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PART I

Core Topics

2

PERFORMATIVITY AND TRANS LITERATURE

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Introduction

Performativity is the core of imaginative literature. Language and nonverbal communication affect social actions in tacit or overt ways. Examples of utterances that constitute actions (speech acts) include officiation, apologies, consents, greetings, invitations, sentencing, and complaints. Socially structured speech acts are key components of our cultural life. This is applicable to literary works as well. Novels, drama, poetry, and films narrativize individuals into and out of existence by giving them legibility or making them ideologically "invisible" or illegible, as the case may be. Characters and readers behave in particular ways to create, fit in, or deviate from social norms.

This sense of performativity is distinct from conventional understanding of performance as an artistic form. Performativity encompasses conscious or unconscious uses of language to affect social actions. In contrast, performance is typically thought of as intentioned enactments for artistic effects. Whether scripted or improvised, these enactments are bracketed and separated from "social practices of daily life" (Taylor 2016, 15) by theatrical or cinematic conventions. Performativity, as distinct from performance, recalibrates our critical capacity to understand transness, understood here as acts of traversing and transversing normative gender categories. Significantly, performativity, as a linguistic function, permeates all narratives (including performance) and therefore has the capacity to expand the scope of trans literature. While this chapter examines transness in performance as well as in printed texts, my focus remains on performativity as a critical concept and how it informs trans studies. The theory of trans performativity that I present here highlights the artifice of gender; I apply it to case studies that feature what might be called narratives of body-swap or malleable bodies, such as *Orlando, Your Name*, and *The Matrix*, as well as plays and films that involve metatheatrical impersonation, such as *Twelfth Night* and *She's the Man*.

A Theory of Trans Performativity

In sociolinguistic terms, performativity can tacitly or overtly affect social actions. Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando* ([1928] 2006) is an example of the first function of performativity: how language tacitly defines social actions. The novel opens with a

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witty sentence about its 16-year-old eponymous protagonist in Elizabethan England by a narrator: "He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (1). Woolf's em dash and the subordinating conjunction of "though" foreshadow Orlando's transformation and undercut the masculine third-person pronoun through a type of "typographic violence" that syntactically casts Orlando's gender in doubt (Daileader 2013, 56). Later, in a matter-of-fact tone, Woolf describes how, after sleeping for seven days, the novel's immortal protagonist, then the English Ambassador, wakes up a woman in Constantinople: "he had become a woman—there is no denying it" (125). Orlando lives through male and female embodiments over four centuries. As I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, Woolfs novel has often been interpreted as trans literature, while the novel's most famous film adaptation includes a performance by Quentin Crisp, who posthumously invited audiences into her trans life.

The second function of performativity is exemplified by the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: how language affects social actions in overt ways through explicit descriptions of gender change. In Book Nine, Iphis undergoes important emotional and physical transformations. Assigned female at birth but raised as a boy, Iphis identifies as a man and falls in love with a woman named Ianthe. So that Iphis can marry Ianthe (because, in the heteronormative world, "no female ever takes a female," [Ovid 1995, 231]), Isis eventually intervenes to transform Iphis, enabling him to take "longer steps than usual" and endowing him with "[stronger] … facial features." Iphis' vigor is now "less becoming to a woman" (233), the poem tells us. Ovid uses feminine pronouns to describe Iphis throughout even when writing about gender transition. Third-person pronouns are markers of social rejection or acceptance, as the case may be, and their usage is an important part of the performativity of speech acts. Ovid's choice of pronouns brings Iphis into being.

The cases of Woolf and Ovid show that the kind of language writers choose can make gender perform in various ways in a narrative. At the core of the stories by Woolf and Ovid are language and performativity—whether in describing characters, pronoun usage, or bringing about actions. A key element of performativity has come to be known as speech acts—utterances that present information (locution) and utterances that perform consequential acts (illocution [Austin 1962]). In J.L. Austin's philosophy of language, illocutionary speech acts are primarily ceremonial and ritualistic. Austin does limit the speech acts to what he calls the "total speech situation," which signifies spatiotemporally (147). Austin is primarily concerned with the present moment of the utterance.

