Nan Goldin: *The Other Side* – photography and gender identity

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Preface.

The subject of this dissertation is photography and gender identity.
The reason why I chose the topic of identity is that it has always fascinated me. It is an immensely diverse subject where scholars from many fields have made important contributions. I had first hand experience with it and the problems that may follow when I worked as a doctor in general practice and in psychiatric wards. I also had the chance to meet more people with alternative gender identities when I studied sexology at Høgskolen i Agder. Some of the people I have met were quite happy and well adjusted, while others suffered. Somehow I wanted to alleviate that suffering, which was often caused by the ignorance and hostility of the rest of society. I still do, as will probably be evident throughout this dissertation.
It seems to me that photography is well suited to tell the story of outsiders. It has a close link to reality, and thus to truthfulness. At the same time it is ubiquitous and greatly influences on us all.

I want to thank my supervisor at IFIKK, Øivind Storm Bjerke, for valuable advice, my teachers at Høgkolen i Agder for inspiration, and all the transgender people I have met for broadening my mind.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1 Author's intention.

Nan Goldin states in the introduction to the photo-book *The Other Side* that her sole purpose with the pictures is to pay homage to her transgender friends and to show everyone how beautiful they are[1]. She insists that we should accept these people on their own terms without judging them on the basis of our mental preconceptions as to what gender should and should not be.

In my dissertation I employ many such mental preconceptions. They are part of my theoretical framework. Nonetheless I do subscribe to Goldin's hope that these people be accepted as they are, regardless of prevailing discourse or theory. It is my intention to show that neither discourse nor theory offers any plausible arguments against a tolerant attitude towards gender variety. This may seem like a bold and perhaps questionable statement, but I do hope that my reasons for making it will become clear in the course of this dissertation.

My ideological stance as someone who wishes to better the situation for people of unconventional gender identity will be evident throughout. My dissertation thus has an ideological basis – and bias. It is this basis that is the reason why I chose this topic in the first place. It influences my selection of image material and all of my deliberations. I realise that someone with a different view might have made quite different choices and arrived at other conclusions. I have no problems with that, seeing that my dissertation is meant as a personal reflection on a photographical work guided by a subjective ideological stance. It is not meant to offer any authoritative or "scientific" truths. My interpretative and theoretical deliberations are more in the vein of speculation. While I fully appreciate the right of other people to indulge in speculations of their own, it is my hope that my writings may inspire readers to reflect on and question the convoluted concepts of gender and gender identity.

Discarding unwarranted preconceptions of gender may at first feel like losing one's footing – an unpleasant sensation. But I do believe that when it is regained the world will feel like a more diverse and interesting place to live in.

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[1] My edition is Goldin, Nan: *The Other Side*, Scalo 1993/2000. (First published in 1992.)

1.2 Thesis.

One main purpose of this dissertation is to investigate whether or not the photographs of Nan Goldin in the photo-book *The Other Side* correlate to the gender discourse from 1970 to the early 1990s. Do the pictures in the book illustrate changes in the conception of gender identity during that time period?

Another main purpose is to discuss more explicitly photography's relationship to gender identity formation. Can photography aid in the creation and affirming of identity positions? If so, in what way can it do it? Can photography be detrimental to identity positions, and if so, how?

These are the main questions that I will posit in this paper, and that I hopefully will be able to suggest answers to.

1.3 Delineation of the dissertation's subject matter.

My analysis will concentrate on pictorial and contextual elements that pertain to gender issues. It would be possible to discuss Goldin with a different focus – such as for instance family photography or snapshot photography – but since that has not been my main interest here those venues will mainly be touched upon only as they relate to issues of gender identity.

I have not analysed all the photographs in the book. I have made a selection, based on the photos' ability to illustrate major points in my discussion. This means that many pictures, and sometimes even whole sections, have been left out. The reasons for my selecting each picture will hopefully become evident as I discuss them in the exposition (chapter 2).

The selected pictures are all reproduced at the back of this dissertation (chapter 5).

1.4 Sources.

My primary source is Nan Goldin's photo-book *The Other Side*.

I have also used some of her other photo-books and exposition catalogues.

I have used material from other photographic artists when appropriate, such as pictures by Jacob Riis, Weegee, Robert Frank, Larry Clark, Christer Strömholm and Mary Ellen Mark.

Literature on photography is part of my contextual and theoretical framework, as are writings on feminist, psychoanalytical, philosophical and linguistic topics[2].

1.5 Method.

I make a formal and iconographic analysis of the selected pictures. I make a contextual analysis on the basis of my theoretical premises. In both the formal, the iconographic and the contextual analysis I try to show how Goldin's photos may illustrate contemporary gender theory and -issues. I make a comparative analysis of the 1970s pictures versus the post 1990 ones and relate it to issues of gender and gender identity. I compare Goldin's work to pictures by other artists that are relevant to my deliberations (Jacob Riis, Weegee, Robert Frank, Larry Clark, Christer Strömholm and Mary Ellen Mark).
Where pertinent to my analysis I will include biographical data of the artist.

1.6 Theoretical and artistic contributors.

In the course of the exposition (chapter 2) the theories and concepts of my main contributors will be expounded in greater detail. What follows is a brief introduction to theses and work pertinent to my deliberations.
I try to relate all my theoretical discussions closely to the medium of photography generally and to Goldin's pictures in *The Other Side* specifically.

1.6.1 Feminism, psychoanalysis, Foucauldian critique and their relation to gender identity.

Feminism and psychoanalysis are among the main pillars of my theoretical deliberations. The main figures are psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, and feminist Judith Butler.

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[2] See chapter 1.6.

I proceed from Sigmund Freud's statement that gender differentiation relies on a bodily organ – the penis, and that from the appreciation of its presence or absence arise men and women, each with quite different traits and personalities. I explore the implications of Freud's theories for men, women and alternative gender identities.

I reiterate the feminist critique of Freud, and the welcoming of the Lacanian reworking of Freudian theory. In Lacan, gender differentiation hinges not on any bodily organ, but on a phantasmatic entity called the Phallus – the symbol of plenitude and ultimate mastery. The Phallus was deemed suitable by feminists for appropriation and re-signification, allowing for new gender differentiation models. This was of importance to women and alternative gender identities alike.

In Butler sex and gender has lost all connection to the physical as she deems them to be purely social and cultural constructions. Gender, according to Butler, is not something we are, but something we do – it is performative. It does not represent any inner, stable psychic entity. It is furthermore defined by the parameters of what she calls "compulsory heterosexuality" in a patriarchal society, and Butler calls for subversion of the gender system in order to facilitate alternative gender identities. I analyse the implications of Butler's views for transgender people.

I reiterate and follow up on Michel Foucault's analysis of the discourse on sex and gender, and the impact it had on the authority of gender systems[3].

I expand on the Lacanian Order of the Real suggesting an alternative basis for subjective gender experience.

1.6.2 Documentary photography and the depiction of "the Other".

I discuss how the subject matter of documentary photography has evolved – due both to political incentives and to a new aesthetic starting with Walt Whitman – to include depiction of groups and individuals deemed to be outsiders and alien, and how these may be constructed as Other. I recapitulate different approaches to the depiction of the Other (in Jacob Riis, Weegee, Robert Frank, Larry Clark, Christer Strömholm and Mary Ellen Mark), and the implication for photography of transgender people.

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[3] The term *gender system* is explained in chapter 2.1.

I posit a fundamental difference between documentary photography based on what Freud called the projection of id urges and the fetish, and one based on a comprehensive narrative approach. The former I call fetishistic photography, and claim that it may be detrimental to the process of gender identity formation. The latter, which I call narrative photography, I find to be much better suited to help stabilize and affirm identity positions.

1.7 Presentation of the subject of study.

In my paper I will analyse the pictures in the photo-book *The Other Side* by the American photographer Nan Goldin. It contains a number of black-and-white and colour pictures taken between 1972 and 1992. Their subjects are all people who were born as biological males and who are in different stages of feminisation. Although their gender status ranges from transsexuals to transvestites to drag queens – or a mixture, I usually refer to them collectively as gender-crossers or transgender people[4]. I use feminine pronouns, as they seem to express the experienced mental gender identity. The names and designations of the subjects I have chosen to write in italics.

The pictures from the 1970s are all in black-and-white, and the ones from 1980 onwards are all in colour.

The photo-book is divided into seven sections:

The first section, called *The Other Side*, consists of photos from 1972-74, taken for the most part at *The Other Side* nightclub in Boston, USA. The club was a meeting-place for transgender people, and arranged drag performances and drag beauty contests. The photos portray Goldin's close transgender friends of this period.

The second section, entitled *Greer*, is shot in New York City in the years 1981-87. They feature Goldin's transgender friend Greer.

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[4] A transsexual is someone who experiences a discrepancy between his/her biological body (genitals etc) and his/her psychological gender identity. Often the person will seek to have the body medically altered (by hormone treatment, surgery etc) to fit the mental gender identity. A transvestite is a person who dresses like members of the opposite sex. Often the cross-dressing has a component of sexual arousal. A drag queen is a biological male who performs in stage acts portraying members of the opposite sex – often in a hyperbolic and parodic fashion. They usually portray people from the entertainment industry, such as singers and film stars. The terms gender-crossers and transgender people generally refer to those who in one way or other cross the boundary between the two sexes.

The third section, *Hi Girl!*, consists of pictures taken 1990-91 of other Goldin transgender friends. They are taken in New York City, Paris and Berlin.
The fourth section, *Kim*, is taken in Paris in 1991-92.
The fifth section, called *The Queen and I*, is photographed in Manila in the Philippines in 1992.
The sixth section is untitled and taken at the *Second Tip* bar in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1992.
The seventh section, *Joey*, features another transgender friend of Goldin's, and is taken in New York City and Berlin in 1991 and 1992.
From these sections I have, as mentioned in chapter 1.3, made a selection of photographs to analyse.

1.8 Presentation of the artist.

Nan Goldin was born in 1953 in the outskirts of Washington DC. Her parents were intellectuals. They were four children, of which the elder sister Barbara Holly was Nan's soul-mate and role-model.
Disaster struck in 1965 when Barbara Holly committed suicide at the age of 18. The parents' reaction of denial and their portraying the suicide as an accident, became formative to Goldin's artistic work. She set out to relentlessly tell the truth, no matter how inconvenient or painful it might be.
Nan started to photograph at the age of 16. Attending the alternative Sataya Community School in Lincoln, Massachusetts, she started working in a dark-room and developed a more conscious attitude towards photography. She recorded her own life and that of her friends in Polaroids. She became the school photographer. While inspired by fashion photography a la *Vogue*, her own pictures had the roughness of reportage.
On moving to Boston in the early 1970s, she met a crowd of transgender people. Fascinated by them, she spent the next few years photographing them extensively and living in close proximity to them. In 1972 she had her first exhibition of black-and-white pictures of drag queens.
She took a night course with Henry Horenstein at the New England School of Photography, and he opened her eyes to photography as an art form. As a result she enrolled in the School of The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and stayed there until she graduated in 1977 with a

Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. At the same time she lost touch with her Boston transgender crowd.

The so-called "Boston school" of photographers included artists like Philip-Lorca di Corcia, Jack Pierson and David Armstrong – the latter a long time close friend of Goldin's. During these years she started using a Pentax camera and a flash and she started taking colour photographs. Inspired by the commercial glitz of Guy Bourdin and loving the artificial light, the pictures took on her well-known intensity of bright colours.

Moving to New York City in 1978, she settled in the destitute precinct of the Bowery. While commercially unsuccessful in the first New York years she made lasting connections to artist Joel Meyerowitz, and Marvin Heiferman at Castelli Graphics. The latter included her in a 1979 Castelli Graphics group exhibition, and when he left Castelli he became her long-time private dealer.

Meanwhile Goldin had to sustain herself working as a bartender, and the odd clientele of her workplace and other shady establishments would be the subjects of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* – destined to be her most famous work. *The Ballad* was initially a slide-show with an accompanying soundtrack showed at Goldin's own place and at underground clubs such as *Rafik's Underground Cinema*, *The Mudd Club* and *Tin Pan Alley*. The audience were bar and club regulars – denizens of the New York underground – belonging to what Nan called her extended family. The slide-show format and soundtrack added to the narrative of the photographs, approximating them to cinema – Goldin's favourite medium.

In the mid-1980s came the breakthrough. In 1985 her work was included in the Biennal Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. *The Ballad* was shown at the Burden Gallery, NYC, the next year and published as a book[5]. It won the Photographic Book Prize of the Year in 1987. Goldin was awarded several prizes over the next years.

Shocked by the effects of AIDS on her community, she curated the exhibition "Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing" in 1989 in New York. The same year she lost her long-time friend, the writer and performer Cookie Mueller, to the disease. Her anti-AIDS effort is probably her most political artistic endeavour, taking a definite stand instead of adhering to her usual code of telling the unbiased truth.

While she had transgender friends in the 1980s – Greer was among them – her subjects of those years were mostly unknown artists and other desolate inhabitants of the New York

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[5] Goldin, Nan: *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, Aperture Foundations Inc. 1986.

underworld. But in 1990 she met up with a new crowd of transgender people, starting a new extensive photographic project portraying them. The result was the slide-show and book (published in 1992) of *The Other Side*, spanning some twenty years of pictures of transgender people.

International fame followed in the 1990s. She went to Berlin on a DAAD grant in 1991. She photographed transgender people there and in Paris. *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* slide-show toured Europe in 1993. She went to the Philippines and Thailand to photograph transgendereds in 1992, and in 1994 she published *Tokyo Love* – a series of portraits of Japanese youths – with Japanese photographer Nobuyoshi Araki[6].

A big retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City in 1996 was called *I'll Be Your Mirror*. An extensive catalogue with the same name was published, and the exhibition toured Europe[7].

More exhibitions and more books followed.

In later years her format has extended from single frame photos, slide shows and books to grids and installations to enhance the narrative of her work. She has kept her special blend of snapshot and deliberate, formal compositions, though with an emphasis on the latter in her recent work. Her subject matter has also expanded to encompass landscape, still life, domestic scenes and religious elements. Some of them have a lyrical, contemplative mood of memory and mourning, others celebrate harmony and friendship. Her colour palette is at times more subdued, and she has a renewed interest in natural light.

The comprehensive photo-book *The Devil's Playground* offers a good presentation of her recent work[8].

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[6] Goldin, Nan & Nobuyoshi Araki: *Tokyo Love*, Scalo 1995. (First published in 1994.)

[7] Goldin, Nan: *I'll Be Your Mirror*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1996.

[8] Goldin, Nan: *The Devil's Playground*, Phaidon Press Limited 2003.

2. EXPOSITION.

2.1 Conceptual considerations.

There is something peculiar about the concepts of *man* and *woman, male* and *female*. What is peculiar is that most of us accept them at face value; they seem self-evident and self-explanatory to us, in need of no further definition. In fact, we do this to such a high degree that any attempt at conceptual deconstruction is met in the general population with scepticism and ridicule. I believe that this is so, despite some forty years of modern feminism and gender theorizing. These movements no doubt have had an effect in the general populace when it comes to some aspects of gender, such as discrimination against the female sex, and to a certain degree what is considered proper behaviour in men and women. But the basis of it all, our gender system itself, is still firmly embedded in our minds.

By *gender system* I refer to a more or less coherent and comprehensive body of thoughts and rules, written or otherwise, that define and delineate issues of gender in a given society at a particular point in time. The thoughts and rules are generally subscribed to by a vast majority of the population. Alternative notions on gender are often subdued or ignored.

In current Western civilization we have a two-gender system; the notion is that there are two genders, and two alone. This system is based on difference. The two sexes, or genders, are defined by the way they differ from each other[9]. Now, the exact contents of these differing traits may have changed over time, but the basic assumption of the system (that there are two, and only two, opposite genders) remains.

Strangely enough this is so, despite the fact that the system has been shown not to be as self-evident and straightforward as it may seem. On every level of understanding, discrepancies occur and come to light. These all tend towards the abundance and proliferation of sexed and gendered concepts and identities, and point to the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of this field.

I will recapitulate some of this complexity.

There is the organic - or bodily - sex, often considered to be the most self-evident concept of them all. But even here, multiple layers and polymorphy abound. The organic sex is in itself

[9] They are often described as having opposite traits, much as in a Derridean binary. See for instance Gamble, Sarah: *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, Routledge 2001, page 216, or Graugaard, Christian: *Sexleksikon*, Rosinante Forlag A/S, København 2001, page 285.

multi-layered, consisting of (at least) a chromosomal, a hormonal, a neurological and an anatomical aspect[10]. Furthermore, these aspects shift their predominance during a person's lifespan, with different implications for sexed development and maturation in, let's say, the foetus, the pubescent and the grown up. These complex organic systems interact, and sometimes – more often than we should think – they produce unexpected results that do not fit within the two-gender system[11]. Examples are hermaphrodites, pseudo-hermaphrodites and intersex individuals, even people without any discernible sex at all[12]. Some of these organic interplays are very subtle, and quite often their mechanisms and effects are poorly understood. Let's take the hormonal systems as an example. In foetal intrauterine growth they fashion the internal and external genitals in complex ways[13]. Sometimes they produce the variations mentioned above. But hormones also affect higher nervous functions and the brain. The way that this happens and which effects it produces is for the most part still a mystery to scientists. It is possible that the mechanisms are subtle and highly graded, producing effects on a sliding scale rather than an all or nothing scale, so that we should not speak of a male or a female brain, but rather of a more or less male or female brain. These hormonal changes of course continue after birth, producing the completion of primary sexual characteristics at puberty, as well as secondary sexual characteristics[14]. And it seems probable that they keep affecting multiple bodily systems throughout the individual's life span.

The hormonal system is just one example of how complex the seemingly self-evident bodily sex really is.

Then there is what I call *gendering*. Gendering is the social process by which the two sexes don certain traits that are not in any simple or obvious way linked to their bodily sexual

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[10] Literature on organic sex abounds within medicine and related subjects. I have mainly used Allgeier, Elisabeth Rice & Albert Richard Allgeier: *Sexual Interactions*, Houghton Mifflin Company 2000, and Almås, Elsa & Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad: *Kjønn i bevegelse*, Universitetsforlaget 2001, and Lundberg, Per Olov (ed): *Sexologi*, Liber AB 2002.

[11] See for instance Almås & Pirelli Benestad, op.cit.

[12] Hermaphrodites are people born with both male and female internal genitalia, and evidence of both male and female external genitalia. The condition is very rare. Pseudo-hermaphrodites are people born with a discrepancy between the sex chromosomes, the internal and the external genitalia. Both conditions are today mostly referred to as intersex conditions. See for instance Graugaard, op.cit.

[13] See for instance Almås & Pirelli Benestad, op.cit., page 19-31 and 248.

[14] See for instance Lundberg, op.cit., page 29-36.

characteristic[15]. Quite often a claim is made that they do have an organic correlate, but this is almost invariably due to misinterpretation of scientific data. Rather than being embedded in natural science, gendering is a cultural and social phenomenon, and the prime movers are diverse, sometimes connected to issues of power.

Why then does the two gender system seem to function so well? It seems to adequately describe almost all of us, leaving only a negligible minority on the outside. This is a complex question with no simple answer. Two factors will be mentioned here: Firstly, there is a socializing and disciplining pressure towards the expression of two, and only two, genders that discourages the expression of other possibilities[16]. Secondly, and as a part of this, there is often a medical intervention at the birth of a child with non-conforming sex to correct nature's "error" surgically, thereby assigning the child to one of the two possibilities, and ease the individual's adaptation to the existing order. Thus one might say that the system is self-perpetuating, excluding polymorphy.

It is not as if one should perceive these strategies as entirely conscious attempts at manipulation. Sometimes they are based on deliberate wishes for power or the like, but quite often their agents have no such desires, claiming only to want to bring the "unnatural" back to what is "natural". Indeed, the existing order of the two gender system does not feel like an "order" at all. It feels "natural" and self-evident, as I noted earlier. This is because the ideological content of the order has become invisible, automatic, disguised under the mantle of "naturalness", "Nature" and inevitability. In other words, the ideology has become hegemonical[17]. Its invisibility is a proof of its success.

What is revealing of the constructedness of this "natural order" is that it at times is implemented contrary to the organic tendency towards complexity, diversity and polymorphism. This is done by calling nature itself "unnatural", or – under the guise of the modern paradigm – as diseased. In the modern paradigm, Nature is the golden standard. Nature is described as a clockwork that works according to laws of perfect harmony. These laws are there for us to discover and scrutinize (through the natural sciences), and ultimately control. Unfortunately, nature does not always act as Nature, deviating from the ideal that

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[15] Judith Butler speaks of "girling" – the social process of leading the female child towards her status as woman. See for instance Salih, Sarah: *Judith Butler*, Routledge 2002, page 77-80.

[16] This is an important point in Judith Butler's gender differentiation theory. See Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble*, Routledge 1999 (first published 1990), and Butler, Judith: *Bodies that Matter*, Routledge 1993, and Salih, op.cit.

[17] See Brantsæter, Marianne C, Turid Eikvam, Reidar Kjær & Knut Olav Åmås (eds): *Norsk homoforskning*, Universitetsforlaget 2001, page 58 ff.

man has bestowed upon it. In that case, it is man's duty to bring nature back to Nature, to restore it to its own ideal self[18].

