Narrative of the Transgender Body

On gendered embodiment, the "cisification" of trans society, and what these concepts inform of trans peoples' occupancy within the physical and mental realms, as well as the narrative spaces those realms inhabit.

On the 16th of April, 2025, the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom ruled that the legal definitions of 'man' and 'woman' would, for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, now refer to the individual's "biological sex"[1], as opposed to their gender. Completely disregarding the complexities of the reality of what "biological sex" even encompasses, one can assume that the Supreme Court, and the transphobic bloc which campaigned for this decision, wish for "biological sex" to be reduced to a person's outer, presenting, sexual organs – I.E. was a person born with a vagina, or a penis? From the EHRC itself:

> "The Supreme Court ruled that in the Equality Act 2010 (the Act), 'sex' means biological sex.
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> This means that, under the Act:
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> - A 'woman' is a biological woman or girl (a person born female)
> - A 'man' is a biological man or boy (a person born male)[2]"

Once again ignoring the added complexity that is the existence of intersex people (the, as of 2023, approximately 1.1 million living in the UK[3]), this judgement is both dehumanising and objectifying – to reduce a topic such as gender, one that is both paradoxically omnipresent to the point of conspiracy, and infinitesimally minor, to the point at which 99.5%~ of the UK's population do not experience discord between their sexed and gendered identities[4] , to a

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[1] Ben Hatton, "**UK Supreme Court rules legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex** " https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/cvgq9ejql39t [accessed 03/07/25]
[2] EHRC, "**An interim update on the practical implications of the UK Supreme Court judgment** " https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/media-centre/interim-update-practical-implications-uk-supreme-court-judgment#:~:text=The%20Supreme%20Court%20ruled%20that,boy%20(a%20person%20born%20male) [accessed 03/07/25]
[3] Micro Rainbow, "**Intersex Awareness Day** " https://microrainbow.org/intersex-awareness-day/ [accessed 03/07/25]

mere discussion of the perceived physical body is, to be frank, embarrassing. Gayle Salamon, working within Sigmund Freud's concept of bodily ego, writes on the phantasmatic body as "[a] body [in] which one has a 'felt sense' [that] is not necessarily contiguous with the physical body as it is perceived from the outside[5]" and argues that "a phantasmatic body part cannot be considered not-body simply due to its immateriality[6]". What Salamon is saying here, is that a discussion of the body cannot be merely reduced to the physical – it is a continual and never-ending process of development and change involving, feelings, wants, and phantasies which transcend beyond the constraints of physicality. This sense of the immaterial phantasmatic self, juxtaposed against the material physical body, is what I chose to base my dissertation on.

This essay will be using the Supreme Court's decision as a contextual frame to situate the context for which I, a trans woman, live and survive under and will ask where the line is between transness* and cisness*, how it is crossed, and if it even exists to begin with. These are not easily answerable questions, but I hope to open a discussion regardless. My dissertation is comprised of two components, and, as such, are complementary parts of a greater body of work; for the sake of simplicity, they will be referred to individually as **the screenplay** and **the essay**. The screenplay is a body swap, in which a trans* girl (**Emily**) swaps bodies with her cis* girl bully (**Liv**): the screenplay's intention is to directly provoke speculation to the above question. If Emily is a trans* girl in a cis* girl's body, and Liv is a cis* girl in a trans* girl's body, then which, if either, are trans* or cis*? Is it right to say that one is less cis* or more trans* than the other, if both have occupied the other's 'oppositely' sexed, but identically gendered, body? The essay, then, seeks to explain why I feel that this arbitrary divide between cis*/trans*, in the current rise of fascism spearheaded by the legalisation of transphobia and exclusion of trans* people, exists to forever perpetuate the

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[4] Office for National Statistics, "**Quality of Census 2021 gender identity data**" https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/genderidentity/articles/qualityofcensus2021genderidentitydata/2023-11-13 [accessed 23/07/25]

[5] Gayle Salamon, "**The Bodily Ego and the Contested Domain of the Material**", in 'differences' 15, no.3: pp. 95-122, 2004

[6] Gayle Salamon, "**'The Place Where Life Hides Away': Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and the Location of Bodily Being**", in 'differences' 17, no.2: pp. 96-112

many false, but widely accepted, narratives of trans* people, and how these narratives informed my creative process.

