

Narrating the Slash:  
Reading Contemporary Intersex Stories

By

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## **Dedication**

To all the creatures, great and small, that dare to fiercely love what is strange in themselves and  
in others.

## Abstract

Intersex is a diagnosis of atypical sex reclaimed as an identity marker for bodies so diagnosed. Intersex is located in the genitals, chromosomes, gonads, hormones, or secondary-sex characteristics of the person named as such. Intersex throws into sharp relief the biopolitical imperative to discipline human and many non-human bodies into uncomplicated categories of male and female. The artistic production about, by, and for intersex people has been understudied. This dissertation enters into the emerging field of intersex studies by providing an imaginative and interdisciplinary response to literary fiction about, life-narratives by, and experimental poetics and film for and about, intersex people. Chapter One examines the erasure of race in Kathleen Winter's 2010 novel about the coming of age of an intersex teen entitled *Annabel*. Building on critiques of Jeffrey Eugenides's oft-studied *Middlesex*, I apply existing scholarship on the eclipsing of race by attempts to incorporate a mythical and metaphorical intersex body into the space of the nation to Winter's text. Chapter Two turns from fictionalized intersex experiences to life-narratives written by intersex people. In this chapter, I centre the object of the scalpel and the medical chart in the life-narratives I study – Thea Hillman's *Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)* and short pieces from the 2015 issue of *The Journal of Narrative Bioethics* – in order to trace the affective narrative strategies the authors deploy in an effort to end the biomedicalization of the intersex body. Chapter Three pivots towards the non-human animal intersex body, and their use in public panics about the increasing environmental toxicity of our world. In an effort to counter this “transsex panic,” I read Aaron Apps's 2015 book of poetry *Intersex: A Memoir* and Lucía Puenzo's 2007 film *XXY* as examples of texts that see sex not as a static or “natural” category, but as a process. The brief Coda that concludes this

dissertation expands on the notion of sex as a process to engage in an experimental discussion of genitalia. The Coda argues for an understanding of genital variation instead of perfection.

## **Introduction: The Trouble**

*The anatomical model for sex is an ideal, and thus, by definition, something impossible for any individual body to possess or perform.*

*Morgan Holmes, "Mind the Gaps" 172.*

We like to think of male and female as uncomplicated categories. Men have penises, testicles, and produce sperm. Women have clitorises, vaginas, wombs, and produce ovum. These sperm and ovum come together to create new life in the process of human reproductive sex. It's a fairly simple story...until, it isn't. At birth, the external organs that indicate our reproductive capacity are given a cursory glance by physicians, nurses, or midwives. That glance and subsequent speech act – "it's a boy!"/ "it's a girl!" – determines how we will be interacted with for the rest of our lives. Even if we change our genders later in life, this first moment of designation as male or female marks us irrevocably. But, should a body need more than just a cursory look, should a body require chromosomal testing to determine their sex because their penis or their clitoris looks like something "in-between," that body begins to make trouble.

"Intersex is trouble" sociologist and intersex activist Morgan Holmes writes:

It is trouble for the families of children so diagnosed; it is trouble for the medical specialists who make careers out of neutralizing "abnormality"; it is trouble to a system of sex/gender that insists that bodies are oppositional in/by "nature" limited by an absolute dimorphism. Most of all, however, intersex is trouble for those whose bodies are so labeled, but not because of any inherent "difficulty" in the biological and/or anatomical manifestation(s) of intersexuality. The trouble with intersex is [...] decidedly social, but the burden of cost for the trouble to the social system is borne primarily by intersex infants and children." (*Intersex* 13)

If we consider the scenario I have outlined above, we can begin to see why Holmes understands intersex as trouble, particularly for intersex infants and children.

“Intersex” indicates bodies that do not fit neatly into the “absolute dimorphism” of our social and cultural system of designating sex. This dissertation uses literary and cultural criticism to highlight and seriously engage with texts written by and about intersex people. I approach fiction, non-fiction, fictional film, and poetics to follow the narrative lines that these texts leave in an effort to highlight the dimorphism that intersex bodies challenge. I take a decidedly intersectional approach, attending to issues of race, class, gender, and sexualities that affect the way intersex bodies and experiences are narrated and read. I follow these narrative threads into some unexpected places: the barren snow-covered landscape of Labrador; the inside of a narrator’s car, where they sit with a stolen copy of their own medical chart; the inside of a narrator’s mouth, where an alligator egg sits and gestates; and the eye of a turtle. It becomes clear that even under the pressure of social erasure, intersex emerges unexpectedly, to challenge one of the most firmly held beliefs in Western culture: that binary sexes are stable categories.

Stable binary sexes categories are the products of the biopolitical disciplining of the body which aims to erase the intersex body by forcing it into fallacious binary categories. Biopolitics is an indispensable term in the sphere of biomedicine and ethics, and therefore provides a valuable mode of thinking through the disciplining of intersex bodies in this dissertation. However, as Thomas Lemke clearly points out in his book *Bio-politics: An Advanced Introduction*, biopolitics has taken on diverse and fluxuating meanings (2). When I use it, I intend to evoke the process of promoting life at the level of populations. Biopolitics works at the level of the statistical group, tracking, tracing, and measuring just what kind of a life is being had in order to make possible a more productive life. By requiring statistically measurable groups,

biopolitics encourages the conditions through which sexuality gets constructed as such in order to make measurable categories – gay, straight, normal, perverted, and so on. These categories enforce a male/female binary in order to carefully secure and police the boundaries of “straight,” “gay,” “normal,” and “perverted,” amongst others, which are then ranked according to their ability to thrive. Those that do not encourage the thriving of life are, through technologies of social exclusion, marginalized. Intersex, then, gets managed into gender and sex categories through violent biomedicalization in order to secure intersex bodies as worth having a life. According to Adele Clarke et. al, biomedicalization exists within the larger structure of biopolitics, and refers to the ways in which medicine has been granted the power, which “automatically ‘built in’ and mobile and embodied in social practices and norms” through biopolitics, to coercively create a “*normalizing imperative*” upon bodies through the state (181). Naming intersex as such therefore creates a bodily category that allows medicine to enact its power on bodies called thusly.

A biologist, Richard Goldschmidt, in 1917, sparked the use of the term “intersex” within the confines of biomedicine. It did not enter use by intersex people themselves, their physicians, or caregivers until the early 1990s (Holmes, “Introduction,” n.p.). Prior to the use of “intersex,” physicians used a broad array of technical terms to refer to bodies that did not fit neatly into their pre-conceived notions of “male” or “female.” Often these differences resided in the external genitalia. Penises were “too small,” or clitorises “too large.” Once physicians were able to examine the gonads post-mortem, there were designations like “pseudo-hermaphrodite,” which often meant that the patient had both male and female gonadal tissue. “True hermaphrodite” as Alice Dreger has argued, was a very rare designation, and often contested by corresponding

physicians even if one physician claimed he had found it, because it undermined the notion that a true sex could be determined by biomedicine (Holmes “Introduction”; Dreger 88).

Since early accounts of intersex emerged in medical literature, the desire to, as Dreger puts it, “keep people straight,” has been a pervasive theme in the biomedicalization of intersex bodies (8). There was, and is, an imperative to know the sex of the body so that we can be clear about who we are sleeping with, and thus that our own sexuality is secured as straight or gay.<sup>1</sup> Intersex, therefore, has been vital to the defining of gender, sex, and sexuality. The goal for most physicians when considering a standard of care has, therefore, and continues to be, heteronormativity. According to sociologist and intersex activist Georgiann Davis, the heterosexual imperative continues to be a defining part of intersex medical management. As Davis points out, the method of identifying a successful outcome of intersex medical intervention persists as heterosexual sex and desire (95). It is to ensure heteronormativity’s flourishing that intersex is named and policed as such.

In the 1950s, a significant shift was made in the treatment of intersex people, who up until this point were given a “sex,” but surgery was not particularly common. However, beginning in the 1950s, a physician at John’s Hopkins, John Money, implemented a treatment protocol called “Optimal Gender of Rearing” (OGR), which promoted immediate and irreversible sex designation at birth. The goal of OGR was to ensure the child’s “‘normal’ (ie. heteronormative) psychosexual development” as well as successful “family bonding” (Clune-Taylor “Genital” 9). OGR required secrecy in order for it to be effective. The child must never know the “true” story about their body. This secrecy posed a problem, however, as children aged. The surgeries, often clitoral or penis resections, or vaginal constructions, resulted in

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<sup>1</sup> There is significant work to be done on the intersections of bisexuality and intersexuality as a result of this kind of logic.

significant scar tissue, which led to a lack of sensation. In addition, the repeated medicalization of children's intersex bodies had also caused significant psychological trauma.

At the time during which Money's methods and theories were beginning to come under scrutiny, a very famous case of John Money's, that of David Reimer, was published by John Calapinto in *Rolling Stone Magazine* and later as a book entitled *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who was Raised as a Girl*, which catalogued the failure of Money's treatment. David had been accidentally burned as a child during a routine circumcision. In response to a TV program they watched featuring Money, Reimer's desperate parents contacted the charismatic physician for help. Money suggested that David be surgically reassigned a girl, and that no one should ever tell him about the sex he was given at birth or about the botched surgery or "correction." But, as David grew, he never felt himself a girl, despite Money's claim that gender was entirely an issue of socialization. In time, David decided to reverse the surgery, live as a man, and tell his story very publically through Calapinto. The effect of these disclosures on Money's career were significant.

While Money's influence over the treatment protocols for intersex may have dwindled over the years, surgery early in life on intersex children persists with a tenacity that is difficult to account for, given the profound psychological and physical damage it is known to do. In response to the continued treatment protocols requiring cosmetic surgery on infant genitalia and enforcement of the sexed binary those protocols point to, the Intersex Society of North America formed in the early 1990s, headed by Cheryl Chase (now, Bo Laurant). The goal of the ISNA was to change social notions about physical sex, and to end the stigma about intersex people through an appeal to what would now be seen as a kind of queer politics as they pushed for a more fluid understanding of gender and physical sex in and outside of medicine. However, in

2006, ISNA was disbanded as many of their executive saw the political appeal of siding with a recently published “Consensus Statement on the Management of Intersex Disorders.” Some of the executive were on the decision-making committee for the consensus statement which promoted the term “Disorders of Sexual Development” (DSD) over intersex. The reason for this change was that DSD allowed intersex traits to be considered no different than asthma or any other medical condition, which the advocates of the term thought would make intersex less an issue of identity politics and more an issue of good medical care.

The backlash to this move cannot be overstated. As Giorgiann Davis writes in her book *Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis*, “DSD terminology has heightened tension within the intersex community” (2). While some intersex people sided with the terminology, others vehemently resist it, citing the “pathologization that underlines the term disorder” (2, original emph.). Despite moves to rename DSD “differences of sexual development,” the charged rhetoric on each side persists. A similar rift occurred within scholarship about intersex. For Morgan Holmes, there are two reasons not to abandon “intersex” as a term: the first is how hard intersex activists worked to reclaim the word from biomedicine in the 1990s and early 2000s. The second is that “We (where we are scholars, or intersexed persons, activists or some combination of these three) are not yet done with ‘intersex’” (“The Intersex Enchiridion” 388). Holmes continues:

The 1990s and early 2000s saw a wresting away of the term “intersex” from its strict, clinical uses and a new deployment of the term to signal a positive means of identifying a self and a history that had been shaped by [a] medical power structure that preferred, indeed, based its treatment protocols not on identification but erasure and silencing. At issue is both the refusal to grant that medical names

are ‘the proper names’ for anatomy, biology, and for lived experience, and, concomitantly, the refusal to grant the clinical view the final authority to frame and give meaning to our lived experience. (388-389)

Therefore, for Holmes, to stay with intersex is to “stay with the trouble”<sup>2</sup> to not to allow medical language to co-opt the intersex body or its experience as proper to medicine any more than it already has.

In contrast, activist, writer, and “rogue intellectual,” Emi Koyama accepts the new nomenclature because she feels that intersex is a term that was “wrong from the beginning,” that it was “slightly more tolerable than the mystifying and misleading term, ‘hermaphrodite’” (n.p.). It marks bodies as “inbetween” male and female, which Koyama writes is not the case. Intersex people, for Koyama, are “male or female with a birth condition.” For Koyama, the goal is to get parents and physicians to refrain from “drastic measures” in treating a child with an intersex trait. The goal of the term intersex, as used by activists in the 1990s and early 2000s, was “influenced by queer identity politics” which attempted to dismantle the binary sex system in order that intersex no longer be a necessary term because “male” and “female” would be outdated modes of oppression. The sham of the binary would be undermined.

However, this project needs to be abandoned as hopeless, for Koyama, and replaced with a radical disability politics that understands intersex as disabled through social systems that “divide human bodies into normal and abnormal, privileging certain bodies over others” (n.p.). Quoting intersex activist Esther Morris, Koyama explains the process of disabling the intersex body thusly: “not having a vagina was not my problem; having to get one was,” which Koyama

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow this phrase from Donna Haraway’s recent book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, in which she encourages an ethics that stays “truly present” instead of harking back to the past or gesturing to the future (as disturbing or idealized as either temporal location might be) but instead stay present and implicated as “mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings” (1).

paraphrases as: “not having a vagina was not a disability, the social expectation that she needed to get one in order to live [a] happy and productive life marked her body as disabled” (n.p.).

In Koyama’s view, queering the world’s idea of gender in order to make intersex unnecessary is too huge of a project that does not help anyone in the here and now. If most intersex people, as Koyama argues, are happy as men and women, then scholars and activists need to accept DSD as a way of embracing a radical disability politics instead. A radical disability approach would undo the medical paradigm that pathologizes the intersex body in the first place. But, I am left wondering about the loftiness of this goal as well. Under biopolitics, it seems to me just as unlikely that we will overturn the medicalization of intersex bodies, when intersex bodies are marked by their very challenge to one of the most foundational tenants of our society: that sex is binary, and unconfusingly so.

Georgiann Davis provides a kind of bridge between intersex and DSD. Though, she does admit that “for people with intersex traits, DSD nomenclature is the key to access biological citizenship and the right to the relational support it makes possible” (115). “Biological citizenship,” a term Davis borrows from Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas, defines the ways in which “individuals use biomedical language to describe aspects of the self” (106). Davis explains that for Rose and Novas, “biological citizenship is established and controlled by powerful institutions, notably medicine, whose rules and expectations are adhered to by active biological citizens. [...] Those who do not adhere to the rules and expectations of biological citizenship are viewed as problematic persons” (106). Therefore, those who use DSD nomenclature, according to Davis’s research, have a much more effective and beneficial relationship with “medical professionals and family members.” However, she continues that “for those who insisted on intersex language, those relationships were more likely to be fractured” (106). At the same time,

those who choose to use DSD language are forced to see their bodies as “disordered.” The choice to identify as a person with DSD in order to gain access to medical care comes at the price of pathologizing one’s own body, revealing the limits of a conservative medical institution and the workings of biopolitics.

Davis’s research confirms that “intersex” and “DSD” are problematic because the rigid two-sex system and its medical, social, and legal enforcers mean that bodies that do not fit into the sex binary (male/female) are trouble from the start. The problem is not the intersex body, however, but the systems that force intersex bodies into the small confines of what is clearly an imagined binary, which I will explain more in a moment. But first, I must explain my own choice of language: In response to the difficulty of language around intersex bodies which are both trying to achieve the best results for intersex people in the now, and in the future, I choose the language of intersex for three reasons: 1) the authors I discuss use the term intersex; 2) I count myself among the scholars of intersex Holmes mentions that are not yet done with the term intersex. Much is left to say about what intersex has meant, is currently meaning, and will mean in the future in relation to intersex texts; 3) the term “intersex” provides an umbrella for all intersex writers and artists with a variety of intersex traits to tell their stories under one heading.

This unfortunate double-bind between intersex and DSD, as I have alluded to, situates intersex bodies as a problem either way. It suggests that the onus for changing the standard of care for intersex people, as Koyama, Davis, and Holmes all point out, rests with intersex people. Regardless of whether one identifies as a person with DSD, or an intersex person, the medical industrial complex still identifies that body to be one in need of fixing. Bioethicist and long-time intersex advocate Ellen K. Feder, in her latest book *Making Sense of Intersex: Changing Ethical Perspectives in Biomedicine*, argues that the intersex body is not the problem – it’s how we view

that body that is. The problem of intersex underscores the staunchly held cultural and social belief in a gender binary. For Feder, Peirre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" is useful. Habitus, the often-unspoken social norms and mores of a particular community, allows us to see more clearly why parents and physicians make the decisions they do in relation to intersex children's bodies. In short, what happens to intersex bodies is about all bodies – their sex, their gender, and their sexuality.

To explicate Feder's use of habitus – and to make obvious the social and cultural investments in an imaginary, static, and easily identifiable male and female sex – Catherine Clune-Taylor draws on Susanne Kessler's work to ask the profound question:

Why is it that when asked in studies [for students] to imagine themselves as a child with ambiguous genitalia, the majority respond that they would hope their parents would not have chosen genital normalizing surgery; yet when asked to imagine themselves as the parents, the majority state that they would chose the surgery? (10)<sup>3</sup>

Feder argues that this choice comes down to a repetition of the world we know through the bodies and lives of children. The enforcement of social norms weighs heavy on parents, who are faced with the knowledge that their child may grow up and be bullied. Discussions of the "locker room" often predominate in these contexts. Physicians and parents alike imagine moments of forced teenage exposure to justify likely multiple genital surgeries, the entire goal of which is "normal"-looking genitals. Despite evidence that intersex people who have not been medically managed do not struggle with the appearance of their genitals unless they were also subject to

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<sup>3</sup> The method through which parents are told about their child's intersex is also significant. Giorgiann Davis notes that a recent study conducted by Jürg Streuli et. al., "showed that subjects randomly assigned to play the role of parents of an intersex child were less likely to grant consent for surgery when a psychologist presented the intersex trait in a demedicalized fashion than when an endocrinologist presented it in a medicalized fashion" (77).

multiple genital exposures at the hands of physicians, these myths about locker rooms and bullying persist (Feder 77).<sup>4 5</sup>

However, Susanne Kessler's work also makes clear that habitus is not the only culprit in the medical management of intersex. Her work also finds that parents needed to be *taught* to see their intersex child's body as problematic. So, their habitus might compel parents to see difference in their child's body, it is the clinical encounter, given its power as biopolitical, that marks the intersex boy as a "monstrosity that forecloses on the child's species membership as a human, and subsequent status as a person" (Holmes "Mind the Gaps" 170). If biopolitics is inseparable from the notion of a population thriving, and habitus is an effort to mandate that thriving, then they work in tandem. According to Karl Manton, Bordieu's theory of habitus stemmed out of an urge to reconcile "social structure and individual agency" (50). While we often think of biopolitics as part of a state-sponsored action, it is enacted on the level of the population by that self-same population. It then combines social structure and individual agency, by encouraging the flourishing of life through the quotidian actions of those who are under its sway. It is, therefore, the moment of medical touch, of clinical exposure, that marks the intersex body as such. The method by which habitus finds enforcement within the realm of the clinic can be accounted for through the logics of biopolitics.

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<sup>4</sup> It is also alarming that these procedures continue when there are no guarantees that genital sensation will not be lost. Questions of genital sensation are not considered on infants, despite significant risks to it with surgical intervention. Imagining a pleasurable sex life later in life is not part of the discussion between parents and physicians. Discussions of heteronormative reproduction, unsurprisingly, are.

<sup>5</sup> A research project I am currently working on with Dr. Fenton, asks questions about how interactions with children and an enforcement of gender and sex norms make plain the ways that adults inscribe heteronormativity onto children. Steve Bruhm and Natasha Hurley explain in their introduction to *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, that children are at once expected to be without a sexuality, but are also expected to be heterosexual. How this investment in the erotic life of the child plays out in the treatment protocols for intersex requires further thinking, something that falls outside of the scope of this dissertation.

Biopolitics enforces itself on intersex bodies by creating the category of intersex as both a medical condition and an undesirable attribute. In response to the biopolitical creation of the intersex body that is unwanted, biomedicalization provides options for managing the intersex body within the confines of the medical institution. Biomedicalization is unique from medicalization because it is enacted not as a necessary medical “fix” but an optimization of the body through ever-increasing molecular science (Clark et. al 173). Biomedicalization, therefore, is able to see intersex at a much smaller increment than before – say, in the DNA. It then calls the intersex body intersex, and begins the process of enacting power upon that body through optimization.

We can apply this concept of biomedicalization easily to the process of pre-genetic diagnosis (PGD) in the case of intersex. PGD is the process of diagnosing a potential gamete with an undesirable trait (such as intersex) the result of which is the option to not implant that gamete within a womb.<sup>6</sup> The process of PGD for pre-implanted gametes is part of a biopolitical process which encourages the flourishing of what medical, legal, and social institutions consider to be normal bodies at the cost of other non-normative bodies. PGD for intersex traits is clearly an example of biomedicalization if we consider that the parents consenting to PGD see the move as one that maintains their own health through an act of individual agency, saving them the

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<sup>6</sup> In October 2013, an issue of the *American Journal of Bioethics* was dedicated to the use of PGD for intersex traits. Bioethicist Robert Sparrow, the author of article to which others responded, argues that PGD for intersex traits that come with significant health risks like CAH (Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia) or AIS (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome) should be subjected to PGD. It is worth noting that the salt-losing form of CAH is potentially life-threatening, but with effective medical care, is manageable (see Ellen K. Feder’s Chapter “The Trouble with Intersex: History Lessons” for more on the impact of salt-losing CAH on the biomedicalization of intersex bodies). PGD should also be considered in cases of cosmetic intersex cases because intersex people do not have a strong community through which to encourage a sense of belonging. Their psychological health is thus at risk. Similar arguments about the psychological health have been peddled by medical professionals in relation to intersex for centuries, without significant evidence to support these claims. In a blog post for *Notches: The History of Sexuality Blog*, entitled “Eugenics and Intersex: The Consequences of Defining ‘Normal’ Bodies,” I take on Robert Sparrow misguided claims.

emotional labour of explaining an intersex child to their larger community, as well as removing the potential of bringing a body into the world that most certainly will be outside of norm to begin with. It also places the burden of bodily difference squarely at the feet of the parents, who must then bear the weight of not only the decision but the moral discourse surrounding their child's body.

Morgan Holmes applies biopolitics not only to PGD, but to the process of identifying an intersexed child as in need of surgical management. She laments that a child born intersexed is only considered to be part of the species of human after medical intervention. She writes that “it may even be that the intersexed infant is thought to lack the criteria for inclusion in species membership as a human being, insofar as the development of the intersexed body is thought to be arrested at some ambiguous embryological stage” (173). That is, because intersexed infants are seen to have been somehow stalled or damaged in the development of their reproductive organs in utero, then in order to “achieve full status as persons” “surgical technologies” must be deployed to “vault them past their ambiguous embryonic stage into human species membership” (173). Without these interventions, intersexed children cannot claim access to the category of the human, thus placing them in constant danger of exclusion, violence, and erasure.

Biopolitics, therefore, forms the underpinning of my understanding of how intersex bodies are related to and interacted with by medical professionals, other care givers, family members, and other members of their social circles, in the texts I explore in the following three chapters. With a careful attention to the workings of biopolitics, this dissertation seeks to understand the role of intersex art in resisting the sexed binary that often “surgically shoehorns” (Fausto-Sterling, “Five Sexes” 47) intersex bodies into these culturally and historically contingent categories. Specifically, I attempt to pin-point how, where, and under what

circumstances resistance to sex norms exist within discourses of and by intersex people. But, before I lay out exactly how I will go about this complicated task, it is important to understand the history of intersex writing and art and how my project fits into these emerging discourses.

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Intersex studies, as a field, is currently emerging and distinguishing itself from the larger and more established disciplines of queer and trans studies. A defining property of intersex studies is what Christopher Breu refers to as an “insistence of the material,” an attention to and investment in the material body necessitated by the biopolitical policing and disciplining of intersex at the level of the material body, and the trauma that falls out from the medical surveillance of and encroachment of that body. Intersex studies therefore veers from, but is intimately entangled with, queer and trans theories through its attention to the body, gender, and sexuality. Intersex is formed through the construction of oppositional sex categories that have particular requirements, as I indicated at the outset of this introduction. If the body cannot be admitted to one particular category or the other, it is deemed intersex. In order to forward particular arguments – that sex is socially constructed, for example – queer theory and trans theories have relied on intersex bodies and histories.

While there is value in trans and queer theories for intersex studies, both theoretical frameworks (neither necessarily cohesive, of course) remain insufficient for thinking through intersex artistic production. Queer theory emerges slightly before intersex activism and provided various modes for thinking about sexuality in radical opposition to hetero – and later homo-normativity. While queer theory’s attention to pleasure might be forestalled by the surgically altered, and thus genital insensate body, as Iain Morland argues, its focus on shame and loss is potentially productive for providing avenues for resisting surgical intervention on intersex bodies

(“What”). I therefore pick up Moreland’s use of queer theory in Chapter Two as a way of understanding the use of the scalpel and the wounds and winces it produces in intersex life-narratives.

Trans theory, at the outset of its scholarly coherence, included intersex. The first *Transgender Studies Reader* entered Cheryl Chases’s article “Hermaphrodites with Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism,” within its important collection of historical and contemporary articles about trans experience, art, and justice. However, by the second *TSR*, which included no historical materials, intersex was nowhere to be found. This shift makes visible the move in trans studies away from an allegiance between discussions of physical sex and gender, in addition to its reliance on the history of intersex to narrate its own. Intersex, after all, has been conflated with trans and queer bodies historically. For example, Havelock Ellis’s notion of sexual inversion which posited that homosexual desire was the result of, in the case of male homosexuality, a female brain in a male body. When this history had been established, the connection between intersex and trans was less secure.

Moreover, the political project that rejects surgical intervention into intersex bodies often cannot be accounted for by the desire for surgical and medical care for trans bodies. In brief, intersex activists and scholars would like to be able to walk out of the hospital untouched, while trans activists would like to access the hospital without derision, stigma, or harm. That said, it would be disingenuous for me not to acknowledge the intersections of intersex and trans in the lives of intersex people who later transition. Contributor to the series of life-narratives I explore in Chapter Two, Sean Sofia Wall’s, experiences transitioning out of a medically and socially enforced female sex assignment is just such an example. He narrates his story as a trans as well as an intersex one because of the kind of care he needed to access (*The Symposium* 117-119).

Stories like these make the divisions between intersex and trans blurry, indeed. In addition to the co-imbrication of trans and intersex experiences, trans studies also produces nuanced and critically rigorous and vibrant analyses of the structures of power that produce intersex in the first place. These critiques of power/knowledge systems that impose a sex/gender binary are important throughout this dissertation, but particularly in discussions of the transsex panic that bubbles up in response to planet toxicity in Chapter Three.

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I recently completed my first attempt at teaching a new course in the Women's and Gender Studies program at the University of Manitoba entitled Issues in Sex, Gender, and Sexualities. During the course, one of my students declared the sexed binary "a hoax." Many of my students in the class are trans, have trans lovers, trans family members, or trans friends. Many identify as a member of the LGBT2SQIA\* community. Therefore, many of them have seen first-hand how this "hoax" plays out in their everyday lives. But, to my dismay, most of them had never heard of intersex. I assigned Sharon Preves's article "Intersex Narratives: Gender, Medicine, and Identity," and found many of them enthusiastically writing response papers to it. Their thoughtful outrage was palpable: How could medicine be so paternalistic? How could such violence be enacted on children? How is heteronormativity so pervasive and malicious to enforce a sexed binary on children too young to consent to surgery? And why did no one tell us about this?

I felt in their rage, my own. As a queer (though, bisexual in spaces in which the word "queer" doesn't connote quite the same) woman, I have known the anger over binaries, over being forced into a box that was convenient to everyone but me. I have known what it is to feel

shame about who I felt I was, and about who I was permitted to be. But, I do not know what it is to be intersex. I know what it is to hate being given an identity to put on, when it doesn't fit quite right. I am impassioned by the desire to break down arbitrary boundaries between straight/gay; male/female; man/woman; butch/femme, that are potentially confining for us all, but are particularly vicious to those of us who live in the space of the slash-between. I don't know what it is to feel medicalized in and out of existence. The points of connection I make, however, reside at the level of sympathetic interaction with stories that refuse to let medico-legal institutions have the final or only say over bodies that take on the lion's share of the burden of heteropatriarchy. This dissertation, therefore, enacts modes of empathic seeing, reading, and response that amplify intersex stories and takes stock of what these stories might be saying to and about us all.

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The scholarly work on intersex has been dominated by historians and social scientists responding to the biomedicalization of intersex bodies. Suanne Kessler's book *Lessons Learned from the Intersexed* (1998), Sharon Preves's *Intersex and Identity: The Contested Self* (2003), and Katrina Karkasiz's book *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived Experience* (2008), are some of the most well-known examples of bioethical and sociological work in the field. Each text, in its own way, attempts to advocate for intersex people in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when awareness about intersex medical management was beginning to grow. In 1999, historian and bioethicist Alice Domurat Dreger added to the largely sociological and bioethical conversation about intersex by publishing *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*, which provides a broad array of responses to the medical management of intersex people. Notably, it includes some of the first testimony written by intersex people about their own experience in a scholarly edition.

Concomitant with her ethical work, and as part of the burgeoning field of intersex studies, Alice Domurat Dreger published her ground-breaking historical analysis of the treatment of intersex, *Hermaphrodites and The Medical Invention of Sex* in 1998. Her book catalogues the changes in thinking and the resulting protocols for intersex medical involvement as technologies and discourses about sex were beginning to move out of religious spaces and into physicians' case studies in late nineteenth-century Britain and France. Not only does Dreger's book make the claim that intersex was defined in order to "keep people straight," but also that intersex was defined in order to secure the sex binary.<sup>7</sup> Elisabeth Reis's valuable history of the US-American medicalization of intersex bodies, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex*, was published in 2009. In it she examines a wide array of case studies published in American medical journals from the early days of the United States national project to the present day. Both of these texts form my foundational and historical understanding of the medicalization of the sexed body.

As a result of the largely sociological and historical focus of intersex studies, testimonies of intersex people are the foundation of most of the work in the field so far. It is important to acknowledge that these sociological, ethical, and historical studies, and the case studies and testimonies therein, form the basis of my own knowledge about intersex. As a literary scholar, I was drawn to the way these testimonies were narrated, and was compelled to read more. I began

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<sup>7</sup> I am certain that many in the field of intersex studies will notice the absence of Dreger's work from much of this dissertation, given the impact she has had on the field. I have chosen to maneuver away from her work in order to highlight the work of other scholars, particularly scholars who are themselves intersex, queer, or trans. This choice is less of an affirmation of identity politics, and more a response to Dreger's recent disturbing positions. I find Dreger's stance on trans people in more recent years to be troubling, and has made me wary of her previous work, but particularly critical of her most recent publications. For an overview of the controversies surrounding Dreger's engagement with trans activism, politics, and scholarship see Julia Serano "Alice Dreger's Disingenuous Campaign Against Transgender Activism."

to wonder where else intersex stories could be found. Certainly, I thought, there were memoirs, novels, works of art, in abundance, responding to the violence intersex people experience.

It is perhaps unsurprising, given the secrecy in which intersex is still shrouded, and the shame that secrecy compels, that intersex stories are still rare. Though, in the past year, Hida Vilorio, a renowned intersex activist, published her memoir *Born Both: An Intersex Life*. Prior to her memoir, Thea Hillman's memoir *Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)*, which I respond to in Chapter Two, was the only widely available text in North America. Given that the numbers of intersex people in North America are statistically significant – the most commonly used numbers (between 0.5 per cent to 1.7 per cent [Carpenter 173]) suggest that intersex, in the broadest definition of the term (1.7 per cent), occurs as often as red hair (isna.org) – this silence is stunning. Transgender memoirs, however, are increasingly popular and can be found in almost any mainstream bookstore. Arguments that might suggest that intersex memoirs trouble the gender binary, leading to a lack of published texts, need only look at the recent surge in these trans memoirs to find that their claims are shaky at best.

Instead, it is more likely that it is imperative for the safety of sex as a biologically stable and bounded category that makes intersex memoirs less likely to emerge. Gender has always been a less stable category, and one with fewer ties to the body that presents it. The argument tends to go that gender is something we put on, but sex is something biologically determined. But, as Judith Butler would have it, sex is just as constructed as gender, and also constructed in and through gender (*Gender Trouble* 12). Notions that sex and gender are not implicated in each other misunderstand that our sex organs are not just gendered but gendering objects. The violence that this gendering has had on bodies such as David Reimer's is intense. Penises make males, the argument goes, and vaginas make females. It is the first thing that is checked when we

are born (or, now, in utero, via the use of sonogram technologies), and our gender is exclaimed as a fixed given based on those genitals. Without these genital structures, a subject is thought to become hopelessly confused about their gender.

In response to the violence that intersex narratives are attempting to expose and counter, Viola Amato in her book *Intersex Narratives: Shifts in the Representation of Intersex lives in North American Literature and Culture*, traces intersex narratives from the beginning of the activist movement in the early 1990s, to the present. She argues that the 1990s marked an important moment because the ISNA and intersex activist movements made space for “intersex individuals” to “reclaim the definitory power over their bodies and their sense of self, which prompted the production of ‘alternative’ intersex narratives and thereby processes of the resignification of ‘intersex’” (14). Her project aims to account for these moments of resignification in order to point to moments of “productive incoherence within these narratives, which potentially provide the conditions of intelligibility for (their) intersex subjects” (14).

Amato’s text marks the first monograph-length discussion of intersex writing.<sup>8</sup> In it, she addresses a number of the texts I will explore, including Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*, Kathleen Winter’s *Annabel*, and Thea Hillman’s *Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)*. However, her text has a different aim, in that it specifically traces the deployment of an intersex identity in these texts as a way of making space for intersex people. She draws on Butler’s idea of intelligibility to think through this process. For Butler, it is only when the body is intelligible that it is given access to a liveable life. While my project, like Amato’s, sees power in the

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<sup>8</sup> Since Amato’s text, the publishing house transcript Verlag has published another monograph on intersex, entitled *Discursive Intersections: Daring Bodies between Myth, Medicine, and Memoir*, written by Michaela Koch. Both Koch and Amato’s texts have come out of American Studies programs in Germany. There is something to be said, therefore, about the fact that no such work has been published in North America proper. I have not engaged with Koch’s text here, because it was published only as I was completing this manuscript.

deployment of intersex as an identity in the texts I study, I expand on her project through an engagement with various critical frameworks including critical race theory, trauma theory, and ecocriticism, to try to make sense of intersex studies in our particular historical moment.

As Amato and others<sup>9</sup> have explored before me, intersex bodies are often used as tools to tell other stories: stories of hybridity, of general mixing, of border crossings, and so on. The intersex body, in these narratives, is meant to do the heavy lifting of the “hybrid” metaphor, or an ideal “queer” body that defies normative gender, sex, or heteronormative ideals. As a result, intersex is often misunderstood, and its histories glossed over by someone else’s agenda. As Morgan Holmes’s asserts, even the very term “intersex” and its pathologization and medicalization are the result of someone else’s goals, the policing of boundaries that do not belong to intersex people, but to the dominant culture and society that disavows it (“Introduction” n.p.). Intersex is always under threat of obfuscation. In response to this obfuscation, this dissertation centres intersex and critically evaluates artistic production by and about intersex people.

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This dissertation is not organized chronologically, but instead by scope and scale. While the chapters are self-contained, they speak to each other through their central concern about intersex specifically, but about sex designation more broadly. Jasbir Puar asks in *Terrorist Assemblages*: “What does it mean to be examining, absorbing, feeling, reflecting on, and writing about the archive as it is being produced, rushing at us – literally to entertain an unfolding archive?” In a contemporary project like the one I am engaging in here, time moves a bit “out of joint” in that it points to a past and a present and a future that we understand and know very little

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<sup>9</sup> Thea Hillman and Morgan Holmes most acutely.

of (Derrida in Puar loc. 211). I connect Foucault's 1990 text *Herculine Barbin* to contemporary intersex memoir, scientific texts to experimental poetry, and as such attend to the "agony" of our present and past times for intersex people. I see this project as an attempt to, as Puar puts it, "historiciz[e] the biopolitics of the now" (loc. 262), to track the ways in which intersex has been picked up in various contexts and written about. However, instead of trying to write a cohesive history, I provide snap-shots, as part of what I see as a project intensely engaged in attempting to imagine space for the category of intersex to disappear as a result of lack of use because medicine no longer holds sway over the intersex body. We, somehow, begin to see physical sex as part of a thriving continuum. I am aware of the cruelty of this optimism, given the persistence of the biomedicalization of intersex people, most acutely, and queer bodies more broadly. But without a sense of hope, it would be challenging to keep writing.

The first chapter takes issue with two pieces of fiction that are likely the most well-known in North America: Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*, published in 2002, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and was a popular addition to Oprah's book club. Given its international reputation, Eugenides's novel is one often cited when I bring up intersex to friends, family, and scholars alike. The chapter does not spend much time with *Middlesex* itself, because the discussion around the text is already saturated with excellent scholarship on its troubled and troubling representations of intersex. The scholarship encouraged by the novel, therefore, provides the important foundation for my discussion of another well-known and much celebrated text about intersex: Canadian Kathleen Winter's 2010 novel *Annabel*. Drawing on critiques by other scholars of the representation of intersex and race in *Middlesex*, my examination of *Annabel* exposes its reliance on whiteness, which necessarily erases race in order to promote a pro-queer politics through its mythologizing of intersex. I argue that the intersex protagonist,

Wayne/Annabel's, bi-racial identity is eclipsed by the text's need to make Wayne/Annabel white in order to foreword a queerness that is palpable to the imagined reader and the state.

Chapter Two takes up texts written by intersex people in an effort both to highlight but also engage with their under-studied texts. In response to the mythologizing and metaphorization of intersex in the fiction of Chapter One, in this chapter I turn my attention to intersex life-narratives. I have chosen to focus on Thea Hillman's 2009 memoir *Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)* and a couple of short narrative pieces from a Narrative Symposium (hereafter *The Symposium*) in *The Journal of Narrative Bioethics*, curated by Giorgiann Davis, because both texts are exemplary of what I see happening in the genre of intersex life-narratives. I find a way into these texts by centering a couple of key objects that feature predominantly and repeatedly in them: the scalpel and the medical chart. By focusing on these objects, the texts' relation to medical power becomes more visible. Instead of ignoring the body, this move puts the body and its vulnerability to, and entanglement with, these objects into better focus without making a spectacle of the intersex body (as often happens in the fictional texts I explore in Chapter One). Moreover, I contend that these objects act as catalysts in the intersex narrators' processes of mourning and experiences of trauma. By attending to these moments of crisis compelled by these objects, this chapter endeavours to sit with the trauma of medicalization and intersex writers' responses to it.

Chapter Three expands the discussion of intersex to include non-human animals as a way of making plain the anthropocentrism and heteronormativity that limits our understanding of physical sex into the two binary categories of male and female. Our current moment has seen unprecedented climate and ecological changes as a result of human consumption. The impact of these changes has hit human and non-human animals alike. Chemicals that we are dumping into

our waterways have shown to impact the reproductive organs of non-human animals. These affected animals have become fodder in discourses about the human impact on non-human populations. Specifically, animals deemed trans or intersex as a result of toxic exposure (or perhaps they were always already that way) are presented in media and scientific reports as aberrations, as dangerous omens of the ecological destruction to come. In response to this rhetoric of “transsex panic,” I propose that two texts about intersex – a 2007 film by Lucía Puenzo called *XXY*, and a 2015 book of poetry by Aaron Apps entitled *Intersex: A Memoir* – forward ecocritics’ Malin Ah-King and Eva Hayward theory that we need to consider sex as an ongoing and ever-changing process instead of a static truth. Both texts, I argue, use their intersex protagonists’ relationship to non-human animals to think through sex as variation that responds to climate change and planet toxicity in sometimes unexpected and wonderful ways.

The final and concluding chapter is a brief thought-experiment that I hope ties together all three chapters through an interrogation of human genitalia and plants. My aim for this chapter is a radical rethinking of bodily perfection. Drawing on the mushroom-penis-object creations of Loriccia Pacholko-Matheson, I propose an acknowledgement of human genitalia as objects of aesthetic variation instead of objects of reproductive function, *per se*. I ask how genitalia can be seen through a queer ethics of desire instead of an aesthetics of perfection, function, or most dangerously, pathologization. Through this experiment, I hope to resist surgical intervention specifically, but biomedicalization more broadly, of sexed bodies.

