in support of a policy of pre-op exclusion.[118] This and other conflicts, as well as concerns for her health, led Gabriel to resign as editor of *TransSisters*, which ceased publication after only ten issues.[119] In a column for the *Bay Area Reporter*, Beth Elliott, who agreed with Gabriel on the need for a "no-penis" policy at Michfest, lamented the death of her publication.[120]

In the absence of *TransSisters*, no organized protests of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival were held until 1999, when Riki Anne Wilchins announced that Transsexual Menace

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[115] Davina Anne Gabriel, "Mission to Michigan IV: No Room at the Information Table," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Autumn 1995, 20.
[116] Davina Anne Gabriel, "Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Summer 1995, 30.
[117] Gabriel, "Mission to Michigan IV: No Room at the Information Table."
[118] Gabriel, "Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss."
[119] Jessica Xavier, "A Look Back at *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*," late 1996, Internet Archive, https://web.archive.org/web/20230623172436/https://learningtrans.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/a-look-back-at-transsisters.pdf.
[120] Beth Elliott, "Sic Transit (Thus Passes)," *Bay Area Reporter*, May 16, 1996, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

would hold a protest across from the festival gates, which she referred to as "Son of Camp Trans."[121] This brash and in-your-face style of organizing was typical of Transsexual Menace, who had distributed flyers at Camp Trans 1994 reading: "We're not well-behaved. . . . [Camp Trans] will be back this summer: bigger, better, and now more politically incorrect than ever!"[122] When festival organizers learned of the intended protest, they released a statement reiterating that the festival is for "womyn-born womyn" only, but that they will not question anyone's gender.[123]

Wilchins went with a protest strategy similar to the action she was planning for 1995: she would bring a pre-operative transsexual woman and a post-operative transsexual man into the festival, to test festival goers' reactions to the presence of penises on both male-assigned-at-birth and female-assigned-at-birth bodies on the Land, raising new questions about the applicability of the "womyn-born womyn only" rule.[124] At one point, Tony Barreto-Neto, the transsexual man, went to the showers to rinse off, and asked the women there if they would be fine with him showering, even though he has "an outy," as he described it. The women saw no problem with him doing so, and so he proceeded to take a shower, only for a rumor to emerge later that "there were men on the land who had shown their penises in the showers."[125] A meeting was held that Saturday between festival staff and Camp Trans protesters, where negotiations led to the

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[121] "Festival Forum," *Lesbian Connection*, December 1999, 5, Tretter-51, Lesbian Connection (Michigan) Publications, Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, MN.
[122] Transsexual Menace, "Barbara Price & Lisa Vogel: Can You Spell T-R-A-N-S-P-H-O-B-I-A?," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Winter 1995.
[123] "Festival Forum," December 1999, 5.
[124] "InYourFace News Interview with Riki Anne Wilchins," Camp Trans '99, August 18, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/20010708051845/http://www.camptrans.com/archive/1999/stories/interview.html.
[125] Tony Barreto-Neto, "Statement from Tony Barreto-Neto, Camp Trans FTM, or... THE SHOWERING PENIS S-P-E-A-K-S!!!," Camp Trans '99, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/20011123060708/http://www.camptrans.com/archive/1999/stories/tony.html; "Festival Forum," December 1999, 5.

tightening of the existing "womyn-born womyn" policy—the organizers chose to add a "no penises on the land" clause, and to require that all festival goers be legally female.[126]

Reactions to Son of Camp Trans were varied, but if one thing can be said for certain, it is that Wilchins' protest kicked off an unprecedented debate in the lesbian press about trans inclusion in women's space. The first two issues of *Lesbian Connection* published the following year contained thirteen total pages dedicated to the issues raised by Son of Camp Trans, far more than after any prior protest of the festival.[127] One woman wrote to the publication that while "the paradox of womyn with penises . . . doesn't make me feel particularly comfortable," this feeling was comparable to that of women of color who "*still* do confront bald racism on the Land."[128]

