

# מטד מוד



א יידישע טראנס-זײַן

A TRANS JEW ZINE

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# From the Joys of Yiddish:

## timtum

Pronounced TIM-tum, using a short u, to rhyme with 'rim rum.' From Hebrew (as pronounced by Polish Jews): tum, 'a simple or stupid child.'

1. An androgynous person - that is, one who has bisexual or ambiguous characteristics; one who is hard to identify as either male or female.
2. An effeminate man.
3. A beardless youth with a high-pitched voice.

In the *Mishna*, a *timtum* is a person whose sex is not determinable - because clothes conceal the genital areas.

The original meaning fanned out, and Jews would call a young man who was beardless, delicate, high-pitched of voice, 'a *timtum*.'

One authority informs me that in some circles *timtum* came to mean 'a total loss,' an unproductive, uncreative misfit. Thus: 'He may read a lot, but he's a *timtum*,' or 'He can't help; he's a *timtum*.'

4. A sexy, smart, creative, productive Jewish genderqueer.



INSPIRATIONAL

# Reading list

Fighting Back: A Memoir of Jewish Resistance in WW2  
by Harold Werner

Memoir of a Race Traitor, by Mab Segrest

The Flying Camel, edited by Loolwa Khazzoom

Jewish Renewal, by Michael Lerner

Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay + Lesbian Past

Twice Blessed: On being Gay, Lesbian + Jewish

Trans Liberation + Stone Butch Blues by Leslie Feinberg

The Bush is Burning! (and other books by:) Arthur Waskow

Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural

America, by Ronald Takaki

With Roots in Heaven, by Rabbi Tirzah Firestone

Gender Outlaw, by Kate Bornstein

Read My Lips, by Riki Anne Wilchins

Jews + Blacks, Alliances + Arguments

After Long Silence, by Helen Fremont

Bridges, a Jewish feminist journal

• for more information about Claude:

- Rose is a Rose is a Rose: Gender  
Performance in photography

- Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren,  
Cindy Sherman

- Bachelors, by Rosalind Krauss

I hate the corporate plan for global domination through capitalism. The world in which everyone drinks the same cake and eats the same burgers and listens to the same top 40. Where 'multiculturalism' is a superficially acknowledged as a profitable marketing device. People are allowed to keep their exotic foods and costumes while singing 'It's A Small World After All', as long as their radically different ways of thinking and being are forgotten.

But studying the history of colonization(s), it was a lot easier for me to lament the devastation of cultures other than my own- native americans, irish, philippines, cajuns, -any group other than Jews. I could mourn the loss of languages and dances and rituals that can occur in one generation, not thinking of my own family, in which my mother, who is fluent in Yiddish, passed on nothing.

Both my parents survived the sho'ah, the holocaust. As a kid, that experience was transmitted to me through osmosis, and defined without being articulated, so much of my sense of being Jewish. It meant negative things: loss, death, displacement, distrust, shame. It meant not celebrating Christmas or believing in Santa, but not necessarily being shown an alternative.

A lot of the Jews I knew growing up claimed to be 'culturally Jewish'. While this is a valid position to claim, it requires a conscious effort to value and maintain Jewish traditions, to not fully assimilate. Unfortunately, for many people being culturally Jewish seems to mean acknowledging only a white-washed version of Jewish identity. It means eating bagels and saying 'oy'. Most urban geys are just as likely to do these things. They are tokens which without a foundation become empty and meaningless to the next generation. Celebrating a skeleton of the Jewish holidays at most of my friends' houses involved mumbling through some Hebrew without any passion, without deep or challenging discussion of what we were doing or why. I hate doing anything superficially. I knew there was more ...but where to find it? As an adult, most Jewish environments are (or feel) closed to me because of sexism, homophobia and

transphobia. But part of what was transmitted me from my mother was that ~~my~~ my Jewishness was permanent and immutable. You couldn't change it, whether you wanted to or not.

So I am trying to figure out- what does it mean to be a Jew?

I recently heard a rabbi describe a study of the Jewish population over time. Somehow, someone calculated different birth and death rates in all the clusters of the diaspora over the centuries. They even took into account all the genocide- the pogroms, the forced conversions, the holocaust. And they came up with a projected number for the global Jewish population which was much higher than the number of Jews that exist today.

It is understandable that there has been attrition. Human beings want to survive, to escape persecution. To be comfortable and not oppressed.

Knowing the opposition and learning my history makes me appreciate our cultural survival.

My mother is Sephardic. The Sephardim were the Jews of Spain, who were expelled in 1492 and scattered all over the world. A lot of them settled in the former Ottoman Empire. Somehow, eventually, my mother's side of the family ended up in a shtetl of Poland before WW2. Her father was a tailor and her mother a seamstress. They spoke only Yiddish. My maternal grandmother alone had 14 brothers and sisters, all of whom had families, almost all of whom were killed by the ~~xxix~~nazis.

My mother's parents managed to escape to Australia, where they worked in sweatshops and raised three kids.

My father was born in Warsaw. His family was Ashkenazi- from eastern Europe. They were also more assimilated and had some money. They survived the war in hiding, moving across Europe with false identities. (Growing up I was told that my aunt's name was Mary, but when my father spoke to his younger sister in Polish, he called her by a different name.) They were often able to pass because of my grandfather's secular education and an ability to

with a high-paying job which provides you with more money than you need to survive, consider it your responsibility to your community to give money towards the healthcare needs of low-income trans people. I encourage anyone with money to do the same. Having the resources to transition into who we are means the difference between physical and mental pain every day, and being right, being real, being whole. ☆



NOT FORGOT THE MORNING THAT I WOKE UP AND WAS TOLD BY MY PARENTS: " We want you to get a nose job and your ears pinned back so you can find a husband."

Many surgeons also require letters from shrinks to verify a diagnosis of 'Gender Identity Disorder'. There are some wonderful, supportive therapists who will bend the Standards of Care and offer sliding-scale fees. There are also many, many 'doctors' who have incredibly narrow, antiquated ideas of what it means to be a 'real' man or woman. Some of these doctors are

condescending fuckers who will charge you \$150 an hour to determine what's wrong with you and what's best for you (because you couldn't possibly know yourself, you sick little freak of nature!). And some of them are members of the 'gay community' - people who claim to be Trans Allies in a political sphere, but who actually know nothing about FTM experience. Yet, these same people feel more than entitled as doctors to supervise our jumps through the hoops of the Standards of Care - for a hefty fee of course. And although the psychiatric industry classifies transsexualism as 'Gender Identity Disorder', every insurance company in the U.S. (except two, I think) specifically excludes coverage of anything related to 'sex transformation'.

Of course, breast enlargement is much easier and less expensive. Non-transsexual body modifications which support the binary gender system are encouraged. People can have their breasts enlarged to the size of watermelons without needing any psychiatric approval.

And I realize that I had it so easy. Even though we have so far to go in terms of social acceptance and healthcare, conditions have greatly improved for some transpeople in the U.S. I am grateful to have all these medical options available to me, and to not have to worry about coming off the operating table alive. Randi Etnner's book Confessions of a Gender Defender describes many real-life examples of transpeople who have been ravaged by the cruelty and transphobia of the medical system. Stories of people who have been institutionalized, had botched surgeries, given conflicting and damaging hormones, died from being denied care. And I also do not need to read a book to hear these stories - they are the stories of too many trans people I know. The bodies of so many people are marked by the pain of their transitions - they are scarred from surviving multiple surgeries by ignorant or uncaring doctors; they cannot get or afford hormones or surgery. These bodies which make people gasp in horror are fiercely beautiful - they survive even these gasps, again and again.

I am so lucky to have the upper-class privilege - money - to afford surgery. Because of job discrimination, and the additional mental stress caused by being gender-variant in this society, many trans men are low-income. Therapy, legal name changes, hormones, endocrinologists, and surgery are large and crucial expenses for many transpeople. Binding (as in binding one's breasts to create the appearance of a flat chest) is a painful necessity for most FTMs living as men or trying to be perceived as male. And for many FTMs with large chests, it is simply not an option. One of the things I have been able to do with my class privilege is give and raise money for other trans peoples' surgery. If you have the money, I encourage you to do the same. If you are an upper-middle class or owning-class transperson, a trans person with a large inheritance, or

speak High German (and several other languages) very well, and 'Aryan' coloring. When my father was 12 his family immigrated to Australia (one of the few countries which accepted Jewish refugees).

I think about my parents' Jewishness and the ways they were damaged by Anti-semitism and the war. I knew that shortly after the war my father's family had to leave Poland (again), because of his subversive political activities. And I know that my father used to write poetry, because I have heard the story of how he once let a teacher (in France) see his book of poems. When the teacher found out he was Jewish, the book was 'lost'.

How much was lost. Lives, childhoods. Art and faith. Hope. A belief in humanity and tikkun (healing). Spirit to pursue things like art and activism and radical visions, which are usually counter-active to making money and gaining social acceptance, but are crucial to living fully and passionately. Awe and wonder and openness. What is called spirituality is nourishment of all this. My father stopped writing poetry and became a virulent atheist.

Everytime I go to shul and everytime I daven I am in mourning for what was lost. But I am so thankful for the strong thin thread that survived. Sometimes I think of the 'marranos' the conversos- hidden Sephardic Jews, who were forced to convert to Christianity by Spain and Portugal, but secretly maintained their traditions. Often a grandmother would descend to the basement to light two candles on Friday evening. A father would wrap himself in a white cloth and fast two days of the year. No one knew why, but that was what was done in their family.

In one scene of Art Spiegelman's Maus books, the author draws himself at his shrink's office. His therapist, like the Spiegelman's parents, is a holocaust survivor. The shrink says: 'you, not your father, are in some ways the real survivor.'

This is not to devalue the lives of those who lived through hell. But the ways that people manage to survive are not always ~~gambled~~ the healthiest.

There is the overwhelming need to assimilate, to conform, to hide and not be too radical or too Jewish.

