

# Transgender activism

Shaping New Subjectivities: Paul B. Preciado and Maggie Nelson

# Transgender people in the world

Androgyny, Intersex, Hermaphrodites, transvestism = age old global phenomena

Gender identity versus gender role -> trans gender, non-binary, third gender

# GRS/SRS: gender/sex reassignment surgery

## Gender dysphoria

- Intersexuals -> involuntary GRS
- Transsexual-> transition
- 1917 first F-M, 1931 Dora Richter and Lily Elbe -> Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld
- Complex medical regime: hormone therapy, surgeries, other, underlying issues, psychological research

# Impact

Identity and sexuality -> legal possibility of gender change (with or without SRS)

Social and psychological implications

Global impact:

- Medical tourism
- SRS as response to homosexuality
- Forced sterilization

-> importance of culture (writing, making movies) to address these issues

# Non-binary into the mainstream?

Theme/character in films and books

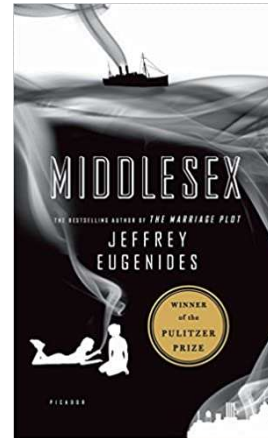
- 'reveal'/exposure
- Stereotype of deception -> trans as illusory

<-> trans cinema/literature from a trans experience

Impact on language: names, pronouns (they/them; iel in French) (compare to feminism)

Growing awareness with general public

-> polarization (woke, cancel culture)



## Eddie Redmayne says it was a mistake to play trans role in The Danish Girl

🕒 1 day ago

## Alain Borer : « Valider le pronom “iel” est un acte d'autocolonisation »

ENTRETIEN. Pour l'écrivain, la décision du « Robert » est consternante, dans la mesure où elle vassalise encore un peu plus la langue française à l'anglais.

Kathleen Stock, the philosophy professor at the centre of a row over her views on gender identification and transgender rights, has announced her resignation from the [University of Sussex](#).

Stock's resignation comes **three weeks after a protest** by some students at the university's Brighton campus, which included posters and graffiti calling for her dismissal.

She has said she believes gender identity does not outweigh biological sex “when it comes to law and policy”, and that people cannot change their biological sex.

In an email to staff, Adam Tickell, Sussex's vice-chancellor, said: “We had hoped that Prof Stock would feel able to return to work, and we would have supported her to do so.

