

# Creating a Home in the Borderlands? Transgender Stories in the *Original Plumbing* Magazine

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## Abstrakti

Transtutkimuksessa on keskusteltu kodin käsitteestä ja politiikasta suhteessa kertomuksiin transsukupuolisuudesta. Artikkelissani syvennän keskustelua kodin ja yhteisön metaforista. Aineistoni ovat trans\*ihmisten tekemän, trans\*liikkeeseen linkittyvän ja trans\*ihmisille suunnatun median kierrättämät kertomukset yhteisöstä, kehollisista muutoksista ja kohtaamisista sosiaalisessa maailmassa. Analysoin erityisesti yhdysvaltalaisen transmiesten *Original Plumbing* -lehden kuutta ensimmäistä numeroa (2009–2011), ja vertaan lehden tapoja käsitellä kodin ja yhteisöön kuulumisen tavoitteita ja jännitteitä transteoretisoinnissa käytyihin keskusteluihin (erityisesti Prosser 1998). Osoitan, miten transihmisille suunnattu media tekee tilaa monenlaisille ruumiille, sukupuolille ja elämille kertomalla tarinoita niin julkisesta poliittisesta aktivismista kuin yksilötason mikropolitikasta. Yhtäältä analysoimani printti- ja verkkomedia toimii vastajulkisuutena (vrt. Warner 2005), joka haastaa vallitsevaa lääketieteellistä näkemystä transsukupuolisuudesta sekä valtasuhteita laajemmassa yhteiskunnallisessa kontekstissa. Toisaalta se kierrättää ajatusta voimauttavasta yhteisöstä, yhteisökodista ja ruumiista joista tulee koteja. Transjulkisuus sekä pyrkii muuttamaan sosiaalista maailmaa että edistämään transihmisten sovittautumista ympäröivään yhteiskuntaan.

Whether or not we hang onto our original plumbing is up to us, but for the trans guys that do, “original plumbing” is a term often used when referring to our genitals, junk, business, family jewels, bits, the “downstairs” parts. It is the aim of OP to shoot true diversity in the FTM community; in size, age, body, surgery, hormone use and non-use, because it is our belief that surgery and hormones don’t necessarily make the man... It’s more than just that. Maybe it’s an attitude, a swagger, a limp wrist or just an awareness of ones self. Needless to say, there is not just one way to be a trans man. (OP No. 1/Fall 2009)

The above quote is from the first editorial of the *Original Plumbing* magazine, a trans male quarterly. *Original Plumbing* is a contemporary transmasculine medium, made by trans men and targeting preliminarily transgender people as its audience. *OP* is probably the most widely circulated trans male magazine, published in zine form, produced in San Francisco and circulated in Western metropolises and through Internet shops.<sup>1</sup> “There is more than one way to be a trans man,” the editorial says,

<sup>1</sup> Zines are noncommercial, non-professional magazines, usually distributed on a small scale, and with an attachment to the culture of zinesters (Duncombe 1997). Zines used to be made by hand and photocopied, producing a distinct amateurish and punkish style, often combining clippings from other printed material and handwritten text. Even in the Internet age, zines can still look

alluding to the arbitrary relation between bodies and identities. It states further that “[i]t is our belief that surgery and hormones don’t necessarily make the man,” referencing critically the idea – not so very common in wider society – that surgery and hormones can, indeed, make “the man.” The notion that is contested in the editorial, of these bodily changes as the necessary condition for becoming “the man” or being a trans man, i.e., of surgery and hormones as the necessary trajectory for all transmasculine people, has a history of medical determination, interlinked with trans people’s own agency (Stryker 2008; Meyerowitz 2002). The idea of an unambiguously gendered body as the *telos* of all trans trajectories is contested in this editorial.

