

discussions of the relationship of biological sex and gender. It presupposes that there are two genders, male and female, founded on the two biological sexes. But many cultures do not share this essentialist assumption and even those that do have not always embraced it. Bringing together historical and anthropological studies, *Third Sex, Third Gender* challenges the usual emphasis on sexual dimorphism and reproduction, providing a unique perspective on the forms of socialization of people who are neither male nor "female." The existence of a third sex allows us to understand how Byzantine palace eunuchs and Indian hijras met the criteria of special socialization. It examines practices such as self-castration, sodomy, and forbidden desires were expressed in the lives of Sodomites in the early modern period, the lives of homosexuals in eighteenth-century England or the so-called "homosexuals" of nineteenth-century Europe. By contextualizing these practices and by examining the bodies, meanings and desires to emerge from them, *Third Gender* provides a new way to think about gender and sexuality systems that is crucial to contemporary anthropology and the social sciences.

Third Gender introduces a significantly new dimension into the study of gender and sexuality. The authors are serious and adventurous in their task, and they have put together an original, courageous collection." —John Strathern, author of *The Gender of the Gift*.

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Third Sex, Third Gender

Gilbert Herdt

ZONE BOOKS

Third Sex Third Gender

Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History

Edited by

Gilbert Herdt

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human classification; along with such writers as Lévi-Strauss, who is inconsistent on the matter, we should want to entertain the possibility of multiple categories in the nature of things in human traditions. The emphasis in the Introduction is in this regard heuristic; the third is emblematic of other possible combinations that transcend dimorphism. However, as the reader will also see, many historical and cultural examples seem to pivot around the question of a third category, which impinges on characteristics of the "deep structure" of the ontology and epistemology of how humans categorize things into twos, threes or other structures of the mind. For analytical purposes, then, the book emphasizes those traditions in which a male, female and third category are posited as part of the reality of nature and culture or the attempt to construct an alternate symbolic reality, in competition with the hegemonic order of a historical social tradition.

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Finally, this book is dedicated to the memory of my dear friend Martin P. Levine, who passed away in early 1993 in New York from complications due to AIDS. Marty visited Amsterdam in 1991 and was deeply struck by the national homosexual monument erected to gays and lesbians around the corner from the Anne Frank House. Today, when I pass by this monument and see the inscription from the famous Dutch homosexual poet Jacob Israel de Haan, I am reminded of the importance of friendship to Marty, and of his importance to me.

Gilbert Herdt
Amsterdam, The Netherlands, March 1993

Introduction:

Third Sexes and Third Genders

Gilbert Herdt

Purpose and Aims

Certain individuals in certain times and places transcend the categories of male and female, masculine and feminine, as these have been understood in Western culture since at least the later nineteenth century. The bodies and ontology of such persons diverge from the sexual dimorphism model found in science and society – in the way they conceive their being and/or their social conduct. Furthermore, in some traditions – cultures and/or historical formations – these persons are collectively classified by others in third or multiple cultural-historical categories. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, such persons and categories are more common in the human condition than was once thought.

This perspective on the transcendence of sexual dimorphism guides the anthropological and historical analyses that follow in several ways. First, we reexamine and redefine studies of sex and gender in light of critiques of sexual dimorphism, which generally suggest the limitations of a reproductive paradigm. Of course, there are conceptual dangers involved in breaking precipitously with the past convention of distinguishing arbitrarily between sex (as biology and nature) and gender (as culture and nurture). However, we aim in this volume to renew the study of sexual and gender variation across time and space, critically looking at the pitfalls of continuing to objectify the dichotomy of sex and gender, which is probably culturally bound and scientifically misleading. Second, we show that, in some places and times, individuals are grouped into divergent ontological categories, identities, tasks,

roles, practices and institutions that have resulted in more than two kinds of persons, that is, what Westerners would classify as two sexes (male and female) or genders (masculine and feminine).¹ Studies of sexual "deviance" or "third genders" have typically conflated these two categories. Generally, sexual conduct has been ignored as a constitutive criterion leading to the formation of a divergent sex/gender category or the inclusion of individuals within it. Thus, to reassess these conceptual links, we examine historical and cultural associations among sexual dimorphism, social science theory and folk classifications of anatomy, erotic conduct and social relations.

Finally, while third sexes and genders are enduring categories and roles in some cultures, they are not present at all times and places, which has implications for the creation and maintenance of third sexes and third genders. On the one hand, such a non-universal status suggests an inherent tension between individual desires to *create* a third sex or gender and verities of the adaptation of human cultures to the phylogeny of *H. homo sapiens*, our species-specific "nature." On the other hand, although anatomy, sexual action and special social relations are common denominators – cultural signs – of classification into third-sex or third-gender categories in some traditions, they are neither necessary nor sufficient to *maintain* them. In short, there is no ready-made formula that will produce divergent sex or gender categories and roles, suggesting that special conditions – demographic, symbolic and historical – combine to create the necessary and sufficient basis for the conventionalization and historical transmission of the third sex or gender.

Historical Evidence and Cross-cultural Conjectures

A revolution in social-historical studies of sexuality and gender has created enormous interest in analyzing historical categories from a cross-cultural perspective.² What we are learning from these studies, and from the work of scholars influenced by them, is that a one-sex paradigm composed of a canonical male with a female body inside was predominant in Western texts until quite recently. Some time later, a three-sex system gave rise to a classi-

fication schema of four genders, evolving out of the eighteenth-century English "molly" and the Dutch "sodomite," for example, which led to a new and more complex classification of sexual natures and beings in the modern period.³

The extraordinary influence of the hermaphrodite in Western culture and art bears witness to the long-emerging tension between systems of sexual and/or gender classification and definitions of "nature" and "society." The representation of the erotic in Western art played with the dictates of sexual dimorphism in its pictorial androgyny, often heavily portrayed with the tabooed depiction of the homoerotic; this representation was later mediated, particularly after the Renaissance, through androgynous imagery in such works as Michelangelo's *Bacchus*.⁴ Such pictorial androgyny is transformed into the later imagery of the monster, in which androgyny moves closer to the sexualized human being, especially the figure of the deviant. Hence, although a significant discourse on monsters and hermaphrodites had abounded for centuries, this approach was replaced with the modern period's conception of the homosexual as a hermaphrodite of the soul.⁵ This development in turn anticipated the construction of the homosexual/heterosexual dualism with which we still live. Among the more interesting and enduring icons of the twentieth-century forms of this dualism in science and mass culture are the gender-transforming transsexual in American culture and the gay and lesbian body, especially in its biologically essentialist image.⁶

These powerful transformations in historical ideas suggest two critiques of both the cross-cultural and historical record on sexual dimorphism and multiple systems of sex and gender. First, many earlier scholars of history and culture predicated their work on the assumption of sexual dimorphism, so common in the literature since before Darwin's influence. Thus, when anthropologists first encountered individuals classified as "berdache" in the cultures of Native North America, these persons were often misinterpreted as biologically abnormal hermaphrodites or "degenerates" and, later, as deviant homosexuals, both of which categories run counter to the cultural phenomenology of berdache roles in these cultures.⁷ Likewise, a similar process of misinter-

pretation and labeling in the third-gender roles of Polynesia from the time of Captain Cook to the present can be witnessed.⁸ Second, a healthy skepticism about cross-cultural and historical claims of inclusion in dimorphic or divergent categories is justified when it comes to sex and gender; as Margaret Mead and Kenneth Read once warned, the cross-cultural record is fragmentary and inconclusive on these matters.⁹ As the history of sexuality has repeatedly shown, claims made for the absence or essence of some entity, whether for homosexuality in other cultures or innate desires in our own, must always be *interpreted* on the basis of further study rather than treated as literal realities since such claims have often proved false, exaggerated or incomplete.¹⁰

The collection of evidence on sexuality from other cultures and historical documents is thus considerably complicated by the taboo against intruding into relations that are culturally defined as inherently private, or intimate or sexual, as Mead and later Michel Foucault warned.¹¹ It does make a difference to the practicing anthropologist and historian, for instance, whether a society approves or disapproves of sexual activity in general; these strictures (e.g., the negative attitudes of erotophobia, misogyny or homophobia) influence the data-collection process through what is revealed or hidden of sexuality.¹² Cultures that institutionalize intense ideologies of sexual dimorphism, as, for instance, in cases of religious fundamentalism, raise methodological issues in social analysis.¹³ As the study of AIDS and sexuality has repeatedly shown, the investigation of alternative, marginal, illicit or illegal forms of sexual practice and social realities requires a different lens of inquiry from that of normative social science.¹⁴

Identifying individuals who diverge from the male and female categories can prove to be difficult even in cultures in which a third sex or gender role is present, because the condition may nonetheless be somewhat disparaged or considered deviant.¹⁵ Because of laws and implicit rules, divergent individuals to whom these categories of being and action apply – sodomites, berdache, women dressed in men's clothes, hermaphrodites in New Guinea and so on – may slip between male and female roles. They may engage in the act of “passing” as normatively male or female or

masculine or feminine (best understood through Erving Goffman's still-significant study of “the natural cycle of passing”).¹⁶ Through behaviors and practices that either set them apart from others or enable them to conform and to pass as normative, such persons carve out a special niche in their societies.

Thus, if the hermaphrodite bears a secret nature, there is not necessarily any reason to confess this nature, for it may offend sensibilities or spiritual and social rules. As Foucault remarked of nineteenth-century France, what the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin “evokes in her past is the happy limbo of a non-identity, which was paradoxically protected by the life of those closed, narrow, and intimate societies where one has the strange happiness, which is at the same time obligatory and forbidden, of being acquainted with only one sex.”¹⁷ Indeed, as I will argue later, the historical and cultural phenomenon of passing marks a significant entry into the field of identities and identity theory, whereby the conventionalized male or female is masked and re-presented as something new in cultural representations.¹⁸ Let the reader be forewarned, then, that we are dealing with matters of inherent difficulty when it comes to studying the third sex and gender.

Darwinian Sexual Dimorphism and Sexology

Over the past century it has been widely assumed, following Darwin, that sexual behavior served the purposes of reproduction and selective fitness of individuals in evolution above all. Darwin reasoned that natural selection affected males and females as a function of their roles in reproduction and/or from resource competition (especially for food), leading to dimorphism.¹⁹ By *sexual dimorphism* is typically meant a phylogenetically inherited structure of two types of human and sexual nature, male and female, present in all human groups. Although we will not be able to examine its full implications in this review, much of the historical and anthropological literature suggests that this emphasis on dimorphism reveals a deeper stress on “reproduction” as a paradigm of science and society.²⁰ The reproductive paradigm remains prominent today in studies that go far beyond evolutionary thinking, to such an extent that I will refer to this as a “prin-

ciple of sexual dimorphism," since it is represented as if it were a uniform law of nature like gravity. That is, it is believed canonical that, everywhere and at all times, sex and/or gender exist for reproduction of individuals and species. In short, reproduction, as suggested in the critiques formulated by feminist and gay and lesbian scholars for a generation, has been the "real object" of normative science, both in biology and social science, for much of the past century.²¹

This cultural achievement is all the more remarkable when we consider the many clues that suggested that dimorphism was an invention of modernism. Indeed, if one is to accept Thomas Laqueur's brilliant interpretations, from the time of Antiquity until the late eighteenth century popular culture and medical theory suggested that there was but one sex: a kind of signified male/masculine body and mind, inscribed on the incomplete and subordinate female body.²² From the book of Genesis as well – an origin myth of the Judeo-Christian tradition – we are told how Adam created a second sex from his own loin. But as Laqueur has commented, "Two sexes are not the necessary, natural consequence of corporeal difference. Nor, for that matter, is one sex."²³ This paradigm was to change by the time of the Renaissance, after which the two-sex model gained in prominence – although without completely destroying the preceding ideas of nature and desire for expressing sex and gender.

Theorists who followed Darwin's consistent emphasis on reproduction typically viewed sexual selection as an innate and natural property of our own species as well. In the social-evolutionary theories of Victorian anthropology, the Darwinian revolution was enormously influential in how it "permanently redefine[d] not only 'man's place in nature,' but also his place in time – as well as the relationship of God both to nature and to humankind."²⁴ Sexuality is problematical in this context, since it was seldom explicitly discussed, and the study of kinship and marriage as social institutions was often reduced to matters of the biological selection of mates.²⁵ Following Darwinian thought and its popular manifestations in various fields, we find many permutations of what might be called an unmarked principle of sexual dimor-

phism: the differences between male and female were innate, as supposedly demonstrated in factors as diverse as morphology, brain size, tool use and the evolution of speech. Within nineteenth-century evolutionary anthropology and anthropometry, research reports on the measurement of sexual dimorphism in human groups were legion, extending from the time of Frances Galton (Darwin's cousin) through Franz Boas, the founder of American anthropology. Racial differences and racism (including the eugenics movement) figured prominently in some corners. Well into the twentieth century we find anthropometry stressing sexually dimorphic differences between the so-called biological races, with clear implications for Social Darwinism. Today, the continued emphasis on kin selection and sexual dimorphism in vulgar sociobiology (less so than in the field's more sophisticated renditions today) must surely be seen as a continuation of the early Darwinian fascination with sexual differentiation and survival.²⁶

Human paleontology has been embroiled in debate over the past few years regarding the relation between such a reproductive paradigm and sexual dimorphism in the human fossil record. Evolutionary writers have typically followed Darwin in seeing a continuum of sexual dimorphism in lower to higher animal forms. For instance, some specialists argue that "in all human groups males average almost 1.1 times as tall as females and are correspondingly more massive."²⁷ However, paleontologists continue to question the significance of size variations in species and individuals for sexual dimorphism. Some authorities suggest that primate sexual dimorphism "corresponds closely to the degree of male competition for mates" and "human sexual dimorphism is clearly not typical."²⁸ Differences occur anatomically in fossil humans in the greater size of males and larger pelvic opening of females. But while its relevance has been projected into prehistory, as if this "followed the same pattern as today," many have questioned the uniformity of such a prehistoric dimorphism, since one trait might recede in prehistoric human beings (e.g., teeth) while another trait (e.g., epigamy) might increase.²⁹ "Sexual dimorphism can only evolve if there is dimorphism in selection

and/or dimorphism in genetic variances."³⁰ Comparative study of species suggests that primates vary according to whether their ancestors were more dimorphic than average, the size of the species and its ecological traits.³¹ In short, sexual dimorphism may be significant for indexing matters of individual and species-specific variation, but its overall significance for sexual and gender differentiation has probably been exaggerated.

