Reclaiming the Pieces:

Transgender Representation in the Moving Image

by

Ethan Bach

A thesis submitted to the graduate

faculty of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Approved:

_____

Shawn Lawson, Thesis Adviser

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Troy, New York

April 2008
(For Graduation May 2008)

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ABSTRACT

As a video artist who has over fourteen years experience studying the moving image, I see a clear historical correlation between societal structure and its representation in the moving image. As a transgender person, I take notice of the ways in which transgender people have been represented throughout the history of the moving image; I am concerned about the affects those representations have on the transgender community. In my own work, I strive to create positive representations of transgender people and to share my knowledge of the moving image with the transgender community in order to encourage diversity and freedom of choice.

Through learning media literacy tools, the transgender community can analyze and inform their understanding of the community's social status and the ways that status is affected by moving image representations of transgender individuals. The experiences of other underrepresented groups who utilized the moving image to organize social change can help inform the transgender community. This knowledge can empower the transgender community to utilize similar approaches to media to create a more representative image of the diverse transgender community and to encourage social change. This envisioned social change would allow transgender people unequivocal equal rights.

In order to move forward in the creation of a new paradigm of social acceptance for the transgender community, it is important to first understand the historic representations of the community. Unless there is literacy of the moving image within the community, transgender people will continue to struggle for their liberation without knowledge of the cause of their own oppression. It is my vision of unequivocal equal rights for the transgender community, that drives me to create imagery inspired by my own views of the transgender community and that motivates me to help other members of my community to proactively participate in social change through moving image representation.

1. Introduction

Just as there is no one specific moment in the history when static imagery began to move, there is no single defining moment when any underrepresented group established an effort to effect social change. Rather, both of these phenomena are defined by a series of moments that serve as developmental markers over time. Through study of these markers throughout the history of the moving image and the social environment, it becomes clear how each influences the other. Information about the relationship between moving image representation and social change can be used as a lens through which the representations of the transgender community can provide clarity on the current social status of transgender people. By setting their own visionary markers for the future through moving image production, the transgender community can work to proactively change their social status within the greater society.

The relationship between the moving image and the social environment have clear influences over the other. The moving image reflects the social structure of the society by mirroring society's view on social issues. When viewing films, one can begin to identify the oppressive representations of specific underrepresented social groups within the larger society. When taking a closer look at the social structure of the time, it becomes clear that these oppressive images are reflective of the dominant culture's views of these underrepresented groups. In a similar vein, the moving image has influenced society by creating images to influence society to believe certain homogenous concepts of themselves and other social groups. The moving image's influence on society is not only of social construction, but also that of psychology of the human brain.

The moving image directly affects a part of the brain that is based on instinct. The deep affect that the moving image has on the brain at an emotional level causes individuals to be heavily influenced by the content in the moving image. This influence is carried with the viewers long after they have left the theatres. The moving image, therefore not only mirrors society, but society is affected by the moving image.

The nature of the relationship between the moving image suggests that it plays an important role in the way all social groups are envisioned, both internally and externally. The purpose of this study is to interrogate the affects that this relationship has on one community in particular: the transgender community. The term transgender is an

umbrella term that has been applied to many categories of individual ranging from those who "cross-dress" to those who medically alter their gender—transsexuals. For the purpose of this study, however, the term transgender refers to anyone who identifies as a gender other than the gender they were assigned at birth. The term transsexual refers to only those transgender people who desire to medically change their gender through hormones and surgery. The term cross-dresser, while still in use today, was typically used historically in a humorous and derogatory way.

Transgender representation in history since the invention of the moving image has experienced a gradual increase in positive representation. This more positive representation, however, generally does not afford transgender people the same rights as other social groups within the modern day United States. This may be due to the fact that the transgender movement is relatively new by comparison to comparable movements among other underrepresented groups within the United States. Therefore, the transgender community can model after other groups that have struggled for and won social rights. When the usage of the moving image by other social groups to aid in their efforts toward social change is analyzed, the examples set by other groups can be used as a foundation for creating social change within the transgender community.

From the birth of the moving image, it has reflected the dominant culture's beliefs towards oppressed underrepresented groups. There are many examples throughout history where particular social groups have taken a stance against the dominant culture's moving image representations of their community. At certain points in history, underrepresented groups have protested the negative representations of their communities by appropriating the tool that was used to create these representations: the moving image. By taking cues from the examples throughout history set forth by other underrepresented groups, the transgender community can work toward the effective use of the moving image to effect social change.

As an artist, I began using video as a way to tell my own story. I am, therefore, particularly interested in how the imagery I create about my own story shapes thoughts of the viewer. After fourteen years working with the moving image, I have broadened my artistic scope from a focus on my own experiences to a focus on my community. My work critiques the images of transgender people as represented with the as differentiated

2

between mainstream and self-representation. The majority of the current representations of transgender people that are available to society at large are the creations of people who are external to the transgender community. With a lack of diverse representation of the transgender community these images become based on stereotypes thus offering little support to the needed diverse representation within the transgender community. The commonly available images, therefore, are not representations of how the transgender community sees itself, both as a community and as individuals. Due to the affects the moving image has society, the transgender community begins to mirror those images of transgender people reflected in the moving image. Subsequently, those moving images created by the transgender community reflect the communities oppressed status within the larger culture.

I feel it is my obligation to help my community move past the oppressed social status and move towards a diverse representation. I strive to create realistic and hopeful representations of my community that reflect both my own opinions on and understanding of the diversity of opinions within the community. By using the moving image to reflect the diversity within the transgender community by providing multi-dimensional portraits of individual people, I hope to change the one-dimensional views of transgender people that have generally been presented in society. Furthermore, I have begun to teach a history of transgender representation in the moving image and am developing a curriculum to instruct the transgender community on media literacy. This curriculum will include media literacy tools for the logical analysis of moving imagery as well as workshops on the application of these tools in creating positive representations of the transgender community. By becoming more involved in the creation of the moving image transgender individuals can begin to set a standard in which the transgender community should be reflected in the moving image thereby influencing those non-transgender individuals to create more positive representations of the transgender community. Emphasis on utilizing the tools of the moving image, as other social groups have done in the past, to further the social status of transgender people is imperative to creating change on a large scale.

2. Historical Review

2.1   Origins of the Moving Image Influences

It is important to note how all forms of communication have been used as a way to influence society. In a theory pioneered by Harold Innis, he states that throughout the ages "communication tended to create a dangerous monopoly of knowledge".[i] I would suggest that, it was not the communication technology itself that created a "dangerous monopoly of knowledge," but, rather, that the use of those technologies by those in power positions to assert control over a community. The powerful individuals who assert themselves in this way are known as members of the dominant culture. This group of people who has the most power to influence and control the societies resources. Through controlling communication technologies, the dominant culture influences larger society.

The moving image has a stronger impact on the viewer than any other form of communication to date, hence supporting the significance it carries when influencing society. While it is of interest to note there are physiological affects on the human psyche from viewing the moving image, it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss these affects in great detail. According to the New Mexico Media Literacy Project, "the human brain processes images differently than words. Images are processed in the so-called "reptilian" part of the brain, where strong emotions and instincts are also located. Written and spoken language is processed in the cerebral cortex, where reason lies. This makes the moving image more effective than print."[ii] Since the moving image imprints information directly on the part of the brain were basic instincts lie, it is difficult to analyze the moving image's effects on the human emotion and thought processes. This paper emphasizes the important impact that the moving image has on social structure. The affects the moving image as a cultural influence has been reshaping society for decades.

Figure 1: Two-Spirit

One pertinent example of how the knowledge monopoly of one culture can be overpowered by another can be seen in the affect western colonization had on the perception of transgender people in Native American tribes such as the Dinéh, Lakota, Mohave, Zuni, and the Cheyenne to name a few. In particular Native American cultures, there were tribes that accepted transgender people—who were sometimes referred to as "two-spirit"—as a part natural gender variation. In some cases, these two-spirit people played integral roles within tribes as healers. The encroachment of television into the tribe has resulted in "two-spirit people …being viewed with suspicion by the less traditionalist in their community."[iii] This strong influence is an example of how the moving image can play a role among other communication technology in creating a dominant monopoly of knowledge.