This notion of an unambiguously gendered body – and the “home in the body and in the world” offered by this body – as the *telos* of both trans people’s individual bodily transformations and trans politics, has been put forward by Jay Prosser in his seminal book *Second Skins* (1998), which has become a major landmark in transgender theory. Prosser argues for taking into account the material body over and above the performative identity, or, indeed, performative body, in order to do justice to the transsexual subject’s desire for bodily transformation and for a yearning for home in a gendered body as well as in the world. The editorial of *OP magazine*, as well as other texts in the magazine, written approximately ten years after Prosser’s book, are in an interesting tension with Prosser’s ideas of trans\*<sup>2</sup>

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handmade. However, the distribution of zines has changed, as they are no longer only sold face to face by the person who made them, as often used to be the case. Many zines are sold and advertised through the Internet, and some zines have their own web pages. *OP magazine*, for example, has its own web page, related blogs, a Facebook page, and its issues and fundraising events are advertised through its web page and Facebook page.

2 The asterisk is used to denote as much inclusivity as possible for identities, experiences and trajectories which can be included under the umbrella of ‘transgender’ or ‘trans\*.’ Nat on Practical Androgyny writes: “Recently there has been a move in some online transgender communities to adopt the alterna-

bodies and trans politics. This tension is what I will address in this article. By comparing stories in *OP magazine* (issues 1–6) and transgender theory, I will analyze the transgender stories of community, bodily change, and encounters in the social world. This allows me to explore how home, belonging and comfort are expressed, tried out and negotiated in *OP*.

### A home of one’s own through assimilation?

In the editorial of the first issue of *OP magazine*, a ‘community’ is mentioned as, on the one hand, already existing, and on the other hand, as a political aim of a more inclusive and respectful community, which would support many different bodies and identities. The discourses and images in *OP magazine* work to create a (trans\*) community as a political community that seeks to redress the harms of transphobia or cissexism.<sup>3</sup> Transgender media such as *OP magazine* work to affirm trans bodies as “homes” by circulating images and discourses of trans bodies and identities and by

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tive inclusive abbreviation ‘trans\*’ (the asterisk is a wildcard, denoting that several different suffixes could apply). This could be short for ‘transsexual’, ‘transgender’, ‘transvestite’, ‘trans man’, ‘trans woman’, ‘(gender) transgressive’ or ‘(gender) transcendent’. There is also the implication that the wildcard invites and includes the reader’s own personal self-definition. As such trans\* is understood to also include genderqueer, gender variant and gender non-conforming people, and all other potentially transgender identities.” (Practical Androgyny) See also the Legalize Trans\* website and You Now You’re Trans\* When...-blog’s post on the differences between the terms ‘trans’ and ‘trans\*’.

3 Cisgender is a term for people who are not transgendered. As Susan Stryker (2008, 22) states, “the prefix *cis-* means ‘on the same side as’ (that is, the opposite of *trans*).” According to Stryker, “[t]he idea behind the terms is to resist the way that ‘woman’ or ‘man’ can mean ‘nontransgendered woman’ or ‘nontransgendered man’ by default, unless the person’s transgendered status is explicitly named.” The term is thus meant to question the self-evident and invisible norm. Cissexism refers to the idea that cisgendered people are inherently better than trans people and to practices pertaining to this belief.

circulating the idea of a welcoming trans community. This hailing of a community is paradoxical; it postulates an identity, i.e., sameness, among trans men, and conveys the impression of bringing similar but separate individuals together in a kind of community based on a shared identity, while it in fact is creating this very identity, much like other media of non-dominant people do (Berlant 2008; Warner 2005). At the same time, the editorial posits a “diversity” both as something that already exists, and something that it sets out to “shoot” in other words, bring about in the existing community. Obviously, how the group represents itself to itself affects what kinds of trans\* lives can be imagined as possible and livable lives. Moreover, how the group represents itself influences who feels included or excluded. As the audience cannot be known or demarcated in advance, the representations can also effect a larger audience than exclusively the trans male community, which is both represented and in part created by the medium. This manifesto seems to be a part of the conundrum that faces many non-dominant social groups: “how should a people be represented?” (Eyerman 2001, 13.)