One can see in the development of later Darwinian thought and natural selection theory the elements that prodded the positive science of sexology toward an essentialism of both gender and sexual ideas. In this respect, sexology is a child of the nineteenth-century Darwinian tradition.³² It follows that the emergence of sexology forged a social and political reform movement in reaction against antiquated ideas of sexuality. Many have seen in these developments the birth of modernism, or at least its lynchpin, for its modernist practitioners, especially Havelock Ellis and Freud, were adamant "sexual enthusiasts."³³ Concurrently, the coinage of *homosexuality* around 1870 and *heterosexuality* around 1890 had far-reaching implications for the principle of dimorphism in medical sexology.³⁴

Quite simply, sexology was to propound two powerful ideas: that "male" and "female" are innate structures in all forms of life, including human beings, and that heterosexuality is the teleologically necessary and highest form of sexual evolution. For example, Iwan Bloch, a notable German scholar and ethnological writer in the sexological tradition, argued that evolution had driven men and women into different "thought worlds." Moreover, "heterosexuality becomes increasingly marked in the evolutionary scale of mammals and man." Furthermore, Bloch "was convinced that the greatest cultural and creative achievements came from 'normal,' not homosexual people. . . . He firmly believed that the 'normal' woman and not the lesbian would advance the feminist movement."³⁵ Freud was to struggle with these essentialist ideas and to reify many of them in his own developmental theory, including many of those that dealt with gender and sexuality. As Peter Gay writes of the sexological position of Freud in his later writings:

Freud's anti-feminist stance was not the product of his feeling old or wishing to be outrageous. Rather, he had come to see it as an inescapable consequence of men's and women's diverging sexual histories: anatomy is destiny. His comparative history of sexual development may be less than wholly compelling, but it calls on the logic of human growth as he defined it in the 1920s. The psychological and ethical distinctions between the sexes, he argued, emerge naturally from the biology of the human animal and from the kind of mental work that this implies for each sex.³⁶

The two distinctive sexes and the imperative for reproduction thus combined to impel the biomedical sexological tradition toward what we might call an essentialist legacy of the paradigm.

Many of the progenitors of sexology, such as Karl Ulrichs and Magnus Hirschfeld, could not have foreseen the outcome of their efforts to establish a sexual science. They were themselves "homosexuals" and formed a hidden network of communicants throughout this period. Along with others, they began to formulate their texts on the basis of the ultimate aims of social reform, such as the liberalization of sexual laws.³⁷ They had agreed to innatist or biological positions, only to find these theories exploited by those quintessential biological reductionists, the Nazis. Hirschfeld's favorite motto, "Justice through Knowledge," was ultimately a defeated axiom after the Nazis' rise to power following the collapse of the Weimar Republic.³⁸ By this time much harm was already done; but this would not do away with the powerful intellectual program of medicalized sexology, which reemerged ever more strongly after the war. Indeed, it is especially after World War II and the founding of the modern sexual clinic that we find two key expressions of essentialized dimorphism:³⁹ sex assignment at birth and the evolutionary theory of the emergence of gender identity.

Sexological writing in the nineteenth century had begun to make an implicit distinction between nature and nurture, heredity and environment, biology and society. Under the influence of Darwinian thought and the putative mechanisms of natural selection, sexual dimorphism emerged in the language of develop-

mentalism. Ultimately such dimorphism has fed into the contemporary paradigms of essentialism/constructionism, often wrongly reduced to mean biology/culture. An explicit individualism, or, more precisely, an ideology of Western individualism, strongly influences many of these early formulations of sexological writing.⁴⁰ For example, in the biomedical discourse on homosexuality and the "intermediate sex" in the late nineteenth century, the distinction between innate and acquired inversion is strongly marked between such scholars as Hirschfeld, Ellis and Freud.⁴¹ More than half a century later, this distinction, still in combination with ideological individualism, results in a new form of dualistic definition: between sex as biological elements (genes, gonads, etc.) and gender as learned cultural elements (masculinity and femininity), as formulated by John Money and Robert Stoller, respectively. Thus continues an implicit contrast between environmentalism (forces outside the organism) and innatism or naturalism (forces inside the organism) in the literature of the mid-twentieth century, reasserted in sex research by Alfred Kinsey et al. in their survey study of sexual behavior of American males. Hence, what emerges is an approach that sees the inner biological elements of sexual development, among which is the male/female dichotomy, as innate and unchangeable. Although this is not without conceptual controversies and dilemmas, its force continues to the present.⁴²

According to the canonical view in sexology, it follows that all human beings are classifiable as either male or female types at birth, through standard clinical and sexological practice.⁴³ This is accepted by all those who work both with normal and abnormal biological sexual differentiation, as is noted in my contribution to this volume. Male and female are differentiated at many different levels of biological development. Ultimately, this idea rests on the assumption of a generalized mammalian pattern of primary femaleness, out of which maleness emerges, which in his early writing Freud referred to as the "bedrock of biological bisexuality."⁴⁴ However, in modern parlance, for instance, consider these four components of standard Western clinical practice: chromosomal sex; gonadal sex; morphological sex and related

secondary sex traits; and psychosocial sex or gender identity. Notice that these criteria do not include sociocultural classification systems; instead, Money and Ehrhardt, for example, assume a strong parallelism between sexual dimorphism in anatomy and gender dimorphism in cultural traditions.⁴⁵ It remains problematic whether these biological universals are always present.⁴⁶ As I discuss in my essay on 5-alpha reductase deficiency syndrome, medical practitioners assume in all cases that a two-sex system is in operation, never questioning whether the presence of a third sex might influence sexual and gender development. This is especially puzzling since some classical clinical case studies in Western countries such as the United States refer to hermaphrodites' subjective development not as male or female identity but as "hermaphroditic identity."⁴⁷

"Critical learning theory" emerged as a potential antidote to essentialism at this time. A powerful and enduring perspective on the role of culture and society in influencing gender and sexuality, critical learning theory suggests a seeming alignment with the social construction of gender. However, this appearance is, like all varieties of essentialist and constructionist ideas, in part illusory because it assumes that learning gender identities takes place only with respect to the dimorphic two-sex system of male and female. Gendered identity as masculine or feminine is thus analogous to the imprinting phase of innate development in animals and in human phylogeny, with the effect that all human beings are either male or female in biological sex and feminine or masculine in gender identity.⁴⁸ This theory suggests that, early in development, sex assignment into either the male or female categories affects most learning in the areas of gender identity and sex role performance.⁴⁹ Sex assignment into either the male or female category is of such general importance that, after a child is approximately two and a half years old, the clinical advice for the doctor is never to suggest changing the child's sexual classification, no matter what information comes to light – even information that the original sex assignment at birth was in error and should have been to the opposite sex – because such a change will do great psychic violence to the mental health of the child.⁵⁰

The epistemology of the approach owes much to Freud's theory of psychosexual development. Thus, the putative effect of early experience in infancy molds or "imprints" a gendered identity on the child.⁵¹ A congruence of biological sex identity and social learning is assumed to create a harmonious effect in "normal and natural" child development in all cultures – notwithstanding transsexuals and hermaphrodites, who suggest a divergent or intermediate identity.⁵²

The totalizing effect of the Darwinian heritage was to represent sexual dimorphism through time and space as a binary principle of social structure. The idea of applying the male/female dyad to domains of society and culture, including the sexual division of labor, promoted by turn-of-the-century social theorists such as the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, thus became an assumptive core of social theory.⁵³ Many anthropologists, for example, began their analyses of social structure with the observation that men and women were, everywhere, not only physically distinctive but also an "objective" basis for society and the economic division of labor.⁵⁴ A fine illustration of the trend in sexology comes from Money and Ehrhardt's classic text on sex and gender, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl*, in which they reify sexual dimorphism as an essential structure of individual development in simple societies, operationalized as what they called "gender dimorphic behavior." They thus assume the existence of a two-sex and two-gender system in all times and places and argue, for instance, that in Australian Aborigine and New Guinea societies all economic and social tasks and roles are gender dimorphic; not only cooking and child care, but rituals and ceremonial practices as well. This dimorphic schema is then mapped onto social structure, culture and ecology, so that Money and Ehrhardt objectified ten quantitative "variables" (idealized culture traits) to be checked off in assessing the relative degree of dimorphism in the practices of native peoples.⁵⁵ This approach suggests in general that the biological dimorphism of male and female is projected into culture and symbolically reflected in its institutions, especially primary or objective institutions.⁵⁶

In short, the question of divergent sex and gender roles and

categories cannot be considered apart from the evolutionary perspective on sexual dimorphism. This paradigm strongly influenced sexology and generally expanded into classical social theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Classical Social Theory and Third-Sex Categories

It was not only sexology that was affected by nineteenth-century ideas of sexual dimorphism. Anthropologists and historians have emphasized reproductive functionalism in their studies of kinship, family, gender roles, sexual practices and the regulation and reproduction of society. Over the past century, the theme of sexual dimorphism has recurred throughout social theory, with the consequent relegation of the third sex to the clinical laboratory of "biological deviance" and the third gender to quaint textbooks of anthropology.

Such a marginalizing emphasis is present in major thinkers since the time of Darwin and Freud in evolutionary and sexual theory, as well as in central anthropological writings by such figures as Durkheim, Mauss and Lévi-Strauss. Today, sexual dimorphism remains central to social-scientific thought and is regarded by many anthropologists as an axiom of cultural classification. Mead formalized this position in a classic essay in the early 1960s: "In all known societies sexual dimorphism is treated as a major differentiating factor of any human being, of the same order as difference in age, the other universal of the same kind."⁵⁷ More recently, the American anthropologist Robert Edgerton, who contributed a significant early study of transsexualism in a non-Western culture, has written:

It is probably a universal assumption that the world consists of only two biological sexes and that this is the natural and necessary way of things. . . . It is expected that people will be born with male or female bodies and that, despite a lifetime of acts that compromise or even reverse normal sex-role expectations, everyone will continue to live in the body of either a man or a woman.⁵⁸

Because male and female are tantamount to natural categories in

social classification, it follows that the intermediate is unnatural, inverted or perverse.⁵⁹ In short, to quote Clifford Geertz on the matter: "What falls between [male and female] is a darkness, an offense against reason."⁶⁰

In general, anthropological studies of sex and gender since the early classics of Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski have assumed a two-sex system as the "normal and natural" structure of "human nature."⁶¹ Mead suggests that the ultimate purpose of sex is for "mating and reproduction by physically mature, child-rearing human beings."⁶² Reproduction in this model was problematic only in its social regulation: "Every human society," she said, must deal with two problems: "the need for reducing reproductivity in particular areas, as among unmarried women," and the aim of "ensuring or increasing reproductivity in other areas, among certain classes in the population." This model is still prominent in anthropology, and as Carole Vance has remarked of anthropological models of sex and gender, "The core of sexuality is reproduction."⁶³

However much social historians have thought to evade the imperatives of Darwinian biology, biological sexology and essentialist ideas in gender study, it has remained difficult to operate outside sexual dimorphism as a conceptual system.⁶⁴ Consciously or unconsciously, some scholars of sexuality still cling to the modernist view that nature restricts culture, that male and female are the inalienable products of biology. These scholars tend to project back into the historical and anthropological records not only the current cultural categories of identity but also the preconceptions of social relations that operated and structurally supported the categories of the past.⁶⁵ As Theo van der Meer reveals in his essay on the eighteenth-century history of the Dutch sodomite, however, while male and female were powerful categories of representation and action, they were not so encompassing as to circumscribe desire for or romantic infatuations with the same sex or the emergence of a subculture of sodomites that evaded the sexual dimorphism of the times through a hidden network of signals and spaces.

But culture is both more diverse than nature and more insidious in its potential to "play" symbolically with the classifications

of human bodies and minds. And yet, while Lévi-Strauss demonstrated this point admirably, he failed to explore and understand the result of the critique against his own work, which, in kinship studies, proposed four, not three, sexes.⁶⁶ In his *mythologiques* project as well, the binary structure of the unconscious mind was invoked to situate the dimorphic categories of male and female at a level of "deep" culture akin to Freud's unconscious.⁶⁷ To take a clue from Foucault, the very notion of human sexual types – male and female, homosexual and heterosexual – is a survival of the realist zoological penchant of nineteenth-century thought in twentieth-century thinkers – including Freud and certainly Kinsey, and recently Lévi-Strauss – who have not reflected on the received dimorphic categories of Western culture in light of the immense variability of human groups. A fuller historical answer to why this is so rests with Foucault, of course;⁶⁸ we will examine several historical texts here and consider later the implications for anthropology.

