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Edited by Pamela L. Caughie
and Sabine Meyer
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Pamela L. Caughie, Professor of English at Loyola University Chicago, is a senior modernist scholar and theorist, former president of the Modernist Studies Association, and founding and co-director of *Modernist Networks* (www.modnets.org), a consortium of digital projects in modernist literature and culture. She is author of two books and over forty book chapters and articles, and editor or co-editor of four works, including *Woolf Online*, a digital archive of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (www.woolfonline.com).

Madelyn Detloff is Professor and Chair of English and Professor of Global and Intercultural Studies/Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Miami University. She is author of *The Persistence of Modernism* (2009) and *The Value of Woolf* (2016) and co-editor of *Queer Bloomsbury* (2016) and *Virginia Woolf: Art, Education, and Internationalism* (2008). She has published articles and chapters on Virginia Woolf, modernist women writers, feminist studies, trans* studies, queer theory and criп theory.

Solve M. Holm is a senior lecturer at the Centre for Gender Studies at Karlstad University, Sweden. They received their PhD from Gender Studies at Linköping University, Sweden, for the dissertation *Fleshing out the Self: Re-imagining intersexed and trans embodied lives through (auto)biographical accounts of the past* in 2017. Their work is within the areas of intersectional feminist and queer studies, the history of medicine and technology, and bioethics. They have specialized in trans* and intersex studies and the history of hormone research on which they have published and given numerous talks internationally.

Michael Levenson is Professor of English and Director of the Institute of the Humanities and Global Cultures at the University of Virginia. He has published extensively on modernism, including *Modernism* (2011), *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* (2005), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), and *A Genealogy of Modernism* (1986).

Sabine Meyer received her PhD from Humboldt University in Berlin in 2014. Dr. Meyer is currently a postdoc at the Department of Northern European Studies at Humboldt University. Her book on Lili Elvenes, *Wie Lili zu einem richtigen Mädchen wurde*, was published by transcript in 2015. She was a research consultant for the film *The Danish Girl* and has given numerous talks and interviews on the topic of this memoir at various universities and for TV documentaries.
Tobias Raun is an associate professor of Communication at Roskilde University, Denmark. He contributed to the catalogue for the 2015 exhibit of Gerda Wegener’s “Lili” paintings at the Arken Gallery in Denmark. His work in the fields of Visual Culture, New Media, and Gender, Transgender, and Queer Studies is internationally acclaimed. He is author of a book on transgender videoblogging (2016) and numerous articles including “The trans woman as model and co-creator: Resistance and becoming in the back-turning Lili Elbe” (2015), and “Trans as Contested Intelligibility” (2014).

Eliza Steinbock is Assistant Professor of cultural analysis at Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society in The Netherlands. Editor of the Arts and Culture section of the Transgender Studies Quarterly, they are author of Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change (Duke University Press 2019) and over 30 essays on transgender cultural production ranging from film, to photography, performance, painting, and digital media.
A Pretty Knot of Lilies: Disentangling Lili Elbe’s *longue durée* in Pop Culture

ELIZA STEINBOCK
Leiden University, The Netherlands

Bursting forth with colors rioting gold, orange, violet, and pinks, the bouquet of unfurled peonies and poppies spills over the lower left quadrant of the painting *Two Women with Flowers (Lili and a friend)*, completed in 1926 by the popular Danish painter, illustrator and satirist, Gerda Wegener (b. 1886 Gerda Marie Fredrikkie Gottlieb). In the intervening space, the chin of the tallest brunette figure with a perfectly oval Mannerist face on an elongated neck is placed in the zero point of perspective. Her dreamy downturned eyes gaze towards her equally pretty friend; her pert mouth is gently closed. The other woman is shown in three-quarters profile, tilting her chin up and looking off in the distance. She is a striking redhead whose curls repeat the curves of the petals; she enters the frame from side right to balance the weight and color of the bouquet. The pinks of their gowns are in tune with the painted petals, while providing a flat contrast that allows for the dimensionality and texture of the blooms to tempt the viewer’s fingers. Pointillist white paint dots loosely echoing the shape of the flower heads lend a lively shimmering quality of light to the otherwise still pose. The equally flat, barely brushed-in background of dark green palm fronds, blue mountains, and only a hint of a light blue sea place us in one of Wegener’s favorite locales, the Italian island of Capri. Wegener spent considerable time here with her spouse and fellow painter best known as Lili Elbe (b. 1882, née Einar Magnus Andreas Wegener, legal name Lili Ilse Elvenes), whom she always depicted as a willowy beauty whether she appears solo, with Gerda, or with other women as in this portrayal. As Tobias Raun argues in his contribution to this scholarly edition, Lili is an active co-creator of her female persona; further, the paintings in which she appears tell another story about Lili that can supplement the other narratives told about her.