I must first answer why I am electing to use the terms **trans*** and **cis*** over their widely used counterparts, **transgender** and **cisgender**; these newer terms, which have been in circulation since roughly 2010[7], were the subjects of Marta Vicente in an article for Transgender Studies Quarterly[8] (TSQ). Trans* and cis*, as Vicente discusses, attempt to create a more honest, and less confining space in which to discuss one's own relationship with their identity and personal experiences, by separating the two prefixes from the category of 'gender'. Vicente, in her article, posits that despite what the term transgender wanted to accomplish – to replace **transsexual** due to its more medicalised and strict sexual dichotomous undertones to towards something more fluid[9] – it may have inadvertently excluded those outside those of 'typical' transgender experiences, as well as completely ostracised transvestites / drag artists, as they do not experience typical dysphoria in regards to their gender, but many still regard them as gender-non-conforming. Vicente therefore proposes that 'transgender' is responsible for creating a typical and universal way that gender misalignment or ambiguity is experienced, expressed, and perceived. To remedy this, within her article she uses the term trans* to:

> "[…] refer to the wide spectrum of transgender identities and experiences. Although [she] risk[s] the possibility of falling into the same limitations that transgender has, by removing gender from trans, it may result in a term that reaches further out from the constraints of gender and […] make it more open ended and rational."[10]

Whilst I certainly agree with what Vicente says here, I find it interesting that there is no reference to the separation of the terms cis and gender. Whilst it is most certainly true that most cis* people do not feel misalignment or question their gender too deeply, many do; a

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[7] Avery Tompkins, "**Asterisk**", TSQ, 1 (1-2, 2014): pp. 26-27. https://read.dukeupress.edu/tsq/article/1/1-2/26/91872/Asterisk [accessed 23/07/25]
[8] Marta V. Vicente, "**Transgender: A Useful Category?** ", TSQ, 8, (4, 2021): pp. 426-439
[9] [Stan] Constantina Papoulias, "**Transgender**"; Theory, Culture and Society 23, nos. 2-3: pp. 231-233
[10] Vicente, "**Transgender: A Useful Category** ?", pp. 426-439

notable group among them would be many of the very same transvestites excluded by the term transgender. It is for this reason that I do not feel comfortable referring to either Emily or Liv within this essay in relation to their perceived sexed and gendered bodies; I feel genuinely that the terms trans* and cis* are far more accurate to discuss the experiences these characters undergo in my creative work, as the boundary between their gendered selves is not so clear cut as 'absolutely cisgender / absolutely transgender'.

In the vein of bodies being hard to define, Emily and Liv both struggle with locating and understanding their new and old bodies beyond the obvious physical aspects: Liv now must navigate a world that detests and laughs at the body she occupies; in a cruel twist of fate, this is largely due to her own making, as the actions Liv undertook whilst inhabiting her given (i.e. 'true') body have now reared their heads at her. For Emily, this means navigating the complicated personal life of a person she only knows the public persona of, and coming to truly understand that to be feminine and embody it, means to be comfortable with your own oppression[11]. This understanding falls under the bio-deterministic reading of Freud's phallocentric process of psychoanalysis and, although it has and should be rightly criticised for said phallocentrism, in this case, it allows for a greater placement and understanding of how trans* feminine bodies are frequently perceived. The phallocentric process of psychoanalysis works thus: young girls divert from a polymorphous sexuality – one that is not traditionally masculine or feminine, and arguably is unrelated entirely to human-human attraction[12] – only after a moment of metaphorical castration, i.e. when a girl discovers she lacks a penis, and by extension, discovers her own inferiority against the superiority of the penis, and ergo, her inferiority to men[13]. Whilst this reading of Freud is, by all accounts, very inaccurate and misogynistic, it does, undeniably, structure the oxymoronic phallophobic-phallocentrism that dominates discourse surrounding trans* bodies,[14] and their occupancy in

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[11] Gayle Rubin, "**The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex**", in 'Toward an Anthropology of Women', edited by Rayner Reiter (1975): pp.157-210
[12] Sigmund Freud, "**Femininity**" (1933). In 'The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis' translated by James Strachey (1955): pp. 412-435
[13] Sigmund Freud, "**The Sexual Enlightenment of Children (An Open Letter to Dr. M F ürst)**" (1907). In 'The Sexual Enlightenment of Children', edited by Phillip Rieff (1963): pp. 17-24

both physical and metaphorical realms. Phallophobia, as loosely defined, is the irrational fear of the penis, or of male sexuality[15], and it is through the phallophobic-phallocentric institutional and narrative structures, that transphobia can flourish without intervention.

