

# Archiving Our Bodies: trans embodied becoming and t4t archival reading

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## Abstract

This article analyses artworks by three non-binary or trans masculine artists: Kris Grey, *No title* (2019), Emmett Ramstad, *The good ones* (2006), and Marie Ahlberg Andersen, *My Dick Clit has many forms* (2022). I look at the corporeal traces the artworks display: wound scabs, blood drops, and crotch imprints, and find that they present a proof of trans becoming which, I would like to suggest, counters hegemonic narratives of transition and disturbs the notion of proof in relation to trans life; to highlight instead, the slowness, temporal multiplicity, and volatile uncapturability of trans embodiment. Through the article, I analyze Grey's, Ramstad's, and Andersen's transition documentation as forms of counter-archiving, as well as how they function as t4t archival offerings – an invitation for other trans people to engage with their transition documentation and the potential of shaping their trans becoming through them. Through my personal narratives as reflexive, personal introductions to the analysis, the artworks, as a t4t archive, shed light on the moments and experiences that in small steps gets us, as trans people, closer to the way we want to be seen and feel about ourselves.

**KEYWORDS:** Archive, embodiment, becoming, t4t, transition, temporality, proof.

In this article, I will engage with the artworks of three non-binary or trans masculine artists: Kris Grey, *No title*, 2019, a series of two photographs, first exhibited as a part of Grey's first solo exhibition *Conduit* in 2019 at Sleeth Gallery at West Virginia Wesleyan College, Emmett Ramstad, *The good ones*, 2006, surgical remains, tin box with glass lid, velvet, cotton stitching, exhibited online, and Marie Ahlberg Andersen, *My Dick Clit has many forms*, 2022, watercolor on paper, series, 186 prints, 6 prints sent to me, 9 prints, first shown at the 8th Nordic Transgender Studies Conference in Tampere, FI, 2023.

When I first encountered each of the artworks over the course of several years, they appeared to me as significant in the ways they documented the embodied processes of medically assisted transitioning. A corporeal change captured, not through the representation of the fully visible trans body, but instead within the material object of the blood drops from injecting testosterone, the nipple scabs after gender-affirming surgery, and the imprint of a trans crotch.<sup>1</sup> I was drawn to these artworks as they resonated with me and my own becoming transness.<sup>2</sup> Transness, often, as in my own case, can be experienced as an embodied knowing that happens over time through different and sometimes divergent experiences, affects, and encounters.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, I analyze the artworks of Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen as medically assisted transition documentation. I will discuss the counter-archival potential of the works as well as how they function as t4t archival offerings of trans becoming and engage with the potential of encountering them as a trans person. I understand the archive as aligned with feminist and queer studies scholar Ann Cvetkovich's queer archives of feeling; as archives of lived experiences and emotions, preserved and documented in ways that extend beyond traditional archival practices, and which make room for the multiplicity of experiences and affects of marginalized communities and histories (Cvetkovich, 2003).

As I will suggest in this article, Ramstad, Grey, and Andersen, through capturing, saving, and sharing their embodied processes, artistically

reclaim trans embodied capture from the medical, judicial, and legal system. They take up and disturb 'proof' as related to archiving, defining, and monitoring trans embodiment – e.g. the demand to show proof of one's transness to access gender-affirming care – troubling hegemonic narratives of transition, and highlight instead the slowness, temporal multiplicity, and volatile uncapturability of trans embodiment.

### The absent body, the present corporeal trace

The artworks in this article are all invested in documenting their bodily process of change but do not show the physical body in its full form. Though different in their strategies for documenting and capturing the transition process, the works of Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen all share the absence of a body but the presence of a corporeal trace. In Grey's work: the blood drops, in Ramstad's: the nipple scabs, and in Andersen's: the imprint of their crotch. As I would like to suggest in this article, the absence of a body in the documentation of bodily change alters the ways the artworks form a narrative and proof of transitioning. They do not figure the body in its whole form, thus disturbing the notion that transness can be known by looking at the body: an assumption that transness is found in the visible and that trans experience is representable through the body – to be looked at, understood, and known by others. The artistic strategies at play in Grey's, Ramstad's, and Andersen's work is partially aligned with abstraction which, according to queer and trans studies scholar Jack Halberstam, offers a "method of representing, complicating, dispersing and concealing trans embodiment" (Halberstam, 2022) with a potential for creating freedom from representation and open for negotiations of gendered and bodily norms (Getsy, 2015). But what I find important is that the works by Grey, Ramstad, or Andersen do not leave the trans body behind – nor do they represent their body in other forms, detached from the corporeal materiality of their body. They do not abandon the

material or embodied experiences of trans life for abstraction, within which lies a risk of making trans experience a concept of generalized gender fluidity - universalized and apolitized. Instead, they figure the trans body in the trace, remnant, and imprint of their transitioning body – the body present and absent at the same time – making it possible to stay with the body and the corporeality of transitioning but offer a space for rethinking and reconceptualizing transition.

