**At the Margins of Time and Place. *Transsexuals and the Transvestites in Trans Studies***

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This special issue began with a simple provocation: “Where do we find the transvestite and the transsexual?” The ascendance and mainstreaming of *transgender* and its offshoots in its Anglo-American idiom represent more than a shift in nomenclature. While *transsexual* and *transvestite* were central categories that organized trans experience across a wide array of geographies, genders, and racial and class coordinates during the twentieth century, these categories have receded into the background of anglophone activism and academia. Trans stud- ies, which has been dominated by US and English-based scholarship, has largely moved on from transsexuals in favor of ostensibly more open-ended and pro- liferating models of gender variance. Transvestites, for their part, have never occupied the center of the field of trans studies. Rendered anachronistic, both groups are more vulnerable than ever to long-standing stigmas with a new temporal twist. They are viewed as either tragic figures who could never be their “true” selves, in the case of transvestites, or hyper gender-conforming figures limited by the time in which they lived, in the case of transsexuals; the forward march of transgender has buried the fact that there are many living people who still identify with and live under those signs.

Defining transsexuality is a thorny business. In creating this special issue, we imagined *transsexual* to signify a particular subject position in relation to the body and the process of changing one’s body. As trans studies has moved toward *trans* as a kind of prefix, able to attach itself to a variety of suffixes (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 2008), to use the term *transsexual* is to refer to a particular relation- ship between bodies and medicine. In naming this connection, we run the risk of collapsing transsexuality as only medical. For us, transsexual is both a medical category and more than a medical category. It describes a relationship to bodily transformation, via hormones and surgery; however, transsexuality is not the literal by-product of medicine. Transsexuality emerged dialectically, in conversation with medicine over the second half of the twentieth century, a global medical accumulation of diagnoses, treatment protocols, public and private clinics, and flows of trans people and trans-derived knowledge in and out of clinics (Aizura 2018). Transsexuality describes the experience of having one’s body poked, cut open, sutured back together, and made anew. In this regard, transsexuality is as much about the material as it is the discursive. It is about the phenomenological as much as it is about the medical. Transsexual is then a historical category that emerges in certain geographies, thanks to certain technologies, in the twentieth century (Preciado 2008). And as this issue attempts to demonstrate, transsexual is also a category of/for the present.

The terms transvestite, travesti, cross-dresser, and their various idiomatic iterations are too often understood (especially in mainstream and cisgender contexts) as not fully actualized transgender. They are imagined to be stalled, trapped in the wrong time or the wrong place, oppressed by cultural conventions, or otherwise unable to achieve “transgender” owing to the limitations of their life circumstances. This progress-oriented notion of transness, from sad transvestite pasts or liminal travesti geographies to open-ended trans presents and futures, renders these identities and embodiments backward or anachronistic.1 Transvestites have historically represented the most visible sign of rupture with the binary norms in many national and local contexts (Berkins 2007) and consequently have suffered intense repression, mockery, and punishment. Transvestites, particularly in the case of travestis in the Americas, are a plural reality, defined by economic precariousness, body maladjustment, transgression of the gender binary, and dense theoretical reflection (Rivas San Martin 2012: 247). As Cole Rizki (2019: 149) wrote in the introduction to TSQ’s special issue “Trans Studies en las Américas”:

As a politics of refusal, travesti disavows coherence and is an always already racialized and classed geopolitical identification that gestures toward the inseparability of indigeneity, blackness, material precarity, sex work, HIV status, and uneven relationships to diverse state formations. To claim travesti identity is to embrace a form of opacity and fugativity that resists necropolitical systems that pointedly rely on capture.

Transvestite and travesti positionalities are often unintelligible in the register of coherent “identity,” which is to say one that follows the Western sexological narrative of separating an internal gender identity from sexual orientation. The lack of bourgeois coherence on this axis is often registered in how the ostensible enmeshment of gay and trans styles of being stand in for a range of negative valuations based on the many axes that Rizki enumerates.

