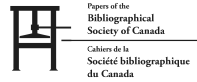


Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada



Subscribing to gendertrash The Radical Subcultural Transmissions of Toronto's Original "TransZine"

Sidney Cunningham

Volume 57, 2019

LGBTQ+ Print Culture: Overviews and Perspectives
L'imprimé LGBTQ+ au Canada et ailleurs : bilans et perspectives

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1069857ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v57i0.32785>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Bibliographical Society of Canada/La Société bibliographique du Canada

ISSN

0067-6896 (print)
2562-8941 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Cunningham, S. (2019). Subscribing to gendertrash: The Radical Subcultural Transmissions of Toronto's Original "TransZine". *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada / Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada*, 57, 13–41. <https://doi.org/10.33137/pbsc.v57i0.32785>

Article abstract

This article situates the Canadian zine series gendertrash between the international political context of early 1990s trans periodicals and its material roots in Toronto's Church-Wellesley village, while also providing a brief discussion of how its form and distribution relate to contemporary scholarship on the zine as genre. Published cross-promotional materials in a number of influential trans periodicals from Canada and the United States, as well as archived correspondence, demonstrate the 'zine's involvement in broader networks of solidarity and resource-sharing – against which the radical politics of this early "gender queer" publication become all the more apparent. The ArQuives' 2017 gendertrash digital collection promises an expanded sense of trans cultural inheritance yet raises ethical questions around privacy and archival categorizations of identity. This article concludes, building on earlier critiques of similar digitization projects, by positing an affect-based analogy between the role of gendertrash's subscription/distribution model and that of this recent digital collection.

All Rights Reserved © Sidney Cunningham, 2020



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Subscribing to *gendertrash*: The Radical Subcultural Transmissions of Toronto's Original "TransZine"

Sidney Cunningham

Abstract

The early 1990s zine series *gendertrash* bears many traces of its material roots in Toronto's Church-Wellesley village, where creators Xanthra Phillipa MacKay and Mirha-Soleil Ross lived and worked, alongside those of a burgeoning international trans periodical subculture. Published cross-promotional materials in a number of influential trans periodicals from Canada and the United States, as well as archived correspondence, demonstrate the zine's involvement in broader networks of solidarity and resource-sharing and serve as a backdrop against which the radical politics of this ground-breaking "gender queer" publication become all the more apparent. This article analyzes these local and international contexts while also providing a brief discussion of how its form and distribution relate to contemporary scholarly understandings of the zine as genre. A digital collection of all four issues of *gendertrash* and related archival materials was published by Toronto's ArQuives in 2017; this article concludes by addressing privacy and categorization challenges which arose during the process of its creation and by drawing an affect-based analogy between the role of *gendertrash*'s original subscription/distribution model and that of this recent digital collection.

Résumé

Le fanzine périodique *gendertrash*, paru à l'aube des années 1990, retient de nombreuses traces de ses racines matérielles dans le village Church and Wellesley de Toronto, où les créatrices Xanthra Phillipa MacKay et Mirha-Soleil Ross vivaient et travaillaient dans une florissante sous-culture internationale de périodiques transgenres. Des matériels de promotion croisée dans certains importants périodiques transgenres canadiens et américains, ainsi qu'une correspondance

archivée, démontrent l'implication du fanzine dans des réseaux de solidarité plus vastes et dans le partage de ressources, et servent de toile de fond rendant encore plus apparente la politique radicale de cette publication avant-garde « *gender queer* ». Cet article examine ces contextes locaux et internationaux, tout en pourvoyant une brève discussion sur les moyens par lesquels la forme et la diffusion de *gendertrash* s'appliquent aux compréhensions savantes contemporaines du fanzine en tant que genre. Une collection numérique contenant les quatre numéros de *gendertrash* ainsi que des documents d'archives connexes a été publiée par les *ArQuives* de Toronto en 2017; l'article se termine en abordant les défis reliés à la discrétion et à la catégorisation qui sont survenus lors de la création de cette collection, et en établissant une analogie affective entre le rôle du modèle initial d'abonnement/distribution de *gendertrash* et cette récente collection numérique.

Early scholarly interest in trans writing mostly focused on the normative feminine self-fashioning of popular autobiographies.¹ Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," which the first edition of the *Transgender Studies Reader* calls "the protean text from which contemporary transgender studies emerged," first appeared in 1991 as a sophisticated yet polemical transsexual response to earlier work by feminist theorists and psychologists.² While the latter used print memoirs and interviews to criticize transsexual womanhood as both regressively stereotypical and false or constructed, Stone points out the highly restrictive circumstances under which these texts necessarily emerge. She prompts us to ask, for example: "not by whom, but *for* whom was Lili Elbe constructed?"³ Elbe's direct influence on her life story, *Man Into Woman*, is highly disputable in comparison to other popular historical trans

¹ Sandy Stone's own bibliography is most relevant here. Efforts to define trans subjectivity through analysis of autobiographical literature have continued among cisgender scholars, although more recent work is typically more sympathetic and affirming of the subjects located.

² Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 221–35 (221). Stone's manifesto is most directly a response to the attack on her by trans-exclusionary radical feminist Janice Raymond in the infamous *The Transsexual Empire*, but other medical, legal, and scholarly figures of authority are addressed more or less directly.

³ *Ibid.*, 224.

life writing—such as that by Christine Jorgensen, Jan Morris, or Renee Richards. The truth of any of these particular accounts is not Stone's main focus, but rather the strictures of medical and cultural gatekeeping, which seem to enable and authorize trans existence only where it may serve to solidify conservative gender binaries.

In disputing negative stereotypes and overgeneralizations, Stone alludes to counterdiscourses appearing in private correspondence and other trans subcultural circulations, while divulging few details about their origins, form, content, or audiences:

Many transsexuals keep something they call by the argot term "O.T.F.": The Obligatory Transsexual File. This usually contains newspaper articles and bits of forbidden diary entries about "inappropriate" gender behavior. Transsexuals also collect autobiographical literature. According to the Stanford gender dysphoria program, the medical clinics do not, because they consider autobiographical accounts thoroughly unreliable. Because of this, and since a fair percentage of the literature is invisible to many library systems, these personal collections are the only source for some of this information. I am fortunate to have a few of them at my disposal.⁴

Tantalizing references like these may suggest, to later generations of trans scholars, the allure of mining our elders' personal archives. In recent years, due to digitization and "onlining" efforts at institutions such as the Digital Transgender Archives (DTA), the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria, and Toronto's ArQuives, these histories are becoming accessible in new ways. Against established genealogies, represented by popular trans autobiographies and the scholarly discipline of trans studies, or the "invisible" genealogies of personal collections, subcultural periodicals represent a middle ground. Within issues, between issues, and between publications, a polyvocal print counterdiscourse emerges through the 1990s, spurred on by these more public or scholarly discussions as much as by more determinedly local concerns.

This article situates the ground-breaking Canadian zine series *gendertrash*⁵ in the context of its emergence in the early-1990s trans periodical landscape of North America as well as the particular social

⁴ Ibid., 224.

⁵ The cover art of issue one appears to depict a full title of "gendertrash from hell," but given that this term appears nowhere else in the first issue, nor any subsequent issues, I am treating "gendertrash" as the full title.

and material environment of its production in Toronto. It draws on published cross-promotional materials in a number of contemporaneous trans periodicals from Canada and the United States, as well as archived correspondence to demonstrate the zine's involvement in broader trans networks of solidarity and resource sharing. In this context, the radical politics of this "gender queer" publication become all the more apparent; *gendertrash* consistently advocated for a trans investment in the decriminalization of sex work, prison abolition, and decolonization, and it featured lengthy critical essays by sex workers and prisoners alongside poetry, visual art, fiction, health advice, and personal ads.