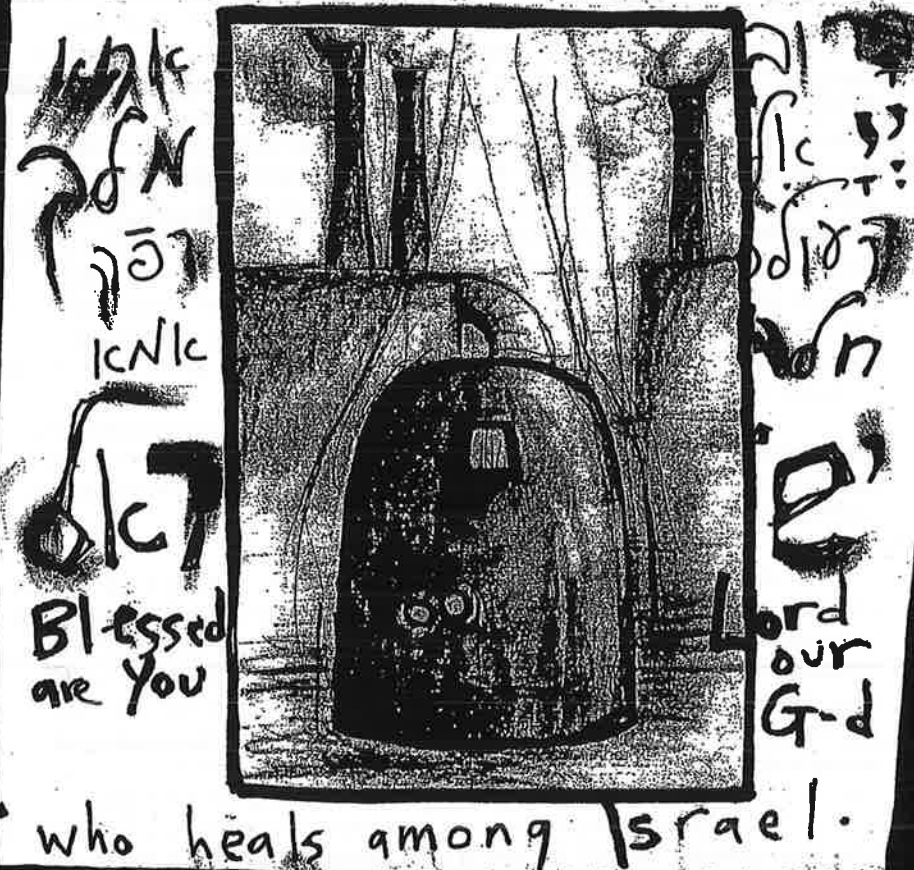
Last spring, my friend Staci became a batmitzvah, and I had an opportunity to go to shul. This occasion just happened to coincide with a few other revelations I was having about gender, which were making me feel even more present in myself. As I stood facing the ark and watched her receive blessings from the rabbi, I realized how incredible it is that I exist and that I am Jewish. How amazing it is that even this small part of my family has managed to survive. That although I will never know the particulars of all the lives lost and all my relatives and family history, that I know this. I can say the words "Baruch ata adonai eloheynu melech ha'olam..." and know that these exact same words have come out of the mouths of my ancestors for generations and generations. I can feel their breath in my mouth. These words bend time. It is said in Judaism that healing goes not only forward but also back.

I know this: that this tradition was so cherished that it was maintained through extreme hardship. And maybe we didn't just survive in spite of it, but because of it. I know something that was precious to them. And when I think of how many little many people (in this century of war and disruption and colonization) know of their family history- I feel lucky: Judaism is huge and it is rich.

I feel like Judaism is a secret package delivered to me through time, disguised and concealed, hidden from the enemy, smuggled through hell under layers and layers of protective cover. With parts so dangerous and large that they were sometimes unknown to the smugglers themselves.

Now it has landed here, with me, in the north america, the year 5760. I don't know when my family was last free to be openly and fully Jewish. Most Jews never were. I feel a responsibility to the generations who sustained this, who died and lived as Jews- who am I to throw away this most precious of gifts- now, when I am finally free to fully unwrap it.

blessing over my flesh in the  
medical waste incinerator



Another sadness is about how I acquired this chest. Most of the surgeons and shrinks are totally exploiting transpeople and making a mint off of us. Chest surgery costs between \$5000 and \$8000 in the U.S. (There are a couple of Canadian doctors who do the surgery for under \$3000.) You can find less experienced doctors who will do it for less, but the prices go way up every year. The inflation is above and beyond compensating for rising hospital fees. Many surgeons also somewhat randomly refuse to operate on certain people because of their weight, their age, or their hormone/ transition status.

Dr. Toby Meltzer did my surgery. His office was one of the fanciest I've ever seen, and his luxury car is parked downstairs. He routinely raises his fees by a thousand dollars. He is one of the most experienced 'sexual reassignment' surgeons in the country. He is also a Jew. In addition to gender-related procedures, he does liposuction on fat people (because only thin people are socially acceptable or attractive), facelifts on older women (because women have to be young-looking to be desirable), and nose jobs on Jewish girls, to make them look 'prettier' (meaning more white/Aryan, less ugly/Jewish). I have

Alterations of the flesh engage the spirit. Fasting, cleansing/ immersion (as in a mikvah), and binding (as with t'fillen) are more familiar Jewish physical vehicles for intense psychological shifts, into a mental state that could be designated sacred. Cutting or piercing, in a sexual or S/M context, have a similar effect, and therefore require (for me) a certain level of trust and connection. It seems obvious that such a radical and deliberate reshaping of my body as chest surgery should be intensely spiritual. However the process of preparing for surgery is pathologized and depersonalized and felt gut-wrenchingly wrong to me. It was like one of those Star Trek episodes where, due to a rift in the space-time continuum, Captain Picard becomes trapped in an alternative universe, where all the people and places are the same, but something feels inexplicably wrong. [In the right universe, gender changes would be celebrated similarly to the way heterosexual weddings are now: by the combined support of family, community, spirituality and state. (But then in an ideal world, there would be no imperialist nation-state, but rather a network of cooperative communities.)]

After speaking with me, a local rabbi generously offered to do a mikvah (ritual immersion) before my surgery. I didn't go through with it for several reasons, one of which is that a ritual which involves being naked in front of another person (in this case a female rabbi) is inappropriate for most transpeople, who are very uncomfortable in their bodies. At the time, I didn't know enough about Jewish practices to create my own, the way that Jewish women have created new rituals for menstruation, menopause, and recovery from sexual assault, among others. And I was lacking confidence and a knowledge of precedent. I did not realize that Jewish practice has changed constantly and radically over the millenia, and that even many seemingly established events, such as Bat and Bar Mitzvahs, are only several decades old. [I did not want this event to be marked only by having to lie to my employer and shrinks, by having cold interactions with medical providers, and by making a large withdrawal from my bank account.]

I did stand on the edge of the Columbia Slough, brush the lint from my inside-out pockets and say *Tashlich*: "And You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). I did walk down to the Latino grocery store and fill a box with tall white novena candles.

"Funeral?" the clerk asked me.

"No, surgery."

He nodded solemnly and handed back my change.

Friends made me intricate candle-wrappers of prayers and sexy pictures, protective beasts and small birds (*feygelech*) with stitched chests. We brought all these candles to the hospital and I kept them lit in my bedroom for the week while I lay in bed bandaged and read sci-fi and James Baldwin.

My father + I meet  
as young men  
in a Berlin café  
before the war.



What is it?

I feel your hands on me from the inside  
I feel your breath in my mouth  
What will happen to you

Feel it feel it in a good way.  
They can't see you so what but you are there  
you exist you are the invisible boy  
You are defiant and exist despite them.  
You can survive in hiding in the sewers of my self.  
You emerge you are starved You are blinded  
everything is red and hurts.  
But this will pass. You will walk above ground.  
Someday you will be special but  
you will wear no special marking.

# SURGERY

"When I rose off of the doctor's slab  
I lost a piece of my heart"

- Hedwig and the Angry Inch

"Today is the birthday of the world."

- traditional Rosh Hashanah liturgy

The day before Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the Jewish year 5760,  
I got a flat chest.

Rosh Hashanah is a holiday of renewal and the first day of the Jewish  
New Year. It is also traditionally the birthday of Adam.

I love love love my new chest. Now I catch myself in the mirror, or feel  
the pull of my t-shirt across my bare chest, and it finally looks and feels right.  
It's an instant and unmediated Rightness. And now my gender is materialized in  
some ways. Although most of the world still can't see it, when I take off my  
clothes now, I can see my boy-ness and my in-between-ness, physically.

But there is also sadness. Sadness I can't quite pinpoint, but it is deep.  
'Real' transsexuals aren't supposed to feel this, according to the doctors.  
Fuck that.

If you have a smaller chest (think A or B cup), then the doctors can just  
make a small incision by your aureola, do some liposuction, and sew you back  
up. There's practically no visible scarring and nipple sensation is often retained.  
I, however, was not a small-chested boy. My nipples were cut off, cored out,  
clipped down, and grafted back on in a different place. There's no nerve action  
going on there. It's a drag, because when I had tits I didn't really get to enjoy any  
nipple sensation, and now that my chest is flat and I can deal with it, I can't feel  
anything. Now my nipples, or 'cosmetic pink dots' as I affectionately refer to  
them, feel prosthetic. They are erotic in an imaginary way, like my strap-on  
prick. Some people regain some kind of feeling, but it's usually not erotic, it's  
not what it was. Maybe there's some vital medical information that I'm missing,  
but it doesn't make sense to me that doctors have figured out how to turn a dick  
into a working pussy, but they can't remove breast tissue without severing the  
nipple nerves. Seems like a matter of priorities, to me.

