



A GAYLE RUBIN READER

GAYLE S. RUBIN

DEVIATIONS

Deviations

A John Hope Franklin Center Book

A Gayle Rubin Reader

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GAYLE S. RUBIN

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FOR JAY

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Acknowledgments

This book has been a long time coming. The essays collected here span almost four decades. Since each of the essays included acknowledgments when they were published, the comments here address those who helped in the preparation of this collection, and the individuals and institutions that have had an enduring impact on my life and work.

As a reviewer recently noted, I have had an atypical career. For much of my working life I was part of the itinerant academic labor force, or what Richard Walker (Geography Department, University of California, Berkeley), calls the “lumpen professoriat.” While marginality is commonly romanticized, I am acutely aware of its challenges. I have been sustained by a network of exceptional friends and colleagues, a series of informal study groups, and some of the more anomalous institutions of academia. This book is a joyous occasion to express my gratitude and appreciation.

I have been immensely privileged to have been educated and inspired by many brilliant thinkers and scrupulous scholars. Richard Bailey, Alton (Pete) Becker, Kent Flannery, Raymond Kelly, Marshall Sahlins, Charles Tilly, and Henry Wright were among my most influential teachers when I was a student at Michigan. Each had a unique and formative impact on my intellectual habits and sensibilities. Since my return to Michigan as a faculty member, Tomoko Masuzawa and Tom Trautmann have been similarly influential as colleagues: their work has profoundly reshaped my own. I can never thank Gillian Feeley-Harnik, David Halperin, Erik Mueggler, Abigail Stewart, and Valerie Traub enough for their generosity, wise counsel, and intense engagement with my work. I am deeply grateful for the support of a small writers group into which I was warmly welcomed: Rebecca Hardin, Nadine Naber, Julia Paley, Damani Partridge, Elizabeth (Liz) Roberts, and Miriam Ticktin, all struggling with manuscripts of their own.

There are a handful of rarified academic programs and places that operate on the periphery of departmental structures and the demands of regular teaching. By providing a respite from the routines of academic life, they nurture new scholarly and artistic endeavors. Several such institutions have aided my unconventional career. The first of these was the Michigan Society of Fellows, in which I was a Junior Fellow from 1975 to 1978. Junior Fellows were appointed for three years, during which they were prohibited from teaching and encouraged to focus entirely on whatever research and creative tasks they chose. The freedom of that Junior Fellowship and its generous stipend enabled me to inaugurate a dissertation on gay leathermen when other possibilities for funding such an unusual project were remote.

During the recession of the early 1970s the society's funds shrank with the swooning Dow Jones. The program was reconstituted, such that the Junior Fellows were required to do some teaching in departments that partially subsidized their cost. Despite this increase in Fellows' obligations and some dents in the original vision, the society survived and has thrived. However, the changes were a cautionary lesson on the impact of hard economic times on academic institutions whose value may not be immediately obvious or easily measurable.

I was extremely fortunate to be invited as a Visiting Fellow at the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University (ANU) in 1993. We visitors had few responsibilities aside from attending daily tea and having conversations with one another and a fantastic group of ANU faculty. This visit was intellectually and professionally rejuvenating. I am intensely grateful to John Ballard, Graeme Clarke, and Jill Julius Matthews for having hosted the events and including me among the participants.

The Social Science Research Council launched the Sexuality Research Fellowship Program (SRFP) in 1995, with funds provided by the Ford Foundation. For ten years the SRFP facilitated an unprecedented avalanche of social and behavioral research on sexuality at the doctoral and post-doctoral levels. I suspect that only the Rockefeller Foundation grants for the original Kinsey studies have had as significant a cumulative impact on the academic study of sexuality in the United States. I applaud the Ford Foundation for having supported such an innovative program, and was exceedingly fortunate to have participated as a pre-doctoral Research Fellow (1999–2001) and as a Research Consultant (2005–6). I am grateful to Diane di Mauro for running the program so brilliantly, and for the opportunity it gave me to meet so many other social scientists actively working on sexual topics. The SRFP facilitated sev-

eral pilgrimages to the Kinsey Institute and Library and enabled me to spend precious time with John Gagnon, one of the most inspirational figures in the study of sexuality in the second half of the twentieth century.

In 2001 I was invited to be the Norman Freehling Visiting Professor at the Institute for the Humanities at the University of Michigan. This was an exhilarating experience, the most thrilling aspect of which was the opportunity to read through classical texts of European and American race theory with Tom Trautmann. Mary Price and Eliza Woodford helped make that visit memorable and productive.

In 2006–7 I was a Fellow at the Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS), a bucolic site overlooking the campus of Stanford University. For more than fifty years, CASBS has provided a chance for scholars in the social sciences to do their own work, wander intellectually, and discover new interests. The vibrant cross-disciplinary interchanges made my sojourn on the hill one of the most intense learning experiences I have had since graduate school, and the presence of Paula Fass, Dolores Hayden, Alison Isenberg, Peter Marris, and Stephen Mintz was markedly serendipitous for my work. The CASBS staff was superb, and I was especially appreciative of the efforts of its director, Claude Steele, director of services, Linda Jack, housing and meetings coordinator, Christy Duignan, and chef, Susan Beach. The library services were outstanding, and I am indebted to librarian Tricia Soto and assistant librarian Jason Gonzales. Ravi Shivana provided exceptional technical support. Like the Michigan Fellows during the recession of the 1970s, CASBS faces financial perils and an uncertain future. I fervently hope that it will survive, and that its uniquely revitalizing intellectual culture will emerge intact from the Great Recession in which the country is currently mired.

I have a passion for libraries and archives, several of which have been critically important at various stages of my work. The first was the Labadie Collection at Michigan, where Ed Weber amassed an unparalleled collection of homophile and gay liberation documents and Julie Herrada continues to cultivate and shepherd the collection. When I first visited the incomparable Kinsey Library, Paul Gebhard was my tour guide through its wonders; Katherine Johnson-Roehr, Jennifer Yamashiro, and Liana Zhou have performed that function on subsequent visits. The GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco is a treasure trove whose navigation has been made possible by a succession of dedicated archivists: Paula Jablons, Willie Walker, Kim Klausner, and Rebekah Kim. Susan Goldstein has steered me to crucial resources held by the San Francisco History Room of the San Francisco Public Library. Rick Storer keeps

the Leather Archives and Museum running smoothly, and also serves as a pilot through its as yet largely uncharted holdings. I am also grateful to the superb staff of the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan.

Advances in certain kinds of knowledge, especially stigmatized subjects, depend not only on scholars, libraries, and archives but also on collectors and dealers who occupy the front lines of resource acquisition. Rare-book dealers and collectors are often the unsung heroes of the “primitive accumulation” phase of new areas of exploration. They are frequently the first to assemble primary sources before institutional libraries become aware of new topics of inquiry, or when such subjects are still considered disreputable. With the exception of a handful of places such as Labadie and Kinsey, this has certainly been the case for LGBTQ sources specifically and for sexual materials more generally.

Dealers and collectors are often exceptionally erudite as well. Several have provided me not only with sources but also with a good bit of my education, much of it unavailable elsewhere. My earliest purchases of rare lesbian books were from Ed Drucker, who ran a gay out-of-print book service called Elysian Fields Booksellers. He was succeeded by Bob Manners of Books Bohemian. C. J. Scheiner was one of the earliest dealers from whom I was able to acquire erotica and sexological texts. His catalogues were like a graduate seminar in the field of sexuality, and I was privileged to visit his mammoth collection all too briefly in the early 1980s. I have also benefited from Joseph Vasta’s deep knowledge of erotic publication. The bulk of my sexology collection was provided by Ivan Stormgart, who has been incredibly generous in sharing his own encyclopedic command of sexual bibliography.

Todd Pratum helped build my collections on right-wing occultism and nineteenth-century racial taxonomy. For decades David Sachs has provided me with all sorts of literature I did not know I needed until he explained its relevance. Among many other things, he introduced me to the early right-wing pamphlet literature on sex education. Sachs and P. Scott Brown supplied me with the core of what has become a substantial library of government reports on urban planning and land use. Bolerium in San Francisco keeps me well provisioned with gay books, left and anarchist texts, and right-wing literature on homosexuality. Gerard Koskovich wears many hats: collector and dealer extraordinaire, but also scholar, curator, editor, and educator. Many of these people have helped build not only my library but also the special collections of many universities.

This book has benefited from many skilled editors, including Dianna Downing, Linnea Due, Lynn Eden, Liz Highleyman, and David Lobenstine.

Jill Matthews devoted several days of her vacation to some of the chapters. Carole Vance was positively heroic in her detailed comments on many parts of the book as it neared completion. It was a joy to work with Tim Elfenbein, my excellent editor at Duke University Press. I deeply appreciated the meticulousness of the Duke copy editors, and Fred Kameny's Herculean efforts to shepherd this project to completion. Ken Wissoker's persistence and willingness to go the extra mile made this book possible. I have a deep sense of books as physical objects, and am delighted by Amy Ruth Buchanan's elegant design.

Melinda Chateauvert, Susan Freeman, Sally Miller Gearhart, Rebecca Jordan-Young, Gerard Koskovich, Rostom Mesli, and Carole Vance supplied last-minute citations and factual details. Sora Counts has helped tame my papers and manage my files for over two decades: she is the finder of lost folders, clippings, and obscure leaflets. Moonyean has systematized my library and kept it usable when its growth threatened to make it unmanageable. Andrew McBride was a matchless research assistant throughout the preparation of this manuscript: he edited and formatted the text and bibliography, and tracked down innumerable citations. Brad Bunnin has been my wonderful guide through the perilous legalities of publication. Linda Alperstein, Neal Powers, Lana Sandahl, and Erda Sanders have kept my body and soul together and functioning.

I have been exceptionally blessed with many long-term friends and interlocutors. Some go back to my undergraduate days, and many date from graduate school. I have encountered others during my subsequent peregrinations. I would not think as I do, or know what I know, were it not for conversations over the years with Henry Abelove, Allan Bérubé, Sally Binford, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Lawrence Cohen, Lynn Eden, John D'Emilio, Ellen Dubois, Lisa Duggan, Jeffrey Escoffier, Estelle Freedman, Eric Garber, Barbara Grier, David Halperin, Susan Harding, Amber Hollibaugh, Isabel Hull, Nan Hunter, Jonathan Ned Katz, Liz Kennedy, Gerard Koskovich, Ellen Lewin, Donald Lopez, Jay Marston, Jill Matthews, Joan Nestle, Esther Newton, Rayna Rapp, Lisa Rofel, Eric Rofes, Mary Ryan, Erda Sanders, Ruth Schoenbach, Tobin Siebers, Larry Shields, Victoria Sork, Judith Stacey, Susan Stryker, Daniel Tsang, Carole Vance, and Martha Vicinus. Several of these have been so much a part of my life and in so many capacities that it is difficult to even articulate all the ways they have contributed to my work and well-being. Carole Vance has been friend, colleague, and comrade in arms: we have talked through countless issues and walked through many hells together. I have known Lynn Eden, Isabel Hull, and Victoria Sork since we were all students. They are more than close friends and treasured colleagues: they are family.

