II.

TRANS THEORY AS GENDER THEORY

This page intentionally left blank

10

THE TIME HAS COME TO THINK ABOUT GAYLE RUBIN

Most readers of these pages are long familiar with Gayle Rubin's fierce intellect, passion, and astounding depth and range of knowledge. Those as yet unfamiliar with her work and influence should prepare for a memorable encounter with a woman branded by the conservative cultural critic David Horowitz as one of the "101 most dangerous academics in America."[1]

When Heather Love invited me to introduce Rubin's keynote address at Rethinking Sex, a state-of-the-field conference on sexuality studies held at the University of Pennsylvania, March 4, 2009, in honor of Rubin's foundational contributions, I thought it would be prudent to refresh my memory of her two landmark articles: "The Traffic in Women" and "Thinking Sex," neither of which I had read recently. In "The Traffic in Women," Rubin begins to develop her thoughts on the processes through which female humans are transformed into oppressed women by citing Karl Marx's observation that a cotton-spinning jenny is merely a machine for spinning cotton that "becomes capital only in certain relations. Torn from these relationships it is no more capital than gold is itself money or sugar is the price of sugar." Likewise, Rubin contends, substituting "woman" for "spinning jenny," a woman "only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human Dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from these relationships she is no

more the helpmate of man than gold in itself is money . . . etc."[2] On turning my attention to "Thinking Sex," it struck me that there could be no more fitting words of tribute—no better way to demonstrate the extent to which Rubin's name has become synonymous with a certain kind of critically engaged, politically radical analysis of sexuality—than to imitate her own rhetorical strategy in "The Traffic in Women" by substituting her name, Gayle Rubin, for the words sex or sexuality in the opening paragraph of "Thinking Sex." And so, if I may, here I present that first paragraph with its metonymic substitution, as I delivered it at "Rethinking Sex":

> The time has come to think about Gayle Rubin. To some, Gayle Rubin may seem to be an unimportant topic, a frivolous diversion from more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine, or nuclear annihilation. But it is precisely at times such as these, when people live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about Gayle Rubin. Contemporary conflicts over Gayle Rubin's values and erotic conduct have much in common with the religious disputes of earlier centuries. They acquire immense symbolic weight. Disputes over Gayle Rubin's behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties and discharging their attendant emotional intensity. Consequently, Gayle Rubin should be treated with special respect in times of great social stress.[3]

It was my great honor that night to treat Gayle Rubin with the special respect she so richly deserves. I first met Gayle more than twenty years ago, in 1989, on the back patio at the Eagle, a gay leather bar in San Francisco, at an event she had helped organize—The Beat Jesse Helms Flog-A-Thon—which was a fundraiser for the Democratic politician Harvey Gantt's sadly unsuccessful bid to unseat North Carolina's infamously racist and homophobic senior senator. I was a green little newcomer to the radical sexuality scene—a twenty-something grad student who, rather precariously, had one foot in the ivory tower at the University of California, Berkeley, and the other foot in the dungeons and drag bars of San Francisco.

I was happy as a pig in a poke that night at the Eagle, wallowing in what was for me at the time a truly revelatory excess of politically progressive pervert power, when I found myself in an animated conversation with some leatherdyke who seemed about ten years my senior, who had the charming remnants of a Carolinian accent, and who really seemed to know a lot about industrial and goth music. When it slowly dawned on me that I was talking to the Flog-A-Thon co-organizer, *the* Gayle Rubin, famous sex radical, found-

ing figure of San Francisco's women's BDSM community, who had known Michel Foucault personally, I was more than a little starstruck.

Two decades later, I'm still a little starstruck and consider Gayle the most important role model for my own career, which, like Gayle's, has skirted the margins of academe before ultimately finding a place within it. I came out as transgender in 1991, just as I was finishing up my dissertation on the history of religion in antebellum New England. Actually, to be more precise, I came out as a lesbian-identified transsexual sadomasochist who was working on the history of the Mormons—and (surprise!) immediately felt the doors of academic employment quickly closing before me as I started my social transition from man to woman.

I know—what was I thinking? Honestly, I was thinking this: "If Gayle Rubin can produce a substantive body of critical and intellectual work, one that's explicitly grounded in her own bodily acts, desires, and identifications, and if she can do that while working on the edgy fringes of the academy where theory and practice meet, rather than producing safer and more palatable forms of disciplinary knowledge, if she can take precisely those ways of being in the world that marginalize her and instructively and productively dismantle them, and if she can do that and eventually land a job without apologizing for who she is and what she does—if Gayle can do all of that for kinky sex—then maybe, just maybe, I might be able to follow her example and do something similar for transgender people." That's what I set out to do in 1991, largely because Gayle's pioneering example made it seem possible to attempt such a thing.

I know that personally I owe Gayle Rubin a large measure of credit for whatever success I have had over the years in moving toward the goal of establishing transgender studies as a recognized academic specialization. Gayle has been a mentor and an inspiration, as I know she has been for so many other people. She first steered me toward the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, which was my intellectual home for many years and where I found a community of independent scholars such as herself, Allan Bérubé, and Willie Walker. She invited me to join reading groups that helped shape my thinking. She wrote the letters of recommendation that eventually landed me postdoctoral positions and professorships, and she's shown me innumerable other kindnesses—so I was pleased to be able to express my gratitude in such a public forum as the 2009 conference in her honor at the University of Pennsylvania, and I am pleased to offer them again, here in the pages of *GLQ*.

But I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge Rubin's formative intellectual influence in helping to sharpen the critique transgender studies

would make of existing scholarship, quite apart from her significance for me personally. At the 1982 Barnard Sex Conference, Rubin and the other "sex-positive" feminists ably demonstrated that feminism was too large a mantle to be claimed exclusively by any one faction of feminist thought. In arguing that consensual sadomasochism, pornography, and sex work could be framed as feminist practices, they forged the main lines of argument against a moralistic feminist orthodoxy that transgender scholars would continue to advance in the 1990s. Since trannies were lumped in with all the other perverts and outcasts from a good-girl feminism that considered trans folks to be either bad, sick, or wrong in our self-knowledges, it only behooved us to follow in the path of the powerful sisters who were talking back with such sass and eloquence in the face of feminist censure.

While it is certainly true that transgender scholarship in the early 1990s was necessarily on one side of the "sex wars" and not the other, just because we who were beginning to articulate that scholarship knew who our friends were, didn't mean we always agreed with their assessment of us. Sex-positive, protoqueer feminism sometimes made the mistake of regarding transgender merely as an erotic practice rather than as something potentially more expansive, as an expression of self or a mode of embodiment that could not be reduced simply to sexuality any more than woman could. Rubin herself, for example, in charting what she called a "moral sex hierarchy" in her article "Thinking Sex," listed transsexuality and cross-dressing as examples of sexuality clearly labeled as "bad" within dominant discourse, without seeming to recognize that this was a reductive sexualization of entire genres of personhood.

One main goal of Rubin's article, of course, was to challenge the way that some schools of feminism established hierarchies that placed their own perspective above all others and claimed the power to judge and condemn everything else as morally suspect. She went on to note how early second-wave feminism floundered when it tried to apply the concept of class to the category woman and succeeded only when it developed an analytic specific to gender-based oppression.

It followed, then, that feminism, as the study of gender, was likewise an insufficient frame of reference for nonnormative sexuality and that a new "sexuality studies" was called for that needn't abandon feminism any more than feminism needed to abandon political economy. Enacting those same discursive maneuvers to "rethink sex," transgender studies argued in turn that it addressed problematics of embodiment, identity, and desire not readily reducible to sexuality, problematics that eluded full capture by the concept of

queerness. Rubin did not resist this miming of the movement of her thought; she was, rather, an enthusiastic participant in the conversations that reframed influential elements of her own earlier work.

For that generosity of mind and spirit, I am personally grateful, and I know the same is true for countless others in myriad ways. If I may be so bold as to use these pages on behalf of all of us whom Gayle Rubin has helped, in one way or another, I would like to express our collective gratitude. Rubin shaped the field of sexuality studies and planted seeds for future developments not only through her keen scholarship but also through the many scholars she has nurtured, encouraged, and cheered on. Simply put, she's a mensch—thank you, Gayle.

Notes

First published in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, no. 1 (2011): 79–84.

1 Horowitz, *The Professors*, 307–11.

2 G. Rubin, "Traffic in Women," 158. The quotation from Marx is from *Wage-Labor and Capital*, 28.

3 Cf. G. Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 3–4.

TRANSGENDER FEMINISM

Queering the Woman Question

Many years ago, I paid a visit to my son's kindergarten room for parent-teacher night. Among the treats in store for us parents that evening was a chance to look at the My Favorite Things book that each child had prepared over the first few weeks of classes. Each page was blank except for a pre-printed line that said, "My favorite color is (blank)" or "My favorite food is (blank)," or "My favorite story is (blank)." Students were supposed to fill in the blanks with their favorite things and draw an accompanying picture.

My son had filled the blanks and empty spaces of his book with many such things as "green," "pizza," and "Goodnight Moon," but I was unprepared for his response to "My favorite animal is (blank)." His favorite animal was "yeast." I looked up at the teacher, who had been watching me in anticipation of this moment. "Yeast?" I said, and she, barely suppressing her glee, said, "Yeah. And when I asked why yeast was his favorite animal, he said, 'It just makes the category animal seem more interesting.'"

At the risk of suggesting that the category "woman" is somehow not interesting enough without a transgender supplement, which is certainly not my intent, I have to confess that there is a sense in which "woman," as a category of human personhood, is indeed, for me, more interesting when we include transgender phenomena within its rubric. The work required to encompass transgender within the bounds of womanhood takes women's studies and

queer feminist theorizing in important and necessary directions. It takes us directly into the basic questions of the sex/gender distinction and of the concept of a sex/gender system that lie at the heart of Anglophone feminism. Once there, transgender phenomena ask us to follow basic feminist insights to their logical conclusions (biology is not destiny, and one is not born a woman, right?). And yet, transgender phenomena simultaneously threaten to refigure the basic conceptual and representational frameworks within which the category "woman" has been conventionally understood, deployed, embraced, and resisted.

Perhaps "gender," transgender tells us, is not related to "sex" in quite the same way that an apple is related to the reflection of a red fruit in the mirror; it is not a mimetic relationship. Perhaps "sex" is a category that, like citizenship, can be attained by the nonnative residents of a particular location by following certain procedures. Perhaps gender has a more complex genealogy, at the levels of individual psychobiography as well as collective sociohistorical process, than can be grasped or accounted for by the currently dominant binary sex/gender model of Eurocentric modernity. And perhaps what is to be learned by grappling with transgender concerns is relevant to a great many people, including nontransgendered women and men. Perhaps transgender discourses help us think in terms of embodied specificities, as women's studies has traditionally tried to do, while also giving us a way to think about gender as a system with multiple nodes and positions, as gender studies increasingly requires us to do.

Perhaps transgender studies, which emerged in the academy at the intersection of feminism and queer theory over the course of the last decade or so, can be thought of as one productive way to "queer the woman question."[1] If we define "transgender phenomena" broadly as anything that disrupts or denaturalizes normative gender and calls our attention to the processes through which normativity is produced and atypicality achieves visibility, "transgender" becomes an incredibly useful analytical concept. What might "transgender feminism"—a feminism that focuses on marginalized gender expressions as well as on normative ones—look like?

As a historian of the United States, my training encourages me to approach currently salient questions by looking at the past through new eyes. Questions that matter now, historians are taught to think, are always framed by enabling conditions that precede them. Thus, when I want to know what transgender feminism might be, I try to learn what it has already been. When I learned, for example, that the first publication of the post–World War II transgender movement, a short-lived early 1950s magazine called *Transves-*

tia, was produced by a group calling itself The Society for Equality in Dress,[2] I not only saw that a group of male transvestites in Southern California had embraced the rhetoric of first wave feminism and applied the concept of gender equality to the marginalized topic of cross-dressing; I also came to think differently about Amelia Bloomer and the antebellum clothing reform movement. To the extent that breaking out of the conventional constrictions of womanhood is both a feminist and transgender practice, what we might conceivably call transgender feminism arguably has been around since the first half of the nineteenth century.

Looking back, it is increasingly obvious that transgender phenomena are not limited to individuals who have "transgendered" personal identities. Rather, they are signposts that point to many different kinds of bodies and subjects, and they can help us see how gender can function as part of a more extensive apparatus of social domination and control. Gender as a form of social control is not limited to the control of bodies defined as "women's bodies," nor to the control of female reproductive capacities. Because genders are categories through which we recognize the personhood of others (as well as ourselves), because they are categories without which we have great difficulty in recognizing personhood at all, gender also functions as a mechanism of control when some loss of gender status is threatened or when claims of membership in a gender are denied.

Why is it considered a heterosexist put-down to call some lesbians mannish? Why, if a working-class woman does certain kinds of physically demanding labor, or if a middle-class woman surpasses a certain level of professional accomplishment, is their feminine respectability called into question? Stripping away gender and misattributing gender are practices of social domination, regulation, and control that threaten social abjection; they operate by attaching transgender stigma to various unruly bodies and subject positions, not just to "transgendered" ones.[3]

There is also, however, a lost history of feminist activism by self-identified transgender people waiting to be recovered. My own historical research into twentieth-century transgender communities and identities teaches me that activists on transgender issues were involved in multi-issue political movements in the 1960s and 1970s, including radical feminism. The ascendancy of cultural feminism and lesbian separatism by the mid-1970s—both of which cast transgender practices, particularly transsexuality, as reactionary patriarchal anachronisms—largely erased knowledge of this early transgender activism from feminist consciousness. Janice Raymond, in her outrageously transphobic book, *The Transsexual Empire* (1979), went so far as to suggest

that "the problem of transsexualism would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence" (178).[4]

Even in this period, however, when identity politics effectively disconnected transgender feminism from the broader women's movement and before the queer cultural politics of the 1990s revitalized and expanded the transgender movement, it is possible to find startling historical episodes that compel us to re-examine what we think we know about the feminist history of the recent past. The Radical Queens drag collective in Philadelphia, for example, had a "sister house" relationship with a lesbian separatist commune during the early 1970s, and participated in mainstream feminist activism through involvement with the local chapter of NOW. In the later 1970s in Washington, DC, secretive clubs for married heterosexual male cross-dressers began holding consciousness-raising sessions; they argued that to identify as feminine meant they were politically obligated to come out as feminists, speak out as transvestites, and work publicly for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.[5]

In addition to offering a revisionist history of feminist activism, transgender issues also engage many of the foundational questions in the social sciences and life sciences as they pertain to feminist inquiry. The biological body, which is typically assumed to be a single organically unified natural object characterized by one, and only one, of two available sex statuses, is demonstrably no such thing. The so-called "sex of the body" is an interpretive fiction that narrates a complex amalgamation of gland secretions and reproductive organs, chromosomes and genes, morphological characteristics and physiognomic features. There are far more than two viable aggregations of sexed bodily being.

At what cost, for what purposes, and through what means do we collapse this diversity of embodiment into the social categories "woman" and "man"? How does the psychical subject who forms in this material context become aware of itself, of its embodied situation, of its position in language, family, or society? How does it learn to answer to one or the other of the two personal pronouns "he" or "she," and to recognize "it" as a disavowed option that forecloses personhood? How do these processes vary from individual to individual, from place to place, and from time to time? These are questions of importance to feminism, usually relegated to the domains of biology and psychology, that transgender phenomena can help us think through. Transgender feminism gives us another axis, along with critical race studies or disability studies, to learn more about the ways in which bodily difference becomes the basis for socially constructed hierarchies, and helps us see in new

ways how we are all inextricably situated, through the inescapable necessity of our own bodies, in terms of race, sex, gender, or ability.

