

# TRAP DOOR

TRANS CULTURAL PRODUCTION  
AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

EDITED BY REINA GOSSETT, ERIC A. STANLEY,  
AND JOHANNA BURTON

The MIT Press / Cambridge, Massachusetts / London, England

# SPIDERWOMEN

Eva Hayward

## TO TRANSPOSE

---

To write this text, I took the word “transposition” for a series of walks through a number of readings alongside experiences and down city streets (which are all the activity of transposition itself): a mapping of senses through which one’s body (as a set of specific, sociohistorical constraints—as in, “a white transwoman”) and embodiment (the sense of being bodily, “my body hurts”) emerge. That is to say, transposition is both cause and effect—the everyday act of becoming otherwise, as well as its foreclosures, refusals, and limits. As for a definition, “to transpose” is to change something into another form, or to transfer to a different place or context: transmutations but also translations and alterations in modes of life and death. Transposition can be a deviation that discomposes order—transpositions are equally as destructive as they are generative. Working with these traipses and etymologies of transposition, I want to suggest that sexual transitions (for my purposes, particularly transwomen’s) are fused with, and perhaps constituted by, forces and excitations of location, of neighborhood. I mean that, for me, transpositions refer both to the sensation (a composite of affects and percepts) of bodily change and to the corporeal states constituted through transsexual<sup>1</sup> transitions, which are all shaped by spatial and environmental orientations.<sup>2</sup>

To do so, I use myself (or parts of myself) as a starting point: I am transitioning. My account of male-to-female transsexual transitioning in an urban setting might appear unavoidably self-indulgent, drifts in personal recollection—as in “my story”—but it is meant to suggest, however speculatively, and without aiming toward universalizing, the sensuous (in this word, hear “violence” as much as “pleasure”) and materialist transactions between body, desire, and environment.

First, it is impossible anymore, if even it ever was, to categorically define the ways that transsexuals become trans-sexed. Attempts to name, chart, and absolutely frame all matrices of transitioning are among the injustices committed against transsexuals.<sup>3</sup> So, why? Why this personal approach? The personal is not the same as the individual, but an opportunity to see how lived experience can be the basis for investigation.<sup>4</sup> To some degree, the effort to “tell my story” is to tell the reader lies. Not intentionally, but obscuration is the unavoidable effect of reporting on the self; “my story” is shaped by repression, a wish to be seen as I want to be seen. But—and this is an advisory “but” for all of us who write about trans/gender/sex—“my story” is a necessary component of trans care. If you are able, and not all trans people are, to receive care, an account of a trans self is obligatory. Even beyond health care, a narrative for “why you want to transition” is solicited by lovers, friends, family, and many others. To transition, to change or alter sex/gender demands a story. Personally, the demand helps with the unexpected, with the inevitable feeling of bodily betrayal. Socially, the account assuages anxiety that sex/gender might change for anyone. Stories, then, are acts of violence and deception, even as they are made necessary.

By redeploying the medicalized legacy of transsexuals’ self-narrativizing—constructing a diachronic narrative from a synchronous field of wrong body-ness so that an account can be given—I use my own felt-body knowledge of transsexuality to push back at larger political, historical, and cultural currents. Rather than reading such reflexivity as a failure of critical distance, I want to say that transsexuality is not about authenticity or originality, but reveals how bodily feeling and desire are constituted socially and spatially. I may want to wish away the narrative demands imposed on transsexuals—after all, they are transphobic, internally and socially—but this imperative reveals the discursive nature of bodies and embodiment, of how political, affective, and social registers work to produce “my body.” Consequently, I offer transpositions not through absolute definition—not to reinforce an “accurate” accounting of the self as definitive—but through description, an effort to describe transitional sensations as they are shaped by a specific location. What is described, what is formalistically detailed, is also transpositional: an effect of forms and forces that causes yet other effects. In other words, transpositional for this essay is a formal account, an attending to the material and sensual constraints of transitioning (as opposed to a purely identitarian refrain).

.....

*Tenderloin, tender meat—taken from under the short ribs in the hindquarters—is the loin, animal flesh, or soft underbelly. In common vernacular, a “Tenderloin” is a district of a city where crime and vice are prominent. Perhaps no surprise that hard-boiled detective fiction (Dashiell Hammett lived at 891 Post Street) and film noir (The Maltese Falcon, John Huston, 1941) would emerge from the wet, chiaroscuro streets of San Francisco’s Tenderloin. My home: 1028 Post Street, San Francisco, part of that Hollywood-inspired noir-hood. It is a small studio. A claw-footed bathtub. One view of the neighboring brick building. A fire escape. I am here to “tend my loins,” to trans sex. My sex is turned to meat, to post-animal (the afterward of the animal is meat), to my tenderloin. I am not sure why this neighborhood, but it seems like a return. An effect of après-coup, of retroaction? Coming home to a place already made by the labors, deaths, and loves of other transwomen, already made by my memories?*

#### NEARNESS OF NEIGHBORHOOD

---

Neighborhood: The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that neighborhoods are “a community; a number of people who live close together; a vicinity or surrounding area.” They are “the quality, condition, or fact of being situated near to someone or something; nearness, proximity.” An urban neighborhood in the US: people moving along streets on foot or by car or bicycle; cell phones vibrating and ensuing conversations; pigeons sitting on the eaves of buildings; federal and state policies subtending urban plans; gentrification and racialization determining who is, and is not, here; a hot day fills alleyways with the stink of urine, rotting food, vomit, and unknowable things; traffic lights directing movements; city sounds building out scale and volume; eateries and shops indulging the walker with window scenes. A plenum of gregariousness, a pulse, a conglomerate that constantly respire and excretes, the neighborhood holds ground just as it lurches for new resources. It is a bumptious, brutally lively, coherence of bodies (human and nonhuman), ecosystems, communities, and buildings. These are not utopic zones of love, though love can be found; neighborhoods are stresses even in apparent moderation, vehemently intractable. Neighborhoods exclude, are designed to make some vulnerable while others safe; neighborhoods can be percussed by bullets as much as by traffic. To be neighborly is as much a threat as an invitation.

Out of the midst of this San Francisco verve, gestated by my own transposing, I again wonder: How do transsexuals living in neighborhoods experience

the reaching and refusing nature of these populated zones in relationship to their own sexual transitioning? First, not all transsexuals transition, certainly many do not, and what counts as transitioning varies greatly, but I am specifically interested in those bodies, particularly transwomen, who alter themselves through surgeries and hormones to feel themselves differently in the world. By “transitioning,” I do not mean a monolithic movement between states, rather I mean simply an emergence of a material, psychological, sensual, and social self through corporeal, spatial, and temporal processes that transfigure the lived body. Rather than accounting for transsexuality as a psychological condition, or a purely sociological production, or as some biological imperative, I offer a supplemental reading that is about the expressiveness of trans. I am not proposing that these other registers of interpretation are without merit; however, I wonder what else can be asked about transitioning. Specifically, how might a transitioning body experience the sensually teeming place of a neighborhood? And, conversely, how do urban forces accompany transsexual transitions—radical alterations to bodily sensoriums—that shape and reshape a neighborly self? What is the somatic sociality of transitioning?

