

PREFACE CALL ME THEY

I've been called a lot of things. And I've called myself a few—a female transvestite, a butch oma, someone who believes in nonbinary trans love like others refer to the Old Testament (something open to interpretation). In the course of researching this book, I've been fully guilty of that most perverse, and common, knowledge-seeking pleasure: me-search. The versions of “me,” however, have been morphing, accumulating under the aegis of changes in name, body shape, clothing style, country, job, and interest groups of all kinds. I can remember learning, as an undergraduate amateur drag king (Danny Illdoya), Leslie Feinberg's pronouns *ze* and *hir* and thinking how cool it would be if we really could get some gender-neutral pronouns recognized. If nothing else, then to hush those twittering naysayers who claim that those who fantasize about abolishing the gender system were all a bunch of elitists, or freaks, or elitist freaks; “yeah, like that'll ever happen,” they snigger. It felt certainly possible to me, if only enough people would use them in languages where gendered pronouns are relevant. But I never actually thought some version of personal pronouns for genderqueer people, namely “they,” would become incorporated into *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* only some fifteen years later. A dictionary!

The singular use of the pronoun *they* to refer to someone whose gender is unknown—as in, “Ask your friend if they want to come along”—is an old phenomenon that has lasted continuously since around 1300. The use of *they* as a nonbinary pronoun, however, is relatively new, which is why it is one of the “words we're watching” for Merriam-Webster and has been included since 2013 in their historicizing catalog of word uses. This is but one indicator for Anglophone users that the implicit binary basis for understanding trans embodiment and identity, cited in the de-

scriptors *male-to-female transsexual* and *female-to-male transsexual*, is under pressure as the sole conceptual world for transitioning. Another route is to highlight trans terminology as jargon, such as by capitalizing *Transsexual* to indicate the term's status as psycho-medical nomenclature, rather than a social identity. The language and related possibilities for understanding trans have wonderfully ballooned to include so many more than medical trajectories. My point is that people should have access to the categories to which they want to belong, and those categories must include so-called binary and nonbinary versions of being female/woman/she or male/man/he.

Though I prefer to be called they, this does not detract from my overarching commitment to categorical inclusivity. Including transsexual in the realm of trans categories, along with intersex and queer, results in certain unresolvable tensions among the vectors of sex/gender/sexuality. These tensions become compounded through how discourses, images, and sound markers supersede one another, creating a palimpsest of trans forms. At the heart of this book, then, is this inevitable historicity of being made in the years spanning a robust transsexual attachment to gender categories through mushrooming genderqueer detachment from such figurations.

Needless to say, this me-search has evolved from within an enormously engulfing wave of change. For example, when I began writing about trans representations, C. Jacob Hale's "Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans ____," first published on Sandy Stone's website January 5, 1997 (and still available), was the only guideline for how, by following fifteen rules, to respectfully orient oneself toward transsexual culture and positions. It might seem unimaginable to some trans-whatevers today that *transsexuality* or *transgendered* would be proper, acceptable terms. In accordance with rule 1, "Approach your topic with a sense of humility," I have tried in my writing about trans cinema and theories to honor their historical specificity, and not to presume that I might "know better" from my vantage point now. The way I use the prefix *trans* to refer to cinema, embodiment, and identities borrows from Hale's openness to any and all future uses of trans _____. I also at times cluster trans ____ identities under the holey umbrella of *transgender* (it doesn't catch all the possibilities) in order to better stress the gendered elements of subjective identity formation.

This me-search arose from wanting to find images that resonated with my affective relation to trans____, and I close the chapters here literally not being able to watch all the new media with trans characters, narratives, thematics, and aesthetics, or produced by trans creatives. The tipping point of a wholly *new* sea change for articulating transness might not be pronounceable yet, but along the way the drip, drip of trans characterizations has puddled into the reality of bigger bodies of trans waters than one person could swim across.

The volatility around burgeoning senses of trans behaves according to market trends, in part, but also in response to, capacious desires for a gender vocabulary that feels adequate to one's lived experience, that does justice to it. With this in mind, the cinematic examples I draw from open up a rich field of how trans subjectivities, lives, experiences, and embodiments have been expressed in, if not pressed into, cinematic forms; accordingly, they demonstrate how cinematic forms have been investigated for their trans aesthetic dimensions. I see my deliberate chunking of materials across the chapters—from pre-transsexual to trans-entity to postgender—as a historical fact of development. It also is to show the wealth of discontinuity in what is today casually called transgender identities and politics.

Culturally, trans has a privileged relation to an aesthetics of change, particularly in comparison to the often negative framework for change emerging in relation to aging or illness. What filmmakers and cultural productions do with this imposition on trans to “stand for” change is what I'm interested in, both representationally and in terms of political agitation. The historical record I excavate demonstrates the superdiversity of trans experiences that resists wholesale appropriation, or collapse into a singular story, form, or ontology. Truly, the singular plural *they* is an incredibly accurate means to describe the singularities present within the plurality of trans. I offer the concept of shimmering images to describe this persistent vision of trans as change, and as a force that continues to achieve change through varying means and ways.

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