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In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives
Judith Halberstam

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In a Queer Time and Place

Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS New York and London

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York and London
www.nyupress.org

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Halberstam, Judith, 1961–
In a queer time and place : transgender bodies, subcultural lives /
Judith Halberstam.
p. cm. — (Sexual cultures)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8147-3584-3 (cloth : alk. paper) —
ISBN 0-8147-3585-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Teena, Brandon, 1972–1993. 2. Transsexualism.
3. Gender identity. 4. Sex role. 5. Transsexuals in motion pictures.
6. Transsexuals in literature. 7. Marginality, Social. I. Title. II. Series.
HQ75.5.H335 2004
306.76'8—dc22 2004018151

New York University Press books are printed on acid-free paper,
and their binding materials are chosen for strength and durability.

Manufactured in the United States of America

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
p 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Acknowledgments

In a book about time, timing is everything, and as I finish this manuscript and begin a new project, I am also on the verge of leaving one job and taking another. Since the Literature Department at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) has provided such an extraordinary intellectual environment for my work, I feel as regretful about leaving my colleagues in La Jolla as I am excited about my move to the University of Southern California (USC) in downtown Los Angeles. UCSD's Literature Department is far ahead of its time in terms of its conception of cultural studies, global cultures, and the future of the humanities; I have learned so much there about how to be a part of an evolving intellectual project and how to collaborate with people who may have different scholarly interests from my own. But it is time to leave there and begin something new, and as I leave, I want to thank and acknowledge the entire department. I also extend thanks for support at UCSD that ran far beyond the bounds of collegiality over the years to John D. Blanco, Michael Davidson, Page Dubois, Steven Epstein, Steve Fagin, Takashi Fujitani, Rosemary Marangoly George, Nicole King, Susan Kirkpatrick, Nayan Shah, Shelley Streeby, and Lisa Yoneyama. Lisa Lowe has been an exceptional friend and a model for how to combine an impassioned pedagogy with a principled commitment to abstract thinking. Working with her on our Perverse Modernities series has been an honor and an inspiration, and in many ways it is Lisa's vision of intellectual community that I take away with me from La Jolla. Eileen Myles and I have been victims of bad timing in that I am leaving as she settles into building an arts scene in San Diego; but I look forward to creating queer havoc with her in the larger arena of Southern California. David Roman, my new colleague at USC makes the move from UCSD to USC, exciting and worthwhile.

An incomplete list of other friends and colleagues who have supported this work across queer space and time and in a variety of locations include Lauren Berlant, Daphne Brooks, Judith Butler, George Chauncey, David Eng, Jillana Enteen, Licia Fiol-Matta, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Diana Fuss, Jane Gallop, Jody Greene, David Halperin, Laura A. Harris, Gil Hochberg, John Howard, George Lipsitz, Ira Livingston, Amelia Jones, Amy Kautzman, Kara Keeling, Laura Kipnis, Heather Love, Richard Meyer, Esther Newton, Marcia Ochoa, Jenni Olson, Katrin Pahl, Pratibha Parmar, Jordana Rosenberg, Gayle Rubin, James Schultz, Cherry Smyth, Gayle Wald, Patti White, and Robyn Wiegman. In Australia, I thank Vicky Crowley, Fanny Jacobsen, Annamarie Jagose, and Linnell Secomb. In Taiwan, thanks to Antonia Chao, Josephine Ho, Naifei Ding, Jiazhen Ni, and Amie Parry. Members of the Sexuality and Space research group at UCHRI—Alicia Arrizon, Tom Boellstorff, Rod Ferguson, Glen Mimura, Chandan Reddy, Jennifer Terry, and Karen Tongson—have provided me with a generative discussion space for new ideas. Karen Tongson in particular has been an excellent ally and interlocutor. I thank David Theo Goldberg and UCHRI for hosting the group. For sharing their artwork and their ideas about it with me, I thank Linda Besemer, Brian Dawn Chalkley, Silas Howard, JA Nicholls, and Del LaGrace Volcano.

José Esteban Muñoz and Ann Pellegrini have been encouraging series editors, and NYU Press's Eric Zinner has been helpful throughout. Lisa Duggan and Nicholas Mirzoeff were tough and careful readers of the manuscript, and this book is much better for their generosity and care. My appreciation to Emily Park for attending to the important details. Thanks and love finally to Gayatri Gopinath, still here through thick and thin.

Portions of this book have been previously published. A short version of chapter 2 was published in Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi, eds., *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (London: Blackwell, 2002), 159–70. Pieces of chapter 3 have appeared in "Queer Auto/Biographies," ed. Thomas Spear, special issue, *a/b* 15, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 62–81; and María Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg, eds., *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 13–37. A short version of chapter 4 appeared in *Screen* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 294–98. Chapter 6 appeared in "Men and Lesbianism," special issue, *GLQ* 7, no. 3 (2001): 425–52. A section of chapter 7 was published in *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (September 2003): 235–54.

1

Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies

> How can a relational system be reached through sexual practices? Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life? . . . To be "gay," I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual, but to try to define and develop a way of life.
>
> —Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life"

> There is never one geography of authority and there is never one geography of resistance. Further, the map of resistance is not simply the underside of the map of domination—if only because each is a lie to the other, and each gives the lie to the other.
>
> —Steve Pile, "Opposition, Political Identities, and Spaces of Resistance"

This book makes the perhaps overly ambitious claim that there is such a thing as "queer time" and "queer space." Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification. If we try to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices, we detach queerness from sexual identity and come closer to understanding Foucault's comment in "Friendship as a Way of Life" that "homosexuality threatens people as a 'way of life' rather than as a way of having sex" (310). In Foucault's radical formulation, queer friendships, queer networks, and the existence of these relations in space and in relation to the use of time mark out the particularity and indeed the perceived menace of homosexual life. In this book, the queer "way of life" will encompass subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, forms of transgender embodiment, and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these willfully eccentric modes of being. Obviously not all gay, lesbian, and transgender people live their lives in radically different ways from their heterosexual counterparts, but part of what has made queerness compelling as a

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form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space.

