Queering Knowledge: An Introduction

I - History and context for the project

This collection of essays draws on the significance of Marilyn Strathern's work in respect of its potential to queer anthropological analysis and to foster the reimagining of the object of anthropology. Strathern's ethnographic contributions to studies of personhood, kinship, gender relations and reproduction in Melanesia and Britain have achieved wide recognition in anthropology, gender, and science studies. Against this background this volume expands the purchase of Strathern's widely acclaimed writings, and their reception, to ask how they might reframe the relationship between anthropology and queer theory. Strathern's analytic devices, rhetorical forms and figurations, and her strategy to conflate conceptual and empirical ontologies, have had profound effects on anthropologists' responses to the crisis of representation, especially for those who have drawn on the productive capacities of her thinking to conjure up the ethnographic present. Amidst such effects the volume emerged out of conversations held over several years in formal and informal gatherings at the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) biennial conference (Tallinn 2014), American Anthropological Association (AAA) Annual Meetings (Washington, 2014; Denver, 2015; Minneapolis 2016) and European Network for Queer Anthropology Workshops (Budapest, 2015) as well as smaller research events. Bringing together a range of authors and themes, the book aims to capture the momentous influence that the scholarship of Marilyn Strathern has had on scholars working at the intersections of social and cultural anthropology, gender and sexuality studies, queer and ethnographic theory. It contributes to the field of Strathernian scholarship most recently mapped in the volumes *Recasting Anthropological Knowledge: Inspiration and Social Science* (Edwards and Petrovic-Sterger 2011), *Knowledge and Ethics in Anthropology: Obligations and Requirements* (Josephides 2015), and *Redescribing Relations: Strathernian Conversations on Ethnography, Knowledge and Politics* (Lebner 2017), extending the debate in new conceptual directions.

Queering Knowledge takes merographic connections as a structuring device for concept-work (Faubion et al. 2016) that can generate points of connectivity and productive rupture in and across the chapters. The merographic relation denotes ways in which parts of things may become shared to effect both differences and connections *through the act* of being contrasted as things. The imaginative act that brings together separate parts as attributes for recognising differences comprises an apposite analogy for the present collection, wherein each chapter comprises a convergence through and around specific Strathernian analytical devices. The present volume thus reflects ways in which ethnographic work might move beyond conceiving 'queer' as a subject

category for use in culturally comparative work, instead considering the productivity of Strathernian analytics through their potential for connectivity and opaqueness. Cross-identification, as a paradigmatically queering knowledge practice (Sedgwick 1985, Muñoz 1999), is activated in the writings collected in the volume through varied generative deployments of Strathern-inspired modes of analysis, connection and abstraction. Conversely, the authors brought together in the book utilize a range of imaginings and analytic subversions to focus on how people might relate to queer object categories partially, merographically, or in terms of a sense of dissonance from signifier and self. In this sense we seek to evoke a sense of representational estrangement and explore how varied analytics, devices and investments become relevant to figuring out intimacies, desires and the politics of sexual and gender diversity. The volume, therefore, proposes a reading that both flows and diverts in connected and unfinished analytic forms, especially in our hope that, as the chapters travel via the interpretations of different readers, the synergies and divergences that the book offers may extend beyond those contained within its pages. The volume asks: through what analytical operations do the participating authors engage in queering knowledge formations, objects, relations and analytics? What knowledge do merographic connections between the chapters elicit? How do they queer knowledge and to what effects? What type of analytical devices does Marilyn Strathern's work offer in respect of the queering properties and potentialities of ethnographic knowledge? What forms of un-concealment, opaqueness and conceptual creativity might conceptual connections between Strathern and queer theory elicit?

II – Out-contextualisation, perspective and the productive life of concepts

Successive readings of Strathern's work have drawn out particular themes and investments in her writings in order to reconfigure links between anthropology and a range of fields. Strathern's interventions, as well as her reflexive engagement with the status of knowledge made a profound mark on conceptualisations of accountability, the importance of description, and debates about interdisciplinarity. Strathern's own relation with the ways in which her work is received in anthropology -as well as in other disciplines- remains one of open curiosity and partial disavowal. In an interview with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Carlos Fausto (2017), Strathern downplayed the interviewers' claims about the sheer originality of her work in favour of situating her oeuvre in the particular context of British anthropology, and its even more particular engagement with structuralist and Marxist traditions. Although Strathern did not explicitly privilege a direct application of the tenets of structural analysis in her own writing, a sense of embattlement and inadequacy led Strathern to confront key questions animating structural and Marxist readings of

social process within the discipline of anthropology. Key amongst these was the need 'to take seriously the feminist claim that in talking about gender, we talk about society.' (2017, 47-48).

