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Fleshy Specificity: (Re)considering Transsexual Subjects in Lesbian Communities

Kelly Coogan

SUMMARY. The transsexual subject position has recently been subsumed under the labeling “transgender.” This article considers the implications of this new labeling for transsexual subjects and their capacity to be incorporated into, or at least configured as affiliated with, lesbian communities and their popularization of transgender terminology. By tracing the complicated academic and political etymology of “transgender,” this article shows how the term unfairly erases the lived experi-

Kelly Coogan recently graduated from Duke University with a degree in Women’s Studies and a Certificate in Sexuality Studies. As an undergraduate, she completed an honors thesis that pushed poststructuralist feminist theory into a more sustained and legitimizing conversation with biology. Her thesis research led to one of her current intellectual interests in transsexuality and its ambivalent relationship to feminist theory. At present, Kelly is a graduate student in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies at Rutgers University. Her dissertation will focus on authoring different genealogies of Women’s Studies, as an institutional field formation and as a (post)identitarian and interdisciplinary knowledge project, in the U.S. and transnationally.

Address correspondence to: Kelly Coogan, Women’s and Gender Studies, Rutgers University, 162 Ryders Lane, Second Floor, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 (E-mail: kellcoog@rci.rutgers.edu).

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ences of transsexual subjects by ignoring their specificities in the flesh. The article concludes by offering alternative disciplinary matrices and conceptual schemas through which to better imagine transsexual subject formation and transsexual subjectivity. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Bodily materiality and biology, Brandon Teena, Butch/FTM Border Wars, gender transitioning, feminist theory, queer theory, linguistic performativity, theatrical performativity, sexed ontology, sex transitioning, transgender and feminism, transsexualism and lesbian theory, transsexualism and feminism, transvestitism and feminist theory

Flesh so named makes difference.

–Jacquelyn N. Zita (1998, p 106)

In 1998, *GLQ* published a special *Transgender Issue* where Judith Halberstam and C. Jacob Hale first discuss the trope of the *Butch/FTM Border Wars* in a collaboratively written introduction to their essays in the issue.¹ Citing notions of space, geography, territory, and territoriality as just as central to the politics of gender and sexuality as notions of time and temporality, Halberstam and Hale introduce the trope of the border war in order to capture the intense, yet sometimes subtly articulated, political battles waged by differing marginal subjects for visibility and inclusion within, as well as affiliation with, lesbian communities. Specifically, the terminology *Butch/FTM Border Wars* denotes disputes between butches and female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs) concerning what bodies and identifications are appropriately “butch” or “transsexual.” Butches are usually, but certainly not always, more visibly queer in relationship to their masculinity than FTMs. Outside of lesbian communities the general public oftentimes reads the queerness of butches *in an instant*. The visual markings of gender transitivity on their bodies reveal that they inhabit a space in between male and female, or what Halberstam and Hale term the *border-zone*. On the other hand, within lesbian communities butches frequently fit group contours more easily than do transsexuals due to their anatomically sexed female bodies.

My definition of lesbian communities in this essay is somewhat loose and most likely controversial. In my mind, lesbian communities include all those queer bodies which rearticulate heteronormative prescriptions of sex, gender, and sexuality in enormously complex ways but are anatomically female. This is not to say that hierarchies within these communities amongst differing female bodies (some that are considered *more* lesbian than others or consider themselves to be the *best* kind of lesbian) do not exist because they surely do. Rather, I hope to hone in on the fact that many lesbian communities continue to be haunted by a very hard-to-shake *a priori* grounding—that of the anatomical facticity of the female body—despite many nuanced attempts by contemporary feminist, lesbian, and queer theorists to challenge the givenness of female anatomy as apt grounds for lesbian politics and scholarship. The anatomical female body *always* and *already* manages to sneak back in as grounds—meaning that it serves as the political grounding point of lesbian coalition amongst the increased emergence of disparate bodies desiring to be called *lesbian*—even if the female body’s grounding as such is radically repudiated on several different post-identity political and theoretical fronts. Nowadays lesbian group contours are increasingly democratic, sometimes even deceptively so. They are loose enough to include a myriad of queer bodily variations, just as long as those bodies are judged anatomically female at the end of the day.

This critique has been rehashed so frequently that it is almost dismissed just as soon as it is staged. But I stage this critique through a different lens, a lens that might shift its terms productively: that of the transsexual subject, *his* or *her* subject formation and *his* or *her* subjectivity. Many lesbian communities criticize and deny transsexuals inclusion, and sometimes even affiliation, due to their ostensible entrance into (hetero)normativity and their capability to *pass*² in mainstream culture. FTMs are ousted by such communities due to their supposed arrival into a stable male-sexed ontology via hormone therapy and/or sex-change surgery.³ Doing away with their anatomically female bodies makes the entrance for FTMs into lesbian communities extremely difficult if not entirely impossible. In fact, one might argue that they habitually serve as the constitutive outside or as the abject of lesbian communities. In the scenario of the butch/FTM border wars, FTMs are in the offensive position, most usually outside lesbian borders, and in some cases fighting desperately for inclusion or at least affiliation.

In its consideration of transsexual subjects, this essay hopes to circumvent rehashing the argument that lesbian communities should try, once again, to do away with the anatomically female body as its ground,

a repudiation that supposedly would allow room for FTMs, intersexuals, and politically sympathetic men. When lesbian identity politics, and even, as I am arguing, some versions of post-identity politics, rely on the anatomically female body for their political grounding, they are usually cast as being essentialist. Yet, even though essentialism, especially biological versions of it, can be highly dangerous for several different theoretical and political reasons, knee-jerk reactions against essentialism make me suspicious especially when they call for doing away with biological discussions of bodies altogether. Such reactions against essentialism are hardly theoretical and political panaceas. The biological organism of the body somehow always manages to return. It cannot simply be ignored and nor can biological sex, even if sex is no longer seen as mapping out the truth of our bodily destinies.⁴ If the case of transsexuality reveals anything at all, it shows us that biological sex is just as *transitory* and *unnatural* as gender, but certainly no less relevant in defining our ontology. To ignore sex's role in constituting our sense of who we are is, in many ways, to *renaturalize* and *reessentialize* it. By ignoring sex altogether, in other words, the transitivity and fluidity of biological sex (even if its versions of transitivity and fluidity are different from those of gender) is left thoroughly under-theorized and under-explored by those theorists needing to study it most.