Queer time perhaps emerges most spectacularly, at the end of the twentieth century, from within those gay communities whose horizons of possibility have been severely diminished by the AIDS epidemic. In his memoir of his lover's death from AIDS, poet Mark Doty writes: "All my life I've lived with a future which constantly diminishes but never vanishes" (Doty 1996, 4). The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and, as Doty explores, squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand. In his poem "In Time of Plague," Thom Gunn explores the erotics of compressed time and impending mortality: "My thoughts are crowded with death / and it draws so oddly on the sexual / that I am confused/confused to be attracted / by, in effect, my own annihilation" (Gunn 1993, 59). Queer time, as it flashes into view in the heart of a crisis, exploits the potential of what Charles-Pierre Baudelaire called in relation to modernism "The transient, the fleeting, the contingent." Some gay men have responded to the threat of AIDS, for example, by rethinking the conventional emphasis on longevity and futurity, and by making community in relation to risk, disease, infection, and death (Bersani 1996; Edelman 1998). And yet queer time, even as it emerges from the AIDS crisis, is not only about compression and annihilation; it is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing. In the sections on subcultures in this book, I will examine the queer temporalities that are proper to subcultural activities, and will propose that we rethink the adult/youth binary in relation to an "epistemology of youth" that disrupts conventional accounts of youth culture, adulthood, and maturity.[1] Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.

These new temporal logics, again, have emerged most obviously in the literatures produced in relation to the AIDS epidemic. For example, in *The Hours*, Michael Cunningham's beautiful rewriting of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Cunningham takes the temporal frame of Woolf's novel (life in a day) and emphasizes its new, but also queer rendering of time and space. Indeed, Cunningham rationalizes Woolf's authorial decision to have the young Clarissa Dalloway "love another girl" in terms of queer temporality. He explains: "Clarissa Dalloway in her first youth, will love another girl, Virginia thinks; Clarissa will believe that a rich, riotous future is opening before her, but eventually (how, exactly, will the change be accomplished?) she will come to her senses, as young women do and marry a suitable man" (Cunningham 1998, 81–82). The "riotous future," which emerges in Woolf's novel from a lesbian kiss in Clarissa's youth, becomes, in Cunningham's skillful rewrite, a queer time that is both realized and ultimately disappointing in its own narrative arc. Cunningham tracks Woolf's autobiographical story of a descent into madness and suicide alongside a contemporary narrative of Clarissa Vaughn, who has refused to "come to her senses" and lives with a woman named Sally while caring for her best friend, Richard, a writer dying of AIDS. Cunningham's elegant formulation of queer temporality opens up the possibility of a "rich, riotous future" and closes it down in the same aesthetic gesture. While Woolf, following Sigmund Freud, knows that Clarissa must come to her senses (and like Freud, Woolf cannot imagine "how the change [will] be accomplished"), Cunningham turns Clarissa away from the seemingly inexorable march of narrative time toward marriage (death) and uses not consummation but the kiss as the gateway to alternative outcomes. For Woolf, the kiss constituted one of those "moments of being" that her writing struggled to encounter and inhabit; for Cunningham, the kiss is a place where, as Carolyn Dinshaw terms it in *Getting Medieval*, different histories "touch" or brush up against each other, creating temporal havoc in the key of desire (Dinshaw 1999).

While there is now a wealth of excellent work focused on the temporality of lives lived in direct relation to the HIV virus (Edelman 1998), we find far less work on the other part of Cunningham's equation: those lives lived in the "shadow of an epidemic," the lives of women, transgenders, and queers who partake of this temporal shift in less obvious ways. Furthermore, the experience of HIV for heterosexual and queer people of color does not necessarily offer the same kind of hopeful reinvention of conventional understandings of time. As Cathy Cohen's work in *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* shows, some bodies are simply considered "expendable," both in mainstream and marginal communities, and the abbreviated life spans of black queers or poor drug users, say, does not inspire the same kind of metaphysical speculation on curtailed futures, intensified presents, or reformulated histories; rather, the premature deaths of

poor people and people of color in a nation that pumps drugs into impoverished urban communities and withholds basic health care privileges, is simply business as usual (Cohen 1999). Samuel Delany articulates beautifully the difficulty in connecting radical political practice to exploited populations when he claims, "We must remember that it is only those workers—usually urban artists (a realization Marx did come to)—whose money comes from several different social class sources, up and down the social ladder, who can afford to entertain a truly radical political practice" (Reid-Pharr 2001, xii). And yet, as Robert Reid-Pharr argues in *Black Gay Man*, the book that Delany's essay introduces, the relation between the universal and the particular that allows for the elevation of white male experience (gay or straight) to the level of generality and the reduction of, say, black gay experience to the status of the individual, can only come undone through a consideration of the counterlogics that emerge from "the humdrum perversities of our existence" (12). *In a Queer Time and Place* seeks to unravel precisely those claims made on the universal from and on behalf of white male subjects theorizing postmodern temporality and geography.