Mary Douglas' review of the *Gender of the Gift* a year after its publication highlighted the book's achievement in terms of its strategy to reposition traditional feminist debates in anthropology by re-situating 'backstage' problems -such as the central and performative character of categorical thinking in the West. Reading Strathern's writing as an example of postmodern anthropology, Douglas commended the book's depth of argument and framing while lamenting the loss of traditional positivist ethnography in a postmodern turn to reflexivity. For Douglas, the main achievement of *The Gender of the Gift* derived from its problematisation of categories of personhood, agency and economic life, which Strathern innovatively plotted against fictions and metaphors not easily comparable or translatable. Strathern's break with the anthropological canon opened the way for a less classificatory and hierarchical form of theoretical production, even if so doing imperilled the comparative ethos of the ethnographic method. Strathern's anthropology was seen as the kind of 'alternative fiction' which could 'counterpoise the hack political narratives that lie to hand'.[i]

Drawing on the impact of Strathern's new wave of gender constructivism in Melanesia, Jolly (1992, see also Lipset 2008, Morgain and Taylor 2015) argued forcibly that a new ontological proposition emerges not from the exposition of particularly Melanesian gender relations, but from a 'new' gendering of relations – the rendering of persons, artefacts and sequences as male and female (1992, 137). For Jolly, unlike traditional anthropological comparison, Strathern's investment in partiality opens up analysis to further interpretations, while writing her vantage point into the analysis – breaking existing convergences between ethnographers' interests and Melanesian men. Sarah Franklin has further argued that Strathern's social theory of gender, already contained in her early writings, proposes a kinetic theory of gender. In a manuscript originally written in 1974, and re-edited as *Before and After Gender* (2016), Strathern demonstrates that rather than being circumscribed to particular sets of relations, not least between men and women, gender is, in fact, a mechanism, a system of symbols, objects, and relations that 'can be used to represent other things, and vice versa' (Franklin, 2016 X). The isomorphism between an analytic object and the process of analysis, between content and form, emerges as a generative result, a relation that reveals, 'the relation between the reader to the text, the texts to each other' (ibid, xx). In this sense gender presents itself as an effect, a play of forces that enclose and reveal the workings of sociality. Franklin situates Strathern's kinetic theory of gender as precursor to the emergence of a performative theory

of gender in the 1990s, arguing that 'using gender as a performative analytic principle—offers a demonstration, and imitation, of what Strathern argues gender is, means, and does' (2016,)

Indeed, for Strathern, the problem of gender was never just about gender. Studying the complexity of social worlds, conceptuality itself becomes generative (Franklin 2014, Street and Copeman, 2014, Edwards and Petrovic-Sterger, 2011); like gender, a performative conflation between abstract and concrete worlds (1995, 7). For example, imagining 'the relation' as an 'internal' feature of sociality, yet also a holographic device that allows the analyst to grasp the social world as a system of relations[ii], Strathern uses vernacular concepts, and the ways these travel across domains of social life, to conceptualise and route generativity and reproduction. Such routings can be taken up in various contexts. For example, thinking through relations *between* women and relations *within* women's networks in London and Manchester, Sarah Green (2002, see also Riles 1998, 2001) twists Strathern's relational view of sociality through a perspectivist lens. Green's ethnography remarked that that the networks that linked gay women after the widespread introduction of ICTs in women's organizations in London and Manchester did not constitute a new or indeed the main basis for sociality, but, rather, the workings of particular cultural formations. These were seen to intervene to make relations meaningful in particular and changing ways. For Green, it is these cultural motions, and not simply infrastructural development, that provide the network metaphor its generative capacity. Navaro (2017) similarly looks for the pathways through which knowledge travels in the making of distinctly cultural devices to accomplish a large-scale humanitarian project. Yet, for Navaro, the introduction of these technologies does not alter social process in a significant way as much as it allows new questions to be asked regarding the constitution of the human in peace processes. Disentangling the conflated idioms of technology and humanism, Navaro's analysis draws on Strathern's thinking to examine how the human and the machine are produced as phantasmal devices emerged in collective processes of production and transformation, circulation and entanglement.

Strathern's reconfigurations and recombinations yield forms of knowledge with surprising effects. Partial connections drawn from different fields of fact – such as Strathern's binary operators, for instance, 'nature' and 'culture', detach knowledge from origin, as they press common idioms against unfamiliar domains (Edwards and Petrovic-Sterger 2011, 3). Franklin (2014) turned to Strathern to revisit merographic connections in the context of an engagement with theories of social reproduction in the biosciences, opening up the devices and discourses in which analogies 'travel back' in shifts of context and scale. Reading the 'new genetics' as one such metaphor, Franklin argues that conceptual generativity lies not only in the capacity of metaphors to engender new

agencies, but in their capacity for return. For instance, reading into the limits of literalism in predictive genetics, Franklin finds that dissonances and variations 'do not travel easily or automatically out of its rather narrow knowledge context' (2014, 4). Rather she observed that analogic return makes possible 'the ability to create, to maintain, and also to change and disconnect the perspectives, or vantage points, out of which we 'do' both the social and cultural work of kinship – as a practice of connection as well as meaning and symbol' (ibid, 4-5).