This project is unapologetically about intersex. It highlights intersex stories, and aims to make space for intersex to flourish in our world. It challenges biomedicalization, pathologization, and social and cultural exclusion of intersex bodies and identities. But, I hope it also provides methods and ideas to challenge the containment of dreams, desires, and pleasures

of all bodies that defy bodily categorization. I have attempted to let rage and desire bubble up at once, from the stories read, and from my own body as well, spilling the banks of the mucky streams and rivers where intersex alligators sun themselves and play. The goal of this project is to provide a space of gestation for an emergent field of intersex studies, holding and highlighting stories that serve as part of its growing archive. Our current moment, ripe with reactionary rhetoric and action against queer people and their bodies, is in dire need of this archive and the stories it reads.

## Chapter One

### “Someone Else’s Story”: Situating Intersex Fictions

In the introduction, I discussed the ways in which intersex has emerged as a visible term, identity, and body up for contestation. “Intersex” in the general parlance is fairly new; but, it is not without cultural touch points. Perhaps the most well-known and oft-discussed cultural text about intersex is Jeffrey Eugenides’s 2002 novel *Middlesex*, which sparked international discussion about intersex after it won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature and was intensely discussed on one of the United States’ favourite talk shows – *Oprah*. Eugenides’s text tells a multi-generational story leading up to the realization of the protagonist, Cal/liope’s, intersex. Another intersex bildungsroman, a 2010 Canadian novel by Kathleen Winter entitled *Annabel*, was a contestant on the Canadian debate-style book awards show Canada Reads, and contender for a number of prestigious literary awards,<sup>10</sup> similarly portrays the coming of age of an intersex person named Wayne/Annabel.

I examine these fictional texts because they have, through their popularity, informed a great deal of the cultural discourse about intersex. As part of the popularity of the novels, their authors were given a significant authoritative voice on intersex, a subject position neither of them embody. Prior to the publication of *Middlesex*, a popular novel about intersex had not been published in the United States or Canada since Elizabeth Ward Howe’s 1846 novel *The Hermaphrodite*. Once *Middlesex* was published, Eugenides was trotted out like an “expert” on intersex, despite having spoken to no intersex people during the process of writing the book (Hillman loc. 248). *Middlesex* did affect some change to medical protocols about intersex, as

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<sup>10</sup> *Annabel* was shortlisted for the 2010 Governor General’s Award, the 2010 Scotia Bank Giller Prize, the 2010 Roger’s Writer’s Trust Fiction Prize, and the 2011 Orange Prize for Fiction. It won the 2011 Thomas Head Raddall Award.

literary scholar Olivia Banner's research uncovers. Banner argues that the changes some pediatric physicians made to end surgical intervention on non-consenting infants were the result of the epic narrative of the text that charts the life-cycle of Cal/liope whose body was never subjected to surgical "treatment," which makes evident what rare longitudinal studies on intersex infants had not made clear: surgery is not necessary, especially at such an early age (845).

Eugenides's novel hit a nerve in the psyche of the American readership both inside and outside the medical establishment. The nerve, I suggest, is not limited to the text's treatment of intersex but expands to its implications on a broader queer community. Through its representation of intersex as a material kind of "queerness," it conjures cultural and social understandings of queerness as biological (instead of a choice).<sup>11</sup> Anecdotally, I know few avid readers who have not read *Middlesex*. All of these readers I have spoken to, who do not identify as queer themselves, particularly those who have had little to no exposure to queer communities or politics, feel the novel helped them become aware of and accept intersex and other kinds of queerness more readily. *Middlesex*, therefore, requires sustained critique within intersex studies as a text that is a common, albeit highly problematic, cultural touch-point for non-intersex people about intersex. Kathleen Winter's text, albeit in a smaller Canadian market, also had a significant impact, particularly in its appearance on *Canada Reads*, during which its representation of intersex was hotly debated.

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<sup>11</sup> Recent discussions by religion scholar Val Heibert make this argument, that LGBT activists should use intersex as an example of queerness that is grounded in biology – therefore, really “born that way.” By using intersex as a way of pointing to all queerness as potentially biological (a recent presentation of Heibert's argues that queerness might be located in the DNA in a way that we cannot possibly know yet) (Steinbach Neighbours 24 Feb 2018), we can advocate better for queer rights within Religious and/or conservative spaces. While I disagree with this tactic, I do think it sheds light on the reasons why Eugenides's text might be so popular. Cal/liope could not help his “lesbian” desire for the Obscure Object. His physical sex (which had always been “male”) made him desire women. For more on this flawed logic, see Morgan Holmes's article “Cal/liope in Love.”

As necessary to *Annabel* and *Middlesex*'s appeal, I propose, is that both books were heralded as revolutionary examples of texts that centred a queer character that ended well. Both protagonists exit their narratives relatively intact, relatively happy, and both make their intersex invisible in the end, receding into normativity. The readers of both novels can sigh with relief that things aren't as bad for intersex people, or perhaps even their other queer counter-parts with whom they are often elided, as they may have imagined. This sigh of relief is, arguably, why these books are so popular within mainstream readership circles. These texts allow for an imaginary narrative in which the (queer) kids are alright, in the end.

It is the aim of this chapter to expose the cruelty of the optimism both of these texts end with, in which both of their intersex characters emerge into the world happy and thriving. I burst this happiness bubble these texts both construct in order to expose exactly who gets left behind in these narratives when they normalize their intersex characters. In a world that sees intersex as anything but normal, such an optimistic ending to both texts is bound to have some excess. The excesses, I argue, are race and queerness,<sup>12</sup> which coningle in troubling ways, particularly in *Annabel*. I rely on the excellent scholarship already done on the erasure of race in *Middlesex* to set up how a similar disappearance occurs in *Annabel*. I point out that in order to make Wayne/Annabel, Winter's intersex protagonist, palpably Other, he must become white. Wayne/Annabel's whiteness effectively eclipses his Indigeneity, as well as any blackness in the text. The racism of the text, that is, its lauding of whiteness, is what allows intersex to be liveable within the world of the novel. Through *Annabel*'s popular representation as a "Novel to Change

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<sup>12</sup> It might seem strange that I conflate the terms intersex and queer when queer quite often refers to an identity position within the broad LGBT2SQIA\* umbrella. For me, intersex is queer through its disturbance of cultural, social, and medical paradigms of male and female. Intersex's queerness is, therefore, easily co-opted as potential for all kinds of normalizing projects, as I will argue happens in both the fictional texts I discuss here.

Canada,” I also contend that *Annabel*’s erasure of blackness and Indigeneity engages in a Canadian version of what David Eng calls queer liberalism, and which Jasbir Puar expands into the concept of homonationalism.

Jasbir Puar suggests that “biopolitics delineates not only which queers live and which queers die [...] but also how queers live and die” (loc. 112). This system of biopolitics, which draws on a Foucaultian positive biopolitics – how queers live and die – and a negative biopolitics such as those of Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics, is indebted to the nation, and the ways in which queers are allowed to fit into, or be expunged from, that nation. Texts created within these nations allow us to see the imaginative limits of what can be enacted within any given national space. *Middlesex* and *Annabel* are two such examples, making clear the pressure of biopolitics on intersex bodies. Our contemporary moment, as Puar suggests, marks an interesting moment for queer subjects within the Nation, which used to be read as “figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and family)” (loc 111). While Puar largely understands queer bodies as gay as lesbian, on which inclusion is conferred, intersex and trans bodies are often excluded from this new era of queer inclusion. Intersex and trans bodies are made queer *par excellence* through their challenge to heteronormativity because of their sex and gender non-conforming status (reminiscent the claim that if you don’t know the sex/gender of who you’re are sleeping with, how can you know if you’re straight?). The project of both *Middlesex* and *Annabel*, I argue, is to respond to the biopolitical exclusion of intersex bodies by extending life and productivity to them in effort to include them in the nation.

To include intersex bodies within the constructed boundaries of the Nation State in these novels comes at a cost, namely of race. This cost is not without real world correlations or

impacts. For Puar whiteness is “cohere[d] as a queer norm and straightness as a racial norm” (loc. 362). Therefore, all queers are coded as white (an argument also made by Patricia Hill Collins), and all racialized bodies are necessarily straight. Through this logic, queers of colour disappear and are disappeared because their of-colour queerness cannot be held up by the nation state. Only a white queerness is permitted inclusion, a process Puar calls homonationalism by way of the export of this white liberal queerness within the project of U.S. imperialism. If, as I say, intersex is a kind of queerness *par excellence*, then if intersex is to be included into the nation state, it necessarily has to be white. Directly or indirectly, both Eugenides and Winter participate in the making white of their characters for this exact reason.

I begin the chapter with a deep analysis of the trajectory of the scholarly criticism of Eugenides’s *Middlesex*, because it is arguably the first contemporary fictional text on intersex to gain significant scholarly attention. This scholarly attention, I contend, is caught up in some of the same optimistic logics that resulted in the novel’s mainstream popularity. However, instead of the interest steaming from the novel’s idealistic conclusion, it is an optimistic reading of the novel’s metaphoric possibilities grounded in Cal/liope’s “hybridity” both as intersex and Greek American that sparked the first scholarly responses. Soon, however, these optimistic readings were met with critiques of the text’s representation of intersex. As I have already articulated, Eugenides’s often fetishistic and largely academic approach to intersex as a site for discussions of gender, fluidity, and identity instead of a lived reality for many, may have helped end some of the surgical interventions into intersex bodies. However, by grounding intersex in the mythological, and the causes for it in an incestuous relationship between Cal/liope’s grandparents, the text came under harsh critique by queer studies and disability scholars like Anson Koch-Rein. Finally, in the most recent scholarship by Stephanie Hsu, the prior

scholarship about hybridity and racial identity in the novel is unpacked and troubled through a critical examination of the text's engagement with Asian-Americanness through its portrayal of Cal/liope's adult love interest Julie Kakuchi, in addition to its representation of the black civil rights movement and the Detroit riots. Hsu makes evident the ways in which intersex is deployed as a way to disappear race in the novel.

I take on Hsu's arguments and apply them to a reading of Winter's *Annabel*, asking how Winter's approach to her queer protagonist, like Eugenides's approach to his, forgets, but is also haunted by, race. While both authors construct intersex characters in an effort to argue for a broad-stroke "queer" (ie. "hybrid," or non-binary) identity – one not constrained by the neat categories of male and female – their intersex protagonists are contained within the biopolitical imperative of the state, itself a project of whiteness. The state must, as its primary goal, protect its own flourishing, a flourishing that gender and sex non-conforming bodies put into question through their refusal, intentional or not, to exist within measurable categories of embodiment, desire, or, often, kinship. Hsu critiques *Middlesex*'s blindness to the biopolitical imperative to amalgamate into or escape from the nation. Cal/liope is forced to flee the US nation to Germany in order to live. But even there, Cal/liope must hide their intersex and Greek identities, the two things that mark them as other. Similarly, in *Annabel*, the intersex protagonist is forced to disappear their racialized identity as Indigenous in order to even begin to claim an intersex identity (something Cal/liope does not do). However, eventually, intersex too falls away, and Wayne/Annabel assimilates into the nation by making invisible (making stealth) their queer body. Therefore, neither text resists or critiques the biopolitical imperative of the nation state, but both participate in the nation-building project at the expense of intersex, particularly racialized and intersex, bodies.

In short, this chapter endeavours to track *Annabel*'s methods of making intersex properly Canadian,<sup>13</sup> keeping in mind three instances of disturbance: 1) Following Puar, and thinking through the popularity of *Annabel*, the text provides an opportunity to think carefully about how queerness can be portrayed within the nation state of Canada, and the impact its rendering of a romanticized queerness might have on intersex people specifically. I strongly contend that the text provides a very narrow – white and middle class – mode of escape from queer oppression; 2) keeping in mind that the nation and the body are both culturally and historically contingent, both *Middlesex* and *Annabel* use intersex as a cultural myth ripe with significance that erases the specificity and political weight and urgency of representing intersex in a moment during which intersex bodies continue to be under threat from medical management and social exclusion. Therefore, I argue that the lived experience of intersex people get lost in this fictional representation to the potential detriment of the intersex rights movement in Canada specifically; and, 3) The ways in which Eugenides's text has been critiqued as one that problematically contends with race provides an avenue for thinking about Winter's novel that has not yet been trod, specifically the way in which race is conspicuously erased in the text in favour of a white, intersex protagonist whose embodied queerness is only made palatable through their whiteness. I will argue that this erasure of queers of colour from both texts makes intersex only legible within whiteness.

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps most obvious to those scholars and activists enmeshed in debates about Winter's text, I want to admit that I find it strange to refer to Winter's protagonist Wayne/Annabel as intersex. I am unsettled by this naming because, as I will explicate below, Wayne/Annabel's intersex trait is an entirely fabricated medical condition that does not fully reflect any intersex trait a person in the real world might embody. However, because Wayne/Annabel is defined as an intersex person in the text, as well as by people who discuss the text, and by Winter herself, I use "intersex" to describe Wayne/Annabel. Interrogating the fictional creation of an intersex trait used in the context of the novel is part of the project of this chapter.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that this chapter is not really about *Middlesex*, though I do address critical moments in the novel as they pertain to my own critical intervention into the text, *Annabel*, and related fictional mythologies about intersex. The discussion of *Middlesex* is already saturated by excellent scholarship on its troubled and troubling representation of intersex. However, the criticism provides necessary and valuable context for thinking about intersex in contemporary literary fiction. I, therefore, position criticism about *Middlesex* as a way of situating intersex studies and discussions of literary fiction about intersex in our contemporary moment – at time of writing, the (almost) Spring of 2018. Given the swiftness of change in discussions of intersex in our Western world (and thank goodness for it), I am certain that my observations here may soon deserve reshaping. But, let me say for now that this chapter is an attempt at a close analysis of the ways I see intersex studies emerging inside the realm of literary analysis. It first pokes its head through the dirt as a way of theorizing the supposed hybridity of the intersex body as it is assumed to relate to racial hybridity. It then grows to critique this mythological and metaphorical approach to intersex through reminding readers of the lived reality of intersex people. It has currently bloomed into a robust discussion of the ways in which intersex is incorporated (or not) into the nation state through an erasure of race.

This chapter begins by tracing the deployment of perhaps the most famous myth about intersex – Ovid’s Hermaphroditus. I include this brief section in order to provide context for the mythologizing and metaphorical use of intersex that occurs in both *Middlesex* and *Annabel*. What is perhaps most surprising about the Hermaphroditus myth is the way it weaves in and through both literary and medical texts as the most available cultural reference point for intersex. I then link my discussion of the Hermaphroditus myth to the use of hybridity as a cultural myth

that gets attached to intersex, bi-racial, and diasporic bodies in *Middlesex*. After this rather lengthy discussion of the criticism of *Middlesex*, which, as I have said, forms the foundation of my understanding of *Annabel*, I begin my critique of Winter's text. My critique begins by providing the larger context of colonialism that is brought up only to be dismissed by the text. This foundation allows for an analysis of the lauding of whiteness, which necessarily pushes aside and erases race in favour of a white-washed queer body. My conclusion considers the cruel optimism that first hails and then upholds whiteness through *Annabel*'s representation of a generic queerness. I hope that this chapter will provide context for further, and hopefully vastly more, analysis of the ways intersex has been represented and addressed by fiction writers and literary scholars alike.<sup>14</sup>

### **Annabel meets Hermaphroditus: Or, The Lure of Myth**

*Hermaphrodite* – 1. One having the sex organs and many of the secondary sex characteristics of both male and female. 2. Anything comprised of a combination of diverse or contradictory elements. See synonyms at **MONSTER**. – Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*

*While the myth of Hermaphroditus has captured the imagination for ages, it traps real human beings in the painfully small confines of story. Someone else's story.* – Thea Hillman

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<sup>14</sup> Since the original writing and formulation of this chapter, another text has been published on intersex by literary giant Arundhati Roy, entitled *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. I hope that my work will help provide a starting point for careful analysis of Roy's text as well as others I am sure will be part of the construction of intersex in our cultural and literary imaginations.

In 1997, *Mosaic, an interdisciplinary critical journal*, published a special issue on *The Lure of the Androgyny*. In her introduction to the issue, “All that Glitters,” Evelyn J. Hinz explains that the concept of androgyny has drawn attention from “psychology, linguistics/epistemology, anthropology/sociology, biology/medicine, religion/ethics.” “In providing this kind of meeting ground,” she writes

The topic would thus seem to effect the kind of blending of differences that on the level of gender is entailed in the concept of androgyny, just as the concept itself is frequently seen as extending far beyond any matter of sexual issues per se and is seen instead as a kind of metaphor for the destabilizing of binaries of numerous kinds and at various levels: the realistic and the fantastic, the visual and the verbal, the comic and the serious, the natural and the supernatural, the artificial and the human, the self and the other, and ultimately good and evil itself. (vii)

Pointing out that the metaphor of the androgyny can be a kind of “fool’s gold,” Hinz is caught between the power of the androgyny to destabilize the boundaries she names above, and the problem androgyny can cause to prevailing cultural and social norms because of how it relates (or doesn’t) to terms like “hermaphrodite, bi-sexual, transgender, and transsexual” (vii) and, by extension, the trouble androgyny makes for pronouns. Its rhetorical pull, therefore, can lead us down the path to iron instead of gold. Androgyny, taken away from the body it is meant to signify, can seduce us, but this kind of disembodied theorizing can eclipse, and even erase, the quotidian realities of living androgyny.

Given that this issue of *Mosaic* is twenty years old, it is surprising how topical it remains. We continue to have debates about pronouns and genderqueer, trans, and intersex bodies;

bisexual desire continues to be erased under LGBTQ political activism and in everyday life; the metaphor of the middle continues to be contested by intersex, bi, and trans activists and scholars alike. And yet, the “lure” of these middle spaces, or these bodies or desires that deconstruct, in their very existence, the binaries between male/female, gay/straight, masculine/feminine, and butch/femme, entice us into thinking that their metaphorical weight might lead us out of our binary-obsessed world, intent on boxes and categories, and into a more peaceful, androgynous space – heavy lifting, indeed.

The lure of the middle space, I argue in this following section, has many implications, particularly when we are thinking about fictions written about intersex. I will begin by laying out one particular myth that continues to seduce novelists and medical professionals alike – Ovid’s myth of Hermaphoditus and Salamicus from his *Metamorphosis*. I look at the use of this myth and how it has weaved its way into even the most influential medical texts, and then back in and through literary fictions which then serve to alter medical knowledge. I suggest that the lack of other cultural touch-stones for intersex has meant that Hermaphroditus becomes the pop-culture reference for knowledge even within the fictional texts I examine. The impact of this legacy is that intersex bodies continue to be viewed as mythical and ahistorical. They belong somewhere/sometime else. It then becomes very easy to sidestep their contemporary medical management and social exclusion. This process becomes particularly evident in the exclusion of the intersex body from the state. For example, most US states and Canadian provinces require a male or female designation of an infant on their birth certificate before that child can be taken home from the hospital. The lack of ability for infants to claim a non-gendered identity at birth means intersex bodies can only exist in myth.

The Hermaphroditus and Salamicus myth has informed mainstream medical discourse since at the least the early 1700s, and up until 2004. For instance, Physician and surgeon Hugh Hampton Young published one of the most influential works in urology in 1937, in which he included more than fifty-five case studies of intersex people, in conjunction with many other related case studies. At the beginning of his book is a section entitled “Hermaphroditism in Literature and Art,” in which he includes a long re-telling of Ovid’s myth of Hermaphroditus and Salamicus. According to Young, the story by Ovid goes like this: Ovid explains that Hermaphroditus, son of Mercury and Venus, and a beautiful boy, enthusiastically travels the world. In his mid-teens he comes upon a pool inhabited by the vain nymph Salamacis. Upon seeing Hermaphroditus, she is immediately struck, and attempts to aggressively seduce him. When he resists, she cries, dragging him down into the water: “You may fight, you rogue, but you will not escape. May gods grant me this, may no time to come ever separate him from me, nor me from him!” Ovid writes, “her prayers found favour with the gods, for, as they lay together, their bodies were united and from two beings, they became one” (102). They are, in essence, grafted together like two shoots of a plant stem: “not both, but neither.” When Hermaphroditus sees what they have become, they beg their parents to curse any man who enters the pool to a lifetime of effeminacy.<sup>15</sup>

In their 2004 article “Hermaphroditus in Greco-Roman Myth: Lessons and Hypotheses for Intersex today,” Physicians Nicholas Jaspe and Monica Florence consider which lessons the

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<sup>15</sup> In her article “The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe,” Lena DeVun recounts Ovid’s tale and its importance to discussions of intersex and the science of alchemy, which sought to bring together male and female elements. In her article “Orientation and Supplementation: Locating the ‘Hermaphrodite’ in the Eyclopédie,” Stephanie Hilger traces the genealogy of the use of the “hermaphrodite” in Romantic-era French medical documents. These two texts importantly show the prevalence of the Hermaphroditus myth in medical literature prior to Hampton Young.

various Hermaphroditus myths (both Greek and Ovid's) might have for "intersexed individuals and their parents." They use the myth to suggest an end to infant genital surgeries, and to support intersex individuals to make choices about their gender and surgery until later in life. The authors invoke Carl Jung in their discussion, reminding us that

Jung once noted that the mythological figures of hermaphroditism represented not only a primitive state but also, paradoxically, symbols of completion and ultimate perfection: the end of progress: "the primordial being becomes the distant goal of man's self-development, having been from the very beginning a projection of his unconscious wholeness." Ironically, since the hermaphroditic figures represent a resolution to conflict, they are sometimes invoked as powerful healers, not as patients. (1477)

We can see from this example the way that the Hermaphroditus myth and the figure of the hermaphrodite (or "mixed" figure – androgyny, intersex, bisexual etc.) continues to hold sway in medical literature. Moreover, we can see how the Hermaphrodite, as in the novels and the attendant literary scholarship explored in this dissertation, becomes the figure of peace, of reconciliation between binary categories.

It is tempting to think that the myth of Hermaphroditus, or even the fictional hermaphrodite, might serve to enact real change, as Jaspe and Florence contend it might. *Middlesex*, as Olivia Banner has made clear, in fact, did make its way into pediatric endocrinology texts, bolstering arguments for the cessation of infant genital surgeries ("Sing" 845). As I briefly intimated earlier, Eugenides's novel's role in changing these protocols had to do with proving that an intersex body, left alone, would not necessarily impinge upon the person's ability to thrive. It achieved this end by dragging the Hermaphroditus myth into the

present moment, and showing how an intersex person might actually live with an intersex body. However, Eugenides also grants Hermaphroditus his wish to be separated from Salamicus. Calliope becomes Cal, and for all intents and purposes, passes as a cis man in society. Therefore, Cal does not remain Hermaphroditus, stuck severed from the rest of society, lonely in a pool. Cal emerges and moves in and through society as if he/Hermaphroditus has never been seduced in the first place. Therefore, while the novel provides a counter-argument for infant genital surgeries because Cal/liope does not get submitted to that practice, it is clear that space for an intersex body identifying *as intersex* is not made by the novel.

Building on the prevalence of intersex as mythical, I embark on the next section with my attention turned to the romanticization and fetishization of the hybrid body, always skeptical of the way hybridity – both as a lived reality and a metaphor – is picked up and made to engage in the labour of both signifying alternatives to our binary world, but does so while erasing the specificities of intersex bodies and experiences. The intersex body, as an all too ready metaphor of hybridity and queerness, I will argue, becomes the queer body *par excellence* but, as I contend, at the expense of erasing other kinds of difference, namely race.

### **Middlesex and the Myth of Sex Hybridity**

*Everything about Middlesex is a promise for Hybridity – Bilyana Vanyova Kostova*

In 1994, Homi Bhaba published *The Location of Culture*, a study of ethnic hybridity, an idea that remains of vital importance to critical readings of Jeffrey Eugenides's second novel, *Middlesex*. At the time of *Middlesex*'s publication, Bhaba's theories were quite popular and thus informed much of the early literary criticism of Eugenides's text. It is not difficult to see why,

given the fraught relationship the text explores between American and immigrant identities.

*Middlesex* follows a brother and sister turned lovers and married couple, Eleutherios (Lefty) and Desdmona (Des) Stephanides, as they leave their homeland in Greece to flee the Greco-Turkish war and the Great Fire of Smyrna specifically, and move in with their cousin Sourmalina (Lina) Zizmo and her husband Jimmy Zizmo in Detroit. As a result of Des and Lefty's incestuous relationship, they pass down a "recessive mutation on my fifth chromosome," 5-alpha-reductase, to their grandson Cal, born Calliope (4).

Cal/liope is born a girl and raised as such until puberty hits and his body begins to change. Cal/liope chooses to transition to Cal after a disastrous time spent at The Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic with Dr. Luce, which draws weighty parallels to John Calapinto's representation of famous (or perhaps infamous) sexologist John Money and his interactions with David Reimer.<sup>16</sup> Cal/liope then performs for a brief stint in a sex side-show act called Octypussy's garden, where he first meets other queer, intersex, and trans people. After the death of his father, Cal/liope returns home as Cal in order to claim his place as a man in his family. Throughout the text, Cal is attempting to make sense of his life, and to find intimacy with his love interest in Berlin (where he has settled), fellow American Julie Kikuchi. The text's exploration of Greek American identity, Asian American identity, and other supposedly "hybrid" identities are mirrored by the arguably strategic sexed hybridity Cal/liope experiences as an intersex person.

Bhabha's engagement with hybridity has claimed the term as part of a racialized/post-colonial discourse of identity. Therefore, the term originated from discussions of race. In response, *Middlesex*, through its intersex protagonist, provided critics with the opportunity to

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<sup>16</sup> See John Calapinto *As Nature Made Him: The Boy who was Raised as a Girl*.

expand the definition of hybridity to encapsulate a broader post-modern problem of multi-faceted, intersectional identities, and with them a multi-faceted, intersectional identity politics. That said, as Merton Lee points out in his article “Why Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex* is so Inoffensive,” Cal/liope himself asserts his apolitical stance: “I happen not to be a political person. I don’t like groups. Though I’m a member of the Intersex Society of North America, I have never taken part in its demonstrations” (Eugenides 106). Cal’s apolitical stance on intersex and political issues more general, in conjunction with the normative conclusion the text comes to, in which Cal/liope asserts a heterosexual, male identity, has set the stage for a lively debate about the promise of the novel to encourage change. But, within this debate it is important to clarify what an apolitical hybridity like Cal/liope’s is made to signify within a text that is also deeply indebted to discussions of cultural and ethnic hybridity, as well as space and race within the contested territory of Detroit, where the novel is set.

Critical responses to Cal/liope’s hybridity exposes a common trope that exists both in Eugenides’s original text and in much of the criticism about it, as well as much of the fictional, medical, and cultural literature about intersex: that the hybrid body is the saviour of a binary-obsessed society. Intersex’s very fetishization exists in the collision between what is often understood as a binary, between male and female, but it is deployed in *Middlesex* to bear the burden of ethnic/cultural hybridity as well. Instead of sex existing on a spectrum of possibilities, sex is seen as two conflicting sites of being – male and female – much like being Greek American. Greek exists in one space, American in another. Bringing them together requires the forgetting of some aspects of one. Perhaps, it even requires the direct disavowal of some of the characters of “Greekness” in order to become “Greek American.” The collision of two wholes, male and female, like Greek and American, is impossible. Something must be sacrificed for the

elision. This sacrifice, I propose, does not fulfill the promise of hopefulness, or of providing space for “bothness.” Instead, what results is a kind of *ontological homelessness*, wherein Cal/liope is forced to flee America and to assume an unequivocally male identity. The project of hybridity, both ethnic and intersex, therefore, ultimately fails. This next section explores this failure, and how, for some critics, the excess that failed hybridity leaves behind is the question of ethnicity and race.<sup>17</sup>

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Early criticism of Eugenides’s *Middlesex* herald it as a postmodern novel, aligning Eugenides’s work with the work of other American postmodernists like David Foster Wallace and Chuck Palahuk. For Fransico Collado-Rodríguez, an early critic of the text, postmodernism is exemplified by texts that seek to “go beyond the apparent world of categorical forms and offer an interpretation of life that may surpass one of the main pillars of categorical thinking: Aristotle’s Law of the Excluded Middle” (72). The authors cited by Collado-Rodríguez, he claims, attempt to argue back against Aristotle’s claim that ““one and the same color cannot be white and black. Nor can the same one action be good and bad: this law holds good with everything that is not a substance”” (72). Collado-Rodríguez points out that Aristotle’s assertion “was to offer racism strong philosophical support. Simply stated,” he continues, “according to Aristotle’s argumentation, a mixture of white and dark colors cannot exist, a notion that proved to be socially true for many non-white people living in the Western world” (73).

What follows from Collado-Rodríguez’s suggestion that “postmodern” novelists like Eugenides engage in non-categorical thinking is that *Middlesex* provides a counter-point to Aristotle’s claim. Through a reading of Cal’s non-sexed-binary body, the reader is able to grasp

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example: Stephanie Hsu, Patricia Chu, Olivia Banner, and Merton Lee.

that a body can indeed hold two things once believed to be as opposite as black and white, male and female, together in one body. Specifically, for Collado-Rodríguez, this non-binary thinking allows for a direct challenge to the racism of the “American New Right.” In addition, *Middlesex* provides an opportunity, through its engagement with ““historiographic metafiction,”” to “reinterpret the American Dream,” to include “border[land] and queer views.” Specifically, he writes, “By problematizing traditional binaries related to race, gender, and sex definition, [Eugenides’s] novel finally demands the opening of a borderland or ‘third space’ where mixed races and intersex identities can coexist” (73).

This optimism espoused by Collado-Rodríguez, at first blush, is encouraging. However, as some later critics contend, Collado-Rodríguez’s optimism does seem misplaced when we consider the fantastic nature of hybridity and third spaces. For example, Debra Shostak contends that this presentation of hybridity “demonstrates the virtual impossibility of a ‘third space’ except in utopian fantasy” (386). She goes on to claim that “To be hybrid does not mean to attain the middle between two origins, to be combinatory and to erase differences, but to be something else” (385). This “something else,” in Shostak’s argument, is not practically attainable, but marks the “distance between theory and practice” (387). To live in the “borderlands,” Collado-Rodríguez suggests, is the space of healing, but for Shostak it is to be “monstrous,” to not having a “recognizable human subjectivity” (388). The novel explores the impossibility of middle-grounds not just in terms of gender and sex, but in terms of cultural hybridity. All of Eugenides’s Greek American characters struggle to find space for themselves, many of them fail – they fail to assimilate. In Shostak’s beautiful phrasing, the American economic imperative means that immigrants are “not to melt together but melt away” (395).

For Shostak, the myth of hybridity falls down at the site of the erotic body. Once Cal's naked body is exposed, there is an immediate drive towards shame and gender determination. Once Cal understands himself to have a phallus, the option to remain a girl no longer occurs to him. His biology has determined his sex (much like what occurs in *Annabel*); because Cal has a phallus he is male. Moreover, Callie is "at the mercy of compulsory heterosexuality that would marginalize and punish her desire, constructed as 'lesbian'" (Shostak 404). Cal's decision to morph into a male is more an issue of conceptualization than transformation, Shostak argues. His body is the same, but "it means differently, and that meaning" Shostak continues, "is inherently oppositional rather than hybridizing" (406). Shostak concludes by stating that each character the fantasy of hybridity falls on—Cal, Desdemona, Lefty—eventually "tumbles back into the binary" (411). The impossibility of hybridity remains.

David Brauner finds a slightly alternative focus within the discussions of hybridity Shostak and Collado-Rodríguez engage in. He figures the failure of hybridity to occur not in a lack of imagination of Eugenides, still tightly bound to the practical realities of our world that foreclose a hybrid body, as Shostak explores, but in voice. Brauner argues that the "transgender voice," poses a challenge to the story's narration because of the problem of making believable and relatable a narrator that embodies and speaks from the position of both genders at once. Brauner cites Eugenides's issue with "'the voice's gender,' since he was uncertain as to whether 'the voice' [should] sound like a woman or a man writing" (van Moorhem qtd. in Brauner 152). What Eugenides thus resolved to do is to narrate from the first-person position, letting the narrative be "'either masculine or hermaphroditic, whatever it was'" (van Moorhem qtd. in Brauner 152). The voice, then, can fluctuate between genders, and inhabit some imagined hybrid,

non-binary space. Thus, in Brauner's formulation, the failure of the hybrid in Eugenides's novel is the "inevitable result of the gender limitations of language itself" (158).

Interestingly, Eugenides decided to write a novel with an intersex character because he believes the "hermaphrodite" to be the ideal narrator, one that can understand both male and female positions, like T.S. Eliot's Tiresias (Kehlman 90). However, according to Brauner, this project was always doomed to fail because of the impossibility of narrating from the position of a sexual-hybrid. That said, what seems a more obvious failure is the reliance on the binary to articulate hybridity in the context of physical sex. This failed attempt to articulate a sexual hybridity assumes two poles – a perfect male and a perfect female – the combination of which is what produces the intersex narrator, as in Ovid's story of Hermaphroditus and Salamicus. This logic places the intersex body as perpetually outside, as an aberration, as an exception instead of the rule.

All of these criticisms of Jeffrey Eugenides's novel pose a problem for the representation of hybridity. For example, there are so many examples of hybridity in our world that the novel is a welcome voice for those who don't have a voice; hybridity is not practical in the "real world"; we just cannot imagine a world in which hybridity can exist; or, hybridity poses a problem for language. These are all justified critiques, but at their core the hybrid still stands as participating in collision between male and female parts in the novel, something that these critiques do not go far enough in addressing. Anson Koch-Rein however, by applying a queer/disability studies critique, begins to uncover this trouble. By engaging in the mythologizing of intersex by way of the use of the "hermaphrodite," the novel, like many other narratives that forward representations of the "mythic, metaphoric, monstrous hermaphrodite," has, in effect, "eclipsed the existence of intersex bodies, and silenced their realities, while the bio-medical authorities have singled them

out of, and then defined them back (via the classification of ‘pseudo-‘) and more often than not literally tried to operate them back into the sexual binary” (242-243). In effect, by mythologizing intersex, actual bodies are placed into a double bind of mythology or pathology. Either they can be a creature of myth, or an object of science. This choice is made obvious in Eugenides’s text, as Cal/liope leaves the grip of Dr. Luce for the Octopussy’s tank, wherein s/he becomes an object of fantasy and desire.

The discourse surrounding *Middlesex* seems to shift around 2008, with the publication of Sabine Silke’s chapter “Translation and Transdisciplinarity: Mapping Contact Zones between Literary and Scientific Practices” and Samuel Cohen’s article “The Novel in a Time of Terror: *Middlesex*, History, and Contemporary American Fiction.” These two texts mark two intertwining avenues of thought about the text that have continued to the time of writing this chapter. The first is a scientific-humanities/medical-humanities approach to the text that reads the “gene” at the outset of the novel – the thing that causes all of Cal/liope’s trouble – as well as Cal/liope’s intersex trait within scientific discourses like genomics and genetics, as well as the contemporary medical management of intersex bodies. The other trajectory is to read *Middlesex* within its contemporary moment, to comment on what histories and cultures, largely US American, that it is participating in. Some authors, like Stephanie Hsu, approach the text’s investment in ethnicity and race. Though, it would be erroneous to suggest that all discussion of hybridity fall away in 2008, hybridity continues to haunt the criticism. The word continues to appear almost all criticism of the novel to date. However, I want to briefly lay out how these more recent critics seem to have laid the groundwork for *Annabel* to emerge as a novel that sidesteps both of these avenues of these later critics – it ignores issues of race and ethnicity, and very intentionally avoids discussions of science.

Silke's argument rests on Eugenides's clever narrative which combines literary and scientific approaches to the body and the way it can be in the world. Most of the discussion of science and medicine in *Middlesex* rests on two fairly large passages from the beginning of the text. The first paragraph of the novel reads:

I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petosky, Michigan, in August of 1974. Specialized readers may have come across me in Dr. Peter Luce's study, "Gender Identity in 5-*a*-Reductase Pseudohermaphrodites," published in the *Journal of Pediatric Endocrinology* in 1975. Or maybe you've seen my photograph in chapter sixteen of the sadly outdated *Genetics and Heredity*. That's me on page 578, standing naked beside a height chart with a black box covering my eyes.

Immediately, it is important to point out that this passage is already making Cal/liope's intersex body fantastical, as a way to get the reader hooked into the story. It is almost akin to a freak show poster, calling us into the tent with the body that was "born twice," as a girl and then a boy. We read to know the "truth" of this body. Later, the reader is more obviously hailed to the freak show when the Hermaphroditus myth is finally acted out in Eugenides's text. Cal/liope is swimming in the tank in Octopussy's garden. The whole story is told while Cal/liope's body is on display for the customers – "Ladies and Gentlemen, behold Hermaphroditus! Half woman, half man!" (482). The reader is being hailed in this call, too. The text is a freak show.

It is interesting that the narrator is also calling to the medical audience in this first passage. The narrator is aware that there may be "specialized readers" consuming this story. Of course, medical audiences have long been the target of fictional or autobiographical narratives of

queer bodies.<sup>18</sup> The second passage combines these two tactical invitations for both a freak show audience and a medical one. It reads:

Sing now, O Muse, of the recessive mutation on my fifth chromosome! Sing now how it bloomed two and a half centuries ago on the slopes of Mount Olympus, while the goats bleated and the olives dropped. Sing how it passed down through nine generations, gathering invisibly within the polluted pool of the Stephanides family. And sing how Providence, in the guise of massacre, sent the gene flying again; how it blew like a seed across the sea to America, where it drifted through our industrial rains until it fell out the earth in the fertile soil of my mother's own mid-western womb. Sorry if I get a little Homeric at times. That's genetic, too.

By being “Homeric” about a gene mutation, Eugenides allows scientific theories and texts to “resonate” through the novel (159), which allows the freak show audience to feel validated in their interest in the text through the scientific gaze. By extension, Silke claims, then, by “breathing life into a genetic mutation[,] *Middlesex* ridicules both the trust in science and the naiveté pertaining to trans- or intergender identity politics which tends to downplay the many humiliations persons of ambiguous genders have to bear in the course of a lifetime” (160). In this formulation, Silke is pitting “trust in science” against “identity politics,” nature against nurture. She is arguing, in sum, that *Middlesex* allows us to destabilize both of these positions by placing them next to, and perhaps, within each other.

What Silke stops short of saying, something that later critics compel us to consider, is that genetics, genomics, and science more broadly is often the cause of the “many humiliations

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Ralph Werther's *Autobiography of an Androgyny*, edited by Scott Herring.

persons of ambiguous genders have to bear in the course of a lifetime.” Moreover, the text has already done the work of humiliating the intersex body by calling the reader to enthusiastically look at its strangeness. Indeed, aside from the intrusive and exposing examinations many intersex people are subject to in scientific exam rooms and in the text itself, science is the very thing that has created the categories for bodies that Cal/liope seems to struggle to fit within. These rigid categories do not perpetuate a lack of “trust in science” but make it so that we can see nothing outside of the scientific/medical model of categorizing bodies. *Middlesex* shows us this problem so clearly. Even though Cal/liope mistrusts Dr. Luce, and therefore does not trust “science,” s/he is also not able to find an identity that is outside of the sex binary peddled to us by medical science.

The difficulty Cal/liope experiences in this example occurs as a result, at least in part, of the emphasis our current Western culture places on the importance of genetics to our identity. In her dissertation *The Biocultural Imaginary: Contemporary Narratives of Genetics and Human Variations in the Sciences and Arts*, Olivia Banner argues that we are now living in a “postgenomic era.” Following the completion of the Human Genome Project and its impressive “rhetorical flexibility,” “genetic discourse” has become central to our discussions of life. For Banner, “‘the gene’ functions as a central hub for contemporary experience and ... its ability to constellate concerns about our world – about health, about identity, about our potential future – derives from its metaphorization as a language, a code, a library, a secret. Such rhetorical framings grant it the connotations of a sacred originary text from which all meaning forms” (3). Banner rightly points out that the position that the gene is responsible for all of our traits, including race, sexuality, and physical capacity is already caught up in heterosexist notions of reproduction and the sexed binary. Most genetic research, she claims, is enacted with the notion

that physical sex, race, and so on, are stable and knowable categories. Moreover, the “metaphorization” of the gene allows for a common cultural signifier that is without political weight or stimulus. We are just “born that way,” making the gene a convenient way to deny the role of culture, society, or personal choice in the process of identity formation.