This essay poses the following questions. How would the way lesbians imagine the borders of their communities have to change in order to include transsexuals with more regularity? How could feminist and queer theories quicken this refashioning of boundaries by shifting their own relationship to biological determinism, essentialism, and the elasticity of the body's fleshy contours? What theoretical and methodological moves will feminist scholars need to make such that transsexual subjectivity may be theorized in ways that do not foreclose its conditions of existence? Perhaps a reconsideration of the place of transsexuals in lesbian communities demonstrates that these communities still succumb to the pressures of a biologically female-sexed ontology in defining who counts as lesbian and who does not. . . . Perhaps the specter of essentialism haunts these communities in a profoundly anti-essentialist guise. . . . As Henry S. Rubin so eloquently suggests,

Nontranssexuals assume the coherent legibility of their gendered embodiment or their identities and are not expected to carry a share of the revolutionary burden of overthrowing gender or imagining what to replace it with. They do not walk around, as they seem to be asking us to do, without gender identities or legible

bodies. No matter how much gender play they engage in, few of them will say that they are not women or men after the clothes come off. They are not called upon to account for the fact that their gender is something they achieved. (1998, p. 273)

Several contemporary feminist theorists deeply fear the idea of sexed ontology, where biological sex is posited as expressing a truth of one's being. According to critics of sexed ontology, to argue that biological sex is ontological is to be a biological essentialist. In other words, when one argues that sex is ontological, one is seen as giving into the facticity of biological sex, or the givenness of the idea that there are two, *and only two*, versions of biological sex. In this scenario where sexed ontology is equated with sexed facticity, one's way of being in the world is determined by the *fact* that one is either biologically male or biologically female. When sexed ontology and sexed facticity are equated, all gendered behaviors supposedly stem from this male/female sexed dichotomy. But is there a way to disentangle this equation of sexed ontology with sexed facticity? What if biological sex is just as complex and multifarious as gender is said to be?⁵ If sexed ontology develops from an understanding of sex that is just as fluid as gender, what happens to the givenness of binary sex? Sexed ontology is not *necessarily* the same thing as sexed facticity. Sexed facticity in biology, or the seemingly natural givenness of two biological sexes, is constitutive of *a single* sexed ontology but is indeed only one of ostensibly several.

No doubt transsexuals epitomize an investiture in sexed ontology through their sex transitioning. They wholeheartedly believe that their entrance into a new biological sex will be constitutive of a new way of being in the world and relating to reality. But they hardly epitomize sex's facticity in biology. If anything, their very existence—along with the existence of intersexuals and hermaphrodites—does away with the idea that two *and only two* biological sexes are naturally given. The subtleties, nuances, and radical differences of the distinction between sexed ontology and sexed facticity are decidedly under-articulated and must be further explored.

I propose that lesbian communities could include transsexual subjects in a way that is sensitive to their everyday lived experiences by doing two things: (1) admitting to the transitivity of biological sex and (2) articulating how the transitory character of sex is both similar to and different from the transitory character of gender. It is the task of specifying versions of the transitory character of sex—of specifying the permeability of transitioning that occurs within the register of the flesh in

transsexual subject formation *and* in the formation of transsexual subjectivity—that lesbian, feminist, and queer theorists⁶ must engage in their scholarly practices and lesbian communities must engage in their political practices. In my mind, these constituencies—academic lesbians, queers, and feminists as well as lesbian communities—participate in the production of imaginative practices of inclusion, or *imagined communities* as Madelyn Detloff talks about,⁷ which either work to include or exclude (sometimes inadvertently) transsexual subjects. This essay is concerned with identifying some of these imaginative practices and more critically discerning how they work and their unintended material consequences or affects for transsexual subjects. The essay started with the trope of the border war because it very nicely exposes how transsexuals and their subjectivities might easily be overlooked by the aforementioned constituencies. As Halberstam has noted, the trope falsely situates butches and FTMs along a masculine continuum, where butches are on the far left, as least masculine, and transsexuals are on the far right, as literalizing masculinity. Although the continuum purportedly represents the multifarious ways specific bodies embody masculinity, it fails oftentimes to properly denote the *highly specific* ways that some subjects feel disembodied by their masculinity and then, in turn, work towards masculine *reembodyment*.⁸ I argue that this representational failure is especially true for FTMs.

Despite their polar placement along this continuum, *butches* and *FTMs* are now seen as justly falling under a new popular label, *transgender*, a labeling that fails to fully capture the specific bodily (re)mappings each undergoes. Transgender currently acts as an umbrella term for a campy assemblage of bodies and identities, like those posited by Susan Stryker such as “FTM, MTF, eonist, invert, androgyne, butch, femme, nellie, queen, third sex, hermaphrodite, tomboy, sissy, drag king, female impersonator, she-male, he-she, boy-dyke, girl-fag, transsexual, transvestite, transgender, cross-dresser” (1998, p. 148).⁹ Since the term has boundless elasticity, several lesbian subjects undoubtedly use it as a self-descriptor. Identifying as transgender, or at least as affiliated with the category of transgender, places these lesbian subjects in coalition with other lesbians who articulate their queerness in profoundly divergent ways. With Stryker’s comprehensive list, it is easy to see how the term transgender performs two very important functions for lesbian, queer, and feminist scholars in assisting lesbian communities to better imagine their contours. First, transgender acts as a term which purportedly *represents* countless queer bodies. It just about allows for transsexual inclusion but at the expense of erasing the

specificity of their lived experiences of transitioning as I discuss below. This erasure of their specificity says to transsexuals regarding their inclusion in lesbian communities: *Almost but not quite*—you can kind of be included, but within the terms and conditions of our understandings of the transitory character of sex and gender and not yours. You must narrate your sense of being transitional according to our understanding of being transitional. Second, in its sustained focus on the descriptive, hermeneutic, and analytical potentials of (*sex*)uality, queer theory has caused ruptures in the theorization of gender by contemporary feminist theory, a phenomenon I will also elaborate below. Transgender attempts to very strategically *bridge* the gap between feminist and queer theories and thus carries the potential to heal these ruptures. With transgender, feminist theorists who take seriously feminism's engagement with queer theory wipe off their sweaty brows in relief, as the term inserts gender and its transitoriness as absolutely central to the process of queering. Yet, a presupposition of the term transgender is that seemingly any *body*, irrespective of its anatomically assigned sex at *birth*, can circulate *freely* through the *trans*, arriving at some gender identifications and leaving again *momentarily* for others.¹⁰ No differentiations in the transitioning process are inherent in the term. For instance, the transitioning of a cross-dresser is different from that of a transsexual, even if biological sex change, with modern biotechnology, is rendered representationally similar to the changing of one's clothes. Such transitionings might be analogous but they are certainly not the same, yet both a cross-dresser and a transsexual might be seen as justifiably transgender. And both might even want to identify themselves as such.

