

# Tomboy objects: reimagining the tomboy as a queer object orientation

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## **Tomboy Objects: Reimagining the Tomboy as a Queer Object Orientation.**

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*L is for Lion* by Annie Lanzillotto (2013) and *Tomboy Survival Guide* by Ivan Coyote (2016) both narrate a childhood in which the self is constructed through a ‘tomboy’ identification. In this paper I read these two texts through a queer phenomenological framework, putting them into conversation with each other and with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) notion of intentionality and Sara Ahmed’s (2006; 2010; 2012) queer phenomenology to reimagine the tomboy as a queer orientation towards objects. Furthermore, through this object orientation, the autobiographical narratives allow the tomboy to refuse heterosexual feminine ideals and to co-exist as both the potential queer and the actual future queer. The objects in *L is for Lion* become queer through proximity to the body, bringing with them a promise of transformation. In *Tomboy Survival Guide*, the queer disruptions brought on by the subject’s failure to orient towards normative objects reveal the straightening devices that attempt to reorient the subject back into line.

There are noticeable similarities between Lanzillotto and Coyote; being of a similar age, their tomboy childhoods occurred during the same historical timeframe – the 1970’s/1980’s. As well as the autobiographical writing that I will be examining here, both writers have also built up archives of multi modal story-telling through live and recorded spoken word and performance. However, there are contradictions and nuances that emerge when comparing the texts; Lanzillotto and Coyote write from different geographical locations that inform the narratives, with Lanzillotto’s childhood spent in the urban landscape of the Bronx, New York and Coyote growing up in the rural town of Whitehorse in the Yukon, Canada.

In *L is for Lion*, Lanzillotto tells a story of migration and generational memory, weaving her own memories with family stories told to her by her Italian immigrant parents and grandparents. Described as an ‘Italian Bronx Butch Freedom Memoir’, Lanzillotto crafts a narrative journey of truth seeking and a longing for freedom. This journey takes her from a tomboy childhood, through the New York City gay club scene in the 1980’s and periods of passing as male in Egypt, and on to Italy in search of family history, before finally ending in

a reluctant return home. I will examine this tomboy as a queer orientation in which the longing for freedom manifests through a queer attachment to objects. In particular, I will focus on Annie's queer material attachment to spaldeens, the small rubber balls used in street games. The spaldeen is a disruptive object that gains a queer agency through its proximity to the body, and, in turn, this disruptive potential allows to Annie imagine the possibility of overcoming the limitations of her child body.

Coyote's *Tomboy Survival Guide* tells of a childhood marked by illegibility as Ivan fails to comply with established gender norms. Like *L is for Lion*, *Tomboy Survival Guide* also offers a narrative journey, however, rather than a journey through place, this is a journey through the complexities of gender: 'a maze of labels that don't quite stick'.<sup>1</sup> In terms of queer object orientations, I will examine how the disorientation caused by Ivan's failure to orient towards normative objects impresses upon and shapes the body. In *L is for Lion* the orientation towards certain objects brings with it the possibilities of transformation and freedom. In *Tomboy Survival Guide*, however, although Coyote does construct their tomboy identity through an orientation towards objects that offer pleasure and affirmation, the most striking difference to *L is for Lion* is in the internalising and shaping effect of the failure to orient towards normalising and expected 'happy objects' (Ahmed, 2010).

### **Locating the Tomboy**

The figure of the tomboy seems to be such a familiar concept within contemporary western culture that it 'needs no definition', conjuring 'a virtually uniform picture of a girl who – by whatever standards society has dictated – acts like a boy' (Yamaguchi and Barber 1995, p. 10). The tomboy is so seemingly self-evident that, as Michelle Ann Abate (2008) points out, towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it became culturally codified and articulated through psychological discourse.<sup>2</sup> However, a deeper interrogation of the figure of the tomboy reveals that, rather than being a singular and unchanging cross-cultural identity, the tomboy has a complex history of shifting meanings and transgressive boundary crossing; not only

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ivancoyote.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Abate references the 1996 article by Shawn Meghan Burns, A. Kathleen O'Neil and Shirley Nederend (1996) in which they present a 12 point 'Tomboy Index' intended to name and categorize tomboy behaviour as childhood cross gender identification.

does she traverse the boundaries of masculine and feminine, she also troubles the boundaries between heterosexual and homosexual and between childhood and adulthood.

