

THE VERY BEST OF ^{CD}



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THE VERY BEST OF

CHER



Epistemology of the Answering Machine: Cher, Chaz, Mourning, and Some Trans Archives

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“I visited Vito Russo at New York Medical Center,” writes Sarah Schulman of watching her friend die of AIDS. “He lay in bed with a Silence = Death button on his striped pajamas.” When Russo died in 1990, Schulman remembers, “the message on his answering machine said, ‘This is Vito. I’m sorry I’m not here.’”¹ Contra his pin, here Death ≠ Silence, for Russo’s voice on the answering machine remains, but his absence is not full voiced either. The voice on the answering machine both is and is not Russo, both outlives and fails to substitute for its original speaker, and can perhaps best be summed up by Russo’s own paradoxical utterance: “I’m not here.”

In what follows, I offer a case for listening to queer histories through answering machines, a technology itself now relegated to the past tense. The answering machine both surpasses and falls short of the person in whose stead it speaks; this time-lapse quality

Figure 1. Cher’s 1974 and 1975 compilation albums

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allows the answering machine to speak to how identities persist and how they change, and how subjects' suppositions about persistence and change are influenced by media and family histories as well as the exhortations of legal and medical institutions.

A comprehensive discussion of the relationships between queers and communication technologies would overload the wires with an occupationally and historically eclectic party line. Queer writers have long used the telephone as an analogy for the pull of the love object. Here's Henry James, writing to Dudley Jocelyn Perse:

Dear dear Jocelyn. Irresistible to me always any tug on your part at the fine & firm silver cord that stretches between us—as I think I never fail to show you: at any twitch of it by your hand, the machine, within me, enters into vibration & I respond ever so eagerly & amply! (My image sounds rather like the rattle of the telephone under the effect of a “call”; but I mean it well, & I mean it, above all, my dear Jocelyn, affectionately!)²

Others saw how such technologies, with their “queer extensions,” renegotiated the very terms of one's relations to self and other.³ So too for Mark Twain in his riff “The Telephonic Conversation,” which called a one-sided telephone call “the queerest of all the queer things in this world”: “You hear questions asked; you don't hear the answer. You hear invitations given; you hear no thanks in return.”⁴ Queer activists made collective life through communications technologies (“AIDS was first reported as a mysterious ‘gay cancer’ in 1981. That year, six friends founded GMHC, the Gay Men's Health Crisis, with nothing but an answering machine—and got more than a hundred calls the first night,” writes B. Ruby Rich⁵) or saw their lives capriciously foreshortened because of them (“The well-known Brazilian theater director Luiz Antonio Martinez Correa [1950–87] brought a 26-year-old man with curly blonde hair and a variety of tattoos on his muscular body from a beach to his small apartment in Ipanema in December 1987. . . . His guest, perhaps with the help of an accomplice, murdered him for his video-cassette, a telephone answering

machine and some cash,” writes David Higgs⁶). Indeed, even Vito Russo’s aforementioned answering machine had a much longer history than already cited here: Jay Blotcher recalls how he was outed to his mother when she called his workplace when “no one was there, [and] heard the answering machine, with Vito Russo’s voice saying, ‘Hi there, you’ve reached *Our Time*, the new gay and lesbian TV show,’” and connected the dots.⁷

That this interview was conducted by Schulman, who would later recount the afterlife of Russo’s answering machine, should tell us something about the play of memory, attachment, and technology in queer history. Indeed, all these themes—of desire and selfhood and how both are cropped by relationality; of violence and availability to it; how all of the above are inscribed within and by the involvement of technologies—will reappear in this essay’s focal scene, an encounter between the singer Cher and her son Chaz, who both possess a dense set of associations to various queer company. It is one thing for the answering machine to speak beyond the grave, as in Russo’s case; it is quite another thing for it to speak from a place whose status *as* grave is deeply contested. Through a reading of Chaz’s voice on Cher’s answering machine, one that considers the projects of phonography and telephony on which it is based, and which draws as well on memoirs and coming-out guides written by Chaz and the concurrent archival concerns of the television show *Transparent* (Amazon, 2014–19), I demonstrate how the epistemic and affective stakes of one strand of queer life—transgender bodies—are mediated through specific sonic technologies that give rise to forms of mournful archives. In short, I seek to show how the answering machine subtends histories that conflate literal death and gender transition; for Chaz, it also affords more radical possibilities than verbal practice alone. Attending to the answering machine complicates the association between voice and agency on which a slogan like “Silence = Death” relies and yields a rethinking of media history and sound studies as they relate to queer lives.

And so I turn now to their story, beginning with a bit of testimony nested in the 2011 documentary *Becoming Chaz* (dir. Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, US), which hears Cher phoning her child Chaz (né Chastity) Bono. In her distinctive contralto,

Cher recounts: “I was hysterical one day, because I was calling her answering machine, and I realized it was her old voice, and I asked, ‘Is there any way I can save it?’—because I will never hear that voice again. And there wasn’t—it was gone. For me, that’s the most dramatic thing that has happened in this whole thing—hearing her voice and knowing I’ll never hear it again.” As a transgender man, Chaz has heard his voice deepen under testosterone’s influence. For his mother, Cher, the “old voice” on the answering machine is a technology that exerts its own influence: a synecdoche that comes to stand for all of the changes—gradual and sudden, visual and sonic, surgical and hormonal—that have marked Chaz’s transition, and an archive that exacerbates her grief. For Chaz, the emergence of his new voice is heard (and heralded) as further confirmation of the wrongness of his female gender assignment at birth. Booking an airline ticket to San Francisco for top surgery, after he’s begun hormones but before he’s gotten a legal name change, Chaz types his birth name into the site, and his partner Jenny remarks, “You sound so wrong with that voice as Chastity.” The camera pans to Chaz’s outdated driver’s license—an archive the new voice gives Chaz further license to gladly discredit.

Cher’s lament—that some authentic part of Chaz is trapped in the answering machine, namely, that part which is irreconcilably Chastity—sits uneasily within a film committed in its very title, *Becoming Chaz*, to affirming Chaz’s becoming. Her articulation of loss regarding a still-living child, moreover, sits uneasily alongside losses like Schulman’s and Russo’s, her role as queer icon, and her own archive’s promotion of her as a cheerful caller (fig. 1). Indeed, the “boundary trouble” of Cher’s own voice has given Cher a shifting sonic identity, encompassing her low vocal range, which had her first single, “Ringo, I Love You,” mistaken for the work of a man (and thus, given the title, a gay man), and her status as the first to get audibly Auto-Tuned.⁸ Yet both Cher and Chaz privilege the voice as a site for locating identity, even as encountering that voice depends on a supporting apparatus: bodies that take testosterone, that speak on the telephone, that listen to the answering machine. Their conversation invites us to convene our own so as to speak further about this relationship between voices and the technologies that lodge

them, and the way these lodgings bear on transgender subjects. Even as Cher would later expand her narrative of mourning—saying, “In the beginning I think I was afraid of losing a child before I got the new one. . . . But we have such a great time now, and I realize that there is no loss”—this same rhetoric of loss is frequently invoked by parents and partners and progeny of transitioning people and grates against their narratives of becoming.⁹

At first hearing, a scene concerning the deletion of a voice on an answering machine would seem easily reabsorbed into that metaphysics-inflected binary between sound and silence, which has been known to elide queer voices in the past.¹⁰ It’s not the old debates about vocality, however, that are at stake for Cher here: not binaries between sound and silence, live speech and dead writing, or live performance and recorded sound, binaries echoed in popular bromides that champion the voice (giving voice to the voiceless, speaking truth to power, breaking the silence, or Silence = Death).¹¹ The fragment of Chastity’s voice lodged in the answering machine is both live and still, partial and repetitious, like Vito Russo’s “I’m not here.” Moreover, Cher does not neglect the sonic for the discursive, or “relegate,” as Andrew Anastasia writes in the inaugural issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, “the embodied voice to a service role of rendering audible the coherent thought,” for Chaz’s changing voice is a sonic matter of deepened pitch.¹² It is also shaped discursively by the history and conventions of the answering machine that contain his now-outmoded outgoing message.