In Wegener’s images, all detail is reserved for the patterns of flowers, textiles, and light, for the stylized short haircuts, and the painted cheeks, lips, and sultry smoky eyes of the figures whether they are women, men, or ambiguously gendered. Most known for her thoroughly modern portraits of women, Gerda Wegener was a take-charge woman who painted other women as highly feminine, slender, and curved in all the right places, but whose gesture and manner spoke to a self-consciousness directed inward, anchored in her own desires. These new women were called with a mixture of awe and derision *cocottes* (a fashionable prostitute) or *les garçonnets* (flappers, or feminine “boys”). Both terms point to the anxiety of social roles becoming murky during the Roaring Twenties, as the urbanized cosmopolitans of the day rubbed shoulders with different classes, and

traveled in mixed circles. Wegener painted her exhibited to great acclaim, the bewitching beauty a few years after the heyday of therogue painter. Though she managed much of the colony of Beaugency and theater, all space allowed oneself to take Wegener’s popular poet Guillaume Apollinaire and spiritual young success and recognition, being favored by the mass consumerism of the 1920s and 1930s. Her glass was clearly fundamen for Lili’s collaboration with many other artists: feminism; she app *longue durée* of modern art. Lili Elbe’s enduring image is the best-known image of the intersex artist, labeled “trans” and reduced to one key identity: *true* multimodality of singularity.

Through examination of his work, Wegener argues that Lili Elbe “sexual indeterminacy.” Further, I offer that for both popular and the sexual indeterminacy that overlays frames of orientation, one must consider the incarnations of sex...
traveled in mixed company to wine-fueled cafés and whirligig amusement parks: scenes Wegener painted herself and Lili into as adventurous, fun-loving gals. Wegener exhibited to great acclaim these depictions of her equally accomplished painter spouse as the bewitching beauty Lili. Their artistic portrayal of Lili’s feminine presentation started a few years after they were married in 1904, and even continued after Lili’s death in 1931, though with lessening popularity until Wegener’s own death in 1940. In their heyday the Wegeners primarily lived together in Paris, France (1912–1930) where they took part in the flourishing scene of avant-garde artists and vacationed in the bohemian colony of Beaugency. They were fervently devoted to the masquerades, balls, carnivals, and theater, all spaces of self-exploration in which costume, presentation, and imagination allowed oneself to try on different guises.

Wegener’s popularity soared when she arrived in Paris, anointed by no less than the poet Guillaume Apollinaire on July 11, 1914 in Paris-Journal: “Mrs Wegener is a delicate and spiritual young woman. [Her] graceful and unprudish drawings have given her great success and recognition as one of the Parisians’ own,” he gushed. With Lili starring as her favored model who projects poised self-assurance whilst striking a seductive attitude, Wegener managed to bridge successfully selling work on the French high art market and the mass consumerist market. Lili’s likeness appears in two paintings bought by the French State (1927 and 1932), as well as in commissioned cartoons, advertisements, designed stain glass in storefronts, and in illustrated erotic books and avant-garde magazines. As a model Lili’s collaborative participation—whether fashionably clothed or joyfully nude—was clearly fundamental to Wegener’s commercial viability: she appealed terrifically to buyers, but also she was a source of endless inspiration for Wegener herself. Since Wegener, many other artists and writers have called upon Lili to figure a knowing and claimed femininity; she appears like a perennial lily, returning in every generation during the *longue durée* of modernism.