Jacob Breslow, in his article for TSQ[16], uses the case of Coy Mathis as a microcosm for how all trans* bodies are narrated and perceived under the highly phallophobic society trans* people occupy. The school district Coy belonged to when she was six in 2012, the Fountain-Fort Carson district of Colorado, made the decision to exclude Coy from the single-sexed space she had occupied previously with no issue, with the district's attorney, W. Kelly Dude, citing the justification for her exclusion thusly.

> "The District's decision took into account not only Coy, but other students in the building, their parents, and the future impact a boy with male genitals using a girls' bathroom would have as Coy grew older. The reason it has apparently not been as "issue" to date is that fellow students and even the teachers in the building are unaware that Coy is a male and at his young age, may appear female.[17]"

Here we can begin to understand how the District, and Dude, felt that Coy's exclusion wasn't merely acceptable, but necessary. Due to the temporal displacement of Coy's body being projected far away from her then six-year-old self and undergoing the simultaneous transmogrification into that of an imagined, older, presumably horny, teenage male, Dude is able to argue within the realms of the biologically determinist reading of Freud that, on the surface, justifies Coy's exclusion.

TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists), and those adjacent to them, weaponise phallophobia in much the same way as Dude did to Coy, in their attempts to exclude trans* people from society. Breslow mentions in his article, that Coy's school district identified

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[14] Jacob Breslow, "**There Is Nothing Missing in the Real** ", TSQ, 4, (3-4, 2017): pp. 431-446
[15] Wikipedia "**Phallophobia** " https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phallophobia [accessed 05/07/25]
[16] Breslow, "**There Is Nothing Missing in the Real** ", pp. 431-446
[17] W. Kelly Dude, "**Re: Coy Mathis/Fountain-Fort Carson School District** " (Letter to Michael D. Silverman, 2012).
https://web.archive.org/web/20130531014156/www.transgenderlegal.org/media/uploads/doc_491.pdf
[Accessed via the Wayback Machine 03/07/25]

where the possibility for metaphorical castration could occur, as well as the psychic brutality Coy could inflict on her peers, in the meeting of 'oppositely' sexed (and in Coy's case, aged) bodies[18] – what this then ultimately means for Coy, and by extension all peoples whose determined sex does not align with their gender, is that gender based violence occurs in a situation in which a person with a vagina is in the same vicinity as a penis. Lacan, elaborating on Freud, separates the penis from the symbolism it holds, and instead christens the symbolism itself as the **phallus**; the phallus represents the meaning associated with the penis – its power, its authority, its status as the ultimate symbol of masculinity[19] – so it is not unfair to say that phallophobia is an extreme aversion of anyone closely associated to the phallus and, on an institutional level, a tool by which to leverage against trans* people, predicated on the assumption on the lesser than female will cower in the presence of her 'biologically superior' counterpart. For Lacan however, the apparent threat of castration – the significant moment that Freud theorised which he claimed defined a child's **psychosexual development** (which Lacan then later shortened to **sexuation**) – when young girls are presented with the 'fact' that their body is 'lacking', cannot occur, as there is nothing missing in the real tangible fact that is a person's body, phantasmatic or otherwise. Breslow writes "for Lacan, it is not whether or not one has a penis but whether one represents, within the structure of desire, what it means to have, or be, the phallus"[20]. From this, we can then understand of the sexist dichotomy escribed to people assigned-female-at-birth (**AFAB**) and those assigned-male-at-birth (**AMAB**); AFAB people inherently 'lack' due to their physical lack of a penis so their phallic association is weaker, ergo, AMAB people are inherently greater due to their close association to the phallus as they have a penis[21]. Institutional phallophobia, and those who weaponise it, expose themselves then for ultimately falling for and believing in the extremely misogynistic and biological deterministic reading of Freud that

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[18] Breslow, "**There Is Nothing Missing in the Real**", pp. 431-446
[19] Jacques Lacan, "**The Signification of the Phallus**" (1958). In 'Écrits', translated by Alan Sheridan, 1-7 (1977): p. 578
[20] Breslow, "**There Is Nothing Missing in the Real**", pp. 431-446
[21] Lacan, "**The Signification of the Phallus**", pp. 281-291

enables patriarchal values and expectations (i.e. the phantasmatic phallus) to continue to be the bedrock of society.