One of my regrets is that my parents are no longer alive to see this book


come to fruition. My father read constantly and was rarely without a book in his hand. He had an extensive home library in which I spent countless happy hours. His love of reference books was contagious. We used to play a game that might have been called “Look It Up.” We would argue heatedly about some factual matter, then eagerly rush to consult an encyclopedia or dictionary to determine who was more correct. His boundless curiosity and his fierce joy in learning are no doubt primarily responsible for my having ended up as an academic.

My mother applied her own considerable intelligence to practical matters, but she was no less thorough. She was an information hound, with a knack for asking the right questions and an instinct for detecting flawed answers. She could recognize patterns with lightning speed, based on minimal data. She was a logistical whiz, fanatically attentive to small details, and a perfectionist in all things. If my father made me an intellectual, my mother made me a careful and probing one. Their training, example, unconditional love, and enduring support made my work possible even when its content left them uneasy or bemused.

Above all, Jay Marston has been my best friend and beloved partner for over two and a half decades. She has given me support, motivation, contentment, and purpose. She has put up with long absences, the stresses of my writing, and the anxieties of my career with fortitude, love, and humor. Going through life with her makes every day a joy. This book is for her.

Introduction

Sex, Gender, Politics



Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852

Text, Time, and Space

Texts are produced in particular historical moments and with specific horizons of possibility. They are part of a repertoire of conversations, questions, assumptions, political environments, available data, and theoretical resources. These discursive conglomerates shift over time—sometimes by slow increments, and sometimes with dramatic jolts. When new formations become the familiar terrain, it becomes difficult to recall the previous landscape with its distinctive assemblage of what could be thought and what seemed significant. Durable texts find new meanings in new historical contexts and evolving pre-occupations. But as texts are read in new circumstances, the issues that formed them are often forgotten, as the edges of the old landscape are eroded by time.

When we go to the library to find out about something, we encounter a huge heap of literature all at once. This creates a tendency to treat a large body of texts as if they all exist on the same temporal plane.¹ But the various layers of accretion were produced at specific moments and under specific conditions. It is important to understand texts in their times. This allows us to think about the temporal aspects of their relationships to one another, and to distinguish

the dialogues which produced them from those with which we are now engaged.

Geology is one of my recreational obsessions, and one from which I tend to draw metaphors. Take fossils. We look at fossils, extracted from their matrices, to understand the qualities of the once living entity of which they are remnants, and to think about their genealogical relationships with other life forms. We learn other things, such as the environment in which the organism once lived, from examining a fossil's matrix. Similarly, texts can be approached from both angles of vision. We can see the qualities of a text and its genealogical relationship to other texts that came before or come later, but we can also learn something about a text from the qualities of the matrix in which it was formed.

All of the essays collected here deal in some way with a set of concerns I have been engaged with during the last four decades: gender, sexuality, power, politics, institutions, and what Charles Tilly has called "durable inequalities."² I have been concerned with how these things are located in specific times, places, and cultural contexts, and in how knowledge of them is assembled, preserved, and transmitted (or not). While these essays manifest a consistent lineage of theoretically interconnected interests, they are also artifacts of very particular circumstances. They have different matrices. Preparing this collection has forced me to think about why they were written, the conditions that molded them, and the persistent themes with which they have wrestled.

Nerd Out of Carolina

In 1968, I was riding a wave, but had no idea that there was a wave or that my own trajectories were being shaped by its motion.³ I was pursuing various intellectual, political, and personal passions. In retrospect it has become blindingly obvious that things I perceived as personally compelling were part of large social paroxysms and tectonic shifts. We are all so much inside our times and places that it is difficult to see them. Nineteen sixty-eight was when I joined the nascent women's liberation movement in Ann Arbor, Michigan. This of course changed my life in countless ways.

In addition to being oblivious to the fact that I was participating in some large-scale social upheavals, I was equally unaware of the impact of accident, coincidence, and chance. Had I been a few years older, I would have graduated from college before encountering the early second-wave feminist movement. Had I been a few years younger, I would have missed that first crest and no doubt have ended up in some other eddy. Had I been at some other institution, there would have been a different constellation of people, ideas, and re-

sources. This book would have turned out differently. Life is path dependent, and chance affects what roads are, or are not, there to be taken.

I have spent most of my life in three places. I grew up in the still apartheid South Carolina of the 1950s and early 1960s. I got my college education at the University of Michigan in the late 1960s and my graduate training at the same institution in the 1970s. I have lived in San Francisco since the late 1970s. Now I split my time between San Francisco and Ann Arbor, where I have been teaching back at my alma mater since 2003. My preoccupations and the ways I have approached them have been profoundly shaped by these three places: South Carolina, Ann Arbor, and San Francisco.

Growing up in the South gave me an intimate familiarity with many of the racist assumptions and constituencies that still have such a grip on our political process. The black–white color line cut through institutions and daily life like a rift valley, dividing occupations, housing, religious worship, medical care, political access, recreation, consumption, and death. The binary racial system overrode or displaced many other social differences, including groups whose “racial” character or ethnicity did not quite fit into the hegemonic bifurcation.⁴

Like the rest of Southern society, the public schools I attended were segregated. The conflict over desegregating the school system in my hometown erupted when I was in junior high, and a handful of African American students were finally admitted to the “white” high school the year I was a senior. As soon as the public schools were integrated, local elites set up a private school for white students; this was typical of the “segregation academies” that popped up all over the South in the wake of desegregation.

The struggles to end segregation ripped the covers off a tacit set of assumptions that had been largely unstated among whites during the Jim Crow era. As the racial regime came under siege, those who rose to its defense began to explicitly articulate their beliefs about why it was necessary. I vividly recall sitting in the school cafeteria listening to my friends spew abhorrent, paranoid, and wild statements to justify racial separation. These were not bad people; they were teenagers who for the most part repeated in school what they heard over their dinner tables at home. But their outbursts revealed a belief system I found as factually challenged as it was morally reprehensible. I too was mostly parroting what I heard from the adults in my life, so claim no moral high ground. However, I did learn from these experiences. They were a sharp lesson in the ways that institutions, beliefs, passion, and power work to maintain systemic inequalities. They left me with an abiding hatred for racism in all its forms and a healthy respect for its tenacity. Growing up during that time as a

white student who supported integration also taught me to stand my ground when I held an opinion that almost no one else shared and which offended a vociferous majority. This would later prove to have been a good preparation for the feminist sex wars.

My Southern childhood also means that the assorted elements that make up the political and religious Right in the United States early in the twenty-first century are familiar characters, worldviews, and agendas. Strom Thurmond was my senator for most of my life. Carl McIntire spun reactionary and conspiratorial tales daily on the local A.M. radio. Respected members of the community participated in the White Citizens Council, a relatively moderate alternative to the Klan, but still deeply committed to white supremacy.⁵ I watched in stunned horror in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when their successors began to acquire the kind of influence and presence in national politics and media they had previously wielded in the South.⁶ I take the Right, from its mainstream to its extremist manifestations, extremely seriously.

The South of my youth was a white Protestant theocracy. My hometown had dozens of Protestant churches, one small Catholic church, and a smaller Jewish congregation to which my family belonged. There were of course plenty of black Protestant congregations, but I never quite knew if there were any African American Catholics or Jews, and if so, where they worshiped. Like the churches, the cemeteries were segregated by religion and race. There was a small Jewish cemetery, a slightly larger Catholic one, and a vast sprawling necropolis for white Protestants. The black cemeteries were located elsewhere in town.

Protestantism was the default setting for all public venues, including the public schools. We began each day with a compulsory recitation of the Protestant version of the Lord's Prayer. This insured that both Catholic and Jewish kids would be alienated. The handful of Catholic kids stopped reciting when we got to the doxology; I would endure the entire exercise in resentful silence. I did not know it at the time, but the imposition of Protestant observance on Catholic school children had historically been a source of bitter conflict, and the passive resistance of the Catholic pupils was a well-developed tactic.

The Elliot School Rebellion in Boston in 1859 resulted when a Catholic student, Thomas Whall, refused to recite the King James version of the Ten Commandments. "Typically, the Catholic students would mutter a different version of the commandments—avoiding the Protestant second commandment, which cautioned against the worship of any 'graven image'—and the substitution would be lost in the general din."⁷ When Whall refused to participate at all, McLaurin Cooke, the school principal, promised to "whip him

till he yields if it takes the whole forenoon.⁷ And so Cooke did, beating Whall's hands with a rattan stick for half an hour until they were cut and bleeding."⁸ Our punishments, thankfully, were far less harsh.⁹

We were lucky to have good hot lunches, prepared and served by a staff consisting mostly of African American women. However, we could not eat until the food had been duly sanctified in the name of Jesus. So there were at least two obligatory Christian observances every day, and sometimes three: special events such as school assemblies and football games always began with yet another invocation in Christ's name.

The acme of this routine religious indoctrination came when I was in high school. On two separate occasions, we were herded into a week of compulsory daily assemblies in which an Evangelical preacher spent an hour exhorting us to take Jesus as our personal savior. These roughly fourteen obligatory hours of attempted conversion occurred well after the Supreme Court ruled against religious instruction (*McCollum v. Board of Education*, in 1948) and even nondenominational prayers (*Engel v. Vitale*, in 1962) in the public schools. But there were few Catholics and fewer Jews to protest. I was the only Jewish kid in my elementary school. There were two of us in junior high. When I got to (the white) high school, there were about a half dozen Jews in a student body of 1,400.¹⁰ As a result of these experiences, I retain a deeply felt antagonism toward both the overt imposition and the creeping infiltration of sectarian dogma into what should be nondenominational and secular public venues.

Despite some heretical opinions, however, I was hardly a political activist. I was just a bookish kid who read as much as possible. When I was punished in elementary school for refusing to recite the Lord's Prayer, the sentence was light and it failed utterly in its disciplinary intent: I was forced to stay inside during recess. This suited me just fine since it was much easier to read in an empty classroom than in the schoolyard, which was dirty, noisy, and had no good place to sit. Mostly I read fiction, but I was also interested in fossils, natural history, and of course, dinosaurs. I read all the books on mythology and medieval romance in the local Carnegie Public Library. Kids were generally not allowed in the adult area, but once I had exhausted everything of interest in the children's section, my father and a couple of friendly librarians quietly arranged for me to have the run of the building.

