

# Summaries

► *Bart Eeckhout*

**A visionary allegory on the transformability of gender?**

Sarah Schulman's *The penis story* (1979)

This contribution looks at a fictional text consciously set up to bewilder readers and challenge their views. *The penis story* is the only short story so far by the politically activist, New York-based lesbian writer Sarah Schulman. Composed at the very outset of her career, it tells of a lesbian character that, under the influence of a frustratingly reined-in relationship with a woman who is waiting for a man to rescue her, wakes up one morning only to find herself with a penis. We follow the character's experiences, which are both funny and informed by a strong sense of gender and sexuality, until she becomes dissatisfied with her physical appendix and decides to have her female genitals reconstructed. The essay analyses this story through the lenses of a chapter entitled *Undiagnosing gender* from the queertheorist Judith Butler's recent collection *Undoing gender* (2004). Such a juxtaposition proves able to elucidate how especially gender and sexuality operate as performative and transformative realities in the story, and to help a better understanding of the heteronormativity paradoxically always informing the concept of autonomy that is at the heart of transgender studies.

► *Marieke van Eijk*

**'I just happened to be a pregnant man!'**

Transgender, a concept that is (not) one

The term *transgender* has gone through a remarkable transition since Virginia Prince coined the term in the early 1980s. She used

this term to distinguish herself from cross-dressing and from transsexuality. Nowadays transgender has come to call attention to an imagined community of people who, in one way or the other, transcend boundaries of gender, sex, sexuality and physicality. However, despite the usefulness to indicate and embrace differences in terms of gender and sex, this umbrella term also carries some fearful contradictions. In this introduction these inherent contradictions are pointed out by paying attention to the development of the term as coined in the 1980s in relation to the emergence of the multidisciplinary field of transgender studies.

► *Marije Graven en Marjolein van den Brink*

**Trans**

Gender diversity, sex equality and law

Many of the problems trans people encounter in daily life are caused by law. For reasons that are not quite clear, law seems very much attached to the categorization of people as either man or woman. In the past years some inroads have been made, in particular with regard to the possibility of legal sex change, which is especially relevant for transsexuals. In this contribution, the current legal situation in the Netherlands with regard to trans people is mapped out and discussed in terms of its relevance to trans people in particular and gender equality more generally. Themes considered include sex-registration at birth and the options to change that, insurance law, issues of social security, and non-discrimination legislation. Attention is paid to relevant case law of the European human rights court as well as of the EC Court of Justice.

- ▶ *Saskia Keuzenkamp*  
**What is the relevance of research on women's emancipation for Mrs. Benayad?**

The largest groups of ethnic minority women in The Netherlands are of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese or Antillean origin. Especially the position of Turkish and Moroccan women in Dutch society is unfavourable, both compared to that of indigenous Dutch women and that of men of their own ethnic group. This chair aims to contribute to a better understanding of the factors that explain this unfavourable position, focussing especially on the role of public policies. The impact of both gender regimes and integration regimes will be studied.

- ▶ *Geertje Mak*  
**Metamorphoses of sex**  
 Hermaphroditism and the emergence of a 'sex of the self' in surgical practices from the end of the nineteenth century

According to Stefan Hirschauer, during the treatment process, transsexualism metamorphoses from a social conflict between a person and society about his or her proper enactment of sex, to a conflict between a self and a body. Surgery operates as a way of swearing one's (initial inappropriate) sex. In this article, this metamorphosis is analysed historically in cases of hermaphroditism. Until about 1900 doubting sex mainly had affected the hermaphrodite as a person: as someone inscribed in society through a name, an outer (physical) appearance, a role, and a civil status. The trouble was located in the relation between the person and society, not in the relation between a body and a self. With the introduction of surgery and anaesthesia from about 1900 physical sex could be sharply distinguished from the person. Mo-

reover, plastic surgery on genitals evoked a quickly increasing demand of hermaphrodites to operate on their sex upon their wish. The emerging frictions between an objectified physical sex on the one hand and the person or the wish of the hermaphrodite on the other, led physicians to treat the person, his or her consciousness, feelings, emotions and sexual inclinations as a separate entity. The sex of self became something doctors started to take care of and gain competence over.

- ▶ *Femke Olyslager en Lynn Conway*  
**A new look at the prevalence of transsexualism in the Netherlands and Belgium**  
 Transsexualism is more common than you think

Often transsexualism is presumed to be rather rare. The medical literature often cites a prevalence of 1 in 11,900 for male to female transsexualism and 1 in 30,400 for female to male transsexualism. A detailed analysis of the publications behind these numbers reveals that these numbers underestimate the relative number of individuals that is confronted with transsexualism, the so-called inherent prevalence of transsexualism. Based on data extracted from earlier publications it is possible to derive a lower bound for the inherent prevalence of transsexualism in the Netherlands and Belgium. This analysis results in inherent prevalencies for sex reassignment surgeries that are about four times higher than the above cited numbers. The prevalence of transsexualism will be significantly higher since not all transsexuals will undergo sex reassignment.