Why, and how, then, did Breslow's article have such a profound impact on my conceptualisation and production of the screenplay? Within the screenplay, Emily and Liv's bodies are swapped – but as Salamon mentions, bodies are more than the physical. In the assumption of one another's bodies, each girl experiences the phantasmatic: Emily, her phantasy made real, finally experiences the figure, anatomy, and form she feels she has always deserved and needed; Liv, for all intents and purposes, experiences the inverse of castration – she becomes endowed with phallic association so strong that her she cannot accept the body she is currently occupying. Liv, in the assumption of Emily's body, then eats Eden's apple, and understands how Emily, and by extension all trans* women whose gendered bodies typically do not align with their sexed bodies and as such are viewed as lesser and false by their detractors (TERFs etc.) due to their sexed association to the phallus, has made the decision to endure the oppression she is subjected to for the sake of one day being, as her dad **James** states, "the girl you were always meant to be". Returning then back to Emily, within her occupancy of Liv's body, she, as someone who has grown up unaffected by the objectification that cis* women are subjected to, experiences a 'true' moment of castration, when **Diane** (Liv's mother) inspects her body for signs of weight gain after which Diane remarks "no man will want you if you look like a cow, Olivia". This moment of weaponised phallocentrism from Diane, is then immediately paired with the revelation that **Louie** (Liv's boyfriend and another bully of Emily's) sexually abuses her at school. Louie kisses Liv without her consent, smacks her bum, and also touches her genitals in class, all of which are experienced by Emily – in this moment, Emily, in much the same way as Liv, eats Eden's apple, and begins to understand why a girl as abused and controlled as Liv, will exercise what little autonomy she has on whoever was 'lower' than her. Of course, I do not want for this to come across as an olive branch to those who "ask reasonable questions". To be clear, it is anything but; Emily and Liv's joint circumstances are a literal phantasy in and of itself. In the current final scene of the screenplay, Liv explains why she is a girl, and Emily is

not. The irony in this of course being, that Emily's body is the one saying it to Liv's body, which Emily points out to her. This scene, I felt, was necessary to include in the screenplay and was essential to be its current conclusion, as it marks the transition of the girls' relationship, as well as the transition of acceptance of both themselves and their bodies for the rest of the screenplay.

Emily and Liv, in the 'becoming' of one another (whilst, importantly, remaining themselves), do not, as I have already mentioned, merely assume the physicality of the other, but also their circumstances. Circumstances, in this case, relates to anything pertaining the day-to-day living, activities, routines, relationships, and indeed the physical body of either girl – in this way, we can refer to Emily and Liv's respective circumstances, as their **Homes**. Home, much like the body, is more than a physical place of residence: it is a circumstance, a pocket of defined space that transcends linear time, in which the phantasmatic and real coincide; it is somewhere a person can return to and feel safe[22]. By this definition, Home is, as one can imagine, a space of privilege that very few queer people have permanent and available access to, as the idea of 'Home' is contingent and reliant on both environmental and physical factors that enable a sense of comfort and order. If those factors are disrupted, or discord is brought 'into the Home', as it were, the occupier of that Home can feel dislocated, removed, and isolated. It is easy to apply this idea at a surface level to Emily and Liv – they have swapped bodies, and therefore, one another's Homes. But Ryan Gustafsson, in their chapter Thinking Trans Embodiment[23], discusses the liminality oft assigned to the state of transness: the movement from the wrong body, to the right one, where the right body is, as put by Sandy Stone, "unambiguously male or female"[24], or to be more demonstrably cisgender. The narrative of transition, in which a trans* person undergoes surgery, hormone-replacement, and countless changes to their private life, frequently frames the "wrong body" as