.....

*I live directly across from Diva's. Standing outside the bar, at all hours, are dazzling women. Their heels cantillate, sounding out the streets. They gather at the entry of the bar, which recedes from the sidewalk just enough to offer shelter and vantage. Their aesthetic exuberance is framed by concrete and steel. They are hyper-visual and their shimmer, sparkle, dazzle also confuse vision, an excess that clouds the question of visibility; the gilded surface deflects a desire for depth even in its allure. Differences in race, ethnicity, and class are not lost—going into Diva's, you are confronted with how race territorializes—but necessity makes the entry a temporally shared space between these glittering women. A glistening threshold—charged with desire and fear—the doorway is the only common ground. Even still, every entry is also a foreclosure. An open door is a closed door, too.*

.....

There are many peoples and histories at play in San Francisco's Tenderloin district.<sup>5</sup> Significant legacies of racial politics, struggles for sex-worker justice, immigration rights, and homelessness activism define the pavement, street corners, community centers, and churches—and these are but some of the accounts that structure this neighborhood. Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman's documentary *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* (2005) depicts

transgender political work in the Tenderloin and the unlikely alliances with various social justice movements. They offer an intersectional arrangement of historical struggles and the rekindled activist energies still at work in challenging transphobia, xenophobia, racism, and poverty.

My project is a narrowing, perhaps even a preterition, of these critical efforts by situating the current Diva's bar, 1081 Post Street, San Francisco, as a hub for the activities of transwomen in this neighborhood. This is arguably an arbitrary center—though how center are any centers?—but, still, Diva's is a place where many transwomen experience kinds of communion. Some of these women are sex workers, some are not; some women go to the bar seeking community, others pleasure. Some women are simply surviving, while others find that these streets are full of deadly consequence. Some women find the visiting men a nuisance; others find the men the reason to come to Diva's at all. Transwomen of color, black transwomen, poor transwomen, feminine transenders, immigrants and migrants seeking refuge, *fa'afafine*, *kathoe*y, *māhū*, and others also find something they need among the streets of Post, Geary, Polk, Turk, O'Farrell, and more. For me, Diva's creates its own gravitational drive, an excited charge in the greater pull of the city, a place of coming together (sometimes forced) even if never visited, with transwomen living, working, and dying in the surrounding area.

.....

*Tergiversation, a politically suspect form of evasion: Some days I try to distance myself from other women working the streets by reading and walking, code switching to shield myself from approaching men. The performance feels tenuous and necessary, but also ruthless. I fold myself inward and lower my vision into my feet; my feet "look out" for me. My toes begin to apprehend the crosswalks differently. Toes register as eyes—"toed-eyed"—giving me a planar view that senses beyond the peripheral through reverberation. Often my guise works, but occasionally men slow their cars anyway and signal me for a paid tryst. "Do you want an ice cream cone?" Depending on my needs, I pretend not to understand.*

#### ANIMATED CITY, ANIMALIZED SPACE

The neighborhood around Diva's is an animated zone, a multispecies site. In addition to transwomen, buildings, and streets, pigeons, spiders, crows, rats, insects, pets, molds, viruses, and numerous other beings share the architectural forms with human selves and their intentions; they, too, are neighbors.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it

seems an unlikely linking of transsexual transitioning and urban space with animality, or risky in that transpeople may appear animalized or that it reduces the lived struggles of animals to make anthropocentric claims.<sup>7</sup> But to refuse the linkage is to refuse how race is at work here. Black transwomen and transwomen of color are already marked by dehumanization, by the racialized limits of "the Human." Race anticipates the human/animal divide, and as such the problem of "the Human" is everywhere.<sup>8</sup> For transwomen who undergo hormonal and surgical alterations, the animal has always been present. Which is to say, while the human/animal divide is a false one—false because it assumes a shared access to the promise of liberal Humanism and its inalienable rights—animals still exist, even if they are also foreclosed from Humanism. Just as racial thinking and violence—for example, the Tuskegee Syphilis experiments, J. Marion Sims's gynecological experiments, and the cloning of cells from Henrietta Lack's cervix—inform the sexually and surgically changing body, so does the instrumentalization of animal life.

Premarin<sup>®</sup> is a standard hormonal treatment for transwomen, consisting primarily of conjugated estrogens isolated from mares' urine.<sup>9</sup> The story of Premarin<sup>®</sup> is full of political contestation, horses kept in cycles of gestation and impregnation so as to collect their urine. The effects of this animal, non-bioidentical hormone are to immerse the body's organs in a chemical bath such that one's proprioceptive senses are as radically changed as one's external presentation: vision is distorted, one is disoriented by racking focus; haptic senses are reworked, making handled things feel like never before; taste is refracted through hormonally changed buds; smells redefine space. The organization of thoughts is sometimes nervous and, at other times, shot through with bliss.<sup>10</sup> The expressive potential of the body, its capacity to respond to the world, is substantively disfigured, transforming the sensuous exchange of self and environment. Changing sex, then, is also always about changing senses and species.<sup>11</sup>

In Myra J. Hird's 2006 essay "Animal Transex," she invites us to think about transsexuality in relation to sex changing in other species. Working from a "new materialism" that finds "agency and contingency within the living and non-living world," Hird argues that an attention to bio-materiality and biomimicry might redefine debates about transsexuality.<sup>12</sup> Eschewing a nature/culture distinction, she offers that "trans exists in non-human species."<sup>13</sup> Though differently refracted through speciated milieus, sex changing can be accounted for by the organism's reading of changes in the environment. Taking over from David Policansky's findings on sex changing in plants and animals, Hird enumerates a vast array of organisms such as fishes, marine snails, worms, and insects that change their sex in relation to environmental pressures, reproductive

potential, or even the vagaries of taste.<sup>14</sup> I do not cite this to propose that human transsexuals change for the same reasons—obviously the modes of change, of transitioning, are at radically different scales and refrains—but that the enactment of sex change is in some way a bodily engagement *with* and *of* the planetary forces (anthropic or not). It is the constitution of a relational milieu, an in-between site through which conductivities and energies form bodiliness through limits of expressiveness or responsiveness. The excitation of transfers is what is at stake in speciation and, for that matter, in sex and sexual orders. Sexual *differences* (not sexual difference) remain unfinished; sexual ontologies stay active, ongoing, differentiating. If sexual differences and sexuality are exuberances,<sup>15</sup> contingencies, then sex is profusive, which is to say it is a continually de-ontologizing event.

.....