Thus understood Nature can be understood as man's projection of his own concepts of perfect harmony onto the world around him, a harmony that is not only perfect, but also intelligible to him.

The effect of the modern paradigm in the sex and gender domain is the two gender system, with its perfect symmetry of identities. Man and woman have a different nature and different traits. These natures and these traits complete each other. What one lacks, the other one has, and vice versa. It is a picture of perfect harmony, intelligible and easily controlled.

Any act that threatens to destabilize this symmetry must be avoided, or the result is chaos and loss of control. This may account, at least in part, for the enduring stability of the two gender system.

Let us now turn to Nan Goldin. In *The Other Side* she is definitely leaving the two gender system behind, bringing chaos to our doorsteps.

At the beginning of the book there is a picture that may serve as an illustration to my deliberations. It is the one called *Roommate in the kitchen*, and it is taken in Boston in 1972[19]. It is a black-and-white photograph – like all the early ones – and is probably taken in daylight. No flash is used. It depicts a person in three-quarter body length. The subject is standing against a wall, a doorway behind her to her left, and a picture mounted on the wall to the right, next to the head. The wall is of light colour, but a dark field occupies the lower part of the picture – behind the subject's lower body – possibly a piece of furniture, and at the picture's left margin seems to be something that could be a mirror. The subject is wearing what seems to be a light, sleeveless dress, tied with a belt or chord at the waist, and is positioned in a frontal, contrappostal pose; the right hand placed on the hip, the left raised and flexed at the elbow, touching the doorpost behind the head; the look is directed straight at the camera.

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[18] My deliberations on "nature" versus "Nature" is inspired by the idealization of the "natural" in the 18th century – see for instance Stenseth, Bodil: *Ekteseng og bordell – om 1790-årenes seksualopplysning*, Aschehoug 1997, and the scientific optimism of the 19th century (the world as intelligible, logical and in perfect harmony) – see for instance Olsen, Ole Andkjær & Simo Køppe: *Freuds psykoanalyse*, Gyldendal, Danmark 1990, page 23 ff.

[19] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 12.

The picture takes on a grainy, fussy quality. Details are lost. Therefore it is hard to make out the picture on the wall. It probably depicts a young girl in a dress, leaning on a piece of furniture, looking out of the picture plane. It is impossible to determine the medium. It seems to be significant, positioned as it is, right next to the protagonist's head.
Who is this protagonist? The caption says "roommate". Further clues are found in Goldin's introduction to the book. There she describes how she in 1972 met a group of people – drag queens – and that she was immediately infatuated with them. She goes on to say:

I fell in love with one of the queens and within a few months moved in with Ivy and another friend.[20]

Now, from other captioned pictures, we know that the "roommate" in this photo is not "Ivy". So it is reasonable to assume that this is the other friend that Goldin mentions.
That means that the subject in the *Roommate in the kitchen* picture is a drag queen – that is, a biological male dressing as and impersonating a woman. This of course comes as no surprise, seeing that drag queens are the subject of the *The Other Side*. We do not know, however, the exact sex or gender identity of *roommate* . Even though Goldin refers to them collectively as drag queens, her book features a plethora of gender variations. Some are transvestites, some are pre- or post-operative transsexuals, and some are "mere" entertainers. The only thing we know is that *roommate* is some kind of gender-crosser.
What may come as a surprise is the seeming *naturalness* of the femininity of the protagonist. The term "drag queen" does have associations to theatricality and props of femininity. Not so in the *roommate* picture. In fact, were it not for the context in which the photograph is presented, it might very well be a depiction of any one woman.
This becomes even more tangible when we turn to another *roommate* picture: *Roommate in her chair*[21]. Also taken in Boston in 1972, this depicts the same person seated sideways in an armchair, looking straight at the camera. The focus is sharper, much more of the details are revealed – and what is revealed seems like the epitome of femininity. The curled hair is tied up in a knot, some strands still fall gently framing a beautiful, heart-shaped face with full lips, almond shaped eyes, fine eyebrows, and skin without a blemish. There is little or no make up, underpinning the impression of naturalness. The body is slim, the pose relaxed, and the attire

[20] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 5.

[21] Goldin, op.cit., page 27.

is that ultimate female garment: the simple, but elegant summer dress. The limbs are long and slender, flexed at the elbows, wrists and knees, the delicate hands softly placed on the body, the legs crossed. The dress stops halfway down the thighs; it is long enough to be decent, but short enough to reveal the elegant, sensual legs. This picture oozes with feminine qualities: beauty, sensuality, softness – and naturalness. No one would – taken out of context – suggest that this is a picture of "nature gone wild", that it represents those crimes against Nature that need to be corrected. On the contrary: this would qualify as a representation of Nature at its peak, as the ideal Womanhood. Interestingly, it does so to such a high degree that it is easy not to notice one discrepancy: the *roommate* has no breasts. That most female of body parts is in fact missing. So how can it be an ultimate expression of Womanhood, when the most crucial of female attributes are not there? In fact, most of the things that we would consider female are not really there. Yet it seems like an ideal depiction of Womanhood.
This is a testament to the subversive power of the artist and her subjects, and may be seen as a critique of the intelligibility and self-evidence of the existing gender system.

It is interesting to compare the two *roommate* photographs.
In doing so, the *kitchen* picture now suddenly seems to have lost some of its naturalness. In fact, it now seems almost like a symbol, a symbol of Womanhood.
The pose, with one hand on the hip, one on the doorpost, and the body swaying in a contrappostal S line, has a sensual quality, and makes ancient renderings of Venus in the bath come to mind. Indeed, the dress seems almost like an ancient Greek *chiton*[22]. The picture on the wall adds a narrative tinge. The little girl may hint at the origin of the protagonist as a "true" and "original" female, at the same time stressing her vulnerability. The doorway may be seen as a symbol of change, of passage through life, or simply an allusion to the unknown or the mysterious – indicating that there are things in life that we cannot fully understand, things that we simply must accept. The riddle of womanhood may be one such thing. The fussy quality of the photograph evokes an almost *Pictorialist* ambience – quite consistent with the symbolical and narrative content of the photograph[23].

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[22] For a description of the *chiton*, see Kiilerich, Bente: *Græsk skulptur – fra dædalisk til hellenistisk*, Gyldendal 1991, page 361.

[23] For a description of Pictorialist photography, see for instance Marien, Mary Warner: *Photography – A Cultural History*, Laurence King Publishing 2002, page 173 ff.

It is as if Goldin presents this individual to us with the intention of making us conceive of her as an archetypal woman - using a number of authoritative means to do so: gestures that are feminine beyond a doubt, allusions to classical beauty, narrative to substantiate origin and establish recognition and sympathy on the part of the spectator, symbolism implying the mystery and versatility of the human condition, and technical strategies aligning the picture with a High Art school of photography.
By using such means, the femaleness she establishes takes on an abstract quality, almost like a platonic idea, a possibility, still not existing *in the world*. The Platonic idea not yet materialized, so to say. In terms that I used earlier in this chapter, she is presented to us not as nature, but as Nature. That such a mishap of nature could be construed as part of ideal Nature, is to lash out at the system of ideal Nature itself. It is utterly subversive.

Let us return to the *Roommate in her chair* picture. It has retained its naturalness. If we look closely at the gestures, like we did in the previous example, we may see small vestiges of "deliberate" femininity – deliberate in the sense that they seem a little exaggerated. The position of the right hand for instance, with the flexed wrist and the fingers gently resting on the shoulder.
Still, the overall effect is one of natural femininity. We have already mentioned the lack of make up, the simple dress and the relaxed pose. The subject is also situated among objects – an armchair, a lamp, a plant and a little piece of cloth on the wall – that do not seem overtly symbolical or allegorical. They look like everyday and straightforward objects. As opposed to the *kitchen* picture, these objects do not remove the protagonist from the here and now. On the contrary, they seem to anchor her in a tangible reality. That reality is in fact her home, the place where she lives. We are told that she is sitting in "her chair", emphasizing precisely the connection to her own, lived life. Thus this picture is firmly set in place and time. The technical execution underpins the impression – the fussy quality is gone, and the details are rendered much sharper.
All in all, this looks like a *straight photography*[24]. This is also very fitting. This picture shows the *roommate* as the materialized, concrete woman, living in the here and now. The Platonic idea made flesh. Where the *kitchen* photograph showed us the transcendent Woman, as part of idealized Nature, the *chair* one shows us the immanent woman, living and breathing among us.

[24] For a description of straight photography, see Marien, op.cit,. page 181 ff.

One might think that Goldin wanted to tell us that *roommate* and others like her exist both as possibility and potential, and as real living beings, and that they are beautiful and worthy of our recognition. In both pictures, the *roommate* looks out of the picture, straight at the spectator, expecting just that.

The designation "roommate" requires some words. Most of Goldin's subjects are named, either by their artistic name or by their first name. But this individual is called only "roommate". This would seem to detract from the person's existence in the here and now. Anonymity tends towards transcendence and the archetypal.
We do not know why Goldin has chosen not to tell us her name. Perhaps the *roommate* didn't want to be named. Or perhaps it is to indicate a special relationship between them. By using the designation "roommate", we are told that the subject and the artist were close, that they in fact lived together. This points to intimacy, to a relationship between real people in the here and now. This would stress the immanent tendencies of the *chair* picture.
In this way, the designation "roommate" could both signify anonymity, emphasizing the transcendental qualities of the *kitchen* picture, or intimacy, underlining the immanence of the *chair* picture.

I have now analysed two pictures from *The Other Side* in order to illustrate some of the problems concerning sex and gender issues. Is such an analysis tenable? Was this in Goldin's mind when she took the pictures?
In the *The Other Side* introduction she writes about her intentions in photographing her friends:

I wanted to pay homage, to show them how beautiful they were. I never saw them as men dressing as women, but as something entirely different – a third gender that made more sense than either of the other two. I accepted them as they saw themselves: I had no desire to unmask them with my camera.[25]

Admiration and a wish to show the world their qualities are her reasons. She does not conceive of them as men, or women, but as something else. She mentions that she sees them as a "third gender". This concept is not neutral. In fact, it was applied to (feminine) male

[25] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 5.

homosexuals in the nineteenth century sexologic discourse, theorizing that they were men with too much female hormones[26]. It is doubtful whether this is what Goldin had in mind. Rather, I think she uses the term just to emphasize that they are something different. It would seem that she feels no need to explain the matter further. She takes them at face value, without any further questioning or need for explanation. Her message to us is: We should not scrutinize. We should simply accept. Sadly, the world does not concur. Acceptance is far from ubiquitous. Scrutiny and theorizing may indeed be employed as a means of raising the level of awareness and acceptance that Goldin calls for.

Besides, Mrs Goldin is not totally consistent herself. On page 35 in *The Other Side* there is another picture of *roommate*. It is taken in Boston in 1973. This time she is not alone; there is another person present in the photograph. It seems to be a woman. One could certainly analyse this photograph extensively. Suffice it to say in this context that there are similarities and symmetries between the two – the stance, the right hand on the hip, the gaze. Even the faces look similar. The caption reads *Sisters*. This may be a picture of *roommate* with her carnal sister – the facial likeness would seem to indicate that. But what is important to us now is that Goldin calls them sisters. In other words, she assigns a feminine noun to the *roommate*. This would seem to indicate that she thinks of her not as a third gender or something different entirely, but as a female. On the other hand, feminine designations are appropriated by certain parts of the male gay community to name gay men[27].

I am not sure which, if any of these two, applications Goldin had in mind. But such intricacies does seem to point to the tangled web that constitutes sexed and gendered existence, and that is exactly what this chapter has sought to do.

2.2 Gender systems, feminism and transgender identity.

In chapter 2.1 I suggested that Goldin's photographs can be employed to undermine the two-gender system. They show us that the system is not as self-evident as we would like to think.

[26] See for instance Graugaard, op.cit., page 538.

[27] See Brantsæter, Marianne C, Turid Eikvam, Reidar Kjær & Knut Olav Åmås (eds), op.cit., page 375 ff.

Another factor that weakens the system's claim to naturalness and universal validity is the fact that it seems to have a discrete beginning in time, prior to which it did not exist. In other words, it has a history[28].

American historian Thomas Laqueur states that in the eighteenth century there was a change in the way that sexual difference was conceived[29]. He claims that prior to the eighteenth century there was really just one sex/gender – the male - and that females were not considered to possess a sex/gender of their own. Rather they were thought of as incomplete and defective men.

Such a one-gender system was partly based on the biblical rendering of how God created humans[30]. He created man first, and then woman, using tissue from the man. Adam was prior to Eve, and Eve was a product of Adam. Eve was "posterior and inferior". Eve was moreover burdened with sin, as she was the one who tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. Thus she was also lacking in moral qualities.

But the system also had roots in ancient Greece. Paramount was the theory of conception expounded by Aristotle[31]. He claimed that women contributed to conception only to a very small degree. Aristotle thought that semen was a condensation of the blood, concentrated to a point that maximized its life force and creative potential. Semen carried the *psyché* (soul, life) and *pneuma* (a divine, spiritual substance). According to the humoral theory women were "cold-wet-passive" and men were "warm-dry-active". The heat and activity of the men was necessary to "boil down" the blood into semen. Women lacked the ability to concentrate their blood into semen, and hence they were essentially impotent in the sense that they could not create life. Aristotle nevertheless did reject the idea that men contribute to every aspect of the conception and that women were just incubators of sorts. This would not explain why some children look like their mother. Aristotle claimed that the women contributed with the material aspect of the foetus. Her menstrual blood was the unstructured, formless and passive matter (*hylé*) that the semen animated. In other words, man was the creator of life, while

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[28] For a view on the contingency of sexual concepts in the course of history, see Foucault, Michel: *Seksualitetens historie I – viljen til viten*, Pax Forlag 1999 (first published in 1976).

[29] See Archer, John & Barbara Lloyd: *Sex and Gender*, Second edition, Cambridge University Press 2002, page 100-101, and Stenseth, op.cit., page 107-109.

[30] See Gamble, op.cit., page 3 ff.

[31] See Heyerdahl, Grete Børsand: "Er kvinnen en defekt mann – tanker om kvinner hos Aristoteles, Thomas Aquinas og Sigmund Freud", in Heyerdahl, Grete Børsand: *Idéhistoriske smuler*, Gyldendal Norsk Forlag A/S 1979, page 134-159.

woman provided the mute matter. The process may perhaps be likened to Michelangelo's conception of the statue trapped inside the stone block, waiting for the artist/creator to release it and thus give it life. Just as it is the artist who turns the rock into art, man turns matter into human life.
Aristotle believed that nature was governed by teleological principles. That is to say that each species strives towards a final and ultimate goal. The final goal of the human species was to create men. Man was the ultimate specimen of the human species. When nature produced a woman it strayed from its goal. But it did not miss the mark entirely. The upside to the mishap of the birth of a woman was the she was useful in the creation of more men.
In ancient Greece Aristotle's view was not shared by all – Leukippos, Demokritos and Hippokrates all meant that man and woman contributed equally to the foetus – but it was his theory that survived and informed later European thought on the subject.
These two sources, the Bible and Aristotle, were employed by later centuries to authoritatively state that women were basically no more than defective men.

The eighteenth century saw the emergence of a bourgeoisie with a new confidence. They had been strengthening their position by accumulating capital through trade and craftsmanship in the growing cities of Europe in the preceding centuries. A new paradigm of liberalism was created to suit their needs. Freedom and rationality would be the hallmark of this new philosophy, and man was its protagonist. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century a division between the public and private spheres developed. Men ruled unchallenged in the public sphere of commerce and government. Women were relegated to the private sphere, where the liberalistic ideals did not apply. Instead domesticity was informed by romantic ideals of emotions and sensitivity. The environment of the private home would serve as a tranquil haven of nurture and care, where the husband could retreat after a long day of strife and competition in the public sphere[32].
Parallel to the division of the public and private spheres, and the application of different sets of ideals to the two, men and women were to an increasing degree afforded different traits. Women were no longer mere incomplete and defective men; they had their own, separate nature. Men's principal traits were rationality and morality. Women's principal trait was emotionality, and she could not be expected to adhere to the high moral standards of men. Men had the intellect necessary to comprehend the intricate workings of society and nature,

[32] See Olsen & Køppe, op.cit., page 23 ff.

and the strength to succeed in a competitive world. Women had the sensitivity that was needed to keep the family together. This was the time of privatisation of family life and the birth of the nuclear family[33].
The effect was that men and women increasingly inhabited different domains, so to speak, according to their (alleged) gender specific traits.
The history of the emergence of the two-gender system illustrates that it is in fact precipitated by and founded on new societal and cultural paradigms at a certain point in time, and as such is no more universal than any other gender system.

Both the one- and the two-gender systems were based on male-female inequality.
The one-gender system was based on a hierarchy of human worth, and as such unabashedly discriminating. The "fact" that women were inferior to men was freely admitted by (male) authorities. In the years between 1550 and 1700 women offered only sporadic opposition. Mostly their concern was for a change in male attitudes, not for equal rights. They entered into the debate on men's premises, arguing for a new interpretation of the biblical texts and defending the moral standards of their sex. Although public attitudes may have changed during this period, women's legal status did not. In 1700 women still could not go to university, the law afforded them no rights to equal job pay and conditions, married women depended on their husbands and they had no rights as to their children. Still marriage was one of the few "careers" open to them[34].
At the advent of modernity their situation started slowly to change. 1792 saw *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft, in which she rallied middle-class women to a raising of female consciousness and education.
It is likely that the division into a public and a private sphere and the constitution of separate female gender qualities valuable to domesticity contributed to increasing the status of women. That is not to say that the system was one of equality. On the contrary, women were still seen as inferior in many respects, not suited to the most prominent positions in societal life. But on the whole the recognition of female distinctiveness and contribution to the community by way of their feminine traits marks a step up from the position of defective men. Women were now considered valuable members of society in their own right.

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[33] See Duncan, Carol: "Lyckliga mödrar och andra nya idéer i det franska 1700-talsmåleriet", in Lindberg, Anna Lena: *Konst, kön och blick*, Norstedts Förlag AB 1995, page 137-164.

[34] See Gamble, op.cit., page 3-15.

The nineteenth century in Britain saw the championing of legal rights for women in many areas. Among them were rights to personal property in marriage, custody of children, divorce and education. The struggles addressed the issues of women's daily lives and often took the form of campaigns. New laws were passed. Progress was sluggish and often involved the readdressing of topics and subsequent bills. Some men joined in the struggle siding with women. Slowly their legal status improved. The end of the century saw the increasing demand for the vote and suffragette activism. There was a widened societal consciousness as to the situation of women[35].

At the turn of the century women had gone from the position of "defective men" to comprising a gender of their own, and they had raised their legal status in areas that affected their daily lives.

After the First World War feminist issues were once again infrequently addressed, and it was only in the 1960s that the next surge in activism occurred. Despite the efforts and success of the fellow female combatants that had preceded them, it was still clear that society to a large extent was founded on injustice and inequality. The assignation of "feminine" qualities and the relegation of the female sex to the sphere of domesticity now were conceived as inhibiting the possibilities of women in society as a whole. In the USA the new struggle employed two strategies. On the one hand, Betty Friedan and the National Organisation for Women (founded in 1966) continued in the equal rights tradition, issuing a Bill of Rights for women in 1967. On the other hand, a more radical strain grew from the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement (opposing the war in Vietnam) and the student revolts. They felt that equal rights were not enough. Claiming that the system itself was oppressive and corrupt, they called for structural changes. They criticized the societal institutions – marriage, child rearing, sexual practices etc – calling for raised female consciousness. They focused on women as an oppressed social group and the female body as the site of that oppression. In both instances the need for autonomy was propagated. Writers such as Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone offered theories on the workings of what they called an oppressive patriarchy, urging women to unite and resist the system. Patriarchal rule was ubiquitous, they claimed, and all women were its victims[36].

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[35] See Gamble, op.cit., page 16-28.

[36] Op.cit., page 29-42.

In the turbulent 1970s of radicalism and calls for female solidarity and unity, Goldin spent her days with her transgendered crowd. They would go to The Other Side nightclub every night but Tuesday, partying and participating in beauty contests. Life was hard for her friends, she admits in the introduction to *The Other Side*:

To survive, some of the queens collected welfare, some turned tricks, others sewed costumes for each other or sold antique clothes they found at thriftshops. There were no job opportunities in those days for people who lived in drag; they were even ostracized by most of the gay male community.[37]

In the 1970s, in a parallel to women's liberation, the gay rights movement gained momentum. The struggle evidently did not encompass transgender individuals. Goldin's account does not only indicate that they were being left out, but that they were ostracized. Her friends did not fit in with the new political agenda. This was in fact also the case with the feminist groups. While they eventually sympathized with the cause of the gays, as one oppressed group towards another – realising that society's repressive techniques were valid for both, gender-crossers were left out. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s, with the advent of queer theory, that their gender expression was accepted on equal terms.

