

CHANGING GENDER

SUSAN
STRYKER





CHANGING GENDER



**SUSAN
STRYKER**



FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX
NEW YORK

[Begin Reading](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[A Note About the Author](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

**Thank you for buying this
Farrar, Straus and Giroux ebook.**

To receive special offers, bonus content,
and info on new releases and other great reads,
sign up for our newsletters.

[**Sign Up**](#)

Or visit us online at
us.macmillan.com/newslettersignup

For email updates on the author, click [here](#).

The author and publisher have provided this e-book to you for your personal use only. You may not make this e-book publicly available in any way. **Copyright infringement is against the law. If you believe the copy of this e-book you are reading infringes on the author's copyright, please notify the publisher at: us.macmillan.com/piracy.**

For Mom, and Mimi

I.

Gender—that ubiquitous and overdetermined concept, amorphous to the point of meaninglessness and thus in need of thoughtful delineation—changed for me one early spring evening in 2023. It’s changed a lot more since then. It needs to change further still.

★ ★ ★

On the typically brisk and bright Northern California late afternoon of March 1, 2023, I’m leaving my office in the low-slung, earth-toned Mission-style building that houses Stanford University’s Humanities Center. I’m at Stanford for a year on a visiting fellowship, ostensibly to finish up a tome I’ve been working on for longer than I care to admit about transgender history in what’s now the United States from the colonial period to the present. The sun’s already started sinking toward the horizon as I walk across Santa Teresa Street to a quaint old turn-of-the-last-century wood-frame structure called the Fire Truck House. Once upon a time, that building actually housed fire trucks, but its second floor now houses QSpot, a campus center for trans and queer students. Established in 1971 by an outgrowth of the post-Stonewall gay and lesbian liberation movement called the Gay Academic Union, it’s one of the oldest continuously operating LGBTQ+ student centers in the world.

A pleasant young woman wearing loose-fitting natural fabrics positions herself between me and the building’s interior as she greets me at the door. Before allowing me any farther, she asks for my name, to check it against the sheets on her clipboard to make sure I’m on the list. I am. “Oh, hello, Dr. Stryker, welcome!” she says, smiling, as I introduce myself. “Thanks

for coming to our Community Care gathering tonight—it means a lot. There’s no program or presentations—we’ll just be hanging out in safe space together. There’s vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free catered Indian food upstairs, and nonalcoholic beverages. And we have trauma counselors on-site if you’re feeling triggered and need emotional support.”

Something in my face must signal that I’m silently thinking curmudgeonly boomer-generation thoughts about the hypersensitivities of “kids today” and all their *safe space* and *triggered* lingo, because she rolls her eyes, nods knowingly, and says, “I know, I know, admin required us to have the trauma counselors.”

That’s higher education today in a nutshell, I think as I tromp up the stairs: a glorified exercise in risk mitigation. Between a sometimes suffocating neoliberal culture within academic institutions that wants everything here to be safe, and disruptive political attacks from the outside that paint everything that happens here as dangerous, the space for truly free learning, thinking, and teaching feels squeezed to the vanishing point. I’d become disenchanted enough with all the headaches associated with being a full-time professor that I’d taken early retirement as soon as I could afford to, so that I could concentrate on the things I truly enjoy—there are many ways to teach and learn beyond the academy. But I’m thankful for the visiting fellowship I’ve been offered at Stanford, which is allowing me to focus solely on researching my book.

Though I resist the “safe space” mentality, I do understand the need for it. The world’s become an increasingly abrasive place for many of us. Back in my younger days, most of the problems we trans folks faced had to do with malignant neglect from a world that couldn’t care less whether we lived or died, whenever it deigned to notice our existence. Now our antagonists are actively gunning for us (and the world mostly still couldn’t care less). Retreating into a nurturing conviviality behind closed doors can be one element of a survival strategy, however much I prefer to focus my attention on whatever danger hurtles directly toward me.

The second floor of the Fire Truck House is a spacious room filled with bland institutional furniture. Couches are arranged into a conversation pit in the center, long tables with computer workstations line one wall, and a

bookshelf filled with queer memoirs and novels and works of nonfiction is off in the corner. The place is packed—a couple of university staffers, a faculty member or two, but mostly students, dozens of them, all trans or queer or somehow adjacent thereto. They are trying to balance, in one hand, plates filled with fluffy mounds of basmati rice topped with bhindi masala or palak paneer, while holding cans of LaCroix sparkling water in the other as they nosh and mingle and chat. I load up my own dinner plate and say hello to a couple of colleagues, including the ones who invited me to come tonight, who introduce me to some of their students. As a visiting researcher with no teaching responsibilities, I've had very little contact with Stanford students.

Many of those at QSpot tonight have never heard of me because they're nineteen or twenty years old and the work I'm best known for I produced before they were born. I'm just another old-timer they might google later to learn why they're supposed to care that one of their profs seems to think they should meet me. Some are a little older, in PhD programs in robotics or biomedical engineering or artificial intelligence—this is Stanford, after all—and they just happen to be trans or queer and don't engage with the kind of humanities-oriented work I do; for them this is mostly just a campus networking opportunity with free food. But for others I'm a revelation. Some are only now coming out as trans or queer after only recently leaving their family's home. It's enough for them simply to know that an OG trans historian like me, or something called trans history, exists. Being a presence for them is a form of labor I still gladly undertake, however fraught the university environment can feel. Others are a little starstruck because they've read things that I've written, or they've seen films that I've made or been in. Those are the students eager to make a personal connection with someone who represents not just a living connection to the past, or who can offer studious insight into the roots of the present, but also the tangible possibility of long-term survival as an openly trans person in a world that's increasingly hostile to our existence.

A grad student happens to know from my Wikipedia page that I was born in Oklahoma, like her, and she wants to compare notes about being Okies. Well, I demur, it's complicated. I did spend about half my growing-

up years in Oklahoma, but I've been in California for more than forty years, and my dad was in the army, so we moved around a lot. Plus the extended bio-fam was all from Arkansas; we were just stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, on and off, but ultimately stayed there after my father died when I was thirteen, so I always have a hard time saying where I'm from exactly. Oklahoma's as good an answer as any, better than most. I was born there. I went to high school and college there. My brother and his family still live in Oklahoma City. The place shaped me, for sure. I'll always feel connected to that land.

Another student says he's heard I'm from a Mormon background and wants to talk about me leaving the Latter-day Saints faith like he did. Well, I demur, it's complicated. My mom's side of the family did indeed belong to one of the tiny minor branches of the LDS churches—one now known as the Community of Christ—but they were actively hostile to the mainstream Utah version of the faith and wouldn't be caught dead calling themselves Mormons. They rejected out of hand all the stereotypical stuff that most people think of as Mormonism, like polygamy and special underwear and temple ceremonies or whatever their takeaway is from that Broadway musical or the real housewives of Salt Lake City, because my sectarian kinfolk thought the Utah church corrupted the original religion revealed to their prophet Joseph Smith.

And besides, we moved around a lot when I was a kid because my dad was in the army, and we weren't always around church people or that side of the family, so I always had a one-foot-in, one-foot-out relationship to a church that had a one-foot-in, one-foot-out relationship to Mormonism. By the time I was in my early teens, I didn't believe things I was expected to believe when I was a child, and I haven't had anything to do with any organized religion in my adult life, so it's not central to my identity to think of myself as ex-Mormon. But true, I did write a flawed and hastily finished, never-published dissertation at Berkeley on early Mormon history that maybe I'll get around to revising someday, and some of the questions planted by my upbringing are tangled in complicated ways with my sense of being trans. I think religion and transness both touch on questions of how

we experience a reality that is intrinsically multitudinous; they both express how we have faith, or don't, in the evidence of things unseen.

A stereotypically nonbinary purple-haired goth kid with facial piercings, extensively tattooed and dressed in black, sidles up to me. They know that in the early nineties I created a guerrilla-style performance art piece, staged as an academic paper delivered at a conference, in which I assumed the autobiographically informed character of an enraged transsexual academic ranting and raving about identifying with Frankenstein's monster. It was later published in article form in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal and is still kicking around and finding new audiences more than thirty years later. *Autotheory*, some call the genre now. I've seen it set to music by punk rockers and experimental opera ensembles, embraced as a manifesto by animal liberationists, adapted as a liturgical text by countercultural spiritual groups. The goth kid thinks it's "sick as fuck" that I'm unabashed about leaning into monstrosity as an ethical refusal to be subjected, as a trans person, to the rules of a normie game you can never hope to win. I don't think monsters are bad things. Monsters are experiments in embodied form that herald unfathomable futures. When somebody makes you their monster, they cede to you a tremendous power, and you should not reject the gift. Refusing to disavow kinship with them keeps me in touch with a dark and vital radiance that I actively embrace.

A trans guy with crisply cropped hair, wearing equally crisp chinos and an oxford shirt, stands nearby, listening to the goth kid's fangirling. He is clearly uncomfortable at the thought of being anything other than utterly normal. The world he'd grown up in had led him to believe that this was a reasonable expectation, at least until the last few years. The one I grew up in? The one we live in today? Not so much. He asks if I feel differently about claiming monstrosity now that I'm older and have been successful in life and can hardly consider myself a marginalized outsider, or whether it plays into negative stereotypes about trans people. Nope, I say, on both counts. Don't relinquish the power of exceeding the frame to those who want that frame to be your cage. Besides, I'm still feelin' it, still find it creatively generative, let a thousand freak flags fly. The goth kid takes this

as an expression of solidarity and boldly invites me over to the pub in the nearby student union to grab a beer later in the evening.

Sorry, can't, I say, I'm going to the Matt Walsh event as soon as I finish making the rounds here at QSpot.

Met with startled, awkward, wide-eyed silence—I can almost hear them say “Why deliberately subject yourself to that BS?”—I soon take my leave. But I actually do feel safer confronting an impending catastrophe head-on.

★ ★ ★

The presence on campus of Matt Walsh—a far-right pundit and anti-trans troll on Ben Shapiro's reactionary *Daily Wire* platform, who has 3.7 million followers on fkaTwitter and describes himself in his profile there as a “theocratic fascist, bestselling children's author, world renowned DEI consultant” just to twist the libtards' nipples—is the reason the trans and queer students of Stanford are gathering in community in the safe space of QSpot, trauma counselors on standby for anybody feeling triggered. Walsh has been on a nationwide barnstorming tour of colleges and universities, lecturing and promoting his film *What Is a Woman?*, a deceptively edited hit piece according to some who unwittingly participated in it, that derides people with trans identities. Today his road show has come to Palo Alto.

Walsh is just one foot soldier in a coordinated assault on trans people that has been gathering momentum for decades in the United States. Though I was already aware of niche critiques of trans people emanating from feminist fundamentalists and religious reactionaries as early as the 1960s, I first started paying attention to the deliberate weaponization of our existence as a mainstream political tactic back in 2007, when conservatives stoked fears about “transgender toilets” to attack the proposed Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), provoking its weak-tea liberal champions in Congress to jettison the bill's protections for trans people, in what would nevertheless be a failed effort to pass a landmark piece of antidiscrimination legislation.

Transphobic discourse featured prominently in the racist fantasies that flooded online populist chatter during the 2008 presidential election campaigns, after Sarah Palin's race-baiting, queer-baiting, conspiracy-

mongering vice-presidential run helped breach the dam holding back the previously publicly unsayable—as when Alex Jones on *Infowars* platformed a story about Barack Obama being gay and Michelle Obama being a pre-op trans woman who kept him sexually satisfied. Full-fledged reaction set in by the mid-2010s, when the so-called transgender tipping point put Laverne Cox on the cover of *Time* magazine and Caitlyn Jenner on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, and prompted an early wave of “trans toilets” and religious liberty bills that at first failed to gain much traction. Reaction ticked up further in the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision recognizing marriage equality in 2015, when the organized right pivoted to trans issues and abortion access as their next most-winnable battles. After overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, trans was simply next in the firing line. Besides, attacking trans people was proving itself to be a potent political strategy.

Back in the early days of the first Trump presidency, when our society was still disoriented by the utter collapse of a consensus reality and we had not yet lost our collective capacity to be shocked by the deliberateness with which partisan interests worked to widen the epistemological breaches that allow consensus reality to crumble, there was a major news story about an influential political consulting outfit known as Cambridge Analytica. The Mercer family of right-wing hedge-fund billionaires, one of Trump’s biggest financial backers in 2016, funded it. It was they, along with Fox News and the Murdoch publishing empire, who promoted a “war on truth” that painted legacy media outlets as “fake news.” They bankrolled conservative news outlets like *Breitbart* and provocateurs like Steve Bannon, the first chief strategist of the Trump White House, who was a former Cambridge Analytica executive.

In a story the likes of which has become far too familiar but was breathless breaking news back then, Cambridge Analytica scraped data from Facebook, crunched the data for insights, and distilled them into memes and tropes and talking points engineered to serve the vested interests of its clients; it then injected that bespoke, microtargeted content back into social media environments like little information viruses. It was part of a massive and diffuse psyop campaign to shape public perception and

influence elections, in part by undermining the truth status of empirical knowledge itself, thereby tweaking information consumers' very sense of what was true, and therefore real, to move just enough votes at the margins to influence the outcome of an election. Working to pass the Brexit referendum in the UK and supporting Trump's quest for the US presidency were but two of their many successful campaigns.

Cambridge Analytica officials secretly recorded by investigative journalists with the British public broadcaster Channel 4 in 2017 described their tactics in candid detail. "There are two fundamental human drivers when it comes to taking information onboard effectively," a senior staffer explains. "Those are hopes and fears, and many of those are unspoken or even unconscious. You didn't know that was a fear until you saw something that just evoked that reaction from you. And our job is to ... drop the bucket further down the well than anybody else, to understand what are those really deep-seated underlying fears, concerns. It's no good fighting an election campaign on the facts, because actually it's all about emotion."

Encountering transness can rip the lid off a very deep well. Because trans lives articulate a different relationship between self and flesh, they imply—if they are to be accepted as trans people present them—a potential for personal identity to relate to corporeal existence in a new way. That scares the bejeezus out of some people and provokes defensive scorn or ridicule or anger from others. Those potent feelings can fuel the often-lethal violence directed predominantly at trans women by men who are attracted to them when those men discover those women's transness, in addition to less immediately lethal expressions of prejudice. Trans issues thus offer a perfect opportunity for fomenting a reactive and fear-based mass politics by targeting a small and relatively powerless minority of actual trans people, precisely because trans issues touch on fundamental and widely shared unconscious fears and concerns.

To ask "Can sex be changed?" and to answer it one way or the other requires engaging with basic philosophical questions about the status of knowledge and the nature of reality. Trans issues impinge directly upon the topics of how we collectively decide in the first place what's materially possible, and therefore potentially real and empirically true, given our

assumptions about what existence is fundamentally capable of accommodating. They traffic with the specters of unreason and irreality that haunt the margins of rational thought, and thus become excellent fodder for conspiracy theories. Accordingly, politically vulnerable trans lives have become a principal battlefield in the struggles over truth and knowledge now rending the fabric of contemporary social existence.

Waging those struggles drove the whole vast raft of anti-trans legislation that swept state legislatures during the second half of the Biden presidency—more than a thousand individual bills in 2022 and 2023: bans on trans women and girls in sports, drag bans and book bans and bathroom bans, bans on medical care and pronoun use, bans on teaching about the actual existence of gender diversity in schools and colleges. Those culture-war battles supply the deep context that informs the second Trump administration’s attempt to declare by executive fiat the “biological truth” of its ideologically motivated and scientifically unsupported definitions of *male* and *female*, and to strike the word *gender* itself from the vocabulary of governance. A shared sense of reality is what’s ultimately at stake in the war over *gender*’s meaning in this moment of epistemic collapse.



Sauntering from QSpot to Dinkelspiel Auditorium, I note how this part of the campus has changed over the course of the day. I passed through it a few hours earlier to retrieve from the library a seldom-read 1976 work titled *Transvestites and Transsexuals: Mixed Views*, by the feminist psychologist Deborah Heller Feinbloom. Feinbloom had been instrumental in setting up a nonprofit community-based service organization to support trans people in Boston in the early 1970s. Given how contentious relations have become between many trans people and some versions of feminism, the historian in me wanted to dig around in that earlier period to get a better sense of how being trans and being feminist related to each other at that place and time. Boston in the seventies was home turf to a couple of the earliest and most influential feminist anti-trans polemicists, Mary Daly and Janice Raymond, whose thought supplies a taproot for much of the anti-trans rhetoric today. Maybe if Feinbloom’s book could help me understand a little better how

Boston's lesbian, feminist, and trans scenes interrelated back in the day, I could have a clearer understanding now of how those same constituencies clash in the present.

The copy of Feinbloom's book I'd requested hadn't been checked out since the 1980s, but when I cracked it open, I found scribbled across the bookplate pasted inside the front cover the words "I think we should hang all these fucking butt pirates!" (Translation, if the slang is unfamiliar: Transsexuals are predatory anal rapists who deserve to be killed by lynching.) Walking back to my office, I couldn't help but wonder if that hateful little message was a testament to the longevity of certain ignorant and phobic attitudes toward trans people, left decades ago and being seen only now. Or was it something inscribed there only in the past few days by a zealous undergrad library work-study student caught up in the current wave of anti-trans discourse, who perhaps became aware of the book only because I'd requested it?

On the way back from the library, I crossed the plaza near the student union and passed through the rift zone of contemporary campus politics regarding trans issues. Thousands of people had circulated through the plaza that day, mostly absorbed in their own affairs, mostly not actively paying attention to either Matt Walsh or trans people. But polarized camps had staked out their positions across from each other. On one side of the plaza, anti-Walsh/pro-trans people had set up informational tables to debunk Walsh's talking points, ask passersby to boycott his lecture that night, and publicize the gathering at QSpot. On the other side of the plaza, College Republicans and a variety of right-wing groups flogged anti-trans propaganda and hyped Walsh's gig. I collected the ephemeral print literature from both sides for my personal archive, then scanned a QR code to register for Walsh's lecture.

Now, this evening, the area around the student union has been transformed. Metal crowd-control barricades create a labyrinthine path to channel lecturegoers single-file past the pretty, conservatively dressed young white women with iPads who are checking the electronic tickets on attendees' smartphones. There is a considerable security presence, including metal detectors and bag searches. I remember when the anti-trans

troll Milo Yiannopoulos—a self-immolating Matt Walsh type of that seemingly long-ago era when Trump first came to power—was scheduled to speak on the UC Berkeley campus in 2017. That night, anti-fascist protesters fighting in the streets with the riot police caused more than \$100,000 in property damage in the course of shutting the event down. Their bonfires made the national news. Tonight, I see only a lone trans woman anxiously flyering the hundreds of people streaming in to hear Walsh speak. Maybe that’s just the difference between button-down Stanford and Berkeley, with its tattered reputation as a radical campus. But maybe it’s also the difference between 2017 and 2023, the difference between militant resistance to an alarming emergent trend and a survival-driven wariness in the face of an ascendant malicious force. The vibe tonight among the trans and queer students is much more like playing cards by candlelight after putting plywood over the windows in advance of the hurricane than it is like disrupting the trash-talkers.

Dinkelspiel Auditorium seats 710 people and is rapidly filling to capacity, mostly, it seems, with members of the public rather than the Stanford campus community. I’m feeling like a spy behind enemy lines when a familiar voice booms out.

“I thought I’d find you here!”

It’s Fred Turner, a communications prof and media theorist who studies Silicon Valley for a living. We’re both fellows this year at the Humanities Center. Fred’s a big, jovial guy, almost exactly my age, with an insatiable curiosity about everything. Like me, he prefers to drink his information straight from the fire hydrant. He’s the perfect companion for a night of ethnographic fieldwork.

Fred scans the room, identifying for me little clutches of up-and-coming tech bros and crypto speculators, the preening Vivek Ramaswamy and JD Vance wannabes trying on a political posture for size, their fingers stuck metaphorically in the wind to gauge the room and suss out the zeitgeist as they plan the next step of their next bid to become the next Peter Thiel or Elon Musk, sensing that maybe this trans thing is a horse they could ride in on. Stanford has been a breeding ground for many such ambitious

oligarchs-in-waiting, and they are thick as flies tonight. A giddy sense of impending triumph palpably pervades the room.

Fred and I take turns pointing out to each other various sub-constituencies amid the larger population of attendees: the serious young white ethnic Catholic men in conservative three-piece suits, Knights of Columbus medallions dangling around their necks, ushering people to their seats; the neo-fash incels unironically sporting Hitler haircuts and mustaches; the hipster Identity Movement guys aping alt-right icon Richard Spencer's sartorial style; tradwives hanging on the arms of their red-hatted MAGA men. Some individuals give off an air of disdainful moral rectitude, and we speculate as to whether they are Christian nationalists, given the rising prominence of Christian nationalism in right-wing circles. Overheard snippets of conversation as to how soon we could upload our consciousnesses to the cloud and merge with our machines into one vast superintelligence, or whether writing off most of existing humanity would actually be the greatest good for the greatest number over the long haul if it helps our species expand beyond our planet, signal the presence of true believers in once-fringe ideas that now animate many of the tech elite. Nothing holds this motley, mostly white mass together tonight apart from its shared fixation on trans people, trans women in particular, as the avatars of everything that's wrong with the world. A harbinger of things to come, the gathering is like a Trump rally focused specifically on transness, smack dab in the middle of Silicon Valley's brain bank.

With mock professorial solemnity I proclaim, "The phobic fantasy of the trans woman today serves the same constituency-mobilization function for a new social assemblage anchored in the far right as the antisemitic fantasy of the Jew did for the European fascists of the 1930s." Fred knits his brows, purses his lips, and wonders aloud how seriously to take my sardonic comment. I wonder, too. There are some obvious parallels between the stereotypical figure of the trans woman in transphobic discourse and the stereotypical figure of the Jew in antisemitic discourse, and a long conflation of queerness and Jewishness in the popular imagination. Both are viewed as "evil deceivers" pretending to be like others, passing themselves off as cisgender people or gentiles, but actually polluting the body politic

with their biological impurities, necessitating the policing and surveillance of the whole social order to root them up, suppress them, contain them, eventually eradicate them. Like mushrooms sprouting from the rotting corpse of the body politic, we, with our public visibility, are thought to be the consequence of social decay. Jewish men, like trans women, are imagined as defective in their masculinity, their genitalia surgically emasculated by circumcision. Trans people, like the antisemitic fantasy in the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, are imagined as a powerful clandestine group orchestrating a sinister plot to transform the governments of the world to better suit their own interests.

But analogy is always a weak form of analysis. Do these family resemblances stem from the same root causes? That smells right at first whiff—heterogeneous social movements like the one forming in Trump’s ambit always need some sort of bogus ideology to glue their disparate components together while papering over their substantive differences. Today, *gender ideology* is a vacuous buzz phrase meant to signal negative opinions of *gender* itself as an idea or concept; it is used to dismiss *gender* as a misrepresentational falsehood layered on top of the obvious physical truth of biological sex. *Gender ideology*, I think, does for twenty-first-century fascisms what actual antisemitism did for Hitler.

Fred and I talk about an academic book we’ve both read, Klaus Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies*, which offers close readings of more than 250 novels and memoirs written in Weimar Germany by members of protofascist militias known as the Freikorps. It dissects those men’s prurient fascination with the soft, leaky, and porous bodies they associate with women and Jews, and their desire to somaticize the hard-body qualities of steel they associate with virile masculinity, machinery, and war. Watching or participating in ribald, farcical theatrical cross-gender dressing was a surprisingly common way for those guys to steer between the Scylla of intense emotional bonds between men in homosocial military contexts and the Charybdis of simultaneously abhorring homosexuality. The two poles merge and meld to forge the fantasy of the feminized male—the transwoman—a figure of both fascination and horror that literally haunted the dreams and animated the erotic inner life of men whose racial and

gender identities were predicated on misogynistic antisemitic transphobia. The transwoman, the un/woman, was a figure for them to fixate upon before violently obliterating her.

As the evening progresses, I have ample opportunities to reflect on the different strands of fear and loathing now consolidating into one large vein of anti-trans animus. The middle-school girls' wrestling coach who stands up in the Q&A to speak passionately about all the boys she pruriently imagines to be pretending to be girls, trying to "invade" her sport just so they can grab some little girl's crotch and squirm around with her on the mat. The young farmer from the Central Valley, waxing eloquent about his ancestors being the original settlers who first civilized California and tamed its land, demanding that real Californians like him rise up to overthrow the secular liberal elites who have taken control of this state and wipe them out along with all the invaders and perverts. The auditorium is populated by people who fear imaginary monsters thought to be somehow related to me.

★ ★ ★

Walsh himself—a bearded, bespectacled, dark-haired thirty-something who lives in Nashville, Tennessee—is outfitted in a casual blazer and T-shirt atop sneakers and jeans. He'd look right at home in a trendy espresso joint in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. He's charismatic, vibrating to the emotional rhythms of his crowd, concentrating and amplifying their feelings, deftly threading them into the overarching narrative he crafts. Listen to him and his colleagues on *The Daily Wire*. It's all racial degenerates, perverts, invaders, illegals, marriage-haters, fetus-killers, child-harmers, Marxists, communists, anarchists, rioters, thugs, criminals, eggheads, elites, liberals, sheeple, the ungodly, uppity women, trans women—they connect the dots and weave it all into One. Big. Picture. I think of Walsh as primarily being a self-aggrandizing opportunist who's jumped on the anti-trans bandwagon to gin up and spin controversy to garner more attention and influence, and who'll move on to some other grift whenever it better suits his ambition at that moment. Though I'm pretty sure he actually does genuinely loathe trans people.

Walsh deliberately positions himself as proudly anti-intellectual and wears his just-plain-folks middlebrow status as a badge of honor—a stance that’s playing alarmingly well tonight at one of the world’s most prestigious universities. And while it’s safe to say that Walsh is not the kind of guy who would pore over Deborah Feinbloom’s mid-seventies feminist take on transsexuals in Boston just so he can own the libs more deeply, with footnotes, he does sprinkle some actual facts into his spiel from time to time. And sometimes he strings those facts together into stories that contain a grain of truth. That’s where the great danger lies.

At one point Walsh says, “I have no use for the term *gender* in the first place, unless we’re talking about the gender of words, masculine and feminine words, which is where this term originates. I see only males and females, men and women.” Walsh then starts riffing on gender ideology. He explains to his audience that “gender ideology was invented by people,” and that “we know who those people were.” Old white guys, he says, in the mid-twentieth century. “They were pedophiles, most of them,” Walsh proclaims. “Everything the left says about gender they have derived from a very small collection of degenerate perverts like John Money and Alfred Kinsey. These guys invented all of this. We can read the books and watch them inventing this. It is a construct.”



In spite of his self-conscious mid-ness—or maybe because of it—Walsh succinctly links a set of complex ideas and judgments into a beguilingly simple narrative. In calling gender ideology a “construct,” he’s dog-whistling at the theory of social constructionism, and in saying it was “invented,” he’s implying that as something merely made up by people, it has less truth value than something that exists naturally, and that it might even be a lie. He links this fakeness and falsity to immorality, and imputes bad intentions to the persons who perpetrate it. I’m deeply familiar with all those standard rhetorical maneuvers in anti-trans discourse. But I hadn’t been expecting Walsh’s propaganda to mention grammatical gender.

Grammatical gender is the practice of assigning nouns and pronouns to categories of words, as one syntactical strategy among many for making

meaning through language. Grammatical gender works by modifying all the member-words of a given category in the same way, and then modifying other words in the sentence in that very same manner, to signal which words refer to one another—like ending the Spanish word for *white* with an *a* when it refers to the word *table* (*la mesa blanca*) but ending it with an *o* when it refers to the word *hat* (*el sombrero blanco*), because *table* and *hat* belong to different grammatical genders, with the *a* and *o* endings showing which category the word belongs to.

In Walsh's account, the difference between words and things gets flattened into nothingness. Grammatical gender ("masculine and feminine words"), biological sex difference ("males and females"), and social roles ("men and women") are simply not meaningfully distinct for him. He assumes a one-to-one correspondence between reality and representation, and he wants language to be a perfectly transparent medium whose words simply refer unambiguously to an existing thing in the world. It's a simplistic point-and-grunt practice that denies, or at least ignores, the existence of a layer of complexity pertaining not just to how representation and signification work but also to how grammar and syntax enable language to do what it does. There's a lot going on in that unacknowledged layer; that's where all the meaning-making machinery is located.

(Walsh's perspective here is similar to the one expressed by Sebastian Gorka, senior director of counterterrorism in Trump's White House, at the closing VIP dinner at NatCon 5, a national gathering of political conservatives, in September 2025; Gorka is quoted as saying that "ideologies are by definition lenses through which you interpret reality based on a distortion of reality. Conservatives don't need a lens. Why? Because all we are driven by is the truth. Truth doesn't need a prism. It doesn't need a lens ... 'A man cannot become a woman' and 'nations need borders' are not ideological statements. They are truth!")

If you look at contemporary social existence from Gorka's and Walsh's vantage point, trying to erase the existence of trans lives makes sense not only because trans lives can evoke visceral fears of becoming psychically undone but also because they challenge the version of reality they think should be unambiguously communicated by language. When trans lives

stage the disjunction of identity, embodiment, and social role, they manifest a capacity for difference and transformation that, in the worldview of people like Walsh and Gorka, simply *cannot* be. One political response to the encounter with that supposed impossibility is that such a thing *shall not* be, so that the world can carry on unperturbed. A few days after Walsh's event at Stanford, his fellow troll at *The Daily Wire*, Michael Knowles, openly stated that, for what he called "the good of society," "transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely." Challenged to defend what sounded like a call for genocide, Knowles protested that "Nobody is calling to exterminate anybody," and argued that a trans genocide would be conceptually impossible, because "'transgender people' is not a real ontological category ... It's not a legitimate category of being."

★ ★ ★

One large grain of truth that Walsh has strung into his misleading narrative is that there is indeed, among people who study such things, a nearly hegemonic story of how *gender* crossed over from grammar and came to refer to the "social construction" of sex. One of the best books on the topic, Jennifer Germon's *Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea*, states it succinctly on page 1: "Until the 1950s, gender served to mark relations between words rather than people." Germon tells the story of how *gender* became a word associated with radical feminists, trans people, and coastal secular elites instead of bespectacled schoolmarms teaching children about subject-verb agreement in their language arts class. It's the same story a generative AI chatbot will slop out if you ask it to write a short essay on the history of the *gender* concept, because that's the story buried in its training data. It's the story excavated and disseminated by academics who embrace the word *gender* as a neutrally descriptive technical term, the story critiqued by "gender critical" feminists, the story lampooned by opponents of "gender ideology." It's the story now being parroted by Matt Walsh.

That story does indeed trace its roots to the work of John Money, a prolific and influential social scientist who conducted medical research at Johns Hopkins University starting in the 1950s. He authored and coauthored a handful of short articles published in the mid-1950s in the

Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital that are widely regarded as the first to use the word *gender* to mean something related to sex and identity rather than words. Money himself often repeated the claim that he was the first person to lift *gender* from grammar and apply it by analogy to people, and to use it to talk about categories of persons rather than categories of nouns and pronouns. It's Money's expansive take on *gender* that now makes that word a name for the dominant framework in the modern West for characterizing the relationship between bodies, minds, and social roles.

Money developed his theory of gender by studying individuals born with atypical genitals, persons once mythologized as “hermaphrodites” and later rendered objects of science as “intersex” people. He focused largely on children born with intersex conditions, because some congenital intersex conditions are linked to life-threatening metabolic disorders (though most are benign variations on the usual plumbing configurations). He then proposed some misbegotten theories of how best to manage the psychosocial consequences of having an intersex body, theories that favored early surgical intervention for all genital anomalies whether something life-threatening was involved or not. That work led him to work with transsexuals who were clamoring for genital transformation surgeries, and he was instrumental in establishing the first university-based surgical sex-reassignment clinic, at Hopkins, in 1966.

Money also studied people who engaged in stigmatized sexual practices, including pedophilia. He did indeed have a well-earned reputation for being sexually omnivorous himself. Accusations of his personal and professional misconduct are not without substance. Walsh has done a good job of marshaling those facts into a story that portrays John Money as personally perverse, to then extend that *ad hominem* moral condemnation to the concept of *gender* itself as an inherent perversion of reality.

But the research I'd been doing through my Stanford Humanities Center fellowship over the past year has taught me that Walsh's story was not merely prejudicial but also factually wrong. It was wrong because the conventional history of *gender*—embraced by all sides of the contemporary culture war—is factually wrong.

I now know there is another story to tell, and I glimpse another way to tell it. That's the lightbulb that goes off for me sitting in Dinkelspiel Auditorium, listening to Matt Walsh spew ridicule and hatred about people like me, and watching the audience lap it up.

★ ★ ★

Fred and I trickle out of Dinkelspiel along with the rest of the crowd, say our goodbyes, and head off toward our respective homes. Walking past the Fire Truck House, I can see that the lights of QSpot are now off and that everybody has gone home for the night, hopefully feeling safe enough, not triggered, nurtured by community, and well fed. Walking past the Humanities Center, I think of all the dusty books like Feinbloom's, somehow relevant to trans history, stacked on my office desk. But I'm beginning to think I've been going about my project all wrong. I've been working on a book about people who'd "changed genders." Truth be told, I've become disillusioned with the project. I've become increasingly skeptical of the usefulness of writing yet another book about trans history to bolster an argument for social belonging by marshaling empirical evidence into an accurate narrative of the actual existence of people I understand to be my trans ancestors. Empiricism is useless when you can't agree on the framework to stick the facts into. The story, I can now see, needs to be about the frame itself.

When I think about all the contestations in recent years regarding trans people and how those struggles fit into much bigger contests over the social and political order, to say nothing of truth and reality, I can't help but marvel that all those tensions condense into a single, simple little word: *gender*. The word, the concept itself, is the ground we fight on, not a side in the fight. What I now could see in the afterglow of my lightbulb moment was that untangling the mess of where *gender* came from, tracing the intellectual history of the concept itself, has the potential to shift the ground of the culture wars if it allows us to understand the issues at stake differently. It promises a way toward new social arrangements that unblock the contemporary impasses in how we think about identity, its relationship

to embodiment and experience, and whether—and how—our sense of self and relations to others and the encompassing world can change.

The possibility of accomplishing that conceptual shift had become concrete for me through the research I'd been conducting over the past year for the simple reason that it had shown me that John Money did not in fact invent the concept of *gender*. His use of that word to mean something related to biological sex, psychological identity, and social role has a history at least a hundred years longer than most people know.

Moreover, misguided as was Walsh's inclusion of grammatical gender in his anti-trans screed, it nevertheless illuminated for me the importance of insisting that *gender* always has something to do with language and grammar, now and in the past. Sundering the two branches of the *gender* concept's intellectual history by introducing a break in the 1950s between words, on the one hand, and bodies, psyches, and social roles on the other hand, obscures a vital continuity having to do with the relationship between representations and realities. Insisting that *gender* still involves how we use words to attach meanings to things does an end run around the whole question of "biological reality."

Driving north on I-280 from Palo Alto to my home in San Francisco gives my thoughts time to unspool about the relationship between *gender* as a linguistic meaning-making practice and the "social construction of reality." That phrase came from the title of a 1966 book by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. It's ironic, given how social constructionism is portrayed by the political and religious right as a spurious and pernicious secular liberal theory, that Berger was a devout Christian who developed the concept in part to grapple with the implications of secular modernity for those of religious faith. Another mid-twentieth-century social scientist, Harold Garfinkel, explored similar ideas about the social production of reality in his 1967 book, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. The word *ethnomethodology* was Garfinkel's fancy term for how the social practices we engage in to produce a shared sense of what's real are not universal, but rather are specific to a particular location (*ethnos*, in Greek) in space and time. Ideas drawn from both Berger and Luckmann's and Garfinkel's books

have long informed my thinking, and I see now that I'll need to revisit them in the new iteration of the book that's now taking shape as I drive.

It should be noncontroversial to note that there are different versions of reality, but *reality* has become about as weaponized and contested a word as *gender*. There's the kind of reality that's real no matter what you think about it, like gravity, and the kind of reality that has material consequences but is real only because a lot of people agree at the same time that it is what it is—like how long a minute lasts. The metric system and the length of a piece of lumber are both real, albeit in different yet interrelated ways. *Gender* in the psychosocial sense is more like the metric system than like a piece of wood. It is not a statement of fact about the physical properties and qualities of biological organisms themselves, but rather about the conventions—the grammars—through which we measure and interpret them. When *gender* as concept and practice changes, the socially produced kind of reality associated with it can change accordingly. And vice versa: When the experienced world changes, people experiment with new conceptual forms and representational practices to catch up with what's happening materially.

Gender's relationship to social-reality production is inextricably intertwined with the concept's grammatical roots. Assumptions about *gender* operate in the background code of our daily experience and interactions with others, the same way that grammar and syntax operate in the background of our language when we talk. *Gender* is not just an object we talk about; it's part of how we talk about objects. It's a word that refers to the structure the word fits into and how that structure functions, as well as a word for an object named within that structure. It's only when we encounter something that calls our unexamined background assumptions into question—something that seems ungrammatical in the sense of violating our unstated reality rules, like how a pronoun is supposed to refer to a certain kind of person—that we confront the possibility of genuinely different ways of arranging the experienced world and our representations of it, and start waging the kinds of reality wars we see raging around trans people in the present.

When we look at the social realities constructed by others and see in them only superstition or falsehood, ignorance or bad faith, they can likewise look at ours and see nothing but the same. But everybody is actually doing the same thing, albeit differently. We're all making our realities real by calling into the concrete grammars of our languages everything we usually relegate to the background—metaphysics, cosmologies, spiritual beliefs, and secular scientific knowledges—so that they might be breathed into mundane life without ever being directly seen, as part of routine interactions with others. *Gender*, as the making and conveying of meaning through the making and relating of category and kind, is a key practice for the everyday enactment of our tacit ontologies. Like the Sorting Hat in the Harry Potter stories, *gender* whispers the secret of our identities into our ears and places us with our kind; it solicits the mystery of our innermost self to disclose itself by summoning that self into words and unfurling into social existence.

How might we all fight over the meaning of our bodies, the value of our lives, our relations to one another and to the earth and to all the wider realms of existence if we weren't fighting over those things according to our current terms of engagement, according to existing meanings of *gender*? We need a new narrative for this moment in planetary history, some new ground, maybe a new groundlessness— a new willingness to sink down together into a common dissolution only to all rise up again as something other than what we were before.

The point of the book I've seen I now need to write is not simply that *gender* is a critical and contested concept for making sense of our present moment, or that it has demonstrably changed over time, or is changing even now. It's that it's within our collective power, as living beings in living cultures, to *change gender* further still. Maybe the fate of the world, or some large part of it, actually involves making that change. Maybe the book I write can contribute in some small way to that transformation if it allows its readers to see *gender*, and themselves and one another, in a new light.

That's a daunting goal—but are you with me so far?

II.

Juana María Rodríguez, who used to chair the gender studies department at UC Berkeley, calls me up one Friday afternoon about a year after my epiphany at the Matt Walsh event at Stanford to say she has some spare comp tickets to the new Taylor Mac show playing on campus at Zellerbach Hall that night and is wondering if I'd like to go.

My brain has been lit for months as I've pursued the new understanding of my book, ideas sparking the same way my physicist friend River says lightning forms: filamentary tendrils of negatively charged ions streaming down from the clouds, positively charged ones reaching up from the earth, with neither having preordained routes between ground and sky; both grope blindly, branch wildly, with what could be described as a non-anthropomorphic expression of physical desire that experiments with as-yet-undiscovered pathways of connection until—*bam!*—they find each other in the middle to become a bolt from the blue. Every spark of an idea building up inside of me is wanting to discharge by touching something I am searching for outside myself. Something vaguely “gendery” that would be good to think with.

My partner of twenty-five years, Mimi, and I haven't been planning anything more electrifying than an old not-married couple's couch-potato night at home with some obscure world cinema offering on the Criterion Channel. Honestly, I figure that Mimi would be about as happy introverting alone with whatever novel she's currently reading if me having a girls' night out contributes in some indirect way to my finishing the book that she is, if anything, more eager for me to finish writing than I am myself. So hell yes, I say to Juana, and thank you, and since BART will likely have stopped

running long before our night is over and I fully expect to be unfit to drive a car, I hope it's okay to crash on your couch, and she says that it is.

Juana and I have known each other since the 1990s, when we both worked or volunteered in the queer nonprofit sector in San Francisco, I with the GLBT Historical Society and she with Proyecto ContraSIDA por Vida. Juana's a lot of fun to hang out with. *Hang out* is just my casual way of saying "think and play together in intellectual community"; ideas derive, ultimately, from the things we do with our bodies in the company of other people.

Taylor Mac's a lot of fun, too—a drag artist whose big-budget, big-hair, elaborately-staged-and-costumed gender-warped gonzo theatrical lollapaloozas earned him a coveted "genius grant" from the MacArthur Foundation. My novelist friend Rabih Alameddine knows Mac, and he once arranged for the three of us to hang out together over lunch. Rabih wanted to knock around some ideas for a stage show, featuring oversize puppets, about a guy who keeps waking up in different historical periods, in each of which he discovers that his, um, private parts are no longer attached to the rest of his body. He's a castrated agricultural slave in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Uruk. An Ottoman palace eunuch. A castrato opera singer. A US soldier whose genitals are blown off by an IED in Iraq. An angel of indeterminate sex conducts our hero from one incarnation to the next until he finally transcends gender and achieves some unmanned state of enlightened being. Or something like that. The project never happened, but it was a lovely little lunch, and I was now genuinely eager to experience Mac's new work. *Bark of Millions: A Parade Trance Extravaganza for the Living Library of the Deviant Theme* was billed as a "four-hour musical-opera-variety show" filled with pleasure and spectacle. Surely something in it would spark to my spark.

Making a four-hour commitment is getting off lightly where Taylor Mac is concerned. My favorite of his works is a twenty-four-hour-long performance of a twenty-four-decade-long history of American music, with one hour devoted to the most popular songs of each decade between 1776 and 2016. I went to see it with Rabih when it played in San Francisco back before the COVID-19 pandemic. There's now a documentary film version

that boils down the experience into a manageable two hours, available for viewing in the comfort of one's own home, for the Mac-curious unready to commit to a long-term relationship.

In the first hour of that show, Mac does a rendition of “Yankee Doodle,” the Revolutionary War ditty turned children’s song. Heads up to all the transphobic patriots out there teaching their nursery-school-aged kids to march around in a circle, waving their cardboard swords, wearing their tricornered hats cut from navy-blue construction paper, singing about a dandy who rides to town on a pony: you’re all a bunch of pedophiles and groomers if you think that song is suitable for children. Macaroni is *not* what you think.



Mac is at his bawdy best when he exaggerates and pantomimes the low-brow double entendres to be found in the best-known lyrics of “Yankee Doodle.” The song’s melody was an old folk tune common to western Europe, but its earliest known verses were written around 1758 during the French and Indian War, near Albany in upstate New York, by an obscure English immigrant and military surgeon named Richard Shuckburgh, who died in 1773 and was remembered as “a gentleman,” in a single, brief obituary, “of infinite jest and humour.” Shuckburgh’s racy lyrics poke fun at the provincialism of the Anglo-American colonist-soldiers with whom he served. And as Mac’s onstage patter points out, most of the “jest and humour” in “Yankee Doodle” revolves around the mockery of male effeminacy and sexual incompetence.

The historian and literary critic Henry Abelove has written an insightful article that informs how I understand the song. In the chorus, the title character of Yankee Doodle is repeatedly told to “keep *it* up,” and encouraged, perhaps because he’s otherwise inclined, to “with the *girls* be handy.” In one version of the song—folklorists have documented more than a thousand variants—Yankee Doodle goes to an army camp where he sees men and boys ogle “a great big gun, as large as a log of maple.” There are other verses about firearms, improperly cocked, shooting off unexpectedly, and about men who love to eat as much sticky molasses as they can cram

into their mouths. At its point of origin, “Yankee Doodle” was an elitist put-down of white male settlers that expresses its ridicule in a sexualized, frankly homophobic fashion—and Mac’s over-the-top rendition doesn’t tell the half of it.

The name of the song itself is layered with risqué puns. *Doodle* was derived from *Dödel*, a Dutch word that then still echoed in the former Dutch colony of New Amsterdam even after it had become British New York. The word’s primary meaning was “fool” or “simpleton” (kind of like *dolt*). But *doodle* was also slang for a penis, particularly a small one. (*Androboros*, the first theatrical play known to have been written in Anglo-America, was a farce penned in 1715 by Robert Hunter, governor of the New York and New Jersey colonies, to vent spleen at political enemies; there’s a character in it named Doodlesack.) *Yankee*, on the other hand, which first meant an upstate New Yorker specifically and later came to mean northerners or US Americans more generally, has an uncertain origin. One theory traces it to the corruption of an Iroquoian word for the European settlers, while another traces it to an ethnic slur the English used for the Dutch. But neither theory accounts for a saltier slang usage recorded among British sailors. At sea, *yankum* meant manual stimulation of the male member. And *yankee*? See *doodle*, second meaning, above. There’s even a homoerotic subtext lurking in the word, given that the act of *yankum* might be performed, in the masculinist microcosm of a sailing ship long at sea, by a *yanker* upon the *yankee* of a shipmate as well as upon his own. (And, for what it’s worth, Tobias Smollett’s popular 1748 comic novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, features a sailor character named Tom Tug.)

Once you get that the song is mostly a bunch of wink-wink-nudge-nudge har-de-har-har dick jokes, the character of Yankee Doodle finally clicks into focus. He is a dim-witted, under-equipped backwoods yokel, an etymological cousin of the *wanker* and the *putz*, and the forerunner perhaps of today’s *incel*, who is maybe more familiar with the touch of his own hand, or that of a male companion’s, than of a woman’s.

By the time of the Revolutionary War, British soldiers were singing “Yankee Doodle” to mock the Continental soldiers they fought, impugning

their manhood. Yankee Doodle is described as being a dandy, an effete man who cares overmuch for his appearance, and the commander of the Continental Army, “Captain Washington,” is portrayed in one version of the song as being a bit of a dandy in his own right, bedecked with “flaming ribbons in his hat.” The hapless Yankee Doodle’s attempt at dandyism fails miserably, however, for as the song’s best-known yet most cryptic lyric notes, he stuck a feather in his hat and called it macaroni.

Macaroni, here, is not an absurdist non sequitur. It refers to an urban style that took off in London in the 1760s, the latest in a long line of men’s fashions characterized by ostentation, extravagance, and effeminacy and disparaged for its associations with rakishness, libertinage, foppishness, and sodomy. “There is indeed a kind of animal, neither male nor female, a thing of the neuter gender, lately started up among us,” *The Oxford Magazine* observed in 1770. “It is called a Macaroni.”

Macaronis were relatively affluent Englishmen of the rising middle class who had taken the Grand Tour of Europe and returned home with French or Italian affectations, and who both emulated and caricatured aristocratic dress by exaggerating its powdered wigs and high-heeled shoes, its laces and velvets and fripperies. The word *macaroni* itself implied a kind of mixing—in literature, a macaronic text is one that combines different languages, particularly when it makes bilingual puns for comic effect, often in a coarse manner reminiscent of *maccarone*, the simple Italian peasant dish of pasta tossed with the day’s assorted leftovers. As individuals who mixed and matched and bent and twisted the masculine and feminine associations of clothing styles and mannerisms, eighteenth-century macaronis were something like contemporary nonbinary or gender-expansive people.

Note how in *The Oxford Magazine*’s definition of *macaroni*, the meaning of *gender* slips between grammatical and social categorization—the macaroni is described as an animal, a thing less than fully human, an *it*, not a *he* or a *she*, because it cannot be conventionally categorized as a clearly gendered person. Cheekily referencing grammatical gender to signal transpositions and crossings of men’s and women’s customary social roles, appearances, behaviors, and functions already had quite a long history in

England by the 1770s. Two pamphlets from the 1620s, for example, *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir*, condemned what their anonymous author characterized as a sudden craze for “manly women” and “womanly men” in Jacobean England; the Latin titles of the English-language tracts swapped around the feminine pronoun *haec*, which refers to *woman* (*mulier*), and the masculine pronoun *hic*, which refers to *man* (*vir*).

What the titles of the pamphlets, as well as the definition of the macaroni, both suggest is that in English, the grammatical sense of *gender* has long been useful for referencing social phenomena that pry apart and rearrange the customary attributes of masculinity and femininity. It’s not that writers centuries ago were using an explicitly defined concept of *gender* the way we might understand it today—it’s that *gender* today still does the same thing that grammatical gender already did then. It already named the set of unspoken rules for determining which nouns belong to which categories, which made *gender* intuitively applicable for situations that called attention to the equally unspoken assumptions that governed belonging to the categories of man and woman. It’s therefore not anachronistic to use the grammatically informed meaning of *gender* in situations, such as describing the social emergence of new styles of being a person, that require grappling with the unstated rules that characterize who’s a what—particularly when those whos and whats are themselves, as objects, undergoing social transformation as a result of historical change, which therefore raises questions about how to refer to and categorize them. That, at the end of the day, is why the macaroni makes an appearance in “Yankee Doodle.”

Using *gender* to refer to social phenomena in periods prior to the mid-twentieth century is not anachronistic in yet another way. Because history is always a past we interpret from the standpoint of a present, we’re always engaging that past through contemporary concepts. The socioeconomic concept of *class*, for example, wasn’t articulated in its contemporary sense until Marx and Weber turned it into a tool for thinking critically about the haves and the have-nots of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But does that mean we can’t talk about what we now mean by *class* in ancient Egypt or Rome? Those societies certainly had

hierarchies based on wealth or occupation. And while it might be important in some instances to know exactly how the ancient Egyptians or Romans thought about those hierarchies, or precisely what words and concepts they used to talk about them, it's also okay for us in the present to use our contemporary language to describe things in the past that fit the description of what we mean by what we say now.

Gender—even *transgender*—when we use those words to describe how past societies sorted people into categories, and how some people fit awkwardly in those categories, resisted them, or moved between them, can work the same way that *class* works for talking about economic stratification in ancient societies. The sorting, crossing, contesting, and changing of categories of personhood, in addition to changes to the implicit rules for belonging to those categories, as well as changes in the nature of the persons or objects thus categorized, are all actually existing things that can be empirically observed not just in the present but in the historical record. If we discern those things in the past and want to talk about them, we need to call them something. *Gender* has been a pretty good word for describing all such matters for quite some time—the “orthodox” history of the *gender* concept’s mid-twentieth-century invention notwithstanding.

“Yankee Doodle,” in light of the foregoing, can be considered a song about “changing gender”—about new forms of personhood emerging amid sweeping historical change, and the meaning-making work of bringing those changes into thought, feeling, representation, and action. Something quite complicated was going on when British redcoats sang about Yankee Doodle Dandy sticking a feather in his hat and calling it macaroni. They were throwing two layers of shade on the poor guy all at once: not only were they deriding Yankee Doodle as anxiously preoccupied with other men’s penises; they were also saying his drag was tacky. And yet the Continental soldiers ridiculed by the song took it up themselves and sang it back at the British as a proud and hearty expression of revolutionary defiance. Their transposition of insult into the register of folk anthem is interesting and significant, whatever words we use to unpack its significance. I’m okay with using the words *changing gender*.

Think about it. Ragtag bands of rural guys with guns marshaled somewhat haphazardly into a military are being trash-talked by their enemies, and they basically say, *Yeah? So? What's it to you?* Instead of tearing their adversaries a new one for casting aspersions on their masculinity, they in essence toss their tresses, hands a-hip, and throw the put-down back in the heckler's face, same as any self-respecting sassy drag artiste—like Taylor Mac—turning the tables on an obnoxious audience member at her show.

Continental sang “Yankee Doodle” back at the British as *camp*, the bitchy style of underdog humor that knowingly mocks the normative social codes that hold camp's marginalized practitioners down. Rather than rebutting a stigmatizing accusation, camp onboard it and transforms it through the same affective jujitsu moves I make when I embrace monstrosity (though with an antic sensibility rather than an uncanny one). It's a straight version of camp, harnessed not to a politically oppressed contemporary queer subculture, but rather to the disparaged and suspiciously nonprocreative incel masculinities of the supposed yokels, dolts, putzes, and wankers caricatured by the figure of Yankee Doodle himself. It's nonetheless a liberatory movement across socially imposed boundaries that discipline individuals into conventional gender roles, an erotic release of libidinal energies bound up in historically contingent forms of personhood now in the process of being jettisoned. All those Yankee Doodle-identified revolutionaries were becoming new kinds of men desiring new modes of governance, whose masculinity was not subordinated to a monarchy, an aristocracy, or some premodern notion of a Great Chain of Being where God the Father, the King of Heaven, was Big Daddy to them all. Those men understood themselves to be free in a historically novel fashion, a freedom manifested at least in part as gender transgressiveness, betokening a newly constituted kind of man.

Yankee Doodle is the archetype of all those westering hordes of mostly landless single white men seeking their manifest destiny, the back-country ne'er-do-wells and wannabes looking to make it big by getting somewhere first, their retooled masculinity harnessed first to war and revolution, and then to land theft and nation-building, who revel in Indian slaughter and the

rape of virgin territory, and glory in the act of becoming a new kind of person as part of a new kind of People.

Yankee Doodle's macaronic transfemininity is not the direct ancestor of *Ru Paul's Drag Race*. It's more akin to the protofascist preoccupations of Freikorps members recounted in Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, and to all those TikTok videos of Israeli soldiers parading around in the lingerie of dead or displaced Gazan women that would become inescapable in my social media feeds in the weeks and months after October 8, 2023. Yankee Doodle played mental dress-up in that same macho funhouse mirror. Kissing cousin to the cross-racial cosplay Indians of the Boston Tea Party, his descendants are less like contemporary self-identified trans people, and more like big-haired rock fans at Twisted Sister stadium concerts in Rust Belt cities in the 1980s, whose disaffected children would one day lust to Make America Great Again.

Changing gender is as American as apple pie. It all depends on who's changing it, and how, and why.

★ ★ ★

By the time I get to Juana's, her other last-minute invitees have arrived. One's Julian Carter, who's all wound up about launching his new book, *Dances of Time and Tenderness*—"a cycle of stories linking queer memory, activism, death, and art in a transpoetic history of desire and touch," according to the publisher's blurb—and seriously needs to unwind. We're all academics of some variety or another, getting together to have fun and talk shop over drinks after a long week of work in the knowledge factory. Everybody's looking to blow off a little steam, everybody's ready to get a little loose and lubricated, before tapping the Uber app and heading to the show.

Maybe it's because our tickets are cheap seats in the nosebleed section of the balcony and we find ourselves at some remove from the onstage happenings, or maybe we've just gotten a little too loose and lubricated to give it our full attention, but *Bark of Millions* doesn't suck us in. Taylor Mac's long-haul extravaganzas are laissez-faire affairs where he encourages audiences to entertain themselves with Nerf balls and Frisbees like it's a

concert in the park, blow bubbles, dance in the aisles, go out to get food and come back. Sometimes it's hard to tell if anybody is really paying attention, but the groove's happy and the audience is having a good time. I spot a San Francisco neighbor, the feminist sexologist, sex-work activist, and porn star Annie Sprinkle, sitting in a nearby section along with her art professor wife, Beth, and a couple of sex-educator friends. I mosey over to chat them all up for a minute about Annie and Beth's current collaborative creative project on what they call *ecosexuality*. It's all about learning to love Mother Nature in new ways. They do performance art about getting married to the earth to sanctify their long-term, loving relationship with it. I used to have a crack-and-peel sticker from one of their projects pasted on my university office door that read "Water Makes Us Wet!"

My group's experience this night is a bit like hanging around at the back of a super-sized nightclub, cruisin' and schmoozin', listening now and then to a charming chanteuse belting out a torch song, far enough away from the action that we soon become more involved in our own conversations than in what we've ostensibly come to see. The variety-show format means there is no narrative arc, and after a couple of pleasant hours we decide we've had enough of the glittery genderati vibe we've come to imbibe and leave in search of pizza.

Bark of Millions's anarchic theatricalization of gender excess has provided enough free-floating grist for our respective professional arts-and-culture knowledge-worker mills to keep us all engaged in chatter and critique long after we leave the show and find a downtown Berkeley cocktail lounge with a low-key down-tempo DJ and a savory bar menu. Julian is deep in conversation with one of Juana's doctoral students we'd run into at the show. Juana and I are nursing mezcal negronis and comparing notes about our work, munching on the slices of shredded shitake mushrooms on flatbread that turn out to be the closest thing we can find to pizza at a place that also serves booze. She catches me up on her recent, lavishly illustrated book on Latina sex workers, *Put a Life*. Juana's always trying to give props to the kind of women who helped her come into her own sense of self as a queer Latina femme. I tell her I'm still working on my interminably unfinished book about trans history that has morphed

into an autotheoretical intellectual history of the *gender* concept, but that I'm having a hell of a time explaining to other people what exactly I'm trying to do.

★ ★ ★

If you've ever had an insatiable curiosity about how a bunch of academic nerds would geek out over gender theory in a bar after having a few rounds, that night would have been a good one to pull up a stool and listen in.

Talking about the history of the *gender* concept with gender studies scholars is kind of like talking about the history of hammers with carpenters: they might be very skilled in the use of the tool without having the slightest interest in or need to know anything about how it had developed over time. Some people use the *gender* tool with technical precision to analyze and critique how societies construct and arrange the material and symbolic differences between men and women and other related statuses, like I was trying to do with "Yankee Doodle." That used to be my day job before I retired. Most people simply bang the word around in everyday speech without knowing or caring about its history, because the word communicates meaning well enough for most purposes most of the time without looking under the hood to see how it works, or rummaging around in the trunk to see what sort of baggage it carries along with it. (Others, of course, claim *gender* is a tool of the devil that should never be used and ought to be destroyed, because they don't want to know what the tool is capable of showing them.) I'm interested in the history of the tool itself. That's a project very different from using the tool to build something or take something apart.

First, some basic background info to get you up to speed on the conversation you'd be listening in on.

The word *gender*, derived from Old French, was introduced to the English language sometime between the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the mid-1300s, when increasing numbers of texts started to be recorded in English again after centuries of Anglo-Norman French being the language of the literate classes. *Gender* is related to *genre* and just means "kind" or "category." If you do a simple search of the 2.7 trillion individual words in

the HathiTrust corpus, a publicly available collection of seventeen million digitized historical texts in English dating back to 1760, you'll see a thirty-fold increase in the word *gender*'s prevalence over the last half century or so. It shot up from one or two occurrences per million words, a rate that held steady for more than two hundred years, to more than thirty-five occurrences per million words by 2020.

What happened? People increasingly used *gender* in everyday speech as a synonym for *sex*. I find that fascinating, because the current technical use of *gender* in my neck of academe is precisely that *gender* is not *sex*. Gender Studies 101, if you never took that class: *sex* is biological, *gender* cultural.

Although the current trend of substituting *gender* for *sex* accelerated sharply in the mid- to late twentieth century, the two words have quite a long history of being used interchangeably. Derived from the Latin *sexus*, meaning "a division" or "a cut," the word *sex* starts appearing in English around the same time as *gender*. It shows up in the roots of words like *bisect* and *section*. It came to refer to human reproductive biology because *Homo sapiens* is a species that typically sorts its different gametes (eggs and sperm) onto different physically separated bodies, and thus *sexes*, or divides, its reproductive capacity, unlike organisms that reproduce asexually by splitting in two, or hermaphroditic organisms that have both sets of gametes on the same body, whether at the same time or sequentially over the organism's life course. (And gametes, it bears mentioning in passing, are not the sole component of biological definitions of sex, and biological markers of sex-status can be mixed.)

Both the linkage and the slippage between *sex* and *gender* are easy to understand because the logic behind their exchangeability is buried deep in the conceptual underpinnings of the words themselves. The etymological root of *gender* is the same *gen-* that you find in *genitals* or *generative*, both having to do with procreation, or in *gentile* or the Spanish word *gente*, both of which refer to peoples or nations related by birth and ethnicity. Much of the "sorting into kinds" that *gender* performs has to do with the "kinds" generated by the "cuts" of sexual division. No wonder, then, the long history of conflating their meanings. The first known English dictionary, Robert Cawdrey's *A Table Alphabeticall of Hard Usual English Words*,

from 1604—a simple list of about twenty-five hundred words accompanied by short definitions—includes *sex* though not *gender*, but defines *sex* as “kind” rather than “cut.”

The increased prevalence of equating or substituting *gender* for *sex* dates only to around 1975. It accompanied a pervasive shift in public consciousness at that time fueled by the feminist movement— a moment of historical change when “changing gender,” in the sense of advocating for new social forms of womanhood, contributed to changing the meaning of *gender* as a word. The feminist social movement gained traction by emphasizing the *sex/gender* distinction. *Gender* as separate from *sex* provided a useful conceptual tool for making feminist arguments that “biology is not destiny.” To understand *sex* as biological, and *gender* as the social organization of biological difference into kinds and categories of people who had different roles and functions, enables the argument that women’s widespread socioeconomic disadvantages are not due to innate biological characteristics that make females weaker, slower, dumber, or less competitive than men. Rather, it’s that beliefs, ideologies, discourses, and forms of social organization—often rooted in ideas about biological determinism—hold women down and hold women back. Biology is just biology, like gravity is just gravity, and it just does what it does. But forms of social organization and modes of thought can be transformed through social movements that change minds, policies, practices, and laws. (Biology, though, it should be noted, is far more changeable than the biological determinists give it credit for, but that’s a topic for another book.)

You can see the “before” and “after” of the new feminist-inspired *sex/gender* paradigm that crystalized around 1975 even in basic “big data” queries that use natural language processing to interpret large sets of digitized historical texts, to thereby demonstrate how word meanings change over time. One easy way to see that change is to note which words appear most often near the word you’re curious about. Before the 1960s, *gender* was most closely correlated in US English with such words as *pronoun*, *noun*, *participle*, *adjective*, *masculine*, *feminine*, *neuter*, *possessive*, *nominative*, *substantive*, *signification*, *verb*, *genitive*, *plural*, *preposition*—and *sex*. Those are almost exclusively grammatical terms, but

there's still a slight correlation with *sex*, because the sex of a noun (or lack thereof) is an important grammatical gender-assignment criterion in English; it's what determines whether you use the pronoun *he*, *she*, or *it*, which is the only place gender shows up in modern English grammar. Then, in the period 1960–2000, there's a dramatic shift in associations where the most closely correlated words to *gender* are *ethnicity*, *consensual*, *norm*, *societal*, *subcultural*, *commonality*, *deviant*, *socioeconomic*, *marital*, and *orientation*. And finally, for the first decades of the twenty-first century, the additional new words with which *gender* had by then become closely correlated included *preference*, *categorize*, *versus*, *stereotype*, *homosexuality*, and *subjective*. One can glimpse even in such meager sets of words and associations the trace of *gender*'s narrative arc from grammar to categories of people to something that's considered a subjective preference.



Given the political impetus to treat *gender* as something distinct from *sex* that took wide hold in the mid-1970s, the simultaneous uptick in synonymizing *sex* and *gender* appears paradoxical. It's as if, when the concepts were pushed apart, some collective unconscious process set in to try to push them back together again.

Because the tension between “gender and sex are different” and “gender and sex are synonyms” contributes to a lot of confusion regarding what *gender* means, I find it helpful to think about the *sex/gender* relationship as being like that folded-paper toy my playmates used to call a cootie-catcher when I was a kid—most people call it a fortune teller—that you manipulate with your fingers to open up and close down in different configurations. Sometimes *sex* and *gender* get pushed together, and sometimes they get pulled apart. Pushing parts of the toy together or pulling them apart in one way causes other parts of the toy to pull apart or push together in some other way. Two surfaces that touch can be separated and made to touch again, even if other elements have been rearranged. (An experiential knowledge-creation arts collective called PolySensorium once designed a paper fortune-telling toy along these very lines for a participatory workshop called the Trans Agency Studio held at an academic conference I attended.)

To insist there's no meaningful distinction between *sex* and *gender*—like when Matt Walsh says he sees only men and women, males and females—denies a patently obvious capacity for movement that's built into the apparatus. The open space of that distinction is where each of us as a sentient biological being elaborates a particular sense of how we relate to, enact, embody, and interpret the socially defined categories through which we live our lives; without that space we'd just be mindless automatons following a predetermined hardwired program. But the flip side of how Matt Walsh sees no difference between *sex* and *gender* is how those who don't share his reactionary views routinely substitute *gender* for *sex*. That's another way of seeing no difference, which can be construed as a denial of another sort. It's what gets the “gender critical” proponents of “biological realism” all riled up about trans people. But to my way of thinking, trans lives manifest all the potentials in this conceptual manifold at once—opening up as well as bringing together, rearranging the configuration of the parts, to make *sex/gender* touch again in a new way. That movement of parts to connect *sex/gender* in new arrangement is what I'd call a *transition*.

To witness the opening up of a space between *sex/gender*, and then to witness the suturing together and closing up of that space, over and over and over again in everyday acts of communication and expression, is to me like watching a culture breathe. It's the movements and actions of the words and concepts themselves while they're being used in some concrete way that make their meanings come alive in practice. It's in pulling apart and bringing together the embodied and experiential dimensions of what we refer to as *sex* and *gender*—of our biological physicality and our culturally patterned subjective awareness of it—that we create an individually experienced and collectively shared space filled with potentials for agency, purpose, and change. Everybody, I'd suggest, opens and closes the space of the *sex/gender* distinction repeatedly in the routine business of living. It's just that not everybody does so in order to transition from one *sex/gender* arrangement to another.

★ ★ ★

That night in the downtown Berkeley bar, as we signal for another round of negronis, Juana is using some of those more current connotations of *gender*—subcultural, subjective—to talk about the lived experiences of queer Latina sex workers. *Gender* for her describes the push and pull, the doing and the done-to of how one's desires mesh (or don't mesh) with those of another. *Gender* is whether you keep your nails short and plain or long and lacquered and what you want to touch with your fingers, whether you leap to hold open the door for your lady friend or wait for your boo to pay that courtesy to you. Those are qualities that get sorted into categories we call *masculine* and *feminine* through the operations of social gendering: *gender* here means the whole ensemble of feelings, mannerisms, appearances, and actions that relate you toward another, whose masculine or feminine gender relates that other in turn toward you. This meaning of *gender* doesn't depend on the respective sexes involved. You can understand a glance, a gait, a posture, a hairstyle as masculine or feminine regardless of the body performing it.

Yes, yes, I say, of course. But I suggest that we're too hung up on trying to define what *gender* means as a word or concept rather than understanding what *gender* accomplishes as grammar and syntax. *Gender* as a word is like one surface on the fortune-teller toy; *gender* as grammar and syntax is like all the possible ways the fortune teller can be rearranged. What if we blew up the association between *gender* and *sex* that has become so commonsensical since the seventies, and dived into an earlier intellectual history—not just back to the clinics in the fifties and sixties but into the even older and longer genealogies of the concept that I'd begun uncovering by paying attention to grammar? However common and contested a term *gender* has become since the 1970s, however much it proved clinically useful in the 1950s and '60s, it was a big wrong turn to have ever imagined that *gender* somehow stopped being about language. To think of *gender* only as the psychosocial manifestation of a biological sex obscures how much it remains a meaning-making practice that involves how we understand what an object is and which conceptual category we place it in. Understanding anew how the linguistic, psychological, social,

and biological all tie together can be part of thinking and feeling our way out of the mess that *gender* has us tangled up in these days.

What if we went back to basics and focused in an expansive way on *gender* as “kind” and *sex* as “cut,” and allowed our imaginations to roam freely with regard to the basic semiotic operation of cutting the world into conceptual bits and grouping those bits into categorical kinds ripe with poetic possibilities for reimagining their relationships? Who made the rule—and who says we have to follow it now—that reproductive sex differences are the only or best way to define salient categories of social personhood, however materially real that biological distinction is?

Before long, I’m launching into a slightly tipsy soapbox speech about how “changing gender” involves something more than saying you used to be an *x* but always felt like a *y* and finally acted on those feelings. It involves something more than saying there’s a social movement to “change gender” in the sense of giving people more boxes to check on a form, or easier processes for moving from one box to another, or getting rid of the boxes altogether, or gaining greater access to increasingly powerful biomedical interventions that are used not just to change bodies but to change legal and administrative classifications. Rather, “changing gender” involves something much more fundamental: how we partition the experienced world according to culturally derived concepts, and imagine how those parts can relate to and act upon one another. It involves grasping possibilities immanent to the current arrangement of things that, like the fortune-teller toy, can unfold into a different pattern. What if we folded our origami paper into some shape nobody had ever folded paper into before?

It’s a hard sell. Even highly trained academics, myself included, are more accustomed to looking at the world through the lens of *gender* as it is currently ground than they are in looking at the lens itself to understand how its history shapes our perception. (Sebastian Gorka’s assertion of an unfiltered manner of perception aligned with conservative values is itself an ideological construction; everybody filters the world in one way or another.)

It’s late. We’ve all had a long night. But we keep bandying about those big questions well into the wee hours of the morning, long after the bar’s closed and we’ve schlepped back to Juana’s, long after the other guests

have made their respective ways home, until I finally crash headlong into unconsciousness on Juana's living-room couch.

★ ★ ★

"Have you had a chance yet to read Judith Butler's *Who's Afraid of Gender?*?" I ask Juana while she slices small squares of Cuban cornbread to wash down with our French press coffee for breakfast. It's spring 2024, and the book has just come out. "The publisher sent me an advance copy to prepare for a forum about it that I'm participating in for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*."

"Oh my god, it's Judith's birthday!" Juana says. "Hang on, I have to text them."

Colleagues at Berkeley, the two have been pals for years. Butler and I know each other—we've crossed paths many times over the years in various academic contexts—but we're more collegial than close. So I veg out, scrolling through my social media, while the two of them make plans to get together soon.

★ ★ ★

Judith Butler, a philosopher and public intellectual who adopted gender-neutral pronouns a few years back, has a starring role in the recent history of the *gender* concept. This is thanks in large part to their influential 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. If you're interested in how the concept of *gender* has changed over time, the role *Gender Trouble* (and its follow-up volume, *Bodies That Matter*) played in that process is unavoidable. Those books lent *gender* renewed academic gravitas by bringing Anglophone feminist analysis into deeper dialogue with continental philosophy and French poststructuralism, especially theories regarding how selves take shape through repeated acts of identifying with and enacting for others culturally familiar forms of personhood (or, conversely, by shaping themselves differently by refusing to reference those familiar forms to begin to enact some new way of being

in the world). Butler condensed these insights into the jargon terms *reiterative citationality* and *gender performativity*.

The publication of *Gender Trouble* was an event that helped establish the contemporary linguistic associations between *gender* and *preference* and *subjective* that made it a bugaboo in the reactionary cultural imagination. Arguably, it's the misapprehension of Butler's early work that shifted the contemporary anti-gender movement into higher gear in the mid-1990s, fueled in part by the notion that *gender performativity* is an inherently preposterous idea that flies in the face of common sense. Sadly, it's not just reactionary anti-gender ideologues who misunderstand the concept of gender performativity. Even many sympathetic to Butler's politics now use *performative* to mean the exact opposite of what the word originally meant. The term traces its lineage to the work of the philosopher of language J. L. Austin, in a series of lectures he delivered at Harvard in 1955, published in 1962 under the title *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin considered *performative* to be a special class of speech act. While many statements use words to describe things—for example, “The apple is red”—a performative does not point words at objects in order to represent them in language. A performative, rather, accomplishes the thing it utters, like when you say “I promise.” Saying “I promise” performs the actual act of promising. It is not the description in language of an act of promising over there somewhere.

Butler was interested in demonstrating that gender—by which they initially meant *gender identity*, the subjective sense of being a man or woman or something else—is not the representation in one's own mind of one's body's biological sex in the same manner that the word *apple* is a mental representation of a round red fruit. Gender, rather, is a set of utterances about self-perception and identity that socially accomplish what they utter. The “being” of a gender identity is the “doing” of its social meanings without necessarily grounding those meanings in the body's physicality—exactly the way Juana was using it last night.

Butler pushes the idea of *gender performativity* even further to say that not only does gender not reference or represent a sex, but that gender actually *produces* sex instead of the other way around. That's where Butler loses many people. That's where the anti-gender crowd and skeptical

ordinary people who think they're simply exercising common sense register a protest and beg to differ. They think claiming that gender produces sex is like claiming that simply pronouncing the word *apple* magically conjures the red fruit into being. But this misunderstands what *gender performativity* means. It confuses *performativity* with *performance* in the sense of something pretend or made up like a theatrical role in a play, something merely spoken that is not materially real. *Performative* has thus come to mean "an empty gesture of no consequence" rather than the exact opposite meaning of making something real by doing it. Misunderstanding what *performative* means trivializes what *gender* does and can contribute to the dismissal of trans people's socially achieved personhood by dismissing it as unreal.

The idea that *sex* is produced by *gender* rather than the other way around (i.e., that gender is the psychosocial representation of a material sex) accelerated criticism, in some quarters, of the post-1975 feminist-inspired trend of substituting *gender* for *sex*. Butler's argument is misunderstood there as well. To say that "gender produces sex" is to say that cultural factors determine what aspects of physical embodiment count when forming ideas about men and women. It means that what counts as *sex* in one context is meaningless as *sex* in another, and that *gender* is the filter that selects what matters and what doesn't. Before scientists knew about genetics, nobody claimed to be a man or a woman based on having XX versus XY chromosomes. There were still people being men and women without that knowledge. And then at some point in history, in some social and cultural contexts, for some people, those chromosomes became definitionally relevant for belonging to one category rather than another. It's easy to extend this argument beyond chromosomes to account for all manner of cultural relativisms in the social construction of identities and roles.

To say that gender produces sex is not a nonsensical topsy-turvy inversion of words and things that denies material reality. The idea of *gender* as a productive set of cultural assumptions and beliefs running in the background of awareness that determine which objects belong to which

categories according to which criteria is yet another way of saying that psychosocial gender, even for Butler, still works like grammar.

★ ★ ★

I'd been anxious that Butler's *Who's Afraid of Gender?* was going to be too similar to what I was trying to do with my own book, and that theirs was getting into print well before mine. We got together for coffee one afternoon, back when they were finalizing their manuscript and I was still deep in the throes of mine, to compare notes. I was relieved to learn that we were up to really different things.

The inciting incident behind Butler's book was a horrifying experience they had in Brazil in 2017 when anti-gender protesters burned them in effigy as a witch, and a stranger physically attacked them in the airport—in Butler's estimation, with the intent to seriously injure or kill them. How is it, Butler asks, that being perceived as the personification of contentious ideas about *gender* could provoke such murderous rage? Their book then offers a sweeping account of how *gender* has functioned in recent decades as what they term a *phantasm*, a psychical repository for all manner of unreal fears that becomes a vehicle for all the weaponized feelings and political fantasies I'd seen playing out in the audience that night at the Matt Walsh event. Butler's book saved me a lot of trouble and considerable page count, because how reactionaries have taken up the *gender* concept and filled it with new content and meaning is an important chapter in the story of “changing gender” that I now needn't rehash.

Who's Afraid of Gender? offers a succinct survey of all the work that *gender* is now being asked to undertake. Butler details the surprisingly central role that certain right-wing strands of Catholicism, particularly those promulgated by the German cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict, played in attaching all manner of theological arguments and critiques of secular society to the *gender* concept. One significant moment in the formulation of “anti-gender ideology” dates to 1995, when the right-wing Catholic writer Dale O'Leary published *Gender: The Deconstruction of Women*, a short booklet written in preparation for the Fourth World Congress on Women held that year in Beijing. That gathering was

something of a “super-spreader” event where discontents with *gender* that had emerged in different religious, feminist, and ethnonationalist contexts worldwide jumped between different populations and mutated into a new and more virulent strain of anti-gender ideology. O’Leary’s tract offered a polemical yet cogent overview of what she called “gender feminism” in the years after World War II, to argue that *gender* was a smoke screen for advancing a secular globalist campaign, promoted by the United Nations and international human rights NGOs, that was hostile to women’s true interests. Though she doesn’t dwell on Butler’s poststructuralist theories, O’Leary’s use of *deconstruction* in her title nevertheless signals how Butler’s celebrity status and *Gender Trouble*’s engagement with poststructuralist critical theory informed the right wing’s adoption of *gender* as the key concept they needed to oppose.

Butler argues that attacking *gender* became a way of attacking many other targets, including ideas of bodily autonomy and self-determination related to abortion rights and marriage equality. They follow the money to show how anti-gender ideology is now being pushed by a variety of well-heeled reactionary political forces ranging in the United States from the Claremont Institute, the Alliance Defending Freedom, the Heritage Foundation, and the Federalist Society, to international actors that include shadowy Russian oligarchs and the Russian Orthodox Church, Hungary’s Viktor Orbán and other Eastern European autocrats, and the Vatican. They dissect British TERFism (the acronym for the somewhat misguided term *trans-exclusionary radical feminism*, which would be more accurate if you substituted *reactionary* for *radical*) and gender-critical feminism (which is not all that critical if by *critical* you mean an analytically sharp takedown rather than the intellectual equivalent of a snarky online review of a restaurant that serves a cuisine you don’t like). Butler ties the contemporary concept of *gender* to legacies of colonialism by platforming the work of African and indigenous feminists, and delves into the epistemological questions the *sex/gender* relationship raises about the *nature/culture* relationship by drawing on feminist science studies and histories of science. All in all, it’s a thorough and useful exploration of one of the hot-button topics of our times.

My book, thankfully, was taking a different tack. Butler supplied an excellent map of *gender*'s contemporary terrain, while I was bent on finding a way out of the rat maze. Where they went horizontal, offering a thick description of how *gender* has come to work in a deeply contextualized present, I was going vertical, drilling down through layer after layer of different historical strata to trace *gender*'s lineages. And for all Butler's acumen and insight, their understanding of *gender* operated squarely within the post-1975 ecosystem of feminist thought that I was trying to historicize. That didn't make their account wrong, but it did mean that in not paying attention to the historicity of the concept itself, they'd left the field wide open for me to tackle that problem myself.

III.

“Are you going to use John Money’s papers while you’re here in Dunedin?”

Jane and I were warming ourselves with big bowls of fresh-caught local seafood chowder at a seaside café near Moeraki Boulders, a cluster of eerily spherical stones that reminded me of giant alien eggs oviposited by a visiting extraterrestrial mothership, scattered across a wind-chopped beach just north of Dunedin, the southernmost large coastal city on New Zealand’s South Island. The city has an almost end-of-the-world feel—*almost*, because you can sit on a harborside bench, as I did during my only-ever visit, and watch the ships depart for the next major landmass to the south: Antarctica. Dunedin is home to the country’s oldest university, built in the flush days during the late nineteenth century, when a gold rush briefly made it the country’s biggest and richest city. I was visiting the university there to attend an academic conference.

Jane, a local with whom I shared some mutuals, had graciously offered to show me around on my one free day. We’d visited the Dunedin Botanic Garden so I could marvel at the native plants, made an hourlong hike up an extinct volcano to take in a ravishing panorama of the city, settled for driving by the Cadbury chocolate factory without bothering to take the guided tour. She and I had been playing the game of connecting the shared dots of our respective social worlds—a filmmaker from San Francisco who’d lived in New Zealand for a few years, a Kiwi intersex activist who’d stayed in my home in the Bay Area—when she popped the question about John Money, Dunedin’s best-known academic export.

Sadly, no, I tell her, I won’t be doing any research at all while I’m here, it’s a pathetically short stay for such a dreadfully long trip. Except for this single day of touring, I’ll be busy at the conference until I head back to

my job in the United States, air-commuting from San Francisco every week to direct the Institute for LGBTQ+ Studies at the University of Arizona, which makes it difficult to be away for more than a few days at a time during the academic year.

Besides, at the air-commute job I'd recently left at Indiana University in Bloomington to take the one in Tucson, my office in the Department of Gender Studies was just across a courtyard from the Kinsey Institute, where the bulk of John Money's papers are now housed. I'd spent many a long hour there plumbing the collection's depths, oddly charmed by all the surreal little psychedelic drawings Money doodled in the margins of his letters, memos, and research notes. He was a talented amateur artist as well as a discriminating art collector. The Kinsey once held a sale of duplicate materials during the years I worked in Bloomington, and I scored a copy of Edward Brecher's 1969 book, *The Sex Researchers*, whose title page was stamped with a seal that read "From the Library of John Money." It's on my office bookshelf now. I'll be contenting myself on this trip, I tell Jane, with simply catching a glimpse of Money's early-career stomping grounds, imagining him as an ambitious grad student and untenured lecturer here at University of Otago, no PhD yet, less than a decade removed from his escape at sixteen from the hardscrabble farm of his fundamentalist Christian family in Morrinsville, on the North Island, near Waikato.

No worries, then, Jane chirps as she scrounges for her car keys so she can drop me back at my hotel in time for the conference's opening-night reception later that evening. Besides, that guy is *so* canceled.

★ ★ ★

John Money (1921–2006) lived a life that provides plenty of fodder for armchair psychoanalysts. His family was of mixed Welsh and English ancestry, his father born in Australia and his mother in the United Kingdom, and they had settled in Aotearoa/New Zealand not long before John was born. As members of the austere Plymouth Brethren—biblical literalists who considered scripture to be the sole source of truth—Money's parents were dirt-poor, anti-intellectual, sexually repressive authoritarians, and their son John was precociously brilliant and desperately hungry for a wider

world. He had a rebellious streak and an arrogance that served his youthful ambition well, though it strained the bonds of collegiality and friendship in later years, and often made it impossible for him to admit to errors in judgment or interpretation.

John Money was, in his own words, “initiated into sex play with boys” during his primary school years and felt “panic” at the thought of romantic attachments with girls. His sexuality and masculinity were twisted by his family’s religion and further warped by his own guilt. As a youth he thought the world would be a better place if human males, like farm animals, were gelded unless needed for procreation. He masturbated constantly as a teen even though he thought it was a sin.