Son of Camp Trans also spurred a number of fears for what would happen in 2000. A week or two ahead of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Beth Elliott, Davina Anne Gabriel, and three other white transsexual women released a statement in which they claimed that "two women once again appear determined to engage in actions that are inconsistent with the wishes of the majority of festival attendees: festival organizer Lisa Vogel and gender activist Riki Anne Wilchins." They argued that, because Wilchins had been known to bring people with penises onto the Land, and because Vogel was staunchly anti-transsexual attendance, both women acted in contradiction to the majority opinion of festival goers, as thought to be established by Gabriel's survey conducted years prior. The five women went on to advocate for a policy of inclusion for post-operative transsexual women. Beth Elliott had expressed such opinions years prior, when she argued in *TransSisters* that post-op only policies may be necessary to protect

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[126] "InYourFace News Interview with Riki Anne Wilchins."
[127] "Responses," *Lesbian Connection*, February 2000, Tretter-51, Lesbian Connection (Michigan) Publications, Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, MN; "Responses," *Lesbian Connection*, April 2000, Tretter-51, Lesbian Connection (Michigan) Publications, Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies, University of Minnesota Libraries, Minneapolis, MN.
[128] "Responses," February 2000, 16.

women's space.[129] While the signatories acknowledged that "this policy cannot address issues of race and class: specifically, the exclusion of women, especially women of color, who are not able to afford sex reassignment surgery," they still went on to call it "the best and fairest policy possible."[130]

This statement—which came to be known as "the Lawrence statement" as it was published on the personal website of Anne Lawrence, one of the five signatories[131]—proved to be extremely controversial in the trans feminist community, and prompted a number of responses. Writers of the first response, published on Japanese-American trans activist Emi Koyama's website, found it troubling that the Lawrence statement went so far as to acknowledge that their policy would disproportionately affect poor women and women of color, only to continue advocating for said exclusionary policy in the next sentence. They also took issue with the statement's remark that "Male genitals can be so emblematic of male power," as "it is the utter lack of economic power that prevents so many from acquiring the much desired female genitals presumed to be anti-emblematic of such power and dominance." Ultimately, the authors of this second statement characterized the Lawrence statement as implicitly claiming that one's womanhood could be bought.[132]

Emi Koyama went on to pen her own response, entitled "Whose Feminism Is It Anyway?" in which she summarized the debate as "White middle class transsexual activists . . . spending so much of their energy trying to convince white middle class lesbians that they are just

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[129] Mustang Sally, "Smells Like Teen Pussy (An Open Response to Rachel Roteles)," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, Winter 1995.
[130] Beth Elliott et al., "The Michigan Women's Music Festival and Transsexual Women: A Statement by Transsexual Women and Their Women Friends," Anne Lawrence, August 9, 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20001018205512/http://www.annelawrence.com/mwmf.html.
[131] Gwendolyn Ann Smith, "My MWMF Statement about the MWMF Statements," August 20, 2000, http://eminism.org/michigan/20000820-smith.txt.
[132] "A Transfeminist Response to 'A Statement by Transsexual Women and Their Women Friends,'" Transfeminism.org, August 18, 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20000929182802/http://www.transfeminism.org/michigan.html.

like other women."[133] Ultimately, Koyama was of the belief that protests demanding access to women-only events were a waste of time, and that an urgent priority for trans feminists should be "the violence against us that has literally killed us or forced us to commit suicide way too often for way too long." In 1999 she published "The Transfeminist Manifesto," where she advocated that trans feminists spend their time working with "traditional domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers and hate crime prevention programs."[134]

The feeling that trans activists' time would be better spent elsewhere was fairly widespread. Gwendolyn Ann Smith, herself a signatory of the Lawrence statement, wrote a piece later that month acknowledging the flaws in the original statement and presenting a list of ways to better spend the time, money, and energy that went into organizing around Michfest. These included fostering understanding within the trans community, creating laws to protect transsexuals, and working alongside politicians to "see what they can do for us – if anything." While noble goals, it should be noted that Smith's suggestions appear less radical, direct, and specific than Koyama's, a possible effect of Smith's whiteness.[135]