Judith Butler builds and expands on this understanding of speech acts to suggest that the impact of an utterance extends beyond the moment of speech (1997, 3). Based on this understanding of speech acts in and over time, Butler develops, in *Gender Trouble*, a theory of performativity that consists of the "repeated stylization of the body […] within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 1990, 45). In her later work, she further specifies that performativity of gender constitutes not a one-time act but a series of reiterative practices (Butler [1993] 2011, xii). Butler's theory echoes citational theatrical acts. That said, not every "first-person speech act" leads to reciprocity "among speaking subjects" (Butler 1990, 268).

In my view, performativity in fiction delineates and maintains social practices, such as how characters present themselves, how their presentation is received or rejected by others, and what the consequences of their actions are. In the realm of gender practices,

language makes gender perform context-driven actions. Some examples of this are the naming and demarcation of sartorial choices, of gendered spaces, such as ladies' rooms, of perceptions of certain actions, such as the ideas of "manning up" or "running like a girl," and of gendered actions, such as describing a female leader as a "girlboss." Usage of gendered language has consequences and precipitates particular kinds of social action. Speech acts can occur in tacit or overt ways in explicitly gendered language or in discourses that do not use gendered vocabulary but imply gendered assumptions.

My theory of performativity hinges on two tenets:

1 that gender as social practices—mannerism, comportment, sartorial choices, grooming habits, uses of voice—evolve over time and in different social spaces; and
2 that these practices are constituted, and sometimes undermined, by performative speech acts, by words that delineate ever-moving interpersonal relationships and social boundaries.

More recent research by Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore (2008) shows that gender practices are part of "rapidly proliferating ecologies of embodied difference," or a realm where perceived differences among humans relate to each other and evolve within a network similar to biological eco-systems. Genders as communal experiences play out in "porous and permeable spatial territories" (2008, 12). Reading gender as reiterative and citational speech acts in particular social spaces refocuses our attention on characters' motivations.

In speech acts, gender is both a spatial and temporal concept, reflecting what one does in a given space at a given point in time. One travels through life with evolving gender practices. But genders (as social practices) also involve interpersonal relationships that may shift over time. Gender is therefore subject to normative and queer inscriptions as well as erasure. Building on Butler's theory of performativity and Austin's concept of speech acts, I argue that gender is produced by trans performativity in temporally bound ways, revealing why our vocabularies of gender evolve over generations.

I call this approach "trans as method." One reads gender differently at different times, just as one is read by others differently at different life stages. In this chapter, I deploy trans as method to interpret dramatic actions (the effort that a character makes to change the emotional state of another) as signifying tacit transness over the course of a given production or film. In this way, transness can be communicated without intentional and explicit statements and without the characters or actors using our contemporary vocabulary of "identifying as trans."

The trans-inclusive notion of performativity that I propose can correct some of the biases that have informed literary studies, such as cissexism, "the belief that [trans people's] genders are … less authentic than those of cissexuals" (Serano 2007, 10). This cisgender-centric position renders trans experience visible but not legible, purportedly "not relatable" to most audiences. The problems caused by cissexism are twofold.

First, it gave rise to the dramaturgical substitution of one fixed identity for another equally fixed identity. A classic of the 1990s, Stephen Orgel's (1996, 106) *Impersonations* regards early modern boy actors as cisgender "transvestite actors." Peter Stallybrass (1992, 79) explicitly pits "the staged body of a boy actor" against "the imagined body of a woman [through] the material presence of clothes" in the early modern "production of contrary fixations." Some nontrans scholars focus on the wellbeing of cisgender audiences, suggesting that early modern "transvestism" is designed to "insulate [the stage] from [the] lustful feelings" of the audience (Orgel 1996, 31).

Second, scholarship outside performance studies tends to regard gender practices as fixed, reflecting the fixity of printed text. The theory of performativity within the context of performance studies dislodges these unexamined assumptions that text alone encompasses everything words connote. From the perspective of speech acts, utterances accrue meanings through contextual embodiment over time. Performative rhetoric and the performativity of narratives are as important as the narrative text in co-producing literary meanings. A text-centric attitude obscures the embodied experience of gender.

