I Am Jack's Transgender Sensorium

Transgender Visual Culture, The Wachowskis, and Fincher's Fight Club

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Abstract

This article examines the connections between transgender ways of retroactive meaning-making through image-making technologies by analyzing David Fincher's *Fight Club* (USA, 1999), films from the Wachowski sisters such as *Bound* (USA, 1996) and *The Matrix* (USA, 1999), trick cinema such as the work of George Méliès, and before-and-after photographic comparisons. This article approaches transgender studies from the perspective that trans* wishes to externalize a yet unrealized bodily presentation. Image-making technologies help to accomplish this goal, particularly when one examines the evolution from before-and-after photography to early trick cinema, and then to digital filmmaking technologies which allow an image to be completely computer-generated while heavily resembling the physical world. Fight Club adopts a narrative structure which is similar to before-and-after photography, in which the film begins at its climax, flashes backward in time to fill in the gaps, and then repeats and pushes past the introductory moment. As the audience gains insight into how the unnamed narrator (played by Edward Norton) invents his alter ego and forms a bond with Tyler (played by Brad Pitt), Marla Singer (played by Helena Bonham Carter) is revealed to be the center of this Möbius strip narrative. The dysphoria Marla sparks is the heart of a trans* reading of *Fight Club*.

Keywords

Transgender Studies, Film Studies. Puzzle Film, Media Studies, Trans Film Theory, Film Theory

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Introduction

Transgender phenomenology is rooted in the desire to make perceivable a feeling of gender that others have not (yet) witnessed. (Keegan, 2018, p. 2)

Fight Club follows an insomniac office drone struggling to define his relationship with masculinity and find his place in the world. Along the way, he meets many men (including Bob and Tyler) and a woman named Marla Singer. The Narrator and Tyler start a club where men fight each other to reclaim their masculinity, and they begin living together in a dilapidated house on the mostly industrial Paper Street. The Narrator compares their life together to *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, a long-running sitcom which began in 1952 and focused on reproducing the ideologies tied to marriage and gender in that period (0:40:30-0:40:45). The Narrator and Tyler continue to develop their relationships with Marla, leading to a sexual connection between Marla and Tyler. Tyler's desire for violence and his dissatisfaction with capitalism grow, leading to the creation of a terrorist group known as Project Mayhem. The Narrator learns that he and Tyler are one and the same. It is his realization which forces both The Narrator and the spectator to examine the narrative retroactively. The purpose of this article is to examine *Fight Club* from a trans* perspective, creating links between *Fight Club*, the puzzle film mode, and trans* phenomenology.

While transgender and transsexual are similar terms, with both indicating a disconnection between one's assigned gender at birth and the gender identity which represents one's internal sense of being, there are stark differences. In general, transexuality as a phenomenon seeks to swap one discrete, physical embodiment for an opposite embodiment. In this way, transexuality ignores the existence of intersex identities and subjugates the trans body to the cisgender body. In contrast, transgender phenomenology seeks to denaturalize the link between sex and gender. Transgender thus presents gender as inherently fluid, and accounts for a wide range of lived experiences. Transsexual is more of a linear process, while transgender is an embodied state and way of being.

Transgender being has gained increasing attention in academia since the 1990s, a fact which Susan Stryker will link to the emergence of the "postmodern condition" and the increased connection between individuals enabled by communication technologies such as the internet. Stryker theorized:

> That a signifier does not point to its signified in any direct manner has been something of a first principle in linguistic theory for most of the twentieth century; only more recently, [...] has it become socially significant that the signifier "gender" does not reference a signified "sex" in quite the direct way assumed by the idea of a "sex/gender system." (1998, p. 147)

Stryker links the denaturalization of a "sex/gender system" to the factors listed above, with the "postmodern condition" affecting the reproduction of identity via media and increasing communication, helping transgender individuals connect with others in a safer manner while still expressing themselves. Transgender film theorist Cáel M. Keegan states that:

> "[T]rans" describes an inherently subjunctive relation to what is considered real, to what can be commonly sensed. To survive, transgender people have had to craft imaginaries that sustain our desire to become, our belief that we might come into perception differently. *The world, and me, as we could be.* (2018, p. 3)

