



**Dressed to Kill (1980, 1:28:00–1:29:53):**

*Miss Blake:* Oh god. What's wrong with that guy anyways?

*Dr. Levy:* He was a transsexual ... about to make the final step, but his male side couldn't do it.... There was Dr. Elliott and there was Bobbi ... Opposite sexes inhabiting the same body. The sex change operation was to resolve a conflict. But as much as Bobbi tried to get it, Elliott blocked it. So Bobbi got even.

*Detective Marino:* By killing Mrs. Miller?

**Peacock Screenplay (2010):**

It's here that we realize Emma Skillpa is really a man—JOHN SKILLPA. (Lander & Roy, 2009, p. 4)

How are Mad\_trans re\_presentations in thriller movies connected to wider societal discourses around madness and trans identity?<sup>1</sup> When is trans identity implicitly understood as Mad, and madness as gendered and racialized? How are these images intertwined in societal power structures and especially within sanism, racism, and gender-based discrimination? How do they reproduce the ideology of normalcy and the conception of the Mad\_trans Other as abnormal and fearsome?

Murder mysteries, thrillers, and horror movies are a common platform for hegemonic fantasies and re\_presentations around Mad\_trans positions. To name just a few movies from the last sixty years: *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), *Dressed to Kill* (De Palma, 1980), *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), and *Peacock* (Lander, 2010). In this article, I argue that Mad\_trans images in thriller movies are embedded in broader societal Mad\_trans re\_presentations and power structures. I argue that the social categories of gender and (mental) disability that underlie Mad\_trans re\_presentations are themselves significantly influenced by societal power relations; and more specifically by racism, genderism, and sanism. I also demonstrate how these images function to reproduce societal understandings of sameness and difference, belonging and Othering, normality and abnormality.

This article analyzes Mad\_trans re\_presentations in four steps. The first part links Mad\_trans images from thriller movies to broader societal discourses around madness and trans identity, discussing examples from medical, activist, and news media discourses. From a historical perspective and in reference to genealogies of madness and normalcy by Foucault (2003) and Ben-Moshe et al. (2009), the second part looks at processes of Mad re\_presentations and psychopathologization in relation to societal power structures. Working with Ahmed's concepts of *collective feelings* (2004a) and *affective politics of fear* (2004b), the third section focuses on the audience's fear response and the function of affects and emotions in re-establishing collectives, Others, and societal norms. The fourth part of this article contributes to the activist, artistic, and theoretical discourse on the possibilities and challenges of resistant re\_presentations and readings.

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<sup>1</sup> Language editing by Jessica Ring.

The goal of using the underscore marking in *re\_presentation* is to challenge the idea of accurate representation and refers to the elements of presentation and representation that are embedded within the term. The underscore is an explicit reminder that there is always a gap between the re\_presentation and the positions re\_presented, as well as between the intention of the producer and how an utterance, art piece, or theory is actually perceived. Moreover, there are different readings and interpretations of what is re\_presented and what is left out. The term *re\_presentation* asks: Who is the agent of whose re\_presentations? Which re\_presentations are at the centre; which are pushed to the margins? Which re\_presentations are silenced, taken out of context, not legible, or unintelligible? In the writing of *Mad\_trans*, the underscore is added to suggest that images and discourses are not only about what is re\_presented; they are also about what is excluded and left unmentioned. For instance, the fact that *Mad\_trans* re\_presentations are not only influenced by gender-based discrimination and sanism, but also by racism and other societal power relations. The underscore aims to highlight the interdependent and intersectional connections that are often made invisible in traditional writing (see Hornscheidt, 2012). I also use *Mad\_trans* as a resistant, reclaimed term of self-identification, and to describe the movements, issues and demands of people who are labeled or who identify as mentally disabled/Mad and trans. I am locating this article in *Mad Studies* (see LeFrançois, Menzies, & Reaume, 2013) and understand sanism as constituting one particular aspect of ableism, and madness one aspect of disability based on the understanding of disability found in the radical model of disability (see Withers, 2012, 2014). I use the concepts of sanism and madness as an analytic framework to examine ableism specifically in the context of psychiatric labels and madness (see Poole et al., 2012).

### **Relocating Mad\_Trans Re\_presentations from Thrillers in Wider Societal Discourses**

It was the experience of watching *Peacock* (2010) that motivated me to research the function of re\_presentations around madness and trans identity. My goal was to understand why images of *Mad\_trans* positions as fearsome and abnormal have been so popular for decades now. The trans references in the movies addressed here have been broadly discussed within various disciplines (see Boyd & Palmer, 2006; Fielding, 2012; Halberstam, 2000; Ryan, 2009; Sullivan, 2000). They have argued that the images and narratives suggest links to hegemonic trans re\_presentations.<sup>2</sup> I would like to take that argument a step further and point to how these images are combined with pathologizing ideas of madness, merging them into one unifying image of *Mad\_trans* positions as dangerous and abnormal. Throughout this article, I refer to this process and those images as *force fused*. *Dressed to Kill*