The reservations of the women's movement towards the transvestites and transsexuals are understandable. The movement depended on theories of patriarchy's universal oppression of all women, and the solidarity and unity of patriarchy's victims. In order for this model to work, they had to have a system with two distinct genders, where the one resisted the other. The two-gender system with its stringency and clarity suited their needs in this respect. The gender-crossers, on the other hand, confused the matter. It was not self-evident what gender they belonged to, and whether they were victims at all. The recognition of such an ambiguous gender category (or categories) threatened to blur the theoretical base of feminism and thwart the political struggle.

There is a picture in *The Other Side* that to my mind eminently expresses the scepticism of women towards transgender people at this time. It is called *Naomi in the audience* (Boston, 1973)[38]. It is a scene from The Other Side nightclub. One of Goldin's acquaintances, Naomi, is seated among the audience, probably watching one of her friends perform in drag. She is

[37] Goldin, Nan: *The Other Side*, page 6.

[38] Goldin, op.cit., page 15.

loudly cheering her on. What is interesting is to see the reaction of the rest of the spectators. Most of them are male, and almost all of them have their eyes fixed on the stage. Some of them express enthusiasm, and some show signs of what seems to be desire. They are immersed in the activity of looking at the spectacle, and they seem oblivious to Naomi and her cheering. All except one person. In the front row, two seats from Naomi in a dress with flowers, sits what appears to be a biological woman. She is not present in any of the other photographs and therefore is probably not part of Goldin's entourage. I imagine she is there for the show. Unlike the men, she is not looking at the stage, but straight at Naomi. To me her expression is one of scepticism and disdain towards the "shouting man in the dress". It is as though she is repressing an urge to cry out: "Who are you to wear that dress and pretend to be a woman!? You are not a real woman no matter what!"

I love this photograph. It has so many layers.

It may be seen as a battleground of two victim positions. Firstly, it is that of the biological woman, struggling hard and earnestly, willing to endure personal sacrifices and many disappointments, to lift herself out of oppression. And secondly, it is that of the "unspeakable" gender-crosser, who can call for support from no-one, expect no improvement, whose cause is lost even before the struggle has begun, and who is so destitute that she has given up the fight and just doesn't care. The first embittered by resistance, but still aspiring to a position of respectability and equality in a society that she resents. Her resentment is now directed at the frivolous, carefree transgendered, thinking that she knows nothing of the burden of the harsh, theory-laden strife she herself has to endure, but still will be claiming the right to the fruit of her toils. The other, creating her world on the fringes of a system of which she could never, and would never, be a part.

To me, this is thoroughly Foucauldian. Being gay, Foucault nevertheless resented the idea that he should "come out" and declare himself as such[39]. To him, all public self-declaration had a price, and that was the price of being caught in the web of prevailing discourse. In that web one inevitably takes on some of that discourse's identity markers, to the limitation of one's own freedom of original self-definition. In other words, at the moment you "confess", you automatically take on the "sins" and "absolutions" of others. Foucault claimed that power does not only reside in authoritative institutions[40]. Power is everywhere. It is played out in every human relationship. It does not flow in only one direction, but in many. It is multiple

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[39] See Mills, Sara: *Michel Foucault*, Routledge 2003, page 19ff.

[40] See Mills, op.cit., page 33 ff.

and pervasive. So you don't have to belong to any of the great movements, such as the women's movement or the gay movement, to wield power. On the contrary, to belong to one of these is to give up part of one's personal power. To Foucault, every person is a power base of his or her own. From these diverse, polymorph power bases springs a plethora of original identity expressions in need of no further definition. To him, this was what subversive use of power meant.
In the Goldin picture, Naomi, to me, represents such an original identity expression unhampered by current discourse. It would seem that the photographer agrees:

This book is about new possibilities and transcendence. The people in these pictures are truly revolutionary; they are the real winners of the battle of the sexes because they have stepped out of the ring.[41]

There is a sense of freedom in having a desire that has never been labeled.[42]

New possibilities and freedom is what Foucault is talking about.
Naomi and the others are not really rebels. In order to be a rebel you must actively oppose something. And inevitably be caught up in the discourse of that opposition. No, Goldin's friends have instead "stepped out of the ring" and created a space apart. They do not rebel against or oppose anything. They just live their lives and don't give a damn what other people think. I feel that this is a sound description of this environment at such an early stage in time.
In opposition to this marginal and enigmatic identity is the biological woman. She has chosen to step into the ring, and to take on the fight within authoritative discourse. The price she has to pay is exactly that loss in self-definitional power that Foucault talks about. In addition to the hard counter-resistance she has met from reactionary forces, she also has had to subsume some of herself to the greater cause. She has gone from being one woman among many diverse women, to being a representative of the species "woman". There has been an exchange of personal for common identity. She has made a sacrifice on the altar of political agency. Perhaps this is also present in her look at Naomi: bitterness brought on by loss of personal freedom and identity, and envy towards those that have retained it.

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[41] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 8.

[42] Goldin, op.cit., page 7.

The outsider's position of Naomi and her friends of course has its costs too. Many of the benefits of the greater society are beyond their reach. To the extent that they are noticed, they are the subject of ridicule and open hostility. But they have retained the power of personal self-definition. They may be abandoned and shut out, but at least they are free.

Another way of interpreting this picture is to make an analysis of the *gaze*, as it is done in Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975)[43], as a site of sadistic control and scopophilia. Mulvey claims that in narrative cinema female actors (and thus by identification the female sex) are subjected to (male) control and desire by way of the gaze of the spectators, the camera and the male actors. Goldin's picture is ripe with gazes – that of Naomi, that of the male spectators, and that of the woman looking at Naomi. If the male audience's gaze is one of control and scopophilic desire, then what about the woman's gaze? It does probably not express desire, but perhaps control. Could her gaze be one that constitutes Naomi as "Other" to her, just as she herself is constituted as Other in the patriarchal economy?[44] As she is ascending in the hierarchy, is she at the same time, by way of wilful exclusion or neglect, leaving people like Naomi behind to fill the void of the Other? The construction of groups of people as Other is a topic that I will revisit in the course of this dissertation (see for instance chapter 2.7).

The woman's look may also be considered by way of the Lacanian concept of *jouissance.*[45] This complicated concept may be seen as the site of a desire for something more than what can be offered by the Symbolic order[46]. It is also the site of loss, a feeling of once having possessed it. But the loss is a phatasmatic one, because that "something more" was never ours in the first place. In the Symbolic order, and especially in human relationships, we are always dissatisfied no matter how hard we strive, and we always have the feeling that there "should be more". This is the realm of jouissance. We can imagine that the woman looks at Naomi and is reminded of her loss, of what she has sacrificed, and of the disappointing nature of her achievements. In contrast, she sees the exuberant and careless joy of the outsider[47].

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[43] See Mulvey, Laura: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in Harrison, Charles & Paul Wood (ed): *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, Blackwell 1992, page 963-970.

[44] For definition of "Other", see for instance Gamble, op.cit., page 289.

[45] See Homer, Sean: *Jacques Lacan*, Routledge 2005, page 88-91.

[46] Homer, op.cit., p33 ff.

[47] Op.cit., p 62-63.

There is one more aspect in the lives of Goldin's friends that I wish to include at this point. It is the one of fashion and glamour. Goldin writes:

There was a wide range of gender identity among my friends. Several were pre-op transsexuals; others, like Ivy, never wanted to be women but were into the art of glamour, into fashion. [48]

My aspiration was to be a fashion photographer; my goal was to put the queens on the cover of Vogue. [49]

Fashion and the glamour of 1930s movies was an inspiration to Goldin. No doubt it coincided with the drag queens' taste for flamboyant costumes and props. They were also into idolizing entertainment stars - singers and actresses - as is evidenced by multiple photographs in *The Other Side*.

There is the picture *Ivy with Marilyn* (Boston, 1973)[50]. It portrays *Ivy* as a diva, wrapped in only a fur boa. Her head is thrown back, her lips slightly parted, eyelids heavy, wearing extensive make-up – including a beauty-spot – in a pose closely recalling that of actress Marilyn Monroe, an all-time favourite of the drag queen community. Monroe is also directly present, in the Andy Warhol print on the wall.

Christmas at The Other Side (Boston, 1972)[51] shows *Ivy* wearing a black dress, long silk gloves, pearl beads and a hat, reminiscent of Greta Garbo. She has just offered a light to the smoking male character in a painting, who has the air of a 1940s or 1950s male movie star. Smoking was considered a sign of sophistication back then.

She appears again in *Ivy in the Boston Garden* (Boston, 1973)[52] and *Ivy in the Boston Garden: back* (Boston, 1973)[53], smoking, wearing a small hat with a veil, coat and skirt, fur boa, short gloves, stockings, and high heeled short boots, strolling through the park exuding nostalgic elegance.

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[48] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 5.

[49] Goldin, op.cit., page 6.

[50] Op.cit., page 28.

[51] Ibid., page 22-23.

[52] Ibid., page 38.

[53] Ibid., page 39.

No less elegant is *Colette* in *Colette at home* (Boston, 1974)[54]. We see her reflection in the ornamented dresser mirror, posing on her bed, naked but for a pair of string panties. She is surrounded by giant feather fans. Her impeccable make up is complemented by a necklace and a set of earrings. The whole picture has an air of timeless beauty and style, accentuated if anything by her nudity. Her languishing look into the mirror lends it a nostalgic tinge.
These photographs bear witness to the fact that the taste for the glamorous in Goldin's drag community had a wide array of expressions, ranging from the camp and over-the-top to the subtle.
Still it may have made it even harder for the women's movement to accept the drag queens as fellow victims and co-combatants. The idolizing of Hollywood movie stars and famous entertainment personas may have been interpreted as bowing to institutions that were perceived as taking part in the oppression of women. The camp and over-the-top expressions may have been considered to be mocking femininity, showing disrespect and a lack of serious devotion to the cause. To the extent that this was the case, I believe that this criticism was unfair and at least to a certain degree misdirected. The drag queen devotion to glamour is more than a simple imitation of the famous, or even of women. It contains strong elements of parody and irony, mixed with admiration, but it is not necessarily directed only at the female sex, or at the entertainment industry per se. I submit that it is an original, creative undertaking, transcending both stardom and womanhood, and that it should be considered on its own terms.
Nevertheless, I do believe that when gender-crossers were finally accepted as part of the prevailing discourse and the Symbolic, their association with glamour and fashion played an important part in their positioning within it.

2.3 Psychoanalysis and transgender identity.

We have seen how female identity changed over the millennia from that of a defective and impotent variant of male perfection, through the acquisition of a separate but less important position, to being the agent of a call for a total revision of a corrupt system. We have seen the emphasis placed on the common fate of all women, and the necessity for unity and solidarity in order to gain political influence.

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[54] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 32.

An important part of the feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s was the compilation of comprehensive theories that could explain and underpin the claims of the movement.
One of the theories that was appropriated, commented on and revised was psychoanalytic theory[55]. In it feminists found both a piece of authoritative patriarchal ideology and a point of departure for criticism. It was the part that dealt with sexual differentiation that was most interesting to them. Writers sought to show how Sigmund Freud's theories on the Oedipus complex, the castration complex and the concept of penis envy were exemplary of the construction of the female as an inferior sex.
As such the interrogation of psychoanalytic theory did not only critique male oppression. It also raised the question of what constitutes sex and gender. In this discussion the *essentialists* claimed that sex and gender are more or less innate or predestined – a result of biological influences that cannot be changed. This is known as essentialism. Against this view were the ones that saw gender as the result of what they called *cultural constructions*. They emphasized the importance of cultural and societal factors at play in constructing gender roles, and the importance of those roles in the experience and expression of gender. They insisted that those roles are amenable to individual and collective intervention[56]. Most feminists held a constructivist view. In the next chapter we shall see this view taken to its extreme when dealing with the theories of Judith Butler.

In a way, Freud has one foot in both the one- and two-gender systems[57]. He claims that children of both sexes are basically the same psychologically up till the phallic phase (4 to 5 years)[58]. Both have retained their activity, and they try to dominate and control their love object (their mother). It is in their further development in the phallic phase that females take on the role of "castrated males", a reminiscence one might say, of the one-gender system. The boy's development, according to Freud, is roughly as follows[59]: On entering the phallic stage, he directs his attention at his penis, and masturbates profusely. His father is the one

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[55] See Gamble, op.cit., page 168-178.

[56] See Archer & Lloyd, op.cit.

[57] My main sources of Freudian theory are Freud, Sigmund: *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Basic Books 2000 (first published in 1905), and Olsen & Køppe, op.cit., and Thurschwell, Pamela: *Sigmund Freud*, Routledge 2000.

[58] Olsen & Køppe, op.cit., page 388.

[59] See Olsen & Køppe, op.cit., page 369 ff. or Thurschwell, op.cit., page 43 ff. for Freud's theory on the development of infantile sexuality and gender differentiation.

who issues a prohibition against this activity. He also notices that the love object, his mother, who he has tried sadistically to possess and dominate in the late anal stage, in fact directs her love towards his father. Noticing the female lack of a penis, he starts to contemplate the possibility of castration. He imagines that castration will be his father's punishment for continued masturbation and wanting to possess and dominate his mother. Faced with this intolerable threat, the Oedipus complex is resolved when he gives in to the masturbation and incest prohibitions (he stops masturbating and stops competing for his mother's love). Instead he now identifies with the father and with his phallic potency and power, which he believes to reside in his penis, and which he some day hopes to emulate. He represses his Oedipal urges. He turns his earlier sadism on himself by incorporating it into the super-ego along with the paternal prohibitions on masturbation and incest. He then enters the period of latency. During latency he learns, by the workings of the super-ego, to develop tender, loving, non-sexual feelings towards his mother and other people in general. On entering puberty, his repressed urges resurface, but he is now able to control them better. He directs them at a mother substitute, his future mate, and mixes them with sublimated tenderness. The result of this process is an individual with both the active agency (the Oedipal urges) and the morals (from the influence of the super-ego) intact.

The girl, on the other hand, develops along a different and more tortuous path, one that Freud had trouble discerning and one that he revised during his career. On entering the phallic phase, she discovers the boy's penis, and that she lacks it. Her conclusion is that she is already castrated. Having "lost" the most important organ of activity and agency, she realises that she cannot compete with her brother (and the masturbation symbolizing his agency). She gives up her clitoral masturbation. Instead of repressing her Oedipal urges, she abandons them altogether. At the same time she shifts from activity to passivity. Seeing that her mother also lacks the penis, she blames her for the loss. Her affection shifts to her father, hoping that he will give her a penis – the basis for the so-called penis envy. In time, her wish to be given a penis is substituted by the wish for a baby. Her Oedipal conflict is resolved by her shift from actively trying to acquire and dominate the love object, to passively waiting for the "gift" of a penis/baby. The sadism from the anal stage is not incorporated into a super-ego structure, but is, in accordance with her passive role, turned into masochism. Nor has she any masturbation prohibition to incorporate in the super-ego. On entering puberty, her masochistic wish for penetration and the gift of a penis/baby is directed at her future mate. The result of this development is a passive individual (abandoned Oedipal urges) relying on the agency of her male companion, and with a poorly developed moral (weak super-ego).

It is interesting to see how Freud's model starts out with two sexes that are basically alike and equal psychologically, who – being faced with a biological difference (lack versus possession of penis – vestige of the one-gender system), become two fundamentally different genders each with their own specific set of traits (fully evolved two-gender system). Since the development is dependent on an organic body part, and since Freud thought that the Oedipus complex was universal – existing in all societies past and present – it is fair to say that his model of sexual differentiation is one of essentialism.

Jacques Lacan in a way translated Freud's model to fit society and culture as a whole[60]. Instead of Freud's oral, anal, phallic and genital (in puberty) phases, he posited three "orders". These are not really equivalent to intra-psychic, developmental phases in the Freudian sense. They are more like general human positions within the family, society, culture and the natural world. Freud took the individual mind as his starting point, and from there tried to work out how interpersonal as well as intra-psychic dynamics affected that mind. His scientific method was theorizing on discoveries he made analysing himself and patients. What he wanted to do was to map the human mind and its pathology. He considered himself a medical scientist first and foremost. The cultural implications of his findings he set forth later in his career, and they were clearly secondary to his medical formulations.
Lacan, on the other hand, while taking Freud's theories as a point of departure, had a much wider scope. He wanted to explain the fundamental premises of humanity as a whole. He considered the individual psyche not as an entity unto itself, but claimed that it could surface only in its multiple, interdependent, complex relations to its surroundings, be that familial, societal, cultural or natural, and that those surroundings were in turn also deeply interconnected. The vessel that allowed the subject to surface was, according to Lacan, language. Nature, on the other hand, served as a kind of perimeter to human existence. The fundamental premises of humanity were that of desire and lack, and society's task was to deal with them.
He stated that the infant's development could be explained as two stages, or "orders", the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and that each of them was in some way connected to an experience of lack.

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[60] My main sources of Lacanian theory are Homer, op.cit. and Lacan, Jacques: "The Mirror-phase as Formative of the Function of the I", in Zizek, Slavoj: *Mapping Ideology*, Verso 1994, page 93-99.

The first, the Imaginary Order, is that of the pre-linguistic child[61]. In it the child lives in a close dyad with his mother. The body exists only as fragments; it is not connected to make up a whole. His perception of himself corresponds to the experience of his drives (hunger as a sensation in the stomach, need for emptying of the bowel as a sensation in the lower intestines etc), and to what he can observe of his body from his limited vantage point. Between the ages of 6 to 18 months he enters the so-called Mirror Stage[62]. In it he detects his own reflection in the mirror, and slowly starts to identify with it. In time he accepts it as a proper representation of himself. The problem with this, according to Lacan, is that the mirror image is not a real, but an imaginary self-representation. The image holds an autonomy and wholeness that the real child does not. So when the child constructs his ego around it, he in fact grants his ego an autonomy and wholeness that was never there. His ego is a conceit. It is this split between the ego structure as a site of autonomy and wholeness and a reality that contradicts it that represents the first lack.

The second lack is the child's loss of his mother's love on resolving the Oedipal complex, and the substitution of this love by the entering into language and the Symbolic Order[63]. The Lacanian version of the overcoming of the complex differs from the Freudian one. It is not the father's penis as a bodily organ that the little boy identifies with on giving up his mother as a love object. It is the Phallus[64]. The Phallus is the bodily penis, but it is also, and more importantly, a site of phantasmatic plenitude and mastery. In this respect it is the equivalent to the mirror image in the Imaginary Order. Believing the father to have that Phallus, the boy follows him into the realm of language and the Symbolic Order, the purported site of the Phallus. The child accomplishes this by subjecting to the Law of the Father - the incest prohibition. One might say that in the Symbolic Order the boy hopes to find the sense of autonomy and wholeness that he has lost, and the love that he has forsaken. Once again the problem is that the Phallus, just like the reflection in the mirror, does not, and did never, really exist. There is not and there never was a total autonomy and wholeness, just as there is no immaculate mother's love.

The experience of the two lacks is what informs the Lacanian version of desire. Desire is the act of trying to rectify them; to mend what has been severed, to find what has been lost.

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[61] See Homer, op.cit., page 17-31.

[62] See Lacan, op.cit.

[63] See Homer, op.cit., page 33-49.

[64] Op.cit., page 51-64.

Desire is the act of hunting for ghosts. Lacan's concept of desire resurfaced throughout his career under different names, such as the objet petit a and jouissance[65]. It is also connected to the third Lacanian order, the Real[66]. The Real is a category that I will come back to later in this dissertation (chapter 2.8).
Inevitably finding that he does not possess the Phallus, the subject will construct a phantasmatic Other, a site where he believes it to reside. The Other becomes the object of his desire. This has bearing on Lacan's thoughts on gender differences[67]. On subjecting to the Law of the Father, and entering language and the Symbolic, the boy identifies with his father's role as the one who has the Phallus. The little girl, on the other hand, has no Phallus. She is constructed within this order as the one being the Phallus, i.e. the object of male desire. She is the Other that holds the promise of (phantasmatic) wholeness and love. As with Freud, this would seem to be an essentialistic gender conception. But there is one crucial difference between the two. Whereas Freud's hallmark of gender difference, the penis, is a concrete, biological, inevitable entity, the Phallus in Lacanian theory is a fiction. The Phallus is not a bodily organ, it is a symbol of something that does not exist, and it is only loosely connected to the penis. Therefore, no-one can really be said to have or be the Phallus. Furthermore, since the Phallus is a purely symbolic entity, a signifier, it may be appropriated and reassigned to new meanings. This point was not lost on feminist writers.

Having reviewed the Freudian and Lacanian theories on gender differentiation, I now return to two Goldin photographs. I want to try to hold *Roommate in her chair*[68] and *Colette at home*[69] up against these theories in order to understand why the transgender people were shut out of the 1960s and 1970s women's movement.
As I have said earlier, feminist writers appropriated psychoanalytic theory - and with it the two-gender system - to show the workings of the patriarchy. Though they opposed the discrimination of the female sex, they did not reject the theory altogether. It would seem that they accepted, and still accepts, crucial aspects of it. In fact, quite a number of writers used it as the theoretical basis from which they set forth their critique of patriarchy. I find this

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[65] Homer, op.cit, page 87-91.

[66] Op.cit., page 81-94.

[67] Ibid., page 95-109.

[68] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 27.