The influences one social group can have over many social groups and the larger social structure by simply using the moving image as a tool for communication are infinite as long as the control over the medium remains in the hands of the dominant culture. By allowing the passive emotional part of the brain to accept the information without analysis allows the monopoly of thoughts to continue. Over a century after the moving image began having an influence on culture there is still a lack understanding and analysis of the effects it has on the social structure and the individual. It is with this understanding of the influence and the control that the dominant culture has when using the moving image that I begin to analyze the history of the effects.

2.1.1 The Invention of the Moving Image

At the beginning of moving image history, considered to begin with the invention of kinetoscope in 1888, the United States was experiencing many cultural shifts. Around this time the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the act of religious freedom while Native Americans' land was being swept away from them at alarming rates and African-Americans were being lynched in the South.[iv, v] It was within this societal structure that audiences began to experience the moving image.

Figure 2:

Although when first created the moving image was not regulated, it did not take long before it was considered to cause controversy. Thomas Edison's short film, *Kiss,* a twenty-second reel of a man and a woman talking ending with the man leaning over to peck the woman's cheek, was one of the first films viewed by an audience. This film was considered by some as a threat to morality and lead to a demand for censorship.[vi] This example reflects the strong emphasis placed on morals of the dominant social structure of the time. The social structure held a higher concern over public displays of affection over people of color being killed and oppressed to further the dominant culture ideology. There was a strong effort to impose this dominant culture ideology on all people even at the cost of people's lives and right to their own expression.

In this environment of active normalization, transgender people were openly scrutinized in extreme ways for not acting in conjunction with societal norms, such as dressing as a gender other than their assigned gender. During the late 1800's some women writers were expressing "cross-gendered characteristics" going so far as to speak about their desires to live as male.[vii] Transgender people have existed throughout United States history, but at certain times they have risked being jailed for expressing their

gender identity. "The police in Stockton, California, briefly held a twenty-year-old woman for masquerading in men's clothing". She confessed,

> "'I loved my mother with all my heart, but I feared even to talk to her at times, lest my rough manner might offend her. From a tomboy full of ambitions, I was made into a sad and thoughtful woman. I commenced to be rebellious. My mother feared for my future, and thought that nothing but a convert would save me, and there I remained. How I yearned for that freedom I dreamed of and how often I wished I could enjoy the liberty that the world sees fit to allow a boy." [viii]

Just as transgender people were denied visibility in society, at this time there were no representations of transgender people in the moving image.

The dominant culture in the United States secured a strong hold over the social environment by asserting its power over people of color and anyone who did not follow the social rules of the time. It was within this dominant social structure that the moving image was created. Due to the nature of new inventions and patents, the machines created to produce filmmaking were at the hands of the elite. Transgender people did not have any positive social status and were either left out completely or, as I will discuss later, were misrepresented in a negative light.

2.2   1900 – 1949 Creating the Foundation

2.2.1 Regulation and Control

At the turn of the century, the influence that the moving image would have on society at large could not have been predicted. In the United States, as film studios made Hollywood their home the moving image was seen as a popular past time rather than a tool of social change. However, as the viewing population increased, the ability of the moving image to act as just such a tool became clear. In order to maintain the representation of cultural norms within this growing communication technology, regulation and censorship tools were established. The regulations and censorship attempted to stifle freedom of expression within the medium, thus silencing certain positive images of underrepresented groups and creating an acceptable norm of oppression. It was within the cultural struggle that representation of oppressed groups within the moving image fluctuated between positive representations and negative stereotypes based on the regulations at the time. Within the cultural turmoil that resulted

from the introduction of a new communication technology, it was the representation of marginal groups that suffered the most at the hands of regulation and censorship.

Due to the growing popularity of the moving image as a favorite past time in the United States, the importance it played on influencing society's thoughts and views also grew. Not only did the Hollywood star system evolve, creating a desire for people to want the fame and glamour of the newly famed actors, but it also influenced the audience with images of various characters played on the screen. When images of underrepresented groups where portrayed in a negative light, the audience was influenced to believe these representations, including those audience members that belonged to the underrepresented group. Censorship laws encouraged negative stereotypes by creating laws to prevent the presentation of anything counter to the dominant cultural ideology.

The first movie censorship law in United States occurred in Chicago. Other city and state governments soon followed Chicago by establishing local censorship boards that enacted filmmaking rules and standards. Film studios were forced to follow these regulations through the pressure of box office sales in order to keep up with the high cost of filmmaking. The establishment and enforcement of the strict regulations resulted from a belief in the deep influence capabilities of the moving image. The regulations were aimed at censoring any images that were in contradiction of the dominant culture ideology. These censored images included, among other things, positive portrayals of people of color, free expressions of sex including homosexual relationships.

> "The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which [previously] condemned the influence of movies on the health, well-being and morals of impressionable youth, begins to lobby aggressively for government regulation of films. The WCTU claims that films are "addictive," that they glorify war and violence, and that they cause crime, delinquency and immoral behavior."[ix]

In response to the various regulatory bodies that were established, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), also known as the Hays Code, was created. Led by Former Postmaster General William H. Hays, "Hays sought to protect the Hollywood motion picture industry from charges of immorality and efforts at censorship by having the industry monitor itself."[x] Although in place, the Hays Code was rarely enforced on the studios.

This atmosphere of restriction of free speech, in the United States, was not limited to restrictions within the moving image industry, but was, rather, a characteristic of the pervasive effort toward normalization in this time period. There were other laws enacted in the time period that placed restrictions—similar to those enforced on the movie industry—on American citizens. During this time period, anyone who publicly criticized the United States government, the American Flag, U.S. Military, or the Constitution faced arrest under the Sedition Act and Espionage Act.[xi]

Although the Hollywood film studios were independently owned businesses, due to the amount of influence the moving image had over the culture, the dominant culture saw need for regulation and censorship. This monopoly of thought was reflective of the time with federal laws that restricted any public critique over the United States government. With this kind of control in place, negative images of underrepresented people in the moving image influenced and reinforced an already prejudice society to believe these negative stereotypes.

2.2.2 Transgender – A Time of Invisibility

In the beginning of the twentieth century as the church deemed cross-dressers as a sign of the devil, cross-dressers had become a regular image in Hollywood films. One example of this is in Henri D'Elba's *Alias Mary Brown*. In this movie the main character takes revenge for the murder of his family by robbing the perpetrators of the crime. In order to avoid detection he dressed up as a woman.

This movie serves as an example of how, throughout the history of the moving image, cross-dressers were commonly portrayed as deceptive characters. In this prototypical portrayal the character would display irrational and insane behaviors while cross-dressed. In these films cross-dressing was presented as a humorous and ironic plot twist in which members of "the audience are not deceived, only other characters are deceived, and so audience pleasure derives in part from watching the deception process unfold. The sharing of the secret with the audience creates endless possibilities for dramatic irony, which depends crucially on the audience knowing something that one or more protagonists do not know."[xii] The concept of the "cross-dresser" as deceiver is still present to this day, both in film and society. When a transgender person is honest about

9

his or her identity, it is not uncommon for the people receiving the information to feel as though they were deceived.

While there were negative representations of transgender people, it was in this time period that extensive scientific and psychological study of transgender individuals began. European scientists had begun to publicize their attempts to transform the sex of animals. This research led a few doctors to experiment with altering the bodies of patients who wanted to change their sex.[xiii] One of these patients was Lili Elbe, one of the leading artists of Art Deco. Unfortunately, she died from complications related to one of these pioneering surgeries.

Prior to World War II Germany led the way in research in sexology, which included research in sex change surgery. However, the advances of the Germany clinic were stifled by the rise of Hitler. The resulting slowed progression of research into sexology and the nature of gender had detrimental effects on the transgender community. During the Nazi attacks, the institute, which was conducting this research, was shut down, all of the records where destroyed, and physicians and researchers attempted to flee. In addition to the scientific limitations they imposed on those researching sexology, transgender people were victims of Nazi persecution during the Holocaust. Transgender people also endured forced sterilization and other forms of abuse under the Nazi regime. [xiv]

While the United States was fighting the Nazis in Europe, in the United States transgender people were treated as "mentally deficient" anomalies. Local authorities detained transgender people under the guise of having a condition of arrest or incomplete development of the mind. Electroshock therapy, typically used to treat certain forms of psychosis, was pioneered in this time period and was used as a "treatment" for transsexuals.[xv]

For many years transgender people were treated as social *other* in society as well as the moving image. In film, transgender people were portrayed as an inside joke between the audience and the cross-dressed character. The larger society treated transgender people as having a mental disease and this was reflected in the moving image as a cross-dressed character acting out of deception, irrational behavior, and acting insane. When studies began that were in support of helping transgender people, they were quickly shut down by the Nazi regime and it would be years before the research would be duplicated.