Despite these loftier and more cosmopolitan ambitions, *gendertrash*'s content and archival paratexts are both firmly tied to the urban space in which it was created by transsexual couple Xanthra Phillippa MacKay and Mirha-Soleil Ross. Its hybrid aesthetic—part computer-generated layout and part DIY paste-up—is not simply a punk throwback, but rather a product of serious economic constraints which were only intermittently relieved by community support and collaboration. Given its unprofitability,⁶ *gendertrash*'s relative influence is better explained by the appeal of Ross and MacKay's earnest creativity, compelling rhetorics, and intense determination to circulate potentially life-saving information.

Following the donation of a large personal collection from Ross, the ArQuives⁷ published an online collection which includes digitized editions of all four issues of *gendertrash* along with related genderpress⁸ records and artifacts. Such collections expand and diversify the hypothetical canon of trans writing and promise valuable records of material/affective links within historical trans networks while also generating new ones—a sense of trans cultural inheritance within communities that increasingly organize in digital rather than physical space.

⁶ An insert added to the first issue notes that the zine is "run by a few starving individuals & funded entirely out of their own pockets ... At least 50% of the original run were distributed to groups & individuals free of charge, in order to reach the transsexual community." The second issue was printed with a subscription page advertising "free to prisoners and the institutionalized" (50), closely following similar language in the listing for *Transsexual News Telegraph*, appearing for the first time in this same issue (49). Dozens of trans prisoners across Canada and the United States responded to the offer of free subscriptions, with many looking for pen pals as well.

⁷ Formerly the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives.

⁸ genderpress was the name of the publishing outfit run by MacKay and Ross. It produced no zines other than *gendertrash*.

This article proceeds in a loosely chronological order in discussing the zine's content and form, and the lives of its editors. Beginning with the combative outer form of the zine, I discuss how this reflects its generic influences, the real material-economic constraints of its production, and, eventually, its involvement in a broader and more ideologically and economically varied network of trans publishers. This transitions into a short section that addresses the relationship between *gendertrash*'s relatively unusual subscription publishing model and the implicit goals of its creators. While aligning *gendertrash*'s collaborative and activist tendencies with what scholar Adela C. Licona terms "third space zines,"⁹ I also acknowledge how other, less zine-like, subcultural trans periodicals exerted an increasing influence over the span of its four-issue run, as MacKay and Ross came into ever greater contact with other trans publishers and activists. In the following section, I return to Stone's manifesto and trace its influence on *gendertrash* and contemporaneous periodicals as an indication of a growing transfeminist backlash against an established "transnormativity" and an illustration of the profound but tumultuous interconnectedness of the subcultural publications involved. The final section posits an affect-based analogy between the role of genderpress's original subscription-distribution model and that of the current digital collection, while assessing responses to the zine's coining of the term "gender[]queer" and the bite-sized politics of the associated genderpress buttons as a measure of its ongoing potency.

"A Hand Grenade Disguised as a Magazine": The Explosive Entrance of *gendertrash*

The first two issues of *gendertrash* are printed on legal-size paper, folded in half and stapled to produce a slim booklet of 8.5 x 7 inches.¹⁰ The cover is a coloured cardstock, which protectively encloses the first and second issues' respective thirty-six and forty-eight inner pages. While not imposing in size, the aggressive front and back covers of the first two issues might impose upon readers an acute awareness of the need for careful hand positioning, when reading in public, if they do not wish to become a miniature billboard advertisement for the zine's radical perspective.

⁹ Adela C. Licona, *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 21.

¹⁰ "Half-legal," in zinester lingo.

"CAUSE WE'RE JUST AS / QUEER AS DYKES AND FAGS / ;MAYBe / evEn / MORe / SO!" is displayed in chopped-up newsprint letters on the back cover of issue one (see fig. 1). This word art is one of the most aesthetically punk/DIY pages of the entire series, and it serves formally as an enveloping claim which is aggressively proven throughout the inner pages. The second issue features a similar piece (see fig. 2), this time spelling out "hey faggots/ If you're gOING to / CALL uS / TRANNIES OR TRANSies / Then WE'LL caLL You / stupid Dicks & WEE-wees / time for you to grow UP." Either back cover might advertise the zine's marriage of low-budget production and angry trans politics to interested readers. Both also telegraph a more particular tension between trans and gay/lesbian communities, and the second-person address could serve, furthermore, to implicate readers in this conflict on the part of this "we"/"us"—a gesture that would presumably have a different impact in the public spaces of Toronto's Church and Wellesley gay village than in more implicitly heteronormative public spaces (or private reading spaces).¹¹ The back cover of the third issue simply displays a larger version of the genderpress "I love transsexuals" pin button (figure 3), one of sixty-three, which could be purchased by mail order.



Figure 1

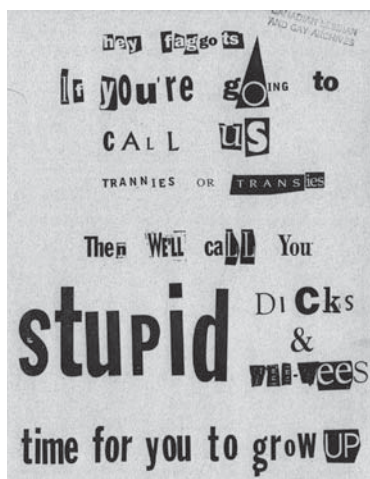


Figure 2

¹¹ On the history and geography of "Toronto's Gay Village," see Catherine Jean Nash, "Toronto's Gay Village (1969–1982): Plotting the Politics of Gay Identity," *Canadian Geographer* 50, no. 1 (2006): 1–16.



Figure 3



Figure 4

The final issue's entire back page was taken up with an advertisement for monographs and videos sold by Creative Design Services (see fig. 4).¹² The advertisement's text takes up only the bottom third of the page; the rest displays a photographic portrait of a blindfolded figure, resembling the mythical mid-century American housewife more than any of the many, diverse photographs of actual trans women elsewhere in *gendertrash*. Most of the ads for publications in *gendertrash* were direct trades for promotion in kind rather than paid advertisements, but in this case payment for this prime real estate was enough to cover most of the printing costs for the fourth issue. So while this advertisement represents (both textually and visually) a significant depoliticization of the outer form of the zine in the sense that it seems to embrace uncritically the sort of traditional gender-normative white, middle-class femininity that Ross, MacKay, and many other trans activists were actively working to challenge, it also signifies the degree to which *gendertrash's* existence and impact was enabled by the support, recognition, and endorsement of other trans publishers—even those printing materials with a considerably less radical perspective.

gendertrash was reviewed (mostly) positively in many other trans periodicals of its time, as well as in the influential zine-review zines *Factsheet Five* and *Queer Zine Explosion*. Within the pages

¹² Creative Design Services was also the American publisher of *Ladylike* magazine.