The plus side of having had this type of surgery is that I have these  
Foxy scars. They're shaped like an anchor, arcing up from my sternum to below  
my armpits. I love my scars - yay for the nervert aesthetic



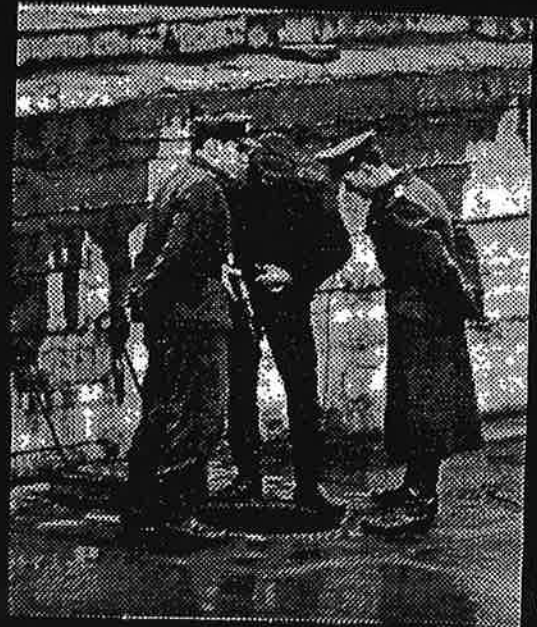
# zaftik



juicy · plump · well-rounded

"In May 1943 the Nazis launched the final destruction of the Jewish ghetto in Lvov. Thousands of Jews were rounded up and executed...A few survived by hiding in the tunnels of the sewer system, beneath the city. ...When the Russians liberated Lvov, the Jews emerged from the sewers looking more like creatures of the underworld than human beings: stooped over, covered with mud, emaciated and wearing rags. Their months in darkness had blinded them, so that for weeks weeks the world looked to them blood-red."

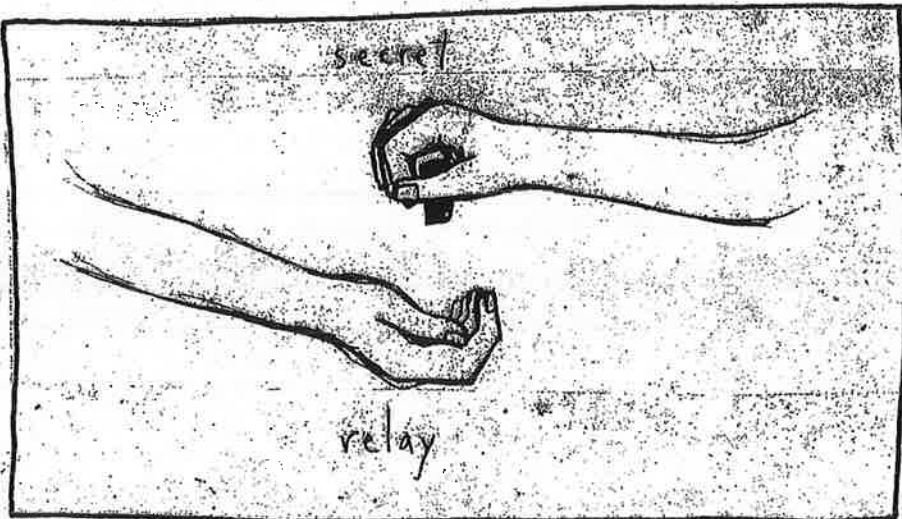
- from "In: The Sewers of Lvov"



The sewer, always a possible escape hatch.

Dear Hellery,

Last night I had one of my dreams that take place in huge, abandoned institutional buildings. Like the old train station in Detroit but 10 times bigger. I was staying in a decrepit room with metal furniture and old mattresses on the floor. At the end of the hall was a door with a frosted glass window. Inside was a medical clinic. I went in for a free consultation and the doctor asked me if I'd like boy hormones at sliding scale - \$5 per treatment. Yes! Yes! Yes! I said and I took some and went back to my room. I looked down at my legs and they were amputee legs like yours, except bent at the ends. I looked in the rusted medicine cabinet mirror above my small sink and - I had beautiful stubble on my chin! It was so exciting. Then you were there. You had brown hair and were wearing an old white undershirt and underwear. I showed you my stubble and told you about the amazing boy hormones and the free clinic. You said 'I didn't think you'd do that.' And I said 'yeah, I didn't want to go through all the trouble of seeing shrinks and being diagnosed gender dysphoric but this was so easy!' Then I showed you my legs and I cried about them. We had some big emotional trauma-bonding, then you said with a big smile: 'But this means you can be in the Miss Amputee Pageant!' And I tried to imagine how that would work with my gender and all.



I walk out into the rain and wonder how to love this. How to find a place in these uncomfortable groups, in this tradition which has no mention of me. How can I love Yiddish, a language in which the only word I can find that possibly refers to trans people is 'timum' - which comes from the word for 'stupid' or 'ineffectual'. I wonder how to hold my cheek to these cracked shards and still love what hurts me, what has erased me and denies me. I know Judaism itself is a model. It maintains a faith in all that is, despite the Jewish experience of extreme anti-Semitism and genocide. I think this is about a commitment to survival. Judaism presents this example: that at our most inspired we choose to honor the holiness of this world. We choose to live fully, which requires a faith in the potential for improvement of this world.

During the services at Beth Israel, the rabbi described an ancient mystic's vision of the Temple, filled with angels. The angels kneel and incant perpetually:

WITP WITP WITP  
Kadosh kadosh kadosh  
holy holy holy

I walk down to the Broadway Bridge in the pelting rain. My insides hurt with the void that should be family, community. I chant kadosh kadosh kadosh. This world hurts and it is holy. Judaism is broken and it is missing the voices of queers and gender-variant people.

Z'Chaim  
to Life.



# feygeleh

straight space, and yet one that I'm very invested in. It makes my genderqueerness and consequent anxiety light up like a neon sign.

So I'm sitting, obsessing and feeling very out of and in place simultaneously. I scan the room, and although 'you can't tell by looking' at us, I relish the similarities of feature - the rows of dark hair, full profiles, the gesturing and intonation that sounds like family.

And then from the seats in front of me, I hear voices that are even more familiar - Australian Jewish voices. Three older female relatives of the bat mitzvah girl have arrived. They sound like my mother, my aunt, my mother's childhood friends. And they are zaftik and made-up and adorned in a way that is also familiar. It is a nice queer/ Jewish cross-over that reads to me as not-WASP or not-straight femme in different contexts.

I can't help but break out into a huge smile, but I immediately look down and try and hide it, before they wonder: 'who is that weirdo, sitting there grinning at us?'

The whole thing is heart-wrenching. Jews have never engaged in these traditions alone; these practices are inherently communal. Conducting a Jewish ritual as an isolated human being feels 'off', like eating bread during Pesach.

The service starts and we read, docile, from prayer-books. It feels too cramped, too rote. The cantor and the rabbis chant most of the prayers alone and all the congregation gets to do is read responsively from our rows. It feels very Christian, very assimilated, very Reformed. I realize how important it is to me to move and express and participate in a service. Finally, the rabbi begins to speak. We are at the Torah portion which describes Jacob wrestling with the angel, and so she is discussing angels. She begins to talk about the difference between Jewish and Christian concepts of angels. Now this I like. Angels, in Jewish tradition, are not cherubic harbingers of goodness. They are fierce and sometimes terrifying. And unlike Christianity, Judaism sees them as an interesting side note. the greatest relevance of angels, says the rabbi, is as a metaphor for humanity at its most inspired. As illustration, she describes a scene from the film Towards a Hate-Free Millenium, about Matthew Shepard. During the trial of Shepard's murderers, the homophobic Reverend Phelps and his followers demonstrated outside the courthouse. They carried their usual signs, which said 'God Hates Fags' and 'Mathew is Burning in Hell'. The rabbi describes how Matthew's friends dressed up as angels, with halos and wings, and simply stood in a line, radiating.

It is pleasantly shocking to hear a straight person speak out about homophobia to a room full of (mostly) other straight people. It's just so unusual.

And meanwhile I sit there, in the fourth row, with no angel costume, next to the Jewish families who are not carrying any signs, but just sitting, with a wide silent berth between us.



# little bird fairy

Here is me on the day I changed my name. Needing another word for me that is not English is not a pronoun, a word that is essence. A word that will never change that is me as a child and me now + me old. A word that is big that will hold me that will not let me go into those chasms opening up beneath me. I need you to call me by that word. Please see me beyond gender. Please know that I don't fit into this stupid fucking system. Please remind me that there have always been people like me. Creatures who were not 'Men' or 'Women'. People who were different. Who made everyone feel uncomfortable. Or maybe reminded people of things beyond what they could name + number. But who were fabulously different. Different in ways that had + have no name. What do you do with that difference? I need to feel the continuation the

organ rupturing when I'm already knocked down. I know it shouldn't - I know the history and the contemporary reality - I know how power works and that I should be sufficiently jaded and bitter by now. But I don't want to be, damnit

It still hurts more to hear a rabbi defend the biblical laws against sodomy and cross-dressing, than it does to hear it from the Christian Fundamentalists. It hurts more to know how Jewish C.E.O.s like Charles Hurwitz are destroying the forests for greed and to know how the Israeli government tortures and massacres Palestinians. It hurts more to know that when the surviving Jews were liberated from the camps, the homosexuals were left behind to die.

So I've stopped going to P'nei Or. I'm hoping it's only temporary. But in the meantime I decide to check out some of the other local synagogues.

It's Friday morning and I'm all set - I've packed my kippah, a clean white shirt, and a copy of *Shalom Portland*. It's getting dark at 4:30 now and tonight the torrential rain starts. Barbur Blvd. is an ocean of cars and I am a stealth minnow on my bicycle, getting soaked, searching for the dome of Ahavath Achim, the Sephardic synagogue. I'm excited because my mother is Sephardic, and I've never been to a Sephardic service before. I lock up my bike, enter the lobby and start stripping off my raingear. I've got prayers under my tongue and as I reach down for my kippah, I see a sign at the entrance to the sanctuary:

"Please respect our traditional separate seating arrangement  
Men sit at the front, women at the back."

I get back on my bike and head out into the rain.

Tonight I've decided to try out Beth Israel, the large fancy Reform synagogue. I know one of the rabbis and she is wonderful. She is always welcoming and friendly towards me and frequently makes a point of bringing up gay and lesbian issues. And a friend already outed me to her as trans, so I don't have to worry about that.

This weekend a young woman in the congregation is having a bat mitzvah. Her extended family is there to celebrate. They are sitting in the next three rows in front of me.