Lili Elbe’s enduring legacy shows how being categorized as “transgender phenomena,” dubbed by Susan Stryker as a Euro-American approach to speak of trans-related objects, becomes framed by not only discourses of medicine and law, but even entertainment. As the field of trans studies took shape in the 1990s, *Man into Woman* was prominently analyzed in Sandy Stone’s foundational “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” but has largely languished since. I believe it has fallen out of favor as a primary transgender studies text because it strongly suggests trans identity may be caused by an intersex condition—a theory commonly floated to naturalize and anatomize transness. Yet, this is precisely why Lili’s life narration should be studied, for I follow Eva Hayward and Che Gosset in asserting that trans theorizations cannot, nor should not, be reduced to one kind of experience or an ontology. Just as it would be impossible to conjecture the true Lili, the “true transsexual” exists only as an ideology in the face of a multitude of singularities.

Through examining this material in the context of transgender coming on trend, I will argue that Lili Elbe is a touchstone cultural text for the ways that modernist notions of “sexual indeterminacy” remain vital to understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality. Further, I offer that Lili’s mediagenic appeal that makes her a lasting image commodity for both popular culture and subcultural audiences derives from the fuzziness of what sexual indeterminacy might mean or entail. The haziness of sexual indeterminacy, which overlays framings of sexed embodiment and gender identity onto sexual practice/orientation, is able to elicit a strong affective response. It is the volatility of her various incarnations of sexual indeterminacy, I argue, that continues to grant each Lili cultural
purchase despite their heady competing and conflicting modernist notions of sex and gender. Amongst the pretty, shimmering stalks, each with their own petal shape and tints, I cannot determine her ultimate meaning, nor distill in her writings one notion of sex, gender, or sexuality. Various cultural producers are thus able to harness Lili’s sexual polysemy to attract different sets of audiences who want to read their own meaning of who she is, and what she stands for. As a highly talented creative person in her own right, Lili’s challenge was to navigate these churning waters of the new woman, the pathologizing of sexual indeterminacy, and a growing art market hungry for images that reflected the infinite possibilities related to a white, wealthy, swinging lifestyle.

THE IMAGE COMMODITY LILI: SEXING UP SEXUAL INDETERMINACY

Enfolded within becoming a sought after image commodity, Lili may have found a means for creative self-actualization that resisted the scientific discourses for describing her “condition.” She personally encountered medical doctors who treated her “sickness” with dangerous levels of radiation, and who suggested she was schizophrenic, homosexual, or simply insane. Puzzling over people who presented stories of feeling differently inside than the masks their bodies wore, sexologists of the day were concerned with creating an adequate scientific language to categorize, and potentially tame the wild, scandalous modern art imaginings of femininity bleeding into masculinity, for example, represented in Wegener’s illustrations, and expressed in Surrealist works most fully by Pierre Molinier. In the face of this pathologization, the persona of Lili as it appears in Man into Woman crafts a narrative that naturalizes her bodily and mental sense of sexual indeterminacy as simply registering someone of “two beings” (115). Though determinedly identified as a woman, Lili is described in her confessions as a mythically hermaphroditic body with male germ glands that are surgically excised, and female germ glands that need to be rejuvenated. Her voice, handwriting, memories, and thought patterns are similarly made over as transferring from the man she was to the woman she becomes. Next to her eventual hormonal and surgical feminization treatment when she was already in her mid-forties, the popular representations of Lili in circulation during her lifetime seem to operate as a tandem creative technology of self-actualization.