# Transgender theory

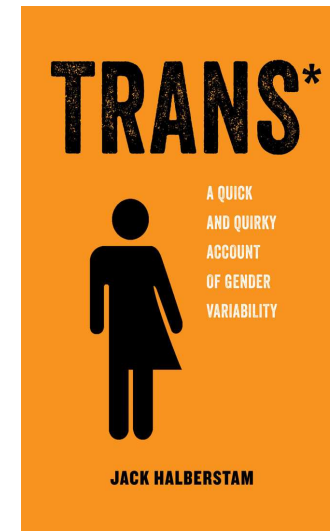
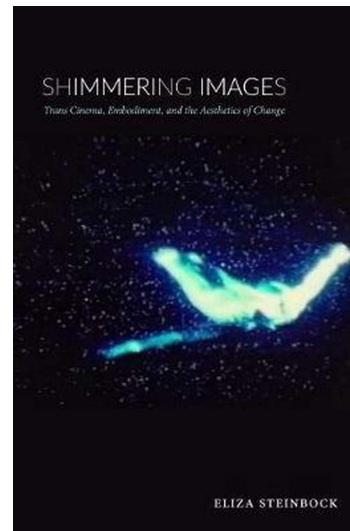
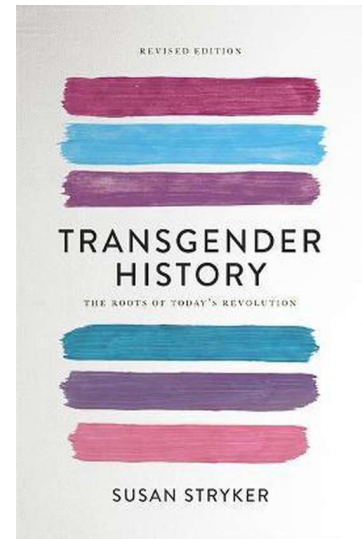
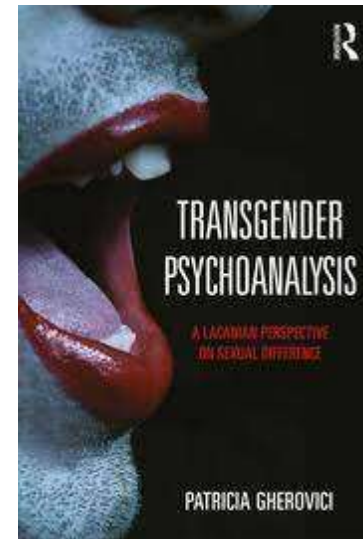
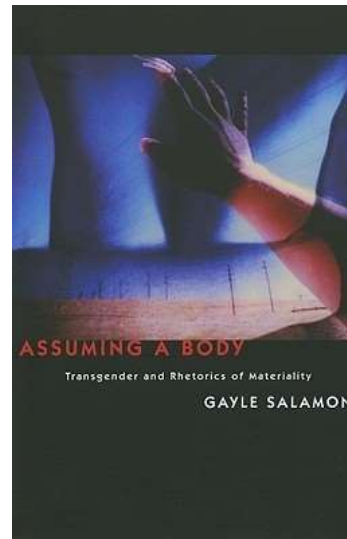
Judith Butler: *Gender trouble*

J. Jack Halberstam:  
*Female Masculinity -> Trans\**

## Trans theory

Susan Stryker, José Muñoz, Sandy Stone, Gayle Salamon, Patricia Gherovici, Eliza Steinbock, Paul Preciado, Jack Halberstam

-> queer theory, phenomenology, psychoanalysis and cultural analysis



Suggested rules for non-transsexuals speaking about transsexuals, transsexuality, transsexualism or trans\*

<https://sandystone.com/hale.rules.html>

1. Humility: you are not expert
2. Interrogate your subject position -> power
3. Beware of colonial subject position: exoticism – denial of subjectivity – exclusion – rehabilitation
4. Don't erase our voices (read what we've written)
5. Our words are part of conversations within our community
6. Don't totalize us
7. Don't uncritically quote non-trans experts
8. Start from hypothesis that “transsexual lives are lived hence liveable”



9. When talking about M-F transition, don't throw in references to F-M without asking about purpose of reference
10. If you judge political agenda, bear in mind your own political agenda
11. Focus on what trans\*experience tells you about \*yourself\* not about trans.
12. Can you travel in trans worlds? We can travel in your world
13. Don't use trope/figure/discourse of trans\* without writing about transsexual subjectivities, lives, experiences, embodiments
14. Not only one figure/trope/discourse of transsexuality
15. If we engage in angry critique, this is a \*gift\* not a rant

# Paul B.(Beatriz) Preciado

Key figure of trans theory

- Philosophy and theory of architecture @ New School (NY) and Princeton, student of Jacques Derrida and Agnes Heller, heavily influenced by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour
- Professor, museum director (MACBA) and curator (Kassel), and writer
- Column for Libération, trans-activist

Books:

*Countersexual Manifesto* ((2002) 2019)

*Testo Junkie: sex, drugs and biopolitics in the pharmacopornographic era* ((2008) 2013)

*Pornotopia: an essay on Playboy's architecture and bodypolitics* ((2014)

*An Apartment on Uranus* ((2018) 2020)

*Can the Monster Speak? Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts* (2021)