Tracing the etymological roots of the term reveals the implicit threat of the tomboy's boundary crossing. Prior to 1570, the term referred to 'a rude, boisterous or forward boy' before shifting in meaning in the later part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to refer to 'a bold or immodest woman' and then, later still, was further modified to indicate 'a girl who behaves like a spirited or boisterous boy; a wild romping girl' (Abate, 2008, p. xiii). With this shift in meaning from male to female, the term gains sexual and class-based connotations, being modified over the decades to indicate at various times 'prostitute', 'athlete', 'real woman' and 'dyke' (Elliot, 1998, p. 95). Mary Elliott's examination of the tomboy's emergence in the literary fiction of post-civil war America, identifies the tomboy as a subversive and solitary figure who disrupted the 'rigid taxonomies of gender identity and prevailing notions of appropriate private and public conduct for women' (1998, p. 92). This subversive potential, she argues further, required correction and containment by a narrative ending of heterosexuality and domestic resolution. The narrative corrections that seek to contain the tomboy's gender transgression are also taken up by Jack Halberstam who defines the tomboy as 'an extended childhood period of female masculinity' associated with a desire for the independence usually afforded to boys (1998, p. 5). The emergence and subsequent decline of the tomboy as a filmic trope, emerging in the 1950s and disappearing in the 1990's, is interpreted by Halberstam as a response to the continued threat of the tomboy who, in failing to contain her masculine identifications, raises 'the specter of the dyke' (1998, p. 193). It is within this context of the tomboy as potential future queer that I examine the tomboy through a framework of queer phenomenology, reading the tomboy through a series of dis/orientations towards object.

### **A Phenomenology of the Tomboy**

My examination of the tomboy draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Ahmed (2006; 2009; 2010; 2012) as a theoretical grounding. Merleau-Ponty argues that it is the intentional orientation of the body towards objects that defines relations between the subject and the social world. Drawing on the lived experiences of the body and its movement in space, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach understands consciousness as an intentionality towards objects, with intentionality defined in terms of a 'directedness' in

relation to bodily movement. The body, he claims, is 'our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions', shaping how we perceive the objects within our field of vision and, unlike other objects whose presence contains the possibility of their absence, the body is ever present (1964, p. 5). Meaning is thus produced through the subject's encounters with the material world and, as the central and constant position from which we encounter that world, the body thus becomes the location of subjectivity and agency.

### **Queering Phenomenology**

The body at the centre of Merleau-Ponty's formulation is an undifferentiated and universally masculine body and Merleau-Ponty make no attempt to account for the experiences of different bodies. However, despite this universalisation of the male body, phenomenology may still offer a valuable starting point for theorising about the disruptions caused by bodies that do not fit this universal model. Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* takes traditional phenomenology's centralizing of the body, the body as the 'here' of perception, as its starting point. However, Ahmed also essentially questions the 'where' of the body by considering the ways in which bodies are shaped by their surroundings, becoming sexed, gendered, and racialised by and through the spaces that they inhabit (2006, p. 8). Ahmed takes the question of bodily orientation towards objects and frames this specifically as a question of sexual orientation: 'to be oriented is . . . to be turned toward certain objects' (2006, p. 6). This approach relies on a definition of queer in terms of spatiality and movement - as that which moves 'across' or 'athwart' (Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii), bent or askew (Cleto, 1999, pp. 12 – 13). Understanding sexuality through these spatial metaphors, Ahmed questions how and where bodies orient themselves in space, how they are oriented towards other bodies, and how bodily orientations within certain spaces can sexualise or desexualise certain bodies (2006, p. 67). This approach stays with the disruptions caused by bodies that refuse or fail to be oriented towards normative objects to expose the mechanisms or 'straightening devices' that attempt to reorient these deviant bodies (Ahmed, 2006, p. 71 – 72; 2009; p. 91). Aligning with definitions of queer in terms of spatial orientation, the gender disruptions of the tomboy become a way of relating to the world that is askew, disturbed or disorienting and it is at the point where the tomboy threatens to exceed childhood object orientation that she becomes subject to corrections and restrictions. The tomboy's queerness is therefore not just the experience of disorientation, it is also constituted by the experience of being put 'back into line', and the attempts (failed or otherwise) made to reorient the tomboy body in line with a

normative adult femininity through the straightening devices of heterosexuality. Tolerated to the point where she signals the possible threat of a lesbian future, the tomboy's queer disruptions expose the failures of heterosexuality to enforce its compulsory conditions and maintain its own naturalisation.