From the archival photographs of Lili included in the Man into Woman English translations and Wegener’s 2015–2017 retrospective catalog, it is clear she had elegant gestures, posture, and was proud to show her long legs. 10 Her comportment in the photograph Lili and Elsa Tegner at the Carnival, n.d., shows the same lift of her pinky finger and slightly open-mouthed smile as used in the Woman in a Mask (sketch for Teindey’s ad) 1918–1925. 11 In the painting Carnival, Lily, Paris, 1928, the same wide-brimmed hat bedecked with large ostrich feathers and flowers rests on Lili’s head as she wore to carnivals, and here a dark eye-covering mask is also held coquetishly aside, as in Wegener’s sketch for the ad. 12 Lili’s face also bears the fashionable make-up to create darkened, elongated, almond-shaped eyes, and rosy cheeks. It is almost as if Wegener’s drawings complete the editorial work of selfie technologies: they crop, filter, color to present Lili as the image of idealized beauty. Like selfies these images place Lili at a remove, while promising intimacy. The more overt sexualization of Lili’s femininity is drummed up in images where Lili strikes poses reclining on chaise lounges. In The Siesta (Lili), 1922, 13 she is drifting off into her own racy thoughts while pausing from reading...
Les Liaisons dangereuses, an erotic masterpiece of French eighteenth-century literature. From these family and friend snapshots to mass commercial products to high art, Lili’s likeness projects an allure that makes her undeniably wanted while also being her own person.

While being a popular image commodity, Lili’s likeness is not selling the sensationalism of gender fearlessness; in these illustrations I detect the distinct gesture of sexing up sexual indeterminacy by doubling the erotic allure of the commodity’s own shine. Lili’s secret of being assigned male at birth is covered over with her open secret of being a sexual being. Commodity fetishism operates to extract from the hidden surplus labor that created the object an added value; this serves to obscure the fact that neither producer nor consumer has a full relationship to the object or to each other. The fetishism of the commodity shields us from this alienation, but our belief in this added value also installs a hierarchy of values in commodities. By becoming an image commodity, Lili no longer has a full relationship to her own likeness, nor does Wegener, and Lili also becomes inserted into a hierarchy of womanhood. It seems that in this case the commodity fetishism also works to overpower genital fetishism, which is the belief that the value of one’s gender identity is derived from one’s matching genitalia. Lili’s version of womanhood is catapulted to the top of the hierarchy by appealing to and attuning with the period’s atmosphere of being enraptured, seduced, and under spell. The sexual indeterminacy transmuted into the indeterminacy of her gaze, knowingly on view, but was not interested in you exactly, but maybe.

The various translated prints of Man into Woman that include snapshots and popularly styled covers were also discovered by trans-identified people (transsexual, transgender, etc.) the world over, many of whom admit in published writing that they found the book being sold as sensationalist literature in shops. In this way Lili’s popular appeal has been instrumental to generations of “subcultural” readers who identify with her story and find their own inspiration for self-actualization in it. For herself, and for “creatures” like her, the commodified image of the new woman has a doubly important meaning, for it signifies the possibility for transforming oneself into the person one most desires to be.

Again, the plurality of self-transformation and identity is key, for the images and writings of Lili tend towards both binary and non-binary readings of the sex/gender system. For instance, Man into Woman mixes metaphors of Lili being the bridge between the banks of the divided sexes, but also associated with the waters that flow between them. Lili is strongly attached to the shimmering waters of her namesake, the Elbe river that surrounds Dresden, the place of her birth, and is drawn to musings on the reflections of other bodies of water. Hence, it remains unresolved in the text as to whether Lili’s sex should be seen as ultimately corrected by leaving the territory of manhood behind and crossing safely to the side of womanhood, as the English translated title suggests (Man into Woman), or, she might ultimately embrace an ambiguous mixture of different shimmering sexes. On the one hand, the state of sexual indeterminacy allowed her to integrate the drama of two personas battling to survive that foreshadows the “born in the wrong body” myth dominant until recently in self-appellations of how being trans feels. On the other hand, Lili’s role as a bridge builder between the sexes also echoes in today’s community of genderqueer and gender-fluid identified people who likewise affirm the multiplicity of gendered personas, which by being identified with both masculine and feminine genders, or different ones at different times.