[69] Goldin, op.cit., page 32.

puzzling. One would think that utter and complete rejection would be the appropriate feminist response to an evidently sexist theory. After all, psychoanalysis is not an established scientific fact. It is a theory. Nothing more. It seems to me that taking it as a starting point – "colluding" with the enemy so to speak – would inevitably corrupt the theorizing process from the start.

People like *roommate* and *Colette* not only threatened to fragment the unity of women, thus curtailing their political agency. The writers may also have been worried that accepting them would tear down their theoretical hold over the movement.
Whatever the reason may be for the rejection by the women's movement, it is clear that *roommate* and *Colette* is incompatible with both the two-gender system and Freudian psychoanalysis.
In chapter 2.1 I discussed the relation to the former. Their existence is equally disruptive to psychoanalytic theory of gender differentiation. Freud claimed that the penis was the organ of primacy. It was the penis itself that started the cascade that eventually turned boys into men and girls into women. It was on recognizing her loss of the penis that the girl abandoned Oedipal urges altogether, subjecting to a life in passivity and penis envy. The thought that someone willingly would want to cut off that most noble of body parts must seem preposterous. Besides, the fact that someone could possess a penis and still feel like a woman would compromise the position of the penis as the prime agent of gender differentiation. According to psychoanalytic theory, gender resides in the penis (or lack of it in girls), not in the brain or in any other body part. If someone is born with a penis, he becomes a man, simple as that.
As far as I know, Freud never observed or treated transgender people, and I have found no description of them in the literature pertaining to him. There existed expertise on transgender phenomena in the first half of the twentieth century, in Berlin, in the circle of Magnus Hirschfeld. But the knowledge probably did not seep through to conservative Vienna.
But we know that Freud was quite liberal in his view on homosexuality[70]. He did not subscribe to the notion that held some merit at the time, that homosexual men were biological males with female brains. His view was that they were males like all other males. Furthermore he stated that they were neither subject to neurological degeneration (another widely held belief about homosexual men), nor suffering from any serious psychological illness. In this respect he was influenced by his admiration for famous artists through history that were

[70] Olsen & Køppe, op.cit., page 231-232.

known to having been gay. He deduced that men of such faculties could hardly have suffered from neurological damage or psychological distress. Freud's position was that homosexuality could be explained by his model of gender differentiation. Gay men were simply men that had chosen a male love object. Their evolution was a variant of the mainstream one. By analogy it is therefore likely that he, had he theorized on transgenderism, would have offered an explanation consistent with his psychological theories founded on the Oedipus complex, the primacy of the penis, castration anxiety, and choice of love object. I am not sure, however, that he would have afforded them the normalcy that he bestowed upon the homosexual male. I doubt it.

The women's movement contested the primacy of the penis and claimed that penis envy was a fabrication. They maintained that up till that point in time, psychoanalysis had been part of the oppressive arsenal of patriarchy. It was part of a system that brutally oppressed all women. A system that all women wanted to overthrow. As I said before, several writers took psychoanalysis as a starting point for their critique. So they were in a way dependent on its power and influence. Without it their critique would be inconsequential. To them, gender differentiation power had indeed resided in the penis. Not because it was inevitable or natural, but as an effect of patriarchal law. Psychoanalysis was an example of the materialization of this law. To claim, as male gender-crossers do, that the female position is the desirable one, would be to undermine the patriarchal power of the penis and to willingly seek refuge in a discriminated state. It would be to contest the system's power of oppression, and at the same time lessen the burden of that oppression by expressing a will to take up a position subjected to it.

Furthermore, the fact that people like *roommate* and *Colette* claim to be women in spite of being born in male bodies weakens the movement's definitional power of the term "woman". Who could decide who or what is a woman? What is the criterion of womanhood? The thought of allowing each individual to answer this crucial question, no matter their biological status at birth, must have seemed impossible. In a way the feminist theorists, just like the psychoanalytic ones, depended on the penis as gender discriminator.

So, in the effort to keep theory comprehensive and unequivocal the transgender people were left to fend for themselves as best they could. They simply did not fit into the picture.

But *Colette* and *roommate* would undoubtedly fare better within Lacanian gender analysis. As I stated earlier, the Phallus – the gender discriminator – is an unstable entity. Not only is it detached from all bodily organs. It is also non-existent within culture as a whole. It does not really reside anywhere. It is a mere phantasmatic symbol of plenitude and wholeness constructed to alleviate and rectify the experiences of lack – the basic human condition. Since it is a signifier, it may be appropriated and re-assigned. Anyone can wield its power.
Since the Phallus, and not the penis, is the site of agency, the configuration of the individual's body parts is no longer of crucial importance. Lacan stated that women can also assume the position of having the Phallus. In fact, they can actually shift back and forth between the positions of having and being the Phallus. Men seem to have more restricted options; they have to choose one of the two and stick to it.
Lacan also claimed that women have a surplus of jouissance – the object of desire[71]. Since they are not subjected to the Law of the Father and the Symbolic to the same degree as men, they are not in the same way caught up in the false promises of the order. Therefore, as kind of "free agents" in the system, they have access to sources of jouissance that are closed to men.
Now it follows that in the Lacanian gender differentiation model, transgender people are in command of the Phallus. Their position within the Symbolic order is not obvious, but it is likely that they, same as women, are not as caught up in it as men are. That would mean that they too have the opportunity to choose their position in relation to the Phallus, and that they too have access to some of that mysterious surplus jouissance.

2.4 Queer theory and transgender identity.

The structuralist scrutiny of "grand narratives" and public institutions had the effect of revealing their contingency. In the 1980s and 1990s, no longer being conceived of as instigated by "nature" or any supra-human authority, they were subjected to critique and deconstruction. Their inner workings of power were analysed and questioned. One by one, the once-eternal truths and beliefs started to crumble. One by one, the narratives and institutions

[71] On jouissance, see this dissertation page 25 and earlier in this chapter.

slowly changed. It was the dawn of the pragmatic and eclectic age of post-structuralism, post-modernism, and – some say – post-feminism[72].

One of the "grand narratives" under attack was that of the two-gender system. As I stated in chapter 2.1 it was so pervasive and was sustained by such subtle mechanisms that it had the appearance of being completely natural and self-evident. But as a result of the critique of the 1980s and 1990s that started to change, albeit sluggishly.

The starting point for the resistance to the two-gender system was twofold, I think. Firstly, there were the great "liberation movements" of the 1960s and 1970s; of women, of people of colour, of homosexual people. They showed that the "truths" underpinning discriminatory practices were based on false assumptions, and that activism was an effective tool in order to obtain change. The movements started a chain reaction. Given their success, more and more people who felt that they were in one way or other victims to the prevailing system would follow in their trail. "Liberation" and the coming into light of "minority" groups were the trends of the day. Secondly, and rather paradoxically, the women's movement also afforded a starting point for the critique of the two-gender system not by its success, but by its shortcomings. As noted in the preceding chapter, the movement built its theories on precisely the two-gender system, championing the theories' universal validity for all women. Unity was paramount, and internal differences in the movement were downplayed. Still it encountered increasing opposition from women who did not feel that their situation was properly addressed and represented. Women of colour and lesbians, for instance, did not feel at home in the theoretical deliberations of an all-white, heterosexual, middle class intellectual elite. Consequently they did not necessarily feel solidarity towards those strata of the female population. The experience of being inadequately represented by feminist theory made them question not only the validity of the theory, but also started a debate on the term "woman" itself. Questioning the unity and "wholeness" (to use a term with a Lacanian tinge) of "woman" led to the partial fragmentation of the movement, and from some of the fragments sprung the so-called *queer theory*[73].

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[72] For deliberations on the term "post-feminism" see Gamble, op.cit., page viii and 43 ff.

[73] These deliberations are consistent with those in Gamble, op.cit, page 43-65.

The *queer* phenomenon is not really a uniform movement[74]. It is rather a multi-focal and polymorph practice of theorizing and critique. Whereas the women's movement sought unity and cohesion, the queer activists embraced diversity. Inspired by Michel Foucault and his theories on the discursive construction of sex and gender – he stated that none of them are "natural" or self-evident entities, but culturally and socially constructed ones[75], and the Derridean concept of linguistic *differance* – claiming that signification depends on what is absent[76], they set out to deconstruct the dichotomies (binary oppositions)[77] heterosexual/homosexual and male/female. Thus sexual orientation, gender identity and gender systems were no longer considered to be innate or self-evident entities. They were deemed cultural constructions intimately dependent on the workings of the society in which they were validated. Given their nature as constructions they furthermore were not universal. They differed from one society to another, and through the span of history. In this context the "woman" that the feminists called to opposition, was no more than a crude discursive and linguistic category, and could not be representative of all the diverse individuals of the female sex. Consequently no theory could claim to speak on behalf of all women, just as no theory could speak on behalf of all homosexuals, lesbians and people of colour.

Judith Butler is the *queer* theorist par excellence[78]. Her writings on sexed and gendered identity have been very influential. In them she seeks to explain the instability and indeterminacy of all such identity categories.
To Butler, sex and gender are cultural constructions. Their means of construction is language. Furthermore she states that sex and gender are performative. Performativity is the repeated expression of the identities that are possible in a specific society[79]. It differs from the term "performance" in the sense that in performativity the deed precedes the "doer", not the other way around. She uses the Althussian concept of interpellation – the naming performed and

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[74] My main sources of *queer* theory are Brantsæter, Eikvam, Kjær, Åmås (eds), op.cit., and Butler: *Gender Trouble,* and Butler: *Bodies that Matter,* and Denborough, David: *Queer Counselling and Narrative Practice*, Dulwich Centre Publications 2002, and Gamble, op.cit., and Salih, op.cit.

[75] See Foucault, op.cit.

[76] See for instance Salih, op.cit., page 31 and 35-37.

[77] Op.cit., page 21.

[78] My main sources on Butlerian theory are Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble*, and Butler, Judith: *Bodies that Matter*, and Salih, op.cit.

[79] See for instance Butler: *Gender Trouble*, page 171 ff.

reiterated by authorities to bestow a particular identity upon their subjects[80], and shows how sex and gender is bestowed upon a person through authoritative utterances from that first statement by the obstetrician: "It's a girl!" Through interpellation and the repeated acts of expressing one's gender - processes that run right through the entire lifespan of an individual - identities are formed that are in accordance with the prevailing discourse and the law of prohibition in that specific society.

Butler claims that it makes no sense to speak of organic or bodily sex as an independent entity, since all sexed and gendered identity is created through language and discourse. We cannot speak of those entities except by using concepts that are always already embedded in and governed by prevailing discourse. She argues that the language that purports to describe bodies and genders actually constitutes them. In fact, sex and gender are the effects, rather than the causes of language and discourse. To her then, the discussion of whether sex and gender are essential or constructed is a futile one, since essentialism does not really exist. Butler's concept of performative gender also means that there is no innate or "original" subject that acts. The subject is no more than an effect of patterns laid down in society, and it is destined to repeat those patterns and in so doing cementing them even more. There is no "doer" behind the deed. And there is no such thing as free will[81].

In a given society there are some identity possibilities that are endorsed and cultivated, and others that are prohibited. According to Butler, in the Western modern civilization these processes follow the law of what she calls "compulsory heterosexuality"[82]. That is to say that the system fosters heterosexual men and women and frowns upon other identity options. Following Derridean language theory she states that the endorsed identities nonetheless contain and depend upon the counterparts that they prohibit. Thus heterosexuality, for instance, depend upon homosexuality for its demarcation and self-definition. In a feat of subversive theorizing, Butler thus places the means of subversion within the system itself.

As I mentioned the concept of agency is a complicated one in Butler's writings. On the one hand, she claims that all sex and gender issues are the result of language, prevailing discourse and the law, and that nothing can exist outside them. Even the subject is such a "prisoner", as

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[80] See for instance Butler: *Bodies that Matter*, page 121 ff., or Salih, op.cit., page 77-80

[81] Butler's notions on free will and agency are complicated. For the most part she views them both as fundamentally limited by and dependent on societal practices that pre-exist the subject. Nevertheless she still suggests that a certain freedom to act differently exists. For more on this topic, see Butler, op.cit. (both books) and Salih, op.cit., and the following pages of this dissertation.

[82] See Salih, op.cit., page 49.

we have seen. The subject accordingly is no "free agent". This would seem to curtail any attempts at instigating changes. On the other hand, she claims that the system itself offers up the possibilities for subversive action. Since the act of interpellation and performativity are ongoing processes that never end, they are also open-ended ones with no possibility for closure. This means that identity is never final or fixed. It is always subject to change. She quotes de Beauvoir in that one is not born, but rather one becomes a woman. So to Butler also, the concept of "woman" is very much a term-in-progress. Since identity is never stable, and since the system cannot help but to produce the very identity options that it seeks to prohibit, the subject can appropriate and don any of these. She speaks of the range of possible identity entities as garments in a wardrobe: the number of garments is determined in advance, but from these one can choose whichever one wants. The system may try to make you put on one or the other. Still the subject can resist the system's call. In this she departs from Althusser, as she states that interpellation is not always effective – it sometimes misses its mark, and in her Foucauldian model power is non-situated, pervasive, multiple and productive. In other words, the system is not infallible. So it would seem that Butler sees agency on the one hand as something that is confined to and "trapped" within the discursive system, but on the other hand as something retaining a certain degree of potency.

Butler offers extensive critique of the law of "compulsory heterosexuality". She claims that heterosexuality is a "melancholic" structure[83]. Melancholy, according to Freud, is the reaction to a loss that cannot be grieved[84]. The reason for the inability to grieve is that the bereaved has ambivalent feelings towards the lost object, feelings that he or she cannot admit to having. Unable to mourn, the person incorporates the lost object and makes it part of its ego structure, giving it a melancholic aspect. Now, in a radical reworking of Freud, Butler claims that what she calls the taboo against homosexuality precedes the incest taboo. Through it the child is prohibited from mourning the loss of the love of the same-sex parent. Still the loss of the love of the same-sex parent is incorporated into the ego structure and kept there as a hidden and unrecognised "homosexuality". Thus heterosexual identity and desire is founded upon the prohibition of homosexual desire - a desire that is in fact incorporated into the ego structure as a melancholic entity. The greater the prohibitive force, the deeper the repression of homosexual desire, and the greater the urge to compensate through what Butler calls

[83] See Salih, op.cit., page 54-56.

[84] See Thurschwell, op.cit., page 89-91.

"hyperbolic heterosexuality" and homophobia. Thus it would seem that heterosexuality, far from being "compulsory", is indeed a defect of some kind.

Resistance and subversion are key concepts in Butler's theories. We have seen that the subject, although no more than an effect of discourse and the law, still retains some agency. Through prohibition the system as well as the heterosexual individual is dependent on alternative identity formations. Since the system uses language as its means of interpellation and prohibition, its concepts are – in accordance with modern language theory – open to appropriation and re-signification. As an example Butler appropriates the Lacanian Phallus. She asserts that since it has no strict relation to any specific body part, and is in fact a mere signifier, it can be made to re-signify any body part or any vessel of power. The Phallus is a "plastic" signifier. She consequently introduces the lesbian Phallus[85].

Drawing on the failure of the interpellative call of the law, she suggests ways to visualize the constructed and unstable workings of sex and gender identity formation. The best way to do this, she says, is through parodic proliferation of gender expressions. Parody is a way of showing alternative identity expressions that are deemed by society not to matter, and at the same time to expose the impotence of the system. Drag, to Butler, can be such a parodic, subversive practice[86]. Drag, she claims, is an allegory of heterosexual melancholy. Nevertheless, she asserts that there are both "good" and "bad" gender citations, and that the bad ones only contribute to enforcing existing heterosexual norms.

Dealing with the issue of hate speech, she returns to her agency-restricted subject, claiming that there is no culpable subject[87]. The law, she says, in fact produces the culpable subject in order to prosecute it. Her alternative is again not one of prohibition, but of appropriation and parodic re-signification of hate speech terms, with potentially unexpected subversive results. Thus parodic proliferation and drag are examples of Butler's strategy choices when faced with restricting discourse and prohibitive law. Mis-recognition of the naming by authorities is another and parallel strategy.

Accepting Butler's theories and activist strategies means that we must give up all our claims to coherence of self-identity and at the same time accept the Otherness within ourselves. This is a point worth noting, since I will try to show what effects such ideas may have had for the transgender community.

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[85] See Salih, op.cit., page 82-88.

[86] Op.cit., page 65-68.

[87] Ibid., page 99 ff.

Butler's most influential books on sex and gender theory were published in 1990 (*Gender Trouble*) and 1993 (*Bodies That Matter*). They are pillars in the field of *queer* theory, and contributed to a greater acceptance of diverse gender expressions. The newly found increase in self-worth can also be seen in Goldin's book, I think.

In the introduction to *The Other Side* she tells us how she lost contact with her trans-gendered friends when she started going to art school full time in the seventies. Then in 1978 she moved to New York City. In the 1980s two of her closest friends were transsexuals. One of them was a top model in Paris – perhaps an omen of the status change in progress.

The only pictures in *The Other Side* from the 1980s are the ones of Greer, a close friend of Goldin's. To my mind they stand apart from the other photographs in the book. In their portrayal of squalid circumstances they more closely resemble the images in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, which Goldin was working on at the time[88].

Then, in 1990, she met a whole new crowd of drag queens in New York. Once again she embarked on an extensive photographic odyssey with enthusiasm. But things had changed. Compared to the queens she was now the older one. And, as she writes:

The social setting has also changed – they are not as marginalized as they were in the mid '70s, but are more incorporated into and appreciated by the gay community. Many have jobs – in bars and clubs, as make-up artists and hairdressers; some are models in Vogue.[89]

The change in social setting is probably, at least in part, due to the watershed academic activity mentioned earlier in this chapter, in which post-structuralist and *queer* theory began to deconstruct old truths and the two-gender system in particular.

This academic influence is also evident in the pictures, I feel. *Joey on my bed* on the back cover of *The Other Side* is an example. It is taken in New York in 1991. It shows *Joey* reclining on a bed, with long, flowing hair and make up. She is wearing nothing but panties, a brassiere and a fishnet body. A big tattoo is visible on her left upper arm. Her right hand is placed behind her head, and her left covers her pubic area. She looks straight at the photographer.

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[88] *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* was originally a slide show. The photo-book containing pictures from the show and given the same name was published in 1986.

[89] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 6.

This, once again, is a wonderfully complex image.

Joey's reclining pose closely resembles that of a Titian Venus. The positioning of her left hand does the same. This so-called *pudica* gesture (holding the hand close to the pubis area) goes all the way back to Praxiteles' *Aphrodite of Knidos* (approx. 350-340 BC), the first completely nude full figure female statue in Greek art. It is possible that the gesture originated from images of Aphrodite-Astarte of Cyprus. In these images the *pudica* gesture does not denote bashfulness, but Aphrodite-Astarte's status as goddess of fertility[90]. So the positioning of the left hand in Goldin's picture may actually be a way to accentuate *Joey's* fertility. Seeing that *Joey* cannot have any children as a woman, the gesture is an example of subtle parody. Through the appropriation of the *pudica* gesture it plays on the ultimate female activity of childbearing.

The whole photograph, as well as the *pudica* gesture, also plays on sexuality in a more general way. After all, Aphrodite/Venus was the goddess of love. But the unabashed eroticism of *Joey* is distinctly more modern than a Praxiteles or a Titian. It brings to mind the Venus-pastiche of Manet's *Olympia* (1863). Both Goldin and Manet deal with "forbidden" sexuality. But whereas Manet in *Olympia's* sad face shows us the costs of this sexuality - and points an accusing finger at the ones responsible for those costs (the male, bourgeois spectator), all such hints of tragedy are gone from the Goldin picture. *Joey* flaunts her body unabashedly; her lips parted; her cheeks flushed. There is no sadness in her eyes, but rather a hint of a smile, both inviting and ironic. The shame of the forbidden love is shed.

The *Joey* picture, like the *Olympia* one, involves the spectator in their themes through the way both protagonists look directly at the viewer. In the Manet painting, the spectator is obliged to consider the ethical and moral consequences of prostitution, and the double standards of the day. In this way it is a painting with a "pedagogic" intent. Goldin's photograph, on the other hand, goes beyond ethic and moral issues, and invites the viewer to reflect upon a much more basic concept, namely that of desire itself. Seeing that the protagonist most likely is an individual of contrasting gender and biological sex, the very nature of desire and sexuality is being interrogated. It is as if though *Joey* looks at us, asking: "What is it that you desire? Is it me, the transgender person named Joey? Or is it a mere fantasy?" What is the real nature and object of (male) desire?

In chapter 2.1 I asked which elements that make up the femininity of the person designated as "roommate". In this *Joey* picture Goldin goes one step further, destabilizing not only the

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[90] See Kiilerich, op.cit., page 162-163.

gender stereotypes, but also the foundations of sexuality itself. This time the Mulveyian male gaze not only misses its mark, as in Goldin's pictures from the 1970s. It is taken up and played back and forth between the spectator and the protagonist like a ping-pong ball, never settling down. This feels like a playful game. It is quite typical of the 1990s that Goldin applies irony and parody as its tools. One may say that this is a thoroughly post-modern work, appropriating and playing with sexual, gender and artistic conventions. It is a picture that resonates with Butlerian ideas.