My reading material, clothing preferences, and interests violated most of the local norms for a proper girlhood. This was after all the 1950s. Middle-class girls were not supposed to be smart, wear glasses, or have career ambitions. The glass ceiling was much lower then. Women had few economic alterna-

tives to marriage, and the elite jobs for working women were nursing, dental assistance, secretarial services, and elementary school education. Most of the schoolteachers were female, but even there women's advancement was limited. All of our school principals and superintendents were men. The highest ranking woman in the local school administration was a vice-principal, who was respected but treated as anomalous.¹¹

When people asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I usually told them I was going to be a scientist. Once the space program was under way I decided instead to become an astronaut, although in the United States these were then all male.¹² Almost every adult (apart from my very supportive father) found my answer so startling that they would ask, incredulously, didn't I want to be a wife and mother? I was quite clear that while I had not decided between physics and astronomy, wife and mother were not among my career goals. In many respects, my childhood in the post-Second World War South preprogrammed me for feminism. I chafed at the suffocating conventions of respectability, claustrophobic gender roles, limited career opportunities, restrictive dress codes, and vicious double standard of sexual morality. When I finally encountered second-wave feminism, it was like finding a bubbling spring in the Kalahari.

There were also many things I loved about the South. My small town was the county seat of an agrarian region; this taught me a good deal about the relationships between even very small urban centers and their rural hinterlands. I worked one summer for the city-planning department, where I learned some of the basic features of real property: taxation, zoning, mapping, and the way private ownership is a function of state systems of registration, record keeping, and contract enforcement. I spent time in fields and forests. My father loved the woods and took me hiking in the woods. He made sure I knew how timber was managed and harvested. Although he was not an enthusiastic hunter, he gave me basic lessons in handling rifles and shotguns.

The rural economy was heavily dependent on cotton and tobacco. Even city kids were expected to be familiar with these products at every stage of cultivation. My kindergarten class was taken to the cotton fields after the harvest to pick the leavings, which taught us how cotton grew, what it felt like, and how hard it was to pick. We saw the cotton gins at work converting the big piles of fluffy seed cotton into tight bales stacked up for shipping. I walked through rows of tobacco in the fields and still remember the intoxicating smell of the leaves as they cured in special barns. I attended tobacco auctions, where buyers for the cigarette factories evaluated bundled leaves in baskets and the bidding was too fast and furious for me to follow.

We were close to our food. There were supermarkets, but they had not supplanted direct contact between consumers and producers. Some neighbors still bought live chickens from the nearby farms and killed them in their backyards. In the summer farmers would drive through town selling produce off the backs of their flatbed trucks. We would get peaches directly from the orchards, and fresh peanuts to boil were a plentiful delicacy. The pecan harvest was a beloved ritual of autumn: we would fill big buckets from some trees my mother owned, and she would spend much of the winter shelling, picking, packaging, and freezing the nuts.

Hunting and fishing brought deer, quail, and fresh fish to local tables. My mother disliked most wild game, but seafood was another matter: she would often drive to the coast just to buy fresh shrimp right off the boats when they docked. During the summers, we usually spent time at the beach where we could catch our own crabs for dinner. I have fond memories of going crabbing on a small rowboat with my father and bringing buckets of wriggling crustaceans home to my mother, who already had a pot of water boiling, ready, and waiting.

The Carolina beaches are glorious, and I especially loved those that were still old, funky, and not yet modernized. “The beach” was not just a strip of coastal sand where people swam and sunned: it was also a space in the cultural imaginary, a place redolent with illicit pleasures. The beaches were real places of unruly behavior, liminal spaces where the usual rules of propriety were somewhat suspended. “The beach” meant drinking and petting, and rumors of sex in the dunes. The coast was an odd combination of quiet backwaters and a thoroughly raunchy night life.

No visit was complete without at least one trip to the honky-tonk amusement park of Myrtle Beach, and the Carolina shoreline was dotted with clubs and pavilions where young people dated, mated, and danced to both records (seven-inch 45 RPM singles) and live bands.¹³ The beaches in particular and the South in general moved to a unique blend of rhythm and blues, Motown, soul, and rock-and-roll. I loved that dance music, the erotic soundtrack of my teens.¹⁴ I started to collect records in junior high and became an occasional DJ. I still DJ whenever there is an opportunity to do so, and there is little I enjoy more than giving a crowd the musical motivation to get up and shake their booties.

Life in the South was also embedded within a dense web of gift exchange, consisting primarily of food, small services, and personal care. The stereotypes of Southern hospitality are (or at least were) largely accurate. People were genuinely nice, friendly, and amazingly helpful, as long as you were part

of whatever was defined as their extended community. An illness, accident, or death triggered an immediate escalation in this system of circulating favors and labor: the women, and a few men, would immediately get to work making casseroles, preparing aspics, baking cakes, and organizing shifts of onsite assistance.

My mother did this for years for just about everyone to whom we were socially connected, and it did indeed all come back around. When my father and later my mother died, flotillas of food quickly materialized. So did a managerial army of efficient hands who answered the door and the phone, ushered the callers in and out, made sure that everyone was fed, took care of cleaning up, kept lists of the gifts that poured in, and freed me and the other dazed members of my family to stagger through the details of death. There was, in short, a very vital communalism that I did not fully appreciate when I was young, and only began to understand when I ran into anthropology and Marcel Mauss.¹⁵ That happened at Michigan. The University of Michigan gave me my education and provided me with a set of analytic tools with which to think, learn, and investigate. If the South shaped my political and social reflexes, Michigan formed my intellectual interests and scholarly habits.

Go Blue

Michigan was a lucky accident. Since this was the period of the space race, the federal government spent money to train young scientists. Among the results were summer science programs for high-school students sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF). Michigan held an NSF program in microbiology at the music camp at Interlochen. I played the oboe, so the Michigan program seemed ideal: I could study microbiology in the morning and take oboe lessons in the afternoon. My parents drove me to Interlochen, and we stopped to check out the Ann Arbor campus en route. I applied to Michigan almost as an afterthought. Had I actually understood the severity of the climate, I probably would have ended up at some nice southern school such as Duke or the University of North Carolina. But we had visited in the early summer, when Ann Arbor is at its verdant finest. Despite a fervent hatred for Michigan winters, I have endured many of them.

The university is an exceptionally well-administered and functional institution. The bureaucracy is large but efficient, and the faculty is treated well. At least in the units with which I have been associated, people are extremely nice and generally reasonable. Intellectually, the institution fosters interdisciplinarity and interaction on a scale I have rarely encountered elsewhere. Michigan is

a very nutrient rich environment, in which one can prosper by mimicking a large filter feeder, swimming around and sucking up the abundant intellectual plankton.

These features are, in part, a consequence of geography. Because Ann Arbor is a small town, it is easy to get around but there are fewer places to go than in a large city. By contrast, the university is huge and there is always something of interest happening. So people connected to the university tend to hang around campus and talk to each other.

The architecture and layout of the central campus also facilitate frequent contact. A large diagonal walkway (a.k.a. “the Diag”) connects the two far corners of the main quadrangle, passes in front of the graduate library, and links most of the buildings on central campus. At each end it terminates at a commercial strip where there are coffee shops, bars, and restaurants. This traffic pattern results in unplanned encounters, and the close proximity of small-scale retail provides quick access to places to get a drink or a meal and continue a conversation. Michigan is also unusual in the strength of the social sciences (an observation for which I am indebted to Claude Steele). Some universities favor the humanities, the hard sciences, or their professional schools. Michigan has all of these, but social science is a substantial institutional and intellectual presence. All of this makes the winters almost bearable.

I enrolled as a freshman at Michigan in the fall of 1966 and quickly went into extreme culture shock. The school had a larger population than my hometown. I was unprepared for much college-level work. South Carolina had one of the worst public-school systems in the United States, but I had been lucky to have some superb teachers. They had provided me with reasonable competence in reading, writing, and languages. My background in math and science, however, was woeful. After a disastrous freshman year it was clear that I was not going to be a physicist.

I was equally unprepared for the political environment. Fights over school desegregation were familiar territory, but I had never heard of Vietnam, much less the movement against the Vietnam War. Ann Arbor was one of the epicenters of a spirited antiwar movement, the New Left, and the counterculture. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) had its origins there. One of its founders, Tom Hayden, edited the student newspaper, the *Michigan Daily*, in the early 1960s. The first anti-Vietnam war teach-in was held at Michigan, in 1965. By the time I arrived, demonstrations were as common as pep rallies.

Like chance encounters, such large gatherings were facilitated by the spatial layout of the central campus. In front of the graduate library, the Diag opens up into an expansive plaza that is well suited for public events. A crowd

could gather in front of the library, and speakers could address the assembly from the elevated platform provided by the capacious library steps. This format was used for everything from football rallies to antiwar demonstrations. When there was no large event, the plaza became an open-air public market of ideas. People would gather on the Diag to discuss and debate politics, or set up tables from which they could disseminate literature promoting various groups, causes, or products. In inclement weather these activities were moved inside to the Fishbowl, an enclosed but also spacious area that linked three (and now four) major classroom buildings.

After the initial shock wore off, I got involved in various aspects of campus politics. In the fall of 1967, some friends and I led a successful movement in our dorm house to end the curfews and dress codes for female students. We thought we were acting on our own, unaware that another dorm across campus was engaged in the same struggle, and that similar rules were collapsing on campuses across the country. And there was more: none of us knew that a court case in 1961, *Dixon v. Alabama*, had previously established the conditions for ending administrative supervision of students' time, sexual conduct, dating patterns, and private lives. This decision probably made our spontaneous assault on the women's curfew possible.¹⁶

Eventually, I gravitated to the periphery of the antiwar movement and acquired a boyfriend, Tom Anderson, who was active in draft resistance. This led me into the feminist movement. The sociologist Barrie Thorne has written about the relationship between the draft-resistance movement and the formation of early second-wave feminist groups in the late 1960s.¹⁷ Since women were not subject to the draft, the female partners of resisters were invariably involved in support roles for the men who were. This structural marginality may have helped propel large numbers of such women into the early versions of what later came to be called consciousness-raising groups.

Sometime in 1968, Tom mentioned that I might be interested in a discussion group being organized by some of the wives and girlfriends of other local antidraft activists. I eagerly joined what became Ann Arbor's first ongoing second-wave feminist organization, the Thursday Night Group. At first, we mostly came together to talk about our frustrations with the gender relations encountered in what was then the New Left. The New Left was probably no more sexist than the rest of society, and possibly a good bit less. Because its explicit values were egalitarian, however, we expected more of our male colleagues and were often bitterly disappointed when they failed to live up to those principles or to apply them to women. The story of how much of

women's liberation emerged from such inconsistencies and dashed expectations has been written about elsewhere.¹⁸

As our Thursday night conversations continued, we expanded our focus beyond the antiwar and New Left movements to think about the situation of women in society at large. We later staged the first teach-in on women in Ann Arbor, wrote articles on feminism for the local underground newspaper (the *Ann Arbor Argus*), and protested the Miss Ann Arbor contest.¹⁹ We also joined the political conversations on the Diag and in the Fishbowl by setting up a literature table from which we distributed the early texts of women's liberation. At first these were mimeographed, but soon they were published as pamphlets by the Radical Education Project and the New England Free Press, the same printers who produced much of the antiwar literature.²⁰

After physics, I had briefly declared a major in philosophy. But feminism engaged all of my passions. There was not yet a program in women's studies at Michigan, and the field itself was embryonic. I took advantage of an option available to students in the honors program to declare an independent major in women's studies, with which I ultimately graduated.