Theories of performativity also affect our understanding of trans literature: in this chapter, I define trans literature capaciously to include not only testimonial memoirs and works by trans-identified authors that address diverse gender experiences, but also, significantly, trans-adjacent literary productions that depict tacit transness but without characters who explicitly identify as trans. Transness has a porous structure, because "cis" and "trans" are relational, spatial concepts. The Latin root *cis* means "on the same side as," while *trans* refers to the opposite side. Much like demonstratives such as "this" and "that" or "here" and "there," which do not and cannot mean by themselves, "cis" and "trans" bear meanings relationally only to one another. We do not always know, and do not need to know, transness, and transness is not always recognizable in the same way to everyone in every culture or every time period. While the following sections progress from overt to tacit representational strategies to signify transness for the sake of clarity, it should be noted that trans performance can become overt or tacit over time: explicit and implicit signification of transness do and often overlap.

Overt Representations of Transness

Gender is as much a set of social practices as a set of narrative patterns. One may narrate oneself into existence, and writers may narrativize and give meanings to others' lives. For example, in his 1580 travel journal, French Renaissance essayist Michel de Montaigne uses verbs such as "passing" and affirming personal pronouns in the majority of his narrative of the life of Germain, likely an intersex individual. Montaigne ([1580] 1903, 39) uses the masculine pronoun even when describing how "all the townsfolk [mistakenly] regard [him] as a girl." However, Montaigne switches to feminine pronouns when recounting how "it came to pass one day when she put forth all her strength in taking a leap, that the distinctive signs of manhood showed themselves" (39). Despite the pivotal nature of this event in Germain's life, Montaigne's tone remains calm and does not sensationalize the event.

Montaigne's travel journal stands in stark contrast to first-person memoirs that offer prominent examples of overt and explicit representations of transness. Memoirs of trans experiences, such as Jennifer Finney Boylan's *She's Not There*, are valuable in their testimonial, political, and pedagogical value, yet risk the exploitative consumption of transgender life. Laxminarayan Tripathi's memoirs, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015) and *Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life* (2016) are other examples of this prevalent genre, as Ananya Chatterjee and Nisarga Bhattacharjee analyze in their chapter on autobiography (Chapter 36). As a form of life writing, these memoirs helped their authors to both legitimize their identities to themselves and to satisfy cisgender readers' curiosity (see also Chapter 24 by Eamon Schlotterback). Understandably, trans memoirs are often sentimental in their presentation of trauma that is caused by trans difference in relation to more typical life experiences. These works reproduce particular types of trans experience and enable the legibility of transness for their authors in the sense of writing oneself into existence. However, they also delimit public imaginations of trans life by affecting the legibility of other trans figures.

Since popular memoirs create dominant narratives of transness that are often, but not always, built around medical models of understanding trans life, they shape the legibility of other trans figures and fuel anxieties about being trans enough. The memoir's social functions of legibility and empowering a community with new vocabularies can sometimes trigger anxieties about inducing transness by reading trans texts (a positive effect), which has led to desperate bans of trans works for children and young adults in some US states. As important as it is to celebrate trans self-representation, there are key benefits to expanding the scope of trans literature beyond explicitly trans narratives through the notion of performativity. As Sawyer K. Kemp argues in their chapter in this volume, trans memoirs may give the false impression that trans trauma is the only noteworthy characteristic of a group of individuals, because memoir exploits and encourages public consumption of personal trauma for inspiration (Chapter 14). Doing so will help us transcend the Cartesian logic we inherited from the Enlightenment—a way of thinking about the world through dualism and binaries. We can decenter the cisgender perspective that has taken a default position in literary criticism by rereading works that were previously (mis)labeled as nontrans—in fact, all writers can produce trans narratives, as well as narratives that may or may not align with their self-identification.

Tacit Representations of Transness

In contrast to overt and explicit depictions of transness, tacit representational strategies are found in works that do not label themselves as trans literature. In Woolf's *Orlando*, for example, Orlando meets a sailor named Shelmerdine in the nineteenth century. They fall in love with one another's masculine and feminine features and qualities. They become married and continue to playfully question one another's gender, but never state their gender identification. Woolf never explicitly explains the protagonist's transformation. They simply "are." The performativity of their speech acts enables their self-identification and genderplay. As a result, whether one can read the novel as a specimen of trans fiction has been much debated. Stef Craps (2006) and Lucas Crawford (2015), among others, interpret the novel from trans perspectives, but Jay Prosser (1998, 168) opposes, arguing that Orlando obtains diverse gender experiences through fantastic, rather than realistic, means, as real-life trans individuals would.