Cher describes the answering machine as a place of enclosure, entrapment, and entombment, one she visits in order to listen to her child. In so doing, she draws on the same rhetoric that lends potency to the metaphor of the closet, which Paul Monette subtitled “the coffin world” and echoes what Jacques Derrida has noted of all archives: that they are places of “house arrest.”¹³ If the closet, housing a person, gets used to make arguments about breaking out and about resisting arrest, Cher means for the answering machine, which houses a voice, to make an arrest: to avow the primacy of the voice contained therein, to make a resting place for an identity (Chastity’s) she feels Chaz has cast off. Moreover, although media

made by and for Chaz relies on similar language of enclosure versus freedom (*Becoming Chaz*, for example, advertises its protagonist as “a male trapped in a female shell. . . . Growing up as Sonny and Cher’s adorable golden-haired daughter in a body he felt wasn’t his own was a crucible that took years to transcend”), Chaz’s own vocal tale ultimately serves to push back against the paratext used to describe him.

In the lineage of Eve Sedgwick’s canonical *Epistemology of the Closet*, this essay interrogates how the answering machine, as an enclosure with certain queer characteristics, makes voices known.¹⁴ Deathliness has dogged queer theory from the outset, and the answering machine’s ability to make voices known, as we shall see, rides reliably on claims about mourning and loss. As such, this essay hears echoes of the question Leo Bersani asked at the height of the AIDS crisis—“Is the rectum a grave?”—when Cher, a contemporary listener, asks: “Is the answering machine?”¹⁵ If the answering machine is a place Cher visits, we may also go there to listen to the conditions of possibility for her listening and to consider in turn how media theory illuminates the conditions of delayed temporality (the answering machine speaks beyond the moment of capture), of scarcity (the answering machine was designed with certain limits, and without the guarantee of response), and of assigning a proxy that is promissory (the answering machine speaks *for* us in particular ways, and often in the form of a promise: “Please leave a message and I will call you back”) through which the answering machine situates voices socially.

To Mummify “Beloved Voices”

Cher seeks to use the answering machine’s outdated form to bolster an argument about another no-longer-here form—namely, Chastity’s voice. But there was always something no longer here about the answering machine, even when it was ubiquitous: at the point at which a message is recorded—either one that greets the caller, as in Chaz’s case, or one that will later respond to that greeting—it is already out of date. Cher’s listening back to the “old voice” speaks to a core attribute of most media (delayed tem-

porality) while countering views of queer subjects as especially in thrall to the past.¹⁶ Like Roland Barthes looking at an 1865 photograph of a man about to be executed and “shudder[ing] over a catastrophe which has already occurred,” Cher similarly shudders at the disappearance of Chastity’s voice.¹⁷ Asynchronous media, whose “reality is that of the having-been there,” seems to speak from beyond a grave.¹⁸

If we can hear hints of André Bazin’s mummy complex in Cher’s maternal dilemma—in her desire to “snatch [something of Chastity] from the flow of time”—contending with the sonic alters our understanding of the mummy complex itself.¹⁹ Friedrich Kittler shows the history of recorded sound not only to contain smaller histories of mourning and mummification, and not only to proliferate different kinds of containers for them (like the answering machine), but to have been founded on mourning from the outset. The first inventor of the phonograph, Charles Cros (who filed a patent eight months before Edison but for lack of funds did not actually construct it) described his project thusly:

*Comme les traits dans les camées
J’ai voulu que les voix aimées
Soient un bien, qu’on garde à jamais,
Et puissent répéter le rêve
Musical de l’heure trop brève;
Le temps veut fuir, je le soumets.*

(Like the faces in cameos
I wanted beloved voices
To be a fortune which one keeps forever,
And which can repeat the musical
Dream of the too short hour;
Time would flee, I subdue it.)²⁰

For Cros, stilling “beloved voices” and making them repeatable beyond the “too short hour” was the impetus for creating an apparatus to record sound.²¹

Accordingly, and as with visual technologies, sonic technologies began a dense dialogue between ghostly mediums and media

more broadly construed. As Kittler recounts in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, “one of the ten applications Edison envisioned for his newly invented phonograph in the *North American Review* (1878) was to record ‘the last words of dying persons.’”²² In 1902, Alfred Parzer-Mühlbacher wrote in the first German manual on the *Care and Usage of Modern Speaking Machines (Phonograph, Graphophone, and Gramophone)* that through said machines “cherished loved ones, dear friends, and famous individuals who have long since passed away will years later talk to us again with the same vividness and warmth.”²³ In 1896, the very first page of the very first issue of a trade publication, *Phonoscope*, described the consequences for mourning: “Death has lost some of its sting since we are able to forever retain the voices of the dead.”²⁴ From there, Kittler says, “it was only a small step . . . to fantasies that had telephone cables linking the living and the dead.”²⁵

Later theorists restitched such sonic innovations in the language of Lacanian psychoanalysis, switching out the thread of lag as a condition of sonic mediation for lack as a condition of being. On the one hand, the voice seems to gesture back at some prelinguistic state of plenitude (since it always seems to be a remnant, it is a powerful tool for Cher’s claims about the left-behind bits of Chaz’s original self). As Mladen Dolar summarizes in *A Voice and Nothing More*, the voice “becomes the bearer of some unfathomable originary meaning which, supposedly, got lost with language.”²⁶ The mother’s voice figures that plenitude: Kaja Silverman writes that the fantasy of the maternal voice is of a “sonorous envelope” that serves as the “prototype for all subsequent auditory pleasure.”²⁷ Cher condenses a similar fantasy of nourishment in the voice on the answering machine: in a 1992 interview, she relates, “My mother, sister, and I all have basically the same voice.”²⁸ Chastity was conscripted into that lineage, into Cher’s fantasy of the familial maternal voice as inheritance; Chaz’s erasure of the old voice on the answering machine can be read as a refusal of the same.

By doubling the voice, the recording doubly gives the lie to visions of the voice as indicating a consistent call of the self (“the voice is the organ of the soul,” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, indexing this position).²⁹ Recorded sound ushers in an era of cine-

matic wrangling with unmoored, disembodied voices—*acousmètres*, in Michel Chion’s term. According to Chion, when confronted by a voice whose source we cannot see, we experience anxiety until it is coupled with a fitting body.³⁰ Chion’s analysis helps us understand the everyday sonic predicaments trans people like Chaz face when voices and bodies are coupled in ways that may not be commonly recognizable *as selves*.³¹ For the unfamiliar reader, and at the risk of condensing overmuch a wide variety of individual vocal experiences, transgender women may feminize their bodies through hormones, but the voice, if it has already broken in puberty, remains deep and liable to be heard as masculine without retraining or risky surgery. For trans men, the voice masculinizes through hormones, but it may do so more slowly or more quickly than other traits, and it may lead to the transitioning subject being perceived as gay, as the linguist Lal Zimman’s work explores.³² In either case, mistaken address often occurs, on the telephone especially.³³

As we track Cher’s and Chaz’s trajectories and the traction the voice has on them, we may keep in mind these two tendencies: to use voices as solutions to the problem of the self and as evidence of that self’s disjuncture or dissolution. Before returning to their own words, consider the difficulty of the original sonic mummifying premise of recording last words. It would seem to sidestep any question of timing: How would one know in practice which words were going to be a speaker’s last?³⁴ In order to be poised to capture last words, one would also need to entertain the possibility that the second-to-last words could be the last words, and so on and so forth through infinite monitorial regress. Fictional examples of such sonic surveillance aimed at capturing last words—Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* among them—are far more common than biographical ones, which tended to fail partially, and in unanticipated ways. In *The Audible Past*, Jonathan Sterne transcribes an 1890 phonographic missive from Jesse Walter Fewkes, the first anthropologist to use a phonograph in the field, who is heard after nearly a century’s lag saying, “That shows that the phonograph can be . . . [here Fewkes’s voice becomes inaudible] . . . for a very long time,” simultaneously proving and disproving his point.³⁵ When, in 1905, a minister prerecorded his own funeral sermon, which was then

played for the assembled after his death, it fulfilled the promise of recording last words only through recording some words, then guaranteeing their placement as last through leapfrogging.³⁶ The enthusiasm for such eschatological edicts in early literature about recorded sound paid little heed to the obstacles blocking the delivery of the plenitude they promised.