2.2.3 Fight the Power Various groups have experienced negative stereotyping in the moving image and have learned to use the tools of the moving image in order to create more accurate images of selfrepresentation. One example of how transgender people can learn from the history of other under represented groups struggles is by looking at the response to D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, a film about the Civil War and Reconstruction, which showed a positive representation of the Ku Klux Klan. Based on Thomas Dixon's novel, The Clansman, this film incited riots in Ohio, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Colorado. Griffith had access to creating and distributing these images of racism to a wide audience.[xvi]

Figure 3:

The Birth of a Nation was responsible for the first instance of underrepresented people utilizing the moving image to help build a positive representation of themselves. "To counter *The Birth of a Nation*, African American filmmakers produced "race films" to provide more positive, realistic onscreen images of blacks."[xvii] Unfortunately, due to the status of black people in society, the films did not receive a wide distribution. In fact, the films are rarely, if ever, mentioned today as a part of cinemagraphic heritage. On the contrary, Griffith's work remains one of the most well known films in history because he was part of the dominant culture and was able to influence the nation. Griffith utilized his access to professional film studio equipment to manipulate the moving image in a way that set new standards for cinematography styles.

The African American filmmakers used the moving image to create new "master narratives" in response to *The Birth of a Nation* and the monopoly of knowledge it represented. In so doing, these filmmakers both battled the racist imagery of larger society and fought for their right for self-representation. Paulo Feirre wrote of the social dynamics that occur when the oppressed begin educate their oppressors in Pedagogy for the Oppressed:

> "the oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both… Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society?" [xviii]

Although the films created by the African American filmmaker's are not well recognized today for their role in history, the act of the oppressed envisioning themselves through the moving image, had a lasting affects: African Americans began to organize the American Civil Right's Movement.

An important change occurred within the African American community in response to *Birth of A Nation,* they began to take responsibility for changing society's images of themselves within the dominant culture. Just as Paulo Feirre points out, the only way to create a change within an oppressive system is for the oppressed to begin to educate and recreate their own power to free the discriminating minds from the weigh of hate and misunderstanding through education. In turn, the oppression will discontinue. Based on these concepts, whether they were conscious or not, the Civil Rights Movement began.

2.3 1950 – 1990 Moving Forward

2.3.1 Creating a Voice

At the end of World War II, the American Civil Rights Movement began as African Americans looked for an end to systematized racial discrimination. As the effort for civil rights begins, a battle for rights in the moving image industry began. The Motion Picture Association of America reviewed the Production Code, which resulted in loosening its monopoly on the moving image.

The Black Civil Rights Movement sparked energy for many other underrepresented groups to begin organizing large social campaigns. The Women's Rights Movement, the American Indian Movement, the Asian American Movement, American Disability Rights Movement, the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement and the Gay Rights Movement all began to organize on a large scale in the 1960s and 1970s. This cultural shift reflected within the moving image.

The moving image was mirroring the social progression of the time with a newfound freedom. It was during this time that Hollywood "would be one of the most socially conscious and stylistically innovative" in history. Considering that "an estimated 80% of the film-going population was between the ages of 16 and 25" the youth were at the center of radical social change.[xix] This change continued for decades until a new dominant cultural response occurred.

Although in the 1980's there were certain groups that continued work for social change, progress on a large scale slowed. The 1980s marked the beginning of a new cultural era in the United States. Referred to as the "Me! Me! Me!" era, the social progress of the previous three decades gave way to a consumer culture.[xx] This consumer culture influenced the moving image industry with the creation of consumer grade electronics; video equipment and personal computers. The distribution of the mainstream moving image also increased with invention of cable television. With the advancement in technology and the democratization of moving image technologies people were able to create representations of their own. This opened the door for marginalized groups to express themselves in new ways. This creative movement was, however, soon stifled by the dominant culture. The National Endowment for The Arts (NEA), for instance, which provides cash grants to artists, adopted "standards of decency" in this time period, which allowed the NEA to only provide funding to those artists that reflect the "values of the American public."[xxi]

The shift from a progressive social movement influence to one that relied on strong concepts of consumerism stifled what could have been the continuation of social progressiveness. The majority of the underrepresented groups which began the social movements gained rights within the larger society, which tempered the energy of the fight. Instead there was a desire to have a piece of the American dream, which required working extra hours and buying consumer goods. Those activists who continued the movement for social justice began to use the new affordable video technologies as a form of self-expression. All around the country many video production facilities held workshops and allowed artists and activists to use their studios. Once again, the dominant society did not approve of the images created and feared that their morals would be overshadowed by these more liberal ideas. The funding for the video production facilities was cut off by creating new rules of morality.**2.3.2 The Naming Ceremony**

    Figure 4: Although the transgender movement did not commence along with the other social movements in this time period there were specific markers that reflected a more positive representation of transgender people within society. In 1953, Ed Wood directed the film, Glen or Glenda "in what Fredrick Jameson would call 'the political unconscious' of dominant cultural discourses and their underlying 'master narratives' - be they

13

biological, medical, legal, philosophical, or literary - and so will tend to reproduce itself."[xxii] As a *politically unconscious* attempt, although it is presumed that Glen or Glenda was an expression of Ed Wood's own struggle with gender identity, he recreated the conflict as previously discussed of the cross-dresser. As a reflection of the larger society of the time it was as if Ed Wood found the courage to write and direct the film from a story in news media the year prior to the film's release: "Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty: Operations Transform Bronx Youth".[xxiii] Although this Ex-GI, Christine Jorgensen, found solace in opening a successful nightclub act where she could find *pragmatic acceptance* of her gender identity, other transgender people were not as lucky.

"Michael Mann distinguishes between 'normative' acceptance of the status quo and 'pragmatic' acceptance. Normative acceptance occurs when dominant social groups manage to mobilize consent in order to legitimize their social position. Pragmatic acceptance is where people comply because they cannot see a realistic alternative. Similarly, it can be argues that stability in modern societies is more likely to be produced through cultural atomism and fragmentation that by externally induced consensus."
[xxiv]

Pragmatic acceptance coincided with the images of the status quo of the time. Once allowed hormonal and surgical transition, transgender individuals often took on these status quo representations of what it meant to be a man or a woman in the United States.

Figure 5: Christine Jorgenson

In 1949, the word "transsexual" is first used to refer to people who wanted to change their sex. No sooner did this group of people have a name than Harry Benjamin, an endocrinologist, started treating them with hormones in the United States. This brought to

light the issues of gender transition and started a nation wide debate on the pros and cons of sex-change surgery that continues to this day.^{xxv}

Although there was a level of acceptance within the dominant culture most transgender people lived in constant fear of being caught for attempting to live within their gender identity. Police commonly raided social spaces where gays, lesbians, and transgender people would meet away from the judgment of the outside world. The transgender community was subject to physical and sexual abuse by the police and often suffered more abuse during these raids than the gays and lesbians who fit their assigned gender identity. During the day, outside the confines of accepting social spaces, transgender people where forced to either deny their gender identity or attempt to pass as their gender identity with constant fear of being caught and ostracized by their community. Throughout history many transgender people have committed suicide due to their oppression and lack of support and understanding. From the 1950s to today although an increasing number of transgender people are finding support, transgender people still have the highest rate of suicide.

In the 1970s, although the discourse in scientific circles as to whether transsexuals should received hormone and surgical treatment were heavily debated, physicians, therapists, and researchers who worked with transsexuals formed the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association. They created their own standards of care and gave "official sanction" that standardized criteria for diagnosis and treatment.[13] With these new standards, Universities began to operate on transsexuals.

