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## Introduction

### *Transfeminist Perspectives*

This book is born of the conviction that feminist studies and transgender studies are intimately connected to one another in their endeavor to analyze epistemologies and practices that produce gender. Despite this connection, they are far from integrated. *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies* seeks to highlight the productive and sometimes fraught potential of this relationship. Feminist, women's, and gender studies grew partly from Simone de Beauvoir's observation that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."<sup>1</sup> Transgender studies extends this foundation, emphasizing that there is no natural process by which *anyone* becomes woman, and also that *everyone's* gender is made: Gender, and also sex, are made through complex social and technical manipulations that naturalize some while abjecting others. In this, both feminist and transgender studies acknowledge the mutual imbrications of gender and class formations, dis/abilities, racializations, political economies, incarcerations, nationalisms, migrations and dislocations, and so forth. We share, perhaps, a certain delight and trepidation in the awareness that gender is trouble: Gender may trouble every imaginable social relation and fuel every imaginable social hierarchy; it may also threaten to undo itself and us with it, even as gender scholars simultaneously practice, undo, and reinvest in gender.<sup>2</sup>

Women's and gender studies have registered increasing interest in things transgender since the mid-1990s. Scholars have organized conferences on the topic, and numerous feminist journals have published special transgender issues.<sup>3</sup> This interest has been inspired in part by inquiry into the meanings of gender, bodies, and embodiment, by transnational and cross-cultural studies that address the varied ways in which cultures ascribe gender, and also by institutional practices that circumscribe or broaden the range of gender legibility. Interest is further inspired by the multiple arrivals and iterations of transgender in classrooms, playing fields, and political movements. As a direct result of these

arrivals, the meanings associated with such terms as “gender,” “transgender,” “woman,” “man,” and “queer” have changed dramatically over the last two decades. Nevertheless, transgender remains institutionally marginal to gender and women’s studies. As a well-established field, gender and women’s studies may include transgender as an add-on, without fundamentally changing the theoretical articulations and material practices that all but ensure that the definition of “women’s studies” will position transgender as something outside or other than itself. Gender and women’s studies is one place where transgender studies has managed to make an institutional home (the other is LGBT studies), but it is as yet an ambivalent home. *Transfeminist Perspectives* suggests that trans might be central, not marginal, to gender and women’s studies.

At the simplest level, *Transfeminist Perspectives* offers multidisciplinary models for integrating feminist and transgender theory, practice, and pedagogy. Its authors come from and teach in a wide range of scholarly disciplines, including English, history, cultural studies, zoology, evolutionary biology, psychology, public health, social justice, economics, law, sociology, sports education, sexuality and/or gender and women’s and/or LGBT studies. These same authors also work as performance artists, bloggers, poets, musicians, administrators, grassroots activists, and nonprofit organizers. Although most articles primarily consider U.S. and/or Canadian contexts, transnational circulations and hierarchies are never completely out of sight and are sometimes central. With essays that focus on how gender is practiced (through scholarly disciplines, university administrations, athletics, law, public health, national border control, and other areas), we hope to make the conversation between feminist and trans studies more accessible and more relevant to scholars of gender in general.

If the affinity between transgender studies and gender studies is obvious, we recognize that it is not necessarily easy. Just about everywhere, trans-literacy remains low. Transgender studies is all but absent in most university curricula, even in gender and women’s studies programs. For the most part, institutionalized versions of women’s and gender studies incorporate transgender as a shadowy interloper or as the most radical outlier within a constellation of identity categories (e.g., LGBT). Conversation is limited by a perception that transgender studies only or primarily concerns transgender-identified individuals—a small number of “marked” people whose gender navigations are magically believed to be separate from the cultural practices that constitute gender for everyone else. Such tokenizing invites the suggestion that too much time is spent on too few people; simultaneously it obscures or refuses the possibility that transgender studies is about everyone in so far as it offers insight into how and why we *all* “do” gender.

But the problem runs deeper than the liberal identity-based values that continue to bring “marginalized others” into curricular relevance. Real conflict continues to separate transgender studies and feminist studies as arenas of inquiry. Our interests, vocabularies, and epistemological foundations can seem—and at times are—opposed. What do we variously mean by “gender” or

“sex”? How is the body made to matter? Critically for us here, how do transgender studies and women’s studies *each* make the body matter such that each field suspects the other of essentialized beliefs about which parts matter most? To whom, who gets to name them, and for what purposes? How do the environments we build and the visual, verbal, and institutional signs with which we build them reflect deep-seated attachments to the sex/gender status quo and all its hierarchies, contrary to our own theorizations? Given these tensions, we might characterize gender studies at the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium to be composed of disparate bodies differently freighted gender and sex while quizzically looking sideways—and occasionally winking—at each other. The sideways glance might be cautious, but it is surely born of a sense that, alone, neither *feminist* nor *trans* is living up to its most expansive vision and also that, at times, they fail us.