The argument Banner goes on to make about *Middlesex*, then, is that the novel perpetuates notions of race, sex, and physical capacity as both knowable and static categories. The “mutated gene” about which Eugenides’s Muse is meant to sing is positioned as solely “responsible for [Cal/Calliope’s] intersex,” which “mobilizes a genetic determinism for identity thus undercutting its own potential critique of sex and gender as socially constructed. In ultimately adhering to a liberal humanist conception of subjectivity and that subjectivity through a narrator who aligns with normative heteromascularity, the novel fails to interrogate the role of normative sex within liberal humanism and its associated genetic discourse” (140). Moreover, Banner writes, “in inscribing the heteronormative male as the narrating voice, the novel therefore weakens its attempts to undermine the conceptualization of a dichotomized sex that subtends the biomedical drive to intervene in intersex” (141). Thus, the novel both denies a middle-space for physical sex and gender by having Cal/Calliope conclude on a heteromasculine identity, but also firms up this choice by grounding it in genetic determinism. For Eugenides, and for much of the popular discourse surrounding genetics, “All of identity comes down to this single gene” (120).

But identity, as both Banner and Stephanie Hsu point out, is also what we claim for ourselves. In her article “Ethnicity and the Biopolitics of Intersex in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*,” taken from the issue of *MELUS* entitled *White and Not-Quite-White*, Hsu interrogates the issue of race and ethnicity in Eugenides’s novel. By tracing the “US immigration

narrative” relied on in *Middlesex*<sup>19</sup> and the way in which the “successful assimilation of the ethnic subject into the American middle class [...] points to the domestication of intersex phenomena,” Hsu is able to tease out the casual connections made in the novel between racial otherness and intersex. As part of this project, she historically situates Eugenides’s novel within the context of the move of self-identification from “intersex” to “DSD” (Disorders of Sexual Development) in some intersex activist circles,<sup>20</sup> which achieves two things: 1) helps advocate for better medical care, 2) departs intersex from an “alliance of sexual minorities” because of the abandonment of identity politics in favour of what some feel is self-pathology. As a way of “shedding light” on Cal’s decision to live as a man, Hsu specifically relies on the notion of “stealth” identity, which is the tactic of “passing” as cis-gendered, one that Cal employs after leaving Dr. Luce’s clinic.

For Hsu, there are a couple of major touch-points in *Middlesex* that encourage a closer analysis of the use of race and ethnicity in the novel. The first is Cal’s deployment of stealth identity in his romantic courtship with Asian American Julie Kikuchi. For Hsu, Cal’s pursuit of Julie “reveals an alternate and frequently overlooked genealogy for intersex genitalia: the sexing of racialized or ethnic bodies” (87). In their relationship, Cal is able to pass as a cis man. However, indicated by her comment to Cal that “Asian chicks are the last stop. If a guy’s in the closet, he goes for an Asian because their bodies are more like boys” (Eugenides 184; qtd. in Hsu 88), Julie is “aware of how their sexual attraction to each other resonates with the gendered implications of orientalist discourse” (88). Cal rejects “US-based paradigms of racial desire,” by instead deferring to his ethnic Greekeness – which is compounded by his reliance on the

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<sup>19</sup> A similar argument is made by Patricia E. Chu in her article “D(NA) Coding the Ethnic: Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*.”

<sup>20</sup> For more on this move and its political impetus and fall-out, see my introduction.

hermaphrodite mythology of Asia Minor. The result, Hsu claims, is that Cal's "amassing of white privilege under the sign of immigrant assimilation lends a racial significance to his stealth identity that has – like the notion of their sexual compatibility – gone largely unmarked by critics" (88). Eugenides portrays this stealth identity, Hsu claims, "as an alternative strategy for intersex survival," as he is "heed[ing] biopower's imperative to focus on the optimal conditions for the human – rather than a specific identity group's – existence" (93).

What has also gone "largely unmarked" by critics, as Hsu is quick to point out, is that "the acceleration of post-racial discourse from the standpoint of the immigrant experience in *Middlesex* parallels the increasing normalization of intersex in the world of the text's reception" (88). Here, Hsu is referring to the biomedical normalization of intersex bodies to fit into tidy categories of male and female in the medical industrial complex, wherein intersex infants are surgically altered at birth to achieve a body that more closely resembles the sex binary that is biopolitically enforced. Using Rey Chow's thoughtful engagement with Foucault, Hsu argues that in our contemporary moment, our "identity categories are reproduced by cultural arguments that assert a biological basis for social formations such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality." This focus has meant that our engagement with biopolitics has focused on the biological rather than "social forms of reproduction." Hsu recognizes that under this process of largely unchecked biopolitical management, identity categories are constantly being "naturalized, deconstructed, or resignified according to hegemonic interests" (89). For Chow, "in the present moment, ethnicity displays a unique biopolitical capacity because it offers individuals a mode of subjectivity that has 'mythic potential' for imagining new forms of belonging" (89). Cal, in his epic tale of his life, certainly monopolizes on this "mythic potential" by positioning his intersex as further justification of his ethnic identity by way of the elision between hermaphrodite mythology, its

location in Asia Minor, and the cultural discourses of intersex that he attempts to align with racial minorities.

Moreover, Hsu argues, it is impossible to disentangle ethnic identity, race, and sexuality. Cal's grandparents' incest is naturalized because it begins back in the "old country," but their marriage is socially recognized as legitimate once they are in the United States. However, Desdemona's "fateful encounter with black cultural nationalism" suggests that it is "less anxious about incest than it is about the concept of miscegenation and its thwarted aim: the social reproduction of human difference through categories of race and ethnicity" (97). Hsu convincingly writes:

While briefly employed in the Nation of Islam's first temple, Desdemona hears an indictment of her own incestuous coupling in Minister W.D. Fard's sermon about "tricknology" (154): in this origin myth intended to demystify the roots of white supremacy, a figure named Yacub creates yellow, red, and white people out of an original colony of Black Muslims through the forced mating of ever lighter-skinned individuals. In addition to implicating the cruelties of racism, "tricknology" directly names the narrative technology which, as in Fard's fable, produces biological or genetic explanations for the existence of social formations like race or gender. (96)

By identifying with Yacub, as Hsu claims Desdemona does, the text assures a redistribution of anxiousness from incest to miscegenation (97). Therefore, the earlier criticism that I pointed to that praised the text for representation of ethnic and/as sexed hybridity is undermined by its own representation of anti-miscegenation. Moreover, Cal's position as "The Man" (ie. the sovereign) happens when he returns to Detroit, a city devastated by the Detroit race riots of Calliope's

youth, and he comes face to face with the racial and ethnic other.<sup>21</sup> Despite not wanting to be “The Man,” his white, male body secures him there. His ethnic identity is hidden (or stealthed) by his white skin. Eugenides’s investment in post-identity positions this moment as one in which the minority gaze of the white male is put into question, instead of the other way around. The other is asked to consider what is beneath one’s own skin.

In a perhaps surprisingly bold reading, Hsu concludes with further analysis of Julie’s body as also being intersex within the long trajectory of equating of Asian men with small penises in cultural parlance and medical research, as well as Julie’s own admission of her body as the “last stop” between a male and female body. Julie’s ethnic body, which Hsu claims fulfills the role of the “modern-day hermaphrodite,” helps assure Cal’s status as “The Man” (104). Expanding on this claim, Hsu reads the shift from intersex to DSD as one that “dispens[es] with the need to claim intersex as a marginalized identity,” as “DSD affords individuals with mixed genital attributes the seeming opportunity to redefine and reapply the biopolitical imperative to maximize their life options” (105). The ability to manipulate identity to maximize the “biopolitical imperative,” she argues, “may not be an option at all for the ethnic body defined by its own abjection” like Julie’s. In conclusion, Hsu asks, perhaps DSD could be “amended to read: Disorders of Sex and Ethnic or Racial Development” (106). In the transition from the “politics of identity to post-identity,” it is the racial or ethnic body that becomes abjected. Drawing on these

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<sup>21</sup> It is significant that Eugenides’s text is set in Detroit, in the Midwest of the United States. In their special issue of *GLQ* called “Queering the Middle,” Martin F. Manalansan IV, Chantal Nadeau, Richard T. Rodríguez, and Siobhan Somerville claim that “When imagined in relation to other regions in the United States, the Midwest is often positioned as the ‘norm,’ the uncontested site of middle-class white American heteronormativity,” and while their text seeks to destabilize such easy associations, *Middlesex* seems to have found a perfect locale in which to situate Cal/liope’s queer body. Within the normative space of the Midwest, which also, because of its association with whiteness, is highly racially divisive, Cal/liope’s body is encouraged to become white, middle-class, and heteronormative. By setting the novel during the race riots in Detroit, *Middlesex* makes these divisions even more stark by creating an imagined centre – white, heterosexual, middle-class – against which all others are compared.

insights by Hsu, I will make similar arguments in relation to the depiction of intersex in Kathleen Winter's *Annabel*.

Viola Amato, in her book *Intersex Narratives: Shifts in the Representation of Intersex Lives in North American Literature and Pop Culture*, offers the suggestion that what is important to consider in fictional representations of intersex is whether they succeed or fail at offering to counter “hegemonic narratives” of gender conformity. The result of offering a critique of such hegemony, she claims, is the potential to open up space for intersex bodies (162). However, it possesses a limited scope in assessing fictional accounts of intersex. Specifically, in the criticism of *Middlesex*, forms of racial exclusion seem to accompany non-normative expressions of gender and sex. Therefore, which intersex bodies do these texts really hold space open for? I begin my discussion of *Annabel* from this vantage point: What does the criticism of *Middlesex* teach us about what fictional representations of intersex, such as *Annabel*, must contend with?

### **Myths of Canadian Sex(iness): Settler Homonationalism**

Toward the end of *Middlesex*, Cal/liope's roommate Zora tells Cal that “there have been hermaphrodites around forever, Cal. Forever. Plato said that the original human being was a hermaphrodite.” She continues:

“Okay, in some cultures we're considered freaks,” she went on. “But in others it's just the opposite. The Navajo have a category of person they call a berdache. What a berdache is, basically, is someone who adopts a gender other than their biological one. Remember, Cal, sex is biological. Gender is cultural. The Navajo understand this. If a person wants to switch her gender, they let her. And they don't denigrate that person—they honor her. The

berdaches are the shamans of the tribe. They're the healers, the great weavers, the artists." (489)

By yoking together the berdache and the hermaphrodite, Zora is conjuring two mythical beings in order to make Cal/líoepé more comfortable in his position as intersex. If intersex is transhistorical – they have been “around forever” – then they are less threatening. In fact, they have special powers.<sup>22</sup>

As a repudiation of just this kind of logic that deploys the “berdache” as an identity up for grabs by all queers – white, settler, and Indigenous alike – Scott Lauria Morgensen submits the concept of settler homonationalism. In a productive rethinking of Jasbir Puar’s notion of homonationalism – the “fleeting invitations into nationalism” that rely on “homonormative ideologies that replicate narrow racial, class, and gender national ideas” (loc. 374) – Morgensen has coined the term “settler homonationalism,” which understands LGBT identities as dependent on the ongoing process of colonization. He claims that the people who are largely complicit in the process of homonationalism – the majority of whom are white, cisgendered men – are also unaware of their position as settler colonial people. They are also ignorant (or at least they appear to be) of the history of the terms on which they form their identities: gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, all terms constructed by the medical industrial complex in a time during which medical knowledge production was being deployed as a method of colonial control (2-3). He writes:

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<sup>22</sup> *Annabel*’s own interest in the Greek hermaphrodite myth occurs on page 173. Thomasina, who becomes Wayne/Annabel’s teacher, muses in the context of a class assignment for which the students all have to draw a Greek god, that she could notice “the presence of a descendent of the child of Hermes and Aphrodite, Hermaphroditus, in Wayne Blake.” Wayne/Annabel is thus given the task to draw this character, which Treadway finds and confronts Thomasina about. He tells her she is interfering with Wayne/Annabel: “Wayne has to live in the real world. I would prefer if you didn’t go giving him colouring books with half-men, half-women in them” (180).

settler colonialism produces what I call ‘non-native queer modernities,’ in which modern queers appear definitely non-native – separated from, yet in a perpetual (negative) relationship to, the original peoples of the lands where they live. The phrase suggests a settler colonial logic that disappears indigeneity so it can be recalled by modern non-Natives as a relationship to Native culture and land that might reconcile them to inheriting conquest” (2-3).

As part of his understanding of settler homonationalism, Morgensen interrogates the white LGBT’s use of the trope of the “berdache” in their arguments about the “naturalness” of gay, lesbian, and transgender desires and gender performance.

The “berdache,” Morgensen claims, is an Orientalist term that “arose first to condemn Middle Eastern and Muslim men as racial enemies of Christian civilization, by linking them to the creation of berdache (in translation) as ‘kept boys’ or ‘boy slaves’ whose sex was said to have been altered by immoral male desire” (36). However, the term “berdache” was soon to signify Indigenous peoples whose gender presentation crossed the boundaries of their Western-European standards. These practices, Morgensen claims, “did not mark just gender or sexual transgressions but the acts of powerful men that turned them or others against nature, resulting in an immoral and effeminized male leadership that justified conquest” (36). The existence of the “berdache,” or the queer, therefore, was integral to deeming Indigenous populations as wholly Other, and as necessary targets for Enlightenment through the process of colonization because of a fear of “a reversal of sex” (36).

As Siobhan Sommerville argues, Darwinian theory was put to work during the late nineteenth-century through a process of comparative anatomy that sought to make stark divisions between the sexes a marker of species progress. The more male-like a female body was, in

particular female genitals, the less developed that race was read to be. Black women and lesbians, because of their observed “larger clitorises,” many sexologists concluded, were closer to being men than white (or other straight and white) women, and were therefore inferior. “As late as 1921,” Somerville writes, “medical journals contained articles declaring that ‘a physical examination of [female homosexuals] will in practically every instance disclose an abnormally prominent clitoris.’” Somerville adds: “Significantly, this author added, ‘This is particularly so in colored women’” (253). The clitoris, because it is so closely aligned with the male phallus, the bigger it is, the more male-like the person who has it is. By extension, therefore, the “berdache,” because of the understanding of “berdache” as having both male and female characteristics at the same time, was deployed as an indicator of Indigenous inferiority, and in need of colonization and civilization.

The story of the “berdache,” for Cal/liope, forgets this colonial history, and instead makes space for him to exist in his intersex body and to be involved in the queer community in Octopussy’s Garden. There is no discussion of colonization in *Middlesex*, or of Cal/liope’s position as settler. His positionality is, like it is for other settler queers, settled through their queerness. As Morgensen argues, that by picking up the “berdache” as indicative of a transhistorical and global queer identity, queer white settlers can claim a kind of comradery between settler and Indigenous queers, whereby they neutralize their position as settlers. Because Cal/liope is intersex, because his body can be associated with the “berdache,” his body is neutralized within the space of the settler colony of the United States. The text claims him kin with the Navajo, in an erasure of the specificity of the contemporary Navajo experience by placing the “berdache” in a context wherein it is static and unmoving, frozen before or outside of the process of colonization.

This revelation for Cal/loiope in *Middlesex*, that his body is associated with the “berdache,” with a spiritual and valued body in an Indigenous culture, makes way for a discussion of the ways in which I will explore the use of Indigeneity in *Annabel* which the novel uses to help the reader make sense of intersex. Critical race studies scholar Ruthann Lee argues, in her valuable work on Canadian multiculturalism, that “multicultural policy is itself part of the colonial project” by “eras[ing] and confin[ing] Aboriginal peoples to the past and deny[ing] the continued existence, struggles, and claims of First Nations Communities” (286). As Morgensen’s argument attests to, the accepting of queerness as part of a multicultural and liberal project relegates Indigenous peoples to what David Eng calls the “dustbin of history” (loc. 599). Queerness becomes the signifier of liberal values and of progress. In this way, queerness gets picked up as part of the nationalist project, by marking Indigeneity as the opposite of that, a relic of the past.<sup>23</sup>

Wayne/Annabel’s father Treadway’s Indigeneity is mentioned in passing early in the text. Winter writes that he is “both Scottish and Inuit” (27), but that is one of two times his heritage is ever hinted at. The second time occurs late in the text, when Treadway is visiting a museum, where he wants to see “the exhibit of Beothuk and Inuit tools and household artifacts and hunting clothes” (432). Later in the scene Wayne/Annabel remarks that his father knows what he does about the “history of ancestors” from books (433). The rest of the text simply refers to Treadway as a “Man of Labrador” (461), or as someone who “belongs to Labrador” (8), which firmly relegates his Inuit identity as something of the past, to be found in a museum or a book, nowhere else because kinship with other Inuit family or kin is never mentioned. Cultural practice is then relegated to a generic practice. Labrador is still a settled place. In order to highlight the

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<sup>23</sup> *Annabel*’s role in Canada Reads highlights the ways in which it becomes useful within a nationalist identity project that chooses which texts will be beacons to “change” Canadian thinking, and which ones will not.

Indigenous history for people not learned in Labrador or Newfoundland culture or history, and perhaps to make the claim that Indigenous and settler culture are more intermingled there, for example, the text would have to make this history obvious.

While other critics have pointed out Treadway's duality (Chafe 67), or his colonized position which has made him unable to accept, as the Innu people do, his own child's intersex (Neuhaus 166), none have grappled with the erasure of his Indigeneity within the framework of the text or the relegation of his identity to a mythical past.<sup>24</sup> By extension, they have also not understood Wayne/Annabel's body as Indigenous. I propose that this oversight is the result of what I will argue – that the text required Wayne/Annabel's whiteness. However, if we consider specifically the erasure of Indigeneity from Wayne/Annabel's body and the text itself we can make better sense of the ways in which Indigenous bodies and sexualities are removed from the text through the process of settler homonationalism.

In Chapter Four of *Annabel*, entitled "Phalometer," Wayne/Annabel's settler mother walks into the hospital with her baby and promptly exits again, running until she comes to a chain link fence. "In the woods, Jacinta knew, if she managed to find a way around the fence, she would find Innu tents" (43), Winter writes. Prompted by the lure of Innu tents in the imagined distance, past the chain link and the hospital, Jacinta recalls a time when she wandered into an Innu camp while picking berries:

there had been a mother and a small baby in one tent, and that baby had something wrong with him.

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<sup>24</sup> Within *Annabel*, little is made of the difference between Inuit and Innu identities, cultures, or land claims. I understand there are substantial differences between the histories, traditions, and struggles of the Inuit and the Innu people. However, the text silences and erases both Innu people and identities and Inuit people and identities from the text equally, which enmeshes both Nations together under the racially and colonially charged logics of the text. These are the logics this chapter aims to critique.

He has been born with a genetic anomaly but his mother had held him and sung to him, a lullaby in Innu-aimun, and no one had tried to take that baby to the Goose Bay General Hospital and maim him or administer some kind of death by surgery. His family cared for him as he had been born. (43)

Following this memory, Jacinta is ushered back into the hospital where Wayne's phallus is measured in a surgical theatre and because his phallus is of sufficient size, according to the doctor, he is designated male. This first examination opens the door for repeated medical monitoring and intervention throughout Wayne/Annabel's life.

This brief, seemingly inconsequential memory of Jacinta's preceding the medical management of her child, makes plain the way in which Indigeneity is deliberately picked up to be tossed aside, in order to make a point about how queer and disabled bodies should be treated. In an imagined Indigenous culture set apart from Western medicalization, the text allows the reader to imagine a space in which the queer/disabled body is not medically managed and loved despite their queerness. Winter, through this passage, places Indigeneity outside of time, outside of the confines of Western biopolitics signified by the hospital and barbed wire fence, as a myth. Suggesting that Indigenous populations are exempt from the reach of medicalization and biopolitical control and exclusion (as if colonization itself weren't the most aggressive kind of biopolitics) severely diminishes the profound impact of these modes of power on Indigenous populations in Labrador, Newfoundland, Canada, and around the world. It places the barbed wire between what Daniel Francis has referred to as "distance between [...] fantasy and reality" about Indigenous peoples (qtd. in LaRocque 6).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that the erasure of Indigenous populations and identities from Newfoundland and Labrador has a long history. It is as if the lack of Indigenous people in Newfoundland is part of the cultural imaginary of the place, likely as a result of the disappearance of the Beothuk (Thorpe, 270). (Thank you to Dr. Jocelyn Thorpe for sharing her chapter with me in advance of its publication).

The fantasy of Indigeneity requires that Indigeneity is always displaced, always imagined as somewhere or sometime else. To give Indigenous people a voice would be to make them real. Therefore, *Annabel* briefly mention Indigenous characters, but they have no voice. Following Jacinta's foray into the Innu encampment, Jacinta is treated to bread and tea, but it is not clear whether or not she speaks to the mother about the child, because we do not witness the voice of the Innu mother. In other passages, the Innu are conjured but their voices are not quoted. We know Wayne/Annabel was taken to the Penachues' tent by Jacinta and a friend, where they were given "black tea boiled on a tin stove" but though Lucy Penachue is named, she does not speak (88). Harold Martin, a fellow citizen of Corydon Harbour, "ha[s] an Innu woman" (254), but we do not learn anything about her. They are, as we see in the above example, not given individual identity because, as Margary Fee argues in "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature," "they must bear the burden of the Other – of representing all that the modern person has lost" (29). In *Annabel*, Indigenous characters "represent a return to what is being actively destroyed around us" (29). They perform, then, an ideological function whereby they present a lost past, associated with the natural, before industrialization, before technology,<sup>26</sup> before medicine. In the context of Winter's novel, they represent a time when queerness was loved, before the biopolitical self-regulation of binary sex and its medical licensing of "maiming" or a "death by surgery."

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<sup>26</sup> Winter writes that white men invented the cinema because they, unlike Indigenous peoples, have no imagination. She explicates: "You were on your own in Corydon Harbour. In the realm of the imagination you were left to your own devices, and this was what most people in Corydon Harbour wanted. This was why they came here, if they came from other places such as Scotland and England and even America; they came to leave behind the collective dreams of an old world and they came to glory in their own footprints on land that had been travelled only by aboriginal peoples and the wild caribou. And if you were one of the Innu or Inuit in those days, you had no need of cinema. Cinema was one of the white man's illusions to compensate for his blindness. A white man, for instance, had no idea of the life within stones. Imagine that" (56). It is possible that Winter is suggesting here that it is a lack of imagination that forced Jacinta back to the hospital, imagination Indigenous people have. This reading, however, still romanticizes Indigeneity as a separate entity from white settlers.

Fee refers to this process of romanticizing Indigeneity only to, or necessarily to, cast it aside as the “identity quest of the bourgeois individual” which is “crucial to Western literature” (17). Through the white person’s “association with the Native,” much Western literature, within which *Annabel* is a certain addition, allows for a “white ‘literary land claim,’ analogous to the historical territorial take-over.” Moreover, “it allows for a therapeutic meditation on the evil of technology and the good of a life close to nature, the latter offering a temporary inoculation against the former” (Fee 17). Jacinta’s moment of reverie allows for a “therapeutic meditation” on the “evils” of the “technology” of gendering. The barbed wire fence, the surgical theatre, the technological implements required to “maim” within the hospital, or to end a life “by surgery,” are positioned as not of the Innu camp, of Indigenous peoples. Instead, it is Western ideas of “progress” that have constructed these “unnatural” categories.

*Annabel* requires this kind of logic, which places intersex as acceptable within cultures “close to nature,” that allow a “temporary inoculation” against biopolitical technologies. And yet, the text permits incredible medical and social violence upon Wayne/Annabel’s body as an effort to further romanticize the Indigenous space outside of colonization as an idealized space for queers. The text, therefore, requires the disabled, queer, Innu child as a counterpoint to Wayne/Annabel’s story, which recalls the notion of settler homonationalism. This small child, which is unnamed in the arms of its Innu mother, provides an alternative to Wayne/Annabel’s story – this is what might have happened had Wayne/Annabel not been born into a white, settler community, but amongst his father’s people, the Inuit. Of course, this is a fiction, a convenient and ill-informed fiction, that romanticizes Indigeneity in order to situate it in the past. By resting it in the past, it disappears. In other words, in *Annabel*, the Indigenous queer body is placed

outside of the time and space of the story, simply as a necessary trope for the method of making the white queer body a body that can be used politically to forward a white, queer politics.

### **The (White) Caribou in the Room: Affective Purity, or How to Care about Queers in Canada**

*In a way, whiteness itself is a straightening device: bodies disappear into the 'sea of whiteness' when they 'line up'; This is not to make 'the fit' between bodies and spaces natural: white bodies can line up, only if they pass, by approximating whiteness, by 'being like.' -- Sarah Ahmed, "The Phenomenology of Whiteness"*

There is an uncanny, unsettling, and perhaps unlikely mirror between a scene in Toni Morrison's famous *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* and the Prologue to Kathleen Winter's novel *Annabel*. In both, white characters are in canoes, haunted by blackness, and are visited upon by a large, white figure that emerges from the snow. In Morrison, the white characters are Edgar Allan Poe's Pym and Peters from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and the haunting is the death of Nu-Nu, the black man. Morrison quotes Poe: "A sullen darkness now hovered above us – but from out the milky depths of the ocean a luminous glare arose [...]. We were nearly overwhelmed by the white ashy shower which settled upon us and the canoe" (qtd. in Morrison 79).<sup>27</sup>

In *Annabel*, the white characters are the "blind-man" and his daughter Annabel. In both stories, out of the ether of the "darkness" (Poe) and the "shadows" (Winter) emerges a "white giant," a human figure whose skin was the "hue" "of the perfect whiteness of the snow" (Poe,

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<sup>27</sup> Similar scenes can be found in Dionne Brand's *Map to the Door of No Return*, and Isabelle Crawford's "The Camp of Souls," which shows how the image of the white person or persons in a canoe, on the dark water, entering spaces of whiteness is emblematic in the Canadian literary imagination. Telling, as well, is how these images get incorporated into discussions of colonization, patriarchy, and racism. (Thank you to Mike Hayden for bringing these texts to my attention.)

qtd. in Morrison 79). In Poe, the narrative ends here. We do not learn what or who the white figure is. In *Annabel*, the figure is the white caribou that has broken from the herd, standing on the bank of the river: “The white caribou stands still, in a patch of sunlight between black tree trunks, staring at the man and the girl inside the vessel. The moss beneath the caribou’s hooves is white and appears to be made from the same substance as the animal, whose outlines are barely there, considering the light above and below it” (2). As Annabel reaches toward the creature, the boat tips, and she and her father, neither of whom can swim, are consumed by the “black, calm water” (2) that surrounds them.

For Morrison, images of “blinding whiteness” like the one Poe imagines above “seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness – a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing” (80).<sup>28</sup> Morrison argues that all bodies are racialized, but the white race goes unmarked because it is the norm against which blackness is made strange. Moreover, enslaved blacks were what allowed for white Americans to experience freedom as such. Therefore, in a US context, blackness is relied upon to construct whiteness as both powerful and free. The “American dream” of freedom and prosperity can only come to be if blackness is there to show whites what enslavement and poverty look like for a black other.

As these two canoe scenes – one Canadian, one US American – attest to, the spectre of blackness haunts both nations with equal force. Black scholars in Canada have been quick to undermine the notion of Canadian “liberalism, multiculturalism and equality” which Robyn Maynard argues has hid anti-blackness in plain sight in Canada (loc. 276). While Canada has

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<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, discussions of queerness in Poe’s text also problematically rely on notions of hybridity and “the hermaphrodite” as interchangeable with “queer.” See Brad Lint’s “The Hermaphrodite in the Abyss: Queering Poe’s *Pym*.” (Thank you to Dr. Dana Medoro for the discussion that led to this find.)

begun to, however inadequately, grapple with its legacy of Indigenous genocide, there is a distinct lack of awareness, as Maynard is quick to point out, about anti-blackness. As Rinaldo Walcott writes, blackness in Canada is an “absented presence always under erasure” (27). Black bodies and experiences are under constant erasure and exclusion, and yet blackness resides as a presence to measure whiteness against. Owing to this process of erasure and presence, blackness, as Walcott uses it, and I follow his usage, is a sign “never closed and always under contestation” (28).

As Stephanie Hsu locates within *Middlesex*, blackness and racial otherness are ready metaphors for queerness and bodily alterity to the detriment of both queer and racialized bodies. I argue that *Annabel*'s positioning of race and queerness extends these metaphors into what David Eng calls a “post-race” era, whereby queer liberalism erases race in favour of a white, queer politics of inclusion. Blackness, in the case of *Annabel*, along with Indigeneity (which is not given a voice, as discussed earlier), get used as tropes, but are not attached to specific, embodied identities that are fully developed or explored as such. Treadway's Indigeneity, as I mentioned, is mentioned briefly but not explained. Black and Indigenous identities and issues fall away in order to uphold the white queer body as one that can be redeemed in the eyes of the nation. Racialized identities, particularly queer ones, do not get access to the nation in *Annabel*. Even white queerness needs to be assimilated into a generic middle-class, urban affluence in order to survive.

What follows in this section is a consideration of the deployment of whiteness in *Annabel* and the ways in which this prevailing whiteness contains the representation of intersex within the boundaries of sexual “purity.” I argue that the novel's deployment of racialized blackness, in particular, traps “black” within racist stereotypes of violence and sexual deviance. Sexual

deviance, which is casually associated with blackness in the text, then, is something that the intersex protagonist, Wayne, must avoid in order to assure the reader's empathy for his specific kind of queer otherness – his intersex. Queerness, in the case of *Annabel*, must be white both figuratively and literally. Drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed, David Eng, George Elliot Clark, and Richard Dyer, I propose that Winter's text exemplifies a specific Canadian queer liberalism that necessitates the queer body as racially white, as well as figuratively white – as pure.<sup>29</sup>

The link between Canadianness and whiteness has been famously explored by George Elliot Clark, who writes in his article "White like Canada," that "the general incoherence of color –based identity in Canada permits Canadian whiteness to exist, then, as an ethereal force." Keeping the significance of Canadian racial whiteness in mind, Clark goes on to examine how the landscape of Canada bolsters this sense of Canadian whiteness because "the bleak topography of [the Canadian] winter – polar bears and permafrost, toques and tundra – has fired the imaginings of Canadian whiteness" (107). Many novels, including Winter's, base a Canadian identity on suffering against the Canadian landscape. Poignantly, Clark writes, "the primeval frontier," in these prototypically Canadian texts, "and the white body become one." In many memorable cases, the Canadian wilderness literally consumes the white body (107).<sup>30</sup>

*Annabel* is set in Labrador, where the change of seasons from colour to white is drastic. The white landscape in winter, for Clark, stirs the imaginings of a Canadian whiteness. *Annabel* is enamored with this Canadian whiteness, which is able to consume and disappear the white body within itself. While at the hospital asking questions about his body's ability to self-impregnate of the doctor, Wayne/Annabel notices a male ptarmigan out the window. Given that

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<sup>29</sup> It is telling to note that the word "white" occurs forty-three times in Winter's *Annabel*. (Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, a text that is aware of its own haunting of whiteness, uses the term forty-one times).

<sup>30</sup> Examples of this phenomena include Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, Gwen Pherris Ringwood's "Still Stands the House," and Sinclair Ross's "The Painted Door."

ptarmigans are always in pairs, Wayne/Annabel is struck that he doesn't notice the other bird. He wonders whether it has been shot. This worry encourages a nervousness about being hunted, like Wayne/Annabel's body so usually is in these hospital settings. The weapon, the scalpel, will come for Wayne/Annabel's body. But, Wayne/Annabel finally sees the female's mate. She isn't dead: "For now the couple was alright. Off they went to feed their young. The white on their bellies had already started to spread against their brown upper bodies. In the winter, they would be indistinguishable from the snow" (306). Whiteness will spread over their bodies and they will be able to hide, less likely to be shot. Wayne/Annabel's body, which, as I will show, is born as a thing of colour, but must wait for whiteness to spread over his body, like the ptarmigans', so that he can disappear, and be consumed by that same whiteness in an effort to evade further biomedicalization. His unmarked queer body will be indistinguishable, able to hide from the hunter's gun/physician's scalpel.

In *Annabel*, the birth of Wayne/Annabel Blake occurs after the story of the white caribou that Annabel saw while in the white canoe on a lake surrounded by the snow, the white caribou that encourages her to reach out and in turn capsizes the canoe. Wayne/Annabel is born into "snow light." "Razor clam shells on [Wayne/Annabel's mother Jacinta's] downsill glowed white, and so did the tiles, the porcelain, the shirts of women and their skin, and whiteness pulsed through her sheer curtains so that the baby's hair and face became a focal point of saturated colour in the white room" (11). Even Wayne/Annabel's father who is in the kitchen outside of the room, is about to set back out on his "white canoe." "His hat was white and so were his sealskin coat and canvas pants and his boots" (11-12). Wayne/Annabel, therefore, is born into whiteness, into the frozen, foreboding land that the white body must then survive in, according to Clark. Wayne/Annabel is the only thing of colour in this scene, which is reminiscent of

Morrison's claim that blackness is made strange in the face of whiteness. Wayne/Annabel's colour is made plain<sup>31</sup> through the whiteness of absolutely everything else. Throughout the rest of the text, his colour must be erased in order that he disappear into whiteness, into the nation.

It is interesting to turn to Richard Dyer's influential book *White*, in light of this pulsating whiteness which begins, and then permeates, the text. In *White*, Dyer argues that there is a racial imagery of whiteness. Like Morrison, he writes that whiteness is at its most powerful when it is invisible, when it becomes an "ethereal force," intangible and unremarkable. In this reality, white people can speak for everyone, whereas non-whites can only speak for their particular group (2). Despite a post-modern approach to embodiment that focuses on intersectionality of voices, ultimately, "we have not yet reached a situation in which white people and white cultural agendas are no longer in the ascendant" (3). Images of whiteness, which include white skin, purity, and white unsullied landscapes, perpetuate racial whiteness, according to Dyer. While the color white is not the "prime cause of racial distinction and racism," for Dyer, "it is part of the way that racial identity is thought and felt about, and of particular significance in a culture bound up with the visual and visible" (42). It is, therefore, necessary to critique whiteness as a pervasive image in *Annabel*, that the prologue and the outset of the novel make obvious, as intimately tied to the novel's positioning of racial whiteness.

Wayne/Annabel is born into a white landscape that has become "sullied" by the death of a child and a father who fall into the black water which is intimately entangled with the birth of Wayne/Annabel, the "thing of colour." Later, at Wayne/Annabel's christening, Annabel's mother Thomasina whispers her dead daughter's name into Wayne/Annabel's ear, which is where

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<sup>31</sup> Throughout the text plainness and whiteness are associated as practical, unmarked, and male. For example, Treadway makes note of how Jacinta likes wearing his "plain work gloves" that are "white cotton." "A box of twenty pairs cost the same as one pair of the ladies' gardening gloves" (393). Ladies gloves, which have "flowers" on them (393), draw attention. Their decoration serves no purpose but to gender them.

Wayne/Annabel gets his double name – “the name Annabel settled on the child as quietly as pollen” (62). Thomasina names the “female half” of Wayne/Annabel after her daughter who drowns in black water. It is significant, then, that it is Thomasina that discovers Wayne/Annabel’s embodied difference which further marks Wayne/Annabel as strange. Glowing in whiteness, Thomasina notices that behind Wayne/Annabel’s scrotum – which, she notices, only has one descended testicle – is “labia and a vagina.” Thomasina’s notice of Wayne/Annabel’s difference creates a momentary “horror,” an opening of a “door to life or death” that only women notice. This door reminds Thomasina that something can always go “wrong,” with one’s child or someone else’s (16). We understand that Thomasina’s daughter is dead before she does, and by extension the collision of the something bad of Annabel’s death and the something bad of intersex is made obvious. Moreover, this scene suggests that Thomasina’s daughter’s spirit has been transferred to Wayne – a life in a life.

This scene further points to the way the novel positions intersex: a darkness born into a white world, one that “opens the door” for something strange to enter this pristine, virginal space. The remainder of the novel is an effort for Wayne/Annabel to claim access to this white space by rejecting anything about himself that is coded as non-white, sullied, or dirty. The text itself continues to white wash and cleanse itself in the face of sexuality, blackness, or strangeness. Moreover, it is difficult not to read Wayne/Annabel’s birth as somehow linked to the death of Annabel, as though intersex itself can only be born from a death, a death encased in black water.

Though Wayne/Annabel’s birth marks him as the only thing of colour in the room, he does pass as white through the rest of the text. In fact, his body becomes increasingly white as the text does away with both the (literal) Indigeneity and (figurative) blackness it is forced to

erase in order to uphold Wayne/Annabel's queer embodiment. However, this whiteness in an intentional choice instead of an unspoken given, as it might be if we didn't know

Wayne/Annabel's father was half Inuit. Winter makes a point of writing that Treadway is "both Scottish and Inuit" (27). But, Treadway's Indigeneity, as by extension Wayne's, is not made much of. This bi-racial identity could be used as a way to further mythologize hybrid identities in the text as we saw in *Middlesex* and the criticism of it. But, the novel drops it after this one brief comment on page twenty-seven. The novel, then, works hard to back-peddle this comment, to erase Treadway's specific identity in order to erase Wayne/Annabel's. As the things of colour begin to fall away in the text, as Ahmed puts it, Wayne/Annabel "cohere[s]" through his whiteness (59).

Wayne/Annabel's intersex, however, does not disappear as easily because it is the thing the text is trying to work through – an embodied queerness that needs to find its way into acceptance by his peers, his family, and his Nation. Intersex makes trouble for Wayne/Annabel at almost every turn: His skin begins peeling on his feet, he develops "breast buds and no Adam's apple to speak of at all," and a slight frame (180), all of which never escape the gaze of his father, his mother, or other adults meant to police his body. While his masculine identity is assured by his mother, however reluctantly, and aggressively enforced by his father, his tastes and interests are also marked as non-masculine, much to his father's chagrin: he doesn't like hunting, he wants to buy and wear a women's bathing suit after becoming enamoured by synchronized swimmer Elizaveta Kirilovna. He attempts to have a brief romantic relationship with a woman, but it never feels quite right. In response to his feelings of confinement in his small town, he leaves Corydon Harbour and moves to St. John's. It is here he decides to stop

taking the hormone pills that were prescribed to him as a teenager and begins “changing [in] appearance,” which puts his body and his livelihood at risk (358).

As if a punishment for his queer appearance, Wayne/Annabel is raped by a group of men whose sole purpose in the novel is to humiliate Wayne/Annabel for his difference. The novel concludes with Wayne/Annabel visiting an old friend, Wally, in Boston where he decides to enter university to become an architect. Part of the reason for this decision is that many people in universities look like him, gender ambiguous. There is a brief epilogue to the novel in which Wayne/Annabel is immersed in a successful life, his father has come to terms with his sexed variance, the marital problems spurred by Wayne/Annabel’s difference have passed away, and Wayne/Annabel’s best friend Wally has overcome her disability (an injury she sustains when trying to stand-up for Wayne/Annabel against bullies and her vocal chords are rather fantastically cut by a piece of flying glass) to become an exceptional singer. This “queer” story has a happy ending.

A prevailing reading of *Annabel* within the Canada Reads debates, in scholarly journals, book reviews, and in my own discussions with family members and friends who have read the novel, is that it opens up conversations about gender and physical sex in an approachable way. Marieke Neuhaus goes so far as to argue that while the text “may not be able to speak for intersex people” (because ultimately the text’s presentation of intersex is an impossible fiction), “it speaks to the need for intersexuality to feature in Canadian discourses of sexuality, both in literary and cultural studies and in the public realm.” “For,” Neuhaus continues, “a world in which intersex people are encountered with respect is necessary for people like Wayne because it is their only ‘possibility of the liveable life’” (139). I am drawn to the notion that the novel, as a celebrated Canada Reads selection, is positioned as ground breaking, as a text to enlighten and

bring about discussion within a Canadian context about intersex. But, I ask what is at stake when such a representation relies on the deliberately whitened body to make this difference legible, particularly in a Canadian context in our current political moment.

*Annabel* was published in 2010, the same year as David Eng's important text *A Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and The Racialization of Intimacy*. This particular moment in time saw a working through of a new "colorblind" era for Eng, in an America that had elected a black president but also, suddenly, had images of two men on the front page of the *New York Times* marriages and events page. Eng reads these two events as comingling and codependent. He contends that what he calls "queer liberalism," the ways in which certain queers have been folded into the economic, social, and legal system, "does not resist, but abets, the forgetting of race and the denial of racial difference" (loc. 231). That is, the acceptance of certain types of "queerness" – those that are economically productive and resemble heterosexual norms – are pushed to be accepted at the cost of an attention to racialized others. Part of the logic of this process of inclusion is that discussions of race are now over, and that the "new civil rights movement" had shifted onto LGBT identities and away from race, which confines the Black civil rights movement to the "dustbin of history" and assumes all gay and lesbians are white (loc. 231). Eng preempts Robyn Maynard's claim that multiculturalism tends to hide what is in plain sight. He claims that "multiculturalism, or the key to a contemporary post-racial new world order of freedom, opportunity, and choice might be seen not as the culmination but the continuing legacy of the long history of the world division of freedom and labour in New World modernity, with gay and lesbian marriage now constituting [...] 'the Last Great Civil Rights Struggle'" (loc. 39).

