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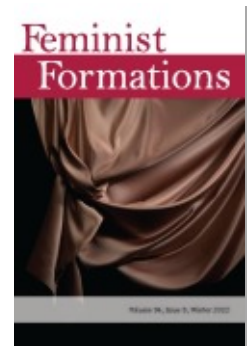
## Coming to (Trans) Care: An Introduction

Jack Jen Giesecking, David A. Rubin

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# Coming to (Trans) Care: An Introduction

Jack Jen Giesecking and David A. Rubin

*Trans Care* landed in our mailboxes just as the pandemic spiked in June of 2020, its publication date being one day shy of the 51st anniversary of the Stonewall rebellion. It is important to gesture to our trans, queer, and ally mailboxes as more than receptacles and rather as sites of connection because this text emerged, a book about the “care webs” that sustain us, when we were even more isolated and afraid than we usually are. Just two years later, Hil Malatino’s short volume has become a central text in the ever-emerging field of trans studies, and a key resource for feminist and queer scholarship as well.

Recently, many of us began to intermittently meet and touch and exchange each other’s aerosols again—awash in vaccines and new immune-escaping variants, war and climate change, PTSD and possibility, loss and our ceaseless practices of healing. The trans care webs Malatino describes in his book can (sometimes) know one another again or for the first time with (in some spaces and times) faces beyond screens, social media feeds, and masks. The replies to *Trans Care* that form this dossier sit squarely in the period of reaching out, and reaching within, that has touched us all in new ways.

We, Jack and David, were invited to put together this dossier after the occasion of Malatino’s Southeastern Women’s Studies Association (SEWSA) LGBTQ Caucus book panel. The scholars in this dossier were invited because they represented a diverse array of topical, disciplinary, identity, and experiential positions. Their readings of Malatino’s book are strikingly distinct and filled with recurring themes: each presents a unique disciplinary take to guide our introspection and our activism while returning us back generously to what light the text sheds upon us. In other words, each reply is its own form of care.

After both discussing this book on the SEWSA panel and then teaching this book—as we discuss in our conclusion—we found so much connecting and loving in/with/from/alongside the “little yellow book,” as Jules Gill-Peterson calls it. Further, editing this dossier of tremendously insightful and generous

trans studies scholars together was its own gift. We came to meet each other as unknowns who were happy to work on something that gave us any sort of joy together amid a period of so much utter crap.

Our first editorial meeting involved an evening beverage, exclamations of how ecstatic we were to be in conversation with this text and this group, and the flow of a beautiful chat of making a friend. In our following gatherings and in between, we sent notes congratulating one another on moves and possibilities of moves; we reminded one another to be gentle with ourselves when facing another bout of the medical industrial complex; we reminded our authors it was surely okay to take more writing time and sent notes to scholars who could not write replies—because after all that too was a form of trans care; and we read, edited, and wrote together, coming to know not only Malatino’s generative contributions but also one another just a bit more in each gesture.

Some brief introductions to the pieces are warranted, but we present them knowing these are only glimpses of a series of texts. We believe that each response, like Malatino’s book and response here, should be read again and again. Each reading offers manifold insights for trans scholarship, trans teaching, trans collegiality, and even everyday trans lives. We structure the dossier to begin from our own geography: the academy. Then we wander across positions and disciplinary boundaries, fuzzy and otherwise, which Malatino perspicuously deems a form of “sprawl” in his reply: through trans comedy shows and punk shows, privates and publics, racialized advertising and discursive productions of who “we” are, the (g\$@#!mn) medical industrial complex, climate change and infrastructure, until we, by which we mean the collective we reading this, finally arrive where so many us inevitably wind up for our survival: community-engaged activism.

“What care is there to be given and who is ready to receive it?” asks Jules Gill-Peterson in our first instance. A broad and important question inspired by *Trans Care*, Gill-Peterson takes up two instances of the academy: the efforts to build “diversity” into the academy, i.e., its “rebranding as trans-inclusive,” and her work as co-editor of *Transgender Studies Quarterly: TSQ* and its relationship to the institutionalization of trans studies. She identifies *Trans Care* as “a signal text” for her hypothesis that “much of the anger, resentment, pain, and anguish animating trans people’s relationship to the academy and trans studies today—which is to say, also, our relationship to one another—comes in the vertiginous disappointment that the university is not the right place for trans care. Yet the demand persists” (her emphasis). She poses a series of “live questions, not rhetorical ones” that invigorate the reader to wrestle with both the negative and positive feelings—and the racialized, racist, and transmisogynist structures that shape these feelings—that bring us to trans care.

