Forthcoming, 2008. In Transgressive Sex, [redacted] Eds. H. Donnan and F. McGowan. Oxford: Berghan.

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Transgression and the Making of 'Western' Sexual Sciences

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This chapter explores some of the connections between the contemporary anthropology of gender and sexual diversity and nineteenth and early twentieth century sexology. As others have suggested, present day anthropological work on gender and sexual diversity tends to suffer from genealogical and historical amnesia (Roscoe 1995; Weston 1998: 1-28; Lyons and Lyons 2004). The important question is: what are the effects of this amnesia? Here I want to suggest two. First, the distinction between 'western' and 'non-western' discourses of sexuality and erotic practice have not been sufficiently interrogated. Second, there is an assumption that a distinct epistemological and ethical gulf separates the recent anthropological study of gender and sexual diversity from the work of the early sexologists and earlier ethnographic imaginings and representations of the gender and sexuality of the 'Other'. This chapter challenges such straightforward assumptions and distinctions.

Firstly, I draw on recent historical work to show how imaginings of and encounters with, as well as deliberate conscriptions of, non-western 'others' were inextricably linked with and a formative part of the making of western sexualities (e.g. Said 1978; McClintock 1995; Nagel 2003; Stoler 1990, 1992, 1995; Lyons and Lyons 2004). This work has clearly demonstrated how the boundaries of Western categories of normative gender and sexuality were established and resisted not simply in relation to the deviant within, but also in relation to the transgressive gender and sexuality of the racialized other without. More specifically, as I shall outline below, central to the changing terms and shifting ground of homosexual transgression in the west has been

the figure of the gender variant other, a recurrent and repeated leitmotif of both ethnological and sexological imaginings at least since the enlightenment (Bleys 1996).

Secondly, I argue that what nineteenth century sexology and present day anthropology have in common is that both are involved in normalizing transgression, by which I mean the attempt not only to render difference intelligible, but also to establish gender and sexual variation as a fundamental condition and effect of human likeness and similarity (Argyrou 2002). What has most often been emphasized in our historical reconstruction of nineteenth century sexology is the pathologization of the homosexual as a sexual intermediate. However, in the most radical of sexological accounts, sexual intermediacy was considered to be not just the property of an anomalous body, the homosexual, but rather an essential characteristic of every human individual. As I demonstrate, such a view in many respects resonates with the insights of recent queer anthropology, where, in contemporary parlance, the 'transgendered' other emerges not as evidence of sexual intermediacy, but rather of the indeterminacy of all subjectivities.[1]

However, there are other more problematic continuities between nineteenth century sexology and twenty-first century queer anthropology than the continued preoccupation with the 'transgendered' other as the key site of and metaphor for sexual transgression and/or sexual variability. More specifically, I suggest that for all the liberating effects and possibilities of both radical nineteenth century discourse on sexual intermediacy and twenty-first century post-modern discourse on subjective indeterminacy, each is none-the-less laden with the weight of a universalizing morality that ultimately re-inscribes social difference and distinction between those people and societies who have an enlightened approach to perceived sexual transgressions and those who do not. For the radical sexologists, the key distinction

to be made was between people who were aware of the biological basis and foundation of sexual intermediacy and who advocated social justice and equality on that basis and people who held unscientific beliefs about sexual variation that led them either naively to tolerate or stigmatize sexually intermediate persons. For queer anthropology, which eschews positivistic biological explanations in favour of a post-modern epistemology that upholds the indeterminacy of all subjectivities, the key distinction is between those who, mistakenly, claim certain knowledge about gender and sexuality and those who know that claims to certain knowledge are always exclusionary and inevitably produce transgressions. The irony is that in attempting to move away from the moralizing tone and tenor of earlier western discourses in which the perceived gender and sexual transgressions of the other were linked and mapped on to a presumed inferior cultural or racial status, both radical nineteenth century sexology and contemporary queer anthropology reinscribe gender and sexual transgression as a key site for and index of cultural and moral hierarchies.

Transgressive sex / transgendered others: Colonial encounters and the making of the modern homosexual

Up until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the various sodomitical practices of people - both among men and between men and women - in the Old World and the New were primarily inflected by western observers in terms of moral degeneracy and heretical religion, rather than in terms of racial difference (Bleys 1996: 31-36; see also Roscoe 1995). However, in what was to become a recurrent theme that in certain respects continues up until the present day, European representations increasingly focused particular attention on male bodied persons among peoples of the New World whose dress and social role was that of women and who, according to most of the

European observers, engaged in and sought out 'passive' sodomy with other men. The increasing attention paid to people described as 'sodomites' in the New World, coincided, Bleys (1996: 44) suggests, with a shift in European discourse from sodomy as a transgressive sexual activity to the sodomite as a distinct kind of sexual transgressor: persons defined both by femininity and by being the presumed penetrated partner in anal intercourse.