If the promise of media mummification is the promise of assuaging death, and if the realization of such promises can be both media-specific and spotty, Cher's own language of loss tacitly acknowledges audio mummification's technological specificity and frequent insufficiency. Notwithstanding her broad expression of preference for ghosts (she has said that she "prefer[s] ghosts to some people"), in her own canon of ghost stories, individual ghosts operate differently. She does not express this difference in terms of personality or plot (the deceased's relationship to her or their unfinished business) but rather describes the objects that house the ghosts themselves—the technologies that constitute her experiences of loss. Cher has described her friendly relationship with the ghost of Sonny Bono, who allegedly illuminates her chandelier "when it is impossible."³⁷ By contrast, Chastity's (sonic) ghost, contained not in a chandelier but in an answering machine, intensifies Cher's mourning, evoking the identity Chaz has now moved beyond and prompting Cher to slip back into using female pronouns to describe him. As a technology of remembrance, the chandelier that casts light sporadically is to Cher like a memory that returns unbidden, a happy reminder of an absent agent. The message on the answering machine is a place that may be visited until its sudden relocation: Cher knows that Chaz will ultimately replace this snippet of Chastity with a new voice. Sonny's ghost is gone until the next time; Chastity's ghost can be called up until it is gone.

There is an extensive public record of Chastity's voice that Cher could instead call up, from her appearances as a toddler, rosy-cheeked and a bit bewildered, on *The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour* (CBS, 1971–74), to her own career as co-front woman of the band Ceremony. Cher's stake in calling up such records demands my own reflection on the technologies of remembrance embedded

in ordinary language: on the *hers* that dot the last sentence, or how to write about Chaz when Chaz was Chastity. For some invested in trans representation, refraining from using a trans person's prior name is a matter of politesse, like not referring to a married colleague by a now-defunct maiden name. For others, there is a term, *deadnaming*, which itself proposes normative terms for that investment: it prohibits the use of pretransition names on the grounds that they are dead. It is not only Cher, then, who traffics in a temporality of trans experience that views the pretransition identity as deceased, and it is useful to consider deadnaming's prohibition alongside Cher's stakes in trespassing it. In a way, the two agendas are not so dissimilar—both seek forms of redress in language that would (for Cher) or would not (for those who seek the prohibition) keep alive a past identity. It is often argued that what a prohibition on deadnaming seeks to accomplish is a denial of the stakes of maintaining archives/evidence of (and even shorthand for) pretransition lives—stakes that are decidedly real for someone like Cher, whose affective drive and maternal love she posits as a positive commitment that demands the archival maintenance of the past.

This debate on whether and how to refer to trans pasts is rendered all the more complex, in this case, by the typical role of celebrity in establishing its grounds. It has been argued that the prohibition against deadnaming serves to protect trans people from outing and violence and does not apply to celebrities (especially those who continue to use their pretransition names in speaking about the past). Chaz is a celebrity of sorts, yet I have already argued that he is uncomfortable with the inherited nature of his celebrity, which accounts for some of his relief in changing his voice; deadnaming him on account of fame would be callous. And yet I argue further below that to give a full account of Chaz's own accounts of himself, as he delivered them over the years, requires forms of reference to the past that are potentially at odds with the practice, now prevalent, of giving a bright line called transition condensed ritual power to license or decommission names. To write about the stakes and counter-stakes of everyday experience for trans people and their families is to archive them in the very

terms of writing, and for reasons I return to in the subsequent section, to edit such conflicts and contradictions out of writing would shore up a different, and equally pernicious, paradigm of identity, one in which the identity of the present moment is seen as always already complete.

For now, this debate can remain alive, well, and unresolved, because adjudicating this question is ultimately not what's most key to understanding Cher and Chaz's auditory encounter. Cher takes the deletion of one particular snippet of Chaz's pretransition voice—the one contained in the answering machine, not the broader archive—as evidence of its overall scarcity: "I will never hear that voice again," she says. And it is to this particular vocal incarnation, the voice set to break off or break free from its "house arrest" in the answering machine, that she attends—not to any of the other voices formerly known as Chastity's that persist in the world in different archives, within jewel cases, or on YouTube.

In short, Cher tunes into the answering machine specifically to make a claim about a disappearing voice. And the answering machine's history shows it to be tuned in to a similar affective frequency: alert, as Cher is with Chastity's voice, to questions of scarcity. First, the answering machine itself was suppressed between its actual invention in 1898 and its popularization in the 1980s, through the machinations of AT&T's on-again, off-again monopoly on telecommunications, which had allowed the company to set the terms of telephonic archiving (and, apropos of this essay's themes, led to its nickname: "Ma Bell"). After several decades of AT&T's strident resistance to the use of the answering machine on public networks, for fear it would decrease call volume and call privacy, the answering machine entered general use. Scarcity was embedded in the answering machine's design, through microcassettes and then cassettes and then the limited cell phone memory devoted to voice mail, all of which had to be erased frequently.³⁸ In Cher's case, of course, the love object produced by the answering machine provokes her to call *more*. In Sterne's take, scarcity marks the early history of recorded sound not only in terms of the finitude of the bodies it was meant to sonically mummify but with regard to the potential decay of the technologies themselves,

sparkling enterprises like the Indestructible Phonograph Recording Company (itself amusingly short-lived).³⁹ Later, communication engineers orchestrated decay via a careful calculus of loss, asking what aspects of the telephonically transmitted voice could be lost for profit without producing the feelings known *as* loss.⁴⁰

To Turn Back Time

Beyond affordance, utterance: in the face of scarcity, the typical answering machine message contains a promise to respond. In recent years, the promise has weighted heavily in affect theory's analyses of how human subjects experience time, echoing Friedrich Nietzsche's earlier characterization of man as "the promising animal."⁴¹ Lauren Berlant opens *Cruel Optimism* with the observation that promises seed futures; its first lines run: "When we talk about an object of desire, we are really talking about a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us. This cluster of promises could be embedded in a person, a thing, an institution, a text, a norm, a bunch of cells, smells, a good idea—whatever . . . the subject leans toward promises contained within the present moment of the encounter with their object."⁴² Similarly, in *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed notes how often a happy future is dangled as promissory note, receipt contingent on good behavior. In directing subjects to mine certain places for happiness, like marriage and parenthood, it "generates those places as being good, as being what should be promoted *as* goods."⁴³ Promises may be bribes, or they may be bribed, but either way they construct a future. Each promise flags and fixes the route forward; together, they flatten that route, time's steamroller.