*Transfeminist Perspectives* critiques the constricting tendencies of disciplinary and identitarian investments. In this volume, the compound “transfeminist” arises out of a desire to see both “trans” and “feminist” do more flexible work; we would like to see them not only opening each to the other but opening broadly in all directions, as though they are *both* potential prefixes *and* suffixes that may modify and be modified by participants whose names we may not even yet know. Bringing feminist studies and transgender studies into more explicit conversation pushes us toward better translation, greater transliteracy, and deeper collaboration through which we may develop critical theoretical and methodological tools that will be relevant to all scholars within and across gender studies.

This book is organized into three parts based on three thematics that are central to feminist, gender, queer, and trans studies: Part I, “‘This Much Knowledge’: Flexible Epistemologies,” considers the sources, proliferations, and contingencies of knowledge and authority; Part II, “Categorical Insufficiencies and ‘Impossible People,’” tracks border crossings and somatic and definitional excesses as they become particularly concrete in the classroom and university infrastructures, public health, and even national border patrols; Part III, “Valuing Subjects: Toward Unexpected Alliances,” considers the practical economies, violences, and desires that discipline gender and invites surprising—what we might call transfeminist—alliances in our academic and social-movement practices. The pedagogical logic of this ordering follows historical developments of feminist and trans theories and also transfeminist commitments to connect classrooms, social movements, and the world beyond. However, those for whom transgender is a relatively new arena might prefer an order that introduces trans issues. An introductory pedagogical ordering could start with Clark A. Pomerleau, who provides perspective on college policies generally, and Pat Griffin, who focuses specifically on athletics. The reader might then continue with Julia Serano’s reflections on misogyny and trans-misogyny and Christoph Hanssmann’s work on transgender trainings offered to health-care providers.

Gender and women's studies scholars regularly request glossaries of trans terminologies and "Trans 101" lessons. The request reflects the non-integration of transgender in gender studies thus far, but, perhaps equally, the fact that no standard lexicon exists; vocabularies and uses are invented and just as quickly challenged as we discover their unintended implications, exclusions, and limitations. It would be fair to characterize trans studies as a field peopled by those who will not rest content with the disciplining behaviors of language, and thus, intentionally or not, we nurture that other quality of language to be prolific and unruly. Some people even prefer the ensuing grammatical disasters, because they sometimes signify something profoundly accurate. In many locales, for example, "they" is a common third-person singular pronoun that some people feel is more flexible and "roomy" than the (over)determined and singular "he," "she," or even "ze." No single individual can keep up with the situational generation of new words across all communities, and published works are always already behind the curve: Glossary definitions in excellent trans studies articles published just one year ago may *now* seem (to some) to be mischaracterizations. The truth is, even within generally agreed upon lexicons, we discover that every term carries different implications for different communities.

That said, given the general unfamiliarity with trans studies, it is worth providing some trans social-movement perspective, addressing some common misconceptions, and offering some linguistic practices. A limited and provisional glossary, along with notes on usage, follows this introduction. Readers unfamiliar with trans lexicons may wish to read the "Note on Terms and Concepts" now or before delving into the chapters.

"Transgender" was coined in its contemporary sense in the early 1990s, when trans activist Leslie Feinberg used it to name a budding movement uniting all possible oppressed gender minorities. Although they did so in sometimes very different ways and in different communities, transsexuals, drag queens, butch lesbians, cross-dressers, feminine men, and masculine women all in some senses crossed, or transed, gender, and most modern "Western" societies took punitive measures to keep such crossings invisible or in check.<sup>4</sup> Transgender was thus first a social-movement organizing principle and came also to be the name of an identity that many people adopt to describe themselves. The ever-evolving list of trans-ing identities that now fit under the "transgender umbrella" may also include FTM, MTF, gender queer, trans woman, trans man, butch queen, fem queen, tranny, transy, drag king, bi-gender, pan-gender, femme, butch, stud, two spirit, people with intersex conditions, androgynous, gender-fluid, gender euphoric, third gender, *and* man and woman—and that list barely scratches the surface.