In an effort to consider the specific lived experiences of transsexuals, I must bring the *trans* celebration of free-floating gender signifiers to a screeching halt. If the theoretical and political hold on transgender is driven by an impulse to include the myriad bodies that wholeheartedly wish to fall under its rubric, will not the term invariably fail to display such endless inclusive capacities in the same way that say *women* fails feminist theory? In the rush towards more inclusive terminology, theorists and activists alike oftentimes forget the arbitrary *beginnings* of their inclusive impulse that presumably stemmed from a desire to represent the specific lived experiences of sexually and gendered marginal subjects with increased accuracy, whether those experiences cohere around pleasure or pain. While umbrella terms such as transgender enable us to imagine politics with augmented inclusion and affiliation, they also risk rendering invisible the precise lived experiences of different bodies *in transition*. For instance, the term transgender risks obscur-

ing the pains and sufferings of subjects for whom sex and gender transitioning is a matter of life and death, like many transsexuals. It also risks eliding the different temporalities of sex and gender transitioning for different subjects. Some versions of transition take minutes and others take years. No version of transition is necessarily more or less real than the other, but all experiences of transitioning deserve to be told, despite their differences.

In no way do I wish to suggest that every subject identifying as transgender unabashedly participates in a gender play that drips with hedonism. Nor do I wish to convey that the ontological condition of transsexuality (not that there is only one) is characterized entirely by long drawn out pain and suffering. Transgenders undeniably experience considerable amounts of pain and suffering at times, and transsexuals undeniably experience considerable degrees of pleasure and satisfaction. The definitional boundaries marking transgender and transsexual distinctness are shifting incessantly; nevertheless, they are still distinct. In an era when gender fluidity is in vogue, it is our responsibility to diligently delineate specificities within and amongst particular gender identity categories. This call for specificity is not to delegitimize the transgender subject position for those who continue to identify as such while receiving hormone therapy or other anatomical surgeries in efforts to feel more sexually embodied, or for subjects who are intersexed or hermaphroditic and have had surgeries imposed on them at birth. The space of sexed and gender in-between-ness can be considerably unbearable for many and deserves the same amount of attention as many transsexuals' desired space of sexed stability does. The transgender experience is not *essentially* pleasurable and the transsexual one *essentially* painful, each are attendant with various pleasures and pains, nor are transsexuals the only subjects seeking anatomical transition. Nonetheless, I am interested in opening up conceptual space for lesbian communities to seriously consider the specific lived experiences of those subjects who transition in the flesh, who shift their bodies' fleshy contours due to perceived sexed disembodiment. These subjects are too often subsumed under transgender or not considered at any length due to their belief in a literalizing fantasy of sex. While many subjects identifying as transgender daily live the pains of their liminality, the *representational matrix* of transgender most often covers over gender's sufferings by conceptually privileging the fluid and reiterative pleasures of gender transitioning, a supposed antiontological space of gender play that, in reality, comes with its own set of ontological commitments around gender's inherently fluid capacities.

The representational matrix of transgender not only effaces the specificities of the various bodies it purports to describe, but it also erases the deeply complicated and contestatory relationship transsexual subjects have had with feminist theory and politics since the late seventies.¹¹ This cleavage occurs most frequently in those versions of feminism that privilege the subjectivity of lesbian subjects who are anatomically female and find their pleasure, empowerment, and politicization via the sexed ontology of their bodies. If theory and practice are mutually constitutive, feminist theorization of transsexuals as politically adverse to or invisible within the category of lesbian significantly marginalizes and excludes an extremely diverse constituency of sexual minorities. From Janice Raymond's 1979 publication *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, to Judith Halberstam's infamous injunction that "There are no transsexuals. We are all transsexuals," the transsexual subject is either radically assaulted by lesbian theorists or swallowed up in the complicated gender and sexual play of postmodernity and postmodern predications of lesbian identity formation.¹² Akin to Halberstam's initial formulation, some postmodern theorists have figured transsexuality as *the* paradigmatic bodily aesthetic of postmodernism, whereby everyone is figured to slide into and out of certain sex and gender aesthetics and practices through time and in different spaces.¹³ In either account—the lesbian feminist or postmodern—the transsexual desire for sexed transitioning in the *flesh* is lost without a trace.

A PROFOUND SHIFT IN IDENTITARIAN KNOWLEDGE FORMATIONS WITHIN THE ACADEMY

Why is the border war a descriptively and analytically useful trope for feminist and queer theorists to study the battles over identity and identification within lesbian communities? Perhaps because it aptly encapsulates the hard-fought struggles for visibility and comfortability, laced with intense pain, which mark the perceived need of certain queer constituencies who feel marginalized within their own communities.¹⁴ It provides representation, albeit only ever partial, to the lived pain of being queer and existing in queer communities amongst other queers, fighting for scarce resources and limited recognition. It identifies the reality that to be *gender-transit* can be either a privilege or an imposition. Gender transitioning can mark sexed and gendered play, and it can also denote the stark reality that an FTM cannot afford sex-change surgery

and must turn tricks in order to save up enough money to one day transition. The specificities of the transitional character of gender have only recently begun to be drawn out thanks to Halberstam's and Hale's groundbreaking formulation of the border war trope. But how did we arrive at this lack of specificity in the first place?

If I were performing an archaeological tracking of how identitarian knowledge formations profoundly shifted in the academy, I would select U.S. feminist and gay and lesbian (not yet queer) theories in 1990 as one point of considerable archaeological shift and, thereby, an apt point of departure. Two major texts were published that year: Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*. Tirelessly poked, prodded, and hailed, these texts no doubt significantly shifted the terrain of theorizing gender and (sex)uality in the academy. Both theorists wrote at a time when their work was direly needed. Being submerged in poststructuralist and postmodernist analysis, feminist scholars desperately desired a non-volitional account of gender identity formation that Butler provided. Likewise, gay and lesbian theorists were frantically pining for a rigorous theorization of sexuality distinct from gender, an analysis Sedgwick devotedly worked towards.¹⁵

To simplify for brevity's sake, Butler's theory of gender performativity warrants that psychoanalysis, in its attempt to articulate the organizing principles of identity, augments the complicated social, cultural, discursive, and political origins of gender identity onto a psychological core. She argues that this displacement comprehends "words, acts, gestures and desire" to "produce the effect of an internal core or substance" on the surface of the body (1990, p. 136). The surface of the body is the site for a *literalizing* fantasy of stable sex, as the organizing principles of identity congeal to reveal the form of a stable sexed ontology on the body's surface. Working against the fantasy that sex expresses the truth of one's being, the theory of gender performativity undoes any psychoanalytic notion that the body congeals into a finalized form once identity is considered fully organized, and it articulates the congealment of the body's surface to the extent that it comes to signify the facticity of sex.¹⁶ Butler reworks female masquerade, the gender ontology of Lacan, and turns Freud's melancholia into a gender ontology so as to conceive of the body's sexing as dependent upon the elasticity of the body's surface, which is rearticulatable incessantly through an individual's acts of loving, desiring, losing, and incorporating those lost objects of love and desire *ad infinitum*.¹⁷ Gender and sexuality are inextricably intertwined in her account.