When we look cross-culturally and transhistorically at societies, as anthropologists and sociologists tend to do, we readily see patterns of variations in the social organization of biological reproduction, labor, economic exchange, and kinship; we see a variety of culturally specific configurations of embodiment, identity, desire, social status, and social role. Which of these patterns do we call "gender," and which do we call "transgender"? The question makes sense only in reference to an unstated norm that allows us to distinguish between the two. To examine "transgender" cross-culturally and transhistorically is to articulate the masked assumptions that produce gender normativity in any given (time-bound and geographically constrained) context. To examine "transgender" is thus to risk decentering the privileged standpoint of white Eurocentric modernity. It is to denaturize and de-reify the terms through which we ground our own genders in order to confront the possibility of radically different ways of being in the world. This, too, is a feminist project.[6]

A third set of concerns that make transgender feminism interesting for women's studies is the extent to which "transgender," for more than a decade now, has served as a laboratory and proving ground for the various postmodern and poststructuralist critical theories that have transformed humanities scholarship in general over the past half century, and have played a role in structuring the generational debates about "second wave" and "third wave" feminism. This is a debate in which I take an explicitly partisan position, largely in response to the utterly inexcusable level of overt transphobia in second wave feminism. The second wave feminist turn to an untheorized female body as the ultimate ground for feminist practice has to be understood historically in the context of reactionary political pressures that fragmented all sorts of movements posing radical threats to the established order and required them to find new, often ontological, bases for political resistance. An unfortunate consequence was that it steered feminist analysis in directions ill equipped it to engage theoretically with the emerging material conditions of social life within advanced capitalism that collectively have come to be called, more or less usefully, "postmodernity."

The overarching tendency of second wave feminism to couch its political analyses within moral narratives that link "woman" with "natural," "natural" with "good," "good" with "true," and "true" with "right" has been predicated on an increasingly nonutilitarian modernist epistemology. Within the representational framework of Eurocentric modernity, which posits gender as

the superstructural sign of the material referent of sex, transgender practices have been morally condemned as unnatural, bad, false, and wrong, in that they fundamentally misalign the proper relationship between sex and gender. The people who engage in such misrepresentations can be understood only as duped or duplicitous, fools or enemies to be pitied or scorned. The failure of second wave feminism to do justice to transgender issues in the 1970s, '80s, and afterward is rooted in its more fundamental theoretical failure to recognize the conceptual limits of modernist epistemology.[7]

Transgender theorizing in third wave feminism begins from a different—postmodern—epistemological standpoint that imagines new ways for sexed bodies to signify gender. Within the feminist third wave, and within humanities scholarship in general, transgender phenomena have come to constitute important evidence in recent arguments about essentialism and social construction, performativity and citationality, hybridity and fluidity, antifoundationalist ontologies and nonreferential epistemologies, the proliferation of perversities, the collapse of difference, the triumph of technology, the advent of posthumanism, and the end of the world as we know it. While it is easy to parody the specialized and sometimes alienating jargon of these debates, the issues at stake are quite large, involving as they do the actual as well as theoretical dismantling of power relations that sustain various privileges associated with normativity and injustices directed at minorities. Because these debates are irreducibly political, because they constitute an ideological landscape upon which material struggles are waged within the academy for research funds and promotions, for tenure and teaching loads, transgender phenomena have come to occupy a curiously strategic location in the working lives of humanities professionals, whether they like it or not. This brings me at last to the crux of my remarks.

For all the reasons I have suggested, transgender phenomena are interesting for feminism, women's studies, gender studies, sexuality studies, and so forth. But interesting, by itself, is not enough, when hard decisions about budgets and staffing have to be made in academic departments, when priorities and commitments have to be actualized through classroom allocations and affirmative action hiring. Interesting also has to be important, and transgender is rarely considered important. All too often, transgender is thought to name only a largely irrelevant class of phenomena on the marginal fringe of the hegemonic gender categories man and woman, or else it is seen as one of the later, minor accretions to the gay and lesbian movement, along with bisexual and intersexed. At best, transgender is considered a portent of a future that seems to await us, for good or ill. But it remains a canary in the cultural

coal mine, not an analytical workhorse for pulling down the patriarchy and other associated social ills.

As long as transgender is conceived as the fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a movement, as long as it is thought to represent only some inconsequential outliers in a bigger and more important set of data, there is very little reason to support transgender concerns at the institutional level. Transgender will always lose by the numbers. The transgender community is tiny. In (so-called) liberal democracies that measure political strength by the number of votes or the number of dollars, transgender does not count for much or add up to a lot. But there is another way to think about the importance of transgender concerns at this moment in our history.

One measure of an issue's potential is not how many people directly identify with it but, rather, how many other issues it can be linked with in a productive fashion. How can an issue be articulated, in the double sense of "articulation," meaning both "to bring into language," and "the act of flexibly conjoining."[8] Articulating a transgender politics is part of the specialized work that I do as an activist transgender intellectual. How many issues can I link together through my experience of the category transgender?

To the extent that I am perceived as a woman (which is most of the time), I experience the same misogyny as other women; and to the extent that I am perceived as a man (which happens every now and then), I experience the homophobia directed toward gay men—both forms of oppression, in my experience, being rooted in a cultural devaluation of the feminine. My transgender status, to the extent that it is apparent to others, manifests itself through the appearance of my bodily surface and my shape, in much the same way that race is constructed, in part, through visuality and skin, and in much the same way that the beauty system operates by privileging certain modes of appearance. My transsexual body is different from most other bodies, and while this difference does not impair me, it has been medicalized, and I am sometimes disabled by the social oppression that takes aim at the specific form of my difference.

Because I am formally classified as a person with a psychopathology known as Gender Identity Disorder, I am subject to the social stigma attached to mental illness, and I am more vulnerable to unwanted medical-psychiatric interventions. Because changing personal identification documents is an expensive and drawn-out affair, I have spent part of my life as an undocumented worker. Because identification documents such as driver's licenses and passports are coded with multiple levels of information, including previous names and "AKAs," my privacy, and perhaps my personal safety, is at risk

every time I drive too fast or cross a border. When I travel, I always have to ask myself whether some aspect of my appearance, some bit of data buried in the magnetic strip on some piece of plastic with my picture on it, will create suspicion and result in my detention?

In this era of terror and security, we are all surveyed, we are all profiled, but some of us have more to fear from the state than others. Staying home, however, does not make me safer. If I risk arrest by engaging in nonviolent demonstrations, or violent political protest, the incarceration complex would not readily accommodate my needs. Even though I am a postoperative male-to-female transsexual, I could wind up in a men's prison where I would be at extreme risk of rape and sexual assault. Because I am transgendered, I am more likely to experience discrimination in housing, employment, and access to health care, and I am more likely to experience violence. These are not abstract issues: I have lost jobs and not been offered jobs because I am transgendered. I have had doctors walk out of exam rooms in disgust; I have had more trouble finding and retaining housing because I am transgendered; I have had my home burglarized and my property vandalized, and I have been assaulted because I am transgendered.

Let me recapitulate what I can personally articulate through transgender: misogyny, homophobia, racism, looksism, disability, medical colonization, coercive psychiatrization, undocumented labor, border control, state surveillance, population profiling, the prison-industrial complex, employment discrimination, housing discrimination, lack of health care, denial of access to social services, and violent hate crimes. These issues are my issues not because I think it is chic to be politically progressive. These issues are my issues not because I feel guilty about being white, highly educated, or a citizen of the United States. These issues are my issues because my bodily being lives the space where these issues intersect. I articulate these issues when my mouth speaks the words that my mind puts together from what my body knows. It is by winning the struggles over these issues that my body as it is lived for me survives—or by losing them, that it will die. If these issues are your issues as well, then transgender needs to be part of your intellectual and political agenda. It is one of your issues.

I conclude now with some thoughts on yet another aspect of transgender articulation, the one mentioned in my title, which is how transgender issues articulate, or join together, feminist and queer projects. "Trans-" is troublesome for both LGBT communities and feminism; but the kind of knowledge that emerges from this linkage is precisely the kind of knowledge that we desperately need in the larger social arena. Trans is not a "sexual identity"

and therefore fits awkwardly in the LGBT rubric. That is, "transgender" does not describe a sexual orientation (like homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, or asexual), nor are transgender people typically attracted to other transgender people in the same way that lesbians are attracted to other lesbians, or gay men to other gay men. Transgender status is more like race or class, in that it cuts across the categories of sexual identity.[9]

Neither is transgender (at least currently, in Eurocentric modernity) an identity term like "woman" or "man" that names a gender category within a social system. It is a way of being a man or a woman, or a way of marking resistance to those terms. Transgender analyses of gender oppression and hierarchy, unlike more normative feminist analyses, are not primarily concerned with the differential operations of power upon particular identity categories that create inequalities within gender systems; rather they are concerned with how the system itself produces a multitude of possible positions that it then works to center or to marginalize.

Transgender practices and identities are a form of gender trouble, in that they call attention to contradictions in how we tend to think about gender, sex, and sexuality. But the transgender knowledges that emerge from these troubling contradictions can yoke together queer and feminist projects in a way that helps break the impasse of identity politics that has so crippled progressive movements in the United States. Since the early 1970s, progressive politics have fragmented along identity lines practically to the point of absurdity. While it undoubtedly has been vital over the past few decades of movement history to enunciate the particularities of all our manifold forms of bodily being in the world, it is equally important that we now find new ways of articulating our commonalities without falling into the equally dead-end logic of totalizing philosophies and programs.

Transgender studies offers us one critical methodology for thinking through the diverse particularities of our embodied lives, and for thinking through the commonalities we share through our mutual enmeshment in more global systems. Reactionary political movements have been very effective in telling stories about shared values—family, religion, tradition. We who work at the intersection of queer and feminist movements, we who have a different vision of our collective future, need to become equally adept in telling stories that link us in ways that advance the cause of justice and that hold forth the promise of happy endings for all our strivings. Bringing transgender issues into women's studies, and into feminist movement building, is one concrete way to be engaged in that important work.

While it is politically necessary to include transgender issues in feminist theorizing and organizing, it is not intellectually responsible nor ethically defensible to teach transgender studies in academic women's studies without being engaged in peer-to-peer conversations with various sorts of trans and genderqueer people. Something crucial is lost when academically based feminists fail to support transgender inclusion in the academic workplace.

Genderqueer youth who have come of age after the "queer" nineties are now passing through the higher education system, and they increasingly fail to recognize the applicability of prevailing modes of feminist discourse for their own lives and experiences. How we each live our bodies in the world is a vital source of knowledge for us all, and to teach trans studies without being in dialogue with trans people is akin to teaching race studies only from a position of whiteness, or teaching gender studies only from a position of masculinity. Why is transgender not a category targeted for affirmative action in hiring and valued the same way that racial diversity is valued? It is past time for feminists who have imagined that transgender issues have not been part of their own concerns to take a long, hard look in the mirror. What in their own constructions of self, their own experiences of gender, prevents their recognition of transgender people as being somehow like themselves—as people engaged in parallel, intersecting, and overlapping struggles, who are not fundamentally Other?

Transgender phenomena now present queer figures on the horizon of feminist visibility. Their calls for attention are too often received, however, as an uncomfortable solicitation from an alien and unthinkable monstrosity best left somewhere outside the village gates. But justice, when we first feel its claims upon us, typically points us toward a future we can scarcely imagine. At the historic moment when racial slavery in the United States at long last became morally indefensible and the nation plunged into civil war, what did the future of the nation look like? When greenhouse gas emissions finally become equally morally indefensible, what shape will a post-oil world take? Transgender issues make similar claims of justice upon us all and promise equally unthinkable transformations.[10] Recognizing the legitimacy of these claims will change the world, and feminism along with it, in ways we can now hardly fathom. It is about time.

Notes

First published in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, edited by Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford (London: Palgrave, 2007), 59–70.

1 This essay was first delivered as a keynote address at the Third Wave Feminism conference at the University of Exeter, UK, July 25, 2002; and it was presented in revised form at the Presidential Session plenary on Transgender Theory at the National Women's Studies Association annual meeting, Oakland, California, June 17, 2006. Many of the ideas I present here have been worked out in greater detail elsewhere in my work (see Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein"; Stryker, "The Transgender Issue"; Stryker, "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin"; and Stryker, "(De)subjugated Knowledges"); see also Zalewski, "A Conversation with Susan Stryker." For another account of the relationship between recent feminist scholarship and transgender issues, see Heyes, "Feminist Solidarity after Queer Theory."

2 Meyerowitz, "A New History of Gender," 179.

3 My thoughts on the role of transgender phenomena for understanding US history in general are significantly indebted to Meyerowitz, "A New History of Gender."

4 See also Hausman, *Changing Sex*, 9–14, for an overview of cultural feminist critiques of transsexuality; and see Billings and Urban, "The Sociomedical Construction of Transsexualism," for a particularly cogent exposition and application of this approach.

5 See also Victor Silverman and Members of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society for transgender involvement in progressive grassroots political activism in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1960s.

6 On cross-cultural studies of transgender phenomena, see Blackwood and Wieringa, *Female Desires*; and Morgan and Towle, "Romancing the Transgender Native."

7 For a poststructuralist, antifoundationalist critique of second wave feminism, see Butler, "Contingent Foundations."

8 The concept of *articulation* is taken from Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 93–194.

9 On the trouble transgender presents to identity movements, see Gamson, "Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct?"

10 On monstrosity and justice, see N. Sullivan, "Transmogrification."

12

TRANSGENDER HISTORY, HOMONORMATIVITY, AND DISCIPLINARITY

The current attention to homonormativity has tended to focus on gay and lesbian social, political, and cultural formations and their relationship to a neoliberal politics of multicultural diversity that meshes with the assimilative strategies of transnational capital. Lisa Duggan's *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003), which describes a "new homonormativity that does not challenge heterosexist institutions and values, but rather upholds, sustains, and seeks inclusion within them," is generally acknowledged as the text through which this term has come into wider currency.[1]

There is, however, an older formulation of homonormativity that nevertheless merits retention, one closer in meaning to the "homo-normative" social codes described in 1998 by Jack Halberstam in *Female Masculinity*, in accordance with which expressions of masculinity in women are as readily disparaged within gender-normative gay and lesbian contexts as within heteronormative ones.[2] It is this earlier sense of homonormativity that is most pertinent to the thoughts I offer here on homonormativity and transgender history, both as an object of scholarly inquiry and as a professional disciplinary practice.

Homonormativity, as I first heard and used the term in the early 1990s, was an attempt to articulate the double sense of marginalization and displacement experienced within transgender political and cultural activism. Like other queer militants, transgender activists sought to make common cause with any groups—including nontransgender gays, lesbians, and bisexuals—who contested heterosexist privilege. However, we also needed to name the ways that homosexuality, as a sexual orientation category based on constructions of gender it shared with the dominant culture, sometimes had more in common with the straight world than it did with us.[3]

The grassroots conversations in which I participated in San Francisco in the first half of the 1990s used the term homonormative when discussing the relationship of transgender to queer, and queer to gay and lesbian. Transgender itself was a term then undergoing a significant shift in meaning. Robert Hill, who has been researching the history of heterosexual male cross-dressing communities, found instances in community-based publications of words like *transgenderal*, *transgenderist*, and *transgenderism* dating back to the late 1960s.[4] The logic of those terms, used to describe individuals who lived in one social gender but had a bodily sex conventionally associated with the other, aimed for a conceptual middle ground between transvestism (merely changing one's clothing) and transsexualism (changing one's sex). By the early 1990s, primarily through the influence of Leslie Feinberg's 1992 pamphlet *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*, transgender was beginning to refer to something else—an imagined political alliance of all possible forms of gender antinormativity. It was in this latter sense that transgender became articulated with queer.[5]

This "new transgender" marked both a political and generational distinction between older transvestite/transsexual/drag terminologies and an emerging gender politics that was explicitly and self-consciously queer. It began for me in 1992, when the San Francisco chapter of Queer Nation distributed one of its trademark DayGlo crack-and-peel stickers that read "Trans Power/Bi Power/Queer Nation." The transsexual activist Anne Ogborn encountered someone on the street wearing one of those stickers, but with the words "Trans Power" torn off. When Ogborn asked if there was any significance to the omission, she was told that the wearer did not consider trans people to be part of the queer movement.[6]

Ogborn attended the next Queer Nation general meeting to protest transphobia within the group, whereupon she was invited, in high Queer Nation

style, to organize a transgender caucus.[7] As a result, Transgender Nation, of which I was a founding member, came into being as the first explicitly queer transgender social change group in the United States. The group survived the soon-to-be-defunct Queer Nation and became, in its own brief existence from 1992 to 1994, a touchstone in the transgender inclusion debates then raging in San Francisco's emerging lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community.