Man into Woman’s afterlife has also fed into future trans cultural production, with Lili securing a sense of possibility for living one’s life as trans. Cael Keegan defines such a
"trans media object" for this audience as a set of images that "cultivates trans consciousness by offering an aesthetic space in which the subject may feel a way forward through the closed phenomenological horizon of binary gender." Man into Woman contains compelling passages of person-direct address and evidentiary snapshots that invite a trans-framed approach into Lili's aesthetic experiences of binary and non-binary gender. These images show us that she relaxes in her favorite hospital garden, that she stands tall back in Copenhagen with family, in short, that this life so many might only dream of as pure fantasy is possible, for she has achieved it. The book is an authentic record then of her perseverance to press past the closed horizon of binary sex, in order to rebirth herself into a differently sexed being. Lili was such an instrumental trans media object for the cultivation of the transsexual consciousness of American tennis celebrity Renée Richards, for example. This passage is from the first third of the autobiographical book that sets up Richards's determination to actualize her feminine self:

Dick's eyes became Renée's eyes. The book was called Man into Woman. . . . I had hit the jackpot. It was an account of the life of a Danish painter named Einar Wegener who was the first recorded case of transsexualism. . . . What powerful drives operated in this man to cause him to seek this crude remedy? . . . Einar Wegener had died within a year after this surgery. Yet, he had been a woman. This was the fact that impressed itself on the personalities of both Dick and Renée. What had seemed impossible was suddenly not so. . . . I could feel Renée strengthen.16

The book cover with its bold title catches her eye, a sensational lure and a potentially cruel trick. Inside Renée devours the story that shows her the way to becoming realized. In fact, Richards admits that to Dick the cost of Lili's life was frightening; it had the right instructional moral effect. However, the details of the surgeries meant that someone had done it, and that Renée learned she too could live one day, which literally strengthened her resolve to emerge as a fully formed consciousness of her own.

Lili is also a muse to the contemporary poet and trans scholar, Arab-Canadian Trish Salah, whose study of Man into Woman directs us towards the difficult genealogy of Lili, who seems to emerge wholly of her time, yet often wrested from it. The following excerpt is from her poem "She is like Sex: a genealogical digression":17

Not so quick. Don't give it all away. Give her a way. Like that, not like that.
Like a sex, as she is, your secret.
[. . . ]
Lili Elbe is posing for a painting. Her wife's favourite new model. Where her career turned. Your textbook modernist she is not in your textbook. Either she.
[. . . ]
Like your sex, she had an occasion. She had an instigator. Their a mise en scène for her, sex.17

The poem leaves open whether the textbook case of being a modernist creation is a reference to Lili or to Gerda, or perhaps to both. In either case, neither woman shows up often in standard modernist scholarship (likely due to rampant sexism and cissexism within canonization processes).18 In this poem's genealogical digression, then, the mise en scène provides an occasion in which this later modernist "we" can find her likeness. The poem suggests that in a context such as this, yet, we must stand at secret, perhaps as an

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Following her death, heady sense of sex element of her sex is factually Lili died for reproductive organs, or a morality tale. It media representation retrospectively, Lili has to fit the shape of representations of he different commercial trauma that become. Most notable because in the book authors and the same-titled 2 Tom Hooper, in whose portrayal of Lili, these and aesthetic works I amass wide adoring audiences rises in dis charged tragic figure.

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poem suggests that our sex, meaning sex in general, arises only in the midst of an occasion, a context such as flickering on and off in a specific, historically-bound relationship. And yet, we must stand at the boundary of Lili’s setting, a space which Salah suggests is the real
secret, perhaps as admirers waiting with more bouquets.

THE TRAGIC-TRANSGENDER LILI: SUFFERING FOR
SEXUAL INDETERMINACY

Following her death, other imagined artistic and popular versions of Lili reanimate the
heady sense of sexual indeterminacy surrounding her, which gleans the mysterious
element of her sex appeal but then fuses it with a sense of impending tragedy. While
factually Lili died following medical complications from experimental surgeries on her
reproductive organs, her physical demise need not be framed as inevitable, a punishment,
or a morality tale. In response to Sam Feder’s claim that “Tragedy, we are taught [by
media representations], goes hand in hand with transness,” it bears investigating how,
retrospectively, Lili has been cast as a “transgender character” whose story can be stretched
to fit the shape of unflattering trans stereotypes.18 Hence, in turning to these later
representations of her life, I want to inquire how Lili’s image has been played out with
different commercial but also political ends. In what cases is her identity reduced to a
trauma that becomes the point of entry and pleasure for non-transgender audiences?