Sedgwick, on the other hand, works hard to disarticulate sexuality from gender by reading the Western European English canon for its perversities and self-differences. Perhaps the most read introduction in the history of Gay and Lesbian and Sexuality Studies, “Axiomatic” lays out seven central axioms for the study of sexuality. Number two is most relevant here: “*The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can’t know in advance how they will be different*” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 27). For Sedgwick, when talking about sexuality, an analytic of gender difference only gets at the gender of one’s sexual object choice. It fails to get at “the array of acts, expectations, narratives, pleasures, identity-formations, and knowledges, in both women and men, that tends to cluster most densely around certain genital sensations but is not adequately defined by them” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 29). While Sedgwick set Gay and Lesbian and Sexuality Studies on intellectual fire, in feminist circles not everyone was overjoyed by the proliferating play of sexual signifiers and practices.

The queer break from feminist inquiry figured academic feminism as anachronistic, as the *has-been* of the intellectual avant-garde.¹⁸ Playing catch-up, some factions of feminist scholarship began increasingly to interact with poststructuralism and its repudiation of referential theories of meaning, forming a body of scholarship now known as poststructuralist feminism, which dispelled any notion that sex has a lasting, factual hold on gender. The marriage of certain gender referents to particular bodies was fast ending in divorce, creating conceptual space for seemingly free-floating signifiers to arbitrarily attach themselves to some bodies and disconnect themselves from others. Supporting sexed ontology was way out of style. Buying into gender ontology was for those who did not have the apt cultural capital for gender ambiguity. Antiontology was now in vogue and so were antiontological epistemologies, hence the overemphasis on epistemology in poststructuralist feminist scholarship and queer theory. The free-floating sex and gender referents touted by poststructuralist feminism began to bode well with the proliferation of pleasurable behaviors and desires that queer theory holds in such high esteem. *Women* no longer fit the bill for the apt subject position of feminism in its convergence with queer theory. A new and more fitting subject position was burgeoning.

Three years later, that subject position—transgender—appeared first for lesbian communities in order to capture a quite different experience than the gender-transit one touted by feminist and queer theorists in the academy. It was a position characterized by the profound pain and loss

in gender identification rather than its potential for proliferating pleasures and desires. On Christmas day 1993 a twenty-one-year-old anatomically sexed female who dressed and frequently identified as a male was kidnapped, made to expose his vagina, and forcibly raped by John Lotter and Marvin Thomas Nissen. A week later on December 31, 1993, he was murdered by these men in a farmhouse in Humboldt, Nebraska. When Lotter and Nissen were finally convicted in February 1996, *Saturday Night Live*'s Norm MacDonald made the following horrid comment during his *Weekend Update* segment, "In Nebraska, a man was sentenced for killing a female cross-dresser, who had accused him of rape, and two of her friends. Excuse me if this sounds harsh but, in my mind, they all deserved to die."¹⁹

His legal name was Teena Renae Brandon (the name that appeared on his birth certificate as well as his gravestone), but, as C. Jacob Hale documents, he went by a whole assemblage of masculine and gender neutral names throughout his short life such as "Charles Brandon,' 'Brandon Brinson,' 'Ten-a Brandon,' 'Billy Brandon,' 'Brandon Brayman,' 'Tenor Ray Brandon,' and 'Charles Brayman'" (1998, p. 312). Hale shows how *Brandon Teena* is a false stabilization of the victim's name utilized by various lesbian and transsexual constituencies to demonstrate the very real violence enacted on their identities. According to him, the name Brandon Teena developed out of a border war between lesbian journalist Donna Minkowitz who wrote an article in the *Village Voice* entitled, "Love Hurts. Brandon Teena Was a Woman Who Lived and Loved as a Man," claiming that s/he was a lesbian, and the famous transsexual activist group Transsexual Menace who vociferously picketed such claiming, as they thought he was justifiably part of their community. The conditions of Brandon Teena's possibility as a political subject post-death (if there is such a thing) grew out of his naming by queer communities who attempted to secure his traumatic existence and extremely violent death as their own conceptual device to represent the violence in queerness, a stabilization that in the end is unfair to the marginal subject who died that day. A term, a subject position, was needed to describe experiences of subjects like Brandon Teena. Transgender seemed apt to perform this descriptive work as the *trans* promised to capture the pain and violence in sexual and gender ambiguity. In the academy around the same time, though, the term was being appropriated for much different ends not at all connected to the initial political impulse of lesbian and transsexual communities to describe the violences of gender marginality.

When the hype around Brandon Teena's atrocious murder was at its peak, in the mid-nineties, scholars were quickly finding ways to regender queer and rearticulate gender and sexuality. Books describing the transitional character of gender through the terminology of transgender emerged to denote the multifarious ways individuals could *wear* their gender differently—*queer* their gender—from one day to the next.²⁰ Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* and Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests* are two such books that situate bodies as cultural texts which are rendered readable as queer through their regendering or their *transgendering*. By asking her readers questions about their gender identity in a manner ringing of postmodern pastiche, Bornstein situates gender along a volitional performative schema.

- What's your gender?
- When did you decide that?
- How much say do you have in your gender?
- Is there anything about your gender or gender role that you don't like, or that gets in your way?
- Are there one or two qualities about gender that are appealing to you, enough so that you'd like to incorporate those qualities in your daily life (1994, p. 96)?

In a similar vein, Garber reads cross-dressing, or transvestitism, as a cultural practice of regendering that disrupts Western binary thinking by introducing a third position into the male/female dyad. Cross-dressing, in upsetting the normative-sexed readability of bodies, destabilizes the binary-ness of categories that are *always already* sexed. The liminality of cross-dressing produces a modality of articulation outside of male or female, offsetting the binarism's cultural, social, and historical power.

The "third" is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis—a crisis which is symptomized by *both* the overestimation *and* the underestimation of cross-dressing. But what is crucial here—and I can hardly underscore this strongly enough—is that the "third term" is *not* a term. Much less is it a *sex*, certainly not an instantiated "blurred" sex as signified by a term like "androgynous" or "hermaphrodite," although these words have a culturally specific significance at certain historical moments. The "third" is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility.

Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge. (1992, p. 11)

According to Garber's reading of transvestitism, queer expressions of one's gender are as simple as changing one's dress, putting on and taking off certain clothes, as she disarticulates gender from anatomy so that sex purportedly becomes readable through dress, enabling queer readings of the body's *clothed* surface. For Garber, gender's intelligibility is performative in the *theatrical* sense, not in the *linguistic* sense, a distinction that too often gets quickly glossed over. Whereas Garber sees the transvestite as putting on and taking off clothes with intention, in Butler's theory of gender performativity, by contrast, gender appears on the surface of the body through unconscious, nonvolitional loss. Both Bornstein's and Garber's understandings of gender's versatility, readability, and wearability provide context for statements like those made by a young Judith Halberstam that "There are no transsexuals. We are all transsexuals" (1994, p. 212) as if the body's sexing is akin to putting on and taking off clothes at will. After all, if anatomical sex no longer has any realness, why wouldn't we all be transsexuals? If skin can just as easily be taken off and put back on as changing our clothing (and it of course cannot) perhaps the transsexual is no longer a needed possibility? Sex and gender are embodied along profoundly different temporal registers when one cross-dresses than when one receives hormone therapy or sex change surgery. In the latter case, a transsexual must *live* each day in *his* or *her* newly sexed body. A cross-dresser may feign maleness for an evening or even several evenings in a row and still not access, or feel the need to access, the same degree of sexed ontology a transsexual often strives for. Uncritically aligning transsexual lived experiences with those of cross-dressers or other gender-queer bodies not shifting their bodies' biological contours unfairly erases fleshy specificity.

For Bornstein and Garber, regendering queer is a volitional practice of reading bodies in certain non-normative ways. Their gender politics are processes of *(re)aestheticizing bodies*, resignifying sexual anatomy with dress and other bodily surface manipulations. Dress becomes one's sexual skin, and transsexuals, through sex-change surgery, are seen as merely refiguring one version of their body's dress code, that of the skin, amongst many. Regendering queer denotes the versatile means through which the body's surface can endlessly resignify sex in ways arbitrarily related to one's sexual object choice. By disconnecting sex from anatomy, Garber and Bornstein (and even Butler at times) imagine

they are antiontologizing sex entirely. It is within this academic context that the *trans* prefix garnered a pleasurable, endlessly inclusive valence, straying far afield from its painful birthing via Brandon Teena's death. *Trans* currently acts as a prefix *reborn* to capture the pleasures, desires, and occasional pains (most usually psychical) that subjects ostensibly experience now that sex (the signified) and gender (the signifier) are subsumed into one another, or more specifically when sex is cast as the discursive affect of gender. *Trans*, in other words, attempts to clean up the referential mess resulting from antiontologizing sexed bodies. An entire set of bodies and identities easily fit under transgender, the new women of poststructuralist feminism.²¹

The political project of antiontologizing sex *is* a gendered (re)aestheticization of bodies and *is* a politics working primarily within the register of bodily surfaces. *The antiontologizing gesture risks rendering bodily surfaces—their reaestheticization, resignification, remapping, etc.—the entire terrain of the political, i.e., everything, in poststructuralist feminist and queer politics.* As I see it, there are two ways to redress this overemphasis on surfaces. The first would be to more finely tune and intricately layer the antiontologizing gesture in its concerns and effects, although it is hard to say in advance exactly what such fine tuning and intricate layering would look like or entail. The antiontologizing gesture currently runs the risk of too facilely producing volitional transgender subjects. In other words, with intention, transgenders seemingly pick up, take on, and put down different gender identities at the drop of a hat. As Jacquelyn N. Zita notes, “Postmodernism supplies a set of ontological commitments needed for a world in which the body appears to be malleable, protean, and constructed through and within discourse” (1998, p. 105). These ontological commitments *do not* assume a centered subject, rife with intention in her gender and sexual acts. The protean self that Zita speaks of is not the conscious agent, the cogito of the Enlightenment, whose gendering precedes its predication by and within discourse. Yet theorists like Garber and Bornstein place their *transgender* subject in the most beneficial and agentic position possible: within this Enlightenment tradition while simultaneously reaping the fluid, transitory, and pastiche-like benefits of its intellectual offspring, postmodernism. No doubt any transgender subject emerging from this context would have a pleasurable existence. The second way this overemphasis on surfaces can be redressed is through *reontologizing*²² sex *differentially*—that is, asking what it means politically and theoretically to subscribe to a sexed ontology that is not mired in a dualistic account

of biological sex but is rather in tune with sex's inherent biological complexities.

MORE THAN WHAT APPEARS ON THE SURFACE

In the past decade and a half, feminist scholars have overtly problematized volitional accounts of gender acquisition. The transgender subject implicitly posited by Bornstein and Garber fetishizes the manifest *consciousness* of gender's performativity, a consciousness no longer seen to exist outside of or in excess of its emergence in discourse. This notion of a transgender subject who fashions *his* or *her* gender at will for a finite period of time fits better within a theatrical theory of performativity, where performance is consciously taken up, not a linguistic one. It is important to note, though, that neither understanding of performance—theatrical or linguistic—aptly captures the experiences of transsexual subjects, their subjectivity or gender acquisition. For instance, in terms of theatrical performativity, the transsexual is hardly an overtly conscious agent who manipulates *his* or *her* fleshy contours to apperceive gender's failure to fully congeal. Transsexuality is a diagnostic category and subjects desiring sex-change surgery must go through myriad medico-juridical institutions prior to receiving permission for change. Transitioning oftentimes takes years of treatment and recovery, sometimes inadvertently resulting in death. There is a high price to pay, monetary and otherwise, for transitioning in the flesh, and it is certainly not a fee overly characterized by gratification and delight.

Yet, despite their inability to fit within volitional accounts of gender acquisition, transsexuals do not conform to Butler's theory of gender performativity either, due to their supposed belief in sex's literalness. If, as Butler suggests, sex was *always already* gender anyway, transsexuals are merely sold short by the medical establishment's emphasis on the truth of sex and really are the cultural dupes many accuse them of being.²³ But Butler shows that sex is *always already* gender via a highly complicated, and sometimes problematic, set of moves that link the formation of the body's materiality to the psychical formation of subjectivity. This linkage proposes a notion of the body's materiality that connects the body to the psyche in such a way that inquiries into the self's psychic structuration risk being seen as addressing the construction of bodily materiality entirely. For Butler, bodily surface signifies the complicated psychic processes whereby psychoanalytic conflicts that occur within the body's interior congeal to produce the body's exte-

rior image. The production of the body's surface appearance is located in these infinite psychic mimetic dramas, and the means through which a subject comes to know her bodily materiality at all is through this phantasmic projection of the body. A subject's bodily matter does not exist prior to its surface projection. This is precisely the point in Butler's theory where transsexuals become misfits, as they are invested in a notion of bodily matter prior to its surface projection. Such a notion explains their feelings of sexed disembodiment and contains the hope that if they do change sex, they will feel more sexually embodied.