There are, however, adaptations of *Orlando* that become "accidentally trans" decades after production. Sally Potter's 1992 film adaptation of the novel featured Quentin Crisp's performance of Queen Elizabeth I. In 2017, Crisp "came out" as a trans woman posthumously in *The Last Word* (Watts 2017, 6), the third installment of her autobiography. One might say, with today's more inclusive vocabulary, that Crips invited the world into her personal space.[1] Her posthumous words retrospectively give her performance in the film new meanings, offering an incidence of a tacit trans performance becoming overtly trans at a later point in time. Commenting on her performance of Elizabeth, Crisp (2017, 131) reveals how she merges her inner self and her onscreen character: "All you have to do is be yourself and say the lines as though you mean them, as though they were your own. It worked for me and the only thing I can do well, the only thing I know how to do, is be me." Acting aided her self-expression, as she recalls fondly how her mother permitted her to "appear in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* dressed as a fairy. To my mind, she knew my desire was to triumph as a woman" (60). Performance is a vital part of her transition, and her memoir now enables new trans interpretations of the film *Orlando* and, by extension, Woolf's novel.

Performative speech acts simultaneously erect and undermine social boundaries of gender, as shown in Makoto Shinkai's (2016) animated romantic fantasy, *Your Name* (*Kimi no na wa*), a more recent example of tacit representation of transness. The box-office hit follows the misadventures of two high schoolers in Japan in 2013. Mitsuha, a high school girl in rural Itomori inexplicably begins to swap bodies regularly with Taki, a high school boy in Tokyo. When inhabiting the other's body, they explore—in childish innocence—their new anatomies and strive to fit in. Despite the film's focus on issues of embodiment, language is a particular area of concern for Mitsuha and Taki. Mitsuha would have to talk like the boy she now embodies, and Taki would have to adopt feminine speech patterns when in Mitsuha's body. Comical scenes ensue when they fail, such as when Mitsuha—waking up and going to school in Taki's body—slips and uses the feminine, singular first-person pronoun.

Singular first-person pronouns in Japanese serve important discursive functions of marking gender, age hierarchy, and levels of formality within that language's honorific speech patterns (Ono and Thompson 2003). Men often use *ore* as their first-person singular pronoun when conversing with male close friends. *Boku*, which is more polite, also carries a masculine impression. Other first-person pronouns include the more formal but more feminine *watashi*, commonly used by women. Men typically use more informal language as a gesture towards building a masculine bond and camaraderie. The bravura around the pronoun *ore*, for instance, buttresses the speakers' masculine identity in a world full of uncertainties. In this context, Mitsuha's slippage of gendered first-person pronouns gives away her body-swapping secrets. It also brings humiliation to Taki (whose body Mitsuha inhabits temporarily), as other boys taunt him the following day.

While its conceit of body swapping veers close to the (now outdated) trans trope of being trapped in the wrong body, *Your Name* is not marketed as a trans narrative. Film critics in and outside Japan, while lauding the film's achievements, completely overlook its potential to be read as trans or *toransujenda¯* literature (a widely used loanword in Japanese carrying most of the connotations of the term trans in English). *The Japan Times* examines the film's lighthearted depiction of "adolescent embarrassment and awkwardness" (Schilling 2016), while *The New York Times* focuses on the romantic aspect of this "wistfully lovely Japanese tale" (Dargis 2017). It would seem a missed opportunity in Japanese journalism, given that modern Japan's prominent trans-identified novelist Fujino Chiya won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize in 1999 for her *Summer's Promise* (*Natsu no Yakusoku*), which features a trans hairdresser. The arc in *Your Name* differs qualitatively from *Summer's Promise* which operates more explicitly as a *toransujenda¯* novel. However, attending to the performativity of the character's speech acts enables us to interpret *Your Name* as tacit trans literature. Mitsuha and Taki each claim to be "trap- ped" in the wrong body, but it is the *wronged* body, body wronged by social biases, that is in need of reclamation. Many body-swapping narratives can be read through a trans lens, yet the critical tendency to overlook tacit representations of transness reflects the institutionalized cissexism that assumes the cis status of characters such as Mitsuha and Taki.

