



Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender

Bernice L. Hausman

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Changing Sex takes a bold new approach to the study of transsexualism in the twentieth century. By addressing the significance of medical technology to the phenomenon of transsexualism, Bernice L. Hausman transforms current conceptions of transsexuality as a disorder of gender identity by showing how developments in medical knowledge and technology make possible the emergence of new subjectivities. Hausman's inquiry into the development of endocrinology and plastic surgery shows how advances in medical knowledge were central to the establishment of the material and discursive conditions necessary to produce the demand for sex change—that is, to both "make" and "think" the transsexual. She also retraces the hidden history of the concept of gender, demonstrating that the semantic distinction between "natural" sex and "social" gender has its roots in the development of medical treatment practices for intersexuality—the condition of having physical characteristics of both sexes—in the 1950s. Her research reveals the medical institution's desire to make heterosexual subjects out of intersexuals and indicates how gender operates semiotically to maintain heterosexuality as the norm of the human body. In critically examining medical discourses, popularizations of medical theories, and transsexual autobiographies, Hausman details the elaboration of "gender narratives" that not only support the emergence of transsexualism, but also regulate the lives of all contemporary Western subjects. *Changing Sex* will change the ways we think about the relation between sex and gender, the body and sexual identity, and medical technology and the idea of the human.



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