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Leiden  
The Netherlands

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## CHAPTER 28

# *Trans*

**Eliza Steinbock**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Film and Literary Studies  
Leiden University Center for the Arts in Society, The Netherlands*

The term *trans* is a word-forming element. The original meaning, in Latin, is “across, beyond, through, on the other side of, to go beyond,” with the prefixal meaning of crossing (trans-Atlantic), changing (transformation), or between (transracial). What are the stakes of invoking a term that both invites and confounds oppositional thinking (male–female, masculine–feminine) in the context of feminist debates on the “sex/gender system” (Rubin 1975, 159) and the “heterosexual matrix”? (Butler 1993, xx). Trans has the power to create new sets of vocabulary that are sensitive to emergence and processual transitioning; hence, trans goes beyond sex change ways of thinking that are entrenched in binary switches. In gender studies, trans is a key term that derives from discussions on self and group identity, that revises medical nomenclature like transsexual and transvestite, and that articulates political demands for groups like Global Action for Trans\* Empowerment. Shifting from a prefix to an adjective, in this chapter, trans also qualifies a person by describing, naming, or modifying their gender identity.

In the twenty-first century, trans flows through many disciplines to account for multiple kinds of crossing that emphasize interconnectivity, such as of economies (transnationalism), language (translation), or species (transgenics). The surge in the popular use of trans in relation to gender issues is growing, with unprecedented media coverage of transitioning celebrities, social movements to end violence against gender-variant people, and mainstream cultural production that features gender-non-conforming characters and performers. In a globalized mediascape, the groundswell of trans issues presents opportunities for comparison: What does trans mean in a particular location? What does the word do in another? How does trans travel? The demand for analysis has resulted in the publication of various special issues of existing journals and edited collections, the founding of the journal called *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, and two volumes of the *Transgender Studies Reader*. Editors Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura of the latter note that terms for *transgender*, *transsexual*, and *transvestite* registering in Google books have skyrocketed from 1992 to 2008, a fact they suggest that indicates trans is “arriving on the horizon of intelligibility” (2013, 2–3).

Students of feminist theory and practice need to understand not only what trans is, and why it is “arriving on the horizon of intelligibility” at this moment in time, but also how trans has contributed to the fields of gender and queer studies. Determining the relationships among these various traditions of thought has led to heated debates, but one crucial point should be clear: trans studies share with women’s and gender studies and queer theory the

inheritance of oppressive regimes of knowledge and social practices that produce gender and sexuality. Therefore, any critical endeavor to analyze that which is personally meaningful (“my gender” and “my sexuality”), without assuming such identity aspects to be universal, requires a toggle between micro and macro levels on which these categories operate. Trans studies include a range of critical approaches that to some extent revolve around debates to determine the proper trans subject for analysis. At the least, the trans desire to transform one’s body to align with one’s psychic and personal sense of self raises vital questions about the ways in which a given (sociocultural and sociopolitical) sex, gender, or sexuality system operates for individuals.

Even if gender and sexuality tend to be generally perceived—and experienced—as natural aspects of our being, the categories that determine gender sexual differences have a history: they are, in other words, sociohistorically specific. Cultural historians largely locate the invention of such categories as homosexual and heterosexual in the rise of the modern sciences in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. Although matters of the flesh up to that point were considered in predominantly religious terms, the development of scientific discourses, and especially medical discourse, increasingly shifted the focus to the human body as the seat of gender and sexual behaviors: a shift in focus that often has been described as that from sin to sickness. Historically, trans studies find their origins in this period, when medical authorities gained increasing authority to speak about the body and its particularities. Modern scientists began to map out and categorize all kinds of bodily aspects and behavior, including what were seen as acceptable and unacceptable modes of being in terms of gender and sexuality. The branch of medical science that concerned itself with these questions was called sexology. This evolving system of medico-scientific discourse that sought to determine the truth about the individual’s sexual and gendered being—a truth they believed to be located somewhere in the body—created a clear distinction between pathological and healthy forms of sexual and gender practices, which were defined, furthermore, as aspects of personhood. Trans subjects emerge in this breach between normal and abnormal, healthy and pathological as “flaws of nature,” as souls trapped in the “wrong body.” Current practices of sex assignment, whether at birth, or later in life, for instance, via sex-change surgery, in strictly binary terms (male versus female) harken back to this early history of classification and pathologization. The ethical questions involved in such decisions and procedures render trans issues hot topics of continued debate.

