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Breaking Ground on a Theory of Transgender Architecture

Lucas Cassidy Crawford¹

INTRODUCTION

By now, the Brandon Teena story is well archived.² In 1993, John Lotter and Marvin Thomas Nissen discovered that their friend had been born “female.” The two men learned about Brandon’s genitals—those bodily bits which prompted the men’s brutality—because of one seemingly simple fact: after committing a minor misdemeanor, Brandon was held in a cellblock for females.³ After sexually assaulting Brandon, the men were eventually questioned but never detained. They murdered Brandon days later. If it wasn’t obvious why institutional sex-segregated architectures (from public washrooms to shelters) are dangerous for transgender people before 1993, it should have become obvious thereafter.

It is easy to make an argument that it is exclusively transphobia and ignorance about trans-embodiment that grounds this often dangerous lack of access. However, as architectural theorist Joel Sanders notes, architecture is not a simple or neutral aesthetic category *to which* gender is merely applied.⁴ Like any art form or cultural production, he suggests, architecture is shaped as much by contemporary gender norms as contemporary aesthetic ones. As Sanders puts it: “Western architects and theorists from Vitruvius to Le Corbusier . . . attempt to locate and to fix architecture’s underlying principles in a vision of transhistorical nature [by] recruit[ing] masculinity to justify practice.”⁵ To Sanders, the seeming gender neutrality of architecture is merely a product of modernist architecture’s attempt to appear transhistorical⁶—as a timeless style of architecture above and beyond fashion. This quotation from Sanders traces out a dizzying cycle of influence: in his view, architectural forms and gendered bodies mutually

reinforce each other's feigned timelessness and stability. This paper takes up one overarching question, one that takes this cycle one step further: how have these gender-based conventions of architectural stability and timelessness seeped into our ways of thinking of our *bodies*?

This article responds to this question via two related arguments: first, that the fraught historical relationship between gender and architecture has always been underpinned by a variously elided sense of gender-crossing—a sense that needs to be cast out in order to uphold the male/masculine aura of the architectural discipline.⁷ As an obvious and, in some ways, overdetermined example, I look to several key gender-charged moments from the earliest known archive of Roman architecture, Vitruvius' *De Architectura*.⁸ If architecture is in some ways an archive of gender (as the first section of this article argues), then our academic and activist attempts to make architecture more “transgender-friendly” might need to change; that is, perhaps we can begin by asking how transgender is already inherent and repressed by conventional architecture rather than talking about transgender as a novel and heretofore silenced topic of concern for architects and architectural theorists.

Secondly, in order to preserve the possibility for disruptive trans architecture that we see even in Vitruvius, the second section of this article suggests that the architectural metaphors often employed in contemporary transgender theory literally domesticate the trans subject. I argue that the common narrative of not feeling “at home in one's skin”⁹ that is shared by many transsexual autobiographers and theorists has subsumed this history—or at least illustrated its erasure—with its problematic yet nonetheless enthralling version of “home.” Via analyses of different conceptions of “home” from Marxist thinkers Theodor Adorno¹⁰ and Leslie Feinberg,¹¹ this article attempts to offer an alternative architectural conception of trans-embodiment, one that is not based on the assumption that bodies must be treated as comfortable and owned homes. While these two thinkers are quite different thematically,¹² both consider ownership as a central mode through

which social inequalities are generated.¹³ In part, this article transfers Adorno's and Feinberg's shared apprehension about ownership from the social body at-large to our individual bodies and discusses the ways in which we think about them. While neo-Marxist thinkers such as these question the justice of various kinds of ownership, what kind of capitalist ideas underlie our common tendency to refer to (and experience) the body as a home that we own?

Taken together, these two arguments suggest that there is much to be gained by rethinking the spatial metaphors with which we describe ourselves. Underlying this suggestion is the belief that our ways of spatially figuring the body in thought and language—what we could call our architectonics of the body—do not merely represent our bodily experience but also shape it. Ultimately then, this article suggests that far from being an afterthought that we may, or may not, want to include in our architectural (and cultural) blueprints, transgender and transsexuality may even be exemplary architectural practices and also the very bases for thinking of bodies architecturally.¹⁴ Such an argument will not only address—albeit obliquely—the urgent need that transgender people have for new ways of conceiving of our bodies, buildings, and homes, but will also offer crucial caution to those who design our hallway paths and doorway thresholds, who advocate single-sex washrooms, and of course, to those who lend any administrative, legal, or quotidian momentum to the ongoing cultural project of guiding trans people to cellblocks of all varieties.

While Vitruvius, Adorno, and Feinberg make up the group of strange bedfellows that inform most of this essay's interventions, the work of one other thinker is constantly at work here: Jacques Derrida, specifically his 1994 text *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*.¹⁵ Among other complex overarching projects, this text moves to the fore the figure of the "archive"¹⁶ as not only a way to rethink the processes by which history gets made, reproduced, and told, but moreover to point out the spatial origins of our relatively new obsession with recording and saving everything. In other

words, what Derrida calls our “archive drive”¹⁷ might help us to reconsider the imperative that to be or to build only timeless-seeming structures and bodies is not only an impossible one but one that encourages us to ignore the complex and multiple histories of bodies. The figure of the archive—a *place* that seeks to consolidate all *times*—is always, Derrida suggests, an institution of “command” and “commencement,”¹⁸ insofar as the consolidation of history that the archive represents is one fixated with origins and power.

Although Derrida notes that the Greek version of the word “archive” witnesses the word’s beginnings as “a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates,”¹⁹ he does not mention that the word “architecture” shares this powerful etymology of containing, constraining, and commanding. If, then, buildings not only house actual archives, but houses and cellblocks are themselves archival (in their materialization of, for instance, gender norms), it is easy to see that Brandon Teena’s body and his jail cell were implicated in a practice of mutual inscription. That is, the cellblock’s authority to inscribe “woman” upon Brandon relies on the subtle gendered norms of buildings that are consolidated through thousands of years’ worth of architectural tradition and memory; likewise, such single-sex spaces imprint Brandon Teena’s body as transgender and concurrently discipline it as such. In the terms of Derrida’s text, the space of the prison returns to the “commencement”²⁰ of Brandon Teena’s life and identification, seeking an “original” gender upon which the “command[s]”²¹ of law can be exercised. When Brandon Teena was released from prison and murdered shortly thereafter, we see—in a fashion at least as literal as Foucault’s²²—that a panopticon creates, as well as holds, its outlaws. This is one sense in which buildings are archives: they can put an anonymous face on our culture’s tendency to cast back through whatever means possible to origins, including supposed origins of gender.