It is hard to describe the discomfort that descends on me in public spaces. Some days I don't care what I look like and some days I'm obsessed with being seen as a boy - I stomp around, square off my shoulders and try to get by without using my voice. When I feel this way, getting called 'ma'am' or 'miss' or 'she' feels like a window suddenly shattering next to my face. I know that most people see me as a girl, but if they can just refrain from pointing it out to me, I'm so much happier. Being at shul is especially awkward because it is a public, very

# 'SHUL-SHOPPING'

For the last five months I have been spending intermittent Friday evenings with P'nei Or, the Jewish Renewal congregation. The services are kind of goofy - there's a lot of spontaneous dancing and tambourine playing. The rabbi plays an acoustic guitar. But I love the intention, the *kavannah*, the focus. Everyone (who wants to) can sing, stand, chant, walk outside to say the amidah (silent prayer) at their own pace, comment, say a bracha (blessing). The music is always semi-improvised and the loose-binder siddurim are always being added to. It includes Ashkenazi and Sephardic melodies and songs that the rabbi is currently writing. It draws from every branch of Judaism (reform, chassidic, reconstructionist, etc.). The mystery of the tradition - the curves of the Hebrew letters, the meditative chant of niggun, the resonance of the Jewish calendar in our collective memories - is gathered inwards on these Friday nights, as we circle our hands over the lit shabbat candles.

Unlike most other services I've attended, I am not immediately attacked, excluded, or unaffected. However, there is a palpable discomfort, which is especially noticeable in such a small congregation. It's also especially jarring to feel so un-welcome after participating in such a moving shared experience. In some ways davening is like great sex or art or other experiences which can bond you to people through their intensity.

I realize that part of this is my own gender discomfort - discomfort with the way I am perceived, with being called 'she' and 'girl' and 'sister'. And discomfort caused by not feeling confident enough to correct anyone, come out to anyone in this setting, yet.

Another part of this discomfort seems to be a Jewish cultural characteristic, which could be called unfriendliness or over-protectiveness. Judaism is the opposite of evangelical. For example, traditionally, anyone seeking to convert to Judaism must make this request three times before being taken seriously. This attitude is understandable in a historical context, in which Jews have often had to evade intrusions by hostile outsiders. However, in the context of the U.S. diaspora, this behavior is counter-productive to welcoming the multitudes of alienated Jews back into any sort of Jewish community. Maybe this unfriendliness also has to do with our own internalized anti-Semitism: maybe it is too uncomfortable to connect with others with whom we have little in common except our shared Jewishness. Or maybe this unfriendliness reflects the extent of Jewish assimilation into white, individualistic, owning-class culture.

But certainly a part of this is homo- and transphobia. I started attending services with two very conventionally-attractive femme friends of mine. The difference in the welcomes we received (or in my case, didn't) was very painful and obvious.

I don't know what the rabbi's stance is on trans- and queer-ness and I haven't brought it up (since I've been there, nobody else has either). I want to be that brave, but honestly I am afraid of what I'll hear. To be rejected by society at large is, you know, kind of a drag, but in some ways it's nothing new, and I'm not that invested in mainstream society anyway. But it especially sucks ass to be rejected and despised by Jews. A betrayal by other Jews feels like an internal

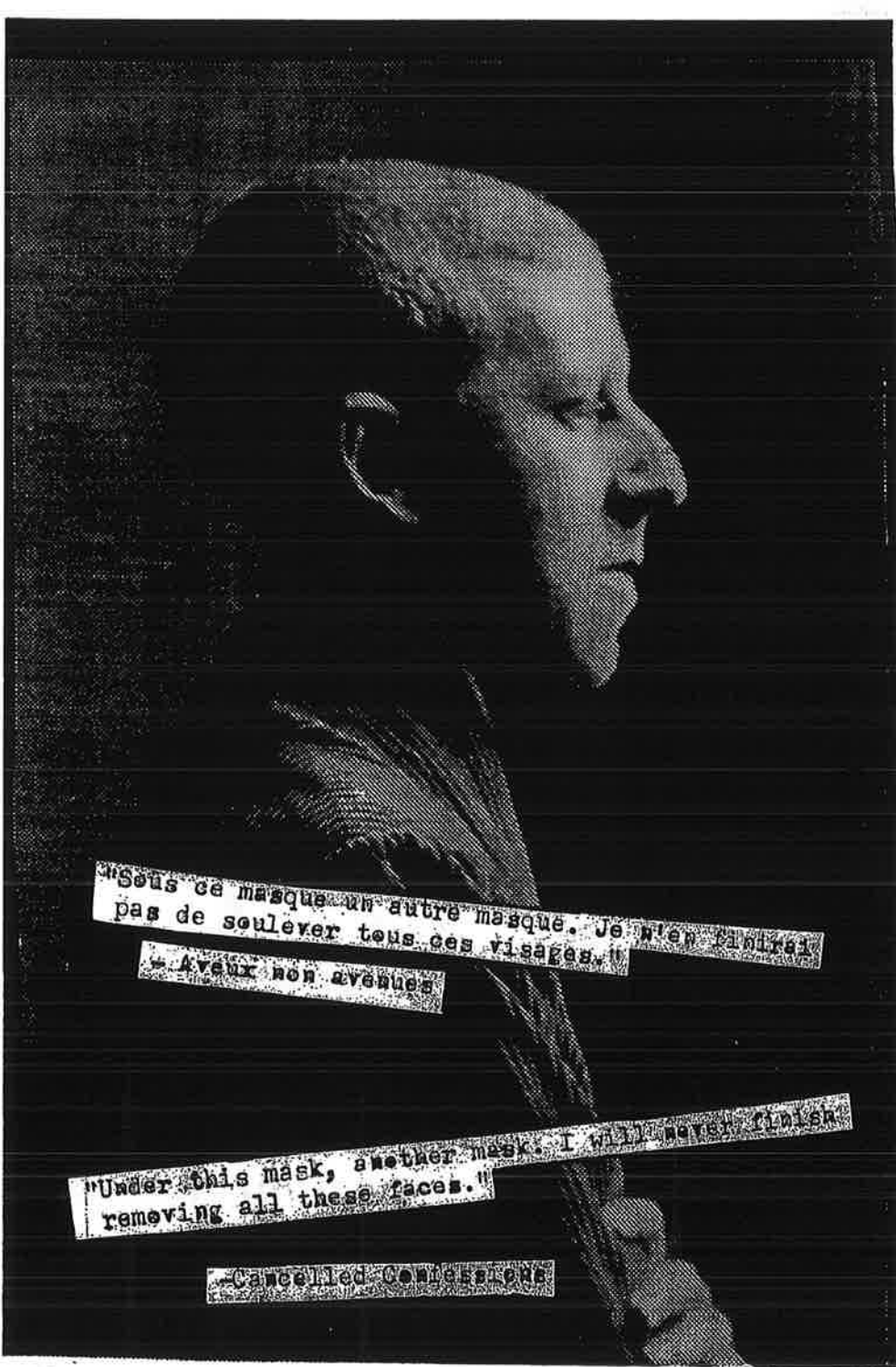
Sameness. Shekhinah don't lose me  
I am your daughter I am your son  
I was your daughter first now I am  
your son. You know me you see  
me  
beyond + below all this.  
You will always recognize my face you  
will always know my name.

אני כן אתה. אתה כן אני.

you see me in all the ways I truly am.  
I hate the fucking binary. Rips me apart  
I Am Not One Thing.  
I Am My Own Very Special  
thing.

Don't lose me. I am not crazy. I am yours.

I was made out of all that is  
therefore I must have been in  
the world before.



Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1919. Silver print.

Reform, Chassidic, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, Renewal, and Conservative are some of the many different branches/ approaches/ practices of Judaism. These branches often overlap and subdivide.

### The Jewish Diaspora

Jewish communities have existed all over the world. There are many subcultural groups, each with their own customs, languages, foods, music, etc. Hebrew is the main textual and religious language of the Jewish people, but at one time each of these sub-cultural groups had their own day-to-day languages as well, which mixes of Hebrew and the languages of wherever they were living. Because of the Holocaust, and mass migration to Israel, most of these languages are increasingly scarce.

The more privileged and recognized Jewish cultural group is *Ashkenazi* Jews, Jews from central and Eastern Europe. They spoke/speak Yiddish - a mixture of Hebrew, German, and other languages. "*Mizrahi* - eastern in Hebrew - is used to describe people descended from Jewish communities that never left the Middle East and North Africa in the course of their Jewish history. Their home language was usually arabic or Judeo-Arabic and many aspects of their culture were closer to their Arab neighbors than to Ashkenazi Jews. The adjective *Sephardi* is the term that derives from *Sepharad*, the Hebrew word for Spain, representing those descendants of the Jewish community that flourished in Spain or Portugal for hundreds of years until the Catholiuc Inquisition and expulsion of the Jews in 1492. This community was dispersed and settled primarily in the Ottoman Empire, especially in Morocco, Turkey and Greece." They spoke/ speak *Ladino*, a medeival Judeo-Spanish language.

"There are other, ancient, Jewish communities that are neither Ashkenazi, Sephardi, nor Mizrahi. Though some Ethiopian, Italian, Greek, and Indian Jewish communities trace their lineage to those lands for more than a thousand years, their histories are tied in complicated ways to the other Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Jews." (quoted text from *Bridges, a journal for Jewish feminists and our friends*, vol. 7)

### The Calendar

The Jewish calendar is lunar and solar-based. Each new 24-hour period begins at sunset, rather than sunrise. There are 13 months, with an extra leap month thrown in every three years, to compensate for the cycle of the sun. Jewish time is also based on the observance of the sky and moon, instead of only fixed, calculated time. Because the length of days and nights varies with the seasons, the length of Jewish hours and minutes also varies.

It is currently the Jewish year 5760. Traditionally, the year one was considered the time of the world's creation. Jews often use the abbreviations C.E. (Common Era) or B.C.E. (Before Common Era), instead of the Christ-based B.C. or A.D.

# \* definitions \*

So, lets fight the power, starting with a little Jewish terminology. (If you're from New York, you will probably know all this. This list is tailored to my current West Coast locale, where I have discovered such tragic voids as unfamiliarity with the word 'schlep'.\*) This will prevent embarrassing situations, like saying 'Huh? What? What's that?' for the tenth time when your Jewish friend tells you she can't hang out on Friday night because its 'SHA-biss'. It might also give you an extra angle to impress that sexy Jew you've been crushed out on!