Trans studies continue a feminist tradition of ideology critique that tracks the ways in which differences in terms of gender, sexuality, race, and class become marked, evaluated, and ranked within a hierarchal system of unequal power relations. Such critiques serve to further analysis of the white supremacist colonial imperialist heteropatriarchy, a phrase widely attributed to African American scholar and activist bell hooks (1952–), and to develop tools for what Caribbean American writer, radical feminist, womanist, lesbian, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde (1934–1992) famously phrased, to “dismantle the master’s house” (1984, 110). Lorde insists that such tools need to come from outside the system or house of oppression, that is, outside the dominant discourses that define some modes of being and behavior as inferior, pathological, or sick and others as healthy, superior, and privileged. French philosopher, historian of ideas, social theorist, philologist, and literary critic Michel Foucault (1926–1984) underscores this point by showing that expressing our ostensibly highly personal and private sexual behaviors and acts of desire in relation to preexisting and predetermined identity categories actually helps reinforce the terms of oppression. In the modern regime of sexuality, one is forced to speak one’s sexual or gendered desires to lay

claim to an acceptable or appropriate identity: for some queer and trans critics, such claims amount to a nonproductive or even a politically regressive act. A nonidentitarian impulse hence can be seen to run through calls for gender-neutral language, for gender-queer spaces, and for so-called gender-fuck interventions—that is, acts that aim at throwing into confusion, or messing up, traditional gender norms and hierarchies through the performance of unusual or excessive combinations of masculinity and femininity. The notion of trans as sexual deviance also places trans subjects in conversation with others living outside the charmed circle of normative sexuality (i.e., subjects that are equally branded by the stigma of perversity). The decision for bodily modification that brings some trans people into contact with medical professionals, often for life, furthermore connects trans studies with critical disability studies, which likewise investigates normative embodiment and established biopolitical orders. In these ways and others, trans is a conceptual operation that transects the academy by connecting a variety of ethical, sociopolitical, and scientific questions that traditionally have been addressed within separate disciplines.

This chapter considers trans as it intersects with debates in feminism and queer theory by successively exploring the ways in which it functions as a linguistic modifier of gender concepts, performs as a subject of analysis, and constitutes a field of studies.

## A MODIFIER: WHAT IS IN A NAME?

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Poststructuralist understandings of the slipperiness of meaning could find its exemplar par excellence in the lexicon of trans. As feminist, queer, and transgender historian A. Finn Enke writes in the introduction to *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies* (2012), “Vocabularies and uses are invented and just as quickly challenged as we discover their unintended implications, exclusions, and limitations” (2012, 4). Sensitivity to naming and nomination likely derives in part from two typical experiences to being trans: (1) very often transitioning involves a legal or personal name change along with a change in gender marker (legal sex status), and (2) nearly all countries that offer a legal route to transitioning require a pathology diagnosis labeling the subject gender dysphoric and, in the recent past, with a gender identity disorder or transsexualism. As a modifying adjective for gender nouns *trans man* and *trans woman* appear most often, whereas *trans* is often considered the generally inclusive and respectful term. Enke reminds us that in the twenty-first century, *transgender* is regularly used in a universalizing dominant discourse spread through academic research, nonprofit organizations, state-sponsored medicine, and funding bodies: “Gender-variant people in many parts of the world may not identify with the concept [of transgender] or the political regimes that disseminate its logics” (2012, 19–20). This section provides an overview of the history and contexts of trans-related terms, trans bodily modifications, and the power of trans to transform social relationships.

### HISTORICAL MEANINGS

The fast-changing definitions of trans-related terms can be tracked through historically specific glossaries available online and in printed books, magazines, and zines. Especially for websites of groups organizing around lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI), a list of terminology has become a standard resource. Often they carry a disclaimer, such as this one from the National Center for Transgender Equality website: “Terminology within the transgender community varies and has changed over time so we recognize the need to be sensitive to usage within particular communities.” The practice of parsing meaning is

not only for professionals but also is a source of rousing debate in local communities. A central topic of debate has been whether and to what extent identity terms carry pathologizing dimensions that some wish to reclaim, much like *homo* (from homosexual), some continue to use *tranny* (from transsexual) even though it is a sexualized and pejorative term associated with trans women (e.g., see Bornstein 2010). The *Transgender Studies Reader's* opening section titled “Sex, Gender, and Science” includes key excerpts from pioneering sexologists who crafted the nineteenth- and twentieth-century psycho-sexological language that not only continues to affect our discussions of trans identity but also shapes thinking on queer bodies and gender normativity.

Historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists have argued that trans as a cross-dressing or cross-gender phenomenon has a much longer history than the nineteenth-century sexual or scientific practice of the classification and categorization of sexual deviance suggests. As long as societies organize according to sexual difference, there will be people who challenge that order. But trans is not always a marker of gender transgression. Trans people and practices are valued in some ancient as well as contemporary cultural traditions, in which they may be celebrated as spiritual guides or simply regarded as another viable gender expression, such as the two-spirit identity in Native American cultures. The anthropological rubric of the “third gender” (Herdt 1996) gathers together all gender-non-conforming expressions that are cross-cultural examples of the “transgender native” (Towle and Morgan

2002, 469), including the female husbands of Western Africa and *hijra* in India. Although appealing as a way to challenge the logic of Western binary gender systems, when third gender examples such as the *xanith* in the Arabian peninsula are used to generalize the possibility of breaking with the binary system, they risk becoming a static figuration in contrast to dynamic Eurocentric cultures capable of change.

