

# General Editors' Introduction

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If the critical import of this issue of *TSQ*, “Tranimalities,” can be narrowed to a single focal point, it is that the human/nonhuman distinction is inextricably tied to questions of gender and sexual difference. Issue editors Eva Hayward and Jami Weinstein, along with the authors whose work they have selected for inclusion, collectively argue that to be human has meant taking a position in relation to sexual difference and becoming gendered (the English *it*, for example, has no personhood, as opposed to *he* and *she*), while to be forcibly ungendered or to become transgendered renders one’s humanness precarious. It can result in one’s status being moved toward the not-quite-human, the inhuman, the “mere” animal, or even toward death, toward a purportedly inanimate “gross materiality.” The editors’ exquisite introduction, the feature articles, and much of the content in the journal’s recurring sections (including Harlan Weaver’s contribution to the New Media section, Paige Johnson’s film analysis and Anthony Wagner’s artist statement in Arts and Culture, and M. Dale Booth’s essay on recent scholarship in the Book Review section) all explore the non/human in relation to transgender at an unprecedented level of detail and theoretical sophistication. They plumb philosophical depths that bring transgender studies into conversation with some of the most fundamental questions we can ask about ourselves and the cosmos we experience, and in doing so they help realize the potential we originally envisioned for this journal and for the field.

In 2008, along with collaborator Lisa Jean Moore, we coedited “Trans-,” an issue of the theme-based feminist journal *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* that serves as a point of departure for this current issue of *TSQ* as well as a point of origin for *TSQ* itself. Notably, we sought then to disarticulate *trans-* as a prefix that denotes certain kinds of capacities, potentials, or critical operations from *-gender* as a suffixed operand, thereby opening a space in which a more minoritizing version of transgender studies could engage with a broader set of theoretical

concerns, and with nearby interdisciplines addressing similar conceptual, critical, and political issues. As we said at the time:

A little hyphen is perhaps too flimsy a thing to carry as much conceptual freight as we intend for it bear, but we think the hyphen matters a great deal, precisely because it marks the difference between the implied nominalism of “trans” and the explicit relationality of “trans-,” which remains open-ended and resists premature foreclosure by attachment to any single suffix. (2008: 11)

Without in any way seeking to disavow the importance of understanding how trans-ing operates on the sociopolitical structures and processes we call “gender,” or of studying the lives of people who identify as transgender or are understood as such by others, we focused instead on soliciting and selecting work that could facilitate transdisciplinary inquiries and enable transversal connections to be drawn between different operands—asking what the transgenic, transnational, or translational, for example, might have to do with transgender, as well as what heuristic or analytic insights rooted in transgender experience might contribute to such transdisciplinary inquiries. Significantly, Eva Hayward’s “More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixial Flesh and Transspeciated Selves,” Natalie Corinne Hansen’s “Humans, Horses, and Hormones: (Trans) Gendering Cross-Species Relationships,” and our own introduction “Trans-, Trans, or Transgender? The Stakes for Women’s Studies,” all published in that issue of *WSQ*, have helped lay a foundation for the works dwelling in the interstices of transgender studies and animal studies included here in “Tranimalities.”

As Victoria Pitts-Taylor and Talia Schaffer (2008: 9) pointed out, we conceptualized *trans-* in *WSQ* “as both assemblage and disassemblage, as folded into structures of power and . . . as a movement of *becoming*.” This is precisely where Hayward and Weinstein pick up the conversation in “Tranimalities.” Their introduction makes a cogent and eloquent case for understanding the space between prefixial *trans-* and suffixial *-gender* as having an ontological dimension; they conceptualize it as a generative void, or place of emergence. For them, *trans\**—with the asterisk holding a space for multiple attachments while visually symbolizing radiant, multipronged means and methods of entrainment—signifies a virtual potential immanent within processes of materialization. *Trans\** represents mattering’s vital capacity to become more and other than it already is through movements, connections, intensifications, and refigurations that traverse existing material arrangements. Hayward, Weinstein, and the authors they are in dialog with thus deepen and expand the rudimentary openings we gestured toward in *WSQ* and further elucidate the insight that *trans\*gendering* entails a kind of speciation (and transspeciation).

We thank Patricia Piccinini for granting permission to use an image of her sculpture *Undivided* for the cover of “Tranimalities.” Piccinini’s work visually explores many of the themes that concern us here. We see two entwined figures on a bed—one coded through its hairstyle, clothing, skin tone, apparent youth, and normative able-bodied appearance as capable of becoming the white masculinist adult subject of Eurocentric modernity destined for fully human status; the other figure, unclothed but more difficult to read, behind the first and embracing him, is humanoid in its general morphology without appearing normatively human. Is it a *kind* of human—either deficient or excessive in relation to anthropic norms—or is it inhuman? It is like nonhuman mammals with its equine mane and porcine face while not being identifiable with any particular species. It bears dorsal protruberances that teratologically disrupt the bodily symmetries associated with human health and beauty, without therefore necessarily being monstrous or abnormal for whatever sort of creature it might be, precisely because we do not know what norms to apply and therefore what its “proper” morphology “should” be. It is not legibly gendered. Unlike the teddy bear toy lying on the floor, this figure is not an anthropomorphized animal Other manufactured for an anthropocentric pedagogy in service to the inculcation of species hierarchy. It is literally in bed with the human, snuggled close to the seat of human sexuality and of dreams alike, simultaneously innocent and polymorphously perverse in its slumbering intimacy. This ambiguous figure enfolds the human, perhaps in the manner of a protective older sibling ontologically and temporally prior to the emergence of the human, or perhaps in the manner of a future descendant reaching back through time to touch its past: the temporality and kinship status of their relation remains queerly unfixed. For now, they are simply copresent, two touching, yet as the artist’s act of naming paradoxically insists, one. Undivided. Piccinini’s work thus asks us to unlearn and imagine differently the non/human dichotomy, and helps us perceive instead a milieu in which it is possible to move between, across, through, and within different kinds of concretizing, individuating, specifying, and speciating processes that emerge materially in concert with one another.