Keegan creates a link between technologies which help to realize imaginaries, such as trick-based film editing and computer-generated image-making, and transgender ways of being. The word "transgender" will be shortened to "trans" or "trans*" throughout this article. Trans* as a term is indicative of a shift towards "a 'transreal' (Blas and cárdenas) or 'transworld' (Horton-Stallings 207–10) proliferation of the body and its senses" (Keegan, 2018, p. 27). This takes place, "[O]ver 'multiple worlds, times, and realities,' across which gender might flicker like a 'shimmering mirage' (Blas and cárdenas 24, 39)." (Keegan, 2018, p. 27) Keegan's language of 'shimmering' has also been used by Eliza Steinbock in studying media through a trans* lens. The goal is to acknowledge and naturalize that the body, and thus an individual's gendered embodiment, is constantly shifting as one experiences life. The shift in the thematization of trans* has impacts not just on how one may view the existence of a transgender cinematic form, but on the depiction of gender in film as a whole, since even the cisgender body is constantly in flux throughout different gendered embodiments (childhood to adolescence, to middle age, etc.). These cisgender bodies still present trans* potential, as they link to the 'shimmering' ideas of gender presented by Keegan, Blas, cárdenas, Horton-Stallings, and Steinbock.

This article blossoms from Keegan's analysis of the filmography of the Wachowski sisters, and his greater goal of locating contemporary transgender cinema and anticipating what it

may become. What is revealed by applying pieces of Keegan's analysis to David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999) is that trans*ness, as a historical and cultural phenomena, is bound up in many of the same societal and technological shifts that would enable the production of many Wachowski and Fincher films, particularly *The Matrix* (1999) and *Fight Club*. This mode of filmmaking is known as the puzzle film. Beyond extracting trans meaning from an individual film, this thesis aims to analyze the transgender potential of the puzzle film mode more broadly.

Steinbock and Keegan both link transgender embodiment to filmic form, as both seek to create reality and depict change. While Steinbock focuses primarily on analog film technologies, such as early trick-editing techniques used by filmmakers like George Méliès, Keegan's study instead examines the ruptures created by the arrival of digital filmmaking technologies. Keegan links the emergence of digital technologies, whether directly tied to the filmmaking process or not, to the aforementioned emergence of trans* ideology. It is their exploration of the trans* potential of trick filmmaking techniques that enables this article's existence.

The trans* potential of these digitally created images lies in the way in which they disrupt the assumed epistemological and ontological ways in which one may construct identities, and, by corollary, gender through cinema. This potential also gives rise to an entire mode of filmmaking, known as the puzzle film, which emerged from the increasing fragmentation of experiences and identities displayed in a cycle of popular films in the 1990s. (Buckland, 2009, p. 1) While an exact definition is hard to pin down, Warren Buckland states that "The puzzle film is made up of non-classical characters who perform non-classical actions and events. Puzzle film constitutes a post-classical mode of filmic representation and experience not delimited by mimesis [or the ideology that the filmic image should mimic reality as much as possible]" (2009, p. 7). In alignment with the ideas of Steinbock and Keegan, the examples of non-classical actions and events within the puzzle film could represent a gender transition.

I employ Steinbock and Keegan's notion that a transgender cinema must use film form to revisit sites of meaning and explore the aesthetic possibilities of change to create a trans* reading of *Fight Club*. As demonstrated by Steinbock's analysis of early trick cinema, it is not necessary to analyze pieces with transgender creatives, nor transgender subjects, to locate sites of transgender meaning-making. What is unveiled by Steinbock and Keegan is that transgender cinema is ultimately organized around a desire to reconceptualize spaces, structures, and time to produce meaning retroactively. Keegan uses this act of revisitation to justify a rethinking of the

Wachowski sisters as pioneering transgender cinema creatives, as well as a means to trans non-linear narrative structures. This article aims to examine the sensorium produced by the audiovisual landscape of *Fight Club*, as well as the trans* possibilities of social spaces, social identification practices, digital filmmaking technologies, and non-linear narratives.