For John Money to have become the best-known, most prolific, and deeply influential sex researcher of the second half of the twentieth century is a testament to the fierce drive needed to reconcile conflicted elements of his own psychobiography. He did so by repudiating what he called “the antisexualism and antimasturbation hysteria” that “spread a sinister influence over me and my generation.” He devoted his entire professional career to rectifying what he considered to be the pernicious consequences of anti-sex prudery by attempting to place the study of sexuality on a firm scientific foundation. He substituted, for the prurient avoidance of sexuality he learned in his parochial family of origin, an intrepid imperial explorer’s fantasy of mastery through identifying and cataloging, and sometimes sampling, every conceivable variety of sexual experience the world might have to offer.

For all that, Money nevertheless held rigid and stereotypical views of men’s and women’s respective social roles. He was married early, briefly, and perfunctorily to a writer whose most desirable attributes he considered to be her “complete womanhood, her ability and desire for the feminine role of wife and mother; and her complete mastery of all the arts and techniques of those roles.” He chalked up the relationship’s extreme brevity to what he retroactively diagnosed as his wife’s psychotic reaction to prescription weight-loss pills, but perhaps he lacked insight into other dysfunctions that might have contributed to the relationship’s demise. Thereafter, Money was mostly married to his career and channeled the bulk of what he called the

“lust factor” into his work, though he did engage in short-term hookups as well as intermittent, non-exclusive sexual relationships of varying lengths with both women and men. He also loved to organize orgies.

In the late 1940s, Money’s drive and ambition took him to Harvard, where, for his PhD, he was admitted into the cutting-edge interdisciplinary social sciences program of the recently established Department of Social Relations. He went from there in the early 1950s to a lifelong faculty appointment in the medical school of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Money became a sexual liberationist every bit as dogmatic in his adherence to his newfound creed as his family had been in its adherence to the Plymouth Brethren. A good deal of the criticism later directed at Money is rooted in anti-sexuality prejudice, but his own belief that erotic expression was always a positive good, one aligned with political liberation and scientific modernity, left him vulnerable to more substantive critiques of his professional ethics. His ethical lapses, along with his deeply inculcated intellectual arrogance, culminated in a scandal that irrevocably tarnished his reputation. As with similar high-profile men such as Woody Allen and Bill Cosby, accusations of egregious misconduct now frame Money’s entire career, whatever merit his work otherwise holds. There’s just no ignoring the Reimer case and the shadow it cast over Money’s theory of gender.

★ ★ ★

Born in Winnipeg in 1965, David and Brian Reimer were identical twins whose treatment exemplified John Money’s gender theory. They became a tragic cautionary tale for his hubris. David, originally named Bruce, suffered irreparable damage to his penis during a botched circumcision at the age of six months. His parents saw Money on television talking about his studies of infants who had been born with atypical genitals, and they thought his expertise regarding pediatric genital anomalies might help them determine the best treatment for Bruce’s injury. They flew their young family to Baltimore to consult with a man they considered an esteemed medical specialist.

John Money's earliest writing focused on some of the same questions about reality and knowledge, science and religion, that now seem to me so necessary to address anew when re-narrating the history of the *gender* concept in his wake. His first undated and unpublished paper, written at the University of Otago, was on psychiatry and religion. His first publication, in 1948, was titled "Delusion, Belief, and Fact." In 1949, he published "Unanimity in the Social Sciences with Reference to Epistemology, Ontology, and Scientific Method." After being introduced to "hermaphroditism" in his first-year seminar at Harvard, he realized he'd found a topic that would allow him to explore all his intersecting interests; his dissertation was titled "Hermaphroditism: An Inquiry into the Nature of a Human Paradox." Primarily a psychologist, Money wanted to learn more about how each and every person becomes the particular kind of individual they consider themselves to be. He adopted the tried-and-true social-scientific method of studying nonnormative cases to illuminate the unstated norms such cases transgress, and studied how people born with intersex conditions came to understand their personal identities in a society that defined men and women based on the idea of two clearly distinguishable binary sexes. That thing about themselves that individuals came to understand is what Money later described with the word *gender*.

Money conducted his doctoral research not just by examining the extant scientific literature on hermaphroditism, but also by interviewing actual intersex people. He noted that such persons' atypical genitalia complicated the medical determination of their biological sex, but that they nevertheless lived socially as men or women, and usually thought of themselves as being either women or men in spite of their physical anomalies. He groped for some way to mark the distinctions he observed between the ambiguous physical sex of his research subjects' bodies, their subjective self-concepts, and their social existences as women and men, and to name the means and manner by which those elements had become misaligned or could be rearranged. To conduct his research he needed to address the concrete question of which pronoun—*she*, *he*, or *it*—he should use to refer to his interviewees and other case studies. Perhaps it was grappling with the implications of pronoun choice, when talking about actual people, that

supplied the inspiration for the technical term Money developed to describe his research findings.

Money fell back on the same solution to naming the disjunctions between mind, body, and role that had occurred centuries earlier to the authors of *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* and *The Oxford Magazine* article on macaronis, when they similarly grappled with the perception that maleness/manhood/masculinity and femaleness/womanhood/femininity had somehow gotten out of whack. They all drew upon the same intuitive recognition that sorting bodies into social categories based on anatomy involved the same meaning-making practices as sorting nouns into grammatical gender categories. Money treated the psychosocial categories of *masculine/feminine* and *man/woman* as the *genders* of male and female biological sexes. His adoption of *gender*-based terminology didn't involve anything more complicated than that.

Money first used *gender* in its social-scientific sense in his single-authored article "Hermaphroditism, Gender and Precocity in Hyperadrenocorticism: Psychologic Findings," published in the *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital* in June 1955. He used it as part of the term *gender role*, which he defined as "all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman, respectively." He repeats this definition in the first of a series of articles published later that year that all use *gender* terminology, coauthored with his Hopkins colleagues Joan and John Hampson about their clinical work with intersex patients. (The Hampsons, in Money's telling, were only tangentially involved in writing the articles and conducting the research they were based on, and in any event they moved on to other research interests soon after their publication; Money always claimed primary authorship and primary responsibility for coining the *gender* terminology.)

Money and the Hampsons assessed *gender role* based on "general mannerisms, deportment and demeanor, play preferences and recreational interests; spontaneous topics of talk in unprompted conversation and casual comment; content of dreams, daydreams, and fantasies; replies to oblique inquiries and projective tests; evidence of erotic practices and, finally, the person's own replies to direct inquiry." In other words, they measured an

individual's fit, or lack thereof, with conventional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, and invited that person to state their self-perceived understanding of themselves as a girl or boy, man or woman.

The primary significance of Money's work is not that he used the word *gender* to name something that otherwise would have remained unnamed in the theory of personality formation he developed, in much the same way that the difference between a noun and its grammatical classification remains unnamed when speaking. Rather, the significance lay in the entirety of the theory itself, which he elaborated in numerous articles and books over the course of several decades, for which *gender* became something of a synecdoche—a part that stands for a whole.

Money's gender theory proposed a critical period in early childhood, generally before the age of two, in which a previously plastic and transformable self-sense locks in as an unalterable identity. It was biopsychosocial, and not strictly social-constructionist, because he thought prenatal hormone levels in the brain, as well as family psychodynamics along with idiosyncratic subjective experience, played equally important roles. Money understood identity formation to resemble language acquisition. In much the same way that a capacity for learning language in early childhood becomes crystallized as a particular "native language" that will inform how subsequent language skills develop, so too did an impressible young psyche become either boy- or girl-identified. Money thought the acquisition of that self-sense in humans happened similarly to how imprinting was thought to work in some animals, as in the famous experiments in which baby geese bonded with the psychologist Konrad Lorenz as their mother.

In light of his theory of gender-identity acquisition, John Money recommended that children born with atypical genitals be subjected immediately to neonatal surgeries intended to give them a more normative physical appearance—almost always female-looking, because surgery is much better at cutting tissue away than it is at building up new anatomical structures. He further recommended that this information be withheld from the child. An early surgical intervention that the infants would not remember later in life, he thought, would allow such children to understand

themselves as normal boys and girls, and to perceive their altered genitals as unremarkable rather than unnatural. Early intervention similarly guarded against new parents considering their intersex infants to be unlovable freaks or monsters. It would better allow them to properly bond with their children and enable them to raise their offspring in clearly defined roles that aligned with social stereotypes for people with genitals that looked like the ones constructed for them.

This was the treatment protocol recommended to Bruce Reimer's parents. In keeping with Money's theoretical understanding that one's feeling of being a boy or girl, man or woman—that is, of having a gender identity—was not hardwired in one's biology, but was rather the outcome of a complex biopsychosocial process in which biology played an important but not determinate role, he recommended that Bruce Reimer's genitals be given a female appearance, and that Bruce be socially reassigned as a girl. Bruce underwent genital conversion surgery at twenty-two months of age. He was renamed Brenda and raised as a girl.

Money thought it was a great stroke of good luck that Brenda had a twin in Brian, because that allowed him to put the social-constructionist elements of his theory of gender identity development to the test by clinically observing the siblings to control for biological and familial psychodynamic factors. As part of this twin study, both siblings continued to see John Money regularly as patients in a clinical setting for several years. Anonymized as the “John/Joan” case, Money turned their story into the prime example in the medical literature of the validity of his theory of gender, on the basis of which untold thousands of intersex children would be operated upon in decades to come.

Both Reimer siblings later claimed Money was emotionally abusive and behaved in sexually inappropriate ways with them, including instructing them to engage in sexual role-playing behaviors with each other when they were alone with him. Brenda also said she never felt like a girl and demanded to retransition at age fourteen, which her parents supported. She eventually became David after a series of masculinizing procedures, including the restorative phalloplasty that Money had recommended against in infancy. Money remained silent in his published work about all such

subsequent developments. Tragically, both David and Brian eventually committed suicide, but not before David spilled their story with all its pathos to Milton Diamond, a biologist long skeptical of Money's gender theory. Diamond encouraged the Reimers to go public, resulting in the *Rolling Stone* journalist John Colapinto writing an exposé in 1997, later expanded into a bestselling book, *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl*, published in 2000.

★ ★ ★

Although the Reimer case did not involve intersexuality, Money recommended David's initial surgery and gender reassignment according to the same rationale for treatment, based on the same theory of gender identity development, that he recommended for intersex infants. By the time the real-life story behind the presentation of the John/Joan case in the scientific literature started coming to light in the later 1990s, the first generation of intersex infants who had been operated on according to the treatment protocols of John Money's gender theory in the 1950s and 1960s had become adults. Many of them suffered from a variety of sexual and emotional complaints or felt troubled by discrepancies between vague memories and family stories that contradicted them. Suspecting that something was amiss, some of them sought and gained access to pediatric medical records previously withheld from them. Many felt that their entire lives had been predicated on secrecy and lies perpetrated by their parents and doctors. Enraged, feeling violated, they began speaking out about the sometimes-horrific consequences of their early childhood medical treatment, and harshly criticized the genital surgeries to which they'd been subjected in infancy as both nonconsensual and mutilative. Many of them rejected the social-constructionist dimension of Money's theories and offered their own experiences as counterarguments to his idea that if gender reassignment and genital transformation took place early enough, the children would unquestioningly accept their assigned statuses.

I had a ringside seat to the birth of intersex activism in the 1990s, when Cheryl Chase (a pseudonym for Bo Laurent), founder of the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA), moved from Tokyo to San Francisco to

network with trans activists, including me, from whom she felt she might learn something about social movement politics. I met a lot of those early intersex activists around my dining-room table. One of my housemates, now a medical doctor specializing in intersex care, edited the ISNA newsletter *Hermaphrodites with Attitude*; another, now a lawyer, founded one of the leading advocacy groups for intersex youth. Chase and my housemates organized the first international gathering of intersex people, which convened overnight at our house before participants headed off to a rented retreat center up in Napa. That's how I first met Mani Bruce Mitchell, the intersex activist from New Zealand.

The Reimer case is not actually the slam-dunk debunking of social-constructionist theories of personality development, nor of the idea of a critical window for gender-identity formation in early childhood, that it is often made out to be. For one thing, Bruce (who grew up to be David) had nearly two years of socialization as a boy by the time he was surgically transitioned to Brenda, and he knew that he had been surgically transitioned. Nevertheless, the Reimer controversy understandably drove a stake in the heart of John Money's career. He went to his grave a few short years later, wounded and embittered, without ever having acknowledged any misdeeds.

The accusations of gross professional misconduct against John Money that surfaced when they did—during that same shift in the zeitgeist when intersex survivors of neonatal genital surgeries started politicizing their treatment outcomes, Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* reworked *gender* with a postmodern twist, and Dale O'Leary's early articulation of gender as the “deconstruction of women” started spreading transnationally—supplied rhetorically powerful ammunition for attacking *gender* itself by attacking John Money as a person. That was the tack Matt Walsh had taken that night at Stanford.

All the more reason, then, to recover a history of *gender* that far precedes and widely circumvents John Money, even while acknowledging his influence in the contemporary concept's dissemination and uptake. Telling that other story is one way to preserve what's actually useful about *gender* by jettisoning the unnecessary baggage.



The standard “lab leak” story of the *gender* nomenclature’s eventual global spread is that after John Money invented it, it migrated via the scientific literature and personal networks among professionals from Johns Hopkins to UCLA. Dr. Richard Green, who completed his MD at Hopkins with Money in 1961 and then joined the faculty at UCLA, played a key role. In 1962, he and a team of researchers at UCLA established the Gender Identity Research Center (GIRC)—the first such “Big Science” major university research unit of its kind—where they refined and expanded the application of *gender* terminology within the biopsychosocial paradigm of identity development they endorsed along with Money. The psychologist Evelyn Hooker, who did much to depathologize homosexuality in the later 1960s and early 1970s, was a GIRC affiliate. Money credits her with coining the term *gender identity*, which led him in turn to modify and expand his own *gender role* into *gender identity/role*. In that pairing, social gender role is understood as the outward expression of internal gender identity, while gender identity is the inward experience of external gender role. (That is, exactly the idea of gender as an inner representation of an outer reality that Butler’s performative model of gender challenged.)

Hooker’s UCLA colleagues, the psychiatrists Ralph Greenson and Robert Stoller, further elaborated Money’s terminology into a tripartite division of biological *sex*, psychological *gender identity*, and social *gender role* based on their research with transsexual patients seeking genital surgeries and hormone treatments, and trying to devise appropriate diagnostic criteria. They theorized the existence of what they dubbed a *core gender identity* based on Money’s ideas of a critical window in early childhood development when identification becomes fixed and unalterable. Stoller’s name became firmly wedded to the *gender* concept in consequence of his authoritative 1968 book, *Sex and Gender*, and its 1975 follow-up, *The Transsexual Experiment*.

Another prominent scholar at UCLA in the 1960s, the sociologist Harold Garfinkel, also took an interest in *gender*. But unlike Stoller and Hooker and their colleagues at GIRC who deployed *gender* terminology as

part of a theory of identity development, Garfinkel took a meta-level perspective on the gender researchers themselves as well as their work. He saw in early social-scientific gender theory a prime example of the local practices for socially producing the distinctive culture-bound, time-bound, and place-bound reality frameworks that he'd dubbed ethnomethodologies. Garfinkel thought the clinical practice of determining a patient's "true sex" and deciding how to treat and correct any anomalies or deviations therefrom made visible our own culture's usually unstated rules, assumptions, and beliefs about what made a man a man and a woman a woman. One of the cases in his 1967 book, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, pertained to a young trans woman known only by the pseudonym Agnes, who had sought a surgical referral from GIRC. Garfinkel demonstrated her to have successfully manipulated the explicit theoretical presuppositions and tacit onto-epistemological assumptions of her medical service providers' ethnomethodology to access gender-affirming care for herself that they might not have provided otherwise. The girl knew how to *werk* it.

The "lab leak" version of *gender*'s origin in John Money's clinic is not so much wrong in its particulars as it is partial and incomplete. Much of that story derived from Money himself, who ceaselessly promoted his inarguably influential work as a central feature of recent world history. "It is impossible to write about the political history of the second half of the twentieth century," Money wrote, particularly the history of feminist thought, "without reference to the concept of gender." He wasn't simply making things up to toot his own horn. Back in the early years of the current century, the evolutionary biologist David Haig conducted a study of thirty million academic article titles published between 1945 and 2001, tracking occurrences of the words *sex* and *gender*, to document what he described as the "inexorable rise of gender" and the accompanying "decline of sex." Excluding strictly grammatical uses of the word *gender*, Haig found that "most, if not all, of the gender-containing titles" published in academic journals from the 1960s forward "appear to have derived the term from Money." By tracing the roots of the citational trees in later feminist scholarship, Haig showed that they all converged around GIRC-affiliated

researchers in the 1960s, and that those researchers all cited Money's work in the 1950s.

After *gender* jumped from Hopkins to UCLA, according to Haig, the *gender* nomenclature spread into feminist social-science scholarship between the late 1960s and mid-1970s, and from there into the women's movement more generally (and from there into society at large). Well before Haig's study, in fact, Joan Scott had already traced much of this history, minus the bean counting, in her landmark 1986 article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." Scott argued that *gender* had evolved from a clinical term to become a conceptual tool that could be used—just as I did when discussing the macaroni in "Yankee Doodle" and talking shop in the bar after the Taylor Mac performance—to analyze the operations of power invested in cultural practices for creating and maintaining hierarchies between men and women, both now and in the past. But in concentrating on *gender*'s analytical use as a social-scientific concept she, too, reproduces *gender*'s break with grammar—the article begins, in fact, with an anecdote about an eighteenth-century instance of using the word to refer to women as a group or class, which Scott dismisses as a "witty" instance of "deliberately misusing the grammatical reference."

The "big bang" moment of *gender*'s conceptual explosion in 1975 that's clearly visible in the HathiTrust Bookworm Viewer visualization of *gender*'s rising prevalence, and further documented by Haig, can be attributed rather precisely to an influential article by the feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." A few other feminists had sprinkled the word *gender* here and there in earlier works for over a decade, but they did so in a pretty rudimentary manner, mostly just using it as a synonym for *sex*, or sometimes to mean the "social construction" of sex. Kate Millett's 1970 book, *Sexual Politics*, based on her 1968 dissertation, explicitly referenced Stoller's recently published volume on sex and gender and used the *sex/gender* distinction to advance a feminist biology-is-not-destiny argument, but it was Rubin who transformed *gender* into full-throated feminist theory, and demonstrated all the many intellectual, analytical, and conceptual tasks that *gender* could perform. Without Rubin, there's no

Butler, no “gender studies.” It was she who coined the term *sex/gender system* to describe the process through which raw little *Homo sapiens* baby bodies get turned into fully acculturated men, women, and others. And it was she who inserted the idea of *sex and gender relations* into anthropological accounts of kinship systems, and wrote of *gender hierarchies* and *gender-stratified societies*. From that one fecund article, a new conceptual universe of *gender* began to unfold in feminist thought, and to diffuse from there into everyday speech.

Rubin’s expansion of *gender* into a feminist analytic provoked criticism and attacks, more or less immediately, from some feminists who considered *gender* to depoliticize the status of women as a subordinated class. Such feminists emphasized a transhistorical, cross-cultural sense of commonality among women based on a shared experience of female embodiment, and saw in *gender* a denial of the basic biological reality behind women’s oppression. And to be fair, there’s a grain of truth in this position. *Gender*, a concept rooted in grammar, focuses not on the objects that are classified and arranged but rather on the rules, practices, assumptions, and beliefs behind those classifications—including beliefs about the nature of the objects themselves; in this case, *sex*—and what all those practices of meaning-making are then enlisted to do, socially and culturally. It’s in the collapse of any distinction between the female body, on the one hand, and woman as a “socially constructed” and culturally variable category on the other, that “gender critical” feminism finds common cause with the perspective that animates contemporary anti-feminist critics of “gender ideology.”

This is the “orthodox” history of *gender*’s dissemination and uptake that I myself learned and taught for many years. It’s insufficient for a few reasons. First, and most simply, another psychologist, Madison Bentley, anticipated by more than a decade Money’s use of *gender* to mean a complex biopsychosocial process of identity-acquisition—and he was not alone in proposing around that time that *gender* was something distinct from *sex*. Second, as Bentley’s own account of his use of *gender* terminology makes explicit, his concept of *gender* owed a considerable debt to canonical work in cultural anthropology that stretched back into the early twentieth century, particularly the work of Margaret Mead and others

trained by Franz Boas at Columbia University, as well as to the role theory of sociologist Talcott Parsons. Finally, none of the major works on the intellectual history of *gender* adequately address the contributions made by trans people, who were as invested as their cisgender feminist sisters in the proposition that biology is not destiny.

★ ★ ★

While John Money cut an extravagant and self-consciously florid figure eager for the world's attention, the circumspect and punctilious Madison Bentley (1870–1955), with his wire-frame glasses, trim mustache, tweed jacket, and fastidious midwestern mannerisms, could have been typecast as the Hollywood cliché of a prim and proper professor in some 1940s B movie. An experimentalist known for his crisp formulation of new concepts, Bentley was intrigued by such far-flung topics as how memories form, the phenomenology of complex emotional experience, and how single-celled animals learned from sensory input. He taught over the course of a long and distinguished career in several esteemed university psychology departments, including those at Cornell, Cal Tech, and Stanford. The author of more than 150 peer-reviewed articles, Bentley was also the longtime editor of *The American Journal of Psychology (AJP)*, the flagship journal of his field, where many of his own articles appeared. He served there in some capacity from 1903 until 1950. Though little remembered now, Bentley was a prominent figure in his profession in his own day and age.

In two articles published in *AJP* in 1945—"Sanity and Hazard in Childhood" and "The Reconstructing Teens and the Stabilizing Twenties" (originally one long article, broken in half for publication)—Bentley offered a concise yet fully formed account of *gender* as a psychosocial developmental process of identity formation that anticipated by more than a decade John Money's earliest use of that word to mean that exact same process.

Yet another psychologist had in fact already begun to adopt the vocabulary of *gender*. In 1940, the medical lexicographer and psychiatrist Leland Earl Hinsie included an entry for *gender* in his *Psychiatric*

Dictionary, with Encyclopedic Treatment of Modern Terms, defining it as a “word used in grammar” that could also be clinically useful in situations where “the sheer difference in the physical structure and externals (including even dress) between the two sexes is under discussion,” rather than the erotic behavior (i.e., “sex” in the sense of “sexuality”) of men and women. He rejected the terms *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality* and proposed in their place *suigenderism* (same gendered) and *altrigenderism* (other gendered). In his entry *neutrality, sexual* he references Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s flirtation with grammatical analogy, quoting the famous nineteenth-century sexologist as follows: “The sexual instinct and desire, save for indistinct feelings and impulses, remain latent until the period of development of the sexual organs. The child is *generis neutrius*.” Hinsie never fleshed out his terminological innovations any further. Neither his work nor Bentley’s more fully elaborated ideas left any imprint in subsequent gender scholarship, but both men’s work remains significant precisely because it situates the articulation of their concepts of *gender* in long-developing lines of thought within the social sciences, which undercuts the anti-Money narrative that *gender* is a suspect concept invented whole cloth by an outré academic maverick.

In Bentley’s first article, “Sanity and Hazard in Childhood,” he defines *sanity* as a person’s ability to marshal sufficient mental resources to address the demands imposed by social existence in order to meet four basic exigencies, the first of which is to create, develop, and maintain a “theater of living,” or a set of subjective perceptions of the experienced environment capable of accommodating and accounting for what the person learns from sensory information. The sane person must also understand how to play their proper role on that stage, as well as how to “maintain an active commerce, under proscribed rules, with other hominid organisms.” Finally, the individual must “regulate his affairs with respect to a given cultural plan and mode.” All of these exigencies must be addressed in early childhood if the child is to successfully manage the transition to more mature stages of the life course. *Hazard*, on the other hand, as Bentley defines it, involves all the contingent fortunes the child might encounter when passing from infancy to the state of “‘the little girl’ or ‘the little boy.’” There were any

number of ways this transition from one life stage to another could go awry. Flawed identity formation within the context of becoming a boy or a girl he deemed a principal hazard of childhood.

Bentley then offers a developmental model for how infants become boys or girls. There's an initial phase when the neonatal organism is learning fundamental things about its bodily-being-in-the-world: eating and sleeping and pooping and moving, along with developing feelings about and uses for all those physical experiences. Then, sometime before the age of two, the infant fully enters into what Bentley calls "the human drama" of social relations with its caregivers and family members, as part of belonging to a larger social order with rules and expectations (like the grammar of a language) that exist before the child's entry into them. Part of that social order is what Bentley calls *gender*, which he defines as "the socialized obverse of sex." *Gender* is "a fixed line of demarkation" organized around characteristics labeled *masculine* and *feminine*, which pertain to "many matters in grouping, playing, exercising, reciting, and the like," that "separate the boys from the girls." (*Gender*, in other words, creates categories of people that have rules or conventions for belonging to them.) Gender competency, like linguistic competency, is acquired through observation, instruction, and practice, and reinforced through rewards and punishments, within the child's theater of living, according to implicit or explicit rules that come to be understood and internalized. "Speech and action from above gradually gender the self-object of the infant," Bentley writes (using *gender* as a verb to highlight that it is a psychosocial process and not merely a static representation "obverse" to a physical sex), with the infant's "self-valuation being regulated by parental pleasure or resigned tolerance upon the discovery that the baby is a girl or a boy."

Bentley continues his developmental theories of gender-identity acquisition and expression over the life course, extending them into adolescence and early adulthood, in "The Reconstructing Teens and the Stabilizing Twenties." He observes that the "sane life-course of civilized man" is in many ways not so different from that of peoples he cringingly deems "savage" or "primitive," in that so-called "civilized" people still practice socio-symbolic rituals for moving from childhood into adulthood

that accompany the physical maturation of the young body and its newfound capacity to participate in biological reproduction. Among the most important factors in this transition from childhood to adulthood is “*gender*, which must always be taken with, but distinguished from, sex—as it has moulded the young organism up to the advent of adolescence.” While sex in the biological sense “is easily confused with gender,” Bentley explains to his readers, *gender* is properly understood as “the socialized interpretation of certain biological differences between male and female.” While the biology of sex remains stable, he contends, its socialized interpretation is much more volatile. So much of what gets labeled “the problem of sex” in a social sense, Bentley claims, actually refers not to sex but to the shifting behaviors of women and men “when the social sanctions for gender rapidly change, for example, as they did between the two great World Wars.”

Bentley offers observations and advice that we’d still do well to heed today amid the contemporary culture wars. What he calls “sheer biological” sex plays “a relatively small part in the life-course,” and matters mostly in terms of reproductive, procreative activities. Other than that, people are basically just people, all doing basically the same kinds of things regarding the body’s organic life; their particular reproductive sex has “little permanent effect upon the organism and upon the successive phases of its existence.” On the other hand, he observes, “gender may have the most profound influences both upon the individual life and upon the institutional and congregate life of the group.” This distinction should be deliberately highlighted in moments of what he calls “revival,” when questions about proper sexual conduct and expressions of masculinity and femininity take on greater social urgency, as he understood them to have done in recent years at the time he was writing in 1945. Bentley could just as easily have been writing about the moral panic over *gender* in the 2020s: “These revivals, always confounding sex and gender, scarcely rest upon straight and reasonable thinking. They commonly fall among those cultish enthusiasms which decry ‘intelligence’ and exalt ‘feeling’ or ‘emotion.’”

At least one other psychologist writing for *AJP* under Bentley's editorship had started using *gender* terminology by the mid-1940s. In a review of two recent works of psychoanalytic theory by Helene Deutsch and Theodor Reik, A. Salina Damm notes what she calls a useful but overlooked distinction within psychoanalysis "between *sex* (a matter of anatomy, physiology and fervid behaviour) and *gender* (the social estimation of the man-like or the masculine and of the woman-like or the feminine)." While Damm gestured toward a prehistory of the *gender* concept and the *sex/gender* distinction in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Bentley himself attributed his embrace of the *gender* concept to the well-known anthropologist Margaret Mead. In a glowing 1950 review of her 1949 work, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World*, Bentley says the book "gives beyond its promise; for it informs the reader upon 'gender' as well as upon 'sex,' upon masculine and feminine rôles as well as upon male and female in their reproductive capacity." He clearly links what he meant by *gender* to what Margaret Mead called a "sex-role." Her role theory drew in turn upon decades of earlier social-scientific thought.

Mead's 1928 book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, about female puberty rites, was, for many years, the world's most widely read work of anthropology among experts and lay audiences alike. It became a bestseller in the interwar years precisely because it spoke to what Madison Bentley labeled "the problem of sex," which was really a change in gender norms, in suggesting that sexual mores were relative rather than absolute. Just as nice Samoan girls could become proper Samoan women while nevertheless comporting themselves in ways that sometimes didn't align with Eurocentric notions of propriety, so too could women in Western society still be good girls even if they bobbed their hair, wore short flapper dresses, danced the Charleston, smoked cigarettes, and had sex before marriage. The takeaway message was that norms change, roles evolve, and at the end of the day it's all relative. That was the perspective Mead continued to advance in her public-facing work, like *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World*, the 1949 book that so impressed Madison Bentley, which argued, in effect, that so-called "modern" people in Western

society are not anthropologically different from people in non-Western indigenous cultures.

Mead's perspective was itself a direct expression of a powerful social-scientific paradigm—the concept of *culture*, the idea that human subjectivities are shaped or “cultivated” through the practices and contexts within which they exist—a concept promoted in large part through the remarkable influence of Franz Boas, the man principally responsible for forging the modern discipline of anthropology. Boas founded the world's first PhD program in the field, at New York's Columbia University in 1899, where he trained Mead and an illustrious cohort of other influential anthropologists.

The program's first graduate, Alfred Kroeber, established the anthropology department at UC Berkeley. Another graduate, Edward Sapir, became a leading expert in comparative linguistics; he's now best known, along with his protégé Benjamin Lee Whorf, scion of an old Puritan family among the earliest settlers in Provincetown, for the so-called Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. They posited the idea of “linguistic relativity” as a subset of their broader commitment to cultural relativism more generally, to argue that different grammars, syntaxes, and concept systems create fundamentally different social realities for their speakers. Boas also trained the folklorist, documentary filmmaker, and novelist Zora Neale Hurston, who became a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance. His student Ruth Benedict went on to become president of the American Anthropological Association, as well as Boas's colleague on the Columbia anthropology faculty. Benedict was bisexual, identified herself as an “androgyne” in private correspondence, and had a romantic relationship with a former student of both hers and Boas's—Margaret Mead—who was also having an affair with Edward Sapir. It was an incestuously tight-knit group of incredibly influential people who shaped twentieth century thought in ways that have yet to be fully appreciated.

When trying to answer the basic question of why human societies differ from one another and change over time, Franz Boas and his students orchestrated a paradigm shift away from biological explanations toward cultural ones. It's significant that the proponents of the new cultural model

were for the most part immigrants and Jews with left-leaning sensibilities and bohemian tastes who did not feel particularly bound by social conventions regarding sexuality. They had little in common with a lily-white WASP old guard that had scant cause to question the biologicistic underpinnings of social theories that rendered their social superiority a fact of nature, rather than the outcome of socioeconomic processes and political struggle. They had scruples about disparaging racial, ethnic, or religious minorities, and a deep stake in articulating counter-perspectives that didn't automatically render members of those groups, as well as people such as themselves, second-tier sorts of individuals.

According to this so-called "culture and personality" school of thought, the primary driver of social existence is not nature, but nurture. Differences in collective forms of human life derive not from baked-in racial characteristics that underpin innate hierarchies, but rather from socially acquired and socially transmitted differences explainable by some combination of historical, geographical, economic, political, linguistic, religious, and metaphysical factors and beliefs, where no one way of being a particular kind of human is inherently superior or inferior to another. There is no progress narrative that stretches from the primitive to the civilized, just infinite varieties of cultural relativity. The very concept of *culture* implies that people become the particular kinds of people they are because of the particular practices of people-cultivation they engage in, not because of some fixed biological quality with preordained meanings or capacities attached. *Gender*, as the concept has come to be used and understood today (thanks in large part to the feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin, whose *sex/gender system* describes this process of personhood cultivation), is a fundamental expression of this basic explanatory framework. Distancing *gender* from John Money restores the concept's indebtedness to this older, deeply grounded perspective.

It has become a commonplace of trans, queer, and feminist discourse in recent decades to point to so-called two-spirit traditions among Native Americans as empirical evidence of the wide array of possible ways for societies to arrange their members into kinship roles and statuses that differ from the biocentric paradigm of the modern West. Much of the *gender*

concept as it has been promulgated in the post–World War II years derives not just from the culture model advanced by Boas and those he influenced but also from outsider interpretations of the indigenous American and Pacific societies that the early cultural anthropologists studied: those were the sources of data from which their theories derived, which they often mangled in the process of incorporating them into a Eurocentric framework.

Boas himself had a multiyear stint working on a geographical survey of Baffin Island, starting in 1883, and his close interaction with Inuit peoples, the subject of his first monograph, inspired a shift in his interest away from studying the land itself and toward the people who lived on it. Alfred Kroeber, at UC Berkeley, was an expert on the gender systems of native Californian cultures; his daughter, the science-fiction author Ursula K. (for Kroeber) Le Guin, drew on her family’s dinner-table conversations about her father’s work to inform the treatment of gender diversity in some of her best-known books, such as *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Ruth Benedict wrote on the Puebloan cultures of the southwestern United States in her 1934 book, *Patterns of Culture*. Sapir, at Yale, was a leading expert on Native American linguistics. Whorf, who made his living as a risk-assessment specialist for an insurance company in Hartford, Connecticut, was a talented amateur linguist with a metaphysical bent. He found his way toward more mainstream versions of linguistics after starting out as a hobbyist captivated by the early-nineteenth-century writings of the occultist Antoine Fabre d’Olivet, especially *The Hebraic Tongue Restored* (1815), which purported to reveal the esoteric meanings of hieroglyphs and the ancient Hebrew script. Whorf went on to try his hand at deciphering Mayan hieroglyphics before specializing in the Hopi language, under Sapir’s guidance, and with the tutelage of the native speaker Ernest Naquayouma.

Their genuine interest in Native American culture didn’t mean, of course, that the Boasians always succeeded in transcending their own unexamined prejudices. They still used a lot of terms like *primitive* and *savage* in their prose, however much they claimed to disavow civilizational hierarchies, but they nevertheless earnestly wrestled with how to make sense of the wildly divergent social practices they encountered among indigenous people for grouping members of their cultures into salient

categories of personhood. *Gender* owes a debt to the knowledge they extracted from Native societies.

★ ★ ★

The final root of *gender*'s genealogical tree that Madison Bentley traced through Mead rather than Money has to do with the social-scientific concepts of *status* and *role*. Money himself, remember, first uses *gender* as part of the term *gender role*, which he defines as whatever a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the *status* of being a man or woman, boy or girl. In using those terms, however, his claims to being the man who invented *gender* notwithstanding, Money situates himself in the longer intellectual lineage that Mead and his other predecessors shared. He is not concocting a whole new concept.

Role and status theories first emerge in Western social-scientific thought in the 1920s and '30s. Talcott Parsons, a sociologist whose stature in his field rivaled Boas's in anthropology, became their principal advocate. They were elements of his "structuralist-functionalist" approach to creating a totalizing theory of human social existence. Parsons described a *status* as "any patterned definition of who and what a person is" and a *role* as its "behavior counterpart." He helped popularize the *status* and *role* terminology within the English-speaking academy more generally, and introduced the specific term *sex role*, as the behavior expected of men and women, respectively, as early as 1940. That term was taken up among cultural anthropologists such as Margaret Mead, who before the 1940s came to a close had adopted Parsons's *sex role* to describe behaviors she had discussed decades earlier, without using those precise words, in her ethnographic study of female puberty rites in Samoa. Those behaviors and how Mead understood them, drawing on Parsons's terminology, are what Madison Bentley dubbed *gender*.

Talcott Parsons played an outsize role in the history of social-scientific research in the post-World War II years. He had been a professor of sociology at Harvard since the 1930s, but in the immediate postwar years was given the opportunity to develop a new kind of academic department designed to foster new kinds of interdisciplinary thought deemed necessary

to grasp the social, technological, and geopolitical complexities of the new world order. In 1945, Parsons became the founding director of Harvard's Department of Social Relations, the first such academic unit in the world. Four years later, that department admitted a PhD student from New Zealand—John Money. Money had been encouraged to apply to the program by his mentor back home, Ernest Beaglehole, who had studied in the United States with Sapir and Benedict. Money would apply the style of social-scientific thought he had been taught as a student and had honed in his doctoral program to the problem of developing a complex biopsychosocial model of identity formation to account for how intersex people developed a sense of self as men or women. There was nothing shockingly original about the theory he developed in light of his formal training—not even calling it *gender*.



The one time I met Virginia Prince, she was bedecked in a big floppy sun hat and a floral print cover-up atop her swimsuit, sipping on a brightly colored fruity drink adorned with a little paper umbrella, holding court from a chaise longue, poolside, at the Airtel Plaza Hotel in Van Nuys, California—a nice-enough business-traveler hotel with an unlovely view of its own parking lot, at a small regional airport that still prides itself on being one of the shooting locations for the classic Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman film *Casablanca*.

It was February 1995, so Prince would have been in her mid-eighties, and I would have been in my mid-thirties. After spending my twenties in grad school and having come out as trans only a few years earlier, I was just starting to get my feet wet in the fields and social networks that I've now spent the rest of my adult life exploring. I said hello and introduced myself. She gave my genderqueer grunge-punk *bas couture* a dismissively quick once-over, arched her eyebrows, glanced away, and did not deign to return my greeting. I wasn't her kind of trans. That was fine by me, because she wasn't my kind of trans, either. But she was a legend (or enfant terrible, depending on who you asked) who played a huge role in disseminating the concept of *gender* and associating it with trans life.

The event that brought us together was something that billed itself as the first International Congress on Gender, Cross-Dressing, and Sex, sponsored by the Center for Sex Research at Cal State University–Northridge. It self-consciously imagined itself as a dialogue between professionals and the community, by which it meant trans people and our psycho-medical service providers. Northridge had long been a hub of academic research on trans issues from that psycho-medical perspective, thanks in large part to the presence there of Vern and Bonnie Bullough, two influential historians of sexuality, who had worked over many decades with Virginia Prince and members of the cross-dressing scene in which she was the queen bee, as well as with sexologists and psychiatrists such as Money, Green, and Stoller.

Trans people on the organizing committee considered the congress to be a breakthrough moment, something akin to patient-advocacy organizations sitting down at last at the same table with the doctors who were managing their care, to transform what had always been a top-down conversation into an exchange between equals. There was great excitement about there being, for the first time ever in such contexts, panels on the arts and humanities that addressed trans topics from a nonmedicalized perspective. That’s why I was attending, to present work about an emerging trans photographer, Loren Cameron, who was getting a lot of buzz back then. I was excited to connect again with many of the folks I’d been meeting over the previous few years—a small handful of other trans artists and academics and activists who were trying to blow this conversation wide open, not put its tight-knit participants on a more level playing field.

I found the congress to be an exasperating exercise in futility. It was organized in two tracks—a “community” track and a “professional” track. All trans people were slated to present in the community track, whether or not we were professionals of either the psycho-medical or the arts and humanities kind. A sign on the front entrance to the hotel read “Conference Attendees Who Are Cross-Dressed Are Asked to Use the Service Entrance at Rear.” The anthropologist Jason Cromwell and I exchanged incredulous, infuriated looks with each other—“Did you just hear what I just heard?”—while listening to a foreign surgeon talk excitedly about performing

experimental genital-swapping surgeries on trans people that had postoperative survival rates measured in weeks or months rather than mere days. Such progress! The word *infuriated* actually fails to capture the depth of rage that can be sparked by confronting a medical power that treats your life as an expendable substance to be consumed in its pursuit of knowledge.

Virginia Prince was at the conference to be honored with a lifetime achievement award. Born in Los Angeles in 1912 to a successful and socially prominent real estate agent and her surgeon husband, Prince grew up economically privileged in the city's posh Hancock Park neighborhood around Wilshire Boulevard. She cross-dressed furtively from an early age and ran afoul of her imperious father when he caught her wearing girls' clothes. She earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry at Pomona College in 1931, where her freshman roommate, by sheer coincidence, was also secretly trans and quietly transitioned to become Barbara Wilcox, in 1940. Barbara eventually married a trans guy, and the two lived a quiet and contented life for many years running a landscaping business in Martinez, California.

Prince went on to earn a PhD in pharmacology at UC Berkeley in 1939, still presenting publicly as a man. While there she anxiously consulted with Karl Bowman, a former president of the American Medical Association and a past director of the Bellevue mental hospital in New York, who was then head of the Langley Porter Psychiatric Clinic at UC San Francisco. Bowman told her that cross-dressing was harmless and she should just relax, learn to accept it, and enjoy herself. While holding a postdoctoral appointment at UCSF in 1942, Prince met the Bay Area native Louise Lawrence at a lunchtime talk Lawrence gave at Bowman's clinic. That meeting changed Prince's life.

Louise Lawrence, born like Prince in 1912, called herself a "permanent transvestite," that is, a person assigned male at birth who dressed in feminine attire exclusively. Lawrence had made it her mission in life to educate medical professionals about the existence of people such as herself. It was she who, starting in the 1930s, built up a network of trans folks based on the names and addresses published in the newspapers of individuals who had been arrested for cross-dressing. And it was she who started

introducing members of that network to one another and to medical researchers interested in studying trans people, including Alfred Kinsey and the endocrinologist Harry Benjamin, later dubbed the “father of transsexualism”; those introductions snowballed by word of mouth over time to span continents. Louise Lawrence first exemplified for Virginia Prince the possibility of something Prince later used as the title of a book: *How to Be a Woman Though Male*. But it was Virginia Prince who turned Lawrence’s networks and connections into a subterranean movement.

Prince launched an abortive little periodical, using Lawrence’s contacts for its mailing list, called *Transvestia: Journal of the American Society for Equality in Dress*, which published two issues in 1952; revived a decade later, *Transvestia*’s second iteration became the backbone of an international organization of cross-dressers that had chapters all across the United States as well as in other countries. Prince also partially bankrolled the production of the movie director Edward D. Wood Jr.’s *Glen or Glenda*, meant to cash in on the excitement, in the early 1950s, around Christine Jorgensen, the first global transsexual celebrity. Wood and Prince knew each other through Southern California cross-dressing circles, but Prince was appalled when what she thought would be a sober and serious educational documentary turned out to be the astonishingly wackadoodle schlock-movie masterpiece that generations of cult-movie fans have come to appreciate.

Virginia Prince introduced the term *gender* to her longtime psychotherapist—the UCLA psychiatrist Robert Stoller.

I first heard that story from neither Stoller—he’d died in a freak traffic accident in 1991, hit by a passing car as he was pulling out of his driveway onto Sunset Boulevard in Pacific Palisades before we’d ever had a chance to meet—nor from Prince, who never did give me the time of day. I heard it from a clinical psychologist at Northridge who worked with trans clients, a guy named Richard F. Docter, whom I’d met at that conference in Van Nuys. The joke was that he was Dick Docter the dick doctor, yuk yuk, but I found him to be a genuinely warm and decent guy. He took me out to share his favorite meal—chicken potpie at the Marie Callender’s chain restaurant near his house in the San Fernando Valley—when I was visiting Northridge

once to give a lecture and conduct historical research in some of Prince's papers held by the university's Oviatt Library Special Collections Department. Docter told me how Stoller told him that it was Prince who first introduced Stoller—and Vern and Bonnie Bullough, too—to Money's work in the late 1950s, and that she was adamant that Money's *gender* nomenclature was absolutely vital for making sense of trans people as well as those with intersex conditions. Ideas of course circulate in all directions between patients and doctors, clients and service providers, even if the official histories leave out the contributions of those of us deemed objects of study rather than subjects who study our own lives as well as the lives of others.

Docter's anecdote jibes with the paper trail. Prince was still living a double life in the 1950s, working as a man in pharmaceutical engineering, where she used her birth-assigned name, while she lived privately as Virginia at home and among her circle of cross-dressing friends. A personal correspondence with another cross-dresser on the East Coast ran Prince afoul of the Comstock Law (which criminalized sending abortifacients and materials deemed obscene through the US mail) in the early 1960s, and after getting off with a slap on the wrist, she came out publicly as trans and never looked back. Prince relaunched *Transvestia*, founded the first national organizations for cross-dressers, hobnobbed with all the medical researchers, advocated for the decriminalization of cross-dressing, and promoted the reform of bureaucratic procedures to facilitate changes of name and gender on government IDs. She started living full-time as Virginia by the later 1960s, as mores loosened along with the rise of the counterculture and the sexual revolution. She gradually became the grande dame of the scene I found myself in a quarter century later, sipping her fruity umbrella drink at the Airtel in Van Nuys.

Before she was publicly Virginia, however, Prince, a highly trained medical professional in her own right, published articles in peer-reviewed academic journals, using pseudonyms to protect her privacy, that drew on Money's *gender* concept and anticipated later developments in the work of Stoller, Greenson, Hooker, Garfinkel, and others at UCLA. The first, "Homosexuality, Transvestism and Transsexuality: Reflections on Their

Etiology and Differentiation,” published in *The American Journal of Psychotherapy* in 1957, argues that male homosexual, transvestite, and transsexual identities all manifest an underlying “feminine identification” in different ways. Prince lays out a three-part division between the biological “sexual woman,” a “psychological woman,” and a “social woman.” The transvestite man, in Prince’s schema, is interested in social womanhood; the homosexual male seeks erotic pleasure from a position of psychical femininity; and the male-to-female transsexual tries to become a woman physically. Prince does not use the term *gender* to name the psychological and social dimensions of womanhood, but she’s clearly referencing the schema of *sex/gender identity/gender role* derived from Money’s work that would later be attributed to her psychotherapist, and she cites Money and his colleagues at Hopkins in some of her other early academic articles.

A decade later, in 1967, still years before *gender* had really caught on in feminist discourse, Prince published another article in *The Journal of Sex Research*, “The Expression of Femininity in the Male,” that explicitly draws on Money to distinguish between *sex* and *gender*. Prince defined *sex* “as a matter of anatomy and physiology,” and *gender* “as a matter of psychology and sociology”—or, as she put in the vernacular, “Sex is below the belt, gender is above it.” Prince was already complaining about the tendency to use the two terms interchangeably, or in ways that led people to think that a given *gender* was always attached to a given *sex*. She pointed out how, in humans, the “many ways in which males and females differ on purely psychological and social levels” are “not directly related to their anatomical and physiological differences.” Gender, then, was largely a human invention, its conventions arbitrary and artificial rather than biologically determined. She made a strong case, well before cisgender feminists took up similar arguments in the succeeding decades, that separating *sex* from *gender* was a “new semantic position” (a surprisingly linguistic turn of phrase for a pharmaceutical engineer) that opened up novel possibilities for pursuing knowledge, gaining insight, and engaging in social change. It irked her, as it admittedly irks me, that somehow or other, people, even specialists, “have not been able to digest this distinction” and “put it into practice,” writing nonsensically, for example, of “anatomic and genetic

gender.” She asked, “Why do we not learn to talk about gender when we want to talk about gender and talk about sex when we want to talk about sex?”

Prince played as important a role in the development of a new *trans* terminology related to *gender* as she did in the development of *gender* itself. John Oliven, a Columbia Presbyterian Hospital staff psychiatrist, seems to have been the first to use a *trans+gender* neologism, riffing on John Money’s terminology in the second edition of his textbook *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology*, published in 1965. But it was trans people themselves who really took that ball and ran with it.

Prince experimented with several words to describe people such as herself—*femmiphile* was a favorite for many years—but by the later 1960s people in her cross-dresser networks, notably those who lived contrary to their assigned status at birth for long stretches of time, were starting to use words such as *transgenderal*, *transgenderism*, and *transgenderist*. Prince herself, in “The ‘Transcendents,’ or ‘Trans’ People,” written for *Transvestia* in 1978, expanded upon the root meaning of the prefix *trans-*, “across.” A transcendent person, she argued, was somebody who crossed over a barrier in order to ascend to a higher level of consciousness or self-actualization. Trans people such as she herself became transcendent by crossing barriers of *gender*, in the psychosocial sense. While “such transcendence or liberation is not easy and exacts a high price,” these trans people become “free agents,” she argued (as only a privileged person who had experienced no barriers in her life apart from being trans could), and asserted that it is “entirely up to them how far out along the continuum” of gender each of them chooses to go.

Prince then designates three classes of trans people—“transvestites, transgenderists and transexuals [*sic*]”—each a little farther along the gender continuum than the others. She personally identified with the middle term, *transgenderist*, “people who have adopted the exterior manifestations of the opposite sex on a full-time basis but without any surgical intervention,” who are “what may rightly be termed ‘male women.’” “To digest this term you will have to really understand the difference between sex and gender,

i.e. between female and woman,” Prince explained. “Such persons,” she held, “have transcended the gender barrier completely.”

However liberatory Prince’s taxonomy might sound in theory, at least to some, however expansive it might become over time to include transmasculine people as well as transfeminine, in practice Prince was far more invested in maintaining boundaries than in transcending them. I’ve often been struck by how, much as John Money was an omnivorous sexual liberationist dead set on maintaining accustomed distinctions between men and women, Virginia Prince was a gender liberationist dead set on maintaining distinctions and hierarchies between different flavors of transness. She became notorious for rigidly policing the boundaries in her world between empathy-meriting middle-class, mostly white heterosexual transvestites, on the one hand, and morally reprobate sex-working homosexual street queens on the other, as well as between transgenderists such as she herself whom she considered to be especially transcendent committed-to-the-bit heterosexual transvestites, and the transsexuals who she thought had simply gone too far by mistaking *changing gender* for *changing sex*.



There is of course a much wider world of *sex/gender* variance and gender nonconformity, even in the predominantly white, upper-middle-class post–World War II US culture that circumscribed Virginia Prince’s life, than she herself imagined when imagining a world of gender diversity that she thought revolved around her. But it was the world in which Prince was a pivotal figure that came to call itself the “gender community” in the 1970s and ’80s, as a collective name for encompassing all the trans varieties of gender. It was boundaried on one flank by the gay and lesbian world, on another by race, and on yet another by class; it was in a co-dependent and dysfunctional relationship with the psycho-medical establishment that enabled it and was far more bourgeois than avant-garde. But its confines nevertheless contained multitudes, condensed to the point of explosion. The conversations that took place there, the organizations and publications that

emerged in this subculture, would play a central role in bringing *gender*, and *transgender*, into wider circulation by the 1990s.

IV.

I became aware of a question concerning technology, a question concerning history, a question concerning reality, a question concerning whether *gender* could change at a specific moment in time. It happened when I was five years old. I was living then in one half of a duplex in Jonesboro, Arkansas, with my mom and her mother, Ruby, whose own mother, Dora—an old Ozarks hillbilly woman—lived in the other half, while my father was serving a combat tour in Vietnam.

★ ★ ★

I knew things the way a small child knows things. I knew that I was a boy like my mother. I knew that my mother was not a boy. There was as yet no contradiction in knowing that.

★ ★ ★

I knew I was a boy when I was five because I knew how to talk and knew what the words I said and heard meant. Even if I couldn't tell you how to diagram a sentence or identify the parts of speech, I experienced how the grammar and syntax of my native tongue positioned me as a speaker relative to others. I knew how to distinguish visual, tactile, and aural differences in the style of clothing and hair and mannerisms between men and women, boys and girls, the same way I knew how to distinguish dogs from cats, sandpaper from satin, whispers from shouts. I knew what I looked like in a mirror. I knew the gender signifiers in my social context the same way I knew the words and the body-appearances that went with them,

because I had learned them both from my experiential world. That's the same way I knew that my mother was a woman and my father was a man.

I knew that I was like my mother and not like my father, in spite of how I looked and what I was called. How did I know that? Why was that what I knew? I have my theories. Those theories don't fall into the born-this-way camp, as you might be tempted to think. You might consider those theories persuasive or interesting—stick around to find out—but they ultimately don't matter. All that matters is that I knew, the same way I knew that it hurt my feelings to be scolded and felt good to laugh. It wasn't the kind of knowing you could argue with or be wrong about. You can choose to believe that I knew that or not. But I'm telling you, and I have no other story to tell. I knew. I remember the knowing. I know I have never known anything else.



At five, I was already oriented toward a womanhood in the future. I was not unhappy in my present. I wasn't anxious about futurity. I went along with how I was verbally and socially positioned by gendering, because young children tend to accept the world as it is given to them, at least provisionally, not knowing what possibilities for being otherwise it might harbor. I simply wasn't attached to the position. There was no fixity or permanence to it. That assumption—of the body as skinprison that binds you in place for life—is internalized only later.

A five-year-old knows some things with certainty, and other things not at all. One thing I didn't know when I was five was that bodies came with different floor plans, and that their particular physical configurations were coordinated with overall visual appearance and sociolinguistic positionality. Of course that's not how I would have said it when I was five. When I was five, all I knew was that an aunt and uncle brought their new daughter home from the hospital, and when I first watched them change my cousin's diaper I learned a consequential and previously unknown fact.

Whoa. Mind blown.

That moment planted the question of whether my gendered appearance and my social positioning were changeable (because I needed them to be),

which raised the question of what possibilities for change-over-time could be empirically verified (that is, the question of history), as well as the question of how such potential changes might be pragmatically accomplished (which is the question concerning technology), and ultimately raised the deepest question of all: whether there was more than one kind of reality (because I experienced incommensurable things as simultaneously true). A space of contradiction had now opened up between knowing that I was a boy like my mother, and knowing that my mother was not a boy. A space to be subjectively occupied for an indefinite duration. A space that might, or might not, contain some capacity for transformation within it that would reveal itself to me over time.



A philosopher colleague in Los Angeles, Talia Bettcher, invented a philosophical term of art for what I experienced, what many like us experience. She calls this the “WTF” of being trans. It’s maybe impossible to explain to somebody who hasn’t experienced it—a kind of “locked-in syndrome” where the self inside the body can’t make itself known to the external world? the sense of having a phantom limb, except it’s your whole body?—but it was an all-encompassing gestalt, resolved by transitioning, that shaped the entire course of my life, my entire orientation toward feeling and thought and action.

Ever since I was five years old, I have been working on mysteries, looking for clues, about how such a thing as I could exist as I do, in a world that’s arranged the way my world is arranged. Was I crazy? Sick? Bad? Wrong? It sure didn’t feel that way. I experienced no particular difficulty navigating what Madison Bentley had called my “theater of living.” My social milieu gave me lots of feedback that I was fundamentally okay. The only discordant thing was that unshakable, unfathomable sense that I was really a girl, which I hid for a long time from absolutely everybody, terrified that its revelation would somehow destroy my world. (Eventually it did, which made space for a new one.) Sometimes those circumstances got me down. Really down. Not the feeling-like-a-girl part; that part has always felt unremarkable in its just-is-ness. No; the feelings of suffocation and

invisibility connected to that sense of a self unperceived, from which no prospect of respite or escape had made itself known. That often brought me desperately low. Though I've never had suicidal ideations myself, I understand why suicide rates among trans people are roughly ten times higher than among the population at large.

I regularly, frequently dissociated. What else is there to do, other than kill yourself, when you feel irremediably trapped by excruciating conditions that might well be impervious to change? It's a miracle that the mind can go elsewhere and return, go elsewhere and return. I can't remember exactly when I started calling that disembodied perspective on myself The Watcher, but it was a perspective I came to know well. A perspective I still sometimes hold. A serene not-me-beside-me experience that imparted a capacity to chug along somewhat hopefully as a child, dispassionately observing myself executing all the routine automatisms of my social life, while I searched for answers to the riddle of my existence. A capacity I can now turn toward the task of theorizing myself.

★ ★ ★

Ears pricked, antennae out, eyes open and on the scan, I was always ready and waiting to receive a signal, any signal, bearing information that might help me address the WTF and allow me to live differently.

I learned the word *transsexual* when I was eleven or twelve, around 1972 or '73, reading the Dear Abby advice column in my hometown newspaper. Precocious, I hightailed it on my bike to the public library to do research and verified for the first time that there were other people who felt the same way I did. They were depicted as miserable creatures. I didn't fully see myself in them due to how they were represented, but that's when I first discovered that a technology existed through which my inner and outer realities could merge, so that I might persist in being myself in a different way, and become for others as I was for myself. That's when I first confronted the question of history, because I recognized even then that there would have been a time before those particular technologies existed. What would have become of a girl like me, in a time before surgery and hormones would have been available? There is a historicity and

contingency to the processes through which we become real. Or would a girl like me even have existed in the past to begin with?

So much of transness is about becoming real. It's about wanting to feel the image of your self-sense warmed on the surface of your body by the sun. It's about identifying with the plush-toy protagonist of the children's book *The Velveteen Rabbit*, who becomes a "Real Rabbit," a "skin rabbit" like its friend the Skin Horse, another toy worn smooth by repeated loving touches from a person who treasures it. Realness is a persistent theme in trans autobiographical writing. The story of Lili Elbe's surgically and hormonally assisted gender transition in the early 1930s, made famous by the (historically inaccurate) novel and film *The Danish Girl*, was based on a posthumously published memoir, completed by others, called *Man into Woman* (1933); Elbe's own title for the partial manuscript had been *How Lili Became a Real Girl*. You see the question of realness popping up in gender-expansive ballroom and house subcultures like the ones depicted in the fictional streaming series *Pose* or the documentary film *Paris Is Burning*, where participants who perform by "walking the categories" of different styles of gender get points for "realness," because realness is the martial art that protects you from transphobic violence. The gender-fluid disco diva Sylvester sang back in the seventies about how "(You Make Me Feel) Mighty Real." The trans journalist, memoirist, and media-maker Janet Mock wrote an autobiography called *Redefining Realness*. The trans game designer and media theorist micha cárdenas sees a similarity between the experience of being trans and the far more common experience these days of toggling between augmented reality, virtual reality, and so-called real life. Everybody's trying to figure out how to navigate through what she calls the *transreality* of these different experiential environments.

★ ★ ★

Learning to hold more than one frame of reference in mind at the same time and to code-switch between them—a kind of ontological multilingualism—was a necessary practice of daily living for me when I was growing up. As a person aware of my transness from quite an early age, I perceived a gossamer veil mediating between the world and me, effecting a subtle yet

all-encompassing sense of disconnection from my surrounds. I found immense pleasure in reading science fiction for all the ways it helped me navigate the shimmering of incommensurable realities I experienced as a result of the WTF. My eighth-grade English teacher turned me on to Kurt Vonnegut, and my favorite novel as a teen was Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. I really related to the novel's protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, who felt "unstuck" in time and place within his humdrum existence due to war-related emotional trauma and what we'd now call complex PTSD. My complex traumas were not a result of conventional war, but Pilgrim's bifurcated experience, living an ordinary life in the mundane world while simultaneously having been transported by fourth-dimensional space aliens with five sexes to live with a porn star in a human zoo on the planet Tralfamadore, felt an awful lot like my sense of being trans. That's what gender dysphoria is, I think, at least in my experience: a complex response to the traumatizing experience of repeatedly encountering a disconnect between the reality of an experienced self-sense from the reality reflected back by the literal image of one's body in an actual mirror, as well as by the more abstract mirrors of language and social relations. Miserably stuck in the endless hall between those reflective surfaces, I searched for a line of flight.



And then there were all the religion-related multiple realities I repeatedly traversed. Half of my family honest-to-god believed that in the 1820s an angel showed a farm boy in upstate New York where to dig for some ancient golden tablets inscribed with "reformed Egyptian" hieroglyphics that, when miraculously translated with the aid of a magical "seer stone," told a story about how American Indians were really Jews who had crossed the Atlantic in saucer-shaped submersible ships illuminated from within by glowing crystals. The Southern Baptist half of the family, who were always exceedingly gracious to their in-laws, were biblical literalists and creationists. Meanwhile, in school, I learned about Darwin's theory of evolution, geological timescales, the Bering land bridge, the Ice Age

migration to the Americas from the steppes of eastern Eurasia, and the archaeology of the great Meso-American civilizations.

Growing up half my life on army bases in the Pacific and in Europe and half in Oklahoma on traditional Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache lands, I was repeatedly exposed to different cultures and languages. I didn't have to try too hard to encounter indigenous perspectives—like, my next-door neighbor in my hometown of Lawton, Oklahoma, adjacent to Fort Sill, was a Comanche car mechanic whose great-uncle had been the last Indian scout for the US Army. The winner one year of the Miss Teen Kiowa beauty pageant lived across the street. I was a kid from a settler background, but Indian Country was all around me, perpetually waxing and waning into and out of my awareness.

There was even an Indian guy—I don't remember his name or tribal affiliation anymore; he was one of the grown-ups, I was just a kid—who sometimes attended the tiny little schismatic Mormonoid home-church gatherings we participated in from time to time whenever they took place in Lawton. He believed in the Book of Mormon story about his ancestral Israelite origins, but he also belonged to the Native American Church, a pan-tribal religion founded in Oklahoma, which combines elements of Christianity with the ritual use of peyote as a sacrament. He would testify in our prayer meetings about his peyote visions. He introduced me to the writings of Carlos Castaneda, who in the 1960s and '70s wrote an immensely popular series of almost certainly nonfactual books purporting to describe his induction into traditional Yaqui shamanic practices. Castaneda, I later learned, studied for his doctorate under Harold Garfinkel, the UCLA ethnomethodologist; one interpretation of Castaneda's writing is that it was not an intentional hoax, but rather a trickster-ish demonstration of the concept that reality is socially produced.

By that time, I had become a devotee of all manner of esoteric lore. I inhaled the texts of ancient cultures and religions as well as all the currently fashionable pop arcana: the Mayan Popol Vuh, the Hindu Upanishads, the I Ching, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*. A bookish, eccentric aunt gave me the complete works of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg for a birthday present. I loved

trashy conspiracy theories, and sometimes I would buy at the 7-Eleven a copy of *Weekly World News*, the wildest of the tabloids readily available to me—less “Secret Love Lives of Soap Opera Stars,” more “Researchers Reveal Hitler’s Secret UFO Plans—Nazis Hoped to Spread Terror in Flying Saucers!” The more inventively configured the conspiracy’s elements, the more luridly plotted its stories, the better I liked it. If it wove in strands of popular esoterica—lost civilizations, the paranormal, the occult, arcane mysticisms, hermetic texts, government cover-ups, disparaged scientific theories—that was better still. Each conspiracy-world was like a portal to a different part of the multiverse, conveyed in a conceptual vocabulary all its own. I blithely shimmied across the dividing lines between one reality and others, day in and day out, while tracing my circuits between home and school, church and mass media, and voracious reading in genre fictions and religious traditions that transported me to realms beyond my own. I hungered for other worlds, whether I believed in a particular one or not.



Going to college allowed me to seal my adolescent preoccupations with the kiss of mainstream legitimacy by formally introducing me to social-constructionist thought. When I was an undergrad at the University of Oklahoma (OU), I had a chance to study for a week with the sociologist Peter L. Berger, who had coauthored *The Social Construction of Reality*.

Berger was an anti-fascist Austrian refugee from the Nazi regime whose Jewish parents had converted to Lutheranism before he was born. He arrived in the United States in 1946 after having spent the World War II years in Palestine. He was part of the remarkable community of European expatriates who made up the University in Exile at the New School for Social Research in New York before later joining the faculty at Boston University. In my undergrad days, OU offered something then called the Scholar-Leadership Enrichment Program (SLEP), which brought world-renowned intellectuals, authors, artists, and other movers and shakers to campus for short, intensive, for-credit seminars. Being accepted into Berger’s highly competitive SLEP seminar was one of those “right thing at the right time” experiences that made it one of the most significant

intellectual events of my young life. Though I would eventually find Harold Garfinkel's work more useful—and far more central to the theoretical development of *gender*—Berger was my gateway drug to the world of social constructionism. Seminar participants read all his major works, not just on the sociology of knowledge, but on the sociology of religion as well, notably *The Sacred Canopy* and *A Rumor of Angels*. Religion has had much more to do with *gender* than I naively would have at first assumed. What I learned that week when I was twenty not only helped me sort out the WTF of being trans; it also played a big role in putting me on the path toward an academic career.

Social constructionism is not a choose-your-own adventure game where anything can be real just because you want it to be. That's the same reductive perspective that portrays trans people as gender-LARPer who pretend that biology doesn't exist and dismisses gender performativity as a magical thinking. Berger grounded his social-scientific work in the philosophical tradition of phenomenology—the study of experience as it unfolds from a first-person perspective. Individual phenomenological experience is always informed by social structures and processes—language, culture, history—that precede any given individual's entry into them. Our actions are guided, and our worldviews shaped, both individually and collectively, by the pre-patterned information we consume directly from social experience. This produces a local, rather than universal, sense of the “reality of everyday life”—an ethnomethodology, to use Garfinkel's term—that bears intimately and immediately on our direct sensory experience. This “local reality” is not the kind involved in experiencing the effects of gravity; it's the kind reflected back to you as empirically true because it's how the world around you is indeed organized socially. It's a “socially constructed” reality that is experienced as objective (actually existing in three-dimensional space), intersubjective (perceived by others as well as yourself), and commonsensically self-evident. There's a simple givenness to it that doesn't ask for proof or require verification. But there's also a deeper layer of social process at work that we usually don't notice.

Part of the local reality of everyday life involves what Berger called “typificatory schemes,” or socially produced and socially shared practices

for conceptually arranging experience. Because experiencing everything everywhere all at once would just be a bunch of noisy static, we need to make sense of experience by filtering and arranging it in some useful fashion. Those filters and arrangements are acquired through socialization. They are psychologically internalized as true. They are physically externalized through our actions. This forms a big self-perpetuating, self-reinforcing circuit or loop that's accepted as real because all of our direct sensory experience is manifested through those filters and arrangements. Language is an especially important component of the reality-generating loop, because it's the medium through which shared symbols, conceptual categories, and stores of information circulate socially. Different languages can give their users not just different words for the same objectively existing reality, but fundamentally different ways of relating to reality and experiencing it.

The *gender* concept is one such typificatory scheme. In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann actually use gender—and trans life in particular—as a primary example of reality's social construction, precisely because trans lives manifest a dissonance within or between different local realities. The authors note that men and women live in different “social worlds,” with boys typically being socialized into masculine symbolic worlds and girls into feminine ones. Normally, they suggest, children internalize as their “proper place” the masculine or feminine symbolic world to which they have been socially assigned. Sometimes, however, a conflict arises between “reality-definitions,” and it becomes necessary for the child to choose between them, raising the possibility of what they characterize as “abnormality,” when “for a variety of biographical reasons the child may make the ‘wrong choice.’” That's Bentley's argument, and Money's, in a nutshell. That was little me in a nutshell, too, though the “choice” never felt wrong, let alone like a “choice.”

Because the “reality of everyday life” is local rather than universal, we encounter not just new information but new schemes for making sense of that information if we live in socially heterogeneous places, or travel a lot, or study the differences of the historical past or the culturally foreign, or

live in a time of rapid and pervasive social change. When you encounter new schemes, you compare them to the ones you already have, and make judgment calls about which to prioritize, abandon, modify, ignore, or embrace. This is not always, or even usually, a rational process. It's a gut check. You bring habits and prejudices along with you to the encounter with that difference, and you carry with you as well an emotional stance toward the reception of new knowledge that portends change and transformation. You might feel fear or antagonism or superiority or hatred. Or you might feel like the clouds are parting and you are stepping into the light of a greater truth.

Finally, Berger situates these phenomenological and experiential processes within longer-developing historical trends that make encountering multiple reality-definitions the norm rather than the exception. He's especially attuned to processes of secularization and modernization, and to the role of technology in creating fundamentally new material conditions that can call into question the schemes through which we've habitually made sense of our lives. The takeaway: Since the advent of the Enlightenment, the rise of industrial capitalism, and the creation of modern liberal democracies that separate church from state and the sacred from the scientific, there's been a fracturing of the social construction of reality within the modern West, and between it and the rest of human history.

So far, so good, as far as I'm concerned, but this is where religion enters the picture for Berger, and where I start to say "Yes, but..." with increasing frequency. Berger sees the expansion of secular modernity as an inexorable historical trend, one that reduces religious belief to a delegitimated and minoritized practice of knowledge-making relative to science. He sees the liberal mainstream Protestantism in which he was most deeply steeped as fighting a rearguard action to translate Christian dogma into terms compatible with modern secular frames of reference. But he is listening, as suggested in the title of his book *A Rumor of Angels*, for whispers of the supernatural reaching us from beyond the secular frame. He is a believer in the faith bequeathed to him by his parents. He yearns to restore the sense of a "sacred canopy" that shelters our lives in the face of existential suffering, doubt, and dread, and gives us a reason to live.

Where Berger and I part intellectual company is that I simply don't believe in his version of God, or share the nostalgic desire he expresses for putting the Humpty-Dumpty of his longed-for sacred canopy back together again, instead of opening himself up to the possibility of something more expansive. He yearns for the restoration of one reality, rather than the experience of many. I'm down for the cause of breaking the monopoly that modern secular Western forms of knowledge hold on legitimating one reality at the expense of others. It's just that the "angels" I've heard through the cracks in that firmament are whispering something altogether different to me than they were to Berger about those rumored realms beyond.

★ ★ ★

I never stopped looking for clues to my mysteries, but I never set out to spend the 1980s in grad school writing a dissertation on early Mormon history. I'm glad that I did, though. Besides all the lifelong friends I made in my doctoral program, the topic I chose was an easy target of opportunity for launching a sideways take on unraveling the WTF of me being trans, at a time when a more direct approach would not have passed muster within disciplinary academic history. My graduate studies taught me how to historicize all those reality-construction questions that preoccupied me, and how to ground them in a well-documented case study. They showed me how to balance answers derived from scholarly research with questions emerging from autobiographical "me-search"—a practice that has served me well in life.

In 1825 there was no such thing as a Mormon. By 1855, under the banner of that new identity, an immense amount of cultural activity had spilled forth: the formation not just of a new church but also of new bodies of scripture, new cosmologies, new historical narratives, and new forms of family and kinship. Something called Mormonism sparked a transcontinental mass migration from its point of emergence in upstate New York to the Great Basin of the intermountain West. It inspired an anti-Mormon political backlash, including vigilante violence against Mormon settlers, and two actual shooting wars—one between Mormon and non-Mormon militias in Missouri, and another between Mormons and federal

troops in Utah. The same bookish aunt who sent esoteric texts my way loved taking me to Mormon historic sites, including that of the 1838 Hawn's Mill Massacre in Missouri near her home, where seventeen Mormons living around the mill site were slaughtered days after Governor Lilburn Boggs issued an executive order that Mormons in his state either self-deport or face extermination. I was taught growing up that I was a member of a persecuted religious minority that had been subjected to pogroms.

How did the emergence of a historically novel identity generate and orchestrate such a vast range of cultural production and social response over the span of a few decades? That was the same "historicity of identity" question I'd been tripping on since I was eleven or twelve: the idea that the kind of person one might become is contingent upon the time and place of one's being.

My doctoral project's unexpected bonus was everything that I learned about the time and place of Mormonism's emergence. It formed in upstate New York in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, in the so-called Burned-Over District—"so-called" because the region, home to some of the first large cities of the industrial revolution, was swept repeatedly by the fires of religious revivalism and radical experiments in new social forms that responded dramatically to the capitalist transformation of the countryside and familiar patterns of daily life there.

Early Mormonism was but one of many such experiments. It was more than a church. In thinking of themselves as "Latter-day Saints," they articulated a particular notion of history, and considered it their mission to restore a purity once known in "former days" that had become corrupted. Mormonism began as a form of Christian communism that rejected the marketplace and commercial society, because the Bible said that in the days of the apostles church members held all things in common. The church advocated polygamy because it was the patriarchal form of marriage, as documented by ancient scripture. I came to see it not so much as a new religious tradition, but as one successful and long-lived example of a genre of similar attempts to stitch back together again what Berger had called the "sacred canopy."

The first articulation of the *gender* concept, I would later learn, was another such effort similarly informed by the Burned-Over District's history. It, too, was in part an attempt to suture the epistemological breach between secular and religious forms of knowledge that had emerged in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, that privileged secularism within new democratic and republican forms of government.

★ ★ ★

In the early 1990s, fresh in the process of my transition to public womanhood, I had become an unemployable recent PhD. The academic job market is tough under the best of circumstances, and being a newly hatched, openly trans lesbian trained in early national period US religious history was far from the best of circumstances. I'd haphazardly completed my dissertation to keep my supervisor from catching wind of my impending transition, pretty sure that he would have derailed the award of my degree if I hadn't filed it before he found out. Well aware of my limited prospects in the professoriate, and doubting that revising my dissertation into a scholarly monograph would be the best use of my time, I started stripping the theoretical copper wiring out of my research before the ink was dry on the signature page, and began looking for ways to use what I'd learned somewhere beyond the academy.

My training was, after all, about the historicity of identity. Trans identities were, at that very moment, undergoing a historical shift in a moment of geopolitical and technological transformation. Largely shut out of the paid economy due to transphobic discrimination—I called this period of life an unfunded postdoc in experiential trans studies—I had a lot of time on my hands. While making a living as best I could and raising my kids, I did things I thought were interesting. I made site-specific performance art about being an enraged transsexual at an academic conference, and dabbled in other media and art forms as well. I volunteered in an archive, learned how to write coffee-table books and magazine articles, taught myself to be a documentary filmmaker, and participated in direct-action political groups. I considered all those disparate undertakings to be part of one big project that nobody would've paid me to do anyway. I wanted to follow my interests

and passions and use my training to make life somehow different, somehow better, for trans people like me, and to educate others. I set out to change gender. Not change *my* gender, though that was part of it. Change *gender*. Into something less deadly for those who do it differently. Through writing, research, art, film, activism, and (eventually) academic field-building, I've been working to change gender ever since.

★ ★ ★

The years I came out as publicly trans and established a new life for myself in the San Francisco Bay Area, roughly 1990–1995, were shaped by the AIDS pandemic, the Gulf War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. AIDS sparked the queer movement that transformed the place of sexual and gender minorities within the body politic, while the U.S. military waged its first major overseas war since Vietnam, and the end of the Cold War unleashed a new chapter in capitalism's global history. The acclaim that greeted Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* at the outset of this period derived in no small part from the prescient conceptual vocabulary it provided to make sense of embodied personhood in this emerging world. In these years, the meaning of *transgender* morphed in ways Virginia Prince never expected (and certainly didn't approve of), to refer to an expansive political movement—inclusive of transsexuals, drag queens, butches, genderqueers, cross-dressers, and others—rather than merely a small clandestine subculture of what Prince's mentor Louise Lawrence had called “permanent transvestites.” In these years, too, the nascent intersex movement opened a new front for social-change activism.

I felt like I was living inside a real-world experiment of things I'd learned in grad school by reading Michel Foucault, whose last semester at Berkeley before dying of AIDS-related illness was my first, about identity as the interface where the rubber hits the road between subjective experience and social existence. States manage their populations by segmenting them into categories—like “disabled” or “child” or “white”—and those management strategies as well as the categories they operationalize can shift in light of domestic and transnational political and economic considerations. Macro-level changes in the world order connect

directly to how people come to identify themselves at the micro level with existing and emergent social categories. *Transgender* in the 1990s, like *Mormon* in the 1830s, was a new identity formation responding to new historical circumstances.

When the first web browser, Netscape Navigator, debuted in 1994, it brought the internet to the masses and set off a tech boom in San Francisco that would eventually overwhelm the city's storied queer and quirky bohemia. But in those early days, digital culture still had a utopian feel. From my perch at ground zero, the new cyberculture positively vibrated with trans sensibilities. It whetted my appetite for exploring all my persistent questions—not just about the historicity of identity, but about technology and the shifting planes of perceived reality. Where was the body in cyberspace? What relationship, if any, did a digital image have to a physical object? Was it like the relationship of a gender identity to biological body, in that it required a different understanding of representation and reality?

My first project as an unpaid, community-based, independent historian working on trans history pertained to Christine Jorgensen, who catapulted into public notoriety in 1952 as the first global trans celebrity. It's hard now to appreciate the level of fame Jorgensen attained in her heyday. Her "sex-change" surgery made headlines around the world, and the trade periodical *Editor and Publisher* said she garnered more words in print that year than the Korean War or the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. She developed a nightclub routine that took her from Montreal to Manila and earned her an income of \$5,000 a week—roughly \$60,000 in today's currency. She's the person whose spectacularity made *transsexual* a household word.

Jorgensen can elicit an eyeroll and a sigh these days from the folks most tuned in to the trans past. She's seen in hindsight as the paradigmatic good-girl poster child for trans respectability: too normative, too white, too pretty, too medicalized, too much the ventriloquist's dummy simply mouthing all of her doctor's discourses. There's some truth in those characterizations, though she was much more than the two-dimensional stereotype she is often made out to be. Her life still offers a good point of departure for exploring questions and answers about gender, history, technology, and reality that

have long animated my thoughts. I've made several pilgrimages to Denmark to work with Jorgensen's personal papers, now housed in the Royal Danish Library. Studying her life taught me a lot about how trans issues tend to flare into heightened visibility at some historical moments more so than others, and how they drive people to find new ways of talking about what's at stake in those issues.

I'd first learned about Jorgensen when I was a teenager in the mid-1970s, when professional women's tennis player Renée Richards was outed as trans (by none other than Tucker Carlson's dad, a television reporter with a penchant for covering trans topics). Newspaper coverage dubbed Richards the most famous transsexual since Christine Jorgensen in the 1950s. That was the first inkling I had as a young person that trans people might have a social history, and not just the psychopathological diagnosis my tweenage trip to the library had discovered. History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme and echo across time, and once I started digging into Jorgensen's legacy in the early 1990s, I couldn't help but notice a lot of similarities between contemporaneous preoccupations with gender, technology, and social change and those of Jorgensen's day.

In her memoir, Jorgensen describes a late-autumn afternoon in 1949 when she stepped up to the counter of a drugstore somewhere in New York City and asked for a bottle of "high-potency estradiol." She was at that time a twenty-three-year-old Bronx native of Danish American heritage still answering, for the time being, to the boys' name her parents had given her at birth.

Slender and slight of build, Jorgensen had been bullied her whole life as a girlish little sissy boy. She had been teased at home for coveting a big sister's dolls and shamed at school for bringing to show-and-tell a piece of embroidery of which she was particularly proud. A star-obsessed movie fan and talented photographic hobbyist with her own home darkroom, Jorgensen clandestinely cross-dressed in an attic hideaway in her family's home and dreamed of being the women she idolized on screen. She felt mortified by the secret romantic fantasies she harbored about some of her male friends. She felt confused by the unshakable sense that she should have been born a girl.

Drafted into the army fresh out of high school in 1945, right at the end of World War II, Jorgensen served most of her short enlistment processing demobilization paperwork for combat soldiers returning home from overseas. She used her GI Bill benefits to study commercial photography, then tried and failed to break into Hollywood as a still photographer who worked on set to document film productions. Before she made headlines around the world in 1952, the closest Jorgensen ever came to her show-biz dreams was working as a low-level film cutter in the newsreel division of RKO's New York City studio.

In the run-up to that fateful trip to the drugstore in 1949, Jorgensen had become enthralled by works of popular science that recounted the already-long history of endocrinology—the science of glands and internal secretions. John Hunter, fellow of the Royal Society in London, the first modern scientific association, had performed gonad-swapping experiments as early as 1771, noting, “I have frequently taken out the testis of a cock, and replaced it in his belly, where it has adhered, and been nourished; nay, I have put the testis of a cock in the belly of a hen with the same effect.” Hunter's experiments aimed at perfecting tissue-grafting techniques, not pioneering the science of sex change, but how he knew when a graft was successful or not was whether a surgically altered hen developed a coxcomb.

By the 1870s, Charles-Édouard Brown-Séquard and other proto-endocrinologists had begun to extract hormones for human use from animal organs and tissues. This led, by the early twentieth century, to a medical fad for “organotherapies” that involved grafting monkey glands and testicular tissue harvested from the bodies of executed criminals, many of them men of color from the colonies, onto the genitals of wealthy older men, most of them white, who were anxious about their erectile dysfunction. In 1913, the Viennese doctor Eugen Steinach published research about determining the effects of the so-called sex hormones on physical development by feminizing male guinea pigs with estrogen and masculinizing female ones with testosterone. Before World War II, pharmaceutical companies had synthesized those hormones and started marketing them in a variety of products they touted as nearly magical life-extending elixirs that enhanced

female beauty and male vigor. In 1950, synthetic hormones were first formulated into a widely available oral contraceptive—“the Pill”—that helped usher in the sexual revolution of the sixties.

But what caught Jorgensen’s attention in 1949, while reading the science writer Paul de Kruif’s *The Male Hormone*, was the fact that chemical compositions of estrogen and testosterone differ by only a couple of hydrogen and carbon atoms. Perhaps, Jorgensen wondered, might some part of her actually be female on a molecular scale? She used the last of her GI Bill benefits to enroll in the Manhattan Medical and Dental Assistants School—as close as a working-class kid with a high school diploma could get to med school—and spent untold hours in the well-stocked library of the New York Academy of Medicine, where she immersed herself in a DIY crash course in endocrinology.

A slim volume titled *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology*, recently published in 1946 by a person then known as Michael Dillon, MD, is known to have been in the academy’s library collection when Jorgensen was spending time in its stacks. Dillon, who took the name Lobzang Jivaka late in his life, had an arresting backstory of his own: a member of a minor and cash-strapped branch of the British aristocracy, born female and raised by spinster aunts after being orphaned in early childhood, he had put himself through medical school at Trinity University in Dublin while still living as a woman. He self-administered synthetic testosterone as soon as it became commercially available in the late 1930s, and, in 1945, at the hands of the acclaimed early plastic surgeon Harold Gillies, underwent the first known female-to-male phalloplasty to give his genitals a male appearance (the technique itself had been developed to treat genital injuries among soldiers in World War I). Dillon took to sea as a ship’s surgeon after being jilted by a romantic interest—Roberta Cowell, another early transsexual—and whiled away his spare hours shipboard reading theosophy and other esoteric literature. He was outed as trans by the tabloid press in 1958 when some royalty-watcher noticed that the first name and pronouns had changed in his listing in *Burke’s Peerage*. Dillon thereafter went into seclusion, converted to Buddhism, and changed his name. He wrote two memoirs and a handful of works popularizing his new religion for English-speaking

audiences, and spent some of his later years in a Tibetan monastery before dying unexpectedly in 1962, after an acute illness.