Lacking coherence, however, is not an epistemological deficit that trans studies needs to repair. The current search for a term that is “good enough”(Wayar 2019) to describe the global experience of those moving away from the sex assigned at birth comes up against a certain political correctness that imposes a proper way to talk about transgender~~ism~~ and nonbinary.2 This search has the effect of erasing the particularities of the vernacular, the historical, or the chosen names for one’s experience. We adapt the concept of the “good enough” from Donald Winnicott’s (1953) “good enough” mother, which challenged the notion of the possibility of a perfect mother to recognize the psychic value of their failure,allowing children to live in an imperfect world. *Transvestite* and the *transsexual* may likewise not be politically or taxonomically perfect terms for some dominant trans scholar and activist communities nowadays, but they simply make sense for some of us within the myriad of experiences of gender disidentification (Muñoz, 1999).

*Transvestite* and *transsexual* are imperfect, sometimes even uncomfortable terms, especially when they “embody a parody of the fragmented corporeal rhetoric that brings irony to the female and male essentialism as well as questions the center/periphery colonial legacy” (Richard 2018: 31). Historically, transsexuals and transvestites have contributed to make explicit the failure in the binary ideology. For example, *la loca* as a militant gender and desiring subject (Perlongher 1997) has functioned as a figure “desencaje” (out of joint) in the Catholic lineages of Latin America and Spain, proving that ours is an imperfectly gendered world, despite centuries of colonial violence meant to cement a binary ideology as natural and immutable. The imposition of the new internationalized gay identity as well as the medical technologies that make possible the modification of the body profoundly transform the meaning and the space inhabited by travestis, cross-dressers, *transformistas*, *femminiellis*, and other trans social forms.

As transsexual editors from two different continents, with two different primary languages, we wanted to ensure that this special issue concerns not only the historical but also the geographical. A colonial spatial logic has also exported transsexuality and tranvestism out of the global North, embedding them as racial markers of gender in the global South. This process is taking place despite vocal counter-claims from communities that reject a Euro-American telos of trans identity and politics. We refer to multiple places in which *travesti* is used nowadays to defend communities from transfeminicide (Bento 2014) and travesticide (Berkins 2015), building on an activism that is rooted in experiences of sex work, and anticolonial and class resistance (Radi and Sardá-Chandiramani 2016). These are often heterodox spaces in their broader regional or national context, where inhabiting the transsexual enables an intelligible transition, a diagnosis that becomes a sort of refuge for some (Pérez 1993). While investigating local epistemologies of trans life and the social forms it takes that exceed or simply do not correspond to a colonial presumption about transsexuals and transvestites from the perspective of the metropolitan global North, this issue seeks to loosen the ease with which the dominant assumed geopolitical and temporal relation between “transgender,” “transsexual,” “transvestite,” and “travesti” circulate.

This issue means to challenge the relegation of the transsexual and transvestite to another time and place in a broad sense, not just by or in transgender studies. Aiming to problematize how these categories do and don’t easily characterize people across transnational, temporal, and linguistic boundaries, we aim to create a way for opening up the pages of *TSQ* to those outside the Western academy by welcoming submissions of varying lengths, languages, and written registers. This particular goal has resulted in the issue’s “Transsexual/Transvestite Scrapbook.” The scrapbook as a genre is a gesture to an important source of transsexual/transvestite history. As Sandy Stone (2006: 224) writes in “The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto”: “Many transsexuals keep something they call by the argot term ‘O.T.F.’: The Obligatory Transsexual File. This usually contains newspaper articles and bits of forbidden diary entries about ‘inappropriate’ gender behavior.”

