One Hundred Years of Homosexuality

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In 1992, when the patriots among us will be celebrating the five-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, our cultural historians may wish to mark the centenary of an intellectual landfall of almost equal importance for the conceptual geography of the human sciences: the invention of homosexuality by Charles Gilbert Chaddock. Though he may never rank with Columbus in the annals of individual achievement, Chaddock would hardly seem to merit the obscurity which has surrounded him throughout the past hundred years. An early translator of Krafft-Ebing’s classic medical handbook of sexual deviance, the *Psychopathia sexualis*, Chaddock is credited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* with having introduced “homo-sexuality” into the English language in 1892, in order to render a German cognate twenty years its senior. Homosexuality, for better or for worse, has been with us ever since.

Before 1892 there was no homosexuality, only sexual inversion. But, as George Chauncey, who has made a thorough study of the medical literature on the subject, persuasively argues, “Sexual inversion, the term used most commonly in the nineteenth century, did not denote the same conceptual phenomenon as homosexuality. ‘Sexual inversion’ referred to a broad range of deviant gender behavior, of which homosexual desire was only a logical but indistinct aspect, while ‘homosexuality’ focused on the narrower issue of sexual object choice. The differentiation of homosexual desire from ‘deviant’ gender behavior at the turn of the century reflects a major reconceptualization of the nature of human sexuality, its relation to gender, and its role in one’s social definition.” Throughout the nineteenth century, in other words, sexual preference for a person of one’s own sex was not clearly distinguished from other sorts of non-conformity to one’s culturally defined sex-role: deviant object-choice was viewed as merely one of a number of pathological symptoms exhibited by those who reversed, or “inverted,” their proper sex-roles by adopting a masculine or a feminine style at variance with what was
deemed natural and appropriate to their anatomical sex. Political aspirations in women and (at least according to one expert writing as late as 1920) a fondness for cats in men were manifestations of a pathological condition, a kind of psychological hermaphroditism tellingly but not essentially expressed by the preference for a “normal” member of one’s own sex as a sexual partner. 6

This outlook on the matter seems to have been shared by the scientists and by their unfortunate subjects alike: inversion was not merely a medical rubric, then, but a category of lived experience. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, for example, an outspoken advocate for the rights of sexual minorities and the founder, as early as 1862, of the cult of Uranism (based on Pausanias’s praise of Uranian, or “heavenly,” pederasty in Plato’s Symposium), described his own condition as that of an anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa—a woman’s soul confined by a man’s body. 7 That sexual object-choice might be wholly independent of such “secondary” characteristics as masculinity or femininity never seems to have entered anyone’s head until Havelock Ellis waged a campaign to isolate object-choice from role-playing and Freud, in his classic analysis of a drive in the Three Essays (1905), clearly distinguished in the case of the libido between the sexual “object” and the sexual “aim.” 8

The conceptual isolation of sexuality per se from questions of masculinity and femininity made possible a new taxonomy of sexual behaviors and psychologies based entirely on the anatomical sex of the persons engaged in a sexual act (same sex vs. different sex); it thereby obliterated a number of distinctions that had traditionally operated within earlier discourses pertaining to same-sex sexual contacts and that had radically differentiated active from passive sexual partners, normal from abnormal (or conventional from unconventional) sexual roles, masculine from feminine styles, and pederasty from lesbianism: all such behaviors were now to be classed alike and placed under the same heading. 9 Sexual identity was thus polarized around a central opposition rigidly defined by the binary play of sameness and difference in the sexes of the sexual partners; people belonged henceforward to one or the other of two exclusive categories, and much ingenuity was lavished on the multiplication of techniques for deciphering what a person’s sexual orientation “really” was—indeed, that is, of beguiling appearances. 10 Founded on positive, ascertainable, and objective behavioral phenomena—on the facts of who had sex with whom—the new sexual taxonomy could lay claim to a descriptive, trans-historical validity. And so it crossed the “threshold of scientificity” 11 and was enshrined as a working concept in the social and physical sciences. 12

A scientific advance of such magnitude naturally demanded to be crowned by the creation of a new technical vocabulary, but, unfortunately, no objective, value-free words readily lent themselves to the enterprise. In 1891, just one year before the inauguration of “homosexuality,” John Addington
Symonds could still complain that “The accomplished languages of Europe in the nineteenth century supply no terms for this persistent feature of human psychology, without importing some implication of disgust, disgrace, vituperation.” A number of linguistic candidates were quickly put forward to make good this lack, and “homosexuality” (despite scattered protests over the years) gradually managed to fix its social-scientific signature upon the new conceptual dispensation. The word itself, as Havelock Ellis noted, is a barbarous neologism sprung from a monstrous mingling of Greek and Latin stock; as such, it belongs to a rapidly growing lexical breed most prominently represented by the hybrid names given to other recent inventions—names whose mere enumeration suffices to conjure up the precise historical era responsible for producing them: e.g., “automobile,” “television,” “sociology.”