But the power of transgender does not depend on how many named categories we develop. Far more importantly, transgender is powerful because it names a politics stemming from a tri-fold awareness: First, binary gender norms and gender hierarchies are established and maintained through violence against those who visibly deviate from them; second, many humans—in their gender

identities and/or gender expressions—do not conform to conventional gender expectations or moral judgments about what kinds of gender “go with” what kind of body; and third, this gender variation itself is intensely valuable as one facet of the creative diversities essential to wise and flourishing societies. This tri-fold awareness is the foundation of trans alliances that ideally cut across nuanced identity labels to make life more livable for people who trans gender, particularly those who are most vulnerable to institutionalized punitive systems, such as incarcerated people, homeless people, poor people, unemployed and underemployed people, undocumented people, youth, and people of color.

In keeping with trans’s work as a prefix meaning “to cross,” the most expansive definitions of transgender emphasize movement away from the culturally specific expectations associated with the sex one is assigned at birth and a movement toward gender self-determination.<sup>5</sup> By this expansive definition, most feminists should be seeing feminism as a transgender phenomenon: Some version of gender self-determination and resistance to binary gender norms and oppressions has always been central to feminism. Transgender phenomena are also created through the accusation of gender deviance, and this accusation is part and parcel of what maintains social hierarchies and the appearance of binary gender. Historically, not only feminism but also lesbian and gay desires and embodiments have been regarded as transgender phenomena: In a sexist and homophobic culture, feminist claims and gay and lesbian desires are all gender-crossing, gender-variant, and gender-deviant. Trans-gender policing has been one node of racialization and the maintenance of class hierarchy, reflected in the practice of calling a grown man “boy” or pretty or fairy, or deeming any woman too masculine or too sexual, too strong or fast, domineering, emasculating, or “castrating” of men. Transgender perspective thus includes political awareness of the ways that social institutions and built environments train all people to pass as a single, consistent, legible, and acceptable gender; simultaneously, that we speak at all is owed to recognition of the ubiquity of gender variance.

In practice, transgender is usually used less expansively and is often reserved for people with significant cross-gender identification, including people who were assigned female at birth and visibly identify and/or live as men (people on a female-to-male spectrum, trans men, and people on a trans-masculine spectrum) and people who were assigned male at birth and visibly identify and/or live as women (people on a male-to-female spectrum, trans women, and people on a trans-feminine spectrum). Reserving transgender for this kind of gender crossing recognizes the particularities of the experience of significant cross-gender identification; it also acknowledges that legal, medical, and social institutions specifically target gender transition and transsexuality with extreme forms of gender oppression that make it difficult to use public accommodations, public services, and many public spaces, and to do anything that requires legal identification documents.

At the same time, limiting the definition of transgender this way may perpetuate the marginalization of trans by reinforcing the misconception that

“trans” describes a very small number of visible people who (by definition) are not everywhere. It may constrict trans itself by requiring certain conformities of people who would take up the name. And, most dangerously, restricting trans to its MTF and FTM manifestations may inhibit alliances by signaling investments in the *relative* normativities and privileges accorded to “less” gender-transgressive phenomena (e.g., being a feminist, being a lesbian, being a masculine woman); such investments avoid and sometimes actively refuse the possibility that trans issues *are* feminist issues and are *within*, not beyond, the scope of feminism.

The belief that trans is rare comes in part from the common misconception that transgender and transsexuality will be visible and obvious (i.e., “You can tell by looking”); therefore, if someone appears to be a woman or man, that person surely is not trans. In truth, the vast majority of people with significant cross-gender identification are not visible as such, and they are not likely to come out as trans whether or not they are living in their gender identity. Many trans people do not have any connection to, and are thus not even known to, trans- or LGBT or queer organizations; this includes many trans students even on campuses that do have trans activist and support groups. It is therefore accurate to assume that we know nothing about other people’s gender histories and identifications. We are meeting, working with, learning from, and teaching trans people all the time.

The other common misconception that shrinks awareness of trans presence is that transsexual identifications are based on surgery. For some people, surgeries are one deeply important aspect of gender self-determination, but it is not surgical status that defines people as transsexual. In fact, the vast majority of transsexual people and people with significant cross-gender identification will have no genital surgeries: Many trans people have no access to medical care, surgery may not be appropriate for many, and many do not want it.<sup>6</sup> The transgender-liberation movement seeks to improve access to all forms of health care and recognizes that body modifications are vital to many people’s gender self-determination. With health care and gender self-determination as core goals, the movement resists being *defined by* the medical establishment that actively excludes the majority of people and pathologizes transsexuality and gender variance. Departing from surgical definitions, a recent study by the University of California found that .3 percent of people (1 in 333) in the United States experience significant cross-gender identification. Many more experience a degree of gender fluidity or gender nonconformity that makes the expectations associated with a binary gender structure profoundly alienating. Along with feminist, queer, disability, and critical-race theories, trans studies recognizes that *all* bodies are made, one kind of body no more or less technologically produced than the other.