Though cross-dressing was not unknown in Europe, it was found in relatively restricted spheres of activity: certainly it was not visibly present in both everyday mundane contexts and in important ritual contexts as it was in different parts of the New World. The point is that among many groups in the New World this was not an unusual practice and as such was not, we might presume, anything out of the ordinary. However, for male European observers, for whom, Bleys suggests following others (e.g Stone 1979; Trumbach 1989a, 1989b), there were growing anxieties about maintaining and ensuring gender difference, the fact that genitally male bodies were dressing in women's clothing and engaging in women's occupations made such individuals remarkable and a source of consternation. Explanation for this gender variation was to be found in what was assumed to be their sexual transgressions, i.e. sodomy. As Bleys (1996: 81) summarizes it,

> The actual or presumed coincidence of cross-gender roles with same-sex praxis [in the New World] made the former instrumental to new sexual theory in Europe that locked sodomy inexorably into the corset of femininity. Passivity, more particularly, as located in the receptive use of the anus, became quintessential to the 'sodomite' identity – a different idea, altogether,

from previous notions of sodomy, which included the active partner as well as the passive one, men as well as women.

The shift from sodomy to the sodomite during the latter part of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century corresponds with several other transformations that were underway at this time. These changes included the increasing development of distinctive and visible sub-cultural communities of effeminate sodomites in European cities, who at least among the middle classes may have been drawing on ethnographic reportage about what were presumed to be similar groups of people in other parts of the world (Bleys 1996: 98). The shift from sodomy to the sodomite also corresponded with the emergence of biological theories of sexual difference between males and females, the naturalization of (hetero)sexual attraction and the development of racial theories of human diversity.

In sum, what emerged out of enlightenment brought about both by various social changes in Europe and by colonial entanglements and encounters was the establishment of an increasingly secular and scientific view of sexual and racial difference, linked together through various forms of analogous reasoning (see, for example, Laqueur 1990; McClintock 1995; Nagel 2003). Sodomy was still seen, by some, as part of the endemic immorality of other peoples. However, it was increasingly identified with the sodomite, an individual whose sexual proclivities were seen as linked to some kind of seen or unseen or as yet undiscovered physical abnormality. Moreover, the perceived gender anomalous status of the sodomite - their effeminized status - metonymically stood not just for the moral turpitude of primitives or cultural decay among the civilized but rather both for the racial inferiority of non-Western peoples and a sign of biological degeneracy among a Western minority.

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If the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were marked by the emergence of the sodomite, the key change that emerged during the nineteenth century, consolidated by the sexologists, was a shift from an emphasis on anatomy to that of the internal nervous system and psychopathology: a shift, as we know, that was central to the making of the homosexual. While both the sodomite and the homosexual were associated with femininity, previously the sodomite's femininity was thought to be rooted primarily in anatomical abnormality or bodily hermaphroditism. The homosexual's femininity was to be found in the mind, a hermaphroditism of the soul (Foucault 1990).

What was the source of this psychopathology? Some nineteenth century sexologists argued that it was the product of mental disorientation brought about by the excessive strains of civilization (neurasthenia), while others argued it was the product of a congenital condition. These questions were premised on the distinction between the 'real' homosexual and the 'circumstantial' or 'acquired' homosexuality of others. They were also posed in terms of evolutionary and racial theorizing that posited an original sexually undifferentiated 'hermaphroditic' primitive state. Hence, whatever answer given or perspectives argued for, the answer given by many, though by no means all of the sexologists (see below), was that homosexuality, at least among the civilized, was posited both as primitive 'remnant' that might disrupt normal species development and/or as biological degeneracy and a 'relapse' into a less advanced state (Bleys 1996: 144; see also Storr 1997, 2002).

Science and social justice: Sexual intermediaries and the transformation of the socially stigmatized body

In the preceding section I have drawn on the work of Bleys to show how encounters with and imaginings of the racial and cultural 'other' were inextricably linked with the development of western sexual sciences, and more specifically the discursive shift from sodomy and the sodomite to the homosexual 'other'. The relation between 'ethnographic imaginings' and western discourses on sexuality was not simply one of conscription, i.e. of drawing on various representations of 'the other' to support one or other Western theories (e.g. Lyons and Lyons 2004). Rather, these encounters with the other themselves shaped, as they were in turn shaped by, changing discourses about the nature of same-sex sexuality and the nature of race and sex/gender: in particular, the visibility of the gender crossing other informed the development of what was to become the dominant model of homosexuality that persisted well into the twentieth century. In this sense, and notwithstanding Foucault's (1990) distinction between western sexual sciences and the erotic arts of the east, one cannot speak of a history of western sexuality as if this were a singular and geographically bounded process. The importance of considering the role of the non-western 'other' in shaping western discourses is not simply to complicate a certain kind of historical narrative and show how 'they' figure in discourses of 'our' sexuality, but also, and perhaps more importantly because western discourses of sexuality and gender are as they have always been or aspired to be, universalising in their scope and imaginings.