In a contradictory environment simultaneously welcoming and hostile, transgender activists staked their own claims to queer politics. We argued that sexual orientation was not the only significant way to differ from heteronormativity—that homo, hetero, and bi, in fact, all depended on similar understandings of "man" and "woman," which trans problematized. People with trans identities could describe themselves as men and women—or resist binary categorization altogether—but in doing either, they queered the dominant relationship of sexed body and gendered subject. We drew a distinction between *orientation queers* and *gender queers*. Tellingly, gender queer, necessary for naming the minoritized/marginalized position of difference within queer cultural formations more generally, has stuck around as a useful term; orientation queer, naming queer's unstated norm, has seemed redundant in most contexts and has not survived to the same extent.

When San Francisco gays and lesbians who were active in queer politics in the first half of the 1990s were antagonistic to transgender concerns, we accused them of being anti-heteronormative in a homonormative fashion. The term was an intuitive, almost self-evident, back-formation from the ubiquitous heteronormative, suitable for use where homosexual community norms marginalized other kinds of sex/gender/sexuality difference. Although I do not recall specific instances where the term *homonormative* was used, or who used it, the general discussions in which the term would have been deployed were playing themselves out in any number of places in which transgender inclusion was being contested: within Queer Nation and ACT-UP and AIDS agencies; at community meetings to organize for the March on Washington in 1993 and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall uprising in 1994; at town-hall meetings about gays in the military and about domestic partnerships during the hopeful early days of the first Clinton administration; during policy discussions about including gender identity in the proposed federal Employment Nondiscrimination Act; in catfights over who could attend the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival; at meetings of the Harvey Milk and Alice B. Toklas Democratic Clubs; at Pride Parade meetings; at membership meetings and board meetings of practically every lesbian and gay

nonprofit organization in the city; at the San Francisco Human Rights Commission committee on lesbian and gay issues; in flame wars in the letters-to-the-editors columns of the *Bay Times* and the BAR (*Bay Area Reporter*); and in coffee shops, bars, dance clubs, dungeon spaces, and bedrooms throughout the city.

The homonormative accusation tended to be leveled against a handful of favorite targets: gays and lesbians who saw transgender issues as entirely distinct from their own and who resisted any sort of transgender participation in queer politics and culture; lesbians who excluded male-to-female transgender people but nervously engaged with female-to-male people, on the grounds that the former were really men and the latter were really women; and, putting a somewhat finer point on the matter, those who conceptualized "T" as an identity category analogous to "GLB" and who advocated for a GLBT community on that basis. In the first instance, homonormativity was a threat to a broadly conceived politics of alliance and affinity, regardless of identity; it aimed at securing privilege for gender-normative gays and lesbians based on adherence to dominant cultural constructions of gender, and it diminished the scope of potential resistance to oppression. In the second instance, homonormativity took the shape of lesbian subcultural norms that perversely grounded themselves in reactionary notions of biological determinism as the only legitimate basis of gender identity and paradoxically resisted feminist arguments that "woman" and "lesbian" were political rather than ontological categories. The third instance requires a more subtle and expansive explication.

In this case, homonormativity lies in misconstruing trans as either a gender or a sexual orientation. Misconstrued as a distinct gender, trans people are simply considered another kind or type of human than either men or women, which leads to such homonormative attempts at "transgender inclusion" as questionnaires and survey instruments within GLBT contexts that offer respondents opportunities for self-identification structured along the lines of

—Man
—Woman
—Transgender (check one)

Misconstrued as a sexual orientation category, trans appears as a desire, akin to kink and fetish desire, for cross-dressing or (more extremely) genital modification. The "T" in this version of the LGBT community becomes a group of people who are attracted to one another on the basis of enjoying cer-

tain sexual practices—in the same way that gay men are attracted to gay men, and lesbians are attracted to lesbians, on the basis of a shared desire for particular sexual practices. "T" is thus homonormatively constructed as a properly distinct group of people with a different orientation than gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (or, for that matter, straights). In this model of GLBT intracommunity relations, each identity is happily attracted to its own kind and leaves the other groups to their own devices except in ceremonial circumstances (like pride parades and other public celebrations of diversity), or whenever political expediency calls for coalitional action of some sort.

In either homonormative deformation, "T" becomes a separate category to be appended, through a liberal politics of minority assimilation, to gay, lesbian, and bisexual community formations. Trans thus conceived does not trouble the basis of the other categories—indeed, it becomes a containment mechanism for "gender trouble" of various sorts that works in tandem with assimilative gender-normative tendencies within the sexual identities.[8]

Transgender activism and theory, on the other hand, tend to treat trans as a modality rather than a category. Trans segments the sexual orientations and gender identities in much the same manner as race and class—in other words, a transsexual woman (someone with a transsexual mode of embodiment who lives in the social category woman) can be a lesbian (someone who lives in the social category woman and is sexually oriented toward women), just as a black man could be gay, or a bisexual person could be poor. In doing so, transgender theory and activism call attention to the operations of normativity within and between gender/sexual identity categories, raise questions about the structuration of power along axes other than the homo/hetero and man/woman binaries, and identify productive points of attachment for linking sexual orientation and gender identity activism to other social justice struggles.

A decade before homonormative became a critically chic term elsewhere, I thus suggest, transgender praxis and critique required an articulation of the concept of homonormativity. The border wars that transgender activists fought within queer communities of the 1990s had important consequences for shaping contemporary transgender politics and theorizing, and for charting a future path toward radical activism. Transgender relations to gay and lesbian community formations necessarily became strategic—sometimes oppositional, sometimes aligned, sometimes fighting rearguard actions for inclusion, sometimes branching out in entirely different and unrelated directions. Central issues for transgender activism—such as gender-appropriate

state-issued identification documents that allow trans people to work, cross borders, and access social services without exposing themselves to potential discrimination—suggest useful forms of alliance politics, in this instance, with migrant workers and diasporic communities, that are not organized around sexual identity. One operation of homonormativity exposed by transgender activism is that homo is not always the most relevant norm against which trans needs to define itself.

Antihomonormative Transgender History

As important as queer identitarian disputes have been for present and future transgender politics, they have been equally important for reinterpreting the queer past. I first started researching the transgender history of San Francisco, particularly in relation to the city's gay and lesbian community, while participating in the Bay Area's broader queer culture during the early 1990s. In 1991, during my final year as a PhD student in US history at the University of California at Berkeley, the same year I began transitioning from male to female, I became deeply involved with an organization then known as the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California. That organization, now the GLBT Historical Society, houses the preeminent collection of primary source materials on San Francisco Bay Area gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities, and is one of the best collections of sexuality-related materials anywhere in the world. I started there as a volunteer in the archives, joined the board of directors in 1992, and later became the first executive director of the organization, from 1999 to 2003.

Through my long and intimate association with the GLBT Historical Society as well as through two years of postdoctoral funding from the Sexuality Research Fellowship Program of the Social Science Research Council, I had ample opportunity to exhaustively research the status of transgender issues within gay and lesbian organizations and communities in post–World War II San Francisco. I was able to scan all the periodical literature, community newspapers, collections of personal papers, organizational records, ephemera, and visual materials—tens of thousands of items—for transgender-related content. This research was motivated by several competing agendas. It was first and foremost a critically queer project, one informed by theory, guided by practice, and framed by my historical training at Berkeley in the decade between Michel Foucault's death and Judith Butler's arrival; I wanted training to account for the precipitation of new categories of personal and collective identity from the matrix of possible configurations of sex, gender,

identity, and desire; trace their genealogies and modes of discourse; and analyze the cultural politics of their interactions with each other and society at large. It was also a project to recover the history of transgender experience specifically, in a way that resisted essentializing transgender identities, and to make that knowledge available as content for transgender-related social justice work. Only those who are "crushed by a present concern," and who want to "throw off their burden at any cost," Friedrich Nietzsche wrote in "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," have "a need for a critical . . . historiography."[9]

And finally, I was motivated by polemical and partisan considerations; I wanted to offer an empirically grounded account of transgender history that recontextualized its relation to gay and lesbian normativity and countered the pathologizing, moralizing, condescending, dismissive, and generally wrongheaded treatment of transgender issues so often found in gay and lesbian discourses of that time.

Over the course of my research, gender-policing practices came into focus as an important mechanism for shaping the landscape of sexual identity community formations described in the major historiographical accounts.[10] As homosexual communities in mid-twentieth-century San Francisco redefined themselves as political minorities, they distanced themselves from older notions of "inversion" that collapsed gender transposition and homosexual desire into one another; they simultaneously drew their boundaries at least partly in relation to new and rapidly evolving scientific discourses on transgender phenomena and related medico-legal techniques for changing sex. Homophile groups such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis were not initially antagonistic to transgender issues; they sometimes fielded queries from people questioning their gender or seeking a community in which to express a transgender identity, but they tended to redirect such queries elsewhere.[11] Transgender issues tended to be seen within the homophile movement as parallel rather than intersecting, at least partially due to the central role that gender normativity played in the homophile movement's public politics of respectability in the 1950s and early 1960s.

In lesbian contexts this took the form of class-based criticisms of butch-femme roles, while in the gay male world it expressed itself through the condemnation of the hypermasculine styles found in the leather, motorcycle, and cowboy subcultures, as well as of the femininity of "swish" styles and public female impersonation. Drag remained an important subcultural idiom, especially for gay men and working-class lesbians, but one typically confined to clubs, bars, and private parties. Street drag was almost universally condemned and largely relegated to territories coextensive with prostitution,

hustling, and other economically marginalized activities. Thus, from the outset of the post–World War II gay rights movement, transgender practices and identities marked communal boundaries between the normative and the transgressive.

One particular archival discovery seemed so perfectly attuned to all my research motivations, however, and so seemingly significant yet almost entirely unknown, that I initially questioned whether it could possibly be true. In the centerfold of the program for the first Gay Pride Parade in San Francisco, held in 1972, I found a description of a 1966 riot in San Francisco's Tenderloin District, in which drag queens and gay hustlers banded together at a popular late-night hangout called Gene Compton's Cafeteria to fight back against police harassment and social oppression. The key text reads as follows:

> In the streets of the Tenderloin, at Turk and Taylor on a hot August night in 1966, Gays rose up angry at the constant police harassment of the drag queens by the police. It had to be the first ever recorded violence by Gays against police anywhere. For on that evening when the SFPD paddy wagon drove up to make their "usual" sweeps of the streets, Gays this time did not go willingly. It began when the police came into a cafeteria, still located there at Turk and Taylor, Compton's, to do their usual job of hassling the drag-queens and hair-fairies and hustlers setting at the table. This was with the permission of management, of course. But when the police grabbed the arm of one of the transvestites, he threw his cup of coffee in the cop's face, and with that, cups, saucers, and trays began flying around the place, and all directed at the police. They retreated outside until reinforcements arrived, and the Compton's management ordered the place closed, and with that, the Gays began breaking out every window in the place, and as they ran outside to escape the breaking glass, the police tried to grab them and throw them into the paddy wagon, but they found this no easy task for Gays began hitting them "below the belt" and drag-queens smashing them in the face with their extremely heavy purses. A police car had every window broken, a newspaper shack outside the cafeteria was burned to the ground, and general havoc was raised that night in the Tenderloin. The next night drag-queens, hair-fairies, conservative Gays, and hustlers joined in a picket of the cafeteria, which would not allow drags back in again. It ended with the newly installed plate glass windows once more being smashed. The Police Community Relations Unit began mediating the conflict, which was never fully re-

> solved, which ended in a group called VANGUARD being formed of the street peoples and a lesbian group of street people being formed called the STREET ORPHANS, both of which later became the old GAY LIBERATION FRONT in San Francisco, and is today called the GAY ACTIVISTS ALLIANCE.[12]

The story seemed important in several respects. First, what reportedly happened at Compton's Cafeteria bore obvious similarities to the famous Stonewall uprising in New York in 1969, where the militant phase of gay liberation is commonly supposed to have begun, but reputedly preceded it by three years. How the San Francisco gay activist community positioned the Compton's story vis-à-vis Stonewall in their first commemorative Gay Pride Parade was clearly intended as an early revisionist account of gay liberation history. Furthermore, the inciting incident of the riot was described as an act of antitransgender discrimination, rather than an act of discrimination against sexual orientation.

At the time I came across this source in 1995, the role of drag queens in the Stonewall riots had become a site of conflict between transgender and normative gay/lesbian histories—transgender activists pointed to the act of mythologizing Stonewall as the "birth" of gay liberation as a homonormative co-optation of gender queer resistance, while homonormative gay and lesbian commentators tended to downplay the significance of antidrag oppression at Stonewall—and whatever I could learn about the Compton's incident would certainly inform that debate. The 1972 document also related a genealogy of gay liberation activism at odds with the normative accounts—one rooted in the socioeconomics of the multiethnic Tenderloin sex-work ghetto rather than in campus-based activism oriented toward countercultural white youth of middle-class origin. For all these reasons, the Compton's Cafeteria riot became a central focus of my research into San Francisco's transgender history and its intersectional relationship to the history of gay and lesbian communities.

Although the 1972 document proved factually inaccurate in several particulars (the picketing happened before the riot, for example), I was ultimately able to verify its basic account of the Compton's Cafeteria riot and to situate that event in a history of transgender community formation and politicization that both complemented and contested homonormative gay and lesbian history. Most important, I was able to connect the location and timing of the riot to social, political, geographical, and historical circumstances in San Francisco in ways that the Stonewall story had never connected gay

liberation discourse to similar circumstances in New York—thereby opening up new ways to think about the relationship between identity politics and broader material conditions. The 1966 riot at Compton's Cafeteria took place at the intersection of several broad social issues that continue to be of concern today, such as discriminatory policing practices in minority communities, the lack of minority access to appropriate health care, elitist urban land-use policies, the unsettling domestic consequences of foreign wars, and civil rights campaigns that aim to expand individual liberties and social tolerance on matters of sexuality and gender.[13]

Homonormative Disciplinarity

Although the history of the Compton's Cafeteria riot provides a productive point of critique and revision for homonormative accounts of the recent history of sexual identity communities and movements, most knowledge of this event has circulated through works of public history (most notably the 2005 public television documentary *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*), work by nonacademic writers, and in community-based publications, rather than through professional academic channels.[14] In those few instances in which this history has been examined in peer reviewed journals, the articles have been placed, as this one has been, in sections of the journals set aside for uses other than feature articles. In the one instance where this has not been the case, the article was written by another (nontransgendered) scholar who interviewed me and made use of primary source documents I directed her to, in order to relate the Compton's Cafeteria riot to her own research interest in the sociology of historical memory.[15]

I point this out not as a complaint—it was my own decision to pursue the public history dissemination of my research findings; I actually guest-edited a journal issue that put my own research into the back matter and anonymized my authorship, and I have eagerly collaborated with other scholars who have never failed to accurately and appropriately cite the use of my research in their own projects. My aim, rather, is to call needed attention to the micropolitical practices through which the radical implications of transgender knowledges can become marginalized. Even in contexts such as this special homonormativities issue of *Radical History Review*, which explicitly called for transgender scholarship that could generate "new analytical frameworks for talking about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer history that expand and challenge current models of identity and community formation as well as models of political and cultural resistance," transgender knowl-

edges are far too easily subjugated to what Michel Foucault once called "the hierarchies of erudition."[16]

In my original abstract for this issue, I proposed not only to recount the little-known history of the Compton's Cafeteria riot but also to call attention to the multiple normativizing frames of reference that kept the Compton's story "hidden in plain sight" for so long—the confluence of class, race, and gender considerations, as well as the homonormative gaze that did not construct transgender subjects, actions, embodiments, or intentions as the objects of its desire. I wanted, too, to make methodologically explicit the critical role of embodied difference in the practice of archival research.