The first editorial of *OP magazine* states that the aim of the magazine is to represent the diversity of the FtM community. It also states that the aim is to diversify this community. The diversity that is both represented and advocated here is about differences in bodies. (Trans)maleness is at the center of *OP magazine*. In the stories in my material, I read diversity in different attitudes to bodily change, hormone use and surgery, but also diversity with regard to different masculinities and, to a lesser extent, (trans)male femininities or (trans)male androgyny. Diversity of gender identifications is also represented to some extent, but trans male stories are at the center of *OP magazine*. Because of the strong influence of medical discourses and practices on trans people,<sup>4</sup> and because non-conforming

4 Transgender is highly regulated by medical professionals and by texts such as DSM/ICD categorizations of pathologies. These texts and professionals using

to binary gender norms might prevent people from getting hormones, surgeries and juridical gender change, it might be more difficult to present male femininity in a trans male context than it is for cis-gendered men. The stakes of non-conforming, in other words, might be higher. Yet OP is a trans male medium, and its stated aim is to present this part of transgender experiences and identities, not the whole spectrum. The more androgynous or non-binary identities are a part of OP, but are not at its center.

The question of whether trans\* identities, experiences and trajectories are reinscribing gender binary or subversive of this same binary, is prominent in feminist studies and queer-theoretical thinking. The epistemological habits of poststructuralist thought tend to be locked in the same questions; how have we come to understand transgender as we do, how is binary gender naturalized in the process, or how is it destabilized. While these questions are not wrong, they do not allow for other questions that might be more urgent, such as, how do lives become livable, or how can more varied bodies and relationships between genders and bodies become livable in today’s world. This inability of much of gender theory to be accountable to the people whose bodies it takes as its examples has been criticized by many transgender theorists (see, for example, Prosser 1998; Namaste 2000).<sup>5</sup> Bearing in mind this critique, I find that the work that transgender media does should not be measured with a normative yardstick of resistance, or in other words, analyzed with a binary view on power (Sedgwick 2003;

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them as guidelines have until recently taken strictly binary views of gender as female femininity and male masculinity, even though there are signs of a change towards a “continuum approach” to gender in DSM/ICD categorizations and even though there are differences between individual professionals’ approaches as to what is considered to be an acceptably coherent gender narrative.

5 Wickman (2011, 15–20) draws together the various aspects of this discussion between queer inspired trans perspective, queer studies writing on trans, and the critique of the latter by trans studies scholars.

Muckelbauer 2000). However, I find that while Jay Prosser, following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (1995), tries to think non-dualistically, or at least to question easy dualisms in contemporary poststructuralist thought, his valuing of the literary works to some extent underestimates the social and cultural contexts where the performative or materializing body narratives that create gendered realness take place. This means that narratives of the body and community becoming “home” have a history and context, and that countercultural context matters.

Even while Prosser (1998) emphasizes the self-determination of transgender people, he does not truly question the medical view, as he underlines the truth of the “wrong body” narrative, while leaving out experiences that deviate from this narrative – experiences that might find a “home” in countercultural contexts and through transgender politics. The multiplicity of trans\*, including bi-gendered, agendered and gender-queer voices abound in zines, Internet forums and web sites today.

This multiplicity can be seen for example in the definitions of transgender as an umbrella term available on various web sites, as well as in the variety of words used to define various identities and experiences under the umbrella. For example the website Practical Androgyny defines transgender in the following way:

“Transgender” is an umbrella term that can potentially cover all people who transgress or transcend (go beyond the limits of) society’s rules and concepts of gender. People may be transgender due to their self expression, identity or personal history. (Practical Androgyny)

Transgender as a wide umbrella term is also ambivalent, however, according to the Genderqueer Identities website’s FAQ

“Transgender”, while often considered an umbrella term for persons whose gender expression and identity is non-normative, an umbrella, as such, under which genderqueer may belong, is a term that tends to be associated with the identities of male and female, or man and woman, such as Female-to-Male (FTM, trans men) and Male-to Female (MTF, trans women), and with the process of transition, physically or in presentation, along binary-associated lines.<sup>6</sup> (Genderqueer Identities FAQ)

Transgender media and trans\* theorization can productively be read as taking part in telling similar stories (cf. Hemmings 2011) that have intertextual connections with each other. Prosser’s book and similar subsequent theoretical discussions (see for example Rubin 2003; Serano 2007) may have affected the ways in which transgender is imagined in the identity-political transgender media, and stories in the media material could be interpreted as later comments on the discussion that Prosser was taking part in ten years earlier. There is a change in the value placed on ‘community’ between these texts, from something imagined and fragile, a thought of possible futurity, to something taken as already existing in reality, something with its own inner conflicts and exclusions, which can be contested in the community media. The change is interesting, perhaps signaling a wider change in the context in which transgender is articulated.