David Eng's argument that queer liberalism necessitates a deliberate erasure of racialized bodies can be extended to *Annabel* through the novel's construction of Wayne/Annabel's intersex. Wayne/Annabel's fictional intersex trait, or series of traits, encapsulate what I term a "generically queer" body, a body that is not grounded in reality, but in a convenient mythology about hybridity. It is a body constructed in a political and cultural moment during which the legal rights and social position of LGBT bodies are up for contestation. It is important to note that Wayne/Annabel's intersex, from imagined symptoms of intersex including self-impregnation is the only moment of fantasy in an otherwise intensely realist text. By positioning Wayne/Annabel as non-specifically intersex, and generically queer, Winter is able to argue for all queer embodiments gaining access to human rights, including bodily autonomy – or so it seems. However, the text's erasure of Wayne/Annabel's Indigeneity, as well as necessarily expunging blackness from the text, makes obvious that the only way to incorporate intersex into the nation (if it can be incorporated at all) is through whiteness. In sum, *Annabel* shifts Eng's observation from a desiring gay and lesbian body to trans and intersex bodies and rights as the "Last Great Civil Rights Struggle,"<sup>32</sup> but the text does not fail to relegate race, ethnicity, and queer desire to the "dustbin of history." In order to forward a colour-blind ethos of queer inclusion, the text must remove markers of race from Wayne/Annabel's body and any stain of blackness of the text itself in order to make palpable Wayne/Annabel's generic queerness.

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<sup>32</sup> In an article published the same year as the Canada Reads debates in which *Annabel* competed, Joe Friesen published an article in the *Globe and Mail* entitled "The next frontier of human rights: the humble public toilet," which sites a *New York Times* article from the same week which claims that "trans issues [are] America's 'next human rights frontier'" (par. 4).

## **Masturbatory Whiteness: Salt in the (Genital) Wound**

*Annabel* makes a point of relegating sexuality into the private sphere, something David Eng argues is necessary for the policing of sexuality and race in a “post-race” world (loc.47). Treadway and Jacinta’s early relationship is positioned in the text as ideal, in order to make the strain of managing the birth of an intersex child on it more obvious. As part of the set-up of their relationship, Treadway and Jacinta’s ideal and quiet early marriage is placed in direct opposition to the boisterous relationships between other couples in Corydon Harbour. Other couples’ love lives are on display for everyone to see, like Eliza Goudie, who becomes infatuated with every new visitor to the town, or Joan Martin’s husband who is known to have an “Innu woman” with whom he has four children (22). Jacinta’s judgement of these women is palpable. She is proud of her relationship with Treadway who “lived for the whiteness and the silence” (12) of the forest.

As an extension of Treadway’s love for “whiteness and the silence,” Winter writes their sex life as quiet and subdued: “When they made love, she climaxed every time, and when she did, he knew” (22). The text does not clarify how Treadway “knows,” but owing to his love of silence and privacy, the reader can assume that it was not her loud cries that told him. Winter further writes, in a sentence that collapses privacy, whiteness, and silence: “Their bedroom was always quiet. Treadway liked a place of repose, a tranquil sleep with a white bedspread and no music or clutter, and so did she” (28).

It is significant to note again that Treadway is not white, but “half Scottish, have Inuit,” which complicates the simplicity of the white blankets and the white privacy of his and his white-settler wife Jacinta’s sex life. For Eng, the bedroom is hardly a private space, particularly for queers and people of colour. Because legal statutes have long been involved in the bedrooms of the nation, anti-sodomy and anti-miscegenation laws in the United States clarify that the

bedroom has long been a place of disquiet for marginalized people, for whom quiet sex is made impossible through its subjection to biopolitical enforcement which polices who they can have sex and under what circumstances. In Canada, despite Pierre Trudeau's public statement that the government has no place in the bedrooms of the nation (CBC Archives), there is a comparative policing of racialized bodies in intimate spaces.

Legal scholar Debra Thomson argues in her excellent comparative analysis "Racial Ideas and Gendered Intimacies: The Regulation of Interracial Relationships in North America," that the anti-miscegenation laws in the United States are not dissimilar to the Indian Act in Canada. As Thomson writes, echoing Eng, "The politics of intimacy have been a central concern of those who rule, implicating the production and regulation of raced and gendered bodies and identifying familial relations as a site of power. In effect, the personal is extraordinarily political" (354). As evidence of the enforcement of the "politics of intimacy" in Canada, Thompson submits the Indian Act, which as part of Bill C-31 in 1985,

stipulated that Aboriginal women who married non-Aboriginal men and the progeny of these interracial relationships would be denied Indian legal status, while Aboriginal men who married non-Aboriginal women would retain the status that would also be given to their wives and children. (354)

Therefore, Thomas states, "Both anti-miscegenation laws and the Indian Act are, in short, striking examples of the state's regulation of the intimate sphere" (354). In light of Thomson's reading of the Indian Act as legislative control of intimacy between white and non-white bodies in Canada, specifically First Nation and white bodies, we can read Treadway's need to wrap himself in white blankets and his need for intimate privacy as a way to shroud his non-white body from the biopolitical gaze. Moreover, Joan Martin's husband's Innu wife is similarly

hidden in the interior as a way of keeping the white (Martin's) body, his non-white partner, and their mixed-race children out of the preview of the white, policing, community.

Wayne/Annabel is not able to hide himself in his small community. His mixed-race and intersex body is constantly under the scrutiny of the biopolitical gaze. His sexuality, therefore, must be made as private as possible even from other potential sex-partners. In essence, his white blanket must be twice as thick as his father's. While he does have a few minor sexual encounters with his girlfriend Gracie before he moves to St. John's, the text does not make much of their sexual intimacy. The text does, however, make particular mention of Wayne/Annabel's masturbation, an act that should by all rights be private. By making the private act of masturbation public to the reader, *Annabel* allows for Wayne/Annabel's teenage genitals to be seen by the reader but not by anyone else in the text.<sup>33</sup> As Wayne/Annabel ages and his sexuality bubbles to the surface of the text's concern, he takes pleasure not in his phallus, but in the space behind it:

[Wayne] lay in bed and touched his own penis. It did not respond but the place behind it, underneath it, buried in his body between his legs, did respond. If he touched the skin underneath his testicle and rubbed it, it made the hunger clamour and grow wild. He pressed and pushed a little, and he thought of penises going into vaginas while he did so, and in a couple of minutes the hunger between his legs opened its mouth and devoured a shuddering, delicious and joyful series of electric jolts that delighted his whole body (162).

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<sup>33</sup> *Annabel* thus avoids having to mention Wayne/Annabel's genitals and other people's reactions to them in sexual/intimate spaces. Wayne/Annabel's genitals are what make public what otherwise would be a private trait, encased within his body. The reaction to them, as scholars of intersex have made obvious, is often less aghast than physicians imagine when they decide to surgically alter them. Therefore, the novel engages further producing anxiety in relation to intersex genitalia.

There are only a few moments like this in the novel, where Wayne/Annabel masturbates or finds pleasure in his genitals, or at all. The pleasure he does find is clearly meant to emulate female masturbation, a private and heteronormative activity which also locates its secrecy in whiteness. Dyer uses the figure of the Virgin Mary to argue this point. He contends that white men are forced to struggle against their dark sexual drives, and to ultimately overcome them. Whereas white women are not to have sexual desire at all, like the Virgin herself, “a pure vessel of reproduction, unsullied by the dark drives that reproduction entails” (28). Sexual desire in women, Dryer writes, is a “disturbance” of their racial purity. Therefore, whiteness and sexuality become linked, not only through fears of miscegenation which also are implicated in these arguments for white, sexual purity, but through the imagination of the white woman as the bearer of the “hopes, achievements, and character of the race” (29). A white woman’s sexuality, or lack thereof, therefore, is indicative of the morality of the entire white race.

As we see from Dyer’s account, this kind of non-reproductive female sexuality does not fit well within ideals of whiteness. Wayne/Annabel’s masturbation is female because he finds pleasure not in the phallus, but in the space behind it. The reader is meant to understand this space as the “vagina” that is hidden for Wayne/Annabel. His phallus is of no sexual interest to him. However, by positioning Wayne/Annabel’s masturbation as female, and moreover as heteronormative (he gets off by thinking about penises going into vaginas), the baggage of white female sexuality is placed upon Wayne/Annabel’s body. Since, as Dyer argues, the white female is read as more pure, the text requires a move away from sexuality entirely in order to achieve its “hopeful” conclusion, which erases both Wayne/Annabel’s race but also his sexuality.

Securing the association of whiteness and sexuality in the text, I submit a second description of masturbation in the text. It is significant because it not only takes place as the last

incident but also because it includes an object that is at once strange and familiar – “a small glass salt shaker made in France” (338). This object, imported from one of the countries that colonized the country we now call Canada, comes to serve as Wayne’s lover: “He closed his eyes and pushed the warm glass against the deeply hidden vagina that belonged to Annabel. This created an orgasm deep inside” (345-346). That this small, glass, salt shaker that Wayne warms on the stove (345) becomes a kind of sex toy is curious. While the salt shaker is empty, we can imagine, when Wayne presses it against his “vagina,” it is meant to be filled up with salt, a white substance. That Winter refers to this empty vessel as a “salt shaker” specifically, leaves it open to be filled with salt, which returns us again to images of purity and snow.

According to Sara Ahmed, “what you come into contact with is shaped by what you do: bodies are oriented when they are occupied in time and space. Bodies are shaped by this contact with objects. What gets near is both shaped by what bodies do, and in turn affects what bodies can do” (152). The proximity, location, and fact of the philosopher’s desk says something about the philosopher, Ahmed argues; it gives away her orientation. The object of the salt shaker, then, is not arbitrary, but implicated in Wayne’s orientation to and with it. Wayne picks the salt shaker perhaps because of its how it is shaped, phallus-like, but also by what it is meant to hold. As Ahmed suggests, no choice of object or relation is without consequence, nor without precedence. Wayne chooses the salt shaker, warms it, presses it against the space Winter calls his “hidden vagina” because there is significance behind the salt shaker as an object, both a colonial but also a racialized significance. All of who Wayne is: his sexuality, his race, his history, his desires, impact that decision and what it comes to mean to him.

The use of the salt shaker as masturbatory object is complicit also in what Ahmed refers to as the “familial,” as the way and where of how things are placed. The salt shaker indicates

both the history of French colonialism, which Wayne holds close, but also the domestic, the normative. It is, after all, a domestic object *par excellence*, one that almost typifies the domestic, bourgeois project. The text seems to be suggesting, through the use of the salt shaker, that if there is any non-reproductive sexuality to be enjoyed by Wayne/Annabel it must be with an object made benign by what it is made to hold.

The disturbing collision in *Annabel* between whiteness, and sexual purity, enacted through Wayne/Annabel's lack of sexual desire except for a benign object, requires an enacting of combining racist and homophobic logics. Fears of Wayne/Annabel's sexuality, a sexuality that cannot be easily identified as gay or straight because of Wayne/Annabel's intersex body, necessarily haunt the text. Wayne/Annabel's sexuality would therefore be deviant, and would put into question Wayne/Annabel's status as an ideal queer.<sup>34</sup> As Mareike Neuheus importantly points out in her article "Inventions of Sexuality in Kathleen Winter's *Annabel*": "Wayne's desires towards others does not feature prominently in *Annabel*" (137). However, she does claim that "fear of homosexuality is present in *Annabel*, however subtly" (136). For example, Neuheus reads a moment in which Treadway dismantles a bridge Wayne and Wally built across a creek during their childhood because Wayne spends too much time in there with a girl, triggering Treadway's fear of homosexuality. Moreover, she cites Wane/Annabel's fear of being caught

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<sup>34</sup> I want to be careful here not to engage in my own act of erasure, that of asexual people. I am troubled by the representation in this novel of asexuality, too, which seems to occur, as I note, after Wayne/Annabel's assault. It had been well documented that asexuality is often thought to necessarily be the result of sexual assault, which makes trouble for survivors who have a desire to have an active sexual life. Moreover, it makes trouble for asexual people who are thought to be survivors, because why else would someone be asexual? All of this said, it is necessary for me to reinforce my position that the text does not allow for its intersex protagonist to have an enthusiastic and pleasurable relationship to sexuality with himself or others. The same can be said about *Middlesex*, which ends with a heterosexual pairing between two people who are too shy to look at each other's bodies, so they hide under the covers (Eugenides 514). It is also necessary to note, as Morgan Holmes has, that Cal/liope's transition to male is necessitated by Cal's desire. *Middlesex* cannot make space for lesbian desire between Calliope and The Obscure Object, so Cal/liope must become Cal, even though there is little indication that Cal/liope preferred a male gender prior to the decision to become male ("Cal/liope" 127).

looking at prom dresses at the store as further evidence of his anxiety over being deemed homosexual. I am puzzled by Neuhaus's reading here, because these allusions to homosexuality, and the fear of it, are not subtle. Neuhaus's later assertion that the text avoids issues of sexuality in order to not confuse LGBT issues with intersex – that is, not to confuse or conflate “‘deviant’ bodies with ‘deviant’ desires” (137) – is an indication that the text sees homosexuality as a problem for intersex social acceptance.

The only instance of homosexual desire we see in the text occurs when a teacher hits on Wayne/Annabel, a scene that reinforces damaging stereotypes that all gay men are pedophilic predators. Wayne/Annabel's teacher Mr. Henry finds him in the cloakroom, and traps him there in such a way that if Wayne/Annabel wanted to escape he would have had to “run right under Mr. Henry's armpit” (107) It is dark in the cloakroom, “hardly any daylight came in.” Despite wanting to escape, Wayne is aroused by the gentle touch of his teacher's finger on his jaw: “Flowers were bursting open between his legs but the flowers were ugly flowers he did not like.” He cannot back up, because he will be burned by the radiator behind him, so he explains that he is only in the cloakroom to get something from his pocket, to which Mr. Henry responds “‘I need to get away by myself sometimes too.’ Mr. Henry takes hold of a piece of Wayne's hair, which Wayne vowed to cut as soon as he got home” (108). The allusion to pedophilia and rape here is unavoidable, as are the assurances to the reader that while the sensations turned Wayne/Annabel on, he was well aware that those feelings are “ugly,” and to be expunged. The hair that Mr. Henry touched has to be cut from his body with violent force.

Winter writes, following this scene: “He had escaped from Mr. Henry, but he could not escape from the fact that a man had wanted him, and that his body had responded to that man with a secret desire of his own. An exquisite stirring, unwanted, involuntary, mysterious” (109).

In fact, as I contend, the rest of the novel attempts to escape from how his body responded to Mr. Henry, in order to make the reader more comfortable with a body that can be wanted by a man, in a moment of “unwanted” intergenerational, homosexual desire. It becomes obvious in this scene that the novel not only doesn’t want to confuse homosexuality with intersex, but wants to valorize intersex and a “deviant” body, while condemning homosexuality without equivocation.

In an effort to assuage these concerns about an enthusiastic, homosexual, and/or queer sexuality, the text makes Wayne/Annabel’s masturbatory object something not-quite obviously phallic (thus neither confirming or denying a sexual desire for the phallus), but something necessarily white and private, marking, like Treadway’s white blanket he sleeps wrapped around, the link between sexuality and race.

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In an effort to make the generically queer body more acceptable within the space of the nation, *Annabel* goes one step further to making Wayne/Annabel’s sexuality private and straight when evidence of it occurs at all, but must also make it benign. As Alice Domurat Dreger’s ground-breaking book on intersex, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* reports, not only is homosexuality haunting intersex bodies, homosexuality and intersex were defined by and though each other. Dreger makes a profound argument that the medical management of intersex bodies was, and is, an effort to “keep people straight.” She writes that:

medical doctors, scientists, hermaphrodites’ parents, and other lay people have historically been interested in sorting people according to their sexes to avoid or prevent what might be considered homosexuality. This is perhaps a necessary outcome in a culture that categorizes sexual encounters primarily according to

the sex of the partners and tends to favour heterosexuality over homosexuality.

(8-9)

In order to combat such anxiety over homosexuality in a body like Wayne/Annabel's, the text must make Wayne/Annabel an empathetic character. Given the heteronormative imperative Dreger points out, the text must do two things: 1) make Wayne/Annabel's sexuality as straight as possible. Or, if this is not possible, Wayne/Annabel's sexuality must be non-threatening, it must disappear. 2) Wayne/Annabel's body must be able to be assimilated into a national identity that can celebrate difference without addressing oppression, so focuses on sexuality at the expense of race.

Perhaps the most overt occurrence of the ways in which whiteness is used in the text as a way of making sexual difference disappear is in the rape scene. Wayne confides in his new friend Steve why his face and body are beginning to look different. He admits to Steve that he is a "hermaphrodite" and tells Steve about his self-impregnation and his other name, Annabel. This knowledge haunts Steve, and soon he shares this information with the intimidating Derek Warford. Derek and his friends find Wayne parked in his van on Signal Hill road and hop in, referring to Wayne as a "little girl." Soon Derek threatens Wayne with a broken beer bottle, and forces him to drive them to Deadman's Pond. It is here that Derek holds the bottle over Wayne's face. Wayne begins to think about

beauty, and how he had never had it, and he realized he had been hoping for it to come. He didn't want a lot of it but he was hoping for some. Just once to look in the mirror and see a beautiful face, even if the beauty was subdued. Even if no one could see it but himself. It didn't even have to be beauty; it only had to be a *fair* face. Without big pores. With *creamy* skin. (378, *emph. added*)

In this moment of pending violence, Wayne begins to think about beauty, a beauty that is definitively fair, creamy, and white. The beauty begins to disappear for Wayne in the face of sexual violence. It is replaced, instead, by the lewdness of Derek's conversation and egging on of his friends to rape Wayne/Annabel.

In stark contrast to Wayne/Annabel's internal musings about beauty is Derek's lamentations that they did not "get one of those black corncobs off Mary Fifield's front door – that'd be just like a big nigger cock we could use. Go get it, Fifield; it's your aunt's door. Big fucking Jesus nigger cock" (381). This assertion by Derek seems at odds with the rest of the text that is so reticent to discuss race. But now, in the face of pending violence against a body none of the boys want to touch, race bubbles up as an aggressive, sexualized force. Wayne is the victim, passive and unmoving, being threatened by aggressive men who desire to see the "truth" of his body. In the process they invoke a popular, racist trope – that of the black male rapist who takes advantage of the submissive defenselessness of white women. In invoking this trope, Derek associates himself with the black male rapist, which serves to further vilify him in this scene. Wayne's white purity is about to be debased by Derek's black desires and quest for dominance.

Cultural critic Siobhan Sommerville argues that the spectre of the black male rapist was enough to link homosexuality to blackness through their shared pathologized desire. The black male desire for white women (and, she points out, not the white male desire for black women) has been read as a misplaced object choice (262). Derek similarly links here the black male desire for a white woman to Wayne/Annabel's assumed trans identity – why would anyone want to transition if not to "get fucked"? This logic exposes a looming threat in the text – pathologized or deviant desire in Wayne/Annabel's body, for whom there is no possibility for anything but misplaced object choice. Because Wayne/Annabel's body exists between imagined male and

female positions, his desire cannot fulfill a heterosexual imperative. The threat of black rape, and the history of pathologization that clings to it, makes these anxieties plain. In this moment, Wayne/Annabel becomes white when placed in opposition to threat of black maleness. The novel, therefore, requires the black cock as a foil to Wayne/Annabel's genitalia, in order to make them, and by extension, Wayne/Annabel, white.

How and when Wayne escapes from Derek and his friends is unclear. What exactly happened to him is also not explained explicitly, only that he is hurt, and hurt in some places he cannot reach (399). What is clear, however, is that Winter has set up a clear dichotomy between blackness, which is equated with lewd sexuality and violence, and whiteness, which is a symbol of beauty, purity, and defenselessness. These tropes are well-worn in Western culture, and so their recurrence here only serves to deepen the significance of their power. Through these tropes, the novel creates Wayne/Annabel's whiteness via the blackness it conjures in this scene of violence. The scene, therefore, also assures an erasure of queer desire from the text, as if queer desire follows the black cock out of the frame of the text, further conflating queer desire and blackness. Following Wayne's rape, his sexuality disappears. He no longer discusses desire or masturbation. In this moment of extreme violence, Wayne/Annabel's body is disciplined to both become white and become asexual, as if both would make Wayne/Annabel's intersex less threatening to the state.

### **Conclusion: White Optimism**

In the epilogue to the novel, Kathleen Winter offers her readers hopefulness, where all loose ends are neatly and preciously tied, and all horrors erased. Intersex is not mentioned or brought to mind. Wayne/Annabel seems to move easily in the space of the opera house, where he

has gone to see Wally Michelin perform with Thomasina. Wally's damaged vocal chords, despite the doctors' lack of optimism, have healed (460) – a result, the text seems to suggest, of her hard work, determination, and passion to be able to sing despite her disability. In this sense, the healed body ends the story. Wayne/Annabel is now studying engineering at a university in Nova Scotia, and is learning to build bridges. His passion for “bridging” (a rather clunky metaphor for peace-building) seems to have, similarly, led him to a place of acceptance in and with his body (459). Within the neoliberal space of the university, which prides itself on promoting individual achievement and merit, Wayne thrives. His embodied difference is no longer a point of contention for the novel, but is able to easily fall away.

In a previous scene, Wayne/Annabel makes plain his desire to disappear within a sea of “ambiguous students.” Winter writes:

Among the students he did not feel out of place because of his body's ambiguity, as he had felt on the streets of downtown St. John's. Many of these students looked to Wayne as if they could be the same as him: either male or female. There was not the same striation of sexuality that there was in the ordinary world outside a campus. There were girls who looked like he did, and here were boys who did too, and there were certainly students who wore no make up and had a plain beauty that was made of insight and intelligence and did not have a gender. He felt he was in some kind of a free world to which he wanted to belong and he wondered if all campuses were like this. (455-456)

Eventually Wayne/Annabel does belong to a “free” place like this, where he is able, the reader is made to assume, to disappear within a space without the “striation of sexuality” that exists elsewhere. The beauty he is wanting to achieve, once again, is an unmarked one, a plain one, one

without a gender. However, Wayne/Annabel's dream of a utopic space sorts bodies into categories of "boys" and "girls" who look ambiguous. But Wayne/Annabel fits into neither of these categories, as the text has made clear. So, what kind of utopia for Wayne/Annabel does the text actually make space for? One that continues to be curtailed from the start, from the moment Wayne/Annabel's colour was marked at his birth. His body, therefore, can never go unmarked. The text's optimism is undermined.

Perhaps Treadway should be the character to whom the reader is meant to look for optimism. He seems to have found peace. The concluding lines of the novel are his thoughts: "Only in the wind over the land did Treadway find the freedom his son would seek elsewhere. Treadway was a man of Labrador, but his son had left home as daughters and sons do, to seek freedom their fathers do not need to inhabit, for it inhabits the fathers" (461). In this passage, nation trumps Indigeneity. Treadway is a "man of Labrador," of the province within the state of Canada. He is not Inuit; his "son" is not Inuit. The gender binary "sons" and "daughters" has eclipsed the confusion of intersex. Wayne/Annabel is unequivocally "Wayne," a son, gone to seek his "freedom." And while there is freedom in Treadway, it is unclear what freedom here means, what kind of freedom the text is envisioning. What freedom did Wayne/Annabel seek that Treadway both "inhabits" but also is found "only in the wind over the land." This contradiction is confusing, and does not provide much clarity about what freedom might mean within the space of the text. It does, however, imply that freedom is what the text settles as the ultimate goal of personhood, a strange embodied/disembodied kind of freedom within the confines of particular instituted spaces – Canada, Labrador, the university.

Toni Morrison, at the outset of the section on blackness in the literary imagination, argues that freedom is only seen as such in relation to black imprisonment, slavery, and subjugation.

*Annabel* positions freedom as an escape from gender and racial ambiguity, where Treadway is not a half Scottish, half Inuit man, but a man of Labrador. Wayne/Annabel has disappeared within the liberal and bourgeois space of the university. While it is unclear what freedom might mean within the text, it is clear that freedom is envisioned by comparison to what it sees as not-freedom: racialization, queer desires, and intersex.

When Canadian actress Sarah Gadon, who was advocating for *Annabel* to win Canada Reads, felt herself at one point backed into a corner about the novel's "tidy" ending, she got defensive. She argued that social change

doesn't have to be born from violence. Change can happen out of a positive feeling. [...] I think that is why [the novel] appeals to young people. I mean, yes, the novel ends on a positive note, but these kids are still young people. They still have their whole lives to live. [...] I think you are all taking a real pessimistic view. And, you know, I think that maybe I'm representing a younger generation that has a little more optimism. (CBC Player, 33:36-35:39)

She argued that the novel ends on a "positive note," because the reader can project the "whole lives" of the novel's characters out in front of them into a more accepting and progressive Canada, a Canada that accepts queers. In the context of "A Novel to Change Canada," which Gadon was arguing *Annabel* could do because of its promise for optimism, the cost of optimism is too high.

Gadon's optimism is a profound example of what Lauren Berlant has termed "cruel optimism." As Berlant explains, "cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing." It can be, she continues, an "excitement at the prospect of the 'change that's gonna come'" (1-2). The reason this optimism is cruel is because it defeats itself

in the very process of making itself happen. For Berlant, “Whatever the *experience* of optimism is in particular, then, the *affective structure* of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world become different in just the right way” (2, original emph). The image of Wayne/Annabel as an image of optimism for progressive queer inclusion constructs an “*affective structure* of an optimistic attachment” to him as an ideal and generic queer that entices readers away from the acknowledgement of the erasure of blackness and Indigeneity that render Wayne/Annabel as an acceptable queer in the first place.

Optimism that attempts to shoehorn intersex bodies into the space of the nation, while erasing race and queer desire, is cruel. Along with age-old myths and metaphors of intersex, it further relegates intersex bodies, particularly racialized and queer-desiring intersex bodies, into another time and space. The next chapter thus addresses how intersex people challenge the mythologizing and metaphorization of intersex in fictional narratives by writing their own.

**Chapter Two:**  
**After the Touch of Loss: Intersex, Objects, and Life-Narrative**

*How do you have a conversation about yourself when all of a sudden you don't know what you're talking about? – Thea Hillman. Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)*

Thea Hillman writes this perplexing sentence when she fails to explain to her lover how she feels about reading transcripts of intersex people sharing their experiences of being medicalized. She is confronted with the fact that while she has not had the (unnecessary) normalizing genital surgeries or damaging medical “treatments” for her intersex traits that others have, she recognizes her shared experience of sexual abuse at the hands of doctors. While these doctors may have been well intentioned, their fascination with her genitals and her body, the regular visits to various physicians, and the repeated exposure of her genitals in examining rooms are traumatic. The trouble for Hillman in this moment in which she cannot say what she is feeling, is that she cannot fully remember her past, she just knows the sense of shame she has as she listens to other intersex people tell their stories. Faced with these newly acquired memories, she does not want to be seen, to be read. “I look [my lover] straight in the eyes,” she writes “and then I look away, scared for him to see me unscripted, to see more things I don't know or can't remember. I feel inside out in front of him and without answers, without the information, without understanding of myself. *How do you have a conversation about yourself when all of a sudden you don't know what you're talking about?*” (loc. 1398).

We are entering an age during which intersex people like Thea Hillman are beginning to catalogue their catastrophic losses, personal and public struggles, and testimonies of thriving, in public. Their memoirs are being displayed on bookstore shelves, their narratives shared in heartfelt pleas for acceptance in YouTube videos, or on panels about the continued use of cosmetic genital surgeries on children too young to consent on the evening news. And yet, few

scholars have made it their business to read these texts as works of art, as worthy of serious study. That intersex texts have, for the most part, not been attended to in meaningful ways<sup>35</sup> speaks both to the invisibility of intersex in our society up until this moment, and from which this new genre of intersex art and scholarship has made itself known, but also to a more profound confusion about what to do with our society's rather arbitrary two-sex model when we make the losses of intersex people, who have suffered perhaps the most cruelly as a result of our continued adherence to it, visible.

The fallout of our two-sex system creates the cruel medical protocols that Hillman recounts, which include both intentional secrecy on the part of medical professionals and family, but also the repression of painful memories, shame, and guilt on behalf of the person who cannot fit into the aching tightness of the male/female binary. The devastating problem of suddenly not knowing oneself, one's body, one's own history, is a common occurrence in many intersex life-narratives.<sup>36</sup> The intersex person writing often feels they have the least information about themselves, that their body is shrouded in secrets known to parents, activists, and medical professionals, but not to them. To write about their life under these conditions is an attempt to make sense of themselves, to uncover memories, documents, stories, and feelings. The project of this chapter is to argue that intersex life-narratives necessarily contend with the scalpel and its enactment of

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<sup>35</sup> Two texts have recently been published out of North American Studies programs in Germany. The first is by Viola Amato, published in 2016, entitled *Intersex Narratives: Shifts in the Representation of Intersex Lives in North American Culture and Literature*. The second is by Michaela Koch, published in 2017, entitled *Discursive Intersexions: Myth, Medicine, and Memoir*. Both of these texts are very recent. While both address Thea Hillman's text, neither approaches the pieces from *The Symposium*.

<sup>36</sup> I use the term "life-narrative" because these texts, I claim, are attempting to "make sense" of their experience of being intersex. They are attempting to narrate a kind of logical trajectory of their lives. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define memoir as a "mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant: the memoir directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator" (198). Because of the memoir's focus on others, rather than the writing subject, this definition doesn't fit the texts I examine. "Life writing" may seem the most appropriate term, but I think it is too expansive, and I want to specifically hone in on the ways in which intersex writers attempt to make sense of their lives, and particularly their treatment by biomedicine, through the act of writing for an audience.

wounding. Intersex life-narratives, therefore, must also grapple with what happens after the trauma of the wound and the wince that the reader has in response to it. I suggest, therefore, that the medical chart, and by extension the diagnosis it holds, acts as a catalyst for the cohering of an intersex community through narrative. In an effort to argue for these commonalities in intersex life-narratives, I read closely two texts that engage in this process of sense-making: Thea Hillman's 2008 *Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)*, and *The Symposium*,<sup>37</sup> fifteen short pieces of intersex life-writing included in the Summer 2015 issue of *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics*.

I chose these particular texts because they are some of the only examples of intersex life writing published in North America at present. But, also, because of the way they narrate and catalogue their losses – loss of genital sensation to surgical intervention, of family closeness to a loss of trust, of childhoods to hospital beds, of friends to feelings of alienation, of lovers to self-loathing, of gender identity to medicalization – and the ways in which identity, community, and politics are constructed and maintained in and through these losses. Judith Butler asks “after loss, what then?” as a way of beginning a conversation about the creation of communities necessitated by loss. In short, this chapter – as a way of forming some kind of response to these losses and the community that grows from them, and in response to the absence of work that turns its attention to intersex losses, communities, and stories – considers not *what* is lost for intersex people (they document these losses achingly enough for themselves), but “*how* that loss is apprehended” (Eng and Kazanjian 6, *emph. in original*).

This chapter is crafted as a response to the one before on fiction. While fiction, largely disregards the lived experience of intersex people in favour of a mythological or metaphorical intersex body, life-narratives by intersex people centre the making-intersex of their bodies

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<sup>37</sup> I will refer to these texts as *The Symposium* because I am including in my analysis only the pieces of life-writing, and not the critical discussions about them that are also included in this issue.

through social, cultural, medical, and legal modes of power. How intersex lives get narrated into being matters. Focusing on the striking similarities in their discussions of two objects – the scalpel that wounds and the chart that diagnoses – I attend to these texts in order to track how an intersex identity and community that is both indebted to, but also separate from, medicine’s power, is forged in and through these narratives.

As Thea Hillman’s title suggests, her memoir *Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)*, is concerned with the language of coming to terms with being intersex. Hillman’s work is a fragmented series of short stories or reflections told from the perspective of a present Thea remarking on the past. She chooses particular moments that highlight the struggle of being intersex and of being someone whose intersex trait has not made her a target for normalizing genital surgeries, nor has she been subjected to the discomfort or confusion of having atypical genitalia. Her “normal” appearing genitals cause Thea repeated stress about her ability to belong to an intersex community. *Intersex* moves in a generally chronological way, despite its fragmented nature, beginning in childhood, moving through the exploration of her queer sexuality, through the breakdown of an important romantic relationship, to the discovery of her intersex and her involvement in the intersex activist community. Then the text takes a turn away from intersex specifically, and instead explores queerness generally, and the troubles associated with being involved in queer activism under the presidency of George W. Bush.

In the summer of 2015, *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics* published an issue on intersex. In it, Georgiann Davis, an important intersex scholar of Sociology, included a “Narrative Symposium” (hereafter *The Symposium*), which consists of the personal stories of thirteen people with intersex traits. *The Symposium*, which includes voices from disparate “race/ethnicity, age, gender identity, nationality, religious observance, diagnosis, and treatment” backgrounds, is an

effort to “normalize, in a positive sense, [intersex] experiences” (89). As Davis points out, this narrative intervention is important because people with intersex traits have “historically been the objects, rather than producers, of knowledge about [intersex] bodies and experiences” (89).

Davis concludes, as many of the stories in *The Symposium* do, that the importance of sharing these stories is the future of the treatment of intersex, and the ceasing of infant genital surgeries in particular.

Davis shares the stakes and the impetus for collecting these narratives and sharing them in the medium of an academic journal. She writes:

This issue provides a formally recognized and ‘valid’ platform for people with intersex traits to tell our stories. Storytelling can empower members of the intersex community, they are testimonies to the ways in which we are thriving in a world that rigidly maintains that individuals must be either “male” or “female.” [...] Our stories also document how normalizing interventions, which are simultaneously fueled by and perpetrate an ideology of sex as binary, have been more harmful than helpful to us. The contributors to this symposium make a powerful case concerning the harms of normalization. The second goal of this symposium is to change the hearts and minds of those who provide, or may in the future provide, medical care for people with intersex traits – and not just of our “conditions” but for whatever else we might need as ordinary consumers of medical care. Third, if doctors and others are listening, the narratives told here have the power to shape dominant medical discourse about intersex bodies and experiences.

It becomes clear in this passage that these stories are written to be compelling, to change minds. This obvious political aim sheds light on trans narrative scholar Jay Prosser’s claim that “the

lives we encounter that feel most authentic, where we feel the most invoked ethically, are also those where we are in a spectatorial position, the suffering staged, and the contexts theatrical” (181). *The Symposium*, therefore, is theatrical in that it is being “put on” for physicians, the suffering is being staged in a particular way to affect the greatest response, and places physicians and other readers in a position where the hope is that we are “invoked ethically.”

The audience for these stories is largely a medical one, or at least consists mainly of people who work within the field of social work, psychology, or medicine. It is not intended for a lay reader, though some of the contributors have shared their stories on their personal blogs (Pagonis). While there are a vast range of stories in the collection that focus on various aspects of living with an intersex trait, most of the texts have similar themes or events. The first is that the authors recollect a sense, in their childhood, that a secret is being kept from them about their bodies. They do not understand themselves, or what might be “wrong” with them. This sense of foreboding is usually the result of their parents or physicians keeping information from them. Eventually, almost all of the authors obtain their medical records or they are told about their medical “diagnosis” as intersex. Their diagnosis becomes a key moment for many of these authors because they finally “understand” their bodies, or at least are given a narrative through which to understand their bodies.

The second theme is the ways in which the locating of community, or others like them, provides a way of narrating the experience of intersex. Many of the authors in this collection set out to look for other people with their traits after discovering them either by accident or by finally being told by a physician or parent. Many of them found information and communities online. Others found communities through their work, through internships they chose within queer communities, or through chance encounters with other intersex, trans, or queer people.

Most authors write about this experience as being a revelation in their understanding of themselves, their bodies, and how to move forward in the world. The difference between this kind of life writing and the fiction I covered in the previous chapter, is that intersex people can see themselves in these narratives, whereas, as Hillman has made evident, they cannot see themselves represented in Eugenides's fiction (loc. 248). While the goal of both the fiction and the life-narrative may be to make more space in the world for intersex people, when the intersex body is used as trope or metaphor, as it is in both Winter and Eugenides's texts, real bodies cannot fit into that mold, thus limiting the effectiveness of the genre to enact real change in the case of intersex.

Enacting real change requires affectively charged narratives that are crafted to ethically entangle the reader. Both Hillman and the authors in *The Symposium* deploy objects rhetorically in order to affect change in their reader and their surrounding community and challenge unnecessary medical intervention into the intersex body. The scalpel, in particular, surfaces as an object that wounds, that cuts, that traumatizes. It therefore is effective narratively through its immediacy and its materiality. It encourages what I analyze as "the wince," an affect that is effective for intersex writers because it encourages both revulsion and disgust in response to surgery. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the wound, the scab that follows it, and the scar that follows that, are embodied experiences for intersex people. Some of what was done to them is not remembered by them and kept from them by family and physicians. Therefore, for those that are able to access their charts, or their diagnosis, that chart or diagnosis becomes an object that begins the process of claiming an intersex subjectivity and narrating an intersex life.

The chart follows the scalpel as an object that coheres into a diagnosis and by extension into a community of intersex people. I rely on Douglas Crimp's formulation of "mourning and militancy" (a particular kind of collective mourning that occurs in a moment of political and social crisis [137]) to understand how vital owning and physically grasping the medical chart is for the intersex author's move from an individual melancholia to a collective "mourning without end" (Eng "A Dialogue" 670). It is without question then, that the medical chart provides the intersex writer a diagnosis, which provides an identity as intersex. This identity, in turn, allows for the writer to imagine and, in some cases, experience a community of intersex people. I contend that the act of life writing is always political, that intersex life-narratives present us with a form of "militancy" that requires a sustained attention to the process of trauma and loss in order to both form and sustain an intersex community that positions itself in opposition to medicalization as its primary goal. The narratives also occur within the context of trauma writing more broadly, filling out the need to redress the hetero-wounding of our culture that traumatizes the intersex body-mind.

In the introduction to their book *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw claim that "If every age has its symptoms, ours appears to be the age of trauma" (2). Emerging out of "the inventory of catastrophic human suffering" of the twentieth century, the "new millennia" seems to be marked by the urge to catalogue that suffering. While I disagree that the twentieth century is unique in its "catastrophic human suffering" there has been, since 1990 or so, an abundance of memoirs, testimonies, and blog posts dedicated to narrating suffering (Douglas 385-386). Whatever the causes, and there is much debate about what they might be (see Eakin; Smith and Watson, 2010), our "culture of trauma" has meant that "accounts of extreme situations sell books." The site of these "extreme

situations” usually play out, on, and with the body. As Miller and Tougaw claim, “The private zones of the body have migrated into public domains and the limits of tellable experience have expanded, almost dissolving the border of the conventional markers that separated the private self from the public citizen” (2). In light of this move of the body from the private to public sphere, the intersex body becomes a body that can be discussed openly, facilitated by the ability to speak publically about genitalia, and the experience of medicalized trauma enacted on the body.

At present, there is little work done on intersex narratives, in particular life-narratives, despite a significant emergence of such writing over the last ten years or so. As discussed in the introduction, the only monograph-length text devoted to intersex narratives is Viola Amato’s 2015 text *Intersex Narratives: Shifts in the Representation of Intersex Lives in North American Literature and Popular Culture*. Similar to the project I am engaging in here, Amato is interested in the ways in which intersex life-narratives speak back to hegemonic modes of portraying and discussing intersex bodies and communities. She sees these hegemonic discourses as cultural, social, and medical narratives that enforce binary sex and gender norms. As she writes, “I approach [intersex] autobiographical, literary and cultural narratives with questions concerning *the accomplishments and contributions of the texts themselves*. I ask *which new knowledge about or paradigms for understanding intersex they produce and how they effect processes of resignification of intersex*” (29, *emph. in original*).

While Amato’s text engages with “autobiographical” material, and she does spend a chapter discussing Thea Hillman’s *Intersex*, her aim in analyzing these texts is different than mine. She takes a broad, historical approach, tracing the many ways intersex life-writing has worked to “resignify” intersex, and make “intelligible” intersex to a larger audience since 1990.

Amato's historical and cultural work has been invaluable to my thinking about Hillman's text in particular, and it is through a collaboration with her thinking that I am able to bring her analysis to bear on my own approach to these texts. My project is concerned with applying a specifically literary analysis to these texts through the use of psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and object-oriented critique, attending to how the "suffering [is] staged" through and with the use of objects in order to secure a genre of intersex life-narrative.