Due to the academic and activist recognition of transgender identity from the 1980s onwards, Goldin's friends were now, as she asserts, brought from the obscurity of their earlier existence and into the light of public interest as part of the gay rights' movement. The movement organized the annual Gay Pride Parades. They afforded a vehicle for political activism, an opportunity for self-promotion and a chance to celebrate. Goldin's photograph *Misty and Jimmy Paulette in a taxi* (taken in New York City, 1991)[91] shows two of her friends on their way to the parade.

Both wear heavy make up. *Misty* has a bright blue wig on, heavy heart-shaped earrings, and a metallic blue, sleeveless dress. Both the wig and the dress are clearly made of synthetic fibres. *Jimmy Paulette* has an equally synthetic blond wig, a short, white fishnet top with sleeves, and a metallic gold push-up brassiere. They sit in the back seat of a taxi, looking straight into the camera.

Again, as in the *Joey* picture, the emphasis here is on the parodic. Neither *Misty* nor *Jimmy* even pretends to mimic any kind of traditional femininity. Their whole attire underpins that impression: The metallic hues and colours of wigs, dress and brassiere are altogether "unnatural". The make-up is more fitting for the theatrical scene than for the real world. *Jimmy's* fishnet top is torn asunder. The straps of her brassiere have gone down her upper arms. The brassiere looks as if it was never meant to fit in the first place. Tellingly, a piece of white fabric is visible in one of the cups, flaunting the artificiality of *Jimmy's* breasts for all to see. Indeed, one gets the feeling that their outfits are a parody, no longer on femininity, but on drag itself. A parody on the parody on gender; a mimesis three times removed.

Misty and *Jimmy Paulette* are ready for the big parade. But I cannot help but wonder what rights they will be fighting for there, what ways of living they will proudly promote. Perhaps their eyes tell it all. Under heavy eyelids they gaze vacantly at the camera, with expressions

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[91] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 58-59.

that do not speak of desire, but rather of fatigue and emptiness. Theirs are not the *Joey* look of playful, ironic and open-ended sexuality.

2.5 Comparing photographs.

I now want to compare the pictures from the 1970s with those taken after 1980. I want to look for further clues as to the disintegration of identity I have discussed so far.

One obvious difference is that while the early photographs are in black-and-white, the latter are all in colour.
Originally, black-and-white was preferred for "Art photography" by artists and critics. The argument was that it set the works apart from everyday life and thus elevated them to the realm of Art – perhaps somewhat like the grisaille of a Carracci painting denotes beings of a "higher" level. Accordingly, colour photography was deemed "too realistic", too close to life to be art[92]. This of course changed with artists like Eggleston and others.
Curiously though, Goldin's colour photography does not necessarily look more "realistic" than her black-and-white ones. In her production as a whole, her colour palette spans the entire spectrum – from bright, saturated hues to subdued nuances of browns, blues and greys. The colour pictures in *The Other Side* tend to be of the saturated kind. Mostly they contain one or more object of bright colour, and the indoor ones – especially the ones taken without a flash – are suffused with the golden glow of the lamplight. These colours are the ones we would expect to find in a fashion magazine – indeed the artist was inspired by fashion photography – and they give the same sense of removal from everyday reality as does fashion photography. They look like they have been taken in a magical land, in a fairy tale of sorts, where everything is glamorous and shiny. In Goldin's pictures it is Saturday night all week long, and the party goes on forever. These are not the hues of an ordinary, dreary Monday afternoon under a pale sky.
One may argue that Goldin's use of colour in *The Other Side* concurs with the post-modern fragmentation of identity. The colours effectively underscore the "unreal" quality of her protagonists and the world they live in. This "unreality" is nothing like the classical, timeless

[92] See Marien, op.cit., page 358 ff.

aloofness of High Art. Rather it seems a symptom of our glaring, hyperbolic age, that, although having lost touch with real life, is all too mundane.

Another factor to compare is the composition of the pictures. Goldin employs different kinds of composition. Sometimes she is strictly formal, especially in portraits, with the subject placed along the middle line or the golden section, and with the picture components carefully balanced. At other times she composes her photographs according to what has been called the "snapshot aesthetic"[93]. A "snapshot" is originally a photograph taken in a hurry to catch a transient scene on film. The picture components often look as if though they are distributed randomly within the picture space. Some are even at the edges of it and may be cut off by the frame in an evidently arbitrary manner. The resulting impression is frequently one of chaos and disarray.
The formal composition type is of course associated with High Art, and the "snapshot aesthetic" connotes the amateur photographer and a more straightforward link between the picture and everyday life. The latter is thought of as being more "realistic". Though having connotations of amateur photography the "snapshot aesthetic" has been appropriated by professional artists in order to convey such a sense of realism.
Goldin quite often uses the "snapshot" compositional device. It is part of her trademark, so to speak. Even though it occurs in both the black-and-white and the colour photographs, it seems to me to be employed more frequently in the latter ones. And again, as with the colours, I am not satisfied that it denotes reality per se. It denotes one particular kind of reality; the haphazard kind – chaos instead of order. To me this is the most important point here. As with the use of colours, I feel that Goldin's choice of this particular compositional technique underscores the fragmentation of the identity of her subjects.

Another technical device of Goldin's is the application of "blur" to the pictures[94]. That is to say that the whole or a part of the picture is out of focus and thus indistinct.
The blur occurs in both the 1970s photographs and the post 1980 photographs. But it seems to me that the blur of the former is of a different nature than the blur of the latter.

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[93] See Aperture 19:1, "The Snapshot", Jonathan Green (ed), Aperture Inc. 1974, and Chalfen, Richard: *Snapshot Versions of Life*, Bowling Green State University Popular Press 1987.

[94] See Marien, op.cit., page 307 and 427-432.

In the 1970s black-and-white pictures, as I mentioned in regard to the *Roommate in the kitchen*, the blur is a uniform fuzziness that fills the entire picture plane (see chapter 2.1). It may be the result of usage of fast film. As I have said it reminds me of *Pictorialist* photographs, with all their connotations of High Art. It signals aloofness and timelessness.
In the later pictures, on the other hand, Goldin uses the blur to create a sense of movement. This is probably done by photographing a subject in motion, or by moving the camera with "too slow" shutter speed. The result here is not one of aloofness, but one of hectic restlessness. It is as if her subjects are so restless that they are literally falling apart.
To put it in a quasi-Neoplatonic way, the black-and-white blur connote exaltation and transcendence while the colour blur connote disintegration and immanence – a return to mute matter. Thus the use of the blur in the colour photographs may once again be interpreted to illustrate the fragmentation of identity, this time involving not only the mind, but the body as well.

There is one more subject that deserves to be mentioned when we compare the older and the more recent photographs of *The Other Side*. It is what I would like to call the narrative content of the pictures.
A narrative is generally understood as a kind of story. In visual art it is the story that the image "tells" us. In a picture the artist may install certain visual clues, clues that are familiar to the spectator, in order to get the correct meaning – the story of the image – across to the spectator. Biblical pictures are exemplary. For instance, the visual clues of a ship, a man being thrown overboard, and a whale, will for a Christian tell the story of Jonah and the whale, with all its connotations of death and resurrection. Visual narratives depend on the spectators being familiar with their "language" – that is, the correspondence between particular visual elements and the underlying story that is to be told. A visual narrative is a kind of a re-telling of a story, a recognition and a reminder. It may also be creative by combining visual elements from different stories.
An artist can turn any picture more narrative by including such elements. Such elements will "rub off" on the other (non-narrative) elements so that they are interpreted in the same manner, or context. The non-narrative elements will thus be imbued with the same qualities that are afforded the narrative ones. Advertising photography, for instance, uses this device all

the time, trying to install upon their products new meanings that are in no way inherent to them[95].

It is interesting to see that Goldin uses such narrative techniques in her black-and-white pictures. For instance, in the *Roomate in the kitchen*, there is the image of the girl on the wall (see chapter 2.1). Even though it is fuzzy, we seem to have seen images like that before. It is sentimental, and connotes, among other things, innocence, girlish sensitivity and a happy childhood. And it is precisely in our recognition of its narrative meaning and connotations that it works, imbuing the *roommate* with the same characteristics. The effect of the image of the little girl is to tell us that the *roommate* too was once an innocent and sensitive girl. In this way, Goldin tries to resolve our uncertainty regarding the identity of the *roommate*, insisting that she is as female as the little girl, and to make us more sympathetic and understanding towards her. It is cleverly done.

We also remember the *Roommate in her chair* photo (see chapter 2.1). The visual clues are subtler here, but they are present all the same. The cloth on the wall connotes domesticity. The summer dress connotes innocence (again) and femininity. The latter is also connoted by the position of the slightly flexed right hand. All these, and more, are visual clues, familiar to us, dense with meaning, applied in order to make sure we get the "correct" story.

In *Colette at home* the subtle connotations are that of old film divas – the fan of ostrich feathers, the lavish jewellery, the heavy make up, even the semi-recumbent pose and the languishing look into the mirror (see chapter 2.2). Not quite so subtle is *Ivy with Marilyn*, but the Warhol poster portraying the film goddess, and *Ivy's* pose, imitating her, are all put there so that we shall make that connection in our mind - between her and the famous female actress (see chapter 2.2). The picture tells us that *Ivy* is not only a woman, but she is the woman of every man's dream. And she is a star in her own right. The narrative here is one of femininity and glamour.

Glamour and femininity is also the theme of *Christmas at The Other Side* (see chapter 2.2). The image of the man makes one think of romantic Hollywood heroes of old. *Ivy* offering him a light connotes the connection between them, as does her Greta Garbo-like attire. The latter also of course connotes femininity.

Now, all the visual clues that aid the narratives in these black-and-white photographs have two important characteristics in common: they are familiar to many people, and their meaning

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[95] See for instance Wells, Liz (ed): *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, third edition, Routledge 2004, page 193 ff.

is more or less fixed. This is of course why these narrative clues work at all. For instance, most people would recognize Marilyn, and most people would associate her with more or less the same kind of narrative.

As I have said, most of the clues are associated with femininity and glamour. This is what Goldin wants to tell us – that these people – her friends – are glamorous, beautiful women, no different than "natural" women or film stars.

Turning to the post 1980 pictures, I believe that this changes.

On the whole there are fewer narrative clues in them than in the black-and-white ones. Furthermore, the ones that are present seem to be less familiar. They do not in the same way carry the obvious links to femininity and glamour that we have seen in the earlier photographs.

To illustrate my point, I will compare two black-and-white photographs – *Roommate in the kitchen* and *Ivy with Marilyn* – with the picture called *Kim at home*. The latter is taken in Paris in 1992[96]. *Kim at home* shows one of Goldin's friends standing against a wall. She is shown from the hips up, and she is naked from the waist up. She wears plain earrings and a bracelet. The wall behind her is blank, except for a painting of a blond woman – also depicted from the hips up, and also nude. The three photographs display the similarity that they all show us the protagonist against a wall with a picture depicting a person – the *roommate* with the little girl, *Ivy* with Marilyn and *Kim* with the blond woman. As I have explained earlier there is a connection between the main subject and the person in the image on the wall. There is a kind of symmetry between them – the ones in the image lend their characteristics to the protagonists. But here the similarity between the three photographs ends. While the little girl and Marilyn are familiar subjects to most of us, with well-known characteristics, the blond woman in the *Kim* picture is not. On the contrary – she is utterly anonymous. The painting is executed in a style close to what we might call kitsch – the style of the common masses. The painting reveals nothing about her personality characteristics. In fact, the most striking thing about her is her nudity, and her pair of perfect breasts. And herein lies the symmetry between her and *Kim*. *Kim* is depicted in a similar pose, exposing her breasts. It is as if the narrative clues seek to suggest that, like the blond woman, *Kim* has perfect, female breasts, and that is all. End of story. In fact, truth be told, they are not perfect – the implants are too obvious, they are placed too far apart, the nipples are too high and too close to the central axis of the body;

[96] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 84.

these features give them a synthetic look – but this, though telling in its own way, is not the most important point here.

The most important point, in my opinion, is that the little girl and Marilyn connote *personalities*, whereas the blond woman connotes no more than a body part. Cliché as those personalities might be, they are still complex enough to hint at a specific personal identity, affording the same to *roommate* and *Ivy*. More than that, we remember the more complex visual clues in the *Roommate in her chair* – the cloth on the wall, the summer dress, the position of the hands and legs etc – all working together to create the image of a beautiful woman. Even though *roommate* has no breasts, her picture is ripe with femininity. Kim, on the other hand, is not complex. She identifies her femininity, not with a personality, but with a pair of perfect breasts.

In clinical psychology there is a therapy form called narrative therapy[97]. It entails recreating one's life story. Stressing the patient's resources, the therapist lingers on moments of coping in the face of adversity. The patient is asked to embellish those moments, using them as a starting point to learn new things about him/herself and his/her resources, thus creating the basis for a new life story. These moments are called "rich" moments, and the stories they underpin are called "rich" stories. The new stories are empowering stories. It seems to me that Goldin's black-and-white photos similarly contain "rich" narrative clues, which may give rise to "rich" and empowering life stories. They afford the subjects a context, a context that is relatively comprehensive and not unknown to society at large. The latter pictures, on the other hand, of which the *Kim* one is a good example, do not.

To conclude, I have suggested that Goldin's use of bright and shiny colours in the post 1980 pictures, the "snapshot" composition, the "blur" that denotes hectic movement, and the impoverished narration, may all be seen to illustrate the loss of identity cohesion that followed the deconstruction of gender systems and identities. In Goldin's colour images I believe that we see this fragmentation at work in the concrete lives of people.

[97] See Denborough (ed.), op.cit.

2.6 Narrative and fetishistic photography.

In this dissertation we have seen that the transgender people were excluded from the feminist struggle of the 1960s and 70s (chapter 2.2). Furthermore we have seen that Freudian psychoanalytic theory did not recognize their existence (chapter 2.3). In the 1980s this changed with the advent of queer theory, Foucault's analysis and the deconstruction of the two-gender system (chapter 2.4).
While deconstruction no doubt was beneficial to the transgender community by diminishing the authority of a discriminatory system, it also seems to have left it in an identity vacuum. Offering no viable alternative its practice of parody and mis-recognition of naming probably also had the effect of identity fragmentation. In the preceding chapter I showed how Goldin's colour photographs may be employed to illustrate this.
Paradoxically I find that her black-and-white pictures speak of a more comprehensive and coherent identity, despite the subjects' ostracized position in the 1970s. This is mainly because of their narrative content and the "rich" stories they tell (see the preceding chapter).

The 1970s pictures are examples of what I would call narrative photography. By the term narrative photography I mean photography that has a comprehensive and coherent approach towards its subjects. The goal is to make us (the spectators) understand them better and sympathize with them. It stresses the common humanity of us all. The voices of the subjects are heard, while the artist aim at building bridges between them and us. Narrative photography seeks to empower and humanize its subjects. Other examples that come to mind are the photographs of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in USA in the 1930s[98], and *The Family of Man* exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1955, organized by Edward Steichen[99].

In contrast to the black-and-white pictures, Goldin's colour photographs resemble more what I would call fetishistic photography. In order to explain the term fetishistic photography, I need to turn to some Freudian concepts.
In chapter 2.3 I outlined his theory on gender differentiation. The end result – achieved in puberty – is heterosexual men and women. Concurrently there is a development in sexual

[98] See Marien, op.cit., page 281 ff.

[99] Op.cit., page 313-314.

practice. The starting point for this development is the child's sexual activities[100]. According to Freud the child is "polymorphously perverse". By this he means that the child finds erotic pleasure in many activities and in the stimulation of multiple body zones. These activities stem from what he calls partial drives, and he sees both the activities and the drives as discontinuous and immature, normally to be abandoned later in life, subsuming them unto the primacy of heterosexual genital intercourse. Sexuality is thus able to fulfil its ultimate goal: procreation. Among these immature practices are oral and anal stimulation, genital masturbation, and also activities like voyeurism and sadism. Sometimes, however, the development is disturbed, resulting in a fixation on an immature partial drive and activity even in adult life.

Fetishism is a substitution of the sexual object[101]. The individual shifts desire away from members of the other sex, and instead aims it at body parts or inanimate objects. These body parts and objects take on the role of sexual goals. Sexual gratification cannot be achieved without the presence of the fetish. Thus it too may be seen as a (pathological) fixation. Later in his life Freud made a connection between fetishism and the castration complex. Fetishism is thought of as the child's denial of the mother's castration, recreating her as a "complete" person (with penis). The chosen fetish object now represents the maternal penis.

Freud made a psychological map of the human mind[102]. In it the psyche is divided in three: the super-ego, the ego, and the id. The super-ego is the site for internalised prohibitions (see chapter 2.3), and functions as kind of a conscience. The ego is the conscious mind, and it negotiates the demands of the id with those of the super-ego, and the needs of the individual with those of the external world. The id is unconscious, and the site of repressed (Oedipal) drives and urges. In order to keep the frightening urges (aggression, inappropriate sexual impulses etc) of the id unconscious, the ego resorts to defence mechanisms. One of them is projection[103]. Projection is the activity of attributing one's own forbidden and painful feelings or urges to others. The desired result is that they stay unconscious in the mind of the person engaged in the projection.

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[100] For the complex subject of infantile sexuality in Freud, see for instance Freud, op.cit., and Olsen & Køppe, op.cit., page 370-377.

[101] See Freud, op.cit., page 19-21 and Olsen & Køppe, op.cit., page 230-231.

[102] See Kringlen, Einar: *Psykiatri*, Universitetsforlaget AS 1990, page 88-89, and Thurschwell, op.cit., page 79-93.

[103] See Kringlen, Einar, op.cit., page 91 ff.

These three concepts – polymorphously perverse sexuality, fetishism and projection – will help explain what I mean by the term "fetishistic photography". Fetishistic photography is dominated by unconscious partial drives and urges (inappropriate sexuality, voyeurism, aggression and sadism). Like them it is neither comprehensive nor coherent. It is fragmented. It indulges in fetishes – objects or situations that unduly take on sexual, voyeuristic or aggressive significance. It functions by projection, meaning that what is portrayed is not the true and actual living conditions of the subjects, so much as the inner (forbidden) feelings of the artist and – by way of expectations and demand – the spectators.
In his essay "Photography and fetish", Christian Metz also underscores the photograph's qualities as fetish[104]. Properties that he underlines are the photograph's physical size (small and portable), timelessness, privacy of reception, indexical properties, properties as keepsake and vessel for the memory, closeness to death and mourning, and its relation to in-frame and off-frame matter (its cutting line). He states that the photograph means both a loss and protection against that loss, just as the fetish means both symbolic castration and the protection against it.
The relation between fetishistic photography and parody and mis-recognition – *queer* theory's main tools of subversion – would be that they both seek a transformation and veiling of the original subject.

Returning to Goldin's pictures, the *Aphrodite and Javier at a sex party* (taken in New York City in 1991) is a highly fetishistic photograph[105].
Two people are depicted. There is a young man (*Javier*) who is wearing some kind of biker cap (a common item in some gay communities), a harness (a common item in gay and straight S&M (sadomasochistic) activities) and a metal bracelet. Other than that he is naked from the waist up. The other person is *Aphrodite*. Only her hair (probably a wig) and her face are visible. She seems to be kneeling down, her face turned up toward *Javier's*, her eyes closed, her mouth open. She is wearing heavy theatrical make-up. *Javier* in turn looks down on her face, with one hand on the top of her head and the other under her chin. It is a typical S&M scene depicting domination and submission, and the sexual arousal that goes with it.
There are two aspects that I find especially interesting in this picture.

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[104] See Metz, Christian: "Photography and fetish", in Wells, Liz (ed.): *The Photography Reader*, Routledge 2003, page 138-145.

[105] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 79.

Firstly, there is the link to S&M. As I have mentioned, sadism (and consequently masochism) is – according to Freud – part of the child's polymorphously perverse sexuality. It also, as an adult sexual practice, utilizes a virtual array of fetishistic objects and stereotypical roles. S&M is as close as you get to fetishistic sexual theatre. Secondly, there is *Aphrodite's* face. She does indeed wear theatrical make-up, and her expression is a stereotype of sexual arousal. She is playing a role. Her facial features are quite obliterated by the make-up. In fact she does not look human at all. She looks like a puppet. All links to a "real" person underneath are gone. Thus this picture contains instances of immature sexual drives (sadomasochism), fetishes (the props of S&M) and projection (the roles of the sexual theatre). It is therefore an excellent example of what I would call fetishistic photography.

2.7 Documentary photography and construction of the Other.

The reason that such a theme as transgender people would be of interest to a serious professional photographic artist has to do with a development that has unfolded, both in art and in society at large, over many years. When it comes to art, the question is what was, and what is, deemed worthy of depiction.

Along with the political revolutions of Europe and the USA in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the subsequent shift from the old, stratified society to modern democracy came new ideas as to what subjects art should deal with. The old hierarchy of genres, with religious, mythological and historical renderings at the top and genre painting at the bottom, was challenged. With Realism the lives of ordinary people became the topic of contemporary art, and with Impressionism modern life itself. Photography would seem especially suited to depict both, due to what was conceived to be its close link to reality, and its availability and dissemination in the populace. Photography was the modern and the democratic medium *par excellence*[106].