In “Exploring Racialized Gender Dynamics through Hil Malatino’s *Trans Care*,” Andrea J. Pitts takes up *Trans Care*’s focus on the care webs of the bar, the club, and the street. They offer a critical reflection on their experience growing

up in the Tampa Bay region of Florida and the racialized gendered dynamics of trans and queer care labor. Grounding their account in histories of settler colonialism and Indigenous genocide, decolonial and Black resistance, and diasporic community formation in spaces also occupied by white supremacist groups, Pitts shares their experience of the oi, ska, and rockabilly scenes of their youth. Analyzing their own “precarious relationship to whiteness, being of mixed ethnic and racial parentage,” Pitts contrasts Malatino’s hot take on trans emo masculinities and Fall Out Boy culture with their growing awareness of the ways in which white masculinities are thoroughly racialized, involved in the ability to control space, and are enabled to regulate the social sphere through acts of ridicule, taunting, and violence. Thus, Pitts raises the question of how racialized gender norms and histories and racialized affective investments in white masculinity shape Malatino’s theorization of trans care. Offered in the spirit of caring critique, Pitts emphasizes the importance of looking not exclusively to “counterculture” to craft trans care webs but also to the ways in which trans BIPOC people learn “our hustles and care praxis from our racial and ethnic communities, even as fraught as those communities might be with awkward, damaging, and sometimes hostile forms of misinformation and belief about trans life, desires, and needs.” For many trans BIPOC, Pitts argues, “our messiness” cannot be reduced to gender alone.

In “Privates: Theorizing Private Space in Trans Care,” Jack Jen Giesecking brings critical geographic thinking to *Trans Care* to highlight ways of doing transness that cannot be cultivated apart from “our wheres of doing transness,” or what he calls “trans space.” By space, they mean the “physical or digital, real or imagined, virtual and material environment in which social relations—individual and collective—take place.” Giesecking argues that trans care webs are expansive affectively and theoretically, and for this reason require a specifically spatial reading. A geographical timeline emerges, he shows, through *Trans Care*’s repeated mention of publics and privates, among other geographical scales and the role of a trans sense of place. Fleshing this trans sense of place out, Giesecking suggests that Malatino’s work specifically and trans studies more generally is uniquely positioned to theorize, study, and critically understand private space as “a sort of embodied and networked care slipping point to mark the public-private divide.”

What is more private and more public than humor? In Rox Samer’s essay, they approach *Trans Care* through trans media studies, pointing to how the book “reckons with the very language appropriate to write of them, with them, for them, without presuming too seamless a relation to them” in the study of the culture of trans objects, namely humor. Samer points to the unsaid consumption (including binge watching) of often or at least at times humorous TV and YouTube/TikTok video sharing trans content. These practices of entertainment consumption, they argue compellingly, is an undercurrent to trans survival—which includes the consumption of trans academic humor,

indeed referencing Malatino's book as such a text. The ways "we've turned to each other" in the face of "a refusal of care [being] the best you can hope for," per Malatino, include, mightily in fact per Samer, ways of "laughing together, via trans comedy" as trans care.

Cameron Awkward-Rich's piece begins from "*feel*"-ing Hil's "already-beloved book" (his emphasis). He intercedes in asking who the trans "We" is in "one of the most immediately useful works of contemporary critical trans studies." Awkward-Rich pushes us to think about when we-ness is a trigger or assumption, whether on account of systematic violence like deracialization or class privilege, or just how you are trans feeling it that day. Rather, he points to a collective tending to and with. Harkening back to the notion of sprawl Malatino sees in these texts, Awkward-Rich beautifully theorizes how that collective "we" can form in an act of "dilation" firmly affixed to the book, offering us how one might "open oneself up, a self-expansion that is, in Malatino's words, 'all about care.'"

David A. Rubin's essay digs into the medicalization of intersex bodyminds through the work on critical intersex studies, an ever-growing field that Malatino's first book is also central to. Unlike the development of gender affirming care that has offered an international lexicon for trans people, Rubin writes that "no comparable model of 'intersex affirming care' has emerged." As a way to disrupt the "uneven and unequal distribution of life chances for intersex, trans, and gender-nonconforming subjects," they theorize the practice of "intersex care" from and alongside Malatino's trans care in that both share "a collective commitment to bodily autonomy and the fundamental right to self-determination." Like many of the other authors, Rubin draws attention to the "colonial modern logics" that shape the violence and injustice that trans and intersex people face as bound to other experiences of inequality, racism, homophobia, and ableism. "Intersex care," they write, "emerges the instant we seek to materialize new modes of valuing a heterogeneity of bodyminds."