There is some cluster of promises that hangs, for Cher, on Chastity's voice; keeps her leaning toward a particular future; leaves her hanging on the line when the voice hangs up; leaves her with certain hang-ups. It may be explicit in Chaz's message, or implicit in the message's codified form; since the film does not play it, we do not know. But its presence helps us to see why the answering machine might play such a prominent role in Cher's story: not

only because it is a vocal technology (for there are others), and not only because it painfully catches the passage of time (for other things do), but because of the promise contained within it. Because Chastity makes a promise on the answering machine, the machine enacts a future, and so the disappearance of the answering machine's voice—which made the promise, now broken—cannot be salvaged by the continuing presence of any old song.

But in structuring desire by building futures for some subjects, promises also bind those who have done the promising and sometimes impose concomitant waiting periods on their desire. The future that transgender subjects are increasingly asked to enact is bound up with pastness. It is not just any promise, not just any future, not just any song that Cher wants to hear Chaz sing. If transition is figured as restoring an original body—the physical self that should have been—it cannot be said to break a promise, but to turn toward a superseding one. With this popular rhetoric of an originary self comes other discursive baggage, piled on those who already carry the burden of plenitude—burgeoning metaphors of being born this way or born again through transition; of transgender conceived as birth defect; of saving transgender children from an identity mislaid by mismatched puberty (which preoccupies many of *Becoming Chaz's* later scenes)—that presumes an identity that is intrinsically known to its intrinsic self and flattens time once again.

These narratives, taken together, are a promise to turn back time and makes trans people a figure of such a project. Cher's 1989 single, "If I Could Turn Back Time," expresses a similar wish, one it knows is impossible ("If I could find a way," she sings plaintively); the mainstream rhetoric of transition increasingly asserts the possibility of that project. In short, these promises find more binding sites than answering machines. They are increasingly written into the language of medicine and the law.⁴⁴

The commitment that ensues—to gestating a self that, it turns out, was there all along—itself colludes with the projects of reproductive futurism that Lee Edelman critiques in *No Future*, but it also serves as a bulwark against anti-body-modification camps, whose perspectives might be succinctly summed up as "No

Suture.”⁴⁵ One thing such promises to turn back time have going for them is their capacity to fend off allegations that trans people are engaging in a process of self-mutilation—allegations that resonate with Cher’s plaint that Chaz is getting rid of his voice. The fixation of such anti-body-modification camps is phallic: As Riki Wilchins archly observes, “Transsexual women are unerringly described as ‘cutting off their dicks.’ No one ever formulates this act as gaining a cunt—not even lesbians, feminists, or transgender women.”⁴⁶ In *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*, Gayle Salamon assembles a violent lexicon that has affixed to trans subjects on the grounds of this alleged loss of body parts: the framing of transition “as if it were akin to a death or as if the post-transition subject will with hir emergence enact the death of the pretransition subject”; its figuration as murderous “in discussions of the procedures of FTM transition, which are sometimes described as self-mutilation or, more hyperbolically, ‘violence against women.’”⁴⁷ These discussions, she writes, “very quickly end with the knife pointed the other way”: one lesbian writer who refers to FTMs as “‘mutilated women’ . . . ends one of her pieces against transgenderism with the sentence ‘let’s put away the knives,’ making clear that in her view lesbians are somehow now the target of that violence rather than transmen themselves.”⁴⁸ Chaz’s transition is similarly described in cutting words. I reproduce this YouTube comment in full to demonstrate how anxieties about the revisability of the sexed body get appended, time and again, to trans subjects:

Obviously, Chaz is human & doesn't [*sic*] deserve [the insults he receives] but the whole sex change situation is an off the rails decision & I find it hard to believe that someone who can't love themselves for who they were born as can love themselves after they have maimed or disfigured themselves. I know that he doesn't think it was a disfigurement but instead, a change for the good. Yet, that's the same mentality of people that cut off their own arms & legs. Stop wanting to be something else & start loving you for you.⁴⁹

In this commenter’s view, to change the body’s contours is to maim or disfigure it. There is a teleology of selfhood that begins

at birth, and to modify the body is both to divert this trajectory “off the rails” and to be that way oneself. (Any preferences Chaz might express on the matter are filed under bad faith.) Transgender studies scholars Jules Gill-Peterson, Susan Stryker, and Nikki Sullivan use the concepts of *originary technicity* and *somatechnics* to dispute how (as Gill-Peterson puts it) humanism’s “implicit hierarchy of the body over technology” issues a normative frame for “‘body modification,’ a phrase whose temporal spacing suggests the prior existence of a ‘body’ that can only be modified after the fact.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Salamon’s project is to show that there are no such rails of being to speak of, let alone a consistent car of bodily selfhood to slide along them. She does so by turning to the same example as our commenter: amputation.

Amputation may create an apparent disjuncture between the visible boundaries of the body and its felt ones, and it has thus figured prominently in historical debates about bodily realness—an argument that may be extended to the disappearing voice on the answering machine. “In discussing phantom limbs,” Salamon writes, psychoanalyst Paul Schilder, once a student of Freud’s, “takes pains to avoid relegating the phenomenon to pathology, insisting that ‘we’ normal people have phantoms, too.”⁵¹ For Schilder, the phantom is the best (dis)organizing principle for the body: “Every body contains in itself a phantom (perhaps the body itself is a phantom).”⁵² In media studies, however, amputation remains the threat of losing wholeness: in *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan famously advanced the extension versus amputation framework of technology, in which technologies modify preexisting human capacities.⁵³ In his view, for example, the telephone extends the human voice but amputates epistolary skill. McLuhan’s framework offers a basic sense of how a technology like the answering machine, whose primary function is voice preservation, could aggravate feelings of loss when the voice itself is absent, though it accomplishes this by reifying a standardized sense of human capability that writers in trans studies (among other disciplines) have skillfully called into question, especially through aforementioned writings on bodily originary technicity.⁵⁴

Technologies like the answering machine shore up par-

ticular visions of the self. When the technologies break or their archives are broken into, this gives them grounds to be mourned. It is impossible to fully consider the urgency of a narrative like Cher's without also considering the revisability of digital sound and image, long-standing anxieties about the revisability of the body, and the conflation of one revisability with the other—in short, all of this underscores the persistence of the sexed body in discussions of trans subjects, even in discussions about media made by and of them, even in discussions of something as ordinary as an answering machine.

This rhetoric of amputation is grafted from a broader strain that sees any nonnormativity as a loss of social value. That Chaz had to navigate this thorny rhetorical thicket long before he ever contemplated transition is apparent throughout *Family Outing*, the volume on coming out to one's family he wrote as Chastity in 1998, the year of Sonny Bono's death and the year Cher released "Believe."⁵⁵ *Family Outing* is steeped in this standoff between loss and gain, the same standoff that makes bodily change such a fraught affair for trans subjects, and the stakes of which were already clear to Chastity; in 1996, Sonny Bono had cosponsored the Defense of Marriage Act in his new role as Republican congressman for Palm Springs. As articulated in *Family Outing*, gay and lesbian subjects must learn to "see our difference as positive, not negative" (26). Parents in turn must learn to replace "their negative view of their child's sexual orientation with the positive qualities in their child that they are proud of" (226). Affective positivity here requires positive power, for the subject who comes out must remake herself as a particular kind of affective laborer: "It's important to be as positive about yourself as possible. I know that if I had told my mom [Cher] directly she would not have felt so betrayed. . . . If the people you are telling pick up any negative feelings from you, they will immediately question what you are saying" (118). This labor has a vocal bent: telling directly, telling positively so as not to be questioned. The book's tenth chapter is titled "You Are Still Who You Always Were." There are many echoes of this phrase in the memoir Chaz would pen thirteen years later, *Transition: The Story of How I Became a Man*, which, in its second edition, saw the sub-

title rephrased as “Becoming Who I Was Always Meant to Be.”⁵⁶ These lines are paeans to the felt sense of an originary, whole self. How poignant, then, that only a few pages before, the author has made her sole reference to transgender people. She wrote, in that moment, as a lesbian woman, “Together, we will take all gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders out of the closet to acceptance, and beyond to empowerment.”⁵⁷ That “beyond” is the unknown frontier of becoming, where losses and gains cannot be plotted in advance, where even our author could not know her future.