In what follows, I want to pick up on some of the crosscurrents within this process in order to demonstrate that at the heart of the sexual sciences was the normalization of sexual difference and transgression. That nineteenth century sexology was also about normalizing difference may at first glance appear ludicrous, since sexology has routinely been described as a pathologizing science. Sexologists certainly normalized the reproductive heterosexual, a normalization that, as Foucault

(1990) demonstrated, fundamentally depended upon its identification of the pathological 'other' and the homosexual in particular. But the pathologization of the homosexual 'other' was already the first move towards its normalization, in so far as it rendered it intelligible and gave a name and status to it.

Perhaps no better example can be given than Richard Frieherr von Krafft-Ebing whose most well known work, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1918 [1886]) was written for lawyers and doctors involved in 'sex crime' trials. Although Krafft-Ebing's work presents one of the clearest articulations of the creation and medicalization of deviant sexual subjects, it was also considered liberating and progressive in its time because of its insistence that sexual perversion was not a sin or a crime, but a disease. Moreover, as Oosterhuis (1997) points out, many of the individuals who read and contributed to Krafft-Ebing's work saw it not as confirming their degenerate heredity, but as demonstrating the naturalness of their ascribed and perceived difference.

In fact, the pathologizing discourse set up the preconditions for early homosexual emancipation in so far as it naturalized homosexuality in terms of biological predispositions that were posited in terms of a broader pattern of sexual variance understood as encompassing sexual orientation, bodily gender and psycho-sexual identity. One of the most important sexologists and advocates of homosexual emancipation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who developed this perspective most systematically was Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935). Trained in medicine and schooled in the emerging evolutionary theory, Hirschfeld (2000 [1914]) drew together the Darwinian insistence on natural variation, with the original 'third sex' view of the *Urning* (male homosexual), first postulated by an earlier sexologist Karl Heinrich Ulrich (1825-1895), to elaborate a view of the 'geno-genetic' laws of

sexual intermediacy (Kennedy 1997; Steakley 1997: 143). Like Ulrich, Hirschfeld sees homosexuality as the outcome of sexual intermediacy, itself the product of natural and continually unfolding evolutionary processes, rather than as either simply the vestiges of primitive bisexuality or of moral or biological degeneracy or disease. Demonstrating this natural and normal 'biological' basis for homosexuality is seen as a key component in the fight for social justice and social reform.

Both Ulrich's and Hirschfeld's views were challenged (both by some of their contemporaries and colleagues and by present day observers, including Bleys 1996: 214-15) on the basis of their over-emphasis on the 'third-sex' model of homosexuality, and a presumed downplaying of forms of male homoeroticism between men who were otherwise regarded - by themselves and others - to be absolutely 'masculine'. However, Hirschfeld's view was far more complex than a narrow reading might at first suggest. As Steakley (1997: 143) suggests, Hirschfeld's thinking about and development of ideas on sexual indeterminacy leads him if not to drop completely, certainly to down-play the 'third sex' terminology because he came to 'regard it as both scientifically inaccurate and tactically counterproductive to minoritize homosexuals in a world populated entirely, as he ultimately saw it, by sexual intermediaries'. In other words, Hirschfeld can be read as suggesting that there are no 'pure' or 'originary' sexes; rather, there is infinite variation across and within individuals categorized as women and men. This variation was not imagined as falling along a simple linear continuum between male and female, but rather as forming a closed circle (Hirschfeld 2000: 420). In such a situation, Hirschfeld 'declared sexual unambiguity itself to be a fiction' (Steakley 1997: 145).

Moreover, while other sexologists assumed that homosexuality was indicative or constitutive of more general neuroses and psychopathologies, Hirschfeld held that

any psychological problems experienced by homosexuals were the product of their socially stigmatized status, and not an inherent part of who or what they were (Steakley 1997: 138). Hence, while the first part of Hirschfeld's magnum opus is concerned with outlining his theory of the homosexuality of men and women, the remaining part of his work is devoted to a comparative sociological and ethnographic account of homosexuality focused, in particular, on the degree to which diverse sexualities were criminalized, tolerated or accepted in different cultures and societies.

Summarizing his ethnographic overview, Hirschfeld (2000: 712-4) enumerates eight general principles with respect to homosexuality. His central contention is that there is no substantial difference in the incidence or occurrence of homosexuality: in all countries there exist women and men who 'sometimes exclusively, sometimes occasionally' feel attracted to their own sex. This suggests, he argues, that homosexuality cannot but be the product of 'natural law'. What I wish particularly to take up here is his sixth principle, namely that, 'Ethnographically, the assessment of homosexuality can be recognized in three stages' (Hirschfeld 2000: 712). The first stage, Hirschfeld suggests, is the 'naïve toleration and usefulness of homosexuality' in that homosexual members are 'acknowledged and related to certain social functions'. He then goes on to specify that in some cases they may be masculine identified, 'virile ones', who may be associated with martial or pedagogic roles; the feminine identified, who are associated with the 'service sector in the widest sense'; and finally those in the middle, neither masculine or feminine but both, who have roles as 'priests, magicians, physicians, sages, seers, poets, singers, and artists'. His celebratory account of the 'intermediate sex' during the 'naïve stage' is very much akin to the English socialist reformer and advocate of sexual emancipation, Edward Carpenter who viewed the intermediate sex as being, when accepted and embraced, always and

everywhere among the heroic figures on the vanguard of culture (Lyons and Lyons 2004: 128-9).