Part of this reluctance to conceptualize bodily materiality separate from or prior to one's bodily surface projection is due to poststructuralist feminism's ambivalent relationship with the biological sciences, an ambivalence that has significant historical weight. Poststructuralist feminists understand the biological sciences to be an intellectual project continually reproducing truth claims regarding biological sex, sexuality, gender, and the body. They see the following equation as an inevitable epistemological implication of biological sciences' devotion to studying biological sex: bodies = sexed ontology = sex's binary facticity. But if anything, transsexuals demonstrate that despite their desire for sexed ontology, with advances made in the biological sciences, particular sexed ontologies are not inescapably connected to specific bodies. No longer is any body *forever* wedded to a single sexed ontology, and biological sex does not have the over-determined factual hold on bodies that it once did. Stripped of its sexually factual baggage, bodily reality in the biological sense should emerge as a legitimate site of inquiry for feminism. When it does, feminists will be able to theorize transsexuals and their specificity with increased rigor and sensitivity.

To the extent that poststructuralist feminists consistently relegate claims regarding bodily biological materiality to the realm of essentialism, they are implicitly rendering the body as a biological organism static and are, in effect, re-essentializing it.²⁴ They are relying on an understanding of the biological sciences that conceives of biology's relationship to bodies as one which is inherently deterministic. As we begin the twenty-first century, the biological sciences conceive of bodies as anything but static. New technologies that rework them emerge nearly every day. Much poststructuralist feminist theory relies on a perception of early to mid-twentieth century biology, which saw bodies as more static and impermeable. No longer a discipline of mere static empirical observation of bodies, the biological sciences of the twenty-first century is a discipline which focuses on bodily reconstruction and rebuilding. At this historical moment, poststructuralist feminist

theory should reassess its contestatory relationship to the biological sciences, not to uncritically valorize them, but rather to engage their reconstructive possibilities and the theoretical openings they create.²⁵

Transsexual photographer Loren Cameron recently published a book of transsexual photographs entitled *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits*. Using riveting personal narratives and photographs of himself as well as other FTM transsexuals from differing class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, Cameron takes his reader through the non-linear and never-ending process that characterizes transsexual identity formation. Intertwining narratives and pictures of self-loathing, self-doubt, and self-actualization that occur at different moments pre- and post-surgery, and focusing on the physical bodily changes that facilitate and accompany these shifts in emotional states, Cameron gets at a level of transsexual agency not yet fully articulated: the level of transition that occurs in the flesh. In an emotionally charged self-portrait entitled “Testosterone,” Cameron, wearing an extremely gruff face, violently smashes a glass bottle against a chain fence. The text alongside the frustrated portrait reads:

I inject myself with a dose of testosterone every two weeks, the standard maintenance schedule for men like me. Between injections, the oil-based drug absorbs slowly through the muscle tissue. I admit I’ve become very attached to taking the hormone, which is responsible for all my physical masculine attributes, like my facial and body hair and muscle development. I’ve noticed that it affects my sex drive and emotional state too. During the peak part of my cycle, I turn into a randy, greasy kind of guy who is more than a little irritable. (Cameron, 1996, p. 20)

His clever title, *Body Alchemy*, marks an obvious attempt to name the level of transsexual agency that occurs within the biological structures of the body, as alchemy refers to the magical transformation of something common into something precious. As I see it, lesbians have little reason, other than an aversion to biology, to place transsexuals on the fringes of their communities or exclude them entirely, as even an aversion to biology is, to a large extent, unfounded if transsexuals are absolved on the basis of their transition into anatomical manhood. Such exclusion rests on the sexed realness of female anatomy, an implicitly biological assumption in itself. Lesbians should view transsexuals as politically aligned with them in their desires to destabilize patriarchal notions of sex’s dualistic facticity and garner some semblance of com-

fort in their own sexed ontologies. Sociocultural, political, historical, discursive, phenomenological, and especially biological inquiries into transsexual fleshy specificity within lesbian communities mark feminist and queer theorists' next scholarly venues from which to know the *edginess* of transsexuals and their subjectivity.

AUTHOR NOTE

I am enormously grateful to Mary Hawkesworth for reading several earlier versions of this essay and providing me with invaluable commentary and suggestions. Louisa Schein, Elizabeth Grosz, and Angela Pattatucci Aragón, as well as other contributors to this volume also read drafts and imparted very helpful advice, the traces of which are no doubt found within my revisions.

NOTES

1. Halberstam, Judith and C. Jacob Hale. (1998). "Butch/FTM Border Wars: A Note on Collaboration." *GLQ. The Transgender Issue*. 4(2). Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 287–309.

2. Much interesting commentary has been produced regarding "passing." Biddy Martin, in "Sexualities Without Genders and Other Queer Utopias," argues that femme lesbians pass in the same way that many transsexuals do. She states, presumably of her own identification, "I prefer Lisa Duggan's lament, her wish that she were a lesbian drag queen, so that her femmeness might be representable as something other than passing, by way of some sort of routing through a gay male form and back again, a routing that makes the crossings in all forms of identification more evident" (1994, p. 112). Jacquelyn N. Zita criticizes the notion of passing altogether in "Male Lesbians and the Postmodern Body": "Passing implies pretense and lying, not a new ontological reading of the body's sex. Postmodernism with its notion of the body as invention of discursivity makes plausible the 'transsexualizing' of the body, a possibility dependent on the adoption of new criteria and alternative readings of the body's sex" (1998, p. 106). Sandy Stone, in a profoundly different vein, discusses the need for transsexuals to resist the impulse to pass so that they may form political constituencies as *transsexuals* in "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." In this endnote, I do not wish to suggest that femme passing and transsexual passing are the same phenomena. Rather, I hope that their contiguities, affiliations, coalitions, and differences might be drawn out with increased specificity. No doubt, their connection, even if it is only a semantic one denoted by the term "passing" itself, is not written about enough by feminist and queer theorists.

3. Throughout the course of this paper, I make a distinction between "transgender" and "transsexual" subjects. For my purposes, transsexual subjects are those subjects who specifically undergo anatomical shifts to assuage their feelings of being wrongly sexed. Many may see my distinction between transgender and transsexual subjects as

arbitrary if not entirely false, but the reasons for such a distinction will become more evident later.

4. That is, mapping out our sexed identities (male, female, etc.), gender identifications (man, woman, trans, etc.), sexual identifications (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc.), sex/gender of object choices (male, female, man, woman, trans, etc.), and desires (heteroerotic, homoerotic, queer, etc.) in the most *heteronormatively* aligned fashion possible. Judith Butler very astutely outlines this alignment in her first chapter of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire,” pp. 3–44.

5. This idea that sex is just as fluid as gender if not more so has come from a series of discussions I have had with Elizabeth Grosz. The fluidity of sex that I speak of in this essay is her idea. My particular exposition of sex’s fluidity, though, is my responsibility and mine alone.