Queer time and space are useful frameworks for assessing political and cultural change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (both what has changed and what must change). The critical languages that we have developed to try to assess the obstacles to social change have a way of both stymieing our political agendas and alienating nonacademic constituencies. I try here to make queer time and queer space into useful terms for academic and nonacademic considerations of life, location, and transformation. To give an example of the way in which critical languages can sometimes weigh us down, consider the fact that we have become adept within postmodernism at talking about "normativity," but far less adept at describing in rich detail the practices and structures that both oppose and sustain conventional forms of association, belonging, and identification. I try to use the concept of queer time to make clear how respectability, and notions of the normal on which it depends, may be upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality. And so, in Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity. Within the life cycle of the Western human subject, long periods of stability are considered to be desirable, and people who live in rapid bursts (drug addicts, for example) are characterized as immature and even dangerous. But the ludic temporality created by drugs (captured by Salvador Dalí as a melting clock and by William Burroughs as "junk time") reveals the artificiality of our privileged constructions of time and activity. In the works of queer postmodern writers like Lynn Breedlove (*Godspeed*), Eileen Myles (*Chelsea Girls*), and others, speed itself (the drug as well as the motion) becomes the motor of an alternative history as their queer heroes rewrite completely narratives of female rebellion (Myles 1994; Breedlove 2002).

The time of reproduction is ruled by a biological clock for women and by strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples. Obviously, not all people who have children keep or even are able to keep reproductive time, but many and possibly most people believe that the scheduling of repro-time is natural and desirable. Family time refers to the normative scheduling of daily life (early to bed, early to rise) that accompanies the practice of child rearing. This timetable is governed by an imagined set of children's needs, and it relates to beliefs about children's health and healthful environments for child rearing. The time of inheritance refers to an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next. It also connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability. In this category we can include the kinds of hypothetical temporality—the time of "what if"—that demands protection in the way of insurance policies, health care, and wills.

In queer renderings of postmodern geography, the notion of a body-centered identity gives way to a model that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and practice. But queer work on sexuality and space, like queer work on sexuality and time, has had to respond to canonical work on "postmodern geography" by Edward Soja, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, and others that has actively excluded sexuality as a category for analysis precisely because desire has been cast by neo-Marxists as part of a ludic body politics that obstructs the "real" work of activism (Soja 1989; Harvey 1990; Jameson 1997). This foundational exclusion, which assigned sexuality to body/local/personal and took class/global/political as its proper frame of reference, has made it difficult to introduce questions of sexuality and space into the more general conversations about globalization and transnational capitalism. Both Anna Tsing and Steve Pile refer this problem as the issue of "scale." Pile, for example, rejects the notion that certain

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political arenas of struggle (say, class) are more important than others (say, sexuality), and instead he offers that we rethink these seemingly competing struggles in terms of scale by recognizing that while we tend to view local struggles as less significant than global ones, ultimately "the local and the global are not natural scales, but formed precisely out of the struggles that seemingly they only contain" (Pile 1997, 13).

A "queer" adjustment in the way in which we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space. And in fact, much of the contemporary theory seeking to disconnect queerness from an essential definition of homosexual embodiment has focused on queer space and queer practices. By articulating and elaborating a concept of queer time, I suggest new ways of understanding the nonnormative behaviors that have clear but not essential relations to gay and lesbian subjects. For the purpose of this book, "queer" refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time. "Queer time" is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. "Queer space" refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics. Meanwhile, "postmodernism" in this project takes on meaning in relation to new forms of cultural production that emerge both in sync with and running counter to what Jameson has called the "logic" of late capitalism in his book *Postmodernism* (1997). I see postmodernism as simultaneously a crisis and an opportunity—a crisis in the stability of form and meaning, and an opportunity to rethink the practice of cultural production, its hierarchies and power dynamics, its tendency to resist or capitulate. In his work on postmodern geography, Pile also locates postmodernism in terms of the changing relationship between opposition and authority; he reminds us, crucially, that "the map of resistance is not simply the underside of the map of domination" (6).

In *The Condition of Postmodernity,* Harvey demonstrates that our conceptions of space and time are social constructions forged out of vibrant and volatile social relations (Harvey 1990). Harvey's analysis of postmodern time and space is worth examining in detail both because he energetically deconstructs the naturalization of modes of temporality and because he does so with no awareness of having instituted and presumed a normative framework for his alternative understanding of time. Furthermore, Harvey's concept of "time/space compression" and his accounts of the role of culture in late capitalism have become hegemonic in academic contexts. Harvey asserts that because we experience time as some form of natural progression, we fail to realize or notice its construction. Accordingly, we have concepts like "industrial" time and "family" time, time of "progress," "austerity" versus "instant" gratification, "postponement" versus "immediacy." And to all of these different kinds of temporality, we assign value and meaning. Time, Harvey explains, is organized according to the logic of capital accumulation, but those who benefit from capitalism in particular experience this logic as inevitable, and they are therefore able to ignore, repress, or erase the demands made on them and others by an unjust system. We like to imagine, Harvey implies, both that our time is our own and, as the cliché goes, "there is a time and a place for everything." These formulaic responses to time and temporal logics produce emotional and even physical responses to different kinds of time: thus people feel guilty about leisure, frustrated by waiting, satisfied by punctuality, and so on. These emotional responses add to our sense of time as "natural."

Samuel Beckett's famous play *Waiting for Godot* can be read, for example, as a defamiliarization of time spent: a treatise on the feeling of time wasted, of inertia or time outside of capitalist propulsion. Waiting, in this play, seems to be a form of postponement until it becomes clear that nothing has been postponed and nothing will be resumed. In Beckett's play, the future does not simply become diminished, it actually begins to weigh on the present as a burden. If poetry, according to W. H. Auden, "makes nothing happen," the absurdist drama makes the audience wait for nothing to happen, and the experience of duration makes visible the formlessness of time. Since Beckett's clowns go nowhere while waiting, we also see the usually invisible fault lines between time and space as temporal stasis is figured as immobility.