In the fall of 1970, I stumbled into anthropology. I needed to find one elective course to get a few credits toward graduation. My roommate, Arlene Gorelick, was an anthropology major. She thought I would enjoy a class she was taking on "primitive" economics from some professor named Marshall Sahlins. So I went to check it out. Sahlins is a mesmerizing speaker and a brilliant thinker. By the time he finished the first lecture, I was hooked: I knew almost immediately that anthropology had the theoretical and empirical tools to explore the issues that mattered to me. By the end of the semester, despite having taken only one anthropology class, I decided to pursue graduate training in the field. I started graduate school at Michigan in the fall of 1971. I loved grad school, and was very lucky to have landed in the Michigan department in the early 1970s.

Sahlins soon decamped for Chicago, but I was in good hands. The intellectual culture of the department was both theoretically vibrant and empirically rich. It was then, as now, a four-field department, something increasingly rare but exceedingly precious. Although I was preparing for a career in sociocultural anthropology, I eagerly took advantage of the opportunity to learn from the other subfields. The linguists deepened my interest in classification and taxonomy and the ways language shapes perception. The archaeologists introduced me to urban geography and gave me ways to think about space and place. They were also intensely engaged in the formation of archaic states and

closely related topics: the emergence of bureaucratic systems, the intensification of social stratification, and the increase in social and economic specialization.²¹

I learned about both evolution and plate tectonics from the biological anthropologists. Plate tectonics and continental drift had only recently been widely accepted as explanatory frameworks for geologic processes and these theories were reshaping large bodies of information across the earth sciences and natural history. One set of implications was of particular interest to scholars of evolution: continental drift resolved issues of the geographic distribution of species that had puzzled Darwin.²² I took a course on human evolution from Frank Livingstone and can still remember his excited lecture about how plate tectonics explained why Madagascar had lemurs, why marsupials were dominant Australian fauna, and most importantly for human evolution, the differences between new and old world primates.²³ Such observations, so commonplace now, were startlingly fresh then.

Frank also introduced me to the critique of race as a useful way of describing human biological variation. The biological anthropologists at Michigan were centrally involved in deconstructing racial taxonomy and the category of race itself.²⁴ A department in which race was a suspect and unstable category was certainly one in which the concept of gender could be similarly dissected.

While the departmental power structures and accepted bodies of knowledge were still heavily male dominated, the intellectual resources for the development of feminist anthropology were readily available. Although there were only two tenured women on the faculty (Norma Diamond and Niara Sudarkasa), this compared favorably with most other departments, only a few of which had any female senior faculty.²⁵ The department did not punish students for political activism, and some of the most respected senior faculty, such as Marshall Sahlins, Eric Wolf, and Joseph Jorgensen, were prominently involved in the antiwar movement.

The generally supportive atmosphere allowed new ideas to flourish. The graduate students were encouraged to be collaborative. We talked incessantly and passionately. The first essay in this present collection is very much a product of the Michigan department in the early 1970s. It began as a term paper for Sahlins's course and was completed when I was in graduate school. For me, "The Traffic in Women" is something like a piece of amber that preserves those heady conversations and that moment in time.

"The Traffic in Women" was published in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna Reiter (later Rayna Rapp). Rayna and I had both been in the Thursday Night Group, and she was also a graduate student in anthro-

pology.²⁶ In 1971, Rayna and a fellow grad student, Lembi Congas, under the faculty sponsorship of Norma Diamond, cotaught the first course at Michigan on the anthropology of women. Rayna had left Michigan to teach at the New School for Social Research by the time the anthology was published, but the book was very much a product of the Michigan department: of the seventeen essays, nine were authored by Michigan graduate students, PhDs, or faculty.

While my paper was thus a profoundly local product, it also resulted from both happy coincidence and deeper structural shifts affecting many feminist intellectuals. The accidental quality is best illustrated by an anecdote about timing. The English translation of Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship* was published in the United States in 1969. Similarly, Althusser's article on Freud and Lacan (and Lévi-Strauss) appeared in the summer 1969 issue of *New Left Review*. Both texts were essentially hot off the presses when I read them in the fall of 1970. Had I taken the same class a year or two earlier, neither would have been available. Had I read them later, the possibilities they presented for feminist thought would have already been extracted, digested, and articulated by others. If the connections they suggested were glaringly obvious to me, they were equally accessible to others. French feminists of various factional persuasions were already familiar with these texts and had been working out their own understandings of the implications of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Lévi-Strauss's models of kinship, and structural linguistics. In England, Juliet Mitchell published her synthesis of Marxism, Freud, and Lévi-Strauss in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974).

One important factor that shaped my paper was the availability of a historically specific concept of gender. I coined the phrase "sex/gender system" while groping for an alternative to "patriarchy," which I considered a hopelessly imprecise and conceptually muddled term. Sandra Harding has posed an interesting question in the title of her essay "Why Has the Sex/Gender System Become Visible Only Now?" Harding is more interested in the epistemological questions than the linguistic ones; she interrogates the historical developments that made such a concept possible and necessary, while taking no note of the introduction of the terminology.²⁷

Jennifer Germon's book *Gender* is a fascinating exploration of why the conceptual language of gender was itself available as a theoretical resource. Germon argues that:

Gender did not exist 60 years ago—at least not in the way we understand it today. . . . A lack of attention to gender's origins has led to the common assumption that it has always been available, an assumption due in

no small part to gender's formidable conceptual, analytical, and explanatory power. Yet gender does indeed have a history, and a controversial one at that. Until the 1950s, gender served to mark relations between words rather than people. While there is evidence that it was used sporadically during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the mid-1950s stand as the historical moment in which gender was codified into the English language as a personal and social category and so began its ascent as a potent new conceptual realm of sex.²⁸

Germon attributes the introduction of gender in its current analytic form primarily to John Money, although she also credits Robert Stoller with helping to establish this usage. In her chapter on the feminist appropriation of the term, starting in the very early 1970s, she credits me with having introduced "gender" into feminist anthropology.²⁹ She comments that "Rubin's analysis demonstrated that she was—on some level—drawing on Money's concept of gender, yet nowhere in 'The Traffic in Women' is there an indication of whence she took the term."³⁰ Germon observes that Money and Ehrhardt's 1972 book *Man & Woman, Boy & Girl* appeared in the collective bibliography of *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, but was not explicitly cited by me.

While I did not cite Money and Ehrhardt, I was indeed influenced by their book and had clearly absorbed aspects of their analytic framework, without grasping its novelty. Their disaggregation of the presumed unity of chromosomal sex, hormonal exposure, internal reproductive organs, external genitalia, and psychological identifications was extremely important, as was their insistence that gender identities could be both disconnected from and more resistant to change than physical bodies.³¹

As Germon and others have discussed, Money's impact is complex, but its relevance for early feminist theory has often been unremarked and underestimated. Germon observes, "That gender is indispensable to feminist theorizing . . . seems so self-evident that it surely goes without saying. Yet it is precisely because gender has achieved that status that its historical legacy is worth examining. . . . Over the past 25 years or so, gender has often been attributed to feminism as though the term had no history outside of that tradition."³² She further argues that Money's research was useful to feminism precisely because it argued for the strength of gender socialization: "That idea was seized upon to demonstrate that women's subordinated sociocultural, political, and economic status was neither natural nor inevitable. Instead it was quite literally produced by culture—itsself a production."³³

I used gender in exactly this sense. Such ideas were in the air, the water, the

conversations, and the feminist pamphlet literature I so eagerly consumed. “Gender” was one of the resources at hand with which to build feminist frameworks. Money’s concept of gender was an element that I crunched with Marx’s discussions of reproduction, Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of kinship, Freud’s theories of femininity, and Lacan’s linguistic reading of Freud. It must have contributed to my choice of terminology.

I almost did not bother to revise “Traffic” for publication. I told Rayna that Mitchell’s book had made my version superfluous. Rayna insisted that I had my own perspective and pressured me to finish the article. I am grateful that she did, and she was correct: my take on Lévi-Strauss, Freud, Lacan, and Marx was different from that of Juliet Mitchell, Monique Wittig, or the French group *Psychanalyse et Politique*.³⁴ Many different feminists were working with common bodies of literature to address a similar set of problems. But local conditions, accidents of timing, and individual idiosyncrasies produced distinctive responses to big seismic changes. We do not make our histories as we please, but we do make them.

Lesbian and Gay Histories

By the spring of 1971, gay liberation had come to Ann Arbor. The local Gay Liberation Front had several men and a single visible lesbian. I came out shortly after that lone lesbian activist visited the Thursday Night Group to explain the new gay politics. Prior to that visit, I had no real concept of homosexuality. Naming is a powerful tool, and the sudden availability of situated and meaningful words such as *lesbian*, *homosexual*, and *gay* was revelatory. The language enabled me to reinterpret my own experience and emotional history. I realized I was in love with one of my feminist comrades and had two immediate goals: to seduce the object of my desire, and to read all about this exciting discovery. Since the girl was unavailable, I headed to the library.

After a disappointing trairpse through the card catalogue at the graduate library, I decided to compile a bibliography on lesbianism. This turned out to be superfluous, as there already was a considerable bibliographic literature. These lesbian bibliographies were difficult to find, but once located they provided a ready roadmap into the available source material circa 1970. Rather than having to reinvent the wheel, I was able to use Jeannette Foster’s *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956) and Gene Damon’s (Barbara Grier) and Lee Stuart’s *The Lesbian in Literature* (1967), as well as some early compilations by Marion Zimmer Bradley.³⁵

Luck, timing, and location were all involved. The Damon and Stuart bib-

liography was the most complete, and it was then of relatively recent vintage. What was more remarkable was that these bibliographies were actually in the Michigan library, in a special collection called the Labadie Collection. The Labadie had originally been dedicated to anarchist materials, but over the years its scope had expanded to include radical politics and social-protest movements, from Left to Right. That it also boasted a focus on “alternative sexuality” and “sexual freedom” was mainly due to Ed Weber, who became the curator of the collection in the early 1960s. By the time I stumbled into the Labadie in 1971, Weber had amassed one of the most significant collections of homosexual publications in any major research library. The pre-gay-liberation homophile movement had generated several important magazines as well as a bibliographic corpus, and the Labadie had them all. This was at a time when university libraries did not generally consider such material worthwhile. As far as I know, the Labadie was unique.³⁶ And it was on my campus.