### CHANGING CONTEXTS

American transgender butch lesbian activist and author Leslie Feinberg (1949–2014) writes in her groundbreaking *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (1996), “I don’t have a personal stake in whether the trans liberation movements results in a new third pronoun, or gender-neutral pronouns. . . . It is not the words in and of themselves that are important to me—it’s our lives” (x). Twenty years later *they* as a gender-plural or gender-neutral pronoun has become common usage in English, while “Mx” as an alternative title entered the *Oxford English Dictionary* in May 2015. The activism around trans lives shapes and is shaped by colloquial language; for some, these identity words encapsulate much about their lives because language has representational power. American artist, media and gender theorist, and a founding thinker of transgender studies, Sandy Stone (1936–) first published the revolutionary essay “The *Empire Strikes Back*:



**Emmett Ramstad, detail of *Hung Like a Garland* (intestines, lace, and pearls) from the multi-work installation *Trans-homoerotic Archive*, 2013.** This work mixes gender signifiers like feminine pearls and lace that compose masculine sausages. The objects bring humor to new ways of thinking about trans embodiment that emphasize crafting and the beauty of the ordinary. © EMMETT RAMSTAD.

A Posttranssexual Manifesto” in 1991. It critiques medical and feminist representations of transsexual identity and encourages trans people to articulate their forms of embodiment and experience across the “entire spectra of desire” to accomplish a “re-visioning of our lives” (2006, 232). The “coming-to-voice” of trans people, American philosopher and transgender theorist Talia Mae Bettcher points out, occurs both within mainstream culture and within what she calls “trans-friendlier subaltern contexts” (2009, 98).

Transgender is not only a referential linguistic denomination but also a concept that professor, author, filmmaker, and gender theorist Susan Stryker’s highly influential book *Transgender History* (2008) defines as “*the movement across a socially imposed boundary from an unchosen starting place—rather than any particular destination or mode of transition*” (1, italics in original). Nevertheless, ethnographers such as David Valentine (2007) and Aniruddha Dutta (2013) show in contexts as different as inner-city New York and rural Eastern India that, when social service providers (e.g., for HIV-prevention and care), use the general term *transgender* instead of local terminology, they often miss their target populations. These authors’ research reveals the ways in which *transgender* is both inflected by class and by race and that other terms might follow the language use of lower caste or class for gender or sexual variance. A major challenge for current trans studies is to account for the continuing whiteness, colonialist, and US-centricity of transgender in such a way that does not disenfranchise other forms of trans expression, such as the *travesti* in the Global South, while still building a transnational movement fighting against trans discrimination.

## TRANSITIONING AND BODILY MODIFICATIONS

Framing the debate around health care and access to treatment rather than the identity of a population is one such way that trans activists have sought to sidestep the confining terms of established paradigms. The persistent trope of trans experience as a state of being in the wrong body has proved a stumbling block: How to successfully articulate your feelings to the medical gatekeepers? (Engdahl 2013). Much like feminists fighting to secure women’s reproductive rights, trans activists have sought a model of thinking about trans that allows clients to give informed consent (rather than receive a diagnosis) to access hormonal and surgical gender transitions—and successfully so, first in Argentina (May 2012). Physical transition is attractive only for some and is possible only for those with monetary means or health care coverage. Those who desire to transition may opt for some combination of the following treatment and procedures: for trans women, procedures include hormone replacement therapy, orchiectomy (removal of testes), vaginoplasty, breast implants, feminizing face surgery, tracheal shave (Adam’s apple), laser hair removal, dermal fillers, and voice training; for trans men, procedures include hormone replacement therapy, chest reconstruction surgery, hysterectomy, phalloplasty or metioplasty (creation of a phallus or freeing of the clitoris), and scrotoplasty (insertion of testes-sized balls).

The *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Health Problems*, published by the World Health Organization, and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, contain the diagnostic criteria that regulate access to treatment and legal recognition of self-identified gender. These terms and classifications change in the course of history, as a result of both changing medical practices and sociocultural beliefs and ideas. Hence, policy and lobbying tends to rely on (changes to) their wordings, reflecting similar processes for the regulation of the former pathology of homosexuality and currently for intersex conditions. The World Professional



Association for Transgender Health also publishes a “Standards of Care” document on its website to assist clients “with safe and effective pathways to achieving lasting personal comfort with their gendered selves.” The purpose is to avoid unwanted medical procedures that national governments force onto trans people (e.g., sterilization) and to fight against the denial of treatments when they are needed. Nikki Sullivan’s research on bodily modification shows that different cultures within the Western world place a lower value on trans practices and nonmainstream body modification than on cosmetic surgery, although all effectively challenge the limits of self-authorization (Sullivan 2006).