Generativity presents a relation between author and work that makes particular sets of relationships thinkable (Biagioli, 2014, Haraway 1988). Readings of Strathern after the ontological turn have recently led anthropologists to consider new 'questions and problems' with ontology, and particularly, redefine the purchase of ontological debates away from philosophical grammars (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017) by underlining a sense commonality between description and epistemology.[iii] Holbraad and Pedersen have suggested that Strathern's own relation with the ontological turn, however awkward, is characterised by her proximity with postmodern anthropology, particularly as a result of the reflexive turn in the 1980s. Strathern's self-reflexivity, for Holbraad and Pedersen, connects her analytic toolkit to feminist scholarship, as it does with the new reflexive anthropology that inspired the revival of ethnographic theory and the ontological turn. Indeed, there is a two-way traffic between the performative effects of analytics, and the way that concepts shape our own formation as analysts. Holbraad and Pedersen (2010) have illustrated a convergence between the analyst and her area of work by encapsulating Strathern's analytics with a figuration of the analyst (which they term 'planet M – which stands for Melanesia or Marilyn'-, and indexes Strathern's 'idealism' and her productive critical engagement with 'context' and the practice of comparison). Such a conflation reveals Strathern's conceptual analytics, such as scale, substance and post-plurality as isomorphic of the relation between abstraction and concreteness in her writing, which Hobraad and Pedersen argue bring forward her 'peculiar sharpness' (Holbraad and Pedersen 2010, 380).

III - Queer anthropology queering knowledge

As editors we are each especially intrigued by how knowledge traverses contexts to varying effects - concrete and abstract. These qualities can involve fissures in the midst of analytical connections, misunderstandings of intent, and iterations of conceptual and ontological divides across information communities.   Ethnographic knowledge might be understood as coming into being in respect of such parentheses and extensions whereby information is relationally constituted, while it in turn is a

form of knowledge that takes relations as its object. This involves consideration of where and how information may be included in any given paradigmatic and/or institutional setting *as knowledge,* and where and how it may not be (perhaps because not admissible materially, socially or conceptually). For anthropologists, and others, with interests in the forms and functions of knowledge production, such observations present a range of challenges. These relate, for instance, to how contextually derived ethnographic findings might connect to wider conceptual formations and dialogues (for example in respect of relations between different disciplines and fields of practice). Ethnographic data (especially as noted in respect of its postmodern readings) is not simply a descriptive form, e.g. for the employment in cultural comparison. Rather ethnography might better be conceived of as a figurative epistemology; located in fieldwork yet calling into question ways in which culture, persons and relations are conceived of analytically (Moore 2007, Strathern 1995). Such analytical strategies become especially complex when ethnographic research is taken-up in respect of queer theoretical perspectives.

As Mark Graham (2014) has recently reflected, anthropology has an especially complex history with respect to its (comparative) representation of same-sex sexualities, as indeed it does with sexualities in general (Vance 1991; Kulick and Willson 1995). However, ethnographies of sexual and gender relations offer formative insights into the development of queer anthropological work, and its relations, or otherwise, to sexual subjects. Sexual and gender relations, as a domain for legitimate ethnographic study, might be seen as repressed in much anthropological writing even while in other readings it has been interpreted as ubiquitously present (Lyons and Lyons 2004). A possible evocation here is of a Foucauldian hypothesis of the repressed; sexuality as *conceived and made present* by moral foreclosures and public subjugation (Graham 2014). Re-readings of the ethnographic record have opened outlooks relevant to such parallels. Margaret Mead's public silence in respect of her bisexuality, for example, has been interpreted retrospectively as having informed conservative and normative analyses of (American) women's sexualities. Being in any way pro-actively vocal about rights and recognition in the case of non-heteronormative sexualities might have called into questions Mead's own sexuality, as well as the veracity of her analytic practice, with unwanted exposing professional consequences (Bateson 1984, Freeman 1983). By implication, this exposure indicates a fissure amidst Mead's work and experience that informed a normative analytical register in her oeuvre (Graham 2014: 15-16). And yet too Mead has also otherwise been important for her foregrounding of *relative* perspective on socio-sexual norms and moralities. Her work has been claimed as precursive to the emergence of non-heteronormative anthropological theory and practice (Newton 2000). No singular figuration (of Mead) is conclusive or complete in

these terms. Her influence on, and connections to, contemporary anthropologies of sexuality are partial and multiple.

In another formative example, that in turn further queries the anthropological record, Don Kulick and Margaret Willson (1995) employed the posthumous publication of Bronislaw Malinowski's private dairies (1967) as a conceptual device to reposition otherwise *hidden* registers of sexuality as having long been implicit in the production of anthropological knowledge. Malinowski had written about sexual desires regarding his Trobriand Island informants in his diaries in a manner not included in published ethnographic accounts. Deploying such instances figuratively, Kulick and Willson contributed toward the development of analytic spaces for reflexive ethnographic writing wherein sexual experiencing has been reclaimed from its putative suppression and instead conceived of for its analytically generative capacity. Such (restorative) actions position the reflexive sexual subjectivity of the ethnographer as a device aimed at disrupting hierarchical relations in fieldwork. This has often been an especially important epistemological and methodological strategy for queer ethnography over the last two decades, in concert with de-colonizing logics and crises of representation as addressed in both queer and ethnographic theory (Muñoz 1998; Adjepong 2017; Bakshi et al. 2016).

