

Keywords

for American Cultural Studies

Edited by

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Frontis: Anselm Kiefer, *Book with Wings*, 1992–94, lead, tin, and steel, 74 ¼ x 208 ¾ x 43 ¾ inches. Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, Museum Purchase, Sid W. Richardson Foundation Endowment Fund.

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squabble between a big brother (the North) and a spoiled, headstrong younger sister (the South), thus foreclosing the possibility of marriage and progeny (unless incestuous). In its most expansive metaphoric manifestation, that of the family of man, nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific theories of polygenesis argued for the separate creation of races in opposition to the Christian concept of humanity's shared blood: "He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).

In the wake of world wars and social and economic upheavals, the United States is currently experiencing the proliferation of families indifferent to traditional concepts of blood, nuclear structures, and lineage. These include communal households; blended families formed through divorce; and families created by means of adoption, artificial insemination, or surrogate mothering for heterosexual or gay couples and single parents. To social conservatives, such families signal the breakdown of traditional norms and underscore their failure to exclude deviants from the national family. They have protested in various ways, encouraging school boards to pull books like *Heather Has Two Mommies* from libraries and family courts to favor adoptive parents over single surrogate mothers, as in the case of "Baby M." To sociologists like Judith Stacey (1990), however, these "brave new families" are the result of resourceful and creative action. In fact, these postmodern families hark back to Williams's premodern *familia*. We are progressing, it seems, back to the future in a movement that demands analysis by American cultural theorists and public policymakers alike.

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Gender

Judith Halberstam

In American studies and cultural studies, as in the humanities more broadly, scholars use the term "gender" when they wish to expose a seemingly neutral analysis as male oriented and when they wish to turn critical attention from men to women. In this way, a gender analysis exposes the false universalization of male subjectivity and remarks upon the differences produced by the social marking we call "sex" or "sexual difference." Post-structuralist feminist theory queries this common usage by suggesting that the critique of male bias or gender neutrality comes with its own set of problems: namely, a premature and problematic stabilization of the meaning of "woman" and "female." In 1990, Judith Butler famously named and theorized the "trouble" that "gender" both performs and covers up. In doing so, she consolidated a new form of gender theory focused upon what is now widely (and variably) referred to as "performativity." In recent years, this focus on gender as something that is performed has enabled new modes of thinking about how the transgendered body is (and can be) inhabited, about the emergence of queer subcultures, and about practices that promise to radically destabilize the meaning of all social genders.

As a term, "gender" comes to cultural studies from American (U.S.) sexology, most explicitly from the work of psychologist John Money (Money and

Ehrhardt 1972). Money is credited with (and readily claimed) the invention of the term in 1955 to describe the social enactment of sex roles; he used the term to formalize the distinction between bodily sex (male and female) and social roles (masculinity and femininity), and to note the frequent discontinuities between sex and role. Since sex neither predicts nor guarantees gender role, there is some flexibility built into the sex-gender system. This reasoning led Money to recommend sex reassignment in a now infamous case where a young boy lost his penis during circumcision. Given the boy's young age, Money proposed to the parents that they raise him as a girl and predicted that there would be no ill effects. Money's prediction proved disastrously wrong, as the young girl grew up troubled and eventually committed suicide after being told about the decisions that had been made on his/her behalf as a baby.

This case has reanimated claims that gender is a biological fact rather than a cultural invention and has led some medical practitioners to reinvest in the essential relationship between sex and gender. It has also been used by some gender theorists to argue that the gendering of the sexed body begins immediately, as soon as the child is born, and that this socio-biological process is every bit as rigid and immutable as a genetic code. The latter claim (concerning the immutability of socialization) has been critiqued by post-structuralist thinkers who suggest that our understanding of the relation between sex and gender ought to be reversed: gender ideology produces the epistemological framework within which sex takes on meaning rather than

the other way around (Laqueur 1990; Fausto-Sterling 1993).