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<sup>2</sup> I am aware that some people do not read these movies as trans related. I nevertheless understand them as a part of *Mad\_trans* re\_presentations based on their explicit or implicit association with hegemonic trans narratives. Examples for these associations can be found in the above-cited quotations from *Psycho*, *Dressed to Kill*, and *Peacock*, as well as in quotations from *Silence of the Lambs* (1991): “Dr. Lecter: Billy’s not a real transsexual, but he thinks he is. He tries to be. He’s tried to be a lot of things, I expect.”

provides the most obvious example of the process of force fusing, in that the main character is explicitly described as “transsexual” by the psychiatrist Dr. Levy, as cited in the introduction to this article. Everything following that statement is a rather stereotypical, pathologizing, and criminalizing description of the psychiatric label ‘*dissociative personality disorder*’ infused with the gender binary concept. Similarly to *Dressed to Kill*, the main character in *Peacock* is constructed along the lines of a very simplistic understanding of ‘dissociative personality disorder’ and force fused with a similarly simplistic understanding of trans identity.<sup>3</sup> These understandings correspond with the hegemonic prototypical perceptions of trans identity and madness that are embedded in normative conceptions of sanity and gender. A man by day and a woman by night, *Peacock*’s main character has a romantic relationship with themself.<sup>4</sup> The murder story centres on the slow “death” of John, the “real” male personality and how Emma, the “fake” (trans)female personality, takes him over; the concepts of *real* and *fake* are exemplified by the quotation provided in the introduction to this article. The climax of the film is when Emma kills a stranger to stage John’s death. When she realizes what she has done and that John is gone, Emma locks herself in her house to protect the people around her from herself.

Watching this film left me deeply confused, with a strong urge to distance myself from those images. I remember how my Mad\_trans self<sup>5</sup> was fighting over which part of me had to be denied in order to create that distance. The names of the producers, cast, and caterers were scrolling down the screen while the thoughts in my head were struggling for something to hold on to. They were screaming, “This is wrong, trans people are not like that, we are ‘normal’ like everyone else!”; “Who are you kidding? This is exactly how crazy you are!”; “Why would anyone make a film like that?” My impulse to distance myself from these images and to fit into the concept of some so-called normality are not unique to any individual viewing experience. As I discuss further at a later point, they are in fact characteristic responses to re\_presentations that portray Mad\_trans positions as fearsome and abnormal.

The *Peacock* example, as well as the quotations from *Psycho* and *Dressed to Kill*, demonstrate how Mad\_trans re\_presentations in thrillers are defined by Mad and trans stereotypes. These images are largely established through transmisogyny and predominantly target trans\_feminine positions. The following discussion of the medical, activist, and news media discourses shows how similar elements of Mad\_trans re\_presentations can be observed in broader discourses around madness and trans identity. The goal of this article is the analytical removal of these hegemonic fantasies from the Mad\_trans bodies that they wrongfully claim to represent, and to re\_locate them within societal power structures. To ask, in the tradition of Mad and

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<sup>3</sup> According to WWTW (“WWTW Interview,” 2010), Michael Lander, the director and co-writer of *Peacock*, stated that the main character was developed based on the idea of a “50s era transvestite” and research on “dissociative personality disorders.”

<sup>4</sup> I am using this pronoun as a singular gender neutral pronoun in this context.

<sup>5</sup> I am using this term as a reclaimed and resistant self-identification as a trans person with experiences of psychiatrization and psychiatric labels.

disability studies: Who is defined as Mad, irrational, or insane, and under what power relations? To serve which interests? To re\_establish which norms?<sup>6</sup>

Over the last seven years, I have followed media re\_presentations and medical and activist discourses around madness and trans identity. As a part of this process, I have experienced Mad and trans discourses as both impenetrably intertwined and distinct at the same time. Discourses focusing on trans identity in particular tend to also simultaneously discuss madness. Trans identity and madness are sometimes presented as synonyms, sometimes as causally determinative (reciprocally), and sometimes in differentiation to one another. Many medical discourses consider trans identity directly or indirectly as a form of so-called ‘mental illness’, ‘disorder’, or ‘dysphoria’ that is diagnostically defined within the categorizations of trans and gender-non-conforming identities in the *International Classification of Diseases (ICD)* and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. While biological approaches suggest that trans identity has biological causes, social psychology often argues that it is socialization that leads to “gender identity disorder” (see American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2009; Jones, 2002). The newly established label of ‘gender dysphoria’ in the *DSM-5* (APA, 2013, pp. 451–459) has another social-psychological approach. It highlights that it is not the identity that is labeled as pathological but rather the dysphoria or distress caused by a lack of trans-specific health care or by societal discrimination and exclusion. As Global Action for Trans Equality (GATE; 2011, p. 17) anticipated: “Even when distress or dysphoria would become the core notion of the diagnosis, given the historical and current functioning of mental disorders the new diagnosis would continue to pathologize trans\* people and their identities.” The diagnosis in the *DSM-5* seems to factor power relations into its derivation of causes for ‘mental illness’. But despite its partial recognition of discrimination, the conclusion of this approach remains the same. “Our basic identities are less and less considered a ‘mental illness,’ but our strategies for surviving are being taken out of context and individualized as ‘mental illnesses’” (Kirby, 2014, p. 163).<sup>7</sup> In that sense, all of the different approaches discussed above uphold the understanding of madness and trans identity as a psychiatric issue and abnormal. In all of these narratives, the construction of diagnoses, ‘mental illness’, and madness remain fundamentally unchallenged within societal power relations.