**Shabbes (Yiddish) or Shabbat (Hebrew)** - the sabbath, a time for rest and reflection, which begins at sundown on Friday night, and ends at sundown on Saturday evening. It is traditional - and a mitzvah! - to light candles, say blessings, eat well, sing, study Torah, bathe, dress up, and have sex, among other things. Shabbat is often metaphorically referred to as a bride or queen.

**Mitzvah** - originally referred to the laws of the Torah, but has come to also mean any good deed.

**Torah** - can refer to the entire body of sacred Jewish literature or the five Books of Moses.

## Holidays

There are so many rich and beautiful holiday traditions...this is just the briefest of introductions.

Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah are the Jewish High Holy Days - Yom Kippur is a solemn holiday during which we fast and ask forgiveness from people we have wronged and God. Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year. A shofar (ram's horn) is blown a hundred times at the synagogue. Eat apples dipped in honey and new fruits of the season - yum!

Sukkot - a harvest festival, and a reminder of the time which the Israelites spent wandering in the desert. It is traditional to build beautiful open booths or *sukkahs* outside, decorated with art, fruit, leaves, lights, etc.

Purim - Read the story of Esther and make lots of noise to drown out the name of Haman, who tried to kill the Jews. Dress up in costume, party, drink, and eat cookies.

Pesach / Passover - A celebration of freedom and spring. It involves eating matzah instead of bread, and having seders - ritual meals during which we read from a haggadah The story of the Israelite slaves' liberation from Egypt is told. There are many radical new hagaddahs, which also focus on other oppressions, such as racial and gender equality and liberation.

Yom Ha'Shoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), Tisha B'Av (tree-appreciation festival), Hannukah, Tisha B'Av, Shavuot, and Simcha Torah (celebration of the Torah) are some of the other minor Jewish holidays.

(\*schlep is a yiddish word meaning 'to drag'.  
I also use it to mean drag as in drag king.)

# Claude Cahun

Jewish genderfreak artfag  
anti-Nazi resistance fighter



Claude Cahun  
self-portrait, 1925

Born in France in 1894 to a wealthy Jewish literary family. At the age of 15, he fell in love with his step-sibling Suzanne Malherbe, alias Marcel Moore. They were to be life-long companions and art co-conspirateurs.

In 1918, he took the name Claude Cahun. The first name Claude is gender ambiguous in French. The last name was taken from his maternal grandmother, 'Cahun', is the French form of 'Cohen', the Jewish surname of the priestly lineage.

The act of defiance attached to leaving "Schwob" to affect "Cahun" can thus only be seen as one of flaunting one's Jewishness in the face of the heightened anti-Semitism of postwar France, a kind of provocation every bit as dangerous as parading one's lesbianism. ✓

OR one's trans gender

In Paris, Cahun briefly engaged in theatrical pursuits, while continuing to contribute to literary journals. In 1930, he produced *Aveux non avendus* (Avowals not admitted), a book of prose poetry and photomontages made in collaboration with Malherbe. Cahun espoused leftist politics and played a role in the Surrealist movement.

Indeed Cahun's entry into the world of the Parisian literary avant-garde was marked by his adopting a pseudonym, the first name of which—Claude—announced a gender indeterminacy that further adjustments in her physical appearance and self-presentation would reinforce. Shaving his head, or dyeing the short crew cut she sometimes allowed to grow pink or green, she adopted a mask of masculinity that he further exaggerated, for example, in the photographic





Even though I hate being perceived as a girl, I recognize the amount of safety it provides me. For example, at the FTM conference in Los Angeles, several guys talked about having to transition because they were so unaccepted and unsafe everywhere. For example, they had been beaten up by butch dykes at lesbian bars who thought they were men. I can go to the dyke bar ~~and~~ and be seen as a dyke, even though I feel like I am being partly misrecognized. And I knew my childhood would have been way more hellacious if my gender issues had been more apparent.

★ In a way, I'm almost always passing, as either 'male' or 'female', because 99.9% of people don't see my gender. They don't have a concept for anything other than men and women. In this sense, passing means being fit into the binary gender system. [I don't 'pass' when people don't know what I am. Then they are actually seeing me more accurately, even though this recognition is almost always hostile.]

★ In an ideal world I would want to be recognized as my own queer gender - which is definitely not a woman and not a man. I'm realizing that part of why I like being called 'he', is to have that dissonance acknowledged. I know that it confuses people and feels wrong. That's the point- I am 'wrong'- I don't fit. And I think a lot of people, whatever their gender presentation, don't fit either, they don't feel like 'real men' or 'real women'. There are many many genderqueer people in the world, just waiting for language and support, to come out. Hopefully, trans politics and culture will make create more space and options for people, similarly to the way queer culture has. Hopefully, in 20 years, me and all my currently gender-anguished peers will be able to sit around and laugh about how alone and crazy we felt.



Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1928.

Yesterday I saw Nomy + we talked about her unicorn obsession + about being Jewish.  
And that night I had this dream:

We are in outer space.  
I am an alien boy.

There has been an intergalactic war - an epic war, between all species of the known universe - going on for centuries, cons.

A tiny silver pod sails toward a remote space station.

A peace council is going to meet, to negotiate, possibly sign a treaty and conduct a ceremony to end this war. Diplomats from every people are gathering - I am one of the representatives. All the alien diplomats are seated around a huge table in a council hall. Negotiations are proceeding well - everyone wants a resolution. But in order to seal this peace, a ritual must be conducted, and certain types of beings are needed to fill certain roles. There is one

This is partly because it's hard to believe that someone accepts me as a boy, when they don't fully accept themselves as male until they can pass 150%. This is where the correlation breaks down for me, between passing as a Jew and as a guy. Other than the time I got a hitchhiking ride from neo-Nazi with a swastika tattooed on his arm, I can't think of too many times that I've wanted to pass as a guy. I can definitively say that I have no desire to be more Christian-like than I have already been forced to be. But it seems like most transpeople (including me right now) are striving to pass and hating the parts that don't pass. Sometimes it is very hard to distinguish between gender dysphoria and internalized transphobia.

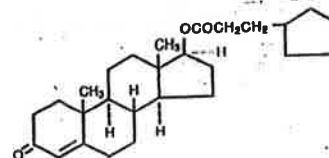
## UPDATE

Its been a couple months since I wrote the last draft of this essay. My ideas about gender are changing so much as I meet more inspiring people, have more conversations, find more books, have more time to think. I'm realizing that a lot of the problem is this: while I'm perfectly happy not passing as Christian or straight, when I don't pass as a guy there is no recognized category for me to fall into other than 'girl', which feels wrong.

Some people, because of their physical presentation, are placed by others in the category of 'tranny' or 'gendertrash' when they don't pass. Because of my 'feminine' traits, I pass well as a girl most of the time. A butchy, dykey girl, but not a gender that utterly confounds people in the way that other more physically ambiguous people do. Part of this has to do with the fact that I'm living in Portland, a good-sized town with a large dyke population.

### Depo®-Testosterone

testosterone cypionate sterile solution  
(testosterone cypionate injection, USP)



I am thinking about the term 'passing'. As a Jew, it means assimilation. Passing always means being accepted into a more dominant group: white, Christian, non-trans, etc. It involves proving that you are not something supposedly inferior. I have even heard the term passing used to describe the situation of genetic men, who must prove their manhood. Passing always means hiding something. It implies posing as something other than what you are. It implies trying to conform to, and live up to, other peoples' standards and expectations.

I understand that we frequently must pass in order to be safe in this society. But I don't want 'passing' to be the ultimate goal for me. I love it when people read me as male, but I don't want to have to not be myself in order to pass. And when someone recognizes me as a boy, I hate to call it passing because it suggests I'm not being who I already am. It suggests that they are being tricked into seeing me as something I'm not. And I don't like saying that I'm 'not passing'. It sounds like I'm failing, like I'm not acceptable. We need new language.

I don't want to pass with all these implications. I want to be seen and recognized as who I already am. And ~~xxx~~ as who I am naturally meant to become, to change and grow into.

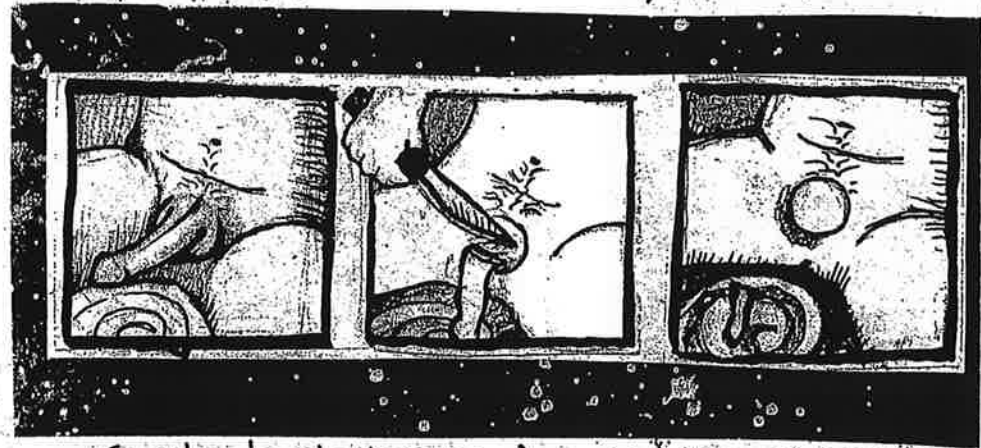


'Passing' is such an internalized word. There are still big chunks of my brain that feel ashamed for not being masculine enough, for not passing, etc. When I hang out with other transguys and they recognize me as male, it feels great, but sometimes I also feel ashamed, like they are doing me a favor.

crucial role vacant- I am the right alien race for it, but not the right alien gender.

So, for the greater good of peace in the universe, I agree to have a sex change.

And now we see: dream slide show of the alien sex change operation. Close up: I have a beautiful gorgeous silver metallic prick. A long knife cuts it off slow clean no blood, just flat underneath and its gone.



So, the treaty is signed. And afterwards I sit at the table next to a very foxy alien tranny girl with red hair. Turns out we're taking the same shuttle back to our homeworlds. She's wearing turquoise lingerie and flirting with me + I think: 'Fuck! Why did I cut off my dick?!'



