

# THE TRANSGENDER ISSUE

## An Introduction

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It's not often that the editor of a scholarly journal has to keep revising the introduction to a special issue simply to stay abreast of new developments relevant to the topic under consideration, but that indeed has been the case with "The Transgender Issue." Two recent events, both of which took place between the first and second drafts of this essay, call attention to the timeliness of the work collected in this volume.

In her discussion of the politicization of intersexual identity, "Hermaphrodites with Attitude," Cheryl Chase notes that the goal of abolishing medically unnecessary cosmetic surgery on infants with ambiguous genitals is a "radical position" that requires "the willful disruption of the assumed concordance between body shape and gender category." She contends that the pragmatic campaign of intersex activists to alter what they consider to be a harmful surgical practice thus promises a profound destabilization of naturalized heteronormative configurations of gender, embodiment, and identity. When Chase completed her essay in the spring of 1997, her views enjoyed scant support beyond a small circle of queer allies, with most medical practitioners dismissing intersex activists as misguided zealots. But in early September 1997, ABC television's *Prime Time Live* newsmagazine ran a story on pediatric genital surgery—in fact, only one of several sympathetic accounts that had appeared in the U.S. national media in the intervening months—that editorialized in favor of the "radical position" advocated by Chase and her fellow activists. It was a stunning indication of how rapidly issues related to queer embodiment have been moving from the margins of U.S. culture into the mainstream.

James L. Nelson, in his contribution, "The Silence of the Bioethicists," offers a comparison and an ethical critique of two different standards of care for the medical treatment of transsexuals. One is the set of standards issued by the

Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBI/GDA), the professional organization for medical, psychotherapeutic, and social-scientific specialists who have appointed themselves the task of managing the lives of transgendered people. The other set is by the Health Law Committee of the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy (ICTLEP), a group of legal specialists and other social activists, many of whom are themselves consumers of transgender medical services. As Nelson points out, these competing standards represent quite different notions of what the biomedical enterprise is about and why a person might elect to participate in it. There is a long history of ambivalent feelings among many transsexuals toward the professionals who offer them access to reembodyment technologies only by pathologizing their desires and stigmatizing their lives. This running conflict between some providers and some consumers of transgender services took a significant turn early in September 1997 with the announcement that HBI/GDA had for the first time elected transsexual/transgender individuals to its board of directors. It remains to be seen whether this development is more akin to the proletariat gaining greater control over the means of (our) production or to colonial subjects becoming functionaries in the imperial bureaucracy. In either case, however, the old us/them dichotomy between people seeking and those providing access to medical procedures for altering the gender-signifying aspects of the body no longer holds true at one of the primary sites of institutional power over transgender lives.

Clearly, there are sweeping changes occurring in professional and popular attitudes toward transgender phenomena. Cultural representations of cross-dressed, transsexual, gender-ambiguous, or otherwise gender-queer figures have become so ubiquitous that it seems pointless to enumerate them. They are readily available not only through such subcultural venues as drag-king shows, gay and lesbian film festivals, or she-male pornography but in television sitcoms, major motion pictures, billboard advertising, and a wide variety of mass-media print sources. On the academic front, to list but a few recent developments, Temple University Press is developing a strong transgender-studies list, and a new social sciences publication, *The International Journal of Transgenderism*, debuted just as this essay went to press. At least four reputable academic journals besides *GLQ* (*Social Text*, the *British Journal of Gender Studies*, the media studies journal *Velvet Light Trap*, and the new *Sexualities*) have scheduled transgender studies special issues for 1998, when a major anthology, *Reclaiming Gender*, is also due out from Cassell. This transgender thing has, as they say in showbiz, got legs.