The different forms of time management that Harvey mentions and highlights are all adjusted to the schedule of normativity without ever being discussed as such. In fact, we could say that normativity, as it has been defined and theorized within queer studies, is the big word missing from almost all the discussions of postmodern geography within a Marxist tradition. Since most of these discussions are dependent on the work of Foucault and since normativity was Foucault's primary understanding of the function of modern power, this is a huge oversight, and one with consequences for the discussion of sexuality in relation to time and space. Harvey's concept of time/space compressions, for instance, explains that all of the time cycles

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that we have naturalized and internalized (leisure, inertia, recreation, work/industrial, family/domesticity) are also spatial practices, but again, Harvey misses the opportunity to deconstruct the meaning of naturalization with regard to specific normalized ways of being. The meaning of space, Harvey asserts, undergoes a double process of naturalization: first, it is naturalized in relation to use values (we presume that our use of space is the only and inevitable use of space—private property, for example); but second, we naturalize space by subordinating it to time. The construction of spatial practices, in other words, is obscured by the naturalization of both time and space. Harvey argues for multiple conceptions of time and space, but he does not adequately describe how time/space becomes naturalized, on the one hand, and how hegemonic constructions of time and space are uniquely gendered and sexualized, on the other. His is an avowedly materialist analysis of time/space dedicated understandably to uncovering the processes of capitalism, but it lacks a simultaneous desire to uncover the processes of heteronormativity, racism, and sexism.

We need, for example, a much more rigorous understanding of the gendering of domestic space. Harvey could have pointed to the work within feminist history on the creation of separate spheres, for one, to show where and how the time/space continuum breaks down under the weight of critical scrutiny (Cott 1977; Smith-Rosenberg 1985). Feminist historians have claimed for some thirty years that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the European bourgeoisie assumed class dominance over the aristocracy and proletariat, a separation of spheres graphically represented the gendered logic of the public/private binary and annexed middle-class women to the home, leaving the realm of politics and commerce to white men (McHugh 1999; Duggan 2000). Furthermore, as work by Paul Gilroy and Joseph Roach has shown, histories of racialization cannot avoid spatial conceptions of time, conflict, or political economy (Gilroy 1993; Roach 1996). Indeed, the histories of racialized peoples have been histories of immigration, diaspora, and forced migration. Only a single-minded focus on the history of the white working class and an abstract concept of capital can give rise to the kind of neat scheme that Harvey establishes whereby time dominates critical consciousness and suppresses an understanding of spatiality.

Lindon Barrett's *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* provides one good antidote to Harvey's clean rendering of Enlightenment divisions of space and time (Barrett 1999). According to the account that Barrett gives in his book, Western philosophy can be historically located as a discourse that accompanies capitalism, and works to justify and rationalize a patently brutal and unjust system as inevitably scientific and organic. So seamlessly has capitalism been rationalized over the last two hundred years, in fact, that we no longer see the fault lines that divide black from white, work from play, subject from object. In true deconstructive form and with painstaking care, Barrett restores the original foundations of Western thought that were used to designate black as inhuman and white as human, black in association with idleness, perverse sexuality, and lack of self-consciousness, and white in association with diligence, legibility, the normal, the domestic, restraint, and self-awareness. By tracing this philosophical history, Barrett is able to explain the meaning of blackness in different historical periods in opposition to the seemingly inevitable, transparent, and neutral rhetorics of time and space that govern those periods.

Tsing also criticizes Harvey for making the breaks between space and time, modern and postmodern, economics and culture so clean and so distinct. She theorizes global capitalism much more precisely in relation to new eras of speed and connection, travel, movement, and communication; she lays out the contradictory results of global capitalism in terms of what it enables as well as what forms of oppression it enacts: Tsing reminds us that globalization makes a transnational politics (environmentalism, human rights, feminism) possible even as it consolidates U.S. hegemony. Harvey can only describe the condition of postmodernism in terms of new forms of domination and, like Jameson, can only think about cultural production as a channel for U.S. hegemony. Tsing, an anthropologist, is in many ways an unlikely defender of the nonsymmetrical relationship of cultural production to economic production, but her most important critique of Harvey concerns his characterization of postmodern culture as "a mirror of economic realities" (Tsing 2002, 466). Harvey's analysis, according to Tsing, suffers first from a simplistic mode of taking cultural shifts and then mapping them onto economic shifts; second, she claims that Harvey makes all of his assumptions about globalization without using an ethnographic research base. Finally, he overgeneralizes the "postmodern condition" on the basis of a flawed understanding of the role of culture, and then allows culture to stand in for all kinds of other evidence of the effects of globalization.

In relation to gender, race, and alternative or subcultural production, therefore, Harvey's grand theory of "the experience of space and time" in postmodernity leaves the power structures of biased differentiation intact, and presumes that, in Pile's formulation, opposition can only be an "echo of

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domination" (Pile 1997, 13). But while Harvey, like Soja and Jameson, can be counted on at least to nod to the racialization and gendering of postmodern space, also like Soja and Jameson, he has nothing to say about sexuality and space. Both Soja and Harvey claim that it was Foucault's interviews on space and published lecture notes on "heterotopia" that, as Soja puts it, created the conditions for a postmodern geography. The Foucault who inspires the postmodern Marxist geographers is clearly the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish*, but not that of *The History of Sexuality*. Indeed, Harvey misses several obvious opportunities to discuss the naturalization of time and space in relation to sexuality. Reproductive time and family time are, above all, heteronormative time/space constructs. But while Harvey hints at the gender politics of these forms of time/space, he does not mention the possibility that all kinds of people, especially in postmodernity, will and do opt to live outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production. By doing so, they also often live outside the logic of capital accumulation: here we could consider ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed. Perhaps such people could productively be called "queer subjects" in terms of the ways they live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned, and in terms of the ways they might work in the domains that other people assign to privacy and family. Finally, as I will trace in this book, for some queer subjects, time and space are limned by risks they are willing to take: the transgender person who risks his life by passing in a small town, the subcultural musicians who risk their livelihoods by immersing themselves in nonlucrative practices, the queer performers who destabilize the normative values that make everyone else feel safe and secure; but also those people who live without financial safety nets, without homes, without steady jobs, outside the organizations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else.