Knowledge making about sexual life-worlds, in respect of representational debates, opens further questions about the relation between queer ethnographic perspectives and subjectivities. A critique of queer ethnography is that it may write-over 'other(s)' experiences by designating subjects of research *as queer,* when in fact this may not be a form of language, or identity, that is recognised by fieldwork interlocutors. Queer, as a domain term, has been queried accordingly for not necessarily bringing anything new to the analytical palette beyond what (feminist) ethnographers already do – allowing for multiple voices and standpoints on gender and sexuality in the writing of research. Moreover the sensitivities that anthropologists have shown in not imposing LGBT terminologies into other global contexts have been seen as compromised by the utilisation of 'queer' as if a universal signifier – applicable to the naming of sexual subjects in their rendering as ethnographic objects (Lewin 2016).

We recognise the conceptual lineages and contemporary problems with ethnographic practice that such an argument points to. Yet, in the present volume we are especially interested in ways in which queer ethnographic engagements may offer unique viewpoints on ways in which non-heteronormative worldings may fall outside of any conceptual or spatial ordering that might render 'queer subjects' as identifiable – as if socially or spatially evident as queer(s) (Boyce and Dasgupta 2018, Decena 2011, Engrebretsen 2013, Gonzalez-Polledo 2017). This stance resonates with an

important attribute of queer theory; its calling into question any assumed isomorphic connection between categories and lived experiences of sexual difference. Given the predominantly heteronormative nature of social structures in almost any given global context queer life-ways may unfold with sensations and affects that may be purposefully and profusely intangible, suffuse with contexts that do not call same-sex sexual subjects into being in respect of self-identifications (Manalansan 2015). Queer ethnographies, accordingly, can move *beyond* the representation of same-sex desiring subjects or the giving of voice to such persons via the cipher of fieldwork (although this may indeed feature as a methodological in some queer anthropology). Rather queer perspectives may emerge more so for their non-affective, *impersonal* properties; for their *not* treading a path back to the framing and naming of queer selves and worlds but rather opening epistemologies and ambiguous (re-)contextualizations of experiencing outside of heteronormative analytical assumptions.

Queer ethnographic strategies, interpreted in this way, are not so much concerned with the cartographic description or designation of sexual differences, but with how knowledge is organized around practices of sexual differentation, informing everyday experiences of body, space and identity in ways that may not conform around singular figurations of same-sex desiring individuals (Graham 2014; Boellstorff 2010, Boyce et. al. 2017). 'Queer', in such terms, does not function as a conceptual device for the designation of extant non-heteronormative subjects in research. Instead queering instantiates understandings of social worlds as not cohering around wholly identifiable, or self-identifying (sexual) selves or other seemingly categorical imperatives as they might come to bear in the naming of entities. It is after such terms that queer ethnographic analytics have been increasingly extended to a range of projects that in ostensible terms have little or nothing to do with sexual subjects but wherein connected analytical ciphers reveal new perspectives on relations with other objects and species (Boellstorff and Howe 2015; Chen 2012). Queer ethnography might thus be seen as emerging amidst incomplete connections through and in social and material worlds. These may effect changes within people's experience but they do not wholly correspondence with any external designations of queer subjects. Taken up in these terms, queer ethnographic knowledge typically does not orient-toward linear object conclusions or the definite evidencing of social contexts or persons. Rather queering performs as an abstraction, an analytical strategy that might displace any assumptive regular connections between (queer) life-worlds and the making of ethnographic knowledge.

Questions of abstraction relate to ways in which anthropologists write-up their research by typically removing themselves from research settings. In order to produce knowledge, in textual, visual,

performative or other forms, the anthropologist needs to also remove themselves from the relations about which they write, to compose analysis both *out* of and *away from* them. This is why anthropological knowledge might carry within its composition necessarily partial forms of representation. As an epistemological enterprise, anthropology cannot be wholly isomorphic with the worlds that it derives from; it is knowledge of a different order. Social worlds emerge differently, temporally and geographically, when looked back at from the present or when re-described from elsewhere. Relations in field-sites endure and change, meanings and signifiers alter and new writing compels itself accordingly. In these terms social-worlds are never contained in information about them, in as much as such information might be imagined as temporally and contextually locative (providing evidence about particular persons or places within measureable timeframes). Rather, a typical anthropological approach is to probe putative 'facts,' as they might seem to provide reductive conclusions. An effect is to query knowledge in reference to the suffuse complexities of ethnographic engagements (that typically do not render decisive end-points) (Engelke 2008).