Scrapbooks are assemblages of varied meaning that rarely become part of the official institutional archive of law, medicine, and social movements. Scrapbooks allow us to know fragments of private lives. They also trouble the line between public and private, official and unofficial narratives, by indexing those fault lines as organizing constraints on many trans lives. They are objects of memory making, but as scrapbook contributor Lindsey Shively notes, in queer and trans communities they are also ephemeral. Scrapbooks often bear memories made to be forgotten, or were put together without the intention of recording anything like an official history. As many of the contributions to this special issue’s scrapbook attest, finding rare visual or textual evidence of the trans past’s richness is often haunted by a lack of clear names, locations, dates, or other corroborating information that can be used to look further into the lives they represent. The scrapbook and the personal photo album are meant for the act of telling stories, the author uses these materials for the purpose of making sense of themselves but also sharing narrative of who they are, what happened to them, and how they want to be seen (Rosón, 2016). For that reason, in the absence of the authors acting out their stories, many old scrapbooks cannot easily be a pathway into further historical retrieval. They are not a transparent archive that can be read and interpreted in a straightforward manner, apart from their creators. It is left to the interested amateur or scholar to find a more labile mode of engagement with the scrapbook as evidence. In similar fashion, this special issue’s scrapbook is not offered as an encyclopedic, indexical, or in any way comprehensive archive or account of transvestite and transsexual life, let alone the medium of the scrapbook itself. On the contrary, the varied geographies, intimacies, private spaces, objects, and feelings traversed by the scrapbook are offered in their incommensurability, their evocations over their declarations, and in the desire that we hope they ignite in the reader. The contributors to the scrapbook have written short texts to accompany their visual object, reflecting on what it means to each of them to be pulled into the historical and the visual by the archive.

The research articles in this special issue unfold likewise in various geographies and spaces— the clinic, the cabaret, and the ravines of the volcanic Canary Islands, to name only a few— showing where transsexuality and transvestism have been consolidated, resisted, and experimented with in ways that refuse to add up to a grand narrative of the passage toward a transgender present and future. From the pages of smut novels to courtrooms in Argentina, the issue aims to highlight the expansive and capacious qualities of transsexuality and tranvestism. Rather than an obituary of categories now rendered obsolete, or a mission of rescue and recuperation, the issue enlivens the categories, welcoming them into the pages of *TSQ* to imagine what they could make possible in trans studies.

In the opening article, “Transgender: A Useful Category?,” Marta Vicente traces a genealogy of the ascension of the term *transgender* as an umbrella for drifting from one’s assigned gender at birth. Analyzing the continuous search for a term that “encompass[es] the multiple and sometimes contradictory relationships between one’s body and its social recognition,” the category *transgender* then becomes a “rubric for understanding the variability and contingency of gender across time, space, and cultures,” always intertwined with other identities, as a sort of social assemblage. This genealogy poses several questions, such as how to think about dissident experiences when terms like *transgender*, *trans*, or *transsexual* did not exist (Halberstam 1998), highlighting the need to focus on the language people used in regard to their lives. Vicente proposes a focus on first-person narratives to build this genealogy and comprehend the “multiple terms used to express the diverse and sometimes contradictory identities an individual can embody.”

Beans Velocci’s “Standards of Care: Uncertainty and Risk in Harry Benjamin’s Transsexual Classification,” argues that in the mid-twentieth-century medical milieu of endocrinologist Harry Benjamin, regret and danger were the unofficial criteria in determining whether someone was eligible for gender-affirming surgery. Through the correspondence of Benjamin with Los Angeles urologist Elmer Belt, Velocci tracks how fears of retribution and legal exposure, rather than onto-logical claims about gender and womanhood, had the final say in the clinical decision-making process. As Velocci writes, “The transsexual emerged as someone to be feared, not for their potential to unsettle gender norms and hierarchies but for the hypothetical harm they might cause to medical practitioners who treated them.” Velocci’s article allows us to imagine transsexuality not as a neatly conained medical category, let alone an ontological one, but as an unruly terrain, often perceived to be dangerous.

Daniasa Curbelo undertakes a rereading of the concept of barranco (ravine), which they identify with the history of indigenous Canary Islander resistance to the colonial order and with political dissidence to the Francoist order in Spain during the mid-twentieth century. These ravines were also where a transvestite/transsexual community lived along with other dissident and marginalized people. Thinking of the barrancos, volcanic scars on the landscape, as a possible place from which to resist order leads Curbelo to create an oral history with its protagonists and to uncover the strategies of resistance in a context of prostitution and delinquency. This methodology allows them to show the complexity of sexual and gender nonbinary identities in which transvestites and transsexuals endure. Curbelo thereby signals the current exile of the concept of transvestite in Spain, which is produced not only through its pejorative connotation but also through the medicalization of gender transitions from the 1980s onward. The transit of water through the barrancos and of the people who do not fit within binary norms and assigned sex, as well as the transit between the urban and the rural, are appropriate descriptions for these experiences of Canary Islander transvestites and transsexuals, which are often not well-known.