## Questions of the archive

Within cultural studies as well as other academic disciplines, common understandings of the archive as brick-and-mortar buildings, museums, libraries, or photo albums and drives – storage units for documents and materials - have been the center of critical attention, focusing on questions of selection, exclusion, and relations of power within the archive. It is the very process of choosing and categorizing that “makes an object archival” (Taylor, 2003, p. 19), as such questions on archiving always involve questions of power (Derrida, 1998). Placing an object as archival material gives it status as proof: “It is proof that a life truly existed, that something actually happened” (Mbembe, 2002, p. 21). Importantly though, the true power of the archive lies outside its own materiality, in the stories the proof makes possible.

Critical engagements with the archive within feminist theory, queer theory, and more recently transgender studies, which this article aligns itself with, have noted the archive’s exclusion of certain stories and lives, questioned what is understood as an archive, and developed new approaches to engaging with archival material as well as new strategies for (counter)archiving. Jack Halberstam as well as queer theorist José Muñoz have called for alternative archives and archival materiality to grasp and account for the subcultural and ephemeral quality of queer life (Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 1996). Especially Cvetkovich’s work in *An Archive of Feeling* (2003) has been central in emphasizing how archival materials contribute to the construction of personal and cultural histories,

and how the lack of attention to the affective dimensions of archival materiality excludes specific experiences and stories from the archive. Cvetkovich has effectively argued for archives as sites for healing, community-building, and resistance, challenging traditional notions of archival neutrality (Cvetkovich, 2003), and for artistic engagements with the archive as perhaps better able to document areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive – emotions, activism, and everyday experiences (Edenheim, 2014).

The relation between the archive and trans life has historically been one of domination, violence, and absence, as trans bodies have entered the archives through medical and police records or death lists – or often not entered at all (Rawson, 2015; Stone and Cantrell, 2015). For many years, the archive has neglected and omitted livable trans existence; a cultural erasure of particular knowledge and lives which has had dire social consequences (Namaste, 2000). Several trans scholars have sought to challenge this gap between trans life and the archive. They have, in numerous ways, engaged critically with the formation of contemporary or historical archives, and these archives’ ability to include and form counternarratives of trans life. I take my point of departure for the discussions on the t4t archive, in this article, from some of the trans studies scholars who have engaged critically with the concept of the trans and queer archival work and the concept of the archive, such as Danish trans scholar Tobias Raun and his work on YouTube Vlogs as documentation and archiving of gender related transition (Raun, 2015), Dutch-based Trans studies scholar Eliza Steinbock’s writing on archival activations in trans cultural production and the potential of trans heritage as well as t4t archival adoration (Steinbock, 2019, 2022a, 2022b), and feminist scholar of archival studies Marika Cifor’s engagement with the accidental corporeal remnants of trans life in the archive as offering counternarratives of trans subjectivity (Cifor, 2015, 2017).<sup>4</sup>

Trans archives are not records of an inanimate past, they are of the present and future as

they allow us to see and imagine trans life. As trans people, encountering ourselves in the physical as well as ephemeral archives can be heartbreaking because the traces of trans life we find are often limited and constructed through the lens of a medical or juridical system. But it can also be heartwarming as, through the archival records, we can come to know ourselves as historical subjects; know that someone like us existed (Steinbock, 2022b), making us feel “less alone” (Malatino, 2020, p. 54). Going into the archive and finding trans people is not about assigning an identity, but about recognizing a “transiness” of something through the lens of our own trans embodiment.<sup>5</sup> It is without the need for a label – by which what we are finding in the archive is not an identity, but a doing or a practice of transness.

Trans and gender non-conforming people continuously struggle for the fundamental right to simply exist, and thus have a distinct investment in issues of archival representation and visibility (Hayward, 2017). Several trans archival initiatives have seen the light in recent years: from *The Digital Transgender Archive* that seeks to increase the accessibility of transgender history through a large online database to *The Museum of Transgender Hirstory & Art*, a conceptual art project and ephemeral pop-up archive of many forms by artist Chris E. Vargas (*Digital Transgender Archive*, 2024; *MOTHA*, 2024). Both initiatives, alongside others, make counter-archival efforts to create archives that challenge or disrupt traditional archival systems, to reclaim agency over how trans communities and experiences can be remembered, represented, and shared.<sup>6</sup>

Working with the notion of the trans archive centers questions around what is documented and saved for whom and asks for critical consideration of the acts of entering, looking for, and finding. Within the archive, who can be included, wants to be found, and on what terms (Drager, 2022)? What enters the archive as a proof of life, makes stories and lives possible – as such, trans archival work is an act of trans worldmaking, with a potential for forming counter-narratives for trans subjectivity.