Most notable because of the resounding commercial success is the novelization of her life
in the book authored by the American David Ebershoff, titled The Danish Girl (2001),
and the same-titled 2015 film adaptation directed by the British Academy Award-winning
Tom Hooper, in which British actor, Eddie Redmayne, plays Einar/Lili.19 Like Wegener’s
portrayal of Lili, these iterations have cross-over appeal in that they are serious intellectual
and aesthetic works in the genre of the historical romantic drama that nonetheless have
amassed wide adoring audiences. It seems that Elbe’s entertainment value for cisgender
audiences rises in direct proportion to the extremity of her dramatization as a sexually
charged tragic figure.

These above-mentioned writers and filmmakers are not wrong to approach Man into
Woman as a highly translatable text to the page or screen. In various other publications I
have excavated and elaborated how this multi-narrated text reads as a moving screenplay,
it employs visual technologies to great effect, and narrativizes with startling drama a
condition that was then understood mainly as an aberration in the flesh, a mental
disturbance or fetish.20 Lili’s sympathetic and soothingly close voice in Man into Woman
articulates that she hopes it becomes a tool to “teach” others about “creatures” like her
(197, 200, 203). In this way, Lili Elbe intentionally offers herself to arrive to an audience
in the form of “pedagogical transgender images,” which Keegan describes as being marked
by the assumption of cisgender audiences who might be persuaded to learn about trans
lives, which are set off from their own normative experiences of being non-trans.21

Though Keegan writes that these kinds of transgender figures are usually fictional or
fictionalized, I think Man into Woman fits the bill.22 Lili’s story may be called an “authentic
record,” but even the sexologist Norman Haire’s introduction admits it “must seem
incredibly fantastic” (57). That is, the book may present certain facts, but structurally they
are set into an embellished dramatic arc with omniscient narrators who look at Lili and
Einar/Andreas as anonymized historical figures who travel along the “byways of sexual
pathology” (57). Those lucky enough to not suffer such pathologies are reminded of their
difference from the first sentence, and are able to resort to the safety of this distant narrational space.24 The question becomes to what extent these remediated Lilies teach cis audiences about the distance they can take to \textit{transness}, that is, if sexual indeterminacy becomes safely relegated to those poor, tragic figures far away “over there” or only to an imaginary “back then.”

\textbf{The Danish Girl} iterations are clearly marked as being fictionalized historical narratives, which at their heart tell of an unconventional love story \textit{presented} as being loosely related to the avant-garde position of the artistic protagonists. Differently from \textit{Man into Woman}’s first- and third-persons narrational strategies, both tales are firmly told from the point of view of the wife (played by Alicia Vikander in Hooper’s film). In doing so, they put the wife forward as the heroine with whom we are expected to identify as we experience the world according to her subjective sense of it, with Vikander especially selected for her visceral connection to her emotions.25 In the film version, the conflict that Gerda faces is not at all about mustering her courage to face social ostracism due to her “odd” or even “insane” spouse, but rather to have equal career recognition. Gerda is under the impression that she invents Lili’s persona, a third person in their marriage who becomes the vehicle for her to both demonstrate her skill as a portraitist and her love for her spouse. This crucial plot line is set up in the first words of dialogue in the film, heard off-camera while Gerda’s preoccupied face is shown in close-up: “Don’t you wish you could paint like your husband? You must be so proud,” says an older well-dressed woman to her. The camera’s framing then zooms out to include the gallery show of Einar’s introspective landscapes that fill the room, seemingly even more present than the jostling crowd. The location title card that comes swiftly after indicates Copenhagen 1926. In fact this is the same year Gerda paints \textit{Two Women with Flowers (Lili and a friend)}, more than twenty years into their marriage, but the film depicts a young married couple potentially in competition and at odds with one another. In the creation of Lili by making Einar yield to her demands—she barks “Sit!” in the first magic sitting—Gerda finally finds the “right subject matter” (in the words of their shared agent) for which there proves to be an enormous market. The film’s narrative arc transitions from Einar’s exhibition’s success in Denmark to Gerda’s glorious successes in France: the catch is she must lose her husband to gain a career.

