

PROOF

10

DIY Therapy: Exploring Affective Self-Representations in Trans Video Blogs on YouTube

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I'm really shy, and these videos are easy because right now all I do is talking to a camera, talking with self, which I do in my head anyway, talk to myself [...] I hold back more in real life than on the computer.

(Simon, a 22-year-old Female to Male (FTM), USA, 7 October 2007)

This is a statement from Simon, put forth in a video blog (vlog), recorded in his home. We can barely see Simon because of the low-level light as he speaks straight into the camera with a rather timid look on his face. In this quote Simon suggests that the camera is an integrated part of his *self* – documenting his thoughts and inner dialogue. But the camera also serves as an external interlocutor, a companion you can trust and tell everything. The camera becomes 'the eye that sees and the ear that listens powerfully but without judgement and reprisal' (Renov quoted in Matthews, 2007: 443). Here, the vlog seems to work as a therapeutic tool that enables Simon to locate and release powerful emotional energy in ways that are not possible off-screen.

Transgender (trans) people have been and continue to be invisible and/or sensationalized both within and outside the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) movement. Many trans people have therefore turned to the Internet for self-representation and for a virtual community, enabling the acceptance and support they often fail to receive elsewhere (Gauthier and Chaudoir, 2004, 379–81). Simon's virtual presence and free flow of self-speak is an example of how computer technology has created new possibilities for trans people to challenge their marginalization in traditional print and broadcast media. But, as Roger Hallas has warned, '[b]ehind the promise of cultural visibility' for marginalized

groups, there is always the ‘potential threat that its publicized bodies merely become a confessional spectacle’ (Hallas, 2009: 11). This article takes as its point of departure the widespread claim that contemporary Western media culture is oriented towards confession (Dovey, 2000). Focusing on a selection of trans video bloggers (vloggers), I argue that the users complicate our understanding of the confessional modus by using interconnected practices like (self-)disclosure, coming out and testimony as tools in an ongoing self-representation and community building. My focus is directed towards different ways that affect is created and recreated within the trans vlogs through these practices. I turn to the term affect, albeit its diverse and slippery use,¹ as it offers me a point of reference from where to recognize the self-speak as something more than banal narcissism and/or confessional self-submission. I argue that the vlog becomes an ‘archive of feelings’, a way of coping with stigmatization and trauma that is not supported by dominant culture (Cvetkovich, 2003: 81–2). Not only does the vlog disclose the affective dimensions of oppression but it also creates a different ‘pedagogy of feeling’ (Gould, 2009: 69), encouraging trans people to come to terms with and enjoy their modified body and trans identity. The subtext is however shame, as trans people are ‘straddling of a line between being accepted and being rejected’ (Gould, 2009: 74) and it generates, at least occasionally, ambivalent feelings about oneself and the (heteronormative) society. My reading suggests that the vlog becomes an important tool, alongside other technologies of the self, in constructing, performing and expressing trans identity.

The overall scope of this chapter is to explore the relation between new media and affect. What can Simon’s statement tell us about the interplay between the vlog as a media and affect as a transformative force? Simon’s quote suggests that new media technologies create new possibilities for the visualization and communication of affect. As Mike Featherstone optimistically incites,

[w]e need to consider the ways in which the new media technologies themselves reveal the centrality of affect in the process of perception and also enable viewers to become accustomed to seeing and enjoying a new register of affect previously undetected in the flow of facial and bodily movements.

(Featherstone, 2010: 211)

In line with Featherstone, I suggest through my reading of the trans vlogs that new information technologies offer greater possibilities for these

1 affective intensities to be transmitted and experienced (Featherstone,
2 2010: 210). Such a reading goes against the writing of thinkers like
3 Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard who have all written extensively
4 on the loss of emotional life and the 'waning effect of affect' (Jameson,
5 1991: 10) with the emergence of new electronic technologies. Rather than
6 destroying 'real' emotions and 'real' presence altogether, one might argue
7 that networked information machines 'enable individuals to transmit
8 or move a sensory experience of self-presence "elsewhere" across virtual
9 space' (Hillis, 2009: 2). The Web becomes an ersatz space where one can
10 reach out, touch, and fetishize other individuals (Hillis, 2009: 15–16). In
11 this vein, I will attend to the importance of the trans vlogs as *mediated*
12 affective expressions of disclosure, coming out and testimony. What
13 difference does it make that the 'revelation' of intimate matters is a self-
14 representation offered to a *virtual* viewer – and how does the mediation
15 and the public broadcasting colour the different affective expressions?