At least two salient sets of factors lie behind the growing attention to transgender phenomena within the academy. The first has to do with the increasingly

global extension during the second half of the twentieth century of what can be labeled—albeit reductively—the “postmodern condition.” Two aspects of this condition are a deepening crisis in the modern, socially dominant, empiricist theory of representation in which representation is conceived as “the reproduction for subjectivity of an objectivity that lies outside it” and the concomitant emergence of a non- or postreferential epistemology modeled by performative linguistic acts.<sup>1</sup> That a signifier does not point to its signified in any direct manner has been something of a first principle in linguistic theory for most of the twentieth century; only more recently, however, has it become socially significant that the signifier “gender” does not reference a signified “sex” in quite the direct way assumed by the idea of a “sex/gender system.”<sup>2</sup> The Internet, which has proven so adept at decoupling virtual persona and physical bodies, has made this situation especially obvious.<sup>3</sup> “Transgender phenomena” emerge from and bear witness to the epistemological rift between gender signifiers and their signifieds. In doing so, they disrupt and denaturalize Western modernity’s “normal” reality, specifically the fiction of a unitary psychosocial gender that is rooted biologically in corporeal substance. As such, these phenomena become sources of cultural anxiety and semiotic elaboration. Transgender phenomena have achieved critical importance (and critical chic) to the extent that they provide a site for grappling with the problematic relation between the principles of performativity and a materiality that, while inescapable, defies stable representation, particularly as experienced by embodied subjects.<sup>4</sup>

The second set of factors has to do with the fact that it is increasingly difficult—especially in places such as the Internet, urban queer communities, the humanities departments of major universities, or other cultural zones where postmodern representational conditions are well established—to avoid encountering people who lay claim to some form of transgender identity. This new visibility is attributable directly to the global, grass-roots transgender political mobilization of the 1990s, which has made living a transgendered life more socially feasible. Consequently, self-proclaimed transgender voices increasingly participate in discussions of transgender phenomena in any number of cultural contexts, often in ways that fundamentally affect the circulation of established transgender discourses. Underpinned by the postmodern turn in the conditions of signification, entirely new language games—novel configurations of discourse involving not just new content but new speakers and audiences—have begun to emerge through various attempts to articulate transgender phenomena.<sup>5</sup> The result, to steal a phrase from Sandy Stone, has been a “bumptious heteroglossia” of competing accounts of what properly constitutes transgenderism and who gets to talk in which ways for what purposes. This metadiscursive situation itself, quite apart from any discussion of what

transgender phenomena might actually be, has attracted swarms of academic culture workers who cut their critical teeth in the language-obsessed and theory-driven 1980s.

Stone's 1991 articulation of "posttranssexual" subject positions as "a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored" has done more to chart the course for transgender studies than any other single piece of scholarship to date.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the terms *transgender*, *transsexual*, and *queer* have become hopelessly tangled in subsequent attempts to carry out the critical project I understand Stone to have envisioned with her neologism "posttranssexual." To a large extent, work in transgender studies will consist of definitional wrangling until a better consensus emerges of who deploys these terms, in which contexts, and with what intent. I hope this volume will make a contribution toward that end. Two prescriptive generalizations seem in order now, however, as the field continues to consolidate. First, transgender studies should be something more than the mere elaboration of certain already-established discourses on transgenderism—the medico-juridical discourse of gender dysphoria enforced by members of HBGDA, for example, or moral discourses such as Janice Raymond's that masquerade as objective critique while passing judgment on the truth or justice of particular gender identities.<sup>7</sup> Second, the field should also be predicated on an explicit recognition of transgendered people as active agents seeking to represent themselves through any number of strategies, rather than as passive objects of representation in a few dominant discourses. It is no longer sufficient (if indeed it ever was) to approach the topic as Marjorie Garber did in *Vested Interests*, where she proceeded solely "by looking at [transsexuals and transvestites], and the cultural gaze that both constructs and regards them," with absolutely no concern for transgender subjectivity.<sup>8</sup> Most of the contributors to this issue—Rubin, Hale, Halberstam, Meyerowitz, and Nelson—deal explicitly with themes of subjectivity, agency, discursive placement, and strategies of self-representation.

A generation of scholarship is beginning to take shape that can better account for the wild profusion of gendered subject positions, spawned by the ruptures of "woman" and "man" like an archipelago of identities rising from the sea: FTM, MTF, eonist, invert, androgyne, butch, femme, nellie, queen, third sex, hermaphrodite, tomboy, sissy, drag king, female impersonator, she-male, he-she, boy-dyke, girlfag, transsexual, transvestite, transgender, cross-dresser.<sup>9</sup> It is appropriately from such critically queer work, rather than from the wider universe of more normative scholarship on transgenderism, that I have selected the contents of this issue of *GLQ*. In doing so, I seek to call attention to the *Q* in the journal's title,

which, as the editors note, is a sliding signifier that “takes us in two directions at once,” toward “the academic legitimacy of *quarterly*” but also toward the upstart rowdiness of *queer*.<sup>10</sup>