## A methodology of t4t archiving

To archive something is simultaneously a reach towards the past and the future; towards a past you want to keep traces of and a future towards which you are preserving something to be seen by others. In this article, I align the works of Kris Grey, Emmett Ramstad, and Marie Ahlberg Andersen with the concept of the archive to examine the artworks as documentation of medically assisted transition, devoted to documenting transition through artistic means. I employ a t4t methodology as a way of foregrounding the potentiality in the relation between the artworks’ gestures of capturing their embodied transition and the trans person that encounters them.

T4t means, most basically, trans-for-trans. The term appeared in early 2000s Craigslist personals, working to both “sequester trans folks from the categories of “m” and “w” and enable some kind of us to find one another for hookups” (Awkward-Rich and Malatino, 2022, p. 2). Today, t4t is still related to trans intimacy but also to separatist social forms and practices of mutual care. As Steinbock puts it: “T4t above all else, counters the overwhelming trope of the wretched, lonely trans person, depressed and suffering” (Steinbock, 2022b, p. 18). I employ t4t in relation to a separatist legacy, but also as a question of addressing and solidarity by which the for takes the form of a for you – a desire of “being ‘for’ and on the side of transness and trans-for-trans encounters, and also a desiring for transiness” (Steinbock, 2022b, p. 12); expressed, in this text, through the methodology of writing about and curating a t4t archive. I am aware of the risks of minimizing the differences surrounding trans life within the rubric of t4t, especially when it comes to racialization and access to gender-affirming care (Awkward-Rich and Malatino, 2022b). As such, I do not engage with t4t as an uncritical hope or call for an idealized or harmonized trans community of sameness, but employ t4t as a reading method, to acknowledge its momentary potential for elaborating trans-for-trans subjectivities and lifeworlds (Malatino, 2022).

Aside from the artworks being records of transition in and of themselves, I, in this article, gather them under the rubric of a t4t transition archive as a methodological proposal through which I am interested in examining the artworks potentiality as t4t gestures; from (someone's) trans becoming to (someone's) trans becoming.<sup>7</sup> I engage with them collectively as a temporary t4t archive manifested in between an ephemeral archive of feeling and the graspable archival object, and the ways they trouble and proclaim what trans embodied becoming might (also) be. In doing so, I contribute to the emerging conversation on t4t methodologies as practices of t4t solidarity that emerges from and seeks contribute to our ongoing collective struggles for trans liberation (Friborg, 2023).

Engaging with a methodology of t4t archiving, and curating the artworks within the rubric of t4t, requires, I believe, a situated accountability, and as such, I begin my analysis with making visible how I came to affectively connect with the artworks through personal experience as a trans person – situating my trans embodied gaze. From this starting point, I examine how the works of Ramstad, Grey, and Andersen can be understood as artistic transition counter-archives and offerings of t4t encounters – for other trans people to be able to recognize themselves and their embodied becoming through them. The t4t potential, I find in the artworks, is fundamentally connected to my own trans experience – what I recognize in the works is shaped by the encounter with me and has shaped and shape my transness in return.

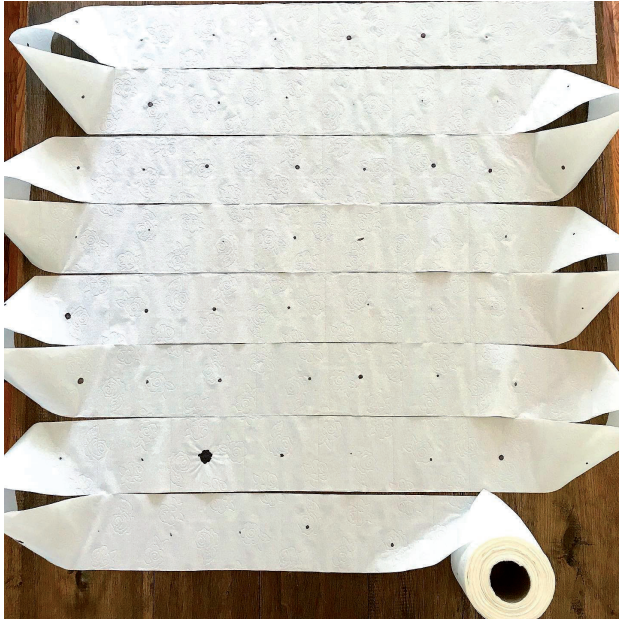
This article is created as a “multi-genre text” (Lykke, 2022) which means the autoethnographic and analytical texts co-exist in the writing and thinking of the article, and in the formation of its t4t archive (Ellis et al., 2011). The personal and analytical reflections are intertwined; one does not exist without the other and vice versa. I further align this situated and autoethnographic approach with feminist and trans studies scholar Ruth Pearce's methodology for the marginalized, in an attempt to honor the ways I, as a trans scholar, am related and relate to my research material; indebted to and immersed within the communities and lives