## TRANS PERFORMATIVITY

Given the continuing contestation of the term *trans*, one might ask, what is its purpose? What can it do? The horizon of intelligibility opened by trans-related language may not necessarily save lives, but it has brought together local and global communities in new ways. Performativity



**Elisha Lim, “Sze-Yang,” pen and ink illustration from Sissies and the Femmes That Inspire Them, wall calendar, 2012.** Drawn portraits of people who feel hailed by the term *sissy* accompany short responses by participants to the term, often highlighting the negative associations and their process of carving out a space of affirming their sissiness: “Sissy means everything you grow up fearing to be . . . is now one of the most powerful sides of myself.” © ELISHA NAÏVE.

refers to the power of a speech act to bring something into being—for example, when an authorized individual says, “I now pronounce you husband and wife.” Declarations of naming more generally have a performative force. With respect to trans-related terms, we can think of the ways in which the self-naming of some individuals have had the power to motivate others to travel for surgery to Thailand’s care centers and to establish Transgender Europe (2005–present), currently with sixty-eight member organizations in thirty-eight different countries. Trans language thus has proven to have social, cultural, and political efficacy.

In *Undoing Gender* (2004), American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler turns explicitly to the “New Gender Politics” invigorated by trans and intersex movements to consider how the problematics of gender and sexuality relate to the tasks of persistence and survival. “I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live,” she writes. “But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable” (2004, 4). Who finds shelter under the umbrella of a term? In the social movements for sexual rights advanced by LGB activists, the additional *T* might be taken to conflate sexuality (LGB) with gender (T). Trans is often included in LGB studies and politics, but subsequently it is not considered for its specificities (trans people can also identify as LGB) and differences, especially in their experience of stigma. Professor, legal expert, and trans activist Dean Spade coined the phrase “LGB-fake-T” (2004, 53) to take aim at the growth of professional organizations and nonprofits directed by white, middle-class, cisgender (defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* as “denoting or relating to a person whose self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex; not transgender”) leadership that do not prioritize trans issues related to health care, homelessness, employment, incarceration, and so on.

## SUBJECT OF ANALYSIS: WHO SPEAKS, OF WHAT SUBJECTIVITY?

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The word *subject* has multiple meanings: the speaker, the subject matter, and subjectivity. As suggested, trans has entered the academy through a variety of existing disciplines but mainly as subject matter, an approach that Stryker calls “the study of transgender phenomena” (Stryker and Whittle 2006, 12). Transgender studies, in contrast, she writes, “considers the embodied experience of the speaking subject,” whose transgender “experiential knowledge is as legitimate . . . and is in fact necessary for understanding the political dynamics of the situation being analyzed” (12). Who is this trans speaking subject and what forms of subjectivity do they mobilize? What can trans as an experience and as a concept tell us about embodiment, difference, and positionality that lie at the heart of feminist and queer enterprises?

Because trans scholarship partially evolves from within social movements, it follows similar patterns of dealing with the subject and subjectivity as women’s studies and gay and lesbian studies while retaining its own, distinct relationships to authoritative medical-scientific fields involved in regulating social practices. This section highlights the various forms of subjectivity delineated in medico-legal scholarship, postmodern and posthuman philosophies, and cultural production.

### NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

Sexological authorities codified trans experience in pathological terms—for example, *psychopathiatranssexualis* (Cauldwell 1956)—an early precursor to the more common term *transsexualism*. Working with case studies, doctors would examine a few patients for similar traits to derive and name a general type. Sympathetic to many sexual minorities, Jewish physician and sexologist



Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) treated trans patients Dörchen Richter (1891–1933) and Lili Elbe (1882–1931) with hormonal therapy and bodily modifications in Berlin in the 1920s. The endocrinologist and German émigré to New York, Harry Benjamin (1885–1986), first took an advocate's stance with his book *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966). Debates on the apparent mutability of sex and the persistence of gender identity reflect an era obsessed with examples that prove gender is either inborn (from nature) or can be shaped socially (by nurture). Despite evidence to the contrary, researchers in newly financed gender clinics largely upheld a dimorphic view on gender conforming to heterosexual social conventions.

Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (1995) broke through the trans narrative of eternal suffering to celebrate modes of being that do not fit neatly into gender, sex, or sexuality binaries. According to the Stop Trans Pathologization's website, this international campaign (2009–present) is annually observed each October by “more than 390 activism groups, organizations and networks from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania.” Trans individuals and advocacy groups have developed their own theoretical interests that sometimes diverge from those held by care providers. Medical and legal advocacy in neoliberal contexts often makes use of the subjectivity framework of gender self-determination as a strategic tool “to express opposition to the coercive mechanisms of the binary gender system” (Spade 2006, 235n9). Although perhaps misguidedly championing the individual production of self, such advocacy seeks to secure a subject position to fight public authorities that impinge on an individual's gender, for example, by assigning birth gender, limiting toilet access, and sex-segregated incarceration.