### A common yearning

The fact that transgender media present the identity that it is creating in circulating stories and images of transgender, as already existing, is a

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6 For examples on forum discussions where less usual or less commonly known trans\* identities are discussed, see for example the list of agendered/neutrois discussions on What is Gender forums.



feature it shares with other publics of non-dominant groups (Berlant 2008, viii), such as women's culture as an "intimate public" of popular culture. Transgender media, like women's "intimate public" articulate an identity of a non-dominant group and posit this identity as already existing. Women's popular cultural "intimate public" is most often "juxtapolitical," and offers feelings attached to injustices, as well as the feeling of recognition between insiders, as an alleviation to structural inequities (Berlant 2008, x–xi, 5, 10).

However, transgender media are also political. I argue, that the viewpoint that separates feelings and affects from politics is misguided. I also contend that seeing emotions as an invariably disturbing factor in public culture is a simplified view (contra Berlant 2008). I agree that there is no "truth" in emotion, in the sense of it being free from suggestion or downright manipulation, or "unmediated" in the sense of free from the effects of power relations and from the cultural education of affect (see for example Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2004; Vaahtera & Vähäpassi 2014). However, the enticing of emotion, or flow of affect, cannot be totally separated from politics. Public cultures of non-dominant people – such as transgender media – are inseparably political and therapeutic, emotional and rational, and about bodies both in the streets and on printed pages (Cvetkovich 2003; Berlant & Warner 1998; Warner 2005). There is undoubtedly a lot of feelings at play in issues that touch one's own self-determination and power over one's own body, issues that Sandy Stone (1991) defined as the keystones of her politics of visibility. The feelings that the stories of activism in transgender media mobilize may thus also be read as part of the politics of the transgender movement. Challenging the dominant medical understanding of transgender has become increasingly important for the transgender movement, and demands for depathologization and the right to decide over one's body have gained both visibility and support from human rights advocates during recent years.

Writing about his feelings on taking part in a French Existrans march for the rights of transgender and intergender people, a reporter for *OP magazine* describes his experience in the following way:

I felt an overpowering sense of belonging. The people around me, although they were shouting in a language I don't speak, were shouting for MY rights! For OUR rights! [--] Toward the end of the route, the Rue de Belleville curved, and from the top of the hill I could see the Tour Eiffel standing tall in the distance. It hit me right then that I was actually in Paris, that I was part of something larger than my own personal gender struggles, surrounded by people just like me, standing up for myself. Everyone around me was chanting and cheering, and for the first time in my life, I felt good about myself, so proud of who I am and who I have become. When we reached the end of the march, we stood together at the Place de la Republique – trans men, trans women, gender-queers, gender-fuckers, cisgendered people, allies, and onlookers. Minutes after arriving, we were directed to lie down and have a moment of silence in memory of all the trans people who have been killed just for being different. It made me want to cry. The whole event was likewise overwhelming. (OP No. 2/ Winter 2010)

The political movement "for the rights of every person who doesn't fit a binary," as described by the reporter, is mobilized by bodies in the streets of Paris, shouting, cheering and doing a silent dead-in, and reported in the community zine based in San Francisco and circulated around Western metropolises. In France, the situation of trans people had started to change at the time of the march. The then Minister for Health, Roselyne Bachelot, had in May 2010 removed transgender from the list of psychic disorders, as an exception from the ICD by France. However, the Existrans march demanded more changes. It was part of the global *Stop Trans*

*Pathologization 2012* campaign, which has organized international days of action each October since 2007 (Existrans 2010 Flickr; Stop Trans Pathologisation 2012).<sup>7</sup> Also, the march demanded the right to autonomy over one's body for trans people, especially a change to the current practice in France and other countries in Europe, where in order to change the legal gender, a doctor has to declare the person to be sterilized or otherwise infertile (Sadie Lune).