As a range of new scholarship on the recent so-called archival turn in the humanities begins to make evident, embodiment—that contingent accomplishment through which the histories of our identities become invested in our corporeal space—not only animates the research query but modulates access to the archive in both its physical and its intellectual arrangement. Discussing how my transsexual embodiment figured into reading a gay and lesbian archive against the grain served the larger purpose of calling critical attention to homonormative constructions of knowledge embedded in the content and organization of the archive itself. My goal was to offer a radical critique not just of historiography but of the political epistemology of historical knowledge production.

Because the tone of what I proposed was deemed "personal," due to how I situated my own research activities as part of the narrative, and because, I suspect, I tend to work outside the academy, I was invited to contribute an essay to either the "Reflections" or "Public History" section of *Radical History Review*, rather than a feature article. I felt some reservations in doing so because my intent had been to do something else. "Reflections" are not as intellectually rigorous as the documented arguments expected in feature articles, and "Public History," as distinguished from what academic historians do, can come off as a form of popularization in which knowledge produced by specialists is transmitted to the consuming masses through less intellectually accomplished intermediaries. The journal's own division of knowledge into "less formal" and "more formal" categories, and the positioning of my work within this two-tiered economy, would replicate the very hierarchies I had set out to critique by containing what I had to say within a structurally less legitimated space.

The most basic act of normativizing disciplinarity at work here is not directly related to the increasingly comfortable fit between gender-normative homosexuality and neoliberal policy. It is rooted in a more fundamental and

culturally pervasive disavowal of intrinsically diverse modes of bodily being as the lived ground of all knowing and of all knowledge production. In an epistemological regime structured by the subject-object split, the bodily situatedness of knowing becomes divorced from the status of formally legitimated objective knowledge; experiential knowledge of the material effects of one's own antinormative bodily difference on the production and reception of what one knows consequently becomes delegitimated as merely subjective. This in turn circumscribes the radical potential of that knowledge to critique other knowledge produced from other bodily locations, equally partial and contingent, which have been vested with the prerogatives of a normativity variously figured as white, masculinist, heterosexist, or Eurocentric—as feminism, communities of color, and third world voices have long maintained, and as the disabled, intersexed, and transgendered increasingly contend.

The peculiar excitement of academic humanities work at this moment in time lies, in my estimation, in the potential of interdisciplinary critical work to produce new strategies through which disruptive knowledges can dislodge the privileges of normativity. Breaking "personal voice" away from the taint of "mere" subjective reflection and recuperating embodied knowing as a formally legitimated basis of knowledge production is one such disruptive strategy. Deploying disciplinary distinctions that foreclose this possibility is not. But that is precisely why the opportunity provided by the editors of this volume for my words to occupy these pages under the heading of an "Intervention" was ultimately such a welcome one. In the end, it has enabled the critique I intended to offer all along, albeit not in the form or manner I initially proposed, while opening up the space to push the argument one turn further.

Homonormativity, I conclude, is more than an accommodation to neoliberalism in its macropolitical manifestations. It is also an operation at the micropolitical level, one that aligns gay interests with dominant constructions of knowledge and power that disqualify the very modes of knowing threatening to disrupt the smooth functioning of normative space and that displace modes of embodiment calling into question the basis of authority from which normative voices speak. Because transgender phenomena unsettle the categories on which the normative sexualities depend, their articulation can offer compelling opportunities for contesting the expansion of neoliberalism's purview through homonormative strategies of minority assimilation.

And yet, even well-intentioned antihomonormative critical practices that take aim at neoliberalism can fall short of their goal when they fail to ade-

quately account for the destabilizing, crosscutting differences within sexual categories that transgender issues represent. Such critical practices can function in unintentionally homonormative ways that circumvent and circumscribe, rather than amplify, the radical potential of transgender phenomena to profoundly disturb the normative—even in so seemingly small a thing as where an article gets placed in a journal. Creating a proper space for radical transgender scholarship, in the double sense of scholarship on transgender issues and of work by transgender scholars, should be a vital part of any radically antinormative intellectual and political agenda.

Notes

First published in *Radical History Review*, no. 100 (2008): 1457–157.

1 Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, 50.

2 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 9.

3 I posted an earlier version of these observations on the genealogy of homonormative on qstudy-lL@listserv.buffalo.edu, November 7, 2006.

4 Robert Hill, personal communication, October 6, 2005; see also Hill, "A Social History of Heterosexual Transvestism."

5 I have made this argument elsewhere; see Stryker, "The Transgender Issue"; Stryker, "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin"; and Stryker, "(De)subjugated Knowledges." On Feinberg's use of "transgender," see Feinberg, *Transgender Liberation*, reprinted in Stryker and Whittle, *Transgender Studies Reader*, 205–20. On page 206, Feinberg, after listing a variety of what s/he terms "gender outlaws," that is, "transvestites, transsexuals, drag queens and drag kings, cross-dressers, bull-daggers, stone butches, androgynes, diesel dykes," notes that "we didn't choose these words" and that "they don't fit all of us." Because "it's hard to fight an oppression without a name connoting pride," s/he proposes "transgender" to name "a diverse group of people who define ourselves in many different ways." While acknowledging that this term itself may prove inadequate or short-lived, s/he intends for it to be "a tool to battle bigotry and brutality" and hopes that "it can connect us, that it can capture what is similar about the oppressions that we endure."

6 Ann Ogborn, interview by the author, July 5, 1998, Oakland, CA.

7 Gerard Koskovich, an early member of Queer Nation–San Francisco, recalls "lively critiques regarding the group's awareness and inclusiveness regarding transgender and bisexual issues." He writes: "I recall a telling incident at one of the earliest QN meetings that I attended: A lesbian in her early 30s made comments to the general meeting to the effect that she didn't appreciate gay men wearing drag, an act that she portrayed as an expression of misogyny—in short, she offered an old-school lesbian-feminist reading. This led to a group discussion

of the uses of drag as a critique of gender norms—a discussion that ultimately changed the woman's mind. That early anti-drag moment quickly gave way to Queer Nation celebrating personal styles that transgressed gender norms in various ways—a phenomenon that fit well with the in-your-face politics of representation that drove many QN actions." Personal communication, December 8, 2006.

8 Valentine, "I Went to Bed with My Own Kind Once"; Valentine, "The Categories Themselves."

9 Nietzsche, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations.*

10 D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identity*; Boyd, *Wide Open Town*; Meeker, *Contacts Desired*; Gallo, *Different Daughters*.

11 Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*.

12 Broshears, "History of Christopher Street West—SF," 8.

13 A fuller treatment of this material exceeds the space limitations of this essay, but it can be found elsewhere in Susan Stryker, "At the Crossroads of Turk and Taylor," 2020 (MW).

14 Silverman and Stryker, *Screaming Queens*; Stryker, "The Compton's Cafeteria Riot of 1966," 5, 19; Stryker, "The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria"; Friedman, *Strapped for Cash*, 129–33; Carter, *Stonewall*, 109–10.

15 Members of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society, "MTF Transgender Activism in San Francisco's Tenderloin"; Armstrong and Crage, "Movements and Memory"; see also Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 229.

16 Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 7–8.

13

LESBIAN GENERATIONS

Transsexual . . . Lesbian . . . Feminist

I interpreted, quite literally, perhaps *too* literally, Leila Rupp's kind invitation to "speak informally for about ten minutes" in the roundtable on lesbian generations by putting the emphasis on "informally" and extemporizing some rather haphazardly organized thoughts on what generation of lesbian I considered myself to be. The venue being the Big Berks and the personal, of course, still being political, I assumed in framing my remarks that an ample amount of autobiographical reflection would be, if not original in its methodological implications, then intelligible or at least excusable under the circumstances.

When my turn came to speak, I offered an impromptu performance in which I sought to cite generational, ethnic, national, and class-based competencies of lesbian identity, while simultaneously ironically distancing myself from those very norms through a calculated and strategic cultivation of affect. By which I mean to say: I tried to make people laugh, and I was pleased to have succeeded through a variety of techniques (gesture, expression, phrasing, timing, embodied context) that don't render well on the printed page. You had to be there. What follows is a loose rendition of that performance into text.

I tried to be funny (1) to demonstrate that lesbian feminists can, in fact, have a sense of humor, and (2) because ironic distancing—a self-protective

critique from within of something I actually care about being part of—has been a mode of survival for me as the particular sexual and gendered subject that I am. As decades of feminist injunctions to be mindful of intersectionality have taught us, all identities are complicated; none can be articulated in monolithic purity and isolation, nor can the messily lived complexity of identity's intermingled attributes be disarticulated and hierarchically arranged other than by conceptual and narrative operations that are always political and often violent.

While I don't deny that my whiteness, upward economic mobility, level of educational and professional attainment, or coastal cultural mores inform my lesbian identity, these intersections have not been particularly difficult to occupy; they are, after all, forms of privilege. Being transsexual—well, that presented more of a challenge. Being transsexual *and* lesbian, with one identity being no more or less ontologized than the other and no more or less constructed, has been a fraught identitarian intersection indeed. Hence, as Donald O'Conner put it so eloquently in *Singin' in the Rain*, "make 'em laugh." Contemplating other approaches to this conversation just makes my stomach churn.

Taking things too literally, by the way, such as the way I took Leila Rupp's invitation to participate on the lesbian generations' roundtable, is something transsexuals are often accused of doing—literalizing that which is properly metaphorical. For example, I might, when called upon to do so, defend my practices of embodiment or stake my claim to gender authenticity by protesting that Simone de Beauvoir herself said, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one," to which a critic would reply, "But she didn't mean it like *that*. Why do you always have to be so *literal*?"

I was born in 1961, which means I'm turning fifty the summer that I'm writing this. I graduated from high school and started college in 1979. The words feminist, lesbian, and transsexual were the labels available to me in my native English at the time when I was doing my formative identity work, and they all stuck. Eventually. Transsexual was the one I consciously wrestled with from the earliest age. I came across the term in a *Dear Abby* advice column published in my hometown newspaper in southwestern Oklahoma in the early 1970s when I was about eleven.

I had always felt transgendered but had never before that moment seen reflected back to me from the world one scrap of evidence that such feelings might map onto an objective reality shared by others, rather than being just a subjective perception of my own. I immediately rushed down to my public library to find out more about this potentially life-changing bit of information

but was disappointed to learn, from the textbooks on abnormal psychology that were the only source of information available to me, that transsexuals were profoundly psychopathological people with a deep aversion to homosexuality who mutilated their bodies in order to appear straight.

Damn. I wasn't a transsexual after all, I thought to my little eleven-year-old self, because I was pretty sure I wasn't crazy, and I actually thought homosexuality sounded kind of cool. I have no more insight into the origins of my sexual orientation than into the origins of my gender identification, just an awareness of the lifelong presence and persistence of both. Go figure—you could get a PhD in trying to sort out how such things can be possible and still not have a good answer. But as far back as I can recall, I always thought of myself, to myself, as a girl who liked girls, and who wanted to be liked as a girl by girls who liked girls. That has been the inalterable transhomosexual structure of my desire and bodily sense.

"The Girl from Ipanema" was a big hit on the radio when I was about five, and I remember projecting myself into it as a proto-femme-lesbian fantasy: I was the tall and tan and young and lovely one, who walked just like a samba that swung so cool and swayed so gentle. As Astrud Gilberto rhymed it in slightly mangled syntax, "Each day as she walks to the sea, she looks straight ahead not at he." That was the me I wanted to be: femininely desirable, oblivious to the male gaze, heading toward something powerful and dynamic and as big as an ocean that could engulf and sweep over me like a lover.

The feminist part came later, but it seemed like a no-brainer. After my father died unexpectedly when I was thirteen, my brother and I were raised by our widowed single mother, and it didn't take a rocket scientist to see that "equal pay for equal work" was simply fair or that the government assistance programs we lived on after my mother decided to go to college to become a social worker helped keep our family together. I earned a reputation as a wild-eyed liberal among my high school friends because I supported the Equal Rights Amendment—although raised a boy, I'd been putting myself in the other guy's shoes, so to speak, my whole life and knew that I wouldn't want anybody discriminating against *me* just because of my gender.

I knew "nice" girls who needed abortions and "bad" girls who hated their horrible pimps; I heard unfiltered misogynistic and sexist locker-room talk from guys who took me for one of their own; I knew from firsthand experience the kinds of psychic woundedness from histories of sexual violence that can echo down through the generations of a family. Feminism, once I was exposed to the concept of it during my undergraduate honors seminar in US history (we read and discussed *The Feminine Mystique*), simply made a lot

of sense to me as a political framework and fit with my perceptions of what a just world should look like. I came to consciousness as a "second waver."

So, there I was, at age nineteen, a transsexual-lesbian-feminist-wannabe, trying to figure out how to put my life together, with all relevant authorities telling me that the pieces couldn't possibly fit. Gender identity disorder officially entered the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, and for people like me, who were assigned "male" at birth, being attracted to people assigned "female" at birth was a contraindication for diagnosis, and pathologization offered the only access route to the medically controlled techniques of body modification that promised any sense of sustainable embodiment. Janice Raymond's paranoiac *The Transsexual Empire* was published a year earlier (it and the psychiatrist Robert Stoller's *Perversion: The Erotic Form of Hatred* were the only two books on transsexuality I could find in my college library). Raymond specifically attacked as "rapists" people who wanted to become "Sappho by surgery," alleging that they—that is to say, me—were symbolically inserting a male presence into a feminine space where it was unwelcome and, hence, were anathema to feminism and lesbianism.

Raymond's book taught me the valuable lesson that there was more than one kind of feminism. At the very least there was the feminism that held that social structures, gendering practices, government policies, economic disparities, and media representations needed to be changed through political action in order to end gender-based oppression; then there was the feminism that one might want to have vulnerable conversations with (and within) about sexuality and gender, provided there was some mutual respect and reciprocity involved; and then there was the aggressive crazy-talk kind that spewed venom every bit as toxic as that served up by the fundamentalist Right, the kind that would lash out to hurt you if you threatened it. That's the part that still makes my stomach churn, waiting for it to pop up when least expected, the part that makes irony and humor feel safe.

One question roundtable participants were asked to consider was: What makes someone part of "lesbian history"? I feel very much a part of that history in the 1970s and 1980s, although not in a way most people would readily recognize—I was neither a subject nor an object of that history, but rather an *abject* of it, relegated to the negative space that circumscribed and defined its positivity. I was no less generationally marked by that historically contingent experience of lesbian feminism for being excluded from its field of intelligibility. This makes me curious, in turn, about the subjectivities of those women able to appear positively as lesbian feminists who were likewise

shaped by a tacit transphobia that, however palpable to me, remained largely invisible to them. Negative affect, it would seem, is a technology that operates on all bodies, centering some and displacing others.