With the beginnings of the early modern period and the importance of the French Revolution in redrawing the boundaries around the individual self, the discourse on sexual dimorphism begins to shape social theory.⁶⁹ A new thematic of individualism emerges to compete with the aristocratic order, a thematic of boundaries redrawn around an autonomous body and self in an age of new cults of the self in the context of struggles for class and sexual equality.⁷⁰ Here, the work of Rousseau is critical, for his texts contain some of the earliest indications of the debate in social theory over constructs and essences in sexuality. In Rousseau's famous disquisition on education, *Emile*, the child "does not feel himself to be of any sex, of any species. Man and woman are equally alien to him... it is nature's ignorance (*Emile*, IV, p. 219)."⁷¹ Prior to sexual desire, *Emile* treats all humans instrumentally; they serve as a means to an end. But with sexual maturation, his desires become "essential" and he can no longer avoid treating others "as a means to his own end."⁷² Because it is "essential," Rousseau suggests that it is best to postpone sexual gratification in the interest of creating a moral and friendly position and for cultivating reason instead of debauchery.⁷³ Thus, "Rousseau

makes Emile moral by delaying his first sexual experience; thus he 'delays the progress of nature to the advance of reason' (*Emile*, IV, p. 316)." He states: "For the object of his desire is at first very unclear to the desirer, who 'desires without knowing what' (*Emile*, IV, p. 220)." "The first act of his nascent imagination is to teach him that he has fellows; and the species affects him before the female sex (*Emile*, IV, p. 220)." Joel Schwartz, in *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, adds, "One wants to obtain the preference that one grants. Love must be reciprocal. To be loved, one has to make oneself lovable.... The object of one's love must be a subject as well, for whom one is oneself in turn an object. For these responses Rousseau contends that 'a young man must either love or be debauched' (*Emile*, IV, p. 214, see also *Dialogues*, I, p. 688)." Thus we see the boundaries of a one-sex system being redrawn around notions of sexual equality in culture and romantic love in the shift to the modern period.

In the nineteenth century a powerful idea of the "divine savage" in a "natural" state profoundly linked the French Enlightenment thinkers, such as Rousseau and Diderot, with the formation of modernist discourse on sexuality. The notions of archaism and primitivism are obviously related to these representational systems.⁷⁴ Late Victorian anthropology was to serve as a significant intellectual link with the later sexology. As social historians such as Randolph Trumbach have written, forms of third sex and gender, first hermaphroditic and later homosexual, bridged modern versus premodern categories. For instance, Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Ellis's comparative study of sexology, Freud's armchair anthropology in *Totem and Taboo* and even the early writings of Malinowski and Mead continued to labor under the illusion of a primitive human nature in which sexuality was more simple and unrestricted than that of modern civilization.⁷⁵ This in turn hinted at the probability that sexual variations across human groups were small (despite Freud's and other sexologists' references to divergent erotic practices of archaic and non-Western societies, such as homoerotic relations among the ancient Greeks), while sexual dimorphism and reproductive heterosexuality loomed large in such "primitive" groups (i.e., those de-

finied as having less compromised, more elementary "human nature").⁷⁶ Moreover, it is still widely held that sexual dimorphism is more prominent in simple societies, especially hunting-and-gathering band societies, than in technologically complex or modern societies.⁷⁷

But twentieth-century anthropology has resisted monolithic theories that explain human nature through universal mechanisms of a common trait or characteristic, largely because such reductionism tends to explain away culture as a mere residue or frill of human life. The notion that sex might organize culture, as Freud consistently suggested, is particularly problematic, since it placed the burden of causation on biological phylogeny rather than on current social practice or function. Freud's famous thesis in *Totem and Taboo* was that a primordial group condition – a ruling tyrant father who was killed and devoured by his sons, who in turn incestuously took women from him – was a mythic/historical event, the Oedipal complex, that has unconsciously ruled over the phylogeny of human evolution ever since. In short, the Oedipal complex and incest taboos separated nature from culture and animal world from human society. The evidence for such a theory was of course nil, but Freud's genius lay in his speculative account that linked past and present in an unbroken chain. It is ironic that the two best-known anthropologists of sexuality and indeed of culture writ large (at least to an earlier generation), Malinowski and Mead, both were influenced by their attraction to and reaction against Freud's theory.

In Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, we find the view that male and female constitute the fundamental structure of society and human development. This is surprising for a number of reasons having to do with Freud's theory of the primacy of the male sex (the phallus), his theory of sexual orientation and his acceptance of hermaphroditism in human nature, as in the nineteenth-century concept of psychic hermaphroditism.⁷⁸ Freud's work is of great interest because of his presumption of innate biological bisexuality and the openness with which the fetishistic erotic interest may be attached in early human development to any social stimulus, creating possibilities for divergent sexual and

gendered relations, such as the homosexual as an intermediate sex. Thus Freud deploys physicalist metaphors of how erotic interests are “split apart” and then “soldered together” again in new combinations.⁷⁹ Although sexual orientation vis-à-vis the sexual object is not viewed as purely innate or learned, Freud nonetheless leans toward the biological determination of developmental subjectivities, as, for instance, in three key areas: anatomy, mental attitudes regarding maleness and femaleness in society and the development of choice of sex object. Nonetheless, the possibilities of an open-ended construction of a third sex and/or gender are muted by the presumption of sexual dimorphism in human phylogeny, including the dimorphism of acquired and innate traits, which Freud borrowed from ideas of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Darwin, Karl Westphal and Ellis, supposedly manifested both at the phenotypic level (anatomy) and the genotypic level (the unconscious). German philosophical essentialism strongly influenced these ideas as well.⁸⁰

Curiously, while Freud thought of the infantile human mind as “polymorphous perverse,” the natural structure of development in the body was typically skewed to the male sex. Freud generally saw hermaphrodites as abnormal in mind and body, as interstitial between male and female.⁸¹ Freud could never escape the essentialist view that humans have an innate biological bisexuality that inclines society to impose a definite structure of gender roles to regulate and direct its expression toward “normal” outcomes. Freud would have probably been surprised to learn that for centuries in the Byzantine Empire there were biologically normal males who became eunuchs not from an essential desire to have a female body or from a need for sexual relations with males; instead, they sought the prestige and privilege of the eunuch’s position in the Byzantine court.⁸² Thus, we see that Freud’s view was too biologically driven and culturally bound to accommodate the range of variations in sex and gender development across time and space. When Freud’s disciples, such as the psychoanalytic anthropologist Géza Roheim, were encouraged to study the most “primitive” of groups; such as Australian Aborigine society, it was to confirm more than to discover that the innate structures of

a biologically driven Oedipal complex were to be found in all places, albeit in a more elementary way in rude societies.⁸³

The later efforts of psychoanalysts — such as Erikson on European and non-Western societies and Sudhir Kakar on India — to “relativize” this model have met with only limited success.⁸⁴ Stages of development are seen as linear, as biologically founded, creating continuity between the drives and wishes of childhood and adulthood when in fact it is the marked discontinuities resulting from historical and cultural formations that are striking.⁸⁵ The innate structure is usually assumed to be a given; the cultural experiences are added on to it but without modification of what came before. Freud and his followers’ naïveté is one thing, having come from decades past; but the contemporary ethnocentrism of psychology is startling. Witness, for instance, the continuing naïveté of some Western psychologists’ stage models of sex and gender development, typically constructed without the benefit of historical and cross-cultural evidence or non-Western theories of the human condition, and the particular analysis of adolescence through assumptive structures of dimorphism.⁸⁶

Ultimately, the exigencies of biology were made into the very substance, the phenomenology and cultural ontology, of the psychic determinism according to Freud. Freud always felt that, at the bottom of human nature — which he sometimes alluded to as the biological “bedrock” of sexuality — our species could not evade the “force” of anatomy and unknown chemical and brain factors.⁸⁷ This is why Freud’s last great piece, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” ends with the dour view that “unconscious resistance to insight,” that is, the revelation of deep biological sexual drives and desires through psychoanalysis, was beyond the patient and the doctor because of its biological origins; hence, the Oedipal complex and differences between the sexes to which these neuroses correspond are likewise outside society’s reach.⁸⁸ It is no wonder Freud clung to a dimorphic model of sex and gender despite the evidence to the contrary.⁸⁹

With the emergence of French sociology and anthropology, we find further reflections of the nineteenth-century influence of dimorphism being worked out in social theory. Beginning with

Durkheim's classic statement of primitive society, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, we find the argument that male and female are so fundamental to the structure of human society that they should be treated as equivalent to the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane.⁹⁰ I doubt whether Durkheim ever questioned the innateness of dimorphism in humans; sexual dimorphism and the duality of male and female symbolism in social action and its collective representations were central to his studies of economy, religion and society. However, we might predict that Durkheim would have subordinated the needs of the individual to the greater good of the collective, as suggested in the following quotation from his famous essay on the dualism of human social life:

Society has its own nature, and, consequently, its requirements are quite different from those of our nature as individuals: the interests of the whole are not necessarily those of the part. Therefore, society cannot be formed or maintained without our being required to make perpetual and costly sacrifices. . . . We must, in a word, do violence to certain of our strongest inclinations.⁹¹

By suggesting that the nature of social existence forced the individual always to confront the duality of being both social actor and unique individual, Durkheim added to the significant commentaries on the problem of the imperfect fit between collective categories and individual bodies, what Roland Barthes once referred to as the problem of "unclassified feelings." Durkheim the utopian socialist thinker was concerned with the moral crisis of late-nineteenth-century liberal democracy – the sense in which modern society was failing to achieve the higher dictates of providing a sound communal existence. Given such a worldview, we might speculate that the anatomically ambiguous hermaphrodite would have been treated as an anomaly that should be fitted into the general social classification of male and female for the greater good.

Faced with the relationship between individual life crises and the social rites and ceremonies for fitting individuals into collec-

tive systems, it is not surprising that Arnold van Gennep, the French ethnologist writing in the same period, strongly reified sexual dimorphism. Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* suggests in general that the two sexes are the fundamental division of society: that in "all societies and all social groups" there is a classification of the "group confined to persons of one sex or the other." Thus, we find in his argument that coitus is an act both of union and identification, such that rituals function as a "separation from the world of the asexual to the sexual."⁹² His dimorphism is even more far-reaching when he suggests that the situation is "simpler" for girls than for boys, since "the social activity of a woman is much simpler than that of a man," even in the case of puberty, where "first emission" does not automatically and intrinsically signify a change in status. There is always a distinction between male and female in these regards, he states, although a contrast must be made between physical and social maturity.⁹³

Some scholars from this period, Georg Simmel in particular, lent a different perspective to sexual dimorphism and social classification by arguing that dyads and triads are instrumental to the structure of social action. Simmel's sociology is especially notable in its insistence that dyads and triads create different phenomenologies or thought worlds.⁹⁴ In the tradition of French anthropology, Mauss hinted at the possible basis of unclassifiable sensibilities and feelings posed by the third sex or gender in his statement that "Any society will find some individuals off system – or between two or more irreducible systems."⁹⁵ Likewise, Gregory Bateson's significant study of logical types of social relations in the Iatmul *naven* ceremony (Sepik River, New Guinea) was to demonstrate how symmetrical and asymmetrical dyadic relations may teleologically create and maintain systems of social classification and action.⁹⁶ Decades later, anthropologist Francis L.K. Hsu theorized that one or another of the kin dyads, such as the husband/wife dyad, form the basis of all fundamental value orientations in kin-based social relations, an approach that causes us to question whether there is an essential structure of dyadic or symmetrical relations that underlies the conceptual representation of sexual dimorphism in social theory.⁹⁷

Sexuality poses a special case for the tribe of anthropologists; and while some ethnographies since the time of Malinowski's great book, *The Sexual Life of Savages*, have taken a critical perspective on sexuality, rarely has this been extended to the question of whether there are but two sexes. Malinowski's work shows the problems with which early anthropology was faced in conceptualizing beyond sexual dimorphism. Coming from Prussia with an aristocratic doctoral training in physics and a strong reaction against conventionalism that expressed itself in his love of the avant-garde, Malinowski pioneered field study in anthropology, beginning with his early study of the family in aboriginal Australia, followed by his famous work on the Trobriand Islands off the coast of New Guinea around the time of World War I.⁹⁸ Malinowski emerged with a functional theory of culture based on individual needs: culture exists almost as a direct expression of needs on the level of the individual to survive and reproduce across time. To his credit, Malinowski more than any other anthropologist of his generation discussed the role of pleasure in traditional society, in large part because of the kind of society in which he worked.⁹⁹ Many human customs, such as kinship practices, seem to meet no direct biological need, however; and the more symbolic such practices were, such as religious ritual or myth, the less his theory worked to explain Trobriand society, let alone the total human condition.