But back in 1946, Dillon's book *Self* offered a full-fledged theory and practical guide for what would later become known as gender-affirming medical care. Because it seemed utterly impossible to change what some doctors then called "congenital inversion"—a since-discarded term that conflated transgender identity and same-sex sexual orientation—Dillon argued that it was in fact ethical to alter a congenital invert's body through hormonal and surgical treatments that could align it with the invert's persistent sense of self. He advocated that such individuals should be allowed to live legally and socially as the kind of person they understood themselves to be psychologically. And as prescient as that proposal was, Dillon wasn't even the first to have made it—the German medical doctor Magnus Hirschfeld had already been making those arguments and providing that sort of care to some of his patients in Berlin back in the 1920s. Jorgensen would later make the acquaintance of another trans woman, Charlotte Charlaque von Curtis, who had worked as the receptionist at Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science until 1933, when Brown Shirts and fascist college students destroyed it and burned its library. She told Jorgensen in an interview in the 1960s of many others like themselves who had passed through Hirschfeld's clinic. I've seen in the archive the list of names that Jorgensen copied down during their conversation.

Jorgensen educated herself regarding what was technically possible in her place and time for addressing the WTF of her transness, and then she went all in to access it. Like contemporary trans people with a backup plan when unable to access meds, she decided to "get hold of that miraculous substance known as 'estradiol'" on her own terms, without a doctor's diagnosis. That was the impetus behind her trip to the drugstore counter on that fall afternoon in 1949, where she told an unsuspecting pharmacy clerk that she needed hormones—usually available only with a prescription—for some lab work related to her training program. He didn't bat an eye before selling her what she wanted to buy.

As Jorgensen later wrote in her memoir, she soon found herself standing outside the pharmacy with a vial of pills she hoped would change her life, marveling over how strange it seemed that the answer to her existential crisis “might lie in the peculiar combination of atoms contained in those tiny, aspirin-like tablets.” She reflected on the awful new weapons that had ended World War II in radioactive bomb blasts that incinerated so many thousands of residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and left their cities in smoldering ruin, and noted how physicists had split the atom to unleash those unprecedented explosions. “There in my hand lay another series of atoms,” Jorgensen observed, “which in their way might set off another explosion.” She had little idea how big that other explosion would be until 1952, as she lay convalescing in a Copenhagen hospital after genital surgery, following two years of supervised hormonal treatments by Danish doctors, and news of her sex change shook the world. That transformation rendered her, in a flash, the face of a newly emergent category of medically engineered personhood: the *transsexual*.



Jorgensen’s story blew people’s minds in the middle of the last century not because what she did was unprecedented or unimaginable—the social phenomenon of individuals moving between and across the distinctions between men and women is amply documented in the historical record in the years before World War II. Her unprecedented notoriety stemmed in large part not from the so-called “sex change” itself, but from a new system of thought for making sense of it. That new system of thought—which I shorthand as *cybernetics* and explore in a later chapter—provided an intellectual matrix for the post-war work of Margaret Mead and Talcott Parsons and John Money, and undergirded the broader shift in thinking about *gender* as a social-scientific concept rather than only a grammatical category.

The mid-twentieth-century version of *gender* that Jorgensen exemplified was deeply connected to the technological innovations of the war years. One artifact in Jorgensen’s archive is *The Unicorn Book of 1952*, an annual yearbook of world events. Its science section noted, in staccato

prose accompanied by a glamorous headshot, that “Ex-GI George Jorgensen voluntarily submitted to surgery, hormone injections by Danish doctors, became an attractive female. New name: Christine.” Echoing Jorgensen’s invocation of mushroom-cloud explosions, the yearbook lingered on news of the first hydrogen bomb tests on Enewetak Atoll, the development of tactical atomic weapons, and breeder reactors that would fuel a new commercial nuclear power industry. It rhapsodized over computers they described as “electronic brains” that were becoming “faster, more compact, and more numerous.” It noted with approval the increasing availability of new consumer electronic devices like transistor radios, and commented enthusiastically on the space race.

Though most of the science stories, Jorgensen’s included, focused on the nuts and bolts of new technologies, the space-race story also noted the wave that year of UFO sightings—a pop-culture phenomenon that troubled the everyday sense of what was possible, real, and true. Popular fascination with flying saucers tapped into the sublime sense that scientific advances had somehow shifted the frame of a familiar reality.

Like UFOs and the Bomb, Christine Jorgensen’s transsexuality offered another such reality-rupturing spectacle for unsettling the ground rules of reality that held sway in her day. Some members of her public experienced her advent as a spiritual event of cosmic importance—an ecstatic passage through a world-frame broken open, incarnating in her transfigured flesh the promise of a new dispensation then in the throes of becoming. Jorgensen’s archive in Copenhagen contains correspondence from the likes of “R.K.,” who wrote to Jorgensen’s parents on December 7, 1952: “I have seen in Christine a miracle of God and I have been so moved that although I have always been an atheist I am now of great faith. I owe much to Christine and to God.” On December 26, “C.J.C.” wrote to Jorgensen herself to reflect on how unprecedented Christmas had been for them that year: “The Christian world beautifully celebrated the birth of an infant. 1952 will be remembered for several reasons but your rebirth as a woman will have immense contemporary and future significance. Perhaps many will in the future have occasion to remember with gratitude your 1952

courage, your courage in the years to come, as we, you and I and others, undertake to reshape human thinking.”

As these and other similar letters attest, the shifts in post–World War II life that accompanied the emergence of the new social system that gave us John Money’s version of *gender* can’t easily be reduced to a scientific or secular frame of reference for those who experienced it. Picking up stitches from an extra-mundane dimension and interweaving metaphysical strands into the fabric of everyday life, shuttling us between different ontological and epistemological registers within our quotidian existence, is in fact *gender*’s deepest work. It’s a practice for making realities real by bringing them into language and shared experience, through how we define objects and sort them into groups.

★ ★ ★

Questions about technology, social change, and the construction of new realities also backgrounded my next major historical research project. It revolved around a then-unremembered event I dubbed the Compton’s Cafeteria riot of 1966, a faint trace of which I stumbled upon in the archives of the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco where I then volunteered. Piecing together the story of that trans riot against police violence, as well as that story’s afterlife, has been an episodic but persistent focus of my working life for more than thirty years.

The riot took place in San Francisco’s seedy Tenderloin neighborhood three years before the more famous uprising at New York’s Stonewall Inn, credited with launching the modern LGBTQ+ movement. Participants and firsthand observers remembered the riot years later as taking place in the wee hours of a weekend night, probably toward the end of the month. That night in San Francisco, sex-working street queens, gay male hustlers, unhoused youth abandoned by their families, and other down-and-out denizens of the impoverished Tenderloin neighborhood stood their ground and fought back against a police raid at a twenty-four-hour eatery located at the corner of Turk and Taylor Streets. The fighting quickly escalated as police reinforcements arrived, and patrons of nearby bars and residents of nearby hotels spilled into the streets to join the fray. One key account of the

incident, written a few years after the fact, noted that “general havoc was raised that night in the Tenderloin.” The riot most likely involved a couple of hundred people who not only smashed out the plate-glass windows of Compton’s Cafeteria and trashed its interior but also destroyed a police car and set a newsstand on fire.

No contemporaneous written records are known to exist, but there are many reasons for that. The gay press at the time was respectability-oriented and didn’t devote a lot of column inches to trans sex workers in the Tenderloin, and the mainstream press worked hand-in-glove with the police department. In the months preceding the riot, the *San Francisco Chronicle* had run numerous stories of raids at bars in the so-called Neon Sex Jungle of the Tenderloin, and the police would have had a motive for quashing an unflattering story, contradicting the narrative of how the cops were cleaning up a crime-ridden district, of how a bunch of street queens got the best of them one night. Arrest records were not preserved in the city archive. The local television station a couple of blocks away had been covering protests and picketing at the cafeteria in the weeks before the riot but did not shoot footage of the riot itself—suggesting, maybe, that it took place in the early morning hours of a Sunday, the one day of the week stations didn’t put film crews in the field back when the news business wasn’t a 24/7/365 enterprise. Or maybe the fact that the local reporter who had been covering the trans scene in the Tenderloin was none other than Dick Carlson, Tucker’s dad, had something to do with it. It’s taken a lot of forensic work, drawing from a lot of extremely fragmentary evidence, to piece together what happened.

A century-long history of segregating and policing the Tenderloin as a sex-work ghetto informed the sudden eruption of militant resistance that night at the corner of Turk and Taylor, but one causal spark that stands out to me among the more immediate triggers for the riot was an abrupt shift in the paradigm of trans medical care provision. In July of 1966, the paternalistic old German American endocrinologist Harry Benjamin, who split his time between San Francisco and New York, published *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. Benjamin, who had known Magnus Hirschfeld in Berlin, promoted the same treatment model that Hirschfeld once

promoted at his Institute for Sexual Science before the Nazis sacked it. It was essentially the same model that Michael Dillon had outlined in *Self*, a treatment protocol whose unavailability in the United States compelled Christine Jorgensen and other trans people in her immediate wake to go abroad. Benjamin's work contributed to the establishment later that year of the nation's first surgical sex-reassignment clinic at Johns Hopkins University, which grew out of the intersex-related work that John Money had been doing there for more than a decade. Though a few surgeons had already quietly started performing genital surgeries for carefully vetted or particularly persistent trans patients, Benjamin's book helped plant the idea that trans surgical care's domestic availability was something in the realm of possibility for a whole class of people for whom travel to Europe remained financially beyond their means.

When I see in my mind's eye those elder trans sisters of mine fighting in the streets, I see people like me boldly staking a claim to the reality of their own womanhood, and insisting on their place in the world, in part by embracing a new technological possibility. People who considered themselves women were compelled to live as feminine men despised by society, their original biological maleness often perceptible to others who treated it like a crime that sentenced them to a marginal life in the Tenderloin's underground economies. They endured a nonconsensual, compulsory, death-dealing mode of existence that made it far more likely that their skin would get caught in the gears of a social machinery that would then tear their lives to bits. Hormone treatments previously available only through illicit channels, and surgeries unavailable at any price, offered an alternative for some who were inclined to adopt it.

Hormones that change the texture of the skin and the shape of the body and surgery that alters the form and function of the genitals are technologies for supporting the realness of a trans identity by means of the body's palpable, corporeal substance. Connect those body-alteration technologies to the wellsprings of self-perception, plug them into the administrative apparatuses of society and law and state, circulate them through public discourses and mass media, and you've got yourself a powerful little local

area network for generating a sharable social reality capable of extending the intelligibility of one's embodied existence into wider realms.

Engaging with those biomedical practices, however, sets the stage for epistemological and ontological battles between conflicting ideas about nature and technology, the organic and the artificial, where the status of what counts as really real, or somewhat real, or utterly unreal or fake or phony is precisely what's at stake. Using those technologies sets off a cultural struggle over how we determine the social meaning of our embodiment, and regulate the technical means of becoming an embodied self.

Wanting better access to those highly contested reality-generating tools offered more than a path to personal well-being and individual happiness for Tenderloin queens who considered themselves women when they rebelled at Compton's. These technologies were monkey wrenches to use in a prison break, the means to demand a social order capable of recognizing and accommodating the vital realness of beings worthy of life, who had been relegated to a human garbage dump by the existing order of things.

* * *

If historical studies of transgender phenomena eventually landed me my major-label recording contract in academe, my noncommercial, bespoke-label, indie-side-hustle passion project has been in an even more marginal and precarious interdisciplinary field dubbed *somatechnics*. It allowed me to explore in the most expansive ways all the technological—and epistemological and ontological—questions that have preoccupied me ever since I first started grappling as a child with the WTF of being trans.

Somatechnics is a word some Australian colleagues and I made up in 2004, after the feminist philosopher Nikki Sullivan, then based in Sydney, started convening a series of international interdisciplinary conferences to explore the ethics and politics of body modification. One of those conferences brought me to John Money's home turf at the University of Otago in Dunedin. Sullivan—among other things, a scholar of John Money's diagnostic categories—was interested in the ethics of body-modification practices that ranged from tattooing to boob jobs to voluntary

limb amputations (a topic John Money actually studied). Those of us who participated in those initial convenings zeroed in pretty quickly on how public discourse about technologically modified bodies usually invoked some moral claim based on distinctions between the natural and the artificial. There was usually some implicit assumption of a natural, organic body that existed before its technical modifications, which were deemed either good or bad based on the technologies involved and the ends those modifications served. The insertion of saline sacks beneath the mastectomy-scarred chest skin of a female breast-cancer survivor? Good, because it restores the form associated with a sense of natural womanhood. Sticking the same sack, using the same procedure, under the skin of my chest? Bad, because it destroys the natural form of the body by an artificial means. Though the techniques are the same, the social ends and the moral judgments attached to them are diametrically opposed, based on underlying values associated with “nature” and “technology.”

But if you acknowledged that human bodies are always already physically modified by *something*—practices of conception and gestation and birthing and child-rearing, processes of gendering and racialization, forms of dress and styles of fashion, habits of work and play, health care and diet and exercise, patterns of consumption and production, experiences of violence and punishment as well as those of nurturing and care, rituals of death and dying—that means there is not now, and never has been, any such thing as an unmodified human body that simply exists in a state of nature. The variably patterned modification of bodyminds is just a long-winded way of describing the operations of “culture.”

As a species, our biological organisms have never not existed in historically changing techno-cultural contexts. Chipped flint, fire, food containers: all were integral to the lives of hominid species that predate *Homo sapiens*; there is thus literally no “before technology” for humans like us. It’s biology plus technology plus culture plus history, all the way down. The very form of the human body is an artifact, produced by the relationship between the organism and other physical elements in their shared milieu. It’s not like the human body randomly evolved into its present form and then suddenly discovered that it could throw a spear. That

we are bipedal, binocular creatures with dexterous hands and big brains has something to do with the flatness of the savannah, the co-presence of herd animals, and the flake-ability of certain stones. Acknowledging that originary state of affairs requires thinking differently about the morality and ethics of embodiment practices, including trans practices of body modification. Mapping good/bad onto nature/technology is not an adequate interpretive framework.

If my work in trans history has been, in part, an effort to help insights and analyses grounded in scholarship to trend on the pop charts, somatechnics has been for me more like a free jazz jam session where the audience is an afterthought; it's just groovin' with friends and collaborators in an open-ended improvisational exploration that pushes an idea toward its most developed expression to see where that takes you and what you bump up against when you get there. How does the world seem different when you approach it through that experimental practice?

A thought experiment might run something like this: Starting with the usually unquestioned sense of a natural organic body supplemented and modified by technology, where does the human body stop and the technological prosthesis begin? Eyeglasses are distinct from the eyes, but soft contacts that adhere directly to the eyeball are a little less so. But what about laser eye surgery? That's more of a technique than a technology, but it still involves a relationship between a biological body and a technical object, one that reshapes the lens of the eye itself instead of pairing the eye with an external lens made of glass. Rather than a body and a technology, you have an embodiment technology/technologized embodiment, a *somatechnic*, with no separation between the *soma* and the *techne*.

But technology doesn't have to be limited to a mechanical add-on or device like eyeglasses or a smartphone camera. It's more capacious than that. One of my Australian colleagues, Joseph Pugliese, and I once tacked a little holiday travel onto one of my working trips Down Under, and went up to the York Peninsula together, where Australia stretches north toward New Guinea, to spend some time in the Daintree Rainforest—reputedly the oldest continuously existing ecosystem on the planet. We signed up with an ecotourism company operated by the local aboriginal Kuku Yalanji people

to spend a day in the forest learning a little about the traditional uses of native plants. Our guide Aaron/Kalka Dudu showed us something he called, in English, a sea lettuce bush (*Scaevola taccada*), covered with plump little white berries whose juice you could squeeze into your eyes to clear up nearsightedness for a couple of hours. I tried it. It worked, no laser surgery required. Aaron said his people's elders use it once their eyesight starts weakening in old age, before going hunting or spearfishing.

Indigenous ethnobotanical knowledge is a technology. And once you start thinking about technology that way—beyond the limited special-case sense of an inanimate prosthetic device added to a body to extend or amplify the embodied subject's will or desire or capacities—you can start to see technology as something more abstract, not a discrete thing but rather a shifting arrangement of relations between parts. If you understand technology in that abstract way, it becomes something fully immanent in a dynamically reconfigurable material realm—not something unnatural added in later by human design. It's like a simple subject-verb-object sentence. It involves instrumentalizing one part of an environment (let's call that a tool) to perform an action (the verb) by one body (in the subject position) upon another body (in the object position). Nothing in such a sentence requires humans to be in the tool-wielding subject position. Aren't humans just powerful tools that carbon uses to transport itself into the air from underground?

★ ★ ★

Language is the most abstract technology that humans use to orchestrate the interactions between subjects and objects in relation to a world. It's time to spend a little time exploring the technical dimensions of how we do things with words, to make meaning through grammatical and syntactical practices, including through the use of *gender*.

V.

My brother Mark, a nurse practitioner who runs a general-practice medical clinic in Oklahoma City, is a very no-nonsense guy who ribs me that I always “take the long way around” in how I think about things, rather than going straight through the open door in front of me. It’s true. I always sidle up sideways and enter askance, wherever I’m going. The ramble is part of the process of figuring out what I think.

Most people find grammar boring. I get it. To be taught grammar is to have something you understand at an intuitive level, because you already speak or write the language, explained to you in tedious detail to no apparent end. Who really needs to know that “Wow!” is a part of speech called an interjection when you look up in wonder at the starry sky? It’s like, instead of listening together to the sound of music, somebody is forcing you to study composition theory and read scientific articles about the physiology of hearing. Those topics have their own wonkish attractions, but it’s hard to sing and dance to them.

Yet dusty ol’ grammar keeps summoning me back into its presence like an austere and jealous Old Testament deity, demanding that I address it with proper reverence. I am rebellious. I am resistant. I would really rather not give grammar a second thought, but grammar implacably insists. If I am earnestly to follow my vocation of “changing gender” wherever it leads, it is the subject of *gender* itself that affords me no other way forward than through grammar.

To fully grasp what *gender* does so that we can do it differently requires a bit of technical knowledge. Not too much—just a Goldilocks portion of its porridge. Not knowledge of grammar for the mere sake of knowing it. Knowledge of grammar to better cast spells of transformation enacted by

the syntax of our utterances. Practical knowledge of grammar to write recipes in anarchist cookbooks that instruct us how to connect the charge to the fuse to the timing device of our poetry bombs, so that we might explode the world as it has been given to us, so that another world might find its way in.

We might as well get the grammar lesson out of the way now and be done with it, sweetened as best I can with seeming diversions that do in fact take us toward our destination, however circuitously I might meander as we go.

★ ★ ★

Jordy Rosenberg's *Confessions of the Fox* (2018) is, hands down, my favorite novel of the past several years. I love it so much that I used to teach an entire semester-long seminar on the book. It pushes on form and genre the way a trans body amid its physical peregrinations pushes against shape and category. It swerves between sexy and cerebral and hilarious from one sentence to the next. It's ostensibly a recently rediscovered eighteenth-century autobiographical manuscript by Jack Sheppard—the historical thief, jailbreaker, and ladies' man who inspired the Mack the Knife character in Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*—with scholarly annotations by a fictive professor of eighteenth-century literature who bears more than a passing resemblance to the author, who also happens to be a professor of eighteenth-century English literature when he's not writing novels himself. Jack, it turns out, was a trans guy, as is the fictional Professor Voth who rescues Jack's manuscript from oblivion, and as is Jordy himself.

The ersatz Sheppard manuscript reads something like a trans version of Sarah Waters's steamy Victorian historical fiction *Tipping the Velvet*, but the magisterial use of footnotes plants Rosenberg's novel, for me, firmly in Great Literature territory alongside such works as Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. They develop a contrapuntal storyline in which the annotator character's life begins to parallel the protagonist Jack's (and Jordy's), and they're filled with wild theoretical excursions and long asides (hmm, just as I tend to do) about the history of fen drainage and radical Protestantism and pirate ghost ships crewed by brigand Maroon bands liberating goods and

chattels from the trade routes of empire (maybe that's a trans style of writing?). The book is a giddy, genre-busting delirium brimming with genuine revolutionary passions simmering below its surface, biding their time before erupting in a rolling boil.

The plot revolves around a mysterious substance called the elixir—concocted in part, it turns out, from animal urine just like some modern-day synthetic hormones. (The trade name Premarin, for example, a synthetic estrogen, is an acronym derived from the words *PREgnant MARE urINe*.) London's mercantilist economy runs on the elixir, a nose candy snorted as a pick-me-up by stock traders and shipping insurers, in much the same way Wall Street ran on coke in the eighties and Silicon Valley runs on psychedelics now. The elixir is kind of like an aphrodisiacal erection-enhancing Viagra, kind of like testosterone in that it masculinizes and virilizes, kind of like ketamine in that it anesthetizes and dissociates the bodyminds of its users. It is criminalized by the powers that be so that they can rake in obscene profits by clandestinely trafficking it on the down-low. Connecting the streets to the elites, the elixir constellates a world order. Jack Sheppard just likes what the elixir does to his body and how he feels with it in him when he and his girlfriend get it on. His increasingly transmasculine embodiment is just a by-product and side effect, grasped from below, of the fundamental drivers of the global economy.

Metabolic rift sounds like the title of a William Gibson cyberpunk novel, or maybe the name of some sonically challenging hardcore metal band, but it's a technical term in Marxist ecological theory. (Well, Marx's term was actually *Stoffwechsel*, or "material exchange"; it was later theorists who juiced it up as *metabolic rift*.) It's the idea that underpins Rosenberg's elixir. I'm more akin to my fellow Oklahoman the folk musician Woody Guthrie, who used to quip that he wasn't a communist necessarily but had been in the red most of his life (back when *red* could mean either "leftist" or "being in debt," rather than "Republican"). I'm more that sort of fellow traveler than I am a card-carrying, technically proficient, politically correct Marxist theoretician. But I do appreciate a good concept wherever I find it, and *metabolic rift* is an unexpectedly

salient conceptual tool for situating the intellectual history of *gender* in both its social and grammatical dimensions.

Capital, in Marxist parlance, is more than mere money—it's money that makes more money because of how it circulates through the cycles of production and consumption, a pool of liquid assets that increases itself through the social and political organization of the circuits of buying and selling commodities. Before capital begins to reproduce itself, however, it must first be amassed through *primitive accumulation*: the straight-up, brute-force, smash-and-grab acquisition of land, labor power, and material resources such as minerals or plant and animal life, by means of colonization, genocide, enslavement, land enclosure, debtors' prisons, and raw extractive practices such as mining, fishing, and lumbering. Capital, in the Marxist view, is predicated on the dismemberment of the body of the earth and the theft of the laboring capacity of its living creatures, human and otherwise.

Metabolism refers to an organism's chemical conversion of food into energy. All living things depend on metabolic processes: the organisms that enrich the soil with nutrients, the plants that grow in that soil, the herbivores that graze on those plants, and the other animals that eat the herbivores as well as the plants. No life, including human life, gets outside the metabolic circuits of the food chain.

Metabolic rift is the problem that arises when the sites of production and consumption within a global capitalist economy become geographically distant enough from one another that they degrade the basic metabolic processes that all life and labor depend on, including the labor that gets turned into capital. Waste streams no longer being recycled back into the place they were derived from, for example, can result in ecological disruption and resource depletion in one location—poorer soils, underfed workers, degraded environments that are not as productive and thus require more labor to produce the same amount of profit—and an increase elsewhere of pollution and garbage and toxic sludge. Metabolic rift, if left unchecked, would trend toward a total ecological destruction that renders life, let alone capital formation and profit-making, impossible.

This perpetually out-of-balance capitalist world thus constantly needs to avert disasters of its own making by intervening in metabolic processes in order to reproduce itself. Regulating metabolism is therefore key to regulating the entire web of relationships between land and life, food and labor, production and consumption. Revolution has its metabolic substrate, too, in Marxist thought; the proletariat needs enough caloric surplus to direct its energies beyond survival activities if it is ever to overthrow the ruling class and eat the rich.

Capitalism, in this view, runs on real-world elixirs of vitamins and fertilizers, pep pills and pesticides. Crucially, it also runs on hormones, the biochemicals most centrally involved in regulating a body's metabolic processes. Hormones occur naturally in plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi, but the industrial versions are everywhere now, in birth-control pills and dietary supplements and industrially produced meat, dairy, and eggs. Microplastic waste that degrades into endocrine-disrupting chemicals in the environment now poses a huge problem for metabolic regulation and other biological processes.

The mid-twentieth-century medical science that took aim at intersex and trans bodies, and promulgated as its by-product the *gender* concept à la John Money, was anchored in problems of metabolism. Because some congenital intersex conditions caused by adrenal gland dysfunctions can interfere in life-threatening ways with metabolism, saving the lives of children born with intersex-related metabolic disorders was one rationale for early surgical and endocrinological interventions that altered their bodies' form and function. Medicalized "sex change" and the concomitant need for a technical vocabulary to describe the disarticulation of body, psyche, and social role were, in part, side effects of genuinely trying, often in some admittedly sketchy ways, to save the lives of some seriously sick kids. But long before John Money hit the scene in the pediatric endocrinology clinic at Johns Hopkins University, even well before Marx wrote *Das Kapital*, the metabolic rift was already shaping how English-language users thought about grammar to address questions of sex and gender.

When linguists talk about *gender*, they mean something very specific: the practice of assigning nouns and pronouns to different categories of words, then making all the words that belong to the same category resemble one another somehow—like the way Spanish adds an *o* or an *a*—and then changing other parts of speech in the same way to show that they refer to that specific noun. Grammarians call this meaning-making strategy *agreement*. Agreement is shown by changing the shapes of words to show which gender category they belong to, and which other words in the sentence they relate to.

Because the word *gender* has become so closely associated with the idea of *sex*, it can be useful to think about a grammatical gender as a “noun class” or “noun category.” Not all languages sort nouns into categories—that is, they don’t have grammatical genders or use agreement as one of their meaning-making strategies. Of the five or six thousand human languages that currently exist, a little more than half of them have no grammatical gender system. This does not mean they have no words for males and females and their differing social roles or biological functions (*gender* in this sense is definitely not a synonym for *sex*); it just means they don’t organize nouns into categories and create agreement between them and other parts of speech to convey meaning.

Among those languages that do use grammatical gender, there might be any number of noun categories, ranging from the minimal two to twenty or more. In some languages, which nouns go into which categories seems totally arbitrary, kind of like the 0 and the 1 in a binary code, which don’t have any intrinsic meaning; what’s important is simply marking a difference that becomes part of how information is conveyed. Some languages use more or less explicit criteria to determine which words are assigned to which categories. Those criteria are often derived from extralinguistic qualities—that is, from language users’ understanding of and beliefs about the world that they live in, and that the language refers to. The inclusion criteria for a language’s genders or noun categories might involve things like shape, color, size, distance from the speaker, or qualities drawn from the cosmologies and belief systems of the language community.

Grammatical gender categorization can thus be a way of bringing the background concepts that orchestrate a culture's experience of the world into a language, and thus into expression and communication as part of social existence. That's what English does when it uses the three grammatical genders of masculine, feminine, and neuter—it brings into language cultural beliefs about what determines *sex*. (And that, remember, is what Judith Butler was going on about decades ago when they said *gender* produces *sex*, in the sense that *gender* expresses the rules and assumptions that define what counts as *sex*, not that it is an utterance that magically materializes new genitals.)

Of the grammatically gendered languages, only about two-thirds of them make reference to male and female reproductive biology as criteria for grammatical gender categories. Paying attention to reproductively significant biological difference is important for perpetuating human life and culture, so it makes sense that those differences would be grouped into different symbolic categories. Exclusive use of sex-based gender categories is an especially common grammatical strategy in the large Indo-European language family of which English is a part—so common and long-standing, in fact, that as early as 500 BCE the Greek philosopher Protagoras dubbed the three grammatical genders of most Indo-European languages *masculine*, *feminine*, and *neuter*. (And it drove him bonkers even then that sometimes nouns were included in one grammatical gender rather than another for no apparent reason. What's masculine about *hat/el sombrero*, for example, or feminine about *table/la mesa*?)

One of the most striking developments in the history of the English language is the shift in its gender system. Old English, like its language cousin German, used to have a grammatical system that gendered several parts of speech and created agreement between them to show which words were related to which other words in any given sentence. Something changed after the Norman Conquest in 1066, when Anglo-Norman French became the language of the monarchy, the aristocrats, the universities, and the law for about three hundred years. When English reemerged as the language of written record as well as everyday speech, Middle English had acquired some new features. One was a simplified system of grammatical

gender that marked gender categorization in only one place—the third-person singular pronouns, whose modern forms are *he*, *she*, and *it*.

This new system represented a radical departure from the way most languages work, and it informs many of the contemporary confusions about the concept of *gender*. English stands nearly alone as one of a tiny handful of languages worldwide, and the only Indo-European language, that uses what came to be called, problematically, *natural gender*—that is, matching the grammatical gender or noun category of a word to the sex (or lack thereof) of the object it refers to. It dispensed with seemingly arbitrary attributions of gender like masculinizing *hat* and feminizing *table*, and used reproductive sex differences or their absence as the sole extralinguistic inclusion rule for belonging to a particular grammatical gender. John Brinsley the Elder flagged the key feature of this peculiar English practice as early as 1612. He noted in *The Posing of the Parts. Or, a most plaine and easie way of examining the Accidence and Grammar, by Questions and Answers, arising directly out of the words of the Rules*: “Q. What is a Gender? A. The difference of Nounes according to the sex.”

Using sex as the criterion to properly grammatically gender the third-person pronouns no doubt informs the long history of conflating *sex* and *gender* in English. It makes it easy to think of pronoun reference as merely reflecting an objective truth about the material world (the way Matt Walsh and Sebastian Gorka do). But the English third-person singular pronouns are one of those cases where extralinguistic criteria inform the grammatical gender category. Sex, if we follow the argument that it’s produced by gender, or accept what contemporary science teaches us about complexity of biology, is not a single objectively existing thing. It’s whatever we use to define what it is—“sex is as sex does,” as the political theorist Paisley Currah has written of sex classification practices in contemporary law and policy. Sex is a set of material characteristics assembled according to reality-constructing cultural templates—Peter Berger’s “typificatory schemes”—that pattern whatever we think determines sex in the contexts in which we speak and act. Choosing the right pronoun by determining sex thus requires drawing on all the contradictory, up-for-grabs cultural baggage, religious precepts, scientific knowledge, metaphysical

underpinnings, social mores, and other beliefs about the nature of existence beyond its linguistic representation that inform what counts as sex.

Third-person singular pronouns in English thus become the point of entry for slyly importing into language, and passing off as nature, the inclusion criteria for categorical belonging. That's why some linguists prefer the term *notional gender* to *natural gender*—because the meaning-making lies in the background ideas we bring to the table, the notions, not the objects themselves, nor the structure of the language. That's why we fight culture wars on the terrain of *gender* and pronouns. Our pronouns are where incommensurable realities joust with one another, backstage, in even the most prosaic acts of speech. We reproduce or contest an entire worldview in every English sentence that contains a third-person singular pronoun.

★ ★ ★

Dennis Baron is an expert on the evolution of English-language pronouns who literally wrote the book on grammar and gender—namely, *Grammar and Gender* (1986). He also publishes a blog called *The Web of Language*, where he comments on language history and current events. Baron's been busy in recent years keeping up with all the culture-war vitriol and the many ignorant yet politically consequential things people spout off about in public regarding *gender* and words—such as the Texas senator and failed Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz saying at Turning Point USA's 2022 Student Action Summit that “my pronouns are kiss my ass.” (Maybe Cruz honestly doesn't know that a pronoun stands in for a noun, so that in this case for him to say “my pronouns” are “kiss my ass” would mean that he uses those words in place of his own name. But I'll give him the benefit of the doubt, because kissing ass *is* something the sycophantic Cruz genuinely seems to identify with; since he's expressing his authentic self through his pronoun choice, I'll respect kiss-my-ass's pronouns just as I ask kiss-my-ass to respect my own.)

Baron's book *What's Your Pronoun?* (2020), one of the books banned from the library of the Naval Academy in 2025 for promoting woke gender ideology, details the fascinating history of English trying, usually

unsuccessfully, to sidestep the structurally intractable problem of the language's incapacity to refer to individuals in the third-person singular without assigning them to a sex by assigning them to a sex-based grammatical gender. One work-around—using *they*, *them*, and *their* in the singular as well as the plural—was noted as early as 1375, and its increasing prevalence in the present mirrors a similar historical shift in usage of the second-person pronoun *you*. That word, *you*, used to be strictly plural, but it came to be used in the singular as well, as the old singular second-person pronouns *thou/thee/thy/thine* started sounding antiquated. A second strategy, documented since at least the nineteenth century, has been to coin new pronouns, the most popular and persistent of which has been *thon*, dating from around 1858, usually considered a contraction of *that one* and intended to evoke the old-fashioned *thine*; the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* includes the word even now. A third has been to revive or repurpose existing words and to invest them with new significance in light of changing social circumstance—the way long-standing uses of singular *they* are being repurposed to refer to emergent nonbinary forms of personal identity. The earliest instance Baron found of that strategy, unearthed by sleuthing around in digital databases of historical newspapers, dates to 1792. It appeared in a long, multipart essay titled “Grammatical Disquisitions,” originally published over several issues of a free-thinking, politically progressive British periodical, *The Bee*.

Most of *The Bee*'s essays, including “Grammatical Disquisitions,” were written by its editor, James Anderson (1739–1808). Anderson was a fascinating polymath. He corresponded regularly with George Washington and was friends with Jeremy Bentham, who invented modern penitentiary architecture and coined the term *panopticon* for an all-seeing surveillance system. Born to a farming family in Scotland, Anderson took over management of the family farm upon being orphaned at age fifteen. He invented a more efficient kind of plow and designed a cable-towed canal boat for moving agricultural products to market. He studied at the University of Edinburgh, became a member of several important scientific societies, and authored a number of influential works on agronomy. Anderson was the first to describe what would later be called the metabolic

rift. And he explicitly linked the problem of pronouns to the political economy of this ecological shift.

Anderson noticed that tenant farmers working lands owned by absentee landowners had no financial incentive to spend their personal earnings on amending the owner's soils after raising and selling their crops, and he wrote of how tenant farming was thus detrimental to soil ecology—a rift created by capitalism in the healthy metabolic relationship between the environment and agricultural production, to be solved, he thought, by better land-management practices. Anderson invented new scientific farming techniques to increase yields in order to improve the diets of working people, while simultaneously aiming to promote sustainability. His writing on land rents and soil science informed the work of the economist David Ricardo and the agricultural chemist Justus von Liebig, both of whom were foundational influences on Marx.

In spite of his intellectual prominence, Anderson never lost his sense of having come from the common people. He was a die-hard republican in a monarchical society, a proponent of universal education, and a feminist man who supported women's suffrage, political equality, and civil rights. These political perspectives informed his advocacy for grammatical reform, and help situate that advocacy within a broader political project.

Anderson laid out a great many propositions in “Grammatical Disquisitions” for how language could be rationally improved. He proposed what he considered to be a more egalitarian way of dealing with pronouns, as well as a more accurate system of grammatical gender. Anderson thought three grammatical genders were simply not enough, but that thirteen might do the trick. He thought there should be separate grammatical genders not just for human males and females, but for nonhuman male and female animals, and for hermaphroditic as well as castrated people and animals, in addition to separate grammatical genders for inanimate objects, along with distinctive plural forms of each gender in order to avoid the sort of confusion created by pronouns such as *you* and *they* doing double duty as both plurals and singulars. It was a novel but utterly unworkable way to address the fact that sex, or its absence, is not nearly as cut-and-dried a state of affairs as *he*, *she*, and *it* encourage us to believe. The circular

category/object relationship assumed by “natural gender” simply can’t be squared by proliferating the number of categories it deploys.

Another of Anderson’s proposals made a lot more sense. While he requested, on the one hand, after a wider range of more highly specific pronouns to encompass the observed range of beings one encountered in daily life, he envisioned, on the other hand, a more democratic one-size-fits-all pronoun for everybody. That “all for one and one for all” word was what he linked, in passing, to changes in the agrarian economy.

Anderson noted a passage in *The Rural Economy of Gloucestershire*, a 1789 work by William Marshall that described vanishing folkways in the aftermath of the enclosure movement, when landowning aristocrats walled off their estates for sheep-rearing rather than agriculture to cash in on a heightened demand for British wool to feed increasingly industrialized textile mills. Oddly, along with the shift to notional or natural gender, some Middle English dialects had—rather than embracing the now-standard *he*, *she*, *it*—merged the distinct masculine (*he*) and feminine (*heo*) of Anglo-Saxon into a singular generic pronoun. Sometimes they used *he* for everything; sometimes they used other pronouns entirely. Gloucestershire’s dialect used *ou* as an all-purpose gender-neutral substitute for *he*, *she*, and *it*, but that pronoun disappeared as displaced peasants were absorbed into the urban underclass and English became a more homogenized language. Anderson thought *ou* supplied a splendid “indeterminate pronoun.” As a peculiar local ethnolinguistic relic of the precapitalist past, it could have given voice in the increasingly class-stratified present to a more egalitarian vision of society, or even prefigure a postcapitalist future where social relations would be transformed.

★ ★ ★

The connection Anderson traces between shifts in pronouns and farming practices is slender, to be sure, but strong nonetheless: a mycelial thread knotting beneath the visible surface of words and historical change, a lively entanglement unearthed through close observation of the physical world and its relation to human activity. It exemplifies the claim that something dynamic, vital, enters the structure of the language from outside it, to

suggest that a linguistic response is needed to accommodate what's happening, and to express the evolving relationship that living presence has with people. As if the land itself, when mindfully attended, might solicit new grammars and syntax, new patterns of relation, between the lives of all those whose life depends upon it.

★ ★ ★

Animacy describes the relationship between life and language. Among all known languages that use grammatical gender, the most common number of genders is two. The most common criteria for distinguishing those two genders from each other are not *masculine/feminine* but rather *animate/inanimate*. Imputing a distinction between the living and the lifeless is by far the most pervasive human practice of grammatically gendering the experienced world.

★ ★ ★

Mel Chen, a gender studies professor at Berkeley, is another of my go-to folks for thinking about language, grammar, gender, and trans stuff. I have fond memories of road-tripping with Mel and each of our then-partners on an epic drive to Fresno because Nikiko Masumoto, a former student we'd both taught, invited us all down to the annual Jam Fest on her family's peach farm. James Anderson would have nodded approvingly at the Masumotos' agricultural enterprise—Niki gave a TED talk about it a few years ago to explain in some detail her family's political and philosophical commitment to food justice. The Masumotos' ecologically sensitive husbandry improves the health and longevity of the orchard's trees and soils. They meticulously manage water as the precious resource it actually is. To sustain equitable relationships with the skilled migrant workers needed for the time-sensitive, labor-intensive annual harvesting of the peach crop, they work with the same families of pickers from the same villages every year. They fund educational and cultural exchange programs between the villages and the peach farm to plow a measure of their earnings back into improving the quality of life at home for the workers who make the

entire operation possible. It's repairing one little stitch in the metabolic rift. But what no longer seems to me a merely coincidental detail is that Niki's father, "Mas" Masumoto, besides growing peaches, is also a writer, described by his peers as a "poet-farmer." He served for a time on the National Council of the Arts. It's as if the land itself, when mindfully attended, might inspire new grammars and syntax, new patterns of relation, between the lives of all those whose life depends upon it, as well as between words themselves.

Mel's an interdisciplinary scholar of gender, sexuality, race, and disability whose work draws on many strands of their lived experience. Besides being a nonnormatively gendered queer person of color, they grew up in the midwestern corn belt to immigrant Taiwanese academic parents, and developed chronic environmental and chemical sensitivities they trace to childhood exposure to toxic pesticides used in commercial agriculture. They became a professor of gender studies after earning a doctorate in linguistics, studying under George Lakoff, a cognitive linguist interested in how concepts underpin language, who is best known for *Metaphors We Live By* (coauthored with Mark Johnson), and who is sometimes considered the contemporary heir of Sapir-Whorf. Mel's first big book, *Animacies*, revolved around a linguistic concept called the *animacy hierarchy*, and how that hierarchy plays out not just within and across languages, but within and across social relationships between different categories of people and other kinds of beings.

While *animacy* itself refers to qualities of agency, awareness, motility, and liveliness, the *animacy hierarchy* reflects a given culture's assumptions about what's alive and what's not, and which lives matter more. The animacy hierarchy is a linguistic technology that uses the syntactical elements of a given language to position some life as more or less lively or agential than other life, or even to mark a fundamental distinction between the living and the lifeless. Those semantic operations can figure in life and death political struggles over racialized, queer, trans, and disabled bodies—any body, actually—deemed less worthy of living than some other.

Mel's gracefully elliptical and elusive style of writing and thinking requires patience and mindfulness from those who try to engage with it. I

approach it the way I approach a meditation exercise, with a detached and open receptivity that allows me quietly to observe something in it I might ordinarily push past without deliberate reflection. Grammar's one of those things one usually doesn't think about at all. Mel has a gentle way of saying, no, wait, slow down for a minute and pay attention to this, the words are doing something quite subtle here, please allow me to point it out to you. It's the same way a naturalist might direct your eyes toward the patterns traced by a tiny hermit crab as it scuttles across the sand, where the ocean touches the beach, before the waves wash it all away.

Mel opens *Animacies* with a close reading of an innocuous little phrase, to show off an animacy hierarchy in action: "the hikers that rocks crush."

It's difficult to make immediate sense of that phrase at first, and you might find yourself reading it a few times to get past the "Huh? Wait a minute—what?!?"

Why? Well, in English, to use the technical terms, the head noun in a phrase—in this case, *hikers*—is assumed to be the most animate. In the basic subject/verb/predicate sentence structure, there's the agency-bearing subject noun that's the doer, the verb that describes the action performed by that doer, and the predicate object noun, syntactically positioned as less agential, which passively receives the action initiated by the subject. The *that* that comes after *hikers* is a little odd. Usually you'd say *the hikers who*, because *who* is the pronoun used for people rather than *that* (a word choice that itself reflects an animacy hierarchy), but in everyday speech people often use *who* and *that* interchangeably, so it's not a big red flag that something's amiss. Based on what you've assumed thus far, you'd expect that next word to be the verb. The hikers are going to *rock* something, the way you'd rock a boat or a cradle. But then the *s* at the end of *rock* makes it a grammatically incorrect conjugation of that verb to go with the plural subject *hikers*. It should be "the hikers that rock"—what? *Crush*? How do hikers rock crush? *Crush* could be a noun, like when you have a crush on someone or when there's a crush of people trying to get through the doors at a concert, but it doesn't make any sense, semantically, for hikers to rock a crush.

Casting around for other ways of parsing the phrase, you perhaps notice that *rocks crush* actually obeys the grammatical rule for subject/verb agreement if we treat *rocks* not as a verb, but as a noun—*rocks*, plural, *crush* something. But a couple of things get in the way of reading the phrase that way. First, that noun/verb pairing comes in the second half of the phrase, and the unstated default assumption in English is that the doer of the action should be in the first half, not at the end, because “doing” takes priority and gets more status in most English-speaking contexts than occupying the lower status and secondary position of being “done to.”

But then, even more important in the cosmology of most contemporary English speakers, rocks are not believed to have agency, awareness, motility, and liveliness—they are inert lumps of inanimate matter, somewhere far below the bottom rung of the animacy hierarchy—so the idea of *rocks* being in the doer position in the phrase is not what first comes to mind. It’s only after a split second of head-scratching befuddlement that the reader recognizes that “the hikers that rocks crush” can in fact be a sensible and grammatically correct English phrase if it refers to backcountry trekkers killed in an avalanche by falling boulders.

Making sense of the phrase, however, requires swimming upstream, against the current of the usual assumptions subtended in the grammatical patterns. It requires cutting against the grain of the implicit animacy hierarchy that informs how the users of the language imagine the relationship between agents, actions, and acted-upons. You probably don’t even notice that you’re doing all that work while you’re doing it. You certainly don’t need to know all the technical grammatical terms it takes to explain what it is that you’re doing without even thinking. You just do it.

We do things like that with language all the time. We use it as a technology for moving things closer to or farther from life and death. In English, we do that explicitly when gendering the third-person singular pronoun. *He*, *she*, and *it* invoke animacy hierarchies, and map those hierarchies onto biological sex or its absence or its social complexities. To be rendered *it* is to be understood as less alive, and thus less valued, than a coherently sexed entity—it is to be like the macaroni, a thing of the neuter gender. Or like Tyra Hunter, a Black trans woman grievously injured in a

car accident in Washington, DC, in 1995. According to witnesses, when the first responders on the scene discovered Hunter had a penis, one of them backed away, laughing, and said to his coworkers, “This bitch ain’t no girl ... it’s a n****r, he’s got a dick.” Hunter died shortly after being transported to the hospital; a wrongful death suit that resulted in a large financial settlement to her survivors alleged that the length of time she was allowed to lie untreated in the street contributed to her untimely demise.

★ ★ ★

Late one Sunday afternoon I’m writing from one of my favorite spots at home, sitting in the comfy chair by the sliding glass doors that open onto the upper deck of our house, enjoying the last of the day’s warmth wafting in with the gentle breeze that puffs now and then through the screen. Mimi is puttering in the garden down below. I can hear my next-door neighbor Simone watering the plants on her deck, and her husband, James, playing blues on his electric guitar; I’ve enjoyed listening to him improve over the years he’s been teaching himself to play the instrument. I am distracted, stuck, trying—and failing, as far as I’m concerned—to finish saying what I need to say about grammar and gender so that I can wrap up this most vexatious chapter.

I’m convinced that stitching together the broken-apart relationship between social and grammatical gender is necessary for understanding why *gender* is such a contentious and confusing topic in the culture wars these days, as well as why “changing gender” actually has something to do with changing our experience of the world around us through the poetry and magic of language. There’s a typically ignored and deeply internalized grammar that choreographs our social relations every bit as much as there’s a grammar that choreographs our words. It’s all so clear in my mind, but I find it unavoidably technical and difficult to get it down on the page in a halfway interesting and understandable manner.

My phone dings that I have a new text message. Saved by the bell! It’s my friend Julian Carter, the guy who’d come with Juana and me to see Taylor Mac. Julian’s a passionate avocational dancer; the Sundance Saloon, a few minutes’ drive from my house, has line dancing and two-stepping for

queer folks every Sunday night, and Julian often texts me to see about popping in for a visit before one of his boot-scootin' boogie-downs. Julian and I have been inner-circle running mates with each other for a very long time, ever since we first met at a sex party back when we were wild young things and learned that we were also both historians with a poetic bent. He now teaches humanities at an art school in San Francisco. He's religious; I'm not. But I can speak the lingo, and I love our code-switching conversations between theology, philosophy, cultural theory, art, and history, when we converse across those different registers about the ultimate commitments we share.

Sure. Genmaicha? I text back. Forty-five minutes later Julian is warming his hands around a cup of green tea with toasted brown rice, and now that we've caught up on each other's latest little life-details we settle in to workshopping our way toward my grammar chapter's exit point.

Choreography is a word that, understandably, keeps coming up in our conversation. Choreography is an art of mapping and transmitting patterns of movements. Julian once wrote a beautiful essay that was equal parts dance criticism and transgender theory, about the concept of transition. In dance, a transition is a shift from one kind of movement to another, often accomplished through small gestures that connect and contextualize poses, positions, sequences, and other ways of moving. Transitions are physical strategies built on movement-grammars to convey feeling, sense, and modes of relating to the movements of others. When I tell Julian that I imagine the movements of the fortune-teller toy, used as a metaphor for the *sex/gender* relationship, to enact a transition between different *sex/gender* arrangements, he reminds me that he was part of the PolySensorium art collective that once designed just such a thing. D'oh.

Language, I say, is another corporeal practice that choreographs how humans move with one another. The common English subject/verb/object sentence structure that I used to exemplify my understanding of technology as a relationship between moving parts can also be considered a choreography. I rehearse for him how nouns cut the experienced world up into named things, imagined as having certain capacities for acting and being acted upon in ways described by verbs. I rehash how personal

pronouns, as a point of entry where the extralinguistic considerations that differentiate between *he*, *she*, and *it* come into the grammar of the English language, position the bodies of speakers and hearers, readers and writers, in relation to one another and to others. They then insert them into a sentence structure—the actors, the actions, and the acted-upon—that orchestrates their interactions based on underlying assumptions about how one part of a milieu is capable of acting on or receiving the action of another. But how English brings a world into words, including how it assigns different levels of animacy and positions the bodies of speakers relative to one another via the pronouns, is just one way among thousands of ways that humans have done exactly this for millennia. There's nothing natural about the English-language strategy, just notional. Other relations to worlds are not just possible; they are actual, and linguistic diversity allows us to inhabit them.

“Oh!” Julian says, “I introduce this idea to my first-year art school students by assigning a chapter in Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, called ‘Learning the Grammar of Animacy.’”

Kimmerer's book is a bestseller I'd long neglected because of a critique I'd once read of it from some indigenous studies scholars. Kimmerer is a botany professor of Potawatomi heritage who lives and works on Haudenosaunee land in upstate New York, and she specializes in the biology of mosses. Like any good scientist, she closely observes processes in the physical world and reports back on how what she's encountered extends or transforms what we think we already know about a given phenomenon. But in addition to Kimmerer's scholarly work, she writes for nonspecialist audiences about weaving together Western science and indigenous knowledges, while listening to what the plants have to say of themselves through their own nonverbal (chemical and electrical) communications—those are the three strands of the braided sweetgrass metaphor that furnishes the title of her book. The criticisms I'd encountered of it had to do with how imagining those three strands to be equally weighted elements in the same braid depoliticized all the ways that Western science had suppressed indigenous knowledge and objectified the nonhuman world in ways contrary to indigenous perspectives. A quick trip

to the Internet Archive retrieved a digital copy of Kimmerer's book, and a hasty skim let me see almost immediately that, while the critique of it I'd encountered has validity, the chapter of the book about animacy nevertheless beautifully expresses some of the ideas I'd been groping toward.

Kimmerer wasn't raised speaking Potawatomi, and she recounts the epiphany she experienced when learning to understand her work and her place in the world differently through trying to learn that language as an adult. Her native English, she notes, is mostly noun-based. It prioritizes "thingifying," and then choreographs relations between the world-fragments it conceptually packages into objects. She reminds me here of Heidegger's essay "The Thing," in which he calls attention to the etymological roots of the Germanic word *Thing*, which means "gathering." (The Icelandic national parliament, for example, is called the Althing. The field or meadow, *vellir*, where the various clans gathered in medieval times to trade with one another and hash out any grievances, is still called Thingvellir. That Thingvellir straddles the seam of two tectonic plates, whose gradual separation permits the upwelling of magma that forms the island of Iceland, suggests to me that premodern Icelanders were attuned to the thingifying, cutting-together-apart operations of the physical world that I see *sex/gender* performing in the sociolinguistic register.) A thing, for Heidegger, is a nexus of relationships and meanings that have become objectified. Germanic nouns give static names to the processes through which things are constituted, which then require verbs to mobilize their congealed and calcified forms.

Only 30 percent of English words are verbs. Verbs, however, make up about 70 percent of Potawatomi words—it's a language that prioritizes expressing the movements and actions of the experienced world, rather than chopping it up into pieces.

Potawatomi falls into the empirically most common category of languages in that it has only two grammatical genders, *animate/inanimate*. But it genders many parts of speech, not just the singular third-person pronouns. Potawatomi grammatical gender, Kimmerer says, brings all the bits of its language—verbs, nouns, pronouns, articles, demonstratives—into

agreement to provide fundamentally different ways of speaking about the living world and the lifeless one. Because the verbs are gendered, Kimmerer points out, “you hear a person with a word that is completely different from the one with which you hear an airplane.” Different verb forms, she says, “different plurals, different everything apply depending on whether what you are speaking of is alive.”

Kimmerer’s epiphany happened when memorizing vocabulary words and noting that the English noun *bay* was translated as the Potawatomi verb *wiikwegamaa*, meaning “to be a bay.” “I swear I heard the zap of synapses firing,” she writes. “An electric current sizzled down my arm and through my finger, and practically scorched the page where that one word lay. In that moment I could smell the water of the bay, watch it rock against the shore and hear it sift onto the sand. A bay is a noun only if water is *dead*. When *bay* is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word.” But when the bay becomes a verb, *to be a bay*, “that releases the water from bondage and lets it live. ‘To be a bay’ holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall, and there are verbs for that, too. To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive.”

And she means *everything*, pretty much. The inanimate grammatical gender in Potawatomi is largely limited to technical objects made by people. The animate gender contains not only humans and other animals and plants, but also supernatural entities and all the elements of the physical and energetic realms. The categories constructed by grammatical gender, to keep pounding the same point into the ground over and over again, are where assumptions about extralinguistic existence and the nature of objects can enter the structure of language. Potawatomi speakers wouldn’t have as much trouble as English speakers making sense of “the hikers that rocks crush” because rocks are animate in Potawatomi. Water is animate. Fire is animate. Air is animate. Landforms are animate. Medicine, musical instruments, songs, and stories are all animate. Maybe a new grammar of

animacy in English, Kimmerer muses, “could lead us to whole new ways of living in the world,” ones that recognize other creatures as sovereign peoples, “a world with a democracy of species, not a tyranny of one.”



What’s at stake, ultimately, in the grammar of animacy is not grammar. What’s at stake is the nature of the nature that of necessity spills into language, and the technical capacity of a language to shape the encounter with that reality. I start to jabber excitedly about all the connections I see between what Kimmerer’s talking about and what I’ve been circling around in my obsessive preoccupations with grammatical gender. That different languages can provide fundamentally different ways of relating to material existence. That in the past, as now, experimentation with language change, including how we partition the world through concepts and categorize the objects we make according to grammatical genders and animacy hierarchies of human devising, correlates with fundamental changes in the material organization of society, and with the political demands and visions of justice sparked by those material transformations. That was the gist of James Anderson’s interest in the lost pronoun *ou*, and part of what Jordy Rosenberg was picking up on with his fictional exploration of the metabolic rift.

That’s the heart of it, really. That the grammar and the syntax of a language have a political dimension as well as an ontological one, in that they inform how we do or don’t recognize or value particular kinds of life, human and otherwise. That grappling with profound social changes—those moments of “revival” that Madison Bentley linked to his version of the *sex/gender* distinction, or that I paid attention to when situating the Compton’s Cafeteria riot and Christine Jorgensen’s celebrity in the context of newly available medical technologies and discourses—can surface the unstated rules and assumptions that usually run in the background of our social and psychical existence. New material conditions pull them in to foreground as part of a meta-conversation about how we know what’s real and true and what it means and why it matters and whether it can change. That’s when we collectively start casting about for new words and new

ways to use them, like *gender* during the Cold War and *transgender* during the early internet era, and wage culture wars over pronouns the way we're waging them now.

Paying attention to how grammar works is a first step toward knowing how to make it work differently. We can break it and open it and reconfigure it with skill and precision, play with it like a fortune-teller toy, in order to better actualize through our language the possibility of grasping another way for the world to be. Paying attention to what the world around us is actually doing, whether that's the way farming affects soil metabolism or the way mosses grow on granite boulders littered across a landscape by retreating glaciers, can suggest that something's *happening* that needs to be recognized, honored, and accommodated in how we use our words.

In the heart of that heart lies the deeper mystery that keeps calling me back to grammar like a jealous god. Or more like a laid-back polyamorous god, actually, an impersonal god that loves everything equally and admits all into its radiant presence, to come and go as they please. The mystery in the heart of that heart is what happens when I try to meet the universe halfway. When I take that leap of faith to believe that something exists beyond my subjective perception of it. That it is an actual presence. That there's a there there beyond the languaging of it that I nevertheless experience only through how I've brought it into language, a there there that I experience otherwise when I step sideways toward the doors of my perception and feel that presence moving wordlessly through me. Of me. As me. Like a bolt from the blue. Like a breath.

When I hold myself open to what is present, it feels alive. It feels like I am part of it. Being trans feels to me like being alive beyond the containers bequeathed to me for holding life. It feels like an overflowing. It feels like something from beyond welling up from within. It feels like vitality finding its watery way around a roadblock of words arranged according to a syntax designed to shut me out and lock me up and shunt me ever closer to lessened liveliness and death. It feels like an imperative to bring life into language, and thus into sociality, anew. It feels like poetry, when language retreats from its utilitarian communicative function and bends toward an untapped expressive capacity. It feels like what I hear people talking about

when they talk about a religion they believe in. I don't need or want any particular religion to bring me to that encounter, but I honestly can't imagine anything more sacred.

VI.

The potted history of the *gender* concept that Matt Walsh referenced in his talk at Stanford the night this version of this book first took shape—that so-called gender ideology was the invention of skeezy pervs like John Money and Alfred Kinsey—could have been lifted in its entirety straight from a few paragraphs in one chapter of a single book, Gabriele Kuby’s *The Global Sexual Revolution* (2012), a work that has been translated into fifteen languages and is widely read and frequently cited in far-right circles.

Anti-*gender* ideas now form a sprawling ecosystem of interrelated interpretive frameworks and fantastical beliefs that span many different constituencies. The anti-genderism of Deep Green Resistance’s anti-technological radical ecofeminism is different from the anti-genderism of the tech-dude bros immersed in what the AI ethicist Timnit Gebru has acronymized as “the TESCREAL Bundle”—a loosely related set of beliefs in transhumanism (uploading consciousness to become immortal), Extropianism (human life as an open-ended project of continuous improvement), singularitarianism (the convergence of humans and machines into a unitary superbeing), contemporary cosmism (off-world living as human destiny), Rationalism (an emotion-averse program of disciplined belief-updating driven by a survivalist ethos), Effective Altruism (market logics as the best mechanism for doing the greatest good for the greatest number), and longtermism (the belief that benefits in the far future outweigh any necessary injustices in the present). TESCREAL anti-genderism is different from the puritanical anti-genderism of Christian nationalists, which is different from the racist anti-genderism of neo-Nazis, which is different from the British gender-critical feminists or the anti-intellectual know-nothingism of Chaya Raichik’s Libs of TikTok or Jennifer

Bilek's antisemitic anti-genderism. But because Kuby distills some of the main features of an essentially conspiratorialist perspective on *gender* into a few succinct passages, her work offers a good starting point for disentangling the *gender* concept from some of the pernicious narratives that seek to capture it.

Kuby, niece of the famous quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg, of uncertainty principle fame, was born in Germany in 1944. She converted as an adult to Traditionalist Catholicism—a version of that faith that rejects the liberalizing innovations of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. She's a prolific author who has become an influential opponent of homosexuality, feminism, abortion, contraception, and trans people worldwide. (She also thinks institutional preschool childcare is a very bad idea because it usurps the role of the mother, and that the Harry Potter books are softening up kids to believe in witchcraft.) Pope Benedict XVI, the former German cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, endorsed Kuby as “a brave fighter against the ideologies that ultimately lead to the destruction of humanity,” including the ideology of “gender.”

Kuby's narrative strategy is to present her version of history as the unmasking of cultural elites, both secular and Jewish, who insinuate anti-Christian ideologies into mass society as part of a vast social-engineering project centuries in the making. Kuby's focus on two figures in particular exemplify her belief in a shadowy realm of secret influencers. Bernard Berelson was a prominent behavioral scientist who, between 1968 and 1974, served as president of the Population Council, a Rockefeller Foundation-funded body that investigates and disseminates information on the social and biomedical aspects of population change. He was an ardent technocrat who advocated for the use of opinion surveys to craft messages that elites could use to deliberately shape public perceptions and behaviors as part of governing society. The other is Edward Bernays, Sigmund Freud's nephew, once described by *Life* magazine as among the one hundred most influential people of the twentieth century.

Bernays authored such works as *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923) and *The Engineering of Consent* (1955). He opened his 1928 book, *Propaganda*, with characteristically unabashed elitism, stating that “The

conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government, which is the true ruling power of our country.” He’s the guy who coined the term *public relations* to replace *propaganda* in US English usage once that latter word became too closely associated in the public mind with Soviets and Nazis. The type of PR campaigns once engineered by Bernays now consciously and intelligently manipulate the opinions of the masses on the topic of *gender*. Understanding what he was up to in his career can shed some interesting light on the difference between conspiracism as a style of historical analysis and the actual existence of powerful social actors who typically operate outside public scrutiny.

★ ★ ★

In a chapter of *The Global Sexual Revolution* titled “Trailblazers of the Sexual Revolution from the French Revolution to Today,” Kuby situates *gender* in an interpretation of history indebted to anti-Illuminati lore about Enlightenment-era secret societies bent on creating a secular *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, or “New Order of the World.” Follow the chapter’s footnotes to her principal reference, E. Michael Jones’s *Libido Dominandi: Sexual Liberation and Political Control*, and you’ll see how indebted she is to Jones’s antisemitic tropes of Jews as the secret puppet masters of that globalist vision, and of a “Jewish revolutionary spirit” that has opposed itself to Western Christendom for nigh on two thousand years, which is in turn but one front in an eternal cosmic struggle between the forces of a benevolent Logos and a malignant Chaos.

Kuby’s view of the history relevant to the emergence of *gender* is more modest in scope, covering only the past 250 years, but it manifests the same commitments that fuel longer narratives by other reactionary conspiracists. She begins with the notorious libertine the Marquis de Sade as the exemplary figure of the French Revolution—Western modernity is for her synonymous with a sexual liberation agenda—before putting a bevy of other notables on parade in a forced march through time that eventually takes us to the French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir.

Kuby's rogues' gallery includes Thomas Malthus, the eighteenth-century British economist, statistician, and demographer whose thought underpins later practices of population management and eugenics; the abortion and contraception advocate Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, imagined as Malthus's modern-day heir; Karl Marx, for all the usual reasons; Alexandra Kollontai, a feminist Bolshevik in revolutionary Russia who worked to legalize divorce, establish communal families, and promote free love as an alternative to paid sex work in a capitalist marketplace; Magnus Hirschfeld, the preeminent advocate for homosexual and transvestite emancipation in Weimar-era Berlin; the noted psychoanalytic theorists Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich, and Carl Jung; and John Watson, a psychologist at Johns Hopkins University credited with developing the theory of Behaviorism. Kuby targets Watson specifically for authoring a 1928 book, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*, which sought to promote scientific child-rearing practices thought to supplant traditional maternal roles, but, like Bernays, Watson also became an ad man who applied behavioral psychology to the art of making a buck by selling stuff. All of these figures have one thing in common, Kuby contends: a hatred of God, a satanic pride and rebelliousness, and a hubristic desire to transform human nature by falsely promising people that they can be autonomous, self-directing individuals rather than obedient children of God. Such lost souls inevitably neglect their children, become dependent on drugs and alcohol, and end their lives "in despair, insanity, the occult, and suicide."

Alfred Kinsey and John Money are crucial whistle-stops on Kuby's whirlwind tour of modern Western history: it is they who lay the sword of "gender ideology" at the feet of Simone de Beauvoir, and she who subsequently hands it off to the "cultural Marxists" of the student-led social movements of the 1960s, who have since quietly gone on to infiltrate liberal society and now comprise a Deep State that is stealthily leading the sheeple to the slaughterhouse. Kuby dubs Kinsey, best known for conducting the first large-scale surveys of human sexual behavior, "the father of sexology" (though he in fact lived many decades too late to stake a credible claim to

that title) and deems John Money his “capable successor,” who “played a key role in gender ideology.”

Kuby is not interested in what *gender* actually consists of in the work she’s referencing—she summarizes “gender ideology” simply as promoting the idea of “free choice of one’s gender.” Though that definition does align with *gender*’s currently common connotation of “subjective preference,” it’s 180 degrees wrong when it comes to Money’s actual ideas. Money was agitated by the ambiguity surrounding intersex and trans people whose bodies, minds, and social roles were not in alignment or agreement with one another according to societal conventions. He wanted to understand how such disarrangements and disorder could come about so that they could be corrected. He championed a medical model for using surgery and hormones and psychotherapy to treat individuals deemed somehow incongruent regarding these matters in an attempt to render them normal. His goal was definitely *not* to promote “the free choice of one’s gender.” Rather, it was to intervene in outlier cases so as to produce the most normative outcomes possible. Money’s version of *gender* was a disciplining of wayward flesh and errant minds— a bringing of discordant elements into agreement. It was trans and intersex people and feminists who placed the emphasis on opening those elements to the possibility of new arrangements.

Kuby couldn’t care less about such details. She is simply interested in painting both Money and Kinsey as ungodly sexual degenerates who invented “gender ideology.” It’s the same ad hominem argument about the same two people with the same one-two punch, made in the same rhetorical style, that Matt Walsh makes in far fewer words in his *What Is a Woman?* spiel. Both Walsh and Kuby gesture toward the same garbled version of the same actual history to situate the *gender* concept in a conspiratorial narrative, and then treat the word *gender* as an empty vessel to be filled with whatever content they find objectionable. They’re both typical in that regard of the broader treatment of *gender* by a wider range of anti-gender ideologists.

Conspiracism is a long-standing narrative mode of historical and social analysis that demands increasing attention amid the epistemic collapse of our now post-truth society. It's a style of historical thinking that has played a prominent role in non-elite post-Enlightenment thought since the eighteenth century. Though it has by and large given voice to reactionary ideas about modernity and liberal democracy, conspiracism spans the entire spectrum of political ideologies and certainly has its left-wing variations.

Conspiracism as a style and structure of explanation is distinct from the practice of shedding light on the empirical existence of intentional collusion and coordination between powerful sets of social actors, who may very well do their self-serving work in smoke-filled back rooms and try to hoodwink the masses on their way to making another dollar. Conspiracism, rather, imagines such powerful cliques and special interests to be the primary explanation for everything that happens. Social, economic, cultural, or environmental conditions are the results of explicit designs by covert combinations of corrupt individuals—not of socioeconomic class interests or broad political coalitions, not due to the operative logics of impersonal social systems that no single person ever created or directed, not circumstances rooted in a variety of non-individualist or even nonhuman factors with multiple origins and causes such as pandemics or climate change. There are no accidents, mistakes, random occurrences, happenstances, or contingencies. Everything in history is happening according to a secret plan. That plan is being executed by a hidden enemy. That enemy has become known and is now being unmasked. That enemy is on the cusp of final victory and must be stopped by any means necessary. Immediate heroic action is now imperative. Fate hangs in the balance. That's conspiracism—the *Da Vinci Code* version of history.

The historian Richard Hofstadter memorably described this way of thinking about history and politics as “the paranoid style”—a style that became increasingly common on both sides of the Atlantic starting in the late eighteenth century. Two works on the causes of the French Revolution published almost simultaneously in 1797 are widely considered to have established the genre of modern political conspiracy theory: the four-volume *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (*Memoirs*

Illustrating the History of Jacobinism) by Augustin Barruel, an exiled French Jesuit priest living in England, and the University of Edinburgh professor of science John Robison's *Proofs of Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried On in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies*. Robison's long subtitle gives away the plot of both books, which is that the French Revolution was masterminded by a secret cabal of anticlerical radicals, the Illuminati, whose views find ongoing expression in the secret rituals and teachings of the Freemasons, who want to destroy Christianity and impose a one-world secular government. TL;DR: conspiracism typically considers modernity to be suspect, and political liberalism rooted in Enlightenment thought to be bad. Although the dramatis personae change, the basic structure of that narrative has informed Western conspiracy theorizing since the 1790s.

Conspiracism inspired the first populist political movement in the United States, institutionalized as the Anti-Masonic Party. It was founded in 1828 in the same protean seedbed of counter-dominant social movements, the Burned-Over District, that spawned the Mormons. Freemasons were usually aspiring, upwardly mobile men trying to get ahead in life by forming social bonds with economically successful people, plugging in to civic life, and getting involved with electoral politics. Anti-Masons were more likely to feel socially excluded and marginalized, ill-served by the market economy, alienated from the government, and suspicious of sanctioned forms of power. The Anti-Masonic Party became a vehicle for all such anti-government and anti-elite sentiment after the mysterious disappearance and presumed murder of a man named William Morgan, who had threatened to publicly reveal secret rituals practiced in the Masonic Lodge of Batavia, New York. His unexplained absence provided the narrative hook on which to hang the cloak of a vast conspiracy theory.

Conspiracist narratives derive their potency from a deep reservoir of populist fantasies, like those about Freemasons as a powerful secret cabal, that misdiagnose the mechanisms of power in modern societies. Unfolding according to the combinatorial logic of dreams, their grammar does not obey the syntax of rational thought. Conspiracies string together symbolically charged collective figures—the foreigner, the subversive, the

pedophile—with bits of information that may be factual, fanciful, or deliberately fabricated. They weave those facts and figures into narratives, often internally contradictory, that feel emotionally true even when they are empirically falsifiable. Those narratives then become part of the ethnomethodological production of a local reality into which all new information will be slotted. That's what makes contesting conspiracism so challenging. It requires more than factual refutation. It requires disrupting and dislodging one version of reality and proffering another, one that not only gets the facts right but also tells an even more compelling story about the arc and thrust of history.

★ ★ ★

A non-conspiratorial account of the operations of power in post-Enlightenment Western secular democracies needs to address the new relationship established between the body politic and political authority after the *ancien régimes*. In the new order, the population and its reproduction, rather than the quasi-mystical power of a divinely sanctioned sovereign, became the paramount source of social legitimacy. Having elected heads of state and representative legislatures, rather than hereditary monarchs and aristocracies defined by family bloodlines that control estates inherited from their forebears, shifted the locus of power and authority's ultimate legitimation to the population—to the People, the *demos* of Democracy.

At the most fundamental physical level, you make and maintain the People of a democratic nation by making and maintaining the babies, as well as the bodies of those who birth those babies, who become in turn the mothers and soldiers and workers of the nation's collective body politic—who become its voters. Relying on the People to legitimate power turns politics into a numbers game, and biological reproduction thus enters the political calculus in a new way. Increasing or decreasing the population, promoting the health and safety of some and neglecting the health and safety of others, inculcating or contesting beliefs about the meaning of biological difference, dampening or inflaming passions connected to those beliefs—all such practices become tools of governance. They underpin the

eventual rise of pollsters and ad men like Bernays, Berelson, and Watson, who use their manifold rhetorical and informational tactics to craft the relationship between the population and the machineries of states, corporations, and capital.

Two powerful and deeply naturalized preexisting concepts for categorizing biological difference, *race* and *sex*, emerged as the central political technologies of the new United States and other such post-Enlightenment liberal societies. *Race* segregates a portion of the population deemed external to the desired homogeneity of the persons imagined to constitute the ideal People of a nation's body politic, but whose exploited labor it nonetheless requires to reproduce the nation as a whole. *Sex* becomes a locus of regulation and control internal to the nation that is necessary for the biological reproduction of the individual bodies that comprise its People. Politics thus becomes what Michel Foucault famously called a *biopolitics*—an intervention of state power into regulating, for its own ends, the productive and reproductive capacities of the individual bodies that collectively constitute its population, and thereby render it into human capital. One element of that regulative logic involves the cultivation of historically contingent forms of individual subjectivity and identity that align persons with the categories of personhood that are biopolitically useful for managing the population at any given moment. Creating agreement between object and category, (pro)noun and noun class, is the work of *gender*. It is here, in the slippery relationship between gender categorization and reproductive sex, as well as between gender categorization and subjective self-identification, that *gender* becomes of paramount biopolitical importance. Obfuscating *gender* obscures how power materially operates within biopolitical modernity.

Kuby and Walsh and all their ilk are onto something when they advance a conspiratorial take on “gender ideology” as the secret sauce of a perverse modernity. Malthus's foundational work in demography was all about articulating the new relationships between population and political power so that population could be directed by *raison d'état*. And that's why Malthus, along with so many of the other figures caricatured in Kuby's concise history of post-Enlightenment western European societies, has something to

do with population science, sex, marriage, abortion, family planning, non-procreative erotic practices, and emerging strategies for categorizing bodies through the people-sorting criteria collectively labeled *gender*. Because *gender* sits at the junction where fantasies of what the body means intersect with techniques for how bodies are managed within modern biopolitical states—including the technology of language—it supplies low-hanging fruit especially ripe for conspiracist harvest. Kuby sees the biopolitics, but she’s concocted a falsifiable narrative about *gender* populated with figures she invests with everything she hates and fears. Explanations are appealing even when they’re wrong, which is what allows conspiratorialism to flourish.



It’s exceedingly weird to have become, personally, a figure in conspiratorial accounts of *gender* (though, thankfully, no one’s yet tried to kill me in an airport). Because I check the visitor analytics on my website and my Academia.edu profile, have a Google alert set for my name, and sometimes do vanity searches to see how my work and my public-facing self are tracking in the world, I have a pretty good sense of where in the infosphere I’m being talked about and who’s doing the talking.

I started showing up on the right wing’s radar screen back in the aughts, when groups like Young Americans for Freedom and College Republicans started calling me out publicly for teaching courses with names like Sex Change City: Urban Trans/Formation in San Francisco, on the history of urban transgender communities and social movements in the mid-twentieth century. By the 2010s, when I had an opportunity to lead an initiative to hire several faculty members in transgender studies at the University of Arizona, I was being included on Turning Point USA’s Professor Watchlist, which profiles faculty members TPUSA deems the most dangerous voices in academe. By the 2020s, I was being targeted by John Sailer, director of higher education policy at the conservative Manhattan Institute, as a principal figure in what he characterizes as an “academia-to-activism pipeline” that grooms impressionable students in the ways of wokeism and DEI.

Sailer's pet tactic is to file Freedom of Information Act requests at public universities to snoop around for something that looks to him like a smoking gun that can be bandied about in the court of public opinion, even if it involves nothing illegal or improper. He's been using my name to try to ferret out secret networks of trans scholars promoting "gender ideology." His approach is conspiracist to the degree that he paints my professional activities as clandestine undertakings to be unmasked rather than something I openly list on my résumé, and construes the professional networks I'm involved in as something that needs to be uncovered through FOIA requests rather than, say, reading the mastheads of journals or the programs of academic conferences posted on publicly accessible websites.

But it's Sailer's colleague Christopher Rufo who has accorded me one of my most prominent conspiracist roles. Rufo bounced around in recent years between several right-wing think tanks—the Claremont Institute and Heritage Foundation among them—before becoming a senior policy advocate at the Manhattan Institute. Like Sailer, he's a culture warrior on a mission to break higher education as it currently exists, in order to turn it into something else. He's gone to Hungary to learn firsthand how Viktor Orbán dismantled academic gender studies programs there and even kicked the privately funded, Western-oriented Central European University out of the country for supposedly promoting gender ideology and critical race theory. Rufo's a frequent talking head on right-wing media outlets such as those of the Tucker Carlson Network, the *Joe Rogan Experience* podcast, and Ross Douthat's platform at *The New York Times*. Florida governor Ron DeSantis appointed Rufo to the board of New College, once a left-leaning public liberal arts institution, so that he could help transform it into a proof-of-concept example for what he wants to do to higher education more generally.

In September 2023, Rufo delivered a public lecture titled "Inside the Transgender Empire" at the Allan P. Kirby, Jr. Center for Constitutional Studies and Citizenship at the Washington, DC, campus of Hillsdale College—a small, well-endowed, conservative, formerly Baptist-affiliated institution in Michigan that's become a hotbed of right-wing activism in higher education. The title of Rufo's talk highlights the connections

between right-wing movements and transphobic versions of feminism by riffing on the title of the first book-length attack on trans people from a feminist perspective, Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* (1979). It lifts as well some of Raymond's conspiracist takes on trans people as victims of and vectors for a shadowy medical-industrial complex that profits by perpetuating a false consciousness about gender. Rufo's lecture, available on YouTube, was also published in Hillsdale's *Imprimis* newsletter, after which hate mail directed at my inbox and social media accounts—a sadly common experience these days for any public-facing trans person—noticeably increased.

In that lecture, Rufo paid me the backhanded compliment of saying that I personally invented gender ideology. Not all by myself, of course. I had help. Rufo depicts me as part of an elite cadre that includes Judith Butler and the feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin, as well as Sandy Stone. Stone had been a sound recording engineer targeted by a high-profile transphobic campaign to drive her out of the women's music scene back in the seventies. She subsequently became an interdisciplinary digital media and communications scholar and artist and is widely credited with kicking off the field of trans studies in the early nineties with what she called a "posttranssexual manifesto." I made the cut based on my enraged transsexual performance piece-cum-academic article, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix."

According to Rufo, "the transgender movement is pressing its agenda everywhere," notably through "activist teachers" who are "using classrooms to propagandize on its behalf." What he characterizes as the "sudden and pervasive rise of this movement" in recent years belies a much longer history that "goes deeper than most Americans know." That deeper history, Rufo informs his audience, reaches back to the late 1980s when the aforementioned group of academics "established the disciplines of 'queer theory' and 'transgender studies,'" through which "the trans movement was hatched" on "the fringes of American academia." We are accused of believing in "social constructionism" (guilty as charged), which allows us to construe the "traditional categories of man and woman" as a "false binary" that has to be "ruthlessly deconstructed" (he must have read Dale

O’Leary). The best way to achieve this goal, Rufo writes, is to “promote transgenderism,” for “if men can become women, and women men,” then “the natural structure of Creation could be toppled.”

I have no objection to tracing histories that are not widely known and longer than commonly imagined—that’s exactly my project in this book. But I don’t think there’s anything secret or hidden about these histories, or that they’re part of a clandestine “empire” of coordinated actions bent on some sort of world domination that must be exposed. Rufo is writing here in the paranoid style.

I could nitpick individual elements of that story, though it’s a no-win proposition to argue with a conspiracist. He draws his causal arrows backward, for one thing, in claiming that the “trans movement” was “hatched” in the academy; trans social movements predate academic trans/queer studies by several decades, and informed them in the same ways that other social movements informed the development of other academic fields of study such as women’s studies or ethnic studies or disability studies. I do in fact know Judith, Gayle, and Sandy, though I don’t know if all of them know all of the others. I can say for sure, though, that we’ve never all been in the same room at the same time. We’ve all made our respective contributions to queer theory and trans studies (and to feminist thought, and to our home disciplines in philosophy, anthropology, media studies, and history), but our efforts don’t add up to an internally coherent whole, let alone a preformed and deliberately executed plan. Trans and queer studies might be relatively neglected and under-resourced afterthoughts compared to, say, the business school, but there’s nothing particularly fringe or marginal about any of us—we were all trained in rigorous doctoral programs at elite institutions, had careers as tenured professors at major research universities, and publish peer-reviewed work in well-regarded academic journals. We’re more full-fledged denizens of the citadel that Rufo is trying to take down than its infiltrators. But it makes for a better conspiracy theory to imagine us as a wily band of antifa intellectuals reconnoitering the ivory towers of academe from our guerrilla encampment in the outlying hills, plotting the corruption of America’s youth at our weekly Sabbath-violating Sunday brunches.

As for toppling “the natural structure of Creation”? That’s a heavy lift, but I’ll give Rufo credit for actually seeming to have read my old *Frankenstein* piece, and for understanding its implications, if not its argument.

Transsexuals, I contended there, like Mary Shelley’s famous literary monster, are expelled from human community due to the supposedly artificial and unnatural means of our embodiment. We are not just ejected but *abjected*, thrown out by virtue of being thrown under the lowest rung of the animacy hierarchy by those who would consign us to nothingness and non-existence—“not a legitimate category of being,” to recall the comment by the *Daily Wire* pundit Michael Knowles. And yet we live. Like this. In the text of the performance piece, I speak from the position of the monster who has been cast into outer darkness, returned to human intercourse from a realm beyond it, wielding language, refusing to disavow the dangerous knowledge the monster now bears of a lively capacity harbored within the benthic realm that exceeds and precedes the ordered world.

Rufo gets me half right. To love myself as a being who did not choose to feel trans yet cannot feel otherwise—this is how I have been made, by whatever agency one imagines to have made me—does indeed require toppling the human-constructed hierarchies arrayed against me, which ground themselves in a limited conception of “the natural structure of Creation.” It is not a futile and nihilistic desire to topple Creation itself; it is an alignment with the anarchic primordium from which our entire universe of possibility has banged itself into existence. The cosmic war between Logos and Chaos is not a contest of equals, in my opinion, for Chaos is the groundless condition of all becomings from which Logos itself emerges. In the beginning was the Word? Not so much. Before the beginning of speech were the conditions of possibility that enabled the Word’s utterance.

Rufo seeks to incarcerate that wild, unfettered potential in the chains of a vast conspiracy. He clearly sees what I represent to him—a blunt dismissal, without apology or regret, of the entire framework within which he operates. I’ve become a very useful monster indeed, in that regard, if I do say so myself. I accept that mantle and wield as best I can the power that

monstrosity confers upon any of us who speak to the current order of the world from both within and beyond it.

★ ★ ★

The conspiracies involving me get darker the deeper I dive into the nether reaches of the web in search of truly outré content. The most fully elaborated scenario I've yet to piece together is that the Hyatt Hotels heiress Jennifer Pritzker, the telecommunications and pharmaceutical entrepreneur Martine Rothblatt, the financier and philanthropist George Soros, and I constitute a cabal of Jewish billionaires who are in cahoots with the extraterrestrial lizard people who want to turn humans into either slaves or food, and maybe upload their consciousnesses onto servers so they can later be downloaded into transhumanist techno-bodies with no free will, like the Borg Collective from *Star Trek*.

In the dreamworld where I've come to play a minor role, Barack Hussein Obama—a.k.a. the lying Muslim foreigner Barry Soetoro who was really born in Kenya—is a secretly gay drug addict kept in line by infinite lines of coke and the girlbone of his pre-op trans gay-married fake-wife Michael, whose Deep State handlers take their orders from the lizard people. Obamacare's antidiscrimination clause mandating state-sanctioned provision of trans-affirming medical services is part of a plot by the clandestine one-world government to sterilize humanity in preparation for the takeover of the planet by the aliens, and to harvest organs for biomedical experimentation and genetic manipulation. They're coming for the kids first, naturally, because kids represent the future. They want us to abort our children, wreck our marriages, abolish our families, and destroy our ability to reproduce.