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[22] Ryan Gustafsson, "**Thinking Trans Embodiment: On Contingent 'Home' and Trans Fatigue** ", in 'Trans Philosophy', ed by Perry Zurn, Andrea J. Pitts, Talia Mae Bettcher, DJ DiPietro. Pp. 81-86, 2024. University of Minnesota Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/jj.13083379 [Accessed 22/05/27]

[23] Gustafsson, "**Thinking Trans Embodiment: On Contingent 'Home' and Trans Fatigue** ", pp. 81-86

[24] Sandy Stone, "**The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto** ", in 'The Transgender Studies Reader' ed by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. P. 227, 2006.

correctable; the phrase “born in the wrong body” is largely responsible for a bulk of collective understandings of trans* bodies and desires, and so the wider trans population is pressured by the societal expectancy that they will want to, and should, ‘redeem’ their bodies so as to not feel they are in the ‘wrong’ one. This redemption, then, is largely understood to be gender reassignment, ergo we can understand that the inhabiting of a person’s ‘right’ body within this context is the act of returning to a Home that was previously locked away[25]. I have chosen to label this structured societal narrative, **cisification** – to preface, cisification does not refer to the act of transition, but the expected/appropriate way to transition and how it is forced, as well as forms of forced detransition as a form of psychic brutality. Looking at both Emily and Liv’s inverted circumstances with the screenplay, it is hard to say which one is more trans* than the other because they are in some way both trans* and cis*. Liv is inhabiting a trans girl’s body, whilst recognising that her gendered soul is cis* (twisting the given Home of how gender dysphoria can be experienced); Emily inhabits the body she always feel she has wanted, but as the screenplay develops, begins to want to inhabit her previous Home – to return to her ‘true’ body – thereby undergoing a form of detransition, and challenging the reasons as to why she is transitioning because if she only wanted breasts and a vagina, Emily would likely wish to remain in Liv’s body. In the disruption of Emily and Liv’s Homes, I seek to challenge the Home in which transness inhabits; as an assimilatory narrative concerned only with the perceived ‘correction’ of the individual into a strictly cisgendered masculine or feminine frame, not the strengthening and unity of the trans* community or understanding of broader trans* identities. This is the cisification of trans society – it is the final narrative of assimilation, in which a society deems you both too masculine to be feminine, or vice versa, and forces you into the accepted end goal transition – cisgender or cis*? To understand this further, I must now briefly return to Breslow’s examination of the case of Coy Mathis, as well as examine how Coy’s case is exemplary of the wider narrative of transition.

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[25] Stone, “**The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto**”, p. 227

Breslow touches on how Coy was perceived as being simultaneously greater, and lesser than, her peers due to her close association to the phallus and her age respectively[26]. What is saddening here, is that Coy was treated as both adult and child on account of her understanding of physical anatomy at a young age, something that is deemed uncommon in cis* children. This refusal to acknowledge Coy's autonomy, made apparent by the temporal brutality which disfigures her into the imagined male, strips her of her childhood, and dooms her far-off adolescence and adulthood into the shadow of the phallus by virtue of her inherent association to it by being born with a penis. Childhood is vital for the neuro-psycho-sexual-physiological development of a child: as seen with Coy, it can mark the beginning of a conscious recognition of that which is 'wrong' in the body, and a need to correct it. But what is childhood for a trans* child, if they are also seen as adult? Within the 1996 Penguin's Classic release of Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, Hugh Haughton's Introduction serves as a biography to Lewis Carroll (real name Charles Dodgson), and an analysis on the Alice books to act as an entrée of sorts: a preparatory course to the stories you will be reading, understanding who made them, and why. Quoting a 1962 article for the New York Times[27], Haughton discusses the lack of good literature that is explicitly for children; because all children have become adults, but no adults can become children, it stands to reason that all children's literature can become adult literature, but no adult literature can become children's literature, due to the passage of linear temporality always progressing forward, and never in reverse[28]. Following this logic, I ask again: what does this mean for trans* people, both children and adults? If, like Coy, trans* people are both assumed to be greater than, and lesser than – what Eco would identify as fascistic rhetoric via a "continual shifting of rhetorical focus, the enemies are at the same time too strong and too weak"[29]– what literature and narratives exist for us? Does it even exist? Our childhoods are so frequently temporally brutalised for the sake of preserving the far off adulthood of a