The report is written in a powerful emotional tone and it aims to evoke similar emotional intensities in its readers. In other words, it works to raise affects. Affect can, on the one hand, be defined as a corporeal reaction or intensity which is attached to emotion or can become translated into an emotion, or on the other hand, as relations of affectivity, for example in relationships between media and audience (Paasonen 2011, 22–23). I interpret the text as affective in the sense that it sets “bodies in motion (*affectio*),” or “the effectivities of bodies on one other,” which according to Grossberg (2010, 193) is one of the three dimensions of affect. According to Grossberg (2010, 194), this dimension of affect as bodies in motion and effective of each other can also work at a distance. Here I read a combination of a political action of “bodies in motion” in the streets, moving, shouting, and stopping the motion for a moment for the dead-in, and on the other hand, the combined effect of moving, affecting and arousing emotions of the description of the event and the feelings of the reporter.

Here the materiality (of bodies), their symbolism (in a symbolic action) and the textual representation of the event and feelings of the writer are in line with each other. The political message as well as the community,

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7 The *Stop Trans Pathologization 2012* campaign tried to remove transgender from the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 2012) of the American Psychiatric Association and seeks to remove transgender from the next ICD (International Classification of Diseases) of the World Health Organization.

in feelings of belonging and stories of belonging, are advanced both by the action of the bodies in the streets and by the narrative of the event in the community zine. These actions, the trans political action in the streets and telling a story about it in the countercultural zine, could both be called “politics of home” in taking trans bodies home via visibility and affirmation as well as making a “home in the world” for trans people. These actions seek to make a “home in the world,” both in the identity-political community via the feeling of belonging, and also in the larger social world.

Here, the bodies for whom the home is made, or which are made “bodily homes” through the affirmation of the crowd and through belonging to the political community, include not only the trans bodies that have undergone all the surgeries sanctioned by medical professionals, but also “gender-queers” and “gender-fuckers” as stated in the quote above, or people who self-identify as “t-boi,” “trans,” “mostly male” or even stating that they “don’t identify themselves,” as did some of the people who attended the march and were interviewed for the zine regarding their identifications and feelings about the trans community. In this story of the march in Paris, people attending the march are described first as “just like me,” and then the author goes on to describe the great variation of the bodies and identities of people in the march. Perhaps, then, what makes people “just like” the writer, is the shared experience of the violence of gendering. The identity of the people in the march for trans rights is postulated at the same instance as it is countered. The identity is then posited more on the shared experience of repudiation in the social world (cf. Shelley 2008, 8) than on a shared view of what transgender trajectories’ telos is, in terms of gendered bodies and identities. The politics of home in the trans movement is represented in *OP magazine* as covering more varied bodies and identities than the politics of home as envisioned by Jay Prosser, for whom the politics of home is about a desire to arrive at a nonambiguous place in the gender binary.

The political project of the transgender movement is advanced through hailing a trans community or in the case of *OP magazine*, a trans male community. Building a feeling of being “at home” in the world as well as in one’s body is said to be a purpose of trans narratives and trans politics (Prosser 1998). I want to argue, however, that a “home” is never solely a matter of individual belonging or individual storytelling. A home as a “place” and a feeling of belonging to the social world is supported (or not) by glances, words, and “the air” in face-to-face encounters (Ahmed 2000, 38–39; 2004). In my view, a feeling of belonging is also supported (or not) by media that circulate the possible or “real” and “ideal” identities, embodiments and stories, of transformation and of “home.”<sup>8</sup> I am following Sara Ahmed’s ideas on the historicity of encounters, which materialize bodies and define “the contours of boundaries of the body-at-home,” the historicity of being “in place” or being recognized “*as the body out of place*” (Ahmed 2000, 38–40, italics in the original). Both face-to-face encounters and media representations have a history and can produce some bodies as being more “at home” than others. The stories that transgender media circulate, of bodies and transformations more varied than what the medical model allows, build belonging or “home” for trans\* people, and function as “sites/agents of the production of and the struggle over the real, in the forms of habits and the habitual” (Grossberg 2010, 194).