Another medical narrative in which madness and trans identity are brought together is that of the differential diagnosis. While trans identity is diagnostically defined as a ‘mental illness’, differential diagnosis largely constructs trans identity in clear differentiation to (mental) disability or madness. Some labels of ‘mental illnesses’ are considered differential diagnoses to trans identity in the diagnostic manuals *ICD* and *DSM*. Country-specific additions to these differential diagnoses

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<sup>6</sup> This series of questions was developed in dialogue with the article: “‘Lame Idea’: Disabling Language in the Classroom” (Ben-Moshe, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> This individualization of structural discrimination in psychiatric diagnoses has as well been powerfully discussed by Tosh (2013) on the example of gender identity disorder and childhood sexual abuse.

can be found in the respective legal or health care regulations or practices. In Germany, the guidelines for the treatment and diagnosis of trans identity (MDS, 2009) name any ‘personality disorder’ as a potential differential diagnosis, in addition to the differential diagnoses listed in the *ICD-10* and *DSM-5*. These guidelines do not only serve to define an individual’s access to trans health care—they also play a crucial role in a person’s legal name choice and gender recognition. In many European legal systems, and specifically that of Germany, a psychiatric diagnosis of ‘gender dysphoria’ or ‘gender identity disorder’ is named as a requirement for a change of name and gender marker (Transsexuellengesetz of 1980). This demonstrates how the psychiatric diagnostic criteria can extend into the juridical space. These regulations prevent or significantly complicate the recognition of a particular gender identity for trans people formerly labeled ‘mentally ill’. Within this medical and legal system, Mad\_trans positions are not recognized as Subject positions. Mad\_trans people are prohibited control over their own gender identifications to an even greater extent than trans people who have not received a mental illness label beyond that of ‘gender dysphoria’.

An entanglement of Mad and trans discourses can also be found within trans activist spaces. Over the last few years, there has been a strong and growing movement of trans activists fighting against the psychopathologization of trans identity. Parts of the movement for trans depathologization are organized under a global campaign called Stop Trans Pathologization (STP), which includes activists and organizations in 41 cities across Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. There are varying positions and approaches within this movement. Some perspectives embed the demands for the depathologization of trans identity within a wider critique of the psychiatric complex and psychopathologization. In Berlin, the STP campaign has been significantly supported by broader antipsychiatric organizations and those critical of psychiatry, such as the *Irrenoffensive Berlin e.V.* (the Mad campaign); *AK Psychiatriekritik* (working group for the critique of psychiatry) and *Verein zum Schutz vor Psychiatrischer Gewalt* (Association for Protection from Psychiatric Violence). Unfortunately, the positions that have received the largest media coverage and political support have focused on distancing trans identity from madness, claiming that trans identity is “wrongfully” considered a ‘mental illness’. Within these narratives, the construction of a depathologized trans identity goes hand in hand with the confirmation of ‘mental illness’ and pathologization of disability, as it supports the idea of “right” and “wrong” psychiatric labels. As discussed by Diamond (2014), these narratives are not exclusive to trans-activist discourses; they can also be observed more widely in pathologized communities’ demands for depathologization. “Contextualizing all human experience is a critical step toward building stronger solidarity networks within and among political communities that have vested interests in challenging their psychiatric pathologization. Many marginalized people fall into the trap of distancing themselves from those who they consider to be truly mentally ill” (p. 202). When constructing trans identity in clear differentiation to ‘mental illness’, trans people with experiences of psychiatrization and psychiatric labels other than ‘gender identity disorder’ or ‘gender dysphoria’ are written out of the narrative. The

realities, struggles, and political demands of Mad and Mad\_trans people thus stay largely unrepresented in the context of trans activist demands for depathologization.

Examples of force-fused re\_presentations around madness and trans identity can also be found in news coverage. There is one particular example that reads as though it were something out of a movie: the German news and police reports regarding the case of the so-called Phantom of Heilbronn. For years, the police in Germany, Austria, and France had been searching for a presumed serial killer, police murderer, smuggler, and thief. They had linked all of the crimes together based on the evidence of one particular DNA profile that was supposedly found at all of the crime scenes between 1993 and 2009. The German media coverage around this case made the intersection of societal power structures apparent. The media speculations around the possible Phantom of Heilbronn were defined by gendered, racialized and psychopathologizing stereotypes. After the murder of a police officer in 2007, the police reports and news coverage on the Phantom were particularly dominated by anti-Romani and racist stereotypes (see “Ermittlungsspannen nach Polizistinnenmord,” 2012), suggesting that the Phantom was Roma. When the first facial composite was made of the Phantom in 2008, the re\_representation of gender on the sketch did not match the presumed sex from the DNA samples. At that point, a new narrative arose around the Phantom. The police announced that “it is possible that she is perceived as a man”<sup>8</sup> (as quoted in *Die Welt*; Keseling, 2008). Some newspapers took up this statement and described the very “dangerous, brutal” and “unpredictable”<sup>9</sup> (Arnsperger & Drissner, 2008; Bojic, T./DPA, 2008) Phantom, as possibly “transsexual”<sup>10</sup> (Schüle, 2008), or as a “woman disguised as a man”<sup>11</sup> (“Phantom von Heilbronn,” 2009). The fact that none of the other arrested suspects could confirm the involvement of the Phantom in these crimes, or even the Phantom’s existence for that matter, was only taken as proof of how terrifying the Phantom must be to keep their alleged accomplices so quiet (Schüle, 2008). One significant aspect of the news and police discourse in this case is that the theories of the Phantom as Roma or trans were developed both parallel to one another and in exclusion of one another at the same time. The Phantom is either Roma or trans (and implicitly *white*<sup>12</sup>). This narrative exclusion is characteristic for the construction of trans identity as implicitly or explicitly *white*, a topic that has been discussed by many scholars and activists such as Bacchetta and Haritaworn (2011) and Binaohan (2014). In March 2009, the supposed Phantom DNA was identified as actually belonging to one of the people who worked in the company that produced the cotton