17 The trans vloggers

19 The trans vlogs that I am investigating are produced, populated and
20 distributed by young English speaking people between 16 and 35 who
21 openly claim a trans(sexual) identity. The vloggers document and
22 discuss transitioning processes and technologies like hormones and
23 surgery. I perceive these vlogs as operating as something in between a
24 diary, an autobiography, and a vehicle of communication and social
25 connection (Raun, 2010). They are on the one hand committed to the
26 articulation and constitution of (trans) subjectivity but on the other
27 hand they are also vehicles for establishing communicative connec-
28 tions with other like-minded people. Thus, the vloggers continuously
29 talk about and approach YouTube as a (trans) community where one
30 shares and discusses (through written comments and video responses)
31 psychosocial issues related to being trans.

32 This chapter features some of the American vloggers that comprise
33 case studies in my Ph.D. research. Taking into account that some of the
34 vloggers may feel personally and emotionally exposed (though YouTube
35 is a public forum), I have chosen to anonymize the vloggers.

37 Challenging confession

39 Confession, disclosure, coming out and testimony are often used
40 interchangeably when theorists try to characterize the impulse towards
41 speaking out that proliferated during the 1990s across a variety of

1 media platforms, not least factual TV programming and digital media
 2 (see Jon Dovey's elaboration in Dovey, 2000: 103–32). However, the
 3 term confession is predominant. Many media theorists draw on Michel
 4 Foucault's concept of confession, introduced in *The History of Sexuality*,
 5 supporting his claim that 'Western man has become a confessing
 6 animal' (Foucault, 1978: 59).

7 While critics have lamented the ways in which the private perme-
 8 ates the public sphere in the so-called confessional culture (Matthews,
 9 2007: 435), feminism, queer theory and transgender studies have con-
 10 tributed extensively to 'a reconsideration of conventional distinctions
 11 between political and emotional life as well as between political and
 12 therapeutic cultures' (Cvetkovich, 2003: 10). While fighting for political
 13 recognition of what has been historically confined to the private sphere,
 14 queer theorists such as Lauren Berlant have also warned against how
 15 mass culture works to depoliticize the social by privatizing the public
 16 sphere. According to Berlant, the political public sphere – our arena of
 17 citizenship's enactment – has been displaced in favour of an intimate
 18 public sphere, individualizing experience of social hierarchy and threat-
 19 ening to turn pain into banality (Berlant, 1997).

20 The trans vlogs enter into this contentious intimate public, by pin-
 21 pointing the nation as a space of struggle and specifying the juridical,
 22 social and psychological obstacles with which this particular group of
 23 people is confronted. The vlogs tap into a mainstream Western media
 24 culture obsessed with affective personal stories, but they do so in order
 25 to debate how 'the personal is political' like the second-wave feminists
 26 of the 60s and 70s. In this way, they open up a space for reconsidering
 27 the notion of 'confession'.

28 Foucault's critique of the practice of confession is related to his scepti-
 29 cal approach to the understanding of emotional expressions as telling
 30 the *truth* of the self and therefore it being innately liberating. Even as
 31 it seems impossible to avoid Foucault's notion of confession when dis-
 32 cussing dominant tendencies within contemporary mainstream media
 33 culture, I do not see the trans vlogs as part of a 'confessional culture' in
 34 the Foucauldian sense. Foucault discusses confession in a context where
 35 it is posed to another, who has the power to punish or forgive (Foucault,
 36 1978: 61–2). In these instances confession requires submission to
 37 authority, divine or secular – it implies a measurement against a norm
 38 and confessions to deviations from that norm (Matthews, 2007: 440).