Through our primary identification with Gerda, the audience is released from having to deal directly with Lili’s personal struggle, including a physical bashing and clear signs of severe anxiety, agoraphobia, and depression. And while we might root for Lili to happily emerge “entirely herself” as she says following her last operation, we are foremost invited to cheer for Gerda’s career to be made on the back of their harmonious collaboration. As their partnership becomes increasingly commercialized it also is \textit{narratively} de-sexualized to transfer from the ambiguity of a possible lesbian attraction within the marriage to a firmly heterosexual Lili and Gerda, who both desire men. Most dramatically in the film Einar is shown to eventually refuse sexual contact from Gerda whereas Lili seeks it out from men. A clear break in their sexual relationship and Lili’s transition occurs following the first operation when their intimate space becomes partitioned; a translucent curtain hangs between them in the double bed, a fabric that recalls the thin linen canvas on which Gerda sketches Lili. In the bedroom the camera stays on the side of Gerda, signaling that we will stay with her as Lili slips away. It comes as no surprise then that the closing image is of their shared yellow scarf, symbolizing their shared femininity and Lili’s achievement of it, caught by the wind to be carried over the Danish fjord, the landscape she painted obsessively while hidden “in the bog” of Einar’s body.26

From the scarf we to “No, let her go.” Lili’s death as an ine moving away. trauma, the first kiss meted out to Hans if she might have expe that resulted in cons mythic kiss that awa her?—places a sex wanting to embody forward the harmful observes is so often transformation, for violence in order to struggle for self-real easily identifying wipity model. Feder e: tragic trans figure d personhood; this po recognition of a trap audiences the opp transperson’s trau the cathartic conclu sympathy for their s woman’s active self-e recognition that Lili means that she is no sexual indeterminacy death.

In the \textit{longue durée} and sexuality, Lili Ell is appealing—version invites and confuse conflictive modernist tropes of anxiety we argued), or the poter shows).29 Pamela Cl Woman with Virgi regarding the culture now, naming it a “tr this particular aesth Lili’s popular culture at stake in defining g and sexual desire.30 I for a whole range of we understand tris is also for this reas
Lili's role in the film is also significant due to the fact that her identity is not clearly defined. Lili's character is often referred to as a transwoman, which raises questions about gender identity and sexuality. The film explores the theme of transformation, with Lili's journey from male to female being central to the narrative. Lili's struggle to find her true self is a common theme in modernist films, and the film uses this theme to explore larger questions about identity and gender.

In conclusion, the film Man into Woman is an example of modernist film theory, with its emphasis on transformation and identity. The film's themes of transformation, identity, and gender are explored through its narrative, which includes Lili's transformation from male to female. The film's use of visual and auditory elements also contribute to its modernist aesthetic, creating a sense of disorientation and confusion that is often associated with modernist films.

From the outset, we see Gerda's initial face-to-face meeting with Lili, and the film's opening scene sets the stage for the rest of the narrative. Lili's transformation is a central theme of the film, and the film explores the complexities of gender identity and sexuality through Lili's journey.

The film's exploration of gender identity and sexuality is also important in the context of modernist film theory, which often focused on the idea of the self and the search for identity. Lili's transformation is a reflection of this search, as she struggles to find her true self and identity. The film's emphasis on transformation and identity is also a reflection of modernist film theory, which often explored these themes through the use of visual and auditory elements.
Lili, a real person, might strategically mobilize a complex set of presentations in order to achieve a degree of convincing authenticity for her claimed personhood. The continuities and discontinuities in her presentation across different cultural texts thus show the persistence of modernist sexual indeterminacy as a flexible model able to adapt to the terrain of ever-shifting trans media landscapes, even as hectic and crowded as they are today.