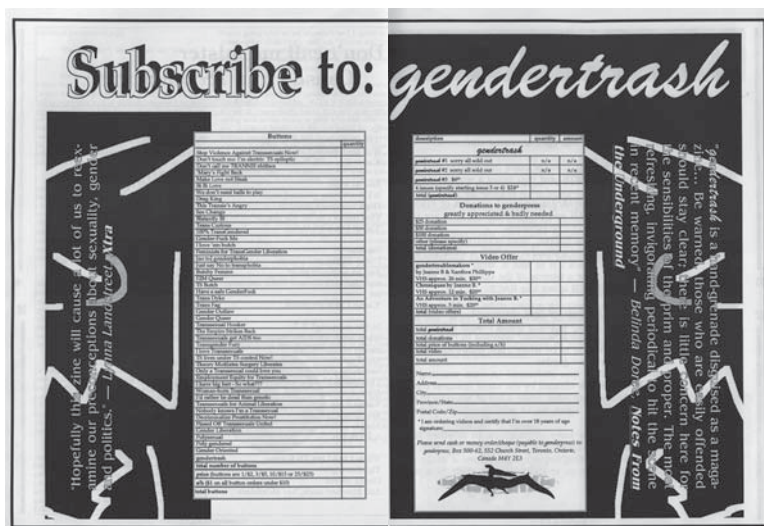


Figure 5

of *gendertrash*, such endorsement is made most explicit in the subscription form, which first appeared as the two-page centerfold in issue three (see fig. 5).¹³ Alongside another endorsement from the Toronto alt-weekly *XTRA*, the form incorporates the following quote from Belinda Doree, of *Notes From the Underground*, a biweekly newsletter from the Ottawa-based trans organization Gender Mosaic: “*gendertrash* is a hand-grenade disguised as a magazine ... Be warned, those who are easily offended should stay clear; there is little concern here for the sensibilities of the prim and proper. The most refreshing, invigorating periodical to hit the scene in recent memory.” Doree’s explosive imagery is a tongue-in-cheek reference to MacKay’s fictional series *TSe TSe TerroriSm* (discussed further below), yet this figurative representation also reflects a recognition of the zine’s acute potential for disruptiveness, both inside and outside of trans communities. To describe this intervention as “refreshing, invigorating” signals Doree’s recognition of the value of pointed challenges from voices occupying substantially different social positions and offering new possible formulations of what might constitute this “scene”

¹³ “Subscribe to *gendertrash*!” in *gendertrash* 3 (winter 1995): 22–24. This subscription form also functioned as an advertisement and was printed in multiple later issues of *TransSisters*.

or community. This snapshot of *gendertrash*'s circular engagement with its own reception, and its related self-positioning on the discursive bleeding edge of a distinct subculture, is very much in keeping with queer theorist Michael Warner's description of the structure of a counterpublic—especially given Warner's emphasis on periodical media as the most prototypical (or perhaps just the most obvious) texts contributing to the formation of a public.¹⁴ Rather than focusing on this relevant yet broad conceptual framework, however, in what follows we will see how *gendertrash* stands in relation to its closest peer publications and to current scholarly accounts of the zine genre.

In functioning (for most of its run) as a subscription zine, *gendertrash* is distinctly unusual within the genre. Many zines are published as stand-alone monographs. Serial zines are far from typical periodicals in that most "consistently appear[] at inconsistent intervals"; subscription zines are almost unheard of.¹⁵ Many of the serial trans publications advertised or otherwise referenced in the pages of *gendertrash* did offer yearly subscriptions, yet this seems almost always to have been enabled by an affiliation with a particular local trans organization or conference, meaning that they likely functioned more like newsletters for a limited, local, and fairly static set of members. *Notes from the Underground* is one such local serial. The most significant exception is the Kansas City-based *TransSisters*, a quarterly "Journal of Transsexual Feminism," which had a nine-issue run between 1993 and 1995. As suggested by the connotative contrast between "zine" and "journal," *TransSisters* had a somewhat more conventional, polished format and a less adversarial slant than *gendertrash*, and it managed to keep much closer to its announced publication schedule, although it was similarly a self-published labour of love on the part of its editor, Davina Anne Gabriel. *Transsexual News Telegraph* (TNT), a serial published in San Francisco from 1991 to 2002, is the next most obvious peer publication,¹⁶ but its publishers, Gail Sondegaard and Anne Ogborn, had served previously

¹⁴ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," in *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 65–124.

¹⁵ Heidy Berthoud, "My Life as a 'Like-Minded Misfit,' or, Experiences in Zine Librarianship," *Serials Review* 44, no. 1 (2018): 4–12 (5), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00987913.2018.1434857>.

¹⁶ In a CiTR radio interview that took place between the second and third issues of *gendertrash*, MacKay explicitly identifies both *TransSisters* and *TNT* as the closest peers of *gendertrash* among trans publications (given their politics and

as organizers for the local activist group Transgender Nation as well as the annual “New Woman” conference.

For some scholars, the defining feature of zines is that they are not made for profit. With good reason, most self-identified zinesters don’t attempt to publish via a subscription model. Subscriptions can help defray ongoing production costs, but they also create obligations that a DIY publisher might struggle to fulfill consistently. Subscription can be understood to mean a commitment either to a particular ideology or to ongoing engagement with a publication, and *gendertrash* attempted to secure both by partial adherence to a mixed set of zine, periodical, and community newsletter conventions. Rather than publishing for an existing (and perhaps institutionally sanctioned) network or to assert a uniquely alienated artistic position, *gendertrash* served as a means to produce a radical, action-oriented community *through* publishing.

A preoccupation with zinesters’ socioeconomic location is a feature of much of the relevant existing scholarship on zines. In one of the most influential studies to date, *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, author Stephen Duncombe claims:

Most zinesters are young and the children of professionals, culturally if not financially middle-class. White and raised in a relatively privileged position within the dominant culture, they have since embarked on “careers” of deviance that have moved them to the edges of this society; embracing downwardly mobile career aspirations, unpopular musical and literary tastes, transgressive ideas about sexuality, unorthodox artistic sensibilities, and a politics resolutely outside the status quo (more often to the left, but sometimes to the right) ... they’re simply “not interested” in the “big game” that is the straight world. In short, zine writers and readers, although they’d be horrified to be tagged with such a pat term, are what used to be called bohemians.¹⁷

Duncombe is neither purely enchanted by, nor cynical toward, the zines and zinesters he studies. He has, however, contributed substantially to an image of zinesters as pursuing unpublishable content and low-quality production in a totally aestheticized

recent debuts). This set of three serials is also mentioned briefly in Susan Stryker’s *Transgender History* (New York: Seal Press, 2008), 183.

¹⁷ Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (Bloomington: Microcosm Publishing, 2008), 12.

(and implicitly ineffectual) reaction to middle-class angst. Avoiding the “‘big game’ that is the straight world” implicitly excludes anyone who would not have had access to this “straight world” in the first place. In response to the limitations of this perspective, scholar Adela C. Licona coined the term “Duncombesque” to describe a subgenre of zines created as “self-reflective spaces of radical individuality”¹⁸—in contrast, that is, to other zine subgenres more invested in collective action and community building, especially those she describes as “coalitional” or “third-space zines”: “where coalitional consciousness is explicit, activism is engaged and promoted, and community building, knowledge generating, grassroots literacies, and information sharing are the articulated foci.”¹⁹

The Mirha-Soleil Ross archival fonds, as well as trans community memory, make it possible to see that *gendertrash* was deeply entangled in (if not the very cause of) such a groundwork. One may argue, in countless ways, that *gendertrash* fulfilled the description of a “third-space zine,” but the urgent local need for continued avenues for communication and organizing may be illustrated most starkly by the zine’s ongoing focus on violence against trans sex workers. This is most immediately visible in the second issue, which contains two artistic memorials for slain sex workers and as well as a warning which describes another’s encounter with a violent client. The same issue also contains an interview with another trans woman recently crowned “Hooker of the Year”—turning a camp title bestowed by the local drag monarchy into a larger aspirational narrative of prosperity and resilience.

Without attempting to stake out some kind of precise intersectional identity coordinates for Ross and MacKay, this ongoing debate among zine scholars illustrates how archival, bibliographic, and editorial work on zines can illuminate histories and methods of subcultural resistance. Therefore, the implications and affective weight of these brief features, directed at a small, local community of trans sex workers (or, for that matter, any other texts contained within the pages of *gendertrash*), may be best understood in an awareness of the personal histories of its creators and the labour that went into assembling each issue and the series as a whole.

¹⁸ Adela C. Licona, *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 21.

¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

Collaboration and Assemblage: Producer and Production History

Mirha-Soleil Ross is a transsexual video maker, performer, sex worker, and animal rights activist who was born and raised in a poor francophone neighborhood on the south shore of Montreal.²⁰ Her first two videos, *Chroniques* (1992) and *An Adventure in Tucking with Jeanne B* (1993), documented some of her early experiences with sex work in her hometown. Ross arrived in Toronto late in 1992, in search of economic opportunities to finance gender-affirming surgery. There she met local trans writer and activist Xanthra Phillippa MacKay, with whom she embarked on a romantic and creative partnership—a whirlwind of artistic productivity—creating the video *Gendertroublemakers*²¹ as well as the first two issues of *gendertrash* before the end of 1993.

gendertrash brought together a wide range of forms—visual art, poetry, essays, interviews, film reviews, resource listings, personals, and more. A large portion of this varied content was created by Ross and MacKay themselves, but much was also contributed by friends, acquaintances, and readers, and hand-pasted together to create the final page masters for photocopying. This low-cost collage technique added to the zine's punk aesthetic, but not all elements of *gendertrash* were hand-assembled in this manner; the basic page layouts and occasional digital artwork demonstrate MacKay's early interest in computer-aided design.²² Although other DIY collage and paste-up techniques are visible inside each issue, in terms of overall format the inner pages sit somewhere between the much glossier

²⁰ Ross's later performance works and public speeches make her working-class Métis background (and the influence it had on her perspective) much more explicit than any of what she produced for *gendertrash*.

²¹ *Gendertroublemakers* consists of short interview segments set in MacKay's apartment; in it, each woman discusses her enjoyment of other trans women's company and her difficulties dating gay men before coming out as trans. These clips are intercut with scenes of the couple playfully embracing on a bed.

²² This is most visible in the word art backdrops used for most of MacKay's *gendertrash* poetry and prose, but there are further examples of her experimentation with digital visual artwork and digital photo manipulation within the Ross fonds. The Hugh Garner housing co-operative in which Ross lived at the time gave her access to a shared computer with desktop publishing software, which she had presumably used earlier for her contributions to *In Your Face* as well as the co-op's own newsletter *Hugh & Cry* (which was edited by Bruce Eakin, a Queer Nation activist who also contributed to a number of the genderpress button designs).

look of contemporaneous American trans subcultural periodicals like *TransSisters*, *Chrysalis*, or *Cross-Talk* and the more conventionally zine-like look of earlier queer zines such as Toronto's *J.D.s* and Montreal's *Queer Tapette/Queer Terrorist*.²³

The first issue of *gendertrash* opens with the promise of giving “a voice to gender queers, who’ve been discouraged from speaking out and communicating with each other”—possibly the first published instance of the now increasingly widespread term *genderqueer*, as I will discuss in the concluding section.²⁴ Following the issue’s front matter, MacKay’s poem “welcome” delivers a similar message in a different register; it begins, “welcome gender queers / to the world of gender trash / our gender world,”²⁵ and then provides three pages of both literal and conceptual space to broach a litany of possibilities for what makes up this “world that is not owned by one / a few / a world that is shared by all of us / a world of our own.”²⁶ This emphasis on claiming space and forming community would become a central focus of the entire series in a manner MacKay could hardly have anticipated. Later issues would be more quantitatively

²³ Ross and MacKay were almost certainly familiar with the Montreal-based zine *Queer Tapette/Queer Terrorist*, as one of its creators, kiwi, was a long-time friend of Ross and later contributed writing to the second issue of *gendertrash*. While *gendertrash* doesn’t reference any punk zines from Toronto other than *In Your Face*, it would be unreasonable to reference a local queer punk subculture without mentioning the possible influence of *J.D.s*—Bruce LaBruce and G. B. Jones’s serial zine. *J.D.s* was a self-described “homocore” zine which began in 1985 and showcased the queerer corners of the hardcore scene in Toronto and beyond through typed or handwritten recollections about “Bruce’s boys” or stylized photographic reproductions and line art, by Jones, glamorizing the typically slender, pale-skinned bodies of hardcore music scene youth. *QT* is much more explicit about asserting the queerness of bisexuality and transsexuality, but both of these late-eighties/early-nineties zines represent a politically and aesthetically punk departure from (and reaction to) an emergent homonormativity. This manifests partly in a confrontational use of language; *J.D.s*, *QT*, and *gendertrash* all make frequent use of slurs like “queer,” “fag,” “dyke,” and “tranny” or “transy.”

²⁴ Xanthra Phillippa MacKay and Mirha-Soleil Ross, eds., *gendertrash* 3 (winter 1995): 2. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, I refer to MacKay and Ross as co-editors throughout this article. The descriptions of their roles varied between issues, however. For the first two, MacKay had the title of editor while Ross was described as “sexual & political advisor” and then as “political and production process supervisor.” For the last two issues, Ross had the editor title while MacKay was given the title of production director. Both were credited for “layout & design” in all four issues.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

polyvocal, as the majority of the first issue's forty pages (including covers) consisted entirely of writing and visual art by Ross and MacKay.²⁷ Still, twelve pages of this first issue were taken up with texts and images submitted or reproduced from other print sources: three pages of personal reflection and creative writing by trans man Bobby Gene (originally printed in *Tapestry* magazine), a one-page "Trannies Speak Out" feature of opinions about slur terms collected from trans patrons at a local bar, three pages reproduced from the local health region's pamphlet on safe electrolysis, two pages about historical trans figures reproduced from the *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary*, and three more pages of submitted poetry, prose, and visual art. MacKay and Ross collaborated on other textual and visual features. Their nonfiction writing in this first issue included some items with a narrow focus (such as a nuanced but positive review of the 1992 film *The Crying Game*), but most served to develop the publication's basic stance on trans experience and its sociopolitical implications.

As with later issues, MacKay contributed multiple poems and instalments of *TSe TSe TerroriSm*, her serialized fantastical narrative of life in Toronto's Church-Wellesley neighbourhood. The first instalment, "Fireworks on Carlton," opens with a transsexual revenge/self-defence power fantasy: transsexual woman Molotov Cocktail is harassed and cornered by young men in a vehicle as she walks past recognizable neighbourhood landmarks, and she defends herself dramatically in a colourful but deadly explosion. As disclosed in a brief foreword, this instalment was published earlier in the Toronto-based Queer Nation zine *In Your Face* 5.²⁸ MacKay revised the ending for reprinting in *gendertrash* 1 upon learning that:

too many people (male) were vicariously getting off on the violence in the original instalment, without considering the implications of that violence [and] these same people saw the characters (especially molotov cocktail) as one dimensional homicidal maniacs, without any real emotions of their own.

²⁷ Ross used the working names Jeanne B and Janou in earlier issues; MacKay occasionally used CaiRa as a nom de plume.

²⁸ This similarly named zine is distinct from the NYC publication launched by Riki Anne Wilchins in 1995. The Toronto-based *In Your Face* was published by Queer Nation Toronto, beginning in 1991. Confusingly, prominent Toronto zinesters Dr. Joe and Candy also published a zine titled *Fist In Your Face* through the early 1990s, which was full of testimony from victims of (frequently queerphobic) beatings.