I am not as concerned with how either referent of *Q* relates to *L* and *G* as I am with the relation of *queer* to another letter entirely—*T*, itself a signifier that slides between “transsexual” and “transgender.” As Judith Halberstam notes in this issue in her critique of Jay Prosser’s “No Place Like Home”:

Sometimes *transgender* and *transsexual* are synonymous . . . [and set] in opposition to *queer*, which is presented as maintaining the same relationship between gender identity and body morphology as is enforced within heteronormative culture. Sometimes, *transgender* and *queer* are synonyms whose disruptive refigurations of desires and bodies are set in opposition to (nonhomosexual) transsexuality’s surgical and hormonal recapitulation of heteronormative embodiment—its tendency to straighten the alignment between body and identity.

In this introduction, I use *transgender* not to refer to one particular identity or way of being embodied but rather as an umbrella term for a wide variety of bodily effects that disrupt or denaturalize heteronormatively constructed linkages between an individual’s anatomy at birth, a nonconsensually assigned gender category, psychical identifications with sexed body images and/or gendered subject positions, and the performance of specifically gendered social, sexual, or kinship functions. I realize that in doing so, and by including transsexuality (which I discuss in more detail below) within the transgender rubric, I am already taking a position in the debate about how these terms interrelate. As I deploy it here, *transgender* bears an intimate and in many ways polemically charged relationship to those versions of the term *queer* that equate it with making visible heteronormativity’s occluded structures and operations.<sup>11</sup> I want to suggest in this essay that *transgender* can in fact be read as a heterodox interpretation of *queer*, that it is a conceptualization of queerness based on the understandings of people who contest naturalized heteronormativity in ways that might include, but are not limited to, homosexual orientation or object choice. Transsexuality, by extension, can also be queer.

The root of my conviction that *transgender*, *transsexual*, and *queer* need not be mutually antagonistic terms is shamelessly autobiographical, a result of my lived experience during the early 1990s when these words were undergoing rapid evolutions in meaning. It will be interesting to see how generalizable my particular experience of their interrelatedness turns out to be as other accounts of that period

are produced. In 1990, I already had been participating for a few years in what I then, under the influence of Gayle Rubin, thought of as San Francisco's "radical sexuality" underground.<sup>12</sup> I was at that time neither a lesbian nor a gay man nor a transsexual in any standard senses of those words, in that my embodiment was unambiguously male and my desire was for women. My desire to be with women sexually was anchored by my position of symbolic identification with what Lacanian psychoanalysis would call "the feminine," and my imaginary identification with a phantasmatic female morphology structured my erotic practices through what can only be labeled lesbian fantasy, but these things did not prevent me from disappearing into the default categories of "straight society" and "heterosexual man" as long as my body remained untransfigured.<sup>13</sup> Surgical and hormonal alterations did not seem viable options at that point, however much those prospects appealed to me at some level. Such things were available only to "transsexuals," who, as I then understood the matter, were compelled by their doctors to try to pass, to claim a coherently gendered life course they had never experienced, and to lie about their desires if they happened to be attracted to members of the gender into which they wanted to transition. I found the inauthenticity required by those demands repugnant. Somewhat compensatorily, I found another set of technologies in the radical-sexuality underground that allowed me to enact my sense of self intelligibly—gaff and gauntlet rather than scalpel and syringe. In dungeons and drag bars I discovered both a performative space for realizing my psychical identifications and an audience that understood and appreciated the performance. There, to an extent that made my body seem as inherently unstable as a blob of gelatin wrapped in rubber bands, I realized that I *was* a mean femme top (for example) to the extent that I *did* mean femme top according to the performative codes that governed the spaces I occupied. I was pointedly reminded, though, how these gender effects ceased outside the scene of play. While I inhabited some of the same subcultural spaces as gays and lesbians, I did not consider myself a member of the so-called gay and lesbian community any more than I considered myself to be straight. I felt utterly ungrounded, a subject nomadic by necessity. The categories of transgender and queer were not yet available in quite the same ways as they shortly would be, though it seems in retrospect that I and many others were already living the concepts without the benefit of those names—names and concepts that academic discourse as well as the language of the streets had been struggling to speak for some time.