NOTES

1. Two Women with Flowers (Lili and a friend), 1926, pencil and watercolor on paper, 52 x 42 cm is held in The Erik Brandt Collection. It is reproduced in the Arken Museum of Modern Art Catalog for the Exhibition of Gerda Wegener (Ishøj: ARKEN, 2015), 45. Many of the images I discuss here, held mostly in private collections, were brought together for the first time by the Gerda Wegener retrospective at the Danish ARKEN: Museum of Modern Art, which ran from November 7, 2015 until January 8, 2017. I have viewed them in the exhibition catalog.


4. The French State bought Lily, 1922, in 1927 (le Musée national d’Art moderne – Centre de création industrielle) and The Siesta (Lili), 1922 (JP 630 P), in 1932, both held in Centre Pompidou, National Museum of Modern Art – Centre for Industrial Creation.


8. Similar phrasing to identifying as someone of “two beings” can be found in two of the existing letters we have from Lili’s own hand. This suggests strong evidence that the persona of Lili in the confessions, at least on this point, is factually close to her personal identity. Both letters from Lili Elvenses to Poul Knudsen can be found in the digital archive (www.lililbe.org/context).

9. Gender scholar Joanne Meyerowitz writes that this version of a “true hermaphrodite” with functioning male and female gonads is impossible, offering a speculation that Lili might have had another intersex condition, like Klinefelter’s syndrome (XXY), which is a chromosomal condition in which testes produce less testosterone than usual resulting in affected physical appearance such as breast growth. See Joanne Meyerowitz, How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 20–21. Sabine Meyer’s research shows that Warnekos diagnosed Lili with female pseudohermaphroditism. See Sabine Meyen, “Wie Lili zu einem richtigen Mädchen wurde”: Lili Elbe: Zur Konstruktion von Geschlecht und Identität zwischen Medialisierung, Regulierung und Subjektivierung (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 272–274.


11. Reproduced in A.

12. Ibid., 18.

13. Ibid., 72.


15. Cécile M. Keegan, 32, no. 61, 2016.


18. See Bonnie Kime Intersections (Ch Broe, eds., The C University, 1990) volumes on gender

19. “Does visibility e Alexandra Juhasz jc57.20161-Feder transpeople that unknown to view (not deceiving or innocent).

20. All of these men


22. Keegan, “Trans P

23. Ibid.

24. “To the reader w this book must be introduction from


12. Ibid., 18.

13. Ibid., 72.

14. In my book, Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), I develop Lili’s fascination with the phantasmagoric visions produced on the surface of the Elbe river as key to understanding the book’s aesthetic of a persistent discontinuity. The visual technology of the phantasmagoria plays with how sexed embodiment can appear and disappear, a “now you see it, now you don’t” type of a visual trick. This visual technology uses trick effects for turning a man into a woman in the blink of an eye. I examine how this phantasmagoric aesthetic of change offers a prototype for modern day transsexuality that is more broadly engraved in cultures of transformational before-and-after technologies.


19. “Does visibility equal progress? A conversation on trans activist media,” Sam Feder and Alexandra Juhasz, Jump Cut 57, summer 2016. https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc57.2016/Feder-Juhasz/TransActivism/index.html. Two unflattering stereotypes of transpeople that remain central to their media depictions are: the deceptive trans (identity unknown to viewer or to other characters, considered dangerous) and the pathetic trans (not deceiving anyone, because their gender identity is not taken seriously, considered innocuous).

20. All of these men are cisgender, and only one of them, Ebershoff, identifies as gay.


23. Ibid.

24. “To the reader unfamiliar with the unhappy byways of sexual pathology, the story told in this book must seem incredibly fantastic,” is the sentence that opens the book’s medical introduction from Haire.
25. Hooper expresses this element in his decision to hire Vikander in the DVD’s director’s interview.

26. It is worth mentioning that this scene was filmed in Norway, although the film’s narrative suggests it is Vejle Fjord. I describe it as Danish since this matters to the film’s narrative, although the irony is that Danish audiences were not fooled since there are no such mountains in Denmark.

27. Feder and Juharzs, “Does visibility equal progress?”

28. Ibid.


31. This idea of Lili being used as a projection screen was generated in discussion with Sabine Meyer about the different interests at stake in The Danish Girl film project.