Feminist and trans pedagogies begin by honoring this variation regardless of whether it is visible to everyone. Learning not to impose gendered assumptions on others and learning to use language that resists binary gender whenever

possible helps. (For examples, see the glossary and usage guide.) “Getting the pronouns right” is not always central to people’s life chances, but it might be a barometer that measures the extent to which an environment is respectful and inclusive.<sup>7</sup> It should be no more difficult to address people by their preferred names and pronouns than it is to comply with the name changes that some people adopt when they marry. However, many people—even people who otherwise work to deconstruct gender binaries—feel uncomfortable calling someone “he” unless that person conforms to cultural expectations of what a “he” looks like. Closely related, some people may assume that he should use the women’s bathroom because he “still looks like a woman,” and therefore that is where he belongs. At the very same time, people on a trans-feminine spectrum (for example, a person who is assumed by others to have a penis and who wears women’s clothing and may identify as a woman or as trans) are often pointedly unwelcome in the women’s room.<sup>8</sup> These cultural habits continue to structure campus and classroom climate; they also prevent the majority of trans people from making their trans identities visible. When efforts are not made to break these habits, it signals disbelief in gender variance; it also suggests that there is no place for trans people. Not least, it tells us precisely where feminist ethics and gender and women’s studies draw lines in the extent to which they can tolerate nonbinary sex/gender, and it suggests that trans identities cross that line into some other inscrutable or impossible form of existence.

In the unruly generation of new language, it is no accident that people are discovering such terms as trans\*, Tiresian, and so forth to name new possibilities and to rename the binary-resistant ontologies that exist within and beyond our grasp. Not surprisingly, many authors in this collection take a moment to reflect on how they are each making trans, or trans-, or trans\* work. Bobby Noble writes of trans “not [as] transgression through gender and/or national, cultural crossings, necessarily, but trans as a modality for reformulating institutionalized and bounded disciplinaries. . . .” Many reiterate the queer-activist and queer-theory call for an anti-identitarian politics. Aren Aizura, for example, argues that we need “a trans theory that not only acknowledges its debts to feminist theory and incorporates feminist critiques of heteronormativity but turns ‘trans’ in an anti-identitarian direction.” *Trans-* emphasizes its work as a prefix. It is possible that the asterisk in *trans\** functions as a truncation symbol the way that putting an asterisk after a word or fragment works in many library search systems. The tension here is that we cannot be claiming to signal literally *all* possible things that could follow trans-: We do not always or equally mean, for example, transpire, transverse, Transylvania, transform, transduct, and transport (although sometimes we might). Once, in an impulse to connect and to leave open simultaneously, I attempted to type \*trans\*feminist\*. As I typed, I discovered that my computer reads these asterisks as commands to bold whatever they surround; thus, what my computer types is not \*trans\*feminist\* but rather **transfeminist\***. This would carry its own set of implications—not what I had in mind, but possibly worth considering. The prefix dash and the asterisk



each force us to know *trans* as modification and motion across time and space. It is not simply a noun. With its mobilities, it modifies; it is a motion anticipating a second; it enacts, it continues with a question, and a star.

### **“This Much Knowledge”: Flexible Epistemologies**

In a 1991 article often credited with helping launch the field of transgender studies, Sandy Stone asked whether and how it is possible for the transsexual to speak: “To attempt to occupy a place as a speaking subject within the traditional gender frame is to become complicit in the discourse which one wishes to deconstruct.”<sup>9</sup> Feminist theory and trans theory have each concerned themselves with ways of knowing, and they have elaborated critiques of the ways that universalizing discourses become authoritative by making other ways of speaking and knowing impossible. Central to this critique is consideration of the *site* of knowledge production. What counts as “knowledge,” and how are legitimacy and authority dependent on the location of its production? What is “experience,” and what role does it play in the production of authoritative and marginalized knowledges? Who can speak, and from what subject position?<sup>10</sup> These questions have infused feminist theory with anti-identitarian, transgender potential, as realized in the work of such philosophers as Monique Wittig and Judith Butler. Transgender studies historian Susan Stryker draws on these and also Michel Foucault’s concept of subjugated knowledges to assert that “experiential knowledge is as legitimate as other, supposedly more “objective” forms of knowledge, and is in fact necessary for understanding the political dynamics of the situation.”<sup>11</sup>