Since both of these attributes went completely against my reasons for writing this story, i have decided to change the ending of the 1st instalment, without changing (& i emphasize this point) any of ... the characters within. They are humyn, with real feelings, concerns, needs & issues, just like those of us who are gender described, outside of the story.²⁹

What MacKay seemed to have thought would circumvent this short-sightedly nihilistic (or “Duncombesque”) reading was not just trans-trans relations, but explicitly romantic trans-trans relations. The added ending reveals Molotov weeping in the arms of her transsexual girlfriend Willow; later, they discuss how the bombing turns into a street party for a queer crowd that had remained hidden and indoors during the harassment.³⁰ This first instalment is written in the present tense, alternating between slur-filled dialogue and a third-person narration on the urban setting with an almost filmic objectivity. Later instalments vary in form, including: a first-person journal entry describing another character’s (The Scream) trip to a bathhouse;³¹ a dialogic commentary by two characters (Turquoise and Swordfish) as they watch a fictional talk show called “Transsexual Views”;³² a stand-up comedy monologue from a (self-righteously non-stereotypically feminine) transsexual liberal intercut with short scenes of violent street harassment;³³ and, lastly, a musical dream sequence with dingbats used throughout to indicate tempo, song structure, and speaker/vocalist.³⁴

The six instalments of *TSe TSe TerroriSm* give only a brief glimpse into a world that seems to anticipate a much longer narrative arc, but its scenes are linked to one another by overlapping casts of trans women appearing in recognizable Toronto locations. Each instalment explores tension *within* this local transsexual community; on the sidelines, “genetic” men and women appear as callous or naive appropriators as well as real, deadly threats. Instead of delving

²⁹ Ibid., 30.

³⁰ CaiRa (Xanthra Phillippa MacKay), “molotov and Willow,” *gendertrash* 1 (April–May 1993): 33–34.

³¹ CaiRa (Xanthra Phillippa MacKay), “The TSTubs,” *gendertrash* 1 (April–May 1993), 35–36.

³² CaiRa (Xanthra Phillippa MacKay), “The Morning After,” *gendertrash* 2 (fall 1993), 45–48.

³³ CaiRa (Xanthra Phillippa MacKay), “Nightmare on Maitland,” *gendertrash* 3 (winter 1995), 29–31.

³⁴ CaiRa (Xanthra Phillippa MacKay), “Nightmare on Maitland (part ii),” *gendertrash* 4 (spring 1995), 33–35.

deeper into these cisgender characters' roles in the conflict, they are used as a traumatic and urgent backdrop for nuanced conversations about tactics and forms of trans resistance. Some characters are more clearly mouthpieces for MacKay's own views than others, but the overall narrative ultimately doesn't prescribe any particular view so much as present rage and violence (i.e., varyingly expressed in literal or figurative episodes of terrorism perpetrated by or against transsexuals) as inevitable given the failure of the ongoing liberal/radical debates either to produce a livable alternate space or to provide security on the public streets. Scenes of intimacy between trans women offer the only brief respites from physical or verbal conflict. While engagement with the readership was only an explicit feature of *TSe TSe TerroriSm* in this one case, the seriality of *gendertrash* meant that broad differences in form and composition between issues represented stages in an evolving relationship between genderpress, its readers, and—increasingly—other trans publishers and activists. The tensions that emerge in conversations between the transsexual characters of *TSe TSe TerroriSm* often played out in one form or another between the actual trans writers contributing to subsequent issues of *gendertrash* and other associated periodicals. Beginning with the second issue, such connections to other trans publications started to become explicit.

As advertised in "Le Babillard,"³⁵ in *gendertrash* 1, a queer zine fair took place in Toronto between the first two issues, and the opportunities for networking may have had a significant effect on *gendertrash*'s subsequent form and distribution. SPEW 3 was organized in 1993 by Alan O'Connor³⁶ as a continuation of two

³⁵ "Le Babillard" translates directly as "The Bulletin Board," but its derivation from the French verb "babiller" (to babble) has slightly different connotations. Other than the title of this recurring section (containing event listings, calls for support, and other ongoing or upcoming projects open to participation), almost all of *gendertrash* is in English. There are occasional references to items having been translated from French into English by Ross, the lengthiest of which being her interview with Diane Gobeil, in *gendertrash* 4. The interview with Dancing Two Eagle Spirit (Sandra Laframboise) in the same issue mentions that, while both are Francophones, the interview was conducted in English to avoid a lengthy translation. The *gendertrash* article misspells "Two" as "To" in Laframboise's name.

³⁶ O'Connor had been involved in the early days of *The Body Politic* (a Toronto-based gay liberation periodical), but his connection to DIY publishing at that point was more closely tied to his work distributing records at punk shows. In 1997, while on a break from professorial duties, he headed the establishment of Whos Emma, a punk collective with a small storefront and performance space which served (among many other things) as the venue for a drag/variety show organized by Ross to fundraise for her animal rights radio program on CIUT.

earlier American queer zine fairs (in Chicago and then New York). Zinesters who could not attend in person were invited to mail in their publications. One of the many submitted publications was *Dragazine*, Lois Commondenominator's biannual periodical "for Halloweeners and Inbetweeners," produced in West Hollywood, California. Very little of the content presented alongside *gendertrash* at SPEW 3 was explicitly trans-related, and whether *Dragazine* is properly "trans" may be as unclear now as it was in 1993. It is even more difficult to establish where *Dragazine* fits into the zine genre, and O'Connor recalls that its relatively glossy, professional aesthetic (if not its varying vulgar content) made it stick out at SPEW 3.³⁷ Yet, inasmuch as *Dragazine* may have failed to fulfill the aesthetic expectations of the queer punks attending SPEW 3, the overall event served as a connection point, for Ross and MacKay, to a wider world of subcultural periodical publishing.

Correspondence confirms that MacKay first encountered *Dragazine* at SPEW 3.³⁸ Around this same time, the publisher of *Cross-Talk* reached out, having seen *gendertrash* listed in *Queer Zine Explosion*.³⁹ Subsequent issues of *gendertrash* demonstrate an increasing awareness of and cooperation with an expanding circle of subcultural periodicals. The second issue featured articles submitted by Davina Anne Gabriel and Janis Walworth, staff writers (and, in Gabriel's case, chief editor) for *TransSisters*, devoted to the ongoing annual "mission" of Gabriel, Walworth, and other American activists to pressure the lesbian feminist organizers of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival to reverse their trans-exclusionary "womyn born womyn" policy.

gendertrash 2 was the first issue to advertise subscriptions to *gendertrash*; it also includes a short listing of five "other interesting TransZines"⁴⁰ with corresponding information on ordering.

³⁷ Alan O'Connor, email correspondence with the author, 14 May 2019.

³⁸ Correspondence from Xanthra Phillippa Mackay to Lois Commondenominator, 6 February 1995, Foo33-4-11, Mirha-Soleil Ross fonds, ArQuives, Toronto.

³⁹ Heather Kitching, interview by Xanthra Phillippa MacKay and Mirha-Soleil Ross, *Queer FM*, CiTR 101.9 FM, 2010, audiotape archives, Student Radio Society of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0132975>.

⁴⁰ *gendertrash* 2 (fall 1993), 49. Toronto-area writer, artist, and editor Amanda Kelly would later create a serial trans periodical/zine simply titled *Tranzine* (along with the oddly spelled *Little Trany Franny*, an ongoing comic series). *Tranzine's* first three issues were published simultaneously in early 1996, and subsequent issues appeared throughout the late 1990s. Like *gendertrash*, *Tranzine* featured some

By the fourth issue, this feature had expanded into a “Publications & Newsletters” section with thirty-seven listings of trans-related periodicals from the US, Canada, the UK, and Australia.⁴¹ Archived correspondence with many of these publishers documents an informal economy of subscription and ad-swapping, and a friendly sharing of information on publishing techniques and welcoming booksellers.

Interlude: A Transfeminist Circle?