In “(Trans) Sex Sells: Star Distributors Ltd. and Trans Sleaze,” rl goldberg examines trans erotic fiction from the 1970s–1990s, focusing on the pedagogical nature of trans sleaze, that is, the ways in which these pulp novels explored the negotiation of gender in a Cold War moment. Troubling sleaze scholarship, goldberg explores how trans erotic fiction was not about enforcing a rigid category of masculinity but, rather, about the possibility of willfully (or forcefully) allowing oneself to be feminized. Yet this process of gendered equivocation and femininization was also fundamentally conditioned by an anti-Black imaginary that goldberg teases out of the titles sold by Star Distributors. As they explain, this pulp literature shows how “Black gender—depicted exclusively as stable masculinity—is the context from which white trans exploration emerges. Quite simply, the white psyche cannot admit the possibility of Black femininity.” “(Trans) Sex Sells” offers a story about the circulation of transsexuality and the genres in which it was constructed/constituted that challenge the supposed dependence of transsexuality on the medical sphere, expanding our understanding of the anti-Black foundations of gender transitivity in the United States. The transvestite resistance in the Barcelona cabarets of the 1960s and 1970s, which was possible even under absolutist regimes such as the Franco dictatorship, is the focus of Iñaki Estella’s analysis in “The Collective Scene.” Habitually, academic literature has focused on the Francoist repression as an overall fact, making invisible the specific practices of resistance to fascism that did exist (Rosón 2016; Platero 2015). These practices of resistance, especially in their transvestite iterations, often occurred in private, which, in Estella’s analysis, was the overlooked prerequisite to their public expression. Estella explores the existence of a counter-public (Warner 2002) that frequented cabarets in Barcelona and showed its admiration for transvestites who in turn were navigating, not without risk, censure from the Franco regime. Although some readings of counter-cultural practices place the spotlight on individuals such as the artists Ocaña or Copi, it is important to not divest them of their social and activist context. Cabaret has been an ambivalent site for transvestite and gay life, but also a site of refuge (Mérida Jiménez 2016), where humor has been a fundamental strategy for navigating mockery and shame and for making desire for transvestites possible.

Finally, in “Mariela Muñoz: Citizenship, Motherhood, and Transsexual Politics in Argentina (1943–2017),” Patricio Simoneto and Johana Kunin retell the story of Mariela Muñoz, an Argentine travesti mother who, thrust into the national spotlight after her adopted children were taken away from her, deployed the strategic role of mother to further transsexual and travesti rights in Argentina. A complex figure, often at odds with feminist and LGBTQ movements in Argentina, Muñoz does not easily fall into the role of beloved trancestor, styling herself as something more like a nationalist transsexual mother to the nation in the wake of years of dictatorship. As the authors write: “Her trajectory defied the limits of cis-gendered and antimaternal feminisms and showed how demands that could be initially considered conservative can lead to unexpected public support and legitimation of a marginalized community.” With this issue, and the accounts of transsexuality and transvestism that it showcases, we hope to inspire the desire to toss aside the “umbrella” of trans and transgender, instead encouraging trans studies to pivot toward more specific (historically, geographically, linguistically) identities and categories. In doing so, we want to contest the imposition of a proper and correct way to enunciate ourselves, encouraging the act of listening and learning from those that often are not at the center of trans studies. Being able to talk about what is materially and symbolically different about being transsexual or transvestite versus transgender nonbinary allows us to more fully account for a heterogeneity of gender experiences. There is a lot to be gained from having an abundance of terms to differentiate between specific trans positionalities and embodiments. Lastly, we acknowledge that the linguistic nuances of a much larger semantic trans field can help to spotlight the entanglements of these experiences with the imposition of colonial, racial, and ablist logics that are at the root of our lives.

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Notes

1. Our thinking about the retrograde character of transsexual and transvestite identities is highly influenced by the work of Kadji Amin and his book, Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History (2017).

2. In her book Travesti: Una teoría suficientemente Buena (Transvestite: A Good Enough Theory; 2019), Marlene Wayar uses this very same term when discussing the violence against transvestites and the long list of lost and dead transvestites in Latin America. Also, building on her own childhood travesti memories, she poses the question of how to raise our children with the hope that they can have a travesty future.

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