Transgender studies could emerge as an academic field only when transsexuals began to produce themselves through counter-discourses and those discourses began to find slender footholds in the academy. Prior to this emergence in the 1990s, experts in various medical specialties, such as endocrinology, psychiatry, and surgery, had produced “the transsexual” and written volumes on transsexuality, and a few feminist scholars had advanced their own gender theorizations on the backs of transsexuals. Sandy Stone’s pathbreaking “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” produced in 1991 with the encouragement of her adviser, Donna Haraway, is one of transgender studies’ first anchors. Stone’s arrival in the academy interrupted a discourse on transsexuality produced entirely by people who had little or no connection to trans lives. More specifically, her arrival as the author of her own story and “posttranssexual” theorizations offered a transfeminist alternative to the explicitly transphobic attacks (against Stone and others) that was then passing as feminist theory.<sup>12</sup>

Feminist and trans studies depend partly on “experiential knowledge,” because social hierarchies keep certain knowledges marginal to the academy. Until recently, the overwhelming majority of scholarship building the field of transgender studies was produced by people who worked outside, or in mar-



ginal positions within, the academy: activists, graduate students, and people in temporary positions. The balance is only beginning to shift (but not yet tip), with an increasing number of scholars who have secure (tenure-track and tenured) positions in academic institutions, and a number of scholars just completing advanced degrees, some of whom will—we hope—remain in the academic labor force. Even as a sizable handful of colleges offers postdocs and temporary teaching positions that include trans studies as a sought-after specialization, every year universities deny tenure to trans\* scholars for reasons that are not evidently based on quality of scholarship, teaching, and service. The regulatory mechanisms of academia are part of what makes it necessary for transfeminist studies to continue to fuel the vital connections between academics and the larger world of justice activism.

The title of Part I, “This Much Knowledge,” comes from a documentary interview with Christopher Majors, an African American man who is reflecting on growing up as the child of Miss Major. “It’s wonderful having her as my dad. . . .” Smiling, Christopher holds his arms wide apart and, his voice soft with emotion, says, “with my dad, I got this\* much\* knowledge\*.”<sup>13</sup> Miss Major, as people often say, “has been there longer than any of us can imagine.”<sup>14</sup> By this, they mean that she was transgender in the 1950s, before transgender had a name; she was among the “street queens” who fought back against police harassment in the 1960s; and, in the complete absence of public resources and organizations, she helped keep trans youth and trans people of color sheltered and as safe as possible. In Bobbie Jean Baker’s words, “she has so much knowledge,” and the community (loosely defined) depends on precisely this.<sup>15</sup>

The academy, slow to pick up on the knowledge produced by the most marginalized members of society, knew nothing of Miss Major until recently. But transgender studies has never been far from named and unnamed organizations serving marginalized populations. Now, Miss Major is searchable on the Web, a public-health activist who has worked for countless resource and justice centers in California; she currently serves as the community organizing director for the Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project, which seeks to end human-rights abuses committed against transgender, gender-variant, gender-queer, and intersex people in prisons. Among the most excluded from dominant social institutions, such as medicine, academics, and law, she is simultaneously among the most articulate critics of the medical, legal, and criminal-punishment systems. Trans-produced documentaries, such as *The Believers* and *Diagnosing Difference*, now make Miss Major’s acumen accessible to a wider audience.<sup>16</sup> Transfeminist studies needs “this much knowledge,” and more, if it is to work from what Dean Spade and others have called “trickle-up” models of justice and education that start with the most vulnerable among us.

The epistemological flexibility of transgender studies is reflected in the breakneck pace with which we adapt and adopt new vocabularies and linguistic practices. But *Transfeminist Perspectives* situates naming in a much broader context of imperial power and anticolonial politics. The collection opens with

Vic Muñoz's reflections on "transing pedagogies." As a Boricua/Puerto Rican professor-activist-blogger "trapped in the wrong classroom" at an American college built on still-contested Cayuga Nation Territory, Muñoz confronts the "racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, transphobia, and language structure that constrain everything I do as an educator" and imagines a "gender sovereignty" grounded in larger decolonizing projects. Chapter 1, "Gender/Sovereignty," opens with a consideration of naming, quoting Linda Tuhiwai Smith: "What happens to research when the researched become the researchers?" This is necessary, but it is also a power that bears terrible responsibility. Continuing with Paulo Freire, "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it." These two quotes frame the heart of our epistemological challenge. As Muñoz asks, "What happens to feminist pedagogy when feminist transpeople of color name the world?" To imagine gender/sovereignty requires not simply a critique of dominant institutions, such as the medico-legal system that named transsexuality; it requires placing the production of gender identities within a "broader framework of antiracist and decolonial struggles." Along with Muñoz, *Transfeminist Perspectives* begins by asking how the *site* of knowledge production itself actively contributes to assumptions about what knowledges matter, how they matter, and to whom they matter.