The second stage is the 'instinctive opposition to same-sex sexuality by the majority' (Hirschfeld 2000: 713). For Hirschfeld, this stage clearly corresponds with the rise and spread of Christianity, and drawing both on Westermarck and Carpenter, he suggests, as have subsequent historians, that the, 'heavy sentence and punishment of homosexuality had its actual origin more in public opinion which predominantly associated it with heresy than in a direct aversion to the thing itself…' (2000: 925). The second stage Hirschfeld suggests will only be overcome as it is replaced by the 'third stage' of 'intellectual penetration and scientific research into homosexuality and related natural phenomena' (2000: 925). Although suggesting that the third stage 'occasionally' connects with the first 'naïve' state of grace, these are exceptions that have previously not had penetrating force.

In sum, Hirschfeld's ideas may be seen as among the most radical of all the sexologists not only in his insistence on the sexual intermediacy of all individuals, but also as bringing together and articulating a moral discourse based on the irreducibility and universality of human biological sameness and difference, i.e. the idea that everyone everywhere is the same in their individual biological uniqueness. That is to say; just as the notion of distinct biological races was to be systematically challenged in the twentieth century, Hirschfeld undermines the notion of there being any fixed or absolute distinction between male and female or between homosexual and heterosexual. Nevertheless, at the heart of Hirschfeld's thinking is an unresolved paradox. That is, while ultimately Hirschfeld sees sexual purity to be a mirage, he nevertheless persists in his belief that a properly trained scientist can distinguish and identify a real homosexual in terms of their underlying sexual intermediacy. This

paradox is inflected in the very ambiguity of the title of his work, *The Homosexuality of Men and Women*, which may be alternatively read as referencing the sameness of all or referring more particularly to the homosexual.

Sameness and difference reconfigured: The moral universes of cultural relativism, social constructionism and queer theory

Hirschfeld's crusade for sexual emancipation was premised on the biological unity of sexual diversity. Hence, in one respect, society, culture and history were seen as largely incidental except in so far as they confirmed homosexuality to be a universal and natural variant. However, in another respect, society, culture and history were regarded as of primary importance in determining the relative social status or stigma of the homosexual, the legal sanctions enacted against same sex sexuality and the relative form and visibility of some kinds of homosexuals and not others. In this way of viewing things, the respective moral and intellectual status, i.e. the relative enlightenment, of any society and culture were in effect measured both by their acceptance or not of sexual variation and by their understanding (or not) of the fundamental nature of sexual diversity as an expression of human sameness.

In what follows, I wish to explore, from the perspective of an anthropologist writing at the beginning of the twenty-first century, how far and to what extent our thinking about sexual diversity has changed as a result of cultural relativism and social constructionist approaches. The first contrast to be drawn between the sexologists and modern anthropology is between the explicit evolutionary ways of thinking about cultures and civilizations versus the cultural relativism of anthropology, a shift that took place in anthropological thinking at around the same time Hirschfeld was writing (see Argyrou 2002: 23–5).

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Put in terms of sex, the fundamental difference between the cultural relativist anthropological perspective and that of the sexologists was that while both recognized to a greater and lesser extent that culture shaped the particular form sex took and the different kinds of moral judgements attached to particular kinds of sexual practices, the cultural relativists argued that there was no absolute measure either of what constituted good or bad sex or of how these were variously understood or construed. Nevertheless, despite this apparent theoretical commitment to cultural relativism, early twentieth century anthropologists drew more on the heteronormative sexology of Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud rather than on the more radical ideas of Magnus Hirschfeld or Edward Carpenter, and still worked within a conceptualisation of basic biological distinction between male and female, and of normal opposite sex attraction between them. In fact, early twentieth century anthropological work on sexuality was decidedly heterosexual in focus, informed as much by previous Victorian debates about primitive promiscuity and marriage as by specifically sexological work focused on homosexuality.

This is not to say that same-sex sexualities were not on the agenda of anthropologists at all. Views of homosexuality were varied, with some anthropologists, like Malinowski, seeing in what he perceived to be the complete lack of homosexual relations among the Trobriand Islands, evidence that homosexuality only arose in certain kinds of situations, especially those where there was greater restriction of heterosexual freedom among the young (see Lyons and Lyons 2004: 165). Mead, similarly reported some intense but temporary same-sexual affairs among both young women and men in Samoa. She noted, for example, that 'native theory and vocabulary' recognized the 'real pervert' although the only evidence of perversion she found was an effeminate man and some 'mixed types' of females,

though she doubted the latter were really genuine (Mead 1965 [1928]: 121-2). For both Malinowski and Mead, the lack or relative lack of the 'real pervert' was in effect the result of the general sexual freedom of the young, and more particularly, for Mead, a result of the fact that heterosexual practices encompassed 'secondary variations of sex activity which loom as primary in homosexual relations' (Mead 1965: 122). As Lyons and Lyons note (2004: 196-7), Mead closes down a potentially more radical view of sexual variation, however, by positing Samoan heterosexual freedom as a kind of inoculation against the development of 'real' perversity.