However, buildings are not merely architectural archives of the gender norms of the day. They also come to function as very particular kinds of

affective archives.²³ That is, while such features as dark hallways or unmonitored washrooms are only risky because of the violence in our gender-normative culture, the way in which fear manifests itself in the body in those moments is often not in terms of these seemingly neutral architectural features; that is, we are accustomed to thinking that we are afraid of people and not of built features. However, because fear and humiliation are surely much more complicated affects than simple responses to bodily danger or insult, it is often unavoidable to fear (or, conversely, desire) certain built structures themselves. In this way, buildings can become virtual archives of affect, where people's shared memories and affective experiences of particular architectural features define a site as much as anything else. All of this is to say that moving through certain spaces makes us tap into our own archives of emotional experience. A transgender person who flushes with anger and indignity when passing by a certain washroom that once proved problematic (or, conversely, with excitement by one that proved interesting) can relate. This architectural archiving of affect is a second way in which we can think about buildings as producing affective archives for their users.

In light of these two definitions of architecture-as-archive, the prescriptive—or hopeful—element of this article is to suggest that this reconceptualization of memory might help us disrupt our taken-for-granted notions about the timelessness or transhistoricity of gender and architecture. Following the two arguments made below about the risks of thinking about bodies as stable architecture or homes, this article ends by suggesting that we replace our figure of the *body-as-home* with one of *body-as-archive*. Though this figure of the archive is far from a utopian one (with its attendant senses of control and access),²⁴ might its openness—its ability to change, move, and be constantly erased and supplemented—offer a more interesting architectonic of the body?²⁵

I. A LITTLE OF COLUMN A, A LITTLE OF COLUMN B

While finding an origin for transgender in architectural practice would be quite beside the point in any analysis seeking to think critically about the process of archiving, Vitruvius's *De Architectura* (the earliest surviving treatise of Roman architecture) shows that the mutually constitutive relationship of gender and architecture is neither new nor simple.²⁶ Vitruvius's text reveals that transgender was present as a threatening supplement even at this moment of supposed architectural Genesis.²⁷ In his germinal and oft-studied text,²⁸ Vitruvius vividly describes the way in which the principles of building were based on the supposed proportion and symmetry of the human body. Like our own myth of Genesis, Vitruvius's origin story begins with two forms: the male and the female. In the following description, it is obvious that, for Vitruvius, architectural norms begin with gender norms.

Without symmetry and proportion there can be no principles in the design of any temple; that is, if there is no precise relation between its members, as in the case of those of a well-shaped man. For the human body is so designed by nature that the face, from the chin to the top of the forehead and the lowest roots of the hair, is a tenth part of the whole height; the open hand from the wrist to the tip of the middle finger is just the same.²⁹

Vitruvius delineates this system of man's proportions at great length in *De Architectura*, codifying everything from the proper place of a man's navel to the relationship that the length of one's foot ought to have to the breadth of one's breast.³⁰ Despite all of this detail, in 1490³¹ Leonardo da Vinci sketched out the bodily proportions supposed by Vitruvius and it became clear—at least to discerning eyes—that Vitruvius' perfect man was an impossibility. As can be seen in da Vinci's sketch, it is not geometrically feasible that the man's navel marks the center of both a circle and the square.³² In true deconstructive fashion,³³ the body's center is already elsewhere even in this definitive structure of the human body. This

revelation, along with Vitruvian Man's curiously in-turned and unstable right foot (and perhaps even his somewhat feminine coif) shows that even the ideal body that was to serve as the model for Roman and Greek architecture resisted systematization *and* representation. If transgender has something to do with how bodies break out of given molds, and how gender is never exhausted by two spaces, then this failure is hopeful. In other words, Vitruvius's anxious attempt to systematize the human body is precisely what makes it exceed any such perfectly archival project.

More significantly, one of the most legendary parts of Vitruvius's work speaks directly to the relationship between gender and building practices. When he famously defines the three orders of Roman columns³⁴—Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian—Vitruvius describes their respective origins in relation to human forms. In telling fashion, he begins by relating the genealogy of the two original columns:

Wishing to set up columns . . . but not having rules for their symmetry, and being in search of some way by which they could render them fit to bear a load and also of a satisfactory beauty of appearance, they measured the imprint of a man's foot and compared this with his height. On finding that, in a man, the foot was one-sixth of the height, they applied the same principle to the column, and reared the shaft, including the capital, to a height six times its thickness at the base. Thus, the Doric column, as used in buildings, began to exhibit the proportions, strength, and beauty of the body of a man. Likewise, afterwards, when they desired to construct a temple to Diana as a new style of beauty, they translated these footprints into terms characteristic of the slenderness of women, and thus, first made a column the thickness of which was only one-eighth of its height, so that it might have a taller (that is, slenderer!) look. At the foot, they substituted the base in place of a shoe; in the capital, they placed the volutes, hanging down at the right like curly ringlets, and ornamented its front with cymatia and festoons of fruit arranged in place of hair; moreover, they brought the flutes down the whole shaft, falling like the folds in the robes worn by matrons. Thus, in the invention of the two different kinds of columns, they borrowed manly

beauty, naked and unadorned, for the one, and for the other delicacy, adornment, and proportions characteristic of women.³⁵

Even thousands of years ago, then, the norms of slenderness were writ large upon women's presence in the public sphere in all too concrete ways.³⁶ This idea sheds new light on the following claim made by Mark Wigley, a gender-savvy architectural theorist and Dean of the Graduate School of Architecture, Preservation, and Planning at Columbia. As he puts it in his intriguing history of closets and domestic privacy, "[A]rchitecture literally clothes the body public. . . . But architecture does not follow or resemble clothing. On the contrary, clothing follows architecture."³⁷ If clothing is modeled after architecture's sheltering of the body, but Ionic columns are modeled after the robes of matrons, transgender is not exclusively a matter of bodies and clothes as we might think; rather, architecture already intervenes in our genders, if only because—as Wigley suggests—our ways of wearing clothing are under the constant influence of architectural fashion.³⁸

Vitruvius speaks more directly to our concerns when he describes the creation of the third—and still most popular³⁹—form of Roman column: the Corinthian.⁴⁰ Immediately, we get a sense that this third form is born of a queer hybrid of the male Doric column and the female Ionic column.