39 In order to access medical and juridical transition, trans people are in
 40 most Western countries bound to go through a practice of confession
 41 described by Foucault, comprising lengthy processes of psychological,

1 psychiatric and physical tests. In the vlogs however, the biographical
2 self-exposure is part of a continuous self-naming and retelling one's
3 story *at one's own request*. I therefore interpret the self-speak and self-
4 representation in these vlogs as a rejection of the assigned role as non-
5 authority and as an objection to the imperative to confess to deviation
6 from a norm. It becomes a resilient collective effort to intervene in
7 and negotiate dominant public discourses on trans identity that often
8 victimize and/or pathologize the trans person.

9
10 **(Self-)disclosure**

11
12 So what's up everyone [...] I haven't really updated anything since
13 I have been on the East Coast – it's been rough – and good [...] com-
14 ing to my past where people don't really see me as me and all the
15 work that I have done for a year and a half [...] just seems to be puff
16 out the door and I am just the same old person to everyone. I am
17 not validly male [...] and I deal with it better, it doesn't hurt as bad
18 but it hurts, a lot [...] And I have also been dealing with this heavy
19 situation, my uncle just passed away [...] I just wanted to update
20 you guys [...] thank you for all your support, I really appreciate it
21 all, and you guys mean a lot to me, and I have really been taking all
22 the nice comments and things you leave to heart and it's just nice to
23 know [...] that just me expressing myself and video logging and talk-
24 ing about my experience maybe help someone, open up a few eyes
25 or something [...] Let me know how you are doing.

26 (James, a 26-year-old FTM, USA, 17 August 2010)

27
28 James is sliding into the picture on a rolling office chair, which sets the
29 tone for a slightly humoristic vlog. But as he places himself in front of
30 the camera and starts talking with a rather agonized look on his face,
31 it becomes clear that the vlog is far from light-hearted. He is in a hotel
32 room, preparing himself for his uncle's funeral and meeting his family.
33 Towards the end, he directly addresses the viewers – 'you guys' – while
34 he gesticulates, waves, and moves the camera around the room for us to
35 see the view from his window, updating us not only on his emotional
36 but also his physical, geographic whereabouts. James shares his painful
37 experience of non-recognition as a man and the ambivalent feelings
38 this creates about both self and family, such as sadness, frustration and
39 despair, thus tapping into feelings of anxiety about social rejection.
40 However, James also expresses gratitude towards the trans YouTube
41 community that supports him.

James's vlog – as trans vlogs in general – is predominantly structured around a 'talking head' speaking straight to camera. The speaking subject, in this case James, seems absorbed in a free flow of talk, dealing with affect and socio-psychological issues. The continuous self-disclosure seems to suggest that you need to reveal in order to heal (Farber, 2006: 9). Thus, the talking modus of the vlog is reminiscent of Sigmund Freud's concept of 'the talking cure', encouraging the individual to say whatever comes to mind in order to break down social constraints (Shattuc, 1997: 113–14). The first step in the recovery process was for Freud the confession of intimate secrets that have initially been rejected or imprisoned in the unconscious mind. But it also had the quality of accusation, of naming the abuse and the abuser, as part of a process of reclaiming and rebuilding selfhood (Dovey, 2000: 111). However, in the Freudian model it is only the analyst who has access to the patient's unconscious and therefore to the ability to 'cure' the patient (Shattuc, 1997: 114).

James's virtual (self-)disclosure is not taking place within a Freudian power distribution, it is rather the result of an active decision to overcome shame, guilt and inhibition (cf. Shattuc, 1997: 116). It is a self-disclosure that works in the service of intimacy and identity, as ways to better connect with others – within the YouTube community – and to better understand the self.