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<sup>8</sup> Translated by the author. Orig.: “*Es kann sein, dass sie äußerlich als Mann wahrgenommen wird.*”

<sup>9</sup> Translated by the author. Orig.: “*gefährlich, unberechenbar*” und “brutal.”

<sup>10</sup> Translated by the author. Orig.: “*transsexuell.*”

<sup>11</sup> Translated by the author. Orig.: “*als Mann verkleidet.*”

<sup>12</sup> I am writing *white* in italics in reference to Eggers et al. (2009, p. 13) to point out its socially constructed character. *Whiteness* is a category to analyze and name privilege and thus differs from the capitalized Black or People of Color, which are resistant and empowering identity categories. The italic writing of *white* aims to reflect this positioned differentiation.

swabs used in the crime scene investigation. The Phantom thus never existed before being invented through the media and police discourses and their Mad\_trans\_racialized re\_presentations. In 2012, the investigation of a radical right-wing group by the name of National Socialist Underground (NSU)<sup>13</sup> determined that the police officer in Heilbronn was murdered by its members. The media coverage and the police reports of the NSU investigation did not revise their previous coverage, one that was both anti-Romani and discriminatory against trans people (see Diel, 2014, “*Ermittlungsspannen nach Polizistinnenmord*,” 2012). The Phantom of Heilbronn vanished from the newspapers and police reports as quickly as it had emerged. What has remained, however, are the violent associations of danger and criminality attributed to Roma and those of fear and abnormality to Mad\_trans people, as well as a distinct separation of Roma and trans positions, and the re-established image of trans positions as *white*.

### **Historically Relocating Mad Re\_presentations and the Abnormal Other**

What is the historical relationship between force-fused re\_presentations around madness and the concept of normalcy? How are they entangled within societal power relations, racism, sanism and gender-based discrimination?

This section historically untangles how Mad\_trans re\_presentations are connected to wider Mad re\_presentations and psychopathologization. Furthermore, it demonstrates how these processes are embedded within societal power relations, the ideology of normalcy, and the construction of the abnormal Other. There are a number of places to begin when attempting to historically disentangle the impenetrable workings of hegemonic Mad re\_presentations and psychopathologization. Instead of starting with a historiography of the construction of madness, I first provide a historical contextualization of normalcy.

“Normalcy is a relatively new concept which arose as part of the modernity project in 1800–1850 in Western Europe and its North American colonized spaces.” Ben-Moshe et al. (2009, p. 114) described how, within the ideology of normalcy, the binary of normality and abnormality became a regulatory tool for the structuring of society. Other than the previously predominant notion of the ideal, the concept of the norm implies that the majority of people are somehow located around the mean: A mean that is constructed in differentiation to the concept of the abnormal.

There is a need for people at the margin, in order to highlight and valorize ‘normalcy’ by contrasting it with a demeaned and derided ‘abnormalcy’ ... Difference is thus projected onto stigmatized populations so all others can strive for some illusory normalcy. (Ben-Moshe et al., 2009, p. 115)

Within the same time frame, the understanding of madness shifted from the ‘monstrous’ to the ‘abnormal’. “Madness was no longer recognized in what brings man closer to an immemorial fall or an indefinitely present animality; it was, on the contrary, situated in those distances man takes in regard to himself” (Foucault, 1989, p. 209). As the abnormal, the Mad Other is kept at a distance—whether that be a

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<sup>13</sup> Translated by the author: Orig.: “*Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund*”

conceptual distance through diagnostically labeling madness as abnormal or a concurrent physical distance through institutionalization. This gap of distance is the space in which the Mad Other becomes perceived as an object to be observed, measured, and categorized. A distance that allows the norm to be established in differentiation to the (imaginary) abnormal Other. And this shift to the concept of abnormal was accompanied by a shift in the functions and the possibilities of psychiatry. As Foucault described in his lectures at the Collège de France, psychiatry was able to claim the basic function of protection and order for itself.

All conduct [is situated] in relation to, and according to, a norm that is also controlled, or is at least seen to be controlled, by psychiatry.... Psychiatry finally sees the entire domain of all possible conduct opening up before it as a domain for its possible intervention and symptomatological evaluation. (Foucault, 2003, p. 160)

It is this framework that enabled current practices of psychopathologization as a tool to define abnormality and protect societal norms.