*My body is still "my body," but also not—hormones initiate radical relays of transformed bodiliness that exceed intentionality, control, authorship. I start to wonder if my "conjugated equine estrogens" are reshaping my species along with my sex. Could mare chemistry be interlacing my own, giving me more of an insight into horse perception than sex perception? I am sure there are no horses in the Tenderloin (although certainly pony/horse play is taking place somewhere in the neighborhood), but as elements of mare urine course through me, I am sensitized to the fact that animals and other nonhumans are everywhere in the city. It is not that I am becoming horse—I am not—but the disfigurement of my sensorium through Premarin® alerts me to forces and presences that had been concealed by my sensory habits.*

*How many transwomen on Post, Larkin, Geary, Jones, O'Farrell, Sutter, Turk, and Taylor are mixing species in their own bodies? How many of us are engaged in some kind of trans-speciation? This is not utopic; on the contrary, it is layers of violence—medicalization, economic/racial inequality in access to trans health care, and domination of species—that subtend my transformed sensorium. And yet, I still desire to feel my body otherwise, to be accounted for in ways that I experience myself. However we may wish transitioning to be self-affirming (and it can feel as such), it is also an act of exclusion and power. Perhaps transpositioning—as subtending the transitional—better attends to (1) trans hatred that imagines transwomen as porous—the threat of psychosis subtending the transsexual "diagnosis"—literally a sex in pieces; (2) the ways our neighborhoods, the spheres that our bodies inhabit—the spheres of the imagination, but also of injustice and unequal access—are necessarily part of our transitions; and (3) how our positions are predicated as much on impossibility as possibility, on what is foreclosed to us as opposed to what is available.<sup>16</sup>*



## ARACHNOSEXUAL

---

Louise Bourgeois's *Crouching Spider*: on the Embarcadero at Mission Street—Entry Plaza at Pier 14. Bourgeois's spider is located outside the Tenderloin, but its touch percusses, vibrates, plucks at the streets from the Financial District as far as the Tenderloin, perhaps just as transwomen's heels (for those wearing them) click and clack, resonating far beyond the Tenderloin. The spider is an effect of gentrification in San Francisco, even as it reaches beyond this. It is a sculpture, but also a provocation. How might this spider, and its fleshy referent, elaborate on the relationship between bodies and spaces? After all, a spider's proximity to its web, made of its own secretions, proposes that home and territory are *of* and *with* the body. A spider makes a web to reach out into the upsurge of energies, to eat, to become more than itself.

Bourgeois's sculpture invites me to think about transwomen as spider-women, spinsters, over-reaching subjects. Transwomen are abjected—disfigured gender cues cause shock, fright, even disgust—just as spiders are scenes of arachnophobia and revulsion, but I want to hold open another line of inquiry. Might web-building best articulate (from concatenation to skeletalization) the act of extending bodily substance through sexual transition; that is to ask, does webbing, and the capacity to weave, describe how transsexuality is also an expression of the body (from sociopolitical to psychical to corporeal) as an address and as a habitat? Expressivity of transsexuality is not a trivialization of a difficult process; on the contrary, transition (or transposition) is an arrangement between the sensorial milieu of the self and the profusion of the world. The improvisation is particular, deadly serious, but also always relational.

*Crouching Spider*: It evokes an extreme response; an enormous bronze spider edging water and land. Neither he nor she, it signifies "it." Uncanny; the size is dwarfing. The legs are spindly, poised on sharp tips; even in their stillness they are lively.<sup>17</sup> Its legs are stretched, as if on the move; motion caught in repose. Is it in its territory? Hunting ground? Is it a trope for fear as an emanation of Freud's "phallic mother"?<sup>18</sup> Like its fleshy counterpart with a cuticle of chitin, this spider's exoskeleton protects it. The networks of nervous and respiratory systems, the hydraulic forces that make other spiders dynamic, are not visible, but this arthropod's segments, its cephalothorax and abdomen, are enmeshed and knotted with now-cooled metal joins.

*Crouching Spider*: The shadow of itself is impossible to ignore, even in fog-heavy San Francisco. Balanced on its own silhouette, a spider in a noir-lit web; it is its web. Equally difficult to overlook is the setting. Yes, the city, the Tenderloin neighborhood. Yes, the boundary between ocean and earth. From one angle, it is



Louise Bourgeois, *Crouching Spider*, 2003.  
Installation view: Embarcadero, San Francisco,  
2007. © The Easton Foundation/Licensed by  
VAGA, NY. Photo: Eva Hayward

at the center of a city in pieces: rising rates of homelessness; housing prices that make unlivable neighborhoods (generating yet more homelessness); unfulfilled promises of utopic inclusion (sexual, national, racial); ever-rising HIV rates among transwomen, especially among black transwomen and transwomen of color; and ever-spreading gentrification that bleaches, whitens, communities. And also, from this angle, the Bay Bridge extends this giant, metal spider, giving it a capacious outstretch that recalls the racial and economic divides (divisions are always also dependencies) between Oakland and San Francisco. Though its spinnerets are encased in inorganic hardness, it seems to have spun out a filament web made of steel and concrete. The spider metonymizes, generating zones of correlation and correspondence between object and space. It is not an endless reach; all things are not counted equally, though one could go far on these threads. This spider is an urban designer just as it is sculptural, a weaver of cityscapes, concatenating parts of the city into its grasp.

The unfolding scene of Bourgeois's spider stringing out the city from itself recalls Jean-François Lyotard's flaying of the body into what reads like a street map:

Open the so-called body and spread out all its surfaces: not only the skin with each of its folds, wrinkles, scars, with its great velvety planes, and contiguous to the scalp and its mane of hair, the tender pubic fur, nipples, nails, hard transparent skin under the heel, the light frills of the eyelids, set with lashes ... dilate the diaphragm of the anal sphincter, longitudinally cut and flatten out the black conduit of the rectum, then the colon, then the caecum ... armed with scalpels and tweezers, dismantle and lay out the bundles and bodies of the encephalon; and then the whole network of veins and arteries, intact, on an immense mattress, and then the lymphatic network, and the fine bony pieces of the wrist and ankles ...<sup>19</sup>

Lyotard continues: "We must not begin with transgression, we must immediately go to the end of cruelty, construct the anatomy of polymorphous perversion, unfold the immense membrane of the libidinal 'body,' which is quite the inverse of a system of parts."<sup>20</sup> Lyotard's contiguous membrane is indiscriminate, postmodern, joining diverse elements into irreverent intimacies. He suggests that the libidinal body seeks to conserve substances and extend them into ever-growing physical and social configurations, while becoming splayed, rendered, and eviscerated. Sexuality is too often imagined as political promise (for instance, the radical force of nonnormative sexualities), but sexuality is, as Freud teaches us, regressive. To manage the regression, we presume that objects (the attachment sites of our sexual drive) will resolve the trouble with sexuality. That "I am trans" is

not radically transgressive; on the contrary, it reveals a compliance with the regulatory regime of the social even if in oppositional form. The sexuality of trans, transsexuality, is the energetic and fantastic space between objects, leaving actual objects (social identity) as necessary compromises. Similarly, the webbing from Bourgeois's spider joins, aggregates others with others, but the responsive sensuality of the web is at work in the prepositions.<sup>21</sup>

Silken spiderlines reference the skeletalization of surface; the web is an extension of the surface affects of the spider—it *feels with its web*. This is not a shallow surface, but a dynamic threshold of sensuality. Likewise, the body is stretched topographically to affectively and perceptually (sensually) react through a spatial and temporal generativity. Bodies are not ruptured or burst open such that they are boundless. Instead, bodies, like cities and web-builders, are inter- and intra-threadings of many sensuous vectors that relay like the spider in its web.