The 'inoculation' theory of sexuality is extended in different ways and forms by various anthropologists, among them George Devereux who is perhaps best known for his account of the Mohave 'berdache' or *alyhas* and *hwame*, both of whom he refers to mainly as respectively male and female transvestite homosexuals (Devereux 1937). Devereux does note that same-sex practices were not solely the preserve of transvestites. However, as with observers in prior times, cross dressing and the adoption of the sex roles and occupations of the genitally opposite sex were seen by him as intimately linked to and ultimately an identifying mark of the 'real' homosexual. For Devereux, moreover, the social confirmation and public acknowledgement of the homosexual was the means whereby the Mohave ensured that this abnormality was regulated and prevented from corrupting the mainstream through its institutionalization.

In sum, the main message to emerge from anthropologists in the first part of the twentieth century with respect to same-sex sexuality is two-fold: first, is the persistence of the idea of 'real perverts' increasingly understood in Freud's (1938) terms as psycho-sexual 'inverts' whose sexual deviance is seen to be rooted not, as with sexologists, in biology but in an abnormal development resulting in the

simultaneous mis-identification with the opposite sex and a sexual desire for the same sex. Secondly, non-western societies and cultures deal with the perceived problem of homosexuality either by encouraging or enabling a much broader range of heterosexual experimentation particularly among the young, or by according the homosexual some measure of legitimation or tolerance, thereby reaffirming and protecting normative heterosexual identities and desires.

Seen from the perspective of social constructionist accounts of sexuality that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, the more radical potential of some early cultural relativist approaches were compromised both because of a persistent and as yet un-interrogated biological essentialism with respect to sex and sexuality and more specifically because of the persistence of a discourse that viewed homosexuality as a fundamentally abnormal condition of a particular kind of deviant personality type. In fact, as Weston (1993) notes, discussions of homosexuality in anthropology generally remained *sub rosa* until the late 1960s. Its re-emergence and gradual institutionalization as a proper field of enquiry coincided with, and were successively informed by, the rise of second wave feminism, lesbian and gay political movements, social constructionism and the rise of queer theory.

The lesbian and gay movement challenged the pathologizing discourse of homosexuality even as it further stabilized the homosexual as a political and cultural identity, moves that were in some sense paralleled by a new *ethnocartography* (Weston 1993: 341) that in many respects was not unlike the encyclopaedic compendiums produced by nineteenth century sexological / anthropological researchers, and that sought to document the presence and relative status of homosexuals in other societies (see, for example, Greenberg 1988). Meanwhile, feminists both inside and outside anthropology and social constructivist sociologists

and historians were establishing the basis not only for deconstructing homosexuality and the homosexual as a universal and invariant 'it entity' (Herdt 1991), but also the Western heterosexist 'correspondence model of gender/sexuality that assigns anatomical sex a constant gender and prescribed object of sexual desire' (Weston 1993: 348).

Another important component of both feminist and social constructivist analysis was that each, if in different ways and with different emphasis, began to see in sex and gender, 'a dense transfer point of power' (Foucault 1990). Within anthropology, as Lyons and Lyons (2004: 285) note, Ortner and Whitehead's (1981) *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* was something of 'benchmark' in this regard. Emphasizing the importance of seeing 'sex' (understood as both gender and sexuality) as a symbolic system, they sought in the volume both to challenge naturalistic assumptions and foreground the inherent political nature of cultural constructions of gender and sexuality while simultaneously being attentive to the individual experience and articulations of these. More concretely in ethnographic terms, Whitehead's (1981) essay, 'The Bow and The Burden Strap', was, if not the first, certainly one of the most important in challenging a view of the Native American 'berdache' (a widely used term that has only recently become critically interrogated and replaced by 'two-spirit') as being fundamentally about deviant or abnormal sexuality. For Whitehead, in a system which differentially defined male and female access to and achievement of prestige and status, 'the berdache' was primarily about the pursuit of status through occupations defined as female.