In Chapter 2, "'Do These Earrings Make Me Look Dumb?' Diversity, Privilege, and Heteronormative Perceptions of Competence within the Academy," Kate Forbes addresses feminist epistemological conflicts head on. Because she is trained and teaches as an ecologist and environmental biologist, lay people grant Forbes excessive authority to answer questions not only in her own area of specialization (ladybugs) but also about birds, weather, and virtually everything imagined to be "science." *Within* the still male-dominated worlds of the sciences, however, Forbes (along with probably most feminine people in higher education) is aware that "looking like" an authority rarely entails femininity. And finally, in gender studies, Forbes is not the researcher, but the researched. As a trans woman, she is "a primary source" in a world that privileges secondary-source knowledges. *Transfeminist Perspectives* critiques the extent to which credentialing (including tokenizing) continues to be gendered in every possible way and joins Forbes in her call for a more ecological model of "diversity" in the academy.

Just as we may ask *how* we know, since its inception, women's studies has rightly asked *what* we should know: What is our subject and appropriate purview? The category "women" has been challenged from multiple sources, beginning with de Beauvoir and Wittig, who questioned the efficacy of organizing under the name "women" when abjection is inscribed into the category itself. Women's studies has also struggled with and against the question of whether "women" is the foundation and universally defined subject of women's studies. If this "women" is a subject produced through colonizations, racializations, class hierarchies, homophobias, ableisms, and transphobias, then who gets to be a woman? In conditions of compulsory heterosexuality, Adrienne Rich suggested

that all women exist on a lesbian continuum, while Wittig suggested that lesbians are not, in fact, women. Although Joan Nestle tackled the problem of being (not quite) woman from a working-class femme perspective, Gayle Rubin explicitly addressed the historical contingency of any “line” between butch and trans and—by extension—between woman and man.<sup>17</sup> *Transfeminist Perspectives* highlights these tensions and insecurities by, as Bobby Noble puts it, “critically trans-ing” women’s studies at the level of its epistemologies, disciplinarity, methodologies, and even its institutionalizations. In Chapter 3, “Trans. Panic. Some Thoughts toward a Theory of Feminist Fundamentalism,” Noble considers the ambivalent presence of trans entities in women’s studies. This proximity itself tweaks at the longstanding contratrajectories inherent to gender studies between stabilizing the fields and subjects (such as “woman” and even “women’s studies”) that maintain our own institutionalizations on one hand and “undoing” these very same fields and subjects on the other. Perhaps we open gender studies by “undoing” ourselves and—as Butler suggested—letting ourselves be undone, even as we may never fully escape the capitalist structures of our own production.

If naming is a productive action, it is so always in relation to place. In Chapter 4, “The Education of Little Cis: Cisgender and the Discipline of Opposing Bodies,” A. Finn Enke elucidates the passage of the neologism “cisgender” from a social-movement context to a campus context, where it politicizes and confirms most identities as “not-trans.” As a disciplinary tool, “cis-” erases gender variance among all people while dangerously extending the practical reach and power of multiple normativities. What investments may account for the appeal of cis- in our classrooms, and what happens to trans\* in the process? Resisting the regulatory function of this binary, *Transfeminist Perspectives* picks up on Sandy Stone’s suggestion that we see gender as genre and on Wendy Brown’s suggestion that gender studies should function as a “genre of inquiry” that sustains gender as “a critical self-reflective category rather than as a normative or nominal one.”<sup>18</sup> Only in this way can we reorient away from identity- and oppression-based politics toward a broader transfeminist vision of education and justice.

## Categorical Insufficiencies and “Impossible People”

If we can become speaking subjects only by occupying legible nodes within institutional structures—that is, by having a name, performing a recognized demographic category, and so forth—we also reckon with the fact that we exceed every possible legible node . . . sometimes so much so that the institution literally has no place for, or violently *mis*-places, such subjectivities. We may be, in Dean Spade’s words, “impossible people.”<sup>19</sup> Most social institutions make medico-legal definitions and genital status the criteria for spatial and social organization: Restrooms are the most ubiquitous example, but also shelters,

prisons, crisis centers, treatment programs, and dorms. The structure of most colleges and universities makes this all too concrete. As Clark A. Pomerleau explains in Chapter 5, "College Transitions: Recommended Policies for Trans Students and Employees," application forms, e-mail addresses, dorm assignments, and even class rosters may only permit potential students to identify according to their "legal sex," which may have nothing to do with how they perceive themselves or how others perceive them; athletic facilities and restrooms that are sex segregated may be completely inaccessible to students, faculty, and staff who do not conform to conventional gender expectations or who do not identify with the gender that others might assume them to be; curriculum and instruction may proceed as though sex and gender are binary, static, and obviously legible; emergency support services, health services, and rape crisis services may only acknowledge clients by their legal or genital status and may even explicitly discriminate against those who do not conform to common gender expectations. Academic institutions thereby discipline gender for *all* participants, and those who will not be disciplined very likely will not be participants at all unless these institutions change.