Using the Foucault of *The History of Sexuality*, we can return to the concepts of time that Harvey takes for granted and expose their hidden but implicit logics (Foucault 1986). Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark, in their introduction to a book of essays on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, present perhaps the most compelling reading to date of a queer temporality that emerges from Foucault's formulation of modernity as "an attitude rather than as a period of history" (Barber 2002, 304). Barber and Clark locate Foucault's comments on modernity alongside Sedgwick's comments on queerness in order to define queerness as a temporality—"a 'moment,' it is also then a force; or rather it is a crossing of temporality with force" (8). In Sedgwick, Barber and Clark identify an elaboration of the relation between temporality and writing; in Foucault, they find a model for the relation between temporality and ways of being. They summarize these currents in terms of a "moment," a "persistent present," or "a queer temporality that is at once indefinite and virtual but also forceful, resilient, and undeniable" (2). It is this model of time, the model that emerges between Foucault and Sedgwick, that is lost to and overlooked by Marxist geographers for whom the past represents the logic for the present, and the future represents the fruition of this logic.

Postmodern geography, indeed, has built on Foucault's speculative but powerful essay on heterotopia and on Foucault's claim in this essay that "the present epoch will be above all an epoch of space" (Foucault 1986, 22). Based on this insight, Soja and Harvey argue that critical theory has privileged time/history over space/geography with many different implications. But for both Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* and Jameson in "The Cultural Logic of Postmodernism," postmodernism is a strange and even bewildering confusion of time and space where history has lost its (materialist) meaning, time has become a perpetual present, and space has flattened out in the face of creeping globalization. Both theorists evince a palpable nostalgia for modernism with its apparent oppositional logics and its clear articulations of both alienation and revolution; and both theorists oppose the politics of the local within "an epoch of space" to the politics of the global—a global capitalism opposed by some kind of utopian global socialism, and no politics outside this framework registers as meaningful. Predictably, then, the "local" for postmodern geographers becomes the debased term in the binary, and their focus on the global, the abstract, and even the universal is opposed to the local with its associations with the concrete, the specific, the narrow, the empirical, and even the bodily. As Tsing puts it, the local becomes just a "stopping place for the global" in Marxist accounts, and all too often the local represents place, while the global represents circulation, travel, and migration. By refusing to set local/global up in a dialectical relation, Tsing allows for a logic of diversity: diverse locals, globals, capitalisms, temporalities (Tsing 2002).

Stuart Hall also reminds us in his essay on "The Global and the Local" that "the more we understand about the development of Capital itself, the more we understand that it is only part of the story" (Hall 1997). And as Doreen

Massey says of Harvey's exclusive focus on capital, "In Harvey's account, capital always wins, and it seems capital can only win" (Massey 1994, 140). Massey suggests that alternatives are rarely suggested by those theorists of the dominant; we are always already trapped, and the more we find evidence of alternatives in local contexts, the more the local becomes mistrusted as "place bound," reactionary, and even fascist. Work on sexuality and space offers a far more complicated picture of globalization and the relationships between the global and the local than Harvey or Soja allow. Indeed, queer studies of sexuality and space present the opportunity for a developed understanding of the local, the nonmetropolitan (not the same thing, I know), and the situated. And while work on globalization will inevitably skim the surface of local variations and perhaps even reproduce the homogenizing effects of globalization in the process of attempting to offer a critique, queer studies of space, sexuality, and embodiment explore the postmodern politics of place in all of its contradiction, and in the process, they expose the contours of what I call in chapter 2 "metronormativity."

One theorist who has accounted for the possibility of "the end of capitalism" is J. K. Gibson-Graham, the collaborative moniker for the joint theories of Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson. In the original and inspirational call for an anticapitalist imaginary, Gibson-Graham argues that "It is the way capitalism has been 'thought' that has made it so difficult for people to imagine its supersession" (Gibson-Graham 1996, 5). Drawing on feminist studies and queer theory, Gibson-Graham contends that capitalism has been unnecessarily stabilized within Marxist representations as a totalizing force and a unitary entity. If we destabilize the meaning of capitalism using poststructuralist critiques of identity and signification, then we can begin to see the multiplicity of noncapitalist forms that constitute, supplement, and abridge global capitalism, but we can also begin to imagine, by beginning to see, the alternatives to capitalism that already exist and are presently under construction. Gibson-Graham calls for the "querying" of globalization through a wide-ranging recognition of its incomplete status, its discontinuities, instabilities, and vulnerabilities. Gibson-Graham proposes "the severing of globalization from a fixed capitalist identity, a breaking apart of the monolithic significations of capitalism (market/commodity/capital) and a liberation of different economic beings and practices" (146).

The literature on sexuality and space is growing rapidly, but it tends to focus on gay men, and it is often comparative only to the extent that it takes white gay male sexual communities as a highly evolved model that other sexual cultures try to imitate and reproduce. One of the best studies of sexual space that does still focus on gay men, but recognizes the fault lines of class, race, and gender in the construction of sexual communities is Samuel R. Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. Delany's book breaks the mold in the genre of gay male accounts of space that often take the form of travelogues and then compare the author's sexual experiences with gay men in a variety of global locations, only to argue for a kind of universal homosexuality within which fluidity and flexibility are the order of the day (Browning 1996). In Delany's book, the geo-specific sexual practices he describes belong to the interactions between men of different classes and races in New York's porn shops and triple-X theaters. These practices develop and are assigned meaning only in the context of the porn theater, and their meanings shift and change when the men leave the darkened theater and reemerge into the city. Delany's study illustrates a few of the claims I have been making here about queer time and space: first, that oppositional cultures, or in Pile's terms, "geographies of resistance," are not symmetrical to the authority they oppose; second, that the relations between sexuality and time and space provide immense insight into the flows of power and subversion within postmodernism; and finally, that queers use space and time in ways that challenge conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility (Delany 1999).