"Gender ideology," which I promulgated along with my Jewish co-conspirators Butler, Rubin, and Stone, enforces an ersatz reality that keeps humanity lulled into false consciousness, in thrall to the reptilian overlords, just like the ersatz reality that Neo red-pills his way out of in the *Matrix* movies. And, parenthetically, red-pilling *isn't* an extended allegory about being trans and taking hormones, like some people have been saying since the Wachowskis came out as trans. Red-pilling is, *of course*, righteous, anti-

woke, real he-man stuff about ripping off the blinders of a fake narrative perpetrated by cucks and feminazis to make men hate their masculinity and thereby undermine the perpetuation of our race, just like JD Vance, Elon Musk, and all the other pro-natalists say.

To be clear: I would have absolutely no objection to being a Jewish billionaire. However, that simply has not been my fate, on either count. I'm from a very non-elite, very not-Jewish, white, southern-small-town background. My grandparents were cotton pickers. My parents were upwardly mobile—my dad was an army sergeant, and my mom a sometimes clerical worker when I was growing up. They wanted me to continue their upward trajectory by getting an education to achieve the class mobility that a college degree would offer. We never experienced poverty, but we were far from being upper middle class, let alone rich.

The confusion about me being a billionaire no doubt derives from my last name, which I adopted when I transitioned, just to create some space between my family of origin and me, in case they wanted to distance themselves from the fire-breathing public transsexual I had every intention of becoming. It was a gesture of respect for the privacy of others. I adopted it in homage to my wilder younger days, when I was involved in San Francisco's leather and kink scenes and worked for a short while as a professional dominatrix, just to see if I could do the work if that's what it came down to as a consequence of transitioning.

Stryker also happened to be, though I didn't know it at the time, the last name of a very rich family. They are the heirs of the Stryker Medical Corporation, founded in the 1940s by the orthopedic surgeon Homer Stryker, which now makes a wide range of hospital equipment. One of those heirs is Jon Stryker, who happens to be gay. His Arcus Foundation, funded with family money, is a major player in LGBTQ human and civil rights activism worldwide. I have certainly had several opportunities to consult with the Arcus Foundation or receive small grants from them for some of my historical research on trans history in San Francisco's Tenderloin. Though I've never met Jon Stryker, and we're definitely not related, I can see how somebody who didn't know any better might imagine his philanthropy and my academic work to be connected through the

shadowy “empire” of a trans-medical-industrial complex. But—shrug emoji—they aren’t.

The Jewish bit is simply an expression of the fundamentally antisemitic and racist structure of modern Western conspiracy theorizing since the days of the French Revolution. Even the extraterrestrial lizard people mythos is a not-so-thinly veiled version of antisemitism that traffics in fantastical amalgamations of ugly, inhuman, powerful, subversive, elite manipulators bent on world domination. It’s basically *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* with a sci-fi overlay, enhanced with a Great Replacement Theory subplot. Though I’m not Jewish, the Strykers I’m not related to are, as are Jennifer Pritzker, Martine Rothblatt, and George Soros. And besides being billionaires, Jennifer and Martine are trans. I’ve met Jennifer and Martine a few times through trans community connections, though George Soros and I have never had the pleasure. If any of them are really building Jewish space lasers at the behest of reptile aliens, I guess I’ll find out about it along with the rest of the civilians.

★ ★ ★

My life partner, Mimi, is an urbane native of Manhattan’s Upper West Side who eventually found her way to San Francisco after living for many years in Boston’s lesbian and leftist communities. She’s a sleuth of Sherlockian proportions when she’s hot on the trail of elusive bits of information. I used to encourage her to become a part-time private eye when she retired from her full-time day job as an archivist, but she opted instead to be an accomplished amateur genealogist, a volunteer database wonk, a committed grassroots political activist for a variety of causes and organizations, and a passionate tree-tender with Friends of the Urban Forest.

Mimi spent the last decade of her archivist career at the medical school library of UC San Francisco, managing a multimillion-page digital archive of documents related to the tobacco industry, all made public through the 1998 master settlement of a class-action lawsuit filed to recover the costs to various state health-care systems of tobacco-related illnesses among their populations. That case culminated in the largest civil settlement in US history—more than \$200 billion—for engaging in a decades-long

conspiracy to deceive the American public about the adverse health effects of smoking.

The architect of that Big Tobacco disinformation and marketing campaign—memorably profiled in the first season of the prestige television series *Mad Men*—was the public relations guru (i.e., propagandist) Edward Bernays, the same guy whom the conspiracist Gabriele Kuby positions as one of the masterminds in the centuries-long plot to bring about the end of humankind now reaching its denouement through the promulgation of “gender ideology.”

A couple of my colleagues that year at the Stanford Humanities Center, Londa Schiebinger and Robert Proctor, established an entire subfield in the sociology of knowledge they dubbed *agnotology*—from the Greek root for “knowledge,” *gnosis*, plus the prefix meaning *not*, as in *agnostic*, or “not knowing”—by which they meant the study of the deliberate production of ignorance. Londa’s a historian who has worked in history of science, studying the development of biological taxonomies like the one developed by Carl Linnaeus; Robert is a historian who has spent much of his career researching the commercialization of tobacco products. He helped secure National Science Foundation funding to establish the digital archive of tobacco industry documents that Mimi later ran.

Agnotology offers an anti-conspiracist framework for how knowledge is deliberately undermined through what Bernays himself called the “conscious and intelligent manipulation” of the habits and opinions of the masses of people. Bernays’s work with Big Tobacco set the stage for later, similar campaigns on behalf of the petroleum industry to muddy perceptions of climate change and fracking, and corn producers and sugar magnates to get added sweeteners into all of our foods, and political consulting firms like Cambridge Analytica that have helped put populist authoritarians in office through electoral politics. And now those same techniques are being used to whip up a moral panic around trans people, cast doubt on the efficacy of providing medicalized gender transitions to those who need them, and promote the politically useful idea that *gender* is a pernicious concept.

By now, the tactics to consciously and intelligently manipulate public opinion should be familiar to anybody who's been paying attention to *gender* for the last decade. First, pick some obscure methodological point in a study or report and make that, rather than the underlying issue, the focus of your concern. Say you are "just asking questions" like journalists at *The New York Times* or *The Atlantic*, and that "reasonable people can differ about this." Shift the so-called Overton window of permissible public discourse, especially in mainstream media coverage committed to "both-sides-ism," so that your deeply partisan position appears more centrist and moderate. Say "common sense" when you mean "unexamined prejudice rooted in factual ignorance." Try to discredit countervailing information. Shoot the messengers. Smear the opposition. Misrepresent what's at stake. Game the system. Flood the discussion zone with so many contradictory batshit theories that anybody new to the topic will become hopelessly confused and throw their hands up in exasperation. Insinuate biased content that benefits your agenda into the ambient environment, like product placement in a movie. Prey on vulnerabilities and prejudices. Amplify them. Circulate conspiracy theories. Engage in demagoguery. Find deep-pocket donors to fund think tanks to hone your narratives and develop strategic game plans, like Project 2025. Lobby the politicians. Donate to their campaigns. Collude with them to propose slates of model legislation to be advanced in different jurisdictions, and see what you can get rammed through, particularly in gerrymandered districts controlled by political allies who suppress votes from oppositional constituencies. Make as many faits accomplis as you can manage so that your enemies have to fight an uphill battle to regain lost ground before they can hope to advance. It's all part of shaping the actions and opinions of the *demos* as part of routine political processes. "It's not a crime to try to influence the outcome of an election," Trump's personal lawyer (and later deputy attorney general) Todd Blanche said in his opening remarks during the 2024 hush-money trial over the Stormy Daniels affair. "That's called 'democracy.'"

It's not conspiracy-mongering to point all that out. The scenario outlined in the preceding paragraph depends, however, on there being an unseen layer of social machinery between the headlines and the bottom line

—the whole vast biopolitical apparatus of government bureaucracies, administrative procedures, regulatory agencies, corporate shills, political parties, op-ed writers, nongovernmental organizations, educational institutions, mobilized grassroots constituencies, labor unions, and civil-society groups that has emerged in consequence of the ways power and knowledge work in modern societies of Eurocentric derivation. We might as well call that machinery the grammar and syntax of modernity. That machinery is now being altered by an implicit animacy hierarchy that does not value my life, and the lives of so many others.

When the Kubys and Walshes and Rufos of the world fulminate about *gender*, they're not simply voicing a religiously motivated screed about people like me doing things with our bodies that make their God sad. They make a substantive point: all of our bodies are indeed targeted by the powers of secular states, corporations, and the capitalist medical-industrial complex. (And sometimes, it bears mentioning, that targeting can have beneficial consequences in addition to the downsides, like when an emergency C-section saves the lives of a mother and child). It's not even necessarily wrong to think of everything they render conspiratorial as an entrenched "Deep State" bureaucracy enabled by "mainstream media" that's being deliberately manipulated by sociopolitical and economic elites—capitalist economies and liberal states are rife with self-serving venality. It's just wrong to imagine that that vast biopolitical apparatus is secretly directed and orchestrated by a handful of Jews, godless commies, perverts, and transnians. It's wrong to cherry-pick the fact that somebody happens to be trans or Jewish or a billionaire and then turn that fact into a highly processed and deceptively packaged Truthy McNugget inserted into a misleading narrative. That's the difference between promoting conspiracy theories and practicing investigative journalism or conducting scholarly research or doing science.

That's the difference, too, between the actual history of how the mid-twentieth-century version of the *gender* concept became globally disseminated by piggybacking on US geopolitical power in the post-World War II years, and the conspiratorial version of the story that attributes its

spread to the machinations of secular or Jewish elites bent on world domination by destroying Christianity and traditional family values.

★ ★ ★

In the 1930s and '40s, Margaret Mead and her like-minded colleagues in the interdisciplinary social sciences not only laid the intellectual foundations for contemporary ideas about *gender* through empirical observation of role diversity in non-Western societies; they also helped lay the intellectual foundations for the post-World War II world order within which that concept would circulate. Most of the major players were liberal anti-fascists who, since the rise of Mussolini and Franco and Hitler, had been adamantly opposed to reactionary populist movements and all the racist “blood and soil” arguments those movements advanced. They became interested as social scientists in what they called the “authoritarian personality,” and in “national character.” They wanted to figure out why some people, as they framed the problem, had rigid character traits, and were drawn to mass movements and charismatic fascist leaders, while others were spontaneous and creative and expressed a love for liberal democratic individualism. Mead and her academic colleagues in the “cultural and personality” school of thought that traced its roots to the likes of Franz Boas and Talcott Parsons devoted their considerable intellectual firepower to answering this question by drawing on their empirical research, as well as on theories about the relationship between culture and character that they themselves had helped formulate. They drafted their version of the social sciences into military service.

When the shooting war finally came to the United States following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Mead and the others all became part of a wartime mobilization to inculcate desired values and behaviors in a population that would be called upon to give its all, whether on the battlefield or on the home front. Mead, for example, who was friends with Eleanor Roosevelt, was part of an influential group of about fifty academics, artists, and thinkers who called themselves the Committee for National Morale and who served in an advisory capacity to the White House, while also churning out innumerable works—ranging from magazine articles to museum

installations—for popular consumption. Cultivating the right kind of democracy-loving person became a project of the state, a war aim, a matter of national security. It harnessed new ways of thinking about how information circulated within the population. These new ways of thinking were closely associated with the novel interdisciplinary field of *cybernetics*.

Cybernetics is usually thought of as having something to do with computers and electronics, and it does. It also has to do with biology, and with social organization. Mostly it has to do with systems, particularly systems of a circular nature, like how a thermostat maintains a steady temperature by having a correction to the system kick in when the temperature gets too high, and another correction kick in when the temperature gets too low. It's worth keeping in mind the full title of the book that coined the term to begin with, Norbert Wiener's 1948 *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. Information circulates through a cybernetic system in ways that allow the outcomes of the system's processes to be fed back into the system in some way that alters the system's operation so that it maintains a desired state or produces a desired new outcome. The Greek root of the word Wiener made up to describe the new field, *kybernētēs*, means "oarsman"—the person who steers a boat, or, by extension, the guiding element of a system. Cybernetics is thus a transdisciplinary framework for understanding what guides, controls, and regulates complex dynamic systems. And, from the standpoint of war planning, it behooves you to understand how to steer the system so that you can take hold of the oar yourself.

Wiener was a mathematician at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who made fundamental contributions to computer science, among many other fields. He did his part for the war effort by developing predictive algorithms that allowed anti-aircraft guns to fire at the spot where a plane engaged in evasive maneuvers would be by the time the ammunition arrived there. But he modeled such systems with a neurophysiologist colleague at Harvard Medical School, Arturo Rosenblueth, along with other researchers working in the life sciences and social sciences. They engaged regularly in lively interdisciplinary conversations that led to highly rarified ways of thinking about similarities

between different sorts of systems. Both automated anti-aircraft guns and mammal bodies could be considered open systems where the output of the system at a given moment—the position of a projectile, a temperature—gets fed back into the system as an input, creating a feedback loop that allows the system to self-regulate or self-transform. And, more to the point in wartime, so that such systems could be guided as weapons by external operators.

The Macy Foundation, a philanthropy established in 1930 to fund interdisciplinary research in health care, sponsored a series of conferences between the mid-1940s and early 1950s widely credited with establishing cybernetics as a field. Though Norbert Wiener wrote the first book about this new science, many other luminaries participated in the meetings. Margaret Mead was a driving force—she had close relationships with the Macy Foundation leaders Lawrence Frank and Frank Fremont-Smith—and first brought to their attention many members of the Committee for National Morale and other scholars and intellectuals of the so-called “culture and personality” school of social scientists. What’s culture, after all, if not a self-regulating and self-transforming system of symbolic interactions? Why couldn’t *that* system be guided as well?

Gregory Bateson was another of the original cyberneticists. Son of the acclaimed British biologist William Bateson, who coined the term *genetics*, Gregory Bateson became an anthropologist who, at first, specialized in the native cultures of New Guinea, where he met Margaret Mead and her then-husband while conducting fieldwork in the 1930s. He became her next husband soon thereafter. Bateson, like Mead, was bisexual, and one of the topics that fueled his initial intellectual as well as romantic infatuation with her was the back-of-the-envelope work they sketched out together, in the field in New Guinea in 1933, to develop a typology of characterological and temperamental traits for different styles of personhood they called “the squares”—masculine and feminine, passive and active—that needn’t be correlated to biological sex, and could be arranged in a variety of patterns (like the fortune-teller toy). It wasn’t just *gender* theory, but *transgender* theory, avant la lettre.

During World War II, Bateson joined the Office of Strategic Services—forerunner of the CIA—which stationed him in Southeast Asia with the soon-to-be celebrity chef Julia Child and her husband. There Bateson developed innovative strategies for fostering the dissemination and uptake of propaganda. He theorized propaganda as a form of induced *schismogenesis*, his name for the process of salient differences emerging within a previously homogeneous social group. Bateson first developed the concept of schismogenesis during his anthropological fieldwork among the Iatmul people in New Guinea, where he studied their *naven* ritual. That rite celebrated an individual's first-time achievement of some culturally significant milestone in life. It involved other members of the culture engaging in behaviors—including wildly exaggerated cross-gender caricatures of typical masculine and feminine dress, mannerisms, and roles—that would usually be considered offensive and socially unacceptable. Bateson's analysis of gender performance in the *naven* ritual as something that set the outer parameters for normative behavior, and thus guarded against social dysregulation, informed cybernetic theory. His wartime work on induced schismogenesis—sabotaging a culture's usual guardrails for keeping potentially disruptive differences in check—laid important groundwork for today's fake news and social media disinformation strategies.

The sociologist Talcott Parsons, whose structuralist-functionalist approach to understanding social phenomena shared significant overlaps with cybernetics, was yet another participant in the Macy Conferences. He, too, espoused the liberal antipathy to both fascism and communism that motivated most of the early cyberneticists. Like Mead, Bateson, and other early cybernetics theorists, Parsons was committed to using social science to cultivate globally the kind of personhood he thought best served his geopolitical vision, and he took a direct role in guiding the postwar reconstruction of Western Europe. Along with other liberal anti-fascists who had worked to undermine the “authoritarian personality” and promote a freedom-loving democratic citizenry, he enlisted the systems-oriented cybernetic approach to communication and control into Cold War anti-communist campaigns.

Many such campaigns were fought on the terrain of culture. Liberal cyberneticists took an active role, for example, in establishing the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), with the avowed aim of “promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture,” and in shaping major exhibitions such as the New York Museum of Modern Art’s *The Family of Man*, a photo show and companion book that championed a universalist perspective on the interconnectedness and essential sameness of human life across all cultural differences. The University of Iowa’s acclaimed Writers’ Workshop was funded by CIA front organizations to promote a particular style of American fiction that focused on the interiority of experience, individualism, and family life rather than collective political action, social conflict, class struggle, the inexorable forces of history, and other supposedly communist-leaning themes. My Stanford friend and colleague Fred Turner, the communications and media studies professor I met up with at Matt Walsh’s *What Is a Woman?* event, has written extensively on these topics, most notably in *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*.

Trying to run the world in this cybernetics-informed fashion required experts who understood all the inputs of the system and their complex interactions. That need contributed to the development of new interdisciplinary academic specializations capable of producing the kind of expert knowledge the United States wanted to help it manage global affairs. Interdisciplinary area studies that focused on the Middle East, Southeast Asia, or other geopolitical hot spots and trained scholars to analyze a given region’s history, culture, religion, languages, social structures, economy, and politics were one such effort to cultivate that sort of expertise. Area studies programs, and the one at Yale University in particular, served as recruitment pools for the CIA in the postwar years.

Talcott Parsons established one such interdisciplinary social studies program at Harvard—the previously mentioned Department of Social Relations. During World War II, Parsons had personally arranged safe haven in the United States for the Austrian Jewish refugee Alfred Schütz,

whose particular synthesis of phenomenological philosophy and sociological theory laid the foundation for the “reality construction” frameworks of both Harold Garfinkel and Peter L. Berger that came to fruition in the 1960s. In the early Cold War, Parsons incorporated Schütz’s perspectives, along with the new cybernetics approach, into his newly founded department. Garfinkel and John Money both earned their doctorates in that program.

Money’s *gender* concept was by and large just another name for the cybernetics framework. If you’ve identified the relevant inputs, understand the flow chart of a system’s feedback loops, and know the filters and sliders that tamp or accelerate the system’s operation, then you can alter the algorithm and recalibrate the system’s operation to produce desired outputs. That’s how Money imagined *gender*. Map the biopsychosocial inputs of personhood, tweak the knobs with hormones and scalpels at the right moment in the system’s dynamic processes, and—voilà!—out pops the kind of person you want to have pop out at the end of the process.

John Money’s version of *gender* distilled the postwar dream of a finely tuned global liberal capitalist system, with the United States as the oarsman. The application of that cybernetics-informed strategy for engineering desired forms of personhood during the Cold War, I’d argue, as the United States sought to use all of its soft powers and money to cultivate geopolitically useful subjectivities, is what ultimately explains the mid-twentieth-century celebrity of Christine Jorgensen. She personified that new system, and became its spectacle.

Gender’s global dissemination as part of that same postwar dream of a new world order seeded the ground for anti-gender conspiracism by allowing the idea to take root that *gender*, arising in the Global North, was imposed through cultural colonialism on the Global South. That claim is not ludicrous. Liberal Western ideologies that tout the benefits of secular modernity and democracy and capitalism, along with the kinds of people best suited for them, have indeed been exported from the West to the rest of the world. *Gender* terminology—standing in for the whole model of identity formation and its potential for manipulation attributed to John Money—comes along for the ride, as would *transgender* terminology in the

1990s. Yes, *gender* is a *phantasm* that can be filled with the ever-shifting contents of a collective conspiratorial dreamlife, but it is also a *fetish*, a mystifying condensation of complicated social relations projected onto and invested in a thing.

Anti-gender conspiracists are not wrong to recognize *gender* as a fetish for a US-centered *Novus Ordo Seclorum*. They're not alone in this recognition, however. Members of indigenous and minority gender and sexuality communities in the Global South have long complained about having to shoehorn themselves into the *gender* framework when seeking resources and support. *Gender* terminology has been a disciplinary stick that guides how the carrot of international aid has been distributed globally. Western aid to the Global South—particularly for behavioral health-care funding to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, or to provide contraception or to support maternal and infant well-being—has flowed through bureaucratic channels that speak in the vocabulary of *gender*, and require aid recipients to package their needs and asks into that vocabulary, too. *Gender* terminology has similarly found its way into human rights treaties and statements from the United Nations about the status of women, such as the one in Beijing in 1995 that appears in retrospect to have been an important nexus for virilizing a more potent strain of anti-gender ideology. *Gender* does indeed introduce a conceptual framework that pries apart the role of women in family life from the biology of the female body, in ways that political conservatives and religious traditionalists find anathema. That framework is taught in elite universities, and it does support the ultimate claims of a trans way of being: that there is no carved-in-stone relationship between sexed embodiment, psychological identity, or social gender role, and that new kinds of persons, and new peoples, can in fact come into being through the rupture and refiguration of those domains.

★ ★ ★

An old leftist dig variously attributed to Marx, Engels, or the German socialist August Bebel (though actually coined by the Austrian liberal Ferdinand Kronawetter) is that antisemitism is “the socialism of fools”

because it misdiagnoses the existence of rich Jewish bankers, rather than global finance capitalism, as the problem to be solved. It's tempting to similarly deride anti-gender conspiracism as another form of social analysis promulgated by fools. It's better, I think, to find compassion while remaining oppositional. Conspiracy theories are the ugly fever dreams that course through the underbelly of secular modernity. They reproduce themselves in the knowledge-free zones hollowed out by agnotological practices. They are populated by the nightmare figures who stalk the imagination of the People, whose persons have been subjected, wittingly or not, to the sexing and racializing practices of our biopolitical reality as the price of admission into the citizenry, or the cost of exclusion from it.

Those biopolitical practices cut us all to fit the categories that administer the population. That cutting leaves its marks on our psyches, and the traumas those psychical cuts inflict when they thingify us in a particular way can manifest in the collective dreamlife as hurt and fear. Here is where the Black rapist comes to haunt a white womanhood that must be protected by lynch law to secure the birth of the proper body politic, here where the subhuman hordes mass, like devouring locusts along a porous and leaky border that must be stoppered by police powers, military force, and vigilante violence. Here is where the degenerates who pollute the blood, kill the unborn, and corrupt the youth all hang out looking for their next victim.

Here now, too, dwell the trans people who must not exist, lest we unmask the fantasy that biology can ever bind identity firmly to the flesh.

To intervene effectively in the current cultural impasses regarding *gender*, the most pressing task is not to call bullshit on anti-gender conspiracism, or to dismiss out of hand the people who traffic in conspiracies about "gender ideology" as ignorant idiots or "deplorables" who cling to their Bibles and guns. Rather, it is to tell a better story publicly, so that those who might otherwise dress up some real concern in the cloak of an unreality can frame those concerns in a more materially grounded narrative that addresses the real thing at stake. It is to tell a better story than the ones cynically manipulated by the servants of power to galvanize the People into action. The task of the politics to which that better story should be harnessed—the task of changing *gender*—should be to

invent a new grammar and syntax for the reassembly of a world in need of transformation.

VII.

The Knickerbocker, a magazine founded in 1833 in New York City, was the premier literary outlet of its day, and it chronicled the decades in which that city became the nation's cultural and commercial capital. Washington Irving was once the magazine's editor, and its roster of writers featured still-remembered names like James Fenimore Cooper, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. *The Knickerbocker*'s December 1857 issue published an anonymously authored short story titled "The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman," which offered a surprisingly sympathetic, psychologically realistic portrait of someone who experiences what would now be called gender dysphoria and tries to ameliorate their suffering as best they can.

Like Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and much of the magazine's other fiction, "The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman" was set in the not-too-distant past in New York's upstate hinterland. This region, along with the western expanses of Pennsylvania immediately to its south, was one of the first places all those land-hungry Yankee Doodles poured into, in the 1780s, once the United States won its revolutionary War of Independence. The new nation tossed into the dustbin of history all the British treaties with Native American peoples that had drawn a western line beyond which Anglo-American settlement was not allowed, and traditional Haudenosaunee lands once governed by the Iroquois Confederacy were quickly gobbled up by real estate speculators who opened them for settlement.

Well before upstate New York became known as the Burned-Over District, it had already become a place for Anglo-Americans to reimagine relations between men and women, sexuality and religion, this world and

the next. The first Anglo-American author to win acclaim in Europe, Charles Brockden Brown, made a name for himself with *Wieland*, published in 1798. Set in colonial northwestern Pennsylvania, it was a gothic horror potboiler about a fanatically evangelical German settler there who spontaneously combusts when he realizes that his mission to convert the local Indians to Christianity has not succeeded. *Wieland*'s children, haunted by their father's mysterious death, fall prey to the manipulations of an itinerant ventriloquist named Carwin, who can throw his voice and impersonate the voices of others, men and women alike. Carwin's cross-gendered vocalizations ultimately drive *Wieland*'s son mad, inspiring him to murder his family with an axe before committing suicide himself. (*Alcuin*, another of Brown's works, also from 1798, was a polemic in favor of free love that included a long fantasy sequence about being transported to another planet where there was no social distinction between the sexes.)

Among the first Anglo-American settlers to arrive in upstate New York were followers of a remarkable religious figure known as the Public Universal Friend. The Friend, who was what we might now call a nonbinary person, claimed to be a genderless celestial entity and to have taken possession of the body of Jemima Wilkinson, a Quaker woman from Cumberland, Rhode Island, at the moment of Wilkinson's purported death during a typhus epidemic in 1776. The Friend asked to be referred to with the generic masculine *he/him* pronouns, and adopted an androgynous hairstyle and manner of dress. He proclaimed that the revolution then unfolding was the beginning of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. The church he founded, the Society of Universal Friends, preached celibacy and eschewed marriage, because sexuality was for the carnal realm, not the heavenly one. It downplayed social distinctions between men and women, because humans in the hereafter would have the sex of angels. It opposed slavery, because in Christ all would be free. And after a few contentious years in Philadelphia, where the Friend's preaching drew the attention of visiting Europeans eager to gawk at the strange fruit of that new experiment in governance called the United States of America, his little band of followers tried to put all of their precepts into practice at a separatist community they named Jerusalem, established near the present-

day town of Penn Yan, on the shore of Keuka Lake in the Finger Lakes region. Some of the buildings there, including a main house with communal sleeping arrangements, still stand today and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



“The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman” told the tale of Japhet Colbones, an odd duck descended from a long line of equally odd ducks who had lived for generations in western New York. The story suggests there’s perhaps a history of madness that runs in the Colbones family’s male line. Japhet had been an industrious and outgoing youth, seemingly destined for greatness, when his life took a peculiar turn in adolescence. He dropped out of school, turned inward emotionally, and claimed to no longer have any grand ambitions. Japhet devoted himself to his farmwork but also took up the typically feminine arts of needlecraft, and was soon winning prizes at the county fair for his quilts and embroidery and other handiworks. He married an older woman on the verge of spinsterhood, Tiddy, and had two children with her. Japhet gave them all a good life, working the fields of their farmstead while also helping out with the housework and child-rearing. Then one day, Tiddy discovered that Japhet had a habit of creeping out of bed in the middle of the night to sneak upstairs to an attic room where he kept a trunk full of women’s clothing that he had sewn for himself. He would dress and admire himself in a full-length mirror, then sit contentedly for hours in a rocking chair, rocking and sewing, rocking and sewing. Tiddy considered it all a harmless peccadillo. Japhet was kind, after all, and a good provider. And that was that, for a good long while.

One fine autumn morning, Japhet sent Tiddy and their young daughters to stay overnight with relatives who lived nearby. They returned to find Japhet’s lifeless body, fully clothed in women’s attire, with a rope around its neck and a suicide note that read, “I think I am a woman. I have been seven years making me a perfect suit of garments appropriate for my sex. As I have passed so long, falsely, for a man, I am ashamed to show myself in my true colors; therefore, I hang myself.” Japhet asked only to be buried in the clothes he—or should that be she?—was wearing. Tiddy honored her dead

spouse's request, much to the titillated curiosity of the scandalized neighbors who attended Japhet's funeral. Tiddy and her girls soon thereafter sold the family farm and moved away, and "the man who thought himself a woman" gradually passed into memory, to become part of local lore.



The cultural milieu that produced the likes of the *Public Universal Friend*, inspired the works of Charles Brockden Brown, and supported a wide readership for a story in the pages of a leading literary review about a self-identified woman distraught about living as a man, also gave rise to a highly elaborated *gender*-based terminology to describe the relationship between personal identity, biological sex, and social role a full century before John Money claimed to have coined *gender* in that sense. As I've been suggesting, the grammatical concept of *gender* has long suggested itself as a handy term for grappling, in moments of rapid technological and social transformation, with phenomena that trouble the conventional assumptions about how you know which objects belong to which categories, precisely because the objects are changing and the categories themselves seem unsettled. That's when the meta-conversation starts about the usually unstated rules running in the background of mundane reality. Those historical circumstances, and that meta-conversation, characterized the scene of *gender*'s heretofore largely unknown elaboration in the mid-nineteenth century.

By the time "The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman" was published in 1857, the upstate New York region where the fictional tale had been set in earlier years had been transformed by the Erie Canal. That artificial waterway, completed in 1823, connected New York City's port to the Great Lakes and the vast Mississippi River watershed in the continental interior. The canal allowed New York to capture the lion's share of trade between two-thirds of North America and the wider Atlantic world, which generated the immense wealth that made New York City the economic, political, and artistic dynamo it remains to this day. It also spurred the development of new inland cities like Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, and Utica—hubs of the industrial revolution that drew tens of thousands of former rural agricultural

workers into the burgeoning wage-labor economy of new water-powered and steam-driven factories.

The Erie Canal was but one part of an even more extensive “transportation revolution” during the early national period that saw the creation, for the first time, of an integrated system of canals, railroads, and highways that enabled relatively rapid long-distance travel to knit the new nation together. One consequence of this heightened capacity for mass mobility, and the new urban environments it helped foster and connect, was a new kind of municipal ordinance that, for the first time in US history, explicitly criminalized cross-gender dressing. The ordinances deemed it a misdemeanor offense for a person to “appear in public in a dress not belonging to his or her sex”; that phrasing was repeated often enough, across many far-flung jurisdictions, that there might well have been some coordination, as there is again today, between anti-cross-dressing initiatives in different geographical locations. The first currently known such ordinance dates to 1843 in St. Louis, the “Gateway City” to the West, which served as the major point of disembarkation for overland migration from the East. It’s striking how many of the cities that passed similar ordinances were new places filled with new people drawn from heterogeneous populations of origin—gold-rush cities like San Francisco and Denver, mercantile ports and riverfront cities like Houston and Memphis, and intermodal hubs between water, rail, and road-based forms of transit like Chicago and Columbus, Ohio, which for a while was the western terminus of the Cumberland Road, the first big federally funded interstate highway. Such places were filled with migrants and foreigners, and with citizens drawn from throughout the nation, most of whom were strangers to one another, as well as to city elites who were eager to assert new forms of social regulation to manage new urban populations.

It’s tempting to think of the city as a place where people looking to live lives happier than the one allotted to the fictional Japhet Colbones could disappear into the masses far from anyone who knew them from a previous walk of life, where they might wear what they wanted to wear and be who they wanted to be. The increasing availability of factory-produced and store-bought clothing, as well as the growing acceptability of feminine

facial cosmetics, certainly made it easier to alter one's appearance than had previously been possible, and to transition into a new social existence. But it's necessary to acknowledge as well that those newfound possibilities for a certain species of freedom simultaneously elicited new strategies aimed at social control. The wave of anti-cross-dressing laws that started in the 1840s addressed an emerging situation where it was becoming more difficult for civil authorities to know who was who and what was what, based on appearance or personal knowledge of a person's social identity.

The infrastructural revolution in the antebellum period coincided with another one in telecommunications. Scientist-inventors figured out how to harness electricity for the purpose of sending long-distance messages, which allowed news to spread by telegraph from coast to coast in seconds, transmitted by wires that ran alongside the new railroads. New print technologies led to an explosion of cheap, accessible, and widely distributed newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides, books, and other print media that were produced and consumed beyond the control of taste-making cultural elites. This was, on the one hand, a democratization of cultural production not unlike that of the early days of the internet; it was, on the other hand, like social media today, a vast expansion of possibilities for making private lives more publicly visible and vulnerable to unwanted attention, and for collapsing the geographical distances between far-flung locations that might otherwise offer some degree of anonymity.

The new imaging technology of photography also made its debut in the 1830s, further increasing opportunities to document the appearance of individual persons and to bind their image to a social and legal identity—especially once rogues' galleries and mug shots became incorporated into urban policing practices. Victorian steampunk versions of mechanical computers called "difference engines" were first envisioned in this period as well, along with the first computer programming codes, developed by Ada Lovelace, based on her observations of Jacquard looms being programmed to weave particular patterns in factory-produced textiles. Birth certificates, passports, and other state-issued identity documents were becoming more common, supplanting lists of names and dates of births and deaths recorded in family Bibles and parish registers. The outlines of the contemporary

surveillance state, based on machine-readable data compiled from official sources, were already becoming visible—and lives that somehow ran afoul of those emerging administrative practices of the biopolitical state, including trans lives that colored outside the categorical lines, were already becoming problems for which social authorities sought solutions.

As a market-oriented economy extended itself quickly and deeply into the hinterland of coastal commercial society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the scope and depth of the social change it fueled unfolded nowhere so fast and furiously as it did in the New England backcountry of upstate New York. The same cultural conflagration that fed the conspiratorialism of the Anti-Masons and sparked the emergence of Mormonism germinated many other new religions and social movements, like seedlings sprouting from charred ground in the aftermath of a forest fire.

Many of those new groups and movements addressed themselves in some way to the transformation of relations between the sexes. The Perfectionists of Oneida practiced “complex marriage,” where every man was married to every woman in the community, and every woman to every man. The Shakers, a celibate and communal offshoot of Quakerism, established a colony in Sodus Bay, on Lake Ontario, whose buildings were later taken over by secular followers of the utopian socialist Charles Fourier. Another group of free-love advocates formed a utopian socialist community on Skaneateles Lake, in the Finger Lakes region, based on the idea that marriage was a form of property, and that equality between the sexes could only be achieved by its abolition. The Anglo-American feminist movement traces its origins to the same region during this period: in 1848, at the Convention at Seneca Falls, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others issued their Declaration of Sentiments, which would inspire the suffrage movement that, decades later, won women the right to vote.

One of the most compelling autobiographies of a nineteenth-century trans person, *The Female Hunter of Delaware and Sullivan Counties*, published in 1855 under the name Lucy Ann Lobdell by the person known later in life as Joseph Israel Lobdell, recounted a life lived in this same region. Lobdell, born in 1829 near Albany and raised in the southernmost

reaches of upstate New York near the Pennsylvania border, became locally famous as a breeches-wearing, rifle-toting sharpshooter who started dressing entirely in masculine attire to hunt for food after being abandoned by a shiftless husband soon after the arrival of their first and only child. He later took to dressing in masculine attire even when not on the hunt. He cut his hair and started paying a different kind of attention to the young ladies.

Lobdell's book was an impassioned feminist polemic about the evils of marriage that advocated strongly for employment opportunities and equal pay for women. It ended with the author's declaration of intending to slip away to the rapidly settling West and take up a new life as a man—which is exactly what Lobdell did. He became an itinerant teacher of music and dance, as well as a miner and a minister. He married a woman, and the two lived as a couple for many years. His siblings considered him mad and eventually had him committed to the Willard Asylum for the Chronic Insane, in Ovid, New York, one of the first locked psychiatric facilities, where he lived out the rest of his long life in the women's ward. He never renounced his masculine identity. In old age, he told one of his psychiatrists, "I am a man, in all that the name implies." In his book's closing paragraphs, Lobdell had written, "Though some do call me a strange sort of being, I thank God that He has given me a heart, that He will mould and fashion after His holy will."



There's a scene in "The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman" in which an itinerant practitioner of phrenology becomes so enthralled by the sight of young Japhet Colbones's cranium when he happens to pass through their village that he offers to examine it free of charge, because, he says, "One did not often meet with such splendid development of the brain." He declared the boy a marvel, destined for college, perhaps even high elected office.

Phrenology—the debunked practice of reading head bumps to diagnose health—enjoyed tremendous popularity in the United States for a few decades after its initial heyday in the 1830s. It was primarily concerned, as it is in "The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman," with the heritability of

supposedly degenerate characteristics from one generation to the next. In an age before Darwinian ideas about natural selection had taken hold, phrenology, rooted in the ideas of Darwin's intellectual competitor Lamarck, offered one of the most widely accepted applications of the theory that evolution was driven by the inheritance of acquired traits. That is, that the impression environmental factors left on the bodies and behaviors of one generation were passed on directly to the next—giraffe parents repeatedly reaching to eat leaves higher on the tree had longer-necked babies—not the Darwinian idea that some randomly emerging new heritable trait gave one individual's offspring a competitive advantage, a greater chance of survival, and more opportunities to reproduce.

Phrenology diagnosed signs of heritable debility and health by interpreting the shape of the skull. Historians trace the beginnings of the practice to the Viennese medical researcher Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828) and Johann Spurzheim (1776–1832), Gall's onetime research assistant and later bitter rival. Gall made fundamental contributions to the early history of neurophysiology regarding the localization of cognitive functions in particular brain regions. But he also drew conclusions from his research that later medical scientists consider unwarranted, including the idea that the relative development or underdevelopment of a given brain region influenced the shape of the skull, which could then be interpreted by trained specialists to better understand a person's character, behavioral traits, and mental capacities. Those ideas, which became strongly associated with scientific racism and eugenics, have no empirical validity whatsoever.

Spurzheim, Gall's former protégé, first coined the term *phrenology*, or “mind science,” to describe the elaborate system of skull-reading he developed following his break with Gall in 1813. Spurzheim introduced the idea that phrenology could offer more than merely diagnosing and interpreting character by analyzing the size and shape of the bumps on a person's head. He thought it could make an intervention. He thought that the brain regions believed to control particular mental faculties could be modified through the exercise of the faculties they governed, in the same way that a limb could be strengthened by physical exercise or become atrophied without it. You could increase your capacity for love by loving a

lot, in other words, because that mental activity would bulk up the love-muscle in your brain.

Spurzheim decamped from Vienna to London soon after the split with his mentor, where his expansion of Gall's ideas into an entire system of living found an enthusiastic following in the English-speaking world. Phrenological Societies sprang up from Edinburgh to India and many points in between. His version of phrenology quickly became a truly "popular science" that blended elements of scientific materialism with Christian moralism and pragmatic advice for daily living, and melded them with a revolutionary democratic ethos of collective and individual transformation, to forge a comprehensive theory of health and life.

Phrenology was but one of many alternative health practices and social reform movements targeting the body and its daily habits that swept the transatlantic world in the early nineteenth century. Nudism, patent medicines, hydrotherapy, electric shocks, and faith healing were then all in vogue. So were other faddish religious, medical, and scientific amalgamations such as galvanism (with its Frankensteinian fascination with electricity's role in animating the body), mesmerism (a proto-psychological precursor of hypnotherapy) and spiritualism (whose efforts to communicate with the dead in séances drew inspiration, in part, from the seemingly miraculous ability of telegraphs to communicate across vast distances by means of a mysterious ether). Body reform movements included campaigns against corsets and tight-lacing; campaigns against alcohol and stimulants such as coffee, tea, and tobacco; and campaigns in favor of vegetarianism and cold cereals for breakfast, the latter of which were thought to curb an unhealthy desire for the nonprocreative solitary sexual act of masturbation (which inspired John Money to write a whole book about nineteenth-century body-reform movements). Phrenology functioned as something of a master discourse for all these fads, because the diagnoses it offered could be addressed by any number of treatment modalities. It helped lend them all the rationalist sheen of science.

These movements were yet another set of consequences of the vast transformation of everyday life during early industrial capitalism. In the aftermath of the Enlightenment revolutions, they became vehicles for the

new biopolitical forms of governance that cultivated the health of the population by attending to the health of the individual bodies that constituted the body politic. They were also lived responses to the epistemological consequences of fracturing the social construction of an overarching reality, where religion was increasingly understood as the private experience of a subjective inner truth, and science as verifiable objective knowledge suitable for a secular public realm. Backchannel commingling of these disparate frames of reference were of course common, where one way of knowing, thinking, or arguing trafficked clandestinely with the other, passing their differently grounded truth claims promiscuously back and forth—in an effort, perhaps, to stitch together anew a “sacred canopy” that had been torn asunder. Phrenology and other such ideological assemblages were practices for awkwardly kludging together science and religion and metaphysical assumptions. They made surface appeals to common sense, often in an implicit attempt to infuse a cosmos increasingly understood in mechanist terms with the sensuous vitality of felt experience. Thanks in large part to the indefatigable efforts of a man named Orson Fowler, *gender* became a key concept within phrenology for carrying out this epistemological repair, by marrying long-standing Christian ideas about the soul to newer ideas drawn from biology.



In 1832, when Johann Spurzheim arrived in the United States to personally spread the gospel of phrenology, crowds mobbed him at every stop. Harriet Martineau, a noted English observer of life in the antebellum United States, reported that “the great mass of Americans became phrenologists in a day, wherever he appeared.” But, sadly, Spurzheim died only a few weeks into his speaking tour, after contracting a typhus infection while delivering an electrifying series of lectures that drew rapturous crowds to the Boston Athenaeum. The city staged an elaborate public funeral in his honor, after which Spurzheim’s brain and skull were removed and preserved as relics by the Boston Phrenological Society. They were eventually donated to the anatomical museum of Harvard’s medical school, where they are still on

display to this day. The rest of Spurzheim's remains were interred beneath an impressive monument in the Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge.

Spurzheim's untimely demise led more or less directly to the career of Orson Fowler, who became the foremost popularizer of phrenology in the United States. Fowler was born in the tiny hamlet of Cohocton in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York in 1809, to pious parents of old New England stock who had planted themselves there in the same wave of settlement that brought the followers of the Public Universal Friend. He grew up amid manifold experiments in imagining new social arrangements between men and women, with firsthand knowledge of people who troubled the conventional boundaries of manhood and womanhood, while the Erie Canal was working its momentous economic transformations and the revival fires of the Burned-Over District blazed their brightest. A man of faith enamored of science, Fowler devoted his life to reconciling the two through phrenology.

Fowler had been encouraged since childhood to train for the clergy. As a teen, he walked four hundred miles from his home in Cohocton, with the four dollars that comprised the sum total of his worldly goods tucked into his front pocket, to attend prep school in western Massachusetts. In 1829, he enrolled in Amherst College, established not long before as a training academy for would-be clergymen. He was a good enough scholar and popular enough student to become president of a debating club, the Alexandrian Society. One of his classmates—eventually a close friend—was the future abolitionist preacher Henry Ward Beecher, scion of a famous family of New England ministers and brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Beecher was president of the Natural History Society, a rival of Fowler's Alexandrians. He would play a pivotal role in Fowler's subsequent career as a phrenologist.

The enthusiasm Spurzheim's teachings ignited in Boston quickly made its way to western Massachusetts, where it swept up the young Orson Fowler. His sensibilities had already been shaped by the reformist spirit that permeated the Burned-Over District of his rearing—he was, for example, an early devotee of the anti-masturbatory and dietary reforms proposed by another recent Amherst alum, Sylvester Graham, of cracker fame. Fowler

embraced phrenology with an ardor that made him the target of relentless teasing from classmates, such as Beecher, who took a dim view of phrenology as a populist pseudoscience.

Beecher proposed a debate with Fowler, confident that he would demolish all arguments in favor of phrenology. He contacted the Boston publisher and bookseller who had taken possession of all the late Spurzheim's books and had them shipped to his rooms at Amherst. Beecher immersed himself in the writings not just of Spurzheim but also of his mentor Franz Gall and the prolific Combe brothers of Edinburgh, two of the most popular phrenologists other than Spurzheim himself.

Much to his own surprise, Beecher became convinced of phrenology's correctness. When Beecher met Fowler in their highly anticipated debate, he shocked the Amherst campus community by arguing in favor of phrenology's truth, conceding the debate before Fowler even had a chance to speak and giving Fowler all of Spurzheim's personal library. That abortive college debate was the turning point of Orson Fowler's life.

After devouring the contents of Spurzheim's library while still an undergraduate, Fowler started venturing to neighboring towns and villages to offer phrenological readings for a small fee, just like the itinerant phrenologist who read Japhet Colbones's skull in "The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman." Upon graduating in 1834, Fowler abandoned his plans for the clergy to become a full-time phrenologist. Along with his brother Lorenzo and various other siblings and in-laws, he turned the practice of phrenology into a lucrative family business whose products and perspectives saturated mid-nineteenth-century life in the English-speaking world.

Fowler became equal parts earnest New Age wellness guru, a man on the make, a sex educator of surprising frankness, and a pearl-clutching morality cop with decidedly racist, antisemitic, and homophobic views. He was a teetotaling vegetarian who thought animals had souls, a strong advocate of women's and children's rights, a firm believer in the health-promoting powers of octagon-shaped houses, and the unlikely publisher of *Leaves of Grass*, the debut work of proto-genderqueer poet Walt Whitman, who was deeply versed in phrenology. Orson and the rest of the Fowler clan

published scads of books and pamphlets as well as a monthly journal. They toured and lectured ceaselessly to promote their phrenological enterprises. They even operated a popular tourist attraction in New York City called Fowler's Phrenological Cabinet, which combined dime museum, freak show, lecture hall, and publishing house, and was furnished with examination rooms to conduct phrenological readings for long lines of paying customers queuing up to have their heads examined.

This vast family business catapulted *gender* into public discourse as something that had to do with the relationship between body, self, and society, rather than between mere words about them.



During phrenology's heyday, critics made fun of it for giving lofty-sounding Latinate names to the mental faculties it purported to describe, diagnose, and treat by interpreting skull bumps. Each mental faculty was thought to be physically located in a particular region of the brain. Sexual passion was labeled "Amativeness," and was thought to be located atop the brain stem, right at the base of the brain, because it was the most primal and primitive of the faculties. The faculty of loving one's children was dubbed "Philoprogenitiveness," and its brain region was thought to be located just above the Amative zone, because children were the product of Amativeness. The faculty for forming the bonds of friendship, called "Adhesiveness," was located just above Philoprogenitiveness, because sociality with friends was important, but not as important as making babies (though in Whitman's phrenology-influenced poetry, Adhesiveness became a key term for reimagining loving relationships beyond the framework of reproductive heterosexuality).

After a young Mark Twain attended one of Orson Fowler's itinerant lectures in Hannibal, Missouri, he wrote that the phrenologist "labeled each bump with a formidable and outlandish name of its own," and "took great delight in mouthing these great names; they gurgled from his lips in an easy and unembarrassed stream, and this exhibition of cultivated facility compelled the envy and admiration of everybody." By the time Fowler took his leave from Hannibal, Twain concluded, its residents had become

“familiar with these strange names and addicted to the use of them and they batted them back and forth in conversation with deep satisfaction—a satisfaction which could hardly have been more contenting if they had known for certain what the words meant.” *Gender* became another such term in Orson Fowler’s specialized phrenological lexicon.

I first learned of Fowler’s phrenological *gender* while holed up in my office at the Stanford Humanities Center one afternoon, reading the pages-long entry on *gender* in the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) and checking out the citations it gave for the first attested uses of various meanings of that word. Surprisingly, this is not something people in the humanities, cultural studies, or social sciences seem to have done much when studying *gender* in its psychosocial rather than grammatical sense. I certainly hadn’t. As noted earlier, those of us in these fields tend to use *gender* as a lens through which to look at the world, rather than treating that lens as an object of study in its own right—a concept with a history that frames the world in particular ways, whose elaboration can be traced over time. But behind the plain gray door of a dictionary entry, I tumbled into a surprisingly deep little rabbit hole that unexpectedly deposited me at Orson Fowler’s feet.

The *OED* cited a work called *Sexuality Restored* (1870), by somebody identified only by the initials O.S., last name Fowler, as containing the earliest attested use of *gender* to mean something connected with human sexuality rather than strictly with grammar. So I went to the Internet Archive to find that work and perhaps others by this Fowler person. Orson Squire. Hmm. It was the first I’d ever heard of the guy. Huh, he was a phrenologist, I noticed immediately, from reading the ornate Victorian subtitles of his books. I was passingly familiar with phrenology as a practice that enjoyed quite a vogue in a historical period I happened to know a fair bit about. Though I did know Whitman was a devotee, and that phrenology later developed some sordid connections to eugenics, I’d never really paid much attention to it. The thought never crossed my mind that phrenology might have anything to do with *gender*.

Turned out, there were tons of other works by Orson Squire Fowler besides *Sexuality Restored*. A mind-boggling number of other works. The

Fowler family's truly prodigious output amounted to millions of copies of dozens and dozens of different titles. All of those many works went through numerous editions with slightly different content, and many of them borrowed big blocks of text freely from one another, which makes it difficult to determine where and when certain often-repeated passages first originated. But doing word searches for *gender* in all the digitally available texts quickly demonstrated that there were many, many instances of Fowler using *gender* to mean something besides grammar, decades earlier than the 1870 work cited by the *OED*.

The afternoon I spent reconnoitering that vast body of literature gave me my first glimpse of a whole new—and still largely unanalyzed—history of *gender*. An etymologist of medical terminology, Diederik Janssen, had taken the same spelunking tour of the *OED* that I had, and had found Fowler (and Madison Bentley) a couple of years before I did. But Janssen is more interested in tracing word histories than in elaborating the concepts his archaeological digs have unearthed; he devotes only a paragraph or two to Fowler's idiosyncratic adoption of the term, and treats it as a curiosity tangential to the more normative medical history that most interests him. The only person yet to really dwell on the significance of Fowler's *gender* is the sexuality studies scholar Benjamin Kahan. In a single short article, Kahan correctly notes that Fowler's nineteenth-century version of *gender* fully anticipates the post-1950s version of *gender* as something distinct from *sex* that was popularized by social scientists and feminist theoreticians alike. But like John Money and the anti-gender ideologues, and unlike the feminist and trans people who have found something politically liberatory in separating *sex* from *gender*, Fowler marked the distinction between the two primarily for the purpose of bringing them back into alignment.

★ ★ ★

Fowler's phrenological *gender*, like Money's cybernetic version, continued to work just like grammatical gender. It was still all about creating agreement. Recall, too, that grammatical gender conveys meaning by creating agreement between different parts of speech not just by assigning different nouns to different categories but also by changing the shape and

appearance of those nouns through adding or swapping around little word fragments that alter the word's morphology, or shape. When you realize that grammatical gender has something significant to do with shape as well as categorization, it makes sense that *gender* became a key term in phrenology—the nineteenth-century practice par excellence for interpreting shape to attribute meaning.

The meaning of bodily shape, particularly the parts of embodiment counted as *sex*, has been a central preoccupation of Western culture for millennia. (My historian colleague Leah DeVun has a terrific book about this, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*.) Shape continues to be central to contemporary debates about trans existence today. It's because shape matters that we trans people modify our bodies to literally be seen, by ourselves and others, as belonging to another gender category. It's what informs in-group trans slang terms like *reading* and *clocking*, by which some trans people critique the passability and realness of other trans people's gender presentation by calling attention to perceived flaws in form or shape when measured against cisgender norms. It informs, too, the "you can always tell" claim about who's trans advanced by gender-critical feminists and anti-gender ideologists to assert the impossibility of trans people ever really passing. It's even at the heart of the so-called "transvestigation" conspiracy theory, in which true believers pore over photographs and videos of celebrities such as Taylor Swift and analyze the minutiae of their physical attributes, to determine which ones are secretly trans. French president Emmanuel Macron and his wife, Brigitte, have even sued right-wing influencer Candace Owens over her conspiracist claims that Brigitte is "really a man." Some transvestigation conspiracies about "elite gender inversion" dovetail with QAnon, in that they consider supposed celebrity sex changes to be initiation rituals into the global pedophilia ring. The nether reaches of this conspiratorial narrative even intersect with all the refurbished crypto-antisemitic Illuminati lore that considers the secret cabal of trans pedophiles to be in cahoots with the extraterrestrial lizard people nefariously plotting world domination and the end of humankind as we know it.

By the later nineteenth century—in such works as *Human Science* (1873), a massive compendium that systematized the fruits of his entire career—Fowler had elaborated what he repeatedly described, in caps, as a complete “THEORY of gender.” By that late date, the term *gender* had become a key term for his whole philosophy of phrenology. But it first started showing up in the mid-1840s, which ties it to the wave of reform movements, emanating from the Burned-Over District of Fowler’s youth, that also witnessed the first municipal ordinances against cross-dressing. It began appearing at roughly the same time as the first sustained efforts to coin new gender-neutral pronouns, like *thon*, that Dennis Baron has done so much to document. Fowler’s version of phrenology was all over mid-nineteenth-century popular understandings of the relationship between science, morality, health, habits, and heredity, and *gender* was shot all through Fowler’s version of phrenology.

Orson Fowler started using the term *gender* in a specific context. By the mid-1840s when the word first appears in his work, one of the most popular and lucrative practices of the Fowler family’s phrenology business was giving skull readings to offer relationship advice to the lovelorn, and to help arrange eugenic marriages that would result in offspring with desirable characteristics. Fowler was becoming increasingly concerned with how character could become warped, and hereditary lines polluted, through such “unhealthy” sexual habits as masturbation and homosexuality. His key writings on these topics were *Love and Parentage Applied to the Improvement of Offspring*, and *Amativeness: or, Evils and Remedies of Excessive and Perverted Sexuality*. These works were where Fowler’s version of *gender* made its debut on the stage of history. *Sexuality Restored*, the 1870 work incorrectly listed in the *OED* as containing the first use of *gender* to mean something related to psychosocial identity, was in fact a late omnibus version of these two texts; its full title was *Sexuality Restored, and Warning and Advice to Youth Against Perverted Amativeness, Including Prevention and Remedies, as Taught by Phrenology and Physiology*.

Both volumes, originally written as companion texts that repeatedly referred back and forth to each other, were widely read and long-lived

works. They went through numerous revised editions and printings beginning around 1844, resulting in roughly a million copies of various versions in circulation over the course of a couple of decades. It's impossible to say definitively when the absolutely earliest instance of using *gender* as a phrenological term might be, but it doesn't really matter all that much: the context and general timing are clear enough. The earliest instance of *gender* I've yet found is in an 1846 edition of *Love and Parentage*. It merely makes mention of "physical gender," which it simply treats as a synonym for *sex*. *Gender*, however, would soon acquire much more elaborate and specialist meanings.

Taken together, *Love and Parentage* and *Amativeness* outlined a complete system of sexual health and morality in which *gender* played a leading role. The very earliest editions of these works do not use *gender* terminology, but they are filled with examples drawn from history and contemporary observation of how the "sexual function," which "was instituted to perpetuate our race," could, when used improperly, contribute to a physical degeneration that would culminate in the breakdown of distinctions between men and women. Fowler frequently cited as a cautionary tale the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus on the sexual depravity of the Emperor Nero, who (in Fowler's purple-prose rendition) scandalously "personated a woman," and "with the affected airs of female delicacy, put on the nuptial veil," to be "given in marriage to one of his infamous herd" in a rite fully consummated in public view, "not even excepting the endearments which, in a natural marriage, decency reserves for the shades of night."

Fowler is clearly casting about in the mid-1840s to find words to describe the disarticulation of the socially sanctioned relationships between body, character, behavior, and role that he criticizes in Nero. As with John Money and other social scientists a century later, grammatical *gender* suggested itself to Fowler as a logical analogy. Those males who "first inflame, then exhaust" themselves through "amatory excesses," he wrote, will lose the "distinctive sexual characteristics" that qualify them as members of a particular category of person. They become what he calls "neuter gender nouns," no longer creatures of the masculine gender bearing

certain characteristics of personhood that are the defining properties of members of that category, but rather “mere things,” an *it* rather than a *he*. He calls them impotent “eunuchs at heart” who “are to true manhood what leather is to skin.” (He might as well have stuck a feather in their hat and called them macaroni.)

In the earliest versions of his key texts, Fowler writes of “mental and physical sexuality” to describe the social, psychological, and biological dimensions of Amativeness that perversion corrupts. The flip side of “perverted sexuality,” for him, was “Spiritual Love,” a concept he outlined in *Love and Parentage*. Spiritual Love was more or less what we might now call reproductive heterosexuality. It was “that love which induces marriage, and secures offspring.” When Fowler rhetorically asked his public, “By what instrumentality is mind transmitted, and soul propagated?” he answered his own question, at first, with “Spiritual Love.” It was the means by which parents passed their qualities and characteristics to their offspring, the very mechanism of heredity that conjoined the carnal realm with an extramundane one. The term Fowler soon settled upon, however, for naming all the connections he saw between spiritual and sexual love, between this world and the world beyond—indeed, the very ether through which all these actions and energies circulated and flowed—was *gender*.



The earliest currently known elaboration in the phrenological literature of *gender* as something more than a mere synonym for *sex* dates to 1847, the year after its seeming debut in an early edition of *Love and Parentage*. Fowler uses the term in an article published in the *American Phrenological Journal* that refers back to discussions of Spiritual Love in another edition of the frequently revised *Love and Parentage*. He used the word *gender* when publishing and commenting on a long-neglected letter to the editor received two years earlier from a reader identified only by the initials “M.F.”—suggesting, perhaps, that Fowler had been mulling over the ideas at stake in this exchange for some time, and that the decision to use *gender* to describe them slowly germinated in his thinking.

M.F. was preoccupied with the question of which of the faculties that human souls exercised in this life would continue to be available to them in the afterlife. M.F. argued that many of the faculties bestowed on people in the “sublunary world” would be of no use in the heavenly realm. In this life humans ate and drank, but in the future life there would be no eating or drinking, and thus the faculties of Alimentiveness (hunger) and Bibativeness (thirst) would be superfluous. Similarly, because there would be neither marrying nor being given in marriage in the afterlife, there would be no need for Amativeness.

Fowler considered M.F.’s understanding to be fundamentally flawed. He made an argument about an essential integrity of human bodies and souls to assert that the soul’s faculties, taken together, composed an integrated organic whole, both before and after death, that made it a unique immortal entity. This being could not exist in this life or persist in the next “without the co-existence of ALL its faculties,” any more than an eye could be an eye without all of its parts. Just as the destruction of the optic nerve or the lens would destroy the eye’s integrity, and thus its identity, “so that it is no longer an eye any more than it is a foot,” the “death of even one of our animal faculties ... would destroy the integrity and personality of the human soul, so that it would become something else.” Without all of our faculties, “we shall not be ourselves.”

Fowler’s thinking here is quite conventional. It’s in line with long-standing Christian ideas about the soul, expressed most directly and influentially in the fifth century by Saint Augustine, who in turn drew on and reinterpreted Platonist and Neoplatonist influences from Greek philosophy. It’s not just that the soul is imagined as an immaterial essence somehow materially connected to a body that it somehow represents on the spiritual plane, like a ghost; it’s that the soul reproduces the shape of the body to reflect the fact that each individual human incarnation is an expression of God’s image. Images have forms. What is the perfect form of the human body that accurately reflects its divinely created nature? Those are the long-running questions addressed in Leah DeVun’s book *The Shape of Sex*. They drive a surprising number of theological debates. How do the male and female differences of Adam and Eve relate to the image of God?

If a body is born with a disfiguring congenital anomaly of some sort, or if a body becomes disabled, what form will it take in the Resurrection? At what stage of life is the body the most perfect? These are the very sorts of religious questions phrenology tackled and tried to answer in light of nineteenth-century science and so-called natural theology.

Fowler introduces the concept of *gender* to describe the intangible sense of an integral yet immaterial self that would persist after the body's death: "Amativeness may be exercised in coarse sensuality, which corrupts and is sinful, or in a pure, elevating, and refined love of the MENTAL gender, so to speak, of the opposite sex. The masculine and feminine consist even more in this mental than physical sensuality; and in another state these mental genders can assimilate and love each other quite as well as here, as our faculties will be more exalted."

It's a remarkable passage in that Fowler, by substituting *gender* for his earlier use of both "Spiritual Love" and "mental and physical sexuality," makes *gender* mean the combination of, and connection between, biological sex and psychosocial identity. In describing a "MENTAL gender," he's positing a *gender identity*—though one derived more from the Christian concept of a soul than from social-scientific theories. In doing so, however, Fowler nevertheless beats John Money and Evelyn Hooker and her colleagues at UCLA's Gender Identity Research Clinic to the terminological punch by more than a century.

★ ★ ★

Orson Fowler taught that the etherealized identity or soul he characterized as a "MENTAL gender" was physically located in the brain region for the Amative faculty, "at the top of the spinal column," where all the nerves enter and exit the brain. This put *gender* "in perfect rapport with every organ and function of the entire body," and "connects every iota" of life "with the brain at the identical point where Amativeness, the cerebral organ of gender, connects with it." *Gender* as spirit thus functions as a properly composed, divinely created ideal form materialized through—or *as*—the corporeal body. Fowler expanded and elaborated this central claim over the course of his career so that *gender*'s primarily identitarian initial meaning

became a name for something much more diffuse and multifaceted—just as John Money’s version of *gender* did from the mid-twentieth century forward, and just as *gender* does now in contemporary anti-gender discourse. Before Fowler was through with it, *gender* had physical, metaphysical, and cosmological dimensions, and it functioned to tie all those different registers together. It became his name for a mysterious medium responsible for linking spirit to body, regulating sexual desire, transmitting the characteristics of the parents to their children, dictating social behaviors, and informing all personal preferences for every imaginable like or dislike.

Fowler considered *gender* to be, “like light, a most active, efficient, and all-pervading principle” that templated the divinely sanctioned “male and female arrangement” of the created universe. *Gender* was a “universal concomitant” that ensured “throughout all Nature” that “males and females are mutually drawn to each other by what we will call sexual magnetism, as are the positive and negative electric poles.”

God, Fowler claimed, had established an order of creation in which human sexual activities contributed to the sacred ontological function of materializing a living cosmos. “God *commands* us to exercise” these sexual functions, he wrote, “and to exercise them *right*; that is, in accordance with those natural laws of gender which He has instituted for their government.” Gender was more than human, more than merely earthbound; it was the “reproductive instrumentality of this entire universe,” something “superadded” to mundane human existence. “Undoubtedly, new worlds are perpetually springing into existence throughout the boundless fields of space,” Fowler speculated, “generated by this element [i.e., gender], just as it is peopling each of these worlds with all forms of individual life. But for gender, inexorable Death would, in one generation, lay waste all the domains of universal space and being.”

Because *gender* is of spiritual origin, Fowler argued, it is superior to matter and “governs” the body’s shape and function through a “sovereign power.” *Gender* determines not just the shape of the genitals and sex-linked traits—such as breasts and beards and bone structure—but also the entire form of the body; it “selects from the blood” particles of “bone, muscle,

nerve, etc. and places them anatomically, thereby forming the material organism.” Fowler often illustrated this claim with the example of an adult’s leg being amputated due to illness or accident. He notes that when the adult is able to have offspring conceived and born after the leg’s removal from the rest of the body, that there will be a family resemblance between the shape of the offspring’s own leg and their parent’s missing limb. “Though the material parental leg has been decayed fifty years, this spirit leg, untouched by knife or saw, still remains, and holds spirit connection with both the spiritual and material element of gender, and through it impresses itself upon the life germ, and thereby brings forth in the offspring just such a leg, foot, toe, nail ... as originally existed in the parentage.” *Gender* was thus the medium by means of which biological inheritances transmitted themselves across the generations.

Fowler believed that *gender*’s relative strength or weakness determined every aspect of personality and every interaction with others, most especially the erotic ones. Gender, the “primal *element*” that animates sexuality, was to love and marriage and procreation “what steam power is to machinery—the prime instrumentality of its motions and productions.” When this motive force is weak, Fowler contended, “all else moves slowly and languidly,” when it is strong, “all else becomes rapid and powerful.” All “who have impaired their gender” through self-abuse and debauchery “are more or less aimless, incoherent, incongruous, blunted, paralyzed, tame, flat, silly, ill-timed, inappropriate, and ridiculous, in expressions and actions,” he moralized, thesaurus seemingly at hand. He might as well have said that they were ungrammatical and had fallen out of agreement with proper form and thus did not properly function.

Gender in Fowler’s phrenology becomes a ubiquitous, shape-shifting utility player of a concept, capable of doing pretty much whatever he wants it to do. Sometimes it meant an immaterial essence, sometimes a masculine or feminine stereotype, sometimes the libido, sometimes a mental self-image, sometimes a body-shape, sometimes the medium and mechanism of heritability, sometimes a vital ether. But precisely by meaning all these things all at once, phrenological *gender* seemed to offer a powerful—and powerfully mystified—explanatory framework that interconnects self-

sense, biological substance, and social order. It explained their potential for transformation through personal agency and the exercise of proper habits that would sculpt temperament as well as corporeal form.

By the end of Fowler's career, his *gender* already meant what *gender* would come to mean all over again by the middle of the next century. It was already a term of grammatical derivation concerned with bringing sex, identity, and social role into right relation. It already explained what Butler's theory from the 1990s explained about how selves take shape through repeated acts of identifying with and enacting for other culturally derived ideas about personhood. *Gender* as developed by Orson Fowler already functioned as what the followers of Michel Foucault would call a "technology of the self" that linked personal practices for cultivating a desired style of selfhood with the biopolitical practices for managing and governing the population that characterizes modern Western societies.

Ironically, Fowler's version of *gender*, rooted as it is in metaphysical notions of a preexisting and eternal bodily integrity, is utterly compatible with late-twentieth-century versions of religiously motivated anti-gender ideology movements that treat *gender* as if it repudiates God-given organic forms and functions—which just goes to show that the concept of *gender* is indeed a phantasm, filled not just with the background rules that determine categorical belonging but also with all of the beliefs that inform those rules, along with the dreams and fears those beliefs inspire, whose contents and definitions can swing wildly over time.

VIII.

Cape Cod juts east into the Atlantic from the Massachusetts mainland like a scrawny little arm flexing its biceps, its forearm angled up to the north, wrist limp, hand flopped back to the west, fingers loosely curled toward palm. Provincetown, out on the fingertips, is where the Pilgrims first landed in 1620 before they crossed Cape Cod Bay to Plymouth. It's where the ferries now come over from Boston. Ptown is a special place: a kitschy, bohemian, super-gay summer vacation destination with world-class lobster rolls and beaches, where West Hollywood bumps elbows with Coney Island as soon as the weather warms up, and first-time tourist families line up on the wharf for whale-watching tours chockablock with A-list queer celebs on the down-low. There's a little cul-de-sac called Whorf Court across from the Coast Guard station, named after the ancestors of the linguist Benjamin Whorf, who settled there early on. Mimi and I have been spending a couple of weeks here every year for the past several years, mostly because she spent her twenties in Boston and still has a friendship network there and loves it out on the Cape. I've come to love it, too. Every time I sit on the deck of some gray-shingled Cape Cod vacation rental, slurping raw oysters and sipping a G&T while watching the sun sink, I think, Damn, this is really a long way from Oklahoma.

Route 6 and its sister highway 6A run like veins down the middle of Cape Cod's arm. Follow the road south from Provincetown, and the first town you'll come to is Truro. Turn east and travel down one of the rutted dirt roads that wind through the trees until you arrive at Lee and Denise's place, a rustic cottage encircled by a high chain-link fence that keeps their dogs from chasing the deer and coyotes that live in the woods surrounding

their house. This used to be their summer place, but they've been spending most of their time out here since retiring.

Lee was somebody I'd been wanting to meet for years before I finally did. She'd been on the periphery of Mimi's old Boston crowd. Back then she'd been part of a lefty urban commune called Oakbyte, many of whose other members I've gotten to know over the years: Ferd the labor organizer, Judy the lawyer who was on the legal defense team for the American Indian Movement after the occupation of Wounded Knee in the early seventies, Larry the environmental activist, Mary the wine buyer for a grocery co-op, Bob and Gred, who each went on to establish other intentional communities in other parts of the country. Every few years, Ferd used to organize a big whitewater river-rafting trip out west somewhere as an Oakbyte reunion of sorts, plus guests, and Mimi and I have often joined in. Lee had never been able to make it to any of the trips we'd been on, but that wasn't the main reason I wanted to finally meet her. She'd had a long and celebrated career as the director of one of the nation's leading LGBTQ+ civil rights organizations, but that wasn't why I wanted to meet her, either. I wanted to meet her because for a couple of years in the 1970s, she had been Cristy Barsky's girlfriend. I'd been hoping to learn more about Cristy for quite some time.



Janice Raymond's book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, published in 1979, was the first major feminist work to substantively critique the concept of *gender*. Raymond pays close and cogent attention to John Money—she even interviewed him for her book—and she diligently takes him to task for all the many ways he introduces anti-feminist stereotypes of women into his theory of gender. She's adept at flagging the places where he gets sloppy and self-contradictory, and flip-flops between biological determinism and social constructionism in his arguments about identity formation. But she goes off in a conspiratorial direction when she characterizes *gender* as a pernicious plot of the medical-industrial complex. That plot is what Raymond meant by "transsexual empire" (which is what allows the decidedly anti-feminist Christopher Rufo to find common cause

with her when he riffs on her title in his lecture on the “transgender” empire). For Raymond, *transsexual empire* is another name for the entire system of heteropatriarchal capitalist medical science that tries to control women’s bodies and minds with pharmaceuticals and reproductive technologies, of which transsexualism is the most abominable outcome. *Gender*, she contends, is the ideology that justifies the operation of that whole vast apparatus, and transsexuals have been its hapless dupes. We are its victims, suffering from the consequences of embracing a false consciousness, but we are also the vectors that spread the ideology of gender to unwitting others.

The Transsexual Empire was the book that set the tone for supposedly progressive takes on transness for many years. It was positively reviewed in *The New York Times* by the anti-psychiatry guru Thomas Szasz. When I started college in 1979, it was one of only two books on trans topics in my university library. (The other was the UCLA psychiatrist Robert Stoller’s *Perversion: The Erotic Form of Hatred*, which included big block quotes of trans people talking about their sex fantasies, most of which had been razor-bladed out of the book’s cum-stained pages, presumably by the same guys jerking off to its content in library toilet stalls, thereby directing toward the trans people represented therein the very erotic hatred that was the subject of Stoller’s book.) When my ex-girlfriend and I and our housemates all scraped together a few thousand dollars each to put a payment down on a big ramshackle old house for our collective household out in Oakland’s Fruitvale district back in the mid-nineties, Raymond’s *Transsexual Empire* was still the only book on trans issues in my new neighborhood’s branch library.

There’s a chapter in Raymond’s book called “Sappho by Surgery” that characterizes lesbian trans women like me as men trying to infiltrate the women’s movement. Raymond depicts us as mindless fembots with zero political consciousness. She advances a “Great Replacement”-style narrative about how artificially constructed transsexuals are designed to supplant “real women.” She compares trans women in feminist movements to eunuchs sent by the patriarchs to guard their harems. She vilifies us as rapists because she construes our mere presence to be a nonconsensual

penetration of women's space. She asserts, decades before Michael Knowles suggested that trans people be eliminated from public life, that "the problem of transsexualism would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence." She claims transgender medicine owes a debt to Nazis experimenting on people in concentration camps, and that because transsexuals want to access genital surgeries and hormones, we are at bare minimum colluding with fascism if not outright complicit in it. And she is determined to root out all such iniquities from her midst.

The primary example Raymond gives of this determination is the successful national campaign she helped promote in 1977 to drive the feminist music label Olivia Records' sound engineer Sandy Stone out of the women's music scene. (It's Raymond's centrality to that campaign that inspired the arms-akimbo title of Stone's aforementioned posttranssexual manifesto, "*The Empire Strikes Back*," which helped launch the academic field of trans studies.) Then, after criticizing Sandy for "dominating" Olivia Records by assuming a position of importance within the collective and thereby fomenting divisions in the women's movement (that is, for the majority of feminist women to have rejected Raymond's trans-exclusionary position), Raymond turns her attention to a local controversy in her own lesbian-feminist community. "In Boston," she writes, before misgendering the person she writes about, "a transsexual named Christy [*sic*] Barsky has worked [herself] into a similar dominant position, this time coaching a women's softball team, coordinating a conference on women and violence, staffing a women's center, and performing musically at various all-women places. Thus, like Stone, [she] exhibits a high degree of visibility and also divides women, in the name of lesbian-feminism."

The mid-1970s were a time when politically active trans people, mostly trans women, were being kicked out of lesbian and feminist movements and spaces with some frequency. These were the years when the transphobic discourses now connected with anti-gender ideology movements were first formulated—not by the reactionary right, but by people like Raymond, purportedly on the cultural left. One of the first high-profile exclusion controversies revolved around Beth Elliott, once the vice president of the San Francisco chapter of national lesbian advocacy organization Daughters

of Bilitis (DOB), who had also helped organize the first big national lesbian conference in Los Angeles in 1973. Beth was hounded out of both the DOB and the lesbian conference by a group of separatists calling themselves the Gutter Dykes, whose earliest interactions with her a couple of years previously make clear how the “social construction of reality” questions at the heart of this book have indeed been central to the contestation of trans social existence and the conflict with some versions of feminism.

In an exchange between Beth and members of the Gutter Dykes published in an obscure mimeographed separatist zine called *It Ain't Me Babe* in 1970, Beth described her long-standing sense of being a woman, which she felt could be recognized by others only if she changed her embodiment. The Gutter Dykes, who at that point were still grappling with the implications of what transness represented to them, replied: “Maybe that was true til about a YEAR AGO, BUT NEW REALITY WOMEN ARE EMERGING.” They understood Beth, as a transsexual, to be enacting what they fully acknowledged to be a “new reality,” albeit not one they endorsed. They thought she should be a feminist man. “We will reinforce you,” they offered. “The more you go through your changes the more meshing with us will be possible. And during the same time, you can try finding other men who can be in your reality.” The collective members assured Beth that “as your new reality emerges, as you are able to live it to any degree, you should be able to feel differently about your body. That’s what happens to us.” For Beth to refuse the reality the Gutter Dykes had in mind for her, and to insist on the reality of her own transition, the Dykes concluded, left them no option other than to wage ontological trench warfare within feminism.

Over the years, I’ve sought out many of the trans women booted from movements, events, and spaces back in the seventies. I’ve gotten to know both Sandy and Beth reasonably well. I had a chance once to talk with Sylvia Rivera, a veteran of the 1969 Stonewall riots and the legendary founder of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), who had been prevented from addressing the Stonewall commemoration rally in New York in 1973, before fighting her way to the stage to deliver an epic takedown of gay and lesbian transphobia. I’d gotten in touch with Margo Schuler, a grad student in musicology at Boston College who wrote on

trans/lesbian conflicts for *Gay Community News* after being excluded from participation in her campus women's center. But I'd never managed to connect with Cristy Barsky. I'd done some googling and found somebody with that name who had been a professional pool player in Albuquerque, but I wasn't sure it was the same person (turns out it was). In any event, Barsky seemed to have kept a low profile after the witch-hunts, so I was reluctant to make a cold contact.

When Mimi and I were first getting together, I asked her if she'd ever been with a trans woman before. She said no, but that a friend of a friend in Boston back in the seventies, when she was first coming out, had a trans girlfriend for a while that Mimi had met but had never known well, and she had seemed like a right-on person. Her being trans didn't seem like a big deal to Mimi, just something uncommon, and therefore sort of interesting. She didn't give it a lot of thought. That was her only personal contact with anyone she knew to be trans until she met me. That friend of a friend turned out to be Lee, I learned much later, whose girlfriend, I learned even later still, turned out to be Cristy.

* * *

The greater Boston area of the 1960s and '70s, like the Burned-Over District in the antebellum nineteenth century, supplied a strangely dense nexus of significant developments for the history of *gender*. Watching *gender* proliferate and diversify in and around Boston in those years is like watching a new ecosystem of emergent life-forms evolve around a geothermal vent on the ocean's floor. During those years, the locale where John Money had first stumbled into the topic of intersex medical care, while steeping himself in cybernetics-infused interdisciplinary social-scientific theory at Harvard's Department of Social Relations, and where Johann Spurzheim's brain pickled in a jar across campus, had become home not just to a vibrant and diverse lesbian-feminist community but also to a remarkable range of trans organizations that collectively thought of themselves as the "gender community." I was interested in that old book I'd retrieved from the Stanford Library the day of the Matt Walsh event—Deborah Heller Feinbloom's *Transvestites and Transsexuals: Mixed Views*

—precisely because it helps map *gender*’s circulation through various Boston-based subcultures and communities that sometimes rubbed up against one another, sometimes even overlapped, without necessarily having all that much to do with one another. Cristy Barsky lived in the intersection where some of those worlds would collide.



There were, of course, many ways of being trans in Boston beyond the self-styled “gender community.” Check out the photographer Nan Goldin’s early portraiture work of denizens of Boston’s gritty Combat Zone, much of it showcased in Laura Poitras’s 2022 documentary film, *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*. The club kids, street kids, and sex workers who were Goldin’s friends and photographic subjects were not the ones most likely to use *gender* terminology to describe themselves: those were the drags, the girls, the gays, the queens, the hair fairies, the hustlers. The “gender community,” most of whose members were better off financially and far more socially respectable in their closeted day-to-day lives than the Combat Zone crowd, had grown out of the old Virginia Prince cross-dresser networks.

Prince had launched a chapter-based national organization she called Full Personality Expression (FPE), also known as Phi Pi Epsilon in imitation of Greek-letter sororities, in 1962. Its Alpha chapter, the first, was the one Prince herself founded in Los Angeles. The third, Boston’s Gamma chapter, established in 1965, was particularly large and active. By 1973, the Gamma chapter had grown disgruntled with Prince’s rigid identity-policing and became the independent Cherrystone Club—so named because the cherrystone clams found throughout the Massachusetts Bay region are sequential hermaphrodites that change reproductive sex over their life course. The Cherrystone Club subsequently affiliated with the Society for the Second Self, also known as Tri-Ess or Tri-Sigma. That organization was created by a merger of FPE with another similar cross-dresser group called Mamselle, founded by Carol Beecroft. She was a refugee from the FPE’s Alpha chapter in Los Angeles who had more expansive ideas about gender diversity than Prince did. Much of the drama that fissured the “gender

community” from time to time revolved around conflicts between participants who thought of themselves as men with a cross-dressing hobby and others who thought of themselves as trans women—or who at least wanted the opportunity to figure out whether they were or not. Even trans communities are roiled by questions of who’s a man and who’s a woman and how you can tell the difference.

The Cherrystone Club itself eventually became a point of departure for yet other new organizations. One of the most influential was Ariadne Kane’s Human Outreach and Achievement Institute, later renamed the Outreach Institute for Gender Studies. Kane, a self-described androgyne committed to blurring the boundaries between masculinity and femininity by circulating between the two and blending them in the middle, had been born in New York City in 1936, then settled in the sixties in Boston, where they initially ran a travel agency and sold real estate, and later became a lay counselor for individuals wrestling with gender identity and expression. Kane had been Gamma chapter president since 1971 and was directly involved in changing the direction of that organization. Kane and other Cherrystone members used the Outreach Institute as a vehicle for launching a notable venture in 1975—Fantasia Fair, a weeklong gathering in Provincetown, appended to what was then the end of the tourist season there in October, that catered to cross-dressers, transsexuals, and gender-nonconforming people. At fifty years old and counting as of 2025, Fantasia Fair is the longest-running trans community event in the United States.

A slightly later spin-off from the old Cherrystone Club was Merissa Sherrill Lynn’s Tiffany Club, established in 1978. It originated in a split between those who wanted Cherrystone to be an apolitical place to engage in their cross-dressing hobby, like the old-school Virginia Prince version of *transgenderism*, versus the new school of those who leaned, as did Kane’s Outreach Institute, toward a more expansive sense of gender diversity, and who wanted to sponsor public advocacy and education efforts as well as opportunities for private support and socializing. By the 1980s, the Tiffany Club spawned the International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE), which published *Tapestry*, long the largest-circulation trans publication in the United States. It sponsored regional gatherings for members of the

national gender community at convention hotels where participants could cross-dress and socialize while attending educational panels and programs. It tried for a while in the early 1990s, not very successfully, to coordinate a national alliance of trans-supporting organizations it called the “Congress of Representatives,” which itself soon spun off as the short-lived, independent Congress of Transgender Organizations.

I was on IFGE’s national board of directors for a year, 1994–95, back when I was still actively exploring the unfamiliar landscape of trans activism on the national level. It wasn’t a good fit for a recently hatched young trans woman with anarchist-leaning political sensibilities and a grunge-punk style, steeped in San Francisco’s subversive sexual subcultures, spouting a bunch of poststructuralist gender theory. But I met some nice people and learned a lot about the galaxy of gender diversity compacted within the overwhelmingly white, predominantly middle-class, and mostly transfeminine “gender community” that was so deeply and expansively rooted in Boston.

It was in these Boston-based networks that both *gender* and *transgender* terminology really started taking off at the grassroots level between the later 1960s and the early 1990s—well before Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and other influences from what Christopher Rufo has described as the academic fringe supposedly popularized them.

Kane, even more than Prince, was the one who pushed that framework the hardest, and helped expand *transgender* beyond Prince’s narrower sense of that word, in much the same way that Kane pushed to expand the scope of organizations that traced their roots back to Prince. A Fantasia Fair regular named Holly Boswell, a widely beloved gentle soul who ran a New Age spiritual retreat center in Asheville, North Carolina, is generally credited with the first published use of *transgender*, in 1991, to mean the whole spectrum of gender diversity rather than some midpoint between transvestite and transsexual as Virginia Prince had defined it. That’s the version of the word that the radical labor organizer and *Stone Butch Blues* author Leslie Feinberg (whose dying words were “Remember me as a revolutionary communist”) picked up and ran with in the title of their influential pamphlet, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time*

Has Come (1992). I've always had a soft spot for Leslie; I met my partner, Mimi, because she saw me introduce Leslie as the keynote speaker at a fundraising dinner in 1995. By that late date, *transgender*, and the *gender* concept that underpinned it, had already traveled far beyond their places of origin.