While calling attention to the social dimension of the 'berdache' status that located them as a normative part of the sex/gender system, Whitehead's account still

remains wedded to an originary male bodied individual, who in some sense is merely masquerading as a woman, because he is unable or unwilling to adopt or pursue masculine pursuits. In this respect, Whitehead's work demonstrated both the potential and limitations of the sexual meanings approach which effectively separated out gender and sexuality as it simultaneously reinscribed and reinstated the sexed body. The challenge to an underlying and originary sexed body was to come through the queering of anthropology that systematically challenged (Western) 'hegemonic ideologies of gender and sexuality' (Weston 1993: 348).[2]

Central to the queering of anthropology was the deconstruction of the sex/gender divide by showing the way in which the sexed body is not prior to, but is itself an effect of gender (Butler 1990, 1993; see also Lacquer 1990). To put it another way, the new politics of queer was 'to make apparent that what had been taken to be a limit set by the natural body is no such thing' (Alsop**,** Fitzsimons, Lennon 2002: 170). Just as the work of earlier relativist anthropologists, such as Mead, had previously been influential in showing the enormous variability of masculinity and femininity and in challenging dominant Western assumptions about men and women, one of the major contributions of anthropology to the development of a 'queer' perspective has been to show that a two gender system, 'imposes an arbitrary dichotomy upon a reality capable of supporting multiple categories, if not a continuum' (Lyons and Lyons 2004: 297). Work within the 'third sex/gender' (see Herdt 1994) was in particular concerned with situations where, it was argued, there was not simply gender-crossing, but culturally recognized and institutionalised multi-gender systems and, once again, the Native American *'two-spirit'* was one of the key exemplars in this regard (see for example, Roscoe 1991).

However useful a notion of multiple genders was and is for deconstructing Western binaries premised on the natural coherence between sex/gender/sexuality, the 'third sex/third gender' model may be criticized, among other things, for its assumptions about discrete gender categories and fixed gender identities, and for its unintended re-naturalization of the 'sexed' body that appears to be a throw back to earlier nineteenth century categorizations of the homosexual as a 'third sex' (Weston 1993: 354). Thus, for example, while recent work on biological sex has seemingly arrived again at the conclusions that Hirschfeld articulated a century ago about the enormous variability of the body, concentration is generally focused on those whose bodily gender provokes the most cultural anxiety, namely the intersexed (Fausto-Stirling 2000). Much of this work has been useful in showing the way in which ambiguity is constructed in relationship to perceived normal bodies and the changing ways these ambiguities have been dealt with. In the process, however, these variously reconstructed bodies become evidence of a distinct 'third sex' that simultaneously reaffirms two originary sexes even as they are meant to register the perceived limitations of the dual sex/gender system.[3]

For these and other reasons as I discuss below, the term 'transgender' has now largely come to supersede although not entirely replace the 'third sex/ third gender' concept and discourse. Like the 'third sex' or multi-gender system, the term transgender is sometimes employed in situations where one or more alternative gender categories are culturally recognized, though the term 'transgender' is used both to flag up the possibility for an even broader range of gender categories (Jackson 2000) and to problematize the notion of fixed and stable identities (Johnson 1997; Blackwood and Weiringa 1999). More broadly, it is used to describe people and situations that variously supplement and/or transgress dominant or mainstream

understandings of gender, while not necessarily occupying a discrete gender category. Kulick's (1998) work on the *travesti* is a good example of the latter. *Travesti*, Kulick argues, are positioned within a dual gender system that defines them as lesser men, because they are seen to place themselves sexually as women in relation to other men as the penetrated partner in homosexual intercourse. At the same time, they variously transgress and redefine both masculinity and femininity, in so far as they not only reaffirm their bodily gender as male and may sexually act as penetrators of other men, but they also claim and aspire to be, despite or more precisely because of their male bodies, superior to women.

Kulick's work on the transgender *travesti* is one of the best examples of the new anthropology of gender and sexual diversity informed by and engaged with recent queer theory. First, it is concerned with reconnecting and interrogating the discursive linkages between gender and sexuality. Secondly, it affirms a view of gender as constituted through repeated bodily acts of identification within a culturally given and normatively enforced gender hierarchy that privileges some bodies over others. Thirdly, it essays a view of transgender people as situated within but at the margins of the norm. In other words, what makes the transgender individual significant is that, as with Newton's (1979) rediscovered ethnographic account of female impersonators in North America, they reveal both the limitations and exclusions affected by hegemonic gender categories and of the artifices through which dominant and mainstream identities are naturalized. As marginal figures they also 'play' with, through parody and mimicry, gender and sexuality in ways that consciously and unconsciously challenge and potentially refigure, if never completely escape, the dominant.

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It is perhaps unsurprising, moreover, that analogies are drawn between transgender people and people who occupy the margins and boundaries of ethnic, racial and national identities (Alsop et al 2002: 213-4). Ethnographic accounts of transgendering are in fact at the forefront of anthropological discussions of the way in which globalizing western discourses of sexuality have been variously appropriated and reimagined in translocal spaces (see for example Besnier 2002; Elliston 1999; Johnson 1998; Jackson 2000; Manalansan 2003). Indeed, in many respects, the transgendered, as others have noted, emerge as 'queer heroes' not because they represent simply a literary or symbolic 'third space' (Garber 1992), nor because they represent a definite institutionalized alternative gender identity in a multi-gender system (ala Roscoe 1991), and even still less because they provide conclusive evidence of a distinctive 'third' or 'intermediary sex' (Hirschfeld 2000; and see also Fausto-Stirling 2000). Rather, they are celebrated because they make clear what is said to be the general situation pertaining to all: namely, that any and all identity categories are problematic, since they provide the terms whereby the subject is formed and made intelligible and close down possibilities and enact violent exclusions that inevitably fail to 'make sense of the specific subjectivities of us all' (Alsop et al 2002: 214); in this sense, as Halberstram (1994, cited in Alsop et al 2002: 206) suggests, we are all 'trans', simultaneously caught up and constituted within the dominant categories, but always already exceeding and transgressing them in both deliberate and unconscious ways.