Reed Erickson, a transgender person who was one of the first Female to Male transsexuals made one of the most important additions to the transgender movement. After he transitioned Reed sponsored educational films and television appearances bringing transsexualism to the attention of the public. He was instrumental in organizing several of the earliest international conferences on transsexualism and in bringing discussions about transsexualism to conferences of broader interest.^{xxvi}

Reed knew that utilizing the media was of utmost importance in order to bring the subject to the public. Reed educated society about transgender issues as a way to become more human in the eyes of the dominant culture. He continued his work by funding the Harry Benjamin Foundation that set up guidelines for transgender people to transition.

With Reeds financial help Harry Benjamin published <u>The Transsexual Phenomenon</u>, which brought recognition of transgender people within the psychological and medical community.[19]

Figure 6: Candy Darling and Andy Warhol After this publication, the first transgender film star is born. Candy Darling became a star through Andy Warhol's films where she acted in *Flesh* and *Women in Revolt*. A year after Candy Darling became a well known figure in Warhol's films, the Stonewall riots occur. The Stonewall riots consisted of transgender people, gays, and lesbians resist arrest during a routine bar raid on The Stonewall Inn in New York City's Greenwich Village. This ignites the gay and lesbian movement. Some believe that the Stonewall Riots ignited the GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender) movement, but the majority of people within the Gay and Lesbian movement failed to recognize the bisexual and transgender counterparts to the community.

The gay and lesbian community left out the bisexual and transgender community as they fought for their rights out of concern for further discrimination. "At a certain point in their existential experience the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction towards the oppressor and his way of life. Sharing this way of life becomes an overpowering aspiration. In their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressor, to imitate him, to follow him".[15] In the struggle for their rights the gay and lesbian movement has in most ways left the bisexual and transgender communities behind especially when attempting to pass federal laws for legal rights.

In the 1980s, when other civil rights movements appeared to be loosing steam, the AIDs epidemic sparked a surge in gay activism. This strong gay and lesbian movement overshadowed and almost silenced the transgender identity in society. At this time, the re-immergence of cross-dressing appears in mainstream moving images. While America was laughing at the cross-dressers in films such as *Tootsie* and the television series *Bossom Buddies*, transgender people were allowed greater freedom in order to express their gender identities through the ability to transition.

Although the 80's were a time when the transgender movement was experiencing a lull in having a voice, the silence was broken when famous jazz musician, Billy Tipton died. Upon his death it was discovered that for 53 years of presenting as male, Billy was

in fact transgender. This story reignited the transgender voice; transgender people began to write anthologies about their experiences as transgender people. This new acknowledgment of transgender people existing within the United States, with the simultaneous increase in access to film and video making technology, allowed transgender people to begin to express themselves within the moving image. Due to the influence of society and the previous images in the moving image, transgender people recreated those stereotypes that had pre-existed. One well-to-do transgender man utilized media to create education films about transgender people just as African Americans and many other underrepresented groups has done previously. This along with setting up research clinics to assist others transition, proved to create social change without the need for a large social group of activists. This is part of the power of influence that the moving image has over society and an example of creating new "master narratives" in order to create social change.

3. 1990 – Present Contemporary Critique

3.1 So Much Media, So Little Time

In the 1990s a huge shift in communication technology occurred. In a time when media access was underfunded and controlled by large conglomerates, the "information superhighway" began democratizing access to information as it became part of mass society.[xxvii] The Internet acted as a forum through which transgender people were able to tell their stories. Before the wide spread use of the Internet, transgender people began to tell their stories in autobiographical accounts through the printed text. The 1990s was the beginning of the transgender community beginning to fight for their civil rights. While the transgender rights movement modeled itself after other civil rights movements, the communication technologies available to the movement were very different.

Another substantial leap occurred in communication technology when video streaming became viable for most Internet users. This allowed the access to the work of independent moving image artists. Video cameras were already easily accessible, but as the technology developed; just about anyone with a cell phone was able to capture video, was able to share these videos via the Internet. In 2005, You Tube was launched, which allowed individuals to post video clips in a public sphere.

It is important to stress that, even in this age of access to moving image technology, there remains a low media literacy rate. Searching You Tube I find that the majority of videos available reflect the ideologies of the consumerist dominant culture. The You Tube videos consist of home made lip synch music videos, *America's Funniest Home Videos* style animal and human tricks, and low budget sitcoms.

In this new age of technology with the rise of access to create and distribute the moving image, there lacks the media literacy required to create *politically conscious* images required to make social change. Although technology is more readily available there still remains a digital divide between those who have more money and education and those who lack the resources. It is obvious, however that Internet technology can work as a tool for social change. One can also find speeches from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on You Tube, which would have been difficult to find previously. What remains to be seen is what would happen if people became media literate and where able to analyze the images created by the mass media.

3.2 The Anthropologic Phase

The Transgender Rights Movement began in the midst of a new age in communication technology and the community was quick to incorporate this technological tools into their fight for rights. The books, the moving image, and the Internet became the main tools in which transgender people would begin to create social change. What began as a handful of transgender people writing books to share their personal experiences soon created a surge of other transgender people speaking out about their own transitions.

Figure 7: Through the written word, transgender people began to create new *master narratives* and to educate each other about transition. Numerous books were published starting in the 1990s documenting first person perspective accounts of transgender people's experiences. Loren Cameron's <u>Body Alchemy</u> is one such work that shows intimate self-portraits of the female-to-male transgender photographer. This book, and others like it, provided documented accounts of the changes that occurred in the transitioning body. Furthermore, these accounts allowed transgender people to see the effects that hormones had on the bodies of other transgender people. These anthologies lead the way to moving image representation of transgender people.

When the film *Silence of the Lambs* was released in 1991 featuring a transgender serial killer, it was received by a mainstream society that was still unfamiliar with representations of transgender people. This film's serial killer first tortured his female victims and then killed them for their skin. He planned to create a suit made of his victims' skin in order to transform himself into a woman. He was portrayed as detesting women because they were naturally something he wanted to be. The problem with this portrayal of transgender people is that it occurred at time when there lacked images of transgender people within the society. Soon this image was counteracted by a series of documentary films, and television series like HBO's *Trans Generation*, that portrayed real lives of transgender people.

In the mid-90s the documentary film, *You Don't Know Dick,* featured transgender female-to-males. The film had limited distribution, only appearing at film festivals and in independent film theatres. Yet, here is an honest account of transgender men living their lives and sharing their experiences. This film, just as the autobiographic books, would set

the stage for how transgender people would continue to represent themselves within the moving image for years to come.

In an effort to educate other transgender people and society at large, transgender people continued to explain themselves through revealing intimate details of their lives. Some individuals documented their attempts to live in the gender they were assigned, their surgical photos, and images of their naked bodies. Although these images may be of particular interest to people of the medical community and those who are interested in their own transition, to the larger society they feed into the idea of spectacle and *other* that transgender people have endured throughout history. This type of representation is what I refer to as the *anthropologic phase.*

The *anthropologic phase* is where transgender people attempt to prove to the larger society that they deserve to exist. By doing so in this way, the larger society is allowed in on the secret just as films allowed the audience to no longer be deceived by the cross-dressers true identity. Although this may prove as an effective tactic for social change, it demoralized the transgender person to have their most intimate parts of themselves to be openly discussed. Just recently on *Oprah* she asked a transgender man what was in his pants. At no other time, with no other group of people, it is culturally appropriate to talk about ones genitals in public.

While it can be argued that mainstream representations of transgender people can have some positive effects, namely providing exposure that transgender people exist, the ability of transgender people to represent themselves allows for more accurate representation. An example where transgender people gained exposure, but the ways in which it was done was negative is on some talk shows. An entire game show spectacle was created around being able to "guess the transgender." In these shows, which occasionally occurred on *Maury Povich,* transgender and non-transgender women would parade in swimwear; the audience would shout whether they thought this person to be a man (transgender woman) or a woman. In the turn of the twenty first century, scientists in the Netherlands find scientific evidence that supports that "a region of the hypothalamus is about 50 percent larger in men than in women, and almost 60 percent larger in men than in male-to-female transsexuals."[xxviii] This study also showed that female-to-male transsexual's hypothalamus was similar in size to that of non-transgender men. This same

year the film *Boys Don't Cry,* a film based on a true story that elicits empathy from the audience and received wide distribution in United States, was released in theaters. This film tells the story of one transgender person's life, including his brutal death that results from the discovery that he is transgender. The film remains problematic because it supports the idea that transgender people live on the edge and eventually will die a horrible death. This is particularly problematic because, at the time, this was the only mainstream reference point for someone to understand transgender, specifically Female to Male transgender.