Psychopathologization has a long heritage of targeting populations and struggles that have the potential to challenge and question hegemonic power relations and the ideology of normalcy. A look at the history of psychiatric pathologization and depathologization shows how diagnoses that decide who and what is labeled as Mad, irrational or insane, shift simultaneously with societal power structures and norms. To name one example, psychopathologization was used to rewrite the resistance and escape of enslaved people during colonialism. The desire to flee captivity was determined to be pathological, based on the invention of the psychiatric diagnosis ‘drapetomania’ (see de Young, 2010, p. 13). Psychiatric labels have been used to pathologize the resistance of (mostly *white*) women against patriarchy, labeling them “hysterical” (see de Young, 2010, p. 40). In the *DSM-II* (APA, 1968) the diagnostic criteria for the psychiatric label of ‘schizophrenia’ was changed to increasingly target and institutionalize members of the civil rights movement (see de Young, 2010, p. 161; Lane, 2010; Metzl, 2014). To this day, emotional responses to discrimination and injustice, such as anger, fear, dissociation, sadness, and despair are labeled as pathological. To this day, the *DSM* and *ICD* list multiple diagnoses around gender identity to target identities and re\_presentations that do not fit heteronormative standards (see APA, 2013; WHO, 2011). These heteronormative standards are themselves defined by racist, ableist, and *white* Western notions of (gender) normativity (see Binaohan, 2014; Haritaworn, 2007; McRuer, 2006) and inscribed into the diagnostic definitions of trans identity, which “reflect cultural prejudices against gender diversity and reinforce narrow Western gender stereotypes” (GATE, 2011, p. 8).

The previous examples, as different from each other as they may be, demonstrate how psychopathologization seems to specifically target populations, identities, and struggles that challenge societal power structures and norms. But how is it possible for psychiatric labels to do this without explicitly referring to the targeted positions? In the following, I argue that this is possible due to the interdependence of psychopathologization and societal power structures. Psychiatric

labels can only target specific populations because society already holds assumptions about those targeted positions; a process that is made especially apparent in the rewriting of the diagnosis ‘schizophrenia’. One important point concerning the link between ‘schizophrenia’ and trans discourses is that “schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders” (see APA, 2013, p. 458) are listed as part of the main differential diagnoses for ‘gender dysphoria’. This makes it nearly impossible for trans people who had formerly been labeled ‘schizophrenic’ to gain access to trans health care or legal gender recognition.

In an interview with *Psychology Today* (Lane, 2010), Metzl made the following comment:

Before the 60s, psychiatry often posited that schizophrenia was a psychological “reaction” to a splitting of the basic functions of personality. Official descriptors emphasized the generally calm nature of such persons, in ways that encouraged associations with [*white*] middle-class housewives.

Today, those characteristics apply much more to the label ‘dissociative personality disorder’, which is still a very gendered diagnosis. In the 1968 publication of the second edition of the *DSM*, ‘paranoid schizophrenia’ was defined as “a condition of hostility, aggression and projected anger” (Metzl, 2014, p. 2), and it was claimed that “the patient’s attitude is frequently hostile and aggressive, and his behavior tends to be consistent with his delusions.” (APA, 1968, p. 34) During the same time period, psychiatric research articles, case studies, and advertisements for antipsychotic medications, using descriptors such as “hostile,” “aggressive,” and “violent” (see Metzl, 2009, 2014), disseminated a masculinized and racialized image of ‘schizophrenia’. However, the image of Black masculinity did not originate in this diagnosis: it has been constructed and upheld as part of the colonial project for centuries. As Kanani (2011, p. 8) notes: “Once slavery was ended in the United States, the myth of the violent African American gained prominence and was used to diagnose African Americans as mentally ill.” Through psychopathologization, hegemonic assumptions about Black masculinity became inscribed into the definition of ‘schizophrenia’ and madness. These same assumptions were then used to label the targeted populations as ‘mentally ill’ or Mad and thus irrational and not to be taken seriously.

If actions, emotional responses, or identities that challenge societal power structures are proven to be not sane (and thus not valid), they do not have to be taken into account. In this manner, psychopathologization disarms the threat of resistant or Mad positions by labeling them as pathological. At the same time, there is a shift from the structural to the individual. Through the psychopathologization and simultaneous individualization of resistant perspectives, the societal power structures that were originally challenged slip out of focus. Not only are the arguments dismissed as not valid, the whole discourse is moved from the structural to the individual. The power structures and norms thus remain out of focus, unnamed and unquestioned.