Delany's groundbreaking analysis of the destruction of sexual subcultures during the corporate development of New York City's Times Square allows him to take issue with the notion that increasing public safety was the main motivation behind the area's face-lift. While developers claimed that the sex industries in Times Square rendered the area wholly unsafe for women and families especially, Delany argues that there is no particular relationship between street safety and the presence or absence of sex workers. He states unequivocally: "What I see lurking behind the positive foregrounding of 'family values' (along with, in the name of such values, the violent suppression of urban social structures, economic, social and sexual) is a wholly provincial and absolutely small-town terror of cross-class contact" (153). While I want to return to this notion of the small-town terror of contact with otherness in my chapters on Brandon Teena, here I am interested in Delany's insights about urban sex cultures and their understandings of space and time.

Delany divides his book into two sections, as the title suggests, and while the first half provides an ethnographic account of the denizens of

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porn theaters, dotted with anecdotes of Delany's encounters with various men, the second half articulates a theory of space, intimacy, and bodily contact in postmodernism. In this latter section, Delany makes some big claims. First, he proposes that "given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will" (111). The encounters between men in the sex cinemas of midtown Manhattan are one of the few remaining zones of pleasurable interclass contact, according to Delany, and by razing this area, the urban planners of the new Times Square are deploying a logic of "safety" to justify the destruction of an intricate subcultural system. In its place, the corporate developers will construct a street mall guaranteed to make the tourists who visit Times Square feel safe enough to spend their money there. The second proposal made by Delany redefines class struggle for a postmodern politics. He argues that class war works silently against the social practices through which interclass contact can take place. In other words, what we understand in this day and age as "class war" is not simply owners exploiting labor or labor rebelling against managers but a struggle between those who value interclass contact and work hard to maintain those arenas in which it can occur, and those who fear it and work to create sterile spaces free of class mixing.

In order to create and maintain new spaces for interclass contact, Delany asserts that we need to be able, first, to imagine such spaces; we have to find out where they are, and how they can be sustained and supported. Second, we need to theorize the new spaces. It is not enough simply to point to new sites for interclass contact but as Delany has done here, we have to create a complex discourse around them through narrative and the meticulous work of archiving. Third, we have to avoid nostalgia for what was and what has disappeared while creating a new formulation for future spaces and architectures. Finally, Delany urges us to narrate an account of the invisible institutions that prop up counterpublics, but also to tell the story of the new technologies that want to eradicate them through a moral campaign about cleaning up the city. Delany repeatedly claims in *Times Square Red* that small towns in the United States are (if measured in terms of the number of crimes per capita) far more violent than big cities and that the structure of violence, particularly violence against queers, say, in each location is quite different. In a small town, the violence tends to be predictable, he claims, since locals often initiate violence against strangers or outsiders; but in the city, violence is random and unpredictable. Delany suggests that we break away from the cozy fantasies of small-town safety and big-city danger, and reconsider the actual risks of different locations in terms of the different populations that inhabit them. Specifically, he recommends that we not design urban areas to suit suburban visitors, and that we start to consider the problem of small-town violence in terms of the lack of cross-class, cross-race, or cross-sexual contact in small towns and rural areas.

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Women are tellingly absent from Delany's smart, engaging, and even revolutionary account of sexual subcultures, and one is led to conclude by the end of the book that as of now, there is no role for women in this subterranean world of public sex. While it is not my project here to discuss the possibilities for women to develop venues for public sex, I do want to address the absence of gender as a category of analysis in much of the work on sexuality and space by shifting the terms of discussion from the global to the local in relation to postmodern geographies; and by shifting the focus from urban to rural in relation to queer geographies. I will also argue for a new conception of space and sexuality—what I call a "technotopic" understanding of space in chapter 5—that opens up in queer art making.

The division between urban and rural or urban and small town has had a major impact on the ways in which queer community has been formed and perceived in the United States. Until recently, small towns were considered hostile to queers and urban areas were cast as the queer's natural environment. In contemporary debates about urban life, affluent gay populations are often described as part of a "creative class" that enhances the city's cultural life and cultural capital, and this class of gays are then cast in opposition to the small-town family life and values of midwestern Americans (Florida 2002). While there is plenty of truth to this division between urban and small-town life, between hetero-familial cultures and queer creative and sexual cultures, the division also occludes the lives of nonurban queers. *In a Queer Time and Place* both confirms that queer subcultures thrive in urban areas *and* contests the essential characterizations of queer life as urban. In an extended consideration of the life and death of Brandon Teena, a young transgender man who was murdered in small-town Nebraska, I look at how the transgender body functions in relation to time and space as a rich site for fantasies of futurity and anachronism, and I ask here why transgenderism holds so much significance in postmodernism.

The first half of the book considers the sudden visibility of the transgender body in the late twentieth century against the backdrop of changing

conceptions of space and identity. This book actually began as a study of the tragic 1993 murder of Brandon. After passing as a man and dating local girls in Nebraska, Brandon died a brutal death at the hands of two local boys who felt threatened by his masculinity. In death, Brandon became a hero, a martyr, and a fallen friend to hundreds of viewers and readers who would have shown little to no interest in his plight had he been killed in a traffic accident or died of disease. Chapters 2 and 3 explore the case of Brandon Teena in detail, and I return to the questions raised there about space, place, and identity later in my reading of Kimberly Peirce's feature film made about Brandon in 1999: *Boys Don't Cry*. I had originally planned a study of the Brandon case along the lines of some of the books that have been written about the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming (Loffreda 2002). But as the "Brandon industry" grew, and as films, videos, novels, true-crime mysteries and other accounts of the case were released, I felt ambivalent about simply contributing to the growing fascination with this young transgender man among urban gays and lesbians. In the hopes of steering clear of the representational and emotional vortex that surrounded Brandon, I decided to study the construction of Brandon in terms of some of the questions about time and space raised by queer studies. And so, I look at Brandon as a figure who represents both anachronism (an earlier model of gay identity as gender inversion) and dislocatedness (a person who chooses the rural over the urban as his theater for staging his gender); Brandon is literally and figuratively out of time and out of place.