In the 1990s transgender people began to use the Internet to share their experiences. These accounts are geared towards other transgender people as a means to gather and share information within the community. The Internet also supports information gathering among doctors who treat transgender patients. Along with the educational services the Internet provides, in this time period transgender people begin to create moving images of themselves on websites. You Tube images of transgender people consist of people documenting the progression of their transition and tips on passing.

Figure 8: TransAmerica

In 2005, *TransAmerica* became the most widely released film in the United States and is the most positive mainstream transgender film to date. The transgender character is not psychotic, is not a murderer, and is not killed. We witness her struggles with her identity and coming out and dealing with her family. She also in the end is awarded with gender corrective surgery and being reunited with her son. *TransAmerica* is an account of a transgender woman who, one week before her gender corrective surgery, receives a phone call informing her that her estranged son is in trouble and needs her help. This

begins cross-country road trip from New York to Los Angeles with her son, who does not know she is his father.

TransAmerica follows certain cinematic standards in the treatment of a transgender character. Early on the audience is aware of the main character's transgender status and the fact that her son does not know creates the concept of the antagonist in order to move the story forward just as films throughout history did with the cross dressing character. The film is also billed as a dramatic comedy when the only thing that could be seen as funny is the "man in a dress", otherwise it is a drama. In the end the son, who once he has reached Los Angeles and becomes a porn star, accepts his transgender mother into his life. In a sense the film is saying, it is for people who are struggling in their lives and live on the fringe of society to accept transgender people.

The transgender movement began as personal accounts through the written word on the transgender experience. Soon to follow were documentary films that took on the same autobiographical look on transgender people. The mass media mirrored the dominant cultural influences of the transgender as a joke and as psychotic through guess the tranny talk shows and *Silence of the Lambs.* All of these examples, although not perfect in terms of creating positive representation, gave transgender people visibility within the larger culture where previously there were almost none. With the persistence of transgender people to tell their own stories at the risk of revealing intimate details about their lives, those negative representations may be the last. With more positive representations being created in the moving image, transgender people begin to obtain more acceptance within the larger community.

4. Media Literacy for Social Change

For years literacy referred only to the ability to read and write, but in an age with the moving image is dominating all aspects of our lives, we begin to see the importance of its influence. If the video camera were viewed as a pencil and video editing as paper, we can clearly see the lack of media literacy in contemporary culture. Although access to video technology is more available than ever before, there still lacks equal representation in the moving image. As I have outlined in this paper, there has been progress with regards to transgender representation in the moving image, yet there still remains a monopoly of knowledge over the technology.

Researchers and practitioners are beginning to recognize the importance in education for student to address advertizing in the moving image with regards to gender identity and sexuality, racism, discrimination, and oppression, but the discourse seems to end there. Little consideration is being given to moving image influences outside of advertisements even though advertising is heavily embedded in films as well as issues listed above.

A small group of people within the dominant culture control the giant corporations that control the media. Not having media literacy affects our democracy and continues to feed an oppressive culture on both a small and large scale. If people remain illiterate, the moving image will continue to affect thoughts and actions of the society both directly and indirectly. Therefore it is imperative for the oppressed to become media literate and begin to redirect the mirror to influence their thoughts, struggles, and stories.

5. My Work

5.1 Past Work

5.1.1 *Read This Before Coming Out to Your Parents*

Figure 9: Read This Before Coming Out to Your Parents

At the same time transgender people were gaining exposure through sharing personal experiences in literature, I was discovering my passion for working with video. At The Evergreen State College where I studied for my undergraduate degree, I was in the hay day of dyke culture in Olympia, Washington. I was active in counter anti-gay legislation and began to become exposed to transgender experiences through text. It was through small publications like Body Alchemy that I began to familiarize myself with transgender identity.

I began creating semi-autobiographic video art pieces about my experiences as a queer person in college. The first was a group project, which included four queer identified students who were all Caucasian and, at the time, dyke identified. We divided the project into four sections with each person received equal time revealing different parts of their lives.

The second video, entitled *Read This Before Coming Out to Your Parents* (1995) was a solo piece that focused on the turbulence of my own coming out to my parents. The video highlighted an interview with my mother over the phone. Her interview was intercut with my voice over. I conducted her interview and at times my lack of comfort was obvious in response to my mother's struggling with my identity. The visuals consisted of a progression of still images from my childhood to the present. The photos reflected how my life changed from spending time with my family to showing only images of myself and my friends. This showed a lost connection with the family that was

recreated through friends, which often occurs in queer and transgender people. My mother's shaky voice said, "I decided to accept it. Maybe not accept it, but not loose my daughter." Other than a couple of images from my childhood, there is a strong absence of my father. We end on the solemn note with my mother's voice speaking of my father's lack of acceptance. My mother stated, " he doesn't accept it, but he has more of an acceptance of that than he does the hair and the ear rings." At the time I had a mohawk and multiple facial piercings. As I looped the last quote I jumped cut video images of myself putting in all of my piercings as if in a direct defiance to my father's disproval.

Looking back on these projects, I see how they are similar to the early documentary films about transgender people. My reasons for making them also seem very similar. At the time I felt I needed to prove myself in some way at a time when my family was not there for me. Utilizing the moving image was a perfect way to share my experience with a broader audience and allow me to express an honest account of the painful process I was going through. I wanted people to have empathy when my family and the larger society lacked it. It was an important part of my personal process and believe it helped me feel that I could take a painful experience and turn it into a something positive if more people could understand.

5.1.2   *Evolution 4.2*
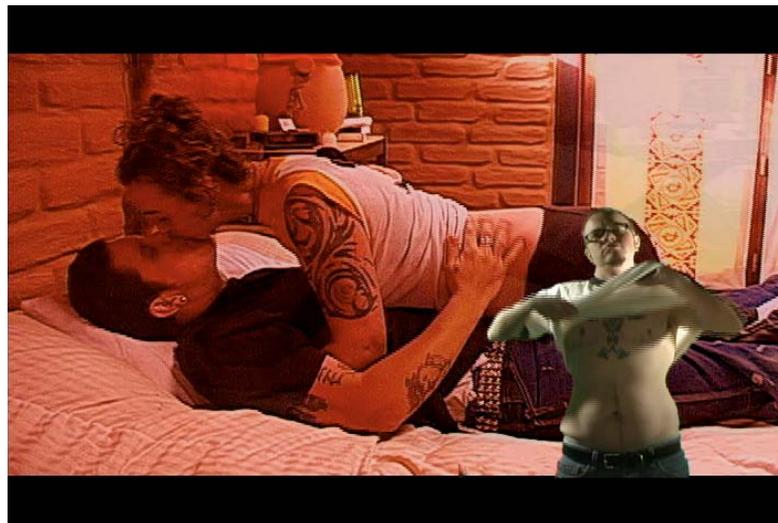
Figure 10: Evolution 4.2

Evolution 4.2 is a short experimental video that invites the audience not only to observe one of the most delicate issues a transgender person may face, the fear of dating,

but it also challenges the audience to emotionally participate. By bridging a glossy narrative with a second layer of reflective documentary style video, *Evolution 4.2* offers a glimpse of reality. The audience is forced into emotionally engaging with the character's experience.

Evolution 4.2 began as a narrative film. At the time, I developed the idea to write the script loosely based on my own experiences as a transgender person who was experiencing my first year of transition where my gender remained ambiguous to most people. At times, clerks would be so confused that they would just stare at me and say, "um he, um she, um he." In a way, I found the experience entertaining to witness how easily confused people would become and how it would often stop them in their tracks just because they could not easily identify my gender identity.

At the time I had incidences of discrimination on the job. I worked as a registrar at a school of Chinese medicine. When some students began to graffiti on the fliers I posted about school related information, I reported the incidents to the CEO, who happened to be a lesbian. She issues a statement upholding the school's no discrimination policy and stated that if it were to happen again, the guilty party would be immediately expelled. All the graffiti stopped immediately.