[T]he Corinthian order never had any scheme peculiar to itself for its cornices or other ornaments, but may have mutules in the coronae and guttae on the architraves according to the triglyph system of the Doric style, or, according to Ionic practices, it may be arranged with a frieze adorned with sculptures and accompanied with dentils and coronae. . . . Thus a third architectural order, distinguished by its capital, was produced out of the two other orders.⁴¹

As a transgender amalgam of the male and female architectural forms, this third column is, as the excerpt above indicates, neither male nor female and neither Doric nor Ionic. With regard to both gender and architectural order, the Corinthian is described by Vitruvius as a hybrid. Unlike the

unvarying proportions and rules of symmetry required of Doric and Ionic columns, the Corinthian style is decidedly volatile, fashioned by varying combinations of the male and female.⁴² In a description that might resonate with Judith Butler,⁴³ this third order “never had any scheme peculiar to itself,” but rather, is a copy of which there is no true original. Indeed, offering an alternative to the former two orders and by making manifest the derivative process of each column’s creation, the Corinthian columns might serve as a reminder that even the forms we regard as originals are actually derivative.⁴⁴ Although Vitruvius goes on to add that the Corinthian columns imitated the “slenderness of a maiden,”⁴⁵ even this description makes clear what kind of “female” body is at stake here: a body that is in progress, a body exhibiting a changing (rather than static) sexuality, an immature body whose march toward reproductive adulthood has been halted, or a body that is immortalized in the sexually liminal space of puberty. Notwithstanding Vitruvius’s reliance on such norms, his tale of the maiden after whom this third order was designed offers a more radical story.

A freeborn maiden of Corinth, just of marriageable age, was attacked by an illness and passed away. After her burial, her nurse, collecting a few little things which used to give the girl pleasure when she was alive, put them in a basket, carried it to the tomb, and laid it on top thereof, covering it with a roof-tile so that the things might last longer in the open air. This basket happened to be placed just above the root of an acanthus. The acanthus root, pressed down meanwhile though it was by the weight, when springtime came round put forth leaves and stalks in the middle, and the stalks, growing up along the sides of the basket, and pressed out by the corners of the tile through the compulsion of its weight, were forced to bend into volutes at the outer edges. Just then Callimachus . . . passed by this tomb and observed the basket with the tender young leaves growing round it. Delighted with the novel style and form, he built some columns after that pattern.⁴⁶

Therefore, while the male and female forms were designed purely on the basis of mimesis, the Corinthian’s hybrid form derives at once from the

form of the orphaned young maiden *and* from the persistent and distorted pieces of nature that wound round the relics of her death. Where Vitruvius hopes to find two original forms, a third not only confounds this binary but also, with his excessive retelling of its multiple origin stories, deconstructs his own attempt to create a linear and systematic history of gender and columns. As a form that (1) imitates bent plants that push against oppressive weights, and (2) takes what it likes from male and female forms without ever maturing into either, the Corinthian column is to Roman architecture what transgender may symbolize (rightly or wrongly) to hetero-normative culture: an unholy combination of norms, a memorial to the limits of its two ostensibly “original”⁴⁷ forms, and a lesson in beauty and artfulness.

However, irony is just one possible consequence of this reconfiguration of the third architectural order. In an extensive dialogue, prominent French architect Jean Nouvel and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard arrive at this intriguing exclamation: “Let’s change the mode of reproduction for architecture! Let’s invent a sexual reproduction of architecture!”⁴⁸ Although this discussion turns quickly into a brief meditation on “genetically programmed buildings”⁴⁹—via Baudrillard’s customary mourning of non-procreative sexuality⁵⁰—it is an idea that deserves some consideration. In opposition to what we may understand to be Nouvel’s idea of buildings procreating like heterosexual subjects, might we ask instead if buildings are *already* engaged in the reproduction of sexuality? And to complete the cycle, how does sexual difference enable the production of buildings? When we consider precisely which root—the acanthus—wrestled its way around the roof tile to become the model for the Corinthian column, we might even have a literal response to Nouvel’s question of the reproduction of architecture. Many gardening guides confirm what is common knowledge among those who tend to such plants: the acanthus flower “[c]an spread invasively by creeping rootstocks, particularly in loose soils . . . [and is] difficult to eradicate once established since small sections of root left behind can sprout new plants”⁵¹ and it “suffers from a major identity

crisis.”⁵² Thus, the reproduction of the acanthus root (the root that led to the production of the Corinthian column) does *not* often spring from the care of parental hands sprinkling seeds or from a sexual (or even asexual) reproduction of plant seeds or spores. Rather, the reproduction of the invasive and durable acanthus plant is often occasioned by loss, removal, and abandoned roots. In sum, the Corinthian column that we know so well was based not only on a hybrid of male and female forms, but also on a flower that thrives in the face of its own death and abandonment—a flower that itself had to overcome architecture (the nurse’s roof tile) in order to survive. If, then, transgender sensibilities of non-mimetic reproduction and building and creation are at the very root of architecture’s diversity *and* of its deconstruction, we may reply to Nouvel: “the sexual reproduction of architecture” has long been at work, and it is decidedly transgender.

II. GOING HOME AGAIN

The previous section traces the way in which architectural forms (especially those that attempt to institute or archive architectural norms) sometimes involve a concurrent “concretization” of gender conventions. If the article has thus far revealed the way in which built space is based on genders, the following section takes up the reciprocal side of this fraught relationship between gender and architecture. That is, it will show that even our ways of thinking about our genders/bodies are informed by the conventions of certain architectural ideals, specifically the idea that “the home” is a good metaphor for our bodies.