Between the Scylla of a preemptive categorical exclusion and the Charybdis of compulsory psychopathologization, I kept my head down for a decade and deferred gender transitioning. I got through the 1980s with the help of graduate school, Michel Foucault, poststructuralism, and Gayle Rubin, sublimating my various dysphorias into a dissertation on the cultural politics of emergent forms of personal and collective identity, and by knocking around in radical sexuality subcultures in the San Francisco Bay Area. The queer movement that erupted around 1990 felt like what I had been waiting for all along, and I threw myself into it without hesitation. New groups such as the Lesbian Avengers, the post-identity politics of Queer Nation, and the eruption onto the scene of this new term, *transgender*, opened up a vital space of possibility. I felt at last that I had someplace to transition *into*: a place for coming out as a transsexual lesbian feminist.

Some of the lines of research I've pursued as a scholar for the past twenty years, as well as my efforts to help establish transgender studies as a recognized academic field, have been motivated to a significant degree by the lesbian feminist identity politics I lived through, albeit in a queer sort of isolation, during the late 1970s and 1980s—a coda, or perhaps a second act, to the "sex wars" that aim to reframe what can be properly considered feminist positions on embodiment, identity, desire, and gender. Looking forward now to future developments in the fields of gender and women's history and its intersection with transgender studies, there are a few emerging matters coming into focus that merit brief mention before winding these remarks to a close.

Another question roundtable participants were asked to consider was: How do we address the contentious borders between lesbian and transgender identities, between passing women and transmen, between gender identity and sexual identity? It seems both obvious yet necessary to point out that the transgender border question cannot be reduced to one between "passing women" and "transmen." This border has indeed been a hot-button issue for some time now, and has received high-profile scholarly treatment in works like Jack Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*. But there is another border. Transwomen are like Canadians in contemporary US discourse on border surveillance and immigration; we're not on the border that gets most of the attention these days, and yet there is a history there, too, of boundaries marked through wars, of cultural conflict, of tropes of nation and citizenship being deployed, of

access barriers thrown up to the restricted country of feminist womanhood—all of which is overripe for rigorous historical appraisal.

I know of only one scholar thus far, Finn Enke at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, who is doing academic work on transgender women and transgender issues in US feminism in the 1970s.[1] There are rich veins of historical material yet to be mined there. Check out the *Alternative Press Index* headings for "transsexual" and "transvestite" and you will find tantalizing leads about transpeople doing political support work for prisoners convicted of sex crimes, participating in gay liberation, joining feminist collectives and establishing women's buildings, organizing rallies against the war in Vietnam, and speaking out about disability in lesbian feminist communities.

There is a new history yet to be written of this recent past, one that upends our received narratives about the 1970s. In Philadelphia, for example, a group called Radical Queens partnered with the separatist Dyke Tactics to push jointly for economic and political transformation. A group of formerly closeted heterosexual male cross-dressers in Washington, DC, came out to support the ERA, arguing that in good conscience they couldn't claim to be "woman identified" if they didn't participate in feminist causes. A dating service in California, the Salmacis Society (named for the typically unheralded female nymph in Greek mythology who fused her body with the demigod Hermaphroditus to become part of a doubly sexed being), promoted "femme-femme" relationships between all sexes and genders.

And there is still much work to do in documenting how transsexual and transgender issues became flashpoints and turning points in the histories of better-known social movements: the ejection of revolutionary street-queen Sylvia Rivera from the Christopher Street Liberation Day commemoration, for example; or Robin Morgan's verbal attack on transsexual lesbian feminist Beth Elliot at the West Coast Lesbian Conference; or Janice Raymond's campaign to have Sandy Stone fired by the Olivia Records women's music collective. Investigating these and similar acts of transgender exclusion from broader movements shines a light on the otherwise invisible operations of the unacknowledged normativities through which social change often moves forward.

Trying to speak intelligibly from a trans-lesbian-feminist sensibility has required developing critiques of dominant forms of womanhood and lesbianism as well as of queerness, critiques that in retrospect look a lot like the emerging critiques of neoliberal homonationalism. To wit: the kind of female homosexual or homonormative male that is increasingly recognized as a legitimate version of the subject-citizen within Eurocentric modernity secures

her or his relationship to state and market precisely by not troubling the regulative framework known as *gender*—a biopolitical technique of bodily administration that transgender embodiment can profoundly problematize.

In hindsight, a lot of the trash talk about transfolks since the rise of gay liberation and second wave feminism sounds like a subspecies of modernization discourse. Some (homo)normative, nontransgendered gays, lesbians, and feminists frequently posit themselves (as in recent debates about trans inclusion in the proposed Employment Nondiscrimination Act) as more progressive, more modern, more liberated, more politically advanced, more befitting of rights than those backward trans people who are either sick, bad, or wrong, who need to be saved from themselves, who need to be educated and have their consciousnesses raised by their more enlightened leaders so that they will become fit bearers of rights at some unspecified point in the future—after real women and men, both queer and straight, get theirs.

But a queer, feminist, transgender analysis of contemporary society, one that can expose and articulate from the inside the relations of power that cast aside all things transgender as inconsequential, marginal phenomena can actually function as a potent site from which to launch a radical, antireactionary, future-oriented, countermodern critique of modernity itself. Hopefully, this sense of the critical potential of a queer feminist transgender studies resonates with other, more familiar, discursive maneuvers within feminism.

Writers such as Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty have helped teach people to see that Western feminism risks repeating the colonizing gesture of "white men saving brown women from brown men" to the extent that it simply puts white womanhood in the geopolitical place of the white man. A new wave of feminist transgender scholarship, such as Afsaneh Najmabadi's meticulous work on the state funding of transsexual surgeries in the Islamic Republic of Iran,[2] highlights the extent to which transsexuals can now be held up as evidence to support contemporary kinds of neocolonial intervention through a structurally identical conceptual operation—namely, Western activists waving the bloody shirt of human rights to save disempowered, queer subjects in distant lands from the backward Islamists who want to transsexualize their bodies to fit them into an oppressive, fundamentalist heteropatriarchy rather than allowing them to become the liberated modern gays they rightfully should be in a free world.

So what is one to make of the fact that in 1979 (during the Iranian Revolution and the hostage crisis at the US Embassy in Tehran, one might note), Janice Raymond published her fantasy of a "transsexual empire" in which "she-male" infiltrators of women's space subvert feminism from within and

become, like the "eunuchs" of old (this is her language, not my gloss), guardians of the harem in service to their patriarch masters? Laughter would be an entirely sufficient response, were it not for the pernicious persistence of the "paranoid style" in US politics and cultural life—certain strands of feminism not excepted—and for the seeming effortlessness with which transsexual women can be slotted into a phantasmatic structure that imagines a stealthy enemy at once foreign, internal, and (as is increasingly the case) Orientalized and Islamized.

When transsexual women are not rendered objects of fear (think here of how the guy-in-a-dress-rapist-in-the-women's-room caricature is deployed to defeat antidiscrimination legislation), they're made into objects of fun (think here of every cross-dressing shtick you've ever seen in a so-called comedy). This is really no laughing matter. (See me perform my righteous feminist anger?) It's not just that transphobic violence can kill and that trans women need to take back a night of their own. It's also that, if we take seriously the discursive maneuvers that foist upon transwomen the most outrageous of constructs, and if we collectively hold space for conversation in a manner that allows transwomen to speak of their subjection to those constructs and of their evasions of those constructs, then transwomen will at last be in a position to report on the state-sanctioned violence of coercive gender-normativization in a voice every bit as powerful as the ones Audre Lorde used to talk about Black and Gloria Anzaldúa used to talk about borders.

So: How many transsexual lesbian feminists does it take to change a light bulb? That's *really* not funny—because we're not trying to change light bulbs; we're trying to change the world.

Notes

First published in *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 375–83.

1 Subsequently published as Enke, *Finding the Movement*. (MW)

2 Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*.

III.

WHEN MONSTERS SPEAK

This page intentionally left blank

14

MY WORDS TO VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN ABOVE THE VILLAGE OF CHAMOUNIX

Performing Transgender Rage

Introductory Notes

The following work is a textual adaptation of a performance piece originally presented at Rage across the Disciplines, an arts, humanities, and social sciences conference held June 10–12, 1993, at California State University, San Marcos. The interdisciplinary nature of the conference, its theme, and the organizers' call for both performances and academic papers inspired me to be creative in my mode of presenting a topic then much on my mind. As a member of Transgender Nation—a militantly queer, direct-action transsexual advocacy group—I was at the time involved in organizing a disruption and protest at the American Psychiatric Association's 1993 annual meeting in San Francisco. A good deal of the discussion at our planning meetings concerned how to harness the intense emotions emanating from transsexual experience—especially rage—and mobilize them into effective political actions.

I was intrigued by the prospect of critically examining this rage in a more academic setting through an idiosyncratic application of the concept of gender performativity. My idea was to perform, self-consciously, a queer gender rather than simply talk about it, thus embodying and enacting the concept simultaneously under discussion. I wanted the formal structure of the work to

express a transgender aesthetic by replicating our abrupt, often jarring transitions between genders—challenging generic classification with the forms of my words just as my transsexuality challenges the conventions of legitimate gender and my performance in the conference room challenged the boundaries of acceptable academic discourse.

During the performance, I stood at the podium wearing genderfuck drag—combat boots, threadbare Levi 501s over a black lace body suit, a shredded Transgender Nation T-shirt with the neck and sleeves cut out, a pink triangle, quartz crystal pendant, grunge metal jewelry, and a six-inch long marlin hook dangling around my neck on a length of heavy stainless-steel chain. I decorated the set by draping my black leather biker jacket over my chair at the panelists' table. The jacket had handcuffs on the left shoulder, rainbow freedom rings on the right-side lacings, and Queer Nation–style stickers reading SEX CHANGE, DYKE, and FUCK YOUR TRANSPHOBIA plastered on the back.

Monologue

The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's, as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist.

I am not the first to link Frankenstein's monster and the transsexual body. Mary Daly makes the connection explicit by discussing transsexuality in "Boundary Violation and the Frankenstein Phenomenon," in which she characterizes transsexuals as the agents of a "necrophilic invasion" of female space (69–72). Janice Raymond, who acknowledges Daly as a formative influence, is less direct when she says that "the problem of transsexuality would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence"; but in this statement she nevertheless echoes Victor Frankenstein's feelings toward the monster: "Begone, vile insect, or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust. You reproach me with your creation."[1] It is a commonplace of literary criticism to note that Frankenstein's monster is his own dark, romantic double, the alien Other he constructs and upon which he projects all he cannot accept in himself; in-

deed, Frankenstein calls the monster "my own vampire, my own spirit set loose from the grave."[2] Might I suggest that Daly, Raymond, and others of their ilk similarly construct the transsexual as their own particular golem?[3]

The attribution of monstrosity remains a palpable characteristic of most lesbian and gay representations of transsexuality, displaying in unnerving detail the anxious, fearful underside of the current cultural fascination with transgenderism.[4] Because transsexuality more than any other transgender practice or identity represents the prospect of destabilizing the foundational presupposition of fixed genders upon which a politics of personal identity depends, people who have invested their aspirations for social justice in identitarian movements say things about us out of sheer panic that, if said of other minorities, would see print only in the most hate-riddled, white supremacist, Christian fascist rags.

To quote extensively from one letter to the editor of a popular San Francisco gay/lesbian periodical:

> I consider transsexualism to be a fraud, and the participants in it . . . perverted. The transsexual [claims] he/she needs to change his/her body in order to be his/her "true self." Because this "true self" requires another physical form in which to manifest itself, it must therefore war with nature. One cannot change one's gender. What occurs is a cleverly manipulated exterior: what has been done is mutation. What exists beneath the deformed surface is the same person who was there prior to the deformity. People who break or deform their bodies [act] out the sick farce of a deluded, patriarchal approach to nature, alienated from true being.

Referring by name to one particular person, self-identified as a transsexual lesbian, whom she had heard speak in a public forum at the San Francisco Women's Building, the letter-writer went on to say: "When an estrogenated man with breasts loves a woman, that is not lesbianism, that is mutilated perversion. [This individual] is not a threat to the lesbian community, he is an outrage to us. He is not a lesbian, he is a mutant man, a self-made freak, a deformity, an insult. He deserves a slap in the face. After that, he deserves to have his body and mind made well again."[5]

When such beings as these tell me I war with nature, I find no more reason to mourn my opposition to them—or to the order they claim to represent—than Frankenstein's monster felt in its enmity to the human race. I do not fall from the grace of their company—I roar gleefully away from it like a Harley-straddling, dildo-packing leatherdyke from hell.

The stigmatization fostered by this sort of pejorative labelling is not without consequence. Such words have the power to destroy transsexual lives. On January 5, 1993, a twenty-two-year-old preoperative transsexual woman from Seattle, Filisa Vistima, wrote in her journal, "I wish I was anatomically 'normal' so I could go swimming. . . . But no, I'm a mutant, Frankenstein's monster." Two months later Filisa Vistima committed suicide. What drove her to such despair was the exclusion she experienced in Seattle's queer community, some members of which opposed Filisa's participation because of her transsexuality—even though she identified as and lived as a bisexual woman.

The Lesbian Resource Center where she served as a volunteer conducted a survey of its constituency to determine whether it should stop offering services to male-to-female transsexuals. Filisa did the data entry for tabulating the survey results; she didn't have to imagine how people felt about her kind. The Seattle Bisexual Women's Network announced that if it admitted transsexuals, the SBWN would no longer be a women's organization. "I'm sure," one member said in reference to the inclusion of bisexual transsexual women, "the boys can take care of themselves."

Filisa Vistima was not a boy, and she found it impossible to take care of herself. Even in death she found no support from the community in which she claimed membership. "Why didn't Filisa commit herself for psychiatric care?" asked a columnist in the *Seattle Gay News*. "Why didn't Filisa demand her civil rights?" In this case, not only did the angry villagers hound their monster to the edge of town, they reproached her for being vulnerable to the torches. Did Filisa Vistima commit suicide, or did the queer community of Seattle kill her?[6]

I want to lay claim to the dark power of my monstrous identity without using it as a weapon against others or being wounded by it myself. I will say this as bluntly as I know how: I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster. Just as the words "dyke," "fag," "queer," "slut," and "whore" have been reclaimed, respectively, by lesbians and gay men, by anti-assimilationist sexual minorities, by women who pursue erotic pleasure, and by sex industry workers, words like "creature," "monster," and "unnatural" need to be reclaimed by the transgendered. By embracing and accepting them, even piling one on top of another, we may dispel their ability to harm us. A creature, after all, in the dominant tradition of Western European culture, is nothing other than a created being, a made thing. The affront you humans take at being called a "creature" results from the threat the term poses to your status as "lords of creation," beings elevated above mere material existence. As in the case of being called "it," being called a "creature" suggests the lack or loss of a superior personhood.

I find no shame, however, in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with nonhuman material Being; everything emerges from the same matrix of possibilities. "Monster" is derived from the Latin noun *monstrum*, "divine portent," itself formed on the root of the verb *monere*, "to warn." It came to refer to living things of anomalous shape or structure, or to fabulous creatures like the sphinx who were composed of strikingly incongruous parts, because the ancients considered the appearance of such beings to be a sign of some impending supernatural event. Monsters, like angels, functioned as messengers and heralds of the extraordinary. They served to announce impending revelation, saying, in effect, "Pay attention; something of profound importance is happening."

Hearken unto me, fellow creatures. I who have dwelt in a form unmatched with my desire, I whose flesh has become an assemblage of incongruous anatomical parts, I who achieve the similitude of a natural body only through an unnatural process, I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic Womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself.