David M. Halperin argues that as early as 1981, in fact, Michel Foucault embraced a "queer" conception of homosexual identity and gay politics. He quotes Foucault as saying that homosexuality represents an opportunity to open up

new relational and affective potentialities “not in virtue of qualities intrinsic to the homosexual, but because *the position of the homosexual ‘off-center,’* somehow, together with the diagonal lines which the homosexual can draw through the social fabric, makes it possible to bring to light these potentialities.”<sup>14</sup> A decade later, Halperin contends, radical-sexuality scholars in the English-speaking academy began using the word *queer* to name the concept Foucault described: a category without a stable referent that acquires its specific meaning from the logic of its oppositions to a norm grounded in particular concrete situations.<sup>15</sup> In popular usage, too, *queer* had begun to acquire new and contradictory meanings, largely in the context of the social movement that produced Queer Nation chapters from coast to coast in the United States. The two meanings that most concern me here are (1) the sense of a utopian, all-encompassing point of resistance to heteronormativity and (2) a “posthomosexual” refiguration of communities of people marginalized by sexuality, embodiment, and gender.<sup>16</sup>

I named myself queer in 1990. In doing so, I felt I could complete the statement “I am a ——— ” for the first time in my life without adding any caveats. The term allowed me to align myself with other antiheteronormative identities and sociopolitical formations without erasing the specificity of my sense of self or the practices I engaged in to perform myself for others. By becoming queer first, I found I could then become transsexual in a way I had not previously considered. Informed by S/M and drag praxis as well as my graduate school exposure to speech-act theory, I began to see transsexuality not as an inauthentic state of being but rather as yet another communicational technology through which I could attend to the care of my self.<sup>17</sup> It was a medico-scientific, juridico-legal, psychotherapeutic apparatus for generating and sustaining the desired reality effects of my gender identifications through the manipulation of bodily surface, thereby extending those effects beyond dungeons or drag bars into more widely shared social spaces. Audience, I finally decided, was everything, and transsexual technology would be my vehicle for what Jacques Lacan called, in another context, “an impulsive leap into the real through the paper hoop of fantasy.”<sup>18</sup> Becoming “a transsexual” implied nothing more than the willingness to engage with the apparatus for one’s own purposes—it said nothing about which transformative procedures one sought, or whether the shape of one’s genitals played a significant role in expressing one’s gender, or what the nature of one’s identifications was, or whether the apparatus worked equally well for all who engaged with it. Naming myself *transsexual* was therefore only a provisional and instrumentally useful move. It rankled, but I insisted upon it, for being interpellated under the sign of that particular name was for me, at that moment in time, the access key to the regulated

technologies I sought. “I name myself a transsexual because I have to,” I told myself, “but the word will mean something different when I get through using it. I will be a new kind of transsexual.”

Searching for a language to express this nascent concept of “neotranssexuality,” I stumbled upon Stone’s essay. At the time, my opinion of the principal difference between her “post-” and my “neo-” was whether or not the term *transsexual* remained instrumentally useful to the subject; that is, had it gotten everything from the transsexual apparatus that it needed? I did not see in “posttranssexualism” a repudiation of genital surgery, as some later interpretations assumed. Stone did write about posttranssexuality’s generating “new and unpredictable dissonances which implicate entire spectra of desire. . . . [where] we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries.”<sup>19</sup> She did not specify, however, the shape of that refigured body or the nature of the dissonances and juxtapositions she wanted that body to take advantage of. As I read the passage, she applied the term *posttranssexual* to transsexuals (however they physically configured their embodiment) who, counter to their programming, elected not to disappear into the woodwork but rather to speak the personal history of their bodily inscription in a politically productive way. This would represent a decisive break with what transsexuality had meant up until that point and hence would be posttranssexual. But as Stone is often read, the disruptiveness she called for is reduced to a cut-up version of heteronormative morphology that celebrates psychosocial men with female genitals and psychosocial women with male genitals.