As the time past, and the hormones continued to affect my appearance, the more people began to identify me as male. I began to experience how other men treated each other. It did not help that I was in my late twenties and I looked like I was fourteen. I had begun to learn to navigate the world as male and the rules where different. Men would constantly tease and harass, in playful ways, but in what also appeared to be as a sign of dominance over what appeared to be an awkward fourteen-year-old boy. I was often taken off guard especially because I was constantly nervous about whether or not I was presenting as male.

It was during this time that I was also single. I had always been attracted to women, but now I wondered what type of women I would date and what type of women would date me. I became extremely nervous about what would happen if I picked up on a straight girl, brought her home, and then she found out that I lacked something we both thought I should have. Conversely, I wondered what would happen if I picked up on a lesbian, or queer identified girl, and she was not able to see me as my male self.

Image trying to date in a small town when your perceived gender is ambiguous and you may begin to understand how frustrating, afraid, and confused I was. These feelings are what *Evolution 4.2* attempts to convey through experimental video. I feel that this video contains a more developed sense of the medium as art, and utilizes more advanced techniques, like green screen and narrative structure, to convey it's message. Although there have been examples of experimental video I could compare *Evolution 4.2* with, I have not viewed any other similar videos dealing with transgender issues.

In terms of placing my own work in relation to the timeline and terms used previously to describe other transgender representations, I feel there exists some similarities. For instance, here I am still attempting to convey my personal experience as a transgender person to the audience. In the film I undress in an attempt to create confusion and eventually shock the audience. With regard to the nudity, I feel there is a difference between the use of nudity in *Evolution 4.2* and other representations of transgender people in the moving image where they expose their bodies. I was not exposing myself in order to give people the pleasure of seeing a transgender person nude, but instead I was exposing myself in an attempt to add a level of intensity to the story being conveyed in the video. I wanted people to feel confused and uncomfortable because that is how I felt about dating. I wanted people to be shocked at my body because I felt that whom ever I dated would also be shocked by my body.

5.1.3 *Introversion*

Figure 11: Introversion

Introversion was an interactive video installation created to challenge the viewer to sit still and look through a live image of themselves in order to see the greater beauty that

exists. In this case an abstract video of a sunset. As a sort of psychological experiment, I was interested to hear the participant's reactions to the project.

Introversion utilized a laptop computer and coding software. When the viewer sat down they would see a reflection of themselves at 80% opacity. As they sat still and gaze into the screen, their image began to fade and they are able to see the video of an abstract sunset. The sunset was not revealed unless the participant remained absolutely still.

From my perspective, the participant's accounts of their interaction with the project appeared to reveal information about the own behavioral patterns of avoidance when it comes to self-reflection. One participant stated that she did not have the patience to sit and try to figure it out. Having known this participant personally, I can attest that she often had to have many things going on at once and quite possibly never sat still long enough to have in-depth self-reflection. Another participant stated that he could not figure out how the installation worked and kept moving into different positions and testing the project in order to "make it work". Again, knowing this participant his disposition was one of often over analyzing situations, which could have kept him from being involved in self-reflection.

My attempt was to convey this message of avoidance to self-reflection to each participant. In the project critique it appeared that the interactive video was ineffective in revealing these attributes to each participant and perhaps I was the only one who truly understood the significance of each persons behavior in response to the interactivity. In the future, I would like to create similar works, but make the intent more obvious to the viewer.

5.2 Current Work

5.2.1 Reclaiming the Pieces

Figure 12: Reclaiming the Pieces

Reclaiming the Pieces is a documentary film that walks us through the lives of four transgender people who have found their sense of place. Beyond just politics and anatomy, this documentary showed transgender people as multifaceted individuals who shared insights on life from their unique experiences. I traveled across the US and interview transgender people from various backgrounds, transgender identity, and locations. From New York City to Santa Fe to San Francisco, this documentary used poetic contemporary filmmaking techniques to tell the stories of transgender people.

The development for *Reclaiming the Pieces* began years ago while I was editing for a documentary film, *Enough Man* by Luke Woodward. *Enough Man* was a documentary film, which interviewed nine transgender men regarding identity, intimate relationships, and sex. While the film is representative of most documentary films on transgender people, by explicitly showing transgender men having sex with their partners makes the film unique. The problem with *Enough Man,* as well as all of the other documentary films I have come across, is that it portrays a homogenous culture of transgender people. First, the film is segregated into only transgender males and secondly, it portrays all white people and thirdly, all the people interviewed were around the same age. It was then that I realized I needed to create a more accurate representation of transgender people.

I began the process with one thing in mind, to represent the transgender community and the diversity within the community. This included people of color, people with disabilities, and a wide range of ages and experiences. I began to have discussions about the project on an on-line message board where many progressive transgender people could speak of the various issues that transgender people have to face. This group of people was an instrumental sounding board for the questions I had regarding this project and the members helped in the development of interview questions.

Here was a community of transgender people who were *politically conscious* individuals. They took pride in analyzing and critiquing culture within the United States and many had studied related topics at universities, some were artists, and others were there to simply share their own personal experiences. We discussed issues of diversity, transgender representation in the media, and what sort of images were lacking of transgender people.

It was not until I considered the project for my master's thesis that I felt prepared to begin shooting this documentary. I scheduled seven interviews and planned my trip across the United States. My budget limit was to not max out my credit card, so my crew of me, myself, and I who operated two cameras, microphones, and interviews. I was in charge of everything from scheduling, interviewing, and arranging permissions with local film offices to shooting b-roll.

At the end of the summer, I had obtained four out of the seven intended interviews, and decided to proceed with editing these four interviews into a self-contained short documentary.

5.2.1.1 People Interviewed

I have always been a traveler, a people person, and one who has an appreciation for diversity. It was on my travels and explorations that I have had the opportunity to meet many interesting people with unique life experiences. Because of my own identity as a transgender person, a number of people I have met along the way share this identity. It was from this resource of friends that I found the people I interviewed for *Reclaiming the Pieces.*

The following people were interviewed in *Reclaiming the Pieces:*

At the time of the interview Cooper Lee was 37 years old and lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He is a Caucasian Female-to-Male who identifies as trans. He is straight and lives with his fiancé. Cooper Lee worked for the Santa Fe Opera and previously worked odd manual labor jobs including: stagehand, construction, and truck driver. He has traveled the United States performing his spoken word and is currently working on his first novel.

Mekah was 56 years old and lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Mekah is a Jewish Male-to-Female who identifies as "female, through and through." She is straight, lives with her husband, and is running for New Mexico State Representative in 2008. Mekah transitioned at the age of 52 while working as a high school art teacher. She was a Navy Seal during the Vietnam War in order to prove her "manliness".

Naomi was 30 years old at the time of the interview and lived in New York City, New York. Naomi is a multiracial/Asian American Male-to-Female who identifies as female. She is a lesbian who worked as a graphic designer, game designer, and project manager. Naomi's family and friends have offered her so much support that she has decided to give back by her involvement with Sylvia Rivera Law Project, which helps low-income trans communities of color fight for change

Jay was 38 and lived in Berkeley, California. Jay is a Caucasian Female-to-Male who identifies as genderqueer. Jay is polyamorous and bisexual and is was working on his Master's degree in social work. Jay had just started hormones and was dealing with finding his place in his community as he transitions. He was involved in the leather community, which has been a foundation for him to feel acceptance.

5.2.1.2 Music

The music for *Reclaiming the Pieces* is a song entitled *Something Different* by Katastrophe. I chose this music because Katastrophe not only raps about his experience as a transgender person, but he is also one of the top artists in the transgender community in terms of his skill level and natural talent.

Some of the lyrics include: "My lips spit shit nobody wants to hear. … fuck all this pain. I am standing right next to you, a transsexual, intellectual…Not out to fight the world because you think I'm a perve, deserve … I'm not impervious to hurt." "A moral

on the gay community. Too soon for me to promote unity when we only see as far as a mirror. Fear. Hate. Try to keep us in our place…Try to save face in a rat race."

The music is used to reinforce the storyline that transgender people are members of society that not only deserve equal rights, but that don't want to be enveloped into a gay community.

5.2.1.3 Distribution

With regards to my experience in representation of under represented people in the moving image, I have discovered that one of the main problems with creating a new *master narrative* is in the lack of distribution. When considering the distribution of *Reclaiming the Pieces*, I am challenged with similar question of where to distribute, who is my audience, and who I want to have access.