### **Annie – Made of Rubber**

In *L is for Lion*, Annie's queer disruptions emerge through a queer attachment to the spaldeen; a small rubber ball used in children's street games in urban areas of New York in the 1930's to the 1970's. As an object, the spaldeen holds its own complex cultural history and its own unique materiality. The spaldeen, a bubble gum pink, spongy, hollow, rubber ball, was a by-product of tennis ball manufacturing. It is essentially a tennis ball without the felt. Incomplete, yet made into something new, it became an integral part of urban street games where creativity with available items became essential to play (Thompson, 1999). Although known colloquially as a spaldeen, the ball was produced by sporting goods manufacturer The Spalding Company and its unofficial name was derived from the New York accented pronunciation of the company name (Fein, 1999).

It is within this historical context that Annie's queer attachment to the spaldeen emerges and her identity as a tomboy becomes tied up with her proximity to this object: 'I felt free and powerful when I saw my pinky ball zoom off in its own direction and disappear on its own. The boys on my team laughed at the other team, because a girl had made it to second...I'd done the work of a tomboy. I'd sent the spaldeen on its way all over the block' (2013, p. 48). The spaldeen allows her to fulfil the role of the tomboy. It represents what she longs to be – out on the street rather than confined to the home, reckless and resilient, capable of metamorphosis and of bending and beating time. Annie's queer affiliations with the spaldeen are revealed through tactile interactions. As she smells its rubbery surface, she daydreams about the freedom of playing in the street (2013, p. 11). This longing for freedom and unrestricted movement becomes attached to the spaldeen as it becomes imbued with the agency that Annie longs for: 'My spaldeen is alive. It's made of electrons. My spaldeen wants to roam, to hop down the stoop and take off under a car chassis, into the current of the street where a car can bump a spaldeen for blocks' (2013, p. 11). Lanzillotto repeats this later

in the text: ‘spaldeens had a life inside them. They were made of electrons. Spaldeens ricocheted off the sides of cars. Spaldeens hit the point of a step and flew clear across the street. Spaldeens got bunked by oncoming car grills and ran to the next block’ (2013, p. 33). Spaldeens have their own agency and temporality, they are unpredictable, disruptive, they bounce ahead, beyond the capabilities of 4 year old Annie and so it becomes a way for Annie to exceed the limits of her body. In an act of what Scott Herring (2011) terms ‘material dissidence’, nonnormative material relations that extends beyond sexuality, Annie also applies the spaldeens as armour to her body. It is when these balls break and split open that they become adhered to the body; ‘when one split open, I suction cupped the halves onto my cheeks and elbows’ (Lanzillotto, 2013, p. 33). In adhering these broken parts her body becomes refigured, its limits extended, allowing Annie to embody the qualities of emotional resilience and hardness and allowing her to imagine a new temporality in which she is able bounce ahead or rise high above the street. By ‘[taking] up residence within [her] bodily horizon’ (Ahmed, 2010, p. 32), the spaldeen becomes a queer object that disrupts and extends the boundaries of the body, allowing Annie to defiantly proclaim ‘Yes Mom, I am made of rubber’ (Lanzillotto, 2013, p. 33).