I Have This Image of You Inside of Me I Want Out

The evolution of digital imaging from former analog processes thus analogizes the historical movement from transsexual toward transgender as a mode that prioritizes ideation over preexisting material forms. (Keegan, 2018, pp. 27–28)

The focus of this article is to explore some historic examples of the powers of image-making technologies, particularly photography and the motion picture, to expand and explore forms of gendered embodiment not yet realized. The image provides an empowering space to explore gendered embodiment and the various shifts in gender which naturally occur over time, whether from year to year or second by second. Eliza Steinbock will connect image-making to empowering forms of transgender embodiment, citing the historical figure of Lili Elbe as an example. Lili would be the focus of a 2015 biopic, *The Danish Girl* (USA, Hooper), which tells the story of her life through the perspective of her wife, who frequently photographed Lili as she expressed her gender identity. The ability for transgender individuals (and their loved ones) to produce images of themselves allows them to control the narrative of their lives and to self-determine gender identity. (Steinbock, 2019, pp. 42–52) In *The Riotous State of Trans Visual Culture*, Steinbock argues that the formal aesthetic qualities of media studies share many similarities with transgender studies in general, and that much can be gained by applying their key philosophies to each other. (Steinbock, 2019, pp. 170–171) Steinbock claims:

> examining the striking similarities between some aesthetic forms of cinema and transgender embodiment. One example … is the dominant trope of the before-and-after images used in trans representation, but also in early cinema trick films, both of which rely on a notion of the seamless and yet shocking effect of a cinematographic or surgical cut. The cut effectuates a temporal, narrative, but also bodily change. (2019, p. 170)

These themes are prominent in Steinbock's analysis of Gerda Wegener's photos of Lili, but the process of film editing strengthens the link between before and after. To Steinbock, the

editing process is reminiscent of a surgical procedure, making true what is not yet reality via its arrangement of shots. In *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change*, Steinbock states that "diverse conceptualizations for trans embodiments and identities emerge together with phantasmagorical visual practices that offer them a horizon of intelligibility by interlacing science with entertainment" (Steinbock, 2019, p. 27). The weaving together of science and entertainment thematizes the existence of filmic technologies, with chemical reactions producing beautiful images. This is similar to forms of gender transition, in which medical and chemical processes may help individuals realize their internal sense of gender. Much of the entertainment of these early film technologies can be associated with the novelty of their existence in a particular moment in time. For example, Steinbock dedicates much time to discussing early trick cinema, particularly that of George Méliès. Steinbock connects Méliès's editing innovations and use of stop-camera technique to the surgical process: Méliès developed a penchant for demonstrating an instant sex change on film. Both the match-on-action trick edit and gender transformation are birthed in the origin story of his discovery of the stop-camera technique (Steinbock, 2019, p. 36).

Steinbock does not claim that Méliès was intentionally creating trans allegories, but rather that cinematic technologies (particularly the ways in which the editing process may link together two seemingly distinct visual forms in an organic way) present trans* potential. Steinbock links the emergence of surgical and hormonal means of gender transition during the same period as Méliès's filmmaking career (2019, pp. 36–42). What their analysis reveals is a connection between phantasmatic filmmaking technologies and watershed moments for images of transgender embodiment. Steinbock focuses on *A Turn of the Century Illusionist* (Méliès, 1899) to assign trans potential to its use of stop-camera editing. This allows a male illusionist and his female assistant to swap places with each other by magic, seemingly. Steinbock connects this to the shimmering, unfixed ideas of gender which contemporary trans theory wishes to push towards.

The language of shimmering, flickering, unfixed, and phantasmal expressions of gender identity also applies to Tyler's existence in *Fight Club*. Before his formal introduction on an airplane, we see Tyler flash for a frame before disappearing. The first time Tyler flashes happens as The Narrator jolts awake to find himself in a garden of photocopy machines, linking the moment to his/Tyler's eventual sexual relationship with Marla. "With insomnia, nothing is real,"

The Narrator mumbles, a cacophony of digital beeps and mechanical hums filling in the audioscape. “Everything is a copy of a copy of a copy” (0:03:58-0:04:10). His statement reflects three factors within the film: The Narrator’s dissatisfaction with his postmodern way of life, his dissatisfaction with forms of gender performativity presented to him before the advent of digital technologies, and how Tyler’s identity will fuse more with Marla as the film reaches its end. Tyler’s second flash occurs as The Narrator meets with a doctor who does not take his concern seriously, reflecting both the struggle transgender individuals experience to have their bodies respected and the deprioritizing of medical treatment in trans* phenomenology. His third flash occurs as The Narrator attends a support group for men with testicular cancer, a social space in which men exist in a non-normative fashion by lacking certain sex-linked characteristics. His fourth flash is triggered by observing Marla. She walks away from him with a puff of smoke emanating from her cigarette, a symbol linked to Marla’s role as femme fatale and the impetus of Tyler’s creation. This culminates near the end of the film with The Narrator finally realizing he is Tyler.