Unlike the languages of technology (whether of production or of knowledge), however, the new terminology for describing sexual behavior was slow to take root in the culture at large. In his posthumous autobiographical memoir, My Father & Myself (1968), J. R. Ackerley recalls how mystified he was when, about 1918, a Swiss friend asked him, “Are you homo or hetero?” “I had never heard either term before,” he writes. Similarly, T. C. Worsley observes in his own memoir, Flannelled Fool (1966), that in 1929 “The word [homosexual], in any case, was not in general use, as it is now. Then it was still a technical term, the implications of which I was not entirely aware of.” These two memoirists, moreover, were not intellectually deficient men: at the respective times of their recorded bewilderment, Ackerley was shortly about to be, and Worsley already had been, educated at Cambridge. Nor was such innocence limited—in this one instance, at least—to the holders of university degrees: the British sociologist John Marshall, whose survey presumably draws on more popular sources, testifies that “a number of the elderly men I interviewed had never heard the term ‘homosexual’ until the 1950s.” The Oxford English Dictionary, originally published in 1933, is also ignorant of (if not willfully blind to) “homosexuality”; the word appears for the first time in the OED’s 1976 three-volume Supplement.

It is not exactly my intention to argue that homosexuality, as we commonly understand it today, didn’t exist before 1892. How, indeed, could it have failed to exist? The very word displays a most workmanlike and scientific indifference to cultural and environmental factors, looking only to the sexes of the persons engaged in the sexual act. Moreover, if homosexuality didn’t exist before 1892, heterosexuality couldn’t have existed either (it came into being, in fact, like Eve from Adam’s rib, eight years later), and without heterosexuality, where would all of us be right now?

The comparatively recent genesis of heterosexuality—strictly speaking, a twentieth-century affair—should provide a clue to the profundity of the
cultural issues over which, hitherto, I have been so lightly skating. How is it possible that until the year 1900 there was not a precise, value-free, scientific term available to speakers of the English language for designating what we would now regard, in retrospect, as the mode of sexual behavior favored by the vast majority of people in our culture? Any answer to that question must direct our attention to the inescapable historicity of even the most innocent, unassuming, and seemingly objective of cultural representations. Although a blandly descriptive, rigorously clinical term like "homosexuality" would appear to be unobjectionable as a taxonomic device, it carries with it a heavy complement of ideological baggage and has, in fact, proved a significant obstacle to understanding the distinctive features of sexual life in non-Western and pre-modern cultures. It may well be that homosexuality properly speaking has no history of its own outside the West or much before the beginning of our century. For, as John Boswell remarks, "if the categories 'homosexual/heterosexual' and 'gay/straight' are the inventions of particular societies rather than real aspects of the human psyche, there is no gay history."

II

Boswell, of course, argues the contrary. He maintains, reasonably enough, that any debate over the existence of universals in human culture must distinguish between the respective modes of being proper to words, concepts, and experiences: according to this line of reasoning, people who lived before Newton experienced gravity even though they lacked both the term and the concept; similarly, Boswell claims that the "manifest and stated purpose" of Aristophanes's famous myth in Plato's Symposium "is to explain why humans are divided into groups of predominantly homosexual or heterosexual interest," and so this text, along with a number of others from classical antiquity, vouches for the existence of homosexuality as an ancient (if not a universal) category of human experience—however new-fangled the word for it may be. Now the speech of Plato's Aristophanes would seem indeed to be a locus classicus for the differentiation of homo- from heterosexuality, because Aristophanes's taxonomy of human beings features a distinction between those who desire a sexual partner of the same sex as themselves and those who desire a sexual partner of a different sex. The Platonic passage alone, then, would seem to offer sufficient warrant for positing an ancient concept, if not an ancient experience, of homosexuality. But closer examination reveals that Aristophanes stops short of deriving a distinction between homo- and heterosexuality from his own myth just
when the logic of his analysis would seem to have driven him ineluctably

to it. That omission is telling, I believe, and worth considering in greater
detail.*