I spent much of the ensuing year in the special-collections reading room, working my way through the lesbian publications (I had as yet little or no interest in gay male materials). I became especially fascinated by Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, and Renée Vivien, all of whom crossed paths in Paris in the early decades of the twentieth century. I spent the summers of 1972 and 1973 in Paris (courtesy of the Center for Western European Studies at University of Michigan) researching this crowd. I had a wonderful time reading lesbian novels and poetry in the Salle de la Réserve at the Bibliothèque Nationale, visiting the buildings where some of these women had lived, searching for their publications in dingy used bookstores, and putting flowers on the graves of Barney and Vivien in the cemetery at Passy.

However, this topic was not a viable long-term project. It did not lend itself to an ethnographic approach, and I was trained in neither literature nor history. I was ill-equipped to undertake research in French, as my language skills could be charitably described as rudimentary. On this occasion, time was not on my side. The archival materials were extremely limited and most were not yet available during my window of opportunity. Barney had only recently died when I arrived in Paris. Her papers were at the Bibliothèque Doucet, but they had not yet been processed.³⁷ The curator, François Chapon, allowed me to gaze hungrily at shoeboxes full of letters, but I was not able to read any of them. For these and other reasons, my research focus shifted away from the lesbians in Paris circa 1900.

I had by then become acquainted with Barbara Grier (a.k.a. Gene Damon). Grier succeeded Marion Zimmer Bradley in writing “Lesbiana,” a bibliographic column for *The Ladder* (the major lesbian publication of the homo-

phile period). She subsequently edited *The Ladder*, and her work on “Lesbiana” morphed into *The Lesbian in Literature*, the bibliography she coauthored with Lee Stuart. In 1973, Grier and her partner started Naiad Press to publish lesbian books. Grier, who seemed to know everyone, was in touch with Jeannette Foster, who had translated Renée Vivien’s novel, *A Woman Appeared to Me*. When Naiad undertook the publication of Foster’s translation of the novel, Grier asked me to write the biographical introduction. I hesitate to include it in this collection, as I have not kept up with what is now a considerable literature on the Paris lesbian crowd.³⁸ There are probably errors I am in no position to know, much less to correct. But it is an artifact of a time when this cast of characters was coming into clearer focus for a generation of lesbian and other scholars, as well as a time when they enthralled me.³⁹

Among my essays, this one is relatively obscure and rarely cited. So I was both amused and honored to discover that Elaine Marks had taken the piece seriously enough to subject it to some fairly withering critical attention.⁴⁰ Marks takes me to task for creating an “imaginary Renée Vivien,” for reading Vivien “in terms of post-1968 Lesbian feminist consciousness,” and above all, for failing to recognize the pervasive racism and anti-Semitism of the world Vivien and Natalie Barney inhabited.⁴¹ She compares and contrasts my essay with one on Vivien by Charles Maurras, who was a major figure of the French Right, a “nationalist, monarchist, and anti-Semite.”⁴² And she warns that “it is incumbent upon readers of Gayle Rubin’s text to question the unqualified praise she lavishes on Renée Vivien and Natalie Clifford Barney.”⁴³ I can only plead guilty as charged and heartily concur with the substance of her critique.

When I wrote that essay I had no idea who Charles Maurras was, apart from his association with Vivien. I had minimal knowledge of the history of European racism, a subject which now, decades later, has become a major pre-occupation, commanding much of my time and a substantial amount of my library shelf space. With two colleagues, I have now cotaught a seminar that specifically excavates some of the tangled history of the racial taxonomies to which Marks refers.⁴⁴

Forty years ago, when I was prowling the streets and cemeteries of Paris, hunting for traces of vanished lesbians, I certainly shared the narrow and myopic focus that characterized so much of that era of lesbian feminist scholarship. I have since been quite critical of that particular form of tunnel vision, and the kind of lesbian history it tended to produce.⁴⁵ Ironically, the research on which this essay was based was largely responsible for a turning point in how I, and as it turned out, many other gay-liberation-era scholars, were reconceptualizing homosexuality and its histories.

Jeannette Foster had titled her book with the term *sex variant women*, rather than with *lesbian*. *Sex variance* is a term with many uses. Sometimes it seems to have been deployed to minimize stigma, and at other times because it was broad enough to include a range of gender as well as sexual transgressions. Whatever Foster's reasons, *sex variant* worked better for the material she amassed than did *lesbian*. Spanning several centuries and multiple countries, the lives and literatures she compiled did not readily conform to the modern taxonomies of lesbianism. On the other hand, the artifacts produced by the Paris crowd as early as the 1890s resonated easily with lesbian feminists (like me) of the 1970s. These women seemed as familiar as some of Foster's other examples seemed remote.

This project convinced me that lesbianism itself had a history. The time I spent trying to digest all the available (nonmedical) literature on lesbianism, as well my obsessive effort to learn the details of this crowd in Paris, turned me into a "social constructionist" with respect to homosexuality. It became clear that "lesbianism" was a historically specific concatenation of same-sex desires, gender variability, forms of identity, and institutional repertoires. It did not easily translate indefinitely backward in time or across cultural boundaries. A number of individuals working on gay materials independently came to similar conclusions at about the same time. Another wave was breaking.

Between 1973 and 1976, the Gay Academic Union (GAU) held annual conferences in New York. When I presented my work on the Paris lesbians on a panel on lesbian aesthetics, in 1974, it was within the framework of looking for the "great lesbians" of the past. In 1976 I spoke on a panel on gay and lesbian history held in concert with a subsequent GAU conference.⁴⁶ Reflecting on the Paris material in relation to the broader trajectory of what might be considered a lesbian past, I argued that what might be called "modern" lesbianism was a distinctive development. In the two years between those panels, my paradigm had shifted.⁴⁷

I was not alone. Responding to my comments, one of the men from *The Body Politic*, Toronto's gay liberation newspaper, mentioned that I might be interested in the work of Jeffrey Weeks, who, he said, was making a similar argument. The outlines of Weeks's argument were already clear in an article published in 1976.⁴⁸ The following year, his landmark book, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, offered a fully developed argument about "the making of the modern homosexual," as Ken Plummer titled a 1981 collection on the topic. Weeks's book was a powerful and coherent articulation of the "social construction of sex" paradigm that came to dominate gay history, the anthropology of homosexuality, and much

subsequent LGBTQ studies. It continued to shape my own work, which was about to change direction in terms of topics, content, and location.

Fieldwork as a Vocation

In 1978 I moved to California, taught temporarily at Berkeley, started my dissertation fieldwork, and ran headlong into the early feminist antipornography movement. I have now lived in San Francisco for over half of my life, except for sporadic visiting positions and seasonal migrations to teach in the frigid Midwest. San Francisco has left indelible imprints on my research projects, political involvements, and personal maturation. Most of the work collected in this volume resulted from research undertaken and experiences encountered in San Francisco. Many forces propelled me to the West Coast. Intellectually, I was shifting from thinking about gender to thinking more about sexuality, from a focus on feminism to lesbian and gay studies, from research on lesbians to research on gay men, and from working in libraries to working in the field. I had begun to wrestle with the politics of pornography, the re-emergence of the socially conservative Right, and the political economies of sexual space. All of these changes started in Ann Arbor, but the move west was a definitive pivot: a permanent turn in direction, focus, and methodologies. I was also unknowingly joining the Great Gay Migration of the late 1970s. I arrived in Berkeley a few months after Harvey Milk was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and moved to San Francisco a few months after his murder. Life and work became enmeshed in the trajectories of gay urban politics.

I had never quite understood the imperative to do fieldwork. My interests in anthropology were forged in theory and I would have been happy to satisfy them in the library. One did not, however, become an anthropologist (at least not in my department) without doing fieldwork. It was the unavoidable initiatory rite of passage. Since fieldwork was inevitable, I was determined to do some kind of research on homosexuality, preferably lesbianism, but I was having difficulties in formulating a project and choosing a field site. The topic of homosexuality was still intensely stigmatized and academically disreputable. I was especially interested in the formation of gay communities and territories, but finding one that had coalesced recently enough so that it could be studied in both the present and a recent past was challenging.

A series of serendipitous events led me to a rather unexpected project: studying the gay male leather community in San Francisco. By then I had concluded that it would be a really bad idea for me to study lesbians. Given the politics and culture of the lesbian community at that time, I decided that

some separation between my research and my personal life would be salutary. With gay men, I could study a homosexual population and yet have a social life elsewhere. I was not a lesbian separatist, but since most of my gay career had been spent firmly ensconced in Lesbian Nation, gay men seemed strange and quite fascinating. The gay male leather community was of recent vintage, having only coalesced after the Second World War. There were men involved in its initial formation who were very much alive and available to interview. In San Francisco, the leather population was highly visible, institutionally complex, and had acquired a territory by establishing a presence in the South of Market neighborhood.

There was some general literature on gay communities that had noted the existence of this group in passing. Esther Newton had recorded observations of “the leather queens” in *Mother Camp* (1972), her pathbreaking study of female impersonators. *Mother Camp* was at that point the only full-length ethnographic monograph on any modern gay population, and it was also the only study of any of the stylistically distinct gay subcultures. She had done the drag queens, but no one had studied the “leather queens.”⁴⁹

As I was starting the field research in 1978, Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality, Volume I* was translated and published in English. I have argued elsewhere that Foucault is often incorrectly credited as solely responsible for the paradigm shift that was under way across a number of thinkers and several fields.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, his book had an enormous impact.

The History of Sexuality is a brilliant literature review of early sexology, the medicine of sexuality that was coalescing in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Foucault’s previous work on French medicine and the history of psychiatry contributed to his wide angle of vision, since much of the development of the science of the “perversions” took place in French psychiatry.⁵¹ His book focuses on the production of authoritative knowledges of sexuality, rather than on the populations of inverts and perverts who were increasingly visible in the streets, cafes, and newspapers of Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and London. But the expanding involvement of physicians and urban police in managing such persons produced records of their encounters. These points of contact became a nexus from which new theories were elaborated.⁵² Foucault’s interests in medicine and criminology were ideally suited for exposing a developing set of relationships among governance, health, and sexual practice.

Foucault sketched out relationships between the emerging structures of variant sexuality and the creation of modern childhood, especially the wars on masturbation; changes in the social roles of women, especially as these were

expressed in their medical complaints and diagnoses; and the increasing involvement of nation-states in managing the physical bodies and procreative activities of their citizens.⁵³ He furthermore made suggestive links between the forces reshaping sexual emotion and practice to the construction of theories of race and the eruptions of state racism.