Long before the Negro child perceives this difference, and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it. Every effort made by the child's elders to prepare him for a fate from which they cannot protect him causes him secretly, in terror, to begin to await, without knowing that he is doing so, his mysterious and inexorable punishment. He must be "good" not only in order to please his parents and not only to avoid being punished by them; behind their authority stands another, nameless and impersonal, infinitely harder to please, and bottomlessly cruel. And this filters into the child's consciousness through his parents' tone of voice as he is being exhorted, punished, or loved; in the sudden, uncontrollable note of fear heard in his mother's or his father's voice when he has strayed beyond some particular boundary. He does not know what the boundary is, and he can get no explanation of it, which is frightening enough, but the fear he hears in the voices of his elders is more frightening still.

-James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time

"dispossession by attrition  
is the permanent condition  
that the wretched modern world enjoys"

-The Klezmatics, Possessed

Being Jewish is so much about galut (exile)- being in a place, but not fully being there - a sense of displacement, millenia of wandering, of watching your back. While at the same time, today in North America, assimilating. Moving through (and upwards in) the crowd, while still having a deep sense of being different. With assimilation comes a fear of being found out.

I am not the nicest person right now.  
The rage is consuming. You can't get away from gender - it's everywhere, in my face. No, you can't do this - you don't fit in here - we don't see you - what's your problem - I feel like everything is against me to prevent my existence. The endless small stabs + exclusions + misunderstandings + terror + danger, add up till my sadness doesn't work - I look you all in the eye + stab the thought into your mind - No, you are wrong. You are the one with the problem. Giant metal claws spring out of my oh-so-soft + small hands + clutch your jaw, turn your Normal genetically-congruent face to the side + make you listen. Soon I'll be ready to go to shul + walk through the gender partition. Soon I'll be ready to take on the doctors + spit their terms back in their faces. Soon I'll be ready to speak at the progressive forum when it's time for the men to speak.

Yeah, keep pushing me -

Some days I feel ready to top the world.

It

(I hate)

He

# PRONOUNS

Hir

She

They

Ze

In self-defense class I learned about a model called a Continuum of Violence, which can be applied to any form of oppression. It illustrates the idea that individual, small acts of violence are related to and enable the most systemic and destructive ones.

At one end of the spectrum we have all the daily incidents which we try to blow off and become immune to. For example, some everyday experiences of racist violence for people of color are: negative, stereotypical images of people of color in the media; verbal harassment, racist or eurocentric comments; being followed in stores and assumed to be a criminal, etc. etc. All these seemingly little things are cumulative and wear down our sense of self-worth. They condition us to accept accept greater violations.

Further along the continuum of racist violence are things like being denied employment, education, healthcare, loans and housing; being criminalized and incarcerated. The end of the continuum for all forms of oppression is the most extreme: rape, murder, cultural obliteration and genocide.

Basic survival is the most pressing issue for most transpeople. At least one of us is murdered every month in the U.S. There are few laws protecting us from job and housing discrimination. Healthcare (basic and trans-specific) is usually inaccessible, unavailable or unaffordable. And that's not even getting international.

However, all this is not unconnected to the painful everyday stuff, often coming from people 'in the community' who should know better.

She explains that something has happened: the combination of my new name plus a word generated by he + I fucking, has opened up this rift.  $\pi\pi\pi + ?$

Somehow she was going to help us adjust the universe so this wouldn't happen.

Last night I dreamt that I was on a bus going to some Jewish event. Two women sitting next to me were having a long conversation. I realized that one of them was a black Jewish transwoman. Someone I needed to meet. I leaned over to introduce myself, made eye contact, and said: "Hello - My name is - " And then - a moment of panic and confusion - I couldn't remember what my name was. But with high femme poise she covered for me, shushed my stammering, and said: "Wait - don't tell me - let me guess." She put one hand to her temple, looked me hard in the eyes and said: "Your name is Micah."

I dreamt that he and I were making out + we kept getting interrupted by these strange things. Like giant beetles the size of sofa cushions suddenly crawling down his shoulder and out from the hallway and all over the floor. Then we're in bed, and he's in crazy girl drag - wearing this white wig and a very elaborate outfit with bits that are held together by purple threads that loop through his toes. Its kind of 60s. And this hot pink halter top. And I'm groping + sucking on his tits. Its totally sick and wrong and hot.

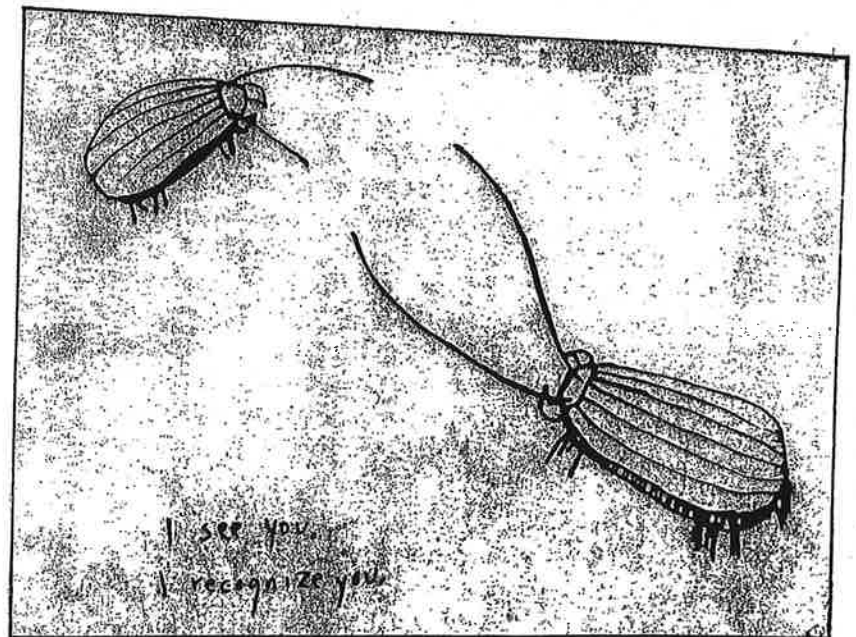
Then I look up, and our bed is outside. Its nighttime, but suddenly these patches of bright blue daylight sky start moving toward us. And the ground is moving too, + seems to have an end, a cliff that is coming towards us fast. Fuck. We start running + run to this field. It is unnaturally quiet and empty. We go through an electric fence and then wander around this old barn. We find a woman sitting in a room in front of a blackboard. She's a middle-aged lesbian with thick glasses and a bowl haircut - very comforting. She explains that this is a parallel universe. It has a name in hebrew that I can't remember. But it is normal to her, she lives + belongs there.

Knowingly referring to a transperson by the wrong pronoun is DISRESPECTFUL, and a step on this continuum.

If someone can't be bothered to get my fucking pronoun right, this tells me several things about them:

- 1) They don't care enough about me or other trans people to make the small effort.
- 2) They don't know shit about transpeople and don't think our lives are important enough to educate themselves about.
- 3) They don't see me.
- 4) I am not safe with them.

When people call me 'she' after I have corrected them, it sucks and makes me think: 'well, I guess I'm just SUCH A GIRL that noone can see me as anything else. oh well' But I know it's not impossible because- somehow- all my friends who love and care about me manage to get it right.



For a long time I thought if people didn't perceive me as a boy, then I couldn't be one. This caused me a lot of pain and was a huge factor in denying my own and other peoples' genders.

I remember the first transguy I met, years ago. At the time, he had just started hormones. I remember hanging out with him in group social situations (mostly after homocore shows) and a lot of people, including (I'm ashamed to say) myself, calling him 'she' and 'her'. I remember having a conversation about this after one such awkward event. Ironic ally, I was talking with another VERY gender ambiguous person about how they "just couldn't see him as male". (of course, this simultaneously justified all the reasons I couldn't be trans...whew, what a relief! ha ha) At the time I thought: 'yeah, that's true, it is hard to see him as male because: I knew him as a dyke, he's so short, etc etc blah blah blah.

Over the years I have had this discussion with different people many times. About how they just can't see their MTF friend as a woman because she 'relates to them like a man' etc. And now I get to have these same conversations in relation to myself.

Like many people, I voraciously read Stone Butch Blues when it first came out. I love that book and I am so glad it exists- it permanently changed the gender landscape of the world. And Leslie Feinberg is a total hero to me, as a Jewish, trans, multi-issue radical activist. However, Stone Butch Blues is a fictional account of the life of one trans gendered butch lesbian - it is not a handbook on the diversity of trans experiences. And so, because it was the first and for a long time the only positive trans information I knew about, it confused me. Although some of the heart-wrenching gender agony felt so familiar to me, the protagonist's life is very different from mine in her ability to pass. Her trans-ness is more physically apparent. From practically her birth she is frequently identified by others as male. She's tall enough

"Hi, (grabbing my hand) my name's Caitlyn...I go to Grant (high school). Where do you go?"

"Wow, I love your piercing \*you're cute, what's your name?"

Teenage girls hit on me with all their lip-gloss aggressiveness. It's flattering and a nice fantasy, but aside from being statutory rape, I know what they're attracted to is an illusion: they think I'm ~~around~~ a teenager.