#### POMO AND AFTER

Trans arrives on the horizon of intelligibility with postmodernism. This is no coincidence, because postmodernism questions any form of universal truth and challenges the fixity of all meaning. The pomo age is thus one of ontological uncertainty, and challenges any and all knowledge claims, including those that seek to define sex and gender once and for all. The framework of relativity offered by postmodern thought has been adapted by trans scholarship to make sense of the lived complexity of gender variance. This approach welcomes the loss of false foundations, in this case of sex defined in binary terms, especially because this so-called foundational category actually may result in far more than two options through combinations of chromosomal, anatomical, reproductive, and morphological elements. Gender terminology has also proliferated beyond two options of man and woman through “the making and unmaking and remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world” (Sedgwick 1990, 23). Drag queen of color and supermodel RuPaul (1960–) taught popular culture audiences, “We're born naked, the rest is drag” (1995, viii), while queer theory often has employed the example of transgender to illustrate the dissonances and fractures between layers of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Poststructuralists theorize a subjectless, although not a bodiless, subjectivity that emerges in and through language. We can speak ourselves only in a system of signification that exists before us and that therefore, to a large extent, offers no more than the contours of a self that never can be fully captured in language or any sign system. The focus on the limitations of what can be said (and thus what one can be) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the privileged or marginalized position from which one speaks as well as the trouble of accessing intelligible discourse to speak one's difference. Inspired by the feminist poststructuralist work of, among others, Donna Haraway (1944–), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942–), and Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004), Stone's “Posttranssexual Manifesto”

submits that trans subjects, much like colonial and indigenous people, have no authentic voice in the existing accounts of themselves. Stone writes, “It is difficult to articulate a counter-discourse if one is programmed to disappear” ([1991] 2006, 230) by assimilation into a dominant (gender, racial, class) culture. Refocusing on the language of the body, Jay Prosser (1998), Henry Rubin (2003), and Gayle Salamon (2008) account for trans experience by engaging the concepts of the bodily ego (Sigmund Freud), lived experience (Maurice Merleau-Ponty), and sexual difference (Luce Irigaray), respectively. Speaking the language of the body only partly circumvents the problem of legitimating discourses, although it can disrupt the smooth closure on which powerful discourses depend.

### PHILOSOPHIES OF DIFFERENCE

To assert trans subjectivity is to claim a difference from other forms of subjectivity. Trans studies rely on existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir’s (1908–1986) insight about the way gender difference comes into being: “One is not born, but rather becomes, [a] woman” ([1949] 2011, 330). The ideological system of difference creates further differentials, with the position of the dominant (male, white, heterosexual) creating the subordinate (female, black, queer). Trans studies’ vexed relation to women’s studies in part derives from that fact that trans men and women alike contest the universal rules about gender acquisition and thus question who falls under the sign of woman or man. Or, as American queer and transgender philosopher C. Jacob Hale suggests, what trans does is to break apart what a woman is (1997); similarly, French feminist, radical lesbian author and theorist Monique Wittig (1935–2003) claimed that “lesbians are not women” (1992, 32) because womanhood is defined as a class of people in heterosexual subordination to men. American trans and environmental arts scholar Eva Hayward’s poetic writings embrace an approach to subjectivity from a trans perspective that highlights the transitioning element in all gendered beings, thereby locating difference in constant, minute shifts rather than in essential or fundamental types (2010).

Belgian-born French feminist, philosopher, linguist, psycholinguist, psychoanalyst, sociologist, and cultural theorist Luce Irigaray (1930–) insists that female sexuality is “this sex which is not one” (1985, 23) to break down the phallocentric standard of the one and universalization of oneness, which relegates the female sex to a zero instead of a plurality. Although opening up the multiple of feminine discourse, Irigaray’s notion of sexual difference in strictly gendered terms appears to foreclose the possibility of a trans articulated sexual difference. Trans scholarship has found more productive inspiration in new (feminist) materialisms that analyze the ways in which technology and environments produce difference. Haraway’s concept of the “post-gender” cyborg (1991, 292) has helped feminist scholarship to critically appraise the ways in which gender technologies are enmeshed with military and colonial histories of techno-violence, and, significant for trans scholars, the promise of monstrous beings (see the chapter titled “Posthuman” in this volume).

Research into subjectivity from feminist and queer perspectives has long paid attention to what counts as viably human and who falls outside of the category. This inquiry currently is being undertaken from a variety of perspectives that bear particular relevance for trans studies. For instance, the concept of biodiversity has inspired scientific examination of the ways in which bacteria and other life-forms share a trans-sex morphology. Animal studies engages posthuman questions by exploring the ways in which so-called companion species—nonhuman animals living closely with humans, for example, cats, horses, and dogs—may affect gender transitioning. Within this current wave of multispecies ethics and ecological approaches to life, the separation of different species is found to rely as much on the racialization of different bodies as their gendering.