There was one more response to the Lawrence statement, which was written by Chelsea Elizabeth Goodwin and signed by two others. Goodwin states that "A post-ops only rule is as bad as the original one—it discriminates on the basis of economic class in practice as surgery is out of reach for many people economically." She goes on to point out that most lesbians can't afford to attend Michfest, and even if they could, many would still be uninterested. When "most of the trans community is desperately struggling for survival without adequate opportunities and protections in housing, education and employment," she concludes, "it is truly sinful to squander

[133] Emi Koyama, "Whose Feminism Is It Anyway?: The Unspoken Racism of the Trans Inclusion Debate," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2006), 703.
[134] Emi Koyama, "The Transfeminist Manifesto," 2020, 7.
[135] Smith, "My MWMF Statement about the MWMF Statements," August 20, 2000.

any more of our few and precious resources at Michigan." A postscript added by Marina Brown asks that, "If you want to add your name as a signatory, don't waste your time. Go and help some of our street brothers and sisters."[136]

A cursory glance at Goodwin's life suggests that the urgency of her statement, as it pertains to street people and other impoverished members of the trans community, stems directly from her experiences as a white transsexual woman activist living in New York City. According to Sylvia Rivera, Goodwin was one of her "original children at STAR House."[137] Following STAR's dissolution, she became active in several queer and trans organizations, including ACT UP, Queer Nation, and Dyke Action Machine. In the 1980s, she and her partner Rusty Mae Moore purchased a house in Brooklyn, which in 1995 was opened to homeless trans people and became known as "Transy House."[138] STAR House was Goodwin's inspiration to open up her own home, which would house as many as thirteen people at a time until its closure in 2008.[139] Rivera herself would stay in Transy House until she passed away in 2002, and Rusty Moore recalls that when Rivera learned of the House, she exclaimed, "Oh wow, you people are doing what I've always dreamed of doing!"[140]

Keeping in mind the context of Goodwin's life and activism, her opposition to the vast resources that went into protesting the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival is unsurprising. Goodwin's statement demonstrates that there was never a single lineage of trans feminism. While Beth Elliott, Davina Anne Gabriel, and other white, middle-class transsexual women worked for

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[136] Chelsea Elizabeth Goodwin, Rev. Marina Brown, and Rev. Laura Potter-deGrey, "Response by Chelsea Elizabeth Goodwin to 'A Statement by Transsexual Women and Their Women Friends,'" Transfeminism.org, February 17, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20010217220359/http://transfeminism.org/doc/chelsea.txt.
[137] Rivera, "Queens in Exile, The Forgotten Ones," 55.
[138] Chelsea Goodwin, Oral History Interview with Chelsea Goodwin, interview by Nadia Awad, May 4, 2021, NYC Trans Oral History Project, https://nyctransoralhistory.org/interview/chelsea-goodwin/; Amanda Davis, "Transy House," NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, March 2017, https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/transy-house/.
[139] *Changing House*, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAdc-D8iZtI; Davis, "Transy House."
[140] Davis, "Transy House"; *Changing House*.

inclusion in largely white, middle-class lesbian feminist spaces and communities, poor transsexual women and queens, such as Chelsea Goodwin and Sylvia Rivera, were organizing the streets for their own survival and that of their "street brothers and sisters." As I have demonstrated, these groups were often in conflict, and to describe them as a single, unified trans feminist movement would be to flatten over the vast disagreements and conflicts over race and class that these groups had been engaged in from the 1970s to the early 2000s.

Conclusion: Whose (Trans) Feminism is it Anyway?