This (I assert) misreading of ambiguously worded passages can be traced back in large part to the shift in meaning undergone by the term *transgender* between the beginning of the queer movement in 1990 and the appearance in 1992 of Leslie Feinberg’s *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*.<sup>20</sup> Until that point, *transgender* had been a term coined to mediate between *transvestite* and *transsexual*. If transvestism meant periodically changing one’s clothes and transsexualism meant permanently changing one’s genitals, transgenderism meant changing the social perception of one’s everyday gender through the manipulation of nongenital signs. By the time Feinberg’s influential tract appeared, *transgender* had come to function in another way as well, as an umbrella term representing all types of nonnormative expressions of gender or sexed embodiment. This is *transgender* as an inflection of *queer*, capable of meaning both a utopian point of inclusive diversity and a “posthomosexual” organization of the sexually



marginalized. Feinberg in fact contributes to this set of associations by rendering transgender people as a vanguard class in the old Marxist-Leninist sense. To the extent that the “gender system” is part of capitalism’s ideological superstructure, which must be overthrown, resisting gender in daily praxis is part of achieving the future social revolution. When that sense of transgender as a sociopolitical avant-garde is combined with the older sense of the term as involving the repudiation of genital surgery, it becomes increasingly easy to see how *posttranssexual*, which looked beyond transsexualism as it currently existed, could become *transgender*, which can function as a version of antitranssexualism—yet another version of the morality tale that condemns the cutting of the flesh.

The word *posttranssexual* functions ambiguously, to say the least, in Stone’s important essay, contributing to a confusing tangle of transgender, transsexual, and queer. In my own experience, the term *transgender* was the means by which I and other self-identified transsexuals aligned ourselves with “queer” sociopolitical formations. This happened first in the emergence of Transgender Nation from Queer Nation in San Francisco in 1992 and subsequently in the formation of the Transgender Academic Network during a queer studies conference in Iowa in 1994. To my mind, in both these contexts, I was queer in the sense Halperin attributes to Foucault—that is, as a transsexual, I occupied a concrete site of resistance to particular forms of oppression, specifically the heteronormativity encoded in the apparatus of transsexuality as well as the transphobia encoded in other sites of antiheteronormativity. I was transgender in that I appealed pragmatically to the rhetoric of queer inclusivity and gender diversity in a way that resisted the collapse of queerness into a category defined exclusively by object choice, and thereby preserved a place for myself as a transsexual. In the experience of others, however, *transgender* became associated with a “queer” utopianism, the erasure of specificity, and a moralizing teleology that condemned certain practices of embodiment that it characterized as transsexual. From yet other positions, “queer” became something that excluded the consideration of gender altogether. Depending upon one’s subject position and political commitments, these trends could be either embraced or bemoaned.<sup>21</sup>

My goal in editing this issue has been twofold. I wanted to bring into interaction with one another several texts, each of which undertakes a methodologically distinctive analysis of a particular concern in transgender studies, and which, when taken together, give voice to the sometimes antagonistic viewpoints of scholars and activists pursuing different political and intellectual goals. It is thus not just the specific content of each particular essay that merits attention or the convergence of these texts upon particularly contested issues but also the

fractiousness of their authors' voices and the colliding ontological, sociological, corporeal, and disciplinary frames of reference that make those voices individually intelligible.

Historian Joanne Meyerowitz's "Sex Change and the Popular Press" documents how readers of mass-circulation print media became aware of new medical possibilities for surgical and hormonal alteration of sex characteristics and began agitating for their application at a time before the term *transsexual* existed. Cheryl Chase's piece on intersex activism and James L. Nelson's contribution on the bioethics of gender dysphoria management have been mentioned above. In "Transgenderism and the Question of Embodiment," feminist theorists Patricia Elliot and Katrina Roen challenge transgender movement activists to avoid repeating the mistakes of previous feminist, gay, and lesbian political mobilizations. Sociologist Henry S. Rubin critiques the overreliance on discursive analysis he sees in much of the current transgender scholarship and suggests returning to a modified phenomenological approach. Paired essays by Judith Halberstam and C. Jacob Hale explore the so-called Butch/FTM Border Wars from either side of that divide, using the tools of literary criticism and analytical philosophy respectively. The *GLQ* Archive essay that concludes the volume can be considered a companion to the one by Meyerowitz that opens it. Produced as a collaboration by several members of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California, "MTF Transgender Activism in the Tenderloin and Beyond, 1966–1975" demonstrates how the term *transsexual*, once established, mobilized a heterogeneous population of "queens" in an impoverished San Francisco neighborhood to form the first known transgender-advocacy organizations.