The discourse of transition today attempts to shield one from that unknown frontier. Offering the promise of becoming “who you always were,” it risks becoming the same kind of mummifying project as early technologies of recorded sound, wherein trans people are an icon through which uncertainty “loses some of its sting,” because change is simply a means of preserving that which was present, that which through technology may continue to be present.

To Not Respond Automatically

In the face of Chaz’s insistence to not call back *as* Chastity, to prune that tendril of his vocality, we might read the figure of the answering machine differently. For if it is possible to read it as a kind of tomb, as Cher does, it is also possible to read the answering machine as a place of uncertainty, anxiety, or purgatory: the answering machine does not guarantee response but rather is a repository for queries, a void to call into. It serves as a placeholder for a response that may not come.⁵⁸ As such, the left-behind quality of the answering machine runs deeper than the fact that our voices change more rapidly than instruments and archives can capture: the voice always utters before any guarantee of response.⁵⁹ In this way, the answering machine comes to seem like a potent miniature of the dilemma of response more generally—it tries to maximize the rate of response, with the understanding that this can only ever paper over the fear that response may not arrive.

On the covers of Cher’s 1974 and 1975 compilation albums already seen here, she smiles into twin telephones (fig. 1). “The

Very Best of” Cher is a Cher, it seems, who offers her voice and who stays on the line. The images are also enigmatic. Who is Cher calling? Her own past self? One consistent interlocutor? Is she calling her child, at that point five or six years old, from the road? Is she smiling at the content of a conversation, or in anticipation of one she expects to have as she hears the phone ring? The covers audition a fantasy of commensurability and communion, of hearing and being heard. In *Becoming Chaz*, of course, where not all of Cher’s phone calls reach a listener, or even her desired proxy on the answering machine, her telephonic history is written more anxiously than on the compilation albums.

Mladen Dolar finds the heart of the issue of the missing archival voice when he writes that the voice always misses its target: “One is too exposed to the voice and the voice exposes too much.”⁶⁰ The voice in the answering machine both promises futures and speaks from the past. It is at once contained, exposed to the possibility of deletion, and so easily “earlifted” to the other. That the voice always does too much or not enough provides the impetus for continuing to speak.⁶¹ Derrida pursues a related thought in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (noting as he does that the French translation for Descartes’s automatic responder, *répondeur automatique*, is the same as for the answering machine): “the question of how an iterability that is essential to every response, and to the ideality of every response, can and cannot fail to introduce non-response, automatic reaction, mechanical reaction into the most alive, most ‘authentic,’ and most responsible response.”⁶² I read this statement alongside the dance of agency in Chaz’s vocal history. Recall that at the outset of *Becoming Chaz*, the changing voice is framed within the supposed biological inevitability of taking testosterone (rather than the decision to take it), which gives way to the idea that because of this change, the answering machine must itself be altered as well. But the role of agency in that alteration is left productively underdetermined, between “mechanical reaction” (“testosterone changes the voice, and so the recording must change, too”) and “responsible response” (“I choose to take T, as I choose to take away this old recording”).

In sum, when transgender subjects reconfigure the archives

of the self, they do so in the face of demands that those archives and selves get reconstructed in automatic response to the call of some original model. The suggestion, then, that the most responsible, authentic, or alive response may entail nonresponse is potent and increasingly plentiful in media about transgender people and their families, including the television show *Transparent*. I will turn to it now, as a coda to this piece.

To Erase One Self / To Self-Efface

Set in Los Angeles and based in part on creator Jill Soloway's own experiences as child of a trans parent, *Transparent* explores the coming out of central character Maura (a retired college professor, née Mort) over four ten-episode seasons and a finale shot between 2014 and 2019. Maura (Jeffrey Tambor) resists the efforts of her children to make her a repository of familial memory, thus echoing conversations about the ethics of erasure and "the right to be forgotten" that play out in other pockets of the political sphere. These conversations overwrite the historical dilemmas of durationality discussed earlier, in which technologies are designed to guarantee the persistence of the bodies they mummify, because they trade instead in records that are too persistent, in durations that compete. In "Oscillate" (2015), Maura receives a batch of childhood photos, of her as the young Mort, from a service that has retouched them such that it appears as though she spent those years as a girl. Later, she pores over them with her own two girls, Ali (Gaby Hoffmann) and Sarah (Amy Landecker), sitting between them on the couch (fig. 2).⁶³ We see close-ups of their hands—the daughters' nails painted canary yellow and Maura's painted mauve—as they flip through pages bearing young Mauras at birthday parties or posing for family portraits, Mauras who never really moved through the world as such. One such Maura, a toddler topped with a bow, stares solemnly, as if she knows the dramatic significance to which this face will later be put to use (fig. 3). Afterward, the episode calls up fictionalized scenes of Magnus Hirschfeld's Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for Sexual Research), of its archives, and then of their 1933 ransacking by the Nazis.



Figure 2. “Oscillate,” *Transparent* (2015)

In *Transparent*, questions about loss are necessarily questions about how loss may play out within archives. Such questions were, at the time of writing, directed at the show itself with particular urgency: in late 2017, the cisgender actor who plays Maura, Jeffrey Tambor, was accused of sexual harassment by two transgender actresses, Van Barnes and Trace Lysette. In early 2018, it was announced that the show would continue for a fifth season without Tambor, but only a single musical finale episode was made. Aired in September 2019, the finale would articulate Maura’s absence by occasioning her death. For writer Emily Todd VanDerWerff, this conclusion was apt for *Transparent*, a show ever “aware of how all endings are actually transitions.”⁶⁴ In VanDerWerff’s view, “*Trans-*



Figure 3. “Oscillate,” *Transparent* (2015)

parent broke so much ground that it revealed the elements of its own foundation that were rotten,” and its ending augured a shift in what televisual portrayals of trans people aimed to capture: away from familial attempts to process unfamiliar changes from the outside and toward those portrayals made by and for trans writers and performers, from the inside of experiences like transition.

From the start, though, *Transparent* has been alert to its own status as archive. “Oscillate” preserves the experiences of Our Lady J, *Transparent*’s first transgender writer, who based the photo-retouching scene on her own life.⁶⁵ What does Maura mean to say with those photos—that she cannot be legible without the archive of consistency they proffer? Or that she changes her past because she changes her future and neither need have a hold over the other? Maura’s redaction of her past, placed alongside 1933’s violent archival modifications, seems a rejoinder both to those who want to call her transition violent and alternately to those who want that transition not to be violent, for it to be nothing substantial, just the same old self minorly shuffled around, no break, no suture.

As with the show’s privileged term, *transparency*, such archival scenes resist a binary of presence and absence and open onto more plentiful representational modulations. For Lisa Gitelman, successful media technologies “start to seem inevitable and then transparent, or transparent and then inevitable.”⁶⁶ *Transparent* shows conventional narratives of selfhood to operate in much the same way, taking their transparency and inevitability away by embedding them in archives perceived not as truth-telling devices dispatched from originary selves, but as artifacts available for tinkering by present-day ones. Maura’s archival engagements remain resolutely visual, but her writing over of the photographic archive of her past recalls Chaz’s erasure of the voice on his answering machine.