## WEAVERS

---

*Thresholds in architectural forms: the sills of doorways, stoops, gates, portals, façades, and kinds of embellishments. But also, interesting nuance: in verb form, thresholding—an intensity that must be exceeded for a reaction to occur. Here in my home, I am freshly aware that my body is a threshold, an entry between rooms, the way the door-frame delimits zones where spiders build tangles across them. It is not as simple as to say that I am crossing from “man” to “woman.” I am not sure I know what such a claim would mean for me, let alone anyone else. But, on a scalpel of desire along a hormonal riptide, I am crossing the matter of my body on a bridge of sensation, moved along by desire. What does it mean to desire cutting? To cut the world, a world that insists on gender? As my body becomes legibly “woman,” a white woman, I am aware that the limits of my body are also energized zones. Transpositional: I stay at the threshold, while actively crossing that very threshold; I am caught and yet mobile in a state of articulation as I make myself intelligible enough to myself and to my neighborhood.*

.....

In her 2008 essay “Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sodomasochism,” Susan Stryker stitches together bodies, places, and histories through the erotic and social force of sadomasochism; she is, I think, the widow building her web. “I envision my body as a meeting point, a node, where external lines

of force and social determination thicken into meat and circulate as movement back into the world."<sup>22</sup> For Stryker, carnal improvisations, pulses, resonances, rhythms "thicken into meat" and bruised tributaries, only to flow back out of this subjective reservoir and into political projects and critical interventions. Web slinging can take the form of a crop, a flogger, and a paddle; the energetic surge, the movement between, is where sexuality is at work.

From Stryker's vantage point, the cityscape is meshed with *pastpresents* (an always present past in the present) such that engaging the space around her is dimensionally extended by "observations into the patterns longer than ... lived experience."<sup>23</sup> History is entanglement, knotting, a game of cat's cradle that maps impressions and embodiments through libidinal tracings, erotogenic intensities, and psychical cartographies. The central trope for Stryker's telling is "porosity" as *poiesis*: "Transsexual sadomasochism in dungeon space enacts a *poiesis* (an act of artistic creation) that collapses the boundary between the embodied self, its world, and others, allowing one to interpenetrate the others and thereby constitute a specific place."<sup>24</sup> Divides between subjects and objects, selves and others, are ruptured and distorted, generating new subjective configurations, but only through the constraints of an impassioned embodiment. Stryker risks physical integrities—skins welt, shoulders empurple, wrists chafe—to explore the inherent openness or pliability of the body:

I invent new choreographies of space and time as I dance my whip across the creature's ass. It is not that I somehow internalize as my own the structure or content of the scene in which I participate, receiving its impression the way clay would receive a sculptor's mark. It is rather a proprioceptive awareness, as I flog, of the role of my body as medium in the circuit of transmissions, and of the material efficacy I possess in my subjective ability to choose one thing rather than another or to poetically imagine the shape of a new pattern.<sup>25</sup>

In Stryker's striking vision of San Francisco, her "autoethnography" of dungeon scenes, she gives an account of making matter ("the way clay would receive a sculptor's mark") through the breaking of bodily boundaries; the scene of the city cuts through Stryker's body and her "creatures" through acts of "reciprocal vulnerability."<sup>26</sup> In contrast, transposition is not interpenetration, not about broken boundaries; it is, instead, an expressive excitation that acts between others because they are others, are unavoidably different, not as engulfing of the other. As such, transposition is a provocation of difference that cannot be resolved by penetration or collapsed selves. Transposition is the energetic force prior to

finding an object, prior to dominating, or submitting to, an object. It may be that identities (selves and others) are compromise formations, but they remain necessary if also precarious and unavoidably temporary.

.....

*The sole witness, I spend hours before the refracting reflection of my transmutating body, tending the sensations, newnesses, and curves that I am manifesting and experiencing. I give my life over to these changes. They exceed beyond what I might have desired. They are unpredictable; they are their own agents.<sup>27</sup> Carefully and deliberately, I emerge as a transsexual self: my transitioning body and I find, tenderly, a new kind of accommodation, negotiating each other. My body is my most intimate other; so close is this other to me that I enact bad boundaries, sometimes lovingly, but also brutally. We create an in-between-ness, a state of psychical process, invention, and sensuous (re)construction. I am of her, and she is with me—this is not remarkable, this is the remarkably banal state of bodily being. It is transitioning that exposes what is disavowed, what is concealed by the everyday; it is transpositioning that exposes the process of bodily being within overpopulated milieus.*

.....

The transitional self (an effect of transpositioning) can never risk disembodiment or autogenesis; it is a sensuous self, made such only through the refrain of sensation (again, composite of affects and percepts). Senses and their subtending registers are reactive to the sensual abundance of the world but limited by affected perceptual milieus (i.e., eyes see only so much; ears hear only a fraction of the sounded-out information in an environment; the unbearability of the world is edited, repressed, managed for livability). The movement of affect with perception creates *texture*, which propagates embodiment, leaving marks and traces.<sup>28</sup> In other words, sensation creates remainders (what we might call “the feel” of things and others) that result in both new iterations of expressiveness as well as corporeality. Texture, then, is the residue of unmetabolized and metabolized sensations of animate forces. The emergence of bodiliness (as well as embodiedness) is manifested in the sensuous connectivity through which the limits between self and environment are activated.<sup>29</sup> The transitional body, in this way, is a textural body, generating contractions of the sensorium through the bio-pharmaco-socio-refractions of hormones, surgery, etc. As Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis describe Naples:

At the base of the cliff itself, where it touches the shore, caves have been hewn. ... As porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways. In everything they preserve the scope to become a theatre of new, unforeseen, constellation. The stamp of the definitive is avoided. No situation appears intended forever, no figure asserts it "thus and not otherwise." This is how architecture, the most binding part of the communal rhythm, comes into being here.<sup>30</sup>

.....