Objects can be made queer through their proximity to the body and for Annie her proximity with the spaldeen is revealed through intimate acts of care and attention: Annie tells of how she would wash the spaldeen in the sink at the same time as she washed her face and hands after playing outside all day: ‘I scrubbed it in the sink with soapy water and a washcloth. It smelled clean, ready for the next day. I slept with it under my pillow’ (2013, p. 35). By drawing the object into closer proximity to the body, Annie’s attachment to the spaldeen is solidified further, closing the gap between object and self. The daily ritual of washing away the layers of dirt from the spaldeen and herself at the same time so that they can start again afresh tomorrow also exemplifies a further aspect of Ahmed’s formulation of the happy object; that of a promised futurity (2010). Happiness, theorises Ahmed, is something that we aim for and reach towards. It is therefore not just a feeling in the present, but something that is always still yet to come, and by intentionally directing ourselves towards the objects that promise happiness we are always ‘aiming somewhere else’, ‘toward that which is not yet present’ (Ahmed, 2010, p. 34). Annie’s relation to her object of happiness directs her towards future possibilities. Through intimate connection with the surface of the spaldeen, through smelling it, washing it, and sleeping with it under her pillow, and through the acts of material

dissidence that see her adhere the broken parts to her skin, Annie's embodiment becomes entangled with this object. The rubbered, indestructible surface of the spaldeen offers an anticipatory temporality that allows her to don a phantasmatic armour, to be unbreakable and reckless, to be fast and bounce ahead of time, and to anticipate what is to come.

The necessity of these qualities become evident as Lanzillotto revisits the domestic violence that shaped her childhood, In the first mention of a spaldeen in the text, Annie's rhythmic bounce of the ball against the wall echoes the rhythm of her father's violence:

I throw the ball. I throw the ball against the wall. I throw. I throw alone. I throw the ball at his head. I throw the ball in the soup. Through the window I throw. Into tomorrow. This ball bounces high so I can't see its top. The ball has an invisible top. I throw the ball and he catches it. I throw the ball and she stops to mark the place. I throw the ball and the rain comes down. All the doors open at once. I throw (2013, p. 10).

The repetitive beating of the ball against the wall is echoed in the staccato of the repetitive sentences and is matched by the beating of her father's fists and, eventually, with the beating of the spoon on the pipes which alerts the neighbours to call the police (2010. p. 10). The repetitive action of the spaldeen allows her to lapse into a fantasy narrative where she is able to get ahead of the violence by bouncing into tomorrow or stop it completely by forcing his fists to open and catch the ball, to allow her mother to stay still. Ahmed writes that 'to make things queer is . . . to disturb the order of things' (2006, p. 163). The bouncing of the spaldeen, and the imagining that comes with it, is an attempt to disturb the order of things, to disrupt the patterns of violence that shape familial relations. Yet, some things, like the invisible top of the ball when it bounces high enough, still lie beyond her perception and when she wants to protect her mother she is often still faced with the limitations of her body.

By following Ahmed's insistence on emphasising 'the strangeness of familiar objects' to disturb and disrupt normative understanding or social relations, the spaldeen becomes reconfigured as a queer object (2006; pp. 161 – 162). It is the incomplete by-product of mass production turned into something new through the imagination of the queer child. It represents what Sedgwick defined as one of the reparative acts of queerness, a pleasurable 'over-attachment to the fragmentary, the marginal, waste, or leftover products' (1997, p.28).



Understood in this way, the spaldeen becomes an object of possibility; its squishy malleable surface invites touch and that touch can send it off into unexpected directions. Annie's identification with the rubbered surface of the spaldeen and her bodily proximity to it becomes co-constitutive queer object relation. Annie's affiliation with the spaldeen, its intimate proximity, its dissident materiality, remakes this familiar object into something strange, something queer. Through this queer object, Annie is able to express a longing to disrupt the spatial boundaries and social norms that contain and limit her child body.

### **Ivan- Failing to Fall in Line**

Coyote's work engages more didactically in questions of gender and identity than Lanzillotto, with many of their speaking engagements taking place in schools and workplaces. Coyote's writing interrogates identity categories such as 'butch', 'woman', 'trans', and 'transbutch' and refuses to lay claim to one term over another. As such, their work challenges the previously established conventions of the linear, medicalised transition narrative (Prosser, 1998; Jacques, 2017).