At the start of this paper I quoted from an interview I conducted with Sandy Stone, where she points out, much in alignment with recent scholarship on trans feminist history, that transphobic feminists were "never the dominant force." While I believe that this is an important claim to take seriously, it is equally important to note that Stone's remark that transphobic feminists' numbers "were never greater or even near the number of people who were trans accepting," assumes a very specific meaning of "trans." As I have demonstrated, feminist promises of "trans inclusion" were in many cases contingent on certain markers of whiteness, including the absence of a penis. That is, the price of inclusion became the price of surgery, a move that excluded less privileged members of the trans community. When Stone speaks of trans acceptance, then, she is referring to the acceptance of a cohort of white, middle-class transsexual women. To close this paper, I repeat a question asked by Emi Koyama, although with a slight modification: Whose (trans) feminism is it anyway?

This paper is not the first to deal with the racialized genealogy of trans feminism. In Elías Cosenza Krell's 2017 paper, "Is Transmisogyny Killing Trans Women of Color?" they argue that "The standard framing of the genealogy of trans feminism has prioritized the academy as the site of trans feminism," and they opt to instead "begin a genealogy of trans feminism with Sylvia

Rivera's Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries."[141] While I concur, I think such a genealogy can be traced back even further, to the early work of Black civil rights lawyer Pauli Murray. As historian Simon D. Elin Fisher has argued, Pauli Murray expressed a transmasculine identity in the 1940s, during which s/he[142] introduced the concept of "Jane Crow" in a short article penned for the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, entitled "Little Man from Mars: He's All Mixed Up." In this article, Murray articulates an early form of social constructionism and intersectional feminism where both race and gender are "systems imposed from without."[143] The article is told from the perspective of the titular martian, who observes two literal crows, Jim Crow and Jane Crow, the bites of which designate people as "culud" (colored) in the former case, and women in the latter case.[144] While feminist analogies between race and sex are often misused by white feminists, as in the case of Robin Morgan, legal scholar Serena Mayeri argues that Pauli Murray's "reasoning from race" relies on connections and overlaps between different forms of power, as opposed to white feminists' "simple parallels or assertions of equivalence."[145] Fisher finds that Murray's understanding of sex as externally imposed in much the same way as race derives from her/his brief period of trans identification, making Jane Crow an intersectional trans feminist concept.[146]

In tracing an intersectional trans feminist genealogy from Pauli Murray to Sylvia Rivera through to Chelsea Goodwin, my intention is to allow us to see trans feminism as having a history that predates the second wave, an intervention that is not possible if we root trans feminist histories in the work of Beth Elliott and her white feminist peers. In this way, my

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[141] Elías Cosenza Krell, "Is Transmisogyny Killing Trans Women of Color?: Black Trans Feminisms and the Exigencies of White Femininity," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (May 1, 2017): 237, https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3815033.
[142] I draw my pronoun usage from Fisher's article, which refers to Murray with s/he and her/his pronouns.
[143] Simon D. Elin Fisher, "Pauli Murray's Peter Panic: Perspectives From the Margins of Gender and Race in Jim Crow America," in *The Transgender Studies Reader Remix* (Routledge, 2022), 558.
[144] Fisher, 557.
[145] Quoted in Schuller, *The Trouble with White Women*, 278.
[146] Fisher, "Pauli Murray's Peter Panic."

argument dovetails with Em Cousens' observation that, rather than second wave feminism preceding trans feminism, as Susan Stryker originally formulated this relationship, it was trans feminism that preceded the second wave.[147] I believe that this observation is vitally important, as trans scholars in recent years have argued that it is important to move beyond the second wave, if not waves altogether.[148] As Jules Gill-Peterson writes in *A Short History of Trans Misogyny*, transphobic feminists did not invent trans misogyny, and are "better understood as conventional boosters of statist and racist political institutions."[149] To combat trans misogyny, then, we need a trans feminism which is capable of pushing back against these institutions. Only the latter genealogy of trans feminism, from Murray to Goodwin, can do this work.