At first photographers were mostly professionals with a studio (permanent or ambulatory), and dedicated (upper class) amateurs. But as the technical development brought forth smaller, affordable cameras, and new systems for developing film (by sending it to a laboratory), the practicing of photography became available to everyone. This dissemination of amateur photographic practice in time inspired professional artist to take up the "layman's" topics –

[106] See for instance Marien, op.cit.

domestic photography, and his compositional technique – the so-called "snapshot aesthetic" mentioned in chapter 2.5.

From the very onset photography was deemed most suited to document events. The public wanted to read about these events in newspapers – and adding a picture to the article served as veritable "proof" as to what had actually happened. The camera could not lie, it was thought. It was the "grand" events that attracted attention: wars, disasters, charting uninhabited parts of the country, engineering feats, and the like. This was what interested the public, and thus what sold newspapers. In a way, these topics could perhaps be described as documentary photography's parallel to the old "high genres" of painting.

The poor and the destitute were also photographed, but often in a picturesque style resembling genre painting, subjects appearing as clichés and examples of specific human types rather than actual individuals[107]. Documentation of the poor and their lives was often a part of the reformist politics of the nineteenth century, designed to better the conditions of the "victims" of an unjust society. Jacob Riis is an exponent of this tradition[108].

In a way this social reform documentary tradition often depended on the division of the population into two groups: "us" and "them". The "them" group was often constructed as Other. The term "Other" has been mentioned before in this dissertation. Constructing someone as the Other entails imbuing a person or a group of people with certain undesirable characteristics. The process parallels that of projection mentioned in chapter 2.6. The difference is that while projection happens on an individual level, the construction of the Other is a societal process. The object is – exactly as in projection – to make a group of people "better" than they are by externalising their flaws. The Other is considered to be distinctly different from the "us" group. While we may pity or sympathize with them, they are nevertheless kept at a safe distance.

There was a change in the 1930s USA, in the years of the Depression, where the many photographers of the Farm Security Administration depicted people fallen on hard times. Emphasizing our common humanity and that their fate could just as well be yours or mine, they collapsed the division between "us" and "them" radically. The result was a new and

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[107] See Wells (ed.): *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, page 65-111.

[108] See Marien, op.cit., page 205 ff, and Riis, Jacob: *How the Other Half Lives*, Dover Publications 1971 (first published in 1890).

more dignified way of depicting the poor and the destitute[109]. This humanizing trend reached a peak in the 1955 *The Family of Man*-exhibition.
Thus the social political trends in the 19th and 20th century helped weaken the old genre hierarchy, and widen the category of worthy subject matter.
Susan Sontag stresses the heritage of Walt Whitman when she tries to explain the proliferation of worthy subject matter in modern society. According to Whitman all things – mundane and exalted alike – are beautiful and deserving of artistic rendering[110]. His is not so much a political as a philosophical and aesthetic vision.
The result of the two visions was perhaps not so much a collapsing of the "us" and "them"-dichotomy altogether, as a widening of the "us" category, so that is would encompass a greater part of the population. It brought people closer together, bringing solidarity where there once had been patronizing pity.

It is interesting to note that as the "us" category widened, the category simultaneously started to disintegrate – from within. I believe that the theories of Sigmund Freud can explain the phenomenon. According to him we are all "monsters" of a kind – our conscious egos desperately trying to restrain the violent and chaotic forces of the id (see chapter 2.6). Two of the ways we deal with them are projection and the construction of the Other. We need those psychological strategies. As the "us" category widened – as "they" (the monsters) became "us" (decent human beings) – there was nowhere left to project our id urges. The id still demanded an arena for its projections, and as a result a new gap opened – within our midst. Now the "monster" was not "out there". It was here, all around us, and sometimes inside us. This tendency is clear in a photographer like Weegee (Arthur Fellig)[111]. One of his topics is the brutality that resides in our very neighbourhood. It is also evident in Robert Frank, whose work displayed the alienation and eeriness of middle class America[112].
So the reason why the Other and the "them" category seem to haunt us is simply because they do not refer to anything external at all. It is us, you and me, and it has always been us. We cannot escape from our ids, but we will try – through projection and the construction of the Other. The minute one object of projection is gone we immediately need to find another.

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[109] See Wells (ed.), op.cit., page 94 ff.

[110] See Sontag, Susan: *Om fotografi*, Pax Forlag A/S, Oslo 2004, page 39 ff, (first published in 1973).

[111] See Weegee: *Naked City*, Essential Books, New York 1945.

[112] See Frank, Robert: *The Americans*, Pantheon Books, New York 1959 (first published in 1958).

As outlined in chapter 2.6 the ego is caught in a predicament. While the id urges are too frightening and devastating to be confronted head on, they are still extremely alluring. The desire to give in to our immediate impulses – sexual, aggressive or otherwise – holds a fascination for us. We are destined to wish for that desire fulfilment. Constructing the Other and projecting the id desires onto it not only enables us to keep unpleasant feelings at bay, but it also allows us to "enjoy" those feelings as they unfold in the life of the Other.
These two mechanisms – avoidance and enjoyment by proxy – will explain the ever-recurring presence of the Other.
These considerations are consistent with the Lacanian concept of "stolen *jouissance*"[113]. In a parallel to Freud Lacan argues that we tend to transfer the pleasures that our super-ego does not permit us to indulge in to the Other – other social groups, other races etc. Thus they become the object of our hatred, disgust, fascination and envy. One example that springs to mind is the tendency to endow "natives" with increased and unfettered libido.
Thus, what documentary photography of the Other portrays is not other people, different from us. It is us, our own minds externalised and made objects. This is the societal variant of what I called fetishistic photography in chapter 2.6.

Another way to consider the nature of a photograph is to see it as a kind of memory. It freezes a moment in time and preserves it for us. It shows us what once was, but will never be again, and is thus a kind of *memento mori*. The picture becomes an object for contemplation and mourning. This function exploits what Roland Barthes called the having-been-there relationship of the photograph to its referent[114].
It seems to me that this is yet another instance of the psyche's strategies of projection and externalisation. Choosing an external object to embody our grief and our memory aids us in escaping melancholy – as melancholy is the internalisation in the ego of mourning[115].
The mode of photography that is most relevant to this psychic mechanism would be family photography. Family photography may be viewed as a sub-category of documentary, one that assumes a close relationship between subject matter and spectator.

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[113] See chapter 2.3, and Homer, op.cit., page 60-63.

[114] See Allen, Graham: *Roland Barthes*, Routledge 2003, page 125-132, and Barthes, Roland: *Det lyse rommet*, Pax Forlag A/S, Oslo 2001 (first published in 1980), and Fried, Micahel: "Barthes's *Punctum*", in Critical Inquiry 31 (Spring 2005), page 539-574.

[115] See chapter 2.4 and Thurschwell, op.cit., page 89-91.

One might say that photography as memory is yet another strategy to keep our psyche balanced.

A third possibility is to consider the photo as a story-telling device, a co-creator of narratives. I have outlined this approach in chapters 2.5 and 2.6.
The psychic correlate to the narrative is the ego (see chapter 2.6). The ego is the psychic entity that has the function of mitigating between the impulses of the id and the demands of the super-ego, and between the needs of the subject and the reality of the outside world. In so doing the ego creates psychic schemata, or stories, that are coherent and comprehensive and that ultimately give rise to what we call an identity. Plainly put, the ego makes up "the story of who we are" in order to make sense of ourselves, and the world we live in.

To summarise, I have identified documentary photography by three functions and their psychic equivalents: as a rendering of the Other coupled with the projection and externalisation of id desires – what I call fetishistic photography, as a memento helping the psyche to avoid melancholia, and as a story-telling device aiding the structuring tasks of the ego – what I call narrative photography.

I will now turn to Goldin and related photographers.
Many different social groups and individuals have taken on the role of the Other in documentary photography and the approach towards them has varied. There is the outsider in Riis' social programme, Weegee's criminal next door, and the alienated American middle class in Frank's pictures. The artist's approach has been either to maintain the division between "us" and "them" (Riis), to place the Other in our midst (Weegee) or to show that we are all Other (Frank). Of these three I think that Weegee works in a manner closest to the fetishistic photography, with his topic of urban nocturnal violence.
Two groups of people that have enjoyed enormous popularity as Other are the sexual deviants and the substance abusers.
Larry Clark's drug addicts, and Mary Ellen Mark and Christer Strömholm's transgender people are examples[116].

[116] See Clark, Larry: *Tulsa*, Grove Press, New York 1971, and Mark, Mary Ellen: *Falkland Road – Prostitutes of Bombay*, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York 1981, and Strömholm, Christer: *On verra bien*, Printfabriken, Karlskrona 2002 (exhibition catalogue).

In his *Tulsa* (1971) Larry Clark literally identifies with the drug addicts. Having been a substance abuser himself he photographs people from his own environment. He treats them with dignity. The pictures are not obviously fetishistic. I therefore feel that this project is a narrative one. He wants to lend the subjects a voice and he wants us to get to know them better, appealing to our common humanity to include them in our "us" category. His later projects on the other hand, like *Teenage Lust* and *The Perfect Childhood*, seems to be more explicitly sexual and voyeuristic, crossing the line into fetishistic photography and constructing the subjects as Other[117].

Mary Ellen Mark in *Falkland Road* (1981) has photographed transgender prostitutes in Bombay. Her approach too is definitely a narrative one. She spent a lot of time getting to know her subjects, and she wants to tell their story as truthfully as she can. The introduction text where Mark tells us about the everyday life of her subjects strengthens the narrative approach of her book.

Christer Strömholm also lived in close proximity to his Parisian transgender subjects in the 1950s and 60s. Like Mark and Clark (in *Tulsa*) his photographs are of the narrative kind. Strömholm portrays his characters with humour, warmth and sympathy.

Goldin, in *The Other Side*, admits that the object of her book is to pay homage to her transgender friends[118]. Her intention is clearly to follow an approach parallel to that of Strömholm, Mark and Clark (in *Tulsa*) – to humanize her subjects, to broaden our minds, and to make us accept them in the family of man. She clearly wants to make what I call narrative photography.

In her 1970s black-and-white pictures I think she succeeds. She has lived among her subjects and gained their trust, and her knowledge of them is comprehensive. As such she is in a perfect position to tell the true story about them, and to bridge the gap between them and us. To this end she employs visual clues that link the subjects' narratives to our own. Furthermore she avoids overtly fetishistic devices that might have taken our attention away from her objective. Her black-and-white pictures are thus in my opinion – despite the projective potential of their subject matter – mainly narrative, and as such supportive of the (identity) structuring function of the ego.

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[117] See Clark, Larry: *Teenage Lust*, Self-Published, 1983, and Clark, Larry: *The Perfect Childhood*, Scalo Zürich. Switzerland 1993.

[118] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 5.

The colour photos are different. In chapter 2.5 I pointed out that they both formally and thematically reflect the fragmentation of gender narratives. I also feel that they are more voyeuristic. In the late 1970s and in the 1980s Goldin lived in a poor and derelict neighbourhood of New York City. Her friends were prostitutes, substance abusers and individuals on the fringe of society. In these years she compiled the collection *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (photo-book published in 1986). The images here are much more brutal and overtly sexual than the black-and-white photos in *The Other Side*. It is my impression that the colour pictures in *The Other Side* are a continuation of the style of *The Ballad*. With their fewer narrative clues, their more sexual, violent and voyeuristic content, and their formal features connoting fragmentation (see chapter 2.5), they are closer to fetishistic photography. As such they do not help in structuring the identity position of the subjects. On the contrary: they construct them as Other, and assert that they belong to the "them" category.

In her early career Goldin often showed her photos to her circle of friends first. They were frequently the same people that appeared in the pictures. The presenting mode was often slide shows. In a way, she intended the pictures to be a kind of family photographs, portraying her "extended family" as she called them. The having-been-there relationship to the referent would have been strong, as the subject matter would have been very familiar to the spectators. Thus the images would function as memorabilia of their lives, and reminders of friends lost to drugs and AIDS. In this way they must have acted as a defence against melancholia.
With the rising fame of the artist came a widening of the audience. Now the spectators did not have first hand knowledge of the subject matter, and the pictures must have lost some of their closeness to their referent and their quality as memorabilia and mourning pieces.

2.8 The Real.

Earlier I wrote that Judith Butler – the post-modern feminist *par excellence* – claimed that there is no gender outside discourse (chapter 2.4). She went even further, positing that organic sex and the body itself are discursive constructions. Her argument is that each time we think, speak or write about gender, sex and the body we cannot avoid using concepts that are already caught up in prevalent discourse and thus determined by it. Taken to its extreme, the ultimate consequence of Butler's view would be that noting, neither gender nor anything else – abstract or material, exist outside language and discourse.

I think that Butler's statements are tautological. The claim that all we can say and write about gender and sex is confined to discourse is self-evident, since the language we are obliged to use is that of discourse. But Butler makes the basic assumption that thinking, speaking and writing are the only ways to gain knowledge of gender and sex – that the only source of knowledge is through the intellect, language and discourse. I believe that this is the source of her tautology, and that it simply is not true. I think that there are kinds of knowledge that are independent of language, and that they stem not from our thoughts, speech or writings on a subject, but from our mere being.

In order to explain what I mean I will offer some examples. These are meant to show that there are indeed non-discursive entities, both in our past and in our present, which affect our lives in a very tangible way.

Imagine that you are on the Palatine Hill in ancient Rome. You are in Emperor Augustus' apartment. Your task is to tell him about the Antarctic. We assume that he has never heard of the South Pole before. Augustus may be fascinated by what you tell him of that alien place, but probably it won't matter much to him. The Antarctic is not part of his discourse, and therefore he deems it to be pretty unimportant. But you may correct him. You may tell him that if it hadn't been for the South Pole and all the water trapped in the ice there, Rome probably wouldn't exist. The Forum, the Mars Marches and all of the Lazio plains would be flooded due to rising sea levels. Also, the saline composition of the world's oceans would have been altered, along with the marine creatures. The ocean currents would have changed, probably with an impact on the *Mare Nostrum* (the Mediterranean) too.

The exact nature of the physical implications of the existence of the South Pole to Augustus' Rome is not what is important here. The important thing is that there were such implications, and that they affected Roman life.

The next example is from the Middle Ages. Imagine a peasant walking in the highlands gathering wild berries. Suddenly he stumbles upon a fossil of a dinosaur. Surely he would have no idea what it was. Perhaps he would call it a "petrified dragon" at best. Again, as with the South Pole, the significance of the found structure would evade him. And again, you could offer him some information to link his everyday life to the creature. You could tell him that these are the remains of a dinosaur, and that the hens on his farm probably are distant descendents of dinosaurs[119]. So if it hadn't been for the extinct animals, he would not have

[119] The scientists believe that birds are the distant descendants of certain dinosaurs.

been able to have an egg in the morning. This might get his attention, but he would probably soon return to his daily chores, offering the fossil no further thought. Nevertheless, the existence of the dinosaurs, hitherto unknown to him, had indeed had a material impact on his life.

Returning to Butler, the crucial question to ask is whether or not the South Pole existed to Augustus, and whether or not the dinosaurs had existed to the farmer. It seems to me that if we are going to follow her logic, the answer would have to be "no, it did not", and "no, they had not". Seeing that both were non-discursive entities, exempt from language (at that time), they cannot have existed. The problem is that this answer seems to defy all common sense. In fact we would claim to know that the Antarctic *did* exist at the time of ancient Rome, and that dinosaurs *were* part of the history of Middle Age man. The only way the two could have been said not to exist is as *discursive* entities. As discursive entities neither the South Pole nor the dinosaurs existed at those times. Consequently, Butler's claim must be read as: No discursive entity can exist outside discourse.
Read like this, I believe that the tautological and self-evident nature of her reasoning becomes quite clear.
While they did not exist in discourse, they did exist in another, very material way. And they had a concrete impact on both Augustus and the farmer. Both of them would have "known" about their impacts – Augustus every time he strolled across the dry land of the Forum, and the farmer every time he ate his egg. This kind of knowing comes from being, and it cannot be equated to discursive knowledge. I choose to call it knowledge-in-being.
Butler's view on existence is what I would call a very anthropocentric view. Allowing discourse and language to define existence by way of the singular human intellect, she sets the human race apart from the rest of creation, depriving us of the common knowledge that stems from being and that we share with every living creature.

A writer that leaves a place for the latter knowledge is Lacan (chapter 2.3).
Lacan operates with a category (or Order, as he calls it) that approximates the Butlerian discourse. It is the Symbolic[120]. It is, just like discourse, determined by language and the power relations expressed therein. The Lacanian Order of the Imaginary – a childhood developmental category that we have encountered in chapter 2.3 – is not so interesting to us in

[120] See Homer, op.cit., page 33-64.

this line of reasoning. But Lacan's third Order is very interesting indeed. It is the Order of the Real[121].

It is my impression that to Lacan the Real is a kind of leftover category. In it goes everything in the grown-up's life that doesn't subsume to the Symbolic as dictated by language and the Law-of-the-Father. It is the category of the "unmentionables" – the things that cannot be put to words or subjected to reason. It may be that he was thinking of the Real as a "locus" where id urges reside. I think that it may be used to further analyse the concepts of knowing and being.

To differentiate between the orders of the Symbolic and the Real – in my way of thinking – I will once again resort to an example.

Imagine that all the people in the world are gathered on the slopes of a huge natural amphitheatre. On the scene stands a man holding a rock. Let us imagine that everybody has decided one thing: they will try to make the stone fall upwards. But every time the man in the middle drops it, it falls to the ground – downwards. No matter what incantation they use, no matter what pleads or threats, the stone will always fall downwards. The stone falling to the ground upon being dropped is an event that takes place in the Real. But suddenly a spectator finds a way to make their wish come true. The solution is to interchange the meaning of the words "downwards" and "upwards". This way what was "upwards" before now becomes "downwards", and vice versa. Now, every time the stone leaves the hand it falls upwards. The falling upwards of the stone takes place in the Symbolic.

The example tells us that there are events that unfold oblivious to our will, reasoning and control, but also that we are free to deal with them as we please on a discursive and linguistic level.

To my mind the objects and events that belong to the Real are exactly those we are unable to control. It may be entities we do not know about – as in the examples with Augustus and the farmer. In fact, events that we know nothing about which still have an affect on us occur every day. To take a very common event: Each hour our brains are bombarded by a huge number of neural stimuli that we are never aware of. For instance, the body proper will send a huge number of messages to the central nervous system that go unnoticed by our conscious mind. From our joints emanate endless information streams as to the location of our limbs and trunk. From our gastro-intestinal tract comes information about its degree of distension. The list goes on and on. Even though very few of these stimuli ever reach the cerebral cortex, we

[121] Op.cit., page 81-94.

depend on them for our well-being, and we act on them even when they are subconscious[122]. These streams of subconscious neural information are other examples of events taking place in the Real.

Physical drives may take place in the Real as well. Overwhelming hunger and thirst for instance. The feeling in your gut when extremely hungry is not just a Symbolic entity – its "physical" presence deafens words and thoughts and cramps the mind.

Extreme emotions act in the same way. I am not talking about the neat cap in hand emotions that come knocking on the door of your consciousness asking politely to be let inside. I am talking about overwhelming, stunning emotions, such as rage and jealousy. They don't ask for admittance to your conscious mind. They run your mind's wall down with a bulldozer and wreak havoc in there, oblivious to your presence.

In my version the Real consists of various elements – for example natural events, bodily stimuli, physical urges, extreme emotions, events or objects hidden by our lack of knowledge. What they have in common is that they evade our intellect, our reason, and thus we cannot manipulate or control them.

This brings me to two of the most characteristic aspects of the Real, as I see it, and also two of its most disturbing ones: it is utterly *alien* and *autonomic*. Compared to our conscious minds it is something else entirely. Even when we scrutinize it, as with the laws of natural science, we do not control it. We merely describe and predict. Our descriptions and predictions take place in the Symbolic, while the actual events always take place in the Real. It is as if the Real has made its own set of rules, in a language we cannot hope to grasp with our conscious minds. Furthermore, the Real seems oblivious to us – to our conscious minds, our civilization, our culture and even our power. It is like a giant machine that works in mysterious ways, hidden to us. It is not only indifferent to our presence. It does not even seem to notice that we are there.

This is a very scary aspect of the Real. I am not sure whether it is in our capacity to truly embrace it. To know that there are workings afoot that are impervious to the conscious mind, the ego, the "I", and even the "we" – that is a frightening thought indeed. And yet it may offer some help as to our topic – the concept of identity, or more specifically the concept of gender identity.

It is important to understand that the Real, the way I understand it here, does not amount to a kind of essentialism (chapter 2.3). Both essentialism and constructivism are part of human

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[122] See any textbook on human physiology.

discourse. They are determined by reason and language. They are the result of the human effort to understand and control the world. The Real, on the other hand, is not a part of discourse. As I explained earlier it works on a different plane. It will not subsume to the efforts of the consciousness to understand. It is alien and autonomic. Thus it cannot be categorized as essentialism. Neither can its knowledge-in-being be equated to the Butlerian claim that gender is a practice and not a stable identity characteristic. The practices and the deeds she talks about take place within discourse, and they are also instances of the attempts of the human consciousness to position itself within the world.