Arenas such as bathrooms, dorms, and athletics that sex segregate based on the (presumed) physical body make most obvious many people's investments in binary sex/gender habits and biases. Although feminist theory has long engaged in deconstructing gender, it has often done so by preserving sex as a more stable and knowable foundation (the insights of Butler and others notwithstanding). This habit of thought presumes that there is a knowable difference between male and female bodies, and that is why (for example) athletics are sex segregated; it presumes that patterns of socialization (aggression, sexualized objectification, and so forth) are built on these physical differences, and that is why (for example) restrooms and dorms must be segregated. In North America, restroom segregation is legitimated by both ideologies together: Many people see urinals and stalls not as cultural structures built to facilitate two different styles of urinating but actually as mimetic representations of bodies with penises and bodies with vaginas. (It should be very confusing, then, to be in countries in which restrooms consist simply of rooms with drains in the floor. Curiously, most North Americans visiting such countries are able to make the adjustment without facing an ontological crisis; curiously, that making such an adjustment is all but unthinkable once we have urinals and stalls to *organize* gender.) In truth, even as various sciences authorize the appearance of binary sex, they could not simultaneously make it more clear that there is *no* definitive measure of maleness and femaleness; human bodies and psyches are all over the map. Moreover, *all* bodies and psyches are subject to technical engineering and social manipulation. As Susan Stryker puts it, "Sex, it turns out, is not the foundation of gender. . . . '[S]ex' is a mash-up, a story we mix about *how* the body means, which parts matter most, and how they register in our consciousness or field of vision."<sup>20</sup>

Athletics is an arena heavily invested in efforts to keep male and female bodies distinct while continually confronting the impossibility of doing so. Athletics

is one of the most common examples used by lay people to “prove” that males and females are “really” (materially and therefore truly, unquestionably, and consistently) different. Enter transgender and gender-nonconforming athletes and athletes with intersex conditions. Title VII, Title IX, and the principles of educational equity require that all students have the opportunity to participate in school sports. Investments in binary sex/gender foreclose this opportunity for many and belie the multiple factors that contribute to varying abilities *within* as well as across sexes. Pat Griffin’s essay “‘Ain’t I a Woman?’ Transgender and Intersex Student-Athletes in Women’s Collegiate Sports” (Chapter 6) addresses epistemological and philosophical barriers to full participation and suggests models to optimize fairness, feminist, and transfeminist principles.

While gender and trans studies have maintained a strong sense of connection between the academy and the world outside the academy, health care is an arena in which these connections are most vital and also most obviously strained. Trans health provision and provider trainings geared at improving the quality of care available to trans and gender-nonconforming people offer a critical lens into the competing epistemological frameworks guiding institutional practices. In Chapter 7, “Training Disservice: The Productive Potential and Structural Limitations of Health as a Terrain for Trans Activism,” Christoph Hanssmann details the challenges of offering trans-health education to medical institutions that shape curricula *before* trans enters the picture. “Trainers [Hanssmann among them] struggle to teach information and strategies that are relevant, useful, and legible to providers, while simultaneously feeling quite troubled by the ways ‘trans health’ is not teachable in the ways that are most broadly available for us to teach it.” Specifically—as will be familiar to many in undergraduate gender studies classrooms—“cultural competence” models frequently deploy “community members” or trainers to sit on LGBT panels for one class out of an entire semester. This common curriculum suggests that simply becoming aware that “diverse” (i.e., marginalized) people exist and are human will somehow translate into better, more-accessible, and less-discriminatory service provision. The training structure leaves no possibility of understanding that “trans”—if it might be considered a demographic at all—is vast, complex, and infinitely diverse across every other possible demographic; much less does it permit educating about the structural factors themselves—including the reproduction of the institution—that contribute to marginalization and lack of access to basic health care.