It is at this point that it is worth returning to consider the question of how far we have 'advanced' in our thinking since the advent of cultural relativism, social constructionism and the emergence of queer theory in the late twentieth century from the vantage point of Hirschfeld some one hundred years ago. Although not

articulated in the same way, Hirschfeld's radical ideas about the infinitely variable body are nevertheless echoed in statements by gender theorists at the beginning of the twenty-first century, 'Whatever the bodily conditions may be, they exceed any account which can be provided of them, leaving open the possibility of alternative understandings' (Alsop et al 2002: 171). The difference of course is that whereas the former started with the necessity and possibility of comprehending the human body as the font of both human sameness and difference, the latter starts from the incomprehensibility and irreducibility of the human body and consciousness as the font of both sameness and difference: in each case, however, the 'intermediate sex' or 'transgender queer' becomes not the marginal figure, but, like the migrant and exile, the carriers of a new cultural truth.

From sexual intermediacy to subjective indeterminacy: The logic and morality of sameness and difference

In the conclusion to his book, Bleys (1996) notes that homosexuality has frequently been repressed in post-colonial discourses, which often stress the alienness of same-sex sexuality. He suggests that in this context Homophobia may be seen as a reply to ways in which non-Western sexualities were constructed by the West in colonial and imperialist contexts as site and repository of the deviant. The irony of the situation, as Bleys (1996: 266) suggests, is that they effectively reproduce the dominant hetero/sexist tropes of the colonizer, 'forgetting the toleration, if not inclusion of sexual variance' within traditional cultures.

In a similar manner, Peletz (2006) usefully reconstructs and attempts to recuperate for the South East Asia region a more pluralist past where, he suggests, a variety of different gender categories and sexual practices were not only

acknowledged but accorded social legitimacy. He also shows the ways in which this pluralism has become subject to various modernist discourses of state and nation, and demonstrates how western discourses of sexuality are variously internalized, reproduced and replayed as 'Asian' values, the consequence of which is that transgendered individuals have come to be redefined:

> . . . as contaminating (rather than sacred) mediators who are perversely if not treasonously muddling and enmiring the increasingly dichotomous terms of sex/gender systems long marked by pluralism. (Peletz 2006:310)

Neither Peletz nor Bleys subscribes to a naïve romantic view of the past lives of exotic natives. Nevertheless, they do see sexual diversity and gender variation, and for Peletz in particular, the legitimacy accorded transgendering, as a marker and index of cultural pluralism more generally. As Peletz (2006: 324) suggests at the end of his paper:

> One can perhaps be more optimistic about the long term, hopeful that political and religious elites in the Philippines, Indonesia and other countries in Southeast Asia negotiate their present crises and variously defined projects of modernity in ways that build on and enhance rather than constrict the pluralistic traditions that long characterized the region.

The irony in what Peletz has to say is neither simply that western colonial discourses that privileged heterosex/genders are now the source of the re-valuing of transgender people in South East Asia, nor that transgendering and same-sex sexuality

are attributed by political and religious leaders in South East Asia to the corrupting influence of the West. Rather, as I suggested at the outset, the real irony is that while contemporary anthropology has sought to distance itself from previous Western discourses in which gender variation was a marker of the sodomite and metonymic symbol of the general moral degeneracy and sexual transgression of the 'other', it paradoxically ends up reinscribing gender and sexual diversity as a measure or standard of the relative enlightenment of both our own and other societies. Thus, for example, concluding a critical review of anthropological writing on 'third sex/gender' Holmes (2004: no page numbers in the original) writes:

> It seems then, that until a society does away with a stratified sex/gender system, those things residing outside the accepted and central terms will continue to be perceived as impure states. Perhaps, therefore, the measure of a society's civil liberties comes partly through the measure of its sex/gender system.

The above examples illustrate well the central contention of this chapter. I suggested at the outset that my aim was to rearticulate some of the historical connections and continuities between contemporary anthropological accounts of gender and sexual diversity and those of the past. Hence, I have sought to trouble the history of sexuality by showing the ways in which both the gendered and cultural 'other' is and always has been implicated in 'western' discourses of sex. I have also sought to complicate the history of sexuality by suggesting that the Foucaultian inspired social constructionist break from the previous biological determinist view may not be such a radical break after all. More specifically, I have focused on the

recurrent re-presentations of the 'transgendered' other and the various discursive shifts that have alternatively construed transgender *either* as the site of and index for moral degeneracy and/or sexual pathology *or* the site of and index for the universal variability and/or indeterminacy of the sexual subject. The overall point is about the way in which the refiguring of the 'transgendered' from essentially different to essentially the same in their irreducible and incomprehensible difference articulates what Argyrou (2002) has referred to as the logic and morality of the same.