In a revisitation of the initiation of the sex scene, The Narrator sprints from left to right to reach the phone in his hotel room. The camera pans right to follow him, with his face obscured. The film cuts to show his back framed in a medium close-up as he dials Marla’s number, then cuts again to his side framed in a tight close-up. The Narrator lingers near the edge of the frame, decentering him from both the shot and the narrative. The film cuts to a different location. An electronic gurgling sound and the ringing of a telephone link both shots. Marla rises into the frame, just to the left of the shot’s center, and answers the phone. “Have we ever had sex?” He asks her. She answers that his question is stupid, and asks him sarcastically, “you want to know if I think we were just having sex or making love?” (1:51:19-1:51:48). She presents sexual contact as being part of one of two binary positions which cannot overlap despite their inherent connection, much like the ideology behind the ideas of biological sex. Marla ends the phone call by stating she is going to visit the house on Paper Street while The Narrator frantically attempts to inform her that he is not home. He slams the phone onto the receiver with a thud. There is perhaps a second of silence before Tyler’s voice interrupts. The film cuts to a long shot which rapidly pans left to reveal Tyler sitting on a chair in the hotel room. His head is shaved, making the uniform spikes on top of his head appear significantly darker than his longer hair. He is dressed much differently than we have ever witnessed Tyler. A fluffy fur jacket surrounds his

head like a lion's mane, and dark sunglasses obscure his eyes. While his grungy outfit is out of place for Tyler thus far, it is not unlike how we often see another individual dress. The outfit mirrors Marla Singer at her most threatening: when she appears at support groups The Narrator attends.

" [W]hy do people think I'm you?" The Narrator asks. He sits across from Tyler, framed in a medium shot from over Tyler's shoulder. Only fragments of Tyler are visible. The film cuts to a medium close-up of Tyler as he brings a cigarette to his lips. "I think you know," Tyler answers (1:52:20-1:52:44). This demonstrates that The Narrator is unable to act without Tyler, but Tyler is able to act for himself. The Narrator rejects Tyler's words, and Tyler repeats the same sentiment as he lights a cigarette. The Narrator closes his eyes, causing a rapid fade to white, then fades back in. This shot is one that has been seen earlier, which depicts Tyler's acts of intimidation and terrorism. A sound akin to a digital record scratch links these shots and indicates the realization which is occurring. The film cuts back to The Narrator's memory of intimidating a high-ranking police officer, showing The Narrator in the same position we had once watched Tyler occupy. Another shot repeats here, one in which Tyler's revolutionary monologuing had caused the digitally created edges of a celluloid film strip to invade the shot. Much like how the use of trick editing allows the illusionist to seemingly transform into his assistant, the use of computer-generated image creation and non-linear narrative structure within *Fight Club* allows The Narrator and Tyler to flicker between embodiments.

Tyler's shimmering existence is an evolution of Méliès's use of trick edits and the trans potential which stems from it. The freedom granted to filmmakers by digital technologies have, again, expanded images of trans embodiment, linked to the shift away from the language of transsexuality to transgender. According to Keegan, transgender pushes towards an understanding of gender as unfixed and ever-changing:

> [T]he material body can no longer be presumed to serve as the basis for gendered subjectivity. Trans* is thus a relativity construct in which we recognize that all bodies, all fields, are in motion—in which the material is as constructed as the purportedly symbolic, and in which the symbolic can simultaneously be lived as the real. Trans* aesthetics thus posit a ... proliferation of the body and its senses over "multiple worlds, times, and realities," across which gender might flicker like a "shimmering mirage" (Blas and cárdenas 24, 39). (2018, p. 27)