Consider, for example, the limitations imposed on culture theory by the Western concept of the incest taboos based on the idea of an essential nuclear family prominent in Western culture. The Trobriands became the first test of Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex applied to other cultures. At the time of Freud's great effort to popularize psychoanalysis and the theory of the Oedipal complex, anthropologists were among the first to chastise him for his insensitivity to cultural differences and his speculative reading of the early human record.¹⁰⁰ By the mid-1920s Malinowski had composed *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, a critique of the Oedipus complex as being always shaped by cultural setting; in fact he did not eliminate Oedipal development but only suggested that in a matrilineal society the object of desire was the

sister more than the mother, with the rival being the maternal uncle rather than the father. By the end of the 1920s, Malinowski's *Sexual Life of Savages*, a remarkable description of love, sexuality and kinship in the Trobriands, was making news for its rejection of the idea that "primitives" were sexually restricted.¹⁰¹ In a sense, Malinowski's great work not only justified the notion of sexual liberation in the age of flappers by suggesting that "primitives" valued pleasure; his book also implicitly attacked the received gender-dimorphic categories of masculine and feminine. Yet Malinowski (like Mead) was unable to escape the historical influence of sexual dimorphism and procreation, returning always to the reproduction ideas of the family and sex as essential needs for human society.¹⁰²

During the same period, Mead's work on gender and sexuality from Samoa was extraordinarily influential in recasting the discourse toward environmental relativism and away from the biological bases of gender and sexuality. Mead's position, as noted above, clearly rested on biological sexual dimorphism, however; in her Samoan work, this was constructed in the area of erotic and emotional differences between the sexes, reinforced by Samoan customs. In her triculture study in the Sepik River area of New Guinea, it was manifested more strongly in her social-development description of sexual "temperament" and "personality" differences, in which a biological force, much like Freud's libido, was suggested to differentiate and mold the sexes, although the baseline starting point of development was provided by culture rather than biology.¹⁰³ (The temperamental exceptions to this point, however, suggested that Mead did not move so fully away from innate biological structures as is often believed; see below.) Critiques of this work have shown the significance of neglected colonial change in the demography and political economy of gendered status and the naive ideology of American individualism that underlay it.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Mead finds that the personality traits denoted as masculine and feminine are "instrumental" but only "lightly linked" to sex differences.¹⁰⁵ Following her teacher, Ruth Benedict,¹⁰⁶ Mead consistently advocated that human nature is "unbelievably malleable" in response to culture and environ-

ment. Nonetheless, Mead, like her contemporaries, never challenged the preconception of biological sexual dimorphism. She explained instances of alternate sex and gender roles, such as the North American berdache, as signs of the "raw potential" of individual biological human nature to circumvent culture in "extreme cases."¹⁰⁷ This model of functional anthropology in the American school of the 1930s suggested plainly that the raw potentials of individuals must be biologically deviant or abnormal, with the biological inversion of the berdache a classic example. Such examples of third sex or gender were thus lumped into a vague category of congenital homosexuality that ratified the nineteenth-century sexological discourse of "natural" dimorphism and heterosexuality.¹⁰⁸

The critique of sexual dimorphism and the incorporation of nonreproductive sexuality into the cross-cultural and cross-historical record have been slow and precarious, as scholars since the emergence of feminist anthropology have suggested. Gendered analyses of kinship have been helpful: "One of the most conspicuous features of kinship is that it has been systematically stripped of its functions . . . it has been reduced to its barest bones – sex and gender."¹⁰⁹ But because gendered analyses have typically ignored sexual conduct and practices, they have also tended to marginalize third-sex and/or third-gender categories and representations in culture and society.¹¹⁰ More generally, Carole Vance states:

Ethnographic and survey accounts almost always follow a reporting format that deals first with "real sex" and then moves on to the "variations." Some accounts supposedly about sexuality are noticeably short on details about non-reproductive behavior; Margaret Mead's article about the cultural determinants of sexual behaviors . . . travels a dizzying trail which includes pregnancy, menstruation, menopause, and lactation but very little about non-reproductive sexuality or eroticism.¹¹¹

Studies of sex and gender variation across cultures and individual differences within cultures form the basis for the analysis not only of social categories inherited from the nineteenth cen-

tury but also of a twentieth-century invention: the concept of "identity." After World War II, the concept of identity emerged in contexts of new social and political formations, both in popular culture and in science. Particularly in studies of national character, child-rearing and personality in the psychoanalytic work of Erikson, the notion of identity became increasingly influential for a generation of psychological, cultural and gender theorists.¹¹²

Concurrent with this movement was the emergence of a new "social constructionist" approach that split sex and gender from biology. For instance, in gender-role study, identity research signified an emerging social science constructionism in the United States, a society that is perhaps notable for the uneasy coexistence of multiple identities of gendered relations and essentialist ideas of sexual dimorphism.¹¹³ This new constructionism was later to become "postmodernist" in character in a variety of fields, but especially in sex and gender and gay and lesbian studies. Feminist writers in the social sciences, in critiques of patriarchal society and male supremacy, have consistently attacked the imagery of sexual dimorphism without always challenging its preconceptions, at least until recently.¹¹⁴ Today, however, scholars such as Theresa de Laurentis are critical of any attempt to construct experience, especially women's experience, while others, such as Gayle Rubin and Carole Vance, are reconsidering the place of sociocultural influences in models of gender and sexuality.¹¹⁵ Much attention is directed to the analytic category of gender and how it is derived or differentiated from sexual difference.¹¹⁶ Feminist writers such as Judith Butler and lesbian theorists such as Sarah Lucia Hoagland are skeptical of notions of identity, as in the constructions of sexual identity and especially of gender identity, since these limit the enterprise of reinterpreting male, female and a third sex as historically bound entities.¹¹⁷

In sum, by emphasizing both biological and symbolic reproduction, scholars have continued a theoretical emphasis on sexual dimorphism in human life, which has marginalized the study of sexual and gendered variations in human history and society. In a parallel way, Foucault has argued persuasively the extent to which sexual and social theory has promoted reproduction over

pleasure as ultimate aims, from Attic Greece to the modern period of Freud.¹¹⁸ Many studies that assumed “male” and “female” to be the fundamental dualism of human nature and culture fan out to incorporate the assumption that two genders, masculine and feminine, are inherent building blocks in human institutions, social roles, family relations, gender and sexuality. Ultimately this imagery is based on a worldview that imagines sexual differentiation in human development to strive ultimately for biological reproduction, while the purpose of gender differentiation is to further the symbolic regeneration of society through the division of labor, social productivity, kinship and family structure and, of course, sexual relations.

Sexual Orientation: What Is a “Third Sex” Not?

Of the various forms of preconceptions that undermine the study of sexual and gender variations, we have so far ignored one that is surprisingly tenacious and often overlooked: the idea that a third sex is simply a deviant sexual orientation.

The Western debate on two- and three-sex systems has long been entangled with discussions about the dichotomous nature of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In recent years, it has fallen to gay and lesbian theorists, in particular, to question the assumption that classifications of divergent sexes and genders should be based on or explained by reference to the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy of Western culture.¹¹⁹ Whereas anthropologists once believed that the berdache or *māhū* and other forms of alternate sexes or genders were the product of temperamental variations directed into the social “niches” of deviant sexuality for social adaptation, scholars such as Barry Adam, Stephen O. Murray, David Greenberg and Walter Williams have shown that we cannot interpret these social and historical forms as biological or accidental variations of some universal “it entity” like the Western homosexual that is purported to be in the very make-up of deviant human nature.¹²⁰ Hence, while the cross-cultural forms of same-sex practice and ontology are of great importance in understanding third-sex or third-gender matters both in Western and non-Western traditions, the latter are by no means reducible to

the former, any more than the nineteenth-century homosexual can be equated with the berdache.¹²¹ Thus, I urge in this section that we not confuse desire for the same sex with a third sex per se, that gender-reversed roles are not the sole basis for recruitment into a third gender role, at least not in all social traditions; and that sexual orientation and identity are not the keys to conceptualizing a third sex and gender across time and space.

It is no mystery why sexual orientation has been lumped with the question of a third gender. As we have already noted, sexologists since the mid-nineteenth century assumed that the third sex typified a person attracted to the same sex. Sexological writers following Ulrichs and Hirschfeld (and here I would include Freud) and sexual reformers such as Edward Carpenter appealed for empathy and support of the “intermediate sex,” who “suffer a great deal from their own temperament.”¹²² In particular, writers in the tradition of the “congenital” theory of sexual inversion, following Richard Krafft-Ebing, tended to emphasize the supposed universals of shared hermaphroditic condition among humans, especially males, which explained how such a “temperament” was to be found in many times and places.¹²³ Twentieth-century scholars working in this tradition have sought physical and biological bases for sexual orientation, including sexual dimorphism of anatomy or brain functions, as in Simon LeVay’s recent “gay brain” study.¹²⁴ Rather, the mystery is why scholars still regard homosexuality as the true or real or hidden cause of instances of third sex or gender in time and space. Surely the situation is not so simple. Recent conceptual schemas link same-sex desires to their social classification and expression by age, gender, class and egalitarian modes of social ideas and relationships.

Neither are the categories hermaphrodite or transsexual the same as third-sex and third-gender variations around the world, notwithstanding the enormous confusion surrounding the use of such terms. One is tempted, for instance, to think of the hijras of India as hermaphrodites (or homosexuals), when in fact they constitute a different kind of social person and cultural reality.¹²⁵ Likewise, the abuse of the term *hermaphrodite* in cross-cultural sexological research shows the failure of this biologically oriented

field to take seriously sex and gender variations.¹²⁶ In the category of the eunuch, there is a difference between someone who is castrated and someone who castrates himself, as Kathryn M. Ringrose shows in her essay below, and there is a further classification, such as in classical and Late Antique society, in Babylonia, China and kindred places, of men who castrated themselves in a ritualistic way.¹²⁷ These and other examples of “castrati” up to the nineteenth century in European society may constitute a potential third-sex category in such places.¹²⁸

A continuing problem in the literature is the conflation of same-sex acts with identities and thus a confusion of a third sex with a third gender. “Third gender” in this logic means a reversal of gendered relations, with males performing female roles. Attraction to the same sex, therefore, essentially reflects abnormal parenting, social learning and other forms of role behaviors that can be corrected with enough gender-typical role modeling to reverse the resulting “gender dysphoria” (the current American sexological and psychiatric nosological classification of atypical or nonconformist gender behavior).¹²⁹ But how is same-sex behavior related to third-sex traits or identity? Here a deeper biological matter is involved, usually a function of temperament or another state variable that cannot be changed. Sexologists have typically explained third-sex identity with male and female as one essential dualism linked with the other dualism of heterosexual and homosexual. By the mid-nineteenth century, Eve Sedgwick argues, this symbolic equation was so powerful that it colored virtually every domain of male sociality and masculine-defined homosocial space, such as the famous ship cabins of Melville’s “Billy Budd,” with the result that the threat of the homoerotic was constant enough to require an effort to suppress any sign of femaleness or desire for the same sex.¹³⁰

When categories of homosexuality have failed to fit an alternative historical or cultural tradition, bisexuality has been invoked. Beginning with the nineteenth century, as Gert Hekma suggests, sexologists (most notably Freud) began to explain the special fit between same-sex desire and social role with the putative category of biological bisexuality.¹³¹ Sexologists such as Money and

Ehrhardt continue this conceptual line, suggesting, for instance, that New Guinea men must be bisexual since the “overlap between homosexual and heterosexual phases of life” through “exclusive or obligatory homosexuality is lacking.”¹³² Recently, Money also used the language of (an implicitly biological) bisexuality to describe the Sambia of New Guinea and the concept of the “Western transsexual” to compare with the hijras of India.¹³³ Such accounts are limited, relying on imported cultural schemas that bend and distort same- and opposite-sex practices in such traditions or see in such practices the essential biological desires of supposedly identical Western forms.¹³⁴ Such a textual bisexuality is at its core dogmatically biological and rests on an assumptive sexual dimorphism. Seldom have writers in the sexological tradition questioned whether, by comparison, the sexual dimorphism or the homosexual/heterosexual duality of Western culture applied to non-Western traditions.¹³⁵ Scholarly reviews over the past decade have generally agreed that, while these traditions share certain elements, they cannot in such simple ways be equated.

Neither is the endurable “androgyny” – the “confusion or conflation of the concepts of and terminology for hermaphroditism and homosexuality” so ancient, as Boswell has well remarked – the core of a universal third sex or gender.¹³⁶ Although gender transformation and symbolic inversion are at the heart of Western camp and thematic variations on men dressing as women from the onset of the early modern period to the present, cross-dressing has taken on new meanings from its earlier gendered basis.¹³⁷ Surely cross-dressing in its myriad forms is not simply another variant of homosexuality or third genders, although many scholars have viewed it this way; anthropologists after World War II, for instance, followed the authoritative lead of Clelland Ford and Frank Beach that “institutionalized homosexuality” is cross-dressing or transvestism; that is, gender-inverted homosexuality equated with a third gender.¹³⁸ It is now widely agreed that cross-gendered practices are but one form of same-sex conduct across time and space, with many variations on the theme.¹³⁹ Attraction to the same sex in many social traditions is a basis for inclusion into a category of persons who may be treated as special, marginal

or deviant, as criminals or sinners, as the case may be; but these may or may not be classified as a third category of sex or gender.

The point is that there is no absolute link between sexual orientation and a third sex or gender. But if the characteristics of a third sex or gender are not dependent on a sexual orientation for the same sex, how are we to anchor anthropological and historical models?

Sex and Gender Dichotomies

How many sexes and genders have there been? By addressing this question, the essays below are of use in thinking beyond social constructionism and essentialism, dichotomies of dimorphism that remain widely polarized in scholarly discourse.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, in view of this critique of Darwinian thought and biomedical sexology, it remains to be seen whether we must continue the conventionalized distinctions between sex as biology (sexual nature) and gender as culture (gendered society) from the past. It seems clear that, in their cultural ideals, many societies continue to reproduce dimorphic systems. However, these must not be confused with analytic concepts, and we need not accept such a dualistic system at all, for it perpetuates the false past dichotomies of nature and culture. Typically, cognitive psychological jargon regards sex as biological and “clearer,” and gender as cultural and “fuzzier.”¹⁴¹ But cognitive boundaries are not all that matter in establishing the existence of enduring third-sex and third-gender systems, particularly in non-Western and premodern societies.¹⁴² The question raises the issue of whether sex and gender are different entities or things, how we might identify them if so and how we might find them situated in bodies or cultural persons or social relations in the world.