★ ★ ★

Boston's Gender Identity Service, Inc. (GIS), a clinic founded in 1972 by Deborah Heller Feinbloom, was an influential switch point between different versions of both *gender* and feminism, and it offers yet another window onto how *gender* started circulating in grassroots social networks in Boston and beyond. GIS provided all transition-related psycho-medical services short of genital surgery (for which it made referrals) and was, to the best of my knowledge, the first stand-alone, nonprofit, community-based gender clinic in the United States. As such, GIS represented an important step away from the top-down Big Science version of trans medical care associated with elite research universities like Hopkins and UCLA. It exemplified instead the ethos that informed the classic feminist health-care manual, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, first published in 1970 by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, which began as a project of the liberal feminist organization Bread and Roses. GIS was initially funded in large part through a grant from the Erickson Educational Foundation, established by Reed Erickson, a wealthy trans man who had quietly bankrolled the vast majority of trans legal and health-care advocacy work in the 1960s and '70s. In its first two years of operation, the clinic grew to include more than a dozen professional staff members, ranging from medical doctors to vocational placement specialists, and it claimed to have served 170 clients.

Feinbloom's first contact with trans communities had taken place one rainy night in late 1968 when she attended a public program in the dingy basement of a church in downtown Boston that was sponsored by the lesbian organization Daughters of Bilitis. That program was called The Changing Aspects of Gender Identity—a relatively early use of *gender* terminology in a semi-public setting. The DOB already had a track record

of engagement with the Gender Identity Research Center at UCLA, given Evelyn Hooker's advocacy work to decriminalize and depathologize homosexuality. The DOB's national newsletter, *The Ladder*, was an important conduit for the *gender* concept to find its way into lesbian discourse, as well as an important venue for airing trans issues from time to time, before they became divisive for lesbian communities in the 1970s.

Feinbloom was attending the DOB program in support of the featured speaker that night, a casual friend and fellow faculty member at the junior college where she was teaching while working on her PhD at Boston College. Feinbloom's colleague had recently been discovered cross-dressing, and consequently fired, and was now in the process of transitioning socially from man to woman. "I found myself confused, intrigued, fascinated, enticed, and it is only fair to admit, repelled," Feinbloom wrote. (Mixed views, indeed, that echo the ambivalence, then as now, that many helping professionals feel about their trans clientele.) Despite that repulsion, Feinbloom went all in, and turned the world that her friend was opening up for her into the focus of her academic research and professional career. She conducted an ethnography of the Gamma chapter of FPE and its offshoots as part of her doctoral research before eventually putting her findings into action by founding the Gender Identity Service to address some of the many problems she saw trans people encounter in their daily lives.

It was there, in a support group, that an emerging cohort of trans women who were much more aligned with the youth counterculture and the women's movement than the "gender community" at large started discussing their budding lesbian feminist identities. Members of the small support group knew each other socially from frequenting the same bars, bookstores, and coffeehouses. One of them participated elsewhere in what she called a "gay women's group," because she thought "the only way to be really liberated as a woman is to be gay." Others in the group agreed, and complained that many of their trans sisters in the "gender community" needed to raise their consciousnesses and abandon self-limiting stereotypes of femininity. They could be just as critical of the perceived hypocrisy of Boston's wider lesbian feminist community, with one member complaining

that as soon as she told her lesbian friends that she was trans, “all those dykes in boots and pants started telling me I looked like a guy.” They were adamant that the problems trans women faced were the consequence of societal oppression, not psychological malady.

Feinbloom eventually collaborated with support group members to publish an academic article, “Lesbian/Feminist Orientation Among Male-to-Female Transsexuals,” that showed no salient differences between them and cis women regarding their feminist values, political commitments, and understanding of lesbian feminism. In the confluence of such women at the grassroots level of the women’s movement with academic feminists like Gayle Rubin, *gender* terminology and the social realities it referenced became flash points in lesbian feminist communities from coast to coast.



Margo Schulter, the musicology grad student at Boston College, was one of those lesbian feminist trans women involved with GIS. Boston College was not a great place to be trans in 1973, when Schulter was kicked out of the campus women’s center by a wave of younger feminists who were devotees of a faculty member there, the theologian Mary Daly. Boston College is a Jesuit institution, and Daly was a former Catholic who had once been a leading proponent of feminist reform within the Church. Her first book, *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), written when the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was promoting a more liberal version of Catholicism, was flush with enthusiasm for incorporating the insights of Simone de Beauvoir and other feminists into a reformed version of her faith. Rumors I’ve yet to verify hinted that in the 1960s Daly thought she might become the first woman to be ordained a Catholic priest.

True or not, by the early 1970s, the door to ordination was still firmly closed for all women. A disenchanted Daly had by then not only renounced Catholicism but also renounced Christianity and embraced a woman-centered neo-pagan goddess spirituality. Her second book was *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (1973). Her third was *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978). That’s where Daly really hits her stride. It was in those years, between 1973 and

1978, that she first elaborated an idiosyncratic conceptual vocabulary and writing style to express her heterodox views. In *Gyn/Ecology* and the later works *Pure Lust* and *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary*, Daly rejects the so-called wisdom of “wantwits and frauds, the academenced hucksters of ‘higher’ learning.” She exhorts women to resist “a-Musement by drones,” by which she means women being held up as sources of inspiration by unsexed male functionaries of the patriarchy, in order to “dream our own dreams.” The overarching vibe is that she’s ripping off the blinders to show her readers the TRUTH by means of an interminable, clever, mean-spirited stream of suggestive faux etymologies and provocative neologisms, with lots of Idiosyncratic CAPitalizations and Hyphe-Nations to suggest that Words point to the Archetypes of Eternal Concepts that SHE the Sage Crone is Revealing to all WYMYN. (She sure had a lot of red-pill energy for a FemiNazi; Trump might even have learned a lesson or two from her about PUNctuation.)

When I think about those “NEW REALITY WOMEN” out on the West Coast telling Beth Elliott that she’s plugging into a wrong reality by being trans, I understand them to express the same sensibility that Daly is expressing in her post-Christian writings at roughly the same time. There’s something ecstatic and charismatic in their strain of lesbian separatist feminism; it is a speaking in tongues during a gynocentric Pentecost, as new flesh for a new dispensation erupts from the metaphysical substrate to manifest in the mundane world.

Daly wrote of what she calls “ontological lust,” an erotic drive to chart one’s course through the “Male Maze” of the language games that create a deceptive “Foreground” for our perceptions. Ontological lust transports one to the “wild reality” of a generative “Background” realm, whence the Goddess-power emanates. Through the encounter with that Background realm, one can begin to spin new “cosmic tapestries” that weave threads of that numinous register into the waking world. She and her followers felt themselves to be in one of those moments that Madison Bentley called revivals, when gender norms are up for grabs, and the subtended practices of reality-construction-through-language become visible as changeable. Daly & Co. were actively engaged in the social construction of a new

reality, albeit one that still considered womanhood to be based on an unchangeable biological foundation.

Daly's perspective here is not so different in many ways from the one I've developed in this book: that words and syntax emerge from and float atop backgrounded concepts and cosmologies that carry worldviews along with them and that are reproduced in everyday acts of speech and interactions with others. Both of us see grammar and syntax (and I'd see gender categorization in particular) as choreographing how a culture's background assumptions, including those ultimately rooted in metaphysical beliefs, find their way into quotidian realities, where "notions" are passed off as "nature." She and I share a perspective on language as something that structures and shapes and, to some extent, blocks and filters our encounters with an extralinguistic reality.

But where she sees language as a "male maze" that cuts off access to the gynocentric metaphysical background realm, I see language as all we've got. That's why I think the way forward politically is a new grammar and syntax—especially a changed *gender* as the point of linguistic entry where the background comes into the foreground—that orchestrates new relations between objects, agents, actions, worlds. Mary Daly, like Matt Walsh and Sebastian Gorka, sees language as the problem when it is not completely transparent to the ground of Being. I see it as the tool, our means of reaching toward the ultimate realities we sense. The angels I hear murmuring from beyond are not monolingualists whispering in the original Adamic one true language. They speak in ten thousand tongues.

★ ★ ★

In 1973, a new graduate student named Janice Raymond entered the PhD program in theology at Boston College to study with Mary Daly. Born in 1943 in Rhode Island, Raymond was the oldest child and only girl in a family of six kids born to Catholic Irish American parents. She'd attended Salve Regina, a Catholic women's college in Newport, and graduated from there in 1965 with a degree in English. She then became a nun, a not uncommon choice for smart and unconventional young women of her demographic who wanted some alternative to marriage and motherhood.

But Raymond also became a feminist, an abortion advocate, and a lesbian, which meant she wasn't a nun for very long. She channeled losing her religion into earning a master's degree in religious studies from Andover Theological Seminary in 1971. When she finished that MA, she enrolled for her PhD with Daly.

Transsexual Empire began as Raymond's dissertation, written in the theology department of a Jesuit university, before she stripped away much of its theological underpinning to publish it as a pseudo-secular book. But it is a religiously motivated work through and through. Raymond had long been interested in androgynous traditions within Christianity, which she framed as a masculinist appropriation of female-centered spirituality. In her master's thesis she blasts the history of androgynous divinities in world religions, arguing that they were originally female goddesses who were partially androgynized in the transition from prehistoric matriarchal cultures to patriarchal historical ones, "before they were ultimately transsexed into the male gods of various pantheons." Transsexualism, in Raymond's final estimation, is more than a misguided medical practice within a system that harms women. It manifests in modern form the world-historical process of effacing the female and feminine from the face of the Divine.

The transphobic critique of John Money's version of *gender* that Raymond advances in *Transsexual Empire* is grounded, ultimately, in the metaphysical framework propounded by her mentor Mary Daly. It revolves around the twin distinctions they both make between the foreground of everyday experience and the background of an extramundane realm, as well as between the concepts of *integration* and *integrity*. That first concept, *integration*, belongs to the foreground. The foreground is the product of human history, which has been dominated and controlled by men. It is violence toward women tout court. *Integration*, here, has to do with the way a society acts on bodies and minds to conform them to—by integrating them into—a social order. That's exactly what Raymond thought the "transsexual empire" of heteropatriarchal capitalist medical service provision did: cut up bodies to stuff them into inauthentic roles designed for the subordination of women. She, like Kuby, sees the biopolitical processes

at work, but like Kuby as well she conceives of them as the machinations of a conspiratorial cabal.

Integrity, on the other hand, belongs in the metaphysical background, beyond and beneath the surface of everyday life. That background, where the archetypes roam free before all the disfigurements and mistranslations of history, is where the deeper truth resides. The desire to access *integrity* and to manifest its qualities in daily life is a desire to restore a lost organic wholeness, in defiance of all the false and fallible ideologies that wound the souls of women and mar their bodies in the broken surface world of which the transsexual is the ultimate symptom and sign. This nostalgia is yet another point of connection between Raymond and Daly's transphobic version of radical feminism and the anti-genderism of the far right, particularly the explicitly religious varieties like Kuby's and Rufo's.

In the dissertation version of *Transsexual Empire*, the theological roots of what Raymond calls the "ethic of integrity" that informs all her thoughts and actions are clearly visible. For all her self-professed renunciation of Christianity, there's still a lot of old Catholic wine in the new bottles of her feminist spirituality. She remains indebted to the Scholasticism of the early Church in how she shapes and frames her questions of morality and ethics, and she advances the same essentially Augustinian ideas about the integrity of the soul that Orson Fowler drew on for his phrenological version of *gender*—the only difference being that Fowler uses *gender* to mean the backgrounded metaphysical unity of body and soul with social existence, while Raymond uses the exact same word as a name for what destroys that very unity. She writes, "The word *integrity* means an original unity from which no part may be taken away—thus an original wholeness of personhood not divided by sex-role definitions." (Her "original unity" is like Fowler's eye that will not be an eye if a single element is missing.) This is the same tradition of moral and natural theology that Catholicism has used to condemn abortion and birth control—the idea that God made your body with certain capacities, and it's sinful to contravene his designs and intentions by thwarting those intentions or altering the body's form and function—but Raymond applies those moral precepts more stringently to sex change than she ever did to abortion and contraception. At one point

Raymond writes, “What I call an ethic of integrity is an attempt to discuss an original unity before the Fall of sex-role stereotyping.” Women’s studies, in her view, “does have a profound religious dimension, which goes beyond religion’s identification with God, gods or religious organizations. It is religious in the sense that it raises questions of ‘ultimate concern’ or meaning for women’s lives, and aids and abets a conversion experience from female to feminist or strengthens the latter identity.”

★ ★ ★

Janice Raymond was, in her own estimation, “fortunate to study with Mary Daly” and to be part of “a radical feminist group of graduate students from many different universities in the Boston area who became activists.” In 1973, the year she began her doctoral studies, those activists drove Margo Schuler from her volunteer role at the Boston College Women’s Center. By 1978, they’d do the same to Cristy Barsky at the Cambridge Women’s Center.

“I remember them being younger than us,” Lee tells me during a quiet moment of short-lived success between largely ineffectual attempts to shush her excitable dogs, while she and Denise, and Mimi and I, and our mutual friend Ferd all sat outside and sipped some bubbly water and nibbled some cheese and crackers on the patio of her home in Truro, when I first had a chance to connect with her face-to-face.

Lee and Denise, as well as Cristy and the Oakbyte communards, were all in their early thirties in the late 1970s, while Janice Raymond’s grad school crowd was still mostly in its early twenties. The two groups were separated not just by age but also by political sensibilities. The people now in my personal circles had all been socialist feminists back then, eager to link the oppression of women to the inexorable logic of capitalism, and to forge alliances with other social movements against racism and war and imperialism, while Daly and Raymond came out of a cultural feminist tradition more centered on the mythopoetic dimensions of embodied female experience. The folks now in my networks were secular rather than spiritual in their belief systems, coalitional rather than separatist in their activism. I share their political commitments, while contending that the conflict

between the secular and the mythopoetic can't be resolved simply by asserting the primacy of one over the other. That resolution requires a more capacious ontological and epistemological framework that dissolves and recasts the grounds of their differences.

Lee and Denise and Mimi banter for a while about how Daly and Raymond and their disciples were hardly even on their radar screens, but what they did notice seemed bizarre to them. "I mean, we were all like...?" Lee says, raising her palms and shrugging her shoulders.

"The whole language thing that Daly was doing..." Denise chimes in, shaking her head.

"So how did you meet Cristy?"

"It was at a women's dance," Lee says after a pause, a faraway cast to her eyes, a slight smile on her lips. "It was one of those, 'I looked across a crowded room and there she was, and everything else faded away' experiences."

I've now seen pictures of the two of them back in the day. They're a couple of peas in a pod, similar haircuts, similar builds, similar ways of wearing similar versions of the androgynous uniform of second-wave lesbian feminist fashion in the seventies, plaid button-down shirts and blue jeans with boots, one of them slightly more femme, the other slightly more butch. They look adorable together. They look happy.

"We talked. I found out that she was volunteering for the Cambridge Food Co-op, going to Chelsea to pick up produce and bring it back to Cambridge. I *immediately* signed up to ride along to help with the pickups"—everybody laughs—"and was able to get myself on as her assistant when she was driving. And ... how long it took..." Lee shrugs again, a wistful mood playing across her face from fond memories of their fast and flirtatious courtship.

Not long, I venture. Not long, she concurs.

"We maybe had done stuff together a handful of times, three or four times," Lee continued, "when Cristy said, 'You know there's something I need to tell you.' And that's when she told me that she was trans. The only thing I knew about trans was Renée Richards," the ophthalmologist turned women's tennis pro who had recently been outed by Tucker Carlson's dad

and was all over the news in the late 1970s. “This was ’77, and my immediate reaction to Cristy was ‘Oh, it’s so brave! This is so brave of you to go through all of this to be who you are!’ You know? I guess to my credit, that was exactly my first reaction. And my second. And my third.”



I met Cristy not too long afterward. She and Lee were still in touch, though fitfully, and Lee had reached out to her on my behalf. It took a minute, but Cristy eventually reached back out to me. We zoomed a few times, and over the winter break during my year at the Stanford Humanities Center, Mimi and I drove up from San Francisco to Portland, where Cristy was then living, to meet her and to connect over the holidays with other friends and family members in the area.

If you’ve ever spent time in Portland, you’re probably familiar with McMenamins—a local, family-owned chain of historic properties that have all been converted into restaurants, music venues, or hotels. Cristy had reserved for us one of the free private sitting rooms at the chain’s sprawling and quirky Grand Lodge location, about twenty-five miles outside of Portland, in a little town called Forest Grove. The Grand Lodge Hotel, built in the early twentieth century, was a former orphanage and home for members of the Freemasons who had families in need. As we hung out there all afternoon in front of a roaring fire, before grabbing a fish-and-chips dinner with a hoppy IPA later that night in the pub downstairs, I tried to piece together the jumbled history of exactly how it all had gone down back in Boston in the 1970s.

Cristy is lightning in a bottle: crackling, volatile and lively, illuminated from within. Short flashes of sharp observations, flashes of humor, flashes of pain and outrage jolt chaotically from her active and churning mind. She’s the lit fuse on a firecracker perpetually on the verge of popping off. Still impish in her mid-seventies, she has the same sly smile I’d seen in her old pictures. She’d read some of my historical scholarship, thought I nailed it, said it gave her some wider context for things she’d experienced up close and personal without the broader perspective. “I was never not wanting to

be found,” she gently scolds me. “I was simply figuring out step by step how to survive physically, emotionally, and financially.”

Cristy shared her life story. Born at Bronx-Lebanon Hospital in 1947 to US-born parents whose own parents had been Ashkenazi immigrants from Poland and Ukraine, she had been raised middle-class in New Jersey and Long Island. Her father worked in the laundry delivery business and had painful memories of antisemitic discrimination within the industry. He told harrowing tales of backroom dealings with Bugsy Siegel and other Jewish mobsters who demanded payoffs for protection in the delivery of linen. “So, Barsky,” they’d ask, “why should we let your trucks out?”

Cristy felt lost and emotionally abused at home. She’d become radicalized in college in the 1960s. She’d been active in civil rights and antiwar causes, and had been involved with Students for a Democratic Society. By the early 1970s, she was living in Cambridge with a lover and a friend and their children, and came out as a trans lesbian in the context of that relationship. According to Cristy, the household broke up in part because the biological father of the children threatened to sue for custody of the kids if they and his ex-wife continued sharing a household with a so-called moral degenerate. Cristy’s father said if she went through with transition, his son would be dead to him. Cristy replied, “Who has the shovel?” and walked out the door.

She had surgery in 1972. Her parents sat shiva for her, at least metaphorically, and for the next fourteen years Cristy had no contact with her family other than a yearly rendezvous with her mother in defiance of her father’s commands. Effectively orphaned, she made a new chosen family in Boston’s lesbian feminist community. “I didn’t get kicked out of my family,” Cristy told me later. “I seized the moment and left when it was time to go.”

During that first face-to-face meeting, I remembered a passage in Feinbloom’s book about her gender clinic, in which she described “a young woman,” age twenty-five, “exceptionally bright and articulate,” who was “born a biological male,” “identifies herself as a radical lesbian,” and lives collectively with “some good women friends who are very supportive and helpful to her.” This young trans woman embraced language from the

feminist movement about reproductive choice, and framed her desire for medical alteration of her own embodiment as “claiming the right to her own body and freedom to make choices that concerned her alone.” She had had “some negative experiences with psychiatrists and mental health professionals and was reasonably turned off about dealing with them,” and “resented the forced intervention of professionals who she felt held a key to referrals, to service, and to care, and who made the decisions about other people’s lives in what she felt was an arbitrary way.” This unnamed woman thought GIS was little better than the rest—a kinder, gentler form of gatekeeping, pathologization, and condescension—and the clinic became, in Feinbloom’s words, “an obvious target for her anger.” That sounded a lot like the Cristy across from me in the sitting room at the Grand Lodge Hotel that afternoon. I read the passage out loud to her from notes on my laptop. “Yeah, that’s probably me,” Cristy agreed. “I never really trusted Deborah Feinbloom.”

Cristy still considers her years in Boston’s women’s community to be the best years of her life. She was a ball of fire, doing all the things that Janice Raymond called her out for doing, and more: volunteering at the grocery co-op, staffing the Cambridge Women’s Center, participating in discussion and consciousness-raising groups, organizing community events, providing support for incarcerated women, doing legal advocacy work, training in martial arts as part of the women’s self-defense movement, playing on and sometimes coaching her women’s softball teams. She and Lee formed a basketball team that she sometimes coached, too, and they coauthored an article in *Gay Community News*, “Why Two Lesbians Fight Violence Against Women.” She was a regular at the Saints, the city’s main lesbian bar, where her love for pool first caught fire. “I was very popular,” Cristy said, grinning, when I asked her about her bar life. “I was gorgeous.” She went to women’s dances.

“And she was a great musician,” Lee recalled when we spoke of her time with Cristy, who had begun to perform at local coffeehouses, women’s music events, and rallies. “She could play the guitar, would write songs and play songs, women-oriented songs.”

When, nearly half a century later, at age seventy-five, Cristy pushed me in our conversation to better grasp what she called “the productive, exploratory, incandescent glory of that period of the lesbian movement, as growing numbers of women from every walk of life began to explore what it meant to be a woman-identified woman,” her eyes lit up, and I could see the thirty-year-old firebrand sitting before me.

Cristy’s deep connections to the lesbian feminist world were plain to see. How that world fell apart for her is harder to piece together. I’ve tried to dig into the archive to pin down some details without much success. *Gay Community News* reported now and then on anti-trans discrimination at gay and lesbian bars in Boston. It noted, for example, a 1975 instance at the predominantly gay male Citadel when “a male-to-female transsexual was refused entrance to the room reserved for women and asked to sit where the men sit, at the front of the bar.” *GCN* editorialized that “transsexuals, persons who live 24 hours a day as women, are entitled to be considered women,” because “they have opened themselves totally to the oppressions that women face” and are thus “entitled to the privileges” of participating in women’s spaces. But the precarious status of trans women in community spaces that Cristy navigated so well for so long were clearly evident. When *GCN* asked both the Citadel and the Saints to clarify their official policy on trans inclusion, the Citadel replied, “Women are women who are born and raised as women,” and the Saints replied, “We treat transsexuals as men whether they are pre-op or post-op.”

A lot of what happened to Cristy was never written down to begin with. I found a letter published in February 1978 in *Lesbian Connection*, a national grassroots publication in which lesbians from all over the United States publicly shared news and views, from a correspondent in Somerville that read, “It has recently surfaced in the Boston community that a ‘woman’ who’s very active in the lesbian community is actually a transsexual. There has yet to be a largescale discussion here about the issues this brings up, i.e., no newspaper articles yet. Hopefully this will happen.” I don’t think it ever did. But that same issue of *Lesbian Connection* contained correspondence on other trans lesbian exclusion controversies in other cities, including Dayton, Ohio, and Madison, Wisconsin, which suggests

that, then as now, anti-trans sentiment can become a bandwagon to jump on. Opinions, however, were by no means uniformly hostile. One letter writer said, “I think that to be male and become female and love women is the greatest expression of true lesbianism there is. She could have stayed male and loved women without society telling her she was wrong.” Another correspondent wrote, “Those of us who were born female cannot, I’m sure, cherish our womanhood as profoundly as do those to whom it comes later on in life.”

I found an essay in a San Francisco periodical called *Dykespeak*, written in 1994 in response to the resurgence of transphobic feminism that accompanied the new burst of trans activism that I myself was part of at that time. The author, Mara Math, recalled being a member of the editorial collective of a publication called *The Second Wave*, one of the first feminist quarterlies in the country, back in 1978. She described how the collective split right down the middle on the question of publishing an attack on trans women. “Not coincidentally,” Math wrote, the three “who voted against publishing a vitriolic hit piece” were “those who had actually met a Real Live Transsexual,” while those who were for it had not. “The real live transsexual I knew,” she continued, “was the target of a campaign to drive her out of the Boston lesbian community. As a Jew and a lesbian I could not stomach the hate-mongering I saw; it reeked too much of the Nazi meetings held to ‘debate’ whether Jews were, in fact, human.”

Communal memory does not often record, nor easily recall, that which it willfully abjects. I asked the people in my life now who were in Boston then to rehash the history for me blow by blow. But trauma fragments memory, and Cristy’s thoughts about it all can ping around like popcorn in a stovetop skillet with no lid. There are some things that Lee hasn’t had to think about for a long time, maybe some things she might rather forget. Besides, it was something that happened decades ago. Details blur in the distance of time. Mimi simply doesn’t remember the conflict that came to a head at the Cambridge Women’s Center in 1978. It wasn’t something that directly affected her.

Lee compares what happened to being ambushed by something in her peripheral vision that suddenly smacked her in the face. In 1978, there was

a public meeting at Bread and Roses, the liberal and mostly heterosexual feminist group, which was still a little uncomfortable about lesbian feminists maybe giving mainstream feminism a bad name. “I think the Bread and Roses people were good people,” Lee explained diplomatically. “I mean, they were working to embrace lesbians, but it didn’t come naturally to them.” They had zero engagement with trans issues, which made them all the more susceptible to the band of young zealots in Janice Raymond and Mary Daly’s ambit, who showed up to demand that the group denounce transsexuals and refuse to acknowledge trans women as women.

Lee remembers this encounter as the opening salvo of a campaign, moving organization by organization, public meeting by public meeting, to push an ideological agenda on a topic that most people hadn’t given much thought to at all. She recalls the “cohort of women who would sneer” when they saw her because she was involved with Cristy. She remembers most vividly when the Cambridge Women’s Center, the absolute hearth of Cristy’s world, held a big meeting to vote on whether she could still be involved, now that people knew she was trans. Cristy, by this time, had no faith in a positive outcome and declined to attend. Lee went so that she could speak up, confident that reason would prevail. She left that meeting shattered when the Women’s Center voted that Cristy was no longer welcome there.

“I certainly never went back again,” Lee said, “and I think there were some number of other people who left the Women’s Center over it, but there were also some who were really committed to trying to reclaim the center and make it a place for all women, including trans women. But all that kind of peaked, and then it sort of slid away, like the issue never existed even for people who knew that it did.”

Cristy remembered it somewhat differently: more of a gradually escalating worst-case scenario than an ambush. The year she transitioned was the year that Beth Elliott had been kicked out of DOB, and Cristy was aware that it had happened. “Early on in my transition,” she said, “I thought to myself I would need to be a world-class lesbian were the shit ever to hit the fan.” Those initial worries diminished over time. As her involvement in the movement and community grew, she thought more about how to make

the community welcoming and supportive of everyone, and less about her own status as a trans lesbian.

At the time, Cristy never felt that she was closeted, just that she didn't lead with being trans. It wasn't a secret. After all, she'd had friends and lovers in the feminist community when she transitioned. She'd been invited onto the radio talk show of a well-known political activist and took calls from listeners about what it was like to be trans. When there were isolated instances of anti-trans discrimination at the bars she frequented, like the Saints or the Citadel, she spoke out and spoke up in favor of trans inclusion, at times identifying herself as trans, at others not. She says nobody clocked her because everybody then had a stereotype of trans women as hyperfeminine heterosexuals obsessed with dresses and makeup, while she appeared every inch the svelte and somewhat androgynous dyke she actually was. Her friends knew she was trans, her lover knew she was trans, and it was nobody else's damn business.

Before long, though, strangers, youngsters, newcomers, true believers in a bizarre and novel conspiracy theory about transsexualism and *gender* started showing up more frequently in her spaces, started chipping away at the corners of her world, thinking that it rightfully belonged to them. They didn't know her as a person. They just knew her as a transsexual—an empty placeholder to be filled with whatever they feared and hated about whatever they thought transness meant. They considered her to be a man, at a moment in feminist history when a new crop of radical lesbian separatists who wanted to “off the patriarchy” began to push for the exclusion not just of trans women but also of women who were involved with men, or women who were the mothers of sons.

Cristy described to me the ongoing harassment campaign. Somebody posting a sticky note with a male symbol on her mail slot at the Women's Center, and scrawling another male symbol under her name on the staff board. “At first I was sure it was a swastika,” she recalled, “breathtaking in its violation.” Acolytes of Mary Daly began leaving messages on the Women's Center answering machine, asking Cristy if “he” wanted to come to Daly's class at Boston College to debate transsexualism. She went to one early meeting at the center about her involvement there. It was

overwhelmingly supportive of her, focusing on how to respond to threats of a boycott if Cristy remained involved. But the vibe was shifting in the broader community. “I started having one bad interaction after another with people I thought were my friends,” Cristy said. “People at the Women’s Center, people in different groups, just people I’d run into on the street. It was growing, the cauldron bubbling, starting to boil, but I still didn’t catch the enormity of it yet.”

Cristy remembers a banner she and Lee made and carried together in lots of demonstrations that said “Women Unite!” They were holding it aloft at a protest when somebody shouted, “There’s the transsexual!” and pointed at the two of them. “I could see a woman staring straight at Lee,” she said, “her face literally contorted with rage, like the white faces I had seen in Southie, dripping with race-hatred during the anti-busing protests, and I understood immediately what had happened.” Cristy was passing. They thought Lee was trans. “Which just goes to show you the vile absurdity of it all,” Cristy explained, “even though I couldn’t ignore the import of it.”

Cristy and Lee carried their banner again at another march soon thereafter. “We were passing under an overpass filled with women,” Cristy recalled, “when somebody shouted, ‘Hey, Cristy, look up!’ They were part of Mary Daly’s crew. Somebody snapped my picture—and not because they liked the way I looked.” A week later at another demo, Cristy ran into another photographer, an acquaintance of Lee’s. She was agitated, and said she knew that the picture of Cristy had been sent to feminist and gay newspapers all around the country, outing her as trans, labeling her an infiltrator. That photographer said she’d been getting calls all week from outlets wanting more photos of the notorious transsexual. She wasn’t sure that that would be right. She felt peer pressure to conform to the new party line. She expressed fear that if she didn’t go along with the requests, then she herself would be ostracized from the movement. And to be honest, she wasn’t sure of her own feelings about trans women in lesbian feminist spaces. The photographer then asked Cristy for guidance but expressed *nothing* to indicate she understood or felt concern for what Cristy herself was experiencing.

“That’s when I realized how big it had gotten,” Cristy said. She was still choking on the irony. “Like *she’s* the victim? Like she’s the good citizen of Salem, wringing her hands and wondering if it’s okay to burn witches? Being targeted, death threats, my relationship starting to fall apart, my lesbian feminist women’s community coming apart at the seams, and I’m supposed to tell *her* the right thing to do? She wants my support, when she’s offering none to me? The women’s movement, in my opinion, was beginning to fail so many women, not just trans women, who couldn’t pass the purity tests being administered by a little army of self-appointed haters.”

Death threats? I ask her to tell me more.

“From all over, mostly from some women in Seattle, some directed personally to me, others I heard about secondhand.”

There was a separatist group in Seattle, the Gorgons, who had threatened to kill Sandy Stone, too, when she was there on a concert tour with some of the Olivia Records recording artists during the boycott campaign. I asked Cristy if that was who had threatened her, but she didn’t really know anything more. Like she’d said already, she sometimes didn’t have the bigger picture for things she experienced directly, or the details that I had been able to reconstruct as a historian. But the bigger picture is pretty simple, really, however many different instances it might encompass: if people feel you are fucking around with their realities, they just might try to kill you. Ask Judith Butler about what happened in Brazil. Or the dozens of trans women murdered in the United States every year, and the hundreds more murdered around the world.

Cristy’s been upbeat and lively throughout our conversation, but she’s started gently weeping as she tells me all this.

I say, “I’m sorry my questions have stirred up painful old memories that you’ve put away, but I really appreciate you sharing them.”

“They’ve *never* been put away!”

I hear the raw suffering in her voice, see her strength in rising above the memory of wounding as she continues to explain.

“I’ve fully recovered. And I’ve never recovered. Those were the happiest days of my life. I was part of a powerful, joyful, beautiful community of people. And that community was undermined for me, and for

so many other women. I don't spend every day mourning, but still, I feel the pain of it. I don't think of myself as a victim, but I'm aware that I was victimized. I'm stronger for what I've experienced. But how do you process the consequences of being targeted like that, when it becomes a pogrom, when it reaches a level that's unthinkable? I never felt, nor do I believe now, that I was 'kicked out.' I could have stayed and fought. But I simply could not bear being made to feel for a second time in my life like an unwanted member of a family. I couldn't face daily disappointment in women who should have known better. So just as I did with my birth family, I made a survival decision to walk away."

Cristy stayed on in Boston for another decade and a half, though she'd lost much of her community due to how the Daly and Raymond crowd's anti-trans, anti-*gender* narrative successfully framed her involvement as an unwelcome presence and divisive threat. Despite her isolation and sadness, she found support from friends and professionals, as well as inspiration and excitement in the worlds of martial arts, chess, chess journalism, and eventually competitive pool. She continued her activism via a paralegal job with federally funded legal services, in which she fought gentrification, housing loss, violence against women, and discrimination against the deaf and profoundly hard of hearing. Her work in support of the deaf community, she told me, is discussed in a chapter of the book *Law Stories*, an anthology of case studies in public interest legal activism edited by Martha Minow, a former dean of Harvard Law School, and Gary Bellow, then the director of clinical programs there. She built a new social life through her work and through sports. Once her father died, she moved to Albuquerque, where her mother had retired, to be with her. When her mother died, she moved to the Pacific Northwest.

"I was surviving," Cristy tells me of those years. "I was slowly, slowly learning to acknowledge the trauma of my childhood, my family, my inability to live up to and protect the most important love and friendship adventure of my life. I came to understand that when things got difficult within the community, I simply did not have the tools, either emotionally or linguistically, to face my accusers and fight back without internalizing their message of hate and dismissal."

Lee has her own complex feelings about the tumult that contributed, in ways both direct and indirect, to her eventual breakup with Cristy. Rage. Fear. Grief. Regret. Relief. Guilt. The storm took its toll and eventually became too much for them to weather together. She turned the page. “One of the things that was true in my relationship with Cristy,” she told me that afternoon in Truro, “was that we did not talk too much about her experience, about her experience growing up trans, what that was like for her, about what transitioning was like for her.” Lee pauses, tries to put her own emotions into words, eventually shrugs one final time. “Well, sometimes that all came out in dysfunctional ways. In retrospect, there’s so much I never knew about her life.”

“I wish things had gone differently with Lee,” Cristy told me. “I brought a great deal of trauma and loss into my relationship with her, and found love, acceptance, adventure, and commitment. As pressure built within the community, I found it harder to be open and honest about my fears, including my fear of losing her, and that hurt our chances of making it as a couple. But you know something? We tried, and it was wonderful that we did.”



It’s early evening on a fine late-summer Thursday, and a flat and easy two-mile walk if you take the shortest route between Harvard’s Schlesinger Library and where I’m staying with Rani, a writer friend from Berkeley who now lives with her doting husband, Will, and all their canine kiddies in a homey, sunlit flat on Dudley Street in Cambridge. I’ve added a little research trip onto the back end of a summer vacation in Provincetown. The Schlesinger is the nation’s preeminent archive of American women’s history, and I’ve spent the week delving into Collection MC 969—Raymond, Janice Grace (1972–2018), 8.04 linear feet—immersing myself in the records of Raymond’s personal life and work. This evening, I don’t feel like taking the shortest route back to Rani’s. I feel unsettled, ruminating on Cristy’s history, its foreshadowing of the current wave of anti-trans animus, and Raymond’s role in both. Thinking about other things, too. I

have no destination in mind. Rambling always helps me parse my heavy moods.

Finding myself near the Mount Auburn Cemetery, one of the first garden-style memorial parks that started replacing spooky old church graveyards in the early nineteenth century, I pop in to pay my respects to Johann Spurzheim's bones, decomposing beneath an elegant, unadorned white marble monument whose austere simplicity, the cemetery website tells me, sparked a national shift in funerary fashion. I wander from there to the hike-and-bike trails that encircle Fresh Pond, and before long happen upon Danehy Park, an urban greenspace that had opened only recently, I learned, in 2021, atop a former landfill. There's a bench beside a path facing something my map app calls the Miyawaki Mini-Forest. It seems like a good place to sit for a bit, to feel the feels and cogitate.

In the early 1970s, some internet searching on my phone soon teaches me, a Japanese ecologist named Akira Miyawaki developed a method for reestablishing ultra-dense pockets of fully functioning native ecosystems displaced by modern development. It involved identifying the plants native to a particular locale, amending the soil of a relatively circumscribed patch of land with compost and other organic material, replanting it with a mix of native species that approximate what a virgin forest there would have contained, and tending it just long enough for all the plants to become well established. The goal is to boost biodiversity, nurture pollinators, sequester carbon in the soil, reduce air pollution and soil contamination, improve groundwater absorption, cool the surrounding area to mitigate the urban heat island effect, and take a step to repair relations between indigenous peoples and later-arriving populations through mutual care for the trees. Or so say some of the many websites I found that promote the Miyawaki method.

There are now a great many such mini-forest projects around the world, and this one is offering a welcome little tonic for my soul. After days of mucking around in the toxic environment of Janice Raymond's archival papers, it feels good to be in the light and air with other beings that don't care a whit about how my genitals acquired their current shape. The forest reminds me of the Masumotos' peach farm in Fresno. It is another effort to

craft new relations between people and the land. It is another effort to heal the metabolic rift and restore ecological balance. Another opportunity to pay mindful attention to the more-than-human world, and to sense its living presence working its way into how I frame and filter that presence within my thoughts and sensory experience.

I think back on the ecosexual performance art of my San Francisco neighbors Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, where they marry Mother Earth because they love her and celebrate her body. Annie's archival papers, and Beth's, too, have been acquired by the Schlesinger, as have Sandy Stone's, for that matter. I find something profound in the physicality of a space of research and learning capacious enough to encompass all the incommensurable difference between all those various versions of womanhood and feminism. The outside world holds that same capaciousness as well. I am in it, and of it, however much Janice Raymond and others like her consider my unnatural monstrosity foreign to it due to the technical means of my embodiment. It was in fact a section in Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, "Boundary Violation and the Frankenstein Phenomenon," that provoked my own strike-back against *The Transsexual Empire*, which Daly's metaphysics had done so much to enable. Daly's language there is pure vitriol: trans women are "necrophiliacs who sense the lack of soul/spirit/life-loving principle within themselves and therefore try to invade and kill off all spirit" in others. I imagined myself, in that autotheoretical piece about identifying with the monster, looking Daly and Raymond directly in the eye while saying of myself, "It's *aliive!*" and grinning wickedly.

There's an admitted antagonism in my fantasy, but I also hold compassion for the misdirected hurt I recognize in Raymond and Daly's position regarding trans women like me. To spend time in Raymond's papers, and to read letters between her and friends and colleagues, helped me better see the "me-search" in Raymond's academic research. It is clearly rooted in the emotional consequences of feeling devalued as a girl by powerful religious figures claiming to speak an eternal truth, and in the conflicted attachments to womanhood that resulted from that narcissistic wounding. She expresses a profound feeling of psychological violation by

masculinist religion, and a devotion to healing herself from that wound. In personal correspondence with others who shared her ex-Catholic trajectory, Raymond and her friends sometimes quip about priests being men in skirts who try to subordinate women. A friend wrote to her that “the worst thing about a Catholic girlhood” was how it contributed to “the absolute difficulty of believing in myself. I can believe in any authority figure that comes along but it is difficult to believe in myself, in my heart.” Raymond replied, “I think one of the worst things about a Catholic girlhood is that it does everything to hold women back from dreaming different dreams and creating new realities.”

There on the bench by the Miyawaki forest, I sit with the awareness that the compassion I feel and the agitation I’m calming both ultimately derive from my complicated relationship with my own mother. That’s what I’ve mostly been thinking about as I wander away from the Schlesinger. Born in Arkansas’s Mississippi River delta in 1938, her tenant farmer parents doing stoop labor in cotton fields owned by somebody else, Mom was just a few years older than Janice Raymond. She’s been on my mind a lot, not just today but also over the past few days. She’d left this life after years of declining health and increasing dementia in the summer of 2020, during the most intense phase of the COVID-19 lockdown, though not due to COVID itself. The grief of her passing was then still only a few years old. Working in Raymond’s papers had surfaced it.

Like Janice Raymond, Mom bore a deep narcissistic wound from her treatment at the hands of men. Well, not men as an entire category. A man. Her father, John Earl. He was violent and cruel by all accounts, and abandoned the family before I was born. He was so absent from any talk during my growing-up years that I just assumed he must have died long ago when my mother, the youngest, was still a small child. It wasn’t until the summer I was turning thirty, when I came out to Mom about being in the process of transitioning, that she told me the full story.

Mom’s mother, Ruby, was from Sharp County, Arkansas, up in the eastern Ozarks, near a place called Strawberry, not too far from Cave City and Evening Shade. Ruby met John Earl, from over in Swifton, when she was seventeen in 1929, and they got married pretty quick. She’d gone into

town one Saturday with her father, Lawrence, a blacksmith, and she'd slipped off to go to the motion picture show while he was conducting his business. She loved the westerns best of all. When she saw John Earl, a year her senior, riding down the main street on a big white horse, Ruby said, "I thought he was the purtiest man I ever did see." That was probably the happiest moment of their relationship.

Four kids later, John Earl wanted out of the marriage and Ruby refused, so he tried to murder her in her sleep one night by suffocating her with a pillow. She fought him off and started sleeping after that with a knife clutched in her fist. He molested my mother, a trusting little daddy's girl, when she was eight. When she didn't respond to his advances the way he expected, he grew cold and vindictive toward her. Sometimes he'd be waiting in the car to pick her up after school. "Hop in," he'd say, and drive Mom out in the country to a roadhouse he ran with his mistress. He'd make her wait in the car while he went inside to be with that woman, and then he'd come back out and tell Mom all about what they did. "Don't you breathe a word of this," he'd threaten every time, and then drive her home for supper.

John Earl had been a deacon in my mother's family's church. She'd watch him every Sunday, passing the collection plate, ushering people to their seats. She'd dare God, if he existed, to strike her daddy dead that very instant. God never did, which soured my mother's faith. But it didn't stop her from going to church whenever she had the opportunity, maybe looking without real hope for a father figure who actually loved her, and dragging me and my brother along for the ride.

When Mom was a senior in high school, she found herself home alone with her father one day, and he attacked her again, and she fought him off, and he packed his suitcase and walked away, and none of my kin ever saw him again. Mom telling me about her father's sexual violence was a welcome, of sorts, into a shared structure of feeling regarding what she thought it meant to be a woman. It was her way of making a new kind of connection with me as I became something she had not anticipated.

My mother was a strong woman who survived other tragedies, including the early death of my father, her childhood sweetheart and knight in shining

armor, the emotional rock of her troubled teen years. As a young widow she put herself through college while raising two kids as a single mom and went on to a successful career. She had a wide circle of friends. She developed a passion for opera. She traveled the world. She never remarried but had a string of romantic relationships. She was certainly a loving person, but she was not an easy one. As a survivor of sexual assault with emotional scars, she was hair-trigger sensitive to any slight or challenge, real or imagined. She did not trust, for good reason, that her boundaries would be respected. They collapsed easily and often. She could fall into the default mode of feeling victimized in the blink of an eye and cast whoever triggered her in the role of retraumatizing perpetrator, and lash out. That person was often me, the rambunctious small child she might feel frustrated with, the obnoxious eye-rolling teenager, the snarky young adult who couldn't get the hell out of Dodge fast enough. I could catch both barrels of her emotional shotgun blast to my face at any moment. It never felt fair. I always felt resentful.

In response to inhaling the secondhand smoke of the abuse my mother experienced at her father's hand, my basic posture in life for a long time was to hold myself ready to defend myself against unjust accusations of reviolating a wounded woman simply by being alive in her presence. It's a habit I have to guard against even now. I'd been in that defensive emotional crouch all week—angry, arguing in my head with Janice Raymond, justifying and explaining myself. Defending Cristy. Defending Margo and Beth and Sandy and all the rest of us. Wanting, at some level, to prove through my eloquence or brilliance or my simple human dignity that I was not, that we are not, the threat she imagines us to be. That we are good. I know that at some deep level my work in trans history and gender theory, my political activism—simply living my life—is an attempt at some sort of healing, some sort of repair, for the consequences of wounded women wounding me. I'm trying to tell a different story, shift the conflicts onto other grounds, in search of resolution.

However improbable the slaking of that reparative thirsting might seem, it is not an impossible hope. I know that women who have been wounded by men, men who swaddle their misogynistic violence in the cloak of

religion, can love a trans person rather than hate them. I know that because I know that my mother loved me. Even if she hurt me.

I know that “changing gender” can be part of changing *gender*, when it breaks open our relations with others and creates a space for them to become something new, something better. Because that’s what happened to me.

IX.

The immense granite boulders in Joshua Tree National Park come to more-than-life for me, on LSD, to reveal themselves as acephalic divinities incarnate. Their skins of fine-wrought golden fish scale, flashed with amethyst and vermillion, malachite streaked and quartzite studded, coruscate in the gentle breeze of the mind's eye.

Nothing entitles me to be here, yet the land presents itself and allows my presence. The land is generous that way, beyond all accounting, even to the uninvited. I am fixated with chemical intensity on what it means that I am here now, unable to turn away from all the pasts, vast and intimate, that have carried me to this moment.



Psychedelics offer a method. They promote neuroplasticity, rearrange the patterns of the brain's electrical activity, and through that altered instrument of perception allow a difference to present itself from beyond the mind's habitual way of interpreting experience. I don't think they need to be theorized much more deeply than that.

Psychedelics have played a not insignificant role in the history of *gender* and transness. The same early-twentieth-century cultural anthropologists who laid the groundwork for the social-scientific *gender* concept also promoted psychedelics to modern Western audiences, often by romanticizing their relationship to Native American spiritual beliefs and rituals. The archaeologist Mark Raymond Harrington, who studied with Franz Boas at Columbia and was married to a descendant of the nineteenth-century Seneca prophet Handsome Lake, introduced peyote to New York

City's bohemia in 1912, at a blow-out party at the home of the influential arts patron Mabel Dodge Luhan, after which psychedelics became trendy among all the beautiful people as a supposed pathway to ancient and arcane wisdom.

Harrington also wrote trashy pulp fiction under the pseudonym Ramòn de las Cuevas. His 1924 short story for *Weird Tales*, "Teoquitla the Golden," revolved around a swashbuckling, Indiana Jones-style archaeological explorer who discovers a lost remnant of the Aztec Empire in the remote Mexican highlands. When the explorer inadvertently contributes to the suicide of the emperor's daughter, he is given the choice of dying immediately by sacrifice to the war god Huitzilopochtli or of becoming a living sacrifice to the goddess Centeotl, the All-Mother. Preferring life, he chooses the latter—which turns out to mean that he is transformed into a woman by having plant-based hormones produced through native ethnobotanical knowledge injected into his bloodstream.

Ruth Benedict, Franz Boas's former student and later colleague at Columbia, not only wrote on the peyote ritual in Puebloan cultures; she used peyote herself, as did Alfred Kroeber at Berkeley. So did Margaret Mead, who in 1932 published an ethnography of a congregation in Nebraska of the Native American Church—the syncretic faith embraced by that Indian guy who sometimes went to the Mormonoid church my family attended when I was a teen—which uses peyote sacramentally. And so did Gregory Bateson, who, through his work with the national security apparatus during World War II, encouraged the CIA to experiment with LSD—whose psychedelic properties the Swiss pharmaceutical chemist Albert Hofmann had discovered only in 1943—as a mind-controlling, brainwashing "truth serum" in the early days of the Cold War. The Macy Foundation funded conferences on neuropharmacology, including the use of psychedelics. Modern Western ideas about psychedelics as a tool for the transformation or manipulation of consciousness are rooted in the same beliefs about the engineerability of personhood that inform the mid-twentieth-century cybernetic version of *gender*—and that now fuel the hype about the pharmaceuticalization of other psychedelic substances. Psychologist Timothy Leary, the acid guru of the sixties, was a faculty

member in Harvard's Department of Social Relations when he urged a generation to turn on, tune in, and drop out, as was his psychedelic colleague Baba Ram Dass, the former Richard Alpert.

Harry Benjamin used to dose his trans patients on acid, back before it was illegal, to see if their gender identities persisted while tripping, which he considered to be a good indicator that they were "true transsexuals" rather than cross-dressers or drag queens (for what it's worth, mine does). Reed Erickson, the trans man and philanthropist who bankrolled Benjamin and the university-based clinics, and underwrote a lot of social services and legal advocacy for trans people in the 1960s and '70s, including Gender Identity Services in Boston, was a next-level psychonaut and early advocate of off-label uses of ketamine as a tool for inner exploration. An engineer by training, as well as a seeker of esoteric knowledge, he was a proponent not just of medico-legal "sex change" but also of what he called "spiritual transsexualism." Physical sex change was not rocket science: snip snip, tuck tuck, inject this drug, sign this paper, and presto chango, achievement of social transition to another gender unlocked! "Spiritual transsexualism" was more ineffable. It was not about changing the body alone. It wasn't necessarily concerned with gender in the strictly masculine/feminine sense. It aimed at an ongoing transformation of consciousness through practices that might involve shamanism, meditation, magic mushrooms, astral projection, out-of-body experiences, and deep, dark dives into the K-hole.

I've had a semi-regular psychedelics practice for years. Ideally, I like to travel four times annually, around the solstices and equinoxes. I've had some big trips, including the classic, ego-dissolving, one-with-everything experience. If that's what dying is like, I'm not afraid of dying. I have wandered in awe through ancient redwoods teeming with the little forest spirits who tend them, watched rainbow-hued serpents arcing in and out of the beach sand where a river empties into an ocean to weave the land into existence, felt earth-energy conduct itself with orgasmic intensity from the soles of my feet on wet grass up through the crown of my head, seen sunsets filled with colored light beyond the accustomed spectrum, and looked up later to see those same vivid hues encircling every star in the sky. I'm reluctant to label such experiences mere hallucination. I understand

them as a line of flight to a becoming-more-than-human with something that exists beyond myself, the conceptual packaging of which has gone all loosey-goosey. Psychedelic experiences contain elements of something real. Feelings, for sure, at the very least. Feelings are always real when you feel them.



I'm sitting today amid fields of granite rolling like the sea, open to whatever difference my chemical teacher will show me, whatever it will enable me to feel. I'm atop an enormous undulating goddess-body of rock with Mimi, encircled by our friends and the dancing Joshua trees who extend their many-fingered limbs ecstatically toward the sun. Some of us are tripping, others are not. I'm maybe three hours in, not yet peaking, but getting there.

We are all listening to one another's stories of our ancestors coming to this continent. The Polish honey peddler struck down by cholera whose widow took their children to live with relatives on New York City's Lower East Side. The one who managed to get all the dining room furniture out of the apartment in Vienna and shipped to the States just before the *Anschluss* in 1938. Mimi's traced her eight great-grandparents to the shtetls they emigrated from in the nineteenth century. We've traveled there together, she and I, placed stones on broken markers atop neglected graves, visited derelict synagogues, desecrated and unroofed, whose empty insides now open to an endless Belorussian sky. My own ancestors came here from Scotland, mostly, so long ago that no memories of a homeland have survived in any family stories passed down to me. No actual histories. Just fictions.

Some words and the worlds that come along with them—*Joshua tree*, *Yucca brevifolia*, *National Park*—have circulated for so long that many of us who use them now don't even have to forget that they have been attached to the land and its life at the point of a sword, at the end of the barrel of a gun, over dead bodies. We do not see how these names have been bound to their objects and speakers by wide ribbons of striped asphalt; by electrical

lines that sag and hum in a hot wind; by markets, mortgages, mining claims; by the ambient sovereign powers of the military, the state, the police.

Gender is another such word that's been brought here, entangled with all that comes with it. I imagine it as a carceral form. In a reverie of chemically loosened and proliferating associations derived from reading and research, I reflect on fragments of histories of beliefs about embodiment that all collided in the colonial matrix of the early modern world. In Europe: the humoral body, composed of choler, bile, phlegm, and blood, whose shape changes when the composition and temperatures of the humors vary due to astral and environmental influences. In the belief systems of some West African cultures: the sense of the body not as a hermetically sealed meat-sack with a soul stuck inside, but rather a body with a bowl-shaped essence, open at the brim, into which spirits, energies, and natural forces can enter, to slosh and swirl around. In indigenous Florida, where the Calusa people, one of thousands of distinct cultures on Turtle Island, believed that each individual had three souls—one that resided in the pupil of the eye and stayed with the body after death, one that lived in the person's shadow, and another that lived in their reflections, both of which lost their connection to the body upon death and took up new residence elsewhere.

The body is not irrevocably destined to be a skinprison. It became that in the context of the transatlantic slave trade, which helped cement the ideology of a singular, solitary, unitary, and unique bodymind, whose unchangeable physical characteristics anchor a person for life in an unalterable social category, as a globally dominant paradigm. That ideology of embodiment became a naturalized belief that underpinned the logic of the racial chattel-slave system through which the modern world was built, a naturalized belief imposed on the populations of colonized lands, a naturalized belief that links categories of race and sex within the biopolitical paradigm of Eurocentric modernity.

★ ★ ★

The name *Joshua tree*, according to contemporary folklore, was bestowed by nineteenth-century Mormons trekking overland to and from their would-

be Kingdom of God on Earth in present-day Utah. The reality's a bit more complicated—Mormons did pass through the region in the nineteenth century; the name does refer to a biblical figure—but calling *Yucca brevifolia* “Joshua tree” doesn't seem to have caught on until the 1910s. But still, by then the Mormons and their neighbors had come to imagine those Mojave Desert succulents as characters in a Bible story. They saw in their upstretched limbs the figure of Joshua, the military leader of the ancient Israelites after the death of Moses, who was commanded by Jehovah to lift up his spear against the Canaanites to secure a Promised Land for his people. The Mormons, in a word, were Zionists, albeit of a different stripe than the usual, who imagined the territory they conquered and settled as already having been given to them in advance.

Whatever sectarian squabbles my mother's family might have had with the Brighamite branch of their faith, the broader mythos they still shared with them was what they bequeathed to me, more than an actual history. They fancied themselves latter-day Israelites by blood descent, endeavoring to establish a New Jerusalem in a New World. I was never taught anything about where my ancestors had come from, or how they moved across the continent to wind up in Arkansas and Oklahoma by the time I was born. But I *was* taught that we were descended from one of the Lost Tribes of Israel, the Ephraimite half tribe of Joseph, whose seed had been scattered to the islands of the sea after the Babylonian captivity, and that we were all now gathering in the end of days, to the heartland of America, where Christ would return to reign in glory for a thousand years before the Final Judgment.

I think: This is why the grown-up version of that little southern small-town kid I used to be has found such deep affinities later in my life with so many secular, diasporic, anti-Zionist Jews. We've rejected the same stories. We're all making community sideways somehow, rhizomatically, with no desire to sink a tale of entitled belonging into a land upon which we are nevertheless present. During Stalin's antisemitic purges in the late 1940s, he called the Jewish intellectuals of the Soviet Union “rootless cosmopolitans” who had no binding ties to the Russian people, and thus no abiding allegiance to the Soviet project. He meant that as a slur. I'd wear that

epithet as a badge of honor were it ever applied to me, and aspire to rootless cosmopolitanism as a goal.

To acknowledge that you are a stranger in a strange land feels like an ethically necessary first step for anyone who has ever arrived somewhere as an uninvited guest. When I try to unsettle from the inside what *gender* has come to mean and do, I'm orienting myself in the direction of a desired world to come. Pulling up roots, relating differently to place and history and others, feels like the right horizon to head toward.

Get up now, a wordless whisper prompts. Go further. Tug harder. Loose *gender's* roots from your body, from this soil.

★ ★ ★

I wander away from my friends.

My body, here, alive and interlaced with ill-cut syntax drips, with sweat that cools my skin, brisk wind, beneath a brightly blazing winter sun, and strains to slip its chain of words.

I wander.

Groping tendrils of perception find and work the narrow gap the molecule has pried apart between this world and another way for it to be, so that alterity can wing its way toward awareness, suddenly, a vagrant cormorant orange-billed, rising from the desert floor.

I wander, I wander in search of that bird.

That way, maybe, over there, toward that interesting arrangement of boulders in the middle distance.

★ ★ ★

In memory, my friend Maura and I are driving along the Oconee River on a muggy November morning out in Greene County, Georgia, not too far from the border with South Carolina, cruising along a deserted two-lane through a stretch of wooded and hilly land, chasing the ghosts of our respective families. The native sugar maple and white pine are long since logged and cleared, the cut-over now overgrown with scrub oak and kudzu. The river itself had been dammed decades earlier to create an artificial reservoir now

surrounded by posh golf resort communities and luxury hotels. Still, it's beautiful to see the morning fog steam up thick from the water and hang about the trees until a midday sun might come to melt it all away. I try to imagine what this country might have looked like when my ancestors arrived around here in the middle of the eighteenth century. They'd already been on this side of the ocean for a long time by then. Some of my family lines, I've learned, have been on this continent for ten generations. Before the day I'm remembering, though, I've never been here before.

The Oconee River was once the boundary established by treaty between white settlement and unceded Native lands. We stop on a bridge by a bend in the river that arcs around a grassy spot that is approximately where my ancestors once owned a three-hundred-acre plantation and nineteen enslaved workers on the bleeding western edge of the new United States. "It is my special direction to my Executors," my ancestor John Finley wrote in the will that described the location of his plantation, "that my negro woman named Judith be set free at my death." I wonder how many of those other eighteen were distant half cousins whose stories have lost their connection to mine. No graves to visit, I drop a stone in the languid water in honor of their memory, in acknowledgment of their suffering, in the knowledge that it is an insufficient gesture of reparation.

My mother's mother Ruby was a Finley, and her father Lawrence's great-grandfather was a man with the unlikely given name of Eleven. Folks called him Lev. He inherited the Oconee plantation and its enslaved workers when his father, John, died in 1803. John's grandfather, Robert Finley, from Dundee, had been the first of their line to come over from Scotland, to Maryland, in the 1690s, and had risen to civic prominence as a tax collector for the Port of Annapolis and inspector of arms for Talbot County. His grandson John struck out to extend his family's fortunes on the Georgia frontier, where Lev was born in 1769. Too young to have fought in the Revolutionary War, Lev joined the postrevolutionary Georgia state militia as a scout and spy engaged in backcountry guerrilla warfare against the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Muscogee Nations. He hated Indians, he said, because they'd killed a favorite uncle in a raid.

After driving a couple of hours past the Oconee, we arrive in Abbeville, South Carolina, where Pickens Street borders one side of a quaint town square whose focal point is a large white obelisk commemorating the Confederacy. I've never been here before, either. My father's mother was a Pickens. My earliest known ancestor in that line was Robert, born in 1644 in Scotland, who went to France in the 1660s, married a Huguenot woman, then moved with her to Ireland. Their children left from there for Bucks County, Pennsylvania, then traveled down the Great Wagon Road of the Shenandoah Valley to Abbeville by the 1760s, where they became part of the colony's frontier planter elite, many of them related by marriage to Huguenot merchants and enslavers in Charleston. My Pickens grandfather seven generations removed was first cousin—their fathers were brothers—to the Revolutionary War general Andrew Pickens, who took part in the Constitutional Convention and became South Carolina's first representative in Congress. Andrew married Rebecca Calhoun, aunt of the future vice president John C. Calhoun, whose racist defense of slavery and states' rights would help stoke the Civil War.

Back on the other side of my family, in 1794, Lev Finley joined a failed insurrectionary expedition led by a rogue militia officer, General Elijah Clarke, under whose command he had served in the Georgia state militia. With popular support from other Anglo-American settlers, they crossed the treaty line established at the Oconee River, built fortified settlements on the Native territory that they occupied, and declared themselves an independent sovereign nation. West Bank settlers, I think, historical and contemporary forms of colonialism melding in my mind as I meander across the desert toward those interesting boulders. The so-called Trans-Oconee Republic was a short-lived affair. George Washington considered its establishment an act of sedition against the United States, and his threat to send in troops soon forced the upstart republic's surrender and dissolution. Lev sold his inheritance on the banks of the Oconee and moved the family out to Arkansas, where their fortunes declined. Their children settled up in the eastern edge of the Ozarks, on the Strawberry River, where Ruby was raised a century later.

While the Finleys stole land and labor at the retail level and killed Indians to settle personal vendettas, the Pickens family stole land and labor wholesale and killed Indians as a matter of policy. My direct ancestors came from the ne'er-do-well branch of the Pickens clan that left South Carolina for Tennessee before pushing on to north-central Arkansas, where they became farmers and small business owners of modest means. But their famous cousin General Pickens defeated the Cherokee, who had allied with the British, in the backcountry battles of the War of Independence. On his plantation, Hopewell, the southern woodland peoples signed the new treaties that opened up much of their tribal lands for settlement. The abrogation of those treaties in the 1830s took what land was left and displaced the Native population there along the Trail of Tears, to the newly set-aside Indian Territory of present-day Oklahoma, where one day I'd be born.

That is my actual family history: a history of settlers who wagered on the basic bargain of whiteness in the colonial and early national periods—that of upward class mobility through geographic mobility, fueled by land theft and enslavement—who lost that bet but still kept playing the game.

★ ★ ★

Ethereal streamers of translucent Day-Glo confetti waft gently down from the sky as I approach the boulders I've been heading toward. Something feels like it's sticking to me, something I'd never have chosen. I am rubbing, rubbing my face and my arms, rubbing my face and my arms. I see that my arms are bubbling. A thin layer of skin slick with sunscreen sloughs off from all of that bubbling and rubbing, rolls into threads of little white worms, squirming little maggots worming their way out of me, wriggling across my forearms. Not something that ever rubs off.

A tawny gravel of decomposed granite crunches and sparkles in sunlight beneath my boots and I startle a cactus wren from a clump of cholla, but it's not the bird I'm looking for. The ground is heaving and breathing. I arrive at my destination, wave back at the friends who have kept a watchful eye from afar to signal that I'm doing okay. It's been, by clock-time, what, five minutes? I sit down in a shady gap between some

stones, lean against their rocky bulk to shelter from the sun. An image comes to mind of that toy with a neon-orange ball on a long rubber band attached to a paddle you whack it with. My perception is doing something like that. Whack! It zooms out hundreds of years and I take in my whole family history here on this continent then it snaps back to that wren on the cactus and zings down into some small place deep inside me. Whack! It zooms out to a complete THEORY of gender then snaps back to a picture of me on my grandmother's lap and burrows even more deeply into interior space. Whack! The ball has become the vagrant cormorant, orange-billed, rising from the desert floor. The rubber band stretches and stretches and stretches—then snaps. I tip backward into the darkness between surface and void that bestows the gift of unbinding feelings from forms, falling, trusting that what I am becoming will catch me as I fall.

★ ★ ★

In a recurring dream that sometimes finds me in the darkness, I am my adult self as I now exist in the day-to-day world. I wander through a party in a big house, filled with people from all walks of my life. I am profoundly, inexplicably sad. The people at the party are all excitedly engaged with one another, and nobody's paying any attention to me. I'm searching for something I can't seem to find. I don't know what it is. There is a closet in the vestibule; perhaps what I'm looking for is inside. I open the door to discover a young child huddled in the back corner of the closet floor. It has the kind of body that would have been assigned male at birth. Its genitals have been cut off. Its fingers and toes have been amputated, ears cut off, nose cut off, tongue cut out, eyes gouged out. Nobody knows it is in there, or if people know, they don't care. It's shivering, starving, anguished and alone in an impenetrable, irremediable solitude. It's me. I am horrified, shattered by grief. I gather myself in my arms and I cradle me. I will never abandon me. I will love me forever with all of my broken heart. I will be the mother I need.

That is the grisly fairy tale I have elaborated around some hard kernel of experience.

• • •

The year I turned five and was already a girl, the year I learned something new about the world that taught me I was trans, was the second time I lived in Jonesboro, Arkansas, with Mom and Ruby. The first time was when my father was in Korea, when I was eighteen months to two and a half years old, and Mom experienced another of her major tragedies. She was pregnant for the second time and gave birth quite prematurely to a baby boy with congenital physical anomalies so severe there was no hope for his long-term survival. Dad flew home from Korea on emergency leave. The baby lived for a month without ever leaving neonatal intensive care. They named him Bruce and buried him, and Dad went back to Korea. My mother told me repeatedly over the years that the deepest regret of her life was that she never held that baby, because the doctors told her it would be easier for her if she didn't bond with him.

I was too young to remember any of this or to understand what was going on at the time, but here's how I think what happened then made me a girl instead of a boy. We all get made as something, right? Otherwise, we're nothing at all.

It was just the run-of-the-mill hazards of early childhood. There is a critical developmental window before the infant enters the theater of living to assume its gendered role in the human drama upon the social stage. Psychological identity is at first malleable—infants have to have the capacity to be shaped by experience to begin with—but self-identification becomes fixed after the critical period, the way molded clay retains its shape once fired in the kiln. What the child locks in *as* is structurally determined by the possibilities present in the child's social and cultural worlds, which are in turn informed by the concepts, categories, grammars, and syntaxes of the child's languages. In my culture, men and women are positioned in different symbolic worlds into which boys and girls, respectively, are socialized. Sometimes, “for a variety of biographical reasons,” the child may make the “wrong choice.”

The contingent biographical circumstances within my theater of living during the critical period of my identity formation were that I was a small male child, socially placed in the symbolically masculine position

according to my culture's category-assignment rules for words and people, home alone with two grown women who exercised power over me, who had good reason to feel rage toward men. That made me their target. They did not abuse me, physically or emotionally, in any acute way that I remember, though the small aggressions were persistent and seem to have left their marks. Ruby would play a game with me where she'd sit me in her lap facing her, hold my wrists, coax me to relax my arms, then slap me in the face with my own hands and laugh at me for being gullible. She'd tell me she wished she'd been born a man, and I a girl. Mom was prone to losing her temper and losing her cool, and lashing out to thwack me with whatever she had at hand. A hairbrush. A kitchen implement. A belt. I never knew when I might find myself snatched up from beneath my armpit, feet dangling, getting whaled on for I knew not what.

"Speech and action from above gradually gender the self-object of the infant," Madison Bentley wrote, "the self-valuation being regulated by parental pleasure or resigned tolerance upon the discovery that the baby is a girl or a boy." Perhaps the emerging self-object of the infant might even take shape in a context of outright hostility to the socially sanctioned gender of rearing for a child of that sex.

I think what happened to divert me from the usual developmental path is that right at the stage when the little perceiving organism that was becoming-me first started laying down its primary psychical cuts between self and other, and coordinating those cuts with a body image, it experienced the impossibility of being positioned as it was being positioned. That is the mutilated image of my dreamchild. Because I provided an easy target for intergenerational retribution directed against the masculinist violence that had been directed toward women, *he* was simply not an emotionally viable point of attachment for the plastic psyche of little becoming-me to latch on to. Death and mourning were in the air; perhaps I even absorbed those feelings at some basic level, associated being *he* with being dead. Or at least with being absent. At that key moment, Dad was not around to exemplify the masculine position as survivable. The "I" I was becoming really needed to be elsewhere. It had to be somewhere. It traced a

line of flight toward the only other option available in that place and time. It locked in. *She* became the only me I've ever been or will be.

★ ★ ★

The infantile solution I found to the general problem of becoming a person presented no difficulties until I was five and first recognized that my solution had put me athwart the ordering of my social world. The necessary and unchosen cross-wiring of that foundational identification launched me on an uncommon life path, but that path emerged from circumstances that are quite commonplace, and ultimately quite banal. There's nothing particularly exotic about the ways misogyny and misandry can perturb the family field. I became a person the same way other people become persons; I just did it with a sideways twist.

There are obviously a lot of ways to be trans, and a lot of reasons for being so. Not that reasons are necessary. I'd never suggest that all trans people share an origin story similar to mine. But I do think the particular story of my self's trans-gendered origins that I've crafted from fragments of memories and feelings scavenged from my inner darkness, from my dream life and autoanalysis and reading and study, is similar to many other such stories in two important respects.

First, that transness is something that just happens sometimes. It is an intrinsic, ineradicable potential within the social process of becoming a person. It is this potential that John Money's normativizing gender theory was designed to forestall, eliminate, or "correct," and whose mere existence anti-gender ideologists seek to deny or destroy. But transness is a strategy that serves an unquenchable will to live; it is a monster that moves in the silent darkness without form or image to carry an emergent self across the killing field of psychological disintegration.

Second, that transness is not the wound; it is the healing. It is my transsexed self who bears the power that mothers the violated parts of me.

The transphobic feminism espoused by Janice Raymond and Mary Daly took direct aim at what it calls "male mothering" as a compensatory desire by men to usurp the life-giving function of female existence. That was Raymond's beef about androgyny in world religious traditions—that it was

symptomatic of transsexing the divine Female with a false masculine appearance. But the darkness moving through me teaches me that that sort of feminism has yet to learn the liberatory unbinding of feeling from form.

When I dwell in the power of ongoing transformation that I find inside myself, I experience there a lively capacity for material becoming that is ontologically prior to the female. It is prior to biological sexing. It is prior to biology, which I think does not enjoy a monopoly over animacy. Animacy, I would argue, is fundamental to materiality itself; to introduce the conceptual break between the living and the lifeless is to introduce the distinction on which all subsequent hierarchies are founded. If virtual quantum states weren't constantly flickering into and out of existence, if atoms didn't somehow swerve together and stick to one another of their own accord, no forms would form at all. There is no hard qualitative line between the organic and inorganic, just different material configurations and levels of complexity, with variable capacities for registering and responding to the events that act upon its substance and for sustaining or reproducing their forms across time. To break the forms that bind those capacities into a particular arrangement can be experienced as death, but it can also allow other lively potentials to emerge. That is a material capacity for bearing liveliness that need not be nominalized in anthropomorphic metaphor as the mammalian female as one of its special cases. But that's what *maternal* means to me, divorced from specific form: a generative ontological capacity for bearing life beyond the merely biological, as well as through it. I feel that sense of the maternal within me.

I owe my life in its present configuration, differently related to the biological, to the existence of that maternal capacity. I did not seek it. I did not earn it. I did not crack the predicament of my childhood circumstances by being smart enough to devise the perfect solution to a puzzle. The solution depended on a capacity that was already simply there, waiting impersonally, unasked for, present and available. It came into me from the outside, through the broken-openness of psychical form. And it saved me.

I'm no more a Christian than I am a card-carrying politically correct Marxist theoretician, but I do appreciate a good concept wherever I might find it. Grace. I'm willing to call what saved me grace, a gift freely

bestowed by the only power I actually venerate—the generative vitality of a cosmos from which I myself am not apart. To begin acknowledging this reality and working with it is what I think it means to begin dislodging the prison house of *gender* from my flesh. It is finding a capacity for the body truly to mean otherwise.



I can't have been lost in my acid-elsewhere too long, because the sun hasn't moved very far in the sky by the time I become aware of myself again. My friends haven't come to check on me. The ground still heaves and breathes. Luminous hieroglyphs, appearing and disappearing quickly, trace themselves ephemerally across the granite surfaces that hem themselves around me. The contrails of jets overhead elaborate themselves into graceful arabesques. Whenever I'm tripping hard I can close my eyes and still see what I saw with my eyes open. I close my eyes. Oh, yeah. Trippin' hard. I see it all. *And everything is so radiantly beautiful.* I long for it to dissolve me into it and vice versa. The land still presents itself to me, still accommodates my presence.

But there is a barrier. The barrier is somewhere inside me. *Everything is so radiantly beautiful and I am trespassing.*



The southwest corner of present-day Oklahoma is not a place most people think of, if they think of it at all, as having mountains. It does. Seven hundred and fifty million years ago, spreading tectonic plates pulled apart an archaic supercontinent, and magma from deep inside the earth welled up from the new seabed's rift zone to create islands through the same geological process that is creating Iceland at this very moment. The remnants of those ancestral landforms are now an anomalous outcropping in the Great Plains called the Wichita Mountains—piles of weathered granite boulders half a billion years old that resemble those of Joshua Tree National Park more than anyplace else I've ever seen. Their highest peaks—dotted with scrub oak, encircled by soaring hawks, and home to the

largest bald eagle population south of Alaska—still rise like islands that jut thousands of feet above the flat, endless sea of grass that now surrounds them. Bison and elk still roam the mountains' wide valleys, pocked here and there with prairie dog towns and carpeted with wildflowers in the late spring of each year. They became the nation's first national wildlife refuge in 1901 because Teddy Roosevelt liked to go hunting there. They are sacred to the Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, and Wichita peoples who still live in the vicinity. I grew up in the shadow of those small mountains, and they remain the most special place on earth to me.

Crouched in the shade of my little rock shelter amid the Joshua trees, I am yet again driving in memory on another leg of my family history road trip with Maura to a little town called Cache, on the southern flank of the Wichitas. There, in 1957, white entrepreneurs opened a Native American-themed amusement attraction called Eagle Park, with a general store called the Trading Post, in hopes of catering to visitors to the wildlife refuge. They purchased several rustic historic buildings and relocated them there to recreate their fantasy of an old frontier town. One of those buildings was Star House, once the home of Quanah Parker, the last Comanche war chief, the original location of which was a few miles away.

Parker played a pivotal role in helping his people make the transition from nomadic life to a sedentary existence as farmers on individual allotments of land all around the Wichitas. One way Parker did so was to promote the pan-tribal Ghost Dance religion, a ritual of collective renewal in a time of cultural collapse, in the 1890s. Another was to promote a version of the peyote ceremony common among Native peoples throughout the borderlands of northern Mexico and the southwestern United States. Parker's efforts contributed to the formation of the Native American Church in 1910.

Star House is a two-story, ten-bedroom clapboard building with ten five-pointed white stars painted on the brick-red shingles of its roof. Constructed around 1890 to accommodate all of Parker's many wives and children, it doubled as the hub of Comanche tribal life, where Parker entertained local cattle- and oil-business elites and greeted visiting dignitaries, including Teddy Roosevelt when he came to visit. Parker's

grandchildren sold the house to the Eagle Park developers in 1958. I guess they needed the money. I remember going there frequently as a kid. Every year-end school party, it seemed, took place at Eagle Park.

Back in the 1950s and '60s, the owners of Eagle Park would stage Indian dances in the Trading Post parking lot every weekend to draw the tourists in. The very first photographs of me were taken there in 1961 when I was just a few days old, after Ruby came out on the Greyhound bus from Arkansas to give my folks a hand with their new infant. My parents, newly arrived from my father's previous posting at an army base in Germany, where I was conceived, thought the Indian dances were something exotic that none of the kinfolk ever would have seen back home. The family was excited to welcome the new generation I represented. Each of them took turns holding me while the others snapped some pictures that now all live in a drawer in the bedside table of my bedroom in San Francisco.

★ ★ ★

Punctum, in the usage of the cultural theorist Roland Barthes, refers to an incidental detail in a photograph that pricks or wounds a particular viewer due to some private meaning the viewer associates with the image beyond its representational content or formal compositional elements. Those first photographs of me have three: they juxtapose the first image of the body I still live, with those that bore the intimate familial relationships that would shape my peculiar sense of self, and they situate us all within the long historical trajectories of settlement and displacement in which a certain version of *gender* has transpired.

★ ★ ★

In Joshua Tree, I am interpreting my experience of an invisible interior barrier as something that protects me from grief. Grief is a liquid draining from my tissues that pools in the pit of my stomach, and I struggle to contain it and keep it down. Grief over my mother's still-somewhat-recent death? The longer-buried grief of my father's untimely demise? A more distant grief over the inherent violence of all gendering, a grief that finds

me sometimes in my dreams? An impossible volume of grief. An ocean of grief rising tidelike inside me, lapping the barrier's edges.

★ ★ ★

Maura and I pull our rental car into the weedy parking lot of the Trading Post, pretty much right where those pictures of me had been taken sixty-some-odd years earlier. The whole Eagle Park complex went belly-up in the 1980s and has long since fallen into decay.

We hop the padlocked gate onto the abandoned grounds and try to trace our way to whatever remains of Star House. We walk where visitors walked for thirty years when they came to ride the carnival rides and eat cotton candy to taste a bit of confectioned history about the vanquished horse-lords of the southern plains and wash it all down with a Coke. A cow pasture now, it's strewn with the stripped-down chassis of abandoned cars and trucks, where improvised seats of cinderblock and liquor bottles encircle charred remnants of impromptu piss-soaked firepits left by other trespassers before us. Over there are the mangled metal rails of the roller coaster, corroded and collapsed. Here, the Tilt-a-Whirl rusting silently into the ground. The Ferris wheel, long stilled, pokes above a canopy of mature trees now grown around and through it. Dismembered legs of carousel horses mingle on a patch of asphalt with beer cans and a busted cash register and shards of shattered glass. We are anthropologists from the future, marveling at the derelict lo-fi pleasure palace of a mid-twentieth-century civilization that has already picked up and gone somewhere else, and left something far older behind, despoiled.

This wreckage—this is where I'm from.

On the far side of a barbed-wire fence we finally behold the overgrown remnants of Star House itself, the five-pointed symbols that gave it its name still visible on a roof that is now crumbling in slow motion into the building's interior.

Someone has planted squash in the ruins.

★ ★ ★

When my grief connects to this memory it overflows the barrier and gushes out to sunder me in two. I am still fixated with chemical intensity on what it means that I am here now, unable to turn away from all the pasts, vast and intimate, that have carried me to this moment. I run a mental tongue around the contours of a congenital absence I haven't noticed before, because the whole known history of my family on this continent has taken place within it. Never before have I found its edges and touched its bloody lips. It is a ravaging emptiness where right relation to place and home might once well have been. Its vacuum has sucked my errant people forward with a homeless hunger that would sate itself on the bounties of others' feasts. Grief pools the deepest here. Grief for the violence that has fed the emptiness. Grief for the emptiness itself. Grief of diaspora, of placelessness, come back to roost at last. Grief in the impossibility of being here, grief in having no other place to be.

How like the grief of my gendering, which opened a path to be elsewhere. Perhaps the function of being split by grief is to open oneself in preparation for another way of being.

* * *

I am sobbing, sobbing. Something is moving inside me. I lurch to my knees and hunch over. I am puking, puking, puking everything out of me. I am still in trespass on the land. The ground is still heaving and breathing. I see that the land has received my inglorious offering. It continues to accommodate my presence. The land is generous that way, beyond all accounting, even to the uninvited.

How might this moment become a beginning for me of a new world we desperately need? I lift my eyes to the horizon to see what I might see.

X.

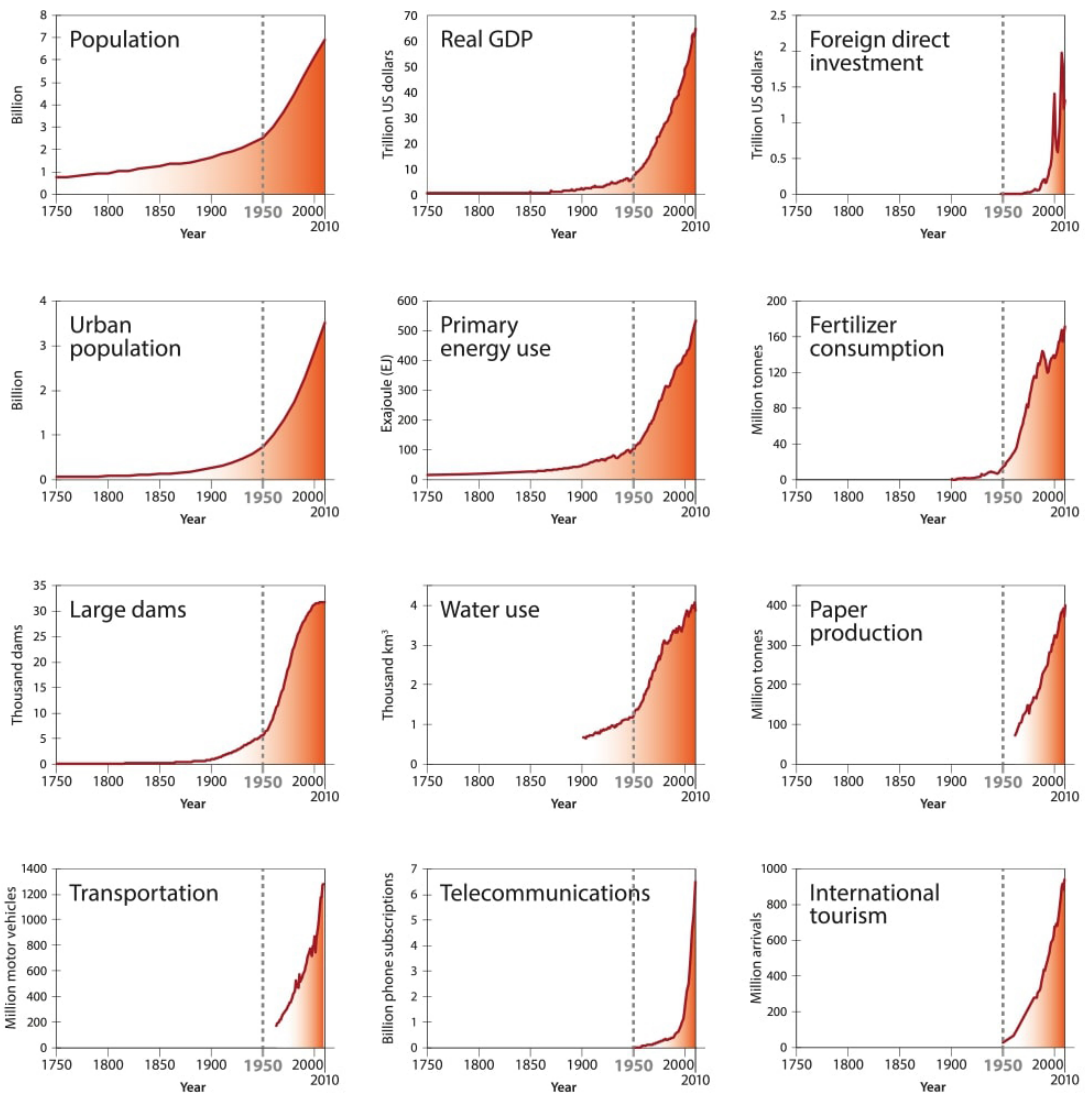
One of the few strings attached to my 2022–23 research fellowship at the Stanford Humanities Center was that each fellow had to share some of their research with all the other fellows at a weekly lunchtime work-in-progress presentation. That was a really good string to be attached to, because those thirty-something cumulative hours of learning and discussion over the course of the academic year shaped the reconceptualization of my project, in ways great and small, by exposing me to the work of scholars I wouldn't necessarily have engaged with otherwise. I had the rare privilege of enjoying “a life of the mind” that year. Who knows whether what I had then will have even a near-term future? Even if the Trump administration doesn't manage to decapitate higher education first, the whole knowledge sector feels like it's about to have its game table flipped by AI anyway.