Trans as Method and Performing Transness

At stake is not whether *Orlando, Your Name, Metamorphoses,* and *Montaigne's Travels* qualify as trans literature, or whether tacit or overt representations of trans presence are more valuable, but rather, how to use trans as method to analyze works that did

not label themselves as "trans" in the contemporary Anglophone sense of the word. Fiction can help us untangle the tension between the truth of an individual's self-determined identity and lies about that identity. As J.L. Austin theorized in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), words do not have innately prescribed meanings in and by themselves. This is especially true for the performing art on stage and on screen. Austin theorizes that "if somebody issues a performative utterance," "persons other than the speaker" have to accept it for it to have power (27). In addition to the aforementioned sociality of gender, performance also involves implicit social contracts of consent. Words—in any language—acquire meaning when spoken in context, embodied by speakers or actors, and accepted mutually by the society at large or by audiences. In performance, words acquire meaning both within a framework of fiction and within the audiences' points of reference. It is in this sense that fiction authorizes trans life onscreen and onstage. The meanings of Woolf's *Orlando* and Shakespeare's plays that Woolf alludes to would change when we consider them as trans performances rather than cis-centric stories requiring suspension of disbelief about cross-gender roles. When the enactment of gendered experiences is not assumed to be predicated on some form of substitution—substituting the actor for their character—or on the recognition of the "real" body beneath dramatic presentation, interpretations of dramatic literature can transcend conventional forms of literal mindedness.

Take, for instance, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, a "most happy wreck" (5.1.264). The play has been traditionally thought of as a comedy of mistaken identities. Washed ashore after a shipwreck in a foreign land, Illyria, and presuming the death of her twin brother Sebastian, Viola—with the aid of the ship's captain—transforms into Cesario to seek employment at the court. *Twelfth Night* is unique among comedies that depict journeys to an elsewhere, because it is energized by Cesario's presence rather than that of Viola: Cesario's displacement is partially defined by his uneasy relationship with Olivia, who falls in love with him, and with Duke Orsino, with whom he is secretly in love. Other characters' speech acts affirm and undermine, in different scenes, Cesario's personhood in Illyria.

After the scene on the beach Viola disappears from sight and the dramatic action. Cesario becomes the main character. Viola's incarnation as Cesario is a form of trans masculine practices to make his life worth living. Significantly, all of the shipwrecked characters stay in Illyria. One may wonder if it is anachronistic to use such modern concepts as trans to analyze materials from a time before the term existed. First, lives under different labels do not invalidate or negate those trans-adjacent experiences. They may have been legible to people living in that time within their vocabulary, and now rendered illegible due to our compulsion to only look for what we think we already know. Second, as Roland Betancourt (2020) argues, it is ahistorical to not use intersectional, or open-ended, modes of inquiry to examine historical works. I use trans as method here to make Cesario's experiences—which are obscured by their historical and ideological distance to modern audiences—more comprehensible.

Traditional criticism, tripped up by the problematic misconception of "crossdressing" as a convenient and temporary dramatic device, has largely overlooked these trans cues and interpreted Viola as a cisgender crossdressing character (Bulman 2008; Garber 2008; Klett 2009; Garber 2011). Beyond consciously self-identified usage, the term "crossdressing" is a misnomer in most contexts, because it overemphasizes the idea of sartorial camouflage, assumes stable binaries, glosses over the performativity of all speech acts, and suggests that trans bodies are inauthentic. Crossdressing as a convenient fiction about compartmentalized, binary genders is not an effective tool with which to analyze a

work such as *Twelfth Night*, because this term is a directional label that marginalizes some gender practices over others. As Stryker (2017, 11) writes, such labels as male-to-female or female-to-male "make about as much sense as calling someone a heterosexual-to-gay man."