Being neither essential nor constructed, but something else entirely, the Real may perhaps be clarified a bit more using terms from the field of religion. The Real is neither parallel to the theological explanation of the human state, nor to the pious life and practice of the believer, but to the very mystery of God Himself and His divine plans – seen from His perspective, not ours. Few believers would object to the notion that God and His plans are for the most part incomprehensible to us, and that we cannot ever understand them as He does. Still they would assuredly maintain that His acts and plans have a profound impact on our lives. *Our understanding* of God and His plans takes place in the Symbolic and in discourse, but God Himself exists on a different level altogether.

Earlier I characterized Butler's model as anthropocentric. Placing the human intellect at the centre of existence it is also a model of pride and *hybris*. I must admit I find such a lack of humility misplaced and unfounded. It also has dangerous consequences, as all *hybris* does, since it may cut us off from interaction with a greater community. Accepting the category of the Real can re-introduce a proper humility and a deeper understanding of our actual place and role in creation.

Can photography play a role in the knowledge-in-being of the Real? Surprisingly, I think it can. I will illustrate it with an example.

There is a picture in *The Other Side* that seems to imply that something "else" is afoot. It is *Jimmy Paulette and Tabboo! in the bathroom* (sic)[123] (taken in New York City in 1991). In it there are two people. Both are depicted from the waist up, and both are nude. *Tabboo!* has a necklace of sorts – perhaps the strap of a garment with an open back. She is standing with her back to us and her face turned away. *Jimmy* stands next to *Tabboo!*, her upper body in a three-quarter profile and her face turned towards us. She has put her left hand on *Tabboo!'s* right

[123] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 51 and front cover (the latter showing only a part of the picture).

shoulder. She looks straight at the camera. She is wearing heavy make-up. To the left in the picture is what seems to be a doorpost or the corner of a wall – the blur makes it hard to tell. Behind *Tabboo!* (i.e. further into the picture space) and partly hidden by her is a frame of some kind. It is difficult to make it out exactly, but it may be a window, a door, or possibly a cupboard. To the right is the corner (or open end) of a (semi?) wall, with some kind of knob attached to it.

This is a mysterious picture, and one of my favourites. As with any great image, it has a number of interpretational levels.

Here I will focus on the aspects that may be said to hint at the Real. These are the position of the subjects and the spatial configuration.

As I said *Tabboo!* is standing with her back to us, and she is facing away from us. It is as if though she is denying us access to information about her. Furthermore, she is looking into the recesses of the room, partaking in a reality that is hidden from our sight by her and *Jimmy's* bodies. In a way, she is "something else", "somewhere else". We have no access to her reality. Her name may be a (humorous) comment on that inaccessibility. She is taboo – forbidden, untouchable. *Jimmy*, on the other hand, may function as a bridge between *Tabboo!* and our world, turning towards us and looking at us. Or perhaps she is a decoy, showing us only what we would expect to see, but not the private world of *Tabboo!*. This is by far the most exciting interpretation I think.

The spatial configuration is also strange. It is very hard to figure it out. We know from the title that it's a bathroom, but what is the front and back of it? Is it a door or a window in the background? Is it a doorpost or a corner on the left? Is it a corner or end of a (semi?) wall on the right? It is perplexing, and adds to the slightly eerie feeling that this scene takes place in a slightly different "reality".

But the prize alienator of them all is the angle of the corner/wall-end on the right. It does not follow the rules of perspective. The corner/end is tilted and slanting. This element, more than any other, gives the picture a slightly "cubist" quality and gives us the feeling that this scene takes place "somewhere else", somewhere beyond our comprehension.

To me the slanting wall is the *punctum* of the picture, referring to Roland Barthes' concepts the *studium* and the *punctum*[124]. According to him, the studium of a photograph is the information it offers when we examine it. The information may be there as part of the artist's intention, and it refers to our common knowledge and culture. It is a kind of interpretation,

[124] See Allen, op.cit, and Barthes, op.cit., and Fried, op.cit.

and it speaks to our intellects. The punctum, on the other hand, is that which strikes us immediately and non-verbally in the picture. It is not intended to be there by the artist. It is an individual entity, and it will be experienced differently from one person to the next. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes concludes that to him the punctum of the picture of his mother is the realisation that she really was there, in front of the camera, but that she is no more[125].
Could one say that the studium part of the Goldin picture – its "interpretation" – would correspond to the events taking place on the Symbolic and discursive level? And could one also say that its punctum corresponds to the events taking place on the level of the Real? *Could one say that what Barthes calls the punctum actually is the Real manifesting itself (differently for each and every one of us) in the photograph?* It is an exciting possibility.
If this is so, it will mean that photos hold more "information" than what is evident on a discursive level. More than that, this non-discursive "information" is in a way more "important" to us than the discursive one. It is that which catches our attention. And we recognize it – on a different level than the picture's discursive information – because it corresponds to something in us, something very basic to us.
This could open up a whole new category of photography: Real photography. It would probably be difficult to practice though, since it possibly would work differently in each and every one of us, and since it, at the very moment it was contemplated, planned, composed, exhibited and interpreted, would become discursive rather than Real. Thus it cannot be. The Real can never be subject to any planned practice – executive, interpretational or other. It can only be subject to guesses, hunches and speculations. That is what I am doing here. Nevertheless I am convinced that it can, and does, have an effect on us. Its effects are probably greater than we will ever realize. I also believe that it is present in photography.

Accepting a Real existence and power means not only that we are obliged to be more humble when it comes to our place in creation – unquestionably a very good thing indeed – but we are also invited to reflect on important concepts such as "truth" and "authority" in a new way. These are of course concepts very pertinent to the definition of identity categories. I will return to this subject in the last chapter of the exposition.

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[125] *Camera Lucida* is the same book as Barthes, op.cit. (Norwegian translation).

2.9 Asian gender diversity.

A pretty large part of Goldin's colour photos in *The Other Side* are from her trip to Thailand and the Philippines.

I have decided not to analyse them at any great length. The reason for this is twofold: Firstly, the two countries have their own complex gender diversity and gender identity discourse, and I do not feel that I know them well enough to perform a detailed analysis. Secondly, the original, indigenous elements in them sometimes differ so much from Western discourse that they may prove only to complicate my analysis, which is directed at the state of affairs in the West. I will, however, mention some major points in order to underpin some of my earlier statements[126].

The first point is what I just mentioned – that these two countries have gender categories and gender discourses of their own and that they do not conform to the Western ones in all their aspects. Both countries have traditional gender discourses, as well as more modern ones, partly influenced by outside cultures and occupants. The result is a complex and original mix of old and new. For instance, Thailand traditionally had a three-gender system – taken from Buddhist origin myths – of man, woman, and *kathoey*. The latter was a biological hermaphrodite and an independently existing third sex. It was considered to be an intermediate category. Inspired by the Hindu idea of union of opposites, transgender people were metaphors of cosmic unity, mediating between the divine and the mundane world. Today, however, under the influence of Western "scientific" or biomedical discourse, the term *kathoey* has come to describe a male transgender category including transvestites, hermaphrodites, transsexuals and effeminate homosexuals. The mediating role is now between indigenous and Western popular culture[127].

The Philippines traditionally had the prestigious and powerful *babyalan* – women or transvestite males performing rituals and healing. Today they have the much less prestigious *bakla* – described as males with a feminine "heart". In both cases the development is based on the influence of both indigenous and foreign factors[128].

These examples illustrate that both countries have had a change in their gender systems with time. It is yet another instance of the instability of gender systems. The fact that Thailand and

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[126] In this chapter I have relied on Nanda, Serena: *Gender Diversity – Crosscultural Variations*, Waveland Press 2000.

[127] Nanda, op.cit., page 71-78.

[128] Nanda, op.cit., page 71-72 and 78-85.

the Philippines have different gender categories and gender discourses than ours shows that not only do gender systems vary temporally, but they vary geographically as well. In fact, all through the ages, all over the globe, there has been a multitude of different gender systems. Variants have occurred in for example North America (the Native Americans), Brazil, India, Polynesia, Thailand, the Philippines and the West[129]. This variation again demonstrates that the categories of gender, stable and self-evident as they may seem, are in fact quite the opposite.

The second point that Asian gender categories makes clear, is that the "truths" of gender systems may be founded on a variety of authorities – "scientific" as well as non-scientific. In this chapter we have encountered a "third gender" being rooted in Buddhism and Hinduism. The Western "scientific" tradition has also influenced gender discourse in Thailand and the Philippines. The latter country has also had influences from Spanish Catholic and Arab Muslim cultures. This goes to show that the authority on which the "truth" about gender categories rests is not always an "objective" scientific one. This fact further destabilises the gender systems' claim to universality and self-evidence.

Goldin's pictures from Thailand and the Philippines are mostly taken in bars in Bangkok and Manila in 1992. They illustrate, in my opinion, the problems that arise when an artist ventures into an unknown territory. In the far Eastern culture Goldin is a foreigner and a stranger. The consequence is that the photographs seem to be more heterogeneous than the Western ones. They contain a variety of partly contradicting elements. Some of the pictures are narrative – some are more fetishistic. Some are formally composed, while others are in the snapshot tradition. The themes vary from striptease nudity, family photographs, beauty contests, entertainment shows and general bar scenes. It is true that especially the formal aspects of Goldin's photographs vary in much of her work. But in her Asian pictures the variation extends to the themes and to the photographic approach (narrative versus fetishistic) as well. To me the story that Goldin tells about Asian transgender identity is thus one of mild confusion.

Owing to their heterogeneous character, it is hard to pick a representative picture. I have chosen one that illustrates the close relationship between Thai transgender identity and beauty and glamour: *Yogo modeling onstage* (sic!) (taken in Bangkok in 1992)[130]. The composition is

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[129] Op.cit.

[130] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 114.

formal. It depicts the subject in a wonderful pink dress with spangles and pearls. She stands against a staircase and a wall illuminated by pink light. On the right is what seems to be a metallic sculpture of a human. *Yogo* is wearing heavy make-up and earrings. She is a traditional glamorous beauty in the vein of *Colette* in *Colette at home* (see chapter 2.2 and 2.5). The *Yogo* picture may exemplify the difficulty in comparing foreign and familiar conditions – with a multitude of unknown factors making the comparison hard despite seemingly obvious similarities and differences – and the resulting difficulty in telling the "whole", "true" story of the subject.

2.10 Truth and authority.

In this final chapter of the exposition I will focus on concepts such as truth and authority in relation to gender identity and photography.

In chapters 2.1 and 2.2 I wrote about the so-called two-gender system. I wanted to show that its claim to be a universal, self-evident system is not tenable. I did this partly by demonstrating that it has not been the prevailing gender system through all of history. It has a history of its own, with an emergence at a specific point in time. So it cannot claim to be universal in time. In the preceding chapter we have seen that it is not universal in space either. The gender systems vary according to geographical and cultural point-of-view.

First and foremost it is Foucault's analysis, deconstruction and queer theory that have deprived the two-gender system of its claim to universal truth and authority. This is evidently beneficial, since the system is based on discrimination, power differences and exclusion. Nevertheless the modes of critique mentioned here are two-edged swords, as I mentioned in chapter 2.6. They potentially can overthrow any gender system based on a claim to truth and authority.

The question now becomes whether or not we, as human beings, need gender systems based on truth and authority. I believe that we do. I also believe that we need "truths" that are non-factual but still authoritative. In a way, I think that we need those even more than the factual ones. This point needs clarification.

There are truths that we accept without much thought. They are the so-called facts of natural sciences, statistics and the like. They have great authority as objective truths – more than any other – owing to the scientific methods they employ, including such standards as reliability

and validity[131]. For instance, no one can seriously doubt the magnitude of the gravitational acceleration constant (the g; 9,8 m/s2 on earth). Once "proved" it becomes an undisputable fact. Still, such undisputable facts, immensely authoritative as they are, matter little to us. For the great majority they do not concern us. So long as they "function" properly, we don't offer them much thought. But even these types of facts may cause controversy among small groups of individuals, namely the scientists that have made them their occupation. I am sure that the "g" was once a source of much heated debate within scientific circles, even if the rest of the population couldn't care less.

This makes for an interesting point. It seems that the importance that we place on so-called truths is not related to their objective authority as truths (their validity and reliability), but depends on the interest that we have vested in them. The more "emotional" investment we have made in them, the more they matter to us, and the more we tend to argue over them. This is the reason why the two-gender system matters so much to us – it concerns us on a much deeper emotional level than for example the magnitude of the "g". And it is the reason why the concept pair "man-woman" – and not for instance the pair "Persian-Siamese cats" – has stirred such heated debate. The latter pair, while indifferent to the vast majority of the population, would however probably stir up controversy in cat-breeder circles.

So it actually seems that the "truths" that really matter to us, the ones that are the source of the most heated debates, are the ones with the least authority as truths (low validity and reliability). In fact they are more like convictions and suppositions than truths. These are the "truths" of religion, politics, nationalism, race, gender etc. Contrary to the immensely authoritative facts of for instance natural science they represent truths that immediately concern each and every one of us at a deep emotional level. In fact, the emotional investment in such "dubious" truths is so widespread and so strong – sometimes people give their lives to uphold them – that their importance to us must be immense. We need them. And we need them in quite another and psychologically more fundamental way than the truths of for instance natural science. Paradoxical as it may sound, we need truths to believe in. The reason may be that they offer a final answer to the important questions. Natural science cannot do this. It can only offer temporary answers in an endless regression of new questions that leave us without emotional closure.

This far in this chapter I have suggested the following: Firstly, that the importance we place on truths is not related to their scientific authority, but to the emotional investment that we

[131] For an explanation of these terms, see Allgeier & Allgeier, op.cit., page 46 ff.

make in them. Secondly, that these un-authoritative truths matter very much to us, so much in fact that some of us are willing to die to uphold them. We need them.

At the same time we also need our important truths to carry some kind of authority. This authority is not the same as the objective authority of natural science. It is the authority of personal emotional conviction.
Accepting that we are in need of authoritative truths that matter to us emotionally, the question now becomes whether or not it is possible to have such truths while at the same time avoiding discrimination. I believe that it is possible. The "old" grand narratives – of which the two-gender system was one – claimed a universal, "objective" authority. Today, thanks to Foucault's analysis, deconstruction and queer theory, this claim is no longer tenable. But still I do believe that we may have "grand" narratives – common convictions and truths that many people believe in – based not on objective, but on subjective authority.
The categorization of truths as based on either objective or subjective authority has some important implications. Admitting that a truth is based on subjective authority means giving up absolute and universal definitional power over it. It also means admitting that no one has the power to sanction people who think differently. It means that we believe in these truths not because they hold any objective authority or because we are afraid of sanctions, but because we realise that we need them. These truths are volitional. We need them to give our lives meaning and purpose – to provide the narratives that the ego needs in order to structure the world. They may be "grand" narratives – i.e. shared by many – or "minor" ones, shared by smaller groups, or held just by a single individual. Their authority is not dependent on the number of people that subscribe to them.

So far in this chapter I have listed two kinds of truths: The objective truths like those of natural science, and the subjective truths of emotionally invested narratives. The first hold extensive definitional power, the latter do not. Both are discursive truths, and their domain is the Symbolic.
As we saw in chapter 2.8, there is another kind of "truth". It is the truths of the Real. It is non-discursive and its domain is the Real.

Let us now see how all this pertains to gender identity.
The essentialist view on gender claims to be based on objective, scientific truths. As I stated in chapter 2.1, the correspondence between the scientific findings and gender traits is not

clear-cut. The findings – the presence or absence of particular chromosomes or genes, the amount of sex hormone in the blood etc – are of a general nature, and their "translation" into the complex world of gender identity is problematic to say the least. The problem seems to be this: scientific facts are formulated in a different "language" than the language we employ to interpret them. The facts are formulated in the language of numbers, ratios and the like. But when we interpret them we are bound to use the words and concepts of prevailing discourse. The more we have a vested interest in that discourse, the more likely we are to project our "prejudices" onto the meaning of the scientific facts when we interpret them. Thus scientific language and interpretational language are of a different nature, or level. All this contributes to the big problem with an essentialist view: how to correctly interpret the scientific facts. As a result the author of this dissertation cannot see that gender essentialism can rightfully claim the status of objective truth.

The view that gender is altogether culturally constructed is also problematic as an objectively authoritative truth. Firstly, it dismisses the findings of natural science, which are objective despite the difficulty of their interpretation. The scientific facts tell us that there is "something" organic there. We just don't know the full meaning of it. Secondly, constructivism falsely dismisses non-discursive knowledge (the knowledge-in-being of the Real) as a source of identity. Accordingly, constructivism cannot be seen as objectively authoritative when it comes to the question of the nature of gender identity.

The Real may be a basis for gender identity as shown in chapter 2.8. Sadly, it can never be proven. So it too must be dismissed as an objective basis.

The conclusion must be that as of today we have no way of describing gender that can lay claim to objective truth and authority. Consequently, gender identity remains anchored in subjective authority alone.

This does not mean that gender identity is an unimportant part of our lives. On the contrary, it is exactly one of those immensely important truths vested with great emotional value that I described earlier. But it does mean that no one – natural scientists, humanistic scientists and feminists included – can claim to know the objective truth about it. No one holds absolute definitional power. Because no one holds it, everybody holds it. Gender identity – as of today – has a basis in subjective, not objective authority. This means that any group, or any individual, can define their own gender identity, and they will always be right. They alone have access to the truth about themselves, and no one can authoritatively tell them otherwise. Of course this doesn't mean that other people cannot utter a different opinion. It only means that they cannot bolster their different opinion with the claim to objective truth.

This situation opens up for a plethora of "grand" gender narratives, and smaller ones. They may have a basis in discourse, such as essentialism and constructivism, or in the Real. Their importance to each and every one of us will depend not on any objective authority, but on the personal emotions we invest in them.
The situation also opens up for a lesson in tolerance. We will learn that my truths, while very important to me, will not be any more authoritative than my neighbour's. Consequently I cannot, and hopefully will not, dismiss his truths. It is my hope that this will open up for narratives that are non-discriminating.

It is my hope that showing each group and each individual that they hold supreme subjective authority will allow everyone to create personal gender narratives with confidence. It is my belief that we need a multiplicity of gender narratives. In chapter 2.1 I suggested that nature thrives on diversity, in contrast to the discursive alignment of peer pressure. One might just as well say that the Real thrives on diversity, contrary to the taxonomic rigidity of scientific discourse. One might speculate that diversity is an end in itself for the Real. Perhaps the Real can be likened to a living, sentient mechanism that wants to try out all its options and all its possibilities, as if to learn by trial and error, or simply to know what it means to be – to be all that it can be. Similarly, multiple narratives – on whatever basis they may rest – can help the human race to know what it's like to be all that it can be.

What are the consequences for photography?
Narrative photography seems perfectly suited to tell comprehensive stories about gender identities. This is exactly the kind of photography that strives to tell the "whole story" about its subjects, lending them a voice of their own. The artist should endeavour to tell an in-depth story in a way that the spectator can relate to, balancing the individual with the collective. Preferably the narrative photographer should choose a subject that he or she knows intimately, or at least one that he or she has the intention of getting to know intimately. This is to ensure that he/she gets the story as the subjects want it to be told – that the story is "true" and not just the result of the artist's own projections. Narrative photography thus has a terrific opportunity to bolster and affirm subjective gender narratives.
In contrast to the narrative approach there is the projective one of fetishistic photography. One example is the kind of "tourist" documentary photography where a professional goes off to some far-away spot and returns with a set of beautiful, exotic pictures, often depicting festivals and the like, which he/she then presents as the "exciting truth about these fascinating

people". For instance, I have often seen pictures of catholic festivals and parades from foreign countries. I have asked myself what these pictures have to do with catholic faith. Being a catholic myself, I know a thing or two about it. It looks to me as if the photographer actually knows very little about catholic faith, and that he or she only wants to present us with the stereotypes of "exotic", "archaic" religion: the huge Madonna sculptures, the colourful crowds, the strong emotions, the simple but devout women, and so on. Contrary to narrative photography this kind of photography is superficial and stereotypical. It teaches us nothing new and only cements our prejudices. It is a vehicle for our id projections, and has nothing to do with enhancing our understanding of other people.
It should be obvious that I call for more narrative in-depth photography and less fetishistic photography – "tourist" documentary or other. The former approach will help establish and affirm gender identities – the latter will only fragment them.