Criticism

In answer to the question he poses in the title of his recent essay, "What Is a Monster? (According to *Frankenstein*)," Peter Brooks suggests that whatever else a monster might be, it "may also be that which eludes gender definition" (219). Brooks reads Mary Shelley's story of an overreaching scientist and his troublesome creation as an early dissent from the nineteenth-century realist literary tradition, which had not yet attained dominance as a narrative form. He understands Frankenstein to unfold textually through a narrative strategy generated by tension between a visually oriented epistemology, on the one hand, and another approach to knowing the truth of bodies that privileges verbal linguisticality, on the other (199–200). Knowing by seeing and knowing by speaking/hearing are gendered, respectively, as masculine and feminine in the critical framework within which Brooks operates.

Considered in this context, Shelley's text is informed by—and critiques from a woman's point of view—the contemporary reordering of knowledge

brought about by the increasingly compelling truth claims of Enlightenment science.[7] The monster problematizes gender partly through its failure as a viable subject in the visual field; though referred to as "he," it thus offers a feminine, and potentially feminist, resistance to definition by a phallicized scopophilia. The monster accomplishes this resistance by mastering language in order to claim a position as a speaking subject and enact verbally the very subjectivity denied it in the specular realm.

Transsexual monstrosity, however, along with its affect, transgender rage, can never claim quite so secure a means of resistance because of the inability of language to represent the transgendered subject's movement over time between stably gendered positions in a linguistic structure. Our situation effectively reverses the one encountered by Frankenstein's monster. Unlike the monster, we often successfully cite the culture's visual norms of gendered embodiment. This citation becomes a subversive resistance when, through a provisional use of language, we verbally declare the unnaturalness of our claim to the subject positions we nevertheless occupy.[8]

The prospect of a monster with a life and will of its own is a principal source of horror for Frankenstein. The scientist has taken up his project with a specific goal in mind—nothing less than the intent to subject nature completely to his power. He finds a means to accomplish his desires through modern science, whose devotees, it seems to him, "have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its shadows. . . . More, far more, will I achieve," thought Frankenstein. "I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation."[9] The fruit of his efforts is not, however, what Frankenstein anticipated. The rapture he expected to experience at the awakening of his creature turned immediately to dread. "I saw the dull yellow eyes of the creature open. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped" (56, 57).

The monster escapes, too, and parts company with its maker for a number of years. In the interim, it learns something of its situation in the world, and rather than bless its creator, the monster curses him. The very success of Mary Shelley's scientist in his self-appointed task thus paradoxically proves its futility: rather than demonstrate Frankenstein's power over materiality, the newly enlivened body of the creature attests to its maker's failure to attain the mastery he sought. Frankenstein cannot control the mind and feelings of the monster he makes. It exceeds and refutes his purposes.

My own experience as a transsexual parallels the monster's in this regard. The consciousness shaped by the transsexual body is no more the creation of the science that refigures its flesh than the monster's mind is the creation of Frankenstein. The agenda that produced hormonal and surgical sex reassignment techniques is no less pretentious, and no more noble, than Frankenstein's. Heroic doctors still endeavor to triumph over nature. The scientific discourse that produced sex reassignment techniques is inseparable from the pursuit of immortality through the perfection of the body, the fantasy of total mastery through the transcendence of an absolute limit, and the hubristic desire to create life itself.[10] Its genealogy emerges from a metaphysical quest older than modern science, and its cultural politics are aligned with a deeply conservative attempt to stabilize gendered identity in service of the naturalized heterosexual order.

None of this, however, precludes medically constructed transsexual bodies from being viable sites of subjectivity. Nor does it guarantee the compliance of subjects thus embodied with the agenda that resulted in a transsexual means of embodiment. As we rise up from the operating tables of our rebirth, we transsexuals are something more, and something other, than the creatures our makers intended us to be. Though medical techniques for sex reassignment are capable of crafting bodies that satisfy the visual and morphological criteria that generate naturalness as their effect, engaging with those very techniques produces a subjective experience that belies the naturalistic effect biomedical technology can achieve. Transsexual embodiment, like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in which it must nevertheless exist.

Frankenstein's monster articulates its unnatural situation within the natural world with far more sophistication in Shelley's novel than might be expected by those familiar only with the version played by Boris Karloff in James Whale's classic films from the 1930s. Film critic Vito Russo suggests that Whale's interpretation of the monster was influenced by the fact that the director was a closeted gay man at the time he made his *Frankenstein* films. The pathos he imparted to his monster derived from the experience of his own hidden sexual identity.[11] Monstrous and unnatural in the eyes of the world but seeking only the love of his own kind and the acceptance of human society, Whale's creature externalizes and renders visible the nightmarish loneliness and alienation that the closet can breed. But this is not the monster who speaks to me so potently of my own situation as an openly transsexual being. I emulate instead Mary Shelley's literary monster, who is quick-witted, agile, strong, and eloquent.

In the novel, the creature flees Frankenstein's laboratory and hides in the solitude of the Alps, where, by stealthy observation of the people it happens to meet, it gradually acquires a knowledge of language, literature, and the conventions of European society. At first it knows little of its own condition. "I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me," the monster notes. "What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them."[12] Then, in the pocket of the jacket it took as it fled the laboratory, the monster finds Victor Frankenstein's journal, and learns the particulars of its creation. "I sickened as I read," the monster says. "Increase of knowledge only discovered to me what a wretched outcast I was" (124, 125).

Upon learning its history and experiencing the rejection of all to whom it reached out for companionship, the creature's life takes a dark turn. "My feelings were those of rage and revenge," the monster declares. "I, like the archfiend, bore a hell within me" (130). It would have been happy to destroy all of Nature, but it settles, finally, on a more expedient plan to murder systematically all those whom Victor Frankenstein loves. Once Frankenstein realizes that his own abandoned creation is responsible for the deaths of those most dear to him, he retreats in remorse to a mountain village above his native Geneva to ponder his complicity in the crimes the monster has committed. While hiking on the glaciers in the shadow of Mont Blanc, above the village of Chamounix, Frankenstein spies a familiar figure approaching him across the ice. Of course, it is the monster who demands an audience with its maker. Frankenstein agrees, and the two retire together to a mountaineer's cabin. There, in a monologue that occupies nearly a quarter of the novel, the monster tells Frankenstein the tale of its creation from its own point of view, explaining to him how it became so enraged.

These are my words to Victor Frankenstein, above the village of Chamounix. Like the monster, I could speak of my earliest memories, and how I became aware of my difference from everyone around me. I can describe how I acquired a monstrous identity by taking on the label "transsexual" to name parts of myself that I could not otherwise explain. I, too, have discovered the journals of the men who made my body, and who have made the bodies of creatures like me since the 1930s. I know in intimate detail the history of this recent medical intervention into the enactment of transgendered subjectivity; science seeks to contain and colonize the radical threat posed by a particular transgender strategy of resistance to the coerciveness of gender: physical alteration of the genitals.[13] I live daily with the consequences of

medicine's definition of my identity as an emotional disorder. Through the filter of this official pathologization, the sounds that come out of my mouth can be summarily dismissed as the confused ranting of a diseased mind.

Like the monster, the longer I live in these conditions, the more rage I harbor. Rage colors me as it presses in through the pores of my skin, soaking in until it becomes the blood that courses through my beating heart. It is a rage bred by the necessity of existing in external circumstances that work against my survival. But there is yet another rage within.

Journal (February 18, 1983)

Kim sat between my spread legs, her back to me, her tailbone on the edge of the table. Her left hand gripped my thigh so hard the bruises are still there a week later. Sweating and bellowing, she pushed one last time and the baby finally came. Through my lover's back, against the skin of my own belly, I felt a child move out of another woman's body and into the world. Strangers' hands snatched it away to suction the sticky green meconium from its airways. "It's a girl," somebody said. Paul, I think. Why, just then, did a jumble of dark, unsolicited feelings emerge wordlessly from some quiet back corner of my mind? This moment of miracles was not the time to deal with them. I pushed them back, knowing they were too strong to avoid for long.

After three days, we were all exhausted, slightly disappointed that complications had forced us to go to Kaiser instead of having the birth at home. I wonder what the hospital staff thought of our little tribe swarming all over the delivery room: Stephanie, the midwife; Paul, the baby's father; Kim's sister Gwen; my son Wilson and me; and the two other women who make up our family, Anne and Heather. And of course, Kim and the baby. She named her Denali, after the mountain in Alaska. I don't think the medical folks had a clue as to how we all considered ourselves to be related to each other. When the labor first began, we all took turns shifting between various supporting roles, but as the ordeal progressed, we settled into a more stable pattern. I found myself acting as birth coach. Hour after hour, through dozens of sets of contractions, I focused everything on Kim, helping her stay in control of her emotions as she gave herself over to this inexorable process, holding on to her eyes with mine to keep the pain from throwing her out of her body, breathing every breath with her, being a companion.

I participated, step by increasingly intimate step, in the ritual transformation of consciousness surrounding her daughter's birth. Birth rituals work to prepare the self for a profound opening, an opening as psychic as it is corpo-

real. Kim's body brought this ritual process to a dramatic resolution for her, culminating in a visceral, cathartic experience. But my body left me hanging. I had gone on a journey up to the point at which my companion had to go on alone, and I needed to finish my trip for myself. To conclude the birth ritual I had participated in, I needed to move something in me as profound as a whole human life.

I floated home from the hospital, filled with a vital energy that wouldn't discharge. I puttered about until I was alone: my ex had come over for Wilson; Kim and Denali were still at the hospital with Paul; Stephanie had gone, and everyone else was out for a much-needed walk. Finally, in the solitude of my home, I burst apart like a wet paper bag and spilled the emotional contents of my life through the hands I cupped like a sieve over my face. For days, as I had accompanied my partner on her journey, I had been progressively opening myself and preparing to let go of whatever was deepest within. Now everything in me flowed out, moving up from inside and out through my throat, my mouth because these things could never pass between the lips of my cunt. I knew the darkness I had glimpsed earlier would reemerge, but I had vast oceans of feeling to experience before that came up again.

Simple joy in the presence of new life came bubbling out first, wave after wave of it. I was so incredibly happy. I was so in love with Kim, had so much admiration for her strength and courage. I felt pride and excitement about the queer family we were building with Wilson, Anne, Heather, Denali, and whatever babies would follow. We've all tasted an exhilarating possibility in communal living and these nurturing, bonded kinships for which we have no adequate names. We joke about pioneering on a reverse frontier: venturing into the heart of civilization itself to reclaim biological reproduction from heterosexism and free it for our own uses. We're fierce; in a world of "traditional family values," we need to be.

Sometimes, though, I still mourn the passing of old, more familiar ways. It wasn't too long ago that my ex and I were married, woman and man. That love had been genuine, and the grief over its loss real. I had always wanted intimacy with women more than intimacy with men, and that wanting had always felt queer to me. She needed it to appear straight. The shape of my flesh was a barrier that estranged me from my desire. Like a body without a mouth, I was starving in the midst of plenty. I would not let myself starve, even if what it took to open myself for a deep connectedness cut off the deepest connections I actually had. So, I abandoned one life and built this new one. The fact that she and I have begun getting along again, after so much strife between us, makes the bitterness of our separation somewhat sweet.

On the day of the birth, this past loss was present even in its partial recovery; held up beside the newfound fullness in my life, it evoked a poignant, hopeful sadness that inundated me.

Frustration and anger soon welled up in abundance. In spite of all I'd accomplished, my identity still felt so tenuous. Every circumstance of life seemed to conspire against me in one vast, composite act of invalidation and erasure. In the body I was born with, I had been invisible as the person I considered myself to be; I had been invisible as a queer while the form of my body made my desires look straight. Now, as a dyke, I am invisible among women; as a transsexual, I am invisible among dykes. As the partner of a new mother, I am often invisible as a transsexual, a woman, and a lesbian. I've lost track of the friends and acquaintances these past nine months who've asked me if I was the father. It shows so dramatically how much they simply don't get what I'm doing with my body. The high price of whatever visible, intelligible, self-representation I have achieved makes the continuing experience of invisibility maddeningly difficult to bear.

The collective assumptions of the naturalized order soon overwhelmed me. Nature exerts such a hegemonic oppression. Suddenly I felt lost and scared, lonely, and confused. How did that little Mormon boy from Oklahoma I used to be grow up to be a transsexual leatherdyke in San Francisco with a Berkeley PhD? Keeping my bearings on such a long and strange trip seemed a ludicrous proposition. Home was so far gone behind me it was gone forever, and there was no place to rest. Battered by heavy emotions, a little dazed, I felt the inner walls that protect me dissolve to leave me vulnerable to all that could harm me. I cried and abandoned myself to abject despair over what gender had done to me.

Everything's fucked up beyond all recognition. This hurts too much to go on. I came as close today as I'll ever come to giving birth—literally. My body can't do that; I can't even bleed without a wound, and yet I claim to be a woman. How? Why have I always felt that way? I'm such a goddamned freak. I can never be a woman like other women, but I could never be a man. Maybe there really is no place for me in all creation. I'm so tired of this ceaseless movement. I do war with nature. I am alienated from Being. I'm a self-mutilated deformity, a pervert, a mutant, trapped in monstrous flesh. God, I never wanted to be trapped again. I've destroyed myself. I'm falling into darkness I am falling apart.

I enter the realm of my dreams. I am underwater, swimming upward It is dark. I see a shimmering light above me. I break through the plane of the water's surface with my lungs bursting. I suck for air—and find only more water.

My lungs are full of water. Inside and out, I am surrounded by it. Why am I not dead if there is no difference between me and what I am in? There is another surface above me and I swim frantically towards it. I see a shimmering light. I break the plane of the water's surface over and over and over again. This water annihilates me. I cannot be, and yet—an excruciating impossibility—I am I will do anything not to be here.

I will swim forever
I will die for eternity.
I will learn to breathe water.
I will become the water.
If I cannot change my situation I will change myself.

In this act of magical transformation
I recognize myself again.

I am groundless and boundless movement.
I am a furious flow.
I am one with the darkness and the wet.

And I am enraged.

Here at last is the chaos I held at bay.
Here at last is my strength.

I am not the water—
I am the wave,
and rage
is the force that moves me.

Rage
gives me back my body
as its own fluid medium.

Rage
punches a hole in water
around which I coalesce
to allow the flow to come through me.

Rage
constitutes me in my primal form.
It throws my head back
pulls my lips back over my teeth
opens my throat

and rears me up to howl: and no sound dilutes
the pure quality of my rage.

No sound
exists
in this place without language
my rage is a silent raving

Rage
throws me back at last
into this mundane reality
in this transfigured flesh
that aligns me with the power of my Being.

In birthing my rage,
my rage has rebirthed me.

Theory

A formal disjunction seems particularly appropriate at this moment because the affect I seek to examine critically, what I've termed "transgender rage," emerges from the interstices of discursive practices and at the collapse of generic categories. The rage itself is generated by the subject's situation in a field governed by the unstable but indissoluble relationship between language and materiality, a situation in which language organizes and brings into signification matter that simultaneously eludes definitive representation and demands its own perpetual rearticulation in symbolic terms.

Within this dynamic field, the subject must constantly police the boundary constructed by its own founding in order to maintain the fictions of "inside" and "outside" against a regime of signification/materialization whose intrinsic instability produces the rupture of subjective boundaries as one of its regular features. The affect of rage, as I seek to define it, is located at the margin of subjectivity and the limit of signification. It originates in recognition of the fact that the "outsideness" of a materiality that perpetually violates the foreclosure of subjective space within a symbolic order is also necessarily "inside" the subject as grounds for the materialization of its body and the formation of its bodily ego.