### LOCATING TRANS IN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Artistic works that claim to represent trans in some sense grapple with long histories of the depersonalization and erasure of trans subjects, raising the question “What does trans *look like*?” (Carter, Getsy, and Salah 2014, 469, italics in the original). As with any presentation of the vulnerable, the visualization of difference can legitimate its existence but concurrently manifest negative stigma; therefore, analysis of such work should include the creator’s authorization to represent such images, and the kinds of visual markers that are introduced and to what effect. Popular genres for presenting trans people are portraiture and documentary photography and film, whose conventions not only may bestow dignity but also risk provoking voyeuristic gazes. Live performance art and dance often play with the spectacle of the trans or gender-transgressive body. Drag and cabaret cultural communities often showcase trans women, drag queens and kings, alongside gay men, like the Dzi Croquettes theater group in Brazil and the “world orders” of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, suggesting that in these communities desire and gender identity cross fluidly from trans to LGB.

Scholarship on trans cultural production has focused largely on dissecting mainstream trans imagery, for instance, of dancer and singer Christine Jorgensen (1926–1989), and of films that have provoked critical responses from gender, sexuality, and trans studies scholars alike, including, *Tootsie*, *The Crying Game*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Boys Don’t Cry*, and *Trans-america*. Author and gender and queer theorist Jack (Judith) Halberstam’s (1961–) work on trans and queer subcultural production chronicles the changes in the neoliberal economic and aesthetic landscape that have led to the embrace of plasticity and non-normativity and thus have opened up possibilities for (some) trans subjectivities to become increasingly intelligible to the general public (2005). At the same time, trans filmmakers and artists must deal with the expectation that they present (their) bodies and lives in a traditionally narrative or realist fashion to authenticate and document the emerging trans community. Some artists refuse to do so and explore trans aesthetics instead through formal experimentation, such as Jules Roskam’s film *Against a Trans Narrative* (2008) and Trish Salah’s poetry *Lyric Sexology Vol. 1* (2014). In fields ranging from architecture to music, trans artists developing a neoformalist and abstract mode of expression try to shake off traditional expectations of what trans is. Scholar Helen Hok-Sze Leung unexpectedly reads trans subjectivities into the arena of Hong Kong action cinema (2008), thus suggesting new avenues for analyzing trans within a transnational framework.

### FIELD OF STUDIES: NOT A SPECIAL ISSUE ANYMORE?

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Even imagining a proper field of trans studies has involved overcoming stigmatizing attitudes about trans as a niche or eccentric topic. Pushing for trans to not only constitute a special issue within gender or sexualities studies has required centering trans experience within a wide range of political, economic, and aesthetic enquiries. In an interview, Stryker explains how trans is not a “fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a movement,” with little “power in numbers,” but rather has a strong “power of articulation” (Time and Franzen 2012, 256). As an embodied and lived concept, trans is able to speak to a large set of contemporary issues, including reproductive rights, border security, legal documentation, and citizenship. Trans follows in some ways the shift from a focus on identity to the interrogation of concepts, which marks the expansion of women’s studies into gender studies. Rather than taking woman as the problem or main object of inquiry, gender studies focuses on the changing, complex power relations that constitute gendered subjectivity (male and female)

through practices of politics, governance, sexuality, culture, and so on. The focus has thus shifted from the result of unequal power relations to the concepts underlying and enabling or, indeed, reinforcing them. The social sciences nevertheless still largely legitimate their knowledge production by seeking empirical evidence: better quantitative and qualitative data on life experiences of an identified population. The defining question “Who counts?” with its assumption of a preformed group of qualifying human beings, thus continues to organize studies on trans mental health, access to care, employment, and legal rights.

Trans studies as a special issue was first introduced in the US-based journal *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* (GLQ) in 1998, an issue expanded on by an interdisciplinary approach in *Women’s Studies Quarterly* (WSQ) in 2008 that included articles on Iranian trans experiences, starfish and transspeciesed selves, and nineteenth-century cross-dressing laws. The field became institutionalized with the launch of the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (TSQ) in 2013. In fifteen years, trans studies has grown tremendously, even if such growth has not yet resulted in a terminal academic degree program. Trans issues continue to be marginalized when taught as a topic within gender and sexuality programs, or as a sensitivity training in health sciences. It is nonetheless important to see how the field has become organized in relation to and in dialogue with gender and queer theories.