In helping steer these articles to publication, I hope to have done more than merely add to the sum of knowledge about transgender phenomena or help clear up some conceptual confusions that often hamstring work in the emergent field of transgender studies. In spite of being critically chic, transgendered people of every stripe still routinely confront forms of violence, abjection, and marginalization that seem largely invisible to many of the nontransgendered. Although our existence provides the grist for the mill of innumerable scholarly articles and tabloid TV news shows, our lives and voices seem little valued when measured by the kind of social support and encouragement we typically receive. Because the academy is part of the larger social fabric, politically engaged academic work often has implications far beyond the institutions of higher learning. It is possible, therefore, that the articles in this issue will contribute something to the broader project of making transgender lives a bit more livable. But it would be no less important if they contribute something to the status of transgender studies—and transgen-

der scholars—within the academy. As a field, transgender studies promises to offer important new insights into such fundamental questions as how bodies mean or what constitutes human personhood. And as individuals, transgender scholars who can speak intelligibly from their positions of embodied difference have something valuable to offer their colleagues and students. I hope that as a result of this issue of *GLQ* and the many other examples of transgender scholarship that are now beginning to appear, more of us will have that chance.

## Notes

I would like to thank all the contributors to this special issue, and all the others who submitted work for consideration, for their patience in what turned out to be a very trying editorial process. Special thanks to David M. Halperin and Carolyn Dinshaw for giving me the opportunity to put together this volume—especially to Carolyn for her timely assistance with the introduction.

1. Fredric Jameson, “Foreword,” in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), viii–ix. *Postmodernism* is a cumbersome and not altogether satisfactory term, but I use it here in a generally historicist sense, rather than in the aesthetic sense Lyotard tends to prefer, as a shorthand notation to describe certain cultural conditions within transnational technoscientific capitalism. See Susan Stryker, “Christine Jorgensen’s Atom Bomb: Mapping the Emergence of Postmodernity through Transsexuality,” in *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Culture, and Politics*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan and Susan Squier (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, forthcoming). For other historicist accounts of an epistemic shift in the mid-twentieth century, see Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975); Andreas Huyssen, “Mapping the Postmodern,” in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 234–77; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Teresa Brennan, *History after Lacan* (London: Routledge, 1993); Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, “Introduction: Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity,” in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1–33.
2. On the coinage of “sex/gender system,” see Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review, 1975), 157–210; for an early critique of the sex/gender distinction based on the imaginary body, see Moira Gatens, “A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction,” in *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 3–20. See also Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations:

- Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3–21.
3. Allucquère Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 65–81; Karen Nakamura, “Narrating Cyberselves as Duped or Duplicitous: Autobiography and Fiction in Transsexual Women’s On-Line Communities,” paper presented at the first annual Conference on Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender, California State University at Northridge, February 1995.
  4. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes in “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*,” *GLQ* 1 (1993): 2, “More can be said of performative speech acts than that they are ontologically dislinked or introversively non-referential. . . . One might want to dwell not so much on the non-reference of the performative but rather on (what de Man calls) its necessarily ‘aberrant’ relation to its own reference—the torsion, the mutual perversion as one might say, of reference and performativity.” Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 27–55, offers the most extensive development of this problematic as it relates to questions of gendered embodiment. For an account of this problematic with specific reference to the question of transgender subjectivity, see Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” *GLQ* 1 (1994): 237–54, esp. 248–49.
  5. I find Lyotard’s development of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of a “language game” useful here, in spite of agreeing with the cautions against relativism issued in Seyla Benhabib, “Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-François Lyotard,” in Nicholson, *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 107–30. Lyotard’s stress upon the agonistic aspects of linguistic exchange (*Postmodern Condition*, 16–17) seems all too accurate a description of the current state of discussion in transgender studies, however much one might rather engage in the sorts of ludic critical interactions envisioned in Donna Haraway, “Cat’s Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies,” *Configurations* 1 (1994): 59–71.
  6. Sandy Stone, “The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 280–304, quotation on 296.
  7. Janice Raymond, *Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) provides the locus classicus of the moral judging of transgenderism, but the theme runs through more recent work as well, most significantly in Bernice L. Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995). In this issue, James L. Nelson gives a good account of antitransgender moralizing, while Henry S. Rubin, C. Jacob Hale, and Judith Halberstam all weigh in specifically against Hausman.
  8. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 98.