Despite the rather unwittingly queer history of transgender’s relationship to architecture we witnessed in Vitruvius, Jay Prosser is certainly right when he points out the following in his critical analysis of trans autobiographies: “home may prove a powerful organizing trope.”⁵³ Indeed, Prosser shows that a dominant theme in many trans autobiographies (from Raymond Thompson⁵⁴ to Mario Martino⁵⁵ to Jan Morris⁵⁶) is the desire to be “at home in one’s skin.”⁵⁷ This home-like feeling is achieved in these

biographies by, as Prosser suggests, finally “feeling one *owns*”⁵⁸ his or her body. Ownership is precisely the word here: everyday trans narratives often configure the completion of medicalized transition⁵⁹ as both the climax of one’s life narrative and also as a process of “coming home to the self through body.”⁶⁰ Considering the very limited set of acceptable narratives of body transformation available in our culture, no person or group should be blamed for connecting to one or another of these emotional narratives. At current, it is difficult to imagine any other climactic narrative moment of trans-embodiment other than transition, especially insofar, as Prosser suggests, “the point of every narrative is, after all, to return home.”⁶¹ He argues that a pre-operative transsexual’s sense of not feeling “at home in one’s skin” is entirely valid and unsurprising.⁶² He validates this common transsexual narrative of living in the “wrong body” when he suggests that a transsexual’s sense of self is no banal version of Cartesianism but is already thoroughly material.⁶³ The transsexual ego is, in Freudian parlance, “a mental projection of the surface of the body.”⁶⁴ In this light, Prosser reminds us that changes in skin or surface are truly substantive, insofar as skin is psychosomatic—both a bearer and producer of psychic symptoms.⁶⁵

Feeling at home in one’s body is surely, then, an urgent need that few, if any, would deny. However, might the forcefulness of this imperative to feel at home in one’s body also derive from the limited and limiting ideas our culture holds about the very idea of *homes*? To what extent is the “home” of trans-embodiment a capitalist, middle-class, and heteronormative home? Is it the very kind of owned home from which so many trans people have been evicted, in which so many have been abused, and within which so many have barricaded themselves? Indeed, the houses and the homes we create within them are not necessarily benign. For those who suffer domestic abuse, those who are not yet of age, those whose homeless milieu underlines the classist privatization of sexuality, or those whose homes represent the impossibility of a satisfying public life, this point is obvious. In addition, the very impetus for the building of homes reflects a certain

(potentially unqueer or even unfeminist) orientation toward gender. Once again, Wigley makes an assertive case for the idea that architecture and gender norms are mutually constitutive.

Marriage is the reason for building a house. The house appears to make a space for the institution. But marriage is already spatial. It cannot be thought about outside the house that is its condition of possibility before its space. The word *Oikos*⁶⁶ refers to the identity *between* the physical building and the family it houses. . . . The physical house is the possibility of the patriarchal order that appears to be applied to it. . . . The virtuous woman becomes woman-plus-house or, rather, woman-as-housed, such that her virtue cannot be separated from the physical space.⁶⁷

In light of this problematic history of the house, much is at stake in one's affective experience of returning (or wanting to return) home to one's self through transition. Because the transsexual project, as Prosser conceives of it, is oriented toward the fulfillment of a single goal, its narratives reach their climax at the cost of neatly wrapping up the lifelong process of living and continually becoming a gendered body. Similarly, insofar as the very idea of a *home* is grounded in the hetero-normative structure of the family, to conceive of the body as a home to be owned entails relying on the very binary system of gender that constrains trans-embodiment in the first instance. The capitalistic sense of ownership implied in this model is also problematic, insofar as this imperative to own objects permanently is a part of what generates the hetero-normative mythology that every human body is naturally stable and fixed. In sum, trans people and our narratives seem (to many minds) to return home—reach their respective climaxes—at the cost of accepting the system of binary gender and discourses of bodily ownership and stasis that already devalue transgender and transsexuality.

Prosser recognizes a paradox between what he calls the transsexual narrative of “going home” and the queer narrative of “resisting domestication.”⁶⁸ As an alternative, he gestures toward specifically transgender narratives. Books such as Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*,

Prosser argues, “contain important ambivalences about home and territory, belonging, and political affiliation.”⁶⁹ Prosser regards transgender—as opposed to specifically transition-oriented transsexuality—as a mode of embodiment that is itself ambivalent about gender; Prosser suggests this ambivalence is also apparent in the main character’s fraught relationship with her home. In this sense, we could say that Jess’s ambivalence about “housing” her body in a particular gender category is echoed in a similar refusal to conform or belong in any simple way to a single place (her small hometown, New York City, and so on). All in all, Prosser offers a rather neat systemization: transsexuals go home vis-à-vis the self, queers are anti-domestic, and transgender people offer the crucial third way. This formulation is keen and alluring, and the way in which it credits transgender people with the most complicated version of home seems a unique one in Prosser’s otherwise specifically transsexuality-focused text.

More interestingly, this valorization of ambivalence about ownership (for Prosser, the body *as* a matter of ownership) is one shared by many critical thinkers of social class. For instance, in his “Refuge for the Homeless,” Theodor Adorno advocates just such an indifferent orientation to one’s property, though he writes about ownership in a much more literal sense.

The best mode of conduct . . . still seems an uncommitted, suspended one: to lead a private life, as far as the social order and one’s own needs will tolerate nothing else, but not to attach weight to it. . . . It is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home. This gives some indication of the difficult relationship in which the individual now stands to his property, as long as he still possesses anything at all. The trick is to keep in view, and to express, the fact that private property no longer belongs to one.⁷⁰

These versions of ambivalence are, however, strikingly different from the one that Prosser champions. While Prosser sees in Leslie Feinberg’s character, Jess Goldberg, a protagonist who journeys from home to home, the transient homes that Jess crafts are rather regular. As she⁷¹ says of her first apartment in New York City, “Gradually I bought furniture . . . I went

crazy buying sheets at Macy's. As my house came together, I suddenly wanted things that made my body feel good . . . And then one day I looked around at my apartment and realized I'd made a home."⁷²

Adorno advocates something different: acknowledging the inescapable unhomeliness of every home, resigning oneself to the conditions of ownership in late capitalism,⁷³ rather than capitulating to them and refusing to perpetuate the illusion that renters and even owners actually possess anything at all. Of course, Jess's position in her culture is radically different from Adorno's: a private space, limited though it may be, might be Jess's only chance for a home-like experience of her body. Furthermore, Jess's life of passing in New York City itself confuses the realms of public and private on which Adorno relies; passing⁷⁴ creates for Jess her own dangerous private(s), even if discovery of the would-be private sphere of her body consistently governs every experience she has of publicity.