#### SOURCES: SPECIAL ISSUES AND EDITED COLLECTIONS

Building up the field of trans studies has taken place in every imaginable discipline. The uptick in special issues and essay collections on trans-related research was especially prominent around the turn of the century. Kate More and Stephen Whittle’s edited collection *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siècle* (1999) is particularly attentive to the historical moment when transgender scholars began to enter the academy and to intervene in debates on gender. GLQ’s 1998 issue edited by Stryker kick-started discussions in the United States on history, bioethics, the butch/female-to-male (FTM) border wars, and on trans embodiment from intersex activist and queer psycho-analytical perspectives. Ten years later, the editors of the 2008 WSQ issue “Trans-” offer the hyphen to explore categorical crossings comparatively like “-gender, -national, -racial, -generational, -genic, and -species” (2008, 11). Other notable journal publications have been Paisley Currah and Dean Spade’s double issue on trans policy in *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* (2009), Talia Mae Bettcher and Ann Garry’s trans and feminism issue of *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* (2009) and Carla Pfeffer’s trans sexualities issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* (2014).

*Transgender Rights* (Currah, Juang, and Minter 2006) is a collection of articles that contextualize transgender transnational law, legal histories, and contemporary politics. *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (Stanley and Smith 2011) and *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders, and Politics of Transition* (Cotten 2011) establish how migration, postcolonial, and abolitionist politics have powerfully intersected and animated trans studies. Both also highlight the racial positioning of the field, with the addition of the special issue on “Race and Transgender Studies” in *Feminist Studies* (2011) that brings together articles on Hassidic drag, ballroom culture, Latina activism, and Vodou epistemologies of gender. Since TSQ’s inaugural double issue on “Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First-Century Transgender Studies” (Currah and Stryker 2014), special issues on decolonizing the transgender imaginary, trans cultural production, and making trans count all speak to the wide range of trans scholarship.

## PERSPECTIVES: TRANS-EXCLUSIONARY FEMINISM AND THE EVIL TWIN OF QUEER THEORY

Fighting against patriarchal gender norms and fighting for equality for all genders are common causes between feminist and trans politics. With the increasing visibility of trans people and scholarship that challenges essentialist ways of thinking about gender, however, a small group of radical feminists have voiced concerns about trans people being the dupes of patriarchal medical doctors who reinforce gender norms by offering sex-reassignment in traditional binary fashion. Such concerns have been raised particularly vehemently against trans-identified women who are perceived as a threat to the safety of women-only spaces, such as toilets and shelters. Within such debates, trans men frequently are discounted as women who believe that it is easier to live as men and to give up the feminist fight. One of the most pernicious ideas about trans women was voiced by Janice Raymond, who proclaimed them men who “rape women’s bodies” (1979, 104), when they appropriate them through a physical transition, and then threaten to invade lesbian feminist spaces. Since the second wave of feminism, scholars such as Mary Daly, author of *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) and Raymond’s dissertation director, have drawn unfavorable comparisons between Frankenstein’s monster and transsexuality, accusing transsexuals of being delusional (Millot [1983] 1990) and guilty of genital self-mutilation (Jeffreys 1997, 2014). The number of productive feminist responses to trans lives and politics, including online discussions and edited collections of academic essays, far outweigh the hostile arguments of trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs). Emi Koyama’s “Transfeminist Manifesto” (2001) is a touchstone text for trans-informed articulations of feminist ideals, as is Krista Scott-Dixon’s collection *Trans/Forming Feminisms* (2006), whereas Julia Serano’s *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (2007) provides a critique of the operations of trans-misogyny.

Both trans and queer studies have their roots in feminism and in sexuality studies during the era of the AIDS crisis. Stryker proffers that trans is the evil twin to queer theory since “gender’s absence renders sexuality largely incoherent, yet gender refuses to be the stable foundation on which a system of sexuality can be theorized” (2004, 212). To many scholars radicalized by AIDS activism, a disease that ignores gender and sexual identity, the newfound exclusionary language of “womyn-born women” and the restrictive gay male “hunk” culture felt divisive and alienating to those who express their gender differently. Zachary Nataf’s book, *Lesbians Talk Transgender* (1996) opens a dialogue by narrating excerpts from lesbian academics speaking on the ways in which male-to-female (MTF) and FTM identities intersect with their own hopes and fears. Queer theory, some scholars maintain, may have proved less able to account for embodiment than trans studies accomplishes. In “Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender” (2003), Cressida Heyes therefore stresses the need to build alliances that incorporate the strengths of each field so as to address the instabilities and lived realities of sex, gender, and sexuality alike.

## METHODOLOGIES: BUILDING A FIELD

Field studies such as disability, intersex, and trans constitute a field by selecting an object of study situated at the intersection of various disciplines. Thus they often use concepts such as ecology or intersubjectivity that travel across a range of faculties, from the sciences to the humanities and back to the social sciences. The methodologies of trans studies scholarship are therefore inevitably transdisciplinary. Given the founding interest in subjects with trans experience, ethnography offers a great deal of political purchase as well as risk. Some of the first ethnographic monographs employ the



method of auto-ethnography to generate informed theoretical considerations, such as Jay Prosser's *Second Skins* (1998) and Henry Rubin's *Self-Made Men* (2003). Anthropologists, such as Dan Kulik in *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (1998), Afsaneh Najmabadi in *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (2014), and Marcia Ochoa's *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela* (2014) use field notes and interviews to draw far-reaching conclusions about embodied trans subjectivity in Brazil, Iran, and Venezuela. The excitement about trans studies has brought out prurient interests and fascination with the exotic, which can be enhanced by sociological methods that hide the subject position of the researcher. To challenge this kind of scholarship, C. Jacob Hale published "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexual Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism or Trans" (1997).