# 1930s until 1970s: era of industrial capitalism

Fordism and Taylorism

Big industrial production (assembly line): car industry and suburban housing

Mass production and consumption of commodities

# 1970s (crisis): shift towards new modes of production

Spectacular growth of new industries: biochemical, computers, communication industries

Third form of capitalism: technocapitalism -> biopolitics



War and cold war: boost for medical and biochemical industry

- Discovery and commercialization of new materials (plastics) and chemical substances (hormones, the pill) and new medical techniques (operations and transplants) -> make it possible to alter gender (transgender) and the body (cyborg)
- Intense Research into sexuality in the US -> disconnection of sex from reproduction -> rise of porn (1960s-70s)
- Psychotropic drugs -> make it possible to alter subjectivity



# The Pharmacopornographic era

Pharmacopornographic = processes of a biomolecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (pornographic) government of sexual subjectivity (...) that becomes visible only at the end of World War II

‘A new kind of hot, psychotropic, punk capitalism’ dependent on substances, symbols, signs and circuits rather than on commodities (p. 33)

# Technoscience

= hegemonic discourse and practice

Transforms **concepts** of psyche, libido, consciousness, femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, intersexuality and transsexuality **into tangible relations**. They are manifest in commercial chemical substances and molecules, biotype bodies, and fungible technological goods managed by multinationals. (p. 34)

‘toxic-pornographic subjectivities’

‘A punk hypermodernity’: the necessity to specify the cultural, political, and technological processes through which **the body as artifact acquires natural status** (p. 35)

*Sexdesign*: Pharmacopornographic biocapitalism does not produce *things*. It produces mobile ideas, living organs, symbols, desires, chemical reactions, and conditions of the soul (p. 36)

# Invention of a subject and its global reproduction

= pharmacopornographic business

What is expensive is research (prototype), what is cheap is reproduction

Information society as model for biopolitical production (Hardt & Negri):

- raw material = knowledge, information, communication and social relationships
- product = symbols and affects

# Porn as core business model of the internet

- Accessibility
- Model of maximum profitability: minimum investment, direct sales in real time, instant satisfaction -> model for business on internet

Raw materials of today's production processes are excitation, erections, ejaculation, pleasure and feelings of self-satisfaction, omnipotent control, and total destruction

What drives this economy (*pharmacopornism*) is *potentia gaudendi* or orgasmic force: the (real or virtual) strength of a body's total excitation. (p. 41)



# Potentia gaudendi

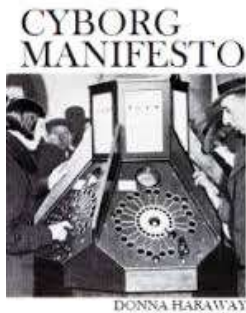
**Indeterminate capacity:** it has no gender; it is neither male nor female, neither human nor animal, neither animated nor inanimated -> compare to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'desire'

Sum of the potential of excitation inherent in any material molecule -> aspires to its own extension and transformation in pleasure

- Impermanence
- Malleability
- Impossibility of possessing and retaining it -> it cannot be reified or turned into private property
- Event, relation, practice, or process

Most **abstract** and most **material** of all workforces. It is inextricably carnal and digital, viscous yet representational by numerical values, a phantasmatic or molecular wonder that can be transformed into capital.

# The effect on subjectivity



**Technoliving:** blurs distinction between art, performance, media, design, and architecture -> either not-yet-alive, or already-dead

Biopolitics becomes biotech politics or 'monster politics' = power and control exerted over a technoliving and connected whole

Profound effect on the body and on gender as construction

Every (human) being possesses potentia gaudendi, power to reproduce molecular joy and therefore also possesses productive power without being consumed and depleted in the process



David Cronenberg eXistenZ 1999

# Biotech versus naked technolife

A body stripped of all legal or political status whose use is intended as a source of production of *potentia gaudendi* (Raw & Biotech)

*A corpus pornographicus* lacking any right to citizenship, authorship, and right to work, is composed by and subject to self-surveillance and global mediatization