In Susan Stryker and Talia M. Bettcher’s introduction to the “Trans/Feminisms” issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, the authors acknowledge the foundational importance of Sandy Stone’s manifesto to current conceptualizations of transfeminism, while also recognizing the influence of earlier theoretical works (particularly by intersectional and/or women-of-colour feminists). Although they briefly mention *gendertrash*, *TransSisters*, *Rites of Passage*, and *Transsexual News Telegraph* as early additions to “a distinct body of transfeminist literature” shaped by Stone’s manifesto, their main focus is on more recent work. Stryker and Bettcher claim that,

In English, transfeminism, written all as one word, usually connotes a “third wave” feminist sensibility that focuses on the personal empowerment of women and girls, embraced in an expansive way that includes trans women and girls. It is adept at online activism and makes sophisticated use of social media and Internet technologies; it typically promotes sex positivity (such as support for kink and fetish practices, sex-worker rights, and opposition to “slut shaming”) and espouses affirming attitudes toward stigmatized body types (such as fat, disabled, racialized, or trans bodies); it often analyzes and interprets pop cultural texts and artifacts and critiques consumption practices, particularly as they relate to feminine beauty culture.⁴²

submitted content and would regularly report on non-local events, but with a much thinner political commentary. In comparison to *gendertrash*, *Tranzine*’s content makes fewer explicit connections to other trans activism or publishing. Overall, the perspective it represents is solidly middle-class, generally taking a liberal individualist approach to concerns like makeup, clothing, romance, and emotional self-reflection—more akin to earlier transgenderist/cross-dressing magazines like *Transvestia*, *Tapestry*, or *CrossTalk*.

⁴¹ Ibid., 41–42.

⁴² Susan Stryker and Talia M. Bettcher, “Introduction: Trans/Feminisms,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, nos. 1–2 (2016): 11–12.

Stryker and Bettcher's loose definition highlights practices popular within and enabled by web-based feminist networks. Indeed, recent scholarly discussions of online trans communities often compare the accessibility and inherent interactivity of these digital counterpublics favourably to the limited and shame-tinged connections enabled by local support groups or the discreetly packaged cross-dressing magazines consumed by earlier trans generations.⁴³ However, as we will see in the following section, this early trans print-periodical circle which surrounded and included *gendertrash* was already responding to Stone (and to the broader possibilities of transfeminist theory and praxis) in a manner that appears highly networked and engaged with their own and each other's readerships.

In the autumn of 1994, *TransSisters* proudly published a letter from Stone to its chief editor, Davina Anne Gabriel. Stone's recognition of *TransSisters*'s success in responding to her earlier call is heavily implied in the following glowing excerpt:

TransSisters gets more interesting, more literate and articulate with every issue. I can see it maturing before my eyes, and it's a wonderful feeling to know that such a publication is possible. It seems that from the earliest public writings by transgendered persons to the present, vast changes have taken place—a great diversity of articulate writers, far less of the Grail narrative of the hero's journey to surgery, less role stereotyping, and vastly more risk-taking. The overall impression I get is that the extremely wide range of beliefs, behaviours, and practices within the transgendered community are becoming more visible, and as a consequence the “transgendered community” begins to take on the depth and complexity of any other “named” subculture—which is to say, begins to escape naming and categorizing. It's a great time to be alive and working.⁴⁴

However Stone may have intended this letter to be taken, Gabriel must have understood the social capital it would carry with other trans

⁴³ See, in particular: Andre Cavalcante, “‘I Did It All Online:’ Transgender Identity and the Management of Everyday Life,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 33, no. 1 (2016): 109–22; but also: Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles, “#GirlsLikeUs: Trans Advocacy and Community Building Online,” *New Media & Society* 20, no. 5 (2018): 1868–88; and Olu Jenzen, “Trans Youth and Social Media: Moving between Counterpublics and the Wider Web,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 24, no. 11 (2017): 1626–41.

⁴⁴ Sandy Stone, letter to the editor, *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism* 6 (autumn 1994): 5.

activists, given the broad desire for writing which could make visible the “depth and complexity” of their subcultural networks. The letter was quoted in a two-page advertisement for *TransSisters*, which ran in the third and fourth issues of *gendertrash*. (Coincidentally, these issues also advertised genderpress’s “The Empire Strikes Back” buttons.)

At the same time that *TransSisters* was advertising its endorsement by Stone, other trans periodicals were circulating ads which somewhat aggressively contrasted the quality of their publications to the implicitly superficial, apolitical, and pre-feminist perspectives of other trans publications. One such ad, which appeared in the fourth issue of *gendertrash*, described the San Francisco magazine *Transsexual News Telegraph* as “The One That Will Never Contain Articles About Shopping or Makeup.”⁴⁵ A larger version of this ad also appeared in the eighth issue of *TransSisters*⁴⁶ on the facing page from another full-page ad for *Chrysalis Quarterly* in which a comparison chart promises “Insightful, Theme-Oriented Issues,” “Attractive Design,” “Strong Stances on Controversial Issues,” “Strong Self-Empowerment Message,” and “Subtle Sense of Humour” in comparison to “Those Other Gender Magazines” full of “Recaptioned Cartoons,” “Stylized Drawings of Women & Men,” “‘First-Time Out’ Stories,” “Tacky Personal Ads,” “‘Girl-in-the-Mirror’ Poems,” and “‘Let’s All Be Girls Together’ Photo Spreads.”⁴⁷

Amid all this intertextual jockeying for a new transfeminist aesthetic and praxis, the most pointed ad promoted the publication *In Your Face!*, subtitled “The Journal of Record of Transexual⁴⁸ and Transgender Activism.” *In Your Face!* was the project of Lynn Walker and Riki Anne Wilchins (a founding member of the NYC-based direct-action group Transexual Menace), first issued in 1995 and circulated primarily as a free insert in other trans periodicals. In what may have been a nod to the recognized radicalism of MacKay and Ross’s zine, the ad proclaimed *In Your Face!* to be “The choice of subversive gendertrash perverts everywhere” and bragged about being “more politically incorrect than ever!” A quote from Gabriel about refusing to print what she saw as “malicious demagoguery”

⁴⁵ *gendertrash* 4 (spring 1995), 44.

⁴⁶ *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism* 8 (spring 1995): 29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁸ The unusual spelling, “transexual,” is a political choice on Wilchins’s part; see: Riki Anne Wilchins, *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1997), 15.

and “poor taste” was included triumphantly at bottom.⁴⁹ *AEGIS News* printed this ad in its September 1994 issue;⁵⁰ the following issue featured a letter from Gabriel protesting the personal attack and a response from the chief editor, Dallas Denny, stating that, “after considerable soul-searching, we decided to run the ad in the interest of free speech.”⁵¹ Other trans periodicals also commented on the conflict. Gabriel must have been somewhat galled by such accusations of undue editorial censure, given the fiery letters section she managed. Despite this apparent rupture, Denny continued in her position as staff writer for *TransSisters* for its entire run, which ended with issue 9 in late 1995. The following year, *In Your Face!* ran a notice about the annual protest against the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival’s trans-exclusionary policy, and listed Gabriel as the organizer and point of contact for the upcoming action.

The controversial *In Your Face!* ad was reprinted in *gendertrash* 3, published in early 1995 after an interlude of more than a year. The zine’s latter two issues, published in fairly short succession, seem in a formal sense to display the influence of this circle of transfeminist serials, what with their expanded size and increasingly sleek design. Both still incorporated some hand-pasted elements, but also made heavier use of the design software QuarkXPress.⁵² They were printed in an 8.5 x 11-inch format—nearly twice the size of the earlier two issues, with considerably more page space to fill. The third issue features lengthy articles, by both Gabriel and Wilchins, about the 1994 “Camp Trans” protest at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. Another feature article, “Genderphobia: Where Separatism Joins Patriarchy,” was written by “nontranssexual” Camp Trans member Janis Walworth and describes her ideological break with lesbian separatists over the issue of transsexual inclusion.

Along with such attention to ongoing discussions between American trans activists, the third issue shows much evidence of Ross

⁴⁹ *gendertrash* 3 (winter 1995), 42.

⁵⁰ *AEGIS News* 2 (September 1994): 14, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/kk91fk52b>. *AEGIS News* is one of two periodicals (the other is *Chrysalis Quarterly*) published by the American Educational Gender Information Service. AEGIS was founded in 1990 by Dallas Denny, who also served as chief editor for both publications.