they represent (Pearce, 2020). Using autoethnographic writing as a starting point for my analysis is a way to make explicit the ways I, as a trans scholar, am differently and corporeally entangled with the trans artworks I write about – and the experiences, affects, and stakes at play in this t4t entanglement..

## Oxidized blood as traces of slow transition

*I first encounter Kris Grey's work while studying in New York in 2015. Drawn to the way they renegotiate their transness through corporeal exposure, I write about their performance *Homage in the first article I publish. I meet them in 2016, when I still have no words for my own transness. Years later, in the late fall of 2020, I am in fertility treatment and take hormone shots daily, when I come across their work *No title. The repetition and labor of making corporeal change resonates with my transness as it is, at this time, entangled, not with testosterone, but with FSH. After several tries of insemination and no luck, the doctors recommend I take follicle stimulating hormone, FSH, to increase chances of getting pregnant. During the first round of hormones, my partner and I do small rituals before administering the shots: candles, music, sage. Other shots are taken on the go: in my grandmother's kitchen or in a friend's bathroom. I get pregnant. In my office, I put up a picture of Kris Grey's blood drops. It anchors the ongoing labor, but also incomprehensibility, of my transness and trans pregnancy. I do not, though, start writing about Grey's work until 2022.***

Kris Grey is a US-American artist of varying media. Educated within ceramics, Grey uses the impact of the sculptural in much of their work – both performance and object based. The work *No title* was exhibited as a part of Grey's first solo exhibition *Conduit* in 2019. When exhibited, the work consisted of two photographs. The first image features an entire roll of toilet paper – the image is taken from above. The roll of toilet paper is partially unfurled on a dark background. The continuous length of paper is zig zagged back and



forth – each square reveals darkened brown dots of varying size. The second image is a close-up of a blood drop on a single sheet of toilet paper. The bright red color of the blood is in stark contrast to the white floral background.

Grey's work *No Title* consists of over 200 blood drops collected every week when they administered their testosterone shot. The small dots on the white background vary in size and placement. Most are placed towards the center of the sheet, some fall to the side, and some are barely visible. A single drop is significantly larger than the others and as an effect of the darkening of the blood, it has slightly curled the paper around it. Aside from the number of blood drops, the darker color of some drops tells a story of time passing. The blood is not recently collected but has darkened over time as an effect of the oxidation of hemoglobin, which happens when blood exits the body, causing bloodstains to morph from bright red to dark brown. The bodily material, the blood, has slowly changed in the encounter with the surrounding world. In the weekly administering of the shot, as testosterone enters Grey's body, a drop of blood leaves the body – both body and drop slowly changing.

In *No title*, testosterone plays an important role. It is the injection of the hormone that creates the bloodstains and as such, the administering of the shot is the structuring factor of the

*No title*, Kris Grey, New York, 2019.

Photo credit: Kris Grey.

work – the trace of this act is all that is seen. I want to think with Grey's work alongside Tobias Raun's and film studies scholar Laura Horak's work on the archive of trans YouTube vlogs as records of hormonal transition. In his analysis of trans vlogs as archives, Tobias Raun finds that testosterone functions as the structuring principle and the transformative technology – exemplified by the standard introduction from the vloggers: "I am x days on T..." and the vloggers' focus on showing corporeal change – e.g. voice change (Raun, 2015). The temporality of the videos as well as transition narratives presented in them, are structured according to what Horak deems "hormone time" (Horak, 2014, p. 573). It is through the investment in hormone time that the trans body becomes legible as trans and as such, as records of transition, the vlogs risk (re)producing norms of transition, teaching viewers what transition is supposed to look like. *No title* offers different views of what hormonal transition 'looks like'. Grey's images do not show the promised proof of corporeal change associated with taking testosterone, instead, they stay in the temporality of seemingly no change, where



the proof of hormonal transition is instead found in a trace of the repeated acts of administering testosterone.