The example of the ‘schizophrenia’ diagnosis demonstrates how psychopathologization works interdependently with racism, sanism, and gender-based stereotypes to redefine the meaning of (in)sanity, race, and gender: It functions

to protect the idea of normalcy and to control what is considered normal or abnormal. Another important point demonstrated by this example is that psychopathologization is not limited to psychiatric labels. It is present in wider psychiatric discourses, marketing and in various other Mad re\_presentations and discourses in society. The psychopathologization of specific positions, therefore, does not necessarily start and end with the implementation and abolition of a particular diagnosis—something that is clearly demonstrated by the history of the depathologization of ‘homosexuality’. Despite its official depathologization in 1973, same-sex sexuality is still considered pathological in many European and North American discourses. There are conversion therapies, suggestions for medical treatment, and pathologizing re\_presentations in fictional and non-fictional productions. For people seeking asylum in Europe due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, the psychopathologization of their sexuality and gender identity is still very much a part of the process. Jansen and Spijkerboer (2011, pp. 50–58) wrote about how the people who seek asylum on the basis of being LGBTQI<sup>14</sup> have to prove their “homo-, trans-, or intersexuality” through medical examinations (including physical, psychological, and psychiatric examinations), witness statements, diverse questioning methods, and documentary evidence (such as explicit photographs). The parameters of these examinations demonstrate a close similarity to former procedures linked to the diagnosis ‘homosexuality’. This is especially remarkable in consideration of discourses and self-promotion of “the West” as progressive, democratic, accepting of diversity, and protective of LGBTQTI people’s rights. The psychopathologization and invasive medical and psychological examination of LGBTQTI refugees demonstrate that this supposed depathologization, freedom, and protection only apply to very exclusive sections of the LGBTQTI communities. That fact is also reflected in the ongoing psychopathologization of sexual orientation that can be observed in the *DSM* and *ICD* diagnostic criteria for ‘borderline personality disorder’, for instance, or for diagnoses around gender identities and expressions (see APA, 2013; WHO, 2011).

### **Relocating Mad Re\_presentations and the Fearsome Other Through Affect Theory**

How are hegemonic Mad\_trans re\_presentations such as the ones found in thriller movies connected to the mechanisms of psychopathologization? What role does spectatorship, and the emotional response of fear in particular, play in the determination of Mad\_trans positions as the abnormal Other? How does the distance created by fear and the distancing from the abnormal Other translate into trans discourses and the concept of (trans)normativity?

Having established how psychopathologization is linked to upholding the concepts of normality and abnormality, and that the key elements of psychopathologization are the distance between the norm and the (imaginary) Mad\_gendered\_racialized Other, interdependence with societal power relations, and individualization, this section now returns to the concept of force-fused

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<sup>14</sup> *LGBTQI* stands for *lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex*.

re\_presentations such as the ones found in thriller movies and reflects on how hegemonic spectatorship co-constructs normalizing re\_presentations. In dialogue with Ahmed's (2004a, 2004b) concepts of collective feelings and affective politics of fear, I discuss some considerations about how fear, as an emotional audience response, is linked to the construction of normalcy, the abnormal Other, and the distance created between them.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004b, p. 64), Ahmed reflected upon the role of fear in the conservation of power and how fear as affective politics preserves power only by announcing a threat to life itself. Ahmed wrote that the fear evoked by one particular encounter or image is never isolated. It stands in dialogue with the past histories of readings and inscribes itself into a collective memory, to be recalled in the context of any further readings of the Other. I argue that the fear evoked by Mad\_trans re\_presentations in thrillers works in similar ways. The reading of these images and the emotional responses of fear and horror occur within a wider framework than the movie itself. They are defined by previous Mad\_trans readings and are inscribed into a collective memory. This memory can then be recalled in the context of any further readings of Mad\_trans bodies and discourses. These processes contribute to a relationship of interdependence between the construction and reading of Mad\_trans re\_presentations in thrillers and wider Mad\_trans medical, activist, and news media discourses as well as everyday encounters.

Another element of the affective politics of fear that I find crucial to the understanding of the role of fear in Mad re\_presentations and psychopathologization is the sideways movement of fear between objects.

The affect of fear is sustained, or is even intensified, through the displacement between objects. The displacement between objects works to link those objects together. Such linkages are not created by fear, but may already be in place within the social imaginary.... I would suggest that the sideways movement between objects, which works to stick objects together as signs of threat, is shaped by multiple histories. (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 66)

The rewriting of the 'schizophrenia' diagnosis can be seen as one example of how the sideways movement of fear works within psychopathologization to re-establish a Mad\_gendered\_racialized Other as fearsome. The Mad\_trans re\_presentations in thrillers and news media discourses discussed above constitute another example. It is curious that images and assumptions around madness and trans identity get joined or force fused into one narrative. This process cannot be understood as an attempt to comprehend or represent intersectional discrimination. As the sideways movement of fear suggests, such force-fused re\_presentations are much more likely to further stigmatize all of the re\_presented subjectivities. Within these images, trans identity is linked to past readings of madness, and madness is linked to past readings of trans identity. The collective reading of Mad\_trans images is thus shaped by multiple histories of the readings of Mad, trans and Mad\_trans images. That points to the multitude of parallels to interdependent processes of psychopathologization, in which hegemonic assumptions about targeted populations are inscribed into the understanding of madness. The fear or irrationality associated

with madness is in turn inscribed into the hegemonic understandings of psychopathologized populations, identities, and behaviors.

Within the concept of affective politics of fear, fear works to create distance: A distance in which belonging and Othering are defined and re-established. “Within political theory, fear has been understood as crucial to the forming of collectives.... Through the generation of ‘the threat’, fear works to align bodies with and against others.” (Ahmed, 2004b, pp. 71–72) The distance evoked by fear enables the defining of the abnormal Other. Simultaneously, the shared fear directed toward the Other creates a collective sense of sameness and intimacy. The norm gets affirmed in differentiation to the (imagined) abnormal Other. Within this process, the Other is read as the cause of the emotional response. The fear is translated from “I am frightened” into “you are fearsome” (see Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b). As previously stated, this reading inscribes itself into the collective memory, to be recalled in the context of any further readings. Based on that understanding, the Mad\_trans re\_presentations that are constructed to evoke fear establish Mad\_trans positions as fearsome and abnormal far beyond any one movie or news article.