According to Aristophanes, human beings were originally round, eight-
tlimbed creatures, with two faces and two sets of genitals—both front and
back—and three sexes (male, female, and androgyne). These ancestors of
ours were powerful and ambitious; in order to put them in their place, Zeus
had them cut in two, their skin stretched over the exposed flesh and tied at
the navel, and their heads rotated so as to keep that physical reminder of
their daring and its consequences constantly before their eyes. The severed
halves of each former individual, once reunited, clung to one another so
desperately and concerned themselves so little with their survival as separate
entities that they began to perish for lack of sustenance; those who outlived
their mates sought out persons belonging to the same sex as their lost
complements and repeated their embraces in a foredoomed attempt to re-
cover their original unity. Zeus at length took pity on them, moved their
genitals to the side their bodies now faced, and invented sexual intercourse,
so that the bereaved creatures might at least put a temporary terminus to
their longing and devote their attention to other, more important (if less
pressing) matters. Aristophanes extracts from this story a genetic explana-
tion of observable differences among human beings with respect to sexual
object-choice and preferred style of life: males who desire females are de-
sceded from an original androgyne (adulterers come from this species),
whereas males descended from an original male “pursue their own kind,
and would prefer to remain single and spend their entire lives with one
another, since by nature they have no interest in marriage and procreation
but are compelled to engage in them by social custom” (191c–192b, quoted
selectively). Boswell, understandably, interprets this to mean that according
to Plato’s Aristophanes homosexual and heterosexual interests are “both
exclusive and innate.”**

But that, significantly, is not quite the way Aristophanes sees it. The
conclusions that he draws from his own myth help to illustrate the lengths
to which classical Athenians were willing to go in order to avoid conceptu-
alizing sexual behaviors according to a binary opposition between different-
and same-sex sexual contacts. First of all, Aristophanes’s myth generates
not two but at least three distinct “sexualities” (males attracted to males,
males attracted to females, and—consigned alike to a single classification,
evidently—males attracted to females as well as females attracted to males).
Moreover, there is not the slightest suggestion in anything Aristophanes

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* Here follows a close reading of two ancient texts. Some readers may wish to skip ahead
to section III.

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says that the sexual acts or preferences of persons descended from an original female are in any way similar to, let alone congruent or isomorphic with, the sexual acts or preferences of those descended from an original male; hence, nothing in the text allows us to suspect the existence of even an implicit category to which males who desire males and females who desire females both belong in contradistinction to some other category containing males and females who desire one another. On the contrary, one consequence of the myth is to make the sexual desire of every human being *formally identical* to that of every other: we are all looking for the same thing in a sexual partner, according to Plato’s Aristophanes—namely, a symbolic substitute for an originary object once loved and subsequently lost in an archaic trauma. In that respect we all share the same “sexuality”—which is to say that, despite the differences in our personal preferences or tastes, we are not individuated at the level of our sexual being.

Second, and equally important, Aristophanes’s account features a crucial distinction within the category of males who are attracted to males, an infrastructural detail missing from his description of each of the other two categories: “while they are still boys [i.e., pubescent or pre-adult], they are fond of men, and enjoy lying down together with them and twining their limbs about them, . . . but when they become men they are lovers of boys. . . . Such a man is a paederast and philerast [i.e., fond of or responsive to adult male lovers]” at different stages of his life (191e–192b, quoted selectively). Contrary to the clear implications of the myth, in other words, and unlike the people comprehended by the first two categories, those descended from an original male are not attracted to one another *without qualification*: rather, they desire boys when they are men and they take a certain (non-sexual) pleasure in physical contact with men when they are boys.