Feinberg's latest novel, *Drag King Dreams*, offers a more intensely ambivalent series of transgender homes, this time of protagonist Max Rabinowitz. Max could be regarded as the older and more resigned version of the young Jess Goldberg, especially in hir relationship to hir home. Having substituted Jess's shopping spree at Macy's for hir own murals and painted Jewish verse, Max must explain to hir friend Heshie the origin of hir apartment's painted walls:

"What will you do when all the walls are full?" he asks. I shrug.
"I usually have to move before that happens. . . . Suddenly all the things about my apartment that make it my home, that feel so familiar, seem bizarre and strange, even to me."⁷⁵

By anticipating hir inevitable departure, even as ze creates hir home, (and by allowing others to enter hir space) Max knows that "home" is only temporary. In the sense that Max does not emotionally invest in hir home as a permanent place of comfort, ze is less at home in hir home than Jess seems to be. When Jess's apartment building burns down in *Stone Butch Blues*, she is crushed; when Max's apartment is robbed and hir Jewish art

defaced with swastikas and words like “faggot,”⁷⁶ ze leaves hir apartment that night without hir belongings and never returns (which is not to say ze was not at all affected). Still, Feinberg’s increasingly Adornian version of the ambivalent trans home complicates what Prosser calls Feinberg’s earlier “crucial irony about home: although home is a place we make up, recognizing its fictionality only fuels its mythic lure.”⁷⁷ As Max Rabinowitz and Adorno both suggest, “recognizing [the] fictionality” of one’s home does indeed change the way one lives within it.

Neither character, of course, offers a model for life. However, there is a crucial and instructive difference between them: an ambivalence towards ownership and homey comfort in Max’s case compared to a spirited hope for comfort in Jess’s case. Whereas many of us can’t help but shuttle between these two positions, these companion texts can show us some of the stakes and possible outcomes of variously associating comfort with homes and with gender “homes.” These can be hopeful avenues of thought for those who desire new ways to think about pre-operative trans bodies as something other than unhomely spaces and for people of all kinds who believe that transsexuality is not merely the unradical resolution (or uncritical happy ending) of a tale of coming home.

But how *can* we conceptualize transition, then, if not as Prosser’s “homesick”⁷⁸ resolution of the transsexual plot? If we continue to entertain Adorno’s sense of home, we might consider one’s “transition” as yet another move in a lifetime of stopovers. To follow Nouvel’s sense that “[t]he future of architecture will not be architectural”⁷⁹ perhaps this means that the future of trans-embodiment will not be transsexual—that is, not exclusively. The future of trans-embodiment may, instead, come to make affective demands on everyone in new ways, and trans and queer activists and thinkers are well-equipped to lead the charge into new conceptions of coalition practices and politics. Although Adorno’s clearly non-transgender perspective might be seen as an indication of his uselessness here, it is precisely that perspective that allows for just such a crucial corrective to

Prosser: *nobody*—at least in late capitalism—is at home in their homes, their bodies, or elsewhere. *This* is what is meant by the idea that the future of trans-embodiment might make affective demands on or invitations to those who seem not to belong to “trans.” The very material tribulations of many normatively gendered people—fear of harassment and rape, poverty, and perhaps especially the daily and dissimulated tasks of maintaining one’s body—all evince this idea. However, Prosser seems to believe that normatively gendered people have *succeeded* in becoming properly gendered citizens when they psychically invest in their bodies, while “if [transsexuals] feel confined in the wrong body on a fundamental level, it must be said that [transsexuals] fail to own [their] own skin, to accept it as [their] own.”⁸⁰ A reciprocal reading of this question of “own[ing] skin” might hold that trans people are successful in shattering the illusion that *any* of us can ever simply be at home in our bodies, even as normatively gendered people work hard to maintain this illusion.

If we are committed not only to vindicating transsexual experience (an important goal, which Prosser meets successfully), but also to establishing a political ethics of trans-embodiment that involves all bodies, then this might be one way to start. Perhaps Prosser’s image of the refusal (he might prefer the word *inability*) to “own” the body is not only indicative of a larger condition of culture, but might also be regarded as a model for relating to the body. Cressida Heyes critiques precisely this ownership-oriented model of relating to our bodies. As she describes it, our current model of the body-crafting or “somatic individual relies on sovereign power—on an understanding of the self as monarch, residing within the palace of the body, guiding its renovation so that its unique status will be made manifest.”⁸¹ Heyes refuses the idea that anyone exercises “sovereign power” in a world where gender (for instance) is an intersubjective production that occurs through relationships and the limited choices made available in our culture. Her rhetoric also points out that a very controlling idea of ownership guides the current models available for thinking of self-crafting

our bodies. If, as Marxist thinkers like Adorno and Feinberg might suggest, one does not simply “own” one’s body—if the body is never an instrument or product of our complete and independent agency—then the body demands a different kind of care, a self-reflexive fashioning and continuous crafting rather than a static having and holding. For such a nomadic sense of our bodily homes, a generally applicable ethics of sexually charged body morphology could very well offer our culture a useful model.

CONCLUSIONS: NOSTALGIA & ARCHIVES

Yet, for all of these attempts at disrupting our desire to return to safe homes, it is unmistakable that whatsoever our cultural conditions, feeling safe and protected is not only a positive feeling, but also an urgent need. If, thus far, this article has brought the more radical history of transgender architecture to bear on our current conceptions of “home” as a metaphor, perhaps the complementary project that remains is to think differently about the actual design of these homes. Does built space necessarily wield the incomparable power of nostalgia with which we imbue our homes? If bodies and buildings are mutually constitutive, surely we are not subject to the ambivalent attraction of our homes without concurrently affecting our spaces. Jennifer Bloomer agrees, as she suggests that a trans person’s supposed homesickness must be echoed by architecture’s own body-sickness.