Mark Seltzer claims in his work on America's "wound culture" that we live in a society so preoccupied with scenes of violence and violation that trauma has become "an effect in search of a cause" (Seltzer 1998, 257). Seltzer's formulation of the psychological experience of trauma as a belated or retrospective construction of the physical experience of violation describes perfectly the kind of attention directed at a Brandon Teena or a Matthew Shepard; such figures are made to stand in for the hurts and the indignities that are so often rendered invisible by the peculiar closet structure of homophobia. A generous reading of this process, by which a community selects a violated member to represent otherwise unrepresentable damage, would see a transformation of a personal affront into a political one. A less generous reading might argue that the process of selecting (white and young) martyrs within urban queer activism allows for an increasingly empowered urban middle-class gay and lesbian community to disavow its growing access to privilege in order to demand new forms of state recognition, and to find new

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ways of accessing respectability and its rewards. Many of the gays and lesbians who attended candlelit vigils for Brandon, and even more so for Matthew Shepard, were indeed people who would otherwise never involve themselves in political activism, and who certainly would not be organizing on behalf of gender-variant queers or queers of color. The varied responses to the tragic murders of these two young, white, rural queers have much to tell us about selective memorialization and political activism, space and sexual identity, and the mobilization of trauma. While the first chapters of *In a Queer Time and Place* focus specifically on the Brandon Teena case, the middle section of this book takes the thematics raised by this case to other arenas of representation, and traces the interactive relations between dominant and alternative genders in twentieth-century visual cultures.

Chapter 4 on queer film and the transgender look, chapter 5 on queer visual culture and figurations of ambiguous embodiment, and to a certain extent chapter 6 on mainstream appropriations of gender ambiguity all examine the circuits of influence that allow for the emergence of the transgender body as simultaneously a symbol for postmodern flexibility and a legible form of embodied subjectivity. At times, I look at the depiction of transgenderism separate from transgender subjects; at others, I explore self-representations of and by transgender subjects. Several chapters in this book try to account for the relations between different levels of cultural production. In chapter 5, I take up debates in art history about the relationships between avant-gardes and subcultures, and I apply them to contemporary queer visual art. In chapter 6, I try to track the barely discernible imprint of influence that transgender subcultures have had on mainstream representations of gender. As my earlier book on female masculinity showed, representations of the gender-ambiguous female body have rarely produced the same interest that their male counterparts (sissy boys, drag queens, transvestites) inspire (Halberstam 1998). And the masculine woman in the past has rarely been depicted as an interesting phenomenon—usually, she has been portrayed as the outcome of failed femininity, or as the result of pathetic and unsuccessful male mimicry. Chapter 6 examines recent comedies about English masculinity like *The Full Monty* and *Austin Powers*. Each of these texts humorously foregrounds the relationship between alternative and dominant masculinities, and surprisingly credits alternative masculinities with the reconstruction of the terms of masculine embodiment. This chapter will ask how and why the genre of comedy allows for an acknowledgment of the influence of minority masculinities. In the case of *Austin Powers*, in particular,

I will propose that the success of the male parody that the film undertakes depends on an appropriation of drag king strategies of male impersonation. Chapter 7 builds on the set of questions I asked in the *Austin Powers* chapter about influence, the circulation of cultural texts, male parody, and subcultural intensity, and the questions in chapter 5 about the avant-garde's appropriation of subcultural material, and explores dyke subcultures as one site for the development of queer counterpublics and queer temporalities. I end this chapter and the book with a specific case history, the musical career of Ferron, through which to analyze the theme of generational conflict and queer time.

Throughout this book, I return to the transgender body as a contradictory site in postmodernism. The gender-ambiguous individual today represents a very different set of assumptions about gender than the gender-inverted subject of the early twentieth century; and as a model of gender inversion recedes into anachronism, the transgender body has emerged as futurity itself, a kind of heroic fulfillment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility. Why has gender flexibility become a site of both fascination and promise in the late twentieth century and what did this new flexibility have to do with other economies of flexibility within postmodernism? As Emily Martin's book *Flexible Bodies* shows in relation to historically variable conceptions of the immune system, flexibility has become "one of our new taken-for-granted virtues for persons and their bodies" (Martin 1995). She continues, "Flexibility has also become a powerful commodity, something scarce and highly valued, that can be used to discriminate against some people" (xvii). While we have become used to thinking in terms of "flexible citizenship" and "flexible accumulation" as some of the sinister sides of this new "virtue," the contemporary interest in flexible genders, from talk shows to blockbuster movies, may also be a part of the conceptualization of a new global elite (Ong 1999).