In *L is for Lion*, Annie's orientation towards the object that enables and maintains her tomboy identifications is expressed as joy, freedom, and possibility (even if this is a fantasy that remains unfulfilled). In *Tomboy Survival Guide*, it is Ivan's failure to orient towards objects that promise happiness which shapes the body. This difference could be a result of age, or the proximity to adolescence, as it is when the tomboy's transgressions threaten to persist into adolescence that tomboy behaviour needs to be contained. As such, Annie's experiences at 6 years old would contrast with those of Ivan, who, at the point in the narrative I will examine, is around 11 years old. Ivan's failure to be oriented by the 'happy object', and the impression that this leaves upon the body, reveals the pressures placed on the tomboy body to straighten, to bring itself into alignment and to eliminate the threat of its lesbian or, in relation to Ivan, its trans potential.

In Ahmed's analysis, happy objects may not necessarily be material, they can be anything that promises happiness. The family, which forms the basis of Ahmed's theorisations, works as 'a promise, a hope, a dream, an aspiration' and so we anticipate that our proximity towards it will bring happiness (2010, p. 45). The promise of happiness offered by the family is

always scripted in terms of a compulsory heterosexual coupling which becomes ‘the condition of the reproduction of life, culture and value’ (Ahmed, 2012, p. 144). What Ahmed’s formulation offers is an attempt to understand why we may continue to orient ourselves towards happy objects despite the ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2008, p. 33) of their frequent failure to fulfil these promises. Ahmed proposes that the family sustains itself as a happy object through the repudiation of those who fail or refuse to orient themselves towards it, subsequently constituting these bodies as ‘affect aliens’, the very source of negative feeling and unhappiness (2010, p. 30). I use ‘affect’ here to refer to the energies transmitted through bodily encounters within social environments that are social in origin yet produce a biological and physical effect (Brennan, 2004, p. 3). The encounters between bodies and objects create an ‘affective atmosphere’ (Ahmed, 2010, p. 39) in which different bodies provoke different affective responses, with some bodies, those ‘affect aliens’ to which Ahmed refers, presumed to be the origin of bad feeling.

The affective atmosphere in which negative affect is transmitted by and through the body that fails to correctly orient towards normative happy objects is evident in Ivan’s narration of watching the wedding of Prince Charles and Diana Spencer on television when they are around 11 years old. In this encounter, Ivan is orientated towards the TV within their grandmother’s home. In their lack of desire for what this wedding represents, the heterosexual reproductive futurity of the family, they locate themselves as an ‘affect alien’: ‘I knew already that I wasn’t like most little girls’, narrates Ivan, ‘I didn’t like the things they liked and I didn’t get how or why to play Barbies’ (2016, p. 39). Difference becomes categorised through an orientation to objects and Ivan’s failure to comprehend the objects of girlhood play means they are already marked as the source of negative affect. However, upon watching this royal wedding, Ivan further internalises this failure. When the TV reporter exclaims how the royal wedding must be every little girl’s dream, Ivan becomes further distanced from other girls and this distance eventually becomes both devastating and unbreachable: ‘what I didn’t realise until that moment was that I was the only little girl like me in the whole wide world’ (2016, p. 39). These negative affects are viscerally felt and transmitted onto the body as Ivan describes how

those words shot out of the tinny speaker in my grandmother’s old cabinet television and pierced through the skin of my still flat chest like poisoned darts...It is hard to

find the words for the kind of lonely I felt in my belly, in my whole body...like lead in the blood in my veins, so heavy it held me down from the inside of me (2016, p. 39).

The distance from 'other girls' holds them down, disrupting and preventing any ongoing orientations that would put them 'in line' with other girls, isolating them as the only girl in the world who holds this difference. Ivan is oriented towards the objects that promise happiness; situated within the family home, directed towards the promise of happiness on the TV screen, their body is physically aligned yet their desires for this 'happy object' are out of line. The royal wedding, the TV set, the grandmother's home, the reporter's words, and the promise of heterosexual futurity, all coalesce to correctly orient the subject and repudiate those bodies that fail to align. Oriented directly in front of the TV, Ivan is positioned to feel the piercing sharpness of their failure to correctly orient their desires. Whereas for Annie, the happy object becomes a way of overcoming the body's limitations, for this tomboy, the happy object acts as a shaping force, impacting and impressing upon the body.