⁵¹ *AEGIS News* 3 (March 1995): 5.

⁵² As evidenced by layout files created in the proprietary digital format and preserved on CD-ROM backups in the Ross fonds. At least one other trans serial publisher mentions using this same software in correspondence also archived in those fonds.

and MacKay's increasing efforts to organize in Toronto and create connections with other Canadian trans activists. Ross undertook the major project of surveying twenty Toronto-area women's shelters about their policies on transsexual inclusion; while only eight had responded by the beginning of 1995, the thorough discussion of their responses reveals varying policies, uncertainty, and desire for further education and discussion. Ross is surprisingly cautious in her analysis and criticism, noting that, besides the practical need for clarification, part of what drove her to undertake this work herself was to avoid having it used by "genetics (especially men)" as a wedge issue against feminist organizers.⁵³ In another form of resource gathering, the third issue also introduced the "gendertrash Canadian Directory of organizations, resources & services for the gender community," which is (to my knowledge) the first such compilation published.⁵⁴ As may be expected, most of the forty-one entries were for organizations in Ontario and Quebec, but there are also listings from BC, Alberta, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia. Entries included brief organizational descriptions, contact information, associated publications, and indications as to whether genderpress had been able to verify the information recently. By issue four, the list had expanded to forty-six entries.

The final issue contained significantly more advertisements for other trans publications than any earlier issue, but the content shifted to reflect voices which were not as regularly featured within the nascent circle of transfeminist serials. The only article to mention the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival was Christine Tayleur's "Racism and Poverty in the Transgender Community." Tayleur, a Transgender Nation member and a social worker operating in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, argued that the focus on annual events like MWMF and the New Women's Conference "do little to help the vast majority of the Transgender Community" as they "are exclusionary in nature, accessible only to a privileged few with the time and money to attend."⁵⁵ Lofofora Contreras, an incarcerated transsexual lesbian, submitted an extensive personal report on abuse

⁵³ *gendertrash* 3 (winter 1995), 7.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 33–36. Issue 4 of *gendertrash* features a brief review by MacKay of *The Rainbow Book: The Ontario Directory of Community Services for Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals, Transsexuals, Transgenderists and Transvestites*; she is critical of its efforts and approach, but also places the onus on "TS/TG/TV people" to self-organize.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

and otherwise dehumanizing conditions in the solitary confinement units at California's notorious Pelican Bay State Prison. Other feature articles in the fourth issue included interviews, conducted by Ross, with Vancouver and Montreal trans activists doing street-based HIV outreach. These interviews appear as a blueprint for later organizing work that would happen through Toronto's Meal-Trans program.

Issue 5 of *gendertrash* was advertised for an August 1995 release, but was never completed. The Ross fonds include a brief outline for the issue and a transcribed interview with local street musician and micro-celebrity Wendy Rose.⁵⁶ As its two editors explained in letters to subscribers and other publishers, the permanent hiatus was brought about by MacKay's increasing health issues; MacKay's poem "Don't Touch Me—I'm Electric / TS Epileptic," in issue 3, makes insightful and touching connections between her experiences of HIV, epilepsy, and trans healthcare.⁵⁷ A letter from Dallas Denny in issue 4 singles out this poem for particular praise and mentions her wearing the genderpress-produced "I'd rather be dead than genetic" button at a recent medical conference.⁵⁸ Given that Denny was attacked numerous times by other activists for her affiliations with institutional gatekeepers, it is interesting to see that genderpress encouraged or enabled her to present a more radical or confrontational image of transsexuality within spaces that may not have been open to trans activists with less educational, professional, cultural, and financial capital. Despite its limited run, *gendertrash* was deeply, materially entwined in a major cultural and subcultural shift in the relationship between self-organizing trans communities and the "transnormative" authority represented by medical, scholarly, legal, and social service institutions.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Wendy Rose, draft interview by Mirha-Soleil Ross, 1995, Foo33-4-26, Mirha-Soleil Ross fonds, ArQuives, Toronto.

⁵⁷ Xanthra Phillippa MacKay, "Don't Touch Me—I'm Electric: TS Epileptic," *gendertrash* 3 (winter 1995): 6.

⁵⁸ Dallas Denny, letter to the editor, *gendertrash* 4 (spring 1995): 3. The conference referenced is presumably the first International Congress on Sex and Gender Issues, at California State University, Northridge, which took place February 22-26, 1995.

⁵⁹ Evan Vipond, "Resisting Transnormativity: Challenging the Medicalization and Regulation of Trans Bodies," *Theory in Action* 8, no. 2 (2015): 21-44. Vipond's article, which also draws on Stone's manifesto, provides a thorough account of the history of these institutional discourses and their production of valid and invalid modes of trans subjectivity.

Material-Digital Afterlife

On 20 May 1996, slightly more than a year after the last issue of *gendertrash* was printed, Ross and MacKay's local social circle was devastated when three street-based sex workers—Shawn Keegan, Brenda Ludgate, and Deanna Wilkinson—were slain. This act of terror was committed at the intersection of Homewood Avenue and Maitland Place, Toronto's primary trans sex-worker stroll and one of the locations explicitly named by MacKay in *TSe TSe TerroriSm*. The murderer's beliefs and personal circumstances would subsequently be broadcast extensively in local media. In 1997, Ross gave an action-oriented speech at a commemorative vigil and helped found Meal-Trans, a community program offering free meals, cultural programming, and facilitated discussion to street-active trans people⁶⁰ on a weekly basis at the 519 Community Centre in the Church-Wellesley village. In September of the same year, Ross (with the support of MacKay and others) organized Counting Past 2, arguably the world's first international festival of trans film and performance.⁶¹

In 2002, in recognition of her many accomplishments, Ross was named Grand Marshall of the Toronto Pride Parade. A long-time vegan and recent host of the community radio show *Animal Voices*, Ross decided to use the opportunity to showcase twenty years of direct action by the Animal Liberation Front; her performance as the "Lady of the Beasts," leading a pack in coyote masks, is documented in the 2002 video *Proud Lives*.⁶² The connections between her concerns about animal welfare, trans identity, and sex work appear throughout her work, but are perhaps most vividly expressed in *Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thoughts of an Unrepentant Whore*, an hour-long series of seven monologues which Ross performed locally and internationally from 2002 to 2003—her lengthiest solo performance.⁶³ In it, she

⁶⁰ The method of creating this temporarily trans-exclusive space is currently, and has always been, to briefly explain to everyone entering whom the event is for and to ask if that applies to them. The regular event is not exclusive to any defined group of "street-active" people, but outreach has traditionally focused on locations relevant to the most economically marginalized trans individuals.

⁶¹ Counting Past 2 took place two months before San Francisco's first Trannyfest film festival, even though organizing for CP2 began later than for the other event. Both organizers screened films at the other's festival and appear (in their correspondence) to have had a friendly, cooperative relationship.

⁶² Mirha-Soleil Ross and Mark Karbusicky, *Proud Lives* (Toronto: V-Tape, 2002).

⁶³ Mirha-Soleil Ross and Mark Karbusicky, *Yapping Out Loud: Contagious Thoughts from an Unrepentant Whore* (Toronto: V-Tape, 2002).

further explored an analogy between coyotes and sex workers as purported urban pests by assuming multiple different characters including second- and third-wave feminist activists and a murderous male “whore hunter.” In the final scene, Ross again returns to meditate on the 1996 terror attack, speaking as herself. When Ross moved back to Montreal in 2008, she donated to the ArQuives a large collection consisting of records of her artistic, activist, and personal life to that point. After some initial processing work, these archival materials remained untouched for a number of years.