If the power of asynchronous, left-behind media was always their indexical, umbilical quality or their ability to conjure ghosts, Chaz and Maura both shoo certain ghosts away; they both self-efface. But Chaz’s erasure is total: he removes not only the extant outgoing message from his answering machine but also the possibility for Cher to converse with him, and within that sonic tech-

nology, as Chastity. Maura's albums, by contrast, maintain her in context, emphasizing that her history is still similarly spatially and socially embedded in spite of the way the photos now depict her as always already female. Such histories and interfaces of mediation matter, I argue, for what comes to count as a continuity or a change, a birth or a death.

Like *Transparent*, *Becoming Chaz* is cheeky in its examination of archival strategies. We hear Cher sharing grief over the voice's imminent demise, but the voice being grieved is not heard. Chaz's erasure is both documented and itself erased, and with it the possibility for the viewer to occupy Cher's position. Nor does the narrative force Chaz to contend with that erasure. Instead, against the various looming originary selves both facilitating Chaz's becoming and threatening to flatten his remaining days, *Becoming Chaz*'s opening scene sees Chaz speaking to those originary selves—or more precisely, denying their ability to speak to him. From behind the camera and a still-black screen, some acousmètre or director asks, "What's your earliest memory?" Chaz responds: "I don't know. . . . I don't have memories till later in life." Elsewhere, Chaz notes how collective memories threaten to engulf him: "For years, random people have approached me with their memories of me as a young child, hoping I will share in their enthusiasm and offer some pearl of nostalgia from the family vault. What they never seem to have understood is that those memories are theirs, not mine."⁶⁷ Like metaphors of the closet or the crucible or the photo album or the answering machine, "the family vault" encloses Chaz. Like the voice he inherited from his mother and her mother before that, "the family vault" is not entirely Chaz's own.

In this moment—in the face of the public's sense of ownership and Cher's feelings of loss, of appeals to turn back time and Chaz's own occasional accession to those discourses—Chaz broadcasts his desire to joyously lose parts of himself, to reconfigure or get rid of the archive that is his body and the different technological archives that exist of it, and to make way for another voice. From within the matrix of accusations about the self-erasures of transgender subjects, Chaz records over his outgoing message. We do not get to hear the "old voice" in *Becoming Chaz*—the spectator,

too, is dropped from those calls. Even as the media made by and about him remains haunted by the phrase, he is no longer (nor was he ever) who he always was.

In spite of Cher's efforts to make the answering machine a homing device, one that would return Chastity's voice to her, the sound of the answering machine haunts in more than one way. The voices it captures are always running along behind (or is it ahead?) of fantasies of the self, unaware of where they will lead (in the same way that Chastity, penning the word "transgenders" in *Family Outing*, was unaware) and of the promises they may have to break along the way.⁶⁸ The technologies of transition—from testosterone to the answering machine to Photoshop—join a long lineage of media technologies used to contend with death and change (or in the case of transgender subjects, changes which have often been denigrated as deathly). Sometimes, they serve to shore up an originary self—to guard against "the flow of time" and its intrinsic and painful indeterminacy.⁶⁹ Sometimes they block the call of the originary self altogether. In probing how more vocal histories are shaped by the technologies that seek to contain them, we might see or hear which conversations about voices get codified, coils stretched through customary use, and which trace promises we are all too accustomed to breaking, calls we habitually put on hold. It is always the tension between binding up those threads, as with a mummy, and letting them trip us up—letting voices tip us out onto the new ground they break.

(After) After the Beep: A Postscript

This essay was written in the early-to-mid 2010s, as a swell of identitarian argument in the US was being put to various salutary and not-so-salutary purposes, and as I sought to trace some of the public conversation around queerness, identity, bodily integrity, media form, and their co-constitution. It is in keeping with the essay's argument about identity and change that much has changed in the lives of its subjects (by which I mean both individual people and the ideas that speak through them) since then. Cher's Twitter account (@cher), penned largely in all caps and

with no shortage of ghost emoji, is entering, in this writer's opinion, a golden age. A musical about her life, *The Cher Show*, ran on Broadway in 2018 and 2019. Chaz completed two runs on the television show *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011–), most recently playing a Trump supporter in a campy take on right-wing nationalism he called “so incredibly gay.”⁷⁰

I have updated the text in several places to reflect changes that have occurred—in Cher's and Chaz's articulations of their relationship, or in the composition of *Transparent*, for example. And I want to close the essay anew with some broader comments on the intervening years, beginning with the observation that trans writers have levied their own increasingly vehement critiques of the “originary self” line of thought that I critique in this article. In a widely read essay for *n+1* from 2018, “On Liking Women,” Andrea Long Chu writes:

It must be underscored how unpopular it is on the left today to countenance the notion that transition expresses not the truth of an identity but the force of a desire. This would require understanding transness as a matter not of who one is, but of what one wants. The primary function of gender identity as a political concept—and, increasingly, a legal one—is to bracket, if not to totally deny, the role of desire in the thing we call gender.⁷¹

In spite of lucid critiques like this one (and their anticipation, for example, by Sandy Stone's observation so long ago that the specter of the “‘wrong body’ has come, virtually by default, to define” transness⁷²), the rhetoric of the originary self has maintained a roving presence, constantly finding new terrain in which to root its claims. Indeed, as I have begun to make my home in an anthropology department, I am constantly confronted with further ways in which those rhetorics of the originary self, applied recently to and by queer subjects, have long been used to curtail the rights and material resources of other populations. I am thinking especially of settler colonial societies, including the US, that deprive indigenous subjects of all manner of goods, including money and land, on the grounds that they are no longer in conformity, in

some spiritual, geographical, material, or economic aspect, with themselves—that they are no longer “who they always were.”⁷³ These restrictions are all the more galling in light of the fact that historically privileged populations are not asked to remain unchanging, and are even granted the capacity to step outside their selves: consider the defense “he wasn’t himself!” that Kate Manne notes is so readily applied to cis white male perpetrators of sexual assault and serves to displace their actions from a matrix of accountability.⁷⁴ The heinous trans panic defense operates via a similar logic, wherein the surprise of someone else’s self is supposedly enough to jolt the perpetrator’s self into out-of-body, unaccountable violence. Thus we see the interconnectedness of the means by which individuals seek intelligibility through or against expectations of their own fixed personhood. And we must remember that mediation, with formal and historical specificity, provisions those means.

All of which is to say, although this article remains about Cher and Chaz and what we can learn from the specific archives of their public lives, I also find these broader resonances important. For the grounds on which Euro-American subjects secure their rights bear on the intelligibility and viability of other choices elsewhere. Elizabeth Povinelli, one of the scholars who has done the most to articulate the not always immediately legible connections between indigenous struggles for justice and queer communities, observes that queer-theoretical work suffers if it abides by “a certain literalism of the referent”—which is to say, if it limits its inquiry to those things already deemed queer.⁷⁵ As someone who works between queer theory, a field where scholars often write about their own identities, and anthropology, a field in which scholars (though this has changed in recent decades) historically have not, I locate both productive tensions and intellectual prods in the ways works that are seemingly about oneself and one’s community necessarily lead away from that place, and vice versa. What I continue to find so striking about *Family Outing* is the way Chaz was able to write about a trans identity that was not his own and that he did not know would become his own. In his story, and in queer theory’s empha-

ses on desire, change, and trespass more broadly, I find lessons for how to think and write judiciously about those aspects of the world that necessarily overflow our previous knowledge. Ultimately, and in spite of the different narratives that lead them there, Cher and Chaz converge at a place of recognition amid radical change.