Now since—as the foregoing passage suggests—the classical Athenians sharply distinguished the roles of paederast and philerast, relegating them not only to different age-classes but virtually to different “sexualities,” what Aristophanes is describing here is not a single, homogeneous sexual orientation common to all those who descend from an original male but rather a set of distinct and incommensurable behaviors which such persons exhibit in different periods of their lives; although his genetic explanation of the diversity of sexual object-choice among human beings would seem to require that there be some adult males who are sexually attracted to other adult

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*To be sure, a certain symmetry does obtain between the groups composed, respectively, of those making a homosexual and those making a heterosexual object-choice: each of them is constituted by Aristophanes in such a way as to contain both males and females in their dual capacities as subjects and objects of erotic desire. Aristophanes does nothing to highlight this symmetry, however, and it may be doubted whether it should figure in our interpretation of the passage.*
males, Aristophanes appears to be wholly unaware of such a possibility, and in any case he has left no room for it in his taxonomic scheme.*

That omission is all the more unexpected because, as Boswell himself has pointed out (in response to the present argument), the archetypal pairs of lovers from whom all homoerotically inclined males are supposed to descend must themselves have been the same age as one another, since they were originally halves of the same being.† No age-matched couples figure among their latter-day offspring, however: in the real world of classical Athens—at least, as Aristophanes portrays it—reciprocal erotic desire among males is unknown.‡ Thus, the social actuality described by Aristophanes features an erotic asymmetry absent from the mythical paradigm used to generate it. Now inasmuch as Aristophanes’s myth is an aetiological fable, a projection of contemporary practices backwards in time to their imagined point of origin, the meaning of his myth is necessarily determined, in the first instance at least, by its contemporary reference. Even though the myth, in other words, happens to posit as the ancestors of “modern” human beings some pairs of lovers of the same sex and the same age who are animated by mutual desire for one another, and who would therefore seem to qualify as “homosexuals” rather than as either “paederasts” or “philerasts,” the myth is clearly not intended to explain mutual same-sex desire among coevals in classical Athens, and so we are not entitled read “homosexual” desire into the myth—especially on the basis of a detail in it whose significance is largely the accidental creation of our own cultural preoccupations (if Aristophanes admittedly fails to say anything explicit that would rule out such a reading of his own myth, that is only because Plato did not anticipate the cultural situation of his twentieth-century readership and so did not dream that anyone would ever place upon Aristophanes’s words what, to Plato’s way of thinking, would surely have been an outlandish interpretation). Those Athenians who allegedly descend from a mythical all-male ancestor are not defined by Aristophanes as male homosexuals but as willing boys when they are young and as lovers of youths when they are old. Despite Boswell, then, neither the concept nor the experience of “homosexuality” is known to Plato’s Aristophanes.‡

A similar conclusion can be drawn from careful examination of the other document from antiquity that might seem to vouch for the existence both of homosexuality as an indigenious category and of homosexuals as a native

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* Nor does Aristophanes make any allowance in his myth for what was perhaps the most widely shared sexual taste among his fellow Athenian citizens—namely, an undifferentiated liking for good-looking women and boys (that is, a sexual preference not defined by an exclusively gender-specific sexual object-choice). Such a lacuna should warn us not to treat Aristophanes’s myth (as, most recently, Cantarella, 84–85, treats it) as a simple description or reflection of contemporary experience.

† Aristotle, Gaum. 3

‡ Plato, Phaedrus. 237a–238a.
species. Unlike the myth of Plato’s Aristophanes, a famous and much-
excerpted passage from a classic work of Greek prose, the document to
which I refer is little known and almost entirely neglected by modern
historians of “sexuality”; its date is late, its text is corrupt, and, far from
being a self-conscious literary artifact, it forms part of a Roman technical
treatise. But despite its distance from Plato in time, in style, in language,
and in intent, it displays the same remarkable innocence of modern sexual
categories, and I have chosen to discuss it here partly in order to show what
can be learned about the ancient world from texts that lie outside the received
canon of classical authors. Let us turn, then, to the ninth chapter in the Fourth
Book of De morbis chronicis, a mid-fifth-century A.D. Latin translation and
adaptation by the African writer Caelius Aurelianus of a now largely lost
work on chronic diseases by the Greek physician Soranus, who practised
and taught in Rome during the early part of the second century A.D.