Sara Ahmed (2000, 87) is wary of the easy antagonism between “home” as a purified space of complete comfort, in which one is comfortable enough to stop thinking, a way of being that “does not over-reach itself,” and nomadism/migrancy as a different way of being, being away from “home,”

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8 Apart from being important for Prosser’s transgender theorization, the trope of home is also an important target of dis-articulating and re-articulating for larger critical strands of theory, such as feminist, postcolonial and diaspora theorization (Gilroy 1993; Brah 1996; Probyn 1996; Fortier 2000; Kuntsman 2009).

losing comfort and being “strange” or mobile enough to think. Even though this critique of the easy antagonism of “home” and nomadism/migrancy is targeted at certain feminist writers who idealize and metaphorize nomadism, it also lends important critical insight into Prosser’s theorization of the politics of home.<sup>9</sup> Idealizing “home” might work in a similar fashion, reinforcing the cultural binary between “home” understood as comfort and ease, and a way of being that “over-reaches itself.” Ahmed (ibid., 87–88) critiques both the idealizing and metaphorizing of migration and the easy dualism between “home” and “away,” which makes it impossible to see how “strangeness” or strangers are already at home. This idea of strangeness as already at home can be used to critically interrogate the way Prosser (1998, 187–188) presents transgender yearning for a “specifically transgendered home,” in other words, a body, and a (transgender) community outside gender binary, “this desire for a culturally specific home leaves her visibly transgendered body with no place like home in the world: no sexed home in which it would seem to belong.” While Prosser writes about transsexual yearning for a home in a gendered body as well as in the (social) world, he posits visibly non-gender-conforming people as “homeless” in the sense of losing home in the world as a trade-off for the *dream* of a transgender “community home.” I find that this juxtaposition of on the one hand transsexual yearning for a home in the body/world as something which can be realized and on the other hand transgender ultimate homelessness makes it impossible to see how both community and home are produced through collective storytelling, collective remembering and the circulation of stories (Ahmed 2000, 91–93). Also, even though Prosser (1998, 205) admits that a home in gender is perhaps always only a yearning, he posits transsexual desire for “home” as more than merely a dream, juxtaposed with the “dream” of a community home. Is the loss of a home that Prosser

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9 For post-colonial and trans of color critiques of Prosser’s uses of the tropes of home and journey, see Halberstam 1998; Aizura 2012; Bhanji 2012.

attaches to visibly gender-non-conforming actually the strangeness “at home” or the experience of being a “body-out-of-place” felt by trans\* people of various identities? And if this is so, is this strangeness, which is already “at home” in Prosser’s thought projected to the ‘transgender’ as opposed to transsexuality? Could the projection be seen as a way of leaving behind the strangeness as well as the feelings attached to that (Love 2009)? This projecting of loss and permanent dis-integration or unassimilability on the figure of the transgender could also be read as a way of “curing” or assimilating some trans\* bodies as healthy, fitting bodies, which fit the social world as it is (Stryker & Sullivan 2009).

The epistemological uncertainty or the inevitable residue of the binary understanding of gender is what I mean by the strangeness being already at home. This epistemological uncertainty is culturally projected on trans\* people, even though it is not an ontological essence of trans\* people, but rather a feature of binary gender as epistemology (see Aizura 2012). Moreover, when epistemological uncertainty and incoherence are projected on transgender people, the uncertainty and incoherence are already at the heart of the painfully-upheld, ostensible certainty and coherence. As countercultural transgender media, *OP magazine* seeks to redress some of the “strangeness” of trans\* people in the wider society. It clearly seeks to build, in Michael Warners (2005) words, a counterpublic – in this case, of transmasculine people. Transgender media stories combined can achieve more than individual stories. One thing that the combined stories can do, is open up the category of trans\* to more varied identities and trajectories than Prosser’s politics of home. They can open up trans\* as “the question of identity” (Sedgwick 2003), instead of a final answer, the question of recognition, belonging and home, in a relationship with social stigma or strangeness. Perhaps then, the visible trans\* politics of bodies on the streets and in print media could be called a common “dream,” or a common yearning, for an inclusive home, a call for embracing the strangeness at home.

## Encounters in the social world

Even though the editorial of the first *OP magazine* displays a manifesto for diversity in bodies and in attitudes towards physical transition through hormones and surgery, physical transition is an important part of most of the stories and portraits in the magazine. It is a point of orientation in many of the stories, especially in “pre-op” stories where it may be represented as a wish or a goal, such as for example in the quote below.