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[26] Breslow, "**There Is Nothing Missing in the Real** ", pp. 431-446
[27] The New York Times Magazine, "**Today's wonder-world needs Alice** ", 1962; reprinted in W.H. Auden 'Forewords and Afterwords', ed by Edward Mendelson, 1973, p. 291
[28] Hugh Haughton, "**'Introduction and Notes ' in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass** ", Penguin Classics, 1998. Authored by Lewis Carroll (1865 and 1872). London: Penguin

phantasmatic figure who is repulsed by our genitals, much like how Dude did with Coy's childhood[30], that it is fair to say that, much like how we are viewed as greater and lesser, literature for trans* people is both indicative of childhood and adulthood, on account of our frequent temporal fluidity / displacement. Further, in what ways does this impact Emily and Liv? They are adolescents, on the cusp of childhood and adulthood, the liminal space which exists only as a transitory state between the unordinary realm of Wonderland and the ordinary realm of reality, much like how the narrative of transitioning is also viewed to be. Additionally, aside from their age, Liv and Emily are also not strictly trans*, nor cis*, and they cannot be classed as non-binary as both are, by their own accounts, women. So: what narratives exist, for Emily and Liv, and all peoples who's gendered and sexed selves are in discord? What exists for people who are pressured, in differing but similar ways, to **cisify** themselves so that they can return to the Home that was 'stolen' from them – be that an enforced 'true' transition, or a brutalised detransition? I wish I had an answer to this, but sadly, I find myself much like Alice was in Wonderland: trying to make sense out of nonsense. Alice's perspective on what she experiences in Wonderland and in the Looking-Glass are a distorted perversion of Victorian England: all the rules, expectations, and values of 1800s Britain is distilled in these books into a cacophony of ever-changing, contradictory, and arbitrary set of rules, that do not make sense to Alice, as the only one of 'sense' in the world of non-sense[31]. In this way, Alice is not unlike Emily and Liv; all three characters occupy a narrative(s) in which their world is ever-changing, perverse, and scary; all three characters undergo bodily transfiguration into something so unlike themselves they fall into disbelief, and, most crucially, all three yearn to return Home, to the circumstances in which feel real and make sense to them.

The question regarding what narratives exist for trans* people was fundamental in my production of the screenplay, and, although we took a while to get here, I truly do feel that

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[29] Umberto Eco, "**Ur-fascism**", 1995. https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/umberto-eco-ur-fascism [Accessed 23/07/25]
[30] Breslow, "**There Is Nothing Missing in the Real**", pp. 431-446
[31] Haughton, "**Introduction and Notes**", p. xliiii

the prior context was necessary to understand why I believe this to be an important question, and therefore, what tools I will be using to try and narrow into an answer. To finally answer the question which until now has been a shadow on the wall: why a body swap? Why did I choose to tackle questions of such importance, with a genre that is almost exclusively used for comedy, especially in film? An easy answer, with, as you have just read, a myriad of complex questions that spawned from it: I felt – rather, I feel – that body swap, as a genre of fiction, cannot ever be considered transgressive, until it recognises the potency of having two differently sexed, but identically gendered, people inhabit one another's Homes. As discussed, if an occupier of a Home (in this case, a body) is uprooted and housed elsewhere, it can be brutalising to the person's sense of self; body swaps rarely tackle this issue, rather simply insisting that their characters can just power through this drastically fundamental change to their body. Occupancy in another's Home is, for our purposes today, another form of Wonderland; it is a realm in which nonsense reigns, in which the rules are arbitrary and fluid, and in which your body is not your own, and substitute to change at a moment's notice; one's sense of autonomy and consent is vandalised by virtue of having to accept another's choice to do what they will, and feel how they will, about your own Home. These events and themes do occur in body swaps, but, as mentioned, tend to be played comedically: in the 2003 version of Freaky Friday sees a mother (**Tess**, Jamie Lee Curtie) and daughter (**Anna**, Lindsay Lohan) swap bodies for a day, and one of the very first things that Anna (in Tess's body) acknowledges is her age, exclaiming she is old and lamenting her loss of beauty, literally referring to herself as "the Crypt Keeper"[32]. Similar scenes are shown within both Jumanji: The Next Level, and Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle: in Welcome to the Jungle, when the protagonists first enter the world of Jumanji, the vain and stereotypically 'girly' character **Bethany** (Madison Iseman), accidentally chooses the avatar of the middle-aged, fat, male avatar of **Dr Shelly Oberon** (Jack Black), with the first thing she does being to immediately remark on her appearance, repulsed at her new fatness, oldness, and maleness[33]. Similarly in The Next Level, the characters **Martha** (Morgan Turner), inhabiting ~~the body of the athletic and sexy~~ **Ruby Roundhouse** (Karen Gillan) and **Fridge**