The topic of this chapter is molles (malthakoi in Greek)—that is, “soft” or
unmasculine men who depart from the cultural norm of manliness insofar
as they actively desire to be subjected by other men to a “feminine” (i.e.,
receptive) role in sexual intercourse. Caelius begins with an implicit defense
of his own unimpeachable masculinity by noting how difficult it is to believe
that such people actually exist; he then goes on to observe that the cause
of their affliction is not natural (that is, organic) but is rather their own
excessive desire, which—in a desperate and doomed attempt to satisfy
itself—drives out their sense of shame and forcibly converts parts of their
bodies to sexual uses not intended by nature. These men willingly adopt the
dress, gait, and other characteristics of women, thereby confirming that they
suffer not from a bodily disease but from a mental (or moral) defect. After
some further arguments in support of that point, Caelius draws an interesting
comparison: “For just as the women called tribades [in Greek], because they
practise both kinds of sex, are more eager to have sexual intercourse with
women than with men and pursue women with an almost masculine jealousy
... so they too [i.e., the molles] are afflicted by a mental disease” (132–133).
The mental disease in question, which strikes both men and women alike
and is defined as a perversion of sexual desire, would certainly seem to be
nothing other than homosexuality as it is often understood today.

Several considerations combine to prohibit that interpretation, however.
First of all, what Caelius treats as a pathological phenomenon is not the
desire on the part of either men or women for sexual contact with a person
of the same sex; quite the contrary: elsewhere, in discussing the treatment
of satyriasis (a state of abnormally elevated sexual desire accompanied by
itching or tension in the genitals), he issues the following advice to people
who suffer from it (De morbis acutis, 3.18.180–181).

Do not admit visitors and particularly young women and boys. For the attractiveness
of such visitors would again kindle the feeling of desire in the patient. Indeed,
even healthy persons, seeing them, would in many cases seek sexual gratification, stimulated by the tension produced in the parts [i.e., in their own genitals].

There is nothing medically problematical, then, about a desire on the part of males to obtain sexual pleasure from contact with males—so long as that desire respects the proper phallicentric protocols (which, as we shall see, identify “masculinity” with an insertive sexual role); what is of concern to Caelius, as well as to other ancient moralists, is the male desire to be sexually penetrated by males, for such a desire represents the voluntary abandonment of a “masculine” identity in favor of a “feminine” one. It is sex-role reversal, or gender-deviance, that is problematized here and that also furnishes part of the basis for Caelius’s comparison of molles to tribades, who assume a “masculine” role in their relations with other women and actively “pursue women with an almost masculine jealousy.” Indeed, the “soft”—that is, sexually submissive—man, possessed of a shocking and paradoxical desire to surrender his masculine autonomy and precedence to other men, is monstrous precisely because he seems to have “a woman’s soul confined by a man’s body” and thus to violate the ancients’ deeply felt and somewhat anxiously defended sense of congruence between a person’s gender, sexual practices, and social identity.

Second, the ground of the similitude between Caelius’s molles and tribades is not that they are both homosexual but rather that they are both bisexual (in our terms). The tribades “are more eager to have sexual intercourse with women than with men” and “practise both kinds of sex”—that is, they have sex with both men and women. As for the molles, Caelius’s earlier remarks about their extraordinarily intense sexual desire implies that they turn to receptive sex because, although they try, they are not able to satisfy themselves by means of more conventionally masculine sorts of sexual activity, including insertive sex with women; far from having desires that are structured differently from those of normal folk, these gender-deviants desire sexual pleasure just as most people do, but they have such strong and intense desires that they are driven to devise some unusual and disreputable (though ultimately futile) means of gratifying them. That diagnosis becomes explicit at the conclusion of the chapter when Caelius explains why the disease responsible for turning men into molles is the only chronic disease that becomes stronger as the body grows older.

For in other years when the body is still strong and can perform the normal functions of love, the sexual desire [of these persons] assumes a dual aspect, in which the soul is excited sometimes while playing a passive and sometimes while playing an active role. But in the case of old men who have lost their virile powers, all their sexual desire is turned in the opposite direction and consequently exerts a stronger demand for the feminine role in love. In fact, many infer that this is the reason why boys too are victims of this affliction. For, like old men, they do not
possess virile powers; that is, they have not yet attained those powers which have already deserted the aged.42

"Soft" or unmasculine men—far from having a fixed and determinate sexual identity, a sexual nature oriented permanently in one specific direction (towards other members of their own sex)—are evidently either men who once experienced an orthodoxly masculine sexual desire in the past or who will eventually experience such a desire in the future. They may well be men with a constitutional tendency to gender-deviance, according to Caelius, but they are not homosexuals: being a womanish man, or a mannish woman, after all, is not the same thing as being a homosexual. Moreover, all the other ancient texts known to me which place in the same category both males who enjoy sexual contact with males and females who enjoy sexual contact with females display one or the other of the two taxonomic strategies employed by Caelius Aurelianus: if such men and women are classified alike, it is either because they are both held to reverse their proper sex-roles and to adopt the sexual styles, postures, and modes of copulation conventionally associated with the opposite sex or because they are both held to alternate between the personal characteristics and sexual practices proper, respectively, to men and to women.43 No category of homosexuality, defined in such a way as to contain men and women alike, is indigenous to the ancient world.*