In 2015, volunteers resumed work on the collection and reinitiated contact with Ross, who subsequently assisted archives personnel and researchers in indexing the extensive materials as well as in assembling further donations of materials. Early in 2017, she gave a small ArQuives team (including myself) permission to publish digitized versions of all four issues of *gendertrash* online. Previously, only the first issue had been accessible on the internet, through the Queer Zine Archive Project. Paul Conway’s influential argument for archives that recognize (and preserve records of) the “secondary provenance” of digital surrogates—given how they inevitably create traces of their own production and use—focuses on extremely large-scale projects (such as Google Books, the Internet Archive, and the HathiTrust Digital Library) in which texts are mechanically scanned in bulk.⁶⁴ For projects like QZAP, which produce large but much more targeted collections of digital texts, this secondary provenance may more often reflect cycles of production, distribution, collecting, and digital reproduction in which the human agents involved have “multiple roles as subcultural participants, activists, and archivists ... roles [which] are mutually-informing, and tightly intertwined.”⁶⁵ Given that our team of queer and trans volunteers was fortunate enough to have the support of Ross herself and a number of her friends, as well as funding from multiple sources, we ultimately produced digital editions of *gendertrash* that display quite vividly the secondary, material-affective investment in this comparatively tiny digitization project—through the form of the zine’s re-presentation, our curatorial paratexts, and the responses engendered by this re-circulation.

⁶⁴ Paul Conway, “Digital Transformations and the Archival Nature of Surrogates,” *Archival Science* 15, no. 1 (2015): 51–69.

⁶⁵ Alana Kumbier, “Queer Zines and Archival Pedagogies,” in *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive* (Sacramento: Litwin Books, 2014), 233–58.

In response to the necessary insufficiency of our digital edition in delivering everything we knew and felt about the zine, I and my two undergraduate peers found it impossible to avoid implicating ourselves in its “gender world.” The longest editorial-curatorial text included in our digital exhibit is a note that clarifies our own queer identities and positions in relation to the zine while attempting to contextualize and historicize its terminology.⁶⁶ In one sense, this is simply a matter of setting the record straight: multiple media outlets have identified Riki Anne Wilchins’s *Read My Lips* (1997) as the first printed instance of the term “genderqueer,” and Kate Bornstein has similarly been associated with the term “gender outlaw” following the title of her 1994 autotheoretical memoir—but both terms were printed earlier in *gendertrash*. It’s not clear that Wilchins or Bornstein themselves claim to have invented these terms, however. Archived correspondence indicates that Ross and MacKay had no interest in asserting ownership either. This is apparent in the pages of the zine, if we understand the glossary of “TS Words & Phrases,” in issue 1, not as a set of static terms and definitions but in terms of its own claim to “attempt to start this process.”⁶⁷ If we want to claim that MacKay and Ross coined “genderqueer,” we can only do so honestly if we also make it clear that *gendertrash* used it as an umbrella term for all people oppressed by an ongoing “gendercide” against those failing to fulfill their assigned “genetic-described” (i.e., cisgender) roles,⁶⁸ rather than with the specifically non-binary gender identity connotations the term generally has today. In narrating our own difference or distance from everything that *gendertrash* says in our digital paratext, we inadvertently disclose something of our own feelings of queer intergenerational kinship, writing that “we encounter *gendertrash*’s unusual terminology not merely as an historical artifact, but as a radical challenge to the way we understand identity, community, and attraction that remains just as relevant and necessary today.” In 2019, it is no longer possible to purchase issues of *gendertrash*, order

⁶⁶ Sidney Cunningham, Caleigh Inman, and MacKenzie Stewart, “A Note on Terminology (Gendertrash: Transsexual Zine, 1993–1995)” CLGA Digital Collections, 2017, <http://digitalcollections.clga.ca/exhibits/show/gendertrash/a-note-on-terminology>. K. J. Rawson provides a lengthier and more substantial discussion of how historical terms of queer identity challenge (productively) archival logics and indexing. K. J. Rawson, “Accessing Transgender // Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics,” *Archivaria* 68 (2009): 123–40.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

buttons, or submit letters and articles; all the same, one may *subscribe* to *gendertrash* in the sense of an “erotohistoriographic” investment in the ongoing vitality of these materials, or as a way of “mining the present for signs of undetonated energy from past revolutions” and driving our responses to the already polyvocal discourse it documented and produced.⁶⁹

In creating this exhibit, all of us became very well acquainted with the materials that Ross donated. The earlier process of describing and organizing her archive had amounted to especially thorough archival research, with the added heavy responsibility of mediating future access by researchers or the general public through the creation of a Ross fonds finding aid. Many materials, like subscriber lists and correspondence with other trans publishers, could not be replicated in our digital exhibit (for reasons of privacy and time), but nevertheless gave us an impression of *gendertrash* as a textual object opening a window onto a much larger historical subculture. Even in a lengthy article such as this one, which draws on connections to contemporaneous periodicals and other historical or theoretical sources, it is only possible to begin contextualizing *gendertrash* in this manner.

We ultimately produced a small exhibit, which included the digitized *gendertrash* zines as well as scans of original artworks and paste-ups used in the DIY production process and photos of each item in the button collection. The buttons represent the bold tone and multifaceted politics of *gendertrash* in a much smaller and much less nuanced form; yet they may also be understood, to the degree that they make it possible to publicly wear a *gendertrash* message, as an even more pointed, sustained challenge to cis- and transnormativity. To gesture formally at the connection between zine and buttons, as well as at the serial format of the original zines, we created an interface for the exhibit by uploading a modified graphic combining multiple versions of the “Subscribe to *gendertrash*!” form to the Neatline plugin (built for Omeka), and configuring it so that by clicking on individual zine issues or buttons on the form, visitors could access the corresponding digitized zines and buttons. This interface highlights several ways in which the original text provided its historical audience a possible avenue into a broader trans space. Clicking on a particular button’s text on the form rewards web users immediately

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Freeman, preface to *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.

with a view of the actual button—something that, for the zine’s original readers, would have cost both money and time. To actually possess the button and realize one’s investment in this historical object, however, is only possible via DIY photo manipulation and button-printing processes, or perhaps through digital republishing.

The digitization work that went into the Omeka-based exhibit also enabled the creation of new print reproductions of the zines and the buttons; these were circulated at a 2018 exhibition of Ross’s work in Toronto and at a small, related button-making workshop. Hosting the workshop concurrently with that week’s Meal-Trans, I had many conversations with participants about the history of these zines and buttons, and saw people embracing genderpress designs and sentiments, modifying them, or rejecting them altogether in favour of their own political/artistic inclinations. There has been similarly sticky engagement with the *gendertrash* materials online, as evidenced by a number of Tumblr accounts which have reposted items from this digital collection (typically acknowledging the print source, but not the source of the digitization). The images of the buttons yielded the most intense interest and responses. In particular, an image of the aforementioned “I’d rather be dead than genetic” button design spawned close to five thousand “notes,” including many comments responding—positively and negatively—to its now-uncommon terminology and implicit critique.⁷⁰ Ultimately, the process of grappling with such queer intergenerational affinities has been generative and affirms the vitality of these historical texts.

Acknowledgments

Funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council supported the writing of this article. Furthermore, my initial work as an intern at the ArQuives was supported by a Knowledge Mobilization Internship grant from York University, and the 2017 online exhibit was organized and supported by the LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory. The 2018 exhibition was funded by Myseum of Toronto.

⁷⁰ *Trans History* (blog), 1 January 2019, <https://transgender-history.tumblr.com/post/181615521091/gendertrash-from-hell-issue-2-volume-1-1993>.

Author Biography

Sidney Cunningham is a doctoral candidate in York University's Department of English. His primary field of research is literary theory, particularly as influenced by psychoanalysis and schizoanalysis. Cunningham's dissertation project draws on trans writing from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries in order to model how gender perception is transformed and transmitted.