[32] "**Freaky Friday**", dir. Mark Waters (2003): 26:57-27:17

(Ser'Darius Blain), inhabiting the same body Bethany did before him (that of Dr Shelly Oberon), find themselves in a situation where they swap bodies a second time, into the avatars that the other inhabited. Martha remarks "what am I supposed to do with this?" whilst gesturing to Oberon's fat body, swiftly followed by the somewhat mocking "sorry, all bodies are beautiful – even this one"; Fridge, now in Roundhouse's body, revels in his newfound athleticism and skinniness, admitting that "[touching Ruby's boobs] was literally the first thing [he] did"[34]. In the examples given here, all the characters merely acknowledge the physiological aspects of another's body, and demonstrably objectify the body they inhabit, ranging from ageism, fatphobia, to misogyny, all for a quick laugh – there are acknowledgments made regarding wanting to be back in their true bodies, but these comments merely further exacerbate the humorous elements. For this reason, I do not feel that these films handle the exchanging of a certain gendered person into the oppositely sexed body well – these films play with trans* themes, and acknowledge their existence even, especially in how the physiological aspects of the new body are handled, but do not give it the time of day nor respect that **re-Homing** deserves.

For most of the characters within the above films who inhabit bodies that are not their own, they are repulsed by them. This repulsion acts as their primary motivation for them to return Home, and in the case of Martha and Bethany, a Home that isn't male, fat, and old. In observing how these films treat the exchanging of Homes, we can see plainly how the narrative of transition – that is a need to cisify oneself – has been, not just drilled into society, but indeed how it has moulded it. Joseph Campbell, in his canonised work The Hero With A Thousand Faces[35] explains the narratological form of the monomyth (or the Hero's Journey[36]) – the theory that all stories and myths follow the same template at their core: a hero steps out of their ordinary world, into the unordinary world, and then a triumphant return back to the ordinary world, with new perspectives and experiences such that their ordinary world is now

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[33] "**Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle** ", dir. Jake Kasdan (2017): 20:40 – 20:47
[34] "**Jumanji: The Next Level** ", dir. Jake Kasdan (2019): 58:57 – 1:00:29
[35] Joseph Campbell, "**The Hero With A Thousand Faces** " 3rd edition (New World Library, 2012)
[36] Joseph Campbell, "**The Hero With A Thousand Faces** "

forever changed. The unordinary world is dangerous, challenging, but promises a period of wonder far beyond what the ordinary world can offer: and so exists the monomyth. When laid out like this, it becomes clear to see how the cisification of trans* people can occur: if a trans* person feels they were 'born in the wrong body', then they will seek to correct their Home[37] (their ordinary world); to achieve this, they must brave Wonderland, which looks very different to how it did when Carroll conceived it – a realm in which trans* people are subjected to ever-changing attitudes[38], arbitrary rules[39], and scapegoating[40] under the ever watchful gaze and allure of fascism that has spread its seeds across the country, cultivating as many as possible with its wyrms, all for the sake of perfecting their individual Home – and, depending on how well they cope in Wonderland, will return as either the corrected cis* individual, or the rejected trans* one. The result is identical either way: an assimilation of trans* society enforced by the expectancy of transition, and the weaponisation of detransition.