But back in the day, I thought those lunchtime presentations and the conversations they sparked were thinkology at its best. I learned there about the weirdly large overlap between Fred Turner's seemingly unrelated work and mine, which allowed me to understand the cybernetic roots of the *gender* concept attributed to John Money. I connected the dots between Robert Proctor's work on the tobacco industry and agnotology to current efforts to manufacture consent about “gender ideology,” and I followed some of the leads I learned from Londa Schiebinger about using big data to trace the genealogy of the *gender* concept. I was able to engage serendipitously with linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians—as well as scholars of film and literature and religion and music and art—who already thought in sophisticated ways about topics I was just beginning to wrap my head around as I began tracing a new history of *gender*.

Matt Walsh's public lecture had caused one penny to drop for me that year at Stanford: paying attention to the continuities between grammatical and psychosocial *gender* was a way to defuse a transphobic talking point by circumventing the whole John Money story, while opening up deeper conversations about *gender*'s role not just in the categorization of words and people but also in the social production of knowledge, truth, meaning-making, and reality. At its most expansive, *gender* is part of the semantic machinery that orchestrates how we conceive the world in terms of objects and actions and make their movements make sense to us, in part through how we group those things together in categories, reflected in the structure of language, that in turn say something about how we imagine them to relate to one another and to the rest of the world they engage. Paul Nauert's work-in-progress presentation at the Humanities Center provoked another penny drop about the relationship between *gender* changing and a changing world.

Paul's project was a comparative study of US industrial policy in occupied Germany and Japan that explored how the US military became the primary driver of anthropogenic climate change over the second half of the twentieth century. He showed some charts representing what environmental historians have dubbed "the Great Acceleration." Most folks are familiar with that hockey-stick-shaped graph of rising levels of atmospheric CO₂, but that's just one metric among many that spiked sharply in the decades after 1945. Ocean acidification, rates of tropical rainforest deforestation, human population increase, the use of nitrogen-based fertilizers, the volume of international air travel, and numerous other change indicators in geophysical and social systems all have broadly similar hockey-stick-shaped trend lines for the post-World War II period (see [Figure 1](#)). Collectively, some argue, these indicators mark the beginning of a new geological era, known popularly if not yet scientifically as the Anthropocene, in which human activity has become a principal agent of planetary transformation.

Socio-economic trends



Earth system trends

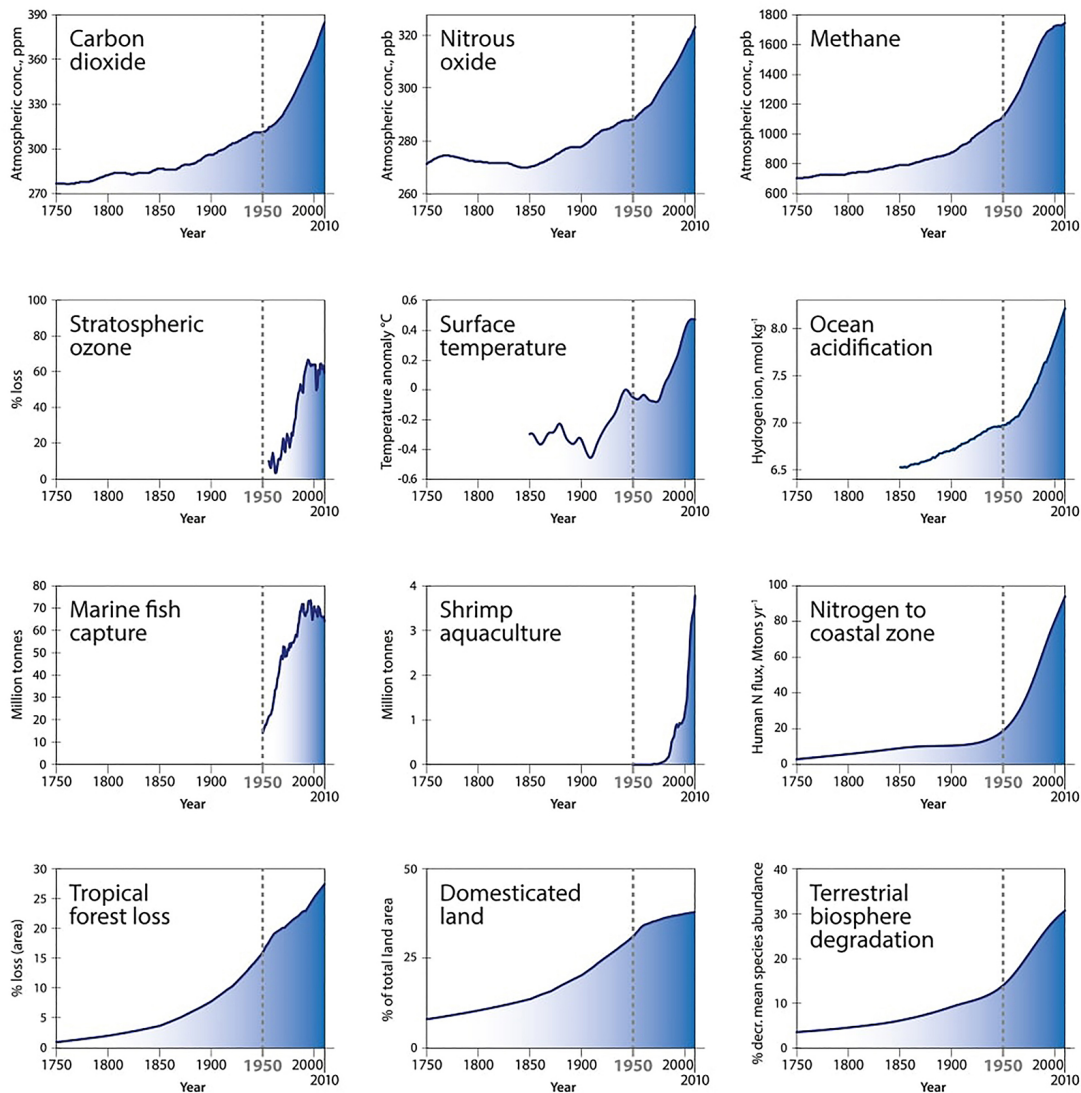


Figure 1. The “Great Acceleration” of the Anthropocene, 1750–2010. (*Future Earth*, <https://futureearth.org/2015/01/16/the-great-acceleration>, retrieved February 2023)

Right after that lunch, I went upstairs to my office to prepare a presentation of my own for an interdisciplinary online working group of scientists and scholars—biologists and psychologists mostly—who were all interested in the history of the social-scientific *gender* concept. I was going to share my latest research into Orson Fowler, Madison Bentley, and other people not named John Money. I wanted to include a graph showing the rising prevalence of the word *gender* in English-language texts post–World

War II. I used the Bookworm Viewer feature of the HathiTrust collection of digitized historical texts to generate one. It spit out another of those hockey-stick graphs (see [Figure 2](#)). I already knew the word *gender*'s prevalence started slowly trending up in the fifties, inflected sharply in the seventies, and had reached the stratosphere by the twenty-first century. But sometimes literally seeing a similarity of shape is what allows you to recognize that two things belong to the same category.

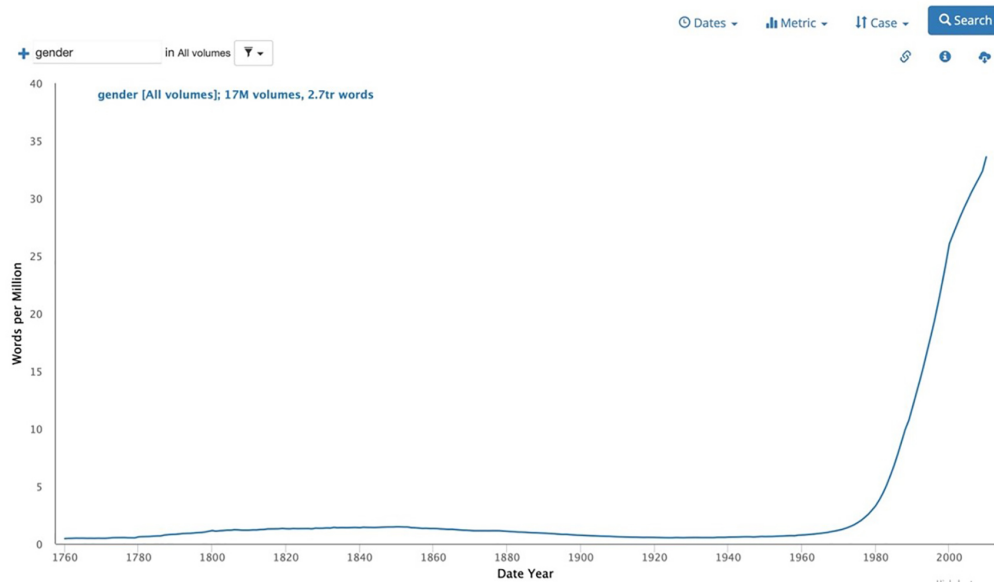


Figure 2. Usage Rates of the Word *Gender* in English, 1760–2020. (*HathiTrust Bookworm Viewer*, retrieved February 2023)

I'm fully aware that the usage rate of a word and the rate of, say, the annual tonnage of aquacultured shrimp, would seem to be an apple-to-oranges comparison, however similarly their graphs are shaped. But there is nevertheless an actual correlation in the historical timing and rates of change between a great acceleration in *gender*'s prevalence and the Great Acceleration of planetary and socioeconomic indicators of human-driven climate change. I think the correlation suggests more than the simple fact that *gender* terminology started taking off in the 1950s as a consequence of the very same global extension of a new world order backed by the US military that accelerated anthropic climate change. The rising prevalence of *gender* post-1945 does not merely parallel the advent of accelerating

climate change—both are co-constituted by the same historical forces at the same historical juncture.

Gender, as part of our linguistic infrastructure, does more than simply pattern speech; it encodes particular ontologies and epistemologies into the social world, and inscribes into thought and expression a set of assumptions about what kinds of bodies and relations are possible, desirable, sayable, and thinkable. In doing so, it helps define the *anthropos* (the “Man”) of the Anthropocene. The great acceleration of *gender*’s prevalence marks an increasingly urgent need to revise the categories of personhood, including the relation of the human to the rest of existence, as part of addressing the environmental, economic, social, political, technological, and spiritual polycrises of our current historical moment.

Arguably, this has long been the case, if the patterns I’ve discerned in the research that went into this book hold up to further scrutiny. The wordplay in the titles of *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* reflected the social dislocations of the early British Empire, while the *macaroni* in “Yankee Doodle” addressed those of the Revolutionary War. James Anderson’s infatuation with *ou* and Orson Fowler’s elaboration of a phrenological theory of *gender* both drew some of their salience from the capitalist transformation of the countryside. John Money’s cybernetic *gender* and Christine Jorgensen’s transsexual celebrity each owed something to the new geopolitical and technological imperatives of the Cold War and the Atomic Age. Trans and feminist *gender* emerged from the social movements of the 1960s. Meta-conversations about *gender* become ubiquitous recurrently, whenever the semantic work we do with that concept feels necessary to undertake anew. It has never felt more necessary than now.

★ ★ ★

For my money, *human* has made a royal mess of things. *Human* too often means something less than the sum total of every member of our species—and why should we even be concerned about our species above all others? We are not alone in this world. Too often *human* is reserved as a form of privilege for the few, denied to the many. To paraphrase the Afro-Caribbean cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter, *human* is overrepresented by the

Enlightenment figure of “Man” as the bearer of reason, the white male European hero of civilization; it renders the rest of us less than fully human by comparison. *Human* merely introduces a break, establishes a hierarchy, between those who can claim that noun, and the rest of the kingdom of life. What else is the *human*, besides this assertion of its superiority? I’d rather conceive of my biological existence in some way that finds a better fit among the rest of the living, and doesn’t define my actual existence as a trans person out of existence, than to be what *human* too often now comes to mean.

The Anthropocene asks us to define the human. The trans body answers: *That all depends on how you conjugate survival*. I threw my lot in with the monsters long ago. When we make new kind, we make new kin, and there’s nothing to lose that’s not worth losing when we forge greater affinities with the nonhuman, more-than-human world. *Gender*, grammatically as well as socially, is a practice for making and unmaking and remaking and maintaining categories of people, things, and words. The very same semantic techniques *gender* uses to orchestrate one particular set of relations can be applied to the orchestration of another set of relations. There can be new grammars of animacy, responsive in new ways to our complex entanglements with other life at planetary and extraplanetary scales. To change *gender* is thus to change how something becomes human, or becomes something else, and as such it becomes a site of contestation for the future of the human and its afterlives, and for our relationship to others and to the earth.

Jack Posobiec and Joshua Lisec published a book in 2024 called *Unhumans: The Secret History of Communist Revolutions (and How to Crush Them)*. The future vice president JD Vance blurbed it. Posobiec is a right-wing pundit better known for a lurid anti-communism inflected by the ethnonationalism of his anti-Soviet Polish ancestry and his promotion of the Great Replacement theory and the “white genocide” trope than he is for being an explicit opponent of “gender ideology.” But all roads lead to Rome. His vision of history aligns with the narrative two thousand years in the making, as E. Michael Jones recounts it, of the forces of a Christian Logos battling the forces of a demonic Chaos championed by a cabal of

Jewish perverts that culminates in the French Revolution, a secular Enlightenment, sexual liberation, the destruction of the family, and the demise of humankind that animates Gabriele Kuby's readership.

Posobiec and Lisec similarly see an eternal struggle between civilization, which they define as a "superstructure built on law and order that keeps the petty, the resentful, and the cruel away from the rest of us," and the opponents of civilization, who worship chaos. He dubs the enemies of civilization "*unhumans*" and channels the spirit of Orson Fowler when he warns that they "change their name, shape and form as needed" so that they might "undo order." We the unhuman, Posobiec contends, place ourselves outside of human community and encourage others to become unhuman, too. And we "will call this evil, good." Amen to that, Jack. I've picked my side. I feel more kinship with rocks than I do with what you'd have *human* mean.

★ ★ ★

In my outline notes for writing up this section of this chapter, I called it "bad stuff that's happened since 2022–23." So much bad stuff has happened since then that it's hard to know where to begin. It's now happening very fast. I wonder sometimes what the point is to writing a book about *gender* at the end of the world as we've known it, when history now needs to be written in the streets. I guess it's just that I need to act as if there will be a future we can live in, even if I don't quite believe it. I nurse some faint hope that something I write or do might somehow help others make the next big transitions we collectively face, whether toward death or a different kind of life.

When we zoom back over the roughly ten-thousand-year scale of the "long Anthropocene," when *Homo sapiens* first added settled agriculture and urban living into the mix of modes of social organization, alongside foraging and hunting, and we then peer ahead from that perspective, it sure looks like we're hitting the limit of a civilizational form that is producing environmental change faster than we can adapt to it. It's getting harder to distinguish reasonable expectations and sober analysis of the near future from hyperbolic fearmongering regarding any number of potential

catastrophes, notably environmental collapse and the supposedly impending AI and robotics apocalypse. What happens to the human when people displaced by climate catastrophe become superfluous to a robotic AI economy that mostly enriches the already rich, who are treating the entire earth as a disposable launching pad for whatever actually comes next? What kind of posthuman might we need in those circumstances—not the technoutopian version of posthumanism for TESCOREAL Bundle believers, but rather some ethical concept of life on the far side of “Man” the way Sylvia Wynter meant that proper noun—and how might some variety of transness help carry us there?

One of the great tragedies of what’s recently happened politically in the United States, in tandem with what looks to me like Trump’s headlong lurch ever deeper into a sociopathic narcissism, is that the levers of power are now held by those who seek to accelerate both the environmental and technological crises, in the fantasy that they will be the ones to survive them and profit from them. They think it’s *their* seed that will be planted in the stars. They are actively destroying elements of the government, economy, social safety net, science, the free press, higher education, and other social institutions in the genuine belief that those elements are anachronisms in the new chapter of history now dawning. Meanwhile, they are enhancing the repressive powers of the surveillance apparatus, the police, and the military that are needed to impose their vision of the future on the rest of us. Though racially minoritized immigrants are currently bearing the brunt of state violence, the powers that be are also specifically targeting trans people—to bury the evidence, I’d argue, that different modes of life are possible in the here and now and not just in some high-tech future.

This “end times fascism,” as Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor have aptly termed it, is deeply anti-modern in the sense that, however much it claims to venerate Western civilization, it actually rejects much of the post-medieval Western political tradition. It’s not just that those now in power are actively dismantling the so-called “rules-based” international order of the post-1945 Pax Americana, or the very notion of deriving governmental authority from the consent of the governed that was the hallmark of

democratic revolutions inspired by the European Enlightenment. We're still in a post-1492 world—global capital underpinned by carceral ideologies of embodiment—but the current ontological struggles that pitch their fiercest battles on trans bodies are refighting the early modern Wars of Religion.

Those conflicts roiled Europe for decades in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, when the question of which interpretation of reality would ultimately capture the state had yet to be settled. The resolution of those wars by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 resulted in the modern form of the European state and an international order soon to be predicated on it. That entire world system seems up for grabs once again. The most fervent prophets of a coming techno-fascist utopia are the most ardent fanboys of a neofeudalism in which corporate CEOs are the overlords of private fiefdoms, and the gated communities of new extraterritorial enterprise zones, stand-alone cities, seasteads, and sovereign citizens beholden to no state at all will replace the territorial states and their populations as they have existed for the past several centuries. One layer of the multidimensional atrocity in Gaza is that a confluence of powerful interests sees it as a site for the construction of just such an elite enclave and considers the population living in their homeland there to be expendable.

The dehumanizing rhetorical violence of the past few years in the United States, directed largely against immigrants and trans people, who are figured, respectively, as the external and internal enemies of the nation, is a sandpaper that constantly rubs you raw. It's hard to read or watch the news without encountering some fresh affront—an AI slop video of King Trump as a *Top Gun* fighter pilot dumping a planeload of excrement on his disloyal, protesting subjects is making the rounds as I put the finishing touches on this book manuscript—and it's demoralizing to see conspiracism, misinformation, disinformation, and pseudoscience falsely frame one's mere existence as a trans person as an assault on the lives of others. It's galling how transparently cynical it all is. In 2024, for example, of the roughly 500,000 NCAA athletes, only 10 were trans women, and only 1 of them had ever won a medal in any event, and yet pro-Trump ad campaigns during the presidential election that year spent more than \$215 million on brutally effective anti-trans commercials, mostly during televised

sporting events, many of them showing out-of-context images of trans women athletes, with the tagline “Kamala Harris is for they/them. President Trump is for you.” Some polling suggested that the ads swayed a nontrivial number of last-minute deciders to vote for Trump, while other polling suggested that the ads increased negative attitudes about trans people overall. In March 2025, when Trump was in a White House press conference with the head of NATO, he pivoted for no discernible reason to the topic of trans sports bans, and said, “I tell the Republicans, I said, don’t bring that subject up because there’s no election right now. But about a week before the election, bring it up because you can’t lose.”

This rhetorical violence is now rapidly acquiring the force of law. At the state and local level, the laws against some aspect or another of trans life have been piling up more quickly than can easily be counted, but they nonetheless form a now-familiar litany: bans on drag and books and pronouns; laws that ban trans people from sex-segregated spaces and activities like bathrooms and sports; laws that threaten to take trans kids from their parents and laws that criminalize providing them with health care; laws that make it impossible to change identificatory markers on government documents; laws that roll back civil rights protections against discrimination. The increasing precarity of trans lives in many jurisdictions, including the prospect of coercively detransitioning minors and the increasing unavailability of gender-affirming care for adults has prompted an internal migration of political refugees fleeing anti-trans persecution to so-called sanctuary states, a migration that already numbered in the tens of thousands before the presidential election of 2024. At the federal level, the second Trump administration’s executive order asserting the “biological truth” of unchangeable sexes determined at conception, and thereby defining trans people out of existence as a social group, quickly trickled down to new policies such as a renewed ban on trans military service and cruel and unusual forms of punishment for trans women incarcerated in men’s prisons.

That executive order also unleashed a torrent of content related to trans lives being removed from government websites. A historic preservationist colleague recently brought to my attention, for example, that the National

Park Service's page for Glide Memorial Church, a building in San Francisco's Tenderloin listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 2022, had been altered to omit the "T" when it cited my scholarship on Glide's significance to LGBT social movements, and erased my own identity as a trans person: "The church's deep engagement and activism for the LGB community was so significant that Dr. Susan Stryker, an LGB historian, later described the church as the 'midwife of the modern LGB movement.'"

Acts of expunging traces of trans life from the public record have become so sweeping and granular under the second Trump administration that the nonpartisan Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention issued a red alert to the effect that trans people in the United States are experiencing what they call a "paper genocide"—the administrative erasure of a minority population's presence within a state's territory, and the excision of that minority from the historical narratives through which that nation tells the story of who belongs within it. Historically, paper genocides have preceded the sorts that culminate in mass murder. Trans history scholars, and the historical profession more generally, have likened the purges of February 2025 forward to digital book burnings, reminiscent of Berlin in 1933. The fires this time, though, are taking place mostly out of public view, down in the weeds of webpages rather than in town squares and urban plazas.

There's real fear now about the emboldened authoritarian impulses of those in power who are beginning to mobilize the repressive apparatus in highly theatricalized ways that dramatize the vulnerabilities that many of us increasingly face. Following the assassination of right-wing influencer Charlie Kirk during a speaking engagement at a Utah college on September 10, 2025, the Trump administration ludicrously—yet ominously—designated "Antifa," a word describing decentralized, leaderless groups of self-styled "anti-fascists" who sometimes engage in disruptive protests of right-wing spaces, a domestic terrorist organization. A September 25 presidential memo addressing "domestic terrorism and organized political violence" described the "common threads" of antifa ideology as "anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism," and "hostility towards those who hold traditional American views on family, religion, and morality." That same

memo directed the Joint Terrorism Task Forces to “coordinate and supervise a comprehensive national strategy to investigate, prosecute, and disrupt entities and individuals engaged in acts of political violence and intimidation designed to suppress lawful political activity or obstruct the rule of law,” including funders of so-called “Antifa” activities. After prosecutors in Utah revealed that the Kirk shooting suspect Tyler Robinson was in a romantic relationship with a transgender roommate, the Heritage Foundation lost no time in urging the FBI to add a new designation to its lists of terrorist groupings—Transgender-Ideology Violent Extremism (TIVE). And later that same month, at an unprecedented gathering of the nation’s top military commanders, Trump told the assembled brass that he intended to deploy the military in Democratic-controlled cities in so-called “blue states,” as he had already done in Los Angeles, to wage war against people he called “the enemy within.”

I’m a reasonably publicly visible trans person with admittedly leftist views who has received funding to support trans studies scholarship from the kinds of liberal private foundations now being dubbed terrorist funding networks, and I live in San Francisco and have expressed my First Amendment rights of peaceable assembly and free speech during protest activities. I’d be foolish to not feel at least *some* trepidation in the current political climate.

I read something not long ago by a former political prisoner in Egypt, Abdelrahman ElGendy, who had come to the United States to pursue his education after gaining his release but had now fled the United States to escape the very sorts of political violence he had experienced in Egypt. Authoritarianism does not arrive with a knock at the door, he said; it arrives when the thought that the knock at the door could come at any moment has been planted in your mind. Authoritarianism by that measure has fully arrived in the United States.

“No one leaves home,” the poet Warsan Shire has written, “unless home is the mouth of a shark ... No one would leave home until home is a voice in your ear saying—*leave, run, now. I don’t know what I’ve become.*” I know people who have been doxed and threatened with death and violence, and student-visa holders who have abandoned their homes to crash with

friends because they went to a pro-Palestinian rally a couple of years ago and now fear deportation by ICE. I was walking to a dinner party with a green-card-holding academic colleague who asked that we not jaywalk from where we'd parked the car to the restaurant across a quiet street from us, because jaywalking is a misdemeanor and people with her residency status were being sent to a Salvadoran gulag over similarly trivial infractions. I know a family in a red state who fled the country because they received an anonymous tip that they were about to be arrested and subjected to a show trial for supporting the social transition of their trans teenager. I know trans academics who hold their classes in unmarked locations to keep themselves and their students safe, and others who have already joined the brain drain to more welcoming countries. I have friends and family members who have expatriated simply because they fear where things are heading. I have friends who have lost their jobs over voicing legally protected forms of speech, or because they teach in gender studies, or because the federal grant funding for their program or nonprofit organization was yanked back. I know of new underground railroads, like those that have been set up to serve abortion-seekers in jurisdictions where it's now illegal, to get trans people to out-of-state or foreign medical service providers, and new networks for the DIY distribution of hormones cooked up by private compounding pharmacies. I've lost track of the number of mutual aid campaigns I've contributed to for getting somebody out of jail or out of the country, or simply for feeding their children, because of how the present moment is landing on them.

Most people I know, though, are unable or unwilling at this time to relocate within the country or to leave entirely, but they're losing sleep over it, and taking precautions. At the most intimate level, I've better learned to appreciate why people wait too long to leave. In addition to all of our adult kids still currently living in the United States, Mimi and I now have a first grandchild, and she's not going to flee from him, and I'm not going to flee without her unless I think my freedom or my life is in imminent danger. Realistically, I don't think I'm at the top of anybody's enemies list, but just as realistically I know that Turning Point USA, the Manhattan Institute, and crackpot conspiracy theorists are keeping tabs on me, so I'm probably not at

the bottom of any such list, either. Mimi and I have talked about our redlines and our contingency plans. I've had similar conversations with my kids and my brother's family and my closest circle of friends. I've taken steps to update and secure travel and identity documents, wills, and other legal documents, and to be able to access my retirement funds from outside the United States. I've been in touch with friends abroad who've offered immigration sponsorship, jobs, spare bedrooms, safehouses off the grid. It is truly breathtaking to realize that liberal democracy is collapsing in the United States, and that its fall is having such deep reverberations around the world that it's not clear where sanctuary might soon still be found.

I've crossed the border several times since January 2025, and every time I've wondered if I will be pulled aside—maybe because I'm on a political enemies watchlist; maybe because a TSA agent just doesn't like the way I look that day; maybe, now that DOGE has eroded the silos between different government databases and the government has given it all to Palantir, I'll be snatched because Customs and Border Protection will have cross-referenced information from Social Security about individuals who've changed names and gender markers with people who are presenting passports and Real IDs at airports and borders, and they've started rounding up the lot of us for identity fraud. I've already disinvited foreign colleagues to events I was planning in the States, because I can't guarantee they wouldn't be singled out for their political views, or charged with immigration crime, detained, and deported to a third country for making statements on visa applications about their identities that the US government might not recognize, even when those identities are reflected on valid identity documents issued by the travelers' own countries.

I know that what trans people as a category increasingly face are things other categories of people have faced before, often for a very long time. We're not yet facing as a group what residents of my neighborhood, right next door to San Francisco's largely Latine Mission District, are already facing from ICE. It's significant, though, that trans people are newly experiencing familiar forms of state violence simply because we are trans. For us to be an explicitly named target category is new.

It's hard to know what "stay and fight" means. I don't have any romantic illusions about becoming a partisan and heading to the hills to wage armed struggle in a looming civil war—though I do know people who've started small-weapons training for self-defense. Besides the fact that I know of no one actually forming armed cadres, if the situation were to deteriorate that far, the people who'd want me dead or disappeared have far more skill and experience with weapons and warfare than I do (i.e., zero). I have participated in some neighborhood organizing to develop "action pods" and to plug into "rapid response teams" to resist unlawful actions by the government and protect the people who are targeted by them in my immediate locale. I do all the usual things that people of my political persuasion do—I've engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience, organized and attended marches and rallies, written to my elected representatives, signed letters and petitions. I've contributed to friend-of-the-court briefs on various lawsuits where knowledge of trans history is pertinent. I speak up and speak out when I see or learn about something suspicious going down and do my best to document it, and to disseminate it on social media. I donate money to causes and give it directly to individuals in need. But it all feels woefully insufficient.

Most days, I just do the work in front of me and hope for the best. I still do a lot that I care about doing. I write for publication. I get to talk to a lot of people in person on lecture tours and university speaking engagements, as well as on podcasts and in documentaries. I speak with the press. I produce film. I make art. I do what I can to secure little toeholds for trans studies within the academy (which increasingly feels like rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*). I consult with projects and activist campaigns that I'd like to see succeed. I put effort into building community by actually answering emails from people who reach out to me about some concern or other, and into strengthening social ties by attending friends' cultural events—musical performances, poetry readings, gallery openings—as well as simply socializing with them, and family, over food and drink. I do my best to hold my dear ones close, to be a good parent to my grown-up kids, and to be a good partner to my partner. Those are the things that matter most.

But this reality is now a split-screen projection. On one side, the story of my life unspools in mundane detail. It's my turn to go grocery shopping this week and to pick the movie we watch tonight; I need to figure out hotels for when we go to that family wedding; maybe we'll take a camper van road trip vacation through the Southwest once the weather cools down; maybe that opportunity to collaborate with some artists in Berlin will pan out, or at least some of the prospective invitations to Lisbon, Cairo, Athens.

On the other side of the screen is everything that disrupts that mundane reality or threatens to. I'll do that collaboration if the funding isn't cut; I'll take that offer unless it's withdrawn; I'll drive through rural areas of red states unless my use of a public toilet seems too risky or the threat of extrajudicial violence seems too high; I'll go abroad unless it's no longer safe for me to cross the border; I'll present that ID until it seems wiser not to; I'll hold that visiting academic appointment until I'm forbidden from doing so for ideological reasons; I'll be at that meeting unless I've been spirited away; I'll make that donation unless my retirement accounts are frozen in an anti-terrorism crackdown or trashed in an economic collapse and Social Security has been looted by cryptocurrency scammers. Maybe it will become clear at some point that the mouth of the shark is closing tightly around me and I'll grab the go-sack and bounce. Or maybe I'll still be doing what I do when the government starts using the military and Brown Shirts to massacre mass protesters, vigilante paramilitaries start setting up checkpoints on the road to the airport, everything is on fire, and the AGIs have gone full Skynet. The future is cloudy, and nowhere is entirely safe.

★ ★ ★

It feels impossible to occupy all the forking paths of these potential realities at once. It simultaneously feels impossible not to. When I acknowledge this situation, I realize that I actually feel like I'm home. I am intimately familiar with this double bind—the kind that resolves only by dissolving the ground on which the impasses have been predicated. This feels like the WTF, the moment I was born to address. The moment that “changing

gender” has prepared me for. The moment when changing *gender* is what we really need to do.

★ ★ ★

One of my glib quips for many years has been to say that the difference between neoliberalism and fascism is the difference between slow and fast. Neoliberal society has its border guards and police forces, its surveillance mechanisms and prisons, its tendency to concentrate executive power, its demagogues and know-nothings, its enemies of the state, its social inequities rooted in race, sex, and class. It holds in reserve extraordinary powers—eminent domain, states of emergency, states of exception, declarations of martial law—that can be invoked as needed to suspend the routine operations of society. And even when law is routinely administered in seemingly impartial ways, it has an implicit bias—to paraphrase Anatole France, the majestic equality of the law forbids rich and poor alike from sleeping under bridges and begging for food in the streets. Woke, liberal, DEI-loving Obama deported more people at the southern border than Bush did, and he targeted US citizens abroad for execution if he deemed them terrorists. Trans people still got tangled up in administrative red tape or were being beaten and killed in public during Biden’s presidency—and he’d once said he thought trans equality was the next big battle in the struggle for human rights.

It’s just that for many people, enough people to create a social inertia, these coercive mechanisms and unjust conditions are things thought to happen to other people, other people who maybe deserve it. Those untouched directly by an injustice can perhaps feel they can safely ignore or minimize it; they might even actually remain entirely ignorant of it. Civil society remains robust enough, checks and balances work well enough, the judiciary is still independent enough, the military subordinated enough to legitimate civilian leadership that the civil liberties and human rights of the bulk of the population remain in place even as they are constantly abused at the margins. Powers held in reserve might never be exercised, or if they are it will be for a good reason that you agree with. Neoliberal society already contains in embryo what fascism develops in full and extends to more and

more of the population. But short of achieving the sort of society I'd actually want to live in, I'll always choose slow death within neoliberalism over the accelerated violence of fascism, because it gives you more time to find the air pockets woven into its social fabric that offer little bubbles of survivability, as well as more time to advocate, organize, resist, and counterprogram.

Under slow conditions, I've practiced slow methods for trying to make the world around me a better place, while rising as needed to confront more immediate challenges. That slow work is the work of the researcher, the scholar, the educator who thinks in time frames measured in decades and generations. But it's also the work of the engaged participant and critical observer of contemporary culture, the wanderer, who gets out in the world and circulates through it to gain insight that can change one's perspective and be communicated to others and inform actions both personal and collective. Those new perceptions change the social assemblage subtly, like seawater slowly dissolving the ice on the underside of an iceberg, and then dramatically, when the iceberg suddenly flips over. The sideways ramble sometimes stumbles upon the unanticipated line of flight.

We rarely change the world, *gender* included, through grand gestures of sweeping historical significance. It's not everybody who gets to storm the Bastille or sack the Winter Palace (and to be honest, those sorts of revolutions often haven't always worked out so well in practice). But we all change the world constantly through innumerable small actions that shift something about how we and others feel, and what we know, that alter our habits and affects and ways of acting and relating to the world.

The heterodox psychoanalytic and post-Marxist cultural theorist Félix Guattari called this way of thinking and acting a "molecular revolution," something emergent and undirected by a political program or vanguard party, in which even small mutations in practices that might seem quite secondary to politics, like fashion, can be "immediately transmitted to the entire planet," and change "the actual substratum of human existence." Writing in the 1980s, he noted, "We do not have the same relations to reading, writing, images, space, sex, the body, the night, the sun, pain, as we had only ten years ago. Profound and irreversible mutations are

underway in all these areas.” What he called “the molecular substratum on which all large social collectives are inscribed” had become “a sort of bubbling soup.” And this in turn, “in reality, opens up fabulous possibilities for liberation.”



Sometimes our actions can aggregate and scale up to become part of a collective effort that is more broadly and deeply transformational. But more often than not, revolution is writ small and transpires within the intimate recesses of everyday life. Sometimes it’s something you receptively experience rather than something you actively do. Creating and experiencing art, music, and media can be practices of molecular revolution if they shift broad patterns of awareness and feeling, of being and acting.

Mimi and I lived in New York for a while just before the COVID-19 lockdowns, and one of my favorite things to do on a weekend was to walk across Central Park from our sublet near Columbia University to visit the museums on the East Side. My first encounter with Kent Monkman’s monumental diptych—*mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)*—in the Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2019, was a moment of molecular revolution for me.

Monkman, who is of mixed Cree and Irish ancestry, and a member of the Fisher River First Nation in Manitoba, is perhaps Canada’s most well-known contemporary indigenous artist. He’s become a big-deal rock star in the international art world, and the Met commissioned his work to inaugurate its 150th anniversary in 2020. It was one in a series of commissions designed to spotlight artists from ethnic and racial backgrounds underrepresented in the museum’s collections. The basic idea was to help a stodgy institution reposition itself in a time of public demand for a more inclusive approach to minority art, and a less extractive sensibility toward global artistic traditions and their relations to the Western canon.

Monkman’s Met commission audaciously reframed the entire history of the so-called Americas between the onset of European colonization and a dystopian near future whose contours are all too readily visible in our

present. It did so by foregrounding indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality that differ from concepts and practices of European origin. Even the work's title—Monkman's Cree ancestors' name for early European colonists due to the means of their arrival—flipped the script by repositioning the viewer's perspective from a Eurocentric one that looks with fascination upon exotic people in foreign lands, to an indigenous one that looks back at the foreign cultures that look at it.

Encountering *mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)* was a full-body experience. Its sheer size—two 11 × 22-foot paintings—dwarfed the viewer. The two paintings flanked each side of the Met's Fifth Avenue grand entryway and exit, but you didn't see them when you came in. You had to turn around to look back. It's only then that you realized that by entering the museum you had cut across the historical narrative that the two halves of the diptych construct. How the work was installed physically reoriented you to the history, and the future, that it depicts.

On the left side of the room, the half of the work called *Welcoming the Newcomers* illustrates the initial phase of colonial contact. It shows indigenous people acting with generosity toward a beleaguered assortment of people flailing in the water, desperate to come ashore. On the right, *Resurgence of the People* directs viewers' attention toward the future, where a boat filled with refugees struggles on a turbulent, rising, and polluted sea, near a band of heavily armed white men clinging to a barren, rocky outcropping. Both works self-consciously appropriate the style of a clichéd genre—that of “history paintings” such as Emanuel Leutze's iconic *Washington Crossing the Delaware*—precisely because doing so allows Monkman to reframe and retell the history that such paintings depict, aggrandize, or even create.

Presiding over the scenes encompassed in both halves of the work, each chock-full of clever art-historical references to famous Euro-American paintings of American Indians, is Monkman's tongue-in-cheek alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, whose raven-haired, scantily clad, gym-sculpted, male-appearing body perches gracefully atop a pair of high stiletto heels. Monkman identifies as a “two-spirit” person, a pan-tribal term coined in the late 1980s for indigenous people whose sense of self doesn't align

with the Western binaries of man/woman or gay/straight. Miss Chief is the artist's sassy retort to centuries of forced assimilation that tried to erase indigenous ways of being that the settler culture considered incompatible with Christianity and European "civilization," including forms of personhood now gathered under the modern umbrella of two-spirit traditions. She is a trickster—*Miss Chief* plays on the word *mischief*, and *Eagle Testickle* on *egotistical*—whom Monkman describes as being simultaneously a figure drawn from Cree mythology, a time-traveling extraterrestrial visitor from a future beyond the stars, and a catty drag-queen-like character through whom he offers wry commentary on decidedly sobering subjects.

In *Welcoming the Newcomers*, Miss Chief stands ashore on unsettled Native lands, reaching into the sea to save hapless, drowning would-be European colonists. In *Resurgence of the People*, Miss Chief stands in the prow of a refugee-laden boat, striking the same pose as George Washington in Leutze's painting of him crossing the Delaware. The effect is to suggest that she is a revolutionary leader for a new people defined not by a shared ethnicity or racial identity, but rather by literally finding themselves together in the same boat cast on the tumultuous surface of a damaged planet. It's the armed white men, desperately clinging to a little rock being engulfed by a storm-tossed sea, who are shackled to the idea of race, and racial supremacy, and to all the dangerous dead ends in which that idea culminates.

Resurgence of the People embodies the ethos beautifully expressed by the Afro-Caribbean philosopher-poet Édouard Glissant, who similarly reworks the history of some other "wooden boat people," his ancestors, who survived the fetid holds of slave ships making the Middle Passage. Lyrically envisioning the sight of something indefinite rising above the horizon from beyond the curve of the ocean's surface, Glissant imagines himself, along with his audience, in a boat bound toward a postcolonial social order whose emerging contours he traces through his writing. He, like Monkman's Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, invites his readers into a new community: "At the bow there is still something we now share: this murmur, cloud or rain or peaceful smoke. We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown

that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone.”

The moment of molecular revolution is the moment I know I want to be on that boat without assuming an entitlement to being there, rather than on that outcropping of land that is supposed to be my birthright. That is a moment of emotional unsettling that looks beyond the framework of the present. I have no real sense of what direction we all might sail. I have no illusion that I should steer the rudder. The future is a turbulent storm cloud in the distance, coming nearer, crackling with energy, demanding our attention. There is no prime directive that outlines how best we should hail it. It’s foolish, actually, to be wedded too closely to a particular program or agenda, as if one can know the answers to all the questions in advance. Experiments are better than dogma. We need to find a way to find a new way together, provisionally, groping along the edges of the actual, nostrils flared to sniff out potentials, curious and undaunted, moved by a desire for something more than we’ve previously imagined was possible. Something sweet. Something good. Something for everyone. Maybe something impossible but without a doubt something we need. We’ll recognize that something if ever it finds us, piece by piece, whenever and however it might arrive.

★ ★ ★

I watch a lot of movies. I listen to a lot of music. All kinds of music, but especially American roots music, all the popular genres—blues, gospel, country, folk, western swing, jump, jive, rockabilly, early rock and roll, soul, funk. And jazz. I listen to a lot of jazz. There’s an excellent collection of films I revisit repeatedly on the Criterion Channel about Afrofuturism—an aesthetic rooted in Black American experience that combines speculative history, science fiction, and fantasy, like the *Black Panther* franchise, which aims to connect the Black diaspora with an effaced African cultural heritage as one path toward freedom. The collection includes films about jazz musicians who have Afrofuturist sensibilities, including one of my favorite films of all time, *Milford Graves Full Mantis*. It profiles the abstract percussionist Milford Graves, whose philosophy of life involved vibrating

in response to the “chaotic heart” of the cosmos he senses when he holds himself open to the energy of the world around him, and channels that into his music. Whenever I lead a psychedelic experience for friends who’ve never tripped before, I try to end the day by screening that film for them. That’s a recurring moment of molecular revolution for me.

Another such moment was provoked by another film in that same collection, Shirley Clarke’s 1985 feature, *Ornette: Made in America*, which includes a biographical vignette from the life of jazz musician Ornette Coleman. Clarke’s film about Coleman changed my understanding of what changing *gender* might mean.

Coleman is widely regarded as the founder of “free jazz,” which took improvisation to new heights in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Free jazz discarded the harmony-based composition, chord progressions, and familiar rhythms against which improvisation measured its departures from earlier jazz idioms in favor of the less-structured experimental style Coleman promulgated, most notably on his 1959 breakthrough album, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. There’s an interesting proposition in jazz history, succinctly laid out in *The Cry of Jazz*, a short 1959 film by the composer Edward Bland, that jazz depends on a formal tension between freedom and restraint, improvisation and structure, that is rooted in the creative response of Black artists to the legacies of enslavement and ongoing racism. When freedom is finally won in the struggle for racial liberation, will jazz become an impossible, meaningless, anachronistic art form? Coleman’s innovations were, in part, a demonstration that jazz, freed from all restraint, would continue to move in new directions.

In Clarke’s film we see Coleman, medium shot, frame right, sitting in a sparsely furnished room as a television plays in the background. Clarke’s off-camera voice says, “Tell us the castration story.”

Coleman then regales Clarke with a tale of how he always felt confused about the relationship between him being a musician and women being interested in him sexually—were those women really interested in him as a person, or were they just interested in being considered cool by association, for hooking up with a jazzman? Because that and other poignant questions cluttered up his mind and got in the way of both life and art, Coleman says

that after marrying and becoming a father, he started “thinking about eliminating any sexual feeling I could have in my body.” Somebody told him that that was called “castration,” so he “went to the doctor and told him that’s what I thought I was interested in him doing.” When the doctor hazarded the suggestion that Coleman might perhaps consider circumcision instead, Coleman asked, “Is that a kind of form of castrating?” and the doctor replied, “Well, not exactly, but it’s symbolic.” Coleman underwent circumcision, but he was disappointed with the results: “I didn’t solve that problem,” the problem of disambiguating his life as a musician and his life as a sexed and sexual person, he said, “by having that particular operation.”

Coleman nevertheless learned something important from his experience of deliberate genital modification:

I realized that being physical or sexual has nothing to do with what you think or believe. It has more to do with who you think you’re affecting and what you think you’re affecting. And so from then—from that day to this day— I have decided there’s two kinds of human beings—one female and one male, and one man and one woman. So I decided to join what I thought the categories would be. I would rather be a man than a male.

Coleman’s saying something here about “changing gender” that takes it in an expansive direction beyond its minoritizing associations with trans people. I hear him saying something that is ultimately about freedom and creativity.

First, when he draws a distinction between “two kinds of human beings” and calls them female and male, man and woman, I don’t understand him to be saying the same thing in two different ways. I hear him grasping the difference between, on the one hand, the biological specificity of the sexed body and, on the other, the subjective experience of thinking, believing, feeling, or experiencing a sense of belonging to a category of personhood. He’s not transgender in the sense of identifying across categories and transitioning from one to another, but like a trans guy, he understands that he can be a man without needing to be a male in a biologicistic sense. He’s traversing—crossing over, transing—the interstitial

space between the two registers of flesh and identity that *gender* traverses to suture physical substance to social category, time and time again, in linguistically, culturally, and historically specific ways. He's opening the space between *sex/gender* in the fortune-teller toy. That gap is a space for meaning's active creation, of semiosis and psychogenesis. The ancient Greeks had a word for that generative space: *chora*.

Coleman became aware of this gap's creative potential by experimenting with the shape of his sex, in pursuit of the artistic or aesthetic goal of freeing his music from the formal, social, and psychical constraints that dragged him down, in much the same way that he experimented sonically with "the shape of jazz to come." Coleman understood his identification with and preference for manhood as something distinct from his male anatomy, and he desired to "join the category" of being a man without anchoring that identification in his reproductive sex. In fact, he tried to weaken the connection between biology and manhood by changing the shape of his genitals. He throws off the dead hand of the past by rejecting the notion that his self-sense is determined by his biological substrate. Black men in America have long struggled to escape the racist baggage of stereotypes attached to their genitalia, though more attention has been paid to the racialized rather than gendered dimensions of that struggle. But there can be a transness in Blackness as well as a transness of gender.

For Coleman, masculinity or manhood had to do primarily with affect. And affect—being moved according to a particular quality of feeling—is what Coleman was ultimately after. As a musician, as a person, he wanted to affect and be affected by others in ways of his own creative making. That's *gender*, too, the way Juana María Rodríguez and I talked about it that night we went to see Taylor Mac—a mode or style of emotional relation with others, communicated and experienced through how we talk and touch the skin of our lovers, the way we carry ourselves in public or choose the cut of our clothes, informed in part by the historically variable and culturally contingent social and conceptual categories with which we identify or to which we have been assigned. Gender is a grammar for speaking our love languages, with feeling, distinct from the body that performs it. And transness is that grammar in revolt.

Coleman says in his interview with Clarke that he was about thirty when he underwent circumcision, which places the timing of that minor surgical procedure during the same years in which he was first innovating the free jazz genre. There's been a lot of musicological writing about the relationship between free jazz and the freedom struggles advanced by the Civil Rights Movement, but nothing at all that I know of on the relationship between free jazz and the space of creative freedom to be found in the unrepresentable crack between biology and its social categorization as sex—the dreamspace filled by that generative cosmological void, where monsters come from, and the unbinding of feelings from form portends the shapes of things to come.

Coleman's comments exemplified for me how it is simply not necessary to use biological characteristics understood to be immutable to assign people to categories of personhood likewise imagined to be immutable. Linking reproductive biology to categories of personhood reflected in the grammatical structure of linguistic gender is an ancient strategy of meaning-making within the Indo-European language family, but it is by no means a universal practice. English, through the quirks of its pronominal system, is particularly good at naturalizing a practice of linguistic representation as an objective physical truth. But none of these linguistic matters would matter as much if not for their being harnessed to the powerful, widely disseminated, and typically unquestioned set of beliefs about bodies—an ideology of embodiment—of the body as skinprison that permanently binds the body into a social rank.

Transness, from this perspective, involves more than gender. It is an affective experience, driven by suffering and drawn by desire, that pulls many kinds of embodied subjects across the social meanings that history tries to sediment into the flesh. It is a practice, a sensibility, an awareness that serves anyone who has a stake in changing how the world acts unjustly toward them because of what their body is made to mean. It is not a delusion, a psychosis, or a make-believe dress-up game. It does not deny biological reality. It is a practice of freedom.

For a person with female embodiment to be a feminist is not for her to deny the reality of her reproductive biology; it is to say that having eggs

and a uterus should not automatically consign her to the status of being a mother and wife who is subordinated to a man. Being female, rather, can be a place from which to assert that one has autonomy over one's body, and a place of agency regarding the path of one's life's unfolding. Because feminism is the political act of crossing over categorical constrictions placed on female bodies, feminism can be considered a trans practice of freedom. For persons of color to be anti-racist is not to deny the biological reality of their physical phenotypes or their ancestry. Rather, it is to assert that having a particular melanin level or hair texture or heritage does not make one inferior to white people or render one the property of another person. Anti-racism, in that sense, is a trans practice of freedom. It is a movement across the boundary of a category constructed for containment. The same could be said of the Jewish anti-Zionism for which I find such curiously deep affinity; it is yet another refusal to be bound by biological claims to a particular identity or parcel of land.

For transgender people, to manifest our identities expresses a similar sort of freedom dream. What the transness of my own gender has taught me is that we all can live in excess and defiance of the socially constructed version of "reality" that renders each of us as a social being and ranks us all based on some of our biological differences. The common cliché is that transgender people feel "trapped in the wrong body." What I, at least, am actually saying is that it's wrong to believe that embodiment must be a trap. Embodiment is the sensuous locus of connection with all that is. It can be lived with a sense of liberation and power, regardless of external circumstances that seek to limit its scope and value.

To change *gender*, ultimately, can be an abolitionist practice that targets the carceral logic on which modern identities have been built—a somatechnics for worming one's way out of the belly of the biopolitical beast of Eurocentric modernity toward a better way of life. From the lived experience of grasping our own inalienable freedom, we can construct and reconstruct the realities of our embodied lives some other way, in liberation and community with others.

What might a “shape of gender yet to come” look like, unfettered from the constraints of existing forms? The ceramicist Nicki Green’s 2017 sculptural work, *Prolapse Figure*, the cover image for this book, points in that direction.

Green is an acquaintance on the fringe of my social world who, before her art career took off and she decamped to the big leagues in Los Angeles and New York, had a rent-money and health-care job as a checkout clerk at Rainbow Grocery, the queer-centric worker-owned organic co-op where I regularly buy my food in San Francisco. One of Green’s smaller pieces sits atop the range hood above the stove in my kitchen. It’s a plain little diner-style coffee cup emblazoned with the logo of the long-defunct Bay Area-based Gene Compton’s Cafeteria chain, one of a limited edition of fifty produced in 2016 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the riot there I’ve spent decades documenting. Green emblazoned each cup with the words “Breaking Dishes for Trans Liberation for 50 Years.”

Green’s *Prolapse Figure* is a work of another order of magnitude altogether from a coffee cup. Standing four feet high, three and a half feet long, and one and a half feet wide, it is composed of recycled stoneware, glaze, felt, nylon, and bricks scavenged from a disassembled pottery kiln. I love that its form incorporates the material remnants of the means through which the form itself was produced—the kiln that baked the shaped clay in the first place. It’s like saying something while diagramming the grammar and syntax that allows the utterance to be said, or showing the code alongside a digital image. Ceramic art in general is a great metaphor for gendering as that process was theorized in the mid-twentieth century: there’s something soft and shapeable about ourselves at first, until experience fires our subjectivities in ways that bake in our psychic contours, after which we can only be broken, sometimes cobbled together again in some new way, but never recast.

And yet, for all its explicit staging of constructedness and artificiality, *Prolapse Figure* is redolent of natural organic form, its honeycombed structure modeled on the appearance of morel mushrooms. Much of Green’s work makes use of mycological imagery. Green, who is Jewish, credits her preoccupation with all things fungal to a provocative encounter with the

German Nazi Julius Streicher's antisemitic 1938 children's book, *Der Giftpilz* (*The Toadstool*, or *The Poisonous Mushroom*). Streicher's book describes Jews as toxic invaders of the healthy body politic of an Aryan white-supremacist society, capable of being mistaken sometimes as something wholesome, while actually threatening death. Green has developed an entire body of work that explores the complex negativity and positive potentials inherent in imagining trans and Jewish life alike through mushroom-inspired themes. Fungi shift shape over the course of their life cycle, threading networks of mycelium through their environments, which then only sometimes burst into visibility to cast their spores and reproduce. Their fruiting bodies—mushrooms—sprout in damaged soils amid decomposing organic matter to bring forth new life from ostensible sites of death. They sometimes contain psychedelic substances that can transform our consciousnesses in the same way that trans lives can push against conventional reality-constructs and change them. Imagined as primitive and plant-like, fungi are more closely related in their evolutionary biology to the animal than the vegetal. They are more like *Homo sapiens* than like a potato, and their category-defying in-betweenness invites us to reexamine the criteria that inform the socially constructed hierarchies we impose on the various kingdoms of life, based on which kinds of life we implicitly assume to matter most.

Prolapse Figure incorporates all these interwoven motifs. Larger in scale than actual morel mushrooms and given a generic and somewhat antiseptic technical-sounding name, the work abstracts the biological, rather than merely representing it, and aesthetically formalizes it in an expansive, larger-than-life physical dimension. The first word of the work's title, the adjective *Prolapse*, suggests the inside-outness of a prolapsed uterus that has extruded itself through the vagina after a difficult childbirth, or the prolapsed rectum of someone who's had a lot of anal sex. The grammar of the title then maps those associative and vaguely pathological connotations of misuse, damage, and out-of-place wrongness onto the *Figure* of the title's second half. And yet the "prolapse" of the sculpture itself, the raw and fleshy-looking pinkish part that bursts outward from within, is the part that arcs upward, hopefully, from the base of its fecal brown enclosure.

Filled with new promise and potential, it undermines all associations with perversely nonreproductive sodomy or procreative sexuality gone awry, to represent life emerging in an unexpected manner. It is a shape of gender yet to come.

I can't help but play the parlor game of attributing esoteric meanings to that shape, like a Rorschach test, like Orson Fowler and the phrenologists of old, or the linguist Benjamin Whorf when he was still fascinated by occult hieroglyphics. Scanned from right to left, *Prolapse Figure* looks to non-Jewish me something like the Hebrew letter *aleph* (א) with one of its typographical elements—the curve of the upper *yud*—inverted in the “wrong” direction and slightly misplaced. *Aleph*, in the mystical tradition of the Kabbalah, represents the unity of God, suggesting, if you squint at it just right, that *Prolapse Figure* could be interpreted as a trans Jewish revisionist take on the divinity of Being. Scanned from left to right as in English, the sculpture resembles nothing so much as a giant high-heeled shoe, reminiscent of the playful sculptures of Claes Oldenburg, that riffs on stereotypical femininity to foreground questions of socially constructed gender conventions.

For those with the eyes to see it so, *Prolapse Figure* is all these things at once: sacral and profane, ineffable and earthy, comic and sublime, beautiful and disgusting, high-minded and coarse. The divergent readings its execution makes possible shuttle back and forth across the space-time of the sculpture's reception by its audience. Their diffractive conceptual patterns shimmer to cast a vital sheen upon the otherwise static object, animating it in the mind's beholding, to render it a perfect metaphor for *gender's* reimaginability.

★ ★ ★

I love my yoga community. People come and go to our little group, but the core group itself has outlasted four long-term instructors, and some of us have been practicing together for more than twenty-five years. We meet at the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House, affectionately known as the Nabe. The building was designed by the architect Julia Morgan, and part of Sun Ra's Afrofuturist classic *Space Is the Place* was shot there. It feels

quintessentially San Franciscan, like my yoga community members themselves—retired librarians and community college instructors, art teachers, building contractors, and others who all share the sense that peaceableness is a virtue, that learning is good and civic engagement an ethical responsibility, and that a little bit of kindness goes a long way. That’s a version of San Francisco that I fear might be aging out. It’s definitely getting pushed aside by the city’s recent identity as a Silicon Valley satellite, and its new one as ground zero for the AI economy.

When I lie prostrate on the floor in *savasana*, the corpse pose, at the end of my regular weekly class and try to let my thoughts flow through my mind without attaching myself to them, I notice that I’m often thinking about breath instead of simply experiencing that I am breathing.

Before there is spoken language, there is breath, its medium. Breath is the point of connection between our metabolism, and the atmosphere, and the energy of the sun that fuels the processes of life, and the vastness of space in which it all transpires. Breath is where the cosmic and the molecular scales collide and intertwine in our lungs and in our blood. *Gender*, I sometimes notice myself thinking, is another such medium, another such movement, another such point of connection between the molecular and the cosmic, where the extralinguistic comes into us from the outside, and through which we direct our energies back out into the world. Maybe Orson Fowler was right, and *gender* is an all-pervasive medium. (I just don’t think it attaches to my body in the faculty for Amativeness in my brain.)

To turn breath into word, into sob, into music, we alter the shape of our bodies. Are we changing breath’s gender when we arrange tongue and teeth and lips and throat just so, pulse and pattern its flow just so, to encode it as symbol with meaning that relates us to others? Breath engenders life however we might alter its patterns.

As we rush through our everyday, distracted, on autopilot, we might never question the commonsense assumption that breathing is a simple in-and-out action, with a back-and-forth two-part motion. But when we slow down and allow ourselves to be mindful of breath, we might notice its fourfold nature. It takes a beat of time for the bellows of the lungs to

reverse direction. The rhythm of the gathering and the releasing of breath includes a duration between its actions. Between inhalation and exhalation there is a pause, and between exhalation and inhalation there is another pause. These pauses are not the same. One is a space filled with air, the other a space of air's absence. These spaces are not of fixed duration. They can be hurried to the point that hyperventilation leads to altered states of consciousness or stretched out through conscious attention and the deliberate cultivation of habit. They are lively spaces that respond to the mind's intention, always in transition from one to the other however varied their pace. Transition is intrinsic to breathing.

You can notice the fourfold nature of the breath without giving names to its parts. I was in my forties before I learned some Sanskrit names for what my body had already taught me about the breath, and the spaces within breath, long ago.

As a disembodied adolescent, I swam. After my father died, my suddenly single mother used the YMCA swimming pool as a summertime and weekend babysitter for my younger brother and me while she was at work. It was my refuge. I reveled in the solitude and freedom of three-dimensional underwater movement—a freedom possible for precisely as long as I could hold my breath. I discovered techniques to maximize the amount of time spent submerged between one inhalation and the next. Submerged, I could disengage from and quietly observe my father's absence, my mother's distress, my own dysphoric relation to embodiment, the suffocating pervasiveness of social gendering. I could take corporeal pleasure in a capacity for three-dimensional movements in my aquatic play-space, tumbling head over heels in reverie, and reflect on how the liquid environment that offered such solace was unlivable for any great length of time, while the airy one above it that sustained my life in the physical dimension threatened social and psychological death. I cultivated an amphibious disposition, moving ceaselessly between things that killed me and enlivened me in different ways, for different durations, at different speeds. That disposition allowed me to intellectualize the necessary discoveries of my youth in service to a transgender art of living. It's The Watcher's realm.

As an adult, I learned that *pranayama* is a name for the practice of consciously attending to breath to cultivate and extend its life-force. *Kumbhaka pranayama* names the practice of retaining or holding one's breath. *Antar kumbhaka*: the cessation of breath once inhalation is complete, and the lungs are full. *Bahya kumbhaka*: the cessation of breath once exhalation is complete, and the lungs are empty. The voluntary, temporary cessation of breath, the creation of space-time between breath, is the most basic physical technique for calming the thoughts of the chattering mind in order to deliberately encourage the experience of meditative absorption, *samadhi*. I appreciate that a language exists that has given names to such things, whether or not I use those words to describe my experience.

When we inhale and exhale, we do the most fundamental physical work of continuing to be alive. There is a reason that police and soldiers are trained in chokeholds, and that Eric Garner's and George Floyd's last words were "I can't breathe." It is the same reason that Frantz Fanon wrote in *A Dying Colonialism*, published in 1959 about the Algerian revolution, on the relationship between individual life and the life of the body politic: "There is not occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of final destruction. Under this condition, the individual's breathing is an observed and occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing." When anti-gender ideology captures the apparatus of state power, it puts a knee directly on the neck of trans people to stop our breath and steal our life by denying us the possibility of social transition. It aims more broadly at shutting down the freedom of movement for all.

★ ★ ★

During the Black Lives Matter protests a decade ago in the aftermath of asymmetrical warfare in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, waged to suppress outrage over the police murder there of the unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown, Lourdes Ashley Hunter-Fowler, founder of the Trans Women of Color Collective in Washington, DC, would often shout

variations on the statement “Every breath a trans person takes is an act of revolution.” That is a revolution I feel called to join, where molecular and macro scales of transformation conjoin.

When we see the cloud of that future hanging low on our horizon, when we hear a call for justice in its rumble, we must first commit ourselves to finding a common way to share a common breath. Only then can we linger in the space between breath, moving to expand that space of possibility, that generative void, and suspend the work of living long enough to dream.

I try to hold myself accountable for all the ways that my own history and experience can separate me from the lives of others I want to align my efforts with, and put us at cross-purposes. A simple form of ethics is to recognize in the thought of another the existence of alterity, that there are more truths than one’s truth alone. But there is a deeper form of ethical relation in which you allow the encounter with alterity to transform you into something that you weren’t before. In the creed of Octavia Butler’s fictional Earthseed religion:

All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
is Change.

God
is Change.

In Édouard Glissant: The *thought of the other* can dwell within you without prying you open or altering your course; *the other of thought* is precisely this altering. “This is an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance.”

I want gender to be turbulent, not settled, a storm casting spores, as more and more of us begin to breathe together.

★ ★ ★

Spirare (Latin, infinitive): to breathe.

When I say I am *in-spired* by words such as “Every breath a trans person takes is an act of revolution,” I am saying that I feel enlivened by “breathing them in.” When I say I want to *con-spire* with them, I am saying I want to “breathe with” them, alongside them. But because I am different in some way from every other person I breathe with, whatever samenesses we might share, to breathe together we must first learn to “breathe across” those differences. We must learn to *trans-spire*.

Transpire is a richly layered word to play with. It can mean merely “to happen.” Subtler shades of that meaning involve happening without volition, simply persisting in being, or being reduced to mere duration. *Transpire* is also a technical term in the life sciences. While biologists tell us that animals *respire*, actively working the lungs to pump atmospheric gases in and out of the body, botanists say that plants *transpire*, passively allowing gases to circulate through the pores of their vegetal tissue. The difference between *transpiration* and *respiration* involves a distinction between active and passive, as well as the relative degrees of agential capacity assigned in marking a boundary within the kingdom of life between plants and animals, between things we eat and things we are. Here once again is the animacy hierarchy in action, nominalizing the world in order to order various bodies, with variable qualities, according to the greater or lesser worth accorded to them. Just as this sorting and ranking of kinds of life based on beliefs about which kinds of life matter more drives histories of racialization, colonization, settlement, and extraction—including histories of food, and therefore metabolism—so too is it the motor that drives the contemporary violence that targets trans lives.

When I contemplate how the word *transpire* looks on the page and reflect on how it can mean “to passively happen,” I’m struck by what changes if I break the word in half and consider its parts separately. *Trans-* is a volatile prefix. It attaches to whatever has been nominalized, to pull it across the boundary between whatever it is and whatever it isn’t, to make both it and the other other than they were before. *Transpire*’s base, *-spire*, from the Latin *spirare*, shares that root with the word *spirit*. The plosive

puh sound in *-spire* requires the body to do what the word means: the lips purse to pulse the breath to utter the sound that conveys the sense of pushing one's life-force into the world in the very act of exhaling. The word *transpire*, thus broken open, no longer suggests a mere static duration. It has changed its meaning by changing its shape. The space that lies between its broken syllables, open and unsymbolized, is the space between breath, the extralinguistic void, the site of an animating power. The word *transpire*, cracked open, allows an unexpected bounty to gush generously forth.



This is what transpires now. Are we not now broken open in some way—all of us—by the violence of our times? We are gathered at the crossroads, strangers with strangers, in a shared and trembling vulnerability we can but pretend we do not feel. Are we not all hungry for some measure of grace?

We who are embodied otherwise, when we manifest our wayward realness, can bring worlds along with us. We have learned for the sake of our own survival that deep transformation is possible. I am here to tell you that this is a power within us all. We can indeed enliven together a new reality that surges forth from what has been to what yet shall be, and not what was, or merely is. The transpiring of our lives can be more than our mere baseline persistence in time. We can indeed breathe change into being across difference.

Something is already shifting. Something tectonic, climatic. The evidence is all around us, as certain as a sudden jolt that punctuates the slow grinding of the continents against themselves, as surely as new patterns of earth, air, fire, and water now rearrange themselves across the planet's surface. *Gender*—that vast Leviathan, the magical device that whispers the secret of our identities into our ears and places us with our kind—is part and parcel of this change. The new configurations of personhood it sets a-bubbling in the cultural substrate are but the signs and symptoms of a deeper flux in the field of life. That vast Leviathan, unshackled from its history, can unfold into new grammars for new namings and new actions in the world.

History is not the past—it is the action of telling a story in the present. History is not a fact; it is a promise—the promise that the future will be as different from the current moment as the current moment has become from all the moments that have come before. History is not the chain that binds us to an eternal order. It is a living witness that bears testimony to the inescapability of difference and the inevitability of change. It is more than piling one dead fact on top of another to fill the emptiness of time. It is more than constructing a monument to the violence of the great and powerful, more than the satisfaction of a craving among the people for the sweet comfort of nostalgia at the end of a bitter day. History is the act of conferring realness on the unremembered and the effaced, in anticipation of futures that we must yet summon forth from a present moment that demands our daily effort to shatter and transform it.

It's time to make history, by changing *gender*, to change the world.

It's time to breathe. To rise. To reassemble. To transform.

Come with me?

It's never too late to live, however close to death we all well might be.

It's not too late, but it's definitely time to go.

Bibliographical Essay

This book was originally conceived as a long narrative of gender-changing people in the parts of North America that became the United States, interlaced with sugar-coated theory pills to explain some of the complexities involved in sorting out the shifting relationships between self-sense and biology and social role, with dollops of first-person reflection to bring interiority into the tale. Though it became a book about “changing gender” as a conceptual frame, it still contains a great deal of trans history content to exemplify that topic.

Joanne Meyerowitz’s *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) set a high bar for the field when it was published a quarter century ago. Popular and scholarly histories of gender complexity, non-normativity, and trans lives have burgeoned over the past decade. For an easy and accessible introduction, see Alex L. Combs and Andrew Eakett, *Trans History: From Ancient Times to the Present Day; A Graphic Novel* (Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2025). For scholarly work that situates US trans history in a longer historical perspective, see Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021); Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Kłosowska, eds., *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality Before the Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021); Greta LaFleur, *The Natural History of Sexuality in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020); and Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020). Popular surveys of more recent history include Eli Erlick, *Before Gender: Lost Stories from Trans History, 1850–1950* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2025); Kit Heyam, *Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender* (New York: Seal Press, 2022); and Barry Reay, *Trans America: A Counter-History* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020). More topically focused work includes C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Peter Boag, *Re-Dressing America’s Frontier Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Emily Skidmore, *True Sex: The Lives of Trans Men at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Jules Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018) and *A Short History of Trans Misogyny* (London: Verso, 2024); Carolyn Wolf-Gould, Dallas Denny, Jamison Green, and Kyan Lynch, eds., *A History of Transgender Medicine in the United States: From Margins to Mainstream* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2025); and Avery Dame-Griff, *The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet* (New York: New York University Press, 2023). For art history, visual culture, and film, see [Tourmaline], Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton, eds., *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (Boston: MIT Press, 2019); David Evans Frantz, Christina Linden, and Chris E. Vargas, eds., *Trans Hirstory in 99 Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024); and Laura Horak, *Trans Cinema: Making Communities, Identities, and Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2026).

Zagria Cowan's website A Gender Variance Who's Who is a remarkable resource profiling thousands of historical trans individuals, including those mentioned in passing here, such as Barbara Wilcox and Charlotte Charlaque von Curtis. The Digital Transgender Archive hosted by Northeastern University offers another invaluable starting point for further reading and research, not just because it contains a significant amount of digitized content but also because it serves as an online guide to the many physical archives with significant trans content, most notably the Transgender Archive housed in the special collections department of the University of Victoria, British Columbia's library.

For more biographical information on the handful of exemplary trans people discussed here, see, on Christine Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, 1967), and Richard Docter, *Becoming a Woman: A Biography of Christine Jorgensen* (New York: Routledge, 2007); on Virginia Prince, see Richard Docter, *From Man to Woman: The Transgender Journey of Virginia Prince* (Northridge, CA: Docter Press, 2004); on Michael Dillon, in addition to his crypto-autobiographical *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology* (London: Heinemann, 1946), see Jacob Lau and Cameron Partridge, *Out of the Ordinary: A Life of Gender and Spiritual Transitions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); on the Public Universal Friend, see Paul B. Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend: Jemima Wilkinson and Religious Enthusiasm in Revolutionary America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); and on Joseph Israel Lobdell, see Bambi L. Lobdell, *"A Strange Sort of Being": The Transgender Life of Lucy Ann / Joseph Israel Lobdell, 1829–1912* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).



My interpretive approach to thinking about history has long been informed by Nietzsche's "On the Uses and Abuses of History" and Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," both of which are widely available in various translations and echoes of which can be heard in my closing passages on "what transpires now."

On the analytical use of *gender* and *transgender* in earlier periods, see Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75; Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore, "Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, nos. 3–4 (2008): 11–22; and Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici, "Trans, Time, and History," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* [hereafter *TSQ*] 5, no. 4 (2018): 518–39. Jen Manion, in *Female Husbands*, discusses "transing gender" as a useful formulation that has the benefit of describing empirically recoverable acts of crossing social categories in the past, while avoiding conflation with contemporary identitarian meanings; see also Marta V. Vicente, "Transgender: A Useful Category?: Or, How the Historical Study of 'Transsexual' and 'Transvestite' Can Help Us Rethink 'Transgender' as a Category," *TSQ* 8, no. 4 (2021): 426–42.

My approach to writing was shaped by the literary and intellectual milieu of the Bay Area in the 1980s. See especially Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), and the idea of "theory in the flesh" drawn from Chicana feminisms; Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 575–99; and the new narrative movement anthologized by Kevin Killian and Dodie Bellamy, eds., *Writers Who Love Too Much: New Narrative 1977–1997* (Ann Arbor, MI: Nightboat Books, 2017). On autotheory, see Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (Boston: MIT Press, 2022); Alex Brostoff and Vilashini Cooppan, eds., *Autotheories* (Boston: MIT Press, 2025); Becky McLaughlin, Eric Daffron, Maria Gil Ulldemolins, and Kris Pint, eds., *Autotheory and Its Others* (Santa Barbara: Punctum Books, 2026). For theoretical approaches to

the monstrous that inform my essay “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix” and provide a subtext in this book, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon Samuel Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Donna Haraway’s widely anthologized “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” in Jenny Wolmark, ed., *Cybersexualities: A Reader in Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); and Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002). See also Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), especially Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 3–25.

Walter Benjamin’s concept of the flâneur (an urban wanderer who simultaneously participates in, observes, and critiques the spectacle of modern capitalism), the Situationist International’s *dériveur* (a more experimental and interventionist urban nomad), and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s “schizophrenic on a stroll” (who actively deterritorializes and reterritorializes the spaces the schizophrenic move through) all inspire the madness behind my own method of wandering; see Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999); Guy Debord, “Theory of the Dérive,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 62–66; and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). For postcolonial, feminist, and queer/trans wanderers, see discussions of “unhomely” movement in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); the flâneuse in Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago Press, 1991); and the nightlife denizen who disrupts heteronormative spatiotemporal regimes in Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005.)



On Stanford’s LGBTQ+ student life, see “Stanford’s Old Firehouse,” on Queer Silicon Valley, <https://www.queersiliconvalley.org>, and the resources listed at Stanford Queer Student Resources, <https://www.queer.stanford.edu>. On the broader intellectual climate of Silicon Valley, see Adrian Daub, *What Tech Calls Thinking: An Inquiry into the Intellectual Bedrock of Silicon Valley* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), and on the moral panic over wokeness, diversity, and inclusiveness on college campuses, see Daub, *The Cancel Culture Panic: How an American Obsession Went Global* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024). On Stanford as a breeding ground for oligarchs in waiting, see Malcolm Harris, *Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World* (New York: Little, Brown, 2023); Erin McElroy, *Silicon Valley Imperialism: Techno Fantasies and Frictions in Postsocialist Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024); and Becca Lewis, “‘Headed for Technofascism’: The Rightwing Roots of Silicon Valley,” *The Guardian*, January 29, 2025. For some of the subconstituencies populating Dinkelspiel Auditorium at the Matt Walsh event: on incels, see Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021); on the American Identity Movement, see Chris Schiano, “Slouching Towards the Ethnostate: Inside the American Identity Movement,” *Unicorn Riot*, July 4, 2019; on Richard Spencer, see Tamir Bar-On, “Richard B. Spencer and the Alt Right,” in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); on Christian nationalism, see Andrew L.

Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); see Russell Vought's contributions to Project 2025—Heritage Foundation, *Mandate for Leadership 2025*, 9th ed. (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, April 2023)—as a practical example of these beliefs.

On Matt Walsh and his Stanford event, see *What Is a Woman?*, dir. Justin Folk (2022); Ari Drennen, "Matt Walsh's Sordid History as a Radio Host, Exposed," Media Matters for America, 2022; "What Is a Woman?," speech at Stanford University, Young America's Foundation, 2023, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EdudD8Xbck; Ava Aidala, "Matt Walsh: A Dangerous Presence on Campus," *Stanford Daily*, February 21, 2023; Stanford College Republicans, "Why We Invited Matt Walsh," *Stanford Review*, February 21, 2023; and Caroline Chen and Mark Allen Cu, "Despite Controversy, No Protests Materialize for Matt Walsh's Visit," *Stanford Daily*, March 3, 2023. Regarding the accusation of deceptive editing in *What Is a Woman?*, see Charisma Madarang, "Three People in Matt Walsh's Anti-Trans Film Say They Were Tricked," *Rolling Stone*, July 27, 2023; and Trudy Ring, "Three Who Were in Matt Walsh's Anti-Trans Film Say They Were Deceived," *Advocate*, July 27, 2023; both articles rely on the NBC News report, "3 People Say They Were Tricked into Appearing in Anti-Trans Film 'What Is a Woman?,'" <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/what-is-a-woman-stream-matt-walsh-movie-daily-wire-rcna91359>. For the Sebastian Gorka quote, see comment posted by @NatConTalk, September 4, 2025, stream<https://x.com/NatConTalk/status/1963756711975497817>.

For statistical portraits of the US trans community over the last decade or so, see Jaime M. Grant, Lisa A. Mottet, and Justin Tanis, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2014), and *2022 US Trans Survey*, <https://ustranssurvey.org>. Regarding the unprecedented onslaught of anti-trans legislation and the still-escalating moral panic over trans people that provided a sobering backdrop to the entire period I was working on this book, one invaluable resource for ongoing political reporting is Erin Reed's blog, *Erin in the Morning*, <https://www.erininthemorning.com>. See regularly updated online legislation trackers, including those at Trans Legislation Tracker, <https://translegislation.com>; Transformation Project, <https://transformationproject.org>; and the Anti-Trans Bills Tracker of the Movement Advancement Project, <https://mapresearch.org>. On the coordination behind this legislative assault, see Madison Pauly, "Inside the Secret Working Group That Helped Push Anti-Trans Laws Across the Country," *Mother Jones*, March 8, 2023. For discussion of Trump's anti-trans executive orders, see Orion Rummeler and Kate Sosin, "All the Ways Trump Wants to Exclude Trans People from Public Life," *The 19th*, March 2025.

On the so-called transgender tipping point of 2014 as a high-water mark of liberal trans-inclusivity, see Katy Steinmetz, "The Transgender Tipping Point," *Time*, May 29, 2014; Buzz Bissinger, "Caitlyn Jenner: The Full Story," *Vanity Fair*, July 2015; and Nick Duffy, "Obama Is Holding a Transgender Film Night in the White House," *Pink News*, November 20, 2015. For critique of this inclusivity as shallow, see "Open Letter to President Obama Concerning WH Trans Movie Night," *TransGriot*, 2015; Treva Ellison, Kai M. Green, Matt Richardson, and C. Riley Snorton, "We Got Issues: Toward a Black Trans*/Studies," *TSQ* 4, no. 2 (2017): 162–87; and Moises Mendez II, "Laverne Cox on What's Changed Since the 'Transgender Tipping Point,'" *Time*, June 2023. On the deliberate weaponization of trans issues for partisan political purposes in the wake of the "tipping point," see Loren Cannon, *The Politicization of Trans Identity: An Analysis of Backlash, Scapegoating, and Dog-Whistling from Obergefell to Bostock* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022), and J. Levi Stoneking, "The Death of a HERO: How Equality Opponents Repealed the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance by Fueling Trans-Panic with Tested Tactics," *Tulane Journal of Law and Sexuality* 26 (2017): 101–21.

On the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) controversy, where the organized right seems to have learned that they could influence center-left coalitions to throw trans people under the bus, see Isaac West, “GENDA Trouble,” in *Transforming Citizenships: Transgender Articulations of the Law* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 115–42, and Kelly McNamara and Elias Vitulli, “A Defining Moment in Civil Rights History? The Employment Non-Discrimination Act, Trans-Inclusion, and Homonormativity,” *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 7, no. 3 (2010): 155–67. On anti-trans religious freedom bills, see Rachael Faithful, “Religious Exemption or Exceptionalism? Exploring the Tension of First Amendment Religion Protections and Civil Rights Progress Within the Employment Non-Discrimination Act,” *American University Legislation and Policy Brief* 2, no. 1 (2010): 59–72; David Sehat, “The Religious-Liberty Attack on Transgender Rights,” *Boston Review*, October 18, 2016; and Rebecca Buckwalter-Poza and Sharita Gruberg, “How the Religious Liberty Executive Order Licenses Discrimination,” Center for American Progress, May 4, 2017.

For still-relevant older scholarship on toilets, see Erving Goffman, “The Arrangement Between the Sexes,” *Theory and Society* 4, no. 3 (1977): 301–31; Susan Ruddick, “Constructing Difference in Public Spaces: Race, Class, and Gender as Interlocking Systems,” *Urban Geography* 17, no. 2 (1996): 132–51; Harvey Molotch and Laura Norén, *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); and Sheila Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010). See also Oren Gozlan, “Stalled on the Stall,” *TSQ* 2, no. 3 (2015): 414–29; Brian Barnett, Ariana E. Nesbit, and Renée M. Sorrentino, “The Transgender Bathroom Debate at the Intersection of Politics, Law, Ethics, and Science,” *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 46, no. 2 (2018): 232–41; Gillian Frank, “The Anti-Trans Bathroom Nightmare Has Its Roots in Racial Segregation,” *Slate*, November 2015; Cassius Adair, “Bathrooms and Beyond: Expanding a Pedagogy of Access in Trans/Disability Studies,” *TSQ* 2, no. 3 (2015): 417–22; Laurel Westbrook and Kristen Schilt, “Penis Panics: Biological Maleness, Social Masculinity, and the Matrix of Perceived Sexual Threat,” in *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity and Change*, ed. C. J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 181–96; and Kathryn J. Perkins, Grant Harting, and Evelyn Ortiz Soto, “A Right to Transition?: Gender-Segregated Spaces and the Legal Construction of Transgender Identity,” *TSQ* 9, no. 3 (2022): 320–39. For a scholarly overview of the dance between trans social exclusion and inclusion, see Zein Murib, *Terms of Exclusion: Rightful Citizenship Claims and the Construction of LGBT Political Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

On eliminationist rhetoric such as that expressed by Michael Knowles at CPAC, see Eva Hayward, “Don’t Exist,” *TSQ* 4, no. 2 (2017): 191–94, and C. Heike Schotten, “TERFism, Zionism, and Right-Wing Annihilationism: Toward an Internationalist Genealogy of Extinction Phobia,” *TSQ* 9, no. 3 (2022): 334–64. On lethal violence against trans women, especially trans women of color, see Trans Murder Monitoring Project, <https://www.tgeu.org/trans-murder-monitoring>, and A. C. Johnson-Manning and L. Slade, “Violence Against the Transgender Community: An Epidemic,” in *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, ed. Ali Farazmand (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022), 13236–45. On the 1995 Tyra Hunter incident mentioned in chapter V, see Jin Haritaworn and C. Riley Snorton, “Trans Necropolitics,” in *Transgender Studies Reader* 2, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 66–76.

On Sarah Palin’s vice-presidential campaign in 2008 as an important breakthrough moment for a new post-truth discursive regime, see Patrice Taddonio, “‘A Serial Liar’: How Sarah Palin Ushered in the ‘Post-Truth’ Political Era in Which Trump Has Thrived,” *PBS Frontline*, January 10, 2020, and Kris Hartley, “Owning the Libs: Post-Truth in Right-Wing Political Discourse,” *International Review of Public Policy* 5, no. 2 (2023): 183–200. On early use of trans conspiracies in this context, see

“Extremist Files: Alex Jones,” Southern Poverty Law Center, 2025; and “‘Michelle Obama Is Transgender, We All Know It’: Alex Jones Claims He Has ‘Proof’ the Former First Lady Is a Man,” *The Independent*, September 1, 2017. On the persistence of such conspiracies, see “‘Obama Is Queer, Married to a Man’: Elon Musk’s Father’s Bizarre Claim,” NDTV World, June 2025.