Grey's work of documenting their weekly hormone injections refuses to show proof of the accumulated corporeal change in transition. The temporality in the transition narrative of *No Title* is processual, slow, and repetitive. Trans embodiment in Grey's work is still imbedded in a relation to hormone technology, but not focused on the result, positioning hormonal transition at odds with chrononormative expectations of trans becoming's progressivist temporality. Their work makes explicit the repeating actions of hormonal transition – the weekly injections of testosterone required to maintain transitioning. *No title* is documentation of transition related corporeal change without a body. At the same time, the work does not fall into being complete abstraction without the presence of bodily materiality. Through the blood drops, the transitioning body is present, but instead of the full body, it is within the trace. Inviting us to consider the unspectacular, quotidian, and continued moments of hormonal transitioning. The work insists on staying with the daily and slow becoming-trans; the quotidian nature of the toilet paper roll they imprinted on for 200 days, makes their continued transition-related labor tangible. Hormonal transition and trans embodiment are, in Grey's work, not processes that begin or end – they are ongoing.

At the time I first wrote about Kris Grey's *No title*, my body had never been in contact with testosterone, but I still encountered my transness through it. As trans or gender non-confirming people, our becoming is work; an ongoing labor I recognize as tangible in the oxidized blood drops in Grey's documentation of their ongoing becoming. *No title* allows me to feel and recognize the ongoing labor of my trans becoming, in my first encounter with *No title*, most viscerally in my trans pregnancy, but, continuously, as I have

been with their work, also in the very subtle, quotidian labor of my ongoing being and becoming transness.

## Dead corporeal matter that (still) matters

*The image of Emmet Ramstad's carefully saved nipple scabs comes to me as I am changing your bandages in the bathroom of our summerhouse. I am bend over awkwardly so you can see your new chest in the mirror, while I carefully remove the old gaze seeped in blood and pus and gently put new gaze over your nipples. It's been a week since your surgery and we are inspecting the wellbeing of your nipples daily. At the pre-surgery consultation, the surgeon told us about the risk of losing a nipple. In detaching and re-attaching the nipples during surgery, there is a risk that they will not take to the body and as such will die and wither away. Over the next weeks, scabs form over your nipples. When they finally fall off, the softest pink skin appears underneath. Both nipples survive. In my office months later, after your chest is healed completely, I return to Ramstad's work to write about it.*

Visual artist Emmett Ramstad's work *The good ones* features two circular metal containers with a glass lid. In the containers are bodily remains: Nipple graft scabs on gaze. Around the scabs are marks from stitches and traces of blood.



*The good ones* by Emmett Ramstad, 2006.  
Photo credit: Emmett Ramstad.

The two circular containers are placed on a brown velvet pillow on which simple embroidery make the shape of two hands holding the containers.

The nipple scabs belong to a temporality of post-transition – remnants of gender-affirming top surgery. I am drawn closer to the tactility of the scabs, their texture and color mimicked in the brown velvet fabric of the pillow. Dead skin slowly separated from the nipples after surgery. What does it mean for Ramstad to save and exhibit their nipple scabs from gender-affirming surgery, and how are they records of transitioning?

What is present in *The good ones* is not the post-surgery body itself, but the remains from the bodily event – the surgery – the scabs, the gaze, the traces of stitches. In these materials, I find the record of the surgery, and as documentation of gender-affirming surgery, they shed light on the complex temporality and affective labor of this event. Imbedded within the scabs are both the abrupt and elongated processes of surgery – cutting and stitching but also sloughing, healing, and saving – pointing not simply towards an embodied future, nor towards a past, but, I believe, encompassing and honoring a more complex temporality and affectivity of surgical transitioning. The affective labor of gender-affirming surgery can be recognized in the soft, homey pillow with hands gently holding the scabs from the nipples once worried about, cared for, and later saved – honoring the affective interwovenness of the body (part) that was and the trans embodied present. Ramstad's work refuses the coherence of the binary transition narrative where movement, physical as well as emotional, only travels forward – towards a 'fixed' binary trans body – leaving 'another body' behind. Through keeping and honoring the scabs as a remain from their pre-surgical body and a trace from the event of the surgery, their post-transition body is temporally and affectively folded between an embodied past, present, and future.

Where Kris Grey's transition documentation challenged showing bodily results of transition to shed light on the slowness and repetitive labor of hormonal transition, Ramstad shows remains from surgical transition to give object to the event

of the surgery and make graspable the complex temporality and affectivity of gender-affirming surgery.