In this sense the trans vlogs share affinities with the move toward self-help in American therapy and the belief in self-actualization and enhancement. The vlogs include techniques from feminist therapy practice, dating back to US radical white feminism of the 1970s: sharing, group discussions and assertiveness training (Shattuc, 1997: 123), enabling the vlogger to get things 'off their chest', to 'process things', while also being a tool in community building. Thus, the vlog has strong similarities with off-screen consciousness-raising groups, where cognitive-oriented discussions go hand in hand with personal, emotional sharing, but here the private (self-)disclosure takes place in a 'public' space – or within a complex 'space' that could be characterized as a *private public*. Furthermore, the vlog seems to simulate face-to-face communication, but it is more than just a substitute for real life relations, as it has 'the capacity to record, capture and slow down the body moving-image' (Featherstone, 2010: 199): it enables an audiovisual affective registration, communication and feedback from an infinite number of intimate strangers.

The 'feedback loops' take many forms. James and the other trans vloggers generously share knowledge of trans-related cultural products

(books, films), juridical questions (how to get a name or gender change) and trans health (how to inject hormones, what kind of surgery to get and where, what psychologists to choose). In this sense the vlogs are important sources of knowledge and the trans vloggers are their own experts. One can describe the vlog as a DIY (Do-It-Yourself) tool that enables a supposedly invert cathartic release ('getting things off your chest') as well as extrovert support and assistance. I am referring to DIY as the activist, collective way of working, criticizing authorities and capitalist logics. And as Jane Shattuc points out: 'Consciousness-raising groups have always been a hybrid: part therapy and part political activism' (Shattuc, 1997: 128). The DIY aspect of the trans vlogs involves sharing experiences, giving and taking advice about how to cope with your life situation as trans. They function as self-help how-to manuals that can make life easier and less expensive for trans people. The trans people are speaking on their own behalf and being experts on their own 'condition' and of various bodily altering techniques and products. Power relations are blurred and positions are fluid and reciprocal. Drawing on, but also rejecting Freud's 'talking cure', the vloggers occupy several subject positions: being the 'patient' talking as well as the 'analyst' listening and interpreting their own or others' recorded words. They use their own as well as each other's videos and comments as therapeutic resources that can help with 'trans processing'. Thus, the vlogs become a kind of communal self-therapizing and self-treatment.

Coming out

You come out once when you decide that you want to transition [...] and then you basically have to continuously come out [...] But for me I am confused because I am not visually transgendered and I am dating a girl and I love her a lot so I don't need to out myself in the dating world [...] But not many people here know and I worry that I am hiding it from them or that if I came out to them that's what they would have thought all along or that they are gonna think about me differently [...] But the fact of the matter is if I don't tell them who I started out as, are they ever gonna find out, are they gonna care, are they gonna think of me differently for no reason at all? I mean, I value others' opinion [...] but at the same time I don't know if I am hiding myself. I think it's an important part of who I am but I don't think that it's an important thing for everybody to know about [...] Part of me really wants to identify as transgender, I wanna be out there [...] represent the community [...] but at the same time,

1 the reason I do this is because I want people to know that I am male,
 2 I don't want them to think that I am somewhere in-between, because
 3 I wanna be fully male and the fact of the matter is that I am not,
 4 but I can be perceived as it.

5 (Wheeler, a 19-year-old FTM, USA, 23 February 2010)

6
 7 Wheeler is vlogging in his room and he smiles at us while he talks about
 8 what it means for him to be transgender. 'Coming out' is a ubiquitous
 9 issue in trans people's lives. As Wheeler states, coming out seems to be
 10 an advantage before you pass, because it enables people to recognize
 11 and approach you as your chosen gender, while it can be a disadvantage
 12 or complicate things when you do pass, because people might not fully
 13 accept you as male if they know that you are 'missing' certain body
 14 parts and/or have a different history.

15 'Coming out' regularly interfaces the image of the closet and origi-
 16 nates in and is strongly tied to the question of homosexuality, as Eve
 17 Kosofsky Sedgwick has remarked. The closet evolves around secrecy
 18 or disclosure, it is 'an excruciating system of double binds' (Sedgwick,
 19 1990: 70) where it becomes almost impossible to decide when one dis-
 20 closes too much or not enough. What Sedgwick points out is the way
 21 the closet evolves around a certain aspect of one's identity that is *not*
 22 *quite visible*, making the metaphor of the closet indicative for homo-
 23 phobia in a way it cannot be for other oppressions. But one could argue
 24 that the question of how discriminatory acts relate to visibility is more
 25 nuanced and complex than Sedgwick's argument seems to suggest. As
 26 Wheeler reminds us, the closet is a vibrant and shaping presence also
 27 for trans people.