In interpretations that hinge on crossdressing as a temporary and temporally abbreviated act of make-believe, Cesario is merely Viola's alter ego and temporary shell for dwelling in Illyria. This type of interpretation has diminishing returns when characters do not return to where they come from and instead normalize the queerness in Illyria. Cisgender sexism forecloses the open-endedness of Shakespeare's text in which Cesario does not change his attire to "become" Viola in the final scene. For example, Trevor Nunn's 1996 film version, set in the Victorian era, concludes with a final scene that contains extratextual material not found in Shakespeare. As the closing credits roll, a dance party is afoot at Olivia's castle. Imogen Stubbs' Viola emerges in a feminine gown to dance with and kiss Duke Orsino. Cesario is seen as Viola's "disguise" to obtain emancipation, safe passage, and employment in a similar vein as other Shakespearean heroines who take on socially transgressive roles. Films such as Nunn's make a point of showing Viola in feminine dress at a wedding or jolly celebration, eliminating Cesario.

Other adaptations of the play, such as Andy Fickman's modern language retelling, *She's the Man* (2006), have Cesario effortlessly transform into Viola in a frilly dress in the final scene, a debutante ball. The Orsino figure, named Duke, falls in love with Viola, essentially a new person, rather than with the Cesario figure with whom he has spent most of the time on screen and in whom he has confided numerous personal secrets. In the end, Duke and Viola share a kiss and dance at Viola's debutante ball.

This type of interpretation may reflect a cultural tendency to seek false clarity, rather than to embrace uncertainty, and regress into simplified binary worldviews in regard to both gender and sexuality. The language of the play text is suggestive and porous rather than prescriptive. In my theory of performativity, all utterances retain a level of openness because meanings emerge contextually over time: Shakespeare's final scene is open-ended, but our present cissexist assumptions often override the openness in such language and put the play in a closed circuit. In Shakespeare's text, Cesario does not dress up frivolously for deception (as Duke in the film *She's the Man* accuses), amusement, or employability (as Trevor Nunn's film suggests), and does not see his true self as temporally demarcated. Cesario's personal truth is revealed by his choice of words and his action of not changing into "maid's garments" (5.1.273).

That said, my theory of trans performativity also finds positive aspects to these two films from the perspective of their characters' enabling speech acts. Both films feature extensive transformation scenes that highlight the physical and emotional labor of curating one's self presentation and public image. The act of curation is part of the speech acts' productive social and aesthetic functions. Another aspect of curation relates to the tension between the ideas of body image as seen by others and what is known as one's felt body image, the internal feeling of one's own self which may be incongruent with the "seen" body (Prosser 1998). Performance helps trans actors such as the aforementioned Crisp materialize their felt body image as an affirming practice. Meta-cinematically, the Violas in both films actualize their felt body images through first performing Cesario and later claiming Cesario as their own.

Both Nunn's *Twelfth Night* and *She's the Man* feature Viola's makeover sequences before the high-stake "performance" of Cesario (in former film) or as Sebastian in the boys' boarding school (in the latter film). While the training montage in both films can

be interpreted as biologically essentialist, it does center the trans masculine body with such gender prostheses as wigs and moustaches. The montage shows how Cesario's gender practices evolve over time. Binary gender accessories do have their place in trans life and should not be unilaterally dismissed under the assumption that trans individuals alone have the burden to deconstruct the "differential gender-mapping" of everything (Halperin 2012, 338) or have a natural affinity to performing "queer sensibility" (Bao 2023, 3). Both films thus affirm these characters' needs for legibility. These cases illustrate that seemingly contradictory notions can be true at the same time in trans representation.

It should also be noted, as I have highlighted earlier in this chapter, that trans performance can become overt or tacit over time. Cesario in *Twelfth Night* indexes transness only in specific scenes. One of the more prominent examples is the Wachowski's *Matrix* trilogy (1999, 2003, and 2003), science fiction films that they directed before their transition. The films revolve around the conceit that most of the humans live in a virtual reality induced by a dream-like state that is controlled by machines. The few remaining humans who are not enslaved by the machines fight back by connecting their brain to the mainframe computer and enter the virtual world of the "matrix." Their embodiment in the simulated reality differs from their bodies in the real world. After the directors "came out," as they put it (Keegan 2015, 139), their films' theme of transformation has come to be regarded as "latently trans-coded" (Sanders 2023). Indeed, the character Switch was written as being male in the real world but female in the matrix. Interpreting *The Matrix* more than a decade after the films' release, Cáel M. Keegan (2015, 29) argues that the franchise is "narratively transgender," with a plotline that follows "the sequence of dysphoria, identity realization [and] name change." For instance, he finds "trans* affect" in Morpheus's lines, "What you know, you can't explain. You've felt it your entire life. There's something wrong with the world" (34). Even though the films were not initially intended as a "trans allegory," the Wachowskis have embraced that interpretation at a later point in time, because, in Lilly Wachowski's words, the narratives were "written by two closeted trans women" (Sanders 2023).