When reading force-fused re\_presentations around madness and trans identity through the concept of affective politics of fear, distancing from Mad\_trans bodies and drawing toward collective ideas of normalcy are key elements of the images that create Mad\_trans bodies as fearsome and abnormal. In hegemonic readings and re\_presentations of Mad\_trans positions such as the ones found in thriller movies or the news reports on the Phantom of Heilbronn, the distance produced by fear functions to strengthen a collective body and the notion of an ableized cis-gendered norm in differentiation to the Mad\_trans re\_presentation. But the collective memories of readings of Mad\_trans bodies are not only interdependent with mainstream news media, fictional, and medical discourses. The distance created by fear and the distancing from the abnormal Other can also be found in discourses aiming to support partially marginalized positions, which are Othered themselves. The urge to create distance from the mostly violent hegemonic projections easily results in distancing from the other Othered positions (see Aubrecht, 2012; Bell, 2006; Diamond, 2014; Withers, 2014). One example of that is the desire to distance trans positions from Mad positions in order to recover the trans body from hegemonic Mad\_trans re\_presentations and projections. In this process, the distance generated through hegemonic Mad\_trans re\_presentations functions to strengthen a collective notion of (trans)normativity. Within the wider context of trans activism, this distancing from the other Other translates into a form of trans politics that is centred around a conception of trans as *white*, (mentally) ableized, and well-adjusted to the requirements of capitalist society (see Bacchetta & Haritaworn, 2011; Fütty, 2014; Puar, 2007, 2013). It is a concept of trans that aims to construct a trans body that is “immune” to hegemonic Mad, racialized, and other Othered re\_presentations—and could thus potentially be assimilated into the ideology of normalcy. As Withers (2012, p. 120) noted: “Working to not be considered disabled in order to avoid stigma without doing anything to challenge the stigmatization of disabled people is, at best, a demonstration of a lack of solidarity, and at worst, complicity in oppression.” It is a form of politics that aligns itself with societal

power structures and normalcy; and in the process, it leaves behind the demands and causes of Mad\_trans individuals as well as other positions that are Othered through multiple forms of oppression.<sup>15</sup>

### **Toward Resistant Readings and Re\_presentations of Solidarity**

How is it possible to create or support counter-re\_presentations and counter-readings within a framework whose language, images, associations, and past history of readings are defined—or at least significantly influenced by—societal power relations?

In this section, I discuss the possibilities and challenges of counter-re\_presentations and counter-readings that have been extensively and critically addressed in theoretical discourses and in the arts.<sup>16</sup> When looking at the elements of spectatorship and past history of readings within the concept of re\_presentation, it becomes especially clear that it is not only the construction of the image or narrative that functions within a framework that is influenced or even defined by power relations: The readings of these narratives and images are similarly influenced by the past history of readings, wider discourses, and ideologies, as well as the embodied situation of the reader within societal power relations (see Shohat & Stam, 2014). This framework defines precisely which associations and readings are possible and which are not; which are legible, intelligible and which are not. This understanding of re\_presentations and spectatorship already hypothesizes the possibility of resistant readings and re\_presentations. However, it also suggests that it is not only the hegemonic re\_presentations that can only partially control the way they are interpreted, the same is true for counter-re\_presentations as well. Shohat and Stam (2014) spoke of dominant, negotiated, and resistant readings and further pointed out “that a ‘resistant’ reading on one axis (for example class) might go hand in hand with a ‘dominant’ reading on another axis (for instance, race)” (p. 349). This resonates with the previous analysis of partially resistant re\_presentations and discourses that support trans issues, while further stigmatizing or ignoring Mad\_(trans) individuals as well as other positions that are Othered through multiple forms of oppression.

For marginalized positions and causes, hegemonic re\_presentations tend to have very limited and clearly defined scripts and suggestions for interpretation. This can be observed in the previously discussed media, medical, and activist discourses around madness and trans identity that favour re\_presentations, frameworks, and suggestions for interpretation that confirm (in part) the concept of normalcy. As a result, I argue, trans narratives function in a framework that is dominated by re\_presentations, suggestions for interpretation, and past histories of readings that mostly construct *white*, ableized, middle-class trans men as re\_prepresentative of trans

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<sup>15</sup> This is a form of politics that is not unique to some areas of trans\_activism; it also applies to any kind of single-issue or single-identity politics within activism or other support structures.

<sup>16</sup> The conversations with and the writings, art works, and talks by the group Collective Creativity, Jovencio de la Paz, Stuart Hall, Shohat and Stam (2014), Straube (2014), San Alland, Vivek Shraya, and Lann Hornscheidt have been crucial to my thoughts on this topic.

issues; racialized trans\_ people as the (assimilated) exception to the norm (see Bacchetta & Haritaworn, 2011) or as the criminalized (sometimes psychopathologized) trans female sex worker; and Mad\_trans positions as dangerous or pitiful and abnormal. None of these stereotypical scripts and suggestions for interpretation truly allow complex, controversial and discursive forms of identifications through varying interests, beliefs, political convictions, or social contexts. As previously argued, these narratives are not solely defined by the re\_presentation intended by the author or speaker. They are constructed within a relationship of interdependence with the framework, suggestions for interpretation, spectatorship, and the past history of readings, which are themselves all dominated by hegemonic discourses.