My goal is to have the widest audience possible without signing a contract with a distributor who will then have ownership as to where the film can be viewed. I am also concerned with maintaining the utmost respect of those people I interviewed. For instance, when I spoke to Cooper Lee about distribution we discussed how easily viewers of You Tube are able to download the video. Although there are ways to turn this function off in the You Tube settings, there are many third party free software applications that allow a viewer to download any video displayed on You Tube. Cooper Lee was emphatic about not allowing others access to using his image to recreate their videos. I am respectful of Cooper Lee's wishes and therefore will not be distributing this documentary on You Tube.

Instead, the video will be available for viewing on my up and coming website, www.reclaimingthepieces.com. The video will also show at academic and transgender conferences as well as film festivals around the world. I am considering releasing the video on DVD as a self-contained video. One DVD would only contain *Reclaiming the Pieces* for a small price. The other DVD would be a special collector's edition to include *Reclaiming the Pieces* along side my other work dealing with transgender or queer issues, most of which was mentioned above. I would distribute all of this myself in order to retain rights.

5.2.1.4 Personal Critique

Reclaiming the Pieces is my most ambitious project to date and I am happy with the results. That being stated, I feel that there is much to be learned from this project. I realize that my ideal in creating a visionary new *master narrative* for transgender representation is a difficult one. I hope to not only influence change on the larger society, but to help transgender people break free from the social duality of choice that I see as limiting the community.

In the completed seventeen-minute project, I ended up spending almost half the time on the coming out section of the documentary. I had intended for the coming out section to be shorter and spend more time on the visionary portion of the film. The visionary portion would consist of two parts. One, transgender people becoming active members of the larger community and providing positive social change and two, transgender people offering insight from their own experiences to provide some betterment for humanity as a whole. It was not until I completed this film that I realized that this was a large order to fill. I feel I did achieve the visionary content to an extent, but I had hoped for the last section to be larger. I feel I could write many pages on what I would like to do differently. Instead, I am going to explain how I would like to present the feature-length version of this documentary, *Reclaiming the Pieces 5.0*, or just *RTP 5.0.*

5.3 Future Work

5.3.1 Reclaiming the Pieces 5.0

Reclaiming the Pieces 5.0 is a feature-length documentary film that explores a diverse population of the transgender community. Through the lives and experiences these individuals who envision a community that looks past the confines of just the straight or transgender culture, This poetic representation of transgender people through the moving image portrays transgender people.

I feel it is necessary to continue working on this project and expanding it into a feature-length documentary for several reasons. A feature-length documentary holds more importance within filmmaking circles and therefore this film would receive more attention. The intensions of this film is to show a wide diversity within the transgender community and the short version did not capture the amount of diversity I had hoped. I am concerned with representations of people of color, various identities, and a larger variety in age range.

In this feature-length project, *Reclaiming the Pieces 5.0,* I will include interviews from the following people:

At the time of writing, Yasmeen is 23 year old and lives in Redwood City, California.   She is a Native American pre-transition Male-to-Female. She found her sense of identity through singing and performing in drag. Yasmeen moved to California in search of a more accepting community in order to discover herself.

Ethan was 47 years old at the time of filming and lived in Toledo, Ohio.   Ethan is an African American Female-to-Male who identifies as a gay transman. He receives SSI and was attending the University of Toledo to study social work and photography. He is confined to a wheelchair due to cerebral palsy. Ethan has only been able to express himself physically in relationships since transitioning. He is part of the BDSM community and writes erotica.

Adam was 28 at the time of writing and living in Los Angeles, California.   Adam is a Caucasian former Male-to-Female who identifies as somewhere between male and female. He dates female identified people and works as a director of interactive programming/designer/animator. Adam lived as female for two years and a few months before he was scheduled to have surgery decided to try living as a male bodied person

again to make sure he was doing the right thing. Although he no longer takes estrogen and did not go through with surgery he feels that "overall it was a successful transition."

5.3.1.2 Storyline

In speaking with Jim de Seve', Director of *Tying the Knot,* a documentary that took a concerted look at the heated and ongoing debate about same-sex marriage in the United States, I realized the importance of creating a larger more complex storyline for the feature length version of *Reclaiming the Pieces.* Although it is still in development, one of the elements of the larger film will be to follow Mekah through the next seven months as she runs for State Senate in New Mexico.

I will shoot pick ups and update the people interviewed as they continue with their lives creating their own stories in order to add depth. The interviews previously conducted I spent three days with each person. I would like to get a more well rounded intimate look into their lives and ask them more questions. I feel that each person is highly intelligent and has insight on life that I have yet to tap into.

Naomi and her friend, who is also a Male-to-Female transsexual, have started a band. Cooper Lee now works at an organization that helps youth to empower themselves through outdoor adventures and challenge courses, and Jay will complete graduate school and begin looking for a job where he will influence public discourse about transgender youth.

The other interviews will be added along with artistic video vignettes creating commentary on the social progress of transgender people in society and the moving image. These vignettes will be used to help clarify some points on social commentary that I would like the film to convey.

5.3.1.2 Music

Music for *Reclaiming the Pieces* features the song *Something Different* by Katastrophe. Title piece performed by the Ice Cream Socialites, which includes Katastrophe and Jena Riot. The feature song will include specific lyrics based on the film. Ice Cream Socialites are an up and coming group from San Francisco, California and have established themselves both within the transgender and queer communitiesw.

5.3.1.3 Distribution

As stated before, I am interested in retaining rights to this film, however I may find that I will get a wider distribution working with a distribution company. I am interested in dealing with a detailed contract that limits the distribution company's rights over my own as the filmmaker. This film will be distributed to film festivals worldwide, television, and DVD.

5.3.2 Other Future Projects

I hope to expand on my own work within the moving image by creating more interactive video projects. I have considered creating interactive work for the web as well as gallery installation projects. Over the past 8 years of my transition from female-to-male I documented the changes in my physical body with still pictures. I have been experimenting with morphing the images between each other showing the changes that occurred. My interest lies in pushing the boundaries of what video means. Interactive work such as that of Toni Dove and David Rokeby have particularly sparked my interest in interactive video art as a way to convey a message.

5.4 Media Literacy Project

Along with presenting my talk, Transgender and Claiming Space in the Moving Image, I am interested in created a set of ongoing media literacy workshops. The workshops will start geared specifically at conferences with a high attendance by transgender people with a plan with a wider audience in mind. My hope is to increase the level of *political consciousness* within the transgender community and to encourage transgender people to create diverse representations through the moving image.

The media literacy project will focus on discussing the history of the moving image and its use as a mirror on the larger social structure, as outlined in this paper. This presentation will include video clips of examples to aid in the discussion of representation in the moving image. The purpose of this section is for the transgender community to become familiar with their own history and realize how these historical representations in the moving image effect the transgender community today. I also hope to help the transgender community to develop a language in which to analyze contemporary images portrayed in the film, television, and art. With the increase in media literacy within the transgender community, I foresee a decrease in tolerance of the

negative stereotypes, an increase in intelligent discourse, and an increase in the creation of new *master narratives.*

The second part of the media literacy project will consist of hands on learning and assigned video projects through three workshops. In the first workshop, participants will be encouraged to bring their video equipment to the workshop, what ever it may be; VHS camcorder, professional HD, or just a cell phone. We will study basic concepts of filmmaking to include image composition, storyboarding, lighting, and sounds. Each individual will be assigned a basic 3-minute project of their choosing consisting of in-camera edits. In the second workshop, we will briefly review the projects and discuss and critique the short videos. We will then discuss concepts in editing techniques and options for creating edits including software that is available and how to use the camera to create edits directly to tape. Each participant will be assigned to create a 15 – 30 minute video either individually or collaboratively. Each person will walk away from the course with a list of resources about topics discussed including types on shooting on a budget. I am considering having the third workshop at the next annual conference. This would require offering support via email to further their development throughout the year and to answer questions. This will allow time for the new filmmakers to develop their projects and ready them for presentation in a section of the conference open for public viewing. The workshop portion will consist of discussion of the projects and critique. We will also be able to discuss future projects. Each participant will be charged with teaching other people what they have learned and to continue creating video.

this grass roots approach to media literacy my hope is to influence transgender people to have proactive participation to create social change. By utilizing one of the most influential forms of communication of our time, the moving image, transgender people can increase the amount of acceptance of transgender people within the larger culture. The more transgender people who create new *master narratives* from a place of *political consciousness*, the more diversity will be represented. The more diversity representation of the transgender community, the more choices transgender people will have when choosing their place within the world.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The video artwork completed up to this point in my career has been consistent in the theme of change, both at the personal and the social level. This work has led me to study the moving image as it has affected society over the past century. Because of my identity as a transgender person I see a specific need that needs to be filled in order to further the transgender movement. In a time when the moving image has saturated every part of the modern day culture, it has become clear that in order to move forward, not only as transgender people, but as a society, there has to be literacy of the moving image.