For the radical sexologists at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the sexual intermediacy of the homosexual was grounded in, and iconic of, the underlying biological variability and hence fundamental sameness of every body. In sexological accounts, society was important in terms of the status and stigmatization or not of the culturally acknowledged intermediate sex, and relative difference between societies and cultures were made and measured in these terms. Similarly, for queer theory and anthropology at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, the indeterminacy of the transgender subject is grounded in, and is iconic of, the irreducibility and hence fundamental sameness of every body.

Whereas the former is premised on a positivist epistemology, the latter post-modern epistemology suggests that nothing can be said with certainty about the body, except that the body inevitably exceeds any attempt to comprehend and contain it. In queer theory, society is important in so far as it is said to provide the terms and regulatory regimes within which different kinds of social bodies are culturally materialized and relative difference between societies and cultures are made and measured in terms of the various exclusions and exclusionary affects through which legitimate and illegitimate subjects are constituted in particular historical situations.

Notwithstanding their different epistemological starting points, both of these positions are, as Argyrou (2002) has argued with respect to anthropology in general, moral statements which are premised on a shared metaphysical belief in the ultimate unity and sameness of human being. As such, they each in their own respective ways, offer important means for combating racist, sexist and homophobic discourses. However, as Argyrou points out, the problem with the logic of Sameness is that it inevitably engenders and reproduces difference and Otherness.

On the one hand, the fundamental difference enacted in radical sexology was between those who had obtained true scientific knowledge about the unity and diversity of all and those who had not. Like Tylor, who eschewed biological racism and instead propounded a view of the psychic unity of mankind, this was not a question of any innate inability of the other to comprehend, but rather a question of instruction and development leading inevitably, for the natives, from naïve acceptance, to enlightenment and social justice (Argyrou 2002: 23-5). On the other hand, the fundamental difference enacted in queer anthropology is between those who claim certain knowledge about self and other – whether essentialized in terms of biology or in terms of identity – and those who claim no certainty at all either about self or other, since we are all, it is suggested, in the same uncertain boat together. While the former is inevitably exclusionary, the latter embraces transgression and transformation.

The problem, of course, with the latter is that it posits some people as having a certain moral and epistemological vantage point from outside the boat, with the majority of people apparently holding on to false and exclusionary truths about their own and others' identities, bodies and desires. Indeed, it is only from this morally certain and seemingly unassailable vantage point that one can view and penetrate the

apparent naturalizing conceits and exclusions that privilege some bodies over others. Moreover, it is not clear whether or not, or to what extent, the transgender individuals and other marginal figures whose transgressions are normatively sanctioned and who putatively make clear the indeterminacy of all subjectivities, are actually aware of their privileged position in illuminating the operations and limitations of power. In which case it is perhaps not too much to suggest that like Hirschfeld's or indeed Carpenter's naïve natives who celebrate the 'mix' without knowing about the biological basis of their - which is also ours and everyone else's - *intermediacy*, so too queer theory celebrates the transgendered as those who revel in, play with and immerse themselves in the 'trans', even if they never really completely know about the epistemological basis of their - which is also ours and everyone else's - *indeterminacy*. Whether or not we are able to think our way out of these ethical and epistemological conundrums is a question that remains to be answered. The first step, as Argyrou suggests, is to acknowledge the intellectual and moral conceits that engender difference in the pursuit of the logic and morality of the same.

Notes

1. The use of the term 'transgender' by anthropologists outside of the specific historical context of Western sexual politics in which it was first used has been the subject of some critique (Valentine 2000, 2002). Though not unrelated, my concern here is with the broader intellectual shifts signalled by the now widespread use of the term 'transgender' in anthropology. It is also important to note that various 'trans' identified people in the west continue to 'conscript' various ethnographic and popular representations of

'third gender' or 'transgender' people in other parts of the world in formulating their versions of what transgendering means (Towle and Morgan 2002).

2. Queer anthropology grows out of lesbian and gay studies. It reflects both important theoretical moves that followed Judith Butler's (1990) seminal text, *Gender Trouble,* and calls from within and outside of the lesbian and gay movements to recognize a much broader diversity of gender identities and sexual subjectivities that did not neatly fit within the male/female, masculine/feminine, gay/straight binaries. A recent review of queer anthropology is provided by Boellstorff (2007) who also discusses some of the problems of defining and labelling what might be identified as 'queer' anthropology.

3. While some anthropologists maintain that it is possible analytically to separate sex, gender and sexuality without necessarily resorting to biological essentialism (e.g. Errington 1990; Shaw 2005), queer theorists such as Butler (1990, 1993) are insistent that one cannot speak of sex (however one might define it) without recourse to gender.

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