I argue that resistant readings depend on the spectator's references to resistant narratives in the past history of readings, wider societal discourses, or imagination. Without this as a tool for counter-readings, resistant re\_presentations and *exit scapes*<sup>17</sup> remain vastly illegible and unintelligible. Within hegemonic Western contexts, resistant references and narratives are largely marginalized or reinterpreted and appropriated within the ideology of normalcy. Due to this lack of resistant references and the vast unintelligibility of counter-re\_presentations, their interpretations tend to associate resistant images with hegemonic imaginaries in order to make sense out of them based on the spectator's pool of references. Counter-re\_presentations that focus on one issue, one aspect of identity, or one element of discrimination might increase their legibility within a hegemonic framework, however, in the meantime they are more at risk of becoming aligned with hegemonic narratives of normativity and power dynamics, regardless of the author's intended spectatorship. Some artists, activists, and theorists thus deliberately choose counter-re\_presentations that confuse the spectator's association with hegemonic references and understandings—just as this text makes use of unconventional orthographic forms, for example the underscore, to disrupt hegemonic readings of re\_presentations and identity categories. Re\_presentations that tend to confuse dominant readings simultaneously feed into the pool of resistant references for any further readings and re\_presentations. As such, these re\_presentations enable the re\_presentation and reading of marginalized positions as complex, varying subjects who identify with different interests, narratives, histories, and beliefs.

As a possibility for varying, complex and controversial counter-re\_presentations and discourses, Shohat and Stam (2014) argued for collective speech and cultural polyphony.

While it is dangerous to imagine that one can speak for others (that is, paradigmatically replace them), it is something else again to speak with or alongside others in the sense of forming alliances. In this sense we are less interested in identity as something one 'has' than in identification as

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<sup>17</sup> The term *exit scapes* was developed by Straube in *Trans Cinema and Its Exit Scapes* (2014). With *exit scapes*, Straube describes moments of disruption within dominant cinematic representations. It describes moments that allow for a critical re-reading and affirmative re-imagining of the re\_presented positions.

something one ‘does’. The concept of crisscrossing identifications evokes the theoretical possibility and even the political necessity of sharing the critique of domination and the burden of representation. It even involves making representation less of a burden and more of a collective pleasure and responsibility. (p. 346)

This concept envisions the possibility of multiple varying and complex counter-re\_presentations that exist alongside each other in solidarity. In the process, it negotiates the intricate tensions between identity politics and constructivism without completely aligning with either one of them. There has been extensive criticism of the distancing from identity politics. For instance, Dacumos (2006) argued how this distance is often used to hegemonically appropriate and claim expertise from positions of power. I find it important to consider this criticism within the idea of collective speech and re\_presentations of solidarity. The positions and re\_presentations supported by hegemonic structures through funding, employment, and space are mostly those which, based on their embodied position or their message, can be at least partially aligned with normativity. I therefore believe that varying, complex, controversial, and discursive counter-re\_presentations that are based on solidarity and alliances must go hand in hand with strategic identity politics, especially on a structural level.

I understand this article and the attempt to relocate force-fused re\_presentations around madness within societal power structures as part of trans\_forming politics<sup>18</sup> and politics of abolition. Trans\_forming politics and politics of abolition embody an alternative to the politics of normalization and trans normalization in particular. This alternative is not rooted within the ideology of normalcy—it is rooted in solidarity, in the radical rejection of societal power structures and an intersectional understanding of discrimination. As Bassichis, Lee and Spade (2011, p. 37) expressed it: “Abolition is about breaking down things that oppress and building up things that nourish.” In a system that upholds its power structures through their simultaneous omnipresence and invisibility, breaking down power structures includes decrypting and exposing mechanisms of oppression. Building up things that nourish includes discussing and taking part in resistant discourses and readings. Within the framework of this article, that meant analytically breaking down the mechanisms of psychopathologization and force-fused re\_presentations around madness. It meant creating an understanding of these images that locates hegemonic fantasies and projections within societal power structures rather than within the targeted struggles, individuals, and communities. This understanding reclaims Mad, disabled, and psychopathologized perspectives, identities, struggles, and emotions as crucial acts and positions of resistance. Building up things that nourish also means envisioning how counter-discourses and counter-readings can be created and supported. Based on a thorough analysis of hegemonic re\_presentations in film, news media, and medical and activist discourses, this article has provided a counter-reading with the goal of contributing to the wider Mad\_trans counter-discourse and

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<sup>18</sup> I am using this term in the spirit of the lab *Politicizing Trans/Trans\_forming Politics*, which took place in 2012 at Humboldt University of Berlin.

envisioned re\_presentations of resistance and solidarity in dialogue with a variety of discourses and concepts.

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<sup>19</sup> No longer online; now available from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org), e.g., from October 13, 2010.