INTRO: Co-Dependent, Post-Dependent

Being considered “post” anything automatically binds the before and after (crudely speaking) in an unbreakable dependency. The “post”, as Latour has forcefully argued, cannot even exist without a concrete predecessor. Expanding on the idea of a pre- and post- dependency bind, this panel explores various intersections where a break between the natural and something else is quite evident. Our first speaker examines the rhetoric of environmentalism seen through the lens of anarchism. Suggesting that a time when our potential extinction demands coalition-building and concerted efforts to resist ecological disaster, this paper suggests that anarchism provides us with strategies for persuasion that are particularly salient. Our second speaker is focused on the common, suggesting that in light of the rise of globalization and networks which threaten to push past the idea of community and instead organize humanity in a more decentralized manner, the drive to form collectives and communities remains strong and functions within these networks. Our third speaker examines the role of appearance that occurs during animal and insect metamorphosis, questioning how the pre- and post- transitional body heightens our understanding of evolutionary tactics. Finally, our fourth speaker focuses on the ways nature heeds its limits and the ways our consumerist practices ignore that call. Following Allan Stoekl, the notion of expenditure, and a tragic sense of higher forms of destruction, in a sense become the ethical questions of our age.

**Meta-metamorphosis: The Aesthetics and Survival of Transition**

This paper has taken a curious turn. What originally started as a hallway conversation turned into a long running nagging curiosity. (Yes, I know, this is not an unfamiliar story to any of us.) And as most research goes, what I thought was going to head one way (pop science’s interpretation of metamorphosis) has instead morphed (get it?) into more of a gendered critique of appeal, sexuality, and change. Here’s a re-cap of that conversation: why are male animals so adorned? These adornments (feathers, colors) are things that would be considered frilly or “metro” on the human end of the animal kingdom. What is it about our perceptions of what is “girly” an attractive, even critical, element of survival? Now, I know this is not a new question – obviously Darwin beat us to it – but it is an interesting one to revisit under the guise genderqueer rhetoric. (Yes, I’ll get there—it’s a jump I know!) The conflict I want to interrogate in this talk is how we have gone from seeing adornment as a successful evolutionary tactic into today’s continuing stereotypes of what it means to be, for lack of a better word, pretty.

And so, this paper interrogates the physical dependency of before and after of a metamorphosed body by taking a look at the changing appearances—permanent, transitional, or temporary. This paper will look at the aesthetic and biological shifting of external appearances. In what I am calling “transitional appearance,” I will use the idea of metamorphosis to suggest that a change in species-level appearance both heightens and limits some of the challenges to evolutionary success. By asking how might we use the notion of the post-natural to think through metamorphosis, this paper will interrogate the importance of a transitional appearance for survival. I begin with a broad discussion of metamorphosis in general and then focus in on the ways we can bring in a dialogue about appeal and attraction that apply both the theories and their applications.

So what’s the difference (or, even importance) between about metamorphosis and appeal? We might consider the intent. Whereas “metamorphosis” is strictly a survival technique, one that responds to outward influences and adapting the physical form for survival, I’m applying “appeal” to the flexible, removable, malleable superficial decoration that adorns the body. Here’s where we might see where the drag queens come into play—the appeal in that case is the excess. On the contrary, the metamorphosis is an entirely different process (one might say the process of sexual reassignment and the actual process of transitioning)—something you cannot remove, and something that has an ontological value in terms of the species.

To interrogate these ideas a bit further, I want turn to a quote from Elizabeth Grosz’s *Becoming Undone*:

“Sexual appeal is not simply some nuanced and indirect advancement of fitness, an awareness of one’s partner’s capacity to yield fit or attractive offspring and to invest in childraising […] Sexual appeal is the place, not of the selfish gene, which always hides underneath all apparent forms of altruism and spontaneity, subverting them with its own self-interest, but of the living being whose pleasures, sensations, and intensities regulate at least some of its activities” (141).

Regulation. When I hear that I think: control, awareness, purpose. On a conscious level, “regulation” is the ability to enforce the control or be the one regulated. (Actually, when you hear “regulate”, does anyone else have Nate Dogg and Warren G in their head now?) To regulate it to keep score; to be regulated is to be merely accounted for. I want to use the suggestion of regulation to think through metamorphosis—how can we regulate change and at the same time be regulated?

Let me talk about an example. The other day in my gender studies class, we had our “drag queen and donuts” day (the donuts were an afterthought). Deedee Chaunte performed two numbers and then answered questions from the audience. The most obvious one my students were interested in was the question of “passing” and “adorning herself” enough to appeal to a different audience from when she’s not in drag. It’s interesting because being in costume, she is experiencing an interstitial moment—she is both regulated and regulator. Being restricted by the body, he sexuality regulates the adornment in order to portray a specific persona.

1. **How does drag help us rethink metamorphosis?** 
   1. Since metamorphosis is part of an evolutionary cycle, what does it do for a social evolution?
2. **In Sex Drag and Male Roles**, Dianne Torr examines the difficulty of transition—not transition in surgical sense, but transition from one social group to another.
   1. In her drag king workshops: these are workshops where a wide range of women who do or don’t really want to be drag kings, but have a genuine understanding of what it means to be to be perceived from a different gender.
      1. The experience of going to a club
         1. Approaching a woman
         2. Approaching a man
         3. Being approached
         4. What this means for regulation
   2. I like this idea of “transitional aesthetics” because it helps complicate the tricky roles involved in gender performance
      1. The idea of drag is an interesting one specifically because it is such a performance: one usually doesn’t dress constantly in drag—it is strictly reserved for performance.
      2. The transitional aesthetic comes into place because it can be something that can be removed
         1. The metamorphosis on this level suggests survival at its purest (in a sense): the idea of surviving instinctual drives of sexual attraction and, as Grosz suggested, subverting the self-interest of “selfish gene” and instead giving preference to a conscious decision.
   3. There is a complication, though:
      1. In one of the “classic” texts on sex/gender and the body, Ann Fausto-Sterling’s *Sexing the Body*, I think speaks to this juxtaposition quite effectively:
         1. When we think of gendered ambiguity, nothing complicates that more than a drag show
            1. Gendered excess
            2. Extreme performance of specific roles
3. To bring this back to metamorphosis, and to close up this talk, we might see how the superficial portrayal challenges what we think will forward the species
   1. Sexual appeal – and here again on a superficial level – is an attraction based on the surface level adornments that accompany a certain performance of gender