Sigmund Freud had a somewhat pessimistic view on the human condition in modern societies[132]. According to him, the id exerts pressure on each individual to seek immediate gratification of their id desires, while the community on the whole depends on the restraining forces of the ego and the super-ego to stay intact. Humans are caught in this endless struggle. They can never hope to resolve it, because the pressure of the id is constant, as is the control needed to keep it at bay. The struggle makes for a miserable, discontented human existence. Freud's view entails that we need the id projections of fetishistic photography and Other construction. Furthermore, no effort will be successful in restraining them, since there is no way to lessen the pressure of the id. Consequently one might as well surrender and let photography fall wholly into the hands of those who wish to exploit its projective potential. Indeed it looks like this is exactly what has happened in the last decade. The spread of sexually explicit images, for instance, testifies to that.
Nevertheless, I cannot subscribe to Freud's pessimism. I cannot accept the inevitability of it. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that humans will always need ways to relieve id desires by projection onto an Other, but I do not think that this is a process that is invariable and totally beyond our control. And I do not believe that the only forces that can keep it at bay are sanctions by the greater community. I think that an equally successful strategy may be to offer alternatives. Faced with these alternatives, people may choose to ignore the id gratification and choose differently. The alternative when it comes to photography is narrative

[132] See Olsen & Køppe, op.cit., page 202, and Thurschwell, op.cit., page 105-111.

photography. I believe that it can be a more satisfying alternative than the projective, shallow and fragmented approach of fetishistic photography.

How does Goldin fare when it comes to expressing the subjective narrative truths of her subjects? Well, I have already pointed out that her post 1980 pictures seem to be more fragmented and fetishistic than the earlier black-and-white ones. I have also pointed out that the black-and-white photos seem to tell a more comprehensive story – a "richer" story – than the colour pictures (chapter 2.5 and 2.6).

It is not easy to know for sure whether or not the black-and-white photographs tell a "truer" story than the colour photos – whether or not the "voice" that is there to a greater extent belongs to the subjects. But I think that it is likely. We know that Goldin lived very close to her transgender friends for an extended period in the early 1970s. So she knew them intimately. I do not think that she spent an equal amount of time with a specific group of transgender people after that. Knowing the 1970s crowd more intimately would have helped her to find their true voice.

It is also possible to speculate that Goldin's success after 1980 – a success at least in part owing to the sensational pictures of sex and violence in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* – may have prompted her to include similar elements in her *The Other Side* photos. It is conceivable that this shifted her focus from the "voice" of her subjects to her audience's demand for the sensational. The photos would then depict not the true subjective narratives of her subjects, but the projections of the spectators – in the way that Goldin interpreted them. This may offer one explanation to the increased fetishistic quality that I have found in her post 1980 colour photographs. I feel that such an explanation is also supported by the fact that she actually becomes a "tourist" documentary photographer herself – on her trip to Thailand and the Philippines – resulting in photographs that seem incongruous, heterogeneous and consequently less narrative. Furthermore, it seems probable that circumstances in the society at large – the fragmentation of grand narratives and authority, and its consequences – would have favoured a fetishistic approach.

Anyway, to me her 1970s pictures tell the most credible story. Looking at them I feel that I hear the voices of *roommate*, *Ivy*, *Colette*, *Naomi* and the others, and I feel that I am told the story about their life the way *they* want it to be told. I think that Nan Goldin's black-and-white pictures make for great narrative photography – on the same level as Christer Strömholm, Mary Ellen Mark and Larry Clark's *Tulsa*.

I want to end this chapter with a picture from *The Other Side*. It is *Tabboo! and Misty at the pier* (taken in New York City in 1991)[133]. It depicts the two subjects, hand in hand, with their backs to the camera. They are dressed in casual men's wear – T-shirts and shorts. *Misty* wears a cap. They look like a couple of pretty inconspicuous guys in the New York night. The only hint that they are "different" from most other guys is the holding of hands. The fact that they look so "ordinary" even when we know they are not, and that they are facing away from us, may illustrate the main point of this chapter: They, and they alone, hold the key to their narratives. Their lives are theirs alone, and it is solely up to them whether or not they will share it with us. To me this is a picture of integrity and control of one's own life story, and a reminder that there is more to a tale than what immediately meets the eye.

[133] Goldin: *The Other Side*, page 81.

3. CONCLUSION.

In this dissertation I have written about selected pictures from the photo-book *The Other Side* by artist Nan Goldin. My intention has been to show how they illustrate theories on gender issues, and the development of such theories from ca 1970 to 1992. I have also intended to show how the medium of photography may be employed to either affirm or to fragment new gender identities. I express my hopes that photographers will choose the first option.

In chapter 2.1 my main concern was the *roommate* pictures. They illustrated a way that photographs may be employed to criticize gender discourse – or in this case specifically the two-gender system. They are examples of the subversive potential of the medium.
All three of them show us a person who, at first glance, seems unquestionably to be a woman. Had we not encountered her in the setting of Goldin's book, I do not think that we would have offered her gender a second thought. We would have accepted her as a woman at face value. But owing to the context of her presentation we know that she is not what we would call a regular female according to the two-gender system criteria. We know that she was born a biological man. But we also know that she now looks very much like a woman. According to the assumptions of the system it should not be possible. It states that there are two – and only two – genders. There can be no middle ground. But there she is nonetheless – our *roommate*. Her very existence threatens the stability of the system and makes us question its authority. In the 1980s and 90s queer theorists would do the same – probably exactly because of the existence of people like her.
One who accepts at face value is Nan Goldin. To her *roommate* is a beautiful woman – one whom she wants to pay homage to with her book. It is as if though Goldin has understood that not all things in life can be readily categorized, and that that is a good thing. It is as if though she urges us to enjoy life's diversity and its mysteries without prejudice or doubt.
Her pictures may be said to celebrate the womanhood of *roommate* on two different levels. In the *Roommate in the kitchen* she is woman as idea. Her classical stance and the *Pictorialist* air of the photograph remove her from the earthly sphere. She is transcendent, aloof, existing as the female potential in us all.
This potential is made flesh and blood in *Roommate in her chair*. The female potential has descended from the celestial domain and is made incarnate as woman. Thanks to the everyday setting and the *straight photography* quality of the picture it shows us *roommate* as a female

in the here and now. Even more so, she does not come across as just any woman, but as the *natural* woman *par excellence*. She is an affront to the teachings of the two-gender system indeed, according to which she is one of "nature's mistakes" amenable to human intervention to return nature to Nature.
Goldin accepts her, adores her, but not even she can escape the constraints of discourse. When she calls one of the *roommate* pictures *Sisters*, it is probably an acceptance of her as a woman, but it is also an admission of the lack of words to describe what discourse does not recognize. The 1970s *roommate* is a woman outside of discourse and language.

Discourse on sex and gender has a long and varied history. In chapter 2.2 I reiterate parts of it in order to show the contingent nature of gender concepts. I also recapitulate the rise of feminism and its relation to those concepts.
We have thus seen that before the 18th century the gender system was close to a one-gender system, with the male as the only gender and the female as a kind of "defective male". These assumptions had their basis both in biblical interpretations and in writings from antiquity. The shift towards two separate genders occurred in the 18th and 19th century when man and woman were relegated to different spheres – the public and the domestic – according to their alleged gender characteristics. The fact that gender categorization shifted illustrates that gender systems are not self-evident, universal entities.
The radical feminist movement in the 1960s and 70s criticized what they called patriarchal hegemony, but it still depended on keeping the two-gender system intact, relying on a coherent female category. All identities that didn't fit into the theoretical framework were left out. Transgender identity was one. I used the *Naomi in the audience* photograph to illustrate biological women's disdain for transgender people.
Left out of discourse and having to fend for themselves, Goldin's friends attempted to create their own life story narratives. Goldin has managed to capture some of those narratives in her pictures and to pass them on to the spectators by employing story-telling visual clues. The little girl in the picture on the wall in *Roommate in the kitchen* is one such clue. It points to femininity as formative of the transgender identity. The Warhol Marilyn poster in *Ivy with Marilyn* is another. It points to femininity, but also to glamour and the entertainment industry – additional identity foundations. The same is found in *Christmas at The Other Side*, where Ivy enters the world of old Hollywood romantic heroes. *Colette at home* illustrates both femininity and stardom, showing her in the vein of a classical film diva beauty.

Goldin's 1970s pictures thus have a dual function as to gender identity. They can be seen to criticize the prevailing two-gender system. And they can be seen as illustrating and affirming the creation of an alternative transgender identity, as of yet outside mainstream gender discourse.

One of the theoretical constructs that came under attack in 1960s and 70s feminism was psychoanalytical theory. This is the subject of chapter 2.3. In psychoanalytic theory gender differentiation depends on the presence or absence of a bodily organ – the penis. It is as such a theory of gender essentialism. The result of resolving the male Oedipus complex is a boy who emulates his father. He keeps his id energy (though repressed), so he therefore remains active – and he develops a strong super-ego (through incorporation of the masturbation and incest prohibition). He therefore has high morals. The girl, on the other hand – on discovering she has no penis – abandons her id energy altogether and hopes for a gift (penis/baby) from her father. She subsequently becomes passive. Having no masturbation or incest prohibition to incorporate she has a weaker super-ego and lower morals.
The theory – conceived by Freud to be universal – was seen by radical feminists as an instance of patriarchal discrimination of the female gender. They criticized it and suggested alterations. Still they often depended on the theory as a basis for their critique.
The transgender person would seem at odds with Freud's model altogether. That someone would willingly remove the organ of pre-eminence – the penis – and seek out the derogated female position didn't sit well with either psychoanalysts or feminists.
The latter welcomed the re-workings of psychoanalytic theory by Jacques Lacan. To his mind the crux of gender differentiation was not the bodily organ of the penis, but the symbolic entity of the Phallus. Being a phantasmatic entity of plenitude and absolute mastery it could not really be said to exist anywhere other than in our longing for it. Feminists claimed the Phallus to be open to appropriation and re-signification, resulting in alternative gender differentiation models more affirming of female self-worth. Lacan also afforded women a place both inside and outside the Symbolic, stressing their role as "free agents". As such they were not to such a high degree tied up with discourse and the Symbolic.
The new possibilities for female affirmation as a result of Lacan's theories may also apply to the transgender population. They too may appropriate and re-signify the Phallus, and they too must be considered "free agents" not tied up with the Symbolic.

As I have explained, the radical feminist critique of the 1960s and 70s did little to change the foundations of the two-gender system. The transgender people were left outside discourse. The first serious blow to the *raison d'être* of the system came with the advent of *queer theory* in the 1980s and 90s, as outlined in chapter 2.4. Paradoxically one of its preconditions was dissent within the women's movement. Several groups felt that their situation did not correspond to that of its middle-class, all-white majority. They felt that their voice was not heard. A discussion of who has the authority to define the term "woman" resulted in the partial fragmentation of the concept. From those fragments arose the queer movement based not on uniformity but on identity diversity.

The main queer theorist is Judith Butler. She did much to rob the two-gender system of its authority. According to Butler, gender is a purely social and cultural construct. It has no basis in any corporeal reality. The same goes for organic sex and the body – they are all discursive entities and cannot exist as anything else. In other words, Butler asserted that the body, sex and gender are *relative*, not universal, concepts dependent on their social and cultural context. She thus discounted gender identity as a stable, "inner" characteristic of humans. In her opinion gender is performative – that is that the acts that are said to express it actually construct it, and the language that is said to describe it actually creates it. Every time we act like a man or woman and every time we speak of men and women, we actually construct the categories of man and woman. To Butler this performative is all the gender identity there is. Like she says: "There is no doer behind the deed".

She criticizes patriarchal society for restricting gender identities to man and woman only, and calls for action to subvert the system. The two subversive tools she mentions are mis-recognition of the system's naming and parody.

One would think that Butler's doing away with the two-gender system would be an unequivocal benefit to transgender identity. After all, she calls for the affirmation of more gender expressions, and affords gender minorities the power to subvert the system. But still, as I have shown in my dissertation, the situation is not that simple.

The problem is that Butler not only does away with the authority of the two-gender system, but with the authority of *all* gender systems. What results is an identity vacuum. In such a vacuum I believe that the identity narratives that suffer the most are those not bolstered by history and tradition. Transgender identity is exactly such an identity.

The picture *Joey on my bed* illustrates my point. Here there is no critique of any particular gender system. Instead we find a playful exploration of the concept of desire. The spectator is invited to participate in the game. But the game has no end, and no answers are given. We

also find parody – most explicitly in the *pudica gesture* – and fetishistic elements, like the clothes of the subject and the overtly sexual ambience of the photograph. Still *Joey* emanates a humorous and confident sense of self-worth.
That too is gone in *Misty and Jimmy Paulette in a taxi*. There is no playfulness in this picture. No games. No confidence. The twinkle in *Joey's* eyes is replaced by the vacant expression of the two in the taxi. Here is parody, but on a different level than in the former picture. The wish to appropriate and express the feminine is abandoned in favour of a parody on drag itself. *Misty* and *Jimmy* are no longer plausible women. On their way to a parade in order to celebrate and propagate minority identities, one wonders what is the basis of the one they will be propagating. They do not look like people who have gotten their identity affirmed. There is no pride or sense of self-worth here.
I believe that in this photograph *Misty* and *Jimmy* may illustrate what happens to people's identity in the vacuum resulting from Foucault's analysis, and queer and deconstructive critique. Lacking identity alternatives, emptiness ensues.

In chapter 2.5 I have compared the black-and-white pictures from the 1970s with the colour ones taken after 1990 to look for signs of identity fragmentation. I have found several such signs.
Goldin's use of colour does not, in my opinion, connote increased reality, but rather a sense of being removed from everyday life to a place where the party goes on all week long. As a result, her world and the people in it look "unreal".
Her use of the snapshot composition device connotes chaos – a haphazard reality with little structuring support for identity formation.
The "blur" – which in my opinion in the 70s pictures points to aloofness – gives the colour ones an expression of restlessness. It is as if her subjects – both their minds and their bodies – are falling apart, returning to the mute matter from whence they arose.
Important is also that the narrative content of the latter photographs is diminished. The visual clues to connect the life stories of the subjects to that of the spectators are fewer, and the ones that are there seem more private and not as recognizable to a wider audience.
As a result it seems fair to say that there is enough evidence – both thematically and formally – to substantiate the hypothesis that the colour pictures illustrate the (scholarly) fragmentation of gender identity of the 80s and 90s.
This is seen quite clearly in the *Kim at home*. Compared to the *Ivy with Marilyn* and the *Roommate in the kitchen* the narrative content is gone from the former picture. What in the

Ivy- and *roommate*-photos served as visual clues to offer narrative support in the *Kim*-image has become a mere reference to a body part. The body part now fills the role of former comprehensive identity narratives. It is an impoverishment compared to the 1970s' situation.

In chapter 2.6 I introduce two kinds of documentary photography: narrative and fetishistic. Narrative photography seeks to tell the whole, comprehensive and true story of its subjects. Its intention is to let the spectator get to know the subjects on their own terms, and to make him or her sympathize with them on the grounds of our common humanity. To make the connection between subject and audience the photographer employs visual clues that have similar meanings in large segments of the population. Narrative photography presupposes that the artist is intimately familiar with the subjects so that he or she will be able to tell the whole, true story. Narrative photography aid the structuring forces of the psychological ego, and is an approach that may bolster and affirm identity positions.
Fetishistic photography, on the other hand, works by the projection of id urges, often constructing the subjects as Other, alienating them. Its aim is not to get to know other people, but to rid the artist (and by proxy the spectators) of unpleasant yet tantalizing emotions, while still being able to enjoy them at a distance. These emotions often are of an immature sexual or aggressive nature and frequently utilize fetishes as their vehicle of expression. Thus fetishistic photography will often portray the sensational and the shocking. It works as a documentary, not of the subjects, but of the artist's and the spectator's ids. It actually tells us very little about its subjects. On the contrary, it bolsters prejudices. Thus this photographic approach can be detrimental to identity positions.
Goldin's picture *Aphrodite and Javier at a sex party* seems well suited to illustrate fetishistic photography. The subjects perform a kind of sexual theatre in the S&M vein. *Aphrodite's* face is covered with layers of heavy make-up, revealing nothing of the person inside. Only the sexual role is apparent.

In chapter 2.7 I speak more generally of the documentary photography tradition and its relation to the construction of the Other. I try to place Goldin's pictures in it.
At the turn of the 19th and 20th century new topics appeared on the scene, owing to both a political agenda to alleviate conditions for the poor and outcast, and a new aesthetic inspired by Walt Whitman. This included renderings of the Other.
I have described different strategies in dealing with the Other as related to the "us" and "them" category. We have seen the distancing approach of Jacob Riis – keeping the "us" and

"them" categories intact, Weegee's introduction of the Other next door and Robert Frank's conversion of "us" (the American middle class) into Other. Larry Clark (in *Tulsa*), Christer Strömholm and Mary Ellen Mark attempt a humanizing widening of the "us" category. Clark's later work seems to reopen the "us"-"them" divide.

In this kind of photography one might speculate that there are different psychic structures at work. The id is always looking for new material to project its forbidden desires onto. Not being permitted by the ego to find that material in the "us" (or "me") category it depends on the Other as alien and part of the "them" category. This construction of Other is the societal parallel to individual projection. The resulting photography tends to correspond to the id desires – irrational, highly emotional and fragmented. I have called it fetishistic photography. The structuring forces of the ego and its creation of comprehensive stories and schemata open up for a sympathetic, humanizing approach to the Other – enabling us to invite them into the fellowship of the "us" category. The corresponding approach in photography is what I have called narrative photography. Finally photography may also be a vehicle for mourning, as in family photography, keeping the psyche from falling into melancholia.

I have suggested that Goldin's 1970s pictures are examples of narrative photography – employing the humanizing widening of the "us" category of Clark in *Tulsa*, Strömholm and Mark. The post 1990 ones are more fetishistic and tied up with projection of id desires – constructing transgender identity as Other and belonging to the "them" category.

In chapter 2.8 I have discussed Butler's claim that there can be no body, sex or gender outside discourse. I have indicated the tautological nature of her reasoning, suggesting that what she is actually saying is that there can be no *discursive* body, sex or gender outside discourse.

In my opinion there is ample evidence that there are several non-discursive elements that influence us. Examples are unknown entities in the present and the past, natural events, physiological processes, strong drives and strong emotions. The fact that they cannot be comprehended or conceptualised does not mean that they do not impact on our lives. I have called this kind of non-discursive knowledge "knowledge-in-being", and related it to the Lacanian concept of the Real. Events in the Real are characterized by their being *alien* and *autonomous* – that is, beyond our control.

There is no reason to believe that the Real cannot manifest itself in photography. Using the *Jimmy Paulette and Tabboo! in the bathroom* as example, I have pointed to *Tabboo!*'s inaccessibility and the spatial configuration as clues to show that some of the events in the picture take place on another, non-discursive level. They happen "elsewhere". The slanting

corner/wall is to me the *punctum* of the photograph. I have vented the thought that a picture's *punctum* may indeed correspond to events taking place in the (individual) Real. This opens up for the possibility that a photograph may contain vast amounts of non-discursive information. I have coined it "Real photography" – a genre impossible to practice, since Real events may be strictly individual, and cannot be planned or anticipated.
Accepting the Real and its influence on our lives may prove an important lesson in humility, realising that we are all to some degree controlled by events beyond anyone's control. It is also an alternative to Butler's anthropocentric model, placing the human race in a wider context as only one part of a vast creation.

In chapter 2.9 I have looked at Butler's Asian pictures. The photographs point to the contingency of any gender system, since such systems differ with time and distance, and to the fact that gender systems may be based on "subjective" and "objective" truths alike. They also illustrate what happens when an artist ventures on new, unfamiliar ground.

In chapter 2.10 I discuss the concepts of truth and authority and relate them to issues of gender identity.
In my opinion both essentialism and constructivism must be dismissed as claimants to the whole, objective truth about sex and gender. We simply do not know enough to validate such a claim. Perhaps we never will.
The Real may be one basis for subjective gender perception, but since it is non-discursive it can never be proved as such.
Nevertheless, the truth about gender is – its non-factual nature notwithstanding – one of those important truths, vested with much emotional energy. As a result the discussions and arguments rage on. My question is who will have the power to create authoritative and at the same time non-discriminating gender narratives and truths. It is clear that we need them.
Differentiating between objective and subjective truths, I claim that we all do, but only for ourselves. Lacking objective, comprehensive truths, only subjective truths can rightfully lay any claim to authority. Anyone is free to define one's own gender. And no one can authoritatively dismiss it.
The personal and sometimes private nature of gender identity I have illustrated with Goldin's picture *Tabboo! and Misty at the pier*. It will always be up to the subjects how much, or little, they want to tell us about themselves. We need to respect their privacy, and not give in to our ids' need for sensational and spectacular projection arenas.

Instead of giving in to id desires, photography can aid in the re-telling, communicating and affirming of gender stories. That is why I have called for narrative photography – to truthfully and comprehensively tell those stories as the subjects would have told them, with respect for their personal integrity.
In my opinion Nan Goldin has succeeded in this in her 1970s black-and-white pictures. They tell the story of *roommate*, *Ivy*, *Colette* and the others in a plausible and personal, yet discreet way. I feel that I know them better. Her colour photographs do not succeed, I think. *Jimmy Paulette*, *Misty*, *Tabboo!*, *Kim*, *Aphrodite* and the others are more like clichés than complete transgender persons. As such they are subject to projection, fetishism and sensationalism.

In my dissertation I have tried to show how photography may aid in the creation and affirming of comprehensive and subjectively true gender narratives. Allowing for personal integrity and the influence of the Real, we are compelled to avoid sensationalism, speculative exploitation and discriminating "truths" laying claim to universal validity.

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5. PICTURES.