After such conceptualisations ethnography, and in relation anthropology, might be imagined as knowledge forms unfolding in present, past and future temporalities together, as opposed to an epistemological commitment to singularly empirical or extant evidentiary instances. And in these terms such knowledge further resonates with queer viewpoints. Queer life-ways might echo the kinds of temporal dispersions described in respect of their conditions for proper realisation not having arrived. Such conditions might be imagined pessimistically, for example after Lee Edelman (2004), stressing that social worlds of the present do not contain conditions for the fulfilment of queer ways of being. Or in a more optimistic vein, as associated with the work of Jose Esteban Muñoz for example (2009), queer life-worlds might be conceived on in respect of futures yet to come, in a utopian manner. Either way, and in a quotidian sense, queer subjects and subjectivities have been conceived of as deferred domains – as *elsewhere* both temporally and in respect of their not being coterminous with readily self-proclaiming 'non-heteronormatively' identifying social actors. Questions pertaining to the relational qualities of ethnographic knowledge insist; if epistemologies of queer relations have not yet been achieved in the present how might we conduct ethnographic research in relation to them? What memories and moments might we draw on reflexively, and what kinds of knowledge might queer kinds of ethnographic experience engender? Such questions suggest the potentialities for a kind of 'radical othering'. Ethnographic viewpoints might facilitate "manifold possibilities" for *anticipatory* alterities (Hendriks 2017). What this suggests is a multiplicity of *possible* queer life-worlds as ontological entry points for ethnographic work – each of which may cohere and aver in respect of any attempt at complete empirical grounding or evidencing.

Such a way of conceiving knowledge, or of 'queering knowledge,' offers divergent perspectives into how information is valued and enacted in different times and contexts. Academic research, to take a salient cotemporary example, is increasingly called upon to demonstrate impact; its application beyond purely disciplinary discourses and debates. Assessments of research efficacy derive from capacities to demonstrate such effects – knowledge arising being valued in these terms while in turn evidencing such values may become attached to on-going investments in knowledge production (by funders). For those of us working in a queer idiom such values can be especially challenging where our research and other forms of engagement may be more typically concerned with how knowledge and relations take shape in contextually multivalent and temporally unrealised forms . As Nadja Millner-Larsen and Gavin Butt have recently observed, 'queer activism—not to mention queer life— is a particularly rich resource for imagining, experimenting with, and enacting the improvisational infrastructures necessary for managing the unevenness of contemporary existence' (2018 forthcoming: 4). Such improvisational qualities open-out perspectives on the 'commons' for Milner-Larsen and Butt, framing viewpoints on already existing queer forms of social action that do not converge around individualistic properties or bounded forms of being. Rather, they reside in shared experiences of space, knowledge and sustenance. The evocation here is one of trans-bordering connections – across domains; communal forms of knowing countering singular ownership and enclosure of properties (e.g. where land and information may be similarly evoked as forms of property). More open – common – engagements in turn point for less enclosed re-contextualizations of knowledge, not prefigured on whole (or wholly owned or defined) objects but rather figuring non-individualistic subjects and incomplete (or merographic) connections. In turn, the present volume seeks to capitalise on the creative analytical potential inherent in queering the relation between property and knowledge (Strathern 2004). By trespassing academic boundaries and disciplinary domains, the book repositions Strathernian analytics at the heart of newly (re-)assembled queer commons.

IV - Merographic Connections, Queering Effects

Strathern does not use the term 'merograph' as a noun, but rather, deploys the etymologically related adjective 'merographic' mostly in reference to connections. For Strathern, a merographic imaginary 'works through the incompleteness elicited by comparison and shifts in perspective. It is an organizing device that produces merographic connections' (Strathern 1992:73). Relations are a way of figuring parts and wholes in the order of experience and interpretation and this extends to the way anthropology figures its own objects and analytical devices. Merographic connections,

therefore, are fundamental for ethnography; they operate in and across the registers that organise worlds through lived experience and conceptuality to the effect that 'a merographic imaginary or modelling orders the analytics of ethnography across fieldwork and writing and observation and analysis' (Strathern 1999:246). Merographic connections elicit a sense of incompleteness through juxtaposition and comparison as a 'a type of analogical perspective, or agentic comparison' (Franklin 2014: 243). In the process, they generate an element of possibility or surprise (Strathern 1992, 1999) that arises out of the shifts in perspectives engendered by partial connectivities and 'cuts in the network' (Strathern 1996). They are activated in acts of re-description and connect to acts of creation and imagination.

In this volume, the authors creatively explore Strathern's conceptual imagination and analytical repertoire as a repository of queer analytics and devices through which presuppositions concerning knowledge, subjects, objects and relations are disassembled and re-oriented. Strathern draws from anthropological theory but re-tools ideas and, as Gell (1999) insightfully argued, provides a meta-anthropology *of* anthropology. The work of establishing a distance from familiar assumptions concerning what appears as common sense resonates with the critical thrust of the interdisciplinary domains of queer theory and queer studies that have sought, inter alia, to denaturalise presuppositions about the stability and coherence of sexual and gender identifications and desire. In this respect, we contest the narrative that positions 'queer' – when it positions queer at all – as a disciplinary sub-field in anthropology or in any other disciplinary configuration. In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's influential early iteration, queer theory entailed a challenge to the logics of minoritizing discourses and political tactics (Sedgwick 1990). In Sedgwick's (1990, 1993) formulation, a critical reading of minoritizing and universalizing views on the homosexual/heterosexual dyad resulted in an anti-separatist and anti-assimilationist stance. Whilst a minoritizing view of the homosexual/heterosexual dyad assumes a 'small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority' or perspective, in the universalizing view, the dyad is generalised and reified to be universally important (Sedgwick 1993:3).[iv] However, as Sedgwick argues, 'lines can never be drawn to circumscribe within some proper domain of sexuality (whatever that might be) the consequences of a shift in sexual discourse' (Sedgwick 1990:2-3). In Sedgwick's post-perspectivism, then, 'queer' does not delimit or circumscribe, but rather, it is tied etymologically and epistemologically to transitivity, relation and strangeness (1993: xii).