Among the most salient passages for my own thinking was his discussion of “alliance” and “sexuality.” I took the former to refer to kinship systems generally, and in particular to the work of Lévi-Strauss, who seemed to be the referent for much of this section.⁵⁴ Foucault notes:

It will be granted no doubt that the relations of sex gave rise, in every society, to a *deployment of alliance*: a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions. This deployment of alliance, with the mechanisms of constraint that ensured its existence and the complex knowledge it often required, lost some of its importance as economic processes and political structures could no longer rely on it as an adequate instrument or sufficient support. Particularly from the eighteenth century onward, Western societies created and deployed a new apparatus which was superimposed on the previous one, and which, without completely supplanting the latter, helped reduce its importance. I am speaking of the *deployment of sexuality*: like the *deployment of alliance*, it connects up with the circuit of sexual partners, but in a completely different way. The two systems can be contrasted term by term. . . . For the first, what is pertinent is the link between partners and definite statutes; the second is concerned with the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions, however tenuous or imperceptible these may be. . . . It is not exact to say that the deployment of sexuality supplanted the deployment of alliance. One can imagine that one day it will have replaced it. But as things stand at present, while it does tend to cover up the deployment of alliance, it has neither obliterated the latter nor rendered it useless. Moreover, historically it was around and on the basis of the deployment of alliance that the deployment of sexuality was constructed.”⁵⁵

Foucault’s comments on “alliance” and “sexuality” were a kind of “*gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*” moment: they situated his project squarely in the long sociological interrogation of what distinguishes traditional from modern societies, and how those differences can be adequately articulated without distortion and gross oversimplification. Understanding the “great transformation” has been at the heart of social theory, sociology, and social history.⁵⁶ Since

Tönnies, Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, the social sciences have continually tackled these issues, but the questions had to be posed for sexuality as much as for political economies, state polities, and civil societies.

I have often wished that Foucault had written the planned volumes on children, women, perverts, and populations; I would love to have read them. Nonetheless, in *The History of Sexuality* Foucault provided a kind of unified field theory for the contemporary study of sex. My colleague Tom Trautmann is fond of observing that we never read the same book twice. I reread *The History of Sexuality* about once a year, when I teach it at the culmination of a seminar on sexology. In each reading I find some important insight I was not previously equipped to notice. The more I know, the more I see in it. In 1978, I also joined the fledgling San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project.⁵⁷ The history project was a small discussion group for individuals conducting investigations into lesbian and gay history. It soon became clear that one of the problems in doing such work was the lack of institutional repositories of primary source material. The Labadie was an exceptional resource: few research libraries or archives collected gay-related documentation. The university libraries in the Bay Area did not even have copies of the major local gay newspapers. Some of Allan Bérubé's early work on gay San Francisco was made possible by a collection of clippings by Bois Burk, a Bay Area resident who contacted Allan and "presented him with folders full of gay-related news articles that Burk had systematically clipped from the San Francisco press for decades."⁵⁸

There were collections in Los Angeles that had emerged out of the homosexual movement of the 1950s and 1960s. What is now the One National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the University of Southern California grew out of a tangled organizational history and the Herculean efforts of Jim Kepner. Kepner had amassed a vast collection under various organizational names, including the Western Gay Archives, the National Gay Archives, the International Gay and Lesbian Archives, and at one time, the Natalie Barney/Edward Carpenter Library.⁵⁹ But until these collections were finally safely installed in a building at USC, they were only sporadically accessible and inadequately stored. I visited the Kepner collection around 1979, during a brief period when it was opened to the public in a rented storefront. The walls were lined with file cabinets, the floors were covered with piles of newspapers, and the catalogue was in Jim's head. He was living on a cot in the basement among the stacks and bookshelves.

In the 1970s, the gay liberation and radical lesbian movements generated a new push for community-based lesbian and gay archives. The Lesbian Her-

story Archives in New York, founded in 1974, was one of these new institutions. The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (GLBTHS) was founded in San Francisco in 1985, as an offshoot of the History Project.⁶⁰ The Leather Archives and Museum (LAM) in Chicago was incorporated in 1991.

In their early days, these community-based archives mostly consisted of the determination of a few souls to collect documents, artifacts, and ephemera with the goal of preserving them and eventually making them accessible. The conditions in these archives were a far remove from the world of well-funded, carefully housed, meticulously tended and temperature controlled collections of the more prosperous universities and private foundations. The Lesbian Herstory Archives were initially housed in the apartment of its founders. What is now the GLBTHS began as boxes of gay and lesbian periodicals in the living room of Willie Walker, a founder and later one of its archivists. Although many have become far better funded and more institutionally stable, most of the early community-based queer archives were closer to Jim Kepner's cot in the basement of his rented storefront than to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

Archives, museums, and libraries need space. Space must be rented or bought. Preservation is labor intensive and ideally requires specialized, and expensive, media such as acid free folders and boxes. Collections need to be catalogued, and access to them requires a secure facility as well as staff to retrieve and reshelve the document boxes. This will seem terribly obvious to anyone who has used a library, but what is not obvious is how much money and labor is involved in setting up new collections and maintaining them. Public and university libraries generally have budgets, even if they are often inadequate and now shrinking to previously unimaginable levels. By contrast, however, the early community-based queer archives had no budgets, no paid staff, and no buildings. All of this had to be accumulated.

When I began my ethnographic research on gay leathermen in San Francisco in 1978, there were few archival, documentary, or artifactual resources with which to work. The GLBTHS and LAM did not yet exist. Much of the primary documentation was still in private hands, housed in basements, attics, and storage lockers. It was unprocessed, inaccessible, and often deteriorating. I traveled to any place that seemed likely to have source material. In addition to visiting Kepner's collection, I made a pilgrimage to the Kinsey Institute Library at Indiana University in Bloomington. The Kinsey Library did have some very helpful material, but little relating to San Francisco gay male leather. Most researchers have the luxury of consulting archival collections that have

been assembled and maintained by others. But like other queer scholars at the time, I did not. Because of the paucity of such material, I began to assemble, store, and maintain my own research collection. In addition, I later became involved with both the GLBTHS in San Francisco and the LAM in Chicago.

As a consequence, I have struggled for over three decades with the problems of collection, storage, preservation, and access, both with my own materials and those of the community institutions with which I have been affiliated. I have learned that if information is to endure, it requires infrastructure: staff, storage, and the cash flow to pay for them. The final essay in this collection emerges from these experiences.

Such challenges were part of what made fieldwork as exciting as library research and as interesting as theory. The process has given me a profound sense of the importance of empirical research, an appreciation for the craft involved in doing it well, and an understanding of how assumptions must respond to observation. There is no substitute for direct engagement in the details of a specific group of people in a particular place. The canonical literatures of social science become stale without infusions of freshly gathered data from primary sources. I am deeply grateful that my teachers enforced the imperative to conduct a field study. I am happy to have learned so much about one small corner of the social universe, and through a learning process that could not have occurred in a library.

I had initially planned to focus on the issues of gay-community formation, the emergence of new sexual identities and subcultures, and urban sexual location. I had come to study the “rise” of gay and leather South of Market, but it was immediately clear that gay and leather South of Market had a very limited future. The neighborhood was about to undergo dramatic change as the city, the Redevelopment Agency, and private developers were starting to build a new convention center and museum complex on the site of what had once been a thriving light industrial and working-class residential neighborhood.

I arrived in Berkeley in April of 1978. Ground for the convention center was broken that August. This massive construction project initiated a cascade of changes in land use that altered the ecology of the neighborhood. Rising rents, changes in zoning, increased policing, and even the reduced availability of parking were symptoms of a broader process of displacement. It was clear that any study of South of Market, gay or otherwise, had to grapple with redevelopment and real estate. I probably spent as much time in meetings of the planning commission and learning about zoning as I did sitting in leather bars. Sex was, after all, enmeshed in the political economy of the city.

In November of 1978, Supervisor Dan White assassinated Supervisor

Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone. The convention center, whose construction had begun that summer, opened, in 1981, as the Moscone Center, in honor of the slain mayor. That same year, reports of strange new diseases affecting urban gay men began to appear in the medical and gay press.⁶¹ HIV and AIDS tore through my research population, killing many people I knew and affecting the social institutions I had come to study. The epidemic necessitated another change in focus as I tried to document the impact of AIDS as well as the reactions to it.

The bulk of that material has been or will be published elsewhere. Most of the results of my fieldwork are collected in another book, a monograph on gay male leather in San Francisco.⁶² There is only one essay from that project in this volume, a piece on a sex club called the Catacombs. However, the engagement with the city, urban space, neighborhood succession, and the scholarly literatures that address these topics became an integral part of all my subsequent work and is especially reflected in this collection in both “Thinking Sex” and “Studying Sexual Subcultures.”

Moreover, the impact of HIV/AIDS was mediated by social structures, political agendas, and sexual stigma. Like all natural disasters, AIDS was also unnatural: a human catastrophe in which cultural frameworks, institutional structures, and individual actors shaped its effects. Many of the responses to it—both inside and outside the gay community—were driven more by fear and sexual squeamishness than by detached science, thoughtful policies, or sound principles of public health.⁶³ In short, one way to think about the impact of AIDS is through the analytic lens of moral or sex panics. The sex-panic paradigm has shaped much of the work represented in this book.

Panics, Pornography, and Perversion

Social and political change was under way in the late 1970s. The long sixties (the cultural period, not the decade) were ending with the resurgent “New Right.” There is no single year to mark the shift, but there were harbingers well before the election of Reagan, in 1980. Anita Bryant’s successful campaign to repeal the Dade County ordinance prohibiting discrimination against gay people took place in 1977. The Moral Majority was founded in 1979. The New Right had been mobilizing funding, think tanks, and political organizations throughout the 1970s; their impact became obvious by the end of the decade. Sex and gender were salient aspects of the social and political agenda of the revived Right: to roll back feminism, restore the Right’s notion of traditional family and gender roles, eliminate comprehensive sex education, promote

sexual purity (abstinence) among the young, recriminalize medical abortion, raise the costs for sexually active youth, combat obscenity and pornography, and insure that homosexuals remained less than full citizens.⁶⁴

Moral and sex panics have been a singularly effective mechanism for enacting these agendas. The concept of “moral panic” was introduced by Stanley Cohen in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972). Cohen’s book was a study on the Mods and the Rockers, youth subcultures in midcentury Britain. Cohen described the public hysteria over these youth subcultures in the 1950s and 1960s as a “moral panic.” Following Cohen, the concept became widely used in sociology, particularly in Britain.