I begin this chapter, like the previous one, with some historical context. I begin with an analysis of Michel Foucault's edited biography, *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, originally published in 1990. I use this text as an opportunity to position it as the forbearer of the life-narratives I analyze in this chapter. I also analyze the ways in which the text marks the move from pastoral to biopolitical power, a move that Foucault marks in the final chapter of his *History of Sexuality, volume one*. This move to the biopolitical has profound impacts not just on the intersex subject but on the form of the narratives they write as well, an argument that is necessary to what will follow. After *Herculine*, I move on to a discussion of the scalpel, followed by the medical chart, both vital objects for thinking about intersex texts, as I have laid out above. Finally, I expand on my discussion of the medical chart as the object that provides the words to name the intersex body and therefore cohere an intersex community, in order to conclude with a brief discussion of diagnosis and cure, drawing on Eli Clare's newest book *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*. I make this final argument in order to link this chapter to the next through a thinking through of the intersex body as one that is made to do the labour of destabilizing the "naturalness" of the sex binary. As I will argue in the next chapter, the staticness of sex as a

diagnosis is destabilized by the process of being in relation with non-human animals and a host of chemical toxins.

### ***Herculine Barbin* and The History of Intersex Life-Writing**

*Herculine Barbin* sets the ground narratively for contemporary intersex writers. The impetus to “see” and evaluate the intersex body, by readers, is strong. Moreover, the fascination with how one can live in an intersex body in a society constrained by a firm male/female binary is palpable. Narrating the experience of straddling the gender/sex binary is a challenge of both form and content, as *Herculine* shows. But perhaps most importantly, *Herculine* marks the beginning of the recognition of the subject of the biopolitical control of hir body. The text’s author, Alexina/Abel, is aware of the ways in which hir body is being managed and attempts to narrate a way out of it in an effort to affect the reader into a sense of outrage at hir treatment. However, like the life-writing of intersex subjects, the target is not one person, but an intangible set of institutional controls enacted by physicians, teachers, parents, and community members. *Herculine* is a text curated and centred around physicians and other thinkers that are not Barbin herself. The intersex life-writing that follow it, through their use of objects, decentre these “authoritative” voices and recentre the text on their own bodies and experiences.

In the epilogue to her influential *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*, Alice Domurat Dreger points out that there are few “first-hand accounts” by intersex people during the nineteenth century about which she was writing.<sup>38</sup> The “personal archive” by “sick people,” or people labelled thusly because of their bodily difference, is thin prior to the early twentieth century (168). After that time, however, Dreger recognizes an “emergence of the voices and

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<sup>38</sup> Dreger’s lamentation is about the lack of texts that we know of. There very well may be many more that have yet to be found and brought to light. I hope that my project will encourage others to engage in this important archival work.

claims – to autonomy, to authority – of medicine’s subjects” (169). Dreger includes people with intersex traits in this group, recording their stories and making them known publically in numbers like never before. She and well-known theorist of the life-writing of illness, Arthur Frank, attribute this emergence to what they nebulously term “postmodernism.” They define “postmodernism” loosely as a time in which the individual subject has more freedom to speak back to power, in what they term a “postcolonial” move that sets up medicine as the colonizing power and the writing subject as the subject which is “impel[led..] to resist and object” (171). This “postmodern” freedom allows the intersex subject to claim their own story of their body and resist its continued medical management both for their own sake and for the sake of other intersex people. However, I find Dreger and Frank’s formulation unsatisfying because I am unsure what we are to assume “postmodern” really means, and I do not think that their definition of “postmodern” accounts for the ways in which the medicalized body is always produced and managed by biopolitical, and not always biopowerful, forces.

Intersex life-narrative emerges as a genre that both grapples with the biopolitics of their medical “treatment” that relies on *Herculine* as a necessary precursor and example text. I rely on two main sources in order to forward this argument: 1) the recent work on Michel Foucault’s republication of Barbin’s memoirs, specifically Lauren Guilmette’s reading of the text; and, 2) an understanding of narrative as a process of working through a social problem (see Frederic Jameson) as well as trauma which can form the basis for a unique intersex identity. In this sense, *Herculine* serves as a precursor to a contemporary group of intersex writing, and provides an opportunity for intersex writers to imagine a new genre. This genre is therefore marked by fragmentation, as well as a working through of the place of pride within spaces of medicalization, pathologization, and exile.

“Do we truly need a true sex? With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, modern Western societies have answered in the affirmative” (i). So begins Michel Foucault’s Introduction to *Herculine*. And arguably, so begins Foucault’s quest to interrogate the disciplining of Western bodies into two definable sexes, which he famously expands upon in *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault and other theorists of gender, sex, and sexuality<sup>39</sup> have found *Herculine* interesting because of the ways the intersex body works to defy the regulatory medico-juridical system that pressures bodies into male and female categories in order to curb “licentious behaviour,” namely “homosexuality” (Foucault, *Herculine* ix). As Foucault writes: “For a long time hermaphrodites were criminals, or crime’s offspring, since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the law that distinguishes the sexes and proscribed their union” (*History vol. 1* 38). Such is the fate of Alexina/Abel, who committed suicide in a “miserable little room” in Paris in 1868 after s/he,<sup>40</sup> having lived as a female for most of hir life, was designated male after an affair with hir female lover in hir late teens, and was thus encouraged to move away from hir home town to Paris. S/he was denied the right to marry the woman s/he loved despite being legally designated male.

It is important to point out that *Herculine* is a text with multiple parts. The first is Foucault’s Introduction; the second Alexina/Abel’s recounting of the early part of hir life prior to the change in hir legal sex designation as male; the third is a fragmented section based on loose pieces of writing by Alexina/Abel once s/he moved to Paris. These fragments are incomplete, and not all of them were published in the collection by the physician who received them from a Dr. Régnier, Auguste Tardieu. The fourth section is a series of medical and legal documents

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<sup>39</sup> See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Julia Epstein, *Altered Conditions*.

<sup>40</sup> Following Morgan Holmes’s example, I use gender neutral pronouns for Barbin because there is no clear indication in the text of Barbin’s self-identified gender.

collected by Foucault regarding Alexina/Abel's life. The final section is a fictional story entitled "A Scandal at the Convent" written by Oscar Panizza based on Alexina/Abel's story. It is thus vital to remember, as predominant intersex theorist Morgan Holmes points out, that *Herculine* is only available to us through "medical (Tardieu) and academic (Foucault) interventions" and thus we must be aware of its "limitations as a translation across languages, time, and disciplines, and through the hands of interlocutors" (*Intersex* 84).<sup>41</sup> I proceed with the following consideration of Barbin's text, then, with the awareness that I am on shaky ground.

In her compelling essay "The Violence of Curiosity: Butler's Foucault, Foucault's Herculine, and the Will-to-Know," Lauren Guilamette attempts to make sense of the inclusion of the amended materials (the medical documents and the brief fictional story) to Foucault's republication of Barbin's memoirs. Guilamette expertly takes on Judith Butler's claim in *Gender Trouble* that Foucault's interest in the Barbin confessional memoirs are a kind of confession of his own. They are, in a sense, our way into seeing parts of Foucault's closely guarded psyche. Butler finds in Foucault's introduction to the text a "problematic romanticism of polymorphous sexual freedom" (Guilamette 7) because he claims that the time Alexina/Abel spent in the convent was a time during which Alexina/Abel was able to explore hir sexuality in a "'natural heterogeneity' among women, a queer freedom before or beyond the repressive patriarchal gaze" (Butler in Guilamette 7).

However, Guilamette argues that this critique by Butler misses the point. Instead, she insists that Foucault is less interested in the ways in which gender or sex are discursive, per say, which is very much a part of Butler's early projects, but how they are imaginary and constructed,

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<sup>41</sup> *Herculine* is therefore unlike contemporary intersex memoirs in that the author had little control of the final published text. A comparison that is worth examining further, but that falls outside of the scope of this project to do.

then, by medical, social, and cultural influences, which become manifest in the memoir and the documents he appends to it. In Guilamette's words:

Foucault's [*Herculine*] volume is not much interested in whether the nineteenth-century hermaphrodite was understood as an 'interior' biological condition or an 'inscribed' cultural condition of a moral, legal, and social order; rather, [...] it] can serve as a site for highlighting the emergence of a violent curiosity animating the 'will to knowledge,' a cruelty that one senses in the fissures between memoirs, medical reports, and fictions – in their shuddering silences and discursive excesses (8).

What seems the keenest silence in Butler's early work on gender, and in particular her work on Foucault's *Herculine*, is the "shuddering silence" about the biopolitical. Guilamette eloquently understands that Foucault's *Herculine Barbin* marks the "fulcrum point in the transformation from the spiritual subject of a pastoral power to the medical subject of a biopolitical regime" (11).<sup>42</sup> She claims that in *Herculine Barbin* and in particular the inclusion of "a set of materials for genealogically interrogating their own presumptions about the 'truth' of sex," "Foucault engaged the violence of biopolitical curiosity." Foucault forces the reader to "wonder what it is about bodily ambiguity that inspires the violence of experts" (18). Guilamette rightly responds to this question by invoking Butler's later work, and Foucault's notion of

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<sup>42</sup> It is not surprising to me that Michel Foucault's text, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1*, which was spurred by his interest in intersex, ends with his first treatise on biopolitics. For me, the link between intersex and biopolitical control of bodies is profound. If biopolitics is geared towards life, and the promulgation of the species, a legible and comprehensible body, then intersex bodies stand in direct opposition to that fostering of life. First, they are perceived as sexually deviant from the very instance of their birth. Second, their bodies are deployed in order to secure a binary sex in the first place, making their silence and expulsion from society necessary to holding up the sex binary.

“curiosity-as-care,” one that attends to vulnerability and listens carefully, one that “cares for what exists and what could exist in all its ambiguity” (18).

Foucault’s *Herculine*, through its attention to the “birth of biopolitics” at the moment of Alexina/Abel’s birth (Alexina/Abel at the “fulcrum” that turns into biopolitical control of the ambiguous body) marks the critique of the “violence of experts,” and “biopolitical curiosity.” This violence, in this early and important text, is the power bestowed upon the surgeon to make sex designation in the first place. It is not the word “hermaphrodite” but the power given to the physician to designate what is “hermaphrodite” and what is not in the first place. Indeed, it is the way in which “normal” and “abnormal” become designated at the outset. It is exactly this biopolitical curiosity that later intersex memoirs, written at the turn of the twenty first century reject. Instead, they attend to “curiosity as care” by providing stories of their own lives on their own terms. They assuage the curiosity about their bodies and their lives, without allowing the “authority” of the physician to be the voice that tells those stories. It is, therefore, vital to remember the place of biopolitics in the emergence of intersex narratives. These texts are attempting to work through biopolitical power, and counter it, when “it” is not a person, but a force. In this sense, contemporary intersex life-writing is a continuation of the project of not only responding to a personal problem, a personal life, but a collective experience of oppression, the source of which is not easily pinned down.

This act of grappling – of coming to terms with the biopolitical control of one’s body within a medicalized context, such as Alexina/Abel finds herself doing, given that her body is a contentious body whose gender and sex is under violent, curious exposure – results in a fragmented text. This fragmentation, I claim, is indicative of intersex life-writing<sup>43</sup> and becomes

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<sup>43</sup> I am thinking here about Hillman’s memoir, as well as Aaron App’s *Intersex: A Memoir*, which I will discuss in the next chapter. But I am also interested in the ways in which intersex stories, even those that are told in a more-or-

part of a genre of that writing. To attempt to make sense of one's medicalized body under the pressure of management while at the same time attempting to maintain something akin to agency has a profound effect on language and narrative. (I am thinking here of Eve Sedgwick's writing, while dealing with her own medicalization during treatment for breast cancer.) For example, the second section of *Herculine*, which follows Alexina's transition to Abel and Abel's move to Paris, is fragmented, disjointed, and, at times, nonsensical. It reads more like a postmodern stream-of-consciousness experiment than a late nineteenth-century memoir.

Vincent Crapanzano, in his article "Self-Centering Narratives," argues that *Herculine* represents Barbin's "loss of a genre" (62). The genres available to Barbin at the time of his writing failed to provide space for a successful articulation of his lived experience as an intersex person forced to legally change his sexed status. According to Crapanzano's careful reading of *Herculine*, "conventionalized discursive strategies by which a man (or woman) of Barbin's provincial, bourgeois background could 'meaningfully' articulate his (her) life – or past – and give seemingly full expression to his (her)self" were insufficient. They "could not give Barbin a vantage point, an identity, in the engendered discourse they assumed. They presume a continuity and (conventionalized) breaks with that continuity (e.g. the changes that occur with maturity, *Bilgung*, or even conversion) that were irrelevant to Barbin's life trajectory" (62). In other words, the genres and methods of writing to which Barbin had access could not articulate such a radical transition from female school teacher to male labourer. The transition, the queer relief into which Barbin's life is thrown, also throws the narrative into a state of chaos, of uncharted narrative territory.

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less teleological way (Calapinto's *As Nature Made Him*; the pieces in *Chrysalis*; and, even the pieces in *The Symposium*), double back on themselves, bring the past into the present, and in the case of the former two, tell only small snippets of experience or offer brief reflections instead of being written as long book-length narratives.

While Crapanzano's understanding of the text's "lack of genre" is convincing, I would like to expand on it here in order to link *Herculine* to contemporary intersex life-writing in a way that has not yet been theorized. Crapanzano argues that the text's fragmentation occurs because the change in Alexina/Abel's legal sexed status, which had ripple effects throughout his social and cultural environment that were irrevocable, is so "radical" that it drops Alexina/Abel "out of (narrative) time," not just with his past but "with the genres and conventions he had for creatively articulating his past" (63). I submit, in response to this reading, a combining of Guillamette and Crapanzano's arguments by suggesting that the narrative becomes fragmented precisely because Alexina/Abel is attempting to grapple with the biopolitical control of his body. For example, Alexina/Abel explains later in the text, after the transition to Abel, that s/he would feel uncomfortable in a marriage because s/he has a "secret" understanding of women that would provide his an "immense advantage" that would "turn against" his. Marriage, of course, is a biopolitical institution that is part of the project of "the family" which manages and maintains the birth and rearing of children. It also provides a certain amount of legitimized space for state-sanctioned desire and care. That Abel finds himself unwelcome in that institution is significant.

It is unclear how Abel's "advantage" (his ability to understand women) provided to his by his time in convents might "turn against him," or, as s/he states, that his "joys would be poisoned in marriage" (107). But it is possible to link these statements to the first part of the passage from which these quotes are drawn. Abel states "As the result of an exceptional situation, on which I do not pride myself, I, *who am called a man*, have been granted the intimate, deep understanding [...] of a woman's character" (107, *emph. added*). By "calling" Abel "a man" the state, who has the legal right to "call" Abel either man or woman, interjects into Abel's life. The naming of Abel as male or female designates, to the state, power to tell Abel whether or not s/he will fit in a

marriage as the “man” or the “woman.” It is the crossing in-between, Abel’s “advantage,” that troubles hir position in this marriage. By exposing hir ability to understand women in the intimate way s/he does, s/he is exposing himself as less-than-male. The intimacy afforded in marriage, including the ability to see and critique a lover’s body, is what would “poison” hir “joys” because it would confirm for hir partner that s/he is not “truly” male. S/he is only “called” male. The institution of marriage, therefore, would not condone a marriage between a woman and Abel because 1) hir gendered behaviour and sexed body do not conform to expected norms; and 2) because Abel would not be able to reproduce as male, thus making sex between hir and hir lover entirely pleasure-focused, which might be what s/he means when he suggests he would “cruelly abuse the immense advantage” that would be hers.

Given that Alexina/Abel cannot marry, and s/he cannot find work, s/he is pushed outside of the normative spaces of belonging – the economy and the family – both owing to hir embodiment as intersex. Embodied belonging is vital for social belonging under biopolitics, and if *Herculine* marks the beginning of biopolitical control over the sexed body as Guillamette has shown, then we can read the shift from the first part of the text to the second as the shift from pastoral to biopolitical power. What happens to the narrative is a result of this shift – it fragments, it sputters, it becomes nonsensical, in an effort to destabilize biopolitical control by attempting to narrate life differently. This destabilization is also the project of Hillman’s and the writers of *The Symposium*, linking *Herculine* to these texts in a trajectory of intersex life-narrative that attempts to resist biopolitical control over their bodies deemed intersex.

## Haunting: The Scalpel

About two years ago, two books arrived in my mailbox on the same day: Giorgiann Davis's *Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis*, and Aaron Apps's *Intersex: A Memoir*. Turning them both over in my hands, I recognized something similar about these two texts' packaging that, despite being about intersex, were quite different in their content. Davis's is a sociological study of the move from "Intersex" to "Disorders of Sexual Development" within North American medical communities and the response by intersex activists to this change. Apps's is a book of poetry about his experience being intersex. The similarity is that the cover of both texts features a sharp, silver, surgical implement (a scalpel in Davis's case and a pair of scissors in App's case). Neither implement is being held by a hand or supported in any way. These implements are floating, like ghosts on white pages. They are threatening agents with no one to wield them. The covers of these texts sparked for me an interest in the way these implements are picked up and presented in intersex life-narratives.

The floating surgical implement encourages the following line of questioning, a line this chapter attempts to follow: 1) The scalpel haunts by threatening a cut, a wound. This wound is a trauma that may or may not be remembered by intersex people. So, if the scalpel is the conjurer of the wound, then how is it deployed politically within these texts? How might the scalpel be useful in thinking through the medical, and more vastly biopolitical, management of intersex bodies? Moreover, what affects might the wound conjure for the reader? In response to this last question, I submit the wince as an affect that encourages the reader to, as Prosser puts it, be "invoked ethically." Through the empathetic revulsion the wince signifies, the text is able to hold the reader and writer together within a register of pain and trauma, but also of anger. These particular affects set up the potential for the next section, which considers the chart and

diagnosis, to construct and cohere an intersex identity and community that rejects, in the most ardent way, the continued medical management of intersex bodies.

### **The Wound and the Spectre of the Scalpel**

This section thinks through the importance of the scalpel in intersex life-narratives. It uses Iain Morland's understanding of the reach instead of the touch as a way of understanding the post-surgical intersex body. I extend Iain Moreland's concept of the reach to the process of "invoking ethically" the reader in intersex life-narratives intent on ceasing unnecessary genital surgeries. The scalpel is the object that encourages the cohering of intersex life-narratives, whether or not the author has had surgery, in an effort to affect the reader into a more acute political awareness about the scalpel's damaging potential.

Grounding this section in Iain Morland's article "What can Queer Theory do for Intersex" from the special issue of *GLQ* entitled *Intersex and After*, it explores Morland's question: "What kinds of critiques of genital surgery does queer theory enable or substantiate?" (286). Moreland points out the limited potential for queer theories that centre on pleasure to understand or think through the post-surgical intersex body that may have lost some, if not all, genital sensation as a result of the surgical wound. However, Moreland does find value in queer theory's necessary relationship to shame, one that some tenants of queer theory, he argues, keep trying to do away with in favour of a pleasure or pride based model that is limited in its ability to make space for "atypically sensate bodies" (287). As an alternative to the queer touch which forms the basis for what Moreland might call the "pleasure thesis" in queer theory, he offers "the reach." In spite of the atypically sensate body's inability for tactility, it still desires, and reaches toward that desire. For Moreland, queer theory's potential lies in thinking through that reach.

I expand on Moreland's idea of the reach here to think about how the intersex author is reaching toward the reader to narrate the process of remembering the moment of surgical wounding. Reaching, I think, is an extension of Jay Prosser's understanding of life-writing as an attempt to invoke the reader ethically. If a critique of genital surgery is what these texts are forwarding, then the reach provides an alternative to the touch between the reader and writer. The touch assumes two tactile and touching bodies, which may not be the case for the post-surgical intersex body.

In the reach, therefore, is a potential for affect instead of the assurance of change. The intersex writer cannot be sure of whether or not they will touch their reader or whether or not the reader will feel the touch if they do. As Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg argue in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, whimsically titled "An Inventory of Shimmers," "Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (1). "Affect, at its most anthropomorphic," they continue

is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. (1)

Therefore, I understand affect and its potential, in the argument that follows, as a force – conscious or unconscious – that may be able to bring about some kind of "drive toward movement" away from the way the texts explain things to be (ie. biomedically managed intersex bodies) to something or someplace else that we may not know in advance, but fundamentally

disavows cosmetic genital surgeries, particularly on people too young to consent. The reach Moreland calls for is therefore the *in-between-ness* where affect resides.

The surgeon's touch is what, therefore, necessitates future reaching instead of touching. Further to Iain Moreland's argument about queer theory's potential within and for intersex studies, he thinks about the surgeon's "decensitizing touch" as that which "change[s] [post-surgical intersex] bodies and thereby constrain[s] the possibility for queer critique" (287). Moreland writes the following passage, which has served as the inspiration for my thinking about the surgeon and the scalpel in this section. I will therefore quote it at length. The rest of this section will show how this passage illuminates much of what is said in intersex life-narratives about the scalpel as a durable and useful object for thinking through the surgeon's touch:

Genital surgery for intersex is an example of how bodies touch. It is an embodied encounter between patients and surgeons. The operating room, a space of stylized hygiene, makes possible extraordinary intimate touches in which normally unseen and inaccessible bodily interiors are touched by their bodies and their technological prostheses. Technology such as the scalpel extends the temporal reach of the surgeon's touch. The scalpel lends the surgeon's touch a force of which durability is an effect: by having the power to cut the body, the surgeon's touch persists in ways that would be impossible otherwise, changing for life the patient's genitalia. (300)

The scalpel, for Moreland, through its ability to cut, wound, and create scar tissue that makes the body possibly insensate and changes "for life" the body of the intersex person, is therefore a vital tool to consider. In fact, as I will argue, the scalpel, like the chart that I will explore later, is an

object that intersex life-narratives organize themselves around. Whether or not the author has had surgery or not, whether or not their body is atypically sensate, the scalpel haunts the text. The scalpel, therefore, coheres intersex trauma narratives under one heading: the physical wound inflicted by the surgeon, and their enforcement of the impossible two-sex model.

A pressing example of the haunting of the scalpel in intersex life-narratives occurs early in Thea Hillman's *Intersex (For Lack of a Better Word)*. Thea and her lover have just returned from a shopping trip and are laughing, rolling around, and "making out" on the bed, when her lover asks if she can give her a haircut – you know, "down there" – because she "thought it would be hot" (loc.37). Thea, despite being shy about her pubic hair because she is hairier than most women as a result of her intersex trait, allows it. She hands her lover a pair of haircutting scissors with "teeth so sharp they seem to cut molecules of air as they close." She writes, "like a surgical implement, they are long, thin, silver, and cold" (loc.44). Interspersed in this story is a discussion of Thea's visits to doctors who carefully examined her body, in particular her clitoris, to make sure "everything was doing what it was supposed to and not one bit more" (loc. 48). These examinations have left Thea unable to accept sexual touch in the way that she would like to. Hillman compares these exams to stories of sexual abuse survivors.

Amidst these reminiscences, Thea watches her lover cut her hair, getting increasingly nervous. "The sharp scissor tips were poking my labia. I was beginning to panic, but I wanted to give her what she wanted so I let her keep going." She writes about wanting to relinquish control to her lover, but is finding it difficult. "And then she cuts me," she tells us.

The scissors slice my flesh, just a little bit, but it's everything. And then she says she needs to stop. Then she starts to cry. And then she leaves the room. She leaves me there, naked on the toilet. My mind races. I can barely grasp the fact that I am

the naked one, scared and vulnerable, and that she's crying. It makes no sense to me. ("Haircut")

Thea, herself, has never been "cut" by physicians. Her story doesn't include what so many intersex stories do, testimonies of surgical impingement without their consent, summers off from school spent in hospitals for yet another surgery and recovery, the shame, guilt, and rage about not having genital sensation, the rejection of physical intimacy as a result of these experiences, and so on.<sup>44</sup> And yet, on the bathroom toilet, having her pubic hair cut by her girlfriend, Thea experiences the trauma of surgical intervention. The spectre of what might have happened to her body, the haunting of what has happened to others, imbues this moment with too much affect, too much trauma, and she takes on the traumatic memory of others.

In her presidential address at the 2011 MLA convention, scholar of life writing Sidonie Smith claims that "narrating lives becomes an occasion for assembling and claiming identities, securing and releasing social relations and negotiating affective attachments. These acts connect people to an intimate past, animating a historical imaginary identified with family and nation" (qtd. in Rippl et. al 5). Often, as Gabriel Rippl and his co-writers argue in their introduction to their book *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in an Age of Trauma*, the dead come back and haunt the living, who write in order to pay homage to the dead or to, as Smith puts it, "claim identities, secure and release social relations and negotiate affective attachments" (5). However, it is not the dead that haunt Hillman, or intersex life-narrative more broadly, but the flesh that the surgeon cuts away, scars, and the potential insensitivity that results from that cut. It is the pressing present and the uncertain future for intersex medical management that is the spectre in Hillman's text.

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<sup>44</sup> For more on this, see Karkazis, *Fixing Sex*; Morland; Dreger, *Intersex in the Age of Ethics*.

It might, then, be possible to expand the concept of the reach, affect's *in-between-ness*, to the urge on Hillman's part to cohere intersex narratives through the spectre of the scalpel. She reaches toward other intersex lives and narratives through her conjuring of the scalpel. It is as if Hillman recognizes that in order to include her narrative into the genre of intersex narrative, there must be a scene of surgical intervention. This movement with her lover on the bathroom floor with scissors is her version of this scene. The stainless-steel surgical implement is the conduit between Hillman's personal narrative and the collective trauma of other intersex people, which begins to cohere a genre of intersex life-narrative. It must, I argue, contain a knife, real, imagined, or haunting. It is through the haunting of the scalpel in Hillman's text that she narrates her experience of intersex as relational to others. As Rippl et. al. explain, "autobiographical lives are always 'relational lives' (Eakin, 'Relational Selves), that is, lives that are related to other subjects as well as to real and imagined communities as small as the family or as large as the nation" (5). It is through the scalpel, first, and the medical chart, second, that the intersex writer relates themselves to the community of intersex others. While this may seem an obvious argument to make in regards to intersex life-narratives that include surgical intervention, it is striking to see the scalpel emerge as an object of significant threat in an intersex life-narrative that does not include surgical management.

### **The Scalpel and the Wince**

This section considers the "wince" as a further affective tool in intersex writing. Specifically, I ask how the recounting of the wound, or trauma, constructed by the scalpel, is deployed in an effort to construct a genre of intersex life-writing that defies the medicalization of intersex bodies. Unlike some early trans life-writing, which has been perceived to be focused on

the individual as a result of the shame and stigma hurled at trans people (Jaques 360), intersex life-narratives can often be read as necessarily community centred. Intersex texts quite often state their investment in the next generation of intersex children, who they hope will not be surgically impinged upon. By recounting the violence of the scalpel, intersex life-narratives assure its affective stance, which seeks to shock the reader into renouncing intersex medical management, specifically on children. Therefore, the deployment of the scalpel, along with excruciating images of the wound, secure a wince. Wince is defined by the *OED* as: “To start or make an involuntary shrinking movement in consequence of or in order to avoid pain, or when alarmed or suddenly affected.” The wince, therefore, permits a conjoining of the reader and the intersex storyteller by creating the same reaction “in consequence” or “avoidance” of pain.

Through a different text entitled “The Injured World: Intersex and the Phenomenology of Feeling,” Iain Morland can help us understand the scalpel’s affective potential to enact a more ethical relation between medical institutions and the intersex body in intersex life-narratives. The text also aids in an exploration of how the scalpel is responsible for the wound around which intersex life-narratives are often organized. Morland recounts the story of his roommates finding a box of his research on intersex surgeries, and their reactions to these images and articles. He writes:

Some phrases in the papers made my housemates wince with dismay: clitoral resection, penile disassembly, pubic skin flaps, urethral mobilization, glans separation. Illustrations of these taking place – the normal currency of medical papers on the topic – elicited sharp intakes of breath. My housemates, none of whom had a background in medicine or intersex studies, even exclaimed in alarm at some of the images: photographs taken during surgery showing swollen and

bloody genitalia, sometimes hooked open with medical equipment or freshly stitched together after an incision. You, reader, may similarly be wincing as I recount the incident. (22)

The wince is a visceral reaction to surgeries that, unlike “elective surgeries with demonstrable health benefits,” not only “sound bad” but “*are* bad” (22). Morland’s article reads this wince as productive because it creates a bridge between those who wince at the sight and explanation of these surgeries and those who have experienced them, whose genitals have, as a result, become insensate. He reads the wince as a move away from the notion of intersex surgery as “individual.” Instead, he claims, “the ensuing reciprocal lack, whereby one individual’s wince at surgery lacks the very lack of feeling that surgery has brought about, might be rethought not as a deficiency but as potentially redemptive,” by which “one cannot avoid being affected by another’s loss of the capacity to be affected” (39). The wince, then, allows for an affective exchange between the object of surgery and those that hear, see, and read their stories.

The beginning of Daniella Truffler’s story in *The Symposium* provides an example of the use of the story of surgical management to encourage the reader’s wince. She begins her narrative thusly: “I was born in 1965 in Switzerland with a severe heart defect and ambiguous genitalia. The doctors couldn’t tell if I was a girl or a boy. First, they diagnosed me with CAH and an enlarged clitoris, and *cut me* between my legs looking for a vagina.” Later, she explains “When I was two months old, and still in the hospital, *doctors opened my abdomen* and found healthy testes, which they threw in the garbage bin” (111, *emph. added*). The emphasis in Truffler’s statements, specifically the emphasis on “cut,” and “opened” require the use of a knife, and indicate a violence with which that action was performed. The “healthy testes,” that “doctors” “threw in the garbage bin” underscore this violence. The result of the aggressive and

acute terminology deployed by Truffler encourage a “wince,” a profound disgust, not aimed at the organs that were cut and removed from Truffler’s body, but that that her body was “opened” only to have her healthy organs thrown away like an abject piece of waste.

The scalpel, through the wince it encourages, returns the reader’s gaze from resting upon the physician and back onto the intersex body, now telling the story. Through the object of the scalpel, which gestures to a largely absent physician who cut open Truffler’s body and threw out her testes, the gaze focuses on Truffler’s body. The physician is largely absconded from the text as only a necessary interloper that caused the wound and the trauma. But the trauma, and how the trauma is narrated, is the focus of the text. Therefore, the wince encouraged by Truffler’s text directs the rage that it hopefully elicits toward the power structures that require a vagina of a female child and deem her healthy testes “garbage” instead of at a particular surgeon, a particular medical practioner, or a particular consenting parent.

Like Barbin before her, Truffler is thus trying to narrate biopolitical violence, a violence that cannot be located in one place, but circulates around and cuts her body and throws away her testes. As a result, when the narrative returns the gaze onto her body, the text begins to rupture and require a different form of narration. Later on, in her story, Truffler again highlights the violence of physicians’ discourse and their blades, while forcing the narrative back to her own body and the body of other intersex people, though in a highly fragmented and experimental way. She writes:

Here is a sample of the sorts of things I have been told by IGM [infant genital mutilation] doctors I have confronted since becoming an activist:

“But you are still standing here” (Yes, still, unlike my best intersex friend and all my other peers who took their own lives).

“Since CAIS [Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome] patients live as women, what do they need their abdominal testes for?” (Hint: How about vital daily hormone supply?)

[...]

“As long as there are parents, we’ll continue to operate”

(Obviously, children have no rights.)

“They’ll never know what they’re missing.” (A popular urologist’s joke responding to the risk of the loss of sexual sensation.)

By narrating part of her text in this question and answer format, Truffler invokes the wince by referring to the physicians’ comments about surgery, like the organs that will be surgically “missing,” the “operations” that will continue, the disappearing of “abdominal testes.” But then, the gaze is displaced through these violent evocations onto the intersex body. The gaze returns to what is in brackets: the intersex children, the hormonal needs of Truffler’s body and others like her, the atypically sensate intersex body, the deaths of people deemed intersex who did not survive the medicalization of their bodies.

The scalpel, and the cut and the wince it gestures to, provides the pivot point on which to turn from the doctor, or even the “parents” who consent to continued operations, and back onto the intersex body. Thus, the surgeon’s knife becomes an object of vital importance for intersex life-writing, whereby the object that cuts becomes all perpetrators of medical violence in order to understand that violence as biopolitical, as amorphous instead of specific. The object then allows the narrative to return to the intersex body and its trauma as a way of centering the intersex body. It is the object that causes the “wince,” for both the intersex author and the reader of the text. The authors, then, pick open the “scabs” of these psychological and physical scars in order to end this

kind of medicalized violence. Stephani Lynell Long, an author I will explore more in a moment, states at the end of her account of medicalization that:

In the past 14 years I have told my story countless times. It's never easy to tell it. Each time it's like pulling the scab off a wound that refuses to heal. But it's something I do because I can. Not everyone has the courage to stand in front of an audience and out him or herself as intersex. (100)

In this passage, Long makes clear that intersex writers open their individual wounds for the sake of all those who are wounded and might be wounded if these practices don't stop. In order for this tactic to be successful, their wound, and its resulting scab and scar, cannot be singular and thus be explained away as a single event of violence, but collective. It focuses on the shared violent biopolitical enforcement of a binary sex, instead of focusing on the singular intersex body, as Truffler does in her question and answer. This move from individual to collective, linear to fragmented, which turns on the blade of the knife, begins to form what a genre of an "intersex story" reads like.

Miller and Tougaw write that

scabs are the benign version of scars, the traces of wounds trying to heal on the surface of the skin. Skin holds memory and, as we've seen in the cases of tattoos and marks, mute signs of old humiliations. Picking scabs keeps the wounds open. Life-writers are willing to tolerate the mess of embarrassment because they also expect their scabs and scars to remind readers of theirs. In hoping for parity, they can wish for clemency. (18)

This passage is useful when thinking about intersex life-writing, in the case of which there might not be the potential for exact "parity" between the intersex writer and the reader because the

experience of medical management in the case of intersex is quite unique. And yet, there is something to be said about the ways in which the reader might respond to the wounding of the genitals in particular (as organs that are both “embarrassing” and the site of pleasure, shame, and as becomes obvious in the case of intersex, identity), as we can see in the example of Morland’s housemates’ wincing. Therefore, the site of the genital cut, wound, and “scab” might be a unique avenue into the empathy Miller and Tougaw are pointing to here.

### **To Have a Name: Diagnosis and the Medical Chart**

*Loss becomes condition and necessity for a certain sense of community, where community does not overcome the loss, where community cannot overcome the loss without losing the very sense of itself as a community. (Judith Butler, “After Loss, What Then?” 468, original emph.)*

The previous section might give the impression that intersex narratives, like most queer texts in public, are just sad. They organize themselves around loss, and the process of cataloguing those individual and collective losses. While this generalization may hold true in our current political moment in which the primary goal of intersex life-narratives is to end the medicalization of intersex bodies, I want to provide the option to read these texts also as organized around the construction and maintenance of community. I therefore rely on Judith Butler’s understanding of the necessity of loss for the construction of community, along with Douglas Crimp’s thinking through of what he calls “mourning and militancy” as a methodology of turning collective loss into collective political action in the face of the AIDS crisis, and David Eng’s notion of melancholia, which presents the sense of individual loss that compels writing in the first place.

For David Eng, the late twentieth century was a moment ripe with melancholia. If we read the quote above by Judith Butler, alongside Wendy Brown’s notion that “discourses of injury and grief not only give form to marginalized identities; they are identity politics’ very

condition of possibility,” we can see how Eng comes to this conclusion (Brown in Eng, “Melancholia,” 1276). Suffering seems necessary for minority group formation. Take the suffering away, and there is no longer a need for the group because suffering is the result of oppression. In Freud’s early theory on melancholia, in “Mourning and Melancholia,” he presents mourning as the normal response to the loss of a “loved person, or the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, ideal, and so on” (243). While mourning may make us strange for the moment, eventually the reality takes over, and we are able to get back to the business of living our normal lives. The pathological response, in contrast, is melancholia, a troubled, ceaseless mourning.

However, as David Eng is quick to point out, Freud is unable to maintain the distinction between pathological mourning (melancholia), and healthy mourning. In *The Ego and the Id*, Eng reminds us, Freud revises his position on melancholia, and comes to understand melancholia as necessary to the formation of the ego. He claims that a subject is forced to give up a sexual object which forces a modification in the ego, which, Freud states, “can only be described as a reinstatement of the object within the ego, as it occurs in melancholia.” “As such,” Eng writes, “there can be no ego without, or prior to, melancholia” (1277). It is, therefore, possible to understand that melancholia is normative, “as a constitutive psychic mechanism engendering subjectivity itself” (1277). Therefore, through Eng’s uncovering of Freud’s later thinking on melancholia, which is not pathological but necessary to subject formation, it might be possible to understand intersex community building as melancholic.

In the late twentieth century, there was a fair amount of work being done on melancholia, but since then it seems to have fallen out of critical favour. Despite the passing of its critical trendiness, I continue to be struck by how much it illuminates the testimony of intersex people I

have been reading throughout this project. Growing up with so much secrecy surrounding their bodies, with scars with no explanations, with repeated exposure to the scrutinizing gaze of likely many physicians, the intersex person bears a sense of loss, but without the words to name it, and therefore no method to process it. The lost object – which I locate as the non-injured body, the “whole” body, which can also be read as the “disparaged object” of normal heteronormative masculinity (Eng, “Melancholia” 1277) which the intersex body, because of its sexed difference, cannot perform – is incorporated into the ego. But, once the intersex person is able to access the object of their medical chart, and they are able to name themselves as intersex, they are able to move out of this sense of melancholia and into what Douglas Crimp understands as a militant state of mourning.

While I am compelled by Eng’s reading of melancholia as necessary for subject formation, I am less convinced that melancholia can move out of the singular subject and into a collective formation of a community. Melancholia seems to be a phenomena of the individual and less adaptable to theorizing collective affects and action. Douglas Crimp’s reading of collective mourning is more apt for the project of thinking about queer community formation in the face of biomedicalized violence, specifically. Becoming medicalized is so often an individual event. The AIDS crisis, however, affected entire marginalized communities in such a short period of time. The government failed to respond. The intersex community has been facing similar failure since John Money’s protocols for surgical intervention in the 1950s. I, therefore, turn to Douglas Crimp’s formulation of militant mourning to help make sense of the way intersex writing, which is always inherently political in its aim to end medical violence against intersex people, narrates their lives and their experiences for the sake of intersex people in the present and future.

For Crimp, in the face of AIDS, some gay men slid into a moralistic melancholia, where the loss of loved ones was too much to bear, and so the melancholic person rejected the *jouissance* of gay life which they associate with the disease. Their response to the AIDS crisis was that gay men needed to “grow up” and become “responsible citizens,” thus rejecting promiscuous sex, and embracing a more normative way of being. Crimp, however, advocates for a militant mourning that advocates for “queer responsibility” which enthusiastically endorses riotous sex in the face of the disease. The lost objects in the face of AIDS, therefore, are the lost loved ones but also the loss of unencumbered sexuality.<sup>45</sup> Thus, this formulation is undeniably useful for intersex life-narrative is because once intersex people claim their chart, many who write stories have been compelled to do so out of a newfound love of their bodies, a “queer responsibility” to spread the riotous love of their identities as intersex, and to practice a radical politics of care for their own bodies and for each other’s. It is with this spirit of care that I approach these texts.

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In their<sup>46</sup> brief life-narrative, “The Son They Never Had,” in *The Symposium*, Pidgeon Pagonis writes the follow integral exchange between them and Lynnell Stephani Long: “Go ahead, say ‘I’m intersex,’” intersex activist Lynnell Stephani Long encourages Pidgeon during their first meeting. After some hesitation, Pigeon mumbles “‘I’m intersex.’” “‘What? I can’t hear you,’ Lynnell said with a smile. ‘I’m INTERSEX.’ ‘There you go. Next step is to get your

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<sup>45</sup> It may seem strange for me to evoke Crimp here, as he is one of the critics Iain Morland collects under those that emphasise the “pleasure thesis” in queer theory – a thesis that excludes the atypically sensate intersex body. However, I think Crimp’s understanding of a queer responsibility in the face of traumatic loss is helpful in understanding how community is formed in the face of loss, particularly loss that is perpetuated by heteronormativity and its biopolitics.