This primary rage becomes specifically transgender rage when the inability to foreclose the subject occurs through a failure to satisfy norms of gendered embodiment. Transgender rage is the subjective experience of being

compelled to transgress what Judith Butler has referred to as the highly gendered regulatory schemata that determine the viability of bodies, of being compelled to enter a "domain of abjected bodies, a field of deformation" that in its unlivability encompasses and constitutes the realm of legitimate subjectivity.[14] Transgender rage is a queer fury, an emotional response to conditions in which it becomes imperative to take up, for the sake of one's own continued survival as a subject, a set of practices that precipitates one's exclusion from a naturalized order of existence that seeks to maintain itself as the only possible basis for being a subject.

However, by mobilizing gendered identities and rendering them provisional, open to strategic development and occupation, this rage enables the establishment of subjects in new modes, regulated by different codes of intelligibility. Transgender rage furnishes a means for disidentification with compulsorily assigned subject positions. It makes the transition from one gendered subject position to another possible by using the impossibility of complete subjective foreclosure to organize an outside force as an inside drive, and vice versa. Through the operation of rage, the stigma itself becomes the source of transformative power.[15]

I want to stop and theorize at this particular moment in the text because in the lived moment of being thrown back from a state of abjection in the aftermath of my lover's daughter's birth, I immediately began telling myself a story to explain my experience. I started theorizing, using all the conceptual tools my education had put at my disposal. Other true stories of those events could undoubtedly be told, but upon my return, I knew for a fact what lit the fuse to my rage in the hospital delivery room. It was the nonconsensuality of the baby's gendering. You see, I told myself, wiping snot off my face with a shirt sleeve, bodies are rendered meaningful only through some culturally and historically specific mode of grasping their physicality that transforms the flesh into a useful artifact.

Gendering is the initial step in this transformation, inseparable from the process of forming an identity by means of which we're fitted to a system of exchange in a heterosexual economy. Authority seizes upon specific material qualities of the flesh, particularly the genitals, as outward indication of future reproductive potential, constructs this flesh as a sign, and reads it to enculturate the body. Gender attribution is compulsory; it codes and deploys our bodies in ways that materially affect us, yet we choose neither our marks nor the meanings they carry.[16]

This was the act accomplished between the beginning and the end of that short sentence in the delivery room: "It's a girl." This was the act that recalled

all the anguish of my own struggles with gender. But this was also the act that enjoined my complicity in the nonconsensual gendering of another. A gendering violence is the founding condition of human subjectivity; having a gender is the tribal tattoo that makes one's personhood cognizable. I stood for a moment between the pains of two violations, the mark of gender and the unlivability of its absence. Could I say which one was worse? Or could I only say which one I felt could best be survived?

How can finding one's self prostrate and powerless in the presence of the Law of the Father not produce an unutterable rage? What difference does it make if the father in this instance was a pierced, tattooed, purple-haired punk fag anarchist who helped his dyke friend get pregnant? Phallogocentric language, not its particular speaker, is the scalpel that defines our flesh. I defy that Law in my refusal to abide by its original decree of my gender. Though I cannot escape its power, I can move through its medium. Perhaps if I move furiously enough, I can deform it in my passing to leave a trace of my rage. I can embrace it with a vengeance to rename myself, declare my transsexuality, and gain access to the means of my legible reinscription. Though I may not hold the stylus myself, I can move beneath it for my own deep self-sustaining pleasures.

To encounter the transsexual body, to apprehend a transgendered consciousness articulating itself, is to risk a revelation of the constructedness of the natural order. Confronting the implications of this constructedness can summon up all the violation, loss, and separation inflicted by the gendering process that sustains the illusion of naturalness. My transsexual body literalizes this abstract violence. As the bearers of this disquieting news, we transsexuals often suffer for the pain of others, but we do not willingly abide the rage of others directed against us. And we do have something else to say, if you will but listen to the monsters: the possibility of meaningful agency and action exists, even within fields of domination that bring about the universal cultural rape of all flesh. Be forewarned, however, that taking up this task will remake you in the process.

By speaking as a monster in my personal voice, by using the dark, watery images of Romanticism and lapsing occasionally into its brooding cadences and grandiose postures, I employ the same literary techniques Mary Shelley used to elicit sympathy for her scientist's creation. Like that creature, I assert my worth as a monster in spite of the conditions my monstrosity requires me to face and redefine a life worth living. I have asked the Miltonic questions Shelley poses in the epigraph of her novel: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me?"

With one voice, her monster and I answer, "No," without debasing ourselves, for we have done the hard work of constituting ourselves, on our own terms, against the natural order. Though we forego the privilege of naturalness, we are not deterred, for we ally ourselves instead with the chaos and blackness from which Nature itself spills forth.[17]

If this is your path, as it is mine, let me offer whatever solace you may find in this monstrous benediction: May you discover the enlivening power of darkness within yourself. May it nourish your rage. May your rage inform your actions, and your actions transform you, as you struggle to transform your world.

Notes

First published in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 3 (1994): 237–54.

1 Raymond, *Transsexual Empire*, 178; Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 95.

2 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 74.

3 While this comment is intended as a monster's disdainful dismissal, it nevertheless alludes to a substantial debate on the status of transgender practices and identities in lesbian feminism. H. S. Rubin, in a sociology dissertation in progress at Brandeis University, [H. Rubin, "Transformations"] argues that the pronounced demographic upsurge in the female-to-male transsexual population during the 1970s and 1980s is directly related to the ascendancy within lesbianism of a "cultural feminism" that disparaged and marginalized practices smacking of an unliberated "gender inversion" model of homosexuality—especially the butch-femme roles associated with working-class lesbian bar culture. Cultural feminism thus consolidated a lesbian feminist alliance with heterosexual feminism on a middle-class basis by capitulating to dominant ideologies of gender. The same suppression of transgender aspects of lesbian practice, I would add, simultaneously raised the specter of male-to-female transsexual lesbians as a particular threat to the stability and purity of nontranssexual lesbian-feminist identity. See Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, for the broader context of this debate; and Raymond, *Transsexual Empire*, for the most vehement example of the antitransgender position.

4 The current meaning of the term *transgender* is a matter of some debate. The word was originally coined as a noun in the 1970s by people who resisted categorization as either transvestites or transsexuals and who used the term to describe their own identity. Unlike transsexuals but like transvestites, transgenders do not seek surgical alteration of their bodies but do habitually wear clothing that represents a gender other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Unlike transvestites but like transsexuals, however, transgenders do not alter the vestimentary coding of their gender only episodically or primarily for sexual gratifi-

cation; rather, they consistently and publicly express an ongoing commitment to their claimed gender identities through the same visual representational strategies used by others to signify that gender. The logic underlying this terminology reflects the widespread tendency to construe "gender" as the sociocultural manifestation of a material "sex." Thus, while transsexuals express their identities through a physical change of embodiment, transgenders do so through a noncorporeal change in public gender expression that is nevertheless more complex than a simple change of clothes. This essay uses *transgender* in a more recent sense, however, than its original one. That is, I use it here as an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries. The term includes, but is not limited to, transsexuality, heterosexual transvestism, gay drag, butch lesbianism, and such non-European identities as the Native American berdache or the Indian Hijra. Like *queer*, *transgender* may also be used as a verb or an adjective. In this essay, transsexuality is considered to be a culturally and historically specific transgender practice/identity through which a transgendered subject enters into a relationship with medical, psychotherapeutic, and juridical institutions in order to gain access to certain hormonal and surgical technologies for enacting and embodying itself.

5 Mikuteit, letter, 3–4 (heavily edited for brevity and clarity).

6 The preceding paragraph draws extensively on, and sometimes paraphrases, O'Hartigan, "I Accuse," and Kahler, "Does Filisa Blame Seattle?"

7 See Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 1–7, for a brief discussion of the Enlightenment's effect on constructions of gender. Feminist interpretations of Frankenstein to which Brooks responds include Gilbert and Gubar, "Horror's Twin"; Jacobus, "Is There a Woman in This Text?"; and Homans, "Bearing Demons."

8 Openly transsexual speech similarly subverts the logic behind a remark by Bloom, that "a beautiful 'monster,' or even a passable one, would not have been a monster." Bloom, afterword, 618.

9 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 47. Subsequent page references are given parenthetically.

10 Billings and Urban, in "The Sociomedical Construction of Transsexualism" (269), document especially well the medical attitude toward transsexual surgery as one of technical mastery of the body. Irvine, in *Disorders of Desire* (259), suggests how transsexuality fits into the development of scientific sexology, though caution is advised in uncritically accepting the interpretation of transsexual experience she presents in this chapter. In spite of some extremely transphobic concluding comments, Meyer, in "I Dream of Jeannie," offers a good account of the medicalization of transgender identities; for a transsexual perspective on the scientific agenda behind sex reassignment techniques. See also Stone, "'The 'Empire' Strikes Back," especially the section entitled "All of reality in late capitalist culture lusts to become an image for its own security" (280–304).

11 Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 49–50: "Homosexual parallels in *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) arose from a vision both films had of the monster as an antisocial figure in the same way that gay people were 'things' that

should not have happened. In both films the homosexuality of director James Whale may have been a force in the vision."

12 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 116, 130. Subsequent page references are given parenthetically.

13 In the absence of a reliable critical history of transsexuality, it is best to turn to the standard medical accounts themselves. See, especially, Benjamin, *Transsexual Phenomenon*; Green and Money, *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment*; and Stoller, *Sex and Gender*. For overviews of cross-cultural variation in the institutionalization of sex/gender, see W. Williams, *Spirit and the Flesh*, 252–76; Shapiro, "Transsexualism," 262–68. For accounts of particular institutionalizations of transgender practices that employ surgical alteration of the genitals, see Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman*; Roscoe, "Priests of the Goddess." Adventurous readers curious about contemporary nontranssexual genital alteration practices may contact E.N.I.G.M.A. (Erotic Neoprimitive International Genital Modification Association), SASE to LaFarge-werks, 2329 N. Leavitt, Chicago, IL 60647.

14 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 16.

15 See Butler, "Introduction," 4, and passim, *Bodies That Matter.*

16 A substantial body of scholarship informs these observations: H. Rubin, "Transformations" provides a productive starting point for developing not only a political economy of sex, but of gendered subjectivity; on gender recruitment and attribution, see Kessler and McKenna, *Gender*; on gender as a system of marks that naturalizes sociological groups based on supposedly shared material similarities, I have been influenced by some ideas on race in Guillaumin, "Race and Nature"; and by Wittig, "The Mark of Gender."

17 Although I mean "chaos" here in its general sense, it is interesting to speculate about the potential application of scientific chaos theory to model the emergence of stable structures of gendered identities out of the unstable matrix of material attributes, and on the production of proliferating gender identities from a relatively simple set of gendering procedures.

15

TRANSGENDER STUDIES

Queer Theory's Evil Twin

If queer theory was born of the union of sexuality studies and feminism, transgender studies can be considered queer theory's evil twin: it has the same parentage but willfully disrupts the privileged family narratives that favor sexual identity labels (like gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual) over the gender categories (like man and woman) that enable desire to take shape and find its aim.

In the first volume of *GLQ*, I published my first academic article, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," an autobiographically inflected performance piece drawn from my experiences of coming out as a transsexual. The article addressed four distinct theoretical moments. The first was Judith Butler's then recent, now paradigmatic, linkage of gender with the notion of trouble. Gender's absence renders sexuality largely incoherent, yet gender refuses to be the stable foundation on which a system of sexuality can be theorized.[1] A critical reappraisal of transsexuality, I felt, promised a timely and significant contribution to the analysis of the intersection of gender and sexuality.

The second moment was the appearance of Sandy Stone's "The 'Empire' Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," which pointedly criticized Janice G. Raymond's paranoiac *Transsexual Empire* and called on transsexual people to articulate new narratives of self that better expressed the authenticity of

transgender experience. I considered my article on transgender rage an explicit answer to that call.

The third moment was Leslie Feinberg's little pamphlet, *Transgender Liberation*. Feinberg took a preexisting term, *transgender*, and invested it with new meaning, enabling it to become the name for Stone's theorized posttranssexualism. Feinberg linked the drive to inhabit this newly envisioned space to a broader struggle for social justice. I saw myself as a fellow traveler.

Finally, I perceived a tremendous utility, both political and theoretical, in the new concept of an anti-essentialist, postidentitarian, strategically fluid "queerness." It was through participation in Queer Nation—particularly its San Francisco–based spin-off, Transgender Nation—that I sharpened my theoretical teeth on the practice of transsexuality.

When I came out as transsexual in 1992, I was acutely conscious, both experientially and intellectually, that transsexuals were considered abject creatures in most feminist and gay or lesbian contexts; yet, I considered myself both feminist and lesbian. I saw GLQ as the leading vehicle for advancing the new queer theory, and I saw in queer theory a potential for attacking the antitranssexual moralism so unthinkingly embedded in most progressive analyses of gender and sexuality without resorting to a reactionary, homophobic, and misogynistic counteroffensive.

I sought instead to dissolve and recast the ground that identity genders in the process of staking its tent. By denaturalizing and thus deprivileging nontransgender practices of embodiment and identification, and by simultaneously enacting a new narrative of the wedding of self and flesh, I intended to create new territories, both analytic and material, for a critically refigured transsexual practice. Embracing and identifying with the figure of Frankenstein's monster, claiming the transformative power of a return from abjection, felt like the right way to go.

Looking back a decade later, I see that in having chosen to speak as a famous literary monster, I not only found a potent voice through which to offer an early formulation of transgender theory but also situated myself (again, like Frankenstein's monster) in a drama of familial abandonment, a fantasy of revenge against those who had cast me out, and a yearning for personal redemption. I wanted to help define *queer* as a family to which transsexuals belonged. The queer vision that animated my life, and the lives of so many others in the brief historic moment of the early 1990s, held out the dazzling prospect of a compensatory, utopian reconfiguration of community. It seemed an anti-oedipal, ecstatic leap into a postmodern space of possibility in which the foundational containers of desire could be ruptured to release a

raw erotic power that could be harnessed to a radical social agenda. That vision still takes my breath away.

A decade later, with another Bush in the White House and another war in the Persian Gulf, it is painfully apparent that the queer revolution of the early 1990s yielded, at best, only fragile and tenuous forms of liberal progress in certain sectors and did not radically transform society—and as in the broader world, so too in the academy. Queer theory has become an entrenched, though generally progressive, presence in higher education, but it has not realized the (admittedly utopian) potential I (perhaps naively) sensed there for a radical restructuring of our understanding of gender, particularly of minoritized and marginalized manifestations of gender, such as transsexuality. While queer studies remains the most hospitable place to undertake transgender work, all too often queer remains a code word for "gay" or "lesbian," and all too often transgender phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual orientation and sexual identity as the primary means of differing from heteronormativity.

Most disturbingly, *transgender* increasingly functions as the site in which to contain all gender trouble, thereby helping secure both homosexuality and heterosexuality as stable and normative categories of personhood. This has damaging, isolative political corollaries. It is the same developmental logic that transformed an anti-assimilationist *queer* politics into a more palatable LGBT civil rights movement, with T reduced to merely another (easily detached) genre of sexual identity rather than perceived, like race or class, as something that cuts across existing sexualities, revealing in often unexpected ways the means through which all identities achieve their specificities.

The field of transgender studies has taken shape over the past decade in the shadow of queer theory. Sometimes it has claimed its place in the queer family and offered an in-house critique, and sometimes it has angrily spurned its lineage and set out to make a home of its own. Either way, transgender studies is following its own trajectory and has the potential to address emerging problems in the critical study of gender and sexuality, identity, embodiment, and desire in ways that gay, lesbian, and queer studies have not always successfully managed. This seems particularly true of the ways that transgender studies resonates with disability studies and intersex studies, two other critical enterprises that investigate atypical forms of embodiment and subjectivity that do not readily reduce to heteronormativity, yet that largely fall outside the analytic framework of sexual identity that so dominates queer theory.