28 The oppression works in analogical ways due to the fact that the closet,
 29 as far as I perceive it, is an effect of what Judith Butler calls the hetero-
 30 sexual matrix. The closet is an effect of a naturalized and compulsory
 31 heterosexuality that requires and produces stable and coherent gendered
 32 beings (both in connection to sex/gender and during a lifetime) and het-
 33 erosexuality as the natural sexual desire and practice, thus constituting
 34 everything else as a secret that you have to confess. As Wheeler makes
 35 clear, the question is not just whether to tell or not, but also *how* to tell
 36 and how to escape the most violating aspects of the closet. As Butler puts
 37 it: 'being "out" always depends to some extent on being "in"; it gains its
 38 meaning only within that polarity' (Butler, 1993b: 309).

39 But the epistemology of the closet can also be said to work differ-
 40 ently for a heterosexual-identified trans person than for a homosexual
 41 because it evolves around and is much more directly connected to issues

1 of 'passing'. As Wheeler indicates, the trans person is subjected to a kind
2 of cross-pressure, caught between the anticipation of binary gender
3 coherence (passing) and of self-disclosure (coming out). But passing
4 is to a certain extent to be closeted, and to out oneself is to a certain
5 extent not to pass.

6 Many trans vloggers are mostly 'out' online as it diminishes the psychic
7 and physical risks that being 'out' in their everyday material life would
8 entail. The vlog allows the trans people 'to perform a degree of public
9 visibility frequently denied to them in heteronormatively inflected pub-
10 lic settings' (Hillis, 2009: 209). One might argue that the vlogs become a
11 way for many trans people to publicly stand up for themselves in a 'safe'
12 way. But having a vlog also exacerbates some of the issues around the
13 closet because of the uncertainty of the receivers of these coming outs,
14 thus it is impossible to keep track of who knows what about you. Some
15 vloggers explicitly address their off-screen family, partners and friends
16 (who might also appear in the vlogs), knowing that they are watching
17 while others express great concern about someone from their off-line
18 life following, especially their family. Adam, for instance, is very worried
19 after he has discovered that his family is watching too:

21 It is incredible vulnerable to know that people in my family are
22 watching these videos and then talking about it with other family
23 members [...] it freaks me out because these videos are like a diary or
24 a journal, it is properly the one place that I edited my words and my
25 thoughts the very least. [...] Knowing that you guys [the family] are
26 watching these or have been watching them, my fear of rejection has
27 just been intensified beyond belief.

28 (Adam, a 34-year-old FTM, USA, 25 November 2008)

29
30 Adam's quote shows how YouTube is a contradictory 'space' for many
31 trans vloggers, a private public forum. On the one hand the vlogs are
32 directed towards 'insiders' with whom they can share experiences, feel-
33 ings and get support. But on the other hand, the vlogs are open to a
34 wider public, often as a way either to reach out to trans people-to-be or
35 to 'educate' outsiders about trans issues.

36 In this sense one can describe vlogging as quintessentially 'coming
37 out' to a public of *intimate strangers*: rhetorically by claiming and con-
38 veying a trans identity, and audiovisually by displaying your changing
39 voice and your bodily becoming to the camera. For some of the new
40 trans vloggers these coming out videos seem to serve as a testing ground
41 for first steps in coming out in real life. The vlogs seem to enable the

trans vloggers to enter a more private 'space' (a safe testing ground), while also being a more public 'space' (making oneself vulnerable to judgement and scorn).