Architecture, “the Mother of the Arts,” is, after all . . . not an object-art, but an object-longing art. And architectural drawings, compositions of lines suggesting form, can be construed as the longing marks of architecture . . . [What is] the place of nostalgia, homesickness, the longing for home, in contemporary Western architecture . . . [?] In its subjugation of matter by form, the modern concept of design necessarily is dominated by a nostalgia for matter, fetishization of an imagined absence . . . For a nexus of lines, whether drawn, virtual, simulated, or troped, is the mark of a longed-for object. Form sitting on the lid of its other, matter.⁸²

Baudrillard concurs by suggesting that “architecture is a mixture of nostalgia and extreme anticipation,”⁸³ while Prosser argues that transsexuals exercise the unique capacity to be nostalgic for bodies that were never theirs. If, as Bloomer suggests, architectural design longs for embodiment, and if, as Prosser suggests, bodies long for homes, then our nostalgia for bodily homes is no simple matter. These different forms of nostalgia are hopelessly intertwined. In fact, to refute Bloomer’s final statement above, both nostalgias confound the distinction between pure form and matter by imbuing form with a material existence and affective power; transsexuals, in Prosser’s estimation, are affectively nostalgic for body parts they never had, and architects sketch physical plans for matter that does not yet exist. Architecture’s appeal to gendered embodiment and trans-embodiment’s supposed desire for homeliness, then, are not simply converse sides of a binary relationship in which one represents form while the other represents matter. They both need and desire each other.

Throughout this analysis, the concept of the ever-dynamic and never-complete archive has remained more than an undercurrent. Vitruvius’s own compulsion to document the folklore of architecture is its own archive, one to which we returned in order to reopen our conceptions of transgender’s relation to built space, and one whose coherence and linear narrative path is disrupted by the non-mimetic and multi-originated Corinthian—“transgender”—column. In response to Prosser, I suggest that instead of conceiving of transsexuality as a journey home, we might think of our practices of the body as a series of stopovers that are, nonetheless, serious and equally oriented toward finding a self through the body. In other words, our bodies could be lived as archives rather than as homes. Transgender and transsexual bodies not only actively archive—through/with bodies—the possibility of moving beyond binary gender, but also unwittingly archive the violence that our culture perpetuates on those who attempt to do so. But what is useful about configuring trans people as archivists of culture? Derrida gestures toward an answer. On one hand, his concept of “archive

fever” describes Prosser’s version of transsexuality: a “compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.”⁸⁴ On the other hand, having archive fever “is [also] to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there’s too much of it, right where something in it anarchives [or, *erases*] itself.”⁸⁵ This second sense of archive fever acknowledges that, try as we might, we will never get home—no surgery or bodily modification will return us to our “commencement,”⁸⁶ or to a final resting place of selfhood. Crucially, however, it is precisely this impossibility that fuels one’s insatiable desire to pursue the archive nonetheless. This active, impassioned, and restless orientation to one’s own body-archive cures the homesickness that Prosser attributes solely to transsexuals, suggesting that we all may be—or could be—infected with a more radical affliction than that offered by the coherent trans subject of identity politics: a high-grade gender fever.

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² See Judith Halberstam, *The Brandon Archive*, in *IN A QUEER TIME AND PLACE: TRANSGENDER BODIES, SUBCULTURAL LIVES* (2005).

³ For Hollywood’s dramatization of this jail scene, see *BOYS DON’T CRY* (Fox Searchlight Pictures 1999). For a perspective of the post-jail “outing” that is written with a clearer mandate for transgender rights, see Leslie Feinberg’s comments in Ingrid Ricks, *Heartland Homicide*, *THE ADVOCATE*, Mar. 8, 1994, at 28.

⁴ See *STUD: ARCHITECTURES OF MASCULINITY* 11–15 (1996) [hereinafter *STUD*].

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ For examples of the convention of representing modernist architecture as the endpoint of architectural history (as beyond all architectural history and fashion), see LE CORBUSIER, *TOWARDS A NEW ARCHITECTURE* (Frederick Etchells trans., 1927) and LE CORBUSIER, *THE DECORATIVE ART OF TODAY* (James Dunnett trans., MIT Press 1987) (1925). For a critical analysis of this disavowal of historicity, see MARK WIGLEY, *WHITE WALLS, DESIGNER DRESSES: THE FASHIONING OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE* xxv (1996).

⁷ For an excellent account of the way in which architecture has been coded as an ultimate male activity, see STUD, *supra* note 4, at 11.

⁸ VITRUVIUS, *THE TEN BOOKS ON ARCHITECTURE* (Morris Hickey Morgan trans., Dover Publications 1960) (1914).

⁹ JAY PROSSER, *SECOND SKINS: THE BODY NARRATIVES OF TRANSSEXUALITY* 73 (1998).

¹⁰ *See generally* THEODOR ADORNO, *MINIMA MORALIA: REFLECTIONS ON A DAMAGED LIFE* (E.F.N. Jephcott trans., 2005).

¹¹ *See generally* LESLIE FEINBERG, *STONE BUTCH BLUES: A NOVEL* (1993) [hereinafter *STONE BUTCH BLUES*]; LESLIE FEINBERG, *DRAG KING DREAMS* (2006).

¹² Adorno (1903–1969) was born in Germany and was a member of the Frankfurt School. He wrote on a great number of topics (film, the Holocaust, music, capitalism, and so on), often with the hope that social change could be achieved through a reconsideration of the role of capitalist production in our culture. Though Leslie Feinberg writes about transgender in the United States, the similarities in each thinker’s utopic hopes for social change is striking: both see capitalist production as central to the many class-based inequalities witnessed in twentieth-century culture (and still today). *See generally* STEFAN MÜLLER-DOOHM, *ADORNO: A BIOGRAPHY* (2005). For Feinberg’s most explicitly Marxist analysis of transgender, see her interesting—if dated—conception of pre-capitalist transgender described in Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*, in *THE TRANSGENDER STUDIES READER* 205 (Susan Stryker et al. eds., 2006).

¹³ *STONE BUTCH BLUES*, *supra* note 11, at 220 (asserting the following: “[T]he motor force of capitalism still drives prejudice and inequity as a vehicle for division.”).