For the Cambridge Analytica scandal and political fearmongering, see Christopher Wylie, *Mindf*ck: Cambridge Analytica and the Plot to Break America* (New York: Random House, 2019), and Anna-Verena Nosthoff and Felix Maschewski, “Order from Noise: On Cambridge Analytica, Cybernetic Governance and the Technopolitical Imaginary,” *Public Seminar* 20, no. 3 (2017). On broader issues of using big data to manipulate public opinion, see Melissa Zimdars and Kembrew McLeod, *Fake News: Understanding Media and Misinformation in the Digital Age* (New York: Random House, 2020); Andreas Jungherr, Gonzalo Rivero Rodríguez, and Daniel Gayo-Avello, *Retooling Politics: How Digital Media Are Shaping Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Johan Farkas and Jannick Schou, *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy: Mapping the Politics of Falsehood* (New York: Routledge, 2024).

For unconscious fear as a motive force for anti-trans sentiment, see Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1: *Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), and *Male Fantasies*, vol. 2: *Male Bodies—Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). See also Shanna Carlson, “Transgender Subjectivity and the Logic of Sexual Difference,” *differences* 21, no. 2 (2010): 46–72; Paul Kingsbury and Steve Pile, “Gender, Sexuality, and Race in the Lacanian Mirror: Urinary Segregation and the Bodily Ego,” in *Psychoanalytic Geographies*, ed. Paul Kingsbury and Steve Pile (New York: Routledge, 2014), 123–38; and especially Patricia Elliot and Lawrence Lyons, “Transphobia as Symptom: Fear of the ‘Unwoman,’” *TSQ* 4, no. 1 (2017): 75–98, for their useful reading of Slavoj Žižek’s analysis of the figure of the Jew in antisemitic fantasy. See Žižek’s essay “‘I Hear You with My Eyes’; or, The Invisible Master,” in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 90–126; for a useful critique of Žižek’s own transphobia, see Che Gossett, “Žižek’s Trans/Gender Trouble,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, November 3, 2015. On *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, see Benjamin Segel, *A Lie and a Libel: The History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, trans. Richard S. Levy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995). On connections drawn between Jewish masculinity and transfemininity, see Daniel Boyarin, “Homophobia and the Postcoloniality of the ‘Jewish Science,’” in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, ed. Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 166–98; Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 2013); and Michael Kimmel, “Is ‘Jewish Masculinity’ an Oxymoron?,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 1 (2025): 1–17.



For the cluster of influences around my evening out to see Taylor Mac, see Mac’s website, <https://taylormac.org>, and Sean F. Edgecomb, “The Ridiculous Performance of Taylor Mac,” *Theatre Journal* 64, no. 4 (December 2012): 549–63. Taylor Mac’s *24-Decade History of Popular Music* was first performed in 2016; the film *Taylor Mac’s 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, dir. Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, premiered in 2023. Taylor Mac and Matt Ray premiered *Bark of Millions: A Parade Trance Extravaganza for the Living Library of the Deviant Theme* in 2024; see Lauren Collins-Hughes, “*Bark of Millions* Review: Children of the Revolution,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2024. For Rabih Alameddine, see especially, among his several novels, *The Angel of History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2016) and *The Wrong End of the Telescope* (New

York: Grove Press, 2021). For Juana María Rodríguez, see *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); and *Put a Life: Seeing Latinas, Working Sex* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023). For Julian Carter, see *Dances of Time and Tenderness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Nightboat Books, 2024), and Julian Carter, Doran George, Maxe Crandall, Selby Wynn Schwartz, and Zach Ozma, “PolySensorium Tells Your Fortune: An Action Art Object,” *TSQ* 5, no. 1 (2018): 143–47. On ecosexuality, see Annie Sprinkle, Beth Stephens, and Jennie Klein, *Assuming the Ecosexual Position: The Earth as Lover* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021); for more information about their ongoing project, see Sprinkle and Stephens Collaboration, <https://sprinklestephens.ucsc.edu>. For the reference to lightning and creativity, see Karen (a.k.a. River) Barad, “TransMaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* [hereafter *GLQ*] 21, nos. 2–3 (2015): 387–422.

On “Yankee Doodle Dandy” and slang uses of *doodle*, see first and foremost Henry Abelove, “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” *Massachusetts Review* 49, no. 1/2 (2008): 13–21, which strongly informs the interpretation and some of the wording offered here. On Richard Shuckburgh as author, see David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America’s Founding Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). On slang, see entries on *yank*, *yanker*, and *yankee* in Mitford Mathews, *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Joseph T. Shipley, *The Origins of English Words: A Discursive Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); and B. R. Burg, *An American Seafarer in the Age of Sail: The Erotic Diaries of Philip C. Van Buskirk, 1851–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). On other satirical political uses of *doodle*, see Peter Davis, *From Androboros to the First Amendment: A History of America’s First Play* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015). And on the topic of masturbation, which unexpectedly recurs throughout this book, see Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

For macaroni fashion, see Simone Chess, *Male-to-Female Crossdressing in Early Modern English Literature: Gender, Performance, and Queer Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Peter McNeil, “That Doubtful Gender: Macaroni Dress and Male Sexualities,” *Fashion Theory* 2, no. 4 (1998): 393–420; Amelia Rauser, “Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 1 (2004): 101–17; and Rictor Norton, “The Macaroni Club: Homosexual Scandals in 1772,” in *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (2021), at <http://rictornorton.co.uk>. Full texts of *Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-Woman* (London, 1620) and *Haec Vir: Or, The Womanish-Man* (London, 1620) are available at the Internet Archive; see also Sandra Clark, “‘Hic Mulier,’ ‘Haec Vir,’ and the Controversy over Masculine Women,” *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 2 (1985): 157–83. For other self-conscious early modern uses of the grammatical concept of *gender* to mean groups of people, particularly when distinctions between men and women blurred, see Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

On camp, see Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’” (London: Penguin, 2018; originally published in *Partisan Review*, 1964); Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonation in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); and Fabio Cleto, ed., *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999). On Israeli cross-dressing during the Gazan genocide, see Estelle Shirbon and Pola Grzanka, “Israeli Soldiers Play with Gaza Women’s Underwear in Online Posts,” Reuters, March 28, 2024; Nina Berman, “Violating Intimacies,” *Mondoweiss*, February 29, 2024; and Heidi Matthews, “Colonial Desire Meets TikTok in Israel’s ‘Lingerie Genre,’” *New Arab*, January 31, 2025. In the documentary film *We Are Twisted*

Fucking Sister!, dir. Andrew Horn (2014), the band discusses their performance personae as a “bridge-and-tunnel” appropriation of, and a blue-collar rebuke to, the avant-garde Lower East Side style of cross-dressed rockers such as the New York Dolls, and how they once hanged and beat an effigy of the Black disco/R&B singer Barry White in a mock lynching during one of their stage shows.

On the etymology of *gender* and *sex*, see Robert Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabeticall of Hard Usual English Words*, ed. Robert A. Peters (1604; facsimile repr. Gainesville, FL: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966), and the attested uses noted in *Oxford English Dictionary*; see also Dennis Baron, *Grammar and Gender* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986). To see the rising prevalence of *gender* in English, navigate to the HathiTrust Bookworm visualization tool by following the step-by-step tutorial at <https://www.hathitrust.org>. On the correlation between *gender*’s “inexorable rise” and the “decline of *sex*,” see David Haig, “The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 52 (2004): 2697–701. On how the terms most closely associated with *gender* changed over time, see the Corpus of Historical American English, <https://www.english-corpora.org/coha>, queried by Federico Bianchi, personal communication with the author, December 12, 2022. For a succinct overview of the feminist *sex/gender* distinction, see Mari Mikkola, “Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender,” May 12, 2008, rev. January 18, 2022, in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender>, and Jemima Repo, “Feminist Deployments of Gender,” in *The Biopolitics of Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1–32.

On Judith Butler’s starring role in the history of *gender* since the 1990s, see especially *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004). See also Sara Salih, “Gender,” in *Judith Butler* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 73–96, and Butler’s conversation with Cristan Williams, “Gender Performance: The TransAdvocate Interviews Judith Butler,” *TransAdvocate*, May 1, 2014. On Butler’s use of performativity and reiterative citationality, see Talia Bettcher, “Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues,” September 26, 2009, rev. January 8, 2014, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-trans>. Two of Butler’s lesser-known pieces that I’ve found especially useful are “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism,’” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3–21, on how *gender* produces *sex* rather than the other way around, and “Performativity’s Social Magic,” in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 113–28.

For more on performativity, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962). For a useful introduction to the distinction between *performance* and *performativity*, see Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Introduction: Performativity and Performance,” in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1–18. For a typical misreading of performativity by an otherwise reliable trans writer, see Julia Serano, “Performance Piece,” in *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2013), 165–76.

On biological diversity, see Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), and Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution’s Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). See also two books by the feminist biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), and *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* (New York: Routledge, 2021). Agustín Fuentes, *Sex Is a Spectrum: The Biological Limits of the Binary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2025), offers a recent overview dismantling rigid binary classifications.

For the forum I participated in on Butler's *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024), see Adrian Daub, "Gender and Its Enemies: Five Scholars Discuss Judith Butler's New Book," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 25, 2024. For additional analyses of the contemporary anti-gender ideology movement, see Sophie Lewis, *Enemy Feminisms: TERFs, Policewomen, and Girlbosses Against Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2024); Mary Anne Case, "Trans Formations in the Vatican's War on 'Gender Ideology,'" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44, no. 3 (2019): 639–64; Greta LaFleur and Serena Bassi, "TERFs, Gender-Critical Movements, and Postfascist Feminisms," *TSQ* 9, no. 1 (2022): 64–84; Gloria Careaga-Pérez, "Moral Panic and Gender Ideology in Latin America," *Religion and Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016): 182–89; Elizabeth Corredor, "Unpacking 'Gender Ideology' and the Global Right's Antigender Countermovement," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44, no. 3 (2019): 613–38; and Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017). See especially, for the emphasis I place in this book on the specifically post-Catholic roots of Mary Daly and Janice Raymond's transphobic feminism, Dale O'Leary, *The Deconstruction of Women: Analysis of the Gender Perspective in Preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, September 1995* (1995; facsimile repr. Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1996).



John Money's primary archival collections are housed at the University of Otago Library (some portions digitized), and the Kinsey Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington. For his art collection, see Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore, New Zealand. On Money's psychedelic doodles, see the visual cultural studies scholar and curator Jeanne Vaccaro, (jeannevaccaro.net), who has lectured on this topic and included Money's work in exhibitions such as *Bring Your Own Body: Transgender Between Archives and Aesthetics* (New York, Cooper Gallery, October 13–November 14, 2015).

The major works on John Money and *gender* that I've characterized as the "orthodox history" include Jennifer Germon, *Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Terry Goldie, *The Man Who Invented Gender: Engaging the Ideas of John Money* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); Lisa Downing, Iain Morland, and Nikki Sullivan, *Fuckology: Critical Essays on John Money's Diagnostic Concepts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Sandra Eder, *How the Clinic Made Gender: The Medical History of a Transformative Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022). For additional biographical information, see Richard Green, "John Money, Ph.D. (July 8, 1921–July 7, 2006): A Personal Obituary," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2006), and Vern Bullough, "The Contributions of John Money: A Personal View," *Journal of Sex Research* 40, no. 3 (2003): 230–36. For Money's earliest research interests, see his "Psychiatry and Religion," undated (before 1946), John Money Collection, University of Otago; "Delusion, Belief, and Fact," *Psychiatry* 11 (1948): 33–38; "Unanimity in the Social Sciences with Reference to Epistemology, Ontology, and Scientific Method," *Psychiatry* 12 (1949): 211–21; and "Hermaphroditism: An Inquiry into the Nature of a Human Paradox" (PhD diss., Harvard University, Department of Social Relations, 1952).

For a short, useful chronology of early *gender* terminology, see Alex Byrne, "The Origin of 'Gender Identity,'" *Archive of Sexual Behavior*, published online June 5, 2023; for Money's first use of social-scientific *gender*, see John Money, "Hermaphroditism, Gender and Precocity in Hyperadrenocorticism: Psychologic Findings," *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital* 96, no. 6 (June 1955): 253–64; for the influential trio of coauthored articles using *gender*, see John Money, Joan G. Hampson, and John Hampson, "An Examination of Some Basic Sexual Concepts: The

Evidence of Human Hermaphroditism,” *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital* 97, no. 4 (October 1955): 301–19; John Money, Joan G. Hampson, and John Hampson, “Hermaphroditism: Recommendations Concerning Assignment of Sex, Change of Sex, and Psychologic Management,” *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital* 97, no. 4 (1955): 284–300; and John Money, Joan G. Hampson, and John Hampson, “Imprinting and the Establishment of Gender Role,” *AMA Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* 77, no. 4 (1957): 333–36. See also John Money, “Linguistic Resources and Psychodynamic Theory,” *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 28, no. 4 (1956): 264–66. Money’s mature theory is fully explicated in John Money and Anke Ehrhardt, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl: The Differentiation and Dimorphism of Identity from Conception to Maturity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); John Money and Barbara Tucker, *Sexual Signatures: On Being a Man or a Woman* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975); and John Money, *Gendermaps: Social Constructionism, Feminism and Sexosophical History* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

Of the voluminous commentary on the Reimer case, see especially John Colapinto, *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), and Judith Butler, “Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality,” in *Undoing Gender*, 57–74. For archival footage of Money related to the Reimer case, see *Every Body*, dir. Julie Cohen (New York: Focus Features, 2023). For the broader history of intersex people and their medical management, see Alice Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Suzanne J. Kessler, *Lessons from the Intersexed* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); and Katrina Karkazis, *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

On intersex activism and critical intersex studies, see [Bo Laurent], “Hermaphrodites with Attitude,” *GLQ* 4, no. 2 (1998): 189–211; Morgan Holmes, *Critical Intersex* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009); Georgiann Davis, *Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Hil Malatino, *Queer Embodiment: Monstrosity, Medical Violence, and Intersex Experience* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019); and Iain Morland, *Intersex: A Manifesto Against Medicalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2025). The intersex activists who gathered at my home before the first-ever international intersex gathering are documented in “Hermaphrodites Speak” (1997), Intersex Society of North America, posted October 27, 2021, on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkjhp6JnS0>.

On the earliest “sex-change” clinics at Johns Hopkins and UCLA, see Emmett Harsin Drager, “Early Gender Clinics, Transsexual Etiology, and the Racialized Family,” *GLQ* 29, no. 11 (2023): 13–26, and Charalampos Siotos et al., “Origins of Gender Affirmation Surgery: The History of the First Gender Identity Clinic in the United States at Johns Hopkins,” *Annals of Plastic Surgery* 83, no. 2 (August 2019): 132–36. See also the relevant portions of Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*; Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*; and Eder, *How the Clinic Made Gender*.

On the “lab leak” history of *gender*’s migration from Johns Hopkins to UCLA, see Diederik F. Janssen, “Who Invented Gender Identity?,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 52 (2023): 2713–16, who argues therein that “gender” did not arrive at UCLA prior to 1962. David Haig, “On the Origins of Gender Identity,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 52 (2023): 2717–18, documents Money’s attribution of “gender identity” to Hooker in their correspondence regarding her “homosexual studies.” See also Evelyn Hooker, “An Empirical Study of Some Relations Between Sexual Patterns and Gender Identity in Male Homosexuals,” in *Sex Research: New Developments*, ed. John Money (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 24–52. For Hooker’s activism to depathologize homosexuality, which seems to have influenced the spread of *gender* terminology in homophile networks, see the

film *Changing Our Minds: The Story of Dr. Evelyn Hooker*, dir. Richard Schmiechen (Frameline Distribution, 1992).

The primary conduit between Hopkins and UCLA was Richard Green. See Richard Green and John Money, eds., *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), and Richard Green, *The "Sissy Boy Syndrome" and the Development of Homosexuality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987).

On Stoller's uptake of *gender* terminology, see Robert J. Stoller, "A Contribution to the Study of Gender Identity," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 45 (1964): 220–26; "Gender-Role Change in Intersexed Patients," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 188, no. 7 (1964): 684–85; "The Hermaphroditic Identity of Hermaphrodites," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 139, no. 5 (1964): 453–57; *Sex and Gender: The Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Science House, 1968); *The Transsexual Experiment: Volume II of Sex and Gender* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1975); and *Splitting: A Case of Female Masculinity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973). See also Karl E. Bryant, "The Politics of Pathology and the Making of Gender Identity Disorder" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007), and Terri Sé Sullivan, "Conversion Therapy Ground Zero: Interrogating the Production of Gender as a Pathology in the United States" (PhD diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 2017).

On Harold Garfinkel's involvement in gender research, see Robert J. Stoller, Harold Garfinkel, and A. C. Rosen, "Psychiatric Management of Intersexed Patients," *California Medicine* 96, no. 1 (1962): 30–34, and Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), especially "Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an Intersex Person," as well as the retrospective appendix in which he discusses Agnes as a wily agent who got what she wanted in the face of institutional barriers. For more on the medical management of Agnes's case, see A. D. Schwabe, David H. Solomon, Robert J. Stoller, and John P. Burnham, "Pubertal Feminization in a Genetic Male with Testicular Atrophy and Normal Urinary Gonadotropin," *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* 22, no. 8 (1962): 839–45. For more on Agnes as a person, see Kristen Schilt, "The Importance of Being Agnes," *Symbolic Interaction* 39, no. 2 (2016): 287–94, and the film *Framing Agnes*, dir. Chase Joynt (2022). For ethnomethodology's foundational contribution to gender studies, see Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

On the dissemination of *gender* from the clinic into feminist theory, see Sandra Eder, "The Life of Gender: Reformulations and Adaptations," in *How the Clinic Made Gender*, 195–224; Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category"; and Haig, "Inexorable Rise." On Money's self-promotion, see John Money, "Gender Role, Gender Identity, Core Gender Identity: Usage and Definition of Terms," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 1 (1973): 397–402; "Gender: History, Theory and Usage of the Term in Sexology and Its Relationship to Nature/Nurture," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 11 (1985): 71–79; *Gendermaps*, which contains an extended discussion of gender's adoption by feminism; and *A First Person History of Pediatric Psychoendocrinology* (New York: Plenum, 2002). For early significant feminist use of *gender*, see Kate Millett, whose 1968 dissertation substantively engages with Stoller's recently published *Sex and Gender*, and who uses the term in her second-wave feminist classic *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), and, most importantly, Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210. On the relation of Rubin's work to trans studies, see Susan Stryker, "The Time Has Come to Think About Gayle Rubin," *GLQ* 17, no. 1 (2011): 79–83. On Rubin as foundational for Butler, see Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler, "Sexual Traffic," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (1994): 63–99.

On feminists whom Haig documents as *gender*'s earliest adopters in "Inexorable Rise," who later developed qualms about the term's use, see especially Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society* (London: Temple Smith, 1972). Oakley subsequently expressed critical views of what she perceived as the misapplication of the *sex/gender* distinction by trans and nonbinary people, in Germaine Greer, "Foreword," and Ann Oakley, "Introduction," in *The Ann Oakley Reader: Gender, Women and Social Science*, ed. Ann Oakley (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2005), vi–viii and 2–5, respectively. See also Moira Gatens, "A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction," in *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3–21. Later "gender-critical feminists" include Sheila Jeffreys, *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism* (London: Routledge, 2013); Debra Soh, *The End of Gender: Debunking the Myths About Sex and Identity in Our Society* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020); Helen Joyce, *Trans: When Ideology Meets Reality* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021); Kathleen Stock, *Material Girls: Why Reality Matters for Feminism* (New York: Fleet, 2021); and Holly Lawford-Smith, *Gender-Critical Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

For a biographical portrait of the unsung Madison Bentley, see Karl M. Dallenbach, "Madison Bentley: 1870–1955," *American Journal of Psychology* 69, no. 2 (June 1956): 169–93, 97–101. For Bentley's two major articles on *gender*, see "Sanity and Hazard in Childhood," *American Journal of Psychology* 58, no. 2 (April 1945): 212–46, and "The Reconstructing Teens and the Stabilizing Twenties," *American Journal of Psychology* 58, no. 3 (July 1945): 324–60. On Leland E. Hinsie and Jacob Shatzky's even earlier use of *gender*, see their *Psychiatric Dictionary with Encyclopedic Treatment of Modern Terms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), discussed in Diederik F. Janssen, "Sex/Gender: Did John Money Borrow the Distinction from Leland Earl Hinsie?," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 49 (2020): 2223–26. See also A. Salina Damm, "Review," *American Journal of Psychology* 59, no. 2 (April 1946): 311–14, and, on Madison Bentley's suggestion that Margaret Mead's "sex role" is what he means by *gender*, see his "Brief Comment upon Recent Books," *American Journal of Psychology* 63, no. 2 (April 1950): 310–16.

On Margaret Mead, see *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1928); and Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). On nature versus nurture, see Stephen Cici and Wendy Williams, *The Nature–Nurture Debate: The Essential Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), and Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Mirage of a Space Between Nature and Nurture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). On the *culture* concept, see Marc Manganaro, *Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), and George W. Stocking Jr., "Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective," in *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 867–82. On Franz Boas, the discipline of anthropology, and the interconnected lives of his earliest students, see William Adams, *The Boasians: Founding Fathers and Mothers of American Anthropology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, *Franz Boas: The Emergence of the Anthropologist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019); and Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, *Franz Boas: Shaping Anthropology and Fostering Social Justice* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022). See especially Charles King, *Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Doubleday, 2019), and Lois Banner, *Intertwined Lives: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Their Circle* (New York: Doubleday, 2010).

On anthropological attention to Native American gender systems, see Will Roscoe, "Bibliography of Berdache and Alternative Gender Roles Among North American Indians," *Journal of Homosexuality* 13, nos. 3–4 (1987): 125–73. For examples of early cultural anthropology's extraction of knowledge from Indigenous social systems, see Matilda Coxe Stevenson, *The Zuni Indians: Their*

Mythology, Esoteric Fraternities, and Ceremonies (Washington, DC: US Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution, 1904); Franz Boas, *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians: Based on Personal Observations and on Notes Made by Mr. George Hunt, Report of the US National Museum for 1895* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1897), 311–738; Alfred Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 78, 1925); Edward Sapir, *Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture: A Study in Method* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1916); Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921); Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934); Benjamin Lee Whorf, “An American Indian Model of the Universe,” in *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. John B. Carroll (1936; repr. Cambridge, MA: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956), 57–64; and, on Whorf’s Hopi language tutor, Davida Fernández-Barkan and Phillippa Pitts, “Naming Naquayouma: A Collaborative Approach to American Murals and Indigeneity at the 1937 International Exposition,” *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2022), <https://journalpanorama.org>. On the influence of Kroeber’s work on the science fiction of his daughter Ursula K. LeGuin, see Charlotte Spivack, *Ursula K. Le Guin* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 1–5, and Phillip Scher, “The Education of Ursula Le Guin,” *The Conversation*, January 31, 2018.

On sociological theories of role, see Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory Pure and Applied* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1949); Uta Gerhardt, *Talcott Parsons: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Bruce Biddle, *Role Theory: Expectations, Identities, and Behaviors* (New York: Academic Press, 1979). On the early history of Harvard’s Department of Social Relations, see Patrick Schmidt, “Towards a History of the Department of Social Relations: Harvard University, 1946–1972” (undergraduate thesis, Harvard College, 1978). On John Money’s involvement, and the role of his mentor Ernest Beaglehole in directing him there, see Eder, *How the Clinic Made Gender*, 90–96.

For participants and conference structure, see the program for the 1995 International Congress on Gender, Cross-Dressing, and Sex at Kassner House Productions, <https://lisakassner.me/gender-conference-cal-state-northridge-ca-1995>. On Virginia Prince, see Docter, *From Man to Woman*, 2004. On Louise Lawrence, see the Louise Lawrence Collection in the Kinsey Institute Archive, and Jules Gill-Peterson, “Toward a Historiography of the Lesbian Transsexual, or the TERF’s Nightmare,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 26, no. 2 (2022): 133–47. The Louise Lawrence Transgender Archive, Vallejo, California, is named in Lawrence’s honor (see <https://ltransarchive.org>).

On mid-twentieth-century transfeminine social networks, see the short-lived *Transvestia: Journal of the American Society for Equality in Dress* and the longer-running publication *Transvestia* (1960–1986), both held by the Transgender Archives of the University of Victoria (BC) Libraries. See also Robert Hill, “‘As a Man I Exist; as a Woman I Live’: Heterosexual Transvestism and the Contours of Gender and Sexuality in Postwar America” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2007), and Hill’s article, “‘We Share a Sacred Secret’: Gender, Domesticity, and Containment in ‘Transvestia’s Histories’ and Letters from Crossdressers and Their Wives,” *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 729–50. See also Darell G. Raynor, *A Year Among the Girls* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1966), and Virginia Prince, *How to Be a Woman Though Male* (Los Angeles: Chevalier Press, 1971). For the Casa Susanna cross-dresser retreat, see the film *Casa Susanna* (Sebastian Lifshitz, 2024), and Isabelle Bonnet and Sophie Hackett, *Casa Susanna: The Story of the First Trans Network in the United States, 1959–1968* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2023). On the film director Ed Wood Jr. as a member of these networks, see *Glen or Glenda* (1953); Rudolph Grey, *Nightmare of Ecstasy: The*

Life and Art of Edward D. Wood, Jr. (Los Angeles: Feral House, 1992); and the Tim Burton quasi-fictionalized biopic *Ed Wood* (1994).

For Stoller's death, see the obituary "Robert Stoller; Theorist on Sexual Issues," *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1991. On Virginia Prince's contribution to *gender* terminology and the *sex/gender* distinction, see Emily Cousens, "Virginia Prince, Robert Stoller and the Trans Feminist Intellectual History of the Sex/Gender Distinction," *History Workshop Journal* 99 (Spring 2025): 73–97, and "The Construction of the Sex-Gender Distinction," *History Workshop*, July 1, 2025. For Prince's articles, see "Virginia Prince: Pioneer of Transgendering," ed. Richard Ekins and Dave King, special issue, *International Journal of Transgenderism* 8, no. 4 (2005), which reprinted several of Prince's most significant articles; those discussed in this chapter are C. V. Prince, "Homosexuality, Transvestism and Transsexuality," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 11 (1957): 80–85; Virginia Bruce, "The Expression of Femininity in the Male," *Journal of Sex Research* 3, no. 2 (1967): 129–39; Virginia Prince, "Sex vs. Gender," in *Proceedings of the Second Interdisciplinary Symposium on Gender Dysphoria Syndrome*, ed. Donald Laub and Patrick Gandy (Stanford: Stanford University Medical Center, 1973), 20–24; and Virginia Prince, "The 'Transcendents,' or 'Trans' People," *Transvestia* 16, no. 95 (1978): 81–92. For additional information on *transgender* terminology and Prince's role in promulgating it, see Cristan Williams, "Transgender," *TSQ* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 232–34, and Hill, "As a Man I Exist," 2007.



For other versions of the personal stories I tell in chapter IV, see "Perfect Day" and "Lesbian Generations," in *When Monsters Speak*, 72–82 and 123–30, respectively; "A Personal Relationship to the Topic," in *Transgender History: Resources for Today's Struggles—and Tomorrow* (New York: Seal Press, 2026), 2–7; and *La Lent Transgènere/The Transgender Lens* (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2019). On the WTF, see Talia Mae Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?," *Hypatia* 10, no. 10 (2019): 1–24. On transness being about becoming real, see Ben Singer, "Velveteen Realness," unpublished paper presented at Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, Graduate Division of the City University of New York, 1996. The Lili Elbe Digital Archive, <https://lilielbe.org>, is a remarkable digital humanities project that makes Elbe's primary materials available online; see also Pamela Caughie and Sabine Meyer, eds., *Man into Woman: A Comparative Scholarly Edition* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), "real girl" quote on 33. For representations of ballroom culture, see the fictionalized streaming series *Pose* (FX, 2018–2021) and the documentary films *Paris Is Burning*, dir. Jennie Livingston (1990) and *I'm Your Venus*, dir. Kimberley Reed (2024). On "walking the categories" of different styles of gender and points for "realness," see Marlon Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013). On realness as self-defense, see Che Gossett and Juliana Huxtable, "Existing in the World: Blackness at the Edge of Trans Visibility," in [Tourmaline], Stanley, and Burton, eds., *Trap Door*, 39–56. On the disco star Sylvester and "(You Make Me Feel) Mighty Real," see Josh Gamson, *The Fabulous Sylvester: The Legend, the Music, the Seventies in San Francisco* (New York: Picador, 2006). Janet Mock's first memoir was *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and So Much More* (New York: Atria, 2014). On the *transreal* in digital media culture and game design, see micha cárdenas, *The Transreal: Political Aesthetics of Crossing Realities* (New York: Atropos, 2012), and *Poetic Operations: Trans of Color Art in Digital Media* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021). For more on transmedia cultural production, see Jian Neo Chen, *Trans Exploits: Trans of Color Cultures and Technologies in Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

On my favorite novel as a teen, see Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell, 1969). On *line of flight*, and my use of other terms drawn from the conceptual vocabulary of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, like *rhizome*, see the web of connections drawn by Adrian Parr, ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005). On the prevalence of queer and trans practices of engaging with science fiction as a line of flight, see Alexis Bard Johnson and Kelly Filreis, eds., *Sci-Fi, Magic, Queer L.A.: Sexual Science and the Imagine-Nation* (Los Angeles: Inventory Press for One Archives at USC Archives, 2024). On the Native American Church, see Omer Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Thomas Maroukis, *The Peyote Road: Religious Freedom and the Native American Church* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010); and Lisa Barnett, *Peyote Politics: The Making of the Native American Church, 1880–1937* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2025). On Carlos Castaneda, see his three works purporting to be about the Yaqui shaman Don Juan: *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971); and *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1972). On Garfinkel's fraught relationship to Castaneda, see Richard DeMille, *Castaneda's Journey: The Power and the Allegory* (Santa Barbara, CA: Capra, 1976), and *The Don Juan Papers: Further Castaneda Controversies* (Santa Barbara, CA: Ross-Erikson, 1980). For more on the trickster hypothesis, see Stefan Lochle, "The Imposter as Trickster as Innovator: A Re-Reading of Carlos Castaneda's *Don Juan Cycle*," in *Fake Identity?: The Impostor Narrative in North American Culture*, ed. Caroline Rosenthal and Stefanie Schäfer (New York: Campus Verlag, 2014), 81–98, and Charlotte Hardman, "'He May Be Lying but What He Says Is True': The Sacred Tradition of Don Juan as Reported by Carlos Castaneda, Anthropologist, Trickster, Guru, Allegorist," in *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, ed. J. R. Lewis and O. Hammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38–55.

On my teenage and young-adult reading in esoterica and ancient religious traditions, see *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiché Maya*, trans. Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley, from the Spanish translation by Adrián Recinos (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950); *The Upanishads*, trans. Juan Mascaró (London: Penguin Books, 1965); *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian*, compiled by Andrew George (London: Penguin, 2003); *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, trans. Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa (Boston: Shambhala, 1975); *The Original I Ching: A Landmark Translation of The Book of Changes Based on Recent Discoveries*, trans. Margaret J. Pearson (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle, 2025); Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha: An Indian Novel* (1922; repr. New York: New Directions Publishing, 1951); *The Complete Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (Washington, DC: Dream Books, 2023); and "Hitler's Secret UFO Plans—Nazis Hoped to Spread Terror in Flying Saucers!," *Weekly World News*, January 27, 1981, 1, 41. For particularly science-fictiony passages in the Book of Mormon about saucer-shaped submersibles, see the book of Ether, chapters 2 and 6.

On the current incarnation of the University of Oklahoma's Scholarship Leadership Enrichment Program, see <https://oslep.org>. On Berger, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); and *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969). For more on the social construction or production of reality beyond Berger and Garfinkel's *Ethnomethodology*, see Dave Elder-Vass, *The Reality of Social Construction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For a deeper dive into this phenomenologically driven approach to social-scientific theory, see Alfred Schütz, especially *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (1932; trans.

Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald Landes (1945; trans. New York: Routledge, 2013).

For more on the schism between Utah Mormonism and the denomination my mother's family belonged to—the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (RLDS), now known as the Community of Christ—see Newell G. Bringham and John C. Hamer, *Scattering of the Saints: Schism Within Mormonism* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2007), 1–22; Steven L. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration: A History of the Latter Day Saint Movement*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Restoration Research, 1990), 89–112; and William D. Russell, “The Fundamentalist Schism, 1958–Present,” in *Let Contention Cease: The Dynamics of Dissent in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, ed. Roger D. Launius and W. B. Spillman (Independence, MO: Graceland/Park Press, 1991), 87–109.

For my somewhat undercooked and hastily completed dissertation, see Susan Stryker, “Making Mormonism: A Critical and Historical Analysis of Cultural Formation” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1992). On general Mormon history, see Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-Day Saints* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1979). For a recent approach more similar to what I aimed for in my own work, see Peter Coviello, *Make Yourself Gods: Mormons and the Unfinished Business of American Secularism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019). On the Hawn's Mill Massacre, see Alexander Baugh, “Jacob Hawn and the Hawn's Mill Massacre: Missouri Millwright and Oregon Pioneer,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 1–25. And on other violence, see Stephen LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987).

Two standard studies of the Burned-Over District are Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), and Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978). See also Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). Charles Sellers directed my dissertation, and his work-in-progress during my graduate years informed my approach to Mormon history; see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815–1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

To get the flavor of trans and tech subcultures in my version of the 1990s in the Bay Area, see Allucquère Rosanne [Sandy] Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); Susan Stryker, “Sex and Death Among the Cyborgs,” *Wired*, May 1, 1996; *Gendernauts*, dir. Monika Treut (Hyena Films, 1999); and my essays collected in the “Trans SanFrisco” section of *When Monsters Speak*. Specifically on the question of the relationship of digital images to physical objects as a trans aesthetic, see Cael Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski: Sensing Transgender* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018); on the “new” transgender as part of a radical social movement, see Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* (New York: World View Forum, 1992).

I expand on and revise old work about Christine Jorgensen previously published as “Transsexuality: The Postmodern Body and/as Technology,” in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. Barbara M. Kennedy and David Bell (London: Routledge, 2000), 588–97, and “Christine Jorgensen's Atom Bomb: Transsexuality and the Emergence of Postmodernity,” in *Playing Dolly: Technocultural Formations, Fantasies, and Fictions of Assisted Reproduction*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan and Susan Merrill Squier (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 157–71. For more on Christine Jorgensen and the racial politics of trans respectability, see Emily Skidmore, “Constructing the ‘Good Transsexual’: Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Press,” *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 270–300, and C. Riley Snorton, “A Nightmarish

Silhouette: Racialization and the Long Exposure of Transition,” in *Black on Both Sides*, 139–57. To place Jorgensen’s trip to the drugstore in the venerable tradition of do-it-yourself trans health care, see Jules Gill-Peterson, “Doctors Who? Radical Lessons on DIY Transition,” *The Baffler* 65 (October 2022). On Charlotte Charlaque von Curtis’s conversation with Jorgensen, see Christine Jorgensen Collection, Royal Danish Library, which I accessed before the collection was fully processed and found in a box of loose materials labeled “Autobiography,” during a visit on October 25–29, 1999; previously cited letters from “R.K.” and “C.J.C.” are in the correspondence files of the same collection. For more on mid-twentieth-century attitudes toward science that informed Jorgensen’s public reception, see David Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), and Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

On the medical history of experimental biology and endocrinology, see, for the Hunter anecdote on testicular transplantation and much else, Ross Brooks, “Bounds of Diversity: Queer Zoology in Europe from Aristotle to John Hunter,” *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society* 195, no. 1 (May 2022): 1–32. See also Nelly Oudshoorn, *Beyond the Natural Body: An Archeology of the Sex Hormones* (London: Routledge, 1994); Chandak Sengoopta, *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life: Sex, Glands, and Hormones, 1850–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Rebecca Jordan-Young and Katrina Karkazis, *Testosterone: An Unauthorized Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Michael Pettit, “Becoming Glandular: Endocrinology, Mass Culture, and Experimental Lives in the Interwar Age,” *American Historical Review* 118, no. 4 (2013): 1052–76; and Paul Preciado, “The Pharmacopornographic Era,” in *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: Feminist Press, 2013), 23–54. On Hirschfeld, see Ralf Dose, *Magnus Hirschfeld: The Origins of the Gay Liberation Movement* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014). On Benjamin, see Alison Li, *Wondrous Transformations: A Maverick Physician, the Science of Hormones, and the Birth of the Transgender Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2024), and Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Julian Press, 1966). For a critical appraisal of the German sexological tradition, see Kadji Amin, “Glands, Eugenics, and Rejuvenation in *Man into Woman*: A Biopolitical Genealogy of Transsexuality,” *TSQ* 5, no. 4 (2018): 589–605, and Laurie Marhoefer, *Racism and the Making of Gay Rights: A Sexologist, His Student, and the Empire of Queer Love* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).

On the Compton’s Cafeteria riot and trans history in San Francisco’s Tenderloin, see the film *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria*, dir. Victor Silverman and Susan Stryker (ITVS, 2005); Susan Stryker, “At the Crossroads of Turk and Taylor: Resisting Carceral Power in San Francisco’s Tenderloin District,” *Places*, October 2021; and Megan Rohrer, *San Francisco’s Transgender District* (Mt. Pleasant, SC: Arcadia, 2025).

On somatechnics and its relationship to transness and technology, see Nikki Sullivan, “Transmogrification: Or, (Un)Becoming Others,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 552–64. See also Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray, eds., *Somatechnics: Queering the Technologicalisation of Bodies* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), and the academic journal *Somatechnics*, published by Edinburgh University Press since 2011.

On broader questions concerning technology, see Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Garland, 1977), 3–35, and Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002). For similar approaches, see references throughout the work of Donna Haraway on the concept of *natureculture*, and in Deleuze and Guattari’s work on the concept of *milieu*, as well as Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory. See also Gilbert Simondon, “The Genesis of the Individual,” in

Incorporations, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 297–319; “The Position of the Problem of Ontogenesis,” trans. Gregory Flanders, *Parrhesia* 7 (2009): 4–16; and *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2016). On the idea of an “originary technicity” that co-constitutes the human, see Nathan Schlanger, ed., *André Leroi-Gourhan on Technology: A Selection of Writings from the 1930s to the 1960s*, trans. Nils F. Schott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), and Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).



For recent Marxist approaches to transness, see Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O’Rourke, eds., *Transgender Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), and “Trans Marxist,” ed. Ira Teran and Emrys Travis, special issue, *TSQ* 11, no. 2 (2024). On the intersections of capitalist transformation, soil science, hormones, and the concept of metabolic rift, begin with Jordy Rosenberg’s *Confessions of the Fox* (New York: One World, 2018), and be sure to read the footnotes. See also “One Utopia, One Dystopia,” Rosenberg’s afterword to *Transgender Marxism*, especially 314–15. For background on the metabolic rift, see John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), and Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Business of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), which fully explicate the derivation of *metabolic rift* from the discussion of *Stoffwechsel* in Marxian thought. For a pop-culture gloss, see the satirical superhero television series *The Boys* (Amazon Prime Video, 2019–), in which the fictional substance Compound V functions as a metabolic elixir, allegorizing the interweaving of consumer capitalism and fascist media spectacles. On cross-species hormones, see Eva Hayward, “Transxenoestrogenesis,” *TSQ* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 255–58. On microplastics and other endocrine-disrupting chemicals in the environment, see Bailey Kier, “Interdependent Ecological Transsex: Notes on Re/Production, ‘Transgender’ Fish, and the Management of Populations, Species, and Resources,” *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20, no. 3 (2010): 299–319. On the treatment of metabolic disorders in pediatric intersex medicine at Hopkins, see Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*.

On the life and writings of James Anderson, see Rosalind Mitchinson, “Anderson, James (1739–1808),” in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Anderson serialized “Grammatical Disquisitions” in the journal he edited, *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, across volumes 10 (239–45, 311–18) and 11 (120–30, 193–204, 240–50, 266–74) in 1792. For the work he comments on regarding the pronoun *ou*, see William Marshall, *The Rural Economy of Gloucestershire: Including Its Dairy, Together with the Dairy Management of North Wiltshire and the Management of Orchards and Fruit Liquor, in Herefordshire* (London: Printed for R. Raikes, 1789). For Marx’s discussion of Anderson’s influence on his own work, see “Notes on the History of the Discovery of the So-Called Ricardian Law of Rent, part 1: The Discovery of the Law of Differential Rent by Anderson. Distortion of Anderson’s Views by His Plagiarist, Malthus, in the Interests of the Landowners,” chapter 9 of *Capital*, vol. 4: *Theories of Surplus Value*, available at Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch09.htm>.

On Dennis Baron, whose sleuthing called my attention to the relationship between agronomy and grammar in Anderson’s work, see his *Grammar and Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); *What’s Your Pronoun?: Beyond He and She* (New York: Liveright, 2020); and *The Web of Language* (blog), <https://blogs.illinois.edu/view/25>.

My discussion of grammar and pronouns draws on Greville Corbett, “Number of Genders,” “Sex-Based and Non-Sex-Based Gender Systems,” and “Systems of Gender Assignment,” in *World Atlas of Language Structures*, vol. 1, ed. Martin Haspelmath, Mathew Dryer, David Gil, and Bernard Comrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 126–29, 130–33, and 134–37, respectively. For the history of grammatical change in English pronoun use, see Anne Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For the distinction between notional and natural gender, see Sally McConnell-Ginet, “Gender and Its Relation to Sex: The Myth of ‘Natural’ Gender,” in *The Expression of Gender*, ed. Greville Corbett (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015), 3–38. See also pertinent episodes of Lena Mattheis’s Queer Lit podcast, <https://www.spreaker.com/show/queer-lit>, discussing Mattheis’s work in progress, *Queer Forms and Pronouns: Gender Non-Conformity in Anglophone Literature*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

With regard to the mycological metaphors I use to illustrate animacy and the more-than-metaphorical relationship I suggest between life and language, see Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, and Shape Our Futures* (New York: Random House, 2020). I wasn’t aware of Sheldrake’s book when writing this one; I just happened to read it while on vacation between the time I submitted my manuscript to the publisher and when I received the copyedited text for final revision. But Sheldrake’s book is uncannily similar to mine, albeit turned inside out. While I’m a humanities-oriented person interested in what words do with—and to—the living world, Sheldrake is a mycologist who addresses similar questions about concepts, grammars, and syntax from a scientific perspective; he even cites some of the same passages I cite in Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and weaves psychedelic-inspired insights into his account of fungi.

For Mel Y. Chen, see *Intoxicated: Race, Disability, and Chemical Intimacy Across Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023), esp. 1–17, for the autobiographical roots of their academic interests. See their *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 2–4, for the close reading of an animacy hierarchy in action. For Chen’s source, see Willem M. Mak, Wietske Vonk, and Herbert Schriefers, “Animacy in Processing Relative Clauses: The Hikers That Rocks Crush,” *Journal of Memory and Language* 54, no. 4 (2006): 466–90. To situate Chen’s work in a broader account of the biopolitics of race and which lives matter more, see Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). To see more of Chen’s framing of race, gender, and sexuality in relation to the human and more-than-human, see “Queer Inhumanisms,” ed. Mel Y. Chen and Dana Luciano, special issue, *GLQ* 21, nos. 2–3 (2015).

On the Masumoto peach farm, see their website, <https://www.masumoto.com>. Nikiko Masumoto’s March 20, 2015, TED talk, “Reigniting the Soul of Farming,” is available on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAAIYFfVR9k>. On Mas Masumoto, see his *Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on My Family Farm* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1996); Marc C. Anderson, “EcoFarm Preview and Masumoto on Life and Fruit,” *Edible Monterey Bay*, January 16, 2024; and Michael Doyle, “David Mas Masumoto Named to National Council on the Arts,” June 20, 2012, on Congressman Jim Costa’s website, <https://costa.house.gov/media-center/in-the-news/fresno-bee-david-mas-masumoto-named-national-council-arts>.

On transition as a movement-grammar in choreography, see Julian Carter, “Embracing Transition, or Dancing in the Folds of Time,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 130–43. For more thoughts on things, sparked by Kimmerer’s “Grammar of Animacy” in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, see Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper, 2009), 161–84. For a feminist take on Heidegger’s sense of words as conceptual containers, see Zoë Sophia, “Container Technologies,” *Hypatia* 15, no. 2 (2000): 181–219. For more on concepts from a linguistic perspective, see George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and*

Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).



Gabriele Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom* (Brooklyn: Angelico Press, 2015), provides a useful springboard into the world of anti-gender conspiracism; her take on perverse modernity draws substantively on E. Michael Jones, *Libido Dominandi: Sexual Liberation and Political Control* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2000). See also Jones's book *The Jewish Revolutionary Spirit and Its Impact on World History* (South Bend, IN: Fidelity Press, 2015), on the two-thousand-year-old Jewish anti-Christian conspiracy, and his *Logos Rising: An Ultimate History of Reality* (Carrollton, TX: Fidelity Press, 2020), on the eternal struggle between Chaos and Logos, darkness and light. For an analysis of the interrelationship between anti-gender ideology and antisemitism in Kuby's work, see Agnieszka Graff, "Jewish Perversion as Strategy of Domination: The Anti-Semitic Subtext of Anti-Gender Discourse," *Journal of Modern European History* 20, no. 3 (2022): 423–39.

To survey contemporary varieties of anti-genderism and the environments they flourish in, see, on Catholic transphobia, in addition to previously cited work, Nicolette Burbach and Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Trans Life and the Catholic Church Today* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024). On Deep Green Resistance and radical ecofeminist transphobia, see Aric McBay, Lierre Keith, and Derrick Jensen, *Deep Green Resistance* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), and Laura Houlberg, "The End of Gender or Deep Green Transmisogyny?," in *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment*, ed. Sherilyn MacGregor (London: Routledge, 2017), chapter 32.

On the stew of once-fringe beliefs now saturating Silicon Valley and the high-tech world, see Timnit Gebru and Émile P. Torres, "The TESCREAL Bundle: Eugenics and the Promise of Utopia Through Artificial General Intelligence," *First Monday* 29, no. 4 (April 2024). For an example of the entanglement of these beliefs with anti-trans activism, see Erin Reed, "Musk Donated \$50M to Anti-Trans Ads in 2022; Now His PAC Is Partnering with TPUSA," *Erin in the Morning* (blog), October 4, 2024, and Ella Yurman, "Vivian Jenna Wilson on Being Elon Musk's Estranged Daughter, Protecting Trans Youth and Taking on the Right Online," *Teen Vogue*, March 20, 2025. For more on effective altruism, see Carol J. Adams, Alice Crary, and Lori Gruen, eds., *The Good It Promises, the Harm It Does: Critical Essays on Effective Altruism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), esp. 1–24. On Rationalism, see Eliezer Yudkowsky, *Rationality: From AI to Zombies*, posted at <https://www.readthesequences.com>, and Keach Hagey, "How Peter Thiel's Relationship with Eliezer Yudkowsky Launched the AI Revolution," *Wired*, May 20, 2025. On Curtis Yarvin and the so-called Dark Enlightenment, important accounts include Andrew Jones, "From NeoReactionary Theory to the Alt-Right," in *Critical Theory and the Humanities in the Age of the Alt-Right*, ed. Christine M. Battista and Melissa R. Sande (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 41–60; Joshua Tait, "Mencius Moldbug and Neoreaction," in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 276–93; and Nick Land's manifesto *The Dark Enlightenment* (Perth, Australia: Imperium Press, 2017), originally published as a blog in 2013.

Naomi Klein's *Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023) offers an excellent orientation into the fractured realities of a post-truth social world infested with conspiratorial thinking. For studies of conspiracism, see Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Robert Alan Goldberg, *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University

Press, 2001); and Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” in *The Paranoid Style and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1965), 3–40, remains a touchstone; see also his *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1963). For primary sources on conspiracism as a mode of historical interpretation, see John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried On in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies* (1797; repr. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1798), and Augustin Barruel, *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, 4 vols. (1797; trans. Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1799). On political anti-Masonry, see Michael F. Holt, “The Anti-Masonic and Know-Nothing Parties,” in *History of US Political Parties*, vol. 1: 1789–1860, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1973), 575–620, and William Preston Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party in the United States, 1826–1843* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

On the biopolitical framework that informs my understanding of modern conspiracism, see Michel Foucault’s “Right of Death and Power over Life,” in *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 1:133–159, as well as his *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), and *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For a useful short overview of biopolitical theory, see Tomas Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). For a cogent discussion of race and sex that I gloss in chapter VI, see Joan W. Scott, “The Utility of Gender,” in *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 22–27. For a direct application of these ideas to trans cultural theory and history, see my short contribution “Biopolitics,” in “Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First-Century Trans Studies,” *TSQ* 1, nos. 1–2 (2016): 38–42. On the relationship of mass fantasy to popular politics, see Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie: And Other Episodes in American Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), and Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2018).

For examples of how I live rent-free in some corners of the reactionary imagination, see “Professor Profile: Susan Stryker,” Professor Watchlist, a website sponsored by Turning Point USA, <https://www.professorwatchlist.org/professor/susanstryker>; Bruce Bawer, “Susan Stryker and ‘Transgender Studies’: The Identity-Studies Swamp Grows Deeper,” *Front Page*, October 4, 2017; Madeleine Kearns, “Heterosexual Men Aren’t Lesbians,” *National Review*, January 25, 2022; and Christopher Rufo, “Inside the Transgender Empire,” *Imprimis* 52, no. 9 (September 2023), and “How the Trans Movement Conquered American Life|The Transgender Empire,” July 11, 2023, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xwsekb5QReo>. For more on Rufo and his worldview, see his *America’s Cultural Revolution: How the Radical Left Conquered Everything* (New York: Broadside Books, 2023), and Ross Douthat, “The Anti-D.E.I. Crusader Who Wants to Dismantle the Department of Education,” *The New York Times*, March 7, 2025.

On moral panics related to sexuality and gender, see Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 267–319. For a prominent episode on moral panics involving children, see Richard Beck, *We Believe the Children: A Moral Panic in the 1980s* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015). On the history of phobic constructions of queer people as pedophiles and groomers, see Estelle B. Freedman, “‘Uncontrolled Desires’: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920–1960,” *Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (June 1987): 83–106. And on the relationship of anti-queer moral panics to antisemitism, see Warren Blumenfeld, “How LGBTQ People and Jews Were Stereotyped as Violent Predators,” *LGBTQ Nation*, December 31,

2016. On the relationship of this history to contemporary anti-trans conspiracism, see Aja Romano, “The Right’s Moral Panic Over ‘Grooming’ Invokes Age-Old Homophobia,” *Vox*, April 21, 2022, and Ali Breland, “Why Are Right-Wing Conspiracies So Obsessed with Pedophilia?,” *Mother Jones*, July/August 2019.

For more on conspiratorial transphobia, see Jules Gill-Peterson, “From Gender Critical to QAnon: Anti-Trans Politics and the Laundering of Conspiracy,” *New Inquiry*, September 13, 2021; Lee Leveille, “The Mechanisms of TAnon: What Is ‘TAnon’?,” *Health Liberation Now!*, April 12, 2021; and Io Dodds, “How Paranoia over Trans Rights Became Catnip for QAnon and the Far Right,” *The Independent*, June 26, 2022. For a specific conspiracy that went mainstream, rapid-onset gender dysphoria, see Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2020), and Jesse Singal, “When Children Say They Are Trans,” *The Atlantic*, July/August 2018. As rebuttal, see O. Rose Broderick, “Evidence Undermines ‘Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria’ Claims,” *Scientific American*, August 24, 2023. For anti-trans conspiracies still moving into the mainstream from the fringe, see Scott Howard, *The Transgender-Industrial Complex* (Green Lane, PA: Antelope Hill, 2022); Wesley Smith, “The ‘Gender-Industrial Complex’ Makes Billions Annually,” *National Review*, August 28, 2024; and Jennifer Bilek, “The Billionaires Behind the LGBT Movement,” *First Things*, January 21, 2020, and *Transsexual Transgender Transhuman: Dispatches from the 11th Hour* (North Geelong, Australia: Spinifex Press, 2024). On antisemitism in Bilek’s work, see Ben Lorber and Heron Greenesmith, “Antisemitism Meets Transphobia: White Nationalists and Anti-Trans Feminists Use the Same Conspiracies to Target Trans and Jewish Folks,” *The Progressive*, April 28, 2021. Bilek writes some about me personally; see her July 19, 2025, post on X.com (@bjportraits) correcting fellow conspiracist Gerald Posner (@geraldposner) to the effect that although I am part of the transgender-industrial complex, I’m not a Jewish billionaire. I’ll leave it to my readers to plunge any deeper into the dark web of anti-trans conspiracism.

On agnotology, see Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, eds., *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). On Schiebinger’s work on taxonomy, see *Nature’s Body: Gender and the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993). For Proctor’s work on tobacco, see *Golden Holocaust: Origins of the Cigarette Catastrophe and the Case for Abolition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). On funding the archive of tobacco industry documents that my partner Mimi managed, see Elizabeth Fernandez, “UCSF to Receive Tobacco Papers, Funding to Improve Public Access to the Documents,” UCSF News Center, December 13, 2011, and Fernandez, “UCSF Awarded \$20M Federal Grant on Tobacco Regulatory Sciences, New Research Will Help Regulate Tobacco Products to Protect Public Health,” UCSF News Center, September 19, 2013. To visit what was originally known as the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library, now the Truth Tobacco Industry Documents Library, see <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/tobacco>. On Edward Bernays’s role in developing the “tobacco playbook” that has since been used in other contexts ranging from food additives to pharmaceuticals to climate-change denialism (and now in anti-gender campaigns), see Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999). On the broader topic of media manipulation, see Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (Syracuse, NY: Pantheon Books, 1988).

My understanding of the mid-twentieth-century dissemination of the *gender* concept through the liberal anti-fascist networks in which Margaret Mead and her coterie circulated owes much to Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Joanne Meyerowitz, “‘How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives’: Sexuality, Race, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Social

Constructionist Thought,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 4 (2010): 1057–84; and Peter Mandler, “One World, Many Cultures: Margaret Mead and the Limits to Cold War Anthropology,” *History Workshop Journal* 68 (2009), 149–72. See also Eder, “Culture, Gender, and Personality,” in *How the Clinic Made Gender*, 84–109. On the birth of cybernetics, see Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1948). For a basic introduction, see Francis Heylighen, Cliff Joslyn, and Valentin Turchin, “What Are Cybernetics and Systems Science?,” Principia Cybernetica Web, October 27, 1999. On the Macy Conferences, see Steven Joshua Heims, *Constructing a Social Science for Postwar America: The Cybernetics Group* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), and Claus Pias, ed., *Cybernetics: The Macy Conferences 1946–1953* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). On Harvard’s Department of Social Relations in this light, see Arthur Vidich, “The Department of Social Relations and ‘Systems Theory’ at Harvard: 1948–50,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 13, no. 2 (2000): 607–48. On area studies as a vector for anti-communism, see Eugene Ford, *Cold War Monks: Buddhism and America’s Secret Strategy in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017). And on interdisciplinary social-science and humanities work as a knowledge formation useful for the post–World War II American empire, see Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). On clandestine funding for anti-communist cultural production, see Eric Bennett, *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing During the Cold War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015).

On Gregory Bateson, see, for a mature exposition of his intricate thought, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972). For his early, half-formed efforts with Margaret Mead to analyze personality types in ways that anticipate later gender and transgender theory, see Gerald Sullivan, “A Four-Fold Humanity: Margaret Mead and Psychological Types,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 183–206, and the discussion in Benjamin Breen, *Tripping on Utopia: Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and the Cold War Origins of Psychedelic Science* (New York: Grand Central, 2024), 32–36. Some of these ideas were later revised and expanded by Mead in *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: William Morrow, 1935). See Breen, *Tripping on Utopia*, on Bateson’s time in the OSS, 55–76, and for a brief mention of schismogenesis, 266. For a full elaboration of that concept, see Gregory Bateson, *Naven: A Survey of the Problems Suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe Drawn from Three Points of View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936). On John Money’s gender as applied cybernetics theory, see Iain Morland, “Cybernetic Sexology,” in *Fuckology*, 101–32.

O’Leary, *Gender: The Deconstruction of Women*, and Kuby, *Global Sexual Revolution*, both narrate from a conspiratorial perspective how *gender* has circulated internationally since the mid-twentieth century; for non-conspiratorial accounts of globalizing *gender* and *transgender*, see David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Annirudha Dutta and Raina Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections,” *TSQ* 1, no. 3 (2014): 320–37; Jenny Andrine Madsen Evang, “Is ‘Gender Ideology’ Western Colonialism?: Anti-Gender Rhetoric and the Misappropriation of Postcolonial Language,” *TSQ* 9, no. 1 (2022): 85–102; and my own short essay on how both concepts originate in the Global North, see “Gender and Anti-Gender: Complex Legacies of US Global Power and Influence,” GATE: Global Action for Trans Equality, <https://gate.ngo/knowledge-portal/article/gender-and-anti-gender-legacies/#>.

On *spectacle* as I use it here, see Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967; repr. Oakland: PM Press, 2024). On *fetish* in its anthropological, psychoanalytic, and Marxist senses, see Emily Apter and William Pietz, “Introduction: Fetishism as Cultural Discourse,” in *Fetishism as Cultural*

Discourse, ed. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1–10. On “the socialism of fools,” see the discussion in Sophie Lewis, *Enemy Feminisms*, 11–12. For a deeper dive into the topic of antisemitic anticommunism, see Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, a meticulous takedown of a former comrade who veered into conspiracism (first published in English in 1907, Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring>).



See “The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman,” originally published in *The Knickerbocker: or, New-York Monthly Magazine* 50 (December 1857): 599–610, reprinted in *Early American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 666–78. On *The Knickerbocker* itself, see Leon Baisier, “Narrative History of the Knickerbocker Magazine” (MA thesis, Creighton University, 1929); Herman Everette Spivey, “The Knickerbocker Magazine, 1833–1865: A Study of Its History, Contents, and Significance” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1936); Frank Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, vol. 1: 1741–1850 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, Belknap Press, 1930); and James Callow, *Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807–1855* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

The classic work on the transportation revolution is George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1951). On state documentation practices, see Susan Pearson, *The Birth Certificate: An American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), and Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America: The History of a Document* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). On the relationship of photography and communications media in this period, see Simone Natale, “Photography and Communication Media in the Nineteenth Century,” *History of Photography* 36, no. 4 (2012): 451–56. On the steampunk roots of mechanical and digital computing, see James Essinger, *Jacquard’s Web: How a Hand-Loom Led to the Birth of the Information Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). On the gradual development of the modern surveillance state, see Christian Parenti, *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America from Slavery to the War on Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). C. Riley Snorton discusses altering gender presentation as a strategy of fugitivity when self-emancipating from slavery in *Black on Both Sides*.

On Charles Brockden Brown’s gothic and speculative takes on gender, see his novel *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* (1798; repr. New York: Penguin Classics, 1991), and his fictional work *Alcuin: A Dialogue* (1798; repr. New York: Grossman, 1971). See also Dana Luciano, “The Gothic Meets Sensation: Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, George Lippard, and E. D. E. N. Southworth,” in *A Companion to American Fiction, 1780–1865*, ed. Shirley Samuels (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 314–29. On the Public Universal Friend, see Moyer, *The Public Universal Friend*. On secular and religious communitarian socialism in upstate New York and western Pennsylvania, see firsthand accounts by the Oneida Perfectionist John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1870), and Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States: From Personal Visit and Observation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1875). See also Arthur Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian Origins and the Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663–1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias—The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North

Carolina Press, 1981); and Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

On Joseph Israel Lobdell, see Bambi L. Lobdell, *A Strange Sort of Being*, and Manion, *Female Husbands*. On the history of first-wave feminism and the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, see the second-wave feminist interpretation, Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978). For a more recent scholarly history, see Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). For a revisionist account, see Lisa Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). And on indigenous influence on Anglo-American feminism in upstate New York, see Sally Roesch Wagner, *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists* (Summertown, TN: Native Voices, 2001).

On the nineteenth-century upsurge in anti-cross-dressing laws, see Jesse Bayker's interactive Historical Cross-Dressing Laws Map at <https://legaldress.org>. For the upsurge in gender-neutral neopronouns at the same time, see Baron, *What's Your Pronoun?*

On the cultural politics that contextualize the appeal of phrenology in the nineteenth century, see, on the period's preoccupation with hieroglyphics (those inscrutable shapes palpably filled with hidden and unknown meaning), John Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980). On Mormonism, see Coviello, *Make Yourselves Gods*. On the influence of Lamarckian evolutionary theories of environmental impressibility, see Kyla Schuler, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017). See also the marvelously subtitled John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America: With Reference to Ghosts, Protestant Subcultures, Machines, and Their Metaphors; Featuring Discussions of Mass Media, Moby-Dick, Spirituality, Phrenology, Anthropology, Sing Sing State Penitentiary, and Sex with New Motive Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). On body-oriented social movements, see Ruth Clifford Engs, *Clean Living Movements: American Cycles of Health Reform* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), and none other than John Money, *The Destroying Angel: Sex, Fitness and Food in the Legacy of Degeneracy Theory, Graham Crackers, Kellogg's Corn Flakes and American Health History* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1985). On spiritualism, see Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), and on early sexology, see Benjamin Kahan, *The Book of Minor Perverts: Sexology, Etiology, and the Emergences of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

Kahan is one of two other scholars I know of who has written on Orson Fowler's *gender*. See Benjamin Kahan, "The Unexpected American Origins of Sexology and Sexual Science: Elizabeth Osgood Goodrich Willard, Orson Squire Fowler, and the Scientification of Sex," *History of the Human Sciences* 34, no. 1 (2021): 71–88. The other is Diederik Janssen, "Know Thy Gender: An Etymological Primer," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 47 (2018): 2149–54.

For primary sources on Fowler's phrenological *gender* in addition to the discussion of "MENTAL gender" in the published exchange with "M.F." in *The American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany*, 1847, and the multiple editions of *Love and Parentage* and *Amativeness* discussed in the main text, see O. S. Fowler, *Works on Phrenology, Physiology, etc.* (London: J. Watson, 1850); *Sexual Science* (Philadelphia: National Pub Co., 1870); and *Science of Life* (London: The Fowler Institute, 1875).

On the history of phrenology, see Madeleine B. Stern, *Heads and Headlines: The Phrenological Fowlers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), which supplies many of the anecdotes I recount about Fowler's personal life. For a more recent scholarly history, see John van Wyhe, *Phrenology and the Origins of Victorian Scientific Naturalism* (New York: Routledge, 2004). On phrenology as a feminist practice, see Carla Bittel, "Woman, Know Thyself: Producing and Using Phrenological Knowledge in Nineteenth Century America," *Centaurus* 55 (2013): 104–30. On *Adhesiveness*, the phrenological term that so enamored Walt Whitman, see Michael Lynch, "'Here Is Adhesiveness': From Friendship to Homosexuality," *Victorian Studies* 29, no. 1 (1985): 67–96. See also Charles Colbert, *A Measure of Perfection: Phrenology and the Fine Arts in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), for a wider survey of phrenology's cultural influence, and Irene Cheng, *The Shape of Utopia: The Architecture of Radical Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023), for octagon houses and their relation to phrenology. Madison Bentley and his circle also had a perhaps not-so-curious interest in phrenology; see their discussion of Edwin G. Boring, "Phrenology and the Mind-Body Problem," in *A History of Experimental Psychology* (New York: The Century Company, 1929), 47–57, in Madison Bentley, "Psychological Antecedents of Phrenology," *Psychological Monographs* 21, no. 92 (1916): 102–15, and Karl Dallenbach, "Phrenology Versus Psychoanalysis," *American Journal of Psychology* 68, no. 4 (1955): 511–25. On mixed views of phrenology's legacy, see Tabea Cornel, "Something Old, Something New, Something Pseudo, Something True: Pejorative and Deferential References to Phrenology Since 1840," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 161, no. 4 (2017): 299–332.

On the contemporary phenomenon of transvestigation conspiracies, see Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (London: Zero Books, 2017); Patrick Lenton, "A Wild Investigation of Transvestigators, the People Who Think Celebs Are All Trans," *Vice*, February 8, 2024; Quispe López, "How 'Transvestigation' Crawled Out of the Worst Corners of the Internet into the Mainstream," *Them*, August 14, 2024; and Angelique Chrisafis, "The Macrons v Candace Owens: Lawsuit Marks New Phase in Battle Against Conspiracy Theories," *The Guardian*, July 26, 2025.



On Provincetown, see Karen C. Krahulik, *Provincetown: From Pilgrim Landing to Gay Resort* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

On Janice Raymond and Mary Daly, I've mostly gone straight to the source material and not spent a lot of time in the secondary scholarship, but do see Julie Kubala, "Teaching 'Bad Feminism': Mary Daly and the Legacy of '70s Lesbian-Feminism," *Feminist Formations* 32, no. 1 (2020): 117–36. On the splits within feminism between socialist feminism and "cultural feminism," see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). See also Julia Harris, "Beyond Exclusion: New Narratives of Lesbian and Trans Entanglements in the 1970s" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2026), for additional information on some of the conflicts recounted in this chapter.

Daly's major works were *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); and, with Jane Caputi, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

Raymond's primary work was *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), though she wrote a second book, *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), which commanded far less attention. A longtime professor at University of Massachusetts Amherst, Raymond devoted her activism in these years to combating international sex-trafficking; I've long speculated that her involvement in international women's human rights spaces, such as the 1995 Beijing conference, contributed a strand of discursive DNA to the mutations of anti-gender ideologies that incubated in those spaces between the 1970s and 1990s. Raymond's most recent publications, such as *Doublethink: A Feminist Challenge to Transgenderism* (North Geelong, Australia: Spinifex, 2019), have returned to the conspiratorial anti-trans polemics of her earlier works; Spinifex has published a number of anti-trans conspiracist titles, including Jennifer Bilek's. All of the biographical information on Raymond comes from immersing myself in her papers at the Schlesinger Library; see especially "Radical Feminist Activism in the 21st Century," *labrys, études féministes/estudos feministas*, January/June 2015, unpaginated, in the folder "Articles—Select, 2004–2018," for her own narrative account of her career, as well as her correspondence files with students, readers, friends, and colleagues to chart the networks within which her ideas circulated. To better understand the religious scaffolding on which Raymond built her anti-gender analysis, see "Transsexualism: An Etiological and Ethical Analysis" (PhD diss., Boston College, 1977), especially Appendix C, "The Androgynous Tradition," 400–49; and Janice G. Raymond, "Women's Studies: A Knowledge of One's Own," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 35, nos. 1–2 (1979–80): 39–48.

For the positive review of *Transsexual Empire*, see Thomas Szasz, "Male and Female Created He Them," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1979. For the only other book on transsexualism besides Raymond's at the University of Oklahoma library when I was an undergrad, see Robert J. Stoller, *Perversion: The Erotic Form of Hatred* (New York: Pantheon, 1975). Raymond discusses her "ethic of integrity" and the distinction between *integration* and *integrity* throughout *Transsexual Empire*, especially 154–77. For a different take on the *integrity/integration* distinction, see Susan Stryker and Nikki Sullivan, "King's Member, Queen's Body: Transsexual Surgery, Self-Demand Amputation, and the Biopolitics of Sovereign Power," in *Somatechnics* (2009): 49–64, and Jasbir K. Puar, "Bodies with New Organs: Becoming Trans, Becoming Disabled," in *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 33–62.

The paragraph in the chapter "Sappho by Surgery" in *Transsexual Empire* that set off my search for Cristy Barsky can be found on pages 101–2. For the wave of trans expulsion controversies in the 1970s, see, on Sandy Stone and Olivia Records, Felix Moore, "How a Feminist, Lesbian Music Collective Powerfully Defended Trans Rights in 1970s Los Angeles," *Pink News*, April 24, 2023; Bonnie J. Morris, "Olivia Records: The Production of a Movement," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 19, no. 3 (2015): 290–304; and Nicole Haring, "Intersectional Resistance Music: Olivia Records, Poetic Protest, and the Women's Movement of the 1970s," in *Words, Music and Propaganda*, ed. Tjaša Mohar and Victor Kennedy (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023), 239–55. For more on Olivia Records, see Ginny Z. Berson, *Olivia on the Record: A Radical Experiment in Women's Music* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2020).

For the Beth Elliott exclusion controversy, see her memoir, "coauthored" with her pseudonym Geri Nettick, *Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual* (San Francisco: Rhinoceros/Masquerade Books, 1996). For an early salvo in the ontological trench warfare about trans women in lesbian communities, see "Letter from a Transsexual," and "Our Response," *It Ain't Me Babe*, December 1, 1970, 14. On the controversy over Elliott's participation in the West Coast Lesbian Conference, see Robin Morgan, "Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?," in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1977), 170–88. *The Lesbian Tide* devoted its entire May/June 1973 issue to covering the conference, which it had sponsored. See also

Finn Enke, "Collective Memory and the Transfeminist 1970s: Toward a Less Plausible History," *TSQ* 5, no. 1 (2018): 9–29, and A. A. Samek, "Violence and Identity Politics: 1970s Lesbian-Feminist Discourse and Robin Morgan's 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference Keynote Address," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 13, no. 3 (2016): 232–49.

On Margo Schulter, see Margo [Schulter], "The Lesbian/Transsexual Misunderstanding," *Gay Community News* 2, no. 35 (February 22, 1975): 6ff., and "The Transsexual/Lesbian Misunderstanding, Part II," *Gay Community News* 2, no. 38 (March 15, 1975): 8–9. On Schulter's collaboration with Deborah Feinbloom, see Deborah Heller Feinbloom, Michael Flemming, Valerie Kijewski, and Margo Schulter, "Lesbian/Feminist Orientation Among Male-to-Female Transsexuals," *Journal of Homosexuality* 2, no. 1 (1976): 59–72. Emily Cousens discusses Schulter in "The 'Women' of Women's Liberation," in *Trans Feminist Epistemologies in the US Second Wave* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

Sylvia Rivera's life is widely documented, but for one short yet useful overview of her life, see Jessi Gan, "'Still at the Back of the Bus': Sylvia Rivera's Struggle," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* 2, 291–301, originally published in *CENTRO: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 19, no. 1 (2007): 124–39. Video documentation of Rivera's incendiary speech protesting the alliance between cisgender gay men and lesbian women who tried to keep her off the stage at the 1973 commemoration of the Stonewall Riot, retroactively given the title "Y'all Better Quiet Down," is available on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb-JIOWUw1o&list=RDJb-JIOWUw1o&start_radio=1.

The exclusion controversy around Cristy Barsky is scarcely documented; for an earlier instance of trans women being excluded from women's spaces in Boston, see "Editorial," *Gay Community News* 3, no. 2 (July 5, 1975): 4. For a later reminiscence, see Medusa Oblongata (Mara Math), "Thinking Out Loud," *Dykespeak*, July 1994, 5. See also *Lesbian Connection*, February 1978, 16, 18, for additional commentary. For a document produced at the height of the controversy, see Lee Swislow and Cristy Barsky, "Why Two Lesbians Fight Violence Against Women," *Gay Community News* 6, no. 6 (August 26/September 2, 1978): 8, 14.

For a national perspective on trans movement building in these years, see Thomas J. Billard, "The Origins and Development of the National Transgender Rights Movement in the United States of America," *Journal of Social History* 57, no. 2 (Winter 2023): 296–318. Archival records for Virginia Prince, the International Foundation for Gender Education, Ari Kane, Fantasia Fair, and other trans organizations are housed in the Transgender Archives, University of Victoria, British Columbia, <https://www.uvic.ca/transgenderarchives>. A good history of Fantasia Fair is available via the Internet Archive: "History of Fantasia Fair," http://www.fantasiafair.org/History_of_Fantasia_Fair.aspx. For more on Boston trans organizations specifically, see Avery Dame-Griff, "A Brief History of Transgender Movement Building," in *The Two Revolutions*, 4–7. Deborah Heller Feinbloom's *Transvestites and Transsexuals: Mixed Views* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1976), particularly chapter 3, "Fieldwork," 33–56, offers a very useful ethnography. On the Daughters of Bilitis, the national lesbian organization at whose Boston chapter's monthly meeting Feinbloom first knowingly encountered a trans person, see Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007). For the wider world of gender variance in Boston, see Nan Goldin, *The Other Side, 1972–1992* (Zurich: Scalo, 1993), and Laura Poitras's documentary film *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* (2022).

On the spread of *gender* and *transgender* terminology from Boston-based networks, see Holly Boswell, "Transgender Alternative," *Chrysalis Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 29–32; Hill, "'As a Man I Exist; as a Woman I Live'"; Williams, "Transgender"; and Feinberg, *Transgender Liberation*. For more on Feinberg, see their autobiographically inspired novel *Stone Butch Blues*

(Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1993), and “Transgender Pioneer and Stone Butch Blues Author Leslie Feinberg Has Died,” *Advocate*, November 17, 2024.

On community-centered feminist public health work in Boston, see *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (New York: Atria, 2011), first published as a grassroots handbook in 1970 (under the title *Women and Their Bodies*) and revised or updated nine times in the forty years that followed; more information at <https://ourbodiesourselves.org>. On Feinbloom’s work to establish and operate Gender Identity Services, Inc., see *Transvestites and Transsexuals*, 1976, chapters 1–3. On Reed Erickson and the Erickson Educational Foundation, see the collections of Erickson’s papers at the Transgender Archives, Special Collections, University of Victoria, British Columbia, and at the ONE Archives, University of Southern California Libraries. See also Aaron Devor and Nicholas Matte, “ONE Inc. and Reed Erickson: The Uneasy Collaboration of Gay and Trans Activism, 1964–2003,” *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2004): 179–209. On Cristy Barsky’s work with the deaf community, see Martha and Gary Bellow, eds. *Law Stories: Law, Meaning, Violence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). Feminist values have long informed trans efforts for better health-care provision; see Christoph Hansmann, *Care Without Pathology: How Trans-Health Activists Are Changing Medicine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024). For a broader exploration of this topic, profiling some people in my Bay Area network in the 1990s, see Angela Hume, *Deep Care: The Radical Activists Who Provided Abortions, Defied the Law, and Fought to Keep Clinics Open* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2023).

On the prevalence of lethal violence against trans people worldwide, see Transgender EU’s Trans Murder Monitoring Project, <https://www.tgeu.org/trans-murder-monitoring>.

Jane Kamensky, former director of the Schlesinger Library, is, among other things, a historian of feminist pornography; see her *Candida Royalle and the Sexual Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2025). Kamensky solicited Annie Sprinkle’s and Beth Stephens’s papers as part of building holdings in that subject area, and Sprinkle and Stephens in turn steered their friend Sandy Stone’s papers to the Schlesinger.

On Spurzheim’s final resting place, see the Mount Auburn Cemetery website, <https://mountauburn.org/notable-residents/johann-spurzheim-1776–1832>. On the Miyawaki Method, see, for example, Simone Webber, “The Miyawaki Method for Creating Forests,” *Creating Tomorrow’s Forests* (blog), May 23, 2022. The method also has its detractors: Annelise Giseburt, “Miyawaki Forests Are a Global Sensation, but Not Everyone’s Sold on Them,” *Mongabay*, June 21, 2023. For broader ecological perspectives on transness, see “Trans* Ecologies,” ed. Erin L. Durbin and Megan A. Moore, special issue, *TSQ* 11, no. 4 (2024), and Douglas Vakoch, ed., *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on Environment and Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2021).



On humanities and cultural studies approaches to psychedelics, see Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). See also “Psychedelic Imaginaries,” ed. Ramzi Fawaz, special issue, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 124, no. 2 (2025), especially J. Christian Greer, “Historians on Drugs: Toward an Empirical Historiography of Global Psychedelic Cultures,” 263–93. See also Alex Dymock, “Acid Feminism: Gender, Psychonautics, and the Politics of Consciousness,” in *Narcofeminisms: Revisioning Drug Use*, ed. Fay Dennis, Kiran Pienaar, and Marsha Rosengarten, *Sociological Review Monograph Series* 71, no. 4 (2023), 817–38. For practitioner perspectives, see Alex Belser, Clancy Cavnar, and Beatriz Caiuby Labate, eds., *Queering Psychedelics: From Oppression to Liberation* (San Francisco:

Synergetic Press, 2022). See also Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, <https://maps.org>.

On the extensive interconnections between the Boasians, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, cybernetics, gender, and psychedelics, see especially Breen, *Tripping on Utopia*, and Norman Ohler, *Tripped: Nazi Germany, the CIA, and the Dawn of the Psychedelic Age* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2024). See as well Mead's little-known book on peyote use among the Omaha people, *The Changing Culture of an Indian Tribe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), and Aurelien Bouayad, "The Cactus and the Anthropologist: The Evolution of Cultural Expertise on the Entheogenic Use of Peyote in the United States," *Laws* 8, no. 2 (2019): article 12. For a primary source, see Albert Hofmann, *LSD: My Problem Child* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980).

On Mark Harrington, see Marie Harrington, *On the Trail of Forgotten People: A Personal Account of the Life and Career of Mark Raymond Harrington* (Reno, NV: Great Basin Press, 1985). For the anecdote about introducing peyote to New York's bohemia, see Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Movers and Shakers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 270–79. For Harrington's pulp story, see Ramón de las Cuevas [Mark Harrington pseud.], "Teoquitla the Golden," *Weird Tales* 4, no. 2 (November 1924): 5–30. On Harry Benjamin dosing his patients, see R. E. L. Masters, *Sex-Driven People: An Autobiographical Approach to the Problem of the Sex-Dominated Personality* (Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1966), 20, 250; for a critical perspective, see Hil Malatino, "After Negativity? On Whiteness and Healing," in *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 169–98. Documentation of Erickson's use of psychedelics and his ideas about "spiritual transsexualism" are shot through his papers in the Transgender Archives at University of Victoria. See also Abram J. Lewis, "Transgender History in a Moment of Danger: Organizing Within and Beyond 'Visibility' in the 1970s," in [Tourmaline], Stanley, and Burton, eds., *Trap Door*, 57–90, and Lewis, "Trans Animisms," *Angelaki* 22, no. 2 (2017): 203–15, as well as several works about Erickson by Chris Vargas in his conceptual art project *MOTHA: Museum of Transgender Hirstory and Art*, <https://www.chrisevargas.com/motha>, and in *Trans Hirstory in 99 Objects*.

For a short history of the land that is now Joshua Tree National Park, see Joseph W. Zarki, *Joshua Tree National Park* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015). On the Mormon-related history of the name, see Chris Clarke, "How Did the Joshua Tree Get Its Name?," PBS SoCal, June 11, 2013.

On Eurocentric ideas about proper kinds of personhood being a colonial imposition, see b. binaohan, *Decolonizing Trans/Gender 101* (Toronto: Biyuti Press, 2019); Maria Lugones, "The Coloniality of Gender," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development*, ed. Wendy Harcourt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 13–33; Deborah A. Miranda, "Extermination of the *Joyas*: Gendercide in Spanish California," *GLQ* 16, nos. 1–2 (2010): 253–84; and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

On non-Western and premodern ideas about the mutability of the body, see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks Through Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); LaFleur, *A Natural History of Sexuality in Early America*; and Roberto Strongman, *Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019). The anecdote about the Calusa people's idea of multiple souls is cited in Pekka Hämäläinen, *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America* (New York: Liveright, 2022). On the Trans-Oconee Republic that my ancestors tried to establish, see Christopher J. Floyd, "Trans-Oconee Republic," in *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last edited September 25, 2014; Ellis Merton Coulter, "Elijah Clarke's Foreign Intrigues and the 'Trans-Oconee Republic,'" *Bulletin of the University of Georgia* 23, no. 4 (1922); and Jennifer Barclay, "Cultivating Race: The Expansion of Slavery in Georgia, 1750–1860," *Agricultural History* 88, no. 1 (2014). On the role of

my Pickens ancestors in the late colonial and early national periods, see Rod Andrew Jr., *The Life and Times of General Andrew Pickens: Revolutionary War Hero, American Founder* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). For the war against the Cherokee, see Robert Ganyard, “Threat from the West: North Carolina and the Cherokee, 1776–1778,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 45, no. 1 (1968): 47–66. For a broader historical overview, see Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of US History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 139–249. On the psychodynamics of white settler colonialism in Anglo-America, see Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000).

On unbinding feeling from form, see Ramzi Fawaz, *Queer Forms* (New York: New York University Press, 2022); in relation to the feminist art critic and curator Lucy Lippard’s concept of “erotic abstraction” in the works of artists such as Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois, see Jo Applin, *Eccentric Objects: Rethinking Sculpture in 1960s America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012); and in relation to the art-historical use of transgender theory, see David Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture and the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015). See also my use of the phrase “unbinding feeling from form” in “On Groundlessness: Transphobic Feminism, Gender Ideology, Transfeminist Critique,” *Sinister Wisdom* 128 (Spring 2023): 170–93. On the idea of a generative ontological void in Black feminist thought, see Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “‘Theorizing in a Void’: Sublimity, Matter, and Physics in Black Feminist Poetics,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (July 2018): 617–48, and for related ideas on the *chora* in Western philosophy, see the essays retrieved by searching for that term in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, especially Claudia Leeb and Emily Zakin, “Psychoanalytic Feminism,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2025 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2025/entries/feminism-psychoanalysis>.

On the idea of biology not having a monopoly on animacy, see the Roman poet Lucretius, *The Nature of Things (De Rerum Natura)*, trans. Alicia Stallings (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007); Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012); [River] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988); Elizabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Natalie Wolchover, “A New Physics Theory of Life,” *Quanta Magazine*, January 22, 2014; and Kathryn Yusoff, *Geologic Life: Inhuman Intimacies and the Geophysics of Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024).

I take a psychoanalytic perspective on individual psychogenesis, influenced particularly by Jacques Lacan’s canonical “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. B. Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 75–81. For more psychoanalytic takes on transness, see “Transpsychoanalytics,” ed. Sheila Cavanaugh, special issue, *TSQ* 4, nos. 3–4 (2017), as well as my own brief essay “Transgender, Queer Theory, and Psychoanalysis,” in *Clinical Encounters in Sexuality: Psychoanalytic Practice and Queer Theory*, ed. Noreen Giffney and Eve Watson (Earth, Milky Way: Punctum Books, 2017), 419–26. The critique of “male mothering” is found throughout the work of Daly and Raymond, but for specific examples see *Transsexual Empire*, 29, 74, 107, and 157.