In 2019, just as this article was getting ready to go to print, I began seeing online another cover for Chaz's book, bearing a different subtitle: "A Change for the Better" (fig. 4). I thought immediately of the top Amazon commenter for the book, who gamely wrote: "*Transition: Becoming Who I Was Always Meant to Be*, is exactly the same book as *Transition: The Story of How I Became a Man*. I bought both books thinking they would be two different versions of the same story, but they are the same book—different title, different cover. Anyway, it is a very good read for those interested in the transgender issue, in particular, a woman transitioning into a man. It helped me understand this situation."⁷⁶ Part of "this situation," this article argues, is exactly what the commenter describes: the way archives of the self reveal disjunctures, or allow their expression, and thus facilitate the making of change and knowledge of its possibility. The covers of Chaz's memoirs are tokens of a type of thing that is often taken to be a fixed index of someone's person: a name, a pronoun, an autobiography, an author's portrait, a driver's license, a birth certificate, a voice. As we are considering how these indices come unstuck, I have argued, we must take up the materiality and the histories of the objects in which they are lodged.

I cannot tell if the cover that bears the subtitle *A Change for the Better* augurs a new edition, or is a remnant from an earlier production process, or is an artifact of a specific local publishing market (it seems to appear mostly on the websites of New Zealand-based booksellers). Nonetheless, it seems a nicer criterion for considering changes. Not asking them to reflect some primordial self, some forever self, some always already self. Not asking changes to stabilize a field (gender identity and expression) which some feel is changing too fast by packaging changes with disclaimers: that a change wasn't really a change, or promises to change no more, or promises to reinscribe boundaries in the moment of its

exercise. A change, simply, for the better: in our scholarly inquiries, self-fashionings, and pursuits of justice, there are worse ways to (provisionally, of course) title our projects.

Notes

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1. Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 61.
2. Susan E. Gunter, “‘You Will Fit the Tighter into My Embrace!’: Henry James’s Letters to Jocelyn Persse,” *GLQ* 7, no. 2 (2001): 346.
3. Henry James, “In the Cage,” in *London Stories and Other Writings* (Padstow, UK: Tabb House, 1989), 284.

4. “The Telephonic Conversation” (Hartford, CT, private reading, 26 April 1880).
5. B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director’s Cut* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), xvi.
6. David Higgs, *Queer Sites: Gay Urban Histories since 1600* (London: Routledge, 1999), 160.
7. Interview by Sarah Schulman, *ACT UP Oral History Project*, 24 April 2004, www.actuporalhistory.org.
8. See Alexander Doty, “Introduction: There’s Something about Mary,” *Camera Obscura* 22, no. 65 (2007): 1–9. For Cher’s account of her first single (released under the pseudonym Bonnie Jo Mason), see Cher, “Ask Me Anything,” Reddit, 28 September 2013, www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/1nc4sk/i_am_cher_ask_me_anything/.
9. Cher, “Ask Me Anything.” For other narratives of familial mourning during transition, see, for example, the first episode of *I Am Cait* (E!, 2015–16), in which Caitlyn Jenner tells her mother, “You lost a son,” or the passages of Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* in which Nelson recounts a conversation with a student whose mother wrote about his transition in a major newspaper as “bring[ing] a parent face to face with death.” Nelson reads aloud the mother’s article, fuming, then recalls her own similar response to her partner Harry Dodge’s beginning testosterone. Nelson, *The Argonauts* (Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2015), 50–53.
10. Art Blake, for example, writes that after John Cage’s time spent in an anechoic chamber, Cage was often made to stand for debates on silence—distracting from his audible queerness, as heard on compositions like *Indeterminacy* and aired as an open secret on Cold War–era game shows. See Art Blake, “Finding My Voice While Listening to John Cage,” *Soundings Out!*, 23 February 2015, soundstudiesblog.com/2015/02/23/finding-my-voice-while-listening-to-john-cage/.
11. On these points, for example, see Eugenie Brinkema (with composition by Evan Johnson), “Critique of Silence,” *differences* 22, nos. 2–3 (2011): 211–34; and Pooja Rangan, “In Defense of Voicelessness: The Matter of the Voice and the Films of Leslie Thornton,” *Feminist Media Histories* 1, no. 3 (2015): 95–126.

12. Andrew Anastasia, "Keywords: Voice," *TSQ* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 262.
13. Paul Monette, *Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992); Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.
14. This lineage also includes such lambent framings as Jack Halberstam's "epistemology of the wardrobe" in *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 98; Heather Love's "epistemology of the vestibule," in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 64; Lynne Joyrich's "Epistemology of the Console," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 3 (2001): 439–67; and David Leong's "epistemology of the pocket," in "The Pocket and the Watch: A Collective Individualist Reading of Japanese American Literature," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1, no. 2 (2015): 76–114.
15. Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," *October*, no. 43 (1987): 197–222.
16. Love's *Feeling Backward* shows the long-standing connection between alterity and delayed temporality in Western thought to have been frequently applied to queer subjects as well.
17. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 96.
18. Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image–Music–Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 44.
19. André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 1:9.
20. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 22.
21. If Cros, who scooped Edison on the phonograph but lost out on the credit when he failed to follow through, framed his project

as evading loss, Edison's own invention of the phonograph followed up on his initial failure to invent something much like the answering machine. For a brief overview of that early attempt, which includes Edison's original sketches, see William Pretzer, *Working at Inventing: Thomas A. Edison and the Menlo Park Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 108–9.

22. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 12.
23. Alfred Parzer-Mühlbacher, *Die modernen Sprechmaschinen (Phonograph, Graphophon und Grammophon), deren Behandlung und Anwendung: Praktische Ratschläge für Interessenten* (Vienna: A. Hartleben, 1902), 107.
24. "Voices of the Dead," *Phonoscope* 1, no. 1 (15 November 1896): 1. See also Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 308.
25. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 12. Indeed, according to Avital Ronell, Alexander Graham Bell and his brothers purportedly made a pact that, should one of them die before the others, they would find a way to communicate postmortem. Both of Bell's brothers died young. He invented the telephone (with the aid of Thomas Watson, also a medium), and waited on their call. The call never arrived, and Bell became an outspoken opponent of the afterlife. See Ronell, *The Telephone Book* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 289–408.
26. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 31.
27. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 73, 84.
28. Nigel Goodall, *Cher in Her Own Words* (London: Omnibus, 1992), 54.
29. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Hyperion: A Romance* (New York: John B. Alden, 1885), 152.
30. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 48.

31. There are many scenarios of vocal incongruity, most bracketed here and all inflected by broader cultural suppositions about the voice. It bears note that in scenarios where one's voice does not sound like one's gender, cisgender people are offered relief by extant systems. I asked one speech therapist whether insurance companies would assist a cisgender man who deemed his voice too high in deepening it. She answered as follows: "Oh, of course. There's a condition called mutational falsetto, in which a man's voice doesn't change after puberty. Insurance absolutely pays for that. It's a fairly common condition—but not as common as being transgender." Interview with the author, 16 February 2012.
32. See Lal Zimman, "Hegemonic Masculinity and the Variability of Gay-Sounding Speech: The Perceived Sexuality of Transgender Men," *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 2, no. 1 (2013): 1–39.
33. The telephone may offer relief from disapprobation resulting from vocal disjuncture, but there are consequences to telephonic mistaken address. Consider that many US-population-level surveys rely on telephone interviewers to assess perceived sex or gender based on the vocal tone of respondents rather than self-reporting. See Kerith J. Conron, Gunner Scott, Grace Sterling Stowell, and Stewart J. Landers, "Transgender Health in Massachusetts: Results from a Household Probability Sample of Adults," *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 1 (2012): 118–22; Sari L. Reisner, Kerith J. Conron, Scout, Kellan Baker, Jody L. Herman, Emilia Lombardi, Emily A. Greytak, Alison M. Gill, and Alicia K. Matthews, "'Counting' Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Adults in Health Research: Recommendations from the Gender Identity in US Surveillance Group," *TSQ* 2, no. 1 (2015): 34–57.
34. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 12.
35. Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 287.
36. "Preached His Own Funeral Sermon by Phonograph," *Edison Phonograph Monthly* 3, no. 3 (1905): 12. See also Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 304.
37. Michael Rothman, "Cher: Sonny Bono's Ghost Plays Tricks on Me," *ABC News*, 30 September 2013, abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2013/09/cher-sonny-bonos-ghost-plays-tricks-on-me/.