Because bodily flexibility has become both a commodity (in the case of cosmetic surgeries for example) and a form of commodification, it is not enough in this "age of flexibility" to celebrate gender flexibility as simply another sign of progress and liberation. Promoting flexibility at the level of identity and personal choices may sound like a postmodern or even a queer program for social change. But it as easily describes the advertising strategies of huge corporations like the Gap, who sell their products by casting their consumers as simultaneously all the same and all different. Indeed, the new popularity of "stretch" fabrics accommodates precisely this model of bodily

fluidity by creating apparel that can stretch to meet the demands of the unique and individual body that fills it. Advertising by other companies, like Dr Pepper, whose ads exhort the consumer to "be you!" and who sell transgression *as* individualism, also play with what could be called a "bad" reading of postmodern gender. Postmodern gender theory has largely been (wrongly) interpreted as both a description of and a call for greater degrees of flexibility and fluidity. Many young gays and lesbians think of themselves as part of a "post-gender" world and for them the idea of "labeling" becomes a sign of an oppression they have happily cast off in order to move into a pluralistic world of infinite diversity. In other words, it has become commonplace and even clichéd for young urban (white) gays and lesbians to claim that they do not like "labels" and do not want to be "pigeon holed" by identity categories, even as those same identity categories represent the activist labors of previous generations that brought us to the brink of "liberation" in the first place. Many urban gays and lesbians of different age groups also express a humanistic sense that their uniqueness cannot be captured by the application of a blanket term. The emergence of this liberal, indeed neo-liberal, notion of "uniqueness as radical style" in hip queer urban settings must be considered alongside the transmutations of capitalism in late postmodernity. As Lisa Duggan claims: "new neoliberal sexual politics . . . might be termed the new homonormativity—it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a semobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 2003).

Harvey has characterized late capitalism in terms of "flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products and patterns of consumption" (Harvey 1990, 147). Increased flexibility, as we now know, leads to increased opportunities for the exploitation by transnational corporations of cheap labor markets in Third World nations and in immigrant communities in the First World. The local and inter-subjective forms of flexibility may be said to contribute to what Anna Tsing calls the "charisma of globalization" by incorporating a seemingly radical ethic of flexibility into understandings of selfhood. In queer communities, what I will define as "transgressive exceptionalism" can be seen as a by-product of local translations of neo-liberalism.

As many Marxist critics in particular seem to be fond of pointing out, identity politics in the late twentieth century has mutated in some cases

from a necessary and strategic critique of universalism into a stymied and myopic politics of self. There are few case studies in the critiques of identity politics, however, and too often one particular theorist (usually a very prominent and sophisticated queer theorist) will stand in for projects that may be characterized as bound and limited to identity claims. Many important theoretical projects have been dismissed as "identity politics" because writers remain fuzzy about the meaning of this term and in many ways, identity politics has become the new "essentialism," a marker, in other words, of some combination of naiveté and narrowness that supposedly blocks more expansive and sophisticated projects. Too often in academia "identity politics" will be used as an accusation of "interestedness," and the accuser will seek to return discussion to a more detached project with supposedly great validity and broader applications.

In a very useful essay on "Taking Identity Politics Seriously," anthropologist James Clifford warns that the blanket dismissal of identity politics by intellectuals on the Left runs the risk of missing the "complex volatility, ambivalent potential, and historical necessity of contemporary social movements" (Clifford 2000, 95). Building on the work of Stuart Hall, Clifford argues that we cannot dismiss the methods used by various communities to "make 'room' for themselves in a crowded world"; instead, he and Hall separately call for sustained analysis of the ways in which "human beings become agents." Clifford believes that "historically informed ethnography" must be central to a "comparative understanding of the politics of identity" (103). While the work I do in this book cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called "ethnography," it does try to make sense of the ways that new gender communities make "room" for themselves, by piecing together a story of emergence from a set of representations produced and circulated within postmodernism.

Often, identity politics becomes far more of a problem outside than inside academia. In mainstream gay, lesbian, and trans communities in the United States, battles rage about what group occupies the more transgressive or aggrieved position, and only rarely are such debates framed in terms of larger discussions about capitalism, class, or economics. In this context then, "transgressive exceptionalism" refers to the practice of taking the moral high ground by claiming to be more oppressed and more extraordinary than others. The rehearsal of identity-bound debates outside the academy speaks not simply to a lack of sophistication in such debates, but suggests that academics have failed to take their ideas beyond the university and have not made

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necessary interventions in public intellectual venues. In transgender contexts, for example, as sociologist Henry Rubin reports, transgender and transsexual subjects have articulated deep suspicions of academic researchers and this has made it very difficult for academics to either conduct extensive ethnographies or intervene in community debates about the meaning of multiple forms of gender ambiguity (Rubin 2003). Surprisingly, transgenders and transsexuals seem not to have quite the same suspicion of social service workers and so they have made the inroads that academic researchers could not into trans communities (Valentine 2000). Indeed, in recent years, the term "transgender" has circulated and taken on meaning often in relation to social service provider interventions into youth groups and sex worker communities.

In the hope that a productive and generative project can be successfully wrested from a deep consideration of the meaning of transgenderism in relation to postmodern understandings of time and space, I offer in the next two sections some alternative ways of accounting for and sustaining the imaginative leap that transgenderism actually represents within queer theory and queer communities. I hope that the essays collected here can begin a dialogue about the meaning of gender variance in queer communities that moves beyond claims of either uniqueness or unilateral oppression, and beyond the binary division of flexibility or rigidity. Steve Pile warns against the premature stabilization of this binary, arguing that "the subjects of resistance are neither fixed nor fluid, but both and more. And this 'more' involves a sense that resistance is resistance to both fixity and to fluidity" (1997, 30). At a moment when the U.S. economic interests in the Middle East are covered over by rhetoric about freedom and liberty, it is important to study the form and structure of the many contradictions of transnational capital at local as well as global levels. Transgenderism, with its promise of gender liberation and its patina of transgression, its promise of flexibility and its reality of a committed rigidity, could be the successful outcome of years of gender activism; or, just as easily, it could be the sign of the reincorporation of a radical subculture back into the flexible economy of postmodern culture. This book tries to keep transgenderism alive as a meaningful designator of unpredictable gender identities and practices, and it locates the transgender figure as a central player in numerous postmodern debates about space and sexuality, subcultural production, rural gender roles, art and gender ambiguity, the politics of biography, historical conceptions of manhood, gender and genre, and the local as opposed to the global.