Against this background, merographic connections become devices that can further the analysis of intractable definitional issues, and problems with categorical congruence and stability. This is particularly important in anthropology because here, as we have argued elsewhere (Boyce et al.

2015, Boyce et al. 2018), queer perspectives are subject to extremely uneven institutionalisation and are often either ghettoized or disavowed. The politics of queer, then, cannot be reduced to ill-judged or straightforwardly nefarious projects of inclusion – into disciplines, institutions, communities or worlds (Puar 2007, Haritaworn et al. 2014). Inclusion is conditional and dependent on acquiescing to a range of normativities. Further, inclusion is often framed so as to leave the very premises at the heart of the constitution of a whole, be that a community (of scholars) or a body politic, its boundaries and limits, unquestioned and unchallenged. This volume treats merographic connections as devices with the capacity to engender a problematization of received assumptions regarding the stability or naturalness of parts and wholes – and by a queer extension, of the presuppositions inherent in minoritarian *and* minoritizing politics. Whilst the politics of merographic connections have remained implicit in the work of Marilyn Strathern, that is, they are not the subject of sustained commentary and reflection, the queer readings of Strathern's oeuvre collected in this volume provide the occasion for focussed commentary and performatively activate this important critical dimension. The contributions gathered in this volume mobilise the generative analytical potential inherent in shifting perspectives to offer multiple, innovative and unexpected re-contexualizations of the work of Marilyn Strathern vis-à-vis feminist anthropology, queer studies and anthropological theory.

In the first essay in the volume, 'Wild Gender', EJ Gonzalez-Polledo addresses Strathern's early work on gender in the context of the emergence of feminist anthropology and in view of the publication of Strathern's 'long waylaid' (Franklin 2017: xiv) manuscript *Before and After Gender* (2017) originally drafted in the mid-1970s. Gonzalez-Polledo traces the key features of Strathern's framing of gender as a set of questions concerning the figuring of differences between kinds and the substitution of a model of singular persons with a composite made out of substance, parts and relations that do not neatly map onto into male and female. Gonzalez-Polledo connects the Strathernian vision of gender as operator, combinatory device and matrix of multiplicity and dividuality to contemporary thinking on transgender embodiment. The chapter draws out the strikingly anticipatory aspects of Strathern's ideas vis-à-vis contemporary debates in the biosciences and transgender studies and works through deconstruction or disassembling that Strathernian gender thinking entails for natural categories and cultural forms. This, Gonzalez-Polledo argues, has pressing contemporary resonance for many social and theoretical projects that seek to 'think past gender' normativity and over-determination to make space for gender as a relation whose effects are differing and indeterminate. As we have discussed in the opening of the book, and As Gonzalez-Polledo argues in this chapter, the futurity of Strathernian gender thinking in *Before and After Gender* opens up gender as an excitable relational threshold of merographic connectivity. The

anticipatory qualities of the Strathernian corpus and its potential for retroactive and futural articulation are explored further in the following chapters.

In 'The (Im)possibililties of Transgression, or, Reflections on the Awkward Relation between Strathern and Queer Politics', Irene Peano undertakes an innovative repositioning of Strathern's work. Peano out-contextualises Strathern's oeuvre vis-à-vis the work of two key contemporary theorists, Donna Haraway and Judith Butler. Peano mobilises another important Strathernian device, the 'partial connection', (Strathern 1991) to extend these thinkers 'beyond themselves' and into relations of connectivity with one another. Peano's aim is to offer a reflection on the awkward relation between Strathern's work, queer politics and the politics of disciplines and institutions. Peano critically examines attachments to 'discipline' (anthropology) and the 'university' (institution) – as composite objects shown in the process of ruination. From the ruins of institutions and disciplines, the chapter resists nostalgia and engages instead in the work of imagining how to queer the contemporary post-disciplinary condition and increasingly fragmented and precarious institutions. Strathern is simultaneously placed in this time and in a different temporality, where distinctions between office and person, and academic and activist could be drawn and meaningfully sustained. The queerness in Strathern's proposition lies in the insistence on the work of gaps and interstices where political manoeuvring can unfold. Further, Strathern's tentativeness is shown to be a potential queer affect and tactic. Most fundamentally, Peano shows how 'Marilyn Strathern made us queer', engendering multiple re-orientations of queer theory and the politics of anthropology in the current post-apocalyptic, post-disciplinary, post-institutional terrain.