Even the presence of trans bodies in overtly trans productions only represent bodies in a moment in time, similar to other processes such as aging or wearing one's hair long or short. In the future, those bodies may cease to index the practices they do today. Societies tend to arbitrarily deem certain somatic and even social transformations (e.g., change of body types) more natural than others (e.g., evolving gender practices). The "naturalized" changes, such as wrinkles, may not always be thought of as positive, but they do not carry with them nearly the same level of stigma as gender transformations do.

Conclusion

My trans-inclusive interpretations examine how literary and dramatic characters use their speech acts to reconfigure transitive social spaces and to deconstruct the supposed neutrality of cisgender subject positions that have dominated literary criticism. Recognizing that compulsory diagnosis is itself another form of imposition, my theory of trans performativity seeks to understand, rather than diagnose and categorize, gender-diverse characters. Trans as method, a systemic method of interpreting the performativity of speech acts, serves disempowered communities rather than services compulsory normativity because it acknowledges the space inhabited by atypical bodies while

avoiding replicating the mis-categorization of trans individuals. Performativity opens narratives up for new interpretations that attend to speech acts.

Attending to performativity enables us to expand the scope of trans literature, to attend to the materiality of transness, and to turn gender variance from merely what is mistakenly seen as a plot device into an integral part of embodied mimesis. This view of trans literature can be more inclusive and demonstrates that transness concerns everyone, especially when there is already an increasing number of documented incidents of cis women being harassed for "not looking feminine enough" (Mahdawi 2023). By trans inclusiveness I refer to conscientious and intentioned engagement with transness rather than a superficial form of encyclopedic comprehensiveness that essentially serves as euphemism for institutions such as schools, workplaces, and literary canons. It is not truly inclusive if we reduce trans theory to a simplified extension of existing gender theory. Being included is distinct from being seen, heard, and understood with compassion. As Kemp writes in Chapter 14, inclusion in a superficial form often serves the institution's optics rather than trans communities.

Last, but not least, as useful as it may be to apply the theory of trans performativity to works that were not labeled as trans, the theory of performativity is not a mechanism of exposure. Further, performativity is not to be conflated with performance. Detractors often accuse trans people of "performing" to "pass" as someone else to deceive the society (Samuels 2015). On one hand, the notion of gender expressions as "citational" practices has been misappropriated by anti-trans groups to invalidate trans life, and, as a result, rejected by some trans activists as harmful to trans self-realization. On the other hand, trans performances can serve socially reparative purposes through characterization and representation, as evidenced by Crisp's role in *Orlando*. The notion of performativity has the power to destabilize the idea of singularity and the perceived absolutism of gender as a signifier.

Note

1 Invitation into one's personal space, instead of coming out, is now a more preferable way to describe the act of sharing one's identities with others. Advocates such as Janet Mock and Darnell L. Moore invite people selectively into their personal space as a form of self-empowerment and assertion of autonomy. Moore, for instance, envisions a "personal/political space that we are no longer forced to come out from, but available for us to invite others into" (Moore 2012). This queer space is defined by self-determination.

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THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF TRANS LITERATURE

Edited by Douglas A. Vakoch and Sabine Sharp

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THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF TRANS LITERATURE

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Douglas A. Vakoch is President of METI, dedicated to Messaging Extraterrestrial Intelligence. Dr. Vakoch's recent books include *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on Environment and Nature* (2020), *Transgender India: Understanding Third Gender Identities and Experiences* (2022), *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature* (2023), *and Indian Transgender Literature: Fiction and Autobiography in Regional Perspective* (2024).

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