*Lacis and Benjamin describe an almost erotic interchange between place and flesh; distinctions between body and architecture appear conjugal, loving, enflamed, not unlike Lyotard's libidinal body. Bridges, crosswalks, alleys, bus routes, streets are pleats in the city through which bodies pulse. On the SF MUNI, I am hurled through concrete veins and steel arteries, along funiculars and elevators. I hold my body in positions that signify my desire, despite my critical resistance, to "pass." But less obviously, hidden in my interior, estrogens have begun to refigure my olfactory nerves. I am smelling layers of place, registering different saturations of funk and perfume.<sup>31</sup> The interior of the train thickens like a miasmic genealogy, and my altering senses work to make sense of it.*

*Moving under the city, the train vectors its way toward my endocrinologist and esthetician so that I may undergo something like a second puberty; puberty is always disfigurement, always a body exceeding intentionality even as the social maps onto puberty, seemingly insisting on the biologization of sex. In this second act of puberty, I tend to myself through the fantasy that this disfigurement will make me more myself. This, of course, is a necessary lie, because disfigurement will exceed my efforts, even as the social accommodates (violently or not) these changes.*

*My body is morphed by a daily dose of 8.5 mg of Premarin®, 300 mg of Spironolactone, and regular treatments of laser hair removal. (There are days I am grateful for the men who slow their cars.) Under the play of bodily forces, my face, breasts, hips, arms, legs, stomach, and shoulders become zones of grumblings, feelings, heavings, pleasures, and leakings, all along a tide of desire aimed toward being sexually otherwise. I try scrubbing out burnt hair follicles on my face—so swollen and raw from the procedure—and elsewhere from laser hair removal before they grow inflamed, become solfataras, and leave darkened scars. Fat deposits uproot and travel to new sites of colonization: hips widen, breasts grow (and secrete fluid, lactate), face changes from oval to heart-shaped, and musculature softens and dissolves. Like too*

*many transwomen, I do this under the specter of AIDS.<sup>32</sup> All my cuts, all my changes, all my desire is refracted through the anguish that is AIDS. What other word describes the multiple deaths at work? Yet and still, I transition even as AIDS reworks the positional. It is not that transwomen, even transwomen who survive through sex work, are at "greater risk of HIV" because of sexual practices—this reasoning is an effect of homophobia and racism—rather, transwomen are at risk because of racism and transphobia and the violent sociopolitical regimes that make transphobia and racism a necessary feature of what constitutes modernity.<sup>33</sup>*

.....

Transpositioning considers how a transsexual emerges through her body's own viscosity, through the energization of corporeal limits. The transpositional is a matrix through which sensations may be drawn back through the body, to make the body feel "familiar," even as familiarity remains ultimately unattainable. That which prompts a transwoman to transition is more than her appearance (what is familiar), and her appearance can only ever be understood as metonymic. Her appearance does not make her a woman, for she is always already un-male/not-man, but it allows her to emerge situationally as a woman, a gendered neighbor, a historical subject.<sup>34</sup> And more so, the affair between the felt-body and the lived-body is also enacted through habitation, the ecosystem of which the self is part. The transpositional, as Lyotard describes the libidinal body, is threaded through itself, just as it's webbed with its neighborhood.<sup>35</sup> A transitioning woman is enfleshing elements of her environment within herself and expressing parts of herself back into the social (social-political-ecological) environment as part of her transition. The environment, populated with inorganic and organic beings, political and psychological forces, holds her while she contributes, at the same time, to building it. This process serves as the conditions of transpositioning, the constitutive activities of sensing and living, and as a generative and disfiguring energy in iterative or "moreover" manifestations. As such, the transitioning woman is a spider in her web, or, more precisely, she is becoming her web, her trap.



## TRAPS AND WEBS

---

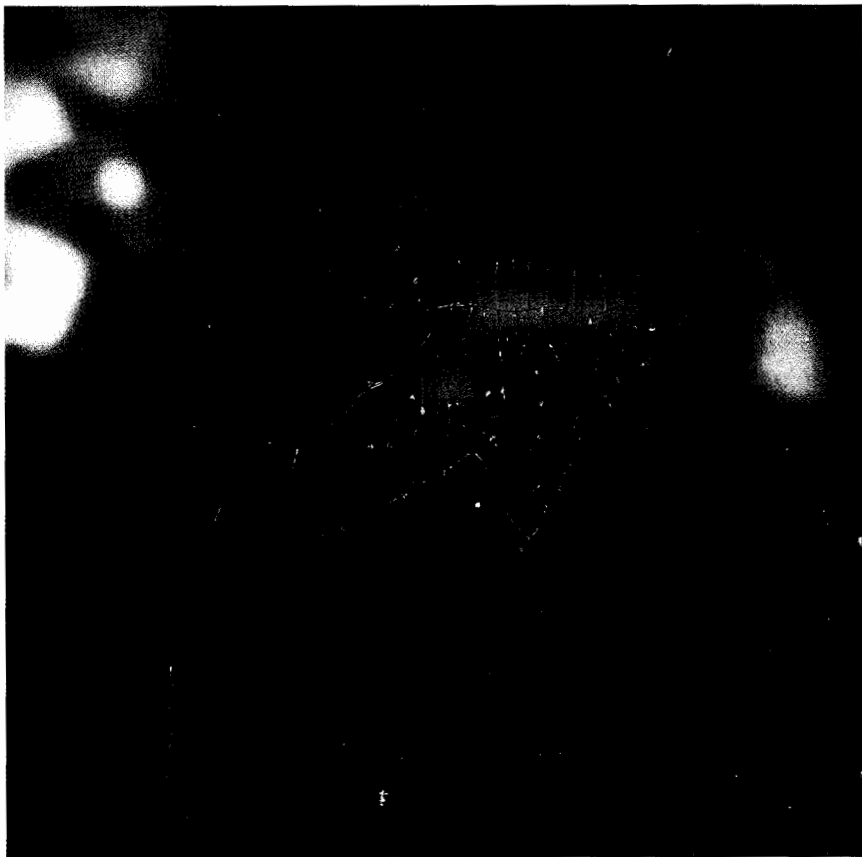
*A spider, in the corner of my studio, by the window, sits and sits. She is an "American house spider,"* *Achaearanea tepidariorum*. *Her legs are white, and her cephalothorax is brown, dusted with black. For now, she is alone in her web. She will only live for a little more than a year. If she produces eggs, the spiderlings will float away on their own glossy lines (ballooning). She stays for what seems like days at the center of her web, her touch-world, while the web seems to trap only dust. And then, as if called from across the room, she moves quickly, even uncannily: there/then not, still/in motion, unsettling/reassuring. This little air-breathing arthropod with two body segments, a set of fangs, four pairs of eyes, eight legs, and pairs of movable spinnerets leaves behind a cobweb. Even now, after the silvery threads have come to look like unspooled, wooly yarn, the web remains a join between angles and planes, but, without her as the perceiving center, it feels ghostly. In contrast, the lived-in web is an optic skin, a resounding connective tissue, building a "home" that senses in order that the spider might feed, entrap, and make more of herself.*

.....