Tyler serves as a basis for The Narrator's gendered subjectivity, moving towards a transreal bodily image. Fincher's use of photogrammetry captures not just the moment of intimacy between Tyler and Marla, but also a slow reverse tracking shot pulling out of a filthy trash can (not unlike the reverse tracking shot that began the film), which also helps move toward a transworld way of being. Photogrammetry is the process of constructing a realistic computer-generated filmic image via compiling various photos of said object. Each photo used to construct the trash can, whether digitally produced or not, represents the trash can in a particular moment which can never be entirely reproduced, but which can be used to suture together a novel object. Keegan links digital technologies to the emergence of transgender:

> "Transgender" is ... historically connected to digital innovations in technology—gaming, chat rooms, online dating, immersive digital worlds, and cinematic effects like the morph and bullet time—that produced new temporal and spatial encounters with the gendered body as the plastic effect of coding. (2018, p. 26)

In contrast to transsexuality, transgender appears in a historical moment directly tied to digital innovations. These innovations alter the link between images we perceive and a tangible object. These technological developments that lead to the emergence of trans* phenomenology are the same factors to which the puzzle film mode is responding to. The assertion this article makes is that the puzzle film mode has trans potential located in the ways in which the puzzle film is bound up in delinking of reality from tangibility. Scholars of transgender film theory are not the only theorists to acknowledge the discorrelation. In *Discorrelated Images*, Shane Denson states that:

> In a post-cinematic media regime, [...] both the subjects and the objects of perception are radically transformed. Older relations—such as that between a human subject and a photographically fixed object—are dissolving, and new relations are being forged. … With the new objects of computational images emerge new subjectivities, new affects, and uncertain potentials for perception and action. (2020, p. 1)

While scholars such as Denson have acknowledged that new subjectivities are emerging from the rise of digital filmmaking, it has not been until the arrival of scholars such as Steinbock and Keegan that the trans possibilities of these innovations are being considered. Examples which fuse the play with film forms and its transgender possibilities are often puzzle films, as has been detailed in the previous two chapters. Amongst these films are many pieces by the Wachowski

sisters, including *Bound* and *The Matrix*, as well as Fincher's *Fight Club*. While attempting to situate a transgender cinema and trans spectator phenomenologically, it is helpful (but not necessary) to examine the works of transgender directors. Limiting narratives of queer possibility to those produced by openly queer creatives is precisely why *Bound* was often ignored upon release and why it would disregard much of Steinbock's work in *Shimmering Images* (Keegan, 2018, p. 8). Additionally, to limit queer analysis to explicitly queer media ignores the historical and contemporary truth that many queer people must express themselves in coded ways to ensure their survival.

Keegan argues that *Bound* and *The Matrix* pioneered the transgender gaze within film, as previous films in this position often align themselves with cissexist interpretations (2018, pp. 25–26). Keegan continues that *The Matrix* "speculates beyond the temporal and spatial limits of cinematic reality, [...]" (2018, p. 26). Keegan links this to aspects of digital filmmaking within *The Matrix*, such as bullet time, computer-generated imagery, and virtual cameras. This draws a connection between the digitized filmmaking practices of *The Matrix* and transgender identity, as:

> Transgender phenomenology is rooted in the desire to make perceivable a feeling of gender that others have not (yet) witnessed. [...] Sensing something others miss, the trans imaginary summons its own literalization, "its externalization, its substantiation, in material flesh" (84–86). (Keegan, 2018, p. 2)

Transgender cinema, and transgender meaning-making more broadly, organizes itself around a desire to revisit physical and cultural sites of meaning to locate ignored embodied subjectivities. There is a desire to assert one's visibility. The discorrelation between images and tangible objects, reinforced by digital filmmaking techniques, may make one question the fixed nature of biological sex and the discrete transition implied by the term transsexual. In other words, a transgender cinema must use film form to revisit sites of meaning and materialize an overlooked embodiment. This can be achieved through examples of classic trick cinema and digital filmmaking techniques. What is also revealed is a distinct link between novel means of observation and transgender being (Steinbock, 2019, pp. 36–42). Keegan uses the idea to pluck trans potential from the film *Bound*.