The question is what 'coming out' online can entail in a contemporary identity political sense. One could argue that the trans vlogs are offering audiovisual presence ('we are here') and with it a sense of empowerment. Coming out as trans on YouTube can potentially serve an extrovert identity political aim by helping to create awareness about trans identities as well as serving a more introvert identity political aim by eliciting pride and self-acceptance as trans. Erica is one of the first and most persistent trans vloggers on YouTube and she clearly thinks of vlogging as a political act. In one of her early vlogs she encourages other trans people to put themselves 'out there' because as she says:

Imagine a world where people see more to transsexuals than just porn stars or street walkers [...] And if more people were out there being open about who they are and what it's like to be who we are and just basically show the world what it's like. Imagine the impact that could possibly have – imagine the minds that could possibly open.

(Erica, a 26-year-old Male to Female (MTF), USA, 5 March 2007)

Being visible as trans is of great political importance, which Sandy Stone already pinpointed in her famous article from the beginning of the 90s. Here Stone requests for more trans people to break the silence and dare to be visible as trans identities (Stone, 2006, p. 232). The trans vloggers are visible as embodied voices rearticulating 'their lives not as a series of erasures [...] but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body' (Stone, 2006: 232).

Testimonies

The vlogs tie into notions of testimony and trauma. As Susan Stryker describes, gender attribution is a kind of 'cultural rape of all flesh' (Stryker, 2006: 254). Stryker describes the ambivalent feelings she has towards the gendering of her and her female partner's child, reflecting on how the utterance 'It's a girl' recalls all the anguish of her own struggles with gender:

A gendering violence is the founding condition of human subjectivity. Having a gender is the tribal tattoo that makes one's personhood

cognizable. I stood for a moment between the pains of two violations, the mark of gender and the unlivability of its absence. Could I say which one was worse? Or could I say which one I felt could best be survived.

(Stryker, 2006: 253)

Stryker's writing shows with great strength how the 'regulatory norms' of sex and gender exclude and alienate trans people. Recent studies within Transgender Mental Health have also started to recognize 'the chronic societal traumas encountered by transgender individuals' and recommend that the psychiatric treatment should be limited to recovery from these societal traumas instead of regarding transsexualism in itself as a specific disease entity (Tarver, 2002: 104). The writing of Judith Butler also deals with the normalization of sex and gender identities, which could be seen as 'a form of insidious trauma, which is effectively precisely because it often leaves no sign of a problem' (Cvetkovich, 2003: 46). As Butler states, "'Sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms' (Butler, 1993a: 1–2).

Thus, heteronormativity has a certain delusional quality as it installs in the outsiders 'the feeling of belonging to a "secret order" that is sworn to silence' (Laub, 1992: 82). Trans people are 'programmed to disappear', as Sandy Stone states:

The highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase him/herself, to fade into the 'normal' population as soon as possible. Part of this process is known as *constructing a plausible history* – learning to lie effectively about one's past. What is gained is acceptability in society. What is lost is the ability to authentically represent the complexities and ambiguities of lived experience.

(Stone, 2006: 230)

This makes it difficult to generate a counterdiscourse, as Stone points out, because as "'subhumans" [...] contaminated by the "secret order", they have no right to speak up or protest' (Laub, 1992: 82).

Many trans vloggers account being alone with the feelings that there was something wrong with them, since they did not identify with their gender attribution, resulting in secretiveness. The importance of feelings of shame and guilt in trans peoples's lives have also been pointed

1 out by Leah Cahan Schaefer and Connie Christine Wheeler: ‘Since the
 2 emotion [of being differently gendered from what one is assigned] ema-
 3 nates internally, the child can blame no one but itself: “It must be me.
 4 I must have done something bad, or wrong, or sinful to be so different
 5 from others”’ (Schaefer and Wheeler, 2004: 119). It might therefore
 6 be useful to think of shame as a traumatic experience of rejection and
 7 humiliation that is connected to certain identity formations, e.g. trans
 8 identity formations (Sedgwick, 1993, Cvetkovich, 2003). As Sedgwick
 9 argues: ‘at least for certain (“queer”) people, shame is simply the first,
 10 and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that has
 11 its own, powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic
 12 possibilities’ (Sedgwick, 1993: 14). What Sedgwick is implying is that
 13 shame is inevitable for ‘queer’ people in a heteronormative society but
 14 that it can be put to creative performative work and have political effi-
 15 cacy. In a similar vein, anger and rage have been posited as important
 16 responses to shame or being situated as an outcast, and yet these affec-
 17 tive responses can form a basis for self-affirmation, intellectual inquiry
 18 and political action (Bornstein, 2006: 240–1, Stryker, 2006). This is also
 19 suggested by Cvetkovich, who opens up possibilities for understand-
 20 ing ‘traumatic feelings not as a medical problem in search of a cure’
 21 but as experiences that can be used for mobilizing cultures and publics
 22 (Cvetkovich, 2003: 47).