David Quammen counsels that we cannot easily identify with spiders; at best we are curious and at worse we are disturbed.<sup>36</sup> Spiders refuse face-to-face ethics; refuse "to face" with their too many eyes and fangs. The aesthetics of disgust and fright overwhelm ethics, perhaps exposing how aesthetics are always foregrounded in ethics. Quammen is right to expose the limits of identification. Identification aims to resolve the divide of difference: "I am like you," or "I know you." Between the spider and me: I cannot "become" *it*, I cannot be "like" *it*. It-ness—the indeterminate pronoun—is a refusal not only to regimes of gender ("him," "her," and other gender pronouns), but also to inclusion in Adam's nameable Eden of belonging. Being "it" is both a violent exclusion and an index of the limits of inclusion. In another register, "it" is often the moniker of sex/gender ambiguity: "What is it?" The "it," here, is not nonhuman or even subhuman; it works at the register of the un-human. It lacks humanness; it is constructed through an absence.

Returning to the spider, it is this it-ness—the limits of inclusion/exclusion—that Nina Katchadourian engages in her "Mended Spiderweb" series. With red thread, Katchadourian repairs torn webbing, mixing mediums to create cross-species rejoinders. The spiders never accept her interventions, cutting out and discarding her efforts with new silks. The desire to mend, to tend,

Nina Katchadourian, *Mended Spiderweb #8*, 1998.  
Cibachrome print, 20 × 20 in (50.8 × 50.8 cm).  
Courtesy the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery,  
San Francisco



perhaps even to “love” the spider’s web is always a scene of rejection, refusal. The limits of identification—to make a web like a spider’s—is the scene that Katchadourian’s work expresses. Both webs are remarkable, but what is profound about the work is not that the spider might accept the human web, but that it will not. And still, Katchadourian labors with this hopelessness; this too is “love.” But there is something about the artfulness, or inventiveness, of the mended webs that speaks to my sense of co-presence, to shared forms of movement, animation, and percussion. The failure of collaboration, here, doesn’t negate the energetic interactions of these species. Error is still expression, an intensity that is engaged by human and spider. Error exposes limits, even the limits of species, which are also near-ness. Spiders build out their worlds, and Katchadourian tunes her art practice to approximate the frequency of their effort. Her red-threaded webs do not look like the spiders’—they are always other to the other—but the capacity to create, to syncopate, to improvise, seems a co-reactivity between spiders and peoples. As Alphonso Lingis reminds us, humans are composites of zoo-intensities, animated movements, bio-differentials, making our experience of agency, sexuality, subjectivity less about individuated forms and more about distribution, collection, variation. He asks, “Is not the force of our emotions that of other animals?”<sup>37</sup> Rather than becoming, identifying, or interpenetrating (as Stryker might call it), difference is maintained even as sensation excites and disfigures limits of self and other. Excitement and disfigurement are discursive, but the effects are not to the same degree. The abyss between the spider and me in this apartment is unbearable (radical alterity is a confrontation with that absolute other, death), and yet we resonate in relation to our different movements and processes.

.....

*After my ordeal with the laser—the post-procedural feel of stung-singed-numbness always reminds me of Blake’s “Tyger, tyger, burning bright”—I stop by Olive (a bar, 743 Larkin Street). In the windowless lounge, I feel like Alice descending into the rabbit hole, passing from the brightness of “not-passing” (so many staring eyes) to the dim shadows of (im)possibility, of inexpressible hope. As the curvature of my eye lenses changes through estrogen sensitivity, my vision brackets and shuttles between planes of focused activity, so that the variations of shadow in this bar are like scrim, opening up scenes as my eyes shift in their sockets.<sup>38</sup> I know these perceptual alterations will be assimilated into a bodily norm soon—the body aims for habituation—but in this newness of sensation, I delight in how my body feels this familiar place*

*afresh, restored of receivable sensory richness. I delight despite how my heightened sensitivity also makes me anxious, uncertain, paranoid—"Is everyone staring at the morphing 'it' that is me?" Remember, perception is always compounded by affect into sensation—my perceptions are refracted through psychic forces, regimes of repression.*

.....

To push further the trope of transposition, I want to foreground the figure of the "trap" for transsexuals and spiders. First, for transsexuals, rather than emphasizing the feeling of "wrong-bodiness," as in the now familiar trope "trapped in the wrong body," what if we highlight other genealogies of the word "trap"? Trap is also a mouth, a mode of utterance, the "O" curve of lips and throat that sounds out and names the apprehension of being embodied.<sup>39</sup> A trap is the wet threshold between tongue and thought. Slang, but, like most lustful language, it longs, cries, erupts. In music, a trap is an ensemble of percussion instruments, drumming out collective arrangements and creative responses. Similarly, in weaving, a trap is a break in the threads of a warp, an unraveling, loosening, unwinding that undoes a tapestry. So, the language of being "trapped in a wrong body" must also, transpositionally, account for these alternate etymologies of articulation, of speaking oneself into culture and history, but also creating a site, a gap, making room in cultural and political fabrications, and finding a tempo, a beat. In this way, entrapment is always also about positionality. To be trapped in the body, then, is about building-out, unraveling, and unknotting so as to rework the territory of embodied self, to speak and receive ranges of sensuous input from one's environment.<sup>40</sup> To some degree, being trapped in a body is an existential crisis for all of us, trans or not. This is not another mind/body split; rather, our bodies are not endlessly available to intentionality. Bodies exceed intention, even as our intentions are always predicated on embodiment. We may belong to our bodies, but our bodies do not necessarily belong to us.

Similarly, the spider's web is a trap, a silk net, a sticky mesh. Created from proteinaceous fibers that are surprisingly light and yet have remarkable tensile strength, this trap is made from the spider; it is an expression of its bodily capacity. The web is a musical improvisation between the spider and its prey, but also between itself and its environment, an expressive extension, a rhythmic prosthesis that defines the limits of spidery sensoriums. As such, webs are precious selves, augmented parts of the spider and its territory—so entrapment, but also resource and reach.

.....

*Exit Theater (156 Eddy Street): Veronica Klaus performs her one-woman show Family Jewels. In her performance she ponders, "People ask me if I feel like a woman. ... Do I feel like a woman? The truth is, I have no idea whether I feel like any other woman. I have no idea whether I ever felt like any other man. All I know is that I feel like me, Veronica. This person whose existence is partly innate, partly instinct, partly art, the art of creating. ... But I do find as I go through life I become more comfortable asking myself questions like 'Who am I?'"<sup>41</sup>*

.....

Might transsexuality be artfulness? If Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggest that art is not necessarily about aesthetics but about sensation, about the expressive potential of "cosmological forces," then could it also be about the transitioning of flesh, organs, and muscle into alternate modes of being?<sup>42</sup> Art in verb form (as in "to art," but also Old English "art"/"are") is an urge, an incitement, and an induction. By this, I mean something quite serious, not some frivolity of creativity, but art as intensifying bodily substance, to resonate otherwise. Transsexual embodiment, in part, is a provocation to live-out, to feel different corpo(realities) through zones of transition and intervention. As such, these provocations are responses to our capacities to resonate (to various degrees and not in terms of maximization) with environments, habitats, and spaces.