Politics in the interstices of disciplines, institutions and life-worlds tie Sorainen's chapter to Peano's intervention. Antu Sorainen's staging of the question in the chapter, 'Gay Back Alley Tolstoys and Inheritance Perspectives: Re-Imagining Kinship in Queer Margins' centres on the life experiences and urban queer worldings as these emerge in the narratives of four 'off-scene gay men', or 'Back Alley Tolstoys', in Helsinki. Sorainen focuses on new kinship practices – a quintessential Strathernian theme (Strathern 1981, 2005), to frame how Back Alley Tolstoys are reinventing the meaning of kin relations through everyday affective and conceptual negotiations and adjustments of normative and experiential framings of what it means to be kin. More specifically, Sorainen draws attention to how the act of will writing has the potential to reconfigure kinship queerly. 'Willing' is the practice that the Back Alley Tolstoys adopt to figure their relations of mutual care and dependence. Through unorthodox kinship charts they illustrate their affective relational worlds to Sorainen, and by extension, the reader. Their contouring of kinning arrangements defies the traditional anthropological conventions for tracing and figuring kinship. Traditional anthropological

diagrammatic conventions for representing descent and affine relations are replaced by loose intricate charts that give a form to the complexity, fluidity and ambiguity inherent in the task of tracing and figuring queer kinship. Back Alley Tolstoys renegotiate their malleable and porous queer ties kinship experientially and conceptually vis-a-vis a multiplicity of legal, social and cultural normativities engaging in everyday practices of queer world-making.

Hadley Renkin's chapter, 'Partial Perversity and Perverse Partiality in Postsocialist Hungary', also brings Strathernian frames into conversation with queer theory, and the work of José Esteban Muñoz more specifically, to redescribe queer lives and experience in postsocialist Hungary. Renkin reflects on the discomforts and failures that punctuate research on sexuality and sexual politics and postsocialist homophobias in East European contexts, drawing out their anthropological and analytical purchase. Intersecting postcolonial and Strathernian critical perspectives, Renkin opens up 'postsocialism' as an ethnographic object to examine the partial connections and disconnections that constitute it and produce it. Connecting Strathernian insights and José Esteban Muñoz's framings of mechanisms and processes of disidentification (Muñoz 1999) Renkin elicits the complexities that connote relations, connections and disconnections that stabilise and naturalise the boundaries of sexual selves through idioms of sameness and difference drawing out their significance for boundary-work around citizenship and the political in a postsocialist Hungary. Renkin suggests a reading of the postsocialist moment as a time of queer misalignment where agentive transversal identifications and dis-identifications emerge in the queer everyday relationalities and exchanges.

The analytical idioms of dividuality, reassembling and queer world-making explored by both Renkin and Sorainen are also mobilised in the next chapter. In 'Property, Substance, Queer Effects: Ethnographic Perspective and HIV in India', Paul Boyce extends questions of postplural thinking to explore social and epistemological relations as they come to bear in the production of knowledge across contexts. Taking community-based HIV prevention in West Bengal as a locus for theorisation, Boyce connects the effects and affects of health promotion actions at differing scales of analysis and experience. Taking an established empirical and epistemological connection (queer subjects and HIV) Boyce employs Strathern's re-framing of ethnographic perspective as a heuristic device to re-imagine ways in which the sexual subjects of public health actions may be 'written' and 'seen' at the confluence of data and life-worlds. Doing so calls attention to 'dividual worldings' amidst the practical production of epidemiological and demographic information. These evoke connections between Strathern and South Asianist anthropological lineages as a means to trouble acts of HIV prevention knowledge making in the past and present, in India and internationally. Queer subjects,

in relation, emerge as enmeshmed with various 'external' properties and substances (such as data-sets and HIV prevention medications). This is so even as they might be conceived of as *singular* objects of information for health promotion purposes. In drawing attention to such obverse iterations Boyce dis-locates queer subjects, perceiving them as entities pulled into divergent knowledge making forms and relations (each of which transitively refracts the other).

The final chapters engage with the Strathernian devices of prefiguration, scale and postplurality. Hoon Song's chapter, 'Prefigured "Defection" in Korea', mobilises Strathern's thinking on parts and wholes to consider registers of (re)unification in North Korea. The chapter reframes geopolitical dynamics – notably those associated with the Cold War and its aftermaths – postplurally, that is, not taking at face value, but rather, probing the logics that frame bipolarisms. Song locates a concern for bipolarity at the heart of Strathern's analysis of prefiguration in relation to gender – also explored in Chapter 1 by Gonzalez-Polledo – elegantly transposing this onto the prefigurations that subtend the distinctions and parting of two Koreas. This foregrounds the sensorial dimensions of the Strathernian notion of prefiguration and the aesthetic, lyrical and scaling properties that emerge from such thinking. Overlaying Strathern's discussion of gender onto Jean Genet's probing of the seemingly self-evident status of the nation-state, Song transposes the Strathernian analytical arsenal of the prefigured to critically address and unpack the State in a discussion of the memoire by exiled North Korean poet Zini Choi. Song explores the defector's enunciatory position, emphasising its mobile qualities and prefigurative capacities to perform a queering double-take on 'what is already there'.