In *The good ones*, the hands on the pillow are literally holding, carefully guarding the corporeal remains from gender-affirming surgery. Scabs, dead corporeal material, which should be disposed of, are instead kept and safeguarded in a gesture saying: "these are worth saving".

In discovering an accidental hair in the archive, belonging to trans woman, sex worker, and activist, Victoria Schneider, Marika Cifor describes the hair as "detritus matter that matters" (Cifor, 2015, p. 646). This dead corporeal matter accidentally making it into the archive, Cifor explains, enables a "counternarrative of bodies in archives that challenges the notion that the body can be seen only in its necessary absence" (Cifor, 2015, p. 646). The archive, according to Cifor, stands in strong relation to the dead, but through finding and engaging with the corporeal material, both dead and alive, the unlively bodies of the archive can become lively (Cifor, 2017). The detritus matter enlivens the bodies of the archive and poses questions of what materialities are absent in the archive and what forms of (trans) life it might exclude.

Traditionally, the documentation and archiving of gender-affirming surgery takes place through doctor's notes, medical journals, and medical archives. But surgery, as a bodily event, is in *The good ones* documented and archived through the bodily materiality of the scabs. Placing the nipple scabs, the remnants of trans corporeal matter, in the archive as proof of trans life becomes a testament to the scabs as matter that still matters; a counter-archival gesture which enlivens the post-surgery trans body on its own terms.

As the image of Ramstad's nipple scabs comes to me during moments of my partner's top surgery aftercare, it anchors the temporal and affective complexity of gender-affirming surgery: the simultaneous fear, excitement, grieving, waiting, doubting, and hoping. As I am immersed within t4t labor of after-surgery care, Ramstad's saving, honoring, and sharing of their nipple scabs, as proof of trans becoming, becomes for me a t4t archival care work; offering for others to encounter and





honor the temporal and affective complexities of trans becoming through them. In the relation between Ramstad's work and my t4t care labor, I recognize the collectivity and communality within trans becoming: How my, and I believe many other trans people's, becoming, and even survival, is fundamentally and importantly supported, shaped, and made possible by t4t encounters and t4t carework.<sup>8</sup>

### Printing incoherence & sharing the embodied trans archive

*Marie and I first talk about their dick clit prints in the rain outside of a café in Copenhagen, where we run into each other. Marie and I have known each other for some years through common friends, and we are a part of the same trans non-binary parent group. I first see their prints at the conference. Marie is nervous about presenting them. I am excited to see them.*

*My Dick Clit has many forms.*

Marie Ahlberg Andersen, 2022. Photo credit: Affective Activism.

At the Nordic Trans Studies conference in Tampere, Finland, Marie Ahlberg Andersen presents nine prints of the series *My Dick Clit has many forms*, placed in three small frames in the common area of the conference. The prints are numbered in a way that makes it clear that there has been lots more made. It feels intimate to look at them. And comforting. The homemade nature of them. The various degree of successfully capturing the body. Curiously documenting a change. The multiple prints of the artist's own dick clit are aesthetic manifestations of an urge to capture or document, even see, a corporeal change. Collected in private of a body part – supposedly intimate – and yet of so much interest in the classification and governance of trans bodies. Because of the printing technique, the prints are not easily recognized as trans genitalia. In their obliqueness, they appear as a body part of 'many forms' – as the title states. One that shifts from every angle – every print a bit different than the last. Captured by the watercolor on paper and at the same refusing certain capture.

*Marie just texted me. They are happy that I want to work with their prints. I was feeling timid asking if I could. They want to send me pictures in better resolution than the ones I took at the conference. In the collection Marie sends me, there are 6 prints. They were selected out of 186 prints, captured over the course of two days.*



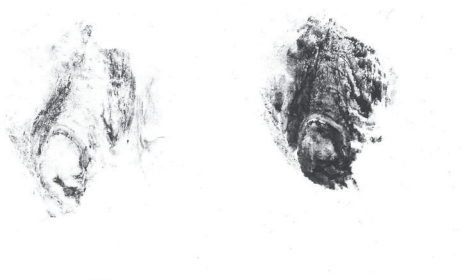
*My Dick Clit has many forms*, Marie Ahlberg Andersen, 2022.

Photo: Marie Ahlberg Andersen.

When looking at the six prints below individually, it can be hard to immediately recognize what they are. Though all the prints are in black watercolor on white paper, they vary in depth and color tone. Some are darker than others because of the amount of pressure that was put on the paper as it was pressed against the skin. Individually, the prints are volatile in their representation – but collectively they form the figure of a trans genitalia: the circle appears to me as the head of a small penis captured in profile.