<sup>46</sup> I adhere to Pagonis’s pronouns.

records.” As this example acutely shows, the medical chart serves as a necessary object in intersex memoirs. It is not simply a metaphorical object that holds the secrets of the intersex person’s treatment, but an object which is physically taken, hidden, and recovered as part of a liberatory process of constructing the self apart from the medical industrial complex.<sup>47</sup> The medical record provides the intersex writer a diagnosis, which in turn provides an identity as intersex. The writer, therefore, takes up this intersex identity, in turn, which allows for the writer to imagine and, in some cases experience, a community of intersex people, as the HIV diagnosis is able to do for AIDS-positive people for Douglas Crimp. This chart, therefore, presents a tricky double bind where the author has to rely on the medical terminology for their body to find a community (““Say “I’m Intersex”””) which allows for the onset of collective mourning. But, the intersex person also claims the chart as a way of disentangling their body from the medical establishment. Moreover, as part of this process of learning about themselves, often the chart provides concrete proof of physical and psychological wounding, enacted by the scalpel as discussed in the prior section, that may or may not be remembered, or really be articulated, by the intersex person. The act of writing for the traumatized intersex person, as I will show, becomes an act of rewriting, either of their personal history or filling in the gaps that the medical history has left. Thus, the scalpel enacts the wound that requires responding to, the chart provides the catalyst for writing by giving language and history to the wound, and the narratives allows for the process of making sense of the wound, the chart, and the life these objects affect.

For some of the writers in *The Symposium*, accessing their chart is difficult. Because many of them feel that the truth hidden in the chart is vital to their formation as a subject, this act

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<sup>47</sup> Most intersex people are not given access to their medical charts until later in life, if then. Some need legal action or the threat of legal action to get access to them (Blair 89; Truffer 111), and some have resorted to taking them from a doctor’s office (Walsh 121).

of withholding is damaging. Karen A. Walsh, in the second-to-last piece in *The Symposium*, writes that “truthful disclosure didn’t come to me about my biology and what was done to me as an infant until I was 33, when I forced the issue by removing my medical records from my endocrinologist’s office” (119). Walsh had found references to herself in a medical journal published in 1960, wherein the doctor describes her anatomy as an infant, and the procedure he performed on her, but gives no information about either the reasons for performing the surgery or the impacts of it on Karen. The brief reasons the doctor did give were that Karen’s gonads could become malignant, but more importantly that there was concern about Karen following a “normal psychosexual pattern.” The goal for Karen’s physician was “normal psychic development.” What resulted from her medical treatment, as Karen points out, is not that. Instead, Karen experiences extreme disassociation, not able to remember important events in her life because of the great trauma of the surgeries, but more importantly the lies that were told to her by physicians and her family at the request of those physicians. For example, she had large abdominal scars that no one would explain to her. She writes:

Growing up, I was treated like a fascinoma and a lab rat at a major teaching hospital on the East Coast. All I learned from those doctors as a young kid was what it feels like to be ogled, photographed, and probed by a roomful of white-coated male doctors. Disassociation made itself my friend, and helped me cope through annual genital and anal exams and probing. I thought I was a freak and I felt completely powerless to protect myself from them and their “care.” (120)

A key component to melancholia, for Freud, is an “extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale.”<sup>48</sup> Freud goes on to write that “The

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<sup>48</sup> Freud defines the id as the “it” we cannot articulate. It contains the drives that are messy and unregulated. The ego encases the id, and serves as a kind of barrier between the id and reality. Freud uses these terms to clarify

patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished” (246). The loss of power, for Karen, without a clear explanation for that loss, has left Karen in a state of melancholy, feeling a “freak,” a moralistic stand she takes against herself. She also feels it is up to her to protect herself from the physicians, and her inability to do so perpetuates her sense that her ego is “incapable of achievement” (246). She therefore, allows herself to continue to be “punished” into gender conformity by physicians through repeated acts of “care.”

Later in life, Karen is hospitalized after her vagina rips during intercourse. She writes that had she known the information about her own anatomy that the doctors kept from her, she would have been more cautious.<sup>49</sup> Following this literal tearing of her body, Karen is compelled to act. Karen explains how she took the medical records from her endocrinologist’s office after he “stonewalled” her, refusing to tell her the “truth” about her intersex trait and how it had been medicalized over her life. She refuses to accept this rebuke, and in response physically removes her medical chart from his office. She then takes her medical records into her car and reads them in the parking lot (122). Moving the physical object of the medical record, or chart, from the space of the physician’s office to Karen’s private car, marks a move from seeing her intersex trait as something owned by the medical establishment which in turn makes her body – that which hosts the intersex trait – an object of the medical establishment, to her body and her intersex trait being owned by her. By removing the chart and taking it with her into her own

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notions of consciousness, unconsciousness, and subconsciousness. For, as he writes, “everything that happens in the id is and remains unconscious, and that processes in the ego, and they alone *can* become conscious. But not all of them are, nor always, nor necessarily and large portions of the ego can remain permanently unconscious” (*Two Short*, 108). He goes later to describe the super-ego as a “vehicle of the phenomenon that we call consciousness” which regulates both the ego and the id. If it is “normally developed” it is “sufficiently impersonal” (*Two Short*, 137).

<sup>49</sup> Psychoanalyst Myra Hird sites a study which argued that telling subjects that they were intersex was less psychologically damaging than withholding that information (1080).

private space, she is also *de facto* moving her body from object of medical management to liberated subject. She can then choose to use her medical records how she likes because they are part of her now, part of her voice. She has reclaimed medical language for herself. She can then move into the process of storytelling.

As Karen uncovers, the medical chart or record lays bare the evidence of wounding. It makes plain all that has been done to the intersex person. She writes that her medical records made evident that:

there was never full disclosure to my parents [or me], and therefore there was no informed consent for the “corrective” surgeries performed on me as an infant. My parents were only told that their little girl would get cancer and would not have normal development as a girl unless her “deformed ovaries,” were removed, and that they should never discuss these problems with me. Thus, after having presented with an inguinal hernia and having exploratory surgery at age 16 months, my intra-abdominal testes were removed in a second surgery two months later. I was pronounced a ‘male pseudohermaphrodite,’ a diagnosis that was shared neither with my parents nor with me.” (119-120)

Here, Karen illuminates the way terms from the chart like “deformed ovaries” and “male pseudohermaphrodite” are picked out from the chart in order to begin to construct a narrative that accounts for the loss of organs (testes), and begins to make sense of the motivations of others in the enactment of trauma against the writing subject. The chart, however, also provides Karen with the identity formation with which she begins this chapter – “I am an intersex woman with Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome” (119). The entanglements of diagnosis with community formation thus surface.

Pidgeon Pagonis's piece expands on Walsh's technique of including terms from the chart into her narrative by including entire selections of their medical records within the text. These records appear before Pidgeon discusses their knowledge of their own intersex. But because we, as the readers, have read the pieces leading up to Pagonis's, we therefore have prior knowledge of what these records signify. They act as a foreshadowing of the pain to come. The first one reads:

Medical Record

6/6/86—Informant: Mother and grandmother Immediate Complaint: Abnormal genitals Present Illness: Jennifer has been considered to be entirely well until exam last week by pediatrician who noted enlarged clitoris and small vaginal opening. Female Genitalia: Clitoral enlargement of 1.5 cm. Sex assignment as a female is entirely appropriate.

As I recalled earlier, Pigeon meets Lynn Stephani Long, who tells them to say they are intersex. Once they do, Long tells them that “the next step is for you to get your records” (105). By including bits of these records, Pagonis gives us a snippet of what goes on in the physician's mind during diagnosis. What is made plain in this excerpt Pagonis provides is that their body was “considered to be entirely well until” it wasn't. That is, until an “enlarged clitoris and small vaginal opening are found.” This discovery, for the medical establishment, means that the body is unwell and is now open to medicalization. While we already know from other narratives we have read before Pagonis's that this series of events is common, it is stark and troubling in a more immediate way when we read the physician's own words.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The physician's own justifications made available in Pagonis's pieces make evident the physician's own investment in policing gender norms. Ellen K. Feder argues in her most recent book *Making Sense of Intersex*:

What is also unique about Pagonis's piece is that we see them respond to the medical chart through life-narrative. They explain how each procedure felt before and after it happened, which allows the reader to see what is often kept hidden from the medical record – the feelings of the patient. For example, the surgery Pidgeon undergoes to “correct Jennifer’s [Pagonis’s prior name] problem with urination,” becomes an extremely traumatic moment for them. The chart continues “At the same time, [Dr. F] is considering doing a vaginoplasty” (103) – “Dr. F is considering vaginoplasty,” not Pidgeon or her family. We learn from Pagonis’s description that “I was being prepared for anesthesia. The doctors came into the room to tell me what was going to happen next. ‘We noticed that your vagina is smaller than other girls.’ While we’re in the operating room fixing your urethra, we can also make a small incision in your vagina to make it larger. This way, you’ll be able to have sex with your husband when you’re older. Does that sound good?”<sup>51</sup> Pagonis writes that, in response, they let out a “shameful ‘yes’” (104). When they wake up from surgery, they write that they were “no longer a child.”

By relating their own experience as well as the physician’s explanations and justifications of the procedures in the excerpts from the medical chart, Pagonis allows us to see how the chart fills in gaps in their own story as well. As a young child, they did not understand what was happening to them or why. But in retrospect, through writing their story alongside the medical

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*Changing Ethical Perspectives in Biomedicine*, that the problem of intersex is not located in the intersex body, but in the ideological investments of the physicians and other medical professionals. For Feder, it is useful to consider that the loss of gender indeterminacy might be a melancholic attachment, and it is through this attachment that violence is enacted on intersex bodies. Eng is quick to point out that in the later writings of Freud, he writes that melancholia is in fact necessary to the formation of the ego, as I suggest earlier. It is useful to remember again that Freud writes, “The ego is created through an ordinary loss predicated on a melancholic incorporation and identification. As such, there can be no ego without, or prior to, melancholia” (Freud in Eng “Melancholia” 1277). The melancholic loss, Feder argues, is of our polymorphous perversity. We lose the fun and joy of gender indeterminacy when we enter into subjectivity. For Feder, then, physicians are acting out a deferred sense of envy onto intersex bodies by way of medical violence. They are disciplining them the way they wish they had never been disciplined.

<sup>51</sup> The moments of friction between the physician’s justification and Pagonis’s own experience expose the power imbalance between the physician and the young child who experiences, but does not understand, these surgeries, the pain, perhaps not even the language being used.

chart, they can piece together the original “Dr. F is considering a vaginoplasty” to the heteronormative imperative placed on them as a child to later “have sex with [their] husband” and the sense of no longer being a child. By being able to understand the impetus for the physicians to alter her body to make it more “(hetero)normative,” Pagonis is able to begin to construct a legible understanding of the trajectory of their own life. They are able to start to see how and why their body was altered and to go through the emotions of dealing with that. Moreover, they are able to start engaging in practices (like activism, and writing this piece for *The Symposium*, which is a form of activism in itself) to stop the same practices being enacted on others.

It is worthwhile to point out that Pagonis’s piece also is fractured and fragmented in order to achieve a narrative that effectively explains and explores the biopolitical violence of their experiences of intersex surgery. Like Truffler and Barbin, Pagonis halts the linear narrative line because linearity cannot account for biopolitics. Like attempting to narrate ether, all three writers disturb the teleology of their texts in order to evoke an ethical response in their reader. Thea Hillman also employs this technique, by writing her life-narrative in poetic fragments that have a loose connection to each other but that do not necessarily line up.

Unlike Pagonis but similar to Karen Walsh, Hillman did not always know she was intersex. She knew she had a condition that would make her body go through the motions of puberty earlier than the other children if she did not take her pills three times a day. But this difference made her feel special and it was not until much later that she recognized how troubling her treatment was. She writes about feeling like she could sense the disgust in the doctor’s face about her body. She claims, in a very telling passage in the text, that what she shares with other intersex people might not just be the sameness of her intersex trait but also that

look of disgust in the doctor's eyes, of watching children like her "turned into a freak right in front of [her] eyes." She comes to the tentative conclusion that maybe those experiences are what make up being intersex after all. She wonders, "maybe the most intersex thing about me was my experience of how my body was treated, rather than whether or not I had confusing anatomy or genital surgery" (loc. 1407).

Hillman's mother knew from very early on in her childhood that there was something different about Thea. Her main indicator was the pubic hair Thea grew at a very early age, and her precocious sexuality (loc. 93-173). Because Thea's mother's inquiry into her daughter's "condition" was spurred by her and not a medical professional's reaction to Thea's body, and because Thea's mother was a health care professional herself, Thea's treatment was not shrouded in the same secrecy as other intersex writer's in *The Symposium* were. For this reason, Thea had no real reason to seek access to her medical chart. She was aware of all that had happened to her and why. However, her identity as intersex came much less easily, despite being told by many intersex activists that because of her CAH, she was – indeed – intersex. It is not until the moment I describe above that she understands herself as intersex. It is trauma that allows her to, finally, say she is intersex. The "most intersex thing about" Thea, in other words, is her experience of trauma at the hands of medical professionals.

For other intersex people their memories are solidified in their medical chart which they then liberate from the medical institution in order to gain agency over how they will construct their own narrative. Thea Hillman has no chart. There is no written record of how Thea's doctor looked at her, no record of her feeling violated in the examining room with the physician, who was eager to examine her clitoris. This difference of cataloguing, where the archive of trauma is strictly in Thea's memory, makes it unique from the pieces in *The Symposium* I have discussed

in this section. However, for Thea it is reading other people's medical records that allows her to make this realization that she is intersex. It is seeing what might have happened to her and what happened to her brethren that allows her to make the connection – she is intersex. Intersex in these texts cannot be disentangled from trauma. To be intersex, for these writers, is to have experienced medical trauma, then to find community, and then to write about their experience.<sup>52</sup>

To construct a legible life-narrative is, in many ways, the goal of psychoanalysis. With so many missing pieces owing to the lack of information given to the intersex person, it is no wonder their attachments are melancholic prior to the discovery of their medical record. There is no place to ground the pain because the memories do not exist. For prominent scholar of illness narrative Arthur Frank, this shift in understanding one's body and experience after reading their medical records is an editorial shift in one's narrative. He claims they now have a "new story" which is not more or less "true" than the old one, but fills in blank spaces when a person may have been sedated or anesthetized during surgery, or simply not told the whole story (23). An extension of this feeling of knowing what "really happened" is the relief of having a diagnosis, a "legitimate" way to explain, or address, their body and what has happened to it. Often the reading of the chart marks a distinct shift from a sense of fear and helplessness to agency. The move that I propose between melancholia and collective mourning, then, is one in which the loss

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<sup>52</sup> This work is in conversation with the excellent existing work on trauma and intersex by Iain Morland, specifically his chapter "Intersex Treatment and the Promise of Trauma" in *Gender and the Science of Difference: Cultural Politics of Contemporary Science and Medicine*, edited by Jill Fisher. In it he argues that what he calls "conservative constructivism," which is the belief that an infant born with an intersex trait should be ascribed a definitive sex at birth, and surgery and rearing should confirm that sex, is an enactment of trauma from the outset. This claim is made on the understanding of trauma, following Kai Erikson as a "blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively." Since, as Morland argues, gender is not something a child is born with but something that happens gradually through socialization, the enforcement of something that is, as Candace Vogler claims of trauma, "more than [one] can handle" is traumatic at its very essence. It is a significant blow to the psyche. The traumas that occur after this first one only reinforce the first.

of power is unexplained and thus helpless, to one in which the loss of power is understood as such and then able to be properly mourned.

Lynell Stephani Long, who was the one to mentor Pagonis in their struggle to find, process, and write about their medical chart, writes about her own struggle trying to find her medical records. But first, she writes: “It wasn’t until I got sick in 1995, however, that I found out that there was a medical term to describe me. I was intersex” (101). She continues later that “I started researching my medical history in 1996 and after buying a computer I began to search the internet. It wasn’t until I saw Cheryl Chase (a.k.a Bo Laurant) on television that I had a name for what was ‘wrong’ with me. I am intersex” (102). The medical diagnosis, in Long’s case, like Hillman’s, acts as a conduit to identity formation. Before naming herself as intersex, what was she? Long explains that during childhood she thought she was a girl until her mother “beat it out of me. Literally” (101). Instead, Lynell is subjected to multiple treatments that are not fully explained to her and that she cannot explain to her friends. The physicians never ask her what she wants but they continue to work to make her into a legible boy (101). This secrecy, compounded by the work of the physicians to make her into a boy, leads Lynell to abuse drugs and to attempt suicide.

The act of researching her own medical history by which she is able to access a “diagnosis” as intersex encapsulates the process during which the individual trauma of secrecy and shame moves into a collective sense of mourning. Long is able to find others like her, like Cheryl Chase (aka. Bo Laurant). She is thus able to construct a community of people, if only online, through which to process her sense of loss – loss of agency, loss of a childhood in the “wrong” gender, the loss of body parts, and the sense of loss at not having a mother that confirmed and supported her gender identity. Moreover, through the process of writing in *The*

*Symposium*, Long is participating in Crimp's notion of "queer responsibility" whereby she is not allowing the shame of her diagnosis to maintain a melancholic attachment to her losses, but instead begin to mourn them.

While it is tempting to refer to this sustained militant mourning as melancholia, I hesitate to do so because, as Long indicates, she moves away from desires for suicide and self-injury to activism and advocacy. David Eng's reading of Freud's early formulations of mourning and melancholia are useful here. He contends that the "melancholic is so militant in his or her denials that the lost object is finally incorporated into the self, turned into the shelter of the ego and preserved as a form of ghostly identification" ("Melancholia" 1276). So far, this seems about right. The intersex person identifies so strongly with their "diagnosis" as intersex, and the harm that was enacted on their bodies and psyches as a result, that they are "haunted" by it. Moreover, if melancholia can be a form of "nascent political protest" by way of staying with grief, then melancholic the intersex writer surely seems to be. But, as Eng continues, "the turning of the lost object into the ego not only marks a turning away from the external world of the social to the internal world of the psyche, it also simultaneously transforms all possible reproaches against the loved object into reproaches against the self" ("Melancholia" 1276). This not the case for any of the intersex people I recounted here. Instead, Walsh, Pagonis, and Long, and Hillman move out into the world, with renewed vigour to address the harm done to them and advocate for others.

### **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, I submit a rather long quotation from Eli Clare's most recent book, a gorgeous and necessary thinking through of cure. In it, he writes about diagnosis. He calls diagnosis a "source of knowledge, sometimes trustworthy and other times suspect. As a tool

and a weapon shaped by particular belief systems, useful and dangerous by turns. As a furious storm, exerting pressure in many directions” (41). Intersex diagnosis (or perhaps more accurately now DSD diagnosis) permits the wounding of intersex people, by naming their bodies as different. However, intersex diagnosis also provides an opportunity for community, as collective sites of mourning and militancy.

Clare writes:

Simply put, diagnosis wields immense power. It can provide us access to vital medical technology or shame us, reveal a path toward less pain or get us locked up. It opens doors and slams them shut.

Diagnosis names the conditions in our body-minds, charts the connections between them. It holds knowledge. It organizes visceral realities. It draws borders and boundaries [...]. It holds history and creates baselines. It predicts the future and shapes all sorts of decisions. It unleashes political and cultural forces. At its best, diagnosis affirms our distress, orients us to what’s happening in our body-minds, helps make meaning out of chaotic visceral experiences. (41)

Intersex narratives orient themselves toward diagnoses of intersex in all of these ways. They “make meaning of [their] chaotic visceral experiences” acquired in and through the medical industrial complex. They challenge the notion that an intersex future is no future at all, but that only occupying discrete male or female categories make life possible. They grieved, mourn, and rage against their medical management. They unleash their own politics, their own cultural forces, against the biomedical encroachment on their past and future intersex bodies and psyches (what Clare necessary collides under the provocative term body-mind).

The unfurling of intersex politics, which both necessarily relies on the medical diagnosis but rejects biomedicalization, within these life-narratives converge at the scalpel and the medical chart in order to enact change. They make use of the visceralness of the scalpel's cut to make clear the violence of surgical intervention. They then turn the medical chart and its wielding of diagnosis to reclaim that same diagnosis to name their bodies intersex and use the term as a road map to find other intersex people. As a result, they create communities that challenge the past, present, and future medical management of intersex people.

As I have shown, intersex is a term that defines intersex bodies into existence. It then uses that same language to deem intersex bodies pathological. Intersex writers challenge the pathology of their bodies through narrating their thriving outside of the medical establishment. However, the threat of intersex to destabilize a sex/gender binary that is constantly being secured and upheld by bipolitical forces threatens to continue the medical, legal, social, and cultural disciplining of intersex bodies; intersex "opens doors or slams them shut." Therefore, intersex narratives are messy. In attempting to articulate biopolitics, the narratives are required to fragment, to stutter, to become less than coherent.

In an effort to keep a sharp eye on popular representations of intersex, my next chapter critiques the way this challenging category of intersex has been picked up in scientific and popular media discussions of planet toxicity. Eli Clare might have something to say about this too, about the way intersex in an era in which sex is being refigured through our proximity to toxins, "predicts the future and shapes all sorts of decisions. It unleashes political and cultural forces." Intersex starts/indicates/acknowledges/is trouble.

### Chapter Three

#### “We Have Enough Endangered Species Around Here”: Intersex in our Age of Toxicity

“If the only constant at the dawn of the third millennium is change, then the challenge lies in thinking about processes, rather than concepts.” Braidotti, Rosi. *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*

This chapter proposes a reading of Aaron Apps’s 2015 book of poetry *Intersex: A Memoir* and Lucía Puenzo’s 2007 film *XXY* that engages with ecocritical and environmental responses to intersex. Our contemporary moment is increasingly anxious about intersex bodies as potential indicators of ecological catastrophe for both non-human and human animals. The “gender bending” chemicals that humans are awash in show how delicate physical sex actually is. Physical sex is not a given binary between male and female but was always already malleable and moveable. However, our cultural imaginary does not promote such a reading of physical sex. Because the sex binary is thought to be necessary to the reproduction of the human species, the flexibility of sex that gender bending chemicals make tangibly obvious, as I will show, results in a panic about ecological change like, perhaps, no other.

My reading of *Intersex: A Memoir* and *XXY*, therefore, proposes that both texts offer potential lines of flight out of the panicked discourses around gender and sex non-conforming bodies that have been linked to toxic chemical exposure. As the previous chapters attest to, our age is not one that is kind to intersex humans, born with genitals, gonads, chromosomes, or secondary sex characteristics that are not what medical practitioners expect. While there is plenty of academic ecocriticism that does the work of thinking about planet toxicity and its effects on sex (see Shotwell, Ah-King and Hayward, and Di Chiro), these texts have yet to fully consider the urgency present protocols for medically managing bodies designated intersex require for these discussions. As I will argue in this chapter, Puenzo’s and Apps’s texts provide us with this

necessary and pressing perspective: On the one hand, environmental toxins are being held responsible for the increase in intersex traits considered “mutations” and are regarded as a sign of the demise of the human (and other) species. On the other hand, intersex points to a flourishing of ways in which sex is embodied, and importantly challenges contemporary beliefs in the sex binary and biological sex itself. At the same time, the medical management of people with intersex traits continues to make traumatic the lives of people so identified. In response to this violent enforcement of sex binaries in an age that is making more unstable binary sex categories that never existed in the first place, we must begin to imagine differently, to have different dreams about physical sex, to see sex as a process of becoming for human and non-human animals alike.

In a brief internet search of the terms “toxicity” and “intersex,” or “toxic” and “hermaphroditism,” or “toxic” and “gender-bending,” one can easily locate dozens of articles that express concern about the effect of human-made chemicals on non-human animal and human bodies. In 2006, an *Independent* UK article reports that flame-retardant chemicals “known as polybrominated diphenyls, or PDBEs” have been found in the fatty tissues of polar bears in Greenland and Norway. These bears – that, as the article points out, are already at significant risk because of climate change and the “melting of their habitat” – are being “poisoned” by these chemicals. PDBEs are being blamed for the bear’s “surprisingly high rate of hermaphroditism.” While studies were still being carried out on the bears at the time of the article’s publication, its author does contend that “about one in 50 female bears on Svalbard have both male and female sex organs, a phenomenon scientists link directly to the effects of pollution” (Usborne).

If polar bears aren't compelling enough evidence for the effect of toxic chemicals on human sex, "gender bending" chemicals like bisphenol A (BPA), one 2017 *Daily Mail* article claims, are linked to "breast growth in men." While they highlight male breast development, they also report that BPAs are linked to a "slew of health issues including cancer, birth defects, diabetes, obesity, male infertility, and endometriosis" (Roundtree). Another article, published in 2009, in *The Guardian* reports that "Two-year-old children are being exposed to dangerous levels of hormone disrupting chemicals in domestic products." A "327 page report" done by the EU, "says that while risks from 'anti-androgen' and 'oestrogen-like' substances in individual items have been recognized, the cumulative impact of such chemicals, particularly on boys, is being ignored." More damning, the report continues:

Phthalates, one of the main anti-androgen chemicals, which are used as softeners in soap, rubber shoes, bath mats and soft toys, have been blamed for blocking the action of testosterone in the womb and are alleged to cause low sperm counts, high rates of testicular cancer, and malformations of the sexual organs. (Bowcott)

What is striking about all of the articles I cite here is that even though the chemicals they point to cause a significant number of other symptoms including, in the case of PDBEs, negative impacts on "thyroid glands, motor skills, and brain function," their gender-bending effects take centre stage, and become the obvious location of panic and anxiety about the ever-increasing toxicity of our planet.

It is seductive to look at these articles and also begin to panic, to despair about the future of our world as we know it. And while it is necessary for us to look at these studies and reports and carefully consider how we might limit our toxic effect on global ecosystems, I am compelled

to point out how anxieties about the potential for an increase in sex and gender non-conformity is rhetorically positioned at the centre of these reports. As Giovanna Di Chiro writes “This contemporary environmental anxiety appeals to cultural fears of exposure to chemical and endocrine disrupting chemicals as troubling and destabilizing the normal/natural gendered body of humans and other animal species leading to what some have called the ‘chemical castration’ or ‘feminization’ of nature” (201).

In an attempt to respond to this “transsex panic,”<sup>53</sup> Malin Ah-King and Eva Hayward consider how we might think differently about this problem of toxicity and gender-bending in their fascinating article “Toxic Sexes: Perverting Pollution and Queering Hormone Disruption.” They first ask their readers not to see these moments of cultural panic about “transsex” human and non-human animals as a “rootbound forecast” of the ecological perils to come for our planet. Moreover, they reject a “purity politics” that attempts to return to an impossible moment before toxification, and instead see ourselves as “already living in ruination” (1-2). As Di Chiro further argues, the “purity politics” that Ah-King and Hayward are trying to avoid, “resusitat[e] familiar heterosexist, queerphobic, and eugenic arguments classifying some bodies as being not normal: mistakes, perversions, or burdens.” Although we may agree with the need to think seriously about how to attend to the toxifying of our planet, we also need to resist “the knowledge/power politics of normalcy and normativity and reinforce [what] queer and disability theorists have analyzed as a compulsory social-environmental order based on a dominant regime of what and who are constructed as normal or natural” (202).

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<sup>53</sup> They use “transsex” as Myra Hird’s does in her article “Animal Transsex,” in which she identifies transsex as an umbrella term for a broad variety of biological characteristics in human and non-human animals that result in what we might consider transgender, transsexual, intersex, homosexual, bisexual, non-monogamous behaviours or traits.

In response to such a call to resist compulsory social-environmental order, Ah-King and Hayward open up space for themselves to imagine intersex polar bears, human children, and fish as all being involved in what they call an ongoing process of sexing. So, instead of seeing these differences as indicative of a future full of intersex, trans, and gender-non-conforming monsters, they see these bodies as part of an ever evolving, fluid, and permeable process of sexing that has always been going on. Sex, therefore, is a process, not a static state. Ah-King and Hayward describe their project of understanding the process of sex thusly:

Across manufactured landscapes, and through chemically polluted oceans, endocrine disruption presents a challenge to how we conceptualize sex.

Following out the knots in this issue, we turn to a model of sex that emphasizes sex as a dynamic process in which organisms have more or less ‘open potentials’ of sex, sex related characteristics, and behaviour (Ah-King & Nylin 2010).

Instead of thinking of sex as a nature-given dichotomy, or essentially discrete characteristic, sex is better understood as a responsive potential, changing over an individual’s lifetime, in interaction with environmental factors, as well as over evolutionary time. (6)

We think of sex as fixed and static after the moment of declaration at birth – it’s a boy/it’s a girl (or perhaps now at gender reveal parties where a white-iced cake is cut and reveals pink or blue cake-flesh inside that indicates, without contestation, that the fetus still growing inside of a womb is, and will always be, pink or blue, male or female). Most bodies, however, do not fit into such an easy binary. Bodies we call “intersex,” for example, do away with sex certainly, and therefore already destabilize “sex as a nature-given dichotomy.”

The two texts I explore in this chapter, Puenzo's *XXY*, and Apps's *Intersex: A Memoir*, narrate intersex in our era of toxicity by making space for an ongoing process of sexing. In this chapter, I explore a variety of different techniques that these texts deploy in order to render this space-making possible: Both texts ask us to consider sex as a process. A process, I contend, that is intimately caught up in and necessary to what Myra Hird calls "an environmental ethics of vulnerability." As Hird writes: "An ethics of vulnerability draws our attention to the extended others—human and nonhuman—affected by our actions in such dramatic events as floods and nuclear disasters, and in longer-fuse changes such as global heating and ground water, and soil and air contamination via landfill leachate" (115). This ethics asks us to attend to the effects of our waste, but not turn away. It asks us to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway 1). By staying with the trouble of planet toxicity and the increasing number of intersex human and non-human bodies in our world, intersex becomes less of a forecast for what is to come, and instead a reality of the now. It is, therefore, vital to attend to intersex stories and experiences of the now in order to keep our attention focused on the livability of their lives. In addition to specifically intersex lives, staying with the trouble provides a moment of reflection on how wrong our cultural, social, legal, and medical notions of sex have become. Sex is not binary, and understanding the dynamic and multitudinous processes of sex can make space for all kinds of embodiments that may otherwise be disciplined out of existence in order to maintain the fallacy of binary sex.

In the mire of our toxic exposure to which we must attend, we have found ourselves experiencing sex differently, with animals and with plants. So, *XXY* and *Intersex: A Memoir* help us imagine how to become. Through the protagonists' close intimacy to non-human animals in the texts, specifically the stare both of them share with an amphibian, both intersex protagonists

are able to understand their own sex as veritable. Their sex, therefore, has “responsive potential” to their world as it changes, as they change, and as they “[interact] with environmental factors” and engage in “evolutionary time” (Ah-King and Hayward 1-2). I, therefore, argue that these texts are what we need in our toxic age, in order to help us think through intersex polar bears, and the ever-changing morphologies of human male and femaleness.

### **A Note on Method: In-process with Green Slimy Creatures**

For months, water creatures have been haunting me. Small frogs, alligators, turtles, and fish, have permeated my thoughts, have been my mind’s companions. Specifically, intersex water creatures, their dimorphic bodies hopping, climbing, swimming against currents towards me. I have been unsure how to speak with them, how to try to understand what their stories might be trying to tell us about our planet, our troubled and increasingly toxic world. This chapter attempts a more fluid and permeable way of writing about these problems. As Rosi Braidotti argues, these questions of process (what she terms “becoming”) are hard to write, because they explode form in their multispecies, interspecies, and non-binary aims. Therefore, this chapter “attack[s] linearity and binary[ies]” and is written in a style that itself isn’t really linear or binary, but is a bit fragmented and messy because the texts and issues they address are also a bit fragmented and messy (8).

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is politically urgent. Writing with this sense of urgency, as Jasbir Puar points out, makes writing messy as well. In these urgent times, we take what material makes us question, and makes us infuriated, or makes clear the struggles we are attempting to articulate (loc. 225-262). The archive of this chapter keeps building; it is “rushing at us” (loc. 262) in the form of both news articles about the monstrous intersex body emerging

out of toxic swamps, in addition to similar reports of physicians who continue to advocate for medical management. Therefore, my writing here is a mash of forms, and takes as its subject a variety of objects and texts that help me make sense of Puenzo and Apps's thinking about what intersex means in an era of toxicity. In brief, like these two texts it explores, it attempts to give space to think differently. In order to do that, form gets a little mucky.

### **A Note on the Science: Or, a Science Lesson for Humanists**

In this ecology of toxins, bodies have responded to chemicals that block, mess with, and mix up chemicals in human and non-human animal bodies that are produced to encourage the growth (or not) of sex organs. Impacted by these chemicals, bodies that defy easy sex designation have emerged, and the reaction by scientists and climate change activists has been acute. The articles that I cite above are but the mainstream responses to an anxiety that permeates scientific studies. For example, Ainara Valencia et al. in their study entitled "Alternation in molecular markers of oocyte development and intersex condition in mullets impacted by wastewater treatment plant effluents" found that Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) discharges result in "alterations in gonad and gamete development such as intersex condition" (10). These effluents contain Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs) which "interact with the endocrine system, causing alterations at different levels of biological organization, from the molecular to the individual and the population level." The particular EDCs they examine are called "Xenoestrogens" which have the "ability to mimic oestrogen or to cause oestrogen-like responses in exposed organisms" (10).

Valencia et. al. provide a useful explanation of the process of toxifying waters with EDCs, which I will quote at length here in order to provide a scientifically accurate description:

EDCs present different chemical structures and have different sources. In industrialized countries these compounds mainly arrive in the aquatic environment from the wastewater treatment plants processing municipal, industrial and hospital waste waters (Campbell et al, 2006). Wastewater treatment plant discharges contain complex mixtures of EDCs, such as natural and synthetic hormones, pharmaceuticals, alkylphenols, bisphenol A, phthalates and pesticides that can interact with each other thus enhancing their potency.

[...] The oestrogenic effects of WWTP effluents have been detected worldwide in different fish species.

The concern for these fish Valencia et al note as a result of WWTP effluents is an intersex trait that “feminizes” male fish populations through the growth of oocytes (eggs) within their testes, which had been shown in other studies. The results of Valencia et al.’s study is as follows: while it is difficult to suggest a direct correlation between the WWTP effluents and EDCs, intersex was recognized within both female and male mullets further downstream than they had been before.

While the study of fish has been significant in relation to EDCs and intersex traits, frogs are also key creatures in the discussions of intersex in non-human animal populations. For example, David K. Skelly et al., did a study of intersex frogs and their concentration in suburban and urban landscapes. The cause of their “abnormal sexual development” is pesticides, according to the authors of the study. While the authors note that previous studies have indicated that “free-living amphibians” are at greater risk for “abnormalities” in “agricultural landscapes,” their study concludes that:

while abnormalities were present in agricultural landscapes, abnormal sexual development tended to be concentrated in landscapes with higher densities of

humans. Suburban landscapes yielded frequencies of testicular oocytes in male green frogs three times higher (21% vs. 6%) than those found in agricultural landscapes. (377)

The authors point to “synthetic estrogens,” leeching into the ground water in larger concentrations in suburban landscapes as a potential cause of these results (378).

What is fascinating about both of these studies, and what opens up possibilities for thinking about sex as a process, is that neither is able to reference a pre-toxic frog or fish population. Without a prior population to point to, the containment of sex within the parameters of “natural” and “toxified” are expansive and blurry. The question therefore becomes: were fish and frogs ever binary to begin with? How much of this sex binariness is a myth constructed by our human imaginary and placed onto non-human animal species? How much of a problem is it, within the co-imbricated ecosystems of fish and frogs and other non-human animal species, that there may be more intersex fish and frogs now? I cannot possibly answer these questions because I am not a scientist nor do I think on an answer to the question of “impact” because we cannot see far enough in advance to know what the result may be (or even when the time of the result may be). However, asking these questions sheds significant light on the anthropocentric bias that projects a binary sex onto non-human animals that may or may not be of any value to their future flourishing. Our ideas of what “natural” sex is might, in fact, be hindering their ability to effectively respond to the ecological “ruination” humans have thrust upon them.

In response to just this problem marking a timeline for intersex and toxicity, a study by Paulina Bahamonde et al. asks whether intersex is caused by EDCs or whether it is a “natural phenomena.” They suggest that it is likely caused by EDCs because they have an “estrogenic mode of action” (33). Their conclusion is that intersex is not “natural,” because they refer to

intersex as a “condition” that puts the species at risk, and therefore, within a somewhat Darwinian understanding of evolution, intersex is not productive. They write: “Intersex is a condition reported in several fish species. It is a concern since gonochoristic should not develop this mixed gonad tissue and there are potential reproductive consequences to developing gonads of mixed sex” (33). These reproductive consequences, however, are not proven but assumed based on an understanding of reproduction that can only occur between two discrete sexes with discrete and wholly different reproductive organs and tissues. As Myra Hird has pointed out, this notion of two organisms of entirely binary sexes coming together to mate as the only option for reproduction is absurd (“Animal” 41).

Non-human animals reproduce through an astounding diversity of means. Bacteria, as Myra Hird notes, exchange genes through a multitude of methods. If exchanging genes is the purpose of reproductive sex, along with creating more creatures like the one reproducing, then bacteria are a key candidate to examine to learn successful techniques. Bacteria use “hypersex (permanent symbiosis)”; they also “pass genes through meiosis, shuffle genes, and successfully resist death” (43). Hird argues that “sociobiologists and social scientists alike have tended to overlook the sex lives of bacteria in order to adhere to a paradigm that *a priori* defines the kind of sexual reproduction humans engage in as superior” (43). Hird goes on to quote Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, who write:

“Our own biologically parochial existence as sexually reproducing beings does not mean...that there is only copulatory, genital=based sex or that sex has anything necessarily to do with reproduction...Sex is not equivalent to reproduction. On the one hand, any organism can receive new genes – can indulge in sex – without reproducing itself. On the other hand, plants bud, bacteria divide

and cells with nuclei reproduce all without any requirement for sex.” (qtd, in Hird 43)

As Hird further contends, “Evolutionary speaking, sexual reproduction is a recent phenomenon.” Moreover, while sexual production might have been a necessary accident, it is not particularly efficient. According to Hird “sexual reproduction consumes twice the energy and genes as parthenogenic reproduction [basically, virginal reproduction]” (43). And yet, sexual reproduction based in the genitals persists in human culture as the default, not just for humans but for other animal species as well. But, the reliance on this myth about human reproduction as superior everywhere from scientific studies like Bahamonde et. al’s to the threat of a man with breasts evidenced in the articles I cited earlier make painfully obvious our investment in binary thinking and its entanglement with our hopes for the future of our species.

Intersex, because we understand intersex in our cultural imaginary to be bodies that exist statically between male and female and male and female bodies are required for reproduction and by extension futurity, therefore serves as a convenient example of monstrosity caused by our own greedy consumption and resulting expulsion of waste. But this rhetoric of monstrosity couched in the affect of horror at our own ecological disaster is not without problems. Rhetoric spreads like a toxin as well, into the hearts and minds of people who hear it. As we rely on the image of the monster to encourage better waste practices, what kind of image of the intersex body are we deploying?: frogs or fish with oocytes in their testes? “Hermaphrodite” polar bears? “Feminized” human boys? Perhaps because the intersex body which is named as such in relation to toxic exposure is often non-human animal in the scientific studies, it is easier to make it monstrous without worrying about its effect on human bodies and minds. In an era in which intersex bodies are still being medicalized and surgically altered because of their perceived

monstrosity, is it wise to deploy intersex bodies – human or non-human – as examples of ecological disaster?

### **I: Swimming in Contagion: Rethinking the Purity of Sex**

*Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option.*

-Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins.*

From the first poem in Aaron Apps's collection *Intersex: A Memoir*, human and non-human animals collide through the process of ingestion and digestion. The first poem recounts the speaker's attendance at a barbeque, where they ate the flesh of a pig. Apps writes: "We ate the strands of meat from the bones. We / ate silver fat. We ate grey-pink animal. We ate vegetable / matter. We ate like we were eating each other" (3). Apps's reference to cannibalism here dissolves the barriers between the human and the animal through our equal opportunity to eat and be eaten, to consume and be consumed, a fact that is necessary in the coming scene with the alligator.

In addition to cannibalism, Apps references "osmosis" as the process of both eating the animal but also as "lovers feasting together." Osmosis is the "process by which molecules of water or another solvent tend to pass through a semipermeable membrane into a region of greater solute concentration, so as to make the concentration on the two sides of the membranes more nearly equal." Another, perhaps more common figurative definition is that it is "a process resembling osmosis, esp. the gradual and often unconscious assimilation or transfer of ideas, knowledge, influences, etc." (OED Online). From this very first poem, we can see Apps playing with bodies' boundaries, through both figurative and literal osmosis, through eating, through

being together in the act of feasting. He is already signaling to us that the body is not as cohesive as we may like to think. Our bodies are always already permeable, fluid, open to foreign bodies, contaminants, already contagious.