6. This is not to suggest that lesbian, queer, and feminist scholars do the same theoretical and political work. Their projects are oftentimes very divergent and are aligned with profoundly different theoretical and political traditions, although I do think that a significant shared fissure for all of them is the exploration of transsexual subjects and their subjectivity.

7. See Detloff, Madelyn (2006). *Gender Please, Without the Gender Police: Rethinking Pain in Archetypal Narratives of Butch, Transgender, and FTM Masculinity* (this volume).

8. Judith Halberstam discusses the phenomenon of the masculine continuum in two pieces. The first is (1998). “Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum.” *GLQ. The Transgender Issue*. 4(2). Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 287-309. She republishes another version of this essay in with the same title in (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, pp. 141-174. In my commentary with Angela Pattatucci-Aragón, she very astutely suggests that the queer overemphasis on notions like “continuum” unfairly erases the cultural intelligibility of femme men who are not gay-identified. Their cultural intelligibility results from either entering into gay communities where their femmeness is acknowledged to the extent that it can be sexualized *or* their femmeness is acknowledged by surgically entering into a biologically female body. While inclusive of female butchness, continuums in queer theory have tended to ignore male femininity.

9. By using the term “campy” in this sentence I do not mean to downplay the serious struggles entailed in transgender embodiment. Campiness can entail a great deal of pain and suffering too. See specifically Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues: A Novel*.

10. With this claim, I do not mean to suggest that the term “transgender” should be set to *only* represent the lived pains and struggles of those wishing to fall within its rubrics. Nor do I intend to suggest that the term “owns” the pain in gender transitioning or in queer practices. Rather, I am generalizing to make a point about how the term “transgender,” as of late, seems to be continually associated with pleasurable valences. For a more sustained discussion and analysis of Butch/FTM pain, please see the work of Madelyn Detloff in this volume, “Gender Please, Without the Gender Police: Rethinking Pain in Archetypal Narratives of Butch, Transgender, and FTM Masculinity.”

11. For a concise version of this history see Cressida J. Heyes’ essay “Feminist Solidarity After Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender.”

12. Halberstam has since revised her seminal formulation “There are no transsexuals. We are all transsexuals” (1994, p. 212). The infamous quote originally appeared in “F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity” in the anthology *The Lesbian Postmodern*

edited by Laura Doan. Her well-received corrective statement appears in “Transgender Butch”: “There are transsexuals, and we are not all transsexuals; gender is not fluid, and gender variance is not the same wherever we find it. Specificity is all. As gender-queer practices and forms continue to emerge, presumably the definitions of *gay*, *lesbian*, *transsexual*, and *transgender* will not remain static, and we will produce new terms to delineate what the current terms cannot” (1998, p. 306).

13. Many scholars, especially ones articulating the fragmented and transitory conditions of postmodernity, have utilized transsexuality for its ability to be paradigmatic of the postmodern condition. Rita Felski documents this phenomenon in her essay “Fin de siècle, Fin de sexe: Transsexuality, Postmodernism, and the Death of History.” She argues that famous postmodern theorists like Derrida, Deleuze, and Baudrillard use transsexuality as a trope for the end of history, an atemporal condition touted by postmoderns. Her essay eloquently asks, “How do our cultural imaginings of historical time relate to changing perceptions of the meaning and nature of gender difference?” (1996, p. 337). “Fin de siècle, fin de sexe” is an epigram coined by French artist Jean Lorrain to denote the figurative affinity of history’s end with sex’s transitional character. Felski describes the utility of this phenomenon at length, “Thus the destabilization of the male/female divide is seen to bring with it a waning of temporality, teleology, and grand narrative; the end of sex echoes and affirms the end of history, defined as the pathological legacy and symptom of the trajectory of Western modernity” (1996, p. 338). Jean Baudrillard’s works *The Transparency of Evil* and *Cool Memories* are perhaps the most famous examples of this phenomenon. Paradigms of gender and sexuality emerge for him to allegorize the epidemic of signification that *is* the (anti)ontological condition of postmodernity. Other texts that document the “free-floating aestheticism” of sex and gender signifiers are Arthur and Marilouise Kroker’s anthologies *Body Invaders* and *The Last Sex*. Despite profound acclaim for her essay, Felski has been criticized by transsexual theorists like Jay Prosser in *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* for her failure to adequately specify transsexual and transgender subjects, as evidenced in this quote. “For example, in *The Transparency of Evil*, Jean Baudrillard writes, ‘the sexual body has now been assigned an artificial fate. This fate is transsexuality—transsexual not in any anatomical sense but rather in the more general sense of transvestitism, of playing with the commutability of the signs of sex . . . we are all transsexuals.’ Here transsexuality, or perhaps more accurately, transgenderism, serves as an overarching metaphor to describe the dissolution of once stable polarities of male and female, the transfiguration of sexual nature into the artifice of those who play with the sartorial, morphological, or gestural signs of sex” (1996, p. 337).

14. My use of the term “queer” in this sentence is not to suggest that all lesbians identify as queer or all queers identify as “lesbians.” Rather, in this sentence I wish to capture the considerable variation of lesbian bodies and bodily practices by using “queer.”

15. But like most archaeological rupturings, these texts were taken up in deeply arbitrary, unpredictable, and, at times, problematic ways. Certainly scholars have done much in the way of criticizing the larger epistemological presuppositions of each text as well as problematizing their more specific questionable maneuvers, but critique most assuredly fails to prevent others from misappropriating both well-thought-out and not so well-thought-out arguments.

16. The bulk of this theorizing occurs in her second chapter, “Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix.” Briefly, she begins with Lacan’s theory of language, where, via paternal law, men are said *to have* the phallus