*I ask Marie about the process of making the prints. They tell me that the prints were made with watercolor face paint applied with a brush. To capture their dick clit, they first tried to use a pillow to provide the pressure on the paper towards the crotch – a method of pussy prints they had heard about from participants at a pussy printing workshop at the Danish separatist, feminist Femø-camp. But they realized that it flattened the print and only allowed for a frontal perspective – which was fine for vulva printing but not for this. Instead, they had to capture the profile to get the nuances of their small penis. With little luck, they created a roller from a pickle jar with the paper taped on and pressed from the side. “I tried the same, but with a lint roller, but ended up using my hand because it turned out to be important to get a fairly precise and firm pressure, and the hand was simply the best” (Andersen, 2023 - my translation).*

The prints linger of the handmade process of capture. The result of applying different levels of pressure in the printmaking – struggling to get it right. Of the two prints below, one is light and soft as a result of a gentle and careful engagement with the body, but also opaque, whereby the



dick clit as a visual object remains partly outside of our reach. The second print, on the other hand, has been made with more pressure and therefore has more detail. Here the circular tip appears more clearly: its roundedness, the foreskin's texture and even hair follicles.

The technique used by Andersen to make prints of their genitalia is a monoprint – a single impression of an image made from a reprintable block. In monoprinting, one block should make one and the same image repeatedly, but, as Andersen describes, it proves much harder to capture their dick clit. And even when they succeed, the prints, as seen above, are both oblique and so different they might as well have been from different bodies. The monoprint, which is supposed to secure coherent capturability, shows up in Andersen's work as difficult to capture and incoherent.

Andersen describes how their technique of capture needed to be adjusted to their specific body, and when best achieved it was their own hand which captured the print. The amount of pressure in the process of capturing has made certain prints more available for recognition. The more pressure, the more visible and available the object becomes to the onlooker. The prints are an unapologetic representation of the trans crotch, and, at the same time, the handmade method of capture disturbs the representational logic and demands on the trans crotch to 'truthtell' about the trans body. The capture and legibility of trans genitalia as the alleged ultimate signifier of sex determination is troubled in *My Dick Clit has many forms*. As Andersen literally takes the capturing of their body into their own hands, the opacity of the monoprints points simultaneously to the illegibility and uncapturability of trans experience as well as the multiplicity and even incoherence of trans embodiment.

Andersen's prints, I believe, are aligned with the strategies of trans opacity as a resistance towards the representability of trans life.<sup>9</sup> The dick clit prints problematize and challenge the dynamics of representing the trans crotch through Andersen's very technique of capture. The printmaking as a technique captures its object with an

unpredictable level of opacity and incoherence, resisting being knowable through the visual, and centers instead the uncapturability of trans becoming.

Trans becoming is, in Andersen's dick clit prints, entangled with an exploration and curiosity of getting to know one's becoming body. Significantly, the 186 efforts in capturing their dick clit are done over the course of two days and as such, the goal is not to document continuous growth, but instead to capture a corporeal moment. But the opaqueness of their genital mono-prints trouble the 'true' capture of the trans body. The inconsistency and opacity of the prints point towards an uncapturable representability of the becoming trans body through the visual and visible record. Effective in its technique and expression, especially as it goes so close to the physicality of the trans body, *My Dick Clit has many forms* also points to the incoherence and multiplicity of trans embodiment through the gesture of their opaque corporeal documentation.

In *My Dick Clit has many forms*, Andersen borrows strategies of the analogue printmaking and a collectivity of the 'kussetryk' (pussy prints) as a separatist tradition of documenting and sharing the body. I am interested in following the collectivity as a separatist gesture within Andersen's work, to think about encountering them through my own transness and their relation to a collective construction of trans embodiment.

Encountering others' transness can play an important role in forming one's own trans embodiment. Trans studies scholar Amira Lundy-Harris refers to this as the 'collective construction' of transness (a term she borrows from SJ Langer) and highlights the ways in which trans people make themselves through the encounter with other trans people and trans experiences (Lundy-Harris, 2022). Seeing the dick clit prints as t4t work, centers the collective creation, as opposed to self-making, in trans becoming. The circulation of the prints between Andersen's handmade capture of their changing trans body to my own trans body, creates a relation between our bodies that can shape my own transness. Reading Andersen's work through the notion of a t4t archive,

highlights the documentation and sharing of trans embodied becoming as an offering for others' trans becoming.