Wonderland, as viewed in the UK post 16th April 2025 by a trans woman, is engulfed by the phantasmatic phallus: the symbol of weaponised phallophobia, and driving force of fascism. As I hold this to be true, I posit: to transition under a fascistic narrative, structured so that you deem your body in need of repair – where the body is incorrect, wrong, or not your real Home –, is to undergo a maligned form of the Hero's Journey, and to undergo said maligned journey, serves only to assimilate – to cisifiy – in an act of internalised transphobia. To be clear: I am not denouncing the power held within the Hero's Journey, but I do oppose its presence in regards to trans* narratives, when the dominant trans* narrative is that of binary transitions being heavily medicalised, pathologised, stringently controlled, and predicated on

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[37] Tanveer Mann, "**Toddler becomes Britain's youngest transgender child after mum found her trying to cut off her 'bits'**" https://metro.co.uk/2015/12/07/boy-6-becomes-britains-youngest-transgender-child-after-mum-found-him-trying-to-cut-off-his-willy-5549667/ [accessed 15/07/25]

[38] Rowena Mason "**Theresa May plans to let people change gender without medical checks**" https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/oct/18/theresa-may-plans-to-let-people-change-gender-without-medical-checks [accessed 15/07/25]

[39] Department of Health and Social Care, "**Ban on puberty blockers to be made indefinite on experts' advice**" https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ban-on-puberty-blockers-to-be-made-indefinite-on-experts-advice [accessed 15/07/25]

[40] @jkrowling https://x.com/jk_rowling/status/1912644919103004807 [accessed 15/07/25]

the desire to fix what is broken, with the ultimate goal to be seen, or want to be, as cisgender as possible. More importantly, transition, when undergone for reasons an individual holds to be true unto themselves, is not cisification. Cisification refers to the need to malevolently 'correct' what is 'wrong' about your body under the predatory neo-Liberal framework of capital, predicated on a basis of assimilation into, not coexistence with, cis* people. This is why I chose to body swap a trans* girl and a cis* girl. In the act of inhabiting each other's bodies, both Emily and Liv understand the association to the phallus, and how that association is weaponised by Liv and Louie to force one of two scenarios: by either forcing Emily to detransition (to **re-cisify** herself) or to have her assimilate totally into cisgender society by abandoning her transness entirely. By placing a cis* girl into a Home which she has expressed verbal and physical disgust over, and by oppositely placing a trans* girl to reckon with the goals of her transition beyond the physical, I force the two girls to reckon with their similarities, their shared pain and love, and the pointless hate which until the events of the film has divided them. The screenplay is currently unfinished, but Emily will not fully forgive Liv by the screenplay's conclusion, nor will Louie recognise and acknowledge his abhorrent behaviour; I feel it is important for trans* narratives to capture both the magic in Wonderland, and the pain of reality. With this in mind, how can the life changing experience of two girls remedy wider societal transphobia? It cannot; it is a story about a collection of people within a society, not the entire one. However, I do not think the screenplay is hopeless: in fact, I think it is precisely the opposite. Aside from Louie and Diane, most of the named supporting characters are trans* positive, with Liv actively working to change her behaviour come the second act, and **Bryony** (Emily's ex and Liv's friend) showing remorse for her ambivalence and apathy towards her being a bystander to Emily's discrimination. Reality, as painful as it can be, is often filled with love – which, as someone within the trans* community, is all I've ever felt.

Much like how trans* people are viewed as both greater and lesser, so too must their stories capture both Wonderland and reality – because for us, there is no distinction; transition is an endless process, one that each trans* person must identify and reckon with in some manner,

and also resist, at all turns the process of cisifying themselves, of assimilation. Emily and Liv's story in Out of Body, is representative of this, as I hope I have made clear. Transition is a beautiful thing, and no one, but you, should define it – narratives and structures be damned.

I wish to close this essay, by first of all giving thanks to both Joseph Ronan and Julie Everton for supervising me on this project, their insight and expertise has been essential in its production and facilitation. Next, thank you to Jess Moriarty for continually supporting both myself and the Creative Writing course at every turn, as well as the entire teaching staff, you are all truly splendid, talented, beautiful people.

In some manner, my Dissertation is a summation of my skills, my knowledge, and my life. It is, in no uncertain terms, my proudest work to date. This course has given me the confidence and power necessary to inspire my own beginning and it is invigorating.

From the bottom of my heart, it has been a pleasure to produce this Dissertation. I hope it is of some enjoyment to read, and I would love to hear what you think <3

With love,

Sonny-Rhoey “Gwen” Arne Ralph Liverod-Griffin (S-R.G.L-G)

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