On the Wichita Mountains, see the entry in the Oklahoma Historical Society’s *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/encyclopediaonline>, and E. Buford Morgan, *The Wichita Mountains: Ancient Oasis of the Prairies* (Waco, TX: Texian Press, 1973). On Quanah Parker, see William T. Hagan, *Quanah Parker, Comanche Chief* (Norman:

University of Oklahoma Press, 1985). On Star House and Eagle Park, see the National Park Service National Registry of Historic Places nomination form, September 9, 1970, https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/70000532_text; and J. Wade Harrell, “Remembering Eagle Park, Cache, Oklahoma,” *J. Wade Harrell Fantasy World* (blog), December 7, 2011. On the Ghost Dance religion, see James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896). For another account of indigenous life in and around the Wichita Mountains, see N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969).

For more on speculative relations to the past and future as a form of repair for historical violence (or the impossibility thereof), see Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2020), and Joseph Pierce, *Speculative Relations: Indigenous Worlding and Repair* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2025). On settler efforts to reckon, or not, with legacies of settlement, see Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).



For Paul Nauert’s project that showed me the shape of gender in the Anthropocene, see “Climate Crucible: American Choices in Germany, Japan, and the Making of the Great Acceleration, 1939–1953” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2023). For the charts on social and earth-system trend lines in the Great Acceleration, see “The Great Acceleration,” Future Earth, <https://futureearth.org/2015/01/16/the-great-acceleration>. For more on the relationship of ecological criticism to trans and gender studies, see Sherilyn MacGregor, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

On the fraught status of the human, see Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257–337, and Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). See also my own small contribution to this literature, “Transing the Queer (In)Human,” *GLQ* 21, no. 3 (2015): 155–58. For the antithesis of how I value this perspective, see Jack Posobiec and Joshua Lisec, *Unhumans: The Secret History of Communist Revolutions and How to Crush Them* (Chicago: War Room Books, 2024).

For more on what it’s like to live and think now, see Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Gan, and Heather Anne Swanson, eds., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Salar Mameni, *Terracene: A Crude Aesthetics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023); and Tavia Nyong’o, *Black Apocalypse: Afrofuturism at the End of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2025). For two differing views on the “long Anthropocene,” see James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), and David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Penguin/Allen Lane, 2021).

On bad stuff that's happened since 2022–23, see the legislation tracking sites and up-to-the-minute political reporting in Erin Reed's blog *Erin in the Morning*. For discussions of the effect of anti-trans political ads in the 2024 election, see Shane Goldmacher, Maggie Haberman, and Jonathan Swan, "How Trump Won, and How Harris Lost," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2024; "Ground Media Study Finds Trump's Anti-Trans Ad Fails Politically, but Dangerously Erodes Public Support for Trans People," *Ground*, October 24, 2024; and Banu Gökarişel, "Convergent Exclusionary Politics of Gender and Migration in Trump's Re-Election Campaign, 2024–2025," *Geographical Journal*, May 2025. The Trump campaign's "Kamala Is for They/Them. I Am for You" ad is viewable on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xzybGKwIGk>. For additional data-driven analyses, see reports from the Williams Institute at UCLA Law School, including Abbie Goldberg and Brad Sears, "The Impact of Anti-Transgender Policy and Public Opinion on Travel and Relocation," UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, May 13, 2025, and Ilan Meyer and Lauren J. A. Bouto, "Impact of Executive Orders on Access to Federal Data," UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, February 2025. On the drastic nature and consequences of the data purges in early 2025, see "Red Flag Alert for the Anti-Trans Agenda of the Trump Administration in the United States," Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security, February 28, 2025. For a historical example of what's meant by "paper genocide," see Jorge Baracutai Estevez, as told to Nina Strochlic, "Meet the Survivors of a 'Paper Genocide,'" *National Geographic*, October 14, 2019. On policies that result in the death of trans youth, see Jules Gill-Peterson, "On Killing Trans Children," *Funambulist*, August 31, 2021.

On the Charlie Kirk assassination and its consequences, see Richard Fausset, Ken Bissinger, and Alan Feuer, "Charlie Kirk Killing Raises Fears of Surging Political Violence," *The New York Times*, September 12, 2025; "Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organized Political Violence," Presidential Memorandum, September 25, 2025; Katie Rogers and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, "White House Plans Broad Crackdown on Liberal Groups," *The New York Times*, September 15, 2025; Jacob Ogles, "The Heritage Foundation Wants Transgender People and Allies Designated as Terrorists," *The Advocate*, September 19, 2025; and Michael Gordon and Shelby Holliday, "Trump Tells Generals the Military Will Be Used to Fight 'Enemy Within,'" *The Wall Street Journal*, September 30, 2025.

On actual and plausible dystopias, see Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor, "The Rise of End Times Fascism," *The Guardian*, April 13, 2025. See also McKenzie Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?* (London: Verso Books, 2019); Douglas Rushkoff, *Survival of the Richest: Escape Fantasies of the Tech Billionaires* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2022); Atossa Araxia Abrahamian, *The Hidden Globe: How Wealth Hacks the World* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2024); Yanis Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2024); and Daniel Kokotajlo, Scott Alexander, Thomas Larsen, Eli Lifland, and Romeo Dean, "AI 2027," April 3, 2025, <https://ai-2027.com/>. On efforts to realize the fantasy of a post-Palestinian Gaza, see William Christou and Quique Kierszenbaum, "Far-Right Israeli Politicians and Settlers Discuss Luxury 'Gaza Riviera' Plan: Legal Experts Say Scheme to Annex Territory and Forcibly Displace Palestinians Is Tantamount to Ethnic Cleansing," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2025, and Natan Odenheimer and Alan Yuhas, "'Fantasy' AI Video, Shared by Trump, of Gaza as Luxury Resort Draws Scorn," *The New York Times*, February 26, 2025. For an actual attempt to build one such city of the future elsewhere, see the NEOM project in Saudi Arabia, <https://www.neom.com/en-us>.

For a standard account of the origins of the modern world system, see Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System*, 4 vols. (New York: Academic Press, 1974–2011). On the resolution of the Wars of Religion and the Treaty of Westphalia as a watershed moment in this history, see Andreas Osiander, *The States System of Europe, 1640–1990: Peacemaking and the Conditions of International Stability* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). For revisionist accounts, see Stephen D.

Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), and Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003). For recent opinion pieces on the end of the post–World War II world order, see Charles Kupchan, “Trump Is Right That Pax Americana Is Over: But Will He Bother to Build Something New?,” *The Atlantic*, January 10, 2025; Eduardo Porter, “What Happens After Trump Blows Up the World Order,” *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2025; Patrick Wintour, “Are We Heading for Another World War—or Has It Already Started?,” *The Guardian*, May 10, 2025; and Paul Krugman, “Decline and Fall of the American Empire,” Substack, August 29, 2025.

On liberal state forms having within them the seeds of fascism, heed the insight of the Nazi political theorist Carl Schmitt, in *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5, that “sovereign is he who can declare the state of exception.” For a longer discussion of repressive powers virtually present within the state being materialized in moments of crisis, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). On fleeing political repression, see Abdelrahman ElGendy, “Why I Had to Flee the United States,” *The Nation*, May 2, 2025; for Warsan Shire’s “Home” and other poems, see *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head: Poems* (New York: Random House, 2022).

On molecular revolution, see Félix Guattari, “I Am an Idea Thief,” in *Soft Subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977–1985* (1996; repr. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 21–32; on the application of this concept within trans studies, see Abraham B. Weil, “Transmolecular Revolution: Trans*versality and the Mattering of Political Life,” (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2019), and Weil, “Transmolecular Revolution,” in *Deleuze, Guattari and the Schizoanalysis of Trans Studies*, ed. Ciara Cremin (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 129–50. On Kent Monkman, see the catalog for his 2025 retrospective at the Denver Art Museum, *Kent Monkman: History Is Painted by the Victors*, ed. Léuli Eshrāghi and John P. Lukavic (New York: DelMonico Books/D.A.P., 2025), and Kent Monkman and Gisèle Gordon, *The Memoirs of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle: A True and Exact Accounting of the History of Turtle Island*, 2 vols. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2023, 2025). For Édouard Glissant, see *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

On Afrofuturism, see Ytasha L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013), and DuEwa Frazier, ed., *Introduction to Afrofuturism: A Mixtape in Black Literature and Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2024). The opening move of Afrofuturist cinema is Sun Ra’s *Space Is the Place*, dir. John Comey (1974). For my favorite in the genre, see *Milford Graves Full Mantis*, dir. Jake Meginsky and Neil Cloaca Young (2018). See also *Ornette: Made in America*, dir. Shirley Clarke (1985).

A different version of the Ornette Coleman anecdote appears in my essay “The Non-Binary Blackness of Pauli Murray and Ornette Coleman: Constraint and Freedom Within the Glandular Imaginary,” in *Multilogues on the Now: On Glands, Membranes and Cavities*, ed. Hana Janečková and Zuzana Jakalová (Prague: Display Collective and Charles University, 2021), 52–89, republished in “Nonbinary,” ed. Red Washburn and JV Fuqua, special issue, *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 51, nos. 3–4 (Fall/Winter 2023): 209–15. For works on Coleman, free jazz, and Black liberation cited therein, see John D. Baskerville, “Free Jazz,” *Journal of Black Studies* 24, no. 4 (1994): 484–97; Charles Hersch, “‘Let Freedom Ring!’: Free Jazz and African-American Politics,” *Cultural Critique* 32 (1995): 97–123; Nichole T. Rustin and Nicholas Gebhardt, “Going for Jazz: Musical Practices and American Ideology,” *Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (June 2003): 111–32; Philippe Carles and Jean-Louis Comolli, *Free Jazz, Black Power*, trans. Grégory Pierrot (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015); Crystal Black Creek Carlisle, *Free Jazz Improvisation: A Continuum, from Africa to Congo Square, from Early Jazz to Bebop, and the Return to Mysticism for Communal*

Healing and Transcendence (West Hollywood, CA: Urspirit, 2014); and Stephen Rush, *Free Jazz, Harmolodics, and Ornette Coleman* (New York: Routledge, 2017). See also *The Cry of Jazz*, dir. Edward O. Bland (1959). On the idea of a “transness of Blackness,” see Marquis Bey, “The Trans*-ness of Blackness, the Blackness of Trans*-ness,” *TSQ* 4, no. 2 (2017): 275–95.

For ceramicist Nicki Green, see her website, <https://www.nickigreen.net>, for documentation of this book’s cover image, *Prolapse Figure*; see also Nicki Green and Ashton S. Phillips, *Divine Portent Joule Bricks (Factory, Procession, and Installation)* in the *Howl* group exhibition, Human Resources Gallery, Los Angeles, September 14–21, 2025 (<https://www.h-r.la/event/howl>); the catalog describes the so-called Joule Bricks as being fabricated from “damaged local earth, collectively sourced waste clay, and desiccated palm fibers, cast with millions of spores of pollution-consuming fungi, and the seeds of local pollution-extracting wildflowers and grasses, then stamped with ‘Divine Portent’ in reference to Susan Stryker’s earth-rumbling essay rallying trans people to reclaim the divinity of our monstrosity.”

Postural yoga and breathing exercises, especially as practiced in the contemporary West, both are and aren’t rooted in ancient Indian somatic traditions; see Alistair Shearer, *The Story of Yoga: From Ancient India to the Modern West* (London: Hurst, 2020), for an account that roots modern yoga in ancient traditions, and Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), for an account that emphasizes the hybridization of Western physical-culture techniques and more traditional forms of yoga as part of the Hindu nationalist project in the early twentieth century. For a pragmatic account of modern yoga’s effects on one’s mind and body, see Ann Swanson, *Science of Yoga: Understand the Anatomy and Physiology to Perfect Your Practice* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2025).

On combat breathing, see Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Harmondsworth Penguin, 1970). See also Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese, “Introduction: Combat Breathing: State Violence and the Body in Question,” *Somatechnics* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1–14, and Elizabeth Stephens and Karin Sellberg, “The Somatechnics of Breath: Trans* Life at This Moment in History: An Interview with Susan Stryker,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 34, no. 99 (2019): 107–19, which includes an earlier version of the peroration “What Transpires Now.” On Ntozake Shange’s adoption of combat breath in her choreopoems, see Ntozake Shange, “Preface,” *Three Pieces* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), xii–xiv. On Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s twenty-one-day performance work, the “Revolutionary Black Breathing Chorus,” see Cathy Thomas, “Reverberations of the Black Feminist Breathing Chorus: An Interview with Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Sangodare,” *Resonance* 2, no. 2 (2021): 281–95. See also Magdalena Górska, *Breathing Matters: Feminist Intersectional Politics of Vulnerability*, Linköping Studies in Arts and Sciences, no. 683 (Linköping, Sweden: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2016); Lenart Skopf and Petri Berndtson, eds., *Atmospheres of Breathing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019); and Petri Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Respiratory Primacy of Being* (Delhi: Routledge India, 2023).

A penultimate note on sources: Feeling that I was falling into a rut by using the same phrases repeatedly in the closing pages of the book yet drawing a blank on how to otherwise phrase things and wanting to end with a big rhetorical flourish, I resorted to plagiarizing myself by querying ChatGPT on May 16, 2025, with the prompt “Writing in the most lyrical and political style of trans studies scholar Susan Stryker, discuss the relationship between grammatical gender, animacy, and transness in the Anthropocene.” I incorporated two passages from the lengthy refrigerator-magnet poetry remix of my own work: “The Anthropocene asks us to define the Human. The trans body answers: *that all depends on how you conjugate survival*” and “Transness is that grammar in revolt.”

For an abortive earlier effort to address some of the themes that conclude this book, see Susan Stryker, “Ghost Dances: A Trans-Movement Manifesto,” and “Susan Stryker Reflects on ‘Ghost Dances: A Trans-Movement Manifesto,’” in *Queer Then and Now: The David R. Kessler Lectures, 2002–2020*, ed. Debanuj DasGupta, Joseph Donica, and Margo Weiss (New York: Feminist Press, 2023), 111–23 and 124–25, respectively. I wrote, in the 2022 reflection on the failed 2009 piece, that I had set out to write on how the Ghost Dance had been used and abused in queer history, mostly by the homophile and Radical Fairy Harry Hay; my goal, I said, was then “to use those reflections as a scaffold for a swarm of half-formed thought and intentions. To acknowledge the ecological horizon against which all thinking unfolds. To imagine transness as a hopeful intervention into the anthropic dimension of the Anthropocene. To hold space for collective grief and mourning. To take seriously the notion that transness is a virtual potential immanent in materiality that can manifest into actuality through our actions. To express the felt experience of encountering, through transness, a cosmic liveliness in excess of the existing arrangements of life in this world, and a desire for worlding otherwise. ‘Ghost Dances’ was all that and less, too much and not enough, a pencil sketch for work then yet to come” (125).

I hope that *Changing Gender* has delivered that and more, still too little and not yet enough, another step toward a maybe never fully rendered and finally finished account of those persistent intentions.

When I asked ChatGPT in that same session on May 16, 2025, to summarize my interest in the Ghost Dance in reference to my entire oeuvre, it told me I was trying to “envision a ritual of collective renewal that emerges from within the logics, crises, contradictions, and aesthetics of late Eurocentric modernity, that does not appropriate other cultural traditions, but is, rather, a symptom of its own unravelling, repurposed as a group choreography of refusal and transmutation.”

I feel so seen.

Notes

The page numbers for the notes that appeared in the print version of this title are not in your e-book. Please use the search function on your e-reading device to search for the relevant passages documented or discussed.

I.

“There are two fundamental human drivers”: “Cambridge Analytica Uncovered: Secret Filming Reveals Election Tricks,” Channel 4 News, March 19, 2018, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpbeOCKZFfQ>, at time stamp 7:00.

“biological truth”: “Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government,” The White House, Executive Order 14168, January 20, 2025.

“evil deceivers”: Talia Mae Bettcher, “Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 3 (2007): 43–65.

“I have no use”: Audio recording in the author’s possession. See also “What Is a Woman?|Matt Walsh LIVE at Stanford University,” March 1, 2023, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EdudD8Xbck.

“ideologies are by definition lenses”: Comment posted by @NatConTalk, September 4, 2025, stream <https://x.com/NatConTalk/status/1963756711975497817>.

“transgenderism must be eradicated”: Quoted in Peter Wade and Patrick Reis, “CPAC Speaker Calls for Eradication of ‘Transgenderism’—and Somehow Claims He’s Not Calling for Elimination of Transgender People,” *Rolling Stone*, March 4, 2023.

“Until the 1950s, gender served to mark”: Jennifer E. Germon, *Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

II.

River says lightning forms: [River] Barad, “TransMaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2015): 387–422, paraphrases 397–98.

“a gentleman” ... “of infinite jest and humour”: Quoted in David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America’s Founding Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 216.

"There is indeed a kind of animal": Quoted in Joseph T. Shipley, *The Origins of English Words: A Discursive Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 143.

III.

Jane and I were warming ourselves: Jane is a pseudonym.

"initiated into sex play with boys": Quoted in Terry Goldie, *The Man Who Invented Gender: Engaging the Ideas of John Money* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 29.

"the antisexualism and antimasturbation hysteria": Quoted in Goldie, *The Man Who Invented Gender*, 21.

married early, briefly, and perfunctorily: Goldie, *The Man Who Invented Gender*, 36.

"lust factor": Quoted in Goldie, *The Man Who Invented Gender*, 29.

Money first used gender in its social-scientific sense: John Money, "Hermaphroditism, Gender and Precocity in Hyperadrenocorticism: Psychologic Findings," *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital* 96, no. 6 (June 1955): 253–64, at 254.

"general mannerisms, deportment and demeanor": John Money, Joan G. Hampson, and John Hampson, "An Examination of Some Basic Sexual Concepts: The Evidence of Human Hermaphroditism," *Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital* 97 (October 1955): 301–19, at 302.

"It is impossible to write about the political history": John Money, "Preface," in John Money and Anke A. Ehrhardt, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl: The Differentiation and Dimorphism of Gender Identity from Conception to Maturity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), xii.

"inexorable rise of gender": David Haig, "The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex: Social Change in Academic Titles, 1945–2001," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 33 (2004): 87–96.

"witty" instance of "deliberately misusing the grammatical reference": Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053.

"word used in grammar": See Leland E. Hinsie and Jacob Shatzky, *Psychiatric Dictionary, with Encyclopedic Treatment of Modern Terms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), discussed in Diederik F. Janssen, "Sex/Gender: Did John Money Borrow the Distinction from Leland Earl Hinsie?," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 49 (2020): 2223–26.

In Bentley's first article: Madison Bentley, "Sanity and Hazard in Childhood," *American Journal of Psychology* 58, no. 2 (1945): 212–46, "theater of living," 227; "maintain an active commerce," 214; "regulate his affairs," 214; "'the little girl' or 'the little boy,'" 232; "the human drama," 225; "the socialized obverse of sex," 228; "a fixed line of demarkation," 228; "many matters in grouping," 228; "Speech and action from above," 227; "self-valuation," 227.

continues his developmental theories: Madison Bentley, "The Reconstructing Teens and the Stabilizing Twenties," *American Journal of Psychology* 58, no. 3 (1945): 324–60, "sane life-

course of civilized man,” 324; “gender, which must always be taken with,” 328; “is easily confused with gender,” 328; “the socialized interpretation,” 328; “the problem of sex,” 329; “when the social sanctions,” 329; “sheer biological,” 329; “little permanent effect,” 329; “gender may have the most profound,” 330; “revival,” 330; “These revivals, always confounding,” 330.

“between sex”: A. Salina Damm, “Review,” *American Journal of Psychology* 59, no. 2 (April 1946): 311–14, quote on 311.

“gives beyond its promise”: Madison Bentley, “Brief Comment upon Recent Books,” *American Journal of Psychology* 63, no. 2 (April 1950): 310–16, quote on 312.

“any patterned definition”: Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory, Pure and Applied* (New York: Free Press, 1949), 43.

“as a matter of anatomy” ... “as a matter of psychology”: Virginia Prince, publishing as Virginia Bruce, “The Expression of Femininity in the Male,” *Journal of Sex Research* 3, no. 2 (1967): 21, 24.

IV.

the “WTF” of being trans: Talia Mae Bettcher, “What Is Trans Philosophy?,” *Hypatia* 10, no. 10 (2019): 1–24, “WTF” elaborated, 6–20.

The gender concept is one such typificatory scheme: Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), passim for synopsis of argument; “typificatory schemes,” 30; gender as different “social worlds,” with a “proper place” for masculinity and femininity, where sometimes competing “reality-definitions” cause a child, “for a variety of biographical reasons,” to “make the ‘wrong choice,’” resulting in “abnormality,” 154.

“high-potency estradiol”: All of the Jorgensen quotes in this section are from *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* (New York: Paul Erickson, 1967), 77–78.

“I have frequently taken out the testis”: John Hunter, *The Natural History of the Human Teeth: Explaining Their Structure, Use, Formation, Growth, and Diseases* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, No. 72 St. Paul’s Churchyard, 1771), 127.

“Ex-GI George Jorgensen voluntarily submitted”: Joseph Laffan Morse, ed., *The Unicorn Book of 1952* (New York: Unicorn Books, 1952), 311–26.

“I have seen in Christine a miracle of God”: For correspondence with “R.K.” on December 7, 1952, and “C.J.C.” on December 26, 1952, see personal correspondence files in the Christine Jorgensen Collection, Danish Royal Archive. The folder location is unknown because the collection was accessed before it was fully processed, October 25–29, 1999.

“general havoc was raised that night in the Tenderloin”: Raymond Broshears, “History of Christopher Street West—SF,” *Gay Pride: The Official Voice of the Christopher Street West Parade ’72 Committee of San Francisco*, 1972.

so-called Neon Sex Jungle of the Tenderloin: Donovan Bess, “A Neon Sex Jungle: Tenderloin’s Exiles of Sin,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 24, 1966.

V.

“*Q. What is a Gender?*”: John Brinsley the Elder, *The Posing of the Parts [...]* (London, 1612), cited as an attested use of *gender* in *Oxford English Dictionary*, entire text available in Early English Books Online (EEBO) database, quote on 4.

“*sex is as sex does*”: Paisley Currah, *Sex Is as Sex Does: Governing Transgender Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2022).

“*my pronouns are kiss my ass*”: Quoted in Mary Papenfuss, “Ted Cruz Makes Crass Crack About Gender Pronouns, Met with Cheers,” *HuffPost*, July 23, 2022.

“*poet-farmer*”: Mark C. Anderson, “EcoFarm Preview and Mas Masumoto on Life and Fruit,” *Edible Monterey Bay*, January 16, 2024.

“*This bitch ain’t no girl*”: Scott Bowles, “A Death Robbed of Dignity Mobilizes a Community,” *The Washington Post*, December 10, 1995.

Potawatomi grammatical gender: “The Grammar of Animacy,” in Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 48–62, “you hear a person,” 53; “I swear I heard the zap,” 55; “could lead us to whole new ways,” 57–58; “a world with a democracy of species,” 58.

VI.

“*a brave fighter against the ideologies*”: Blurp from Pope Benedict XVI on Gabriele Kuby’s author website, <https://www.gabriele-kuby.de/product-page/die-globale-sexuelle-revolution> (translation mine).

“*The conscious and intelligent manipulation*”: Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Liveright, 1928), 9.

Kuby situates gender in an interpretation of history: Gabriele Kuby, “Trailblazers of the Sexual Revolution from the French Revolution to Today,” in *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2015), 26–53.

“*in despair, insanity, the occult, and suicide*”: Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution*, 26.

“*the father of sexology*”: Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution*, 44.

“*free choice of one’s gender*”: Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution*, 44.

That’s conspiracism—the Da Vinci Code version of history: Here I am paraphrasing Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 7.

“*posttranssexual manifesto*”: Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New

York: Routledge, 2006), 221–35.

“*the transgender movement is pressing*”: All quotes in this paragraph are from Christopher Rufo, “Inside the Transgender Empire,” *Imprimis*, Hillsdale College, 2023, <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/inside-the-transgender-empire>.

“*It’s not a crime to try to influence the outcome of an election*”: Quoted in Wesley Parnell, “The Words That Defined Closing Arguments in Donald Trump’s Trial,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 2024.

“*promoting world peace and security*”: Fernando Valderrama Martínez, *A History of UNESCO* (Paris: UNESCO, 1995), 30, quoted in Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 166n41. As of September 2025, UNESCO describes itself as “a specialized agency dedicated to strengthening our shared humanity through the promotion of education, science, culture, and communication” (<https://www.unesco.org>).

VII.

“*appear in public in a dress*”: For one instance of this phrasing in an 1863 ordinance, see Clare Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law and Fascination in San Francisco* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 2. For other instances, see Jesse Bayker’s interactive Historical Cross-Dressing Laws Map at <http://legaldress.org>.

“*I am a man, in all that the name implies*”: “Wise’s ‘Case of Sexual Perversion,’” appendix C in “*A Strange Sort of Being*”: *The Transgender Life of Lucy Ann/Joseph Israel Lobdell, 1829–1912*, by Bambi L. Lobdell (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 200.

“*Though some do call me a strange sort of being*”: “Narrative of Lucy Ann Lobdell, the Female Hunter of Delaware and Sullivan Counties, N.Y.,” appendix A in “*A Strange Sort of Being*,” by Bambi L. Lobdell, 183.

“*One did not often meet*”: “The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman,” *The Knickerbocker: or, New-York Monthly Magazine* 50 (December 1857): 599–610, reprinted in *Early American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 666–78, quote on 668.

“*the great mass of Americans became phrenologists*”: Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 3:201, quoted in Madeleine B. Stern, *Heads and Headlines: The Phrenological Fowlers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), xiii–xiv.

“*labeled each bump*”: *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. Benjamin Griffin and Harriet Elinor Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 2:335, quoted in Stern, *Heads and Headlines*, 20.

“*THEORY of gender*”: O. S. Fowler, *Human Science: or, Phrenology [...]* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Co., 1873), 233.

“*physical gender*”: O. S. Fowler, *Love and Parentage: Applied to the Improvement of Offspring [...]* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1846), 64, cited in Diederik F. Janssen, “Know Thy Gender: Etymological Primer,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 47 (2018): 2149–54, quote on 2152.

“sexual function” ... “was instituted”: O. S. Fowler, *Amativeness: or Evils and Remedies of Excessive and Perverted Sexuality [...]*, 13th ed. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1848 [Orig. pub. 1844]), v.

“personated a woman” ... “not even excepting”: Fowler, *Amativeness*, 9.

“first inflame, then exhaust” ... “distinctive sexual characteristics”: O. S. Fowler, *Sexual Science; Including Manhood, Womanhood, and Their Mutual Interrelations [...]* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1870), 308.

“neuter gender nouns” ... “are to true manhood”: Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 308.

“mental and physical sexuality” ... “By what instrumentality”: Fowler, *Amativeness*, 27.

Fowler uses the term in an article: O. S. Fowler, “Article LIX. Approbativeness in Animals,” *American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* 9 (1847): 347–50.

“sublunary world”: Fowler, “Article LIX. Approbativeness in Animals,” 349.

“without the co-existence of ALL its faculties” ... “we shall not be ourselves”: Fowler, “Article LIX. Approbativeness in Animals,” 349–50.

“Amativeness may be exercised in coarse sensuality”: Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 350.

“at the top of the spinal column” ... “with the brain”: O. S. Fowler, *Sexuality Restored, and Warning and Advice to Youth Against Perverted Amativeness [...]* (Boston: O. S. Fowler, 1870 [second thousand]), 5–6.

“like light, a most active, efficient, and all-pervading principle” ... “male and female arrangement”: Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 65.

“universal concomitant” ... “males and females are mutually drawn”: O. S. Fowler, *Science of Life [...]* (London: The Fowler Institute, 1875), 88.

“God commands us to exercise” ... “Undoubtedly, new worlds are perpetually springing”: O. S. Fowler, *Life: Its Science, Laws, Faculties, Functions, Organs, Conditions, Philosophy, and Improvement [...]* (Boston: O. S. Fowler, 1871), 17.

“governs” ... “sovereign power”: Fowler, *Science of Life*, 205.

“selects from the blood” ... “Though the material parental leg”: Fowler, *Sexuality Restored*, 8–9.

“primal element” ... “are more or less aimless”: Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 17, 98.

VIII.

“the problem of transsexualism”: Janice G. Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 178.

“In Boston” ... “a transsexual named Christy [sic] Barsky”: Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire*, 102.

exchange between Beth and members of the Gutter Dykes: “Letter from a Transsexual” and “Our Response,” *It Ain’t Me Babe*, December 1, 1970, 14.

“I found myself confused, intrigued, fascinated, enticed”: Deborah Heller Feinbloom, *Transvestites and Transsexuals: Mixed Views* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1976), 2.

“gay women’s group”: Feinbloom, *Transvestites and Transsexuals*, all quotes on 159–62.

“wantwits and frauds”: Mary Daly, “New Archaic Afterwords,” in *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), xxvii–xxviii; the afterword succinctly exemplifies Daly’s evolved style.

“ontological lust” ... “cosmic tapestries”: Daly, “New Archaic Afterwords,” *passim*.

“before they were ultimately transsexed”: Janice G. Raymond, “Transsexualism: An Etiological and Ethical Analysis” (PhD diss., Boston College, 1977), appendix C, “The Androgynous Tradition,” 400–49, quote on 401.

the concepts of integration and integrity: Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire*, 154–77, *passim*.

“ethic of integrity”: Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire*, 155; Janice G. Raymond, “Women’s Studies: A Knowledge of One’s Own,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 35, nos. 1–2 (1979–80): 39–48, quote on 42.

“The word integrity means an original unity”: Raymond, *Transsexual Empire*, 155.

“What I call an ethic of integrity”: Raymond, *Transsexual Empire*, 155.

“does have a profound religious dimension”: Raymond, “Women’s Studies,” 43.

“fortunate to study with Mary Daly”: Raymond, “Radical Feminist Activism in the 21st Century,” unpaginated manuscript, for presentation at labrys, études féministes/estudos feministas, n.l., January 2015, in folder Articles—Select, 2004–2018, Raymond Papers, Shlesinger Library.

“I remember them being younger than us”: All quotations and biographical information from Lee Swislow are based on an interview with Susan Stryker conducted July 29, 2022; transcript revised and edited by Lee Swislow and Susan Stryker.

I met Cristy not too long afterward: Quotations and biographical details in this section are drawn from a Zoom interview between Cristy Barsky and Susan Stryker, October 30, 2022, and an in-person interview in Portland, January 5, 2023; they were extensively reworked in collaboration with Cristy Barsky via email correspondence, April–August 2025.

“a young woman”: Feinbloom, *Transvestites and Transsexuals*, 50–51.

they coauthored an article: Lee Swislow and Cristy Barsky, “Why Two Lesbians Fight Violence Against Women,” *Gay Community News* 6, no. 6 (August 26/September 2, 1978): 8.

“a male-to-female transsexual was refused”: “Editorial,” *Gay Community News* 3, no. 2 (July 5, 1975): 4.

“It has recently surfaced”: *Lesbian Connection*, February 1978, 16, 18.

“Not coincidentally”: Medusa Oblongata (Mara Math), “Thinking Out Loud,” *Dykespeak*, July 1994, 5.

“necrophiliacs who sense the lack”: Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 71.

In personal correspondence with others: For a published example of the “men in skirts” quip, see Susanna Sturgis, “An Interview with Jan Raymond,” *Off Our Backs*, October 14, 1979, 14–15: “It’s been my experience that men, hell, even the Jesuits at Boston College, are so much more accepting of transsexuals than most women. Yeah, well, they’re all walking around in skirts too!” For the exchange about Catholic girlhood, see Ann Conway to Janice Raymond, September 4, 1980, and Janice Raymond to Ann Conway, October 27, 1980, Janice G. Raymond Papers, Schlesinger Library Folder, Letters, 1972–2018, 1 of 2.

IX.

“It is my special direction to my Executors”: John Finley (1725–1803), Last Will and Testament, Filed with Thomas Carleton, Clerk, Court of Ordinary, Greene County, Georgia, April 30, 1803; digital image in author’s possession.

what I am becoming will catch me as I fall: This paraphrases a saying attributed to the seventeenth-century Hasidic mystic Israel ben Eliezer, also known as Baal Shem Tov, “If I am falling, let me fall, the one I am becoming will catch me,” used as an epigraph in Abby Stein, *Becoming Eve: My Journey from Orthodox Rabbi to Transgender Woman* (New York: Seal Press, 2019).

X.

“superstructure built on law and order” ... “will call this evil, good”: Jack Posobiec and Joshua Lisec, *Unhumans: The Secret History of Communist Revolutions and How to Crush Them* (New York: War Room Books, 2024), 1–2.

“end times fascism”: Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor, “The Rise of End Times Fascism,” *The Guardian*, April 13, 2025.

“I tell the Republicans”: Remarks by President Trump and NATO secretary general Mark Rutte before bilateral meeting, March 13, 2025, quoted in Samantha Reidel, “Trump Hints That Attacking Trans Rights Will Be the GOP’s 2026 Midterm Strategy,” *Them*, March 21, 2025. Full remarks at US Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, <https://nato.usmission.gov/remarks-by-president-trumpand-nato-secretary-general-mark-ruttebefore-bilateral-meeting>.

"The church's deep engagement and activism for the LGB community": National Park Service, "Glide Memorial Church," February 19, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/places/glide-memorial-church.htm>.

"domestic terrorism and organized political violence": "anti-Americanism ... and morality," "coordinate and supervise ... obstruct the rule of law"; all quotes from "Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organized Political Violence," Presidential Memorandum, September 25, 2025.

"the enemy within": Michael Gordon and Shelby Holliday, "Trump Tells Generals the Military Will Be Used to Fight 'Enemy Within,'" *The Wall Street Journal*, September 30, 2025.

former political prisoner in Egypt: Abdelrahman ElGendy, "Why I Had to Flee the United States," *The Nation*, May 2, 2025.

"No one leaves home": Warsan Shire, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head: Poems* (New York: Random House, 2022), 24–25.

"molecular revolution" ... "We do not have the same relations": Félix Guattari, "I Am an Idea Thief," in *Soft Subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977–1985* (1996; repr. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 21–32, quote on 29–30 (the term is used throughout as well).

"At the bow there is still something": Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 9.

"Tell us the castration story": Shirley Clarke, *Ornette: Made in America* (Milestone Films, 1985), at time stamp 1:05:55.

"There is not occupation of territory": Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Harmondsworth/Penguin, 1970), 50.

"Every breath a trans person takes is an act of revolution": For the use of variations on this phrase see, for example, John Riley, "Trans Community Calls for Solidarity," *Metro Weekly*, November 21, 2014, and Lourdes Ashley Fowler-Hunter, "Every Breath a Black Trans Woman Takes Is an Act of Revolution," *HuffPost*, February 6, 2015.

"All that you touch": Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993), 3 and throughout.

"This is an aesthetics of turbulence": Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 155; used as an epigraph in Kathryn Yussof, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

Acknowledgments

Thanks first and foremost to Jane von Mehren, who solicited and sold this book and launched it out of the starting gate—I am forever grateful. Thanks as well to my literary representative Sarah Chalfant and her colleagues at the Wylie Agency—Emma Smith, Natasha Fox, Rebecca Nagel, Bonnie McKiernan, and Leila Greening—for helping me get it across the finish line.

Eric Chinski, my acquiring editor at Farrar, Straus and Giroux, told me in our first meeting that he “just wanted a good book” and didn’t care if the final project veered away from the initial proposal; I’m sure he didn’t expect it to veer so much or take so long to finish, so I thank him for his patience, as well as for the many ways he and his colleagues at FSG—Eliza Rudalevige, Jackson Howard, Andrew Jacobs, Janet Renard, and Nancy Elgin, among others—shaped this book for the better.

Mimi Klausner and I have been copilots and sidekicks in each other’s lives for decades; our relationship and the home and family we make together is an ongoing source of love and support. Thanks for making a life with me, Mimi: for wandering together as well as staying home and watching movies and doing politics, for your concrete help with recalcitrant citations, and for giving feedback on more drafts of this book than you probably really wanted to read.

Thanks, in fact, to our whole blended and extended family, who help keep me grounded in the things that matter most. Kathy Klausner and Beni Strebel made their lovely country house in Sonoma available to me not once but twice, for writing retreats at crucial moments in the drawn-out process of finishing this book. Thanks to my grown-up kids Virgil and Saoirse for talking shop and sharing their perspectives with me, and to my

brother Mark and sister-in-law Sonya and their kids Cam and Leo for their hospitality whenever I visit and their openness to me publicly discussing our shared family histories. Thanks, Mom, for (almost) everything; I miss you.

Thanks to Kristen Nelson, Oscar Klausner, Samantha Bounkeau, Muffy Koster, and Peach Kander for assistance with managing my administrivia at different times over the past several years, and for sharing their own creative and intellectual practices while being in conversation with me about mine. Thanks to Harrison Apple, Angie Lopez, Emily Colcord Schrader, and Eva Astrid Jones for research assistance. Thanks as well to my book-therapist Anahita Kashefi and especially my writing coach David O'Neill.

Julian Carter, Juana María Rodríguez, Rabih Alameddine, River Barad, Mel Chen, Maura Finkelstein, Annie Sprinkle, Beth Stephens, Rani Neutil, Nikki Sullivan, Joseph Pugliese: thanks, friends, for hanging out in ways that showed up in this book. Thanks as well to other friends and colleagues whose social and intellectual involvement in my life and thought, and their indirect contributions to this book, are no less valued: Victor Silverman, Lorraine Mann, Jim Van Buskirk, Allen Sawyer, Sarah Schulman, Selby Wynn Schwartz, Zein Murib, Chandra Laborde, Lizzie Reis, Red Tremmel, Sheila Cavanaugh, and Gayle Rubin. Thought is a collective practice.

Cristy Barsky and Lee Swislow: this book would not be what it is without your willingness to share your stories. It wasn't always easy to wrangle memories of a painful history onto the page, but it was wonderful that you were willing to do that work. Thanks as well to Lee's wife, Denise McWilliams, and to the whole Oakbyte gang for additional reminiscences, especially Ferd Wulkan, Judy Somberg, and the late Larry Rosenberg.

Thanks, in no particular order, to: Nicki Green for use of *Prolapse Figure* as cover art; Marlene Hoeber for sharing thoughts on a rough draft; Benjy Kahan for also reading a rough draft and corresponding with me about Orson Fowler and nineteenth-century sexology; Jordy Rosenberg for being my Marxist ecology whisperer; Federico Bianchi and Ellis Martin for help with data-driven humanities research; my online working group on the history of *gender* in the social and biological sciences—Anne Fausto-

Sterling, Charlotte Tate, Daphna Joel, Marjorie Rhodes, Kristina Olson, and Thekla Morganroth; Carolyn Dinshaw for sharing materials on Joseph Lobdell and recommending me to Hal Moma, who guided my paragraphs on Anglo-Saxon and Middle English grammar; Marc Stein and Julia Harris for assistance with *Gay Community News*; Judith Butler for the coffee date that put my mind at ease; all the folks I'm in conversation with about psychedelics and the humanities—Trish Daley, Ramzi Fawaz, Christian Greer, Joe Metzler, Abe Weil, Sam Carmel, Ella Ben Hagai, and McKenzie Wark; and the core members of my yoga community over the years: Saeeda, Heather, Richard, Tim, Joe, Jim, Robin, Kathleen, Joan, Maria, Erica, and both Debbies.

I regret that I can thank neither the Guggenheim nor the MacArthur Foundation for their support of this book, but of course I hope I might be able to thank them at some point in the future for their support of something else. Thanks, though, to Wellspring Advisors for their early support of the original version of this book before I retired from the University of Arizona. Thanks to Yale University for naming me Presidential Fellow and Distinguished Visiting Professor in Gender Studies 2019–2020, and to Mills College for appointing me Barbara Lee Distinguished Chair in Women's Leadership 2020–2022; both positions allowed me to combine a little teaching with support for research and writing. My students at Arizona, Yale, and Mills all helped me refine my ideas through the classes I taught on materials intended for this book.

Deepest thanks to the Stanford Humanities Center for awarding me the Martha Sutton Weeks External Faculty Fellowship for 2022–2023; Roland Greene, Kelda Jamison, Svetlana Turetskaya, and the rest of the staff there created the welcoming, supportive, and stimulating environment that enabled me to reframe my project. Thought-contributions from my colleagues Fred Turner, Robert Proctor, Londa Schiebinger, and Paul Nauert are noted in the pages of this book, but I feel equally indebted to conversations with Eve Oishi, Eric Plemons, Vaughn Booker, Christy Piccichero, and my regular carpool besties Monique Allewaert and Judith Rodriguez. Every member of the cohort contributed in some indirect way to the final form of this book. Thanks are due as well to Maxe Crandall, the

former acting director of Stanford's Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program, for networking me around the Stanford community, and to Adrian Daub, Allison Dahl Crossley, and the rest of the staff and affiliated scholars at Stanford's Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research, where I have held a visiting appointment and faculty research fellowship while finishing this book.

For work-in-progress presentation opportunities, I thank Moira Fradinger for inviting me to her Trans Studies in the Americas symposium at the American Academy of Berlin in 2022; the organizers of the 2022 Lesbian Lives Conference in Cork, Ireland, for the invitation to present a keynote there that became part of chapter VIII; the conveners of *Inventing the Human*, a symposium at the University of Melbourne in 2023, for inviting my keynote, "The Romantic Roots of Gender in the Anthropocene"; the interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies Association for asking me to deliver a keynote address on *gender* and phrenology at their 2024 annual meeting; Kyla Wazana Tompkins and Christine Varnado for the invitation to workshop my partial manuscript with their grad students at the annual symposium of the Global Gender and Sexuality Studies Department at the University of Buffalo in spring 2025; and Elisavet Pakis, Tzeli Hadjidimitriou, and Myrto Tsilimpounidi for inviting me to read from and discuss a near-final version of selected portions of the manuscript at Sappho's Academy in Skala Eressos, Lesvos, Greece, in September 2025.

[Index](#)

The index that appeared in the print version of this title does not match the pages in your e-book. Please use the search function on your e-reading device to search for terms of interest. For your reference, the terms that appear in the print index are listed below.

Abelove, Henry

abortion

academia; conspiracy theories about; interdisciplinarity in (*see also under* Harvard: Department of Social Relations; Stanford University: Humanities Center at); under Trump

Adhesiveness

Adventures of Roderick Random (Smollett)

Afrofuturism

afterlife, in phrenology

agnotology

agreement, grammatical

agriculture

AI apocalypse

AIDS

AJP (American Journal of Psychology)

Alameddine, Rabih

Alcuin (Brown)

Alliance Defending Freedom

All the Beauty and the Bloodshed (Poitras)

Alpert, Richard

alternative health practices

altrigenderism

Amativeness

American Indian Movement

American Journal of Psychology, The (AJP)

American Journal of Psychotherapy

American Phrenological Journal

Amherst College

amputation

ancestors; colonialism and; trans, *see* trans ancestors

Anderson, James

Androboros (Hunter)

Animacies (Chen)

animacy

Anthropocene
anthropology; cybernetics and; feminist; psychedelics and
antidiscrimination legislation
anti-fascist protestors
anti-gender ideology movement; Butler and; as conspiracism; constituencies of
Fowler and; global dynamics of; Raymond and; *see also* anti-trans campaigns
Anti-Masonic Party
antimasturbation hysteria
anti-racism, as trans practice; *see also under* colonialism: reckoning with
antisemitism: conspiracism and; rootlessness and; as “socialism of fools”; transphobia and
anti-trans campaigns; athletics and; constituencies of; feminist, *see* feminism, trans-exclusionary; as
genocidal; legislation in; as moral panic; resistance to; safe space and; terrorism charges by; *see
also* anti-gender ideology movement
anti-Zionism, Jewish
Aotearoa
Apache Nation
Arcus Foundation
Arkansas
art
As Nature Made Him (Colapinto)
athletics
atomic weapons
Augustine (saint)
Austin, J. L.
Australia
authoritarianism; *see also* fascism
autobiography
autotheory

ballroom culture
Bannon, Steve
Barad, River
Bark of Millions (Mac)
Baron, Dennis
Barruel, Augustin
Barsky, Cristy; at Cambridge Women’s Center; childhood of; Feinbloom and; introduction to via Lee;
Raymond on
Barthes, Roland
Bateson, Gregory
Bay Area, *see* San Francisco Bay Area
Beaglehole, Ernest
Bee, The (periodical)
Beecher, Henry Ward
Beecroft, Carol
Behaviorism
Bellow, Gary
Benedict, Ruth
Benjamin, Harry

Bentham, Jeremy
Bentley, Madison; on revivals
Berelson, Bernard
Berger, Peter L.
Berkeley, *see* UC Berkeley
Bernays, Edward
Bettcher, Talia
Beyond God the Father (Daly)
Biden, Joe
Big Tobacco
Bilek, Jennifer
biology: culture vs.; diversity of; freedom vs.; sex and
biopolitics; bureaucracy and; further reading on; technologies of the self and
Black Lives Matter movement
Blackness, transness and; *see also* race
Blanche, Todd
Bland, Edward
Boas, Franz
Bodies That Matter (Butler)
bodily autonomy
body modification; *see also* medical transition
body reform movements; *see also* phrenology
Boggs, Lilburn
books: banning of; burning of
Boston; Cristy's experiences in; gender community in; medical transition in; Money and;
Phrenological Society in; Women's Health Book Collective in; *see also* Harvard
Boston College; Schuler at
Boston Tea Party
Boston University
Boswell, Holly
botany
both-sides-ism
Bowman, Karl
Braiding Sweetgrass (Kimmerer)
Bread and Roses
breath
Brecher, Edward
Brecht, Bertolt
Breitbart
Brinsley, John, the Elder
British Empire: Brexit and; enclosure in; Native Americans and; TERFism in; Yankee Doodle and
Brown, Charles Brockden
Brown, Michael
Brown-Séquard, Charles-Édouard
Buddhism
Bullough, Vern and Bonnie
Burke's Peerage
Burned-Over District; *see also* New York, upstate

Bush, George W.
Butler, Judith; Fowler's prefiguring of; Rubin and; violence against
Butler, Octavia

Calhoun, John C.
Cal State University–Northridge
Cal Tech
Calusa Nation
Cambridge Analytica
Cambridge Women's Center
Cameron, Loren
camp
Canada
Cape Cod
capitalism; antisemitism and (*see also* antisemitism); class and; climate change and; disinformation
and; patriarchy and; racialized, *see* colonialism; reality and
cárdenas, micha
Carlson, Dick
Carlson, Tucker
Carter, Julian
Castaneda, Carlos
castration
Catholicism; Raymond and
Cawdrey, Robert
Center for Sex Research
Central European University
ceramics
change; gender in times of
Channel 4
Chaos, Logos vs.
Charlaque von Curtis, Charlotte
Chase, Cheryl
ChatGPT
Chen, Mel
Cherokee Nation
Cherrystone Club
Child, Julia
childhood, *see* identity formation
Choctaw Nation
chora
choreography
Christianity, *see* Catholicism; Mormons
Christian nationalism
Chronicle of Higher Education, The
Church and the Second Sex, The (Daly)
CIA
Citadel (bar)
Civil Rights Movement

Civil War
Claremont Institute
Clarke, Elijah
Clarke, Shirley
class, concept of
climate change
code-switching
Colapinto, John
Cold War; cybernetics during; psychedelics and
Coleman, Ornette
College Republicans
colonialism; artistic engagement with; breath and; embodiment and; gender's global dynamics as;
neofeudalism and; nostalgic; reckoning with
Columbia University
Comanche Nation
Combe brothers
Coming of Age in Samoa (Mead)
Committee for National Morale
communism; Mormonism and; opposition to; *see also* intentional communities
Community of Christ
Compton Cafeteria riot
computers, *see* AI apocalypse; tech elites; technological innovation
Comstock Law
Confessions of the Fox (Rosenberg)
Congress, US
Congress of Transgender Organizations
conspiracism; agnotology as alternative to; in anti-gender movement; antisemitism of; biopolitics as
alternative to; cybernetics as alternative to; etymology of; history of; about medical-industrial
complex; as methodology; about Obamas; about Stryker; transvestigation and
contraception
cosmetics
Cowell, Roberta
Cox, Laverne
Cree Nation
Cromwell, Jason
cross-dressing: criminalization of; militaristic; organizations; Prince and; in rites of passage; *see also*
drag
Cruz, Ted
Cry of Jazz, The (Bland)
Crystallizing Public Opinion (Bernays)
Cuevas, Ramòn, de la
cultural production, democratization of
culture: in anthropology; as body modification; cybernetics and
Currah, Paisley
cyberculture
Cybernetics (Wiener)
cybernetics

Daily Wire, The
Daintree Rainforest
Daly, Mary; acolytes of; monstrosity and; Raymond and
Damm, A. Salina
Dances of Time and Tenderness (Carter)
Daniels, Stormy
Danish Girl, The
Darwin, Charles
Daughters of Bilitis (DOB)
de Beauvoir, Simone
Deep Green Resistance
degeneracy, in phrenology
de Kruif, Paul
“Delusion, Belief, and Fact” (Money)
democracy: biopolitics of; dismantling of; feminism and; manipulation and
Democratic Surround, The (Turner)
Der Giftpilz (Streicher)
de Sade, Marquis
DeSantis, Ron
Deutsch, Helene
DeVun, Leah
Diamond, Milton
diaspora
Dillon, Michael
disability studies
dissociation
DOB (Daughters of Bilitis)
Dobbs v. Jackson
Docter, Richard F.
d’Olivet, Antoine Fabre
doodle, as slang
Douthat, Ross
drag; banning of; camp and; Mac’s performances as; in Monkman’s art; realness and
drugs; *see also* psychedelics
Dunedin, New Zealand
Dying Colonialism, A (Fanon)
Dykespeak

Eagle Park
ecofeminism
ecology: animacy and; Anthropocene’s destruction of; metabolic; mycelial; regenerative; unhuman
and
ecosexuality
effective altruism
Elbe, Lili
ElGendy, Abdelrahman
Elliott, Beth

embodiment; carceral; liberatory; monstrous, *see* monstrosity; somatechnics and; *see also* medical transition; race; sex
 “*Empire Strikes Back, The*” (Stone)
 Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA)
 enclosure movement
 endocrinology
 end times fascism; *see also* fascism
Engineering of Consent, The (Bernays)
 Enlightenment; conspiracism and; secular society after
 Erickson, Reed
 Erie Canal
 esoterica
 ethnobotany; *see also* peyote
 ethnomethodology
 eugenics; phrenology and
 evolution; of human embodiment
 “Expression of Femininity in the Male, The” (Prince)
 extractive industries; *see also* metabolic rift

 Facebook
 fake news; *see also* reality
Family of Man, The (MoMA)
 Fanon, Frantz
 Fantasia Fair
 fascism: cybernetics and; neoliberalism and; in 1930s Europe; protests against; self-identification as; under Trump
 fear
 Federalist Society
 Feinberg, Leslie
 Feinbloom, Deborah Heller
Female Hunter of Delaware and Sullivan Counties, The (Lobdell)
 feminism; Butler and; eco-; 18th century; health-care and; 19th century; socialist vs. mythopoetic; straight
 feminism, trans-exclusionary; polemicists of (*see* Daly, Mary; Raymond, Janice); targets of (*see* Barsky, Cristy; Elliott, Beth; Schulter, Margo; Stone, Sandy); as TERFs
femmiphile
 fetish
 film; on Goldin; on jazz; Jorgensen in; *Matrix*; realness in; by Stryker; of *24-Decade History of Popular Music*; by Walsh; by Wood
 Finkelstein, Maura
 Finley, Ruby
 Finley family history
 Fisher River First Nation
 Floyd, George
 food co-ops
 food justice; *see also* ecology
 footnotes, in literature
 fortune-teller metaphor

Foucault, Michel
 Fourier, Charles
 Fowler, Orson; on afterlife; education of; on gender; on marriage; publishing by
 Fox News
 FPE (Full Personality Expression)
 France, Anatole
 Frank, Lawrence
 Frankenstein's monster, *see* "My Words to Victor Frankenstein"
 freedom: control and; transness as practice of
 free jazz
 free love
 Freemasons
 Freikorps
 Fremont-Smith, Frank
 French and Indian War
 French Revolution
 Freud, Sigmund
 Full Personality Expression (FPE)

 Gall, Franz Joseph
 gametes
 Garfinkel, Harold; Castaneda and
 Garner, Eric
 Gay Academic Union
Gay Community News
 Gebru, Timnit
 gender; as abolitionist practice; alternative self-identifications to; in anthropology, *see* anthropology;
 biopolitics of, *see* biopolitics; Butler and, *see* Butler, Judith; as carceral; cybernetics and;
 etymology of; feminism and, *see* feminism; as fetish; of divinities; grammar and, *see* grammar;
 grassroots use of; in Great Acceleration; love languages and; as not anachronistic; orthodox history
 of; in phrenology; psychedelics and; in psychology (*see* Bentley, Madison; Money, John);
 reactionary response to, *see* anti-gender ideology movement; as relational; relationship with sex,
 see sex; in sociology; trans contributions to; in times of change; usage rates of; as a verb
 gender-affirming care; *see also* medical transition
Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea (Germon)
 "Gender: A Useful Category" (Scott)
 gender clinics, *see under* medical transition
 gender community
 gender critical feminism; *see also* feminism, trans-exclusionary
 gender dysphoria; in 1850s; Stryker's experience of
 gender feminism
 gender hierarchies
 gender identity: Butler on; coining of; Fowler on; Money on; Prince on; *see also* identity formation
 Gender Identity Research Center (GIRC)
 Gender Identity Service, Inc. (GIS)
 gender ideology; *see also* anti-gender ideology movement
 gender role, Money's definition of
 gender-stratified societies

gender studies; conspiracism about; under fascism
Gender: The Deconstruction of Women (O’Leary)
Gender Trouble (Butler)
genetics
genital conversion surgeries, on children; *see also* medical transition
genocide; *see also* Palestine
Germany
Germon, Jennifer
Ghost Dance religion
Gillies, Harold
GIRC (Gender Identity Research Center)
GIS (Gender Identity Services, Inc.)
GLBT Historical Society
Glen or Glenda (Wood)
Glide Memorial Church
Glissant, Édouard
Global Sexual Revolution, The (Kuby)
Goldin, Nan
Gorgons
Gorka, Sebastian
grace
Graham, Sylvester
grammar; agreement in; animacy in; as choreography; diversity of; gender as; politics of; pronouns
in; in revolt; Rubin on; sentence structure in; sex and
Grammar and Gender (Baron)
“Grammatical Disquisitions” (Anderson)
Graves, Milford
Great Acceleration
Great Replacement Theory; *see also* population management
Green, Nicki
Green, Richard
Greenson, Ralph
grief
Guattari, Félix
Guthrie, Woody
Gutter Dykes
Gyn/Ecology (Daly)
gynocentric Pentecost

Haec Vir
Haig, David
Hampson, Joan and John
Handsome Lake (Seneca prophet)
Harrington, Mark Raymond
Harris, Kamala
Harry Potter books
Harvard: Department of Social Relations at; Law School of; Medical School of; Schlesinger Library
at

HathiTrust Bookworm Viewer
Haudenosaunee Confederacy
Hawn's Mill Massacre
hazard, Bentley on
health fads
Hebraic Tongue Restored (d'Olivet)
Heidegger, Martin
Heritage Foundation; Project 2025 by
hermaphrodites, *see* intersex people
Hermaphrodites with Attitude (ISNA newsletter)
"Hermaphroditism, Gender and Precocity" (Money)
"Hermaphroditism: An Inquiry" (Money)
Hic Mulier
Hillsdale College
Hinsie, Leland Earl
Hirschfeld, Magnus
history; conspiracist; trans, *see* trans history
Hofstadter, Richard
homosexuality: alternative term for; depathologization of; phrenology and; Prince on
Hooker, Evelyn
hormones; in *Matrix*; prenatal; *see also* medical transition
How to Be a Woman Though Male (Prince)
How to Do Things with Words (Austin)
human, as hierarchical; *see also* animacy
Human Outreach and Achievement Institute
Human Science (Fowler)
Hungary
Hunter, John
Hunter, Robert
Hunter, Tyra
Hunter-Fowler, Lourdes Ashley
Hurston, Zora Neale

Iatmul people
ICE
Iceland
identity documents
identity formation: Bentley on; ceramics and; colonialism and; Money on; psychoanalysis on; social construction and (*see also* social constructionism); Stryker's
IFGE (International Foundation for Gender Education)
Illuminati
immigrants, targeting of
Imprimis (newsletter)
incels
Indiana University
indigenous peoples: in anthropology; art by; on embodiment; ethnobotany and; languages of; *see also* colonialism; Native Americans
Infowars

“Inside the Transgender Empire” (Rufo)
inspiration, etymology of
Institute for LGBTQ+ Studies
Institute for Sexual Science
integrity, Raymond on
intentional communities
International Congress on Gender
International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)
internet age; *see also* social media
intersex people: activism of; metabolism and; Money and
inversion, congenital
Iowa Writers’ Workshop
Iroquois Confederacy
Irving, Washington
ISNA (Intersex Society of North America)
Israel
It Ain’t Me Babe (zine)

Janssen, Diederik
jazz
Jenner, Caitlyn
Jews, *see* antisemitism; anti-Zionism
Jivaka, Lobzang
Joe Rogan Experience podcast
John/Joan case
Johns Hopkins University; Behaviorism at; community-based clinics vs.; UCLA and
Jones, Alex
Jones, E. Michael
Jorgensen, Christine; background of; celebrity of; endocrinology studied by
Joshua Tree National Park; tripping in
Journal of Sex Research, The
Jung, Carl

Kabbalah
Kahan, Benjamin
Kane, Ariadne
ketamine
Kimmerer, Robin Wall
Kinsey, Alfred
Kinsey Institute
Kiowa Nation
Kirk, Charlie
Klausner, Mimi; ancestors of; Boston crowd of; home life with
Klein, Naomi
Knickerbocker, The (magazine)
Knowles, Michael
Kollontai, Alexandra
Krafft-Ebing, Richard von

Kroeber, Alfred
Kronawetter, Ferdinand
Kuby, Gabriele
Kuku Yalanji people
kumbhaka pranayama

Ladder, The (newsletter)
Lakoff, George
Lamarck, Jean-Baptiste
land, *see* agriculture; colonialism; ecology
Langley Porter Psychiatric Clinic
language: acquisition of as metaphor for identity formation; choreography and; culture and; grammar
 of, *see* grammar; “male maze” of; signification and; as technology
Latter-day Saints
Laurent, Bo
Lawrence, Louise
Law Stories (Minow)
“Learning the Grammar of Animacy” (Kimmerer)
Leary, Timothy
Leaves of Grass (Whitman)
Left Hand of Darkness, The (LeGuin)
”Legend of Sleepy Hollow, The” (Irving)
legislation, anti-trans
Le Guin, Ursula Kroeber
Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention
“Lesbian/Feminist Orientation Among Male-to-Female Transsexuals” (Feinbloom)
lesbians: publications of; as separatist; trans exclusion controversies among
Leutze, Emanuel
lexicography
LGBTQ movement; erasure from; financial support for; respectability in
Libido Dominandi (Jones)
Libs of TikTok
Liebig, Justus von
lightning
linguists; *see also* grammar
Linnaeus, Carl
Lisec, Joshua
Lobdell, Joseph Israel
Logos, Chaos vs.
Love and Parentage (Fowler)
Lovelace, Ada
LSD
Luckmann, Thomas
Luhan, Mabel Dodge
Lynn, Merissa Sherrill

Mac, Taylor
macaroni

Macron, Emmanuel and Brigitte
 Macy Foundation
Mad Men
Male and Female (Mead)
Male Fantasies (Theweleit)
Male Hormone, The (de Kruif)
 male mothering
 Malthus, Thomas
 Mamselle
 Manhattan Institute
Man into Woman (Elbe)
 “Man Who Thought Himself a Woman, The”
 marriage: equality; Mormon; 19th-century experimentation with; phrenology and
 Marshall, William
 Martineau, Harriet
 Marx, Karl; influences on; on metabolic rift
 masculinity: Jewish; as relational; in Weimar Germany; in “Yankee Doodle”
 masturbation
 Masumoto family
 maternal capacity
 Math, Mara
Matrix movies
 McMenamins
 McWilliams, Denise
 Mead, Margaret; cybernetics and; psychedelics and
 medical transition; banning of; conspiracism about; community-based; in Europe; FTM; genital-
 swapping and; Jorgensen and; metabolism and; Money and; Obamacare for; psychedelics and;
 realness and; at universities; *see also* somatechnics
Memoires pour server à l’histoire du Jacobinisme (Barruel)
 Mercer family
 metabolic rift; pronouns and; repair of
Metaphors We Live By (Lakoff)
 Metropolitan Museum of Art
 migration: family histories of; policing of, *see* ICE; by trans people
Milford Graves Full Mantis (film)
 military: Anthropocene and; citizens targeted by; cybernetics and; masculinity in; psychedelics and;
 Stryker’s father in; trans people in
 Millett, Kate
 Minow, Martha
mistikôsiwak (Monkman)
 Mitchell, Mani Bruce
 Miyawaki Mini-Forest
 Mock, Janet
 molecular revolution; art as
 Money, John; archives of; background of; debunking primacy of; cybernetics and; masturbation and;
 Prince and; Raymond on; Reimer case and; sexual misconduct by; theories of; use of *gender* by;
 Walsh on
 Monkman, Kent

monstrosity
more-than-human world, *see* ecology
Morgan, Julia
Morgan, William
Mormons
mothering, male
Mott, Lucretia
Mount Auburn Cemetery
Murdoch publishing empire
Muscogee Nation
mushrooms
music
Musk, Elon
mutilated dream child
mycology
“My Words to Victor Frankenstein” (Stryker)

Nabokov, Vladimir
name changes
Naquayouma, Ernest
NatCon 5
National Park Service; *see also* Eagle Park; Joshua Tree National Park
nation-states
Native Americans; gender among; land stolen from; peyote and
natural gender
nature: capitalism and; culture and; technology and; *see also* ecology
Nauert, Paul
naven ritual
Nazis; experiments by; neo-; propaganda and; proto-; refugees from; sexology and
NCAA
neofeudalism
neoliberalism, fascism and
neonatal intensive care
Nero (Emperor)
neurophysiology
Neutil, Rani
New College
New Guinea
New York, upstate; antebellum gender variance in; Anti-Masons in; feminism in; Fowler from;
Mormonism’s origins in; social and technological change in; utopian communities in; Yankee
Doodle and
New York Times, The
New Zealand
nonbinary people; macaronis as; pronouns for; Public Universal Friend as
notional gender

Oakbyte (commune)
Obama, Barack and Michelle

Obergefell v. Hodges
Oconee River
OED (Oxford English Dictionary)
Office of Strategic Services
Oklahoma; Native Americans in
O’Leary, Dale
Oliven, John
Olivia Records
Oneida Community
ontological lust
ontological multilingualism
Orbán, Viktor
organotherapies
Ornette (Clarke)
OU (University of Oklahoma)
ou pronoun
Our Bodies, Ourselves
Outreach Institute for Gender Studies
Overton window, shifting of
Owens, Candace
Oxford English Dictionary (OED)
Oxford Magazine, The

painting
Pale Fire (Nabokov)
Palestine
Palin, Sarah
paranoid style; *see also* conspiracism
Paris Is Burning (Livingston)
Parker, Quanah
Parsons, Talcott
passing, *see* realness
Patterns of Culture (Benedict)
pedophilia; conspiracism and
Perfectionists
performativity
Perversion (Stoller)
petroleum industry
peyote
phalloplasty
phenomenology
Phi Pi Epsilon
photography
phrenology; gender and; as health fad; lexicon of; marriage and; Whitman and
Pickens family
plants; *see also* ecology
Poisonous Mushroom, The (Streicher)
Poitras, Laura

policing; *see also* ICE
pollsters
polycrisis
PolySensorium
Pope Benedict XVI
population management: biopolitics and; Great Replacement Theory and; Malthus and; natalism and;
Population Council and
populism: conspiracism and; cybernetics and
Pose
Posing of the Parts, The (Brinsley)
Posobiec, Jack
poststructuralism
Potawatomi language
Potrero Hill Neighborhood House
pranayama
Premarin
primitive accumulation
Prince, Virginia
Pritzker, Jennifer
Proctor, Robert
Professor Watchlist
Prolapse Figure (Green)
pronouns; gender neutral; in Latin; metabolic rift and; Money and; third-person singular
Proofs of Conspiracy (Robison)
propaganda: public relations and; schismogenesis and
Protagoras
Protestant Reformation
Protocols of the Elders of Zion
Provincetown
pseudoscience; health practices of; religion and
psychedelics; indigenous use of; Stryker's revelations on
Psychiatric Dictionary (Hinsie)
psychoanalysis: sex vs. gender in
Psychological Care of Infant and Child (Watson)
psycho-medical model, *see* medical transition; Money, John
puberty rites
public opinion, manipulation of
public relations
Public Universal Friend
Puebloan cultures
Pugliese, Joseph
punctum
Pure Lust (Daly)
Put a Life (Rodríguez)

QAnon
QSpot
quantum physics

queer theory, *see* gender studies

race: animacy hierarchy and; art and; biopolitics of; breath and; colonialism and, *see* colonialism;
Great Replacement theory and; phrenology and; slavery and; transness applied to

Raichik, Chaya

Rainbow Grocery

Ram Dass

Rationalism

Ratzinger, Joseph

Raymond, Janice; anti-gender movement and; archives of; Catholicism and; Cristy's cancellation
and; male mothering and

reality; animacy hierarchies and; biopolitics and; capitalism and; change and; conspiracism and;
cybernetics and; esoterica and; ethnomethodology and; extralinguistic; fascism and; feminism and;
ideology and; internet and; language and; Money on; phrenology and; pseudoscience and;
psychedelics and; public opinion and; religion and; science fiction and; social construction and;
technology and; violence and; Wars of Religion and

realness

"Reconstructing Teens" (Bentley)

Redefining Realness (Mock)

Reich, Wilhelm

Reik, Theodor

Reimer, Bruce/Brenda/David & Brian

reiterative citationality

religion: as anti-gender; Dillon and; hypocrisy of; land and; pseudoscience and; reality and;
sociology of; transness and; Wars of; *see also* antisemitism; Catholicism; Mormons

reproduction; democracy and; phrenology and

resistance

revolution; aspirational; breath and; French; molecular; sexual; technological; unhumans and

Revolutionary War

Ricardo, David

Richards, Renée

right-wing movements, *see* anti-gender ideology movement; anti-trans campaigns; fascism

rites of passage

Rivera, Sylvia

Robinson, Tyler

Robison, John

Rodríguez, Juana María

Roe v. Wade

Rogan, Joe

role theory

Roosevelt, Eleanor

Roosevelt, Teddy

Rosenberg, Jordy

Rosenberg, Larry

Rosenblueth, Arturo

Rothblatt, Martine

Royal Danish Library

Rubin, Gayle

Rufo, Christopher
Rumor of Angels, A (Berger)
Rural Economy of Gloucestershire, The (Marshall)
Sacred Canopy, The (Berger)
 Sade, Marquis de
 safe space
 Sailer, John
 Saints (bar)
 Samoa
 sanctuary states
 San Francisco Bay Area; Glide Memorial Church in; in 1960s; in 1980s; in 1990s; as Stryker's home;
 UCSF in
 Sanger, Margaret
 "Sanity and Hazard in Childhood" (Bentley)
 Sapir, Edward
 Schiebinger, Londa
 schismogenesis
 Schuler, Margo
 Schütz, Alfred
 science fiction
 Scotland
 Scott, Joan
 sea lettuce bush
Second Wave, The (magazine)
 secularization
Self (Dillon)
 Seneca Falls Convention
 Seneca Nation
 sex; Bentley on; Butler on; etymology of; feminism and; fortune-teller metaphor and; grammar and;
 Prince on; shape and; *see also* reproduction
Sex and Gender (Stoller)
 sexology; *see also* Money, John
 sex reassignment surgery, *see* medical transition
Sex Researchers, The (Brecher)
 sex-roles
 sexual abuse
Sexuality Restored (Fowler)
Sexual Politics (Millett)
 sexual repression
 sex workers
 Shakers
 shape: gender and; in phrenology; religion and
Shape of Jazz to Come, The (Coleman)
Shape of Sex, The (DeVun)
 Shapiro, Ben
 Shelley, Mary, *see* "My Words to Victor Frankenstein"
 Shire, Warsan

Shuckburgh, Richard
Silicon Valley, *see* Stanford University; tech elites
Slaughterhouse-Five (Vonnegut)
slavery
Smollett, Tobias
social constructionism; biopsychosocial vs.; opposition to; performativity and; reality and
Social Construction of Reality, The (Berger)
social control: cybernetics and; freedom and; public relations and
socialization; *see also* identity formation
social media
social movements: academia and; coalitional; feminism and
Society for the Second Self
Society of Universal Friends
sociology: agnotology and; reality frameworks in; role theory in
somatechnics
Somberg, Judy
Soros, George
souls
South Carolina
Space Is the Place (Sun Ra)
“spiritual transsexualism”
Sprinkle, Annie
Spurzheim, Johann; remains of
Stalin, Joseph
Stanford University: Bentley at; Humanities Center at; LGBTQ+ student center at; Matt Walsh at
Stanton, Elizabeth Cady
Star House
status, in sociology
Steinach, Eugen
Stephens, Beth
St. Louis
Stoller, Robert; Prince and
Stone, Sandy; archives of
Stone Butch Blues (Feinberg)
Stonewall uprising
Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR)
Streicher, Julius
Stryker, Jon
Stryker, Susan: in academia (*see also under* Stanford fellowship of); ancestors of; art appreciated by;
ChatGPT on; childhood of (*see also under* gender of); conspiracy theories about; contingency
planning by; gender of; grief of; intergenerational trauma of; last name of; as parent; partner of, *see*
Klausner, Mimi; projects of; psychedelic practice of; recurring nightmare of; religion and; siblings
of; Stanford fellowship of; as trans elder; yoga practice of
Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)
Studies in Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel)
suffrage movement
suicide
suigenderism

Sullivan, Nikki
Sun Ra
Supreme Court
surveillance
Swislow, Lee; Cristy and
Sylvester
systems theory, *see* cybernetics
Szasz, Thomas

Table Alphabeticall of Hard Usual English Words, A (Cawdrey)

Tacitus

Taylor, Astra

tech elites

technological innovation; in somatechnics

telecommunications, 19th century

tenant farming

Tenderloin neighborhood

“Teoquitla the Golden” (Cuevas)

TERFs, *see* feminism, trans-exclusionary

terrorism

TESCREAL Bundle

textile industry

Theweleit, Klaus

they/them pronouns

“Thing, The” (Heidegger)

thon pronoun

Tiffany Club

TikTok

Tipping the Velvet (Waters)

Toadstool, The (Streicher)

tobacco industry

Torres, Agnes

“Traffic in Women, The” (Rubin)

Trail of Tears

trans ancestors; Agnes as; in Boston; Charlaque von Curtis as; Dillon as; Jorgensen as; Lawrence as;
Lobdell as; macaronis as; Prince as; Public Universal Friend as

transatlantic slave trade

“‘Transcendents,’ The” (Prince)

transfeminine people: in lesbian communities; phobic fantasy of; violence against; *see also* cross-
dressing; *specific people*

transgender: as not anachronistic; early usages of; expansive meaning of; “tipping point”

Transgender-Ideology Violent Extremism (TIVE)

Transgender Liberation (Feinberg)

trans history; autobiography and; Compton Cafeteria riot as; in court; erasure of; Jorgensen’s role in;
writing of; *see also* trans ancestors

transhumanism

transition: in breath; in choreography; onto-epistemological assumptions and; *see also* medical
transition

transmasculine people; in *Confessions of the Fox*; exclusion of; 19th century
transness: art and; erasure of; fear of; fortune-teller metaphor for; as healing; intrinsic potential for;
Marxism and; monstrosity and; as practice of freedom; psychedelics and; realness and; religion
and; technological innovation and; WTF of
Trans-Oconee Republic
trans people: antagonism toward, *see* anti-trans campaigns; in athletics; boundaries among; in early
1990s; in intellectual history of gender; medical transition for, *see* medical transition; migration by;
movement building by; policing of; suicidality and; support services for in 1970s
transphobia, *see* anti-trans campaigns
transpiration, etymology of
transportation revolution
transreality
Transsexual Empire, The (Raymond)
Transsexual Experiment, The (Stoller)
“transsexualism, spiritual”
Transsexual Phenomenon, The (Benjamin)
trans studies
Transvestia (journal)
transvestigation
Transvestites and Transsexuals (Feinbloom)
Trans Women of Color Collective
trauma; of biopolitics; Cristy’s; gender dysphoria as; Stryker’s mother’s
Tri-Ess
Trump, Donald: first administration of; second administration of
truth, *see* reality
Turner, Fred
Turning Point USA
Twain, Mark
24-Decade History of Popular Music (Mac)
2024 presidential election; *see also* Trump, Donald: second administration of
2022, bad stuff since
two-spirit traditions
2008 presidential election
typificatory schemes

UC Berkeley: Butler at; Chen at; Foucault at; Mac at; Prince at; Stryker at; Yiannopoulos at
UCLA
UC San Francisco
UFOs
”Unanimity in the Social Sciences” (Money)
UNESCO
Unhumans (Posobiec)
United Nations
University of Arizona
University of Iowa
University of Oklahoma
University of Otago
urbanization

Vance, JD
Velveteen Rabbit, The (Williams)
Vonnegut, Kurt

Wachowski, Lana & Lilly
Walsh, Matt
Wars of Religion
Washington, George; *Crossing the Delaware*
Waters, Sarah
Watson, John
Weber, Max
Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary (Daly)
Weekly World News
Weird Tales
West African cultures
What Is a Woman? (Walsh)
What's Your Pronoun? (Baron)
whiteness; *see also* colonialism
Whitman, Walt
Whorf, Benjamin Lee
Who's Afraid of Gender? (Butler)
Wichita Mountains
Wieland (Brown)
Wiener, Norbert
Wilcox, Barbara
Wilkinson, Jemima
Wood, Edward D., Jr.
Wooden Boat People (Monkman)
World War I, genital injuries in
World War II; cybernetics and; new world order after; psychedelics and
Writers' Workshop (University of Iowa)
Wulkan, Ferd
Wynter, Sylvia

"Yankee Doodle"
Yaqui shamanic practices
Yiannopoulos, Milo
yoga
"(You Make Me Feel) Mighty Real" (Sylvester)
Young Americans for Freedom

Permission Acknowledgments

Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint the following material:

Prolapse Figure (2017), on the front cover, is used with the permission of Nicki Green.

The “Great Acceleration” charts, on pages 249 and 250, are used with the permission of Future Earth.

Grateful acknowledgment is also made for permission to republish revised, abbreviated, or expanded versions of passages drawn from the following previously published works:

Susan Stryker, “Transsexuality: The Postmodern Body and/as Technology,” *Exposure: The Journal of the Society for Photographic Education* 30, no. 1/2 (1995): 45–53.

Susan Stryker, “Christine Jorgensen’s Atom Bomb: Transsexuality and the Emergence of Postmodernity,” in *Playing Dolly: Technocultural Formations, Fantasies, and Fictions of Assisted Reproduction*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan and Susan Merrill Squier (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 157–71.

Susan Stryker, *La Lent Transgènere/The Transgender Lens* (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2019).

Elizabeth Stephens and Karin Selberg, “The Somatechnics of Breath: Life at This Moment in History: An Interview with Susan Stryker,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 34, no. 99 (2019): 107–19.

Susan Stryker, “On Groundlessness: Transphobic Feminism, Gender Ideology, Transfeminist Critique,” *Sinister Wisdom* 128 (Spring 2023): 170–93.

Susan Stryker, “The Non-Binary Blackness of Pauli Murray and Ornette Coleman: Constraint and Freedom Within the Glandular Imaginary,” in *Multilogues on the Now: On Glands, Membranes and Cavities*, ed. Hana Janečková and Zuzana Jakalová (Prague: Display Collective and Charles University, 2021), 52–89.

ALSO BY [SUSAN STRYKER](#)

When Monsters Speak: A Susan Stryker Reader (McKenzie Wark, editor)

Transgender History

Queer Pulp

Gay by the Bay (coauthor, with Jim Van Buskirk)

[A Note About the Author](#)



[Susan Stryker](#)'s historical research, theoretical writings, mediamaking, activism, and academic field-building activities have helped shape the conversation on trans issues since the early 1990s. Stryker retired from the University of Arizona in 2020 and currently holds a distinguished visiting appointment at Stanford University's Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research. She is the author of many academic and general audience works, including *Transgender History*. She lives in San Francisco. You can sign up for email updates [here](#).

**Thank you for buying this
Farrar, Straus and Giroux ebook.**

To receive special offers, bonus content,
and info on new releases and other great reads,
sign up for our newsletters.

[Sign Up](#)

Or visit us online at
us.macmillan.com/newslettersignup

For email updates on the author, click [here](#).

Farrar, Straus and Giroux
120 Broadway, New York 10271

Copyright © 2026 by Susan Stryker
All rights reserved
First edition, 2026

All acknowledgments for permission to reprint previously published and unpublished material can be found [here](#).

Cover design by Emma Moore

Cover art: Nicki Green, *Prolapse Figure*, 2017. Glaze on recycled stoneware with wool felt, nylon straps, and Voulkos kiln bricks. 49 x 46 x 18 inches. Photograph courtesy of the artist

Ebook ISBN: 978-0-374-71549-6

The publisher of this book does not authorize the use or reproduction of any part of this book in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. The publisher of this book expressly reserves this book from the Text and Data Mining exception in accordance with Article 4(3) of the European Union Digital Single Market Directive 2019/790.

Our ebooks may be purchased in bulk for promotional, business, educational, and specialty retail/wholesale use. Please contact MacmillanSpecialMarkets@macmillan.com.

www.fsgbooks.com

Follow us on social media at @fsgbooks

Synoptic Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Notice](#)

[Dedication](#)

I.

[Presenting Myself at QSpot—Autotheoretical Monstrosity—A Very Brief History of the Recent Anti-Trans Campaigns—Waging Onto-Epistemological Warfare—A Hateful Little Message Left in a Library Book—With Fred Turner in Dinkelspiel Auditorium—Matt Walsh—A Primer on Gender and Grammar—A Preview of John Money’s Career and the Orthodox History of the Gender Concept—Reimagining What “Changing Gender” Might Mean—Introduction to the Social Construction of Reality.](#)

II.

[Seeing Taylor Mac with Juana María Rodríguez—“Yankee Doodle”—Calling It Macaroni—Historical Slippages Between Grammatical and Psychosocial Gender—After the Show—The Etymology of *Gender* and *Sex* in English, and Changes in Their Usage—Separating and Conflating *Sex* and *Gender*—The Fortune Teller—A Topsy Rant About What I Now Understand “Changing Gender” to Mean—The Significance and Influence of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*—How *Who’s Afraid of Gender?* Saved Me a Lot of Trouble—An Archaeological Approach to the Gender Concept](#)

III.

[Dunedin, Aotearoa/New Zealand—Biographical Sketch of John Money—The Reimer Case—Intersex and Other Activisms in the 1990s—The “Lab Leak” Theory of How Gender Terminology Spread—The Unsung Madison](#)

Bentley—The Gender Concept’s Roots in Cultural Anthropology and the Sociology of Roles—Virginia Prince—*Gender and Transgender*

IV.

Me-Search and Research: An Origin Story and Intellectual Trajectory—WTF—Becoming Real—Ontological Multilingualism and Lines of Flight—Getting a Little Schoolbook Learnin’—Social Constructionism Explained—Early Mormon History—What to Do When Disemployed—The Internet Age—Christine Jorgensen and Transsexual Technologies of the Self—Sex/Change/City in San Francisco—Somatechnics

V.

Taking the Long Way Around—Jordy Rosenberg’s *Confessions of the Fox*—Metabolic Rift—A Brief Yet Helpful Guide to Grammatical Gender—Pronouns—James Anderson’s “Grammatical Disquisitions”—Mycelial Networks—Mel Chen and Animacy Hierarchies—Julian Carter Comes with Choreography—A New Grammar of Animacy—The Extralinguistic Feels Alive

VI.

Anti-Gender Conspiracism—Gabriele Kuby’s Potted History of Perverse Modernity—The Paranoid Style—Biopolitical Fantasies of Sex and Race—Playing the Monster—The Wildest Stories—Big Tobacco—Agnotology—An Anti-Conspiratorial Narrative of Gender’s Global Diffusion—Cybernetics—Gregory Bateson and Schismogenesis—US Soft Power in the Cold War—The Socialism of Fools

VII.

“The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman”—Gender Variance in Upstate New York in the Early National and Antebellum Period—The Burned-Over District and the Capitalist Transformation of the Countryside—Phrenology—Introducing Orson Fowler—Interpreting Shape to Attribute Meaning—

Transvestigation—Love and Parentage and Amativeness—Fowler’s
Phrenological Theory of Gender

VIII.

Provincetown—Transsexual Empire—The “Gender Community” in Boston
—Deborah Heller Feinbloom and Gender Identity Service, Inc.—Mary
Daly’s Gynocentric Pentecost—NEW REALITY WOMEN—Janice
Raymond’s Pseudo-Secularism—Integrity and Integration—The Ballad of
Cristy and Lee—At the Miyawaki Forest—All About My Mother

IX.

Uninvited in Joshua Tree—Psychedelics as a Method for Wandering—
Migration Histories—Attaching Stories to Things with Words—Road
Tripping—The Mutilated Dreamchild—On the Maternal—Grace—Eagle
Park and Quannah Parker’s Star House—Grief as Preparation for the Future

X.

Gender in the Anthropocene—Conjugating Survival—Bad Things That
Have Happened Since 2022–23—End Times Fascism—No One Leaves
Home Until Home Is the Mouth of a Shark—The Double Bind—Molecular
Revolution—Wooden Boat People—Ornette Coleman and the Shape of
Gender Yet to Come—Nicki Green’s Prolapse Figure—Breathe—What
Transpires Now

Bibliographical Essay

Notes

Acknowledgments

Index

Permission Acknowledgments

Also by Susan Stryker

About the Author

Copyright