III

Plato’s testimony and Caelius Aurelianus’s testimony combine to make a basic conceptual and historical point. Homosexuality presupposes sexuality, and sexuality itself (as I shall argue in a moment) is a modern invention. Homosexuality presupposes sexuality because the very concept of homosexuality implies that there is a specifically sexual dimension to the human personality, a characterological seat within the individual of sexual acts, desires, and pleasures—a determinate source from which all sexual expression proceeds. Whether or not such a distinct and unified psychophysical entity actually exists, homosexuality (like heterosexuality, in this respect) necessarily assumes that it does: it posits sexuality as a constitutive principle of the self. Sexuality in this sense is not a purely descriptive term, a neutral

* Indeed, as Manili (1983), 151 and 201n., observes, even the category of anatomical sex, defined in such a way as to be applicable to men and women alike, does not exist in Greek thought: "the notion of sex never gets formalized as a functional identity of male and female, but is expressed solely through the representation of asymmetry and of complementarity between male and female, indicated constantly by abstract adjectives (to thely ['the feminine'], to areion ['the masculine'])."
representation of some objective state of affairs. Rather, it serves to interpret and to organize human experience, and it performs quite a lot of conceptual work.

First of all, sexuality defines itself as a separate, sexual domain within the larger field of man's psychophysical nature. Second, sexuality effects the conceptual demarcation and isolation of that domain from other areas of personal and social life that have traditionally cut across it, such as carnality, venery, libertinism, virility, passion, amorousness, eroticism, intimacy, love, affection, appetite, and desire—to name but a few of the older claimants to territories more recently staked out by sexuality. Finally, sexuality generates sexual identity: it endows each of us with an individual sexual nature, with a personal essence defined (at least in part) in specifically sexual terms. 14 Now sexual identity, so conceived, is not to be confused with gender identity or gender role: indeed, one of the chief conceptual functions of sexuality is to distinguish, once and for all, sexual identity from matters of gender—to decouple, as it were, kinds of sexual predilection from degrees of masculinity and femininity. That is precisely what makes sexuality alien to the spirit of ancient Mediterranean cultures. For as the example of Caelius Aurelianus makes plain, ancient sexual typologies generally derived their criteria for categorizing people not from sex but from gender: they tended to construe sexual desire as normative or deviant according to whether it impelled social actors to conform to or to violate their conventionally defined gender roles. 15

Sexuality, then, is not, as it often pretends to be, a universal feature of human life in every society. For as the word is used today (outside the life sciences, at least)" sexuality does not refer to some positive physical property—such as the property of being anatomically sexed—that exists independently of culture; it does not rightly denote some common aspect or attribute of bodies. Unlike sex, which is a natural fact, sexuality is a cultural production": it represents the appropriation of the human body and of its erogenous zones by an ideological discourse. Far from reflecting a purely natural and uninterpreted recognition of some familiar facts about us, sexuality represents a peculiar turn in conceptualizing, experiencing, and institutionalizing human nature, a turn that (along with many other developments) marks the transition to modernity in northern and western Europe. As Robert Padgug, in a classic essay on sexuality in history, puts it,

what we consider "sexuality" was, in the pre-bourgeois world, a group of acts and institutions not necessarily linked to one another, or, if they were linked, combined in ways very different from our own. Intercourse, kinship, and the family, and gender, did not form anything like a "field" of sexuality. Rather, each group of sexual acts was connected directly or indirectly—that is, formed part of—institutions and thought patterns which we tend to view as political, economic, or social in nature, and the connections cut across our idea of sexuality as a thing, detachable from other things, and as a separate sphere of private existence. 16
Where there is no such conception of sexuality, there can be no conception of either homo- or heterosexuality—no notion that human beings are individuated at the level of their sexuality, that they differ from one another in their sexuality or belong to different types of being by virtue of their sexuality. 49