The chest, however, is not only the location of negative affect: through acts of queer resistance it is also the location of joy and pride. As a child, Ivan recalls an incident in which a stranger calls him a good son as he helps his mother with the shopping. 'My chest puffed up like a rooster and I stood taller, like I thought maybe a soldier would, or a doorman, someone with a uniform and a purpose' narrates Ivan (2016, p. 16). Unlike the failure that presses upon them when their desire fails to orient towards the happy object of the family, this recognition has the opposite affect as they expand into space, upwards and outwards, standing taller and imagining a future self. The chest is thus continuously reinscribed as the location through which the tomboy's bodily orientations are enacted in social spaces.

The work of Iris Marion Young (1980) provides a further axis of analysis for the tomboy's bodily orientations. In her analysis of what she calls 'feminine bodily existence', Young seeks to clarify Merleau-Ponty's proposition that the body is the central instrument through which the social world is understood by arguing for the specificity of the female body. Young considers femininity not as innately biological or essential, but as 'a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical *situation* of being a woman in a particular society' (1980, p. 211, italics in original). Young claims that 'not only is there a typical style of

throwing like a girl, but there is a more or less typical style of running like a girl, climbing like a girl, swinging like a girl, hitting like a girl', and, as we will see in Ivan's case, 'swimming like a girl' (1980, p. 213). What these actions have in common, and what comes to defines femininity, claims Young, is reluctance and inhibition (1980, p. 213). Young's concept of feminine bodily existence diverts from the purposeful actions of Merleau-Ponty's universal masculine subject, whose body is experienced solely as a medium for the enactment of his intentions, and instead proposes that the female body is experienced as a 'fragile encumbrance', exhibiting an inhibited intentionality, which she explains as a withholding of full bodily commitment to an intended action (1980, p. 214). Therefore, if gender is 'an effect of the kinds of work that bodies do, which in turn 'directs' those bodies, affecting what they 'can do'' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 60), then the repetitive movements that signal the body as 'girl' orients that body in certain directions, restricting and dictating its actions. The specificity of female bodily movement, to be a girl, to throw, move, run, catch or swim, 'like a girl' is thus a historically situated performative action of becoming that emerges both within sites of resistance and also in the everyday, quotidian movements of the body (Foster, 2009, p. 73). The restrictions of this framework become evident in Young's negation of other intersecting differences of race, dis/ability, age or sexuality and her assumption of the categories of 'woman', 'girl' and 'female' as unproblematic analytics. However, rather than dispense with this analysis, it may still provide a platform from which to theorise the historically and culturally differentiated ways in which bodies are constituted by their movement in space.

Impressed upon by patriarchal gendered expectations of dress, grooming, appearance and familial obligations, Young suggests that the female body is experienced as both subject and object 'to be looked at' (1980, pp. 217 – 218). In this dual state of subject and object, female subjectivity is co-constituted alongside the ever-present possibility of becoming the object of the gaze of another. Assigned female at birth, passing for periods of time as male, identifying at different times as tomboy, woman, butch and trans, Coyote passes in and out of gendered categories with different degrees of failure, success and resistance. As such, Coyote's transmasculine embodiment adds a further complexity to Young's claims.

Alongside various encounters in which strangers assume them to be male, Coyote also recounts how, when beginning swimming lessons at age six, their decision to go bare chested results in them being read as a young boy. This first act of passing as male 'happened

incidentally, accidentally...I fell into line with the boys that first day, and it only got easier after that' (2016, p. 16). Ivan's narration of this event constructs their orientation, or 'falling into line' as something that is acted upon them, rather than an event enacted through their own agency. This 'accidental' passing allows Ivan to access space differently as one whose body is read as male rather than female, allowing them to access the 'greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys' that the tomboy seeks (Halberstam, 1998, p. 6).

Ivan explains;

I didn't understand why it was easier to do cannonballs and tread water without a flotation device without being afraid of the deep end when nobody expected you to be afraid. It just was. I still remember that too-good-to-be-real feeling of the water sliding over my bare chest. It's not like I thought I was a real boy. I just knew I was not really a girl (2016, pp. 19 – 17).