Fight Club begins with an extended reverse tracking shot that uses computer-generated imagery to pull the audience through The Narrator's nervous system (0:0:30-0:2:06). The camera emerges

through the skin, observing a single bead of sweat. The shot focuses on two eye-like holes on a gun whose barrel rests in The Narrator's mouth. Racking focus graphically links the gun to actual eyes. The moment is similar to the opening sequence of the film *Bound* (Wachowskis, USA, 1996) in how it frames the narrative, and the relationship between lesbian lovers Corky and Violet. The film opens on a tracking shot which moves through the interior of a large closet (0:01:00-0:02.03). The lustrous fabrics link these garments (which we will later learn belong to the more traditionally feminine Violet) with not just Corky's iconic leather jacket, but also the generally wet aesthetics of the film. The look and tangibility of fluids materialize an unexplored reality, such as Violet's desire for Corky. A similar aesthetic appears in the opening sequence of *Fight Club*, where dark, chiaroscuro lighting makes surfaces appear wet even when dry. Keegan says this about the opening sequence of *Bound*:

> Designed to disorient the viewer, the "unfixed" scene (Hanson 3) withholds our directional relation to the surrounding architecture, which remains defamiliarized. We are not yet sure whose senses we are inside. Slowly the camera glides past hat boxes and pairs of pumps, [...] A woman's voice repeats, "I have this image of you inside of me, like a part of me. . . I want out. . . Like a part of me,". We begin in a moment of temporal suspension that leads into an extended flashback, only to flash forward and then surpass this point again later in the film. (2018, p. 11)

Keegan argues that in order to escape the trap of heterosexually-aligned feminine gender roles, Violet must fuse her dysphoric and sexual desires for Corky's body. This is much like the complex sexual relationships between the main trio in *Fight Club*. Omerso states:

> Before the dramatic revelation about Tyler's true nature, [...] he is presented as [...] an object of desire to Joe [The Narrator]. [...] "[...] I want Tyler. Tyler wants Marla. Marla wants me" (4). The queerness of Joe's longing is stated clearly enough. (Omerso, 2009, p. 64)

While Omerso is analyzing the novel, the script by Jim Uhls and Fincher's final creation are loyal adaptations in this regard. As discussed in depth in the previous two chapters, there are sexual undertones not just in the relationship between The Narrator and his alter ego, Tyler, but to the wider social structure of fight clubs. The relationship between Tyler/Narrator and Marla is also overtly sexual, with instances of sexual contact between these individuals initiating Tyler's shift from a local troublemaker to a national threat.

Much like how the closet is used as an architectural symbol of materialist, capitalistic femininity which Violet wishes to escape, the skyscraper in which the protagonists are trapped serves as a symbol of late-capitalist, neoliberal, phallic masculinity (Keegan, 2018, pp. 11–21). While there are some striking differences between the sequence Keegan describes and the opening of *Fight Club* (such as the comparative brightness of *Bound*'s image), both sequences are fundamentally similar. The camera in *Bound* pans and tilts to show material goods which are thought to construct femininity, while the camera in *Fight Club* races through The Narrator's nerves. In contrast to the materiality thought to construct femininity, masculinity is often thought to be inherently possessed. To enhance masculinity, one must train their mind and body rather than using their purchasing power.

"People are always asking me if I know Tyler Durden," The Narrator states in voiceover (0:02:04-0:02:08), foreshadowing the non-linear narrative structure which will follow. Much like Violet's disconnected lines in *Bound*, this statement hints at the temporal suspension in which we are caught. Time must pause in this moment to revisit the factors leading up to it. Keegan states that the temporal organization has trans possibility:

> Narrative time is bent inside Violet's closet, layered much like the shelves of clothing, ... We have entered a box that symbolizes heteronormative control of sexuality but also a form of "pleated time" (Carter) that mimics the folded-back temporality of gender transition, in which memory is experienced across differentially gendered versions of the self… Inside Corky, Violet is dysphoric, longing and waiting for escape from the meaning of her gender, which is domestication and heterosexual labor. Corky… is Violet's transition. Time lies coiled like a spring, waiting to expand and transport them both beyond the limits of the film's horizon. (2018, pp. 13–14)

Time expands backwards and then pushes past the point of origin. A similar effect is imposed on the narrative of *Fight Club.* The Narrator will be thrown from this moment with Tyler to the impetus of his alter ego's creation, Marla Singer. She triggers a sort of dysphoria within The Narrator, who must create Tyler as a means of transition. (0:02:59-0:19:12) Much like *Bound*, *Fight Club* will lay its narrative out like a Möbius strip for its viewers: we have returned to the beginning, yet it has twisted to reveal its inner workings.