38. For a brief overview of AT&T's suppression of the answering machine and the magnetic tape, see Tim Wu, *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2010).
39. Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 297–301.
40. A 1923 issue of *Popular Science* defended these practices as producing a “good enough” voice; see R. W. King, “The Great American Voice: Fitting 13,000,000 Telephones to 110,000,000 Talkers,” in *Popular Science Monthly*, November 1923, 69; see also Mara Mills, “Deaf Jam: Inscription, Reproduction, Information,” *Social Text*, no. 102 (2010): 35–58. The concern of audio enthusiasts with so-called lossy versus lossless forms of file compression is but one of many ways sonic technology's self-written history of loss persists.
41. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. J. M. Kennedy (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1887).
42. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 23.
43. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 6.
44. On this point, see Gayle Salamon, “Withholding the Letter: Sex as State Property,” in *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 171–91.
45. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
46. Riki Wilchins, *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender* (Riverdale, NY: Magnus, 1997), 193.
47. Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 118.
48. Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 118–19.
49. “Gender Switch: Chastity Bono to Become Chaz,” *ABC News*, 12 June 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8M_-CJkO2A.
50. Jules Gill-Peterson, “The Technical Capacities of the Body: Assembling Race, Technology, and Transgender,” *TSQ* 1, no. 3 (2014): 405; Susan Stryker and Nikki Sullivan, “King's Member, Queen's Body: Transsexual Surgery, Self-Demand Amputation, and the Somatechnics of Sovereign Power,” in *Somatechnisation*:

Queering the Technologicalisation of Bodies, ed. Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 49–61.

51. Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 43.
52. Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body: Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche* (New York: International Universities Press, 1950), 297.
53. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 8–11.
54. Gill-Peterson, “The Technical Capacities of the Body”; Stryker and Sullivan, “King’s Member, Queen’s Body.”
55. Chastity Bono, with Billie Fitzpatrick, *Family Outing: A Guide to the Coming-Out Process for Gays, Lesbians, and Their Families* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).
56. Chaz Bono, with Billie Fitzpatrick, *Transition: The Story of How I Became a Man* (New York: Dutton Penguin, 2011). For the reader attempting to discern something about Chaz’s subjectivity from these texts, Fitzpatrick’s involvement renders close reading that is speculative and spectral.
57. Bono and Fitzpatrick, *Family Outing*, 184.
58. In 1982, a *New York* magazine writer penning a buyer’s guide to the newly available technology was less restrained in her terminology, calling the answering machine “a sort of Roach Motel for messages.” See Elizabeth J. Block, “All the Answers about Answering Machines,” *New York*, 29 March 1982.
59. In this way, it is like Derrida’s postcard that can always get lost in the mail. See Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
60. Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 81.
61. René Descartes, *The Method, Meditations, and Selections from the Principles of Descartes*, trans. John Veitch (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1907), 55–56. This passage is also discussed in Dominic Pettman, “After the Beep: Answering Machines and Creaturely Life,” *boundary 2* 37, no. 2 (2010): 134–53, alongside a discussion of Descartes, whose dismissal of animals on the grounds that their responses are automatic raises the question of whether

the capacity to refuse response is integral to any true response. Pettman intriguingly notes that Descartes's own aversion to automatic response may have been a complicated response to his own devotion "to a custom-made automaton doll of his deceased daughter Francine," though he adds that "without the benefit of a time machine, we can only speculate whether he attributed a soul to this mechanical doppelgänger of his flesh and blood" (136).

62. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 85. I am also indebted to Pettman, "After the Beep," for this inclusion.
63. "Oscillate," episode of *Transparent*, writ. Bridget Bedard, dir. Andrea Arnold, Amazon Studios, 11 December 2015.
64. Emily Todd VanDerWerff, "Transparent Waves Farewell, from the Far-Off Shores of 2014," *Vox*, 2 October 2019, www.vox.com/culture/2019/10/2/20884192/transparent-finale-review-vanderwerff-maura-dies.
65. See "Our Lady J, *Transparent's* First Trans Writer, Discusses Becoming Part of the Family," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 December 2015, www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/showtracker/la-et-st-our-lady-j-transparent-first-trans-writer-20151211-story.html.
66. Lisa Gitelman, "Media, Materiality, and the Measure of the Digital; or the Case of Sheet Music and the Problem of Piano Rolls," in *Memory Bytes: History, Technology, and Digital Culture*, ed. Lauren Rabinovitz and Abraham Geil (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 200. I thank Nick Seaver for pointing me to these references in his work on the player piano.
67. Bono and Fitzpatrick, *Transition*, 9.
68. Bono and Fitzpatrick, *Family Outing*, 184.
69. Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 9.
70. Carli Velocci, "Chaz Bono on *American Horror Story's* 'Incredibly Gay' Season," *Syfy Wire*, 9 November 2017, www.syfy.com/syfywire/chaz-bono-on-american-horror-stories-incredibly-gay-season.
71. Andrea Long Chu, "On Liking Women," *n+1*, no. 30 (2018), nplusonemag.com/issue-30/essays/on-liking-women/.

72. Sandy Stone, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," 9 April 2014, sandystone.com/empire-strikes-back.html. The "some" in this article's title is also an homage to this work, where Stone writes of the "forgotten word" in discourses about trans people: "The word is *some*."
73. See Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "The State of Shame: Australian Multiculturalism and the Crisis of Indigenous Citizenship," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 575–610; Jessica R. Cattelino, "From Locke to Slots: Money and the Politics of Indigeneity," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 2 (2018): 274–307; and Tania Murray Li, "Articulating Indigenous Identity in Indonesia: Resource Politics and the Tribal Slot," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 1 (2000): 149–79.
74. Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 61.
75. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 11.
76. Cecy B. Umberger, customer review of Chaz Bono, *Transition: Becoming Who I Was Always Meant to Be*, 28 December 2016, Amazon, www.amazon.com/Transition-Becoming-Who-Always-Meant/dp/0452298008/.

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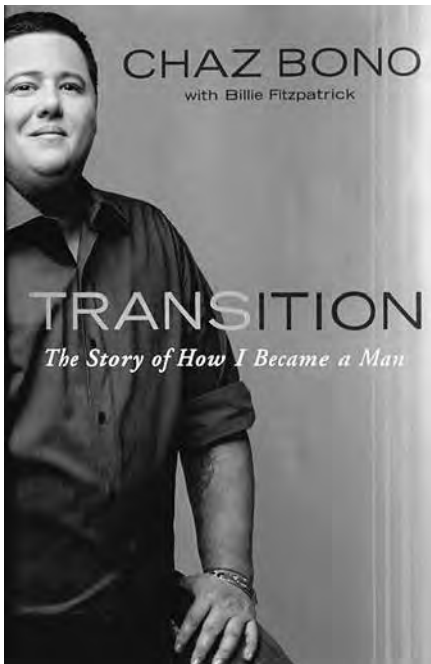


Figure 4. The first (2011) and second (2012) editions of *Transition*, with alternate subtitles