In the context of ingestion, the pig becomes its component parts (silver fat, meat, bone), which are then shit out by the speaker in an explosive and humiliating ejection of diarrhea in a public washroom. During what is already a horrible moment, the speaker also must contend with their sex and gender non-conforming body in a public toilet when a mother and daughter enter the washroom and the speaker realizes that they are in “*the women’s room*” (7, original emph.). Apps explains in *Narrative Line: Barbeque Catharsis* (5),

And there I am, finishing the mess, stuck in the stall,  
sweaty and dishevelled. I could just leave, but that’s some-  
how inappropriate. The rhetoric overwhelms. Bathrooms  
are gender ciphers—to be in the women’s room with my  
body is to be in the wrong space, regardless of genitals.  
To be androgynous or intersex in the bathroom in a way  
that doesn’t pass is to put gender at odds with sex, it is to  
be policed by the scrutiny of the mother and the daugh-  
ter, and those standing outside of the door. (8)

As if being covered in shit was not enough, the speaker now has to contend with our social and cultural misunderstanding of genitals equal gender. Public washrooms, as recent debates in Canada and the US about transgender bathroom bills make clear, are what Apps calls “gender ciphers.” They are the sorting space for the biopolitical enforcement of binary gender and sex. Because Apps writes this moment in the aftermath of his body’s violent expulsion of pig-matter,

he is colliding the human/animal division with the male/female binary. Though, his project, as I will show, is to collide both of these oppositions in and through his intersex and imagining body. So, from the start, *Intersex: A Memoir* is both a treatise on species collision, and of the trauma and discomfort of having a body deemed intersex by the medical industrial complex and the social and cultural world that supports such a designation.

In a series of poems that comes later in the collection entitled “*Narrative Line: defining the crevice (1) – (6)*,” the speaker “18, almost a man” steps out of his back door in the everglades, and is met by “the living body of an alligator” (21). While considering the body of the alligator as object, and his own body as object to be eaten, Apps uncovers the fleshiness of bodies and their “holes” – holes to eat through, breathe through, shit through. “Everything sparkles and breaks as it moves: flesh down / flesh,” he writes, evoking his flesh, as now unique and distinct from his body, moving down the neck of the alligator. His flesh is no longer a human, but is food for an alligator. The gator, similarly, is not a creature but an “animal I make object,” a collection of holes, teeth, eyes, and menacing muscle. The human and the alligator are bodies with purposes – to eat and be eaten. Gender and sex fail to matter. What matters is who eats and who is eaten. Which one will “scream” and which will “swallow” (22).

In this section on this series of poems, I argue that Apps is creating alternatives to both the stark divisions between the human and non-human animal and between male and female enforced on human and non-human bodies through the violence of the biopolitical injunction to live. Living in a biopolitical sense, for Apps, is to be whole. Whereas, in the face of impending death, the bodies Apps envisions become a series of parts that are able to become with other organisms, and have radically different potentials for being. By fantastically undoing and

dismembering predominant anthropocentric biopolitical discourses, Apps helps us to imagine the body otherwise.

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Imagine a lake in Florida. It is a place where people go to fish, to camp, to engage with the wilderness. The lake, however, was leveed in the 1920s, '40s, and '50s, to create thousands of extra square miles of “muck farms.” A large spill of pesticides, along with the perpetual runoff from farms along the leveed shore, have produced large algae blooms and hostile conditions for lake life (Florida). The name of this tragic lake is Lake Apopka. Along the shores of this lake, farm labourers worked to harvest the crops that grew there. Many of these farm workers talked about being sprayed with pesticides as they worked, their clothes dripping with it (Slongwhite). But it isn't their stories that get trodden in front of the media as evidence of human error. It is the alligator that has enraptured the imagination, a species much older than us, older than dinosaurs.<sup>54</sup>

In an online video produced by “We are Change Orlando,” a correspondent named Justin interviews the prominent biologist Louis Gillette at a “Beyond Pesticides” conference about the effects of pesticides in the lake.<sup>55</sup> Justin was particularly repulsed by “mutant hermaphrodite alligators inside the lake.” These “mutant hermaphrodite alligators,” Gillette believes, were made this way by a specific “chemical cocktail” that is mostly human made. The hatching rate of the alligators was significantly lower than those in other lakes. They tested a variety of hypotheses only to realize, after performing biopsies on the alligators, that their testes and ovaries were

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<sup>54</sup> According to the Smithsonian, crocodylians (of which alligators are a member), have been around for “about 85 million years,” but belong to a “diverse and disparate group of creatures that go back to the Triassic.” Scientists have traced ancestors of crocodylians to 205 million years ago (“Top Ten” Smithsonian.com). Homo Sapiens, by comparison, have only been living on Earth about 20,000 years (Smithsonian.com “What does it mean?”).

<sup>55</sup> See Di Chiro's discussion of Guillette's deployment of tiny penises, “teeny weenies” in the same alligator population (206).

“abnormal.” In addition, the values of their hormone levels – testosterone and estrogen – were different than in other lakes.

Justin responds to this information by saying that these variations were what really “stuck out” to him, that these alligators were basically “mutants,” “like something out of a movie.” What worries Gillette, however, is that these “mutations” are not immediately visible, like missing limbs or that they “don’t got the right number of eyes,” which then “freaks us out.” He claims that part of the fear is that the malady is unseen. The alligators looked pretty healthy when they hatch. Like a baby you bring to a clinic that “looks like a baby,” there isn’t anything obviously wrong, Gillette explains. But, once they did further testing, the “wrong” is obvious: they are intersex alligators. While Gillette admits it is impossible to pinpoint which chemicals are causing which symptoms, the polluted lake is not safe for baby alligators, and by extension he believes it is not safe for human children either. The alligator and the human are made kin through their ability to be contaminated.

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In response to the alligator he meets outside of his backdoor in the Everglades, a water system attached to Lake Apopka, the speaker in Aaron Apps’s poems, through the process of thinking through the way his body might be torn apart by the alligator, is able to imagine the body not as cohesive but as a series of parts. He writes “would the thing I turn into a thing in my / mind lunge at my feet and tear my toes into discrete little / dick shapes?” The toes become dicks, a collection of “phalanges, metatarsals, tarsals” which he imagines “capture[d] / in an anatomy diagram in the gator’s jaw” (23). The threat of his coming death allows for a reimagining of his own anatomy, each appendage of his body ripped apart from each other and

reoriented within the gator's mouth. Apps's is able to imagine his own body being consumed, which would allow for his body and the alligator's to literally become one.

In an effort to stave off his impending consumption by the gator, the speaker grabs a "specific red broom" (22) and "aimed it at / the gator's face" (23). It is at this moment, in the (4)th poem in the series, when "time stopped queerly" (24). In a moment of heightened recognition of the "white-pink / silk of the gator's tongue and mouth," and the "unmoving bristles of the broom on the concrete," the gator "entered me. And I entered the / gator And I wanted to do it again. Harder. But I couldn't / do anything" (24). In contrast to the hard lines of the edges of the poems themselves, which are flush on both sides, marking a clear division between text and blank page, the line between human/animal, self/other is broken. The alligator enters the human. The language of "harder," and "inter," along with the description of the gator's tongue and mouth imply a sexual entering, a penetration into the "holes" that the last three poems discussed.

Through this act of imaginative sex, "we both became animal," Apps writes, "as we both flooded / outwards, mixed, and coagulated together" (24). After this becoming, the roles seem to reverse, and the broom, seemingly apart from the speaker, an agent of its own, "flipped out kinetically toward the gator's tongue, eye sockets, cranium, and toward the jaw's hinge" (24). This reversal marks a switch, whereby the gator now is a series of discrete objects "in front of the broom like / a thousand reflective balls." In the act of trying to lunge out, to harm the gator, to make certain that the space between human/gator is accentuated through the length of the broom, the human and gator come together. It is a strange and unexpected mingling in this moment of potential violence.

There are two comingling avenues of thought I want to explore here. The first is the notion that both the gator and the speaker “become animal,” a Deleuzian concept that we can perhaps read alongside Ah-King and Hayward’s notion of process in order to understand how toxicity reminds us all that we have always been in a process of becoming. The second is an understanding of the broom as a scalpel-like object that, through trying to accentuate the distance between the speaker and the gator, and thus violently halt the moment of becoming, activates it. I read the broom as parallel to the scalpel’s ability to slice and make discrete objects, to halt becomings, but Apps’s imagination explodes the scalpel’s disciplining potential by instead enacting the becoming of a speaker-alligator assemblage.

To become for Deleuze is “not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity indiscernibility, or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a molecule – neither imprecise or general non-preexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form” (1). Based on this quote from Deleuze, becoming is a collapse, like Apps with the gator, where the speaker does not want to be the gator (imitation) or be like the gator (mimesis) or even be gator-like (identification) but has an involuntary indiscernibility, where the speaker’s body and the gator’s cannot be wrenched apart.

Apps’s “becoming animal” may thus be read in a Deleuzian sense, then. The speaker, nor the gator, requested to become, neither of them choose. But yet, they come together in a “zone of proximity indiscernibility, or indifferenciation” where they could no longer be distinguished from each other. In this moment, they are able to become, what Deleuze might call elsewhere a speaker-gator assemblage, whereby they are intensely comingled and unspecific within their own form. In this state, we can potentially imagine all kinds of radical potentials for

different modes of thinking and being with non-human animals. We might be able to care for a gator, for what is happening to its world, and imagine our worlds as both equally toxic and toxifying. In this becoming space, we might see an ethical relation to the gator, a dissolving of the hierarchical map of the species in which humans exist at the top, in the face of the gator's opened jaw.

However, the red broom is what might stop this becoming, even if the becoming was to be eaten. It is the tool that has the potential to cut through the moment of becoming, as it so-often cuts through any co-relation between beings we see as opposite. It is not coincidental that becoming woman and becoming animal are thought together by both Deleuze and Aps. To have a sex that is not clearly delineated is to be closer to animals, to be less evolved. The broom, if it is a scalpel-like object, is meant to hold at a distance the animal from the human. Given that the speaker is intersex, the collision between the animal and the human has a unique and complex history. Siobhan Somerville argues that the deployment of genitalia in scientific work sought to confirm racist formulations of black female bodies. Somerville offers a reading of enlightenment thinkers and their fascination with the genitals of African women. Their genitals are imagined by these physicians as less evolved, more like a man's (larger clitoris, large labia etc.), which further confirms for those writing about them at the time that non-white women were more like animals (252). The implications of these racist rhetorics position all intersex people as closer to animals, as less human (though the impact of this rhetoric, continues to be more acute for intersex people of colour [see Elizabeth Reis]). Therefore, the red broom and the scalpel have similar jobs – keep becoming at bay in an effort to assert the intersex body as a human body.

By wielding the broom, the speaker is attempting to accentuate the space between the human and the animal – “I / grabbed the broom with my hands and then aimed it at / the gator's

face” (23). This space between the gator and the human cannot be held, as the space between male and female cannot be, even with the intervention of the knife (as Chapter Two made evident). In the space Apps imagines, in which the body explodes into its pieces, it is able to be incorporated with the other, a fantastic occurrence that is in direct opposition to the medical logic of containment. Medical logics generally, but about intersex specifically, take the body down to its component parts in order to make it cohere and bind to itself under the categories of male/female, cured/sick, dead/alive. That the broom fails to make such a coherence happen for the speaker’s body, to make it bounded and separate from the gator but instead works against itself, is a radical upheaval of medicine’s power which makes space for Apps’s intersex body in the moment of becoming. Becoming and Ah-King and Hayward’s notion of process might come together here, as an unintended and unexpected disruption of the status quo – both the holding apart the male/female as well as the human/animal binary.

For Apps, however, this becoming and perhaps process too, cannot be held indefinitely. Apps continues: “And then we split.” The speaker stands on the “edge of the concrete side- / walk holding tightly onto the handle of the red broom.” The gator moves back into the runoff pool: “When it hit the water it was there / in the ecology like water.” Apps is creating an intentional division here between the human standing on the stark ground of concrete, and the gator which moves into the “slick ball pit full of shiny gonads.” The runoff pool is a space that is abundant with “asexual slugs and insects, the dividing tubers, the / sea of unfertilized eggs growing of their own accord. All / in the liquid flooding into the alligator’s eyes becomes its / black shadow blood” (25). Apps’s poem becomes a lamenting on behalf of the speaker that the alligator’s membranes, the eyes, are being infiltrated by beings that are not constricted into the neat categories of male and female to which human beings are ascribed. In the world of the

alligator, there is more permeation, more fluidity, than humans are allowed. Through the speaker, Apps exposes his reader to the potential of permeability of the human body. He is showing us that we were never bounded beings but also that in this moment of recognizing the self as unbounded, there is a sense of loss, a mourning over the loss.

Apps seems to be speaking to, or with, the materialist feminists who argue for a material reconsidering of the body as both culturally and historically contingent *and* biological. Through the speaker's position as an intersex body, he is unable to turn away from his biology, from the reality of his body as biopolitically policed because of its perceived anatomical difference from the norm. Instead of imagining the body as only culturally inscribed, material feminists like Stacey Alaimo and Susan Heckman have proposed that while the categories of "male and female" that Apps laments here are indeed culturally and historically constructed, they are also grounded in material biology. They do not see the biological and the cultural as antithetical to each other, but intertwined in ways that are not necessarily easy to track.

One of the most exciting tenants of this theory relies on the notion that the human is not a bounded being, but is filled with an ecology all its own, full of single celled organisms all living in and eating our bodies. Moreover, there are all kinds of contagion and infiltration between and within species all around us all the time. Bacteria and viruses float around us, moving in and out of our bodies unseen, making obvious that the body was never autonomous to begin with. When the alligator and the speaker in Apps's poem come together, Apps has a moment of clarity when he is able to see the alligator moving into its ecology, something he has not noticed prior. He envies the alligator's ability to move in the "slick ball pit full of shiny gonads." But, it is also here, amongst the "asexual slugs and insects, the dividing tubers, the / sea of unfertilized eggs growing of their own accord" that the alligator is sucking in all the toxins that humans have

dumped into that water. By alluding to “asexual slugs” and “unfertilized eggs growing out of their own accord,” Apps is drawing attention to the queerness of the water, which we can understand, given the scientific studies and media reports I have listed, as being made even more so as we move deeper into an era of toxicity. The alligator he describes here, after all, is part of the same water systems as the intersex alligators sliding around Lake Apopka. Therefore, it is through the alligator that readers that have been privy to the kind of transsex panic listed above, his body as both part of and apart from the toxic causes for intersex.

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Towards the end of the poem sequence in which the speaker encounters the alligator, Apps makes us aware of the method by which an alligator’s sex is determined. The heat of the sand in which the alligator eggs gestates nudges the chromosomes in the alligator toward male or female. Given this information, the speaker muses: “what sex an egg would become, nursed / on my tongue, heated and moist on the bottom, cooled on / the top by the breath, lukewarm and asexual like a men- / struating penis, always there becoming against threatening / omnivorous teeth” (25). This passage, through the process of alligator gestation, collects together an ethics of care whereby the speaker keeps the egg safe in his mouth, although with the ever-present reality of the “carnivorous teeth” just outside of the egg’s shell, and biological sex. Inside the speaker’s mouth, the alligator egg is both becoming a sexed creature, because it is also being held, and “nursed.” This coming together of care and sex, within the mouth of an intersex speaker, has something to teach us about living on a toxic planet with human and non-human animal others.

In her book *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*, Alexis Shotwell relies on queer disability scholars Alison Kafer and Robert McRuer to suggest we organize our politics around the “disability to come” (loc. 3346). McRuer famously argues for a “queer crip”

politics that understands that able-bodied people's future is the present of people with disabilities. Disability is already here, and has always been here. Though some of us may be able-bodied now, we are all likely to be disabled in the end, and by recognizing that, able-bodied people might be able to see present disabled people and how we treat them differently. For Kafer, we must keep an eye on the intersectionality of disability politics, which sees the disabled body as without a sexuality, as without agency, and as locked in a kind of "childhood." Arguing for a politics that is "against purity" in the context of these two theorists, Shotwell seems to be suggesting that disability is not only an inevitable future, but a normative present and past. Like the process of sexing Ah-King and Hayward describe, disability is both a present reality, and an ever-growing possibility in the future.

Perhaps that is what the alligator came to tell Apps. While in other poems in *Intersex: A Memoir* Apps frames his intersex as a disability, open to the medical involvement and scrutiny of physicians, in the poem with the alligator, there is no concern for his intersex body per se. In the face of the body being torn apart, there is no politics, no identity. There are only thoughts of each toe being separated from the other. The speaker is suggesting, perhaps, that in living and life we are not whole. We may be torn apart, or we may already be in pieces. So, too, in the face of ecological change. In this space, we are able to see that our bodies have always been something else. We begin to imagine the way that the chemicals we put in and near our bodies are affecting our skin, our blood, our intestines, our cervixes, and our very cells.

In the (6)th installment of Apps's alligator poems, when the alligator moves back into the "black-green mesh / of water, tiny buzzing animals, and slimy aquatic foli-age," the speaker feels "abandoned." They remark that "there was an unfathomable distance separating us." The speaker desires to be entered by the alligator again, "such that I cease to know myself / again. Harder"

(26). For Shotwell, interdependence is a “useful way to think about current experiences of complicity and implication” (367). For Apps, he is at once wondering about how to be entered, and left alone, by the living body of the alligator.

The speaker’s mourning here is indicative of the mourning of our moment of ecological change, a mourning that is profoundly seductive, as it propels us into either complacency or panic.<sup>56</sup> What if humans had not begun the process of destroying of the planet? Eli Clare catalogues this loss beautifully:

Many of us mourn the vacant lots, woods, and swamps we played in as children, now transformed into landfills, strip malls, and parking lots. We fear the far-reaching impacts of climate change as hurricanes grow more frequent, glaciers melt, and deserts expand. We long for the days when bison roamed the Great Plains and Chinook salmon swam upstream in the millions. We desire a return. (Loc.1043-1045).

Clare then recounts that the response to this mourning is to restore. But, restoration for Clare is often like cure. Disabled bodies, like intersex ones, are trotted out as examples of the negative effect of impending ecological doom. Holding these two positions together – loss and the compulsion to restore, futile as it may be; loss and the desire to cure – is incredibly wrenching. There are no easy answers. Every option sucks.

The speaker stays with this mourning. Abandonment does not make him turn away from the alligator but vulnerable in the face of it, as Myra Hird requests we be. Instead, he wonders how to become in an intimate inter-species way through the act of gestation, of caring for the little alligators to come, perhaps the ones Louis Guillette warns about. But, Apps’s poem also

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<sup>56</sup> Thank you to Dr. Bruce Erickson for reminding me about the mourning that results from this kind of species collapse and its inevitable end.

makes way for thinking about the process of sexing, of disabling, as something to both mourn, in the sense that we know how intersex and disabled people are treated today, but also to value. By holding the alligator egg on his tongue, the speaker is showing care instead of cure.

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What happens when we think about endocrine-blocking chemicals and human populations?<sup>57</sup> As Alexis Shotwell notes, the link between intersex frogs and humans is a delicate one. Shotwell writes that in our current polluted present, which continues becoming more so every minute, frogs and toads have been made use of as particularly weighty signifiers:

Anurans [frogs and toads] have, over the last ten years, been frequently held up as warning signs for biological dangers inherent in many ways of our practices around food, climate, and mining. Industrial production, of corn or petroleum or almost anything else, had significant effects on the world around it. [...] One of the main ways people argue that these effects are too harmful to justify current production practices evokes gender and disability danger; humans, the warning goes, will be born disabled, queer, or genderqueer if we continue using or producing certain substances. And the way we know this, the narrative continues, is that frogs and toads are being born with bodily anomalies including ambiguous genitalia, changed voiceboxes, extra limbs, and more. (loc. 141)

Along with Shotwell, I want to encourage a necessary worry about these anurans, and for the alligators in Lake Apopka, without promoting an anti-disability or anti-trans politics. I also do not want to suggest that these frogs and toads are “merely” “indicator species.” I want to use

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<sup>57</sup> Dr. Dayna Scott has published widely on the issue of these chemicals and the male birth rate on first-nations in the path of waste waters loaded with EDCs. But yet, no research on intersex has yet been done to my, or Dr. Scott’s knowledge (personal correspondence).

Shotwell's analysis, alongside Ah-King and Hayward's, to provide context for the work Apps and Peunzo are doing to make space for intersex in our increasingly toxic planet.

Each of these theorists, along with Myra Hird, make obvious the ways in which humans put our own cultural baggage onto the bodies of non-human animals. Shotwell provides an illuminating example of this case. She thoughtfully engages with the work of the scientist Tyrone Hayes, who has been resisting a large pesticide-producing company called Syngenta for years over their use of a chemical called atrazine. As part of the rhetoric of the important fight to end the use of this dangerous chemical, Hayes has deployed the image of the "queer" frog in an effort to alarm the public into action. Shotwell quotes extensively from an interview Hayes did with *Democracy Now!* in an effort to show this transsex panic rhetoric at its most obvious. I reprint this rather long exchange here, to illustrate the ways in which human morality about sex, gender, and sexuality finds itself enmeshed in debates about toxicity, symbolized by the threat of non-human animal mutations. Amy Goodman, the host of *Democracy Now!* asks Hayes

"And, Professor Hayes, talk about exactly what you found. What were the abnormalities you found in frogs, the gender-bending nature of this drug atrazine?" Hayes answers: "Well, initially, we found that the larynx, or the voice box, in exposed males didn't grow properly. And this was an indication that the male hormone testosterone was not being produced at appropriate levels. And eventually we found that not only were these males demasculinized, or chemically castrated, but they also were starting to develop eggs. And eventually we discovered that these males didn't breed properly, that some of the males actually completely turned into females. And now we're starting to show that some of

these males actually show, I guess what we'd call homosexual behavior. They actually prefer to mate with other males.” (loc. 1639)<sup>58</sup>

Given Hayes's findings that do not seem to indicate a problem with the birth rate of these frogs, but instead locate the danger in gender-bending, and in the homosexual behaviour of the frogs, it becomes achingly clear the way our own human biases, transphobia, and fear of queerness informs these transsex-panicked rhetorics. In fact, these frogs might be flourishing, but we fail to see their changes in sex and sexuality as part of a variant morphology and potentially productive response to a changing environment, something we might very well learn from.

In response to our reductive human understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality, Apps brings our focus back around from non-human animals and thinks carefully about the medical management of intersex bodies into obvious sexed categories, categories many non-human animals like the frogs Hayes mentions make problems for. Apps writes later on in *Intersex: A Memoir* that the “tangled genitals” are those “that cannot be focused on.” Following this statement is a picture, focused on the image of what looks to be a woman, laying back, her phallus being grabbed and shown to the camera. “[T]he living specimen of a hermaphrodite” (55). Strange how these histories and “tangled genitals” get picked up with horror when scientists want to talk about toxicity and what is “queer.” Perhaps it is because we cannot focus on intersex stories of thriving in humans like Apps and in frogs like the ones Hayes describes, because we conveniently do not know them. Apps links the intersex genitalia, the surgeon, and

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<sup>58</sup> I want to acknowledge, with Shotwell, that I do not believe Tyrone Hayes, or any other scientist working on planet toxicity, to be malicious. Instead, I understand their work as participating in a system that is heteronormative and anthropocentric in its understanding of sex, sexuality, and gender. I merely point out how their research becomes reliant on “transsex panic” in order to encourage a more impactful (via fear) response to their findings. For an excellent reading of Hayes's scholarly history, including his important work encouraging more people of colour to thrive in STEM and his activist work against Syngenta, see DiChirno (211-214).

his own fascination with frog bodies next in this series of poems about the trajectory of his intersex life:

The boy grows up and moves and moves up to observing  
things higher on the food chain The twelve-year-old boy  
cuts into a frog and sticks pins into the few droplets in  
its heart. [...]

As more and  
more creatures come, more creatures are dissected. More  
creatures are subject to violence. (57)

Apps is recreating his own history of violence and dissection in his practices on frogs, but also “cow eye,” a “fetal pig,” a “cow heart,” and an “embalmed cat” (57). It is likely that these dissections were part of what he had to do for school – the practice of seeing our innards in the innards of other creatures. But, because Apps has his own history of medical violence, he can see these acts as violence. He can see that he both is and is not the frog, the fetal pig, the cow eye.

The ideas of sex and gender, Apps goes on to say, are not empirical, but are skewed from the start. Therefore, we must understand that seeing a biological or cultural root of masculinity or femininity is always already off kilter. Apps writes: “The empirical sight aimed at an ideal / knowledge grabs a body and aligns it, corrects it, through / its adolescent dick-lens” (58). There is no outside of the “dick-lens” that presumes in advance what a dick should or should not look like. Even the notion, like Shotwell has contended, of a “queer” or “genderqueer” body presumes what a non-queer, normal frog dick would look like. The non-normative frog is then held up as the indicator of difference, instead of a variation from the “norm.” Is a variation then considered queer? And then is queer implicated in the non-normal of environmental pollution?

What if we saw variation as a norm instead of a queerness? Queerness, it would seem to me, is a choice to veer, a choice to claim one's own body, or identity, as such. As I will explore in the following section, what happens to the secret intersex bodies, the thriving ones, who have been surgically handled or not, when we ascribe to them "queer"? What happens to the frogs, turtles, alligators forming variations to climate disaster without being seen by human eyes? Are their variations queer? But once we hold up a camera and empirically say "strange," when we click pictures of a "beautiful, petite flesh node" and "erase the doctor's hand" (60), we end up with just the flesh, with no explanation. There is no queerness because there is no one to hold up its difference. Instead, the body exists in a "fluid fuckstorm" of other bodies, chemicals, and organisms. It is, truly, in progress, in relation.

The point is not that we should not attend to the change in our planet, or that all will work out fine in the end if we just leave it alone. Instead, I propose that we be aware of how our pointing to a body – frog, human, alligator – and assuming that its non-normative body is only a devastated product of our pollution is dangerous and misguided. Eli Clare argues for a politics that both acknowledges disability but does not pity it. Instead, it values it. What happens if we both acknowledge intersex and the possibility that some intersex phenomena might be products of human capitalist waste and greed and are still valuable as such? Christine Johnson argues that such an acknowledgement in relation to trans bodies would allow for trans to move out of the medical industrial complex wherein trans people must be deemed mentally ill in order to access care (qtd. in Rudacille 4841), and thus a similar process is possible for intersex.

It is the medical hand in the pictures, scholars of intersex medicalization know so well and that Apps includes in this series, that create intersex in the first place. Without that hand, a "penis" or a "clitoris" is just a phallus. Without the designation of "pseudohermaphrodite" under

it, no “hermaphrodite” exists in need of “fixing” or looking at. The category of intersex through medicalization. What if intersex was seen instead as a series of variations instead of a monstrosity in need of fixing, in need of medical touch? Aaron Apps allows us to begin thinking about intersex as part of a continuum of sex, and part of permeable bodies that are constantly in a state of “osmosis,” of becoming and unbecoming. His formulation of intersex in relation to non-human animals and the toxic exposure of being an organism on this planet to be ingested and ingesting allows us to rethink sex altogether and thus implicitly resists the medicalization that the rest of his poems testify to. Puenzo’s *XXY* thus forms a kind of anticipatory response to Apps, showing how a notion of a continuum of sex achieved through a kinship with non-human animals can be lived for an intersexed human.

## **II: The Sea Monster: On Variation and Monstrosity**

### **A Second Note on Method: On Watching**

It is a trend in much of the recent work on ecologies for the writers to eventually come around to an ethics of care for our planet that involves how we watch or look at the world and all of the creatures in it (see Shotwell, Hird “Waste,” Tsing). Along this vein, Alexis Shotwell talks about her friend Jim Maughn. Jim helps her understand, in the context of her previous discussion of anurans I referenced above, that “holding an ethical regard for anurans for themselves holds out a promise for the rest of us” (loc. 1768). Shotwell draws on what Anna Tsing calls an “*art of noticing*.” Shotwell writes about this art of noticing, which stems from a love of the creatures we notice, as “a rich resource for countering the dangers [...of] using frogs and toads as merely indicator species for potential human dangers and falling into harmful tropes around sexuality, sex, gender, and disability” (loc. 1778). “Seeing things differently,” (Maughn in Shotwell, loc.

1778) or looking queerly, allows us to learn more broadly, to be more in tune with what is happening to the earth as it happens, to notice differences, minute changes, to attempt to see as the animal sees. *XXY*, I argue, looks differently, and encourages us to look differently too. I therefore begin by explaining the film's queer gaze and why it is important to understand its gaze as such before moving on too quickly. The queer gaze I deploy takes notice of non-human animals in the film, as well as the film's positioning of Alex's body as straddling the divide between human and non-human animal. My turn to the non-human animal is part of this chapter's project of seeing sex as a process, a process non-human animals throw in sharper relief than human-animals are permitted within our limiting cultural, legal, and medical understandings of sex.

The film is shot through lenses that paint most of the scenes in green and blue tones, encouraging what Debra Castillo understands as a haunting of the film by the sea and sea creatures, which "establish[es] an allegorical parallel to half-unseen, vaguely threatening sea creatures" (161). Alex's body often comes in contact with scaly and slimy creatures of the sea. Her body, often threatening to sluff off her clothes, as they fall loosely on and off her shoulders, suggests that she is not quite human. She has not been culturally inculcated into the society that surrounds her. Instead, she seems more at home in the water, floating bare-chested, looking at the sky. However, what is most striking about how the film is shot is that it often orients the camera at the edge of the ocean water, pointing the camera inwards as if the viewer weren't human at all either but one of Kraken's sea turtles he is intent on saving, floating in the surf (See Figure 1). Through this orientation, we are able to perhaps skew our gaze away from seeing the events of the film as other humans might see it and instead the way other creatures might see them and, by extension, skew our gaze of Alex's body.



Figure 1: Still from Lucia Puenzo's *XXY*. The house is lurking in the mist, just back from the beach. The camera is set on the sand, as if it has just emerged from the water behind it.

As I have already discussed, in her article “Animal Transsex,” Myra Hird suggests a reorienting of our thinking about the way we look at and think about non-human animals. She argues that instead of looking at animals that are different from us, that act differently from us, and pointing to them as queer, she asks us to consider how strange we must seem to those same creatures. After all, the way humans reproduce is not very energy efficient. We tend to attempt to fit our sexual relationships into monogamous boxes that are too small for our desires, and we can only give birth to a few offspring at a time. This kind of thinking, of humans as rather odd compared to those species that engage in what we might consider queer sex, in the sense that it is non-normative – between two species, a bee and an orchid for example – allows for a reorienting of non-human animal sex as normative. Such a reorienting might be liberating. I propose that *XXY*, through the orientation of the camera at the sea’s edge, is already thinking not with the

animal, or as the animal, but from an animal position. What if we saw the world from the ground, from the sea, looking inwards, as they might, from these alternative positions?

Eli Clare suggests that marking a body as “disordered” or “defective” is embedded in the process of expunging that body from our social and cultural world. In a world that values purity, as Alexis Shotwell and Malin Ah-King and Eva Hayward have attested, we see bodies that are created by toxins or by some “glitch” or “stall” in development as those that make our world impure, which is reminiscent of the DSD discourse that make intersex traits the result of a stalled or glitch process of sexual development. The development is disordered. A disorder allows for medical, social, and legal involvement. By suggesting the body is disordered we are saying that it would be better if it were ordered, the same not other, evolved not stalled. In the face of these logics of disorder, according to Clare, we must resist the impulse to make pure, or to “cure,” our world of these bodies. Looking at the world differently can help us achieve an ethics of queer looking.

Eli Clare further suggests that when he is on the ground, sliding down the mountain on his butt, because his cerebral palsy means he cannot walk down, he sees things he otherwise might not see (loc. 1480). He, therefore, isn’t angry he has to slide down, while others trot, but profoundly blessed that he is given a semi-unique opportunity to see otherwise. Through its gaze oriented in the sand, which places the human-animals in what we might understand as an aquarium-house (see the above image) that the turtles at night might creep up to and stare in, tapping their flippers on the glass windows, *XXY* is encouraging us to do as Clare is forced to. We don’t engage in this queer looking because our bodies necessarily require us to look differently, but because our world is changing and as Shotwell and Tsing note, we must attune ourselves to that change. We must get down on the ground, in the sand, not to see the world as

Alex might, but to see Alex as the turtle might, as a creature who swims among sexless anemones and hermaphroditic coral might. Instead of seeing ourselves as other from these seemingly strange species, we understand that they outnumber us. Their variations have helped them survive, their otherness from us is exactly what helps them live on this earth.

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*XXY begins with a pair of feet walking on dry straw, with a long knife swinging beside it. The scene cuts to a dark scene – space or underwater, perhaps – with a sea-like plant undulating. It cuts back to the feet. A second pair join the first. Cut to the scene of a forest. The camera is moving quickly. We see two young people running. One, hunched slightly, with short hair and dark clothes, carrying a knife. The other, obviously a girl, with long dark hair and a patterned tank top and jean shorts. She is smiling. We hear them breathing deep as they run. A snake slithers in the grass. Back to the sea creatures. Back to the hunched young person running. The camera runs with them. The hunched person brings the knife down to the ground. The scene cuts, but we hear the echo of a grunt. They have cut something. We see the title, XXY, emerge from the darkness of the ocean scene. It fades.*

*The hunched person running is now seated, in a barn or small shed perhaps, knees pulled up, staring intently. They have short black hair, clear green eyes, and white skin. They are slightly damp, slimy almost. Their eyes dart, as if sensing danger, but then close and they relax. They reach for something – a partially smoked cigarette and a box of matches. They light the cigarette in their mouth. The scene cuts to a woman walking somewhere else. She enters a doorway, and walks in-between rows of skeletons, large ones, massive spinal columns, stretched horizontally on either side of her. She walks into a new space, with a glass cabinet behind her filled with glass containers with specimens inside. They look like fish. She sighs. We see what she*

*sees, a hand using a scalpel to cut into flesh, removing a shell from the body to make visible the organs. The camera pans to the face of this person, and another person looking on. The person cutting is a man, with thick rimmed glasses, a ratty pink shirt, an apron, and a black toque. He pulls something from the body he has been opening, places it in a tray and hand it to the other man. This man also has a ratty shirt on, with thinner rimmed glasses, held on by a string, a black and grey beard and thick black hair. He examines what has been passed to him. He sighs. "Female," he says. The camera moves back to the woman. "They're on their way," she says. The man examining does not look up from what he sees. "You go. I'll pick Alex up and meet you at home."*

From the moment *XXY* begins, the protagonist, Alex (Inés Efron), is associated with monsters of the sea and the land. Alex's body, like Apps's, is constantly under the threat of violence, exclusion, alienation, and medicalization (not unlike other monsters we could name) because it is different. It doesn't "fit." We are not made aware, until quite a bit later, what is particularly different about Alex, but this first scene gives so much away. It sets up Alex's menacing body, holding a knife, stalking a girl. This is the image of the monster we are used to. It also is reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster, who waits outside of the house of a family he wishes he could be a part of. Like the monster, Alex is outside of the house, under it even, like a troll, waiting to be included, scared and alone. But it also makes plain Alex's relationship to the ocean and the creatures therein. It is as if the interspersed shots of the sea creature are what are in Alex's mind – the asexual, hermaphroditic, and multi-sexed creatures of the sea.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *XXY* was released in 2007, at a time during which environmental issues were colliding with political concerns. For Charlotte E. Gleghorn, *XXY* was a part of a number of films reacting to the political liberation in Argentina from authoritarian rule (149). (While the film is set in Uruguay, Kraken and Suli have moved there from Argentina. Ramiro, Erika, and Álvaro come to visit from Argentina.) It represents the freedom for artistic expression dealing with a wide range of topics, specifically sexuality and gender identity (Martin 35). Also in 2007, a two-week climate summit in Bali, Indonesia was promised to "breathe new life" into debates about international approaches to climate change (*New York Times*).

*XXY* traces the challenging emotional journey of Alex, the intersex protagonist,<sup>60</sup> through the process of coming out intersex in her small Uruguayan community. During this process, Alex's mother Suli (Valeria Bertuccelli) invites some old friends, Erika (Carolina Pelleritti) and Ramiro (Germán Palacios), from the city to their house. It turns out there was an ulterior motive for this invite. Ramiro is a plastic surgeon, and Suli has invited him to take a look at Alex and see what he might be able to do for her, to make her "normal." Alex's father, Kraken (Ricardo Darin), comes to learn about the real reason for their visit late. However, he suspects, and we are meant to understand that his job as a biologist makes him more open to Alex's non-binary body than those who do not have a grounding in biological science. As the parents debate the cultural and social consequences of Alex's body, Alex begins a romantic and sexual relationship with Ramiro and Erika's son Álvaro (Martin Piroyansky). The tension between Ramiro's desire to surgically alter Alex's body, Kraken's resistance, and Álvaro and Alex's complicated affair comes to a head when Alex is sexually assaulted by a group of boys that want to see her genitals to find out "what" she is. The assault, and the subsequent love and tenderness that surround Alex by her family and friends, allows her to come to the conclusion that she does not want to decide whether she is male or female, but to just be.

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<sup>60</sup> Jeffrey Zamostny argues that "in contrast to works that use 'the hermaphrodite' as a trope for an original unity of the sexes' decadence, or degeneration, the film focuses on the lived experience of a concrete intersexed adolescent raised as a girl." Alex, he contends, is "portrayed not as a metaphor but as a material being in relation with others" (190). While it is true that the film does not overtly engage in metaphorical thinking about intersex (like *Eugenides* or *Winter*, which I explore in Chapter One), it is also true that Alex's specific intersex trait is not named in the film. This move to evade diagnostic language about intersex makes space for intersex people with a variety of traits to identify with Alex, but it also makes intersex a vague and unspecific site of difference located in the genitals. By constantly localizing intersex in the genitalia, the film also makes obvious our cultural and social investment in policing genitals over other sex signifiers like the gonads, the maker of intersex in non-human animals.

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*In the kitchen, Ramiro is cutting some meat. After he cuts, he smells his finger. We follow his eyes to Alex's feet in the fridge. He smiles at her. She takes a carton of milk to her lips. She drinks and it spills down her chin which she wipes with her shirt sleeve. He continues to cut. "Do you like it?" she asks. "What?" he says. "My house." "Yes." She smiles. She stares at him. "Don't lie to me," she says. He smiles. She moves closer. She takes some of the meat, begins eating it. He takes some and eats it too. "Do you like cutting people up?" she asks him. He looks down. "It's my job." Kraken is yelling for her. The camera cuts to him.*

In the poem that begins Aaron Apps's book, that I began my analysis with, the speaker is eating a barbequed pig. The act of eating pig flesh, I argued there, allows for the body to be rendered into its component parts, to be seen as intermingled with the organs of the animal being eaten. Through eating, for Apps, the human and the animal collide. This scene in *XXY* makes a similar claim, whereby the body is rendered into its component parts in order to draw attention to the fragmentation of the human body under threat of death or medical management. The sausage on the counter that Ramiro cuts is an obvious referent to Alex's problematically large phallus. While we are never shown Alex's phallus, its size haunts the film through its ability to penetrate. For a gendered-female such as Alex to penetrate is a confusion of terms in Western society because women are meant to be penetrated by a male phallus, not penetrate.

Ramiro's cutting of the sausage is, as Anne Tamar-Mattis puts it, a "heavy-handed" metaphor for surgical intervention (72). While it may be "heavy-handed," it is also necessary. The threat of surgical management cannot be overstated in texts about intersex. Like the speaker's red broom in Apps's poetry, Ramiro's knife in this scene threatens to make clear divisions in Alex's body between male and female. It is his "job," as he puts it, to "cut people

up.” Ramiro frames cutting as an obligation, to society, perhaps, to enforce a “normal” ideal of embodiment onto the bodies he cuts. He, therefore, is the discipliner of the body.

Alex disrupts the disciplining of her body by taking a piece of the sausage and eating it, all well augmenting the scene’s erotic tension. As Jeffrey Zamostny argues, Ramiro’s

invasive gaze is not lost on Alex, who turns the tables on Ramiro by asking him an uncomfortably direct erotic question “¿Te gusta?” (Do you like it?). Alex’s clarification that she is asking not about her body but about her house barely diminishes the scene’s sexual tension. Her next question – “¿Abrir cuerpos te gusta?” (Do you like to open bodies?)<sup>61</sup> – solidifies the analogy between Ramiro’s cutting of the phallic-shaped sausage, possible future operations on Alex’s body, and sexual violation. Overall, this scene illustrates Alex’s resistance to Ramiro’s vision of her as a piece of flesh on which he can exercise erotic and medical violence. (196)

Zamostny’s reading of this scene is particularly productive because it gives agency to Alex early in the film over her own medicalization. Alex reads Ramiro’s gaze as Ramiro attempts to read her, destabilizing the biopolitical power of his gaze, and by extension the power of his knife. By eating the phallic-shaped sausage that he has cut, she owns the phallus he wishes to cut off of her by ingesting it and making it a part of herself. She becomes, like the speaker in Apps’s poem does, with the animal. She destabilizes the human/animal as well as the male/female binary. Just

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<sup>61</sup> I choose to use the translation provided by the film’s subtitles because I do not speak Spanish. Zamostny’s translation of Alex’s question as “do you like to open bodies” instead of “do you like to cut bodies” is interesting because instead of placing the emphasis on the act of cutting, which Ramiro is currently doing to the sausage, the emphasis is placed on seeing. Ramiro is attempting to see the truth of Alex’s body, a truth that is impossible from the start for any body. Either “cut” or “open” conjures the medical gaze, whereby the physician is given the authority to look at, and then to cut, the body that they deem abnormal.

following this scene, she runs from the house with her father to attend to injured sea turtles, who have also been cut by humans, which further conflates Alex's body with the animal.