As globalization becomes an ever more inescapable context in which all our lives transpire, it is increasingly important to be sensitive to the ways that

identities invested with the power of Euro-American privilege interact with non-Western identities. If the history and anthropology of gender and sexuality teach us anything, it is that human culture has created many ways of putting together bodies, subjectivities, social roles, and kinship structures—that vast apparatus for producing intelligible personhood that we call "gender." It is appallingly easy to reproduce the power structures of colonialism by subsuming non-Western configurations of personhood into Western constructs of sexuality and gender.

It would be misguided to propose transgender studies as queer theory for the global marketplace—that is, as an intellectual framework that is less inclined to export Western notions of sexual selves, less inclined to expropriate indigenous non-Western configurations of personhood. Transgender studies, too, is marked by its First World point of origin. But the critique it has offered to queer theory is becoming a point of departure for a lively conversation, involving many speakers from many locations, about the mutability and specificity of human lives and loves. There remains in that emerging dialogue a radical queer potential to realize.

Notes

First published in GLQ: *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004): 212–15.

1 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.

16

TRANSING THE QUEER (IN)HUMAN

My very first article, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix," published in *GLQ* twenty years ago, addressed questions of transgender embodiment and affect through the figuration of (in)human monstrosity. I have stayed close ever since to the themes and approaches laid out in that initial work and have noted with interest how current queer critical attention to the nonhuman world of objects, and to the weird potential becomings of vital materialities and matterings, resonate with the concerns I addressed back then.

At the time, my goal was to find some way to make the subaltern speak. Transsexuals such as myself were then still subordinated to a hegemonic interlocking of cis sexist feminist censure and homosexual superiority, psychomedical pathologization, legal proscription, mass media stereotyping, and public ridicule. The only option other than reactively saying "no we're not" to every negative assertion about us was to change the conversation, to inaugurate a new language game. My strategy for attempting that was to align my speaking position with everything by which "they" abjected us. It was to forgo the human, a set of criteria by which I could only fail as an embodied subject.

It was to allow myself to be moved by the centrifugal force pushing me away from the anthropocentric, to turn that expulsive energy into something else through affective labor, and to return it with a disruptive difference. I

embraced "darkness" as a condition of interstitiality and unrepresentability beyond the positive registers of light and name and reason, as a state of transformable negativity, as a groundless primordial resource. As I said then, "I feel no shame in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with nonhuman material being. Everything emerges from the same matrix of possibilities." Speaking as-if Frankenstein's monster—an articulate, surgically constructed (in)human biotechnological entity—felt like a clever, curiously cognizable strategy for speaking as a transsexual, for talking back to hegemonic forces and finding a way around.

I like to put parentheses around the "in" in (in)human because what appeals to me most about monstrosity as I have lived it is its intimate vacillation with human status, the simultaneously there-and-not-there nature of a relationship between the two. (In)human suggests the gravitational tug of the human for bodies proximate to it, as well as the human's magnetic repulsions of things aligned contrary to it. It speaks to the imperiousness of a human standard of value that would measure all things yet finds all things lacking and less-than in comparison to itself; at the same time, it speaks to the resistance of being enfolded into the human's inclusive exclusions, to fleeing the human's embrace. (In)human thus cuts both ways, toward remaking what human has meant and might yet come to be, as well as toward what should be turned away from, abandoned in the name of a better ethics.

Over two decades, I have worked to establish transgender studies as a recognized interdisciplinary academic field by editing journals and anthologies, organizing conferences, making films, conducting historical research, training students, hiring faculty, and building programs. My goal has been to create venues in which trans voices can be in productive dialogue with others in ways that reframe the conditions of life for those who—to critically trans (rather than critically queer) Ruth Gilmore's definition of racism—experience "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" because of their gender nonnormativity.[1]

This, for me, has been an "other conversation" that becomes possible when monsters speak. I consider working to enable more felicitous conditions of possibility for more powerful acts of transgender speech to be vital work that nevertheless carries many risks: it can bring too much that might better remain wild to the attention of normativizing forces, produce forms of gender intelligibility that foreclose alternatives and constrain freedom, consolidate identities in rigid and hierarchized forms, police discourses through institutionalization, and privilege some speakers over others.

Yet I still believe that advancing transgender studies within the academy is a risk worth taking if we bring our most radical visions of justice with us as we try to create something new, something better than the past has bequeathed us. I see the positive work of building transgender studies as one way to address half of the (in)human problematic: to abolish what "human" historically has meant, and to begin to make it mean otherwise through the inclusion of what it casts out (without, of course, abjecting something else in the process).

At the same time, in the (in)human problematic's other dimension, I am eager to make work with as much distance from the anthropic as possible. This is what I have tried to explore in the other half of my working life, through my involvement with the Somatechnics Research Network. Coined by a group of interdisciplinary critical and cultural studies scholars at Macquarie University in Sydney who were inspired by Nikki Sullivan's brilliant deconstructive work on body modification, *somatechnics* emerged as a shorthand label for a robust ontological account of embodiment as process.[2]

Its conversations draw on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body as sedimented habitual practices, as well as on rich Australian traditions of feminist philosophies of the body and critical studies of whiteness, race, and (post)coloniality.[3] Its ethical stance draws much from Jean-François Lyotard's *differend* and Emmanuel Levinas's stranger at the door, while its welcoming of strangeness owes much to queer and crip sensibilities.[4]

As a portmanteau word (soma, body, + technics, tools or techniques), somatechnics seeks to name the mutually constitutive and inextricably enmeshed nature of embodiment and technology, of being(s) and the means or modes of their (or its) becoming. Like Donna Haraway's *natureculture*, somatechnics dispenses with the additive logic of the "and" to signify the nonseparateness of phenomena that are misrepresented as the conjunction of separable parts.[5] It plays alongside the Derridean "always already" of embodiment's technologization as well as alongside Bernard Stiegler's notion of the body's "originary technicity."[6] At the same time, somatechnics provides a name for the "whole intermediary cluster of relations" that Michel Foucault tells us traverses the capillary spaces linking the anatamopolitical and biopolitical poles of biopower, that constitute a nexus of techniques of subjective individualization and techniques of totalizing control of populations.[7] It is the circuitry, and the pulse, through which materiality flexes itself into new arrangements.

Jami Weinstein is right to point out that somatechnics can carry forward a humanist remainder to whatever extent it concerns itself solely with people. But why must our interest in bodies be confined to human bodies alone? Fol-

lowing Giorgio Agamben, we can acknowledge that within the metaphysics of Western biopolitics, the human emerges precisely where bare biological life (zoe) is simultaneously captured by the political order (polis) to potentiate as the good life while also being excluded as mere life, the life shared with animals and other entities in the kingdom of the living.[8]

The threshold of biopolitical viability thus opens in two directions. Somatechnics, as a frame of reference in which body+milieu+means-of-becoming are constantly trading places and trying on each other's clothes, has the capacity to render the human nothing more than a local instantiation of more fundamental processes under special conditions. If transgender looks back to the human with the goal of making it something else, somatechnics faces a posthuman future.

In these repeated trans movements across the cut of (in)human difference, we find a potential for agential intra-action through which something truly new, something queer to what has come before, begins to materialize itself.

Notes

First published in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2015): 227–30.

1 Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.
2 N. Sullivan, "Transmogrification."
3 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.
4 Lyotard, *The Differend*; Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*.
5 Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*.
6 Stiegler, *Technics and Time*.
7 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1.
8 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1–5.

17

MORE WORDS ABOUT "MY WORDS TO VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN"

This short essay marks the third time I've commented in *GLQ* on its publication of my 1994 article, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix," a performative text that riffs on a scene in Mary Shelley's novel, in which the creature talks back to its maker, to stage a transsexual retort to the devaluation of trans lives through attributions of unnaturalness and artificiality. As such, it helps map a particular dimension of queer theory's development over the last twenty-five years.

While it's difficult to assess the importance of one's own work, I can certainly say I'm happy that my Frankenstein article still has a life of its own, a quarter-century after I first let it loose in the world, and that it remains one of the most read works in *GLQ*'s history (currently at number two, after Cathy Cohen's magnificent "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens"). I have a Google alert set for it and take great pleasure in seeing mentions of it pop up in my inbox from time to time, like postcards from the Travelocity gnome that keep me apprised of how and where it moves and of the company it keeps. It's gained a cult following, supplying pull-quotes for innumerable Tumblr and Twitter accounts, and it has contributed to wide-ranging scholarly conversations on embodiment, techno-cultural studies, gothic literature, and science fiction, affect theory, posthumanism, animal studies, radical veg-

anism, philosophy of the body, and the relationship between queer and trans studies, to name but a few of the contexts in which it has circulated.[1]

Although I didn't conceptualize it this way at the time, my Frankenstein article offered an implicit critique of what, in today's lingo, could be called an unstated cisnormative bias in queer theory. As I was writing it, I was reading the pair of articles on the queer politics of gay shame by Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick that opened the inaugural issue of *GLQ* and served as a point of departure for a new phase in queer studies' institutionalization; they supplied an unacknowledged background to my own thoughts on the affect of rage.[2]

Shame, as I understood it to be articulated in early queer theory, was predicated on the prior consolidation of a gendered subject and emanated from the subjective perception that one was a "bad" instantiation of something that one recognized and accepted oneself as being. But what if one balked at that gendering interpellation and was thus compelled to confront not bad feelings but the hegemonic materio-discursive practices that produce the meanings of our flesh to render us men or women in the first place? I was not ashamed that in the name of my own psychical life I needed to struggle against the dominant mode of gender's ontologization—I was enraged.

The first opportunity to reflect on "My Words to Victor Frankenstein" came in the tenth anniversary issue of *GLQ* (2004), to which I contributed an essay called "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin," which made explicit what previously had been unstated in my earlier work. My own involvement in self-styled radical queer networks in the early 1990s had led me to assume that "queer" was a family to which I belonged as a trans person, and guest-editing "The Transgender Issue" of *GLQ* (1998) helped confirm me in that belief. But as the new millennium dawned, it felt increasingly necessary to flag the ways that cisnormative queer theory naturalized the binary gender categories of man and woman, as the enabling condition of queer sexuality's intelligibility, and relegated questions about the production of the categories themselves to a marginal status or treated those questions as altogether extraneous to queer theory. Trans studies, I suggested, like queer of color or queer crip critique, offered a different way to imagine how queerness could be constituted by attending to other registers of difference than sexuality.

By the time I revisited the article yet again, in 2015, for *GLQ*'s special double issue "Queer Inhumanisms," the ground of queer theory had moved in directions that made my old article appear more prescient than marginal in its focus on a mode of embodiment excluded from the status of human and thereby deemed less worthy of life.[3] Reflecting a broader shift in the hu-

manities and social sciences, queer theory increasingly linked a biopolitical framework, which analyzed the segmentation of populations and the hierarchizing of its groups, with assemblage theories that helped conceptualize connections across scales of existence from the subatomic to the cosmic, and an ontological perspective that emphasized the intrinsic fluidity and liveliness of materiality.

In this emerging paradigm, questions about the interrelatedness of such categorizations of life as species, race, or sex and of how those categories, materialized in ways that created greater or less capacities for living, came to the foreground. As queer theory turned toward establishing transversal connections between many varieties of life enfleshed in ways that subordinated them to the white heteromasculine able-bodied figure atop Eurocentric modernity's humanist hierarchy of values—Man—it could now look differently on the figure of transsexual monstrosity already nestled within its folds, waiting to be apprehended anew.

Karen Barad's "TransMaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings," published in the "Queer Inhumanisms" issue of *GLQ*, articulated the affinities between my old Frankenstein article and the so-called new materialisms far more cogently than I ever have while deftly calling needed attention to the fraught relationship I suggested between processes of transsexuation and racialization. In the original 1994 article, I had written that my "rage colors me." I deliberately played on the polysemic shades of "color" to make space for holding a question that I did not then know how to properly frame, let alone answer, but which I would now pose as follows: To what extent might the affect that emanated from my own enmeshment as a white transgender person in what Alexander Weheliye has since termed "racializing biopolitical assemblages" share some kinship with affects emanating from others who have been differently racialized than I, differently subordinated in the hierarchies of life than I, yet with whom I could strive toward some commons that better sustains all of our differently enfleshed lives?[4]

Katrina Roen was the first scholar to comment on that phrase about transgender rage and color in her 2001 article "Transgender Theory and Embodiment: The Risk of Racial Marginalization" and to note, accurately, of me, "That she is colored by rage is explicit. How she is colored by race is not" (256). The unstated whiteness norm of academic transgender theorizing is something with which I have been deeply complicit, even in my best efforts to do otherwise.

One genealogy of transgender studies traces its root to Sandy Stone's "The 'Empire' Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," modeled, in part, on

Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," and written during Stone's years as Haraway's student in the History of Consciousness program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Haraway explicitly acknowledged that her figuration of the cyborg drew on queer of color feminisms; but Stone, crafting her own manifesto in the heady atmosphere where Gloria Anzaldúa published *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and Chela Sandoval was writing the dissertation that became *Methodology of the Oppressed*, did not make the deeper lineage or broader context of her figuration of the post-transsexual similarly explicit as her mentor had done for the cyborg, and it's taken a generation of scholarship to recover the ancestors and kin of color invisibilized within the post-transsexual strand of thinking that I think of as my home.

In Barad's engagement with my Frankenstein article, which they approach from the vantage point of quantum field theory, they dwell on the theme I dwelled on, of being a becoming that emerges from a nothingness that nevertheless teems with lively potentials. I still think the greatest strength of my article is the way it affectively transforms the experience of being abjected from the human because of one's mode of embodiment into the joyously empowering experience of embodying a new modality of techno-cultural life, predicated on different premises than those that subtend Man. And yet I take to heart Barad's critique of the metaphorics I deployed in the representation of that insight, of being thrown into "darkness," and emerging from the "blackness" from which "Nature itself spills forth."[5]

As Barad notes, however much my language aims at voicing a condition of unrepresentability or interstitiality, however much it strives to communicate a sense of the void as "full and fecund, rich and productive, actively creative and alive," it recapitulates "the underlying metaphysics of colonialist claims such as terrae nullius—the alleged void that the white settler claims to encounter in 'discovering undeveloped lands,' that is, lands allegedly devoid of the marks of 'civilization'—a logic that associates the beginning of space and time, of place and history, with the arrival of the white man."[6]

In other words, I inadvertently perpetuate the racist trope of imagining blackness as the unmarked and unacknowledged condition on which the existence of whiteness depends. Marquis Bey, in a recent article, "The Trans*-ness of Blackness, the Blackness of Trans*-ness," does a much better job than I at expressing my ill-formed intent when he says that blackness and transness "are differently inflected names for an anoriginal lawlessness" that manifests "in the modern world differently as race and gender fugitivity" (275).

I have no idea where "My Words to Victor Frankenstein" will go from here, or what it might have to do with queer theory in the future, or if it and queer theory will go anywhere else at all from here; all things come to an end at some point. But as we celebrate the bicentennial of Mary Shelley's novel and come to an even greater appreciation of how that work has always posed a feminist and implicitly queer, posthuman critique of Eurocentric biopolitical modernity, I'd be delighted for my own words to share in some degree the longevity of the words that inspired them, as they tag along for the ride with that famous literary monster and, hopefully, find new ways to have something to say to whatever present moments yet may come.

Notes

First published in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019): 39–44.

1 See Barad, "TransMaterialities"; Galofre and Misse, *Politicas trans*; Liberazioni, "Monstri (e) Queer"; N. Sullivan, "Transmogrification"; Weaver, "Monster Trans"; Zigarovich, *The TransGothic in Literature and Culture*.

2 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity."

3 See Muñoz et al., "Dossier: Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms."

4 Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

5 Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein," 251.

6 Barad, "TransMaterialities," 417.

This page intentionally left blank