If the sleeping figure of the human child is legible as white, loaded with all the colonial and racial supremacist baggage that that term can carry and connote, what color is the skin of the nearby figure? Is it like human whiteness or more akin to the pale flesh that a chimpanzee’s dark fur roots itself in, needless of melanin to protect the epidermis from potentially carcinogenic solar ultraviolet radiation? The human child and its companion are chromatically similar, though the latter is perhaps a shade darker than the former. This both stages and begs the question of how, or whether, biopolitical techniques for hierarchizing differences within our species’ populations might translate across species boundaries, and of how

racialization, dehumanization, animalization, and (trans)gendering might relate to one another. If transgenering involves processes through which minoritized manifestations of embodied selfhood are sorted into the hierarchical classifications of the human, the not-quite-human, and the inhuman, a curious and significant lacuna in this issue of *TSQ* is the absence of sustained engagement with racial categorization—the practice par excellence of denying fully Human status to some humans—and with critical race studies, along with a dearth of work by transgender studies scholars of color. Similar concerns could be raised around the lack of explicit focus on disabled bodies—another arena in which the non/human boundary can be staged with deleterious effects for those who differ from anthropically privileged bodily norms and the environments such normativized bodies produce.

These omissions stem not from the editors' lack of awareness or lack of recruitment effort, or from lack of participation by people of color or people with disabilities with the journal and in the field, but point rather to deeper problematics in the field's constitution and development and to the ways identity politics and identity-oriented scholarship can be made to operate. Cuts in the body politic that produce hierarchized categories of personhood create conditions of possibility for acts of narrative suturing, for trans-movements capable of conjoining a divided materiality (the same way that filmic cuts operate to tell cinematic stories), but these cuts can also result only in disconnection, separation, and isolation. While a failure to connect across a cut might stem, for some, from a lack of desire to be in-relation-to some particular other (or even from an explicit aversion), it might also be merely a consequence of imaginative or analytical failure, or a failure of technique. Whatever the diagnosis, it remains the case that despite diligent efforts to promote transgender studies as yet another critical perspective on more globally relevant questions regarding the conditions of life, it is still too easy to understand (and reproduce) the field as merely a marginalized minority discourse—as being of, by, and for (often unmarked as white and able-bodied) trans\*-identified people alone. Such identitarian disconnects happen in many directions at once—we can confront and critique the persistent predominance of whiteness and ablist or other privileged statuses in transgender studies as barriers to politically productive connectivity with similarly biopolitically operated-on categories of the precariously human and potentially non/human, while also lamenting the lack elsewhere of sustained engagement with, interest in, desire for, or freedom from aversion to critical insight drawn from living transgender lives. Clearly, many critical fields converge around questions of the non/human within biopolitical regimes, and all would be mutually enriched by more capacious transdisciplinary coinvolvement and tool-transfer.

To take but one example: In his recent *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Alexander Weheliye (2014) begins to orchestrate a conversation across disparately biologized social formations and configurations of contested personhood. He argues that within our current episteme, what he calls “dysgenic humans,” a category he describes as being comprised in the contemporary US of blacks, Latinos, Indians, and other such transracial groups as the poor, the incarcerated, the disabled, and transgender people, are similarly “constituted as aberrations from the ethnoclass Man by being subjected to racializing assemblages that establish ‘natural’ differences between the selected and the dysselected” (28). Addressing what that similarity might entail, without resorting to the naive comparativism of what Janet Halley (2000) has called “like-race” arguments, feels both timely and urgent, for it is becoming increasingly difficult to think of transgender persons and trans-gendering processes as anything other than emergent manifestations of the same biopolitical processes that racialize. That is to say, both processes speciate living materiality as hierarchized.

The works in “Tranimalities” transversally connect transgender studies’ investigation of the refusal of full humanity to transgender people with animal studies’ critique of the non/human dichotomy, just as transversal connections between animal studies, ecofeminism, critical race studies, disability studies, and queer theory have already put pressure on other dimensions of the biopolitical hierarchizations of differently embodied and subjectivized living material beings. That pressure is intensified by better appreciating the kinds of dehumanizations experienced by transgender people, while the critical operations symbolized by that clingy asterisk—of which Hayward and Weinstein ask so much—can further contribute to even more expansive trans-ings of frameworks and fields.

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