¹⁴ For reasons that will become clear, the boundary between transsexuality and transgender becomes necessarily permeable in this argument. In general, however, I use ‘transsexual’ to denote one who seeks hormonal and surgical treatment to change sex, though at times it is obvious that the term ‘transgender’ or ‘trans-embodiment’ are meant as umbrella terms for gender-bending practices.

¹⁵ *See* JACQUES DERRIDA, *ARCHIVE FEVER: A FREUDIAN IMPRESSION* (Eric Prenowitz trans., Univ. of Chicago Press 1996) (1995).

¹⁶ *Id.* at 1.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 19.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.* at 2.

²⁰ *Id.* at 1.

²¹ *Id.*

²² See generally MICHEL FOUCAULT, *DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH: THE BIRTH OF THE PRISON* (Alan Sheridan trans., Gallimard 1977) (1975) (analyzing Jeremy Bentham's "panopticon" prison design, which uses architecture and design to generate self-surveillance in prisons. Foucault suggests that this design (based on the unequal "seeing/being seen dyad" wherein prisoners cannot tell if they are being watched) creates a visual economy that accomplishes discipline and creates "docile bodies" far more effectively than the more obviously cruel public admonishments (such as executions and torture) that characterized pre-nineteenth-century France. Brandon Teena's well-known case emphasizes the consequences of architectural design for gender in particular.

²³ For more on the specifically emotional investments in, and functions of, the archive as both a literal place and as a figure for memory, see ANN CVETKOVICH, *AN ARCHIVE OF FEELINGS: TRAUMA, SEXUALITY, AND LESBIAN PUBLIC CULTURES* (2003).

²⁴ See DERRIDA, *supra* note 15, at 2. Here, Derrida introduces the way in which "superior magistrates" originally "commanded" archives and controlled the interpretation of their materials. Significantly for the argument that follows, Derrida calls this mode of control a kind of "house arrest."

²⁵ While the figure of the archive is clearly meant in this article as a general guiding concept, Derrida's very nuanced text deserves a fuller read. For sophisticated analyses of Derrida's theory of the archive, see Michael J. O'Driscoll, *Derrida, Foucault, and the Archiviolithics of History*, in *AFTER POSTSTRUCTURALISM: WRITING THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF THEORY* 284 (Tilottama Rajan & Michael J. O'Driscoll eds., 2001); JONATHAN BOULTER, *MELANCHOLY AND THE ARCHIVE: TRAUMA, HISTORY, AND MEMORY IN THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL* (forthcoming).

²⁶ For a thorough introduction to the history of architecture's implicit and explicit gender politics, see *GENDER SPACE ARCHITECTURE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INTRODUCTION* (Iain Borden et al. eds., 2000).

²⁷ VITRUVIUS, *supra* note 8, at 72.

²⁸ For an excellent analysis of Vitruvius's many statements about bodies and proportions, see INDRA KAGIS MCEWEN, *VITRUVIUS: WRITING THE BODY OF ARCHITECTURE* (2004).

²⁹ VITRUVIUS, *supra* note 8, at 72.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ For a reproduction of this sketch, now recognized as the standard "Vitruvian Man," see MCEWEN, *supra* note 28, at 158–59.

³² VITRUVIUS, *supra* note 8, at 72.

³³ See JACQUES DERRIDA, *WRITING AND DIFFERENCE* 352–54 (2001). Derrida uses the spatial figure of "the center" to explain that no structure (including ones that present themselves as coherent and airtight) can define itself as such without reference to something outside of itself. To simplify, it is because of this impossible interiority of structure that Derrida suggests "that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it . . . the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center." (emphasis added). Insofar as Vitruvius is attempting to craft just such an airtight structure (or "totality"), it is all too perfect that the center of his theoretical body is not actually at the centre of the sketch, where we intended it. In a sense, then, da Vinci's sketch helps us quite literally deconstruct Vitruvius's implied bodily norms.

³⁴ VITRUVIUS, *supra* note 8, at 102–13.

³⁵ *Id.* at 103–04.

³⁶ For an analysis of the ways in which femininity and slenderness are thought to be mutually constitutive in contemporary Western society, see SUSAN BORDO, *UNBEARABLE WEIGHT: FEMINISM, WESTERN CULTURE, AND THE BODY* (1993).

³⁷ WIGLEY, *supra* note 6, at 368.

³⁸ For Wigley, just dressing ourselves in/as various genders is an architectural act. For his arguments about the often sexist relationship between architecture and fashion (in which supposedly feminine fashion must always be disavowed by supposedly masculine architecture/architects), see WIGLEY, *supra* note 6, at xxv.

³⁹ Corinthian columns are not difficult to find, from the legislature building of one of Canada's most conservative provinces (Alberta) to the U.S. Capitol and the Reichstag.

⁴⁰ VITRUVIUS, *supra* note 8, at 103–05.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 102.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ See JUDITH BUTLER, *GENDER TROUBLE: FEMINISM AND THE SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY* 41 (1990). Here, Butler argues that “gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy.” Vitruvius mirrors this idea by showing that transgender is to “male” and “female” not as copy is to original; rather, the obviously “constructed” hybrid Corinthian column reveals the way in which the male and female (Doric and Ionic) columns are also built on constructed notions of femininity and masculinity.

⁴⁴ See *id.* at 139.

⁴⁵ VITRUVIUS, *supra* note 8, at 104.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ BUTLER, *supra* note 43.

⁴⁸ JEAN BAUDRILLARD & JEAN NOUVEL, *THE SINGULAR OBJECT OF ARCHITECTURE* 54 (Robert Bononno trans., 2002).

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 55.

⁵⁰ For another example of Baudrillard's anxious hetero-normativity, see JEAN BAUDRILLARD, *THE VITAL ILLUSION* 10 (Julia Witwer trans., 2000). As when he writes with Nouvel, here, Baudrillard views technological advances—from cybersex to artificial insemination—as fraught steps towards the body meaning nothing. As he puts it: “We've been sexually liberated, and now we will find ourselves liberated from sex—that is, virtually relieved of the sexual function.” Among other things, we might wonder: if most of us would, at this unlikely juncture, continue having sex, then perhaps Baudrillard's apocalyptic vision might not be so bad?