The invention of homosexuality (and, ultimately, of heterosexuality) had therefore to await, in the first place, the eighteenth-century discovery and definition of sexuality as the total ensemble of physiological and psychological mechanisms governing the individual's genital functions and the concomitant identification of that ensemble with a specially developed part of the brain and nervous system; it had also to await, in the second place, the nineteenth-century interpretation of sexuality as a singular "instinct" or "drive," a force that shapes our conscious life according to its own unassailable logic and thereby determines, at least in part, the character and personality of each one of us. 50

Sexuality, on this latter interpretation, turns out to be something more than an endogenous principle of motivation outwardly expressed by the performance of sexual acts; it is a mute power subtly and deviously at work throughout a wide range of human behaviors, attitudes, tastes, choices, gestures, styles, pursuits, judgments, and utterances. Sexuality is thus the inmost part of an individual human nature. It is the feature of a person that takes longest to get to know well, and knowing it renders transparent and intelligible to the knower the person to whom it belongs. Sexuality holds the key to unlocking the deepest mysteries of the human personality: it lies at the center of the hermeneutics of the self. 51

Before the scientific construction of "sexuality" as a supposedly positive, distinct, and constitutive feature of individual human beings—an autonomous system within the physiological and psychological economy of the human organism—certain kinds of sexual acts could be individually evaluated and categorized, and so could certain sexual tastes or inclinations, but there was no conceptual apparatus available for identifying a person's fixed and determinate sexual orientation, much less for assessing and classifying it. 52

That human beings differ, often markedly, from one another in their sexual tastes in a great variety of ways (of which sexual object-choice—the liking for a sexual partner of a specific sex—is only one, and not necessarily the most significant one) is an unexceptionable and, indeed, an ancient observation; 53 but it is not immediately evident that differences in sexual preference are by their very nature more revealing about the temperament of individual human beings, more significant determinants of personal identity, than, for example, differences in dietary preference. 54 And yet, it would never occur to us to refer a person's dietary object-choice to some innate, characterological disposition or to see in his or her strongly expressed and even unvarying preference for the white meat of chicken the symptom of a profound psychophysical orientation, leading us to identify him or her in
contexts quite removed from that of the eating of food as, say (to continue the practice of combining Greek and Latin roots), a “pectoriphage” or a “stethovore”; nor would we be likely to inquire further, making nicer discriminations according to whether an individual’s predilection for chicken breasts expressed itself in a tendency to eat them quickly or slowly, seldom or often, alone or in company, under normal circumstances or only in periods of great stress, with a guilty or a clear conscience, beginning in earliest childhood or originating with a gastronomic trauma suffered in adolescence. If such questions did occur to us, moreover, I very much doubt whether we would turn to the academic disciplines of anatomy, neurology, clinical psychology, genetics, or sociobiology in the hope of obtaining a clear causal solution to them. That is because (1) we regard the liking for certain foods as a matter of taste; (2) we currently lack a theory of taste; and (3) in the absence of a theory we do not normally subject our behavior to intense, scientific or etiological, scrutiny.58

In the same way, it never occurred to pre-modern cultures to ascribe a person’s sexual tastes to some positive, structural, or constitutive feature of his or her personality.59 Just as we tend to assume that human beings are not individuated at the level of dietary preference and that we all, despite many pronounced and frankly acknowledged differences from one another in dietary habits, share the same fundamental set of alimentary appetites, and hence the same “dieticity” or “edility,” so most pre-modern and non-Western cultures, despite an awareness of the range of possible variations in human sexual behavior, refuse to individuate human beings at the level of sexual preference and assume, instead, that we all share the same fundamental set of sexual appetites, the same “sexuality.” For most of the world’s inhabitants, in other words, “sexuality” is no more a fact of life than “dieticity.” Far from being a necessary or intrinsic constituent of the eternal grammar of human subjectivity, “sexuality” seems to be one of those cultural fictions which in every society give human beings access to themselves as meaningful actors in their world, and which are thereby objectivated.*