*Transfeminist Perspectives* participates in anti-identitarian theorizations by noting that educational curricula may follow liberal political strategies that view “rights” as something to be earned by naming, gaining successive recognition for, and belonging to marginalized or “left-out” populations. We see identity-based categorizations reinforced also at national borders, where people are made to perform as a passing (and documented) demographic, as Aren Z. Aizura forcefully argues in his essay “Transnational Transgender Rights and Immigration Law” (Chapter 8). While acknowledging that “transgender is an

identity category whose subjects' access to freedom will be divided along the cuts of affluence, racialization, gender, and citizenship, we also need to look at where and how bodies escape or act clandestinely outside of those categories—and at moments in which the categories of immigrant, transgender person, man, woman become incoherent and inconsistent.” When gender, along with so many other signifiers, is a central feature of identity documentation, its legibility must be seen to be contingent on and produced by global movement and border control.

## Valuing Subjects: Toward Unexpected Alliances

The many examples of institutional efforts to spatially organize bodies (restrooms, identity verification, national borders, and so forth) provide lenses into the ways that bodies are not self-evident material, and they also serve as reminders that so-called “cultural” and “material” realms are inextricable. Although this idea is not new to feminist, queer, or trans theory, Dan Irving points out that our pedagogies and epistemologies often continue to be based in systemic logics that “create distance between . . . the purview of political economy and the construction of recognized trans identities and political organizing.” In Chapter 9, “Elusive Subjects: Notes on the Relationship between Critical Political Economy and Trans Studies,” Irving critiques strategies used by Canadian trans activists to gain access to provincial health insurance plans. Making political claims based on the “fitness” and entrepreneurial potential of trans people may bolster the very structures that create the conditions of oppression. Irving asks, for example, “How does the marketing of trans workers to potential employers contribute to the formation of ‘proper’ or ‘deserving’ trans subjects? What are the implications of such knowledge for sex/gender-variant people who remain chronically unemployed or employed in criminalized sectors of the economy?” Liberal logics present some bodies—masculine, white, educated, and/or legal bodies—as having greater intrinsic value and potential than others, simultaneously maintaining the marginalization of feminine, poor, criminal, and/or undocumented bodies.

Although most dominant political economies continue to prioritize and to privilege masculinities, even feminist economies may participate in misogynies. In Chapter 10, “Reclaiming Femininity,” Julia Serano provides greater nuance to the misogyny that judges all expressions of femininity as artificial, frivolous, manipulative, and less valuable. *Trans*-misogyny, more specifically, delegitimizes trans people who are on the trans-female/feminine spectrum of gender identity and expression. In feminist and many queer contexts ranging from alt femme conferences to privileged institutions, such as the Association for Women in Psychology, trans women are shunned as “doubly artificial, because we are trans and because we are feminine.” Serano suggests that *all* femme- and femininely identified and feminist people need to develop alliances around

the value and power of femininity even while challenging the compulsory femininity that confronts virtually all people assigned female at birth. Trans-misogyny is an essential element of misogyny in general; by the same token, trans-misogyny is not specifically a “trans” issue but, more broadly, a feminist issue. Rather than being outsiders, people on trans-feminine spectra are inherent and necessary to the “community” invoked in the name *feminist*.

Feminist, queer, and trans scholars and activists have long charged that the distinction between political issues and personal issues is a false one. The decision by lawmakers, states, and other institutions to frame certain issues as “personal” is itself a political act intended to obscure what are actually organized violences and injuries against marginalized groups. Nevertheless, many activist organizations continue to organize through “rights” discourses that reify the belief that justice can be served by gaining privatized or individualized entitlements. In “What’s Wrong with Trans Rights?” (Chapter 11), Dean Spade analyzes the common twin prongs of trans rights (law reform) and hate-crimes legislation and details the structural reasons why neither improves the life chances of those they purport to protect. Neither model eliminates bias, prevents discrimination and marginalization, or deters violence. We need, therefore, to shift our framework away from a trans-rights model. Instead, Spade calls for “critical trans resistance” that will center our social movement strategies in mobilization against sites of violence and prioritize “those living under the most severe forms of coercive violence.” This is not easy, and Spade acknowledges that it requires every bit of creativity, humility, bravery, self-reflection, and perseverance we can muster.

Activists (and, probably even more so, academics) are not always known for our humility; nor is self-reflection always held up as a powerful tool of resistance and social transformation. And yet, without these, as Ryka Aoki points out in her essay, “When Something Is Not Right” (Chapter 12), we are destined to keep making the same mistakes over and over. “Once,” Aoki admits, “I imagined art was my savior.” But she learned otherwise through two encounters she had while touring with the Tranny Road Show in North Carolina and Colorado—each terrifying in its own way. It turns out that art—and I would say also academics—can only heal when we are open to the most surprising and unexpected alliances: the connections that shatter our preconceptions about each other, and also about ourselves. It is in this spirit that the authors of this collection share our transfeminist perspectives.