To question the number of sexes and genders is to reconsider the perceptions and interpretations of the history of Western sexuality, with the relevant period of time currently still under dispute.¹⁴³ It is widely agreed that Western nations, especially social elites and later the nineteenth-century bourgeois class, based their understanding of sex and gender on the existence of only two biological (and especially morphological) entities that we cat-

egorize as natural sexes: male and female. Sexology, as we have seen, split apart sex as biology and gender as culture in the last century, with the “homosexual” or “Uranian” or “intermediate” sex a symbolic go-between.¹⁴⁴

Heuristically, Western social theorists and sexologists continue to divide their observations of human action into two distinct categories, one signified by anatomical sexual characteristics, usually the genitals, and the other signified by cultural, psychic or behavioral characteristics, usually instantiated in social relations. Traditionally, the former have been represented as sex factors, while the latter have been encoded as gender factors. Using these signs, the evidence reviewed here and presented in subsequent essays suggests that creating and maintaining a *third-gender* category is difficult, tenuous and problematic; yet clear examples of it are found in other times and places. Conversely, the creation of a *third-sex* category is more problematic and rarer; fewer cases have been identified in cultures and individual life-course histories.

The Darwinian revolution, as we noted, institutionalized a reproductive paradigm of sex and gender, body and mind, that – although contested by puzzling cases on the margins of normative science – remains at the center of biological and social inquiry. Nor has the paradigm of reproductive dimorphism dissipated through its failure to explain such phenomena as the forms of hermaphroditism or the gender-transforming roles of the berdache and, more recently, the Western transsexual. These “cultural objects” – previously marginalized by science – have increasingly come to the fore and pushed “normal science” into a more critical mode.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, since the 1960s – the second sexual revolution in the United States – a large measure of sex and gender research has tried to criticize and reinvent the categories of investigation, particularly by feminist and gay scholars on the periphery of such fields.¹⁴⁶

For more than fifty years a canonical view proposed that culture and nature were distinct categories of structural analysis: in symbolic structures, sex was to nature and to “female,” as culture was to gender and to “male.”¹⁴⁷ Sex and gender as ultimate causes were typically dualized as nature and nurture and traced

to correlates with social practices.¹⁴⁸ Later, critiques of such dualisms – implicitly critiques of sexual dimorphism – led to feminist gender analyses, such as the critique of Lévi-Strauss's theory of kinship.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, to circumvent the sex-equals-biology, gender-equals-society dichotomy, anthropologist Gayle Rubin once suggested combining the two: "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."¹⁵⁰ Building on these earlier critiques, scholars such as Donna Haraway argue that the models are themselves "cultural constructions," amalgams of Western science and folk belief.¹⁵¹

The "reality status" of the sex/gender dichotomy can never be one of a pure physical reality, for its meanings invoke particular social realities too. As anthropologists have been insisting for some time, these entities are symbolic as well as material, thus requiring interpretation according to the systems of meaning in which they emerge and are expressed. (Why do so many of these essentialist vs. constructionist discussions continue to be centered around the issue of homosexuality? The answer lies, in part, with the long challenge to reproductive ideology posed by same-sex desire.)¹⁵² This point helps us to elucidate the chronic confusion between medical and social science models and the folk theories of local traditions in many nations. As Stephen Murray (following Ernst Mayr) has reminded us, the history of Western biological theory is replete with examples of essentialism versus constructionism in the understanding and classification of nature.¹⁵³ Thus, Murray writes of the "recurring clash between essentialism (doctrines that maintain there are a limited, readily conceivable number of species characterized by essential, distinct features) and nominalism (doctrines positing an inter-breeding population of individual organisms grouped more or less arbitrarily by species names)."¹⁵⁴ The essentialist assumes that reality refers to the timeless condition of the body, its phylogeny and ontogeny, whereas the constructionist interprets reality as situated in social roles and lives, with knowledge and desire creating existence not in the abstract but in particular social surroundings.

Neither anthropology nor history has succeeded very well in displacing or replacing these ideas of sexual dimorphism in human culture and development, despite the long-term existence of these critiques. In large measure this is because the perspective of cultural or historical variations on a two-sex model is relatively recent and radically new, and these variations are only beginning to shape the central conceptual tendencies in these fields. For example, scholars sometimes assume that anthropologists question the epistemology of all analytical categories, at least in the sense of contextualizing them (through cross-cultural study), if not in fact deconstructing them in line with postmodern critiques of colonial and world-system factors of socioeconomic change.¹⁵⁵ However, such a critical perspective on sexual categories and practices is new and partial in the field.¹⁵⁶ In recent decades, a division of labor has resulted in the promotion of "social construction" accounts of gender in anthropology and history and the biological components of sexuality in sexology. As this paradigm breaks up, studies from all sides are challenging the assumptive structure of sexual dimorphism and the hegemony of the scientific paradigm.¹⁵⁷

The efforts of anthropologists and historians to refigure this dichotomy have been largely unsuccessful, including Rubin's (1975) essay, because of the powerful hegemony of the reproductive-dimorphism paradigm in the biomedical sciences.¹⁵⁸ However, a different perspective on the possibility of a third sex versus a third gender has emerged from the reinterpretation of sex and gender. Kessler and McKenna, for instance, in a widely cited text from the period, suggested that the categories of male and female – based on anatomical criteria – are neither universal nor valid concepts for a gendered classification system.¹⁵⁹ Instead of morphology, they suggest that, for some cultures, gender role becomes the central constituent of gender. Thus, they suggest that the berdache is "a third gender category, separate from male and female."¹⁶⁰ Not only do "they contend that a dual gender classification system is merely a cultural construction," as Bolin has noted, but they leave aside the question of whether sexual desire or practice enters in.¹⁶¹ This is significant because, in the arena

of sexuality, social pressures and power relations are never far from the expression of third-sex and third-gender roles.

Competing Cultural Systems

Anthropologists have long known that two distinct, even competing, cultural ideas may simultaneously coexist to explain how society works in everyday practice. For instance, as Edmund Leach demonstrated in his famous study of the political systems of Highland Burma, two ideologies of social relations and power may coexist as competing models or idioms for the organization of social interests: the one predominant, the other subordinate, for a time; but they may oscillate and reverse historically, changing social action "on the ground."¹⁶² Again, we know that Muslim male religious ideals of male and female roles sometimes diverge from their folk understandings, especially in domestic life.¹⁶³ In each culture, local conceptions of "human nature" are woven in and around stories about gendered social relations and desires that get expressed in practice, although open contradictions between cultural ideals and social practice sometimes prevail.¹⁶⁴

Systems of ideas about reproduction may come directly from folk or popular culture, although they are clearly influenced in the modern period by sexological science and medical notions of sex, reproduction, gender and the psychology of development.¹⁶⁵ Between science and popular culture or folk ideas, we have the basis for understanding a new moral discourse of classification relevant to the third sex and gender.¹⁶⁶ Such issues in relation to philosophy have been well studied in classical Attic culture following Socrates, wherein the rising social formation resulted in newly engendered roles and the eventual privatization of the psyche as individual self.¹⁶⁷ In short, the emergence of a historical category of the gendered self was gradually attached to sex roles, leading to more explicit sexual-dimorphic ideas crystallized in the scientific and technological (in Foucault's sense) discourse of ancient Greece.

But how do such ideas and practices influence the creation and reproduction of alternate sex and gender practices? Clearly, power is a key factor in deciding which ideas get played out in

which arenas and by which actors. Rubin once suggested that Western institutions continue to oppress and subordinate the Western "subject" to heterosexual forms and women to patriarchal forms.¹⁶⁸ This occurs, she argued, through the exaggeration of sex differences in order to suppress equality between the sexes. "The division of labor by sex can therefore be seen as a 'taboo': a taboo against the sameness of men and women, a taboo dividing the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories, a taboo which exacerbates the biological differences between the sexes and thereby creates gender."¹⁶⁹ Such an analysis links conceptions of sex and gender with the need, in systems of inequality, to maintain through ideas or social relations these same forms of inequality.

Power structures must be seen not only in relation to their ability to coerce and force persons into the social classification of the sexes and genders but also as systems of ideas through which such power is manifested. The role of an elite or its discourse can critically influence the maintenance of a sex and gender system, namely, in its attitude regarding symbolically potent third-sex/gender figures, such as the hijras of India or the *māhū* of Polynesia. Such responses within a hegemonic situation include how cultural ideas of male and female are related to gendered relations and sexual practice and whether there might be two or more cultural idea systems (or mythologies) for reproducing sexual and gendered relations present within the same culture during the same historical period.¹⁷⁰ Historical and social formations create for cultural actors what we might call mainstreams and margins, social arenas which cultural spaces and social places define by who does what with whom and under what normative circumstances their actions are approved or disapproved.¹⁷¹ Their actions and roles thus reflect the structure of power relations through dominant versus subordinate ideas of sexual relations during the historical period.

Certain cultures go to extreme lengths to exaggerate the differences between male and female. For example, among the peoples of New Guinea, such as the Sambia or the Bimin-Kuskusmin, sex and gender differences are prominent in myth and cultural

organization.¹⁷² Reproduction is central to all of these, but what is defined as “reproductive” varies greatly, as, for instance, in the case of Sambia men who inseminate boys to complete their “biological masculinization,” enabling the boys ultimately to become reproductively competent.¹⁷³ Such a view underlines the importance of recognizing the inherently cultural nature of the definition of reproductive processes and the fallacy of opposing real and symbolic forms of procreation.¹⁷⁴

Consider the competing idea systems within the history and sexual culture of urban Brazil.¹⁷⁵ Over several centuries, Richard Parker suggests, the local beliefs of perceived anatomical differences were transformed into culturally defined ontologies of gender, with distilled ideas about appropriate sexual action. The marked sexual dimorphism of this patriarchal system relates the local concept of same-sex desire to “a kind of symbolic equivalent of the biological female.”¹⁷⁶ However, sharply opposed idealized anatomical types produce defined realities of masculine and feminine encoded into a collective system of sexual classification that symbolically constructs social reality. Thus, what is sexually exciting to Brazilians is also forbidden or taboo, so that the violation of the taboo creates a significant subordinate ideology of state and church formations.¹⁷⁷ The classification system facilitates domination through the acceptance of sexual and gender hierarchy, because the public ideology of institutions and discourse is highly dimorphic.

In the accounts collected below these “reproductive” factors of power are expressed in variations on what might be called idea systems of human sexual nature and human sexual culture. In our own Western tradition, such conventionalized cultural definitions of human nature confront us with moral systems of the classification of bodies, persons and acts that go well beyond Darwin’s nineteenth-century sexual dimorphism, as Foucault repeatedly showed in his discussions of the “incorporation of perversions” that inverted the masculine and feminine, making the sodomite into the permanent “species” of the homosexual.¹⁷⁸ They represent a distillation of folk ideas; or, alternatively, ideologies of collective ideas of human nature crystallized into codes which tell

what a human being is and should be and that prescribe behavior in ways that create a full person across the life course.¹⁷⁹ In most traditions these pivot on male and female as fundamental types of human nature. But the fact that they are pivotal does not preclude the existence of alternate sex and gender ideas or social roles.

For example, the Bimin-Kuskusmin speak of hermaphroditic individuals and have a category for them; their autochthonous ancestor is hermaphroditic as well. Yet their sex and gender system is strongly marked for sexual dimorphism, seemingly unable to circumvent the powerful institutions that instill and reproduce male and female differences rather than blend them. (The Indonesian community studied by Cora DuBois is comparable to the Bimin-Kuskusmin in this respect; categories for hermaphrodites are not lumped together or confused with transvestite third-gender roles in these Indonesian societies, such as the *waria* role reported by Dede Oetomo.)¹⁸⁰ Cultural ideas of a third sex or gender are not to be interpreted automatically as manifestations of social reality, nor must they be confused with the schemas and practices of such peoples (a comparative principle reiterated by Mead in this context).¹⁸¹ In short, the mere existence of an idea system that exaggerates sex differences does not preclude the institutionalization of a third sex in such cultures (indeed, among both the Sambia and Bimin-Kuskusmin these coexist).¹⁸²

Power and Sexual “Passing”

Why, Goffman once asked in his influential book *Stigma* (1963) – a study of how social actors managed “spoiled” identities – does someone attempt to pass as “normal,” a categorical Other, unless it is to avoid discredit and the loss of social status?¹⁸³ In the more extreme cases, sociologists have long suggested, the deviant or forbidden third sex or gender leads individuals to avoid being identified; that is, they are forced to adapt the appearances and accoutrements of hegemonic social roles and practices.¹⁸⁴ Alternate or “deviant” third-sex and third-gender roles are thus typically displaced to the illicit, immoral or illegal margins of society.¹⁸⁵ Those who are “passing” seek to hide their sexuality and be defined as normatively male and masculine or female and feminine

(or heterosexual, e.g.; not gay or lesbian), objectifying the very categories (male and female) that stand in opposition to their hidden being and desires.¹⁸⁶ Such matters require an analysis of the embedded concepts that define and express cultural reality and how power manipulates realities and persons, as these impinge on the creation and presentation of an individual's sense of belonging to third-sex/gender categories, either overtly in public or covertly in private discourse and thought.¹⁸⁷

The key to understanding the recombination of ideas about culture and nature here rests in the relationship between social status, power and the secrecy of passing as normatively male and female and heterosexual/homosexual in the Western tradition.¹⁸⁸ However, in American culture, unlike that of India or Native North America, we do not recognize sexual or gendered transformation in categories; change may occur in the person but not in the categories of male and female. The transsexual is thus required to hide and pass under threat of punishment, which is sometimes severe.¹⁸⁹ There is a cultural logic in the emergence of these categories and identities, a structural trend that relies on hierarchy and status differences. When males have more privileged positions, so the logic goes, when their relations derive in part from principles of subordination, then males who opt out of their "biologically based" sex roles lose status and are disparaged. No one would desire a decrease in status, or so goes the rational choice theory; therefore the change and loss of status can only be motivated by biological drives beyond the conscious intentions or free will of the person.¹⁹⁰