23 I would argue that a wide variety of affects such as shame, anger,
 24 rage have solidified into a visible *counterpublic* with the trans vlogs. The
 25 vlogs can be regarded as polyphonic testimonies as the vloggers describe
 26 the everyday negotiation of stigma and they unpack its psychological
 27 dynamics, explaining how it comes to be internalized by those affected
 28 (cf. Hallas, 2009: 56). The articulation of experiences and emotions –
 29 often of excitement about the bodily changes or frustration about the
 30 discrimination by state institutions or people around them – becomes
 31 a form of embodied knowledge communicated to a supposed emphatic
 32 listener. The audiovisual form of the vlogs adds the important somatic
 33 dimension to bearing witness, creating a strong sense of bodily presence
 34 and expressing a sense of ‘I’m here, I count and so do my feelings’.

35 A special mode of expression has developed in the form of com-
 36 memorating collages. In Wheeler’s vlog commemorating his ‘one year
 37 post-op’ the moving image includes earlier and present footage in order
 38 to bear witness to his bodily becoming. The vlog enters with quiet
 39 but evocative piano music and it accompanies the moving image of
 40 Wheeler, who winces while opening his hooded sweatshirt to show his
 41 newly operated chest. ‘Right, so two days ago I was cut open’ he tells

1 us, while a big bandage, drains and tubes of blood are revealed. He initi-
 2 tiates us into the procedure and the function of the tubes and then a
 3 new video clip appears with a change of scenery and Wheeler showing
 4 off his chest, now only covered by big patches. Yet another clip replaces
 5 the other and as if in fast forward we witness the healing process. In one
 6 clip after another Wheeler poses, turns around and flexes the muscles
 7 in his upper body while bending a little in order to look into the cam-
 8 era and get a glimpse of what we are seeing. The camera functions as
 9 a fellow social actor, implicating the viewer in the transformation and
 10 making him/her a co-witness in the process. Wheeler offers insights
 11 into how the healing progresses, what it feels like at the different stages
 12 and tells us that he is trying out some 'silicon scar strips' that 'a really
 13 awesome guy mailed' to him who used them himself and whose 'results
 14 were incredible'. 'Thank you so much for sending them to me' he
 15 replies, looking into the camera smiling, holding up his sweater for us
 16 to see the strips and the chest. The vlog ends with the actual one-year
 17 update where he shares with us the name of the surgeon and that he is
 18 'definitely happy with the results'. The music gets louder and the vlog
 19 ends with a still-photo collage of close-ups of Wheeler's chest.

20 It seems evident that Wheeler's vlog works as testimony – a testimony
 21 of a body in becoming. The vlog produces a documentation of a body
 22 that materially is taking a more recognizably male shape through hor-
 23 mones and surgery. The vlog also becomes a technology of the self, a
 24 medium through which to produce a (trans)male body by trying out
 25 and incorporating culturally located bodily practices that define gen-
 26 der. But one might ask what purpose a testimonial vlog like this one
 27 serves. Sara Ahmed suggests that '[t]estimonies [...] are not just calls for
 28 recognition; they are also forms of recognition, in and of themselves'
 29 (Ahmed, 2004: 200). Wheeler's vlog is constructed as a source of recog-
 30 nition that inscribes and manifests him as a (trans) man. However, tes-
 31 timonies also have a communal, didactic, and therapeutic purpose – it
 32 is a reciprocal process where you tell your story for the sake of yourself
 33 as well as for the sake of others, thus as a way to change your own life
 34 by affecting the lives of others (Frank, 1995: 17–18). Testimony is a way
 35 to heal oneself as well as others with similar experiences; in Ahmed's
 36 words, '[h]ealing does not cover over, but exposes the wound to others:
 37 the recovery is a form of exposure' (Ahmed, 2004: 200).