⁵¹ Missouri Botanical Garden, *Acanthus hungaricus*, <http://www.mobot.org/gardinghelp/plantfinder/plant.asp?code=A960>. (last visited Jan. 24, 2010).

⁵² Plant Delights Nursery, Inc., On-Line Catalog, <http://www.plantdelights.com/Catalog/Current/page1.html> (last visited Jan. 24, 2010).

⁵³ PROSSER, *supra* note 9, at 77.

⁵⁴ See generally RAYMOND THOMPSON & KITTY SEWELL, *WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?: A GIRL'S JOURNEY TO MANHOOD* (1995).

⁵⁵ See generally MARIO MARTINO, *EMERGENCE: A TRANSEXUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (1977).

⁵⁶ See generally JAN MORRIS, *CONUNDRUM* (1974).

⁵⁷ PROSSER, *supra* note 9, at 77.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 7.

⁵⁹ The word “transition” in this article refers to the general process of sex reassignment, during which a person pursues various bodily changes (such as hormonal therapy, vaginoplasty, hysterectomy, phalloplasty, mastectomy, and so on). The common usage of “transition” is merely to refer to somebody commonly regarded as changing their sex. In this article, the word is also meant to describe the very specific theory of gender change that underlies the assumption that this kind of medical transition is the only version of trans-embodiment. While this article does not seek to vilify or champion any kind of person or process of transition, it does question the spatial logic (of ownership, of linear paths to gender change) through which transition is sometimes seen as the only option for trans people.

⁶⁰ PROSSER, *supra* note 9, at 83.

⁶¹ *Id.* at 205.

⁶² *Id.* at 73.

⁶³ *Id.* at 69. As Prosser puts it, “If the goal of transsexual transition is to align the feeling of gendered embodiment with material body, body image . . . clearly already has a material force for transsexuals.”

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 65.

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ For more analysis on the gender-charged figure of the *Oikos* (an ancient Greek word), see Ann Bergren, *The (Re)Marriage of Penelope and Odysseus: Architecture, Gender, Philosophy*, 21 ASSEMBLAGE 6, 21 (Aug. 1993).

⁶⁷ WIGLEY, *supra* note 6, at 336–37.

⁶⁸ PROSSER, *supra* note 9, at 177.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ MÜLLER-DOOHM, *supra* note 12, at 39.

⁷¹ Regarding pronouns, I follow the novels’ own usages: “her” for Jess in *STONE BUTCH BLUES* (though the pronoun and Jess’s gender identity fluctuate) and “hir” for Max in *DRAG KING DREAMS*. “Ze” is a gender-neutral pronoun used by many trans people in order to avoid being limited to (and conceived of) as either one gender or another (as “he” or “she”). “Hir” is the correlative possessive pronoun, which is used by many trans people as an alternative to “her” or “his.” (Instead of “ze” and “hir,” some trans people also use “they” and “their” to refer to themselves. Many use he and she, and sometimes fluctuate between them from time to time and milieu to milieu.)

⁷² *STONE BUTCH BLUES*, *supra* note 11, at 237.

⁷³ For a short history of the meaning and history of the phrase “late capitalism,” see FREDERIC JAMESON, *POST MODERNISM, OR, THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF LATE CAPITALISM* xviii (1991). Here, Jameson offers a number of synonyms that help offer a wider purview of the word: “‘multinational capitalism,’ ‘spectacle or image society,’ ‘media capitalism,’ ‘the world system,’ even ‘postmodern.’” Appropriately enough for the argument at hand, Jameson traces the term back to Adorno: “As far as I can see, the general use of the term *late capitalism* originated with the Frankfurt School; it is everywhere in Adorno and Horkheimer, sometimes varied with their own synonyms (for example, ‘administered society’).” In what follows, Jameson gives a succinct definition

of the early and recent usages of the term. In his estimation, the two features of this early usage of “late capitalism” are “a tendential web of bureaucratic control (in its more nightmarish forms, a Foucault-like grid *avant la letter*)” and “the interpenetration of government and big business (‘state capitalism’) such that Nazism and the New Deal are related systems.” Today, this phrase refers to the way in which this bureaucratization and interpenetration have become so common that we scarcely notice. In Jameson’s words, “as widely used today, the term *late capitalism* has very different overtones from these. No one particularly notices the expansion of the state and bureaucratization any longer: it seems a simple, ‘natural’ fact of life.” In this article, it is precisely the way in which the “expansion” of conditions of ownership have become “natural” ways of relating to our bodies that is at stake.

⁷⁴ “Passing” occurs when a trans person is never (or rarely) interpreted as trans. Such a person is said to be “passing” insofar as they are taken for the gender towards which they are moving through transition (and sometimes without any medical intervention or intention). While for many trans people, passing is of paramount importance, some regard it as yet another way to reduce trans presence and visibility in the public sphere. For a popular take on this question (one that tries to conceptualize the question of passing beyond people who identify as trans proper), see MATTILDA, A.K.A. MATT BERNSTEIN SYCAMORE, *NOBODY PASSES: REJECTING THE RULES OF GENDER AND CONFORMITY* (2006).

⁷⁵ STONE BUTCH BLUES, *supra* note 11, at 120–21.

⁷⁶ *Id.* at 262.

⁷⁷ PROSSER, *supra* note 9, at 177.

⁷⁸ DERRIDA, *supra* note 15, at 91.

⁷⁹ BAUDRILLARD & NOUVEL, *supra* note 48, at 17.

⁸⁰ PROSSER, *supra* note 9, at 73.

⁸¹ CRESSIDA J. HEYES, *SELF-TRANSFORMATIONS: FOUCAULT, ETHICS, AND NORMALIZED BODIES* 6 (2007).

⁸² Jennifer Bloomer, *The Matter of Matter: Longing for Gravity*, in *THE SEX OF ARCHITECTURE* 161, 161–62 (Diana Agrest et al. eds., 1996).

⁸³ BAUDRILLARD & NOUVEL, *supra* note 48, at 15.

⁸⁴ DERRIDA, *supra* note 15, at 91.

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ *Id.*