Q: Are you planning on having top surgery? A: I do want to get top surgery really bad. I feel like my relationship with my chest is unfortunately based on paranoia – believing people have laser eyes that can see through my bad posture and layers and fabric to be like ‘THOSE AREN’T PECS, THEY AREN’T EVEN MAN BOOBS’ and I attribute a lot of what I read as not passing to their nefarious existence. (OP No. 1, Fall 2009)

This is a quote from an interview with Cyd, “fauxtralian dude-bro-fag,” by Amos Mac. This comment could be deciphered as a wish for a home in the body, and through it, in the world, in the way Prosser describes the transsexual desire for bodily transformation. There are also other kinds of stories, such as the interview and portraits of stunt-man Sawyer (OP NO 4/ Summer 2010) who describes himself as a “female bodied-fag” and in Amos Mac’s words has “no interest at this time of their life to take hormones.” In this interview, there is no explanation for the reluctance to take hormones, even though taking hormones is an obvious reference point and it seems as if they must be addressed in the interview, however briefly. Perhaps this story works as an orientation device (Ahmed 2006, 3, 11, 155) for the audience, showing how one can relate to gender – at least momentarily – in a way which is not attached to the hormonal balance of testosterone versus other, “female” hormones, or the unambiguous (gendered) shape of the body. This story could also be seen as a different



kind of “politics of home,” than Prosser’s. The space given to this story in a trans male quarterly creates a “home” for various bodies in the trans community.

In the interview with Sawyer, it is perhaps the fact that his coworkers are “respectful” of his trans identity, which makes him socially, and not only “internally,” a trans person – or, rather, a man. This respect can be manifested in pronoun use, as in another interview with Simone, the baker, explaining his job in the same magazine: “Not everyone knows or respects my pronouns here, but enough people do that I’m comfortable with staying even though I’m not thoroughly thrilled with my job” (OP NO 4, Summer 2010). The male pronouns used by others effectively make Simone a man in his social surroundings. This powerful effect of precarious everyday interaction resonates with with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003) call for thinking about performativity “spatially” or “relationally.” This means regarding belonging and realness as things, which are created performatively by telling body narratives within *certain publics* about and to certain bodies and selves. My query about the difference that audiences – or publics – make is inspired by Sedgwick’s (2003, 9) theorization on the spatial dimension of (queer) performatives and her point about the difference that audiences make.<sup>10</sup> This is an instance of micropolitical action, as is writing about it in the zine. The pronoun “he” functions as an orientation device, attaching maleness to the person it is used for, and makes the workplace a “comfortable” place for Simone. Making certain places comfortable is here

10 Sedgwick (2003, 9) writes of the spatial, or relational dimension of performativity, discussing anthropologist Esther Newton’s (1972) “spatially precise analysis” of drag clubs and her “extra alertness to the multisided interactions among people ‘beside’ each other in a room,” which in Sedgwick’s words “underlines Newton’s continuous assumption that drag is less a single kind of act than a heterogeneous system, an ecological field whose intensive and defining relationality is internal as much as it is directed towards the norms it may challenge.”

partly about words attached to bodies in a respectful way. I understand this act of respectful pronoun use and asking for the right pronouns, as well as discussing it in a trans zine, as “politics of home” which seeks to make space for various trans bodies in the social world. The interactions in the social world involving words, bodies and encounters can make maleness effectively “gendered realness.” The signifying words (pronoun), the bodies (trans), and the encounters, all of which are effective through discursive or cultural formations, including the discourse of transsexuality and the counterdiscourses of trans movement together produce a habit change. Discussing these encounters and tactics in the magazine may even spread these tactics.