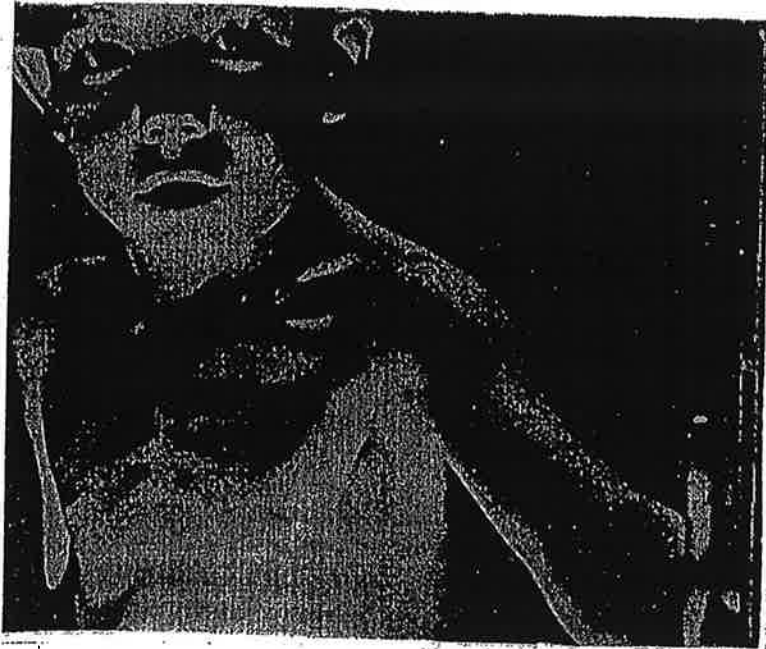
From a fully medically-transitioned FTM activist in his 30s: "You're 26!?! No way- I thought you were 16! I can't believe it! I thought for sure you ~~were~~ were so young!" etc etc etc

And sometimes it's just the lie. It's the wrongness of a category I slip into because the binary gender system can't accommodate me. The reality is I'm 27 ~~xxx~~ and sometimes I want to be seen as my actual age. I get to continue to experience ageism and condescension. Sometimes I want to be taken seriously, as everyone of every age should be. And being constantly referred to as a 'trannyboy' by certain non-trans people begins to feel incorrect, cutesy-fied, reduced. ★

Sometimes BOY feels like a revolutionary new gender that I am defining as I'm living it.

Sometimes I identify as a boy because it's the closest choice I've got.





'Boy' seems like a more appropriate male label than 'man' - a position which is granted gender privilege and dominance. I don't have either of these things because people don't perceive me as male, and because I wasn't raised with the (sense of) entitlement that most bio-guys have.

When people read me as a guy they see me as very young. 'Boy' is what is reflected back at me by society. Bus drivers never hesitate to hand me a youth ticket, and if I protest, they think I'm trying to pull one over on them.

"Hey, bro, you got a smoke?"

"Cheer up, sherty."

"Got the time, m n?"

Young guys approach me on the street, thinking I'm one of them. If I decide to answer back, the look of horror that crosses their face is inevitable.

and butch enough that- even though it's done in a painful and usually violent and derogatory way- others recognize her trans-mess. And when she finally decides to take hormones, she has no problem passing as a man.

The experiences of trans people who pass and those who don't are very different.

It is Feminism 101 that girls can have short hair and be sperty, and boys can play with dolls and be emotional. But a lot of this seems to go out the window in trans contexts. Non-trans people use it to justify their inacceptance and transphobia ("He can't be a guy, he's not -----.") And transpeople also fall into this trap. Those who pass are often considered the 'real' or successful ones. When transpeople hold up the most conventionally pretty MTF or the biggest FTM, or the person who's scars show the least, as their role model, it reflects their internalized transphobia.

I also frequently hear (or read) transpeople pointing to their 'congruent' attributes as proof of their real gender. For example: "I'm great at math- I have a male brain." "Look how tall he is- you can just see that his body is waiting for testosterone." I know how it feels reassuring to find things which seem to be markers of one's true self. But while this may feel validating to me, it is not actually proof of my gender or anyone else's. This kind of thinking reinforces the binary gender system which is killing us. Our gender is just what we know and feel and say it is.

While I do get 'sir'ed and some people read me as male, this usually lasts about a minute, or until I open my mouth. I'll never consistently pass as a guy unless I take hormones, and even then...who knows? A lot of transpeople do everything medically possible to confirm their internal gender identity, and are still not accepted by society. And a lot of transsexuals, especially MTFs, have been put through extensive re-socialization training to

behave and appear more 'feminine', to walk and talk 'right', in order to pass (Kate Bernstein writes about this in Gender Outlaw). Many transpeople are forced to conform to society's gender expectations in order to survive. But ideally, why should our sense of self hinge on other peoples' perceptions? Besides being completely maddening, this goes against everything I believe in as a feminist and a queer.

I used to be obsessed with these lists that I carried around mentally:

## male

broad shoulders  
tall  
strong  
stoic  
loud  
macho  
good at sports  
muscles  
hairy  
good at fixing things  
etc. etc.

## female

high voice  
breasts  
emotional  
small feet+hands  
long hair  
small frame  
short  
crosses legs  
round face  
no-low body hair  
soft skin

↑  
goes on forever + ever...

(High scores =  
= recognition  
= acceptance  
= safety  
= privilege)

# BOY

For years this has been the word closest to my gender.

I wander around the mall by myself for hours, try trying to find a dress shirt for this wedding. Nothing fits in the men's department. I finally get up the courage to go into the men's clothing store and they tell me I'm just under the smallest size they carry. I always just miss the cuts: for the smallest size men's shoes, sleeve length, shirt size. Shopping sucks in general (fuck consumerism!) but shopping with gender anxiety is even more fun. And when you're trans and your body is extra 'wrong' it sucks even more ass. If you're MTF and big or FTM and small, it's an extra level of invalidation. I imagine if I was a big, tall transguy, going out and pulling a men's shirt off the rack that fit me would feel like a confirmation of my gender.

Of course, other people experience variations of this situation- if you're any kind of big/ fat girl or slight boy, finding clothes is difficult, and makes you feel un-sexy and invisible.

"Have you tried the boy's department?"

Sometimes I love being a boy. I can be a bratty little boy or a cocky teenage boy who wants to pin the cheerleader up against the wall and have his way with her. Sometimes I love the un-adulthood of it: not 'growing up' in the sense of conforming and losing your right to play. Sometimes 'boy' feels right because it's a young male identity, and my male self is young in some ways- he's inexperienced and hasn't been out in the world very long. He's experimenting and adolescent. His sideburns and pecs aren't visible yet. ★



Claude as a young boy at the age of 27.

If you get enough points on either side, you get put in that category.

How many points do you need ?

20? 10? 5?

What if you only have three ? What if you have zero?

needless to say: This is also maddening.

I hereby declare that you can be whatever you want to be without any points!

In order to understand trans gender expression and see and respect people as who they really are, we have to break down our gender conditioning. We have to get used to (and excited about) bearded ladies and dudes with cunts. Short boys with 'dessert hands' and big-boned gals with deep voices . We have to trash the lists.

This is exciting because when we validate other people and create space for their own unique gender, we do the same for ourselves.

More Space, More Creatures.



we like that

I'm queer as  
fuck + I'm going  
to carve a space



in your  
brain for  
trannies.

Yeah, it'll hurt  
but its the  
good kind  
of pain.

Sometimes I think, if I do transition medically, that physical adolescence would be the appropriate time for a bar mitzvah. Then my voice would crack, like my friend Adam's did, as I read my Torah portion. Then we could all celebrate my 'becoming a man' in the Jewish community. We could all celebrate my becoming more passable. (i am being sarcastic). Yeah, I can see myself making that speech up on the bima...

Judaism is such a challenge right now, because it is so strictly gendered and so patriarchal. There is millennia of work to do to transform the religion and culture simply around feminism and women's equality - never mind trans issues, which few people have even heard of, much less begun to think about. So many of the rituals involve men's roles and women's roles, neither of which I can participate in publicly right now...because I'm in-between, because I don't pass as a man and there's no way I'm going to pretend to be a woman - it would feel false and invalidating to everything I'm trying to uncover right now. But in some ways they both feel wrong. Because I don't really feel like a man or a woman.

In some ways, having a bar mitzvah would feel like stepping up and taking my place at the gates of gender privilege - privilege which I don't and will never have. Even if I do someday 'pass', I will always be different, I will always be flamingly queer. I will never be seamlessly, thoughtlessly gendered or bodied. I will never be able to stop worrying about the possibility of being revealed, of violence. . . And I am shaped by my girlhood, by my experiences of being female, of being a dyke. She is part of me always.

Any spirituality is about wholeness, healing and honesty. How could I do something sacred, how could I do something in the names of my ancestors without being whole, without being honest?

Tisha B'Av, 5759

Today my friend Miriam and I are fasting. We are in the Jewish book aisle at Powell's, planning our shabbos dinner for tomorrow night. It's a special kind of torture: we're looking at recipes for kugel and kreplach, cucumber salad and piresaki. It's 5pm and we're a little loopy from hunger.

So, this very cute elder Jewish lady approaches us and says, gesturing towards me with a note of gleaming anticipation in her voice:

"Is this the bar mitzvah boy?"

I blush beet red. A bar mitzvah boy is 13 years old. I am twice that age. Miriam, thank god, graciously says: "He's a little older than that." The woman replies, "Well, you can never tell- MY bar mitzvah boy is 6'2"!"

What is she seeing? Does she think Miriam is my mother? She's definitely using that 'let's boast about our sons' tone.

I can't talk (this is very difficult for me). I can't say anything or I'll no longer be able to enjoy this moment. Miriam proceeds to engage her in conversation about various books of the Hebrew alphabet. Then, (and this is so Jewish) this woman, who is now standing about 2 feet away from me, says to Miriam 'confidentially' in a very loud voice: "Oh, I hope I did n't offend him!"

# Respect / Etiquette / Support

OK, here are some basics. Of course, every trans person is different, and may be more or less concerned about these issues. This list is based mostly on my own experience as a white trannyboy in his mid-20s who doesn't usually 'pass'. Also, some things, which are totally inappropriate towards strangers or acquaintances, might be fine or welcomed in the context of a trusting relationship. I'm sad to say that I've done most of the things on this list at some point in my life, and had most of them done to me by other trans people. As with other oppressions (like racism, homophobia, sexism...), they are socialized into us from birth. We are all taught to be transphobic, and unlearning it is a process and a responsibility.

-If you don't know what pronoun or gender-labels someone prefers (and there's no mutual friend around to clue you in), just ask them. Politely. And respectfully. Usually when people can't immediately determine someone's gender, they become afraid and hostile. If you misrecognize someone's gender it's O.K., it's not the end of the world. Don't freak out. Misidentifying or being unable to classify someone's gender does not have to be an awkward or shameful experience. By asking someone in the right way, you can indirectly communicate: 'I want to be respectful of you and I don't want to make any assumptions. I see your gender ambiguity and/or fluid gender expression as a positive, fabulous, creative and honest (need I go on?) thing.'