In addition to sharing theoretical underpinnings and methods with gender and sexuality studies, trans studies shares the former projects' stakes in expanding publication venues and developing degree programs. The *International Journal of Transgenderism* began in 1997 as the official journal of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (precursor to World Professional Association for Transgender Health, or WPATH), with mainly non-trans (cisgender) authors. The career paths for many of these scholars were limited to medicine, psychology, sociology, and law. To some extent these remain the most robust arms of trans-oriented research. Until recently, there were fewer tenure-track positions for trans expertise through women's and gender or sexuality studies. Stryker's position as the director of the Institute for LGBT Studies and Associate Professor in Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Arizona facilitated the acquisition of the first four tenure tracks in trans studies during 2013 and 2014. This unprecedented development has encouraged other American universities to invest in training programs and appointments in trans studies. Students in undergraduate programs are far more likely today to read work by trans academics, study texts on trans issues, and connect to trans people in everyday culture than ever before. The horizon of how to define or approach trans is no longer unknown, and the possibilities of where it will go next are still wide open.

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## Summary

This chapter offers a survey of research conducted under the banner of trans studies as it intersects and develops from and in interrelation with gender and queer studies. The chapter addresses the politics of naming, the problem of the speaking subject, and the emergence and development of the field to highlight the many ways that trans is contingent on relations of power constructed through sociopolitical discourses, patterns of intelligibility, and disciplinary regimes. Trans neither wholly describes the object of study nor does it merely refer to methodological tools. The term itself should at all times be carefully defined, and special attention should be paid to its function in context: What does *trans* mean or do here? and why/how does it occur in this context in the first place? An analytic use of trans breaks through binary thought, and yet it also can refer to extremely marginalized peoples. This tension is trans studies' greatest asset, because these different meanings situate trans at the intersection of a variety of academic discourses while rooting its practice in everyday social realities.

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## FILMS

*Against a Trans Narrative*. Dir. Jules Rosskam. 2008. A provocative and personal experimental documentary investigating dominant constructions of trans-masculine identity, gender, and the nature of community.

*Boys Don't Cry*. Dir. Kimberly Pierce. With Hilary Swank and Chloë Sevigny. 1999. A fictionalized account of Brandon Teena's life cut short by rape and murder in Nebraska.

*The Crying Game*. Dir. Neil Jordan. 1992. A psychological thriller set during the Irish Troubles explores issues of gender, sexuality, race and nationality through an unexpected romance.

*I.K.U.* Dir. Shu Lea Cheang. With Akira Aja, Miho Ariga, and Zachary Nataf. 2000. Inspired by *Blade Runner* and Japanese pornography, the sci-fi feature centers on shape-shifting cyborgian spies who collect orgasm data for a corporation.

*Let Me Die a Woman!* Dir. Doris Wishman. 1978. The semi-documentary "exploitation" film on trans women

features interviews with surgeons, queens, and graphic re-enactments.

*Maggots and Men*. Dir. Cary Cronenwett. 2009. An experimental historical narrative set in a mythologized, post-revolutionary Russia that re-imagines the story of the 1921 rebellion of the Kronstadt sailors with a twist of gender anarchy thrown in by featuring a range of masculine actors (trans and non, genderqueer and butch).

*Mommy Is Coming*. Dir. Cheryl Dunye. 2012. Raunchy and sex-plicit comedy of errors set in the underground scene of Berlin in which monogamous queer lovers try to spice things up, only to end up sharing their bed with mommy.

*Silence of the Lambs*. Dir. Jonathan Demme. 1991. A psycho-crime and horror film about stopping serial killer "Buffalo Bill," known for killing women and wearing a suit of their skins.

*Still Black: A Portrait of Black Transmen*. Dir. Kortney Ryan Zeigler. 2008. The film presents the stories of six thoughtful and diverse black trans men, who speak on love, family, passing, and sex.

*Tootsie*. Dir. Sydney Pollack. With Dustin Hoffman, Jessica Lange. 1982. The romantic comedy depicts a difficult male actor who decides to present as a woman in order to land a new job, with ensuing gender deception plot twists and feminist insights.

*Transamerica*. Dir. Duncan Tucker. With Felicity Huffman. 2005. Set up as a road movie, the comedy-drama follows a trans woman (played by a cisgender actor) who must make amends with her long-lost son in order to access her surgical treatment.

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