In "Trans Arts of Cultivating Resilience: *Trans Care* and Climate Emergency," Davy Knittle analyzes *Trans Care*'s deployment of ecological metaphors and "articulates an approach to care that centers trans life as it is sutured to networks of interspecies support and belonging." Knittle takes the management of wildfires as one example of living with the conditions of "imminent environmental collapse." He asks how attention to conventional family structures can help us think critically about the ideological and political economic motivations of fire management and building practices "that produced our current catastrophic relationship to fire in the United States, particularly in the wildland-urban interface." Turning to science fiction as a resource for rethinking the ecological present, Knittle engages with Octavia Butler's visionary 1993 text, *Parable of the Sower* to explore both the gains and challenges of pivoting from a cisheteronormative model of care to one of interdependence. In this way, Knittle sheds new light on the environmental and infrastructural relations with which trans care webs are woven and rewoven.

Reweaving is a central figure taken up by Elliot Fukui and Christoph Hanssmann's co-authored creative, philosophical, and activist-oriented collaborative contribution to this dossier. In "Aftercare and Catharsis: Cultivating the Trans Arts of Living," Fukui and Hanssmann reflect on Malatino's "minimal definition of community" as "folks who are reweaving" to foreground the expansiveness and potential of this definition. Sharing experiences from Fukui's *Cathartic Cartographies* workshops, including his experience of being gay/trans bashed on a Brooklyn sidewalk, Fukui and Hanssmann analyze the varied geographic and geopolitical scales of transphobic violence and community response. Fukui's workshops encourage participants to reflect on the many layers of violence, past and present. "*Cathartic Cartographies* asks participants where they work, hustle, find joy, and experience harm, and so on—and then spatially plots their responses. These maps become a collective one, revealing hauntings and the specters they raise." Conjoining the geographic with the spectral, Fukui and Hanssmann's provocative contribution demonstrates that *Trans Care* "offers up both theories and journey maps to consider care otherwise, enacted by *those who are reweaving*."

In his response to this dossier, "Sprawl: Emergent Forms of Thinking with *Trans Care*," Malatino writes of the sprawl he sees in these replies: across topics, disciplines, approaches, and insights. For Malatino, sprawl itself is sprawling like this dossier: he uses words like untidy, irregular, awkward, luxurious, extravagant, ungainly along zones of underthought and/or indiscernibility. The dossier is also a sprawl of possible ways of thinking and being, part of the core of what being trans is or always might yet be.

Most importantly, to us as editors, Malatino shares about their experiences of writing *Trans Care* that articulates a theme we previously had not recognized: our collective authorial replies to Malatino bear a true sense of joy for reading his book. The hurt and rage and loss and fear and sadness and trauma that Malatino was situated in—that the rest of the contributors refer to, make undercurrent, or outright discuss in our replies—is now laid bare. We wonder now how this "little yellow book" will be read and, even we would suggest, must be read differently or with even more generosity and care, whereby we consider not just the positionality of the author as what he must face in an identity category, but also the positionality of each author's bodymind *and* heart. Perhaps this, too, is a contribution of *Trans Care* and trans care more broadly: the bodymind laid bare as something so much more than the bodymind it is made out to be.

We are grateful to Hil, Jules, Andrea, Rox, Cam, Davy, Elliott, and Christoph for their labor, determination, brilliance, and resistance in writing this dossier and in writing all that they write. We thank them for giving of themselves and giving us each other too. This dossier too produces a contested and shifting "we"—"provisional and desiring," as Malatino puts it in his response to this dossier. How these "I's" become a "we" is in the act of showing up for

one another, showing up together. In both the *I* and the *we* and the spacetime between, let there be trans care.

**Jack Jen Giesecking** is an urban and digital cultural geographer, and environmental psychologist whose first book is *A Queer New York: Geographies of Lesbians, Dykes, and Queers, 1983–2008* (NYU Press, 2020). Jack is Managing Editor of *ACME: International Journal of Critical Geography*. They are presently working on his second book, *Dyke Bars\**. He is Research Fellow at the Five College Women's Studies Research Center. Jack can be found at @jgieseking or jgieseking.org.

**David A. Rubin** is Associate Professor in the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of South Florida, author of *Intersex Matters: Biomedical Embodiment, Gender Regulation, and Transnational Activism* (SUNY Press, 2017), co-editor of *Queer Feminist Science Studies: A Reader* (University of Washington Press, 2017), and co-editor of "The Intersex Issue," a recent special issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*: TSQ.