while women are said *to be* the phallus. Butler reads Lacan as arguing that these ontological specifications of having and being the phallus are never fully actualized by men and women, respectively; having and being are ultimately “comedic failures that are nevertheless compelled to articulate and enact these repeated impossibilities” (1990, p. 46). Because women fail to ever fully become the phallus, they are always an approximation of sorts—they merely “appear” to be the phallus. Lacan, terms this “appearing as being the phallus” masquerade. The function of masquerade, according to Lacan is to mask or ‘[dominate] the identification through which refusals of love are resolved’ (Lacan, quoted by Butler, 1990, p. 48), the mechanism of Freud’s melancholia. Butler turns to Freud’s notion of melancholia and reads it as a gender ontology for two reasons. First, because of melancholia’s reliance on the Oedipal drama, and the Oedipal drama’s basis in an externally enforced prohibition against a son’s sexual desire for his mother and father, Butler is able to argue that the process of masquerade (with its reliance on melancholia) is not attempting to access a signification prior to culture. Whereas Lacan awards the realm of the Symbolic special access to the ‘real’ prior to the realm’s emergence in culture, Butler argues that masquerade’s dependence on melancholia and melancholia’s dependence on externalized prohibitions requires a reconceptualization of masquerade. The continual play of appearances that make up the “internalized” dramas of masquerade can no longer be conceived of as based in an ability to approximate a pre-cultural ideal of the phallus. Rather, according to melancholia, cultural taboos on incest and homosexuality produce the dramas of the psyche. Therefore, these dramas are not framed by a pre-cultural, pre-discursive ideal. The second reason Butler returns to Freud’s notion of melancholia is to argue that the mechanism of melancholia explains how one’s truth of sex comes to be located on the surface of the body. Whereas the notion of masquerade temporalizes the play of the appearance of gender, melancholia theorizes the production of an incorporated space, where one’s lost love (i.e., father and/or mother) and lost modality of desire (i.e., heterosexual or *homosexual* as Butler theorizes) becomes internalized. This incorporated space, according to Butler, is located on the surface of the body. Melancholia, the never-ending process of identity formation through incorporating the history of one’s lost love objects, explains for Butler the incessant acquisition of one’s gender identity.

17. For the purposes of my investigation of “transgender” in feminist scholarship, two things about Butler’s work are important to note. The first has just been discussed at length; that is, the overt privileging of psychoanalysis to discuss gender’s unnaturalness and transitional character (*but not a transitional character that is easily or volitionally entered into*). The second is Butler’s wedding of false sexed ontology to a matrix of compulsory heterosexuality. For Butler gender and (sex)uality are *always already* inter-articulated in highly complicated and interdependent ways.

18. Biddy Martin superbly accounts for this phenomenon in her aforementioned “Sexualities Without Genders and Other Queer Utopias.” She begins her comprehensive article, “For a long time I have been concerned about a tendency among some lesbian, bisexual, and gay theorists and activists to construct ‘queerness’ as a vanguard position that announces its newness and advance over and against an apparently superseded and now anachronistic feminism with its emphasis on gender. [. . .] But I am worried about the occasions when antifoundationalist celebrations of queerness rely on their own projections of fixity, constraint, or subjection onto a fixed ground, often onto feminism or the female body, in relation to which queer sexualities become figural, performative, playful, and fun” (1994, p. 104).

19. This quote is taken by C. Jacob Hale's "Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead: In the Butch/FTM Borderlands," 1998, p. 311.

20. For a review of several of these books see Bernice L. Hausman's "Recent Transgender Theory."

21. In my commentary with Angela Pattatucci-Aragón, she insightfully expands my argument here to suggest that not only is feminism's uptake of the transgender subject position about appeasing the post-identity impulse of queer theory, but it also explores new possibilities of being and doing womanhood whereby patriarchal power might be increasingly diminished and undermined. Transgender undoubtedly proliferates the times and spaces of patriarchal resistance, but it will by no means end patriarchy by overturning the given conceptual status of gender's binarity. Indeed, the struggle against patriarchy is much more multidimensional than the scope of a conceptual or linguistic shift.

22. This idea of reontologizing sex comes from a conversation I had with Elizabeth Grosz. What this reontologization entails for transsexuals, though, is my idea alone, and I take full responsibility for its potential problems.

23. Bernice L. Hausman's *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* has been criticized on several fronts for positioning transsexuals as cultural dupes of the medical establishment. See most particularly the introduction to Jay Prosser's *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, "On Transitions—Changing Bodies, Changing Narratives" and Judith Halberstam's "Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum."

24. While my emphasis is primarily on transsexual subjects, poststructuralist feminists, by failing to engage the biological sciences, also have difficulty addressing the issue of a woman who reinvents or enters more fully into her femininity via plastic surgery. A whole range of theoretical and political issues and questions arise through biology's capacity to shift the body's fleshy contours that poststructuralist feminists have considerable difficulty addressing. Transsexuals are obviously not the only sexed and gendered subjects who feel uncomfortable with their sexed assignment at birth. Even anatomical females who remain female look to biology to augment or improve their femininity in culturally normative ways.

25. My skeptical reader continues to ask, "Why biology for transsexuals?" Because biology is exactly the locale where transsexuals garner agential specificity from other marginally gendered bodies. Other theorists of transsexual subjectivity reconsider phenomenology and its capacity to theorize notions of sexed (dis)embodiment and interiority that poststructuralist accounts of gender gloss over. Phenomenology seems to be the best scholarly venue from which to study *feelings* of sex *dis* and *re* embodiment for transsexuals, before, during, and after surgery that exceed discursive prediction. In "Phenomenology as Method in Trans Studies," Henry S. Rubin argues that "whereas discursive analysis hopes to penetrate essences and demonstrate the fiction of their fixed and naturalized character, phenomenology takes it as a matter of fact that essences are always already constituted in relationship to embodied subjectivity, hence they are natural and malleable" (1998, p. 267). Jay Prosser vies for phenomenology as well in theorizing transsexual subjectivity in the second chapter of his *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, "A Skin of One's Own: Toward a Theory of Transsexual Embodiment," pages 61-98. Two other important pieces bring up the problematic of embodiment for theorizing transsexual agency: Bernice L. Hausman's "Virtual Sex, Real Gender: Body and Identity in Transgender Discourse" and Patricia Elliot's and Katrina Roen's "Transgenderism and the Question of Embodiment: Prom-

ising Queer Politics?" As critics of discursive analysis have noted, discourse, especially language, binds the expression of affect, or the feeling part of emotion. See particularly Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, and Performativity*. Discursive analysis cannot get at transsexuals' plea that they feel in the wrong body or wrongly embodied, and phenomenology understands bodily ontology in such a way that is not overly determinative or necessarily sex-essentialist. Specifically, theorists of transsexuality have been most interested in phantom limbs (i.e., in the case of an FTM, imagining a penis that does not exist) or anosognosia (i.e., in the case of an MTF, having a penis that one does not want or does not feel as one's own). How can feminist and queer theorists unproblematically valorize sexual pleasure when many subjects do not *feel* right with the anatomical apparatuses that such pleasure ostensibly coheres around? This is not to suggest that feminist and queer scholars not theorize pleasure. Rather, it is to note that the conditions of pleasure are themselves highly contingent and in need of more extensive consideration. Brushed under the poststructuralist feminist epistemological and methodological rug as of late, phenomenology, in its ability to take seriously embodiment and interiority, certainly deserves reconsideration, but it does not get at transsexual specificity in quite the same way that biological sciences do. Feminist and queer theorists may use phenomenology to theorize a whole set of gender-queer bodies that claim sexed disembodiment, but biology specifically captures transsexual agency in fleshy transitions like no other disciplinary matrix.

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