The transgender public often challenges the hegemonic binary understanding of gender. It also often challenges the hegemonic, i.e., medical, understanding of transgender, in advocating anti-pathologization politics and in presenting the great variation of genders, bodies and identities as something to be celebrated, instead of stigmatizing. However, the transgender public is also sometimes “juxtapolitical” (Berlant 2008) in that it circulates stories, which tell that the only change that needs to happen is in the transgendered individual’s body, so that it will “fit” into the social world.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, individualizing the feeling of fitting, it sometimes repeats the stories that Prosser tells, about a process of bodily change that simultaneously produces a feeling of a “fit” between the mind and the

11 It is important to note that I analyze the stories of transgender media, not the lives or choices of transgender people. I do not want to posit a juxtaposition between changing one’s body and changing the social world. This kind of juxtaposition is not to be found in *OP magazine* either. The separation I make is between the different ways that different stories work. When changing one’s body is presented as the only necessary change in transgender stories of transgender media, the media is not working in a strictly political way, but these stories in the “community media” affirm the identities of trans people, and this is also an important effect in itself.

body, and a feeling of a “fit” between the transgendered individual’s body and the social world. This individualizing veils the historicity of belonging to or fitting the social world, and the power relations that make some bodies slide easily through the social world and some bodies and people feel unfit, dis-integrated (Stryker & Sullivan 2009) or like an obstacle to the smooth running of things (Ahmed 2012). Still, transgender media also circulate stories of micro-political actions and changes, such as the encounters of transgender people in the workplace, where they are able to change the practice of pronoun use and make the pronouns “fit” them instead of focusing solely on the change in an individual’s body (or mind) and fitting it into the social world.

### **The promise of (political) community: to bring bodies home**

There seems to be a community in the making in *OP magazine*, an imagined community (cf. Anderson 1983) of transmasculine people of various gender identifications, bodies, as well as stages and versions of bodily “transitioning.” This imagined community is not completely open to just any gender variation (which could be said to include also the “ordinary” or cis-genders). It is united by some kind of attachment to the prefix ‘trans’, as well as to maleness and masculinity, or at least one of them. It is centered on the bodily transitioning and the written and photographic portraits of visibly transitioning transmales, with occasional inclusion of more unusual body narratives, such as the stories of people who attach themselves to both butch and trans communities, people who identify as trans(male) but do not wish to take hormones or have surgery, people who have started their lives as intersexed and have a different transition story to tell, and people who have stopped taking “T” for the moment or for good, or people whose self-definition is something other than male or female. However, all these

stories and portraits are bound together by an attachment to the word “trans” and /or to a “trans community.” This is perhaps something that both Stone and Feinberg envisioned when the former wrote about “a counter discourse” (Stone 1991) of trans people and the latter in the influential novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) about a trans community as a political community. Prosser (1998, 188) concludes that Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* ends with the question of a “community home” for Jess, “fantasy of specifically transgendered home.” If in Prosser’s account of the novel this “community home” is still a fantasy, it is possible to claim that the novel in fact worked to build such a “home” and that today in transgender media this kind of “home” is produced even more effectively.

In the transgender stories of *OP magazine* we can unravel an articulation, a chrySTALLIZATION, of the context as a complex web of relations, which are constantly being articulated (Grossberg 2010). Here, in these chrySTALLIZATIONS, also the implicatedness of (trans) people in the power relations can be deduced; how people both desire belonging and question the terms of this belonging. Furthermore, the micropolitics that I read in these stories happens inside these relations, and could be called a form of re-articulation (Grossberg 2010). These stories of encounters and tactics in the encounters, in the social world, implicitly question the medical model of transgender where transgender is seen as an objective pathology in an individual’s body or mind, or rather, as an objective incongruence of body and mind. They highlight the social power relations and practices of gendering while also drawing attention to the possibilities of changing them.

Transgender media such as *OP magazine* make the existence of a great variety of genders visible; bodies and identities that have a discursive platform in the transgender subcultural context but not in the wider social world. Transgender media sometimes articulate and circulate the political

activism of transgender politics of the streets and the micro-politics of for example individuals in workplaces. On the one hand, transgender media function as a public, or even as a counterpublic, that challenge the power relations of the wider social world, and the dominant medical model of understanding transgender. On the other hand, these media also circulate the idea of an empowering “community” as a “home.” The trope of community in these transgender stories affirms the identities and bodies of trans\* people. They also perhaps help trans\* people to “integrate” into the social (world) (Stryker & Sullivan 2009). The narratives of community and bodies becoming a home also sometimes challenge the social world. Perhaps the dynamic tension between these two trajectories is necessary for imagining an identity-political community; a community that is both about identity and about change.

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