In *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, Jeffrey Weeks introduced the sociological language of moral panic into the emergent field of sexual history. Weeks is a brilliant scholar who was trained in both sociology and history. One of his characteristic intellectual habits has been the creative injection of sociological analytic frameworks into historical narratives. He quickly grasped the applicability of Cohen’s concept of “moral panic” for thinking about the mechanisms of structural changes in sexual regulation. My own work has been profoundly affected by Weeks, and I expanded on his discussion in “Thinking Sex.” But I was still using the phrase *moral panic*. Carole Vance started to use the phrase “sex panic” to reference moral panics about sexuality in particular in her book *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*.⁶⁵ Whether called moral panics or sex panics, they are potent engines of social change. The United States, since the late 1970s, has been in an almost perpetual state of panic over sex: over pornography, prostitution, trafficking, homosexuality, sex offenders, and, especially, children.

During this same period, starting in the last 1970s and continuing into the present, the feminist movement has been rent by a series of poisonous disputes over many of these same issues, particularly pornography, prostitution, and “perversion,” but also including transsexuality and some aspects of homosexuality. While most feminists are supportive of homosexuals and gay rights, there have also been vituperative denunciations of gay male behavior and even some lesbian practices, notably butch and femme roles. On many issues, the agendas of some feminists have at times converged with those of social conservatives.

As a combatant in the feminist sex wars, I have watched with considerable dismay as sex panics within feminism have been used repeatedly to push what I consider to be a fundamentally reactionary sexual agenda. Many of the essays in this collection are marked by those concerns, and some have addressed them directly. “The Leather Menace” was written in response to the

controversies over lesbian sadomasochism in the late 1970s. “Misguided, Dangerous, and Wrong” was directed at the feminist antipornography movement and analysis.

The battle lines of the sex wars have shifted, with much of the focus now on issues of “trafficking.” Many of the former antipornography activists have moved into the antiprostitution wing of the antitrafficking movement, which they see as a means toward the abolition of all commercial sex, including pornography and prostitution. Opposition to trafficking began as a form of antiprostitution mobilization in the late nineteenth century, and the current discourse on trafficking has a tendency to revert into attacks on sex work, sex workers, and their customers. Contemporary antiprostitution organizations tenaciously promote this amalgamation of trafficking with the sex industry. The essay “The Trouble with Trafficking” addresses the historical background of the powerful undertow that continually drags popular understandings and legal definitions of trafficking toward prostitution rather than toward coercion, labor abuse, and the challenges facing migrant workers in many occupations.

The essay “Of Catamites and Kings” addresses issues of lesbian gender, butches, and female-to-male transsexuals. It has a more tangential relationship to the sex wars. However, long before the fights over pornography, transsexuality had exposed many of the fault lines in feminism that would fracture in the sex wars. Disputes over transsexuality in the early 1970s were harbingers of the outbreak of hostilities that tore through the feminist movement in the early 1980s.⁶⁶ “Thinking Sex” has a complicated relationship to the sex wars.⁶⁷ It had multiple agendas that expressed many of the changes of direction taking place in my life, politics, and work. The essay and several comments on it occupy considerable space in this collection. For further reflections on the context and career of “Thinking Sex,” see Chapter 8, “Blood Under the Bridge.”⁶⁸

Then and Now

A cartoon titled “In the Nostalgia District” appeared in the *New Yorker* while I was editing this introduction.⁶⁹ The image depicted a row of shops, all obsolete: Joe’s Fix-it Shop, Photo Developing, Stationery Supplies, Acme Travel Agency, and the Kwik-Konnect Internet Café, this last showing several CRT monitors available for customers to use in the days, not all that long ago, before flat screens, laptops, smart phones, iPads, and WiFi. Rereading these essays has made me feel like a permanent resident of the nostalgia district. I have had to confront how young I was then, and how old now; how much I did not know then, and how much I wish I did not know now.

Small details have been continual reminders of how much time has passed. When I wrote “The Traffic in Women,” anthropologists were still using the term *primitive*. Transistor radios were a recent invention, when semiconductors were replacing vacuum tubes in consumer audio equipment. Psychiatry was still dominated by psychoanalysis. Freud was the canonical authority, for any discussion addressing sexual “deviation,” including homosexuality. Today, psychoanalysis is widely considered passé, and hardly anyone feels a need to genuflect in Freud’s direction. There is still a lively academic and queer theoretical literature that engages with Freudian psychoanalysis and finds it useful.⁷⁰ But among practitioners, the primary consumers of psychoanalytic literature on homosexuality are the ex-gay ministries and conversion specialists who promote the idea that gay people can and should become heterosexual. This is a very different landscape.

All of the older essays are evidence of how much technological, intellectual, and political change has taken place. The music at the Catacombs was recorded from vinyl records onto reel to reel tapes. There were no CDs, much less digital downloads. When the porn wars erupted in feminism, most pornography consisted of printed material purchased in porn shops or movies seen in porn theaters. By the early 1980s, the latest innovation in pornographic media was home video: the VCR was a dramatic change that allowed people to easily consume porn films in the privacy of their homes. No one was “sexting,” or downloading porn from the Internet. The Internet itself was still text based, and mainly used by the tiny cadre of programmers who were creating it. Much of the software that made the Internet accessible to ordinary users was developed in the 1990s and a tipping point toward mass access and use was only reached with consumer friendly browsers such as Netscape (1994) and Explorer (1995).

For the Internet to expand beyond universities, government, and the defense industries, computers had to shrink from the size of rooms to fit on desktops, and their cost had to plummet. Personal computers began to penetrate the consumer market only in the early 1980s. The early essays here were written on a typewriter, when my idea of technological paradise was to own an IBM Selectric. I bought my first computer in 1984. Early versions of “Misguided, Dangerous, and Wrong,” and “The Catacombs” were the first of the essays in this collection to be composed with word processing.

The scholarly literature on sexuality has exploded since the early 1980s, and we know a lot more now than we did about many things. One of the examples that jumped out while I was going over these essays is the expansion in knowledge of the “lavender scare,” the post-Second World War crusades against homosexuals that included a total ban on federal employment of “sex

deviates.”⁷¹ The emergence of the early gay-rights movement in the United States after the Second World War was in part a response to these witch hunts, policies, and legal persecution. Much has changed politically. Gay activists finally succeeded in getting the ban on federal employment lifted in 1975.⁷² The removal of homosexuality from the list of sexual pathologies in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* in 1973 was a huge step.⁷³ So was the Supreme Court decision that declared sodomy laws unconstitutional in 2003.⁷⁴ I did not expect to see the end of sodomy laws in my lifetime, and I am ecstatic to have lived to see this come about.

On the other hand, I am troubled that there is still such a huge and dangerous apparatus of sexual regulation, and concerned that some of it is expanding rather than contracting. The front line of the battle for gay rights has moved from decriminalization and depathologization to areas of impaired citizenship: mainly marriage and military service. Gay activists have been fighting the restrictions on military service for decades, since they were first instituted during the Second World War. Prior to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” all homosexuals were simply barred from the military.⁷⁵ “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was implemented in the early 1990s when attempts to lift the previous ban failed. As this book goes to press, the restrictions barring openly gay personnel from serving in the military are due to be removed, but are still in force.

The first of the articles in this collection was published over three decades ago, whereas others were written for this book. There is, therefore, a problem of tense. Each of these pieces inhabits a different present. Often when I speak of “now,” the text is addressing something that was “then.” And “then” can be quite a long time ago.

Nothing dates scholarly literature more than references to current events, so most academics leave such commentary to journalists, or, these days, post them on their blogs. Yet I feel strongly that we should use all the intellectual tools we possess to think about the present, so I live with the consequences. One is that my essays are full of comments on current events which are no longer current. Nevertheless, while there are ways these essays are obviously dated, in other respects they seem contemporary, and occasionally eerily prescient. We are still enmeshed in conflicts that have roots in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Much of the political conversation and social concern with issues such as pornography, sex work, civil equality for gay and lesbian citizens, transsexuality, AIDS prevention, sexual variation, women’s roles, and children’s sexuality occurs within frameworks that were constructed then and have been cultivated ever since.

In March of 2009, Frank Rich, in his *New York Times* column, announced

that “Americans have less and less patience for the intrusive and divisive moral scolds who thrived in the bubbles of the Clinton and Bush Years. Culture wars are a luxury the country—the G.O.P. included—can no longer afford.” He also predicted that “When the administration tardily ends ‘don’t ask, don’t tell,’ you can be sure that this action . . . will be greeted by more yawns than howls.” Furthermore, “In our own hard times, the former moral ‘majority’ has been downsized to more of a minority than ever. . . . Even the old indecency wars have subsided.”⁷⁶

Unfortunately, the announcement of the death of the culture wars was all too premature. In the two years since Rich’s column, the culture wars have come roaring back, if indeed they ever went away. Social conservatives have been pressuring the Obama Justice Department to be more aggressive in their prosecution of pornography. Abortion rights have been under their most sustained assault since *Roe v. Wade*. The war over same-sex marriage has intensified. To Rich’s credit, in an earlier column, he did note that gay civil rights were an exception to his otherwise rosy forecast, commenting that Karl Rove’s and George W. Bush’s “one secure legacy will be their demagogic exploitation of homophobia. . . . [But], that lagging indicator aside, nearly every other result . . . suggests that while the right wants to keep fighting the old boomer culture wars, no one else does.”⁷⁷ And Rich was especially optimistic about abortion rights.

That was before anti-abortion forces in the House of Representatives used the Affordable Health Care Act as a toehold to re-launch campaigns for increased federal restrictions on abortion, mainly through newly inventive restrictions on insurance coverage for the medical procedure. Since the 2010 midterm elections put Republicans in complete control of twenty-one states, several of those states have proposed or passed unprecedented anti-abortion regulations.⁷⁸ These include forcing women to take medically unnecessary sonograms, imposing mandatory “counseling” that requires doctors to read government written anti-abortion scripts to their patients, shortening the number of weeks in which abortion can be legally performed, and instituting onerous new architectural regulations on abortion clinics that are intended to make code compliance difficult or impossible. Requirements that both parents of girls under seventeen provide notarized signatures raise the bar of parental notification for minors seeking abortion. Other tactics include novel bans or restrictions on even private insurance coverage for abortion, laws ostensibly protecting embryos from “fetal pain,” and proposals to define an egg as a legal person as soon as it is fertilized.

Attacks on funding for Planned Parenthood have become common at both

federal and state levels. Defunding Planned Parenthood will go well beyond abortion services, and eliminate much of the routine health care the organization provides.⁷⁹ And these are only the legislative maneuvers. In addition to the episodic murders of physicians providing abortion services, abortion providers have been subjected to sustained harassment and threats of violence to them and to their families. Many anti-abortion activists are also opposed to legal contraception. They do not just want to roll back *Roe v. Wade*. They want an end to *Griswold v. Connecticut*.