I have a new interest in learning about video from an engineering standpoint. By becoming more literate with the technical aspects of video as well as video's social implications, I hope to increase my influences in society. Through my own art as well as by teaching others media literacy I hope to become a proactive participant in social change.

7. Endnotes

1. Briggs, Asa and Burke, Peter. <u>A Social History of the Media: from Guttenberg to the Internet</u> (Madden MA: Polity Press, 2005) 6 – 7.

2. *"Media Literacy: Basic Concepts."* New Mexico Media Literacy Project. 10 Jan. 2008
   <http://www.nmmlp.org/media_literacy/ML_concepts.html>.

3. *"Two-Spirit Tradition in Native American Culture."* 28 Jan. 2008
   <http://www.androphile.org/preview/Culture/NativeAmerica/amerindian.htm>.

4. *"New Perspectives on the West."* PBS. 15 Feb. 2008
   <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1890_1900.htm>.

5. "About the 19th Century Decades Pages." Kingwood College. 10 March 2008
   <http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/19thcentury1890.htm>.

6. *"Film Censorship in the U.S. - a Brief History."* National Coalition Against Censorship. 1 March 2008 <http://www.ncac.org/issues/film_censorship.cfm>.

7. Taylor, Clare, L. <u>Women, Writing, and Fetishism 1890 – 1950: Female Cross-Gendering</u> (Oxford : Clarendon Press ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2003) 41.

8. Duberman, Martin, Martha Vicinus, and Georhe Chauncey, Jr. <u>Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past</u> *(*New York : New American Library, c1989) 189.

9. *"A Timeline of Film Censorship."* National Coalition Against Censorship. 2 Feb 2008 <http://www.ncac.org/issues/film_censorship.cfm>.

10. *"Will Hays and Motion Picture Censorship."* The Library of Congress. 3 March 2008 <http://lcweb2.loc.gov:8081/ammem/amrlhtml/dthays.html>.

11. National Coalition Against Censorship.

12. Phillips, John. <u>Transgender On Screen</u> (New York, NY: Palgrave Mac Millian 2006) 56.

13. Meyerowitz, Joanne. <u>How Sex Changed</u>: <u>A History of Transsexuality in the United States</u> (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002) 5.

14. *"Transgender History."* Transgender Zone. 2 Feb 2008
    <http://www.transgenderzone.com/features/timeline.htm>.

15. Ibid

16. National Coalition Against Censorship.

17. "*D.W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation.*" PBS, 10 Feb 2008 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/flashpoints/theater/birthofanation.html>.

18. Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1986), 28 – 29.

19. Mintz, S. "*Digital History.*" 2007.University of Houston, 10 Feb 2008 *<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>*.

20. "*American Cultural History: 1980 – 1989.*" Kingwood College Library, 10 Feb 2008 <http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade80.html>.

21. Mintz.

22. Lauretis, Teresa de. Technologies of Gender (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1-2.

23. Transgender Zone.

24. Thompson, Kenneth. Media and Cultural Regulation (California: Sage Publications Ltd., 1997), 36.

25. Transgender Zone.

26. A.H. Devor, PhD. "Reed Erickson and The Erickson Educational Foundation." The University of Victoria, 12 March 2008 <http://web.uvic.ca/~erick123>.

27. Besser, Howard. "The Information SuperHighway: Social and Cultural Impact." University California Los Angeles, 10 Feb 2008 <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/~howard/Papers/brook-book.html>.

28. "Are Transsexual's Brains Different?" eTransgender, April 12, 2008.   < http://etransgender.com/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=510>.

8. Bibliography

1. Bornstein, Kate. <u>Gender Outlaw: on Men, Women, and the rest of us</u>. New York: Vintage Books, 1995

2. Benjamin, Jessica. <u>The Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender Psychoanalysis</u>. New York: Routledge, 1998

3. Bucy, Erik P. and John E. Newhagen. <u>Media, Access: Social and Psychological Dimensions of New Technology Use</u>. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004

4. Butler, Judith. <u>Undoing Gender</u>. New York: Routledge, 2004

5. Butler, Judith. <u>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity</u>. New York : Routledge, 1999

6. Butters, Jr., Gerald R. <u>Black Manhood on the Silent Screen</u>. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002

7. Codell, Julie F. <u>Genre, Gender, Race, and World Cinema.</u> Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2007

8. Colapinto, John. <u>As Nature Made Him, The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl</u>. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000

9. Elledge, Jim. <u>Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Myths</u>. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2002

10. Farrington, Lisa E. <u>Creating Their Own Images</u>. Boston: Oxford University Press, 2005

11. Feinberg, Leslie. <u>Transgender Warriors, Making History from Joan to RuPaul</u>. Boston : Beacon Press, 1996

12. Glenhill, Christine and Linda Williams. <u>Reinventing Film Studies</u>. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2000

13. Haifeng, Ni and Zhu Jia. <u>Synthetic Reality</u>. Hong Kong: Time Zone 8, 2004

14. Halberstam, Judith. <u>In a Queer Time and Place</u> New York: New York University Press, 2005

15. Halter, Ed. *"Before YouTube."* The Village Voice 16 Jan. 2007

16. Hilger, Roger. <u>From Savage to Nobleman.</u> London: Scarecrow Press Inc., 1995

17. Hillis, Aaron, *"Internet Killed the Video Star."* The Village Voice. 17 July 2007

18. Hirsh, Susan E. <u>The War in American Culture.</u> Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996

19. Jameson, Fredrick. "*The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism."* The New School. 8 Jan. 2008 *<http://homepage.newschool.edu/~quigleyt/vcs/jameson/jameson.html>*.

20. Kailey, Matt. <u>Just Add Hormones</u> Boston: Beacon Press, 1994

21. Kilpatrick. <u>Celluloid Indians.</u> Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999

22. Lehman. <u>Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture</u>. New York: Routledge, NY 2001

23. Meyerowitz, Joanne. <u>How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States.</u> Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University, 2002

24. MiddleBrook, Diane Wood. <u>Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton.</u> Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1998

25. Miller, Branda. *State of the Art: Art of the State.* 1991.VHS. New York, NY: Deep Dish Television

26. Moore, Wayne. <u>Translations/Transformations: Gender and Culture in Film and Literature East and West</u>. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993

27. Namaste, Viviane K. <u>Invisible Lives</u>. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002

28. Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. <u>The Oxford History of World Cinema</u>. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996

29. Pierce, Kimberly, and Andy Bienen. *Boys Don't Cry.* 1999. DVD. New York, NY: Hart-Sharp Entertainment.

30. Pomerance, Murray. <u>Cinema and Modernity</u>. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006

31. Prosser, Jay. <u>Second Skins</u>. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998

32. Rees, A.L. <u>A History of Experimental Film and Video</u>. London: British Film Institute, 2003

33. Renov, Michael and Suderburg, Erika. <u>Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices</u>. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, c1996

34. Russo, Vito, and Rob Epstein *Celluloid Closet.* 1995. DVD. Beverly Hills, CA: Brillstein-Grey Entertainment.

35. Seiter, Ellen. <u>Remote Control: Television Audiences and Cultural Power</u>. London ; New York : Routledge, 1989

36. Tucker, Duncan. *TransAmerica.* 2005. DVD. New York, NY: Belladonna Productions.

37. Wood Jr., Edward D. *Glen or Glenda.* 1953. DVD. Hollywood, CA: Screen Classics, Inc.

Appendix A: DVD Video Examples

DVD Video Examples

Read This Before Coming Out.mov	Length: 05:27
Evolution4.2.mov	Length: 05:19
ReclaimingthePieces.mov	Length: 16:22