We should be careful not to treat the figures of this second genealogy as simple heroes, however. Goodwin herself does not tell her story with a heroic sense of pride, but with exasperation. When asked about her experience of running Transy House in an oral history interview, she recounts the following story: "Every time a social worker got a transgender person and didn't know where to place them, they'd just call us or without even notifying us send them to our door, and I'd be working in my office, the doorbell would ring, I'd come downstairs, there'd be some homeless trans person standing there." By bringing impoverished trans people to Transy House, social workers of the kind Goodwin describes here were offloading this trans care work, simultaneously fulfilling and tiring, onto her shoulders. Goodwin's tone in this interview suggests a long history of burnout and frustration with the decades of thankless work she did for trans and queer people. "Maybe it's time to perhaps write a little less about the Stonewall era,"

[147] Cousens, *Trans Feminist Epistemologies in the US Second Wave*.
[148] Emma Heaney, *Feminism Against Cisness* (Duke University Press, 2024).
[149] Gill-Peterson, *A Short History of Trans Misogyny*, 25.

she says, “and start looking at the things that happened in the 1980s and at trans participation in ACT UP and in Queer Nation.”[150]

With all this in mind, Goodwin’s reply to the Lawrence statement can be read as a call for others to pick up the torch. By hero-ifying activists like Chelsea Goodwin and Sylvia Rivera, we risk celebrating their achievements in a way that simultaneously consigns these poor trans women and queens of color to do the hard work for us, resulting in tremendous burnout, fatigue, and frustration. In order to ensure our survival in a time of mass political repression and violence, it is necessary that we take up a trans feminism that roots itself in the lineage of Pauli Murray, Sylvia Rivera, and Chelsea Goodwin, one that leaves behind the white middle-class transsexual women that these histories have too often been rooted in, and one that takes seriously the notion that no movement can free us without centering the concerns, experiences, voices, and activism of the most vulnerable of us. No more queens in exile.

[150] Goodwin, Oral History Interview with Chelsea Goodwin.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, it is necessary to give thanks to my classmates, each of whom provided both company and invaluable feedback on my project. I would also like to thank Dr. Jess Pearson, my capstone professor, who not only was a major source of advice, ideas, and feedback, but also created a wonderfully warm and welcoming classroom environment which facilitated the connections I made this past semester.

At every step of the way, my project advisors were among my greatest resources. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Myrl Beam, who agreed to do an independent study with me in which we laid the foundations for my paper. Myrl has been an excellent conversation partner and I have learned a tremendous amount from his mentorship. Dr. Amy Sullivan provided me with splendid advice at every turn and her enthusiasm for me and my work was one of the factors propelling me forward. Dr. Chris Wells is my go-to person for questions about the nitty gritty of historical writing, and I would not be where I am today without our myriad hours-long conversations in his office.

I would like to thank my coworkers, supervisors, and friends at the Macalester College Library, whose hard work has made it so that I am able to access most of the sources I have drawn on. In particular, I am thankful for Connie Karlen for searching tirelessly for my Interlibrary Loan requests, and Katherine Fish for providing access to a number of crucial online archives. That being said, I would be remiss to overlook the contributions of the student workers who ensure that our collections are easily accessible.

I have also drawn heavily on the Jean Nickolaus Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota libraries, both for its physical materials and oral history collections. I am grateful to Aiden Bettine for allowing me to use the collection's materials, and the many people who staff

the reading room, transcribe oral history interviews, and otherwise make the collection possible. This includes Myra Billund-Phibbs, who has so graciously been a mentor for me through the process of formulating my argument and finding a place for myself within the profession.

To close, I wouldn't have been able to do it without my friends, family, and roommates, whose willingness to talk with me about my work has meant so much to me and taken my project in countless different directions that it would not have gone otherwise. Perhaps my biggest debt of gratitude is to my partner, River Emerson, who sparked the very idea for this project, read and edited my work at every stage, and whose love, support, and friendship has kept me afloat at every point of the process.

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