Passing is a cultural performance but it is also a power play. With passing we come to a different problem in the creation and maintenance of a third sex or gender: the sense in which secrecy, lying, cheating and other tactics of opportunistic adaptation apply to the situation of the individual who cannot or will not conform to particular sex and gender conventions. The categorical distinctions at the cultural level are blurred or transcended at the level of social interaction, as with the cases of hermaphrodites and transsexuals. As Harold Garfinkel once insisted in his classic study of heterosexual passing among American transsexuals, the power

of conformity in American culture is great enough to create the idea of "cultural genitals":

From the standpoint of an adult member of our society, the perceived environment of "normally sexed persons" is populated by two sexes and only two sexes, "male" and "female." [Thus, it follows that] certain insignia are regarded by normals as essential in their identifying function. . . . The possession of a penis or a vagina as a biological event is to be distinguished from the possession of one or the other or both as a cultural event. . . . [thus suggesting] the differences between biological and cultural penises and vaginas as socially employed evidences of "natural sexuality."¹⁹¹

One of the most powerful case studies of passing ever conducted is Garfinkel's remarkable ethnomethodological investigation of a biologically normal Southern California male changing to the social role of a female. His detailed study of "Agnes," a UCLA transsexual patient who successfully passed as female in every sphere of her life (including living with female roommates in a small apartment for two years), offers many cues for thinking about the social and moral pressures to conform to two-sex systems.¹⁹² "Passing was not her [Agnes's] desire. . . it was necessity," he says. Garfinkel insightfully reveals the meaning of passing by intersexed persons as either male or female in contemporary society. He shows how they are moral ascriptions and recognizes that the status, social legitimacy and freedom of the actors are constantly in peril.¹⁹³

In other times and places as well, avoidance of being forced into a cultural classification of normative sex or gender roles may require circumventing direct challenges to the authority system. Here the cultural actor may exercise the radical option of passing as a normative member of the sex or gender dyads of the hegemonic majority of the historical society in question. Biological females who dressed in men's clothes throughout Europe for centuries and females in the Balkans, especially those who aspire to the warrior role, who successfully pass as the empowered sex/gendered man are exercising such options.¹⁹⁴ They are sur-

prisingly greater in number than we might have once thought.¹⁹⁵

The social possibilities of passing offer status enhancement or decline. Hence, as power and prestige are at stake, societies may go to some lengths to survey and control social transitions between these liminal positions; indeed, the third sex and gender is a state “betwixt and between” par excellence.¹⁹⁶ Similar social and political implications apply to biological males who castrate themselves to become palace eunuchs, the male sodomites of the seventeenth century, mollies of the eighteenth century, “inverts” and “intermediate-sexed” homosexuals of the nineteenth century and other categories in which aspects of the male actor are viewed as immoral, illegal or illicit in the classification of the social order. Conversely, the logic goes, women who opt for third roles and identities are opting “up”: that is, moving socially and symbolically upward in the status hierarchy system. For example, female berdache, like women who take on manly roles, especially the admired position of the Balkan warrior males, are then reared as men and gender-identified as males. They remind us of the *kwolu-aatmwol* among the Sambia of New Guinea.¹⁹⁷ This raises questions regarding the instability of third-sex/gender categories,¹⁹⁸ a matter to which I will return in the conclusion.

Cultural Reality and Ontologies of the Third Sex

To create the meaningful conditions and agency of self-motivating social actors, every culture constructs its own ontology. For a collective ontology to emerge and be transmitted across time, there must be a social condition, eventually a stable social role, that can be inhabited – marking off a clear social status position, rights and duties, with indications for the transmission of corporeal and incorporeal property and status. We have already seen the power exerted to conform to reproductive and dimorphic structures that results in passing behavior. For an individual to express sex and gender being is not in itself always sufficient to sustain the beliefs, accoutrements and social structure of third sexes or genders. Ideally, categories of being acquire greater force the longer they exist historically and are eventually transformed into social roles and practices, as hinted by the cultural ontologies of the berdache,

the hijra, the *māhū*, the Sambia *turnim-man* and other examples in this volume.

The work of culture in these famous traditions is to create ontologies that link the inside and outside of the person as a whole system.¹⁹⁹ By cultural ontologies, I mean local theories of being and the metaphysics of the world; of having a certain kind of body and being in a certain kind of social world, which creates a certain cultural reality; and of being and knowledge combined in the practice of living as a third sex or gender. Local models of ontology are concerned with the nature of being a person and of being in the world with such a nature. Such local theories implicitly ask: What drives, intentions, desires and developmental pathways characterize the nature of a person?²⁰⁰ Are these characteristics found also in other persons or in entities (such as spirits) and the social and physical surroundings? By contrast, the Western folk ontology of sexuality takes as its intentional subject the lone individual, whose sexual nature is borne in the flesh of one sex or the other, but not in both, and who is viewed quite apart from other entities of a social and spiritual sort.

In short, the third sex has, in some places and times, emerged as an ontological entity, that is, a distinctive “subject” with its own moral voice. When people identify with a category, they endow it with a meaning beyond themselves. Thus, to say, “I am berdache,” is to suggest an “I” (subject) in active identification with “berdache” (categorical object); and again that the subject and categorical object are in a stable formation across time.²⁰¹ That is not the case, of course, in a culture that lacks a third-sex category, such as France of the nineteenth century, in which the sorrowful hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin ultimately destroyed himself.²⁰² In the modern period, such persons seek a shifting target, a divergent and eclectic set of people who identify with ambiguous persons but not categories and who also feel the pull of other factors of social classification, such as class.²⁰³ This is why the presence of androgynous figures, of ontological beings and entities, especially gods and spirits, is critical in understanding the emergence of culturally constituted third-sex and third-gender roles.

To take the textbook case of the ancient Greeks as a prominent starting point: it is not what you *are*, they might have said; it is what you *do* that counts in the reckoning of gender and sexuality. Thus, the erotic relations between men and boys were not a challenge to strongly dimorphic gendered roles, with masculine honor and feminine nature distinct, a view that was at once ontological and instrumental in its everyday practice of differentiating nature from desire in their view.²⁰⁴ The Greek system of desires and appetites, their taxonomy of forms of love, was indeed a curious combination of what would, in the later modern period, be referred to as social constructionism (impressionism) and essentialism (realism).²⁰⁵ Whatever the exigencies of one's body, especially the visible anatomy, we can ask: What social role does the person take, or what position do they claim: that of the first sex (male), second sex (female) or third sex (e.g., hermaphrodite)? Certainly the example of Tiresius the soothsayer was widely known, signifying mythological indications of gender transformation throughout the ancient world.²⁰⁶

Clearly, the Greek cultural signifiers of human nature were characteristically gendered as masculine or feminine, but their sex system was open to other signifiers.²⁰⁷ Plato's idea of three sexes as a part of an original human nature was prominent in the *Symposium*, and this no doubt bears to some extent on the concept of *psyche* in Greek and the very different notions of culture and human nature in the Greek tradition, which allowed a greater latitude of exceptions to the later historical gendered self that was to emerge.²⁰⁸ The god Hermaphroditus held a special meaning, often equated historically with what we would today label the folk ideology of homosexuality; and hermaphroditic images are common in Greek art (and before that, in Egyptian statuary).²⁰⁹ Here too we see the ineluctable tendency of the modern period to dimorphize classical culture.²¹⁰ This is why the example of Tiresius, the epitome of a prophet, is telling: according to myth, he was born of one sex, changed form to another, but later in life changed back again, suggesting that the soothsayer should embody both male and female qualities for greater magical power.²¹¹

Thus, the phenomenological force of the idealized form grows

the longer it exists within the traditions of a culture, which is one of the aspects of the third sex and gender hitherto ignored by anthropologists.²¹² Through time and the contextual routines and social habits of growing up, of constructing social relations around a certain identity, presentations of person and self are distilled, habituated and made into a rather enduring system of being of a third sex and/or gender.

Changing Genders and Transforming Sexes

Virtually all known forms of third sex or gender suggest transformation of being and practice: the alteration of qualities or essences of the body and person with time. This may have occurred in the womb, in early childhood or in later life. Of course, examples of alternate sex and gender categories are also known in which being of a different nature, that is, neither male or female nor masculine or feminine, is also known; but what marks the Western conception of these matters is the quality of transformation. Why this seems not at issue is that Western ontology and epistemology suggest that, while much about the individual may change, one's sex and gender (and nowadays their sexual orientation) should remain fixed and unchanging throughout the individual's life course. One indication of this comes in the context of the 1960s and what was at that time a new awareness of transsexualism. In this context, Mead once warned about the preoccupation of Americans with differentiating male from female, of placing too much emphasis on initial sex assignment rather than on subsequent gendered achievements that altered gender-role assignments, suggesting the very basis for mediating forms of sex and gender to emerge in the future. Her worry has been taken to its furthest reaches in the modern technological context, with the use of genetic screening to identify and restrict entrance of male and female athletes in competitions, especially the Olympics.²¹³

What does such change indicate for non-Western ontologies? The Western view since the time of colonial expansion has been strongly influenced by reproductive assumptions about the ultimate and unchangeable nature of gender and sexuality. These attitudes were in turn mapped onto the interpretations of sexual

activity and social roles among colonial peoples, which is evident from the responses to all forms of sodomy (here, “unnatural sexual practice”) among colonized peoples from before the modern period, especially in the New World.²¹⁴

It is fitting that we consider the issues of changing genders by first referring to the congeries of roles known as “berdache” in Native North America.²¹⁵ Here the person did not remove his or her genitals but moved into the other gendered role. Some berdache were of extraordinary influence in their own local communities, as Will Roscoe has shown from a recent biographical study. Among the Zunis, Roscoe notes, the death of a berdache such as We’wha elicited “universal regret and distress.”²¹⁶ But for the Spanish and Anglo-Americans who overran the Southwest, berdache often evoked dismay, disgust, anger or, at the least, ridicule. Berdache were viewed as more than anomalies; they were monsters, freaks of nature, demons, deviants, perverts, sinners, corrupters. They committed the “nefarious vice,” the “abominable sin.” We can now see why, in the colonial period, it is reported that the perfect berdache would pass as a person of the opposite sex in order never to be detected.²¹⁷

Notice the early tendency to identify berdache with biological abnormalities or to wonder whether there was a biological basis for their behavior.²¹⁸ Such a bias is in keeping with Western ontology, which ascribes sex and gender to biology and permits no transformation after birth, except in the recent case of transsexuals, through radical surgery. Berdache, in general, were changing genders, not sexes. The biological bias continues to the present.²¹⁹ In many such traditions, a strong inclination existed to attribute change to biological factors. This is often regarded in a negative light, although with many exceptions, as we will see. In the case of the palace eunuch, many negative qualities were attributed to the eunuch; eunuchs were anomalous, being unable to suckle but also unable to impregnate. Their association with the female world, with harems and slaves, seems to have lent them certain negative connotations, as Ringrose suggests.

The berdache was of course not singular but of many tribal forms, with different beliefs and social practices, as Roscoe shows.

The cultural ontology was legitimized by social practices, such as an initiation, folklore, a variety of social attitudes, generally approving sexual attitudes and higher-status positions for women and berdache. We will use the Mohave case as representative of selected issues here, although it is distinctive, and Roscoe’s essay below illustrates more general trends.²²⁰

Several cultural and ontological features qualify the candidacy of Mohave berdache to a third-gender role.²²¹ First, Mohave recognized a distinctive ontology of the berdache, expressed in heartfelt desires, task preferences and cultural transformation, both at the level of the genitals and of personal pronouns. Second, they legitimized the role by spiritual power, an attribute lacking in our Western conception of these variations of sex and gender. Third, Mohave did not stigmatize the condition: they did not reduce the whole person to the sex act; the condition of the berdache was not illegal or immoral, only atypical; and in general social privileges were not withheld from the berdache. Nor did Mohave stigmatize the partners or lovers of the berdache, a point to which Greenberg has drawn special attention in viewing the general social support and acceptance of the third sex and gender among Native Americans.²²² Finally, they recognized that the sexual excitement of the berdache depended on being in a sexual and social formation with someone of the same biological sex but of the opposite gender. Their excitement (for “male” berdache, of being penetrated anally by their partners and having an orgasm in this way) suggests a significant basis for the personal ontology and commitment to the role throughout the life of the individual.