There are significant points of tension between both films, though. *Bound* ends with Corky and Violet driving away together in a shiny, bright red truck, leaving behind the cisheterosexist

structures which make themselves visible within Violet's closet. (1:42:58-1:43:59). The transition which Corky represents for Violet is presented as liberation, while Tyler is presented as destructive. In contrast, *Fight Club* ends with Tyler's death and The Narrator holding hands with Marla as two towers fall one after another, almost like one has taken the other down (2:15:29-2:16:16). *Fight Club* thus presents the link between sexual desire and gender envy as a destructive force rather than one associated with liberation. There may be a link to misogyny here, as a desire to escape traditional femininity is viewed as natural due to patriarchal values, while a desire to circumvent certain embodiments of masculinity is not allowed. Another point of tension is that Corky and Violet are both presented as real, tangible beings while Tyler is imagined. His version of masculinity is an amalgamation of media images, cultural knowledge, and advertisements which are only loosely tethered to reality. Keegan argues that the detachment from reality is a result of digital imaging technology:

> Digital imaging … disrupts the presumed indexicality of analog film, drawing attention to the inherent gap between the cinematic image and its material referent. Transgender performs a similar move, further destabilizing the assumed "natural" link between sex and gender. (2018, pp. 27–28)

Keegan aligns additionally with the film's narrative structure, as it destabilizes the assumed chain of narrative events via its pleated temporality. As we double back to the film's opening sequence, we push through The Narrator's journey of realization and return to him with Tyler's gun in his mouth. "This is it. The beginning," Tyler states, indicating not just the beginning of a new world which Tyler believes will blossom from his destructive actions, but the starting point of the narrative (2:09:40-2:09:45). The confrontation between Tyler and The Narrator continues, until The Narrator realizes the power he holds over his alter ego. "That gun isn't even in your hand," he mumbles, "that gun's in my hand" (2:12:09-2:12:20). The film cuts from a long shot of Tyler leaning back in a lounging manner as he smokes to a medium close-up of The Narrator, which tilts downward to reveal the gun resting between his thighs. The phallic insinuation is once again lacking subtlety. The Narrator puts the gun to, in his words, "our head" (2:12:41-2:12:44). Tyler steps forward, and The Narrator stands up to match him before placing the gun barrel between his lips and pulling the trigger. A cloud of smoke appears around The Narrator as he collapses into his chair. "What's that smell?" Tyler mutters, blowing rings of smoke from his lips. He drops to his knees, then prone as the film cuts back from a medium shot to a long shot. We hear

Tyler hit the ground a second time, but do not see any traces of his existence. The smoke, which indicated the perceived danger which Marla brings, has been again associated with Tyler and flipped from an example of destruction to one of salvation. These impossible body movements have finally been separated from Tyler's existence, and are placed in the hands of The Narrator (2:09:35-2:13:50).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to explore the trans* potential of *Fight Club*'s digital filmmaking techniques and its non-linear narrative structure. This has been achieved by highlighting the connection between the ability of the filmic image to show change over time in a distinct way, which holds particular salience for transgender individuals both historically and contemporaneously. This includes Steinbock's analysis of the trick films of George Méliès. I applied their analysis to moments in *Fight Club* which show the push and pull within the relationships between The Narrator and Tyler. The Narrator believes he is unable to act in the ways which he deserves and thus creates Tyler to enable him to perform these actions. This is the heart of a trans* reading of the film, as is revealed by the similarities between Keegan's analysis of *Bound* and my reading of *Fight Club*. The non-linear narrative structure, in which meaning is created in a retroactive fashion, mirrors the ways in which transgender individuals exist in the world. The existence and evolution of trans* meaning-making has historically been bound up in forms of before-and-after imagery, a practice which can be observed in a variety of mediascapes ranging from photographs of Lili Elbe, trick cinema such as the works of George Méliès, to digitally enhanced films such as those produced by the Wachowski sisters and David Fincher.

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