

General Editor's Introduction

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Like any new transdisciplinary area, at the moment of trans studies emergence there were no conventions limiting what one could look at, no particular sets of methodological processes one must follow, no “proper objects” (Butler 1994). Before Sandy Stone launched the field with the appearance in 1991 of “*The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*,” the study of all things trans had pretty much been limited to pathologizing medical and psychiatric discourses (1991). After its publication, the horizons seemed endless. Since then, the truly transdisciplinary side of trans studies—distinct from the medical and psychological literatures, which, if no longer explicitly pathologizing, are certainly disciplinarily bound—has made possible the comingling of things that are not supposed to go together: biological and text-based disciplines, or the study of humans and the study of other animals, to give just two examples.

But it's difficult for a new area of inquiry to maintain its transdisciplinarity for very long. If it is to survive, it must adopt at least some of the conventions of a discipline. As institutional formations, disciplines matter in important and concrete ways. The differences between how disciplines organize the production of knowledge justify the existence of departments and programs, jobs, grants, and publication opportunities. Emerging areas of inquiry have no departments and no academic jobs, and fewer grant opportunities. If editors and hiring committees think the object of your research is weird, or if your evidence seems nonsensical, it's much more difficult to get published. Important work gets done in the institutional homes that disciplines offer. Without material support, the potential originality and importance of the work done by those swinging without a net may never be realized and recognized.

It's at this point that any transdisciplinary apparatus—in this case, trans studies—is at risk of solidifying, of foreclosing more possibilities than it opens up. Absorption into the institutional matrices of knowledge production can lead to regularizing the use of the concepts, the methods, and the kinds of questions

that first made it innovative. Over time, the specific practices that bind trans studies into a recognizable and increasingly legitimate area of inquiry get routinized. What were once particularly innovative moves can crystallize into necessary citations for newcomers. Canons form, antinormativity becomes normative, what was once new becomes derivative. Moreover, the mechanisms that produce distributive injustice in the academy, such as institutional prestige, private capital, white privilege, and location in the global north, begin to matter a great deal in deciding what work is seen, what work counts, what work must be cited. Rather than rejecting disciplinarity and all that it brings, then, it might be better to recognize that trans studies has by now consolidated into something, even if that something turns out to be (conceptually and methodologically) evasive, contingent, allergic to stasis. As Stanley Fish reminds us, “the fact that a self-advertised unity is really a grab-bag of disparate elements held together by the conceptual equivalent of chicken-wire, or by shifting political and economic alliances, or by a desire to control the production and dissemination of knowledge, does not make the unity disappear; it merely shows what the unity is made of, not that it isn’t one” (Fish 1995: 74). Indeed, by being aware of its proto-disciplinary status, we may be better positioned to avert the downsides of disciplinarity.

Another foundational trans studies text, Susan Stryker’s 1994 essay, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix,” with its depiction of noncompliant rage-fueled transsexual monsters, was an extraordinarily effective refusal both of genre policing—it was both performance and theory, narrative and analysis—and of the discourses (abjection, pathologization, false consciousness, even liberal humanism) that corralled trans subjectivity into reassuringly familiar forms (1994). Stone and Stryker produced their work outside the academy, outside of disciplinary structures, yet together they birthed a new (inter- or trans-) discipline. As trans studies grows in the academy, the task of *TSQ* is to ensure that devastatingly original work continues to grace its pages. That work may not look like what came before it. Indeed, it might even reject some of its foundational assumptions, just as our *Ur*-texts refused the discourses that preceded them. As part of this challenge, I invited two emerging scholars, Andrea Long Chu and Emmett Harsin Drager, to give *TSQ* readers their take on trans studies thus far. As you will see, they do not pull their punches. Since this is a general issue rather than a theme essay, the contributions to this issue do not fall under any particular theme. Collectively, however, the assortment of subjects, authors, methods, and regions represented in this issue demonstrate the catholic approach to the study of gender that *TSQ* aims to preserve.

The publication of this issue marks an end to my tenure as general coeditor. *TSQ* made its debut in 2014, but my coeditor Susan Stryker and I had been working on bringing it into being—shopping around a proposal, developing

an editorial board, putting out our first call for papers, and getting articles in the production pipeline—since at least 2009. As anyone who has edited a journal will attest, ten years is more than enough time to devote to such an all-consuming project. While there have been the inevitable frustrations, delays, and mistakes—word-count screwups seem to be my particular specialty—I couldn't have had a better companion on this journey than Susan. In addition to her own brilliance as a scholar, as a coeditor she is absolutely unflappable, a freakishly fast writer of beautiful prose, and an awesome scout for new talent. I am also indebted beyond measure to the indefatigable Abraham Weil, our editorial assistant, who is starting a new job at California State University, Long Beach. I am delighted to be replaced by Francisco J. Galarte, who has generously agreed to join Susan as a general coeditor.

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References

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