38 Scarring and healing play a key role in this vlog as well as in many
 39 other FTM vlogs. On the one hand the vloggers bear witness before the
 40 camera to the 'scars' left in/on the trans person as an effect of misrec-
 41 ognition, stigmatization and discrimination and on the other hand

the vloggers willingly exhibit their physical scars or proudly present their reconfigured chest to the camera. The surgical scar is an umbilical cord that 'indicates a reminder or remainder of gender transition' (Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2007: 63). The flat chest is fetishized as one of the prime markers of masculinity, while the scar is celebrated as the marker of overcoming physical and psychological distress. The scar signals a *rite de passage*, an inscription of masculinity in/on the body.

I would argue that the vlogs present witnesses who are able to speak within both discourses of subjectivity, on the one hand witnessing inside an 'event' (being the victim who 'suffers' and overcomes) and on the other hand witnessing outside it (being a self-educated expert with medical and psychological knowledge of the 'condition') (cf. Hallas, 2009: 101). Like the AIDS activist videos, the vlogs work as tools of resistance through visualizing and addressing shamed bodily processes that do not appear in mainstream media.

Exit: The trans vloggers as an affective counterpublic

I read the trans vlogs as an *archive of feelings*, a repository of feelings experienced by individuals in transition. They are privatized affective responses as well as collective or political ones (Cvetkovich 2003: 10). Along these lines I perceive the trans vloggers as an *affective counterpublic*: a loosely self-organized entity that uses and to a certain extent is enabled by the tools and framework provided by YouTube. They establish themselves through the activity of vlogging about being trans and through the continuous hailing of themselves as a counterpublic.² As Michael Warner points out, a counterpublic is 'defined by their tension with a larger public' and it maintains at some level 'an awareness of its subordinate status' (Warner, 2002: 56). The cultural horizon against which it marks itself 'is not just a general or wider public but a dominant one' (Warner, 2002: 119). The trans vloggers offer an alternative horizon of opinion and exchange that have a critical relation to power. The (self-)disclosing aspect of the vlogs seems to be an effect of but also a response to the heavily pathologized and shamed discourses around trans identity. The vlog becomes a therapeutic tool where you individually as well as collectively try to make sense of what is happening bodily, psychologically and socially when transitioning. Coming out as trans online is a prerequisite for entering what I call an affective counterpublic but it also ties into conflictual modes of publicness. Thus, the vloggers seek to increase the amount and circulation of the 'archives of feelings' but no one is unaware of the risk and conflict involved (cf. Warner, 2002: 120).

The disclosure of the trans vloggers' bodies and intimate feelings suggests that being trans is not something (deeply private) you should be ashamed of or hide. Thus, they need YouTube as a public platform in order for these actions to count in a public way and thus be transformative. In conclusion, I perceive the vlogs as enacting a kind of bio-digital politics through the publicized bodies and onscreen self-disclosure of feelings attached to this body. The public display has the aim of transformation, testifying to overcoming/surviving distress and creating alternative audiovisual trajectories that commemorate trans identities and bodies, which contribute to a reconfiguration of the discursive space within which one can speak of and be visible as trans.

Notes

1. In the anthology *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg offer a much needed introduction to the different and complex vectors of affect studies. They outline no fewer than eight different angles onto affect's theorization. However, the two dominant vectors of affect study in the humanities are Silvan Tomkin's psychobiology of different affects (taken up by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick) and Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze's Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities (taken up by Brian Massumi) (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 5–9).
2. I draw on Michael Warner (instead of Jürgen Habermas and Nancy Fraser) because he develops his notion of public and counterpublic vis-à-vis queer theory and explicitly refers to different queer counterpublics.

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