Limits and challenges to logics of pluralism and perspectivism are explored further in Silvia Posocco's chapter, 'Postplurality: An Ethnographic Tableau'. Posocco focuses on the relation and disjuncture between analysis and experience and mobilises Strathern's work on scale to reflect on the analytical implications and consequences of postplural scales and postperspectivism. Posocco explores how ethnographic objects such as signatures, documents and archives in Guatemala, rather than stable entities, are in fact implicated in shifts in scale. For Posocco, ethnography ensues out of a series of shifting ethnographic tableaus which are assembled and disassembled giving ground to a succession of postplural effects. 'Queering', for Posocco is an 'ethnographic effect' that operates through scale, and more specifically, through a socially, historically and culturally situated scale of postplurality in the aftermath of genocide. Postplural framings fundamentally problematize assumptions regarding the assumed self-evidence of notions of bounded, organic and/or integrated social wholes or individual subjects, as well as the assumed transparency of analytics of gender and sexuality – and the idea of 'proper objects' of queer anthropology. Whilst Song emphasising movement and flow in

processes of composition and decomposition, Posocco foregrounds shifts and jolts in the sensory and conceptual assembling and reassembling of subjects, objects and worlds.

Whilst these chapters locate queering in analytical operations of overlaying, overturning and transposition, performing a merographically structured analysis, Eriksen and Jacobsen, in the next chapter, contextualise and out-contextualise Strathern's oeuvre meta-theoretically vis-à-vis contemporary anthropological theory and queer theory. In 'On Feminist Critique and How the Ontological Turn is Queering Anthropology', Eriksen and Jacobsen reflect on the impact Strathern's work has had on the discipline of anthropology. They foreground the way Strathern has inaugurated a postplural, postrepresentational alter-anthropology and see the ontological turn in its current iteration (e.g. Holbraad and Pedersen 2017) as located squarely within a feminist genealogy. Whilst it could be argued that 'the ontological turn' disavows such a relation to feminist scholarship – or only very partially, selectively and ambivalently acknowledges a debt to feminist criticism, Eriksen and Jacobsen provocatively re-contextualize Strathern's oeuvre, and in turn, out-contextualise and queer contemporary debates about ontology. The queering impetus exerted by Strathern's work relates, for the authors, to the way it challenges epistemological and ontological presuppositions, hence 'not only the relationship between subject and object in representation, but also the ontological assumptions in this relationship' (page X). From this perspective, the reproduction of established categories is problematic and this extends to sexual and gendered identity classifications, including those emerging out of feminist and queer identitarian designations and projects, a theme taken up also by Sorainen, Renkin, Boyce and Posocco in earlier chapters. The Strathernian model of recursivity found in the relation between subject and object is a device with radical queering potential that can inform and re-energise a critical analysis of normativities – a field largely still marginalised in the discipline of anthropology. Eriksen and Jacobsen challenge any minoritising politics or claims principally reading Strathern in relation to key debates in contemporary anthropological theory.

The writings collected in the book reposition 'queer' as a boundary object (McSherry, cited in Strathern 2004) whose circulation through disciplinary and inter-disciplinary epistemic communities reconfigure anthropology *and* queer studies. In a conversation with the volume editors held in Cambridge in March 2018, Sarah Franklin reflects on the inspiration/influence that Marilyn Strathern's work has exerted over her research trajectory and career at the intersections between anthropology, sociology, science studies and gender theory. This relation extends from their encounter at the University of Manchester in the late 1980s to Franklin's editorial work on Strathern's 'lost manuscript' originally written in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, in 1974 and

published as *Before and After Gender* in 2016. In the interview we conducted for this volume, Franklin unpacks how her engagement with Marilyn Strathern shaped her ethnographic approach to scientists' work in the field of reproduction, notably assisted conception technologies as well as cloning, and, more recently human embryonic stem cell derivation. Franklin's project has consistently focussed on exploring the multiple dimensions of conception as this process is recontextualised through ethnographic practices of re-description. Franklin argues that conception is queer in the sense that it does not fit into normative narratives of what reproduction is like, but rather reveals genealogy as a normative fiction in social and scientific practice.

The analytical practices mobilised in the chapters elicit the queering capacities inherent in Strathernian devices, uncovering connections that were, arguably, already present, and in the process, conceiving new knowledge formations, e.g. about relations, knowledge, gender and queer as heuristic devices that converge newly via the Strathernian investments that each of the authors open out (and which taken as a related set the chapters also together become). The multiplicity of queering analytics and investments collected in the book foreshadow connections already present in the thinking of the contributors in various ways. Through queer relations to the Strathernian archive, the authors brought together here queer genealogies, enact differentiating concept-work and renew investments. They return to us a differently imagined terrain for queer studies *and* anthropology.

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[i] See Douglas (1989).

[iii] For Pedersen, this sense is exemplified in Strathern's recent reflection that 'What is true of what is observed is also true of the manner of observation' (Strathern in Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, 210).

[iv] Anthropological empiricism, for Strathern, emphasised 'relations known to the observer as principles of social organisation, and relations observed as interactions between persons' (1995, 12).
[iv] Contradictions ensue between transitivity and separatism, but Sedgwick's analytical strategy is not to adjudicate in reference to a normative framework, as the epistemological conditions to do so do not exist. Rather, Sedgwick insists on the 'nominally marginal, conceptually intractable set of definitional issues [pertaining to the homo/hetero distinction] which will lend to the domain of sexuality a continuously intractable, un-circumscribable and ultimately constitutionally unstable quality, irrespective of the discourses