Furthermore, anthropological authorities tended to be reductionistic in reducing the berdache as a category to “abnormal” aspects of homosexuality or to gender inversion. Both Benedict’s and A.L. Kroeber’s functional theories suggested the biological abnormality of the berdache, who was unable to fulfill the warrior ideals of Native American cultures.²²³ When bravery in warfare is expected, some will not by temperament be able to produce it, they reckoned: hence, the berdache. Abnormal individuals need a social niche, just like everyone else in a culture, Kroeber argued. The berdache was no different, just a special case of fit-

ting a constitutional type to a cultural type. Kroeber expected that in any population there would be a certain number of abnormal individuals who could not fit the norm, and customs would evolve to accommodate the personal needs of the deviant nature to culture. George Devereux added the intellectual baggage of the Freudian "invert," which had its own representation of the homosexual as constitutional invert.²²⁴ Mead also epitomized this position by suggesting that homosexuality and transvestism of the berdache type were inevitable mismatches between individual temperaments and the social requirements of particular cultures.²²⁵ Bolin finds in general that the berdache category has been variously referred to as cross-cultural homosexuality, transvestism and transsexualism, with major disagreements on whether the focus of study was "sexual object choice, dress, gender role, or even identity."²²⁶

The spiritual aspects of the berdache are significant in interpreting the third sex and gender. In the case of the Mohave, for instance, the institution was sanctified by two sorts of symbols: a widespread origin myth; and dream theory, suggesting that Mohave women's dreams would influence the fetus in the womb.²²⁷ Devereux shows connections between the dream theory and uterine fantasies of the mother of the berdache; but he goes further to regard all Mohave shamans as "crazy" and as "inverts," inversion as a biological defect and homosexuality in all tribes as neurotic.²²⁸ Nor is this view entirely defunct. We find in Gisela Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg the functional notion that, where strong sexual dimorphism occurs, without the possibility of individual exceptions, "transvestism offers an institutionalized way of compensating for lack of success in a male role by assuming a female social role."²²⁹

Yet other authors have gone to the extreme of treating the berdache's capacity to change genders as a special case by virtue of its association with the role of the shaman or of magical power in general in these cultures. We know, of course, that not all shamans are berdache, any more than all berdache are shamans. Yet Mircea Eliade makes this generalization: "The majority of shamans are inverts and sometimes even take husbands; but even when they are sexually normal their spirit guides oblige them to

dress as women."²³⁰ Still, in its strongest form, as in the writings of Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, we find a general equation in which homosexuality in shamanism is viewed as the outcome and ultimate form, if not in fact the cause, of transvestism in all simple societies.²³¹ Obviously there are myriad examples of shamans who are not gender transformed.²³² There are also societies in which the prescription to change genders is a requirement of the role.²³³

One of the most curious cases is that of the Inuit Eskimo of Canada, in which is posited a complete theory of the ontology of the third sex, wherein the individual becomes a shaman as a fetus in the mother.²³⁴ Thus, the "third-sex" Inuit shaman is perceived as changing genders by reincarnating from the opposite sex or having a spiritual past life that suggests gender transformation as an intermediate form of human being.

As Devereux interpreted it, the berdache provides a fine example of how custom defined desire: by virtue of being a berdache the social actor would want to act as the opposite sex, the biologically male berdache acting as female, for example, cutting himself to bleed as though he menstruated and simulating pregnancy by being bloated from constipation. But why would the person take the role on in the first place?²³⁵ Devereux believed the reason had to do with biology, an innatism of inversion, and he used the ideal of nineteenth-century Western homosexuality through which to represent it. This was an unfortunate categorization; it violated more than it illuminated of the berdache role. Walter Williams has suggested that three Western norms were most violated by "male" berdache roles: gender reversal, passivity (male berdache in passive sexual relations with other males) and the subversion of nature by the "unnatural practices."²³⁶

But what about the cases of changing sex? Here, more radical ideas come into play, involving notions of transforming the body, its organs, fluids and reproductive capacities. The cases to consider in this book are those of the New Guinea hermaphrodites, the hijras of India and American transsexuals.

The 5-alpha reductase hermaphrodite is a rare species of biologically intersexed individuals that results in delayed anatomical maleness, with absent or tiny male genitals sometimes mistaken

for female ones.²³⁷ In the Dominican Republic, the study of such persons was conducted in the absence of a proper understanding of local ontological categories, especially the *guevedoche* (“penis at twelve”), which permits a kind of delayed third-sex or third-gender nature to emerge around the time of puberty.²³⁸ Such persons have a folk classification that permits them the flexibility to change dress and tasks, names and decorative motif, with alterations in sexual partners, albeit those of the “appropriate” sex object at that stage of their lives. My analysis rejects the biological reductionism of the biomedical interpretation of this case.²³⁹ Among the New Guinea Sambia, several criteria constitute the categorical *kwolu-aatmwol* (“female thing changing into male”). These traits include, for instance, anatomical ambiguity at birth; assignment of the infant to neither the male nor female categories but rather to the *kwolu-aatmwol* category; the existence of a lexeme and noun of the same name; a cluster of social attitudes about personal development and change; the existence of moral and social practices that constitute a different means of handling social life after puberty; and the autochthonous myth of parthenogenesis in the ancestors, whose first anatomical condition was hermaphroditic.

These criteria define a symbolic niche and a social pathway of development into later adult life distinctly different from the cultural life plan set out by a model based on male/female duality. Note again how the *kwolu-aatmwol* exists in a culture of extraordinary gender differentiation, with sexual dimorphism marked in humans and in nature, according to the Sambia worldview.²⁴⁰ That such a categorical alternative exists at all is a true accomplishment, a partial victory of nature over culture – not as complete as the American transsexual who uses the wonders of medical technology to do so, but still rather impressive – such that we might be inclined to see it as a triumph of the third sex. And yet, in the Sambia scheme of things, no classificatory distinction is tenable that separates sexual nature from sexual culture when it comes to these persons. “Thirdness” in nature exacts its social cost; like the hijras, this form of thirdness is not admired, and any evidence that persons would cling to the categorical position

must cause us to take notice. The Sambia evidence suggests that socialization into the role of a mistaken female produces such a strong learning effect that these cultural females would happily live as biological females their whole lives and never transform into the male sex, were it possible to do so. In this sense, cultural socialization of sex and gender triumphs over anatomical nature.

Certain kinds of characteristics serve to differentiate sex and gender categories in other cultures, and these are not confined to those of Western distinctions in any simple sense. For example, the forms of *bayot* and *lakin-on* reveal alternate-sex and alternate-gender persons from Cebuan society in the Philippines.²⁴¹ These two categories are synonymous for many things in local language, including homosexuality, transvestism, hermaphroditism and so on. Yet the ethnographer tells us that the

Cebuan vocabulary... distinguishes between degrees of “*bayotness*.” A slightly effeminate man is *dalopap* or *binabaye*... When these terms are used in reference to a chicken, they describe a rooster with henlike plumage... [whereas] *bayot-babyot* are more effeminate males, who do not cross-dress and who usually are not considered active sexual inverts. [But] male transvestites, who normally regard members of their sex as erotic objects, are “real” or “true” *bayot*... Identification of a person as a *bayot* or *lakin-on*... is based on both physical fetuses and behavioral characteristics. Cross-dressing is not essential for such classification.²⁴²

Indeed, we learn that it is dangerous to cross-dress “in public”; cross-dressing occurs only in private or in the anonymous circumstances of large cities for migrants.²⁴³

Here again, power and passing enter the picture; but the point is that significant local traits distinguish the development of alternate-sex and alternate-gender relations in such a small society. Compare this to the account of the Indonesian “third-sex” role of *waria*, as reported by Oetomo, or the *māhū* of Tahiti, known for centuries, analyzed by Levy and here reported anew by Niko Besnier, which provides important comparisons to the Cebuan and *waria* traditions.²⁴⁴

The hijras of India are another case of changing sexes, or, to be more precise, of being ritually invested into a third sex. In India sex/gender-role pressures are sufficiently great as to have generated variations of a third kind. The best-known form is that of the hijras, hermaphroditic or castrated males, who assume a ritual caste role that we may interpret as a third sex and gender. However, another lesser-known alternate category – in this case a third gender, not a third sex – is opted for by certain women. This occurs in the case of the unmarried celibate female who visibly dresses and acts as a man in many contexts in the Kangra fringe area of the Himalayas.²⁴⁵ Although the hijra is constituted on anatomical grounds and the Indian women who dress as men are rare and created from gender-role distinctions only, the two types are significant variations on male/female dimorphism in one of the world's oldest and largest civilizations.

The hijras seek the protection and blessings of the Mother Goddess and in turn have the ritual power to bless and curse. As Serena Nanda notes, cutting off the penis defines the “ideal marker” of the hijra's role. Hijras can bless children, and curse adults, to earn a living; their powers exercise symbolic control over life and death. They legitimately claim as their own caste all children who are anatomically hermaphroditic or have a strong desire to become a hijra; that is, children who are neither male nor female and who may, as adults, be perceived either as hijra or, when apart from the caste, “pass” as biologically and socially normative females. The existence of a lower caste embodied by hijras completes the social reproduction of these persons in the collective of the social body as well. In fact, the hijra is not an entirely esteemed social category; it is perceived as somewhat discredited, as associated with fallen women, prostitutes, marginals and ritually dangerous underclasses that threaten the upper castes, from whom, incidentally, the hijras seem not to be drawn. Both sex and gender criteria help culturally to define the hijra, and we can identify the category as rather markedly “third” in nature and culture. In her extant analysis of the hijra, Nanda tends to see the dilemma and construct an account of the cultural reality of hijra; she compares the hijras with transsexuals.²⁴⁶

This analytic move, as she herself has noted and as she explores in new ways in this volume, is a problematic classification in two respects: there is no Western category of thirdness in general, and transsexuals experience an existential crisis in the definition of what Garfinkel has called their “cultural genitals.”

The American transsexual displays very different ideas and social relations compared with the Indian hijras, a cultural instance that seems more fully inscribed as both a third sex and a third gender. American culture is heavily dimorphic in its sex and gender roles and institutions.²⁴⁷ Transsexuals are driven – in the nineteenth-century biological sense of the term – to the radical surgical step of altering their morphology through medical technology to conform to their ontology. Notice that the hijra, too, undergoes castration, healing and bodily and spiritual rebirth to be more like the opposite sex, but in the Indian context, a cultural reality shared in public life extends beyond the doctor's office. Thus, a mismatch between transsexuals' anatomical nature and their inner, desired being moves them, much like the berdache, to sexual bonding with the opposite sex, but opposition is here based not on the morphology but on private reality that lacks a cultural seal of approval.

Notice that, as we move closer in historical time, we find increasing numbers of historical examples of cross-dressing and of women who dress in men's clothes. Perhaps this is an artifact of a better historical record. However, these are aspects of the transition not only to modernism but possibly also to the advent of increasing sex and gender hierarchies through the gender reversals and transvestism of the early homosexual role and of the transsexual in modern times. As noted by René Grémaux, the historical formation of women who dressed in men's clothes bears a relationship to gender passing for status enhancement.²⁴⁸ In the twentieth century, one of the more remarkable examples of this genre was Jack Bee Garland (1869–1936), an American female who lived as a man. Jack claimed to enjoy the company of men more than that of women; and the biographer sees in this the evidence for Jack's being a female-to-male transsexual, although one wonders about the symbolic power and enticements of being and living

as a man in such a strongly dimorphic and patriarchal society at the time.²⁴⁹ Clearly, this leads to issues of seeing the transsexual not only as someone who senses the self to be in the wrong body and who desires to pass as the opposite sex, but of a problematical ontology of the self that has no matching social and historical category and role in which to anchor itself.²⁵⁰

Desire and the Transition to Modernism

The missing key to much study of third sexes and genders is the understanding of the desires and attractions of the individual and the role in which these influence the establishment of a social status as a third sex or the effort to pass as normative and live secretly as such. Especially in those instances of recruitment or advancement to a new position, of the Mohave child becoming a berdache or a young Indian male electing to have himself castrated, we are woefully ignorant of the reasons the individual desired such a transformation. How much of it is the product of ontology, of a sense of being that identifies with the category; and how much comes from social and sexual practices that direct individuals from the position of normative sex and gender roles and hierarchies? From anthropology and history our knowledge of these matters is limited, although the essays in this book are a notable advance.

By focusing on the concept of desire we face the challenge of linking these cross-cultural forms to the transition to modernism in our own Western tradition since the Renaissance. If my intuition is correct, this is exactly the missing element in understanding the creation and maintenance of the third sex and gender across time and space. What role do choice, free will and voluntarism play in discriminating individual and group social practices with respect to the third sex? Why, that is, does a ten-year-old Mohave select to undergo the ceremony to become a berdache, which his parents must arrange although not necessarily encourage?²⁵¹ Whatever the answers to such questions, the transition to modernism identifies the emergence of individual and private desire with the creation of third-sex and third-gender categories in culture and history.

To take a paradigmatic example from anthropology and social history, the emergence of same-sex desire and the creation of new third-sex and third-gender categories and roles are proving to be an area of immense interdisciplinary overlap in the study of the variety of "homosexualities." Where homosexuality was thought to occur in tribal societies, in the sense of same-sex desire coupled with gender transformation of social role and dress, it has been seen as the manifestation of something basic, primitive, biological: a certain kind of essential nature forcing its way out of the body.²⁵² We now see how naive such a view was.²⁵³ It is well known from the research of Trumbach that a series of emergent sex and gender forms of social role and desire were prominent by the eighteenth century in England.²⁵⁴ Later, as Hekma shows, sexologists who inherited these distinctions expressed a worldview that compressed all sex and gender variation into a two-sex-system equation of "perverse implantations," to use Foucault's term. And so often these linked biological forms to gender change as located in individual minds or bodies rather than examine any aspect of the historical or social conditions of their lives.

When might one legitimately see sexual desire or practice as a signifier of a third sex, as neither a male/female nor masculine/feminine signification? Some, such as Foucault, have wondered whether desire for the same sex creates these bases in society and psyche for the third sex (i.e., in his famous discussion of the nineteenth-century closet homosexual's "compulsion" to confess and the desires that emanate from this). As we are learning from the earliest reaches of the modern period, same-sex desires seem fundamental to the nature of some sodomites during the golden age in Holland and later to the mollies in England. While these developments were important in the formation of social classifications and hierarchy in the modern period, they also have profound implications for the emergence of moral ontological categories of sex and gender.