Transpositioning, then, is vibratory; a transitioning woman is, first and importantly, vibratory. She is a partly an "artful" response between emotion and environment, politics and ideological power, and for those who start transitioning with Premarin®, this responsiveness begins with animals (even, unfortunately, their brutal instrumentalization) and the violences that make possible medicalization, recognition, and subjectification. Unavoidably, non-human substances are unleashed into her body, transforming and altering it. Through the sexually differentiating forces of horses, the transwoman's body is made emphatically more and otherwise. And through the provocation of the senses, bodies become threaded through themselves in the act of changing their forms, architectures, ecosystems; an act manifested from drives materialized into exterior potentialities. Again, transitions are never utopic, because transitions function transpositionally; that is to say, we transition through matrices of sensation, power, institutionality, and situationality.

In terms of sensation, we transposition with our environment through the sleeve of our senses. Transpositionally, interiority can be understood, then, as

a sensuous exteriority drawn within the membrane of the “self.” As Lefebvre writes, that space is “first of all my body, and then it is my body counterpart or ‘other,’ its mirror-image or shadow: it is the shifting intersection between that which touches, penetrates, threatens or benefits my body on the one hand, and all other bodies on the other.”<sup>43</sup> Spiders, webs, traps, and some transsexuals are being iteratively reconfigured through sensuous involvements—threads held together, more or less conditionally, until they are eaten by the spider who spun them, or get swept away in a cleaning frenzy, or are reworked after having caught a meal, or are simply abandoned for another site.

---

“Spiderwomen” by scholar Eva Hayward was first published as “Spider City Sex” in the journal *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* in 2010. It was later significantly revised for publication in *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders, and Politics of Transition*, ed. Trystan T. Cotten (New York: Routledge, 2012), where it appeared as “Spiderwomen: Notes on Transpositions.” The latter version of the text was revised and expanded in 2016 for publication in this volume, where it is reproduced by the permission of Taylor and Francis Group, LLC, a division of Informa, PLC.

---

## NOTES

1. “Transsexual” is an abandoned term, perhaps even an abandoned identity. I do not use “transsexual” to rescue this violently institutionalized, medicalized, and politically troubled category. And yet, I still find the “-sexual” of *trans-sexual* a provocation that holds sexuality in relation to trans. That is to say, sexuality cannot be disaggregated from trans-. What it is to be transsexual is, in part, about desire, fantasy, wish fulfillment, and other registers of Eros. The more voguish “transgender,” or simply “trans,” foregrounds the workings of identity and gender, which has resulted in both a whitening of transgender politics (race, ethnicity, and nationality are dislodged, even in intersectional projects, as tertiary to gender) and an investment in nameable identities over and against the precarity of subjectivities. I prefer to stay with all the trouble of transsexuality as a way to insist on not only sexuality, but all the unresolved politics associated with contemporary transgender movements and field formations.

2. See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

3. See Michael J. Bailey, *The Man Who Would Be Queen: The Science of Gender-Bending and Transsexualism* (Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 2003); Bernice Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Sheila Jeffreys, *Unpacking Queer Politics: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2002); Catherine Millot, *Horsexe: An Essay on Transsexuality*, trans. Kenneth

Hylton (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1990); and Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1994).

4. See Vivian Sobchack, "Simple Grounds: At Home in Experience," in *Postphenomenology: A Critical Companion to Ihde*, ed. Evan Selinger (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), 13–20.

5. Pat Califia, "San Francisco: Revisiting 'The City of Desire,'" in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Spaces, Sites of Resistance*, ed. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1997), 177–96.

6. See Mary Pavelka, "Sexual Nature: What Can We Learn From a Cross-Species Perspective?" in *Sexual Nature, Sexual Culture*, ed. Paul Abramson and Steven Pinkerton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 17–36; Myra J. Hird, "Naturally Queer," *Feminist Theory* 5, no. 1 (2004): 85–89; Catherine Ingraham, *Architecture, Animal, Human: The Asymmetrical Condition* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Frances Bartkowski, *Kissing Cousins: A New Kinship Bestiary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

7. Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, introduction to *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 1–14.

8. What constitutes sex/gender—a consolidation of gender as sex—is predicated on the category of "the Human," which is an effect of antiblack violence (Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003], 203–29). So, while the desire for sex change is just that, it is a desire made possible through the construction of sex/gender by the legacy of "gratuitous" antiblack violence (Frank Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010], 60). My effort to frame the cut as "possibility" (after all, at some level, desire is regressive) also must reconcile "possibility" as a condition predicated on a history of black suffering, making a progressivist ("it gets better") grammar of transsexual life into a project of white uplift. Cut sex, then, is possible because sex is always sex (a construction made possible by racial violence), specifically antiblack racism.

Rewritten as "cut sex," the construction of sex as a racial project is foregrounded ("sex"), and the capacity to further alter sex ("cut") is recursive, is retroactive (the prefix "re-" is more often at work in trans- than not). We can say that transsexuals cut the technology of sex—an order, a regime, a categorization—but this cut is not only given meaning through racial capitalism. The institutionalization of "trans/gender/sexual" reifies the sex/gender order over the racial violence that made sex/gender coherent in order to be trans(gressed). Transsexuality, then, becomes the logic of sex healing itself through wounding—but, and this is the point I tried to make in my "Starfish" essay, sex (sexual difference) as the (white) logic of "the Human" is what must be thought otherwise. Cut sex, then, can also be an effort to recognize how sex—the wound in the world, as Dionne Brand describes the ongoing effects of the Middle Passage, a wound that made possible the "Human" sex/gender order (Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* [Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2002])—is a (white) humanizing project. The starfish—starfish-ed body—locates the "oceanic" (Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 214; where she redeploys Sigmund Freud's "oceanic") as the domain of racial slavery and colonization that continues to work for sex. The "lessons" (how is cross-species epistemology also an extracting—making fungible—of capacity?) from non-mammalian, invertebrate starfish are about the problem of sex (more precisely, the broader problem of racialized modernity). Transsexuality is not liberation—transsexuality

is not a solution to sex, nor for that matter is queer—but cut sex, or more exactly *cut sex*, is a refusal of anthro— which, Wilderson excellently diagnoses as “the Human/the Black” (Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 64). To cut sex “otherwise” is to see how the industry of sex is built on colonial racism—intersectionality has become a misused tool for reinforcing the administration of sex (often in the form of white diversity), what was never Kimberlé Crenshaw’s project, even as it has been read as such—a legacy that has installed Modernity and “The Human” (see Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-racist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 [1989]: 139–67). This is what a regenerating starfish (again, regeneration is a negation of transcendentalism, and an insistence on the regressive nature of desire—regeneration is never utopic, quite the opposite) living in Middle Passage teaches us about sex.