9. Rather than produce an entire bibliographical essay, I refer readers to the bibliographies of the individual articles in this issue and to two Internet lists devoted to this topic: [trans-academic@mailbase.ac.uk](mailto:trans-academic@mailbase.ac.uk) and [trans-theory@mailbase.ac.uk](mailto:trans-theory@mailbase.ac.uk).
10. Carolyn Dinshaw and David M. Halperin, "From the Editors," *GLQ* 1 (1993): iii–iv.
11. For influential formulations of *queer* as a critical term, see Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," *differences* 3:2 (1991), iii–xvii, and Michael Warner, "Introduction," *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxvi–xxvii.
12. Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 267–319.
13. On the crucial role played by structures of fantasy in the construction of the self, see Jean LaPlanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 5–34.
14. Michel Foucault, quoted in David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 67.
15. The association of this concept with the word *queer* has much to do with the impact of militant AIDS activism, especially the in-your-face tactics of ACT UP, on linking a specifically gay politics with broader, nonidentity-based social concerns. The prototypical "queer" text is the anonymously written broadside, "Queers Read This!" distributed from the back of the ACT UP float in the June 1990 New York gay pride parade. See also Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, 63.
16. On the early history of Queer Nation, see the following articles in *OUT/LOOK* (winter 1991): Allan Bérubé and Jeffrey Escoffier, "Queer/Nation," 12–14; Steve Cosson, "Queer Interviews," 14, 16–18, 20–23; Alexander Chee, "A Queer Nationalism," 15–19; Maria Maggenti, "Women as Queer Nationals," 20–22. See also Tim Kingston, "In Your Face: Queer Nation," *San Francisco Bay Times* 12, no. 3 (1990): 4–5, 38. The "utopian inclusivity" version of queerness predominated in the first public mission statement of Queer Nation–San Francisco, distributed as a flyer in July 1990, which proclaimed that "we are here to promote unity between all people" (quoted in Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* [San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996], 122).
17. The application of speech-act theory to the analysis of gender is precisely what made Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) such a powerful intervention, in spite of her failure to apply the concept to transsexuality. Gender play in an S/M context functioned for me as an *ars erotica*, as Foucault defined that term in *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 67, 70–71.
18. Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian Thing, or The Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977),

141–45, quotation on 139. I do not consider transsexual reembodyment techniques to be the sole means of performing the “reality” of psychical identifications. The masculinity of some butches, for example, is every bit as real as the masculinities of some FTMs and some nontranssexual men in the sense of being an irreducible residue that, unlike the fluctuations of the imaginary or the symbolic, “always returns to the same place”; it is that before which the imaginary falters and the symbolic stumbles, something recalcitrant and resistant (ibid., “Translator’s Note,” x). The salient difference lies in the means through which one performs an identity, which in turn has an effect on determining the audience and venue of the performance. For a provocative discussion of how “realness” works in some transsexual contexts, see Ben Singer, “Velveteen Realness,” paper presented at the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Trans/Forming Knowledge Conference, New York, May 1996.

19. Stone, “The *Empire* Strikes Back,” 296.
20. Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* (New York: World View Forum, 1992).
21. Patricia Elliot and Katrina Roen’s contribution to this issue gives a good account of how some of these political and theoretical differences have played out in various feminist, queer, and transgender texts. For some other trenchant analyses of these and other boundary disputes, see Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Bodies in Motion: Lesbian and Transsexual Histories,” in *A Queer World: The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 134–52; Ki Namaste, “Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory’s Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity,” in *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology*, ed. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 183–203; Kathleen Chapman and Michael du Plessis, “‘Don’t Call Me Girl’: Feminist Theory, Lesbian Theory, and Transsexual Identities,” in *Cross Purposes: Lesbian Studies, Feminist Studies, and the Limits of Alliance*, ed. Dana Heller (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 169–87. Naturalization is, of course, a strategy that everybody uses in some fashion, but there are differences between “denaturalizing naturalizations” and “naturalizing naturalizations,” however awkward those terms sound—for example, the ways MTF transsexuals stabilize the category “woman” as compared to the way nontranssexual women do it.