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*Kraken is rushing. Alex rushes after him. They are talking about turtles. Alex helps him load the truck. She sits in the back. Álvaro asks if he can come along. They ride in the back, looking at each other. Cut to fish being unloaded. Kraken comes to a small boat, where his colleague is examining a bleeding sea turtle who has had its front flipper damaged. Kraken groans. They were caught in net for over twenty hours, he is told. "Poor things. Can you identify them?" Alex is staring at something. Soon we see what. A few young boys are helping an older man unload a boat. One of them stops and stares back at her. She stares, unflinching. He looks upset. The camera cuts between their faces, and then Álvaro, who looks at the scene, mouth slightly agape. Kraken asks if there were others. He is told there were. The other man talking to them gestures to the other boat. Kraken turns and asks the older man – "do you have something for me?" He says "nothing." "Are you sure?" he asks. "Are you a biologist or a cop?" the man retorts, before saying: "You should come with an apology rather than an attitude." It turns out he is the father of Vando, whose nose Alex broke. He says his son was spitting blood. "My wife wants to report it. She better not come around here again." Vando calls after her: "Alex." She runs to him and starts shoving. "What are you looking at? What?" Kraken breaks it up. "Enough already." "That's it, take her away." Vando's father says. "Too many endangered species as it is." Kraken walks back to him. "Your son is afraid of my daughter? Your son is a traitor." "I won't allow..." "You won't allow what?" "She's capable of breaking his nose again. She's just like me. She's capable of doing it." They leave with the turtles in the back of the truck.*

The world, at present, for turtles, is a hostile one. The waters in which they live are being polluted with chemicals, plastics, and other human-made detritus. The process of mass-fishing catches them in our nets, as this scene obviously shows, damaging their bodies. Climate change is raising the temperature of their nesting sites, which is limiting the viability of their offspring and resulting in the birth of more female turtles than males (another source of transsex panic). It is our human involvement within the ecosystem of the turtles that is endangering them. The line spit at Kraken, “there’s enough endangered species as it is,” makes obvious the link between turtle and intersex endangerment.

Jeffrey Zomostny reminds us that “Kraken’s earliest action in *XXY* consists of opening a sea turtle in order to identify its sex” (197). He and Suli, similarly, were forced to identify Alex as female at birth, because no other options existed. According to Zomostny, “[Lucía] Puenzo has indicated in an interview that she included the reptiles in the film because it is impossible to determine their sex without opening their shells,<sup>62</sup> much as Alex’s sex remains ambiguous until people like Ramiro or the rapists pry into her medical records or forcibly remove her clothing” (197). Alex’s identification with the turtles, as I have argued, in addition to the turtle imagery that abound in the film, Zomostny writes, “associates Alex with an endangered species

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<sup>62</sup> Jorgelina Corbatta excerpts from this interview with Puenzo further to argue for a non-surgical approach to intersex bodies. She sees Kraken as an ally for intersex people because of his focus on biology. He has “written a book on sex and keeps aquariums full of clownfish, a species that is always born male but may become female later in life.” She quotes Puenzo saying:

I really liked the idea of this biologist who had studied the sexuality of other species in the world, who always saw Alex as the perfect creature. He never understood why Alex should be operated on or normalized. I thought it was important to have the other world where hermaphrodite organisms exist, like the animal world, present in some point. Sea turtles, from the outside, you cannot see if they are male or female. You have to open them. (Smith in Corbatta 826)

It is interesting to consider Kraken and Ramiro’s gazes as both grounded in their scientific training, but their vastly different approaches to the human body. Ramiro’s desire to perfect the human body is skewed by Kraken’s biologist approach to Alex’s body as already perfect within the milieu of non-human animal studies.

constantly at risk of falling into dangerous nets, whether of fisherman or the cultural norms of a society that cannot accept intersexual difference” (197).

The process of medicalization makes Alex’s body endangered. Medicalization is the tool through which biopolitics makes intersex bodies invisible, effectively erasing them by first identifying them as intersex and then “normalizing” them into categories of male and female. Therefore, for a human’s body to be read by the medical establishment as intersex is to be endangered from the start. This scene in the film makes obvious Alex’s endangered body – in kinship with the endangered turtles. The threat of her medicalization haunts the rest of the film. By alluding Alex’s body with the turtle through the line “enough endangered species as it is,” the film prompts the viewer to develop an urge to protect Alex’s body. While this logic of endangerment has the potential to position Alex as rare and intersex as an aberration, the proliferation other intersex species in the film – of clownfish and salamanders, etc. – destabilizes this logic.

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*A scene begins with Suli sitting on the porch, smoking a cigarette. Her colour has changed; she is softer now than we have seen her before. She is now wearing a tan sweater, kind of a butch one. She sees something in the distance. She walks over the dunes and notices broken sea turtle shells, strewn on the beach. It looks like maybe three turtle shells. A power boat with three figures recedes in the distance. All we hear is the boat and the sound of the waves.*

*Cut to Alex floating in the water. She is topless, wearing necklace with a turtle locating tag on it. Her eyes are closed. She is vulnerable, like the turtles who were killed and whose shells have been left on the beach. The camera pans far out. We can see the sea, the beach, the grey sky, and a small disturbance in the water that is Alex – like spotting a whale, just poking out*

*above the water. Álvaro stands on the beach. He can see her. He is fully clothed. He cocks his head to the side and begins to undress. The camera returns to Alex. The camera is above her, looking down at her closed eyes. She could be sleeping. Or dead. Álvaro disrobes and tentatively gets into the water. There is minimalist music playing, and birds. Alex sees or senses him, and we see her, from his vantage, swim in the other direction. She is walking, again, through the forest, pulling on her clothes. “Alex,” we hear, breathless. Álvaro is coming behind her. She continues to walk. He catches her, grabs her arm to turn her around. They look at each other. The camera is beside them, facing their profiles. “I don’t understand,” he says. “You’re not...” “I’m both,” she says. “But that’s impossible,” he says. “You tell me what is and isn’t possible?” “But do you like guys or girls?” “I don’t know,” she says. She turns to walk away. She stops. “Sorry about what I did to you,” she turns to tell him. “You didn’t do anything,” he says. “I’m not upset. I liked it.” “Really?” “Yes.” “So did I.” “You did?” he walks toward her. “Then let’s finish it. We didn’t finish it...” “Never with you!” she exclaims, pushing him and turning to walk away. “Why?” “I want something else.” “I want something else too!” “Oh yeah? What do you want?” she stops to ask him. “What do you want?” he responds. She turns to walk away. He runs after her. He grabs her arm again, telling her it will be their secret. He won’t tell anybody. She refuses him. “Go! Tell everybody I’m a monster.” She pushes him, and runs away. He calls after her. He eventually gets up and walks the other way.*

Earlier in the film Álvaro and Alex had sex. Kraken discovered them, Alex penetrating Álvaro from behind. In the scene I recount above, Álvaro has finally had a chance to confront Alex about their sexual encounter. They are both clearly confused in the wake of their queer sex. The easy binaries of “who they like” are crumbling. For Alex, her non-binary body feels

monstrous – capable of penetration, but also seemingly female. Charlotte E. Gleghorn reads this moment in the film through Foucault’s notion of the monster. She quotes Foucault at length:

“The monster is essentially a mixture [...] of two realms, the animal and the human: the man with the head of an ox, the man with a bird’s feet – monsters. It is the blending, the mixture of two species: the pig with a sheep’s head is a monster. It is the mixture of two individuals: the person who has two heads and one body or two bodies and one head is a monster. It is the mixture of two sexes: the person who is both male and female is a monster. It is a mixture of life and death: the fetus born with a morphology that means it will not be able to live but that nonetheless survives for some minutes or days is a monster. Finally, it is a mixture of forms: the person who has neither arms nor legs, like a snake, is a monster.” (159)

For Gleghorn, Alex is a monster both because her body is a “hybrid” of “the human and aquatic kingdoms” as well as male and female (160). Alex wears the same tags the turtles wear, and thus has associated herself with the turtles. Álvaro, too, comes to wear the sign of the human/animal monster, the turtle tag, once he realizes his love for Alex also makes him a monster, a person with hybrid desires.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen seems to echo Foucault when he writes in his famous “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)”:

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. (4)

Cohen's thesis that the monster is "of a time" places the monster in a position of intense significance. The monster can say a lot about the culture that creates it. *XXY* therefore, constructs an intersex protagonist in 2007, for a reason. Alex's perception of her body as "monstrous" makes visible the anxieties of the culture that produces it. Cohen continues "The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read" (4). That the intersex body is a trope or an anxiety within a culture is not a new thesis. The trans and intersex body have been made to signify "the postmodern," the "modern," the coming of the end times, the threat of ecological catastrophe, liberal allowances of immoral homosexuality, and the list goes on.

It is easy to see that Alex's body, therefore, is also "pure culture," created by the culture that produces it. Any biological difference in Alex's body that marks it as different is identified as such by the culture that consumes it. While intersex is a product of material realities, legal, medical, and social systems of power, Alex's unspecified "intersex" body is a cultural production that is very much caught up in the anxieties of its specific moment – climate change, political change, the opening of restrictions against queer bodies in Argentina, and so forth. It is thus necessarily invested in troubling the division between nature and culture, in evolution, in human intervention into the "natural." It would be impossible to read Alex's body as separate from our current socio-cultural moment, obsessed with gender difference and climate change, the damage to our easy culture and social definitions of physical sex, but also the damage to our polluted planet. So, when Alex yells "Go tell everyone I'm a monster," it is a call that is always already caught up in the way she has internalized cultural understandings of her body as monstrous.

Part of the project of this chapter, therefore, is to imagine a way out of this monstrous thinking by instead imagining the “monster” as part of seeing human sex as variant, as a process. Sex, as Ah-King and Hayward point out, is one of the ways creatures contend with their environments. Monster thinking, as Foucault argues, conceptualizes sex as binary from the start, and therefore, intersex as an aberration that emerges between. However, if we imagine sex as part of an infinite spectrum of possibilities, then the hybrid monster is no longer possible. I argue that although Alex has internalized the monster in her – “go tell everyone I’m a monster” – Álvaro’s desire for her body allows for space to open outside of this binary-invested thinking.

Álvaro tells her that he liked the sex they had, to which she tellingly responds “really?” This “really” pre-empts her assertion that her body is monstrous because it cannot believe someone desires it. Álvaro, by affirming the sex they had as pleasurable and desirable, provides an avenue for Alex to view her body differently, as desired instead of predatory like the monster. As Deborah Martin argues, the view is meant to identify with Álvaro (39),<sup>63</sup> and through his desire is able to see Alex’s body differently as well, as a desiring and desired body, instead of one that needs to be “fixed” in order to be desirable. As the protocols for intersex medical management expose anxieties about heterosexual reproduction or sexual pairing, it is useful to provide representations of the intersex body as desirable, and desirable outside of the bounds of fetishization. Álvaro did not know Alex’s specific morphology before they had sex, which makes it impossible to propose that he had sex with her in order to see or experience a monstrous or freakish body. In an earlier scene, immediately following their sex act, Álvaro

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<sup>63</sup> Martin writes that Álvaro’s gaze is “desiring yet insufficient” because his gaze of Alex is constantly obscured. She writes that although Álvaro’s “investigative gaze is privileged,” it is undermined by Alex, such as by her hand which is held up to the camera in one photo of her, which he looks at for an extended period. This obscuring distances Álvaro from power, according to Martin. She writes that Álvaro’s “diegetic and scopic disempowerment prevents his perspective from becoming identified with mastery or control, yet by privileging the gaze of a character who desires Alex, the film [...holds up] the idealization of bodies different from the norm” (39).

masturbates in an effort to assuage the ramped desire that was not “finished.” This act of masturbation further indicates to the viewer his lust for Alex. Alex is desired as a whole, and her genitals are but the tool that pleasures, albeit in a surprising upheaval of gendered norms. As Debra A. Castillo notes, “the two characters [Alex and Álvaro], each outsiders in their own way, and hence, rejected or seen as freaks by their peers, respond to gay Argentine poet Néstor Perlongher’s statement, cited by Puenzo: ‘We do not want respect, we want to be desired’” (Tehrani in Castillo 158). Desire, therefore, is a productive avenue for imagining sex non-conforming bodies outside of hybridity and monstrosity.

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What often gets lost in a lot of discourse around climate change, sea turtle populations, and intersex medical management is that there are so many bodies and experiences we do not see. In their article “Climate Change Increases the Production of Female Hatchlings at a Northern Sea Turtle Rookery,” J.L. Reneker, and S.K. Kamel explain that climate change has resulted in a drastic increase in female sea turtles in the North Carolina rookery they have studied over the past twenty-five years. They worry that these numbers could spell disaster for the sea turtle population more generally. However, this is not yet the case. Moreover, they write that adaptations in response to climate change have already been documented in many plants, birds, and small mammals in the form of range expansions and shifts (Hughes 2000), though evidence of this behaviour is limited (Janzen 1994) [...]. Sea turtles have been documented nesting earlier in the season during years of warmer sea surface temperatures (Wishampel et. al. 2004, Hawkes et al. 2007) but more research is needed as only a few studies have observed shifts in nesting start dates over longer timescales (e.g. decades; Morzaris et al 2008)” (3262).

What Reneker and Kamel skip over here are the number of sea turtles that may be already adapting, may already be laying eggs earlier in the season to combat the changes in climate. Somehow, it strikes me as arrogant to assume that creatures that survived the extinction that took out the dinosaurs could be so easily devastated by human beings. That said, I am not suggesting that human beings have not, and will not continue to, lay absolute waste to our planet, or to sea turtle populations. What I am pointing to is that we cannot know what we cannot see. What is in excess of the human gaze exists, is adapting and changing in the face of our impact on their environments. There is a species of lizard that has an entire female population. They have learned to reproduce asexually, but still engage in the act of sex with each other to promote the process of asexual reproduction. They, therefore, have adapted to the same threat of extinction that Reneker and Kamel worry about (Harmon).

Like these sea turtles and this lizard, intersex people may be thriving where advocates and medical professionals themselves cannot see. Intersex people that may or may not have been subjected to surgical intervention may be living liveable lives, in or out of their own kind of intersex closet. They may not be aware of their intersex. They may not call it that, making themselves invisible to statistical capture. Their intersex bodies are surely desirable, desiring, existing, perhaps adapting, loving, dreaming, swimming, all without being marked, not even called “intersex.” Some people see this possibility as utopian, and maybe it is. Or maybe it is happening now, out there somewhere, in spaces we are not looking in. Or, perhaps, intersex people who do not want to be seen, to be commented on, have developed camouflage tactics.

Alex’s body, and the turtle who is harmed, may have gone unmarked until the threat of violence or the violence itself make them visible. Just preceding Alex’s assault at the hands of three men, she is walking along the beach, the hood of her sweater pulled up over her head. It is

as if she is a turtle, tucked into her shell.<sup>64</sup> The men force her hood down, and shortly after, her shorts, so that they can expose her phallus. This moment of violence does not allow her to be hidden, but exposes Alex, makes her visible. Perhaps the most well-known attribute of a turtle is its ability to “turtle,” to hide. Alex’s family has managed to keep her hidden, “turtled,” in Uruguay for a number of years – “we left ... to escape some kind of people,” Kraken reminds Suli, and yet here they are sitting around “our table.” Ramiro and Erika are the kind of people that seek to expose Alex in order to normalize her. It seems counter-intuitive, doesn’t it? To expose her body to “those kind of people,” in order to hide within the category of “normal” through surgical and hormonal management?

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Figure 2: Still from Lucía Puenzo’s *XXY*. Alex’s bedroom.

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<sup>64</sup> For further thinking on Alex’s “turtling” see Zoila Clark’s “Our Monstrous Humanity in Lucía Puenzo’s *XXY* and *The Fish Child*”

On the wall in Alex's bedroom there is a family tree, which evokes comparison to Darwin's genealogical diagrams. Next to the tree are a series of corals (all known to be hermaphroditic) in addition to sand dollars and sea stars (both of which are known to reproduce asexually [Choi]). Placed next to these creatures are two dolls. Both of their bodies have been doctored. One dark-skinned doll has been fashioned a phallus made from a cigarette (which we have seen in other dolls of Alex's), and breasts made from shells. The other doll, with pale white skin and blue eyes, no longer has arms, and has been given blue hair made from twine. The dolls are surrounded by tacked-up images of whales, hearts, a long haired human figure in distress. A third doll, in a glass case, sits between the two other dolls, protected. A pet lizard roams free amongst Alex's things.

The invocation of Darwin here suggests that, perhaps, Puenzo is wanting the viewer to understand Alex's intersex, her different body, as hereditary. Alex's displayed family tree allows her to imagine a branch she belongs to, with other bodies just like hers. That the dolls sit next to this charts helps us to understand that Alex wants to create other humans that look like her, but they don't exist. In order that they exist, she must attach detritus to their bodies – pieces of scrap. For Alex, these pieces of junk form an identity. Scraps of paper, little pieces of memory, of found objects, are what make up a room that describes us. It is Álvaro who is looking around Alex's room, assessing her, trying to understand her through the objects she owns. Darwin understood the body like this room.

In recent work in material feminism, Darwin's theory of evolution has been re-examined to focus on variation instead of aberration. Elizabeth Grosz famously re-reads Darwin to undermine Enlightenment misreadings of his theories. These misreadings focus on evolution as a process of logical response to a specific environment. Grosz, instead, forwards the notion of

variation. In order for a species to survive, Grosz argues, there needs to be a range of difference within the species that might be able to respond better (or worse) to any given change in the environment. “Monstrosities” and “teratological variations,” are often produced in a species but “only those that remain both reproductively successful and only those that attain some evolutionary advantage, either directly or indirectly help [...] proliferation” (31). Following this logic, Darwin’s logic, means that if an individual has even a tiny variation that might help it survive and reproduce in any given environment, that individual may have an advantage or privilege over another individual. These small advantages may be amplified over time (31).

Species that are “most open and amenable to change” thus, are most likely to live on. But, what “living on” looks like is hardly easy to grasp in the current world. Grosz writes that “evolution is a fundamentally open-ended system that pushes towards a future with no real direction, no promise of any particular result, no guarantee of progress or improvement, but with every indication of inherent proliferation and transformation” (38). I mention evolution in light of these questions, and bring up Alex’s family tree, to suggest that Alex’s intersex body might be part of a new kind of heredity. Heredity that accepts that it passes down toxicity, that passes on intersex. By constructing more intersex bodies next to this chart out of the same waste that may be blamed for intersex in the first place, Alex is leaving a message for visitors to her room that intersex is part of the “proliferation and transformation” of our planet.

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Like my reading of Aaron Apps’s poetry as indicative of human-animal becomings as a way of resisting the medicalization of the intersex body, Debora Martin argues that a similar becoming happens in *XXY*, exemplified in the kinship Alex has with her lizard. The lizard that crawls over Alex’s things also crawls on her naked body earlier on in the film. Martin writes that

“if Alex’s body is paralleled with the animal, and especially, with human domination of the animal, the film also figures her attached to the animal as a kind of becoming, as lines of flight from the rigid either/or straightjacket of the human” (38). For Martin, the film “figured Alex’s body as a site of becoming and rejects the idea of a fixed subjectivity or corporeality” (38). Martin’s reading of Alex’s becoming animal is useful because it allows us to imagine a more expansive or fluid subjectivity. However, I want to expand this reading in two directions in an effort to conclude this chapter. First, Alex’s becoming animal needs to not only open up space for Alex, or for other intersex people, but for all of us to understand human sex outside of the “rigid either/or” from the start. That the film includes known “hermaphrodite fish” or molluscs or salamanders does not just hark the human to another space of becoming with the animal in an effort to destabilize physical sex to include intersex, it reminds us that the category of intersex need not exist in the first place. In a way, all of us are intersex because the binary of sex is a culturally and historically constituted fiction.

Second, the becoming-animal of Alex’s body also allows an opportunity imagine the possibilities of becoming with plants. After Álvaro has come to feel and know Alex’s body, he finds himself in her room and flipping through her journal. We also witness the pages. This is one of them:



Figure Three: Still from Lucía Puenzo's *XXY*. Alex's journal.

In it, we see a plant growing from Alex's belly button, as or from Alex's phallus. She is saying "Happy Birthday." I read this drawing as Alex's coming of age and a coming in to an understanding of her body as part of an ever-evolving ecology of sex difference. Like the turtles she adores and which she tags herself to be a part of, she also images herself as part of the plant life that surrounds her.

The plants and the other creatures she fills her world with – sand dollars and sea stars – reproduce asexually. They literally grow new members from their body. Alex's body, in this image, does not grow more of herself, but grows differently, as a plant. Myra Hird argues that plants are some of our most sexually diverse kin, having varied and multiple sexes. She writes:

non-human living organisms display a wide diversity of sexual behaviour. But non-human living organisms also display a wide diversity of sex. Non-humans eschew the assumption that sex involves two (and only two) distinct (and

opposite) entities (female and male) and further that these two sexes behaviourally complement each other. Virtually all plant and many animal species are intersex. That is, living organisms are often both sexes simultaneously which means that there are not really two sexes at all. Most fungi have thousands of sexes. Schizophyllum, for example, has more than 28,000 sexes. And sex amongst these promiscuous mushrooms is literally a “tough-and-go” event, leading Jenni Laidman to conclude that for fungi there are “so many genders, so little time.” (“Animal” 41)

This expansive sex makes our own imagined dichotomous two seem limited indeed. Plants make obvious Ah-King and Hayward’s injunction against binary gender thinking by pointing out that sex has never been clearly two, or even five (see Fausto-Sterling “Five”), but is a complex series of fluid indicators. It is unclear whether Alex knows about plant reproduction, but this image conjures potential for us all to understand ourselves as part of a plant world that sees sex as multitudinous and varying.

In the first part of Apps’s poetry collection, as I indicated, he mentions that he is not only eating pig flesh but also “vegetable matter.” Vegetables, for Apps, are also part of the process of ingestion, osmosis, and becoming I wrote about earlier. But, unlike non-human animals which, as I have shown, have not escaped our dichotomous view of sex and reproduction, plants remain free to engage in inter-species and wacky sex (from our vantage point, of course) with their multitudes of sex – “in reality there are a thousand thousand sexes” (Apps). Vegetables and other plants, therefore, offer us radical potentials for seeing sex otherwise. In our world, texts like Apps’s and Puenzo’s provide space for sex to be imagined differently in collaboration with the plants and non-human animals that surround and infiltrate us.

### **Coda: On Reaching**

In this Coda, I provide another possible avenue for future research that combines discussions from the previous chapter about intersex in environmental discourse that does not dissolve into transsex panic. I want to signal a focus on genitals, in particular, and how fungi (as, perhaps, part of a very broad definition of “plants”)<sup>65</sup> might offer an understanding of genitals as a plethora of opportunities instead of a proscribed ideal to which all other genitals must secretly, or not so secretly, be upheld. I consider Loriccia Petchalko-Matheson’s, a local Winnipeg artist, work on mushrooms and penises as a way into these discussions (see Figure 4). This Coda is not meant to be a thorough examination of plant studies, fungi studies, or even queer plant/fungi studies, but a series of engagements with fungi and genitalia that might be followed through on in the future. I hope, however, that these avenues of thinking also serve as a cap-stone to the arguments that have proceeded them. Specifically, this Coda addresses the struggle of discussing intersex to begin with, which I argue is rooted, at least in part, in our social and cultural ambivalence (or even revulsion) to the open discussion of genitalia.

In the Fall of 2017, I began thinking about intersex and transsex panic. I was concerned about the ways intersex was being picked up in scientific and popular discourses about climate change and planet toxicity as an ominous indicator of the coming apocalypse for the human species. I had not yet begun writing the previous chapter, but I was thinking on it. During this time, I happened upon a small exhibit of Pechalko-Matheson’s work. The sculptures I saw were small, delicate mushroom-looking objects that twisted and turned off of a white surface, like mushrooms stretching out in all directions to distribute their spores. However, they also had an

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<sup>65</sup> I want to be clear that I know that mushrooms are fungi and not “plants” proper. I place them within a very broad definition of “plants” that includes living species that are not animal. Though there is much to argue about what constitutes liveliness, my broad definition of plants does not include rocks or minerals.

uncanny likeness to circumcised penises, with their mushroom-like heads, standing awkwardly against a white backdrop. But unlike human penises, which can often have a slight curve, these mushroom-phalluses were bending all around themselves, like a dance. While we often see allusions to phalluses in art, we do not often see them bending and dancing, reaching for the open air in round-about ways.



Figure 4: Loriccia Petchalko-Matheson, “*Incipient I-VIII*” MAWA Gallery. Winnipeg, MB.

These twisting penis-mushroom-objects got me thinking about fungi and genitalia, and the multiplicity of fungi morphology compared to rigid cultural images of penises and vaginas as perfect objects. Any deviation from such perfection is meant to result in shame, in abjection, and increasingly, in consensual plastic surgery as well as the non-consensual genital surgeries on intersex bodies (Rabin n.p). As I have made plain in the previous chapters, intersex bodies born with genitals that do not align with the ideals of human genitalia, are quickly surgically impinged upon in order that they be disciplined into heteronormative ideals of penises and vaginas – materially evolved to fit into one another (or so the story books say). Penises are long and

straight. Vaginas are fleshy (though not too much), and have a deep hole for receiving. The clitoris doesn't concern the ideal too much, as Iain Morland explained in Chapter Two, except when it is beyond the size limit of acceptable. What all genitalia have in common is that they are rarely discussed in public, which is a problem for intersex — when an infant is born whose genitals look atypical, what discourses do parents have to discuss that difference? Medicine provides some language, but to claim that language the child has to be biomedicalized.

Porn studies scholars have touched on penis size, specifically as size is often equated with race,<sup>66</sup> on the ways in which the penis has featured in pornography.<sup>67</sup> Porn is laden with prosthetic penises, and other methods of camera placement that augment the size of the penis. Female genitalia, too, have come under increased scrutiny, and have thus been subject to some of the fastest growing plastic surgeries in the world – labia resection (Rabin n.p.). What becomes clear in plastic surgeon's promotional videos for surgeries on both typically male and typically female genitalia, found easily on the internet, is that anything other than the “perfect” vagina, with plump labia majora and discreet labia minora, and a clitoris no bigger than a juju bean, is considered a particular fetish instead of a normal variation of a body. Similarly, penises that fall outside of the acceptable range largely constructed by pornography are also subject to the gaze of the plastic surgeon. Clinics promise a longer and more girthy penis.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See Linda Williams “Skin Flicks”; Joseph Bennan “Size Matters: Penis Size and Sexual Position in Gay Porn Profiles”; Menelaos Apostoolou “Female Choice and the Evolution of Penis Size,” Daniel Fiaveh, “Hegemonic Penile Discourses and Continuities in Penile Conceptualizations.”

<sup>67</sup> In her contribution to the *Porn Studies: A Reader*, Constance Penley recounts a scene from an unnamed stag porn film from the 1950s, wherein two women are mushroom hunting together. They “come across a penis poking through the underbrush. They examine the penis with a magnifying glass before deciding that they have discovered a new species of mushroom. An intertitle tells us that ‘the mushroom was enjoyed in all kinds of sauces,’ and we see the two women and the naked man revealed to be attached to the penis, in various combinations” (316). It seems the pleasurable potential of the mushroom to both be eaten and sexually enjoyed has an established history.

<sup>68</sup> It is important to note here that I am not suggesting that the desire for a particular kind of genitals (say, in the case of trans desire) is pathological – far from it. It is vital to understand that gender affirming surgery is life-saving. What I am saying, however, is that we are all held to these unrealistic expectations for genital perfection. Desire is an important consideration here, and one that requires more careful thought especially as it relates to trans and intersex, but is outside of the scope of this project.

It occurred to me that if the cultural imagination around genitals is to change, and the surgical protocols that this imagination follows from, then there needs to be other options for imagining genitals. I agree with Morland that pleasure need not be the only avenue for queer theory, and queer theory must account for atypically sensate bodies. However, valuing pleasure can be a way of forestalling unnecessary genital surgery in the first place (288). If we value pleasure above aesthetics, and/or if those genital aesthetics are expanded beyond the current limiting vision of binary-sexed genitals, then we might find an avenue out of making the intersex body's genitals insensate or atypically sensate to begin with. It might be possible to think differently about genitals. Toward this aim, I propose a reading of three aspects of the penis-mushroom-object of Pechalko-Matheson. The first is aesthetics and pleasure, and the way in which the penis-mushroom-object allows a renewed thinking about genital aesthetics. The second is their reach, which hopefully moves away from the phallocentric discourse about penises and plants that aligns the phallus, uncomplicatedly with maleness. The third returns to Myra Hird's quote, and Aaron Apps's that followed it, from the conclusion of the previous chapter: if there are, indeed, "five thousand thousand sexes," and mushrooms show us that, then maybe mushrooms can help us think about sex as multiplicitous, which would forestall a thinking of the penis/vagina dichotomy from the outset.

### **Genital Aesthetics**

It will come as no surprise by the conclusion of this dissertation on intersex that the aesthetics of genitals, even infant genitals, is prized above pleasure in the cultural, legal, medical, and social discourses that have shaped the narratives I have discussed. But, there is one particular

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moment that has stuck with me above all others. In her book *Making Sense of Intersex: Changing Ethical Perspective in Biomedicine*, Ellen K. Feder recounts a moment sitting in a physician's office. This physician, it seemed, was on board with changing the protocols for medical management for intersex infants. But, at the end of the conversation he had to stop at a desk he was passing. Feder writes:

“Just a minute,” he said as he opened a file on the computer. A close-up digital photograph of an enlarged clitoris appeared on the monitor. Gesturing toward the image, he said “But when you have cases like that. What are you gonna do with *that*? I mean, you can't leave it like that.”

An “enlarged clitoris” is not threatening to the infant's health, but to their recognition as female because of the way “female” genitals are meant to look. The physician is repulsed by this infant's genitals not because of a health problem, but because of a cultural one.

In addition to the disturbing story Feder tells about the physician who recoils from an infant's “enlarged clitoris,” she reminds readers of Susanne Kessler's claim that enlarged clitorises did not cause a problem for women. In fact, many women had no idea their genitals would be considered “abnormal” until they came into contact with the medical gaze. However, as Feder writes in a footnote that undermines the hopefulness of Kessler's work:

It appears that this is something that may grow increasingly rare in the current climate of access to internet photos of genitalia. There is some evidence that the proliferation of such photos is promoting a desire for labiaplasty in girls with typical genitals, as physician Lenore Tiefer (2008) has discussed in what could be taken for a direct response to a question Kessler posed ten years earlier

regarding what seemed like an outrageous question: “What will happen if it becomes fashionable to alter one’s genitals?” (S.J. Kessler 1998, 119). (221)

It seems we have reached that moment, when genitals have been so policed that an imagined genital ideal comes to encourage fashionable surgery. If fashionable surgery becomes normalized, then the risk to intersex bodies increases.<sup>69</sup>

Pacholko-Matheson’s mushroom-penis objects are all different from each other. They are different sizes. They curve and grow in different ways. They are different colours. In the plant and non-human animal world, we accept these differences as variations. Mushrooms are vastly different in their structures, colours, and abilities to be luminescent. Their variations are read as part of their urge to draw in bugs, so that these bugs they may rub their bodies against the alluring mushroom and then walk across the forest floor dropping spores (BBC, 35:54-38:30). It is a kind of inter-species method of reproduction.

Such variation is unwelcome in human genitals. Our bodies, arguably, have variations that might very well be lure tactics, if left alone and not subjected to the normalizing gaze of the physician. However, these variations are too often met with revulsion instead of with a focus on pleasure. The mushroom’s variations are permitted pleasure in the cultural framing of their variation. Plants, it seems, “still queer *life*,” in their sheer multitude of their different embodiments (Sandilands, “Fear” 5). Thinking genitals with plants, therefore, shows the very limited imagination humans have in relation to our genitals despite the plethora of possibilities for pleasurable luring that plants make visible. In an era in which fashionable genital surgeries risk further impingement on intersex bodies, to say little of the shame that even “typical” genitals

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<sup>69</sup> Again, I am absolutely not suggesting that fashionable genital surgery is necessarily wrong in a moralistic sense. Nor am I conflating fashionable genital surgery with gender affirming surgery. These are complex discussions of desire that I want to explore in the future. But, the increased focus on genital perfection does put intersex bodies at heightened risk, and that risk needs to be highlighted.

encourage that makes way for fashionable surgeries in the first place, mushrooms are one way of reorienting the disciplining gaze on human genitalia.

### **Plant/Genital Reaching**

In her review of three texts on plant politics aptly titled “Fear of a Queer Plant?,” Catrona Sandilands comments on Michael Marder’s musings on Jacques Derrida’s use of the sunflower in thinking about phallogocentrism and metaphysics from his book *The Philosopher’s Plant*. She writes:

Taking up the flower that Jacques Derrida uses to depict phallogocentrism in his critiques of the metaphysics of presence (in *Glas*) – “worshipping the light of reason, thinkers salute its phallic erection (204) – Marder insists on the addition of “phyto-” to highlight how plants are involved in the twinning together of masculine sexuality with logos, and also in its deconstruction. For Derrida, masculine erection is the model for the process of things coming into presence” (423).

I want to stop here to point out the problem with thinking about plants and genitals. The problem is that plants like the sunflower have long been deemed phallic, and thus masculine in their reach to the sun (to Enlightenment). Their other parts (petals and so forth) have been thought about as feminine allure (as Sandilands also points [424]). That is, the phallic reach is active, while the floweresque seduction is always in waiting. While this is not the moment to dive into Marder’s critique of Derrida, I do want to point out this passage as an example of the kind of thinking that ties together the plant, the reach, the phallus, and maleness that does not allow for a complex notion of the reach as queer, as Iain Morland reads it. Not every reach is achieved, as I will

show. It is hopeful. And for mushrooms, that have a plethora of sexes, their “phallic reach” need not be associated with the phallogocentric (or phytophallogocentric) order.

If we recall from Chapter Two, Morland argues for the reach as an alternative to queer theory’s pleasure thesis that centres touch. He makes this move in order to include the post-surgical intersex body that may be atypically sensate as an effect of the wound, cut, scab, and scar. In response to the loss of genital sensation as a result of surgical cutting, Morland proposes the reach. He recounts the story of David Reimer, whose penis was burned off in a surgical accident. He “described the persistence of desire following the removal of his penis” this way: “‘If you lose your arm,’ he explained to his biographer, ‘and you’re dying of thirst, that stump is still going to move toward that glass of water to try to get it. It’s instinct. It’s in you.’” For Morland, “Reimer’s narrative of reaching interestingly demonstrates both the flexibility of desire and also desire’s stubbornness – its persistence after genital modification signals its adaptability just as much as its intractability” (305).

I cannot help but read the dance of the mushroom-penis-object as a kind of desiring reach. A mushroom reaches out in order to disperse spores, to send parts of itself out into the world, not knowing in advance where they will go or whether they will reproduce the mushroom at all. Therefore, their reach is not phytophallocentric in that it is not a reach for the sun (for “enlightenment” as Marder and Derrida put it). It is hope in the wind. It is a desire without assurance. It is reaching out for the glass of water without, perhaps, the tool with which to grasp. The reach, therefore, does not assure pleasure. It is the hope for pleasure; the hope for a future to come that has not yet arrived.

### **Five Thousand, Thousand Sexes**

If heteronormativity has always encumbered thinking about non-human animal sex as anything but reproductive, as the previous chapter articulated, then that same heteronormative thinking has forestalled the ability to think about sex organs as anything other than penis and vagina, a pole and a hole. However, much reproductive sex, and most non-reproductive sex, takes more diverse pleasure in the body than the myth of penis-in-vagina sex can account for. Catrona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson provide a succinct analysis of the heteronormativity placed on “nature” in the introduction to their ground-breaking text *Queer Ecologies*.

A queer ecology for Erickson and Sandilands takes account of the rise of sexology at the same moment as reconceptualization of “nature” which uses evolutionary theory to naturalize reproductive heterosexual sex. They promote connecting this historical discourse to contemporary transsex panics (6). I want to return to these discussions, which occupied much of Chapter Three, in the final moments of this dissertation. The term “intersex” assures a falsity that has been made normative in our society – that sex exists in two obvious camps in humans (and, as Sandilands and Erickson offer, ecologists enforce on non-human animal bodies as well [11]), male and female. With these categories come assumptions about not only what our sex organs do, which is the focus of much of the work of queer ecologists, but also what our sex organs look like. What these sex organs look like is vital not only to determining what is an intersex body, but what must be done to make the intersex body acceptable.

The mushroom-penis-object is useful to counter such an impossible problem as the problem of the ideal penis or clitoris (which must be decidedly not a penis). If the penis, or phallus, can reach otherwise, can dance and sway, and twist and turn, it can be seen differently, as divergent. But, if we extend a queer ecological critique to the mushroom-penis-object, then it

may be possible to understand biological sex, and the penis as the *a priori* indicator of sex, as a false indicator of a false category. To review: Debra Shostak argued in Chapter One that Cal's nakedness is what exposes his body as impossible. His genitals, in short, show Cal he is male. His phallus makes impossible any other choice (404). In the early pages of *Annabel*, Wayne/Annabel is brought into a surgical theatre to have his penis measured. The measurement indicates that his penis is of sufficient length to gender Wayne/Annabel a boy. His penis is the indicator of his gender. The vaginal opening confuses the penis, but it is still a penis, therefore he is male according to the medical establishment.

In *The Symposium*, Hida Viloría recounts the ways in which physicians' fears of a "grossly enlarged clitoris" leads to the continued advocating for infant genital surgeries (Viloría 115). Stephanie Lynell Long recounts the multiple urinary tract infections she got as a result of the "surgery to move my urethra from the base of the penis to the tip." She continues "for years I would get a burning sensation in the middle of the penis after urination" (101). Daniela Truffer's "micropenis" was "shortened" "to the size of a 'very small clitoris'" (111). It is the penis, therefore, that causes anxiety for physicians because it is either attached to a body that was otherwise designated female or it doesn't look or function as a penis is culturally ascribed to do (i.e. provide the ability to pee standing up). Moreover, if we recall, in *XXY*, Alex's phallus causes confusion. Alex's ability to penetrate another body causes abhorrence and disgust. It is Alex's penis – though, significantly, it is never called that – that marks Alex's body as unique for the viewer.

The genitals, but specifically the penis, are what causes the most anxiety about intersex in the art that is created about people named intersex, as each of the texts I have studied show. It therefore is inevitable that this Coda should ask serious questions about it. However, it is also

inevitable that the thoughts I have included here seem whimsical or inconclusive. Whimsy, or imaginative thinking, is potentially the only way out of the oppression of heteronormativity and the biomedical violence that is enacted through and on intersex bodies. Both *XXY* and *Intersex: A Memoir* provide imaginative thinking in response to both the early fictional narratives and the heartbreak of the life-narratives in Chapter One and Chapter Two. I ended with them as examples of the shimmers of hope that they encourage. Like Jose Muñoz, I see value in orienting ourselves toward an imagined queer future to come. This Coda, therefore, has attempted to expand outward from *XXY* and *Intersex: A Memoir* to offer a future-oriented move that does not accept transsex panic in the face of ecological change, but queer potentials that we cannot yet fully grasp, like the 28,000 sexes of the mushroom (Hird, “Transsex,” 41), the scale of which is almost too much to comprehend.

For Anna Tsing, it is the mushroom that persists at the end of the world. Even in the ruination of capitalism, greed, and consumption, the matsutake mushrooms grow with increased vigor (3). Mushrooms, she also argues, defy categorization into “species” because of the complexity of their sex (232). The mushroom’s thousand thousand sexes, then, might be understood as part of its persistence. Multiplicitous sex is what provides variation for our survival. This “queer future” is still arriving. Sex itself is always in the process of arriving.

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