# Bio-techno program

Control the sexuality of those bodies codified as women and cause the ejaculation of those bodies codified as men

Who? Pharma & audiovisual industry: two tentacles of a gigantic, viscous built-in circuit

-> no longer the State, but commercial multinationals

Aim = profit (capital) by transforming potentia gaudendi into capital

Excluded from this regime = precarious bodies -> not yet been capitalized as bioconsumers/producers by the Western pharmaceutical industry (economy of invention/creative industry), 'raw' subjects

# A Body-essay

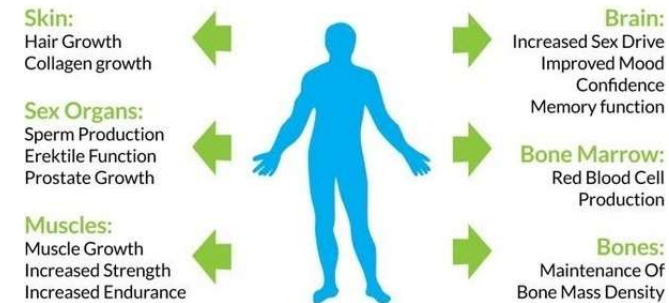
Book is based on a lot of research (PhD)

- History of the pill, of hormones, porn industry...
- Foucauldian view of late 20th century
- Who determines who can use which substances? <https://www.testofuel.com/tf/what-does-taking-testosterone-do-to-a-woman/>
- 'Trans' versus junkie (anabolic steroids) -> two 'abnormal' subject positions

Autobiographical style

- Experiment with testosterone -> trans-sexuality (see Counter-sexual manifesto)
- Effects of testosterone on the body and the mind but also on the style of the book

## The Effects Of Testosterone



# Activism and transition

## Activism

- Against power of farmacopornographic industries -> third world, AIDS, sex workers
- Mistake of feminism: adopting the pill and accepting power of pharmaceutical industry
- Not return to “natural” state -> take control of hormones and of potentia gaudendi and creative new forms of sexuality and gender not controlled by multinationals

## Transition

Beatriz to Paul (2018) + also preferred pronoun male

-> no longer female, but also not like a man:  
state of **transit**



# Preciado on love and on covid

- <https://www.zonebooks.org/news-preciado-passaporta>
- <https://www.artforum.com/slant/paul-b-preciado-on-life-after-covid-19-82586>

## 2. Maggie Nelson The Argonauts

°1979

literary author/poet

Creative writing at CalArts

Mix between theory,  
autobiography, poetry, and art  
criticism





# The Argonauts (2015)

“I Love You” is like “the Argonaut renewing his ship during its voyage without changing its name.” Just as the *Argo*’s parts may be replaced over time, but the boat is still called the *Argo*, whenever the lover utters the phrase “I love you,” its meaning must be renewed by each use, as “the very task of language is to give one and the same phrase inflections which will be new forever.” (5)



# Different narrative layers

- Queer love story of Maggie Nelson and Harry Dodge: exploration of assimilation versus queer subversivity in the wake of proposition 8 (=legal bill in California undoing the right to gay marriage)
- Complex family situations
  - Stepmother versus mother
  - Ordinary life, homeliness, motherhood versus queer activism
- Effects of hormones on female body: Maggie's pregnancy and Harry's transition -> image of the *Argo*
- Creative writing and theory

# A new type of writing?

## Precursors/sources of inspiration

- *Écriture féminine* & lesbian writers from the 1970-1980s: Hélène Cixous, Audre Lorde, Monique Wittig: formal experiments, looking for new, bodily expressions of feminine subjectivity (also in male writers e.g., James Joyce)
- American literature: New York School: Frank o'Hara, Queer poetry Eileen Myles, New Narrative Robert Glück
- Homage to different types of theorists known for their style: Roland Barthes, Judith Butler, D.W. Winnicott, Eve Sedgwick, Susan Sontag -> Influence of *A Lover's Discourse (Uit de taal van de verliefde)* (Roland Barthes)