## t4t archiving

Engaging with the blood stains, nipple scabs, and crotch prints, in the works of Ramstad, Grey, and Andersen, as documentation of a medically assisted transition is to center them as proof. It is, though, as I have shown, not proof of a 'finished', coherent, linearly progressing transitioned body. Instead, their ephemeral transition archives make a different kind of story possible: one of slow processes, affective labor, heterogenous temporalities, and uncapturable incoherence of trans embodied becoming. As I have shown in this article, through capturing and sharing their corporeal traces as proof of trans becoming, Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen artistically reclaim trans embodied capture from the medical, judicial, and legal system through the collection of blood, exhibition of corporeal matter, and imprint of bodies. They trouble the violent demands on trans people to show proof of themselves within a cis-normative understanding of gendered embodiment to access vital care and protection, and disturb the very notion of proof through abstraction, ephemerality, and uncapturability – allowing for trans becoming to appear in all its multiplicity, uncapturability, or incoherence.

In this article, through the rubric of the t4t archive, the works of Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen form a counter-archive through their collecting, saving, and capturing of corporeal traces, remnants, or imprints of their transitioning bodies. As counter-archival objects, each of the artworks question and trouble hegemonic medically assisted transition narratives, resisting the embodied coherence and legibility, the health care system and medical archives require of trans people. They offer transition documentation which disturbs the conceptions of medical transition as aligned with chrononormative trans embodiment. Through the documentation of their transition, Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen give materiality, tangibility, and



Prints of Grey's, Andersen's, and Ramstad's artworks, 2024. Image by the author.

temporality to experiences of trans becoming that are often intangible, volatile, and incoherent. They make artistic, counter-archival offerings which record knowledges and proof of transition in other places than the medical journal and enlivens the becoming trans body on its own terms. Through their counter-archival strategies and the formation of a t4t archive, Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen, reclaim proof as a vital tool for trans becoming and t4t togetherness.

Reading the works of Grey, Ramstad, and Andersen as t4t archives, highlights the potential of encountering them as a trans person. Printed images of the artworks have been hanging, side-by-side, in my office, as I have been writing this article. As a temporary t4t archive, they have supported, and continue to support, how I come to recognize the processes and labor of my own trans becoming. In the capturing and sharing of

their embodied becoming, they offer a t4t archival moment that, despite our transness being manifested in different ways, enables me to encounter, recognize, and shape my own transness through their work.

Gathering the artworks in a t4t archive counters the singularity and loneliness of trans embodiment, emphasizing the potential of forming collective counter-narratives of trans becoming. A t4t perspective does not erase the differences between transition processes or experiences – medical, social, or neither – but allows for the possibility of letting the artistic documentation of the multiplicity of trans embodied processes become a site for t4t encounters. A t4t offering – documenting, sharing, encountering, and becoming with and through each other – that in small steps gets us, as trans people, closer to who and how we want to become.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The artist’s own words.
- <sup>2</sup> ‘Becoming trans’ signifies a continuous process and disturbs hegemonic narratives of transition which privileges linear progression and permanence in transition (Deleuze, 2005). I prefer this term because it encompasses the incoherent and more subtle becoming within trans experience.
- <sup>3</sup> I employ *trans* as involving claims of gendered personhood related to corporeality and embodiment. Inclusive of everyone who understand themselves in relation to trans as a descriptor of selfhood or lived experience (Malatino, 2022).
- <sup>4</sup> These are just a few of the trans studies scholars who have contributed to trans archival studies in recent years. Others include Emmett Drager, Jules Gill-Peterson, Elspeth Brown, Harrison Apple, and more.
- <sup>5</sup> “Transiness” is the word Susan Stryker uses for the recognition, in historical or archival material, of what she calls the “transiness” of something. A knowing of something trans, read through your own trans embodiment (U of T Digital Humanities Network, 2020).
- <sup>6</sup> For example, “Transgender Hirstory in 99 Objects: Legends & Mythologies”, One Archives.
- <sup>7</sup> See also (Madsen, 2024).
- <sup>8</sup> Collective trans (after)care has been beautifully written about by Hill Malatino in *Trans Care* (2020).
- <sup>9</sup> I understand trans opacity as an alternative strategy to the fight for increased visibility, as the right to remain partially unreadable or incomprehensible; drawing on Édouard Glissant’s understanding of opacity and read through Halberstam (Halberstam, 2011, 2018). I also draw on Jules Gill-Peterson’s engagement with strategies of opacity as a disturbance of medical and social systems which seek to make trans identities visible and legible (Gill-Peterson, 2018).