9. To be clear, I do not advocate the use of Premarin®. The living conditions of horses used in urine collection raise serious ethical questions. Horses are impregnated, kept in small enclosures where they are unable to turn around, and rubber sacks are attached to hold their urine. Horses are given small amounts of water to get higher concentrations of estrogen. It has become more common for endocrinologists to put transwomen on plant-based hormonal replacement therapy. See Eva Hayward, “Transxenoestrogenesis,” in “Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First Century Transgender Studies,” special issue, *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 255–58.

10. See Sheila Kirk, *Feminizing Hormonal Therapy for the Transgendered* (Pittsburgh, PA: Together Lifeworks, 1999); K. L. Krenzer and M. R. Dana, “Effect of Androgen Deficiency on the Human Meibomian Gland and Ocular Surface,” *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* 85 (2000): 4874–82; E. Moore, A. Wisniewski, and A. Dobs, “Endocrine Treatment of Transsexual People: A Review of Treatment Regimens, Outcomes, and Adverse Effects,” *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* 88 (2003): 3467–73; and Hilleke E. Hulshoff Pol, Peggy T. Cohen-Kettenis, et al., “Changing Your Sex Changes Your Brain: Influences of Testosterone and Estrogen on Adult Human Brain Structure,” *European Journal of Endocrinology* 155, no. 1 (2006): 107–14.

11. Eva Hayward, “More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixial Flesh and Transspeciated Selves,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3–4 (2008): 64–85.

12. Myra J. Hird, “Animal Transex,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 21, no. 49 (2006): 37.

13. Ibid.

14. David Policansky, “Sex Change in Plants and Animals,” *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 13 (1982): 471–95.

15. See Pavelka, “Sexual Nature”; Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999); Hird, “Naturally Queer”; and Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution’s Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

16. See Eric A. Stanley, “Near Life, Queer Death: Overkill and Ontological Capture,” *Social Text* 29, no. 2 (2011): 1–19.

17. Mieke Bal, *Louise Bourgeois’ Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Griselda Pollock, “Maman! Invoking the m/Other in the Web of the



Spider," in *Louise Bourgeois Maman*, ed. Marika Wachtmeister (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2005), 65–97.

18. Like Medusa, the "widows" of film noir are phallic women, threats emanating from a fetish. For Freud, the fetish is a disavowal of castration, a psychic compromise that invests an object, ambivalently, with the promise of an intact mother (phallus and all) and the threat of loss. The relationship between heterosexual men and pre/non-operative transwomen—often problematically called "tranny fetish" or "chicks with dicks"—reveals how fetishism maneuvers around homophobia (same sex, two penises) and endows heterosexuality (a man and a woman). Her genitals are what he desires as much as her femininity. She, literally, embodies castration; she is what he most fears. Her femininity—indeed, his desire for her to "pass"—is what shields him from her threat. For her part, his "straightness"—and, as difficult as it is to admit, possibly his homophobia—enables him to see her as she sees herself, as a woman. See Héctor Babenco's film *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985).

19. Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Ian Hamilton Grant (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 1.

20. *Ibid.*, 2.

21. Alex Potts, "Louise Bourgeois: Sculptural Confrontations," *Oxford Art Journal* 22 (1999): 39–53.

22. Susan Stryker, "Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sadomasochism," *Parallax* 14 (2008): 42.

23. *Ibid.*, 37.

24. *Ibid.*, 39.

25. *Ibid.*, 42.

26. *Ibid.*, 38, 43.

27. Kirk, *Feminizing Hormonal Therapy for the Transgendered*.

28. Eva Hayward, "Fingeryeyes: Impressions of Cup Corals," *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (2010): 576–98.

29. Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Alphonso Lingis, *Dangerous Emotions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2005).

30. Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacin, "Naples," in *Reflections* (New York: Harcourt, 1978), 165–66.

31. Moore, Wisniewski, and Dobs, "Endocrine Treatment of Transsexual People."

32. I have written: "*The cut is possibility*. For some transsexual women, the cut is not so much an opening of the body, but a generative effort to *pull the body back through itself* in order to feel mending, to feel the growth of new margins. The cut is not just an action; the cut is part of the ongoing materialization by which a transsexual tentatively and mutably becomes" (Hayward, "More Lessons from a Starfish," 72). Although this cut was meant to de-ontologize sex and "the Human"—an effort to make transsexual becoming speciated, a refusal of anthropos as about only sex, which is necessarily a refusal of anthropos more broadly—my cut was read as whole (over partial) or about able-ism (an inability to recognize

limits) (see, for example, Jasbir K. Puar, "Bodies With New Organs: Becoming Trans, Becoming Disabled" *Social Text* 33, no. 3 124 [2015]: 45–73; and Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012]). While I agree with these excellent critiques, I do think both (differently) misunderstand trans subjectivity, especially how trans women are always a sign of death, always a sign of *dis-*. For instance, one in three trans women are HIV+, which is to say that any "cut" is always an infected cut (certainly mine was). Che Gossett precisely describes the inextricable "vectoring" of criminalization, transphobia (especially transmisogyny), antiblack racism, and AIDS phobia—they write, "We are living in a time of 'chains and corpses,' death, loss and mourning, of outrage and activism in response to mass incarceration, mass detention and deportation, HIV criminalization, AIDS phobia and the ongoing AIDS epidemic, anti-queer and anti-trans police violence" (Che Gossett, "We Will Not Rest in Peace: AIDS Activism, Black Radicalism, Queer and/or Trans Resistance" in *Queer Necropolitics*, ed Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco [New York: Routledge, 2014], 31–50). HIV+ transwomen are regularly refused hormones or surgical interventions—Why would an already dead and dying body want to injure the body, make the body more vulnerable? Circumventing such restrictions—for instance, the vast majority of trans women, especially working-poor and of color, do not have insurance to cover bodily intervention—is always an act of resistance that cannot be reduced to queer understandings of normative/nonnormative gender/sex. To talk, to write, to theorize about transwomen, the force of HIV must always be attended to. To not attend to how HIV works as politically sanctioned death for transwomen is to make transwomen killable. Moreover, not attending to HIV rates among transwomen is also to not attend to race, particularly the role of antiblack racism that continues to define the AIDS epidemic (see Adam Geary, *Antiblack Racism and the AIDS Epidemic: State Intimacies* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014]).

33. See Geary, *Antiblack Racism and the AIDS Epidemic*.

34. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

35. Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 2.

36. David Quammen, "The Face of a Spider," in *The Flight of the Iguana: A Sidelong View of Science and Nature* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), accessed February 17, 2017, <http://web.stanford.edu/~jonahw/AOE-SM06/FaceSpider.html>.

37. Lingis, *Dangerous Emotions*, 36.

38. Krenzer and Dana, "Effect of Androgen Deficiency on the Human Meibomian Gland and Ocular Surface."

39. Ruth Salvaggio, *The Sounds of Feminist Theory* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999).

40. Hayward, "More Lessons from a Starfish"; Prosser, *Second Skins*.

41. Veronica Klaus, *Veronica Klaus*, accessed January 15, 2009, <http://www.veronicaklaus.com/>.

42. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (London: Verso, 1994).

43. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 184.