The moral ideology of dimorphic reproduction and its dualism of heterosexual and homosexual has changed greatly over historical time. Nearly three centuries ago same-sex desire was punished by death in many Western countries. For example, in Holland

between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the “sodomite” was tried and condemned to death, initially in secret and then in public execution, as Theo van der Meer demonstrates. Many people were executed during this 150-year period. The evidence from love letters and confessions suggests that some of these sodomites had a clear sense of desiring the same sex. Why were the early executions secret? Because sodomy was loathsome, such a crime against God and nature that it should not be discussed in public, a truly silent discourse.²⁵⁵ The gender hierarchy of the time included the manifestations of patrician power of men over women and then over the “whore.” As the sodomite network of the seventeenth century came into existence, this sex and gender system began to change, with the introduction of a new fourth category, the “he-whore,” as a third-sex/gender role. By 1811 the worst abuses were over, and eventually the Netherlands went on to become not only the most enlightened of countries, but with increasing secularization, the most progressive in the area of same-sex rights. By contrast, in Germany this change did not occur; and with the fall of the Weimer Republic, the Nazis enforced a naive “naturalist” ideology of reproduction that made men superior to women, abortion a crime against the state and homosexuality a moral drain and threat to the reproductive virility of the fatherland.²⁵⁶ These moralisms propped up a totalitarian order that required procreation to sustain its expanding engine.

In addition to looking at the issues of a third sex and gender from the perspective of a reproductive ideology or “technology,” we might consider how desire and pleasure influence the emergence of the third sex or gender. Social history also teaches that the construction of the sexual as a morally based normative category of being and action was tantamount to the invention of sexual or gendered “normality” – especially through nineteenth-century medicine. Historically, as Foucault has detailed, the invention of normality as a social category of the nineteenth century had the greatest of consequences for emerging forms.²⁵⁷ It led to a new sexual/cultural ontology, to the production of private desires and their hidden expression in power relations.

The construction of the homosexual in the modern period

becomes an important clue to understanding the emergence of sexual and gender dimorphism in this period. As sexology creates a zoological classification of sexual types, including the “intermediate sex” or “psychic hermaphrodite” prominent in the works of such figures as Ulrichs, Ellis, Hirschfeld, Carpenter and Freud, we see the beginning of a new form of evolutionary thinking. Krafft-Ebing incorporated many of Ulrichs’s ideas into his sexological works. It was to Ulrichs perhaps that the notion of the intermediate sex as a “female soul enclosed in a male body” (*anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*) – or at least its popular form – must be credited. It was believed by some medical practitioners and popular authorities that one could identify the male homosexual immediately by physical examination; he would have a large or small penis, a lopsided mouth or another anatomical mark that signified his status as a “monster” of nature, an intermediate sex.²⁵⁸ The “victims” of masturbation as a “disease” were similarly classified. Ulrichs believed that same-sex desires exist in everyone; but in the third or intermediate sex, the Uranian, these take a more intense dualistic form. From a letter of December 23, 1862, he states: “Sexual dualism, which is universally present in embryonic form in every human individual, simply reaches a higher degree of expression in hermaphrodites and Uranians than in the ordinary man and woman. With Uranians, their level of expression merely takes a different form than with hermaphrodites.”²⁵⁹

The nineteenth century is an odd mixture of sexual libertarianism and excessive social classification and conformity, as historians such as Paul Robinson and Jeffrey Weeks have noted.²⁶⁰ On the one hand, we might note how theories of heritable versus acquired theories of sexual inversion, especially those forms of same-sex desire, were increasingly contested and politicized. These were considered part of the intermediate third sex. Again, Ellis argued for biologically heritable conditions, while Krafft-Ebing suggested that acquired inversion, such as from the practice of “excessive masturbation,” could lead to sexual inversion.²⁶¹ On the other hand, this was the age of Oscar Wilde and sexual progressivism; “boy worship” was “conspicuous at Oxford”; John Addington Symonds advocated the ethics of the homo-

erotic Greeks while himself serving as anonymous informant in Ellis's 1894 case study of homosexuality; and the British socialist activist Carpenter pleaded (in 1907) for the rights of the "intermediate sex."²⁶² Perhaps this cultural emphasis on both sexual libertarianism and social-conforming classification is to be explained as the product of a society itself divided over the role of gender and sexuality in the modernizing family and state. Whatever the case, these controversies have continued the preconceptions of the past, such as in the nature-versus-nurture arguments regarding sexual orientation.²⁶³

Hence, by the late nineteenth century, the third sex and gender were increasingly regarded as the product of sexual dimorphism and a definite degradation of reproductive evolution. For instance, while Hirschfeld advocated an innate conception of homosexuality as a third sex, the prominent intellectual savant of the era, Iwan Bloch, admired by Freud, held another view. Both Freud and Bloch shared the idea that bisexuality was in the state of nature and a regressive feature of mammals and humans. As Wolff writes in her biography of Hirschfeld: "Bloch shared Freud's view that heterosexuality was the truer aim of human sexuality. He wrote: 'Only the differences between man and woman represent the perfect state of sexual evolution. The "third sex" is a regressive phenomenon.'"²⁶⁴

As many nineteenth-century writers, such as Ulrichs, Hirschfeld and Freud, argued, there were obviously individuals inclined to actions that suggested they were neither purely male nor masculine. Freud's biologically based idea of a "psychic hermaphrodite" perhaps bears as much of the imprint of Aristotelian sexual-difference exaggeration as it does the late Victorian obsession with the definition of what was natural and unnatural in the highly individualistic bourgeois ethic of turn-of-the-century capitalism that then dominated.²⁶⁵ We find encoded in the Freudian view in particular a consistent and strongly marked differentiation of classification on the basis of activity and passivity.²⁶⁶ Changes in the structure of society and the cultural field of sexuality were to bring about increasingly rigid forms of social classifications of functions, drives, desires, sexual objects and sexual relationships.

Here, we should cite Foucault's by-now-famous comment on this change: "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."²⁶⁷

Third-sex/third-gender desires are more than matters of erotic arousal and more than the commitment to the social functions of gendered roles or sexual hierarchies, although they may include these matters. Desire represents a mode of being, a way of linking personal reality to cultural ontology; it represents the creation of an ontological space, situated halfway between the private and the public, between the individual and the secret side of the social person – especially one who inhabits a capitalist society with its marked ideology of individualism; and it represents a publicly defined cultural standard or institutional norm, with its symbolic expressions time honored as tradition and presented to the person and self as immutable cultural reality.²⁶⁸ With desires writ large we are dealing, then, with the more inclusive desire to be and become a third-sex and third-gendered person. It is toward this end that a new history and anthropology is required to uncover those hidden forms from other times and places that elucidate larger meanings of being and becoming an alternate-sex and alternate-gendered being.

Endings and Beginnings

One of the critical points of this review has been to show that, with the emergence of modernism, the cultural elaboration of and attention to desire as new subject/object relationship and individual desires as a content of being and action became critical to understanding the emergence of a third sex and gender. This suggests that new elements of individualism, of oscillations of conformity to and rebellion against sex and gender hierarchies, increasingly entered into the discourse of interpreting what is normative and aberrant in transcending sexual dimorphism as we come closer in historical time to the present. Passing must also be underscored as a critical, emergent concept; it implicates nor-

mal and abnormal identity and the strategies of power avoidance in the effort to live and survive as a third-sex and third-gendered being. This too may be a product of the modern period and of modernist culture in general.

I have been critical above of biologically oriented sexology and sex and gender research that slights historical and cultural factors or reduces them to the fabled pigeonhole of a blackbox. As I have made repeatedly clear, however, these problems of folk categories and scientific essentialism of sexual dimorphism are roadblocks in anthropology and history as well, in part because of the overemphasis on gender and the underdevelopment of sexuality as a subject in anthropology.²⁶⁹ But these fields, biology included, are changing. Recent biological thinking is more flexible on the question of sexual dimorphism and the possibility of a third sex "in nature." Thus we find the so-called hard-wired science investigators, those who watch birds and salamanders, and their collaborators who have made certain "hermaphroditic" fishes and "bisexual" frogs their specialities, suggesting phylogenetic plasticity instead of sexual dimorphism or heterosexual/homosexual dualism in species.²⁷⁰

All categorization involves treating dissimilar things as similar, to repeat Nietzsche's words, and such treatment is endemic in the areas of sex and gender. We are reminded of Susanne Langer's advice regarding the biological world: "The difficulty of drawing a sharp line between animate and inanimate things reflects a principle which runs through the whole domain of biology; namely, that all categories tend to have imperfect boundaries. Not only do genera or species merge into each other, but classifications made by one criterion do not cover the cases grouped together by another, so that almost all general attributions have exceptions, some of which are really mystifying."²⁷¹ A critical perspective that results from this review is that Darwin probably exaggerated the influence of sexual dimorphism in evolution. Certainly many who followed him, including sexologists, have done so; and while those of us in cultural and historical theory cannot do without these significant factors of sex and gender formation, we must be skeptical of their application to social life.

With the proposition of third sexes and genders we are dealing also with problems of duality, in Durkheim's sense, and with the problem of thirdness, as denoted by such scholars as Simmel and Mauss. But the problem is not merely one of irregular boundaries and scientific ineptitude in handling nature, as Langer implies: there is also the social and political threat of the marginal, the rebel – the person who is beyond the margins; and the problem of passing is essential to an interpretation of deviance and adaptation here. When someone is discredited, a degree of hiding is always required; and the fact that passing occurs in many instances of third sex and gender suggests that power commonly sanctions reproductive ideas and dimorphic roles.²⁷²

Such "problems" posed by the third sex and gender for an epistemology of sexual dimorphism and reproductive ideologies will not go away. In social and historical traditions of multiple-sex and multiple-gendered beings we are dealing with biological, cultural and moral classification systems of humanity. The range of cases reviewed here suggests only a small number of those available in the extant literature, and these suggest a critical need to rethink the distinction between sex and gender and between sexual nature and gendered culture. Variations in sex and gender, including the formation of third-sex and third-gender categories, roles and ontological identities are not universal; they vary across time and space: And yet it is clear that these patterns are more pervasive and significant in some cultures than in others. Why is this?

One of the findings of my own comparative work on culture, sexuality and historical change has been to demonstrate that the intentional actor in search of a new identity requires a separate social space; it is within this liminal space that culture is created and transformed.²⁷³ Secrecy is a special case of this sort.²⁷⁴ It thus follows that, for the liminal being of the third-sex or third-gendered person, categories create the possibilities of social relations; but passing as normative may be required unless the social spaces and cultural places for thirdness are structured across the course of life. Only a few societies around the world have provided this, such as the hijras of India; and these offer prime examples of the

institutionalization of third sex and gender into the social fabric of human groups.

The existence of a dualistic ontology, such as sexual dimorphism, as a principle in our worldview often predicates its antithesis and brings into being its mediators, whether at the level of ideology or social practice. Is the two-sex system of Western culture, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, a universal or a local condition of human nature? If it is universal, why does it not occur everywhere? Yet, if it is local, why do we find so many examples of it distributed around the world? Does biological reproduction force humans to work around if not to invoke the two-sex system? My hunch is that, where reproduction is considered the *sine qua non* of sexuality, as in the United States during the past century, we should expect to find the most disapproving attitudes toward the third sex. Indeed, these attitudes might be characterized as representing the horror of sexual ambiguity, noted in the early 1960s by Garfinkel in his study of transsexuals, hermaphrodites and other odd sorts who passed as "normal."²⁷⁵ We thus come to have instantiated within and on us the very signs of a two- or three-sex/gender system – onto our private parts and in the whispers of the self.

We must conclude that it is indeed rather difficult to create and maintain third-sex and third-gender categories; and perhaps the imperfect fit between personal and sexual desire and social duty or customary roles helps us to explain the reason. And yet, nonetheless, this achievement is by no means rare and is, indeed, to be expected as part of the historical, social and psychic landscape in a good number of times and places, as we have seen.

Conversely, sexual dimorphism is not inevitable, a universal structure. Certainly it is celebrated in many places but it is not privileged at all times and places. An insight that emerges from Bateson's study of the structural relations between roles and categories is the difficulty of maintaining balance between symmetrical dyadic systems.²⁷⁶ That things come in twos and not threes, and that a third category tends to mediate the other two, has long been noted by social thinkers and those in exchange theory, perhaps iterated by Simmel's classic essay.²⁷⁷ Many postmodern writ-

ers have critiqued the biological reductionism of past models of sexuality and gender. Many, such as Kessler and McKenna, for instance, treat the berdache and similar examples apart from male and female as universal categories of gender dichotomies.²⁷⁸ They see the "dual-gender classification system" of our culture as a "cultural construction." It is obvious from my critiques that I am sympathetic with this view. However, in saying this, we must return to issues of desire, of pleasure, of being, which are transformed into doing, that is, into social and historical practice. Here, it seems to me in closing, we still have much to learn and a good deal of research ahead.

As I have shown elsewhere, the sexual ontology of the berdache is remarkable, because it posits a clear form of preferred sexual excitement, which may be one basis for attraction to the role.²⁷⁹ No anthropologist has ever explained why these particular forms of social and sexual desire created the perfect fit between individual and culture among the berdache, or, indeed, why this form of sexual excitement would be attractive to them. Many of us are interested in how and why the hijra, the *māhū*, the transsexual, the *kwolu-aatmwol* and so on have become what they are and committed to their social positions. But we would like to know more about their cultural ontologies and personal realities as well as their appearances. We are in great need, therefore, of a new historical ethnography that reveals the everyday life of sexuality and power relations, including the conditions under which passing and emergence occur, as they have been revealed, for instance, in the context of gay- or lesbian-identified people who "come out" by declaring their same-sex desires to create new social relations rather than continue to pass and remain secret. We need an anthropology and social history of desire that will lead us to closer approximations of understanding the lived realities of peoples themselves.²⁸⁰ It is toward this end that this book has modestly contributed a beginning.