## -Respect Their Self-Identification

Ok, I've written about this extensively elsewhere, but it's real important, so here's a brief fresh'n up:

By doing this you are saying: 'I see you, I support you, I respect you.' By not doing this you let trans people know: 'I don't understand you and I'm not trying to. What you tell me about yourself isn't important, all that's important is how I think of you. I am not your ally. You are not safe with me.' It's fucking hard and dangerous to change your name and pronoun, especially if you don't 'pass'. Know that it has taken a lot of courage for this person to let you know who they really are; they are sharing something very precious.

-You do NOT have the right to know any medical or anatomical information about anyone else's body (unless they decide to share it with you). This means: don't ask about their genitals, their surgeries, the effects of their hormones, etc. etc. THIS IS PRIVATE! The first question usually asked to transmen is 'Do you have a penis?' or 'Do you have a vagina?' [This is incredibly phallo-centric, invasive and degrading. It reduces transmen (and all men) down to one body part, as if all the rest of our minds, hearts, bodies, contributions and personalities are not important. Our bodies are not a community forum. Just because your friend of a friend of a transperson told you that so and so is having surgery, doesn't mean you have the right to come up and ask them about it (especially in front of other people!) If you want to find out more about transsexual bodies, do some work: look up books or look on the internet.]

I dream about knowing ASL-speaking without my voice. In ASL, there are no gendered pronouns. People are placed in space, + then referred to by pointing to those coordinates.

BOY -



-8022!

### -Don't Interrogate Me

once again, it's not my job to educate you and I may not feel like answering your incredibly personal questions right now. For example, don't ask me how my family is taking it, if you've just met me.

### -The Boys Don't Cry Syndrome

Since this movie came out, many many people have taken it upon themselves to discuss it at length with me, ask me if I've seen it, explain how tragic it was and how hard it was for them to watch as a non-trans person. This is sort of the equivalent of coming up to me and saying 'Hey, you're a Jew! Have you seen the latest movie about the Holocaust? Well, let me tell you, I'm Very Interested in this subject, and boy was it hard for me to watch all those people get killed.' It IS really important for people to educate themselves about different experiences of oppression, however, someone who has to deal with that oppression all the time may not want to hear about it, or process how hard it was for you, as someone not directly effected by it. Check yourself before you bring up the ten latest, most horrifying transphobic things you heard yesterday, which your trans friend may actually not want to re-experience with you.

### -Outing

There are many situations in which it may not be safe for a trans person to be out. Examples are: family, work, dealing with the cops, walking by large groups of aggro young white men at night, etc.

Transpeople have to negotiate this ground everyday, depending on how we pass and how others perceive us. For example, if someone reads me as female and refers to me as 'she', I might or might not correct them depending on many variables: whether I'm going to have to see them again, how awkward or dangerous or annoying a situation might become, how confident I feel, who I'm with, how much backup I have, etc. etc. Outing someone could very easily cost someone their job, a relationship, or their physical safety. This is definitely a gray area and one that is good to check in about.

-Also, think about when and why you out someone as trans. Are you talking about your 'transgendered friend' just to prove how open and hip you are? Is it necessary to out this person, or are you doing it for your own personal reasons? As my friend Jayson said: "Sometimes I just want to be the regular guy-next-door." Well, sometimes I just want to be the regular alien boy next door.

### -Names

are very powerful things. For a lot of trans people, the names given to us by our parents represent a gender identity which was wrong, humiliating and forced. Changing our names carries a lot more weight than it does for non-trans people. So don't ask someone what their old name was. And don't ask if our current names are our 'given names'. If someone wants you to know, they will tell you. And if you know someone's old name, don't share it with other people. Also, don't make comments about the gender implications of transpeoples' names. This is especially annoying in a cross-cultural context. A name which means (or sounds like) 'Badass Warrior King' in one language, might mean (or

tsuris



trouble · aggravation

# THE TZADDIK OF LUDOMIR

A TRANSGENDERED CHASSID!

One of the rare examples of a significant <sup>trans</sup> ~~lesbian~~ figure in earlier Jewish history is the Betula (or Maid) of Ludomir, Hannah Rochel

(1805-92).<sup>18</sup> Before her planned marriage, Hannah went into a trance and claimed to receive a "new and sublime soul." ~~She~~ <sup>He</sup> broke ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> engagement and began acting like a man, wearing tallit and tefillin and studying and praying. ~~His~~ <sup>Her</sup> synagogue was equipped with a special room for ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> own prayer and study, and from which, with the door open, ~~she~~ <sup>he</sup> would deliver sermons to ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> followers in the next room.

(Jewish law would not permit a woman <sup>or a transman</sup> to worship in the same room with ~~men~~.) <sup>non-trans</sup> Due to ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> brilliance, and the belief that ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> new life was the result of a miracle, ~~she~~ <sup>he</sup> became a well-known Chasidic leader whose followers were known as the Chasidim of the Betula of Ludomir.

The Zaddik of Chernobyl, a well-known Chasidic leader, finally convinced ~~him~~ <sup>her</sup> to marry at the age of forty—a marriage ~~she~~ <sup>he</sup> was unable to consummate. After ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> marriage ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> influence waned. ~~She~~ <sup>He</sup> had previously been seen as a male tzaddik (righteous man) residing in the body of a woman. With ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> marriage, ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> identity as a woman was established, diminishing ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> credibility as a religious leader. The story is a sad one, full of repressed ~~sexuality~~ <sup>sexuality</sup>. Although there is no

<sup>Trans</sup> evidence that ~~she~~ <sup>he</sup> ever was an active lesbian, ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> ambiguous <sup>gender</sup> ~~sexuality~~ was directly responsible for ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> influence as a Chasidic leader and ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> return to "normality" for the loss of ~~his~~ <sup>her</sup> power.

-from "In Search of Role Models"  
by Jody Hirsh  
in the book Twice Blessed

sound like) 'Nellie Flower-Picker' in another. Don't assume that you know what meanings our names have.

-Don't assume which direction we're going in. Because of the invisibility of FTMs, when passable transmen come out, they are often assumed (by non-trans folks and MTFs) to be biological men who are transitioning to be female. Also, there are infinite ways to transition. Hormones, surgery, binding, packing, name and pronoun changing, are some of the possible exterior steps of a gender transition. Trans people have the right to make all, some or none of these changes, and in any order.

-Don't judge our ability to pass

For example: "Maybe if you did \_\_\_\_\_ (or didn't do \_\_\_\_\_) you'd pass better/ I'd be able to accept your gender." It is also not always appropriate to compliment people on how well they pass. (Whether or not we are able to pass is often a matter of money and genetics, not desire or determination. These comments are divisive to trans communities. They reinforce fucked-up straight, binary gender standards by labelling certain traits (and people) as 'good' and 'real'.]

Do not ask if we are sure, or remind us that our transition is irreversible and that we may regret our changes. We have been thinking about and dealing with our gender issues for a long time, and we are aware of, and probably very excited about, the consequences of our decisions.

Do not tell your trans friends how much you liked them, or certain things about them before, better.

Do not tell them how uncomfortable they make you. If you are uncomfortable with their transition, find ways to work on it yourself or with other, knowledgeable non-trans friends.

Yes, it's true, trans people are all incredibly sexy in our own unique individual ways, but don't fetishize and tokenize us. Don't tell us how you love FTMs because we were socialized female and therefore aren't like 'real men'. While this may be true for some individuals, FTMs are just as diverse as any other group. Many transmen identify as 'real men' who are just as (or more) masculine than people assigned to the male gender at birth.

Age

A lot of transguys look much younger than they are, especially if they are not on hormones, are on a low dose of hormones, or are just starting hormones. Because of this, we may experience some of the lovely effects of adulthood, such as not being taken seriously, or being condescended to. Don't be surprised if you or others radically misread a transperson's age.

The 'Extra Letter' Syndrome

Gay and lesbian organizations all over the country have added a token 'T' to their names (along with an extra 'B' (bisexual) and, more recently 'I' (intersex)),

without doing anything to include trans people or issues in their organizations. Although queer and trans struggles are interlinked, they are different.

(If you are queer:)

**Don't assume that because you are queer, that you know about trans issues.**

Recognize your own gender uniqueness and how transphobia affects you, but don't speak for trans people.

Also recognize that within trans communities, not only is each individual's experience different, but each group of individuals' experience is different from other groups. For example, African-American transsexual issues are different from disabled third gender issues, which are different from intersex issues, which are different from drag king issues (etc. etc.). Just as you probably wouldn't (or shouldn't) ask a gay man to explain lesbian issues, you shouldn't lump all trans people together, because we all have unique experiences of oppression.

Don't assume you know about trans issues because you once knew A trans person.

#### Good Things:

Be honest about how much you know, or don't know. It is refreshingly wonderful to hear someone say: 'Actually, I don't know anything about transpeople. I want to support you and respect you, so please forgive my ignorance. I'm going to go get some books and start educating myself.'

-Educate Yourself! Go to the library or bookstore, or the internet. Start an unlearning transphobia group with your other non-trans friends. Write a non-discrimination policy for your workplace that protects gender identity and expression. Bring in some trans folk to do an educational presentation for your group or organization. Think about how you can be a better ally to trans people.

-And on a personal level: once you have educated yourself, talk with other non-trans people about gender issues. Trans people shouldn't have to do all the work. Besides, even though there are way more of us than you think, there aren't enough of us to educate all the hordes and hordes of non-trans people in the world. Also, it's a lot harder for us to do this work, because we are more vulnerable. And helping someone unlearn their transphobia usually involves hearing and sorting through a lot of hurtful crud while people sort out their feelings about gender.

#### Interrupt inappropriate gender behavior

This is another thing which is sometimes easier for a non-trans person to do, because they are not making themselves as personally vulnerable. However, it requires a lot of understanding about trans issues. For example, if someone is still referring to me by the wrong name and pronoun, I don't trust them to appropriately correct others. I do have a couple friends who are very skilled at this, and they never cease to amaze me. For example, correcting other people when they refer to someone by the wrong pronoun is very important. When

introducing people, it is good etiquette to clue them in beforehand about the gender of and language preferred by any transpeople who are present. By this I don't mean outing any transpeople who would prefer not to be out, but letting people know how to refer to any transpeople who may not pass. And simply saying things like: "I'm a lady, he's a guy." or "That's none of your business" or "Actually, his voice/body/manner is just great the way it is, and I don't want to hear another comment about it", can save the day.



Claude