As this quote illustrates, the body, if and how it is made legible, offers the conditions through which we enter the social world. In their accidental passing as a boy, Ivan learns to swim without the 'fragile encumbrance' of the female body. This may suggest that a tomboy identification offers a means to 'escape or transcend the typical situation and definition of women in various degrees and respects' (Young, 1980, p. 211). However, a framework of queer object orientation intervenes in this reductive understanding by exposing the forces that seek to straighten the tomboy back in line with a heteronormative legible femininity and making visible the impressions of these straightening attempts on the body.

It is Ivan's act of going bare chested that allows them to inhabit space uninhibited.

Importantly, at age 6, it is not the absence or presence of breasts that indicate the sexed body, it is the absence of the clothing (a bikini top) which would have indicated the future potential of female breasts. The bikini, purchased by Ivan's mother, is described as sporty, butch even, and the bottom half could pass as boy's swimming trunks. The top half, however, represents the potential of a female bodily experience as defined by Young. Although narrated as accidental, and as being 'so easy...I didn't give it much thought', Ivan's passing as male is an act of resistance. In what could also be considered an act of material dissidence, Ivan does not simply choose to not wear it, their actions towards the object are one of intent and wilfulness.

Scrunching up the top, shoving it deep inside a shoe, and discarding it at the bottom of the locker are actions of agency and resistance. Through the act of going bare-chested, defying parental authority, and rejecting the item that would indicate the futurity of their body, Ivan is assumed to be 'not girl', forcing a re-orientation that enables them to 'fall in line' with the boys and, by falling in line, Ivan avoids becoming an object under the gaze of others and is instead constituted as a subject with action and intention. Ivan is no longer the object of a gaze that expects them to 'swim like a girl' and this lack of expectation allows them to take up space in the pool, asserting their body by 'cannonballing', moving in the pool unrestricted by floatation devices and unhindered by fear.

### **Tomboy Futures**

*L is for Lion* and *Tomboy Survival Guide* both offer autobiographical narratives that invoke a tomboy childhood through an orientation towards objects and allow this to exist alongside a butch adulthood. With Coyote, however, this claim becomes complicated as they challenge the boundaries of butch by expanding it into a transmasculine identification. Coyote's links the sensations of swimming bare-chested as a child to their adult experiences following top surgery, connecting their newly shaped transmasculine chest to their child body: 'I look at pictures of shirtless me at five years old', they recount, 'and I can see the shape of my now flat chest foreshadowed in my tiny frame even back then' (2016, p. 127). Coyote's now flattened adult chest 'remembers' the sensations of the still flat child chest (2016, p. 177). Refigured through their transmasculine embodiment, the flatness of their adult chest becomes aligned with the younger body before they learned to understand it as the object of female bodily experience, 'before it changed and grew and swelled to become something else' (2016, p. 117). Rather than a linear narrative of pre/post-surgery, the autobiographical narrative allows Coyote to construct their childhood self alongside their adult self. This allows for the possibility of a tomboy narrative in which the queer potential of the tomboy is not corrected but expanded to include a wider transmasculine possibility.

Lanzillotto's queer attachment to the spaldeen continues beyond childhood and makes a frequent appearance in her work as a performance artist and storyteller. In one of her earlier pieces of performance art, Lanzillotto launches fifty fake pink spaldeens at an x painted on a

brick wall while telling stories about her mother (2013, p. 253).<sup>3</sup> Within the autobiographical context this continued attachment produces a coherent continuation between the gender deviant tomboy and the adult butch self, thus breaching that boundary of adolescence at which the tomboy's masculine identifications are straightened out in favour of a normative femininity. It is when the tomboy's masculine identifications resist the straightening devices of heterosexuality with its demands of restriction and compliance, and threaten to extend into adolescence, that she 'raises the specter of the dyke' (Halberstam, 1998, p. 6), marking her body and future as potentially queer. Through the autobiographical narratives of Coyote and Lanzillotto, the tomboy is able to co-exist as both the potential future queer and the actual future queer who refuses to assimilate to normative heterosexual femininity. In the queer temporality of the tomboy memoir, the imagined queer future for her body appears as both potential and as already fulfilled.

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<sup>3</sup> In this performance Lanzillotto is forced to use fake spaldeen as they were no longer available at the time as the Spalding company moved the production of their tennis balls to China and as such, there was no longer an excess of the pink rubbery inside that became spaldeen.

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