All of these arguments about how we ought to talk and think about sex and gender today assume a related question about how the modern sex-gender system came into being in the first place. Different disciplines answer this question differently. In anthropology, Gayle Rubin's work on "The Traffic in Women" (1975) builds on Claude Levi-Strauss's structuralist analysis of kinship (1971) to locate the roots of the hierarchical organization of a binary gender system in precapitalist societies where kinship relied upon incest taboos and the exchange of women between men. Esther Newton's (1972) ethnographic research on drag queens in Chicago in the 1960s and 1970s finds gender to be an interlocking system of performances and forms of self-knowing that only become visible as such when we see them theatricalized in the drag queen's cabaret act. In sociology, Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna (1990) have produced a brilliant handbook on the production of gendered bodies, providing readers with a vocabulary and a set of definitions for the study of gender as a system of norms.

Working across these disciplinary formations, American studies and cultural studies scholarship on gender continues under numerous headings and rubrics. Researchers studying the effects of globalization have paid particular attention to transformations in the labor of women under new phases of capitalism (Enloe 1989; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). Scholars working on race have traced very specific histories of gender formation in relation to racial projects that

attribute gender and sexual pathology to oppressed groups. In African American contexts, for example, black femininity has often been represented as vexed by the idealization of white femininity on the one hand and the cultural stereotyping of black women as strong, physical, and tough on the other (Hammonds 1997). Other scholars seeking to denaturalize cultural conceptions of manhood have examined masculinity in terms of new forms of work, new roles for men in the home, the function of racialized masculinities, new styles of classed masculinity, the impact of immigrant masculinities upon national manhood, and the influence of minority and nonmale masculinities upon gender norms (Bederman 1995; Sinha 1995; Harper 1996). Queer theorists have detached gender from the sexed body, often documenting the productive nature of gender variance and its impact upon the way gender is understood and lived.

In all of these research contexts, gender is understood as a marker of social difference, a bodily performance of normativity and the challenges made to it. It names a social relation that subjects often experience as organic, ingrained, "real," invisible, and immutable; it also names a primary mode of oppression that sorts human bodies into binary categories in order to assign labor, responsibilities, moral attributes, and emotional styles. In recent years, cultural work dedicated to shifting and rearticulating the signifying field of gender has been ongoing in queer and transgender subcultures. Drag-king shows, for example, have developed along very different lines than their drag-queen counterparts (including those docu-

mented by Newton). While drag queens tend to embody and enact an explicitly ironic relation to gender that has come to be called "camp," drag kings often apply pressure to the notion of natural genders by imitating, inhabiting, and performing masculinity in intensely sincere modes. Where camp formulations of gender by gay men have relied heavily upon the idea that the viewer knows and can see the intense disidentifications between the drag queen and femininity, drag-king acts more often depend upon the sedimented and earnest investments made by the dyke and trans-performers in their masculinities. Drag-king acts disorient the spectator and make her unsure of the proper markings of sex, gender, desire, and attraction. In the process, they produce potent new constellations of sex and theater (Halberstam 1998).

Understood as queer interventions into gender deconstruction, drag-king performances emerge quite specifically from feminist critiques of dominant masculinities. In this sense, they can be viewed as growing out of earlier practices of feminist theory and activism. Consider Valerie Solanas's infamous and outrageous 1968 *SCUM Manifesto* (SCUM stood for "Society for Cutting up Men"), in which she argued that we should do away with men and attach all the positive attributes that are currently assigned to males to females. As long as we have sperm banks and the means for artificial reproduction, she argued, men have become irrelevant. While Solanas's manifesto is hard to read as anything more than a Swiftian modest proposal, her hilarious conclusions about the redundancy of the

male sex ("he is a half-dead, unresponsive lump, incapable of giving or receiving pleasure or happiness; consequently he is an utter bore, an inoffensive blob . . . etc") take a refreshingly extreme approach to the gender question (1970/2004). The performative work of the manifesto (its theatricalization of refusal, failure, and female anger and resentment; its combination of seriousness and humor) links it to contemporary queer and transgender theaters of gender. Like Solanas's manifesto, drag-king cultures offer a vision of the ways in which subcultural groups and theorists busily reinvent the meaning of gender even as the culture at large confirms its stability.