Then there is that pesky “lagging indicator” of the alleged truce in the culture wars: gay rights. Marriage is a conduit for an extraordinary range of redistributive benefits, citizenship rights, and social privileges.⁸⁰ Much of the language around same-sex marriage emphasizes sentiment, but much of the impact of bans on marriage (and even domestic partnerships and “marriage-like arrangements”) is practical: confiscatory taxation and costs for medical insurance and care, bureaucratic unintelligibility, Kafkaesque dramas when conducting routine business such as filing tax returns, and impenetrable barriers to rights and privileges available to other citizens, such as immigration for partners.⁸¹

While much of the rhetoric about same-sex marriage is religious, the bans on gay marriage do not prevent clergy from performing religious ceremonies in denominations that permit them, nor does legal gay marriage require ceremonies from denominations that prohibit them.⁸² There are battles within specific religions over the conduct of their own clergy, but these are internal matters to those organizations. The dispute over the legality of gay marriage is entirely over civil marriage: bans on same-sex marriage simply prevent states (or the federal government) from giving the same civil status to all marriages. While they differ in scale, the bans on same-sex marriage are similar in some respects to the apartheid racial rules of my Southern childhood. The racial regime was more systematic and reached further into the social capillaries, but both carve gashes through the social landscape and the activities, events, and institutions of everyday life. While public opinion in the United States appears to be slowly drifting toward favoring equality for gay citizens, there are well-funded and dedicated constituencies who would like to reduce it. Many of the individuals and organizations that are battling same-sex civil marriage also promote the restoration of criminal penalties for homosexuality.

Sex is often imagined to be marginal to the really important political issues: power and war, the relations of production, and social stratification in the old sense of wealth and status. Yet I am continually stunned by the persistent salience of sex, gender, stigma, and panic. Some of this is simple opportu-

ism: While the Bush administration was promoting its orgy of homophobia, it was presiding over a massive transfer of assets from the bulk of the population—low-income, middle-class, and even lower-rich—to a tiny sliver of the extremely, extraordinarily, and incomprehensibly wealthy. Indeed, one of the most significant political and social developments of the last thirty years is what has probably been one of the greatest transfers of wealth in human history.⁸³

Human history is full of pillaging, but it is usually accomplished by overt means and the threat or exercise of lethal force. Armies of conquest simply seized the wealth of their defeated enemies. Imperial, royal, and feudal states were mechanisms to enable ruling elites to exact tribute and treasure from their subordinate populations. But for a democratic state to legalize the looting of the many for the benefit of the few, large numbers of people must be persuaded to vote against their economic interests. For the last several decades, race and sex have been especially reliable means to do so. The “threat” of gay civil marriage has been a repetitively effective tactic to motivate people to vote for politicians whose policies have brought many of those voters increased misery, greater poverty, and insufficient medical care. The manipulation of sexual anxieties continues to be a potent instrument for making the process of systemic wealth extraction both culturally palatable and politically viable.⁸⁴

I do not think, however, that the politics of sexuality are only matters of expediency, despite how effective they have proven to be. There are real material, cultural, and emotional stakes to these intense social conflicts over morals and values. Much of my work has been dedicated to exposing them, and to understanding how much they matter.

Sodomy has been (mostly) decriminalized. Some gay partners can get benefits, although unlike heterosexual spousal benefits these are taxed as income, which makes them considerably less beneficial. Gay studies are (somewhat) institutionalized in major universities, and doing gay research is no longer automatic career suicide. Yet, the Defense of Marriage Act requires legalized discrimination against same-sex couples and families. Gay civil marriage is illegal in most states, and its illegality is more systematically codified now than it was even a decade ago. We have spent a billion or two dollars teaching kids that sex is dangerous and that promises will protect them from pregnancy and STDs more efficiently than condoms. Uganda has been in the news because of a proposed law that would, among other things, mandate the death penalty for some homosexuals. There are calls for making homosexuality a capital crime in the United States as well, although no one has seriously (yet) introduced legislation to that effect.

I hope someday sex really is marginal.

The Traffic in Women
Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex

1

The literature on women—both feminist and antifeminist—is a long rumination on the question of the nature and genesis of women’s oppression and social subordination. The question is not a trivial one, since the answers given it determine our visions for the future, and our evaluation of whether or not it is realistic to hope for a sexually egalitarian society. More important, the analysis of the causes of women’s oppression forms the basis for any assessment of just what would have to be changed in order to achieve a society without gender hierarchy. Thus, if innate male aggression and dominance are at the root of female oppression, then the feminist program would logically require either the extermination of the offending sex, or else a eugenics project to modify its character. If sexism is a byproduct of capitalism’s relentless appetite for profit, then sexism would wither away in the advent of a successful socialist revolution. If the world-historical defeat of women occurred at the hands of an armed patriarchal revolt, then it is time for Amazon guerrillas to start training in the Adirondacks.

It lies outside the scope of this paper to conduct a sustained critique of some of the currently popular explanations of the genesis of sexual inequality—theories such as the popular evolution exemplified by *The Imperial*

Chapter 1 was originally published in Rayna Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly View Press, 1975), 157–210. The version included here is from Karen Hansen and Ilene Philipson, eds., *Women, Class, and the Feminist Imagination* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1990), 74–113.

Animal, the alleged overthrow of prehistoric matriarchies, or the attempt to extract all of the phenomena of social subordination from the first volume of *Capital*.¹ Instead, I want to sketch some elements of an alternate explanation of the problem.

Marx once asked: "What is a Negro slave? A man of the black race. The one explanation is as good as the other. A Negro is a Negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations. A cotton spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. It becomes *capital* only in certain relations. Torn from these relationships it is no more capital than gold in itself is money or sugar is the price of sugar."² One might paraphrase: what is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human Dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from these relationships, she is no more the helpmate of man than gold in itself is money . . . and so on. What, then, are these relationships by which a female becomes an oppressed woman?

The place to begin to unravel the system of relationships by which women become the prey of men is in the overlapping works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Sigmund Freud. The domestication of women, under other names, is discussed at length in both of their oeuvres. In reading through these works, one begins to have a sense of a systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products. Neither Freud nor Lévi-Strauss sees his work in this light, and certainly neither turns a critical glance upon the processes he describes. Their analyses and descriptions must be read, therefore, in something like the way Marx read the classical political economists who preceded him.³ Freud and Lévi-Strauss are in some sense analogous to Ricardo and Smith: they see neither the implications of what they are saying, nor the implicit critique that their work can generate when subjected to a feminist eye. Nevertheless, they provide conceptual tools with which one can build descriptions of the part of social life that is the locus of the oppression of women, of sexual minorities, and of certain aspects of human personality within individuals. I call that part of social life the "sex/gender system," for lack of a more elegant term. As a preliminary definition, a "sex/gender system" is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied.

The purpose of this essay is to arrive at a more fully developed definition of the sex/gender system, by way of a somewhat idiosyncratic and exegetical reading of Lévi-Strauss and Freud. I use the word *exegetical* deliberately. The dictionary defines *exegesis* as a "critical explanation or analysis; especially, in-

terpretation of the Scriptures.” At times, my reading of Lévi-Strauss and Freud is freely interpretive, moving from the explicit content of a text to its presuppositions and implications. My reading of certain psychoanalytic texts is filtered through a lens provided by Jacques Lacan, whose own interpretation of the Freudian scripture has been heavily influenced by Lévi-Strauss.⁴

I will return later to refine the definition of a sex/gender system. First, however, I will try to demonstrate the need for such a concept by discussing the failure of classical Marxism to fully express or conceptualize sex oppression. This failure results from the fact that Marxism, as a theory of social life, is relatively unconcerned with sex. In Marx’s map of the social world, human beings are workers, peasants, or capitalists; that they are also men and women is not seen as very significant. By contrast, in the maps of social reality drawn by Freud and Lévi-Strauss, there is a deep recognition of the place of sexuality in society, and of the profound differences between the social experiences of men and women.

Marx

No theory accounts for the oppression of women—in its endless variety and monotonous similarity, cross-culturally and throughout history—with anything like the explanatory power of the Marxist theory of class oppression. Therefore, it is not surprising that there have been numerous attempts to apply Marxist analysis to the question of women. There are many ways of doing this. It has been argued that women are a reserve labor force for capitalism, that women’s generally lower wages provide extra surplus to a capitalist employer, that women serve the ends of capitalist consumerism in their roles as administrators of family consumption, and so forth. However, a number of articles have tried to do something much more ambitious—to locate the oppression of women in the heart of the capitalist dynamic by pointing to the relationship between housework and the reproduction of labor.⁵ To do this is to place women squarely in the definition of capitalism, the process in which capital is produced by the extraction of surplus value from labor by capital.

Briefly, Marx argued that capitalism is distinguished from all other modes of production by its unique aim: the creation and expansion of capital. Whereas other modes of production might find their purpose in making useful things to satisfy human needs, or in producing a surplus for a ruling nobility, or in producing to insure sufficient sacrifice for the edification of the gods, capitalism produces capital. Capitalism is a set of social relations—forms of property, and so forth—in which production takes the form of turning money,

things, and people into capital. And capital is a quantity of goods or money which, when exchanged for labor, reproduces and augments itself by extracting unpaid labor, or surplus value, from labor and into itself. “The result of the capitalist production process is neither a mere product (use-value) nor a *commodity*, that is, a use-value which has exchange value. Its result, its product, is the creation of *surplus-value* for capital, and consequently the actual *transformation* of money or commodity into capital.”⁶

The exchange between capital and labor which produces surplus value, and hence capital, is highly specific. The worker gets a wage; the capitalist gets the things the worker has made during his or her time of employment. If the total value of the things the worker has made exceeds the value of his or her wage, the aim of capitalism has been achieved. The capitalist gets back the cost of the wage, plus an increment—surplus value. This can occur because the wage is determined not by the value of what the laborer makes, but by the value of what it takes to keep him or her going—to reproduce him or her from day to day, and to reproduce the entire workforce from one generation to the next. Thus, surplus value is the difference between what the laboring class produced as a whole, and the amount of that total which is recycled into maintaining the laboring class.

The capital given in exchange for labour power is converted into necessities, by the consumption of which the muscles, nerves, bones, and brains of existing labourers are reproduced, and new labourers are begotten. . . . [T]he individual consumption of the labourer, whether it proceed within the workshop or outside it, whether it be part of the process of production or not, forms therefore a factor of the production and reproduction of capital; just as cleaning machinery does.⁷

Given the individual, the production of labour-power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance. For his maintenance he requires a given quantity of the means of subsistence. . . . Labour-power sets itself in action only by working. But thereby a definite quantity of human muscle, brain, nerve, etc., is wasted, and these require to be restored.⁸

The amount of difference between the reproduction of labor power and its products depends, therefore, on the determination of what it takes to reproduce that labor power. Marx tends to make that determination on the basis of the quantity of commodities—food, clothing, housing, fuel—that would be necessary to maintain the health, life, and strength of a worker. But these commodities must be consumed before they can be sustenance, and they are not