It is revealing, then, that Solanas is at once the most utopian and dystopian of gender theorists. While Butler, in her commitment to deconstructive undecidability, cannot possibly foretell any of gender's possible futures (even as she describes how gender is "done" and "undone"), Solanas is quite happy to make grand predictions about endings. Many academic and nonacademic gender theorists after Solanas have also called for the end of gender, noted the redundancy of the category, and argued for new and alternative systems of making sense of bodily difference (Bornstein 1994; Kessler 1998). But socially sedimented categories are hard to erase, and efforts to do so often have more toxic effects than the decision to inhabit them. Other theorists, therefore, have responded by calling for more categories, a wider range of possible identifications, and a more eclectic and open-ended understanding of the meanings of those categories (Fausto-Sterling 2000). It seems, then, that

we are probably not quite ready to do away with gender, or with one gender in particular, but we can at least begin to imagine other genders.

Whether by manifesto or reasoned argumentation, scholars in the fields of American studies and cultural studies have made gender into a primary lens of intellectual inquiry, and the evolution of gender studies marks one of the more successful versions of interdisciplinarity in the academy. Indeed, as U.S. universities continue to experience the dissolution of disciplinarity, a critical gender studies paradigm could well surge to the forefront of new arrangements of knowledge production. At a time when both students and administrators are questioning the usefulness and relevance of fields like English and comparative literature, gender studies may provide a better way of framing, asking, and even answering hard questions about ideology, social formations, political movements, and shifts in perceptions of embodiment and community. Gender studies programs and departments, many of which emerged out of women's studies initiatives in the 1970s, are poised to make the transition into the next era of knowledge production in ways that less interdisciplinary areas are not. The quarrels and struggles that have made gender studies such a difficult place to be are also the building blocks of change. While the traditional disciplines often lack the institutional and intellectual flexibility to transform quickly, gender studies is and has always been an evolving project, one that can provide a particularly generative site for new work that, at its best, responds creatively and dynamically to emerging research questions and

cultural forms, while also entering into dialogue with other (more or less established) interdisciplinary projects, including cultural studies, American studies, film studies, science studies, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, and queer studies.

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Globalization

Lisa Lowe

"Globalization" is a contemporary term used in academic and non-academic contexts to describe a late-twentieth-century condition of economic, social, and political interdependence across cultures, societies, nations, and regions precipitated by an unprecedented expansion of capitalism on a global scale. One problem with this usage is that it obscures a much longer history of global contacts and connections. In the ancient world, there were empires, conquests, slavery, and diasporas; in medieval and early modern times, Asian, Arab, and European civilizations mingled through trade, travel, and settlement. Only with European colonial expansion, beginning in the sixteenth century and reaching its height in the nineteenth, did global contacts involve Western European and North American dominance; the rise of Western industrialized modernity made possible by labor and resources in the "new world" of the Americas was, in this sense, a relatively recent global interconnection. Yet today the term "globalization" is used to name a specific set

of late-twentieth-century transformations: changes in world political structure after World War II that included the ascendancy of the United States and the decolonization of the formerly colonized world; a shift from the concept of the modern nation-state as bounded and independent toward a range of economic, social, and political links that articulate interdependencies across nations; and an acceleration in the scale, mode, and volume of exchange and interdependency in nearly all spheres of human activity.

Even with this caveat, "globalization" is not a self-evident phenomenon, and the debates to which it gives rise in American studies, cultural studies, and elsewhere mark it as a problem of knowledge. For economists, political scientists, sociologists, historians, and cultural critics, globalization is a phenomenon that exceeds existing means of explanation and representation. It involves processes and transformations that bring pressure upon the paradigms formerly used to study their privileged objects—whether society, the sovereign nation-state, national economy, history, or culture—the meanings of which have shifted and changed. Globalization is both celebrated by free-market advocates as fulfilling the promises of neoliberalism and free trade, and criticized by scholars, policymakers, and activists as a world economic program aggressively commanded by the United States, enacted directly through U.S. foreign policies and indirectly through institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, exacerbating economic divides with devastating effects for the poor in "developing"