* In order to avoid misunderstanding, let me emphasize that I am not saying it would be outlandish to categorize people according to dietary preference; I do not believe my analogy between dietary and sexual object-choice shows that distinctions based on object-choice are absurd and that we should place no more credence in sexual categories than in dietary ones. On the contrary, it is easy to enumerate forms of dietary behavior whose subjects we tend to classify as specific types of human beings; there are many conditions under which we refer a person’s dietary behavior, even today, to some constitutive feature of his or her personality: if, for example, I eat so little as virtually to starve myself, I am identified as an “anorectic,” which is to say that I become a particular species of person, characterologically different from other people, with a peculiar case history, presumed psychology, and so forth—just as if I have sex “too much” or “too often,” I am regarded as “sexually compulsive” or, even, as “a sexual compulsive,” yet another species of humankind. Whereas some aspects of one’s dietary patterns (e.g., preference for white meat) are considered unremarkable, and are therefore not marked,
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To say that sexual categories and identities are objectivated fictions is not to say that they are false or unreal, merely that they are not positive, natural, or essential features of the world, outside of history and culture. Homosexuals and heterosexuals do exist, after all, at least nowadays; they actually desire what they do: they are not deluded participants in some cultural charade, or victims of "false consciousness." Moreover, the modern term "homosexual" does indeed refer to any person, whether ancient or modern, who seeks sexual contact with another person of the same sex; it is not, strictly speaking, incorrect to predicate that term of some classical Greeks. But the issue before us is not captured by the problems of reference: it cannot be innocently reformulated as the issue of whether or not we can accurately apply our concept of homosexuality to the ancients—whether or not, that is, we can discover in the historical record of classical antiquity evidence of behaviors or psychologies that are amenable to classification in our own terms (obviously, we can, given the supposedly descriptive, trans-historical nature of those terms); the issue isn't even whether or not the ancients were able to express within the terms provided by their own conceptual schemes an experience of something approximating to homosexuality as we understand it today. The real issue confronting any

others are marked, just as only some aspects of sexual behavior (e.g., homosexual object-choice) are marked, whereas others (e.g., preference for persons with blue eyes) remain unmarked. (I wish to thank George Chauncey for supplying me with this formulation of the issue.) Moreover, a growing mass of historical data suggests that dietary categories have indeed provided, in certain times and places, a viable basis on which to construct typologies of human beings: see Bynum (1987), and for an example from relatively recent history of the possible linkage between sexual and dietary morality, see Stephen Nissenbaum, Sex, Diet, and Dehility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform, Contributions in Medical History, 4 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

My argument, then, is simply this: (1) there seems to be no way of proving that sexual preferences are more fundamental features of the human personality than dietary preferences; (2) dietary preferences don't, for the most part, determine our personal identities nowadays; (3) therefore, sexual preferences should not be thought of as intrinsic constituents of the personality; rather, sexual categories based on preference should be considered culturally contingent. Now contingency is not the same thing as absurdity. To be sure, so long as one's notions of "truth" are connected—as Western notions have tended to be since the Renaissance—to notions of "nature" and "necessity," to what is naturally and necessarily and always the case (whether human beings recognize it to be the case or not), there may be some difficulty establishing that a traditional way of looking at things is grounded in culture rather than in nature without also seeming to imply that it is false. But I am not claiming that it is false to categorize people according to sexual object-choice, merely that it is not natural or necessary to do so; such classifications are, instead, just as contingent, arbitrary, and conventional as are classifications of people according to dietary object-choice. Both schemes are possible; neither is inevitable. To maintain that something isn't a fact, in short, is not to maintain that it's a lie. We are concerned here neither with truths nor falsehoods but with representations, and our willingness to accept or believe in representations generally has to do more with their representational power than with their truth.
cultural historian of antiquity, and any critic of contemporary culture, is, first of all, how to recover the terms in which the experiences of individuals belonging to past societies were actually constituted and, second, how to measure and assess the differences between those terms and the ones we currently employ. For, as this very controversy over the scope and applicability of sexual categories illustrates, concepts in the human sciences—unlike in this respect, perhaps, concepts in the natural sciences (such as gravity)—do not merely describe reality but, at least partly, constitute it. What this implies about the issue before us may sound paradoxical but it is, I believe, profound—or, at least, worth pondering: although there have been, in many different times and places (including classical Greece), persons who sought sexual contact with other persons of the same sex as themselves, it is only within the last hundred years or so that such persons (or some portion of them, at any rate) have been homosexuals.

Instead of attempting to trace the history of "homosexuality" as if it were a thing, therefore, we might more profitably analyze how the significance of same-sex sexual contacts has been variously constructed over time by members of human living-groups. Such an analysis will probably lead us (and we must be prepared for this) into a plurality of only partly overlapping social and conceptual territories, a series of cultural formations that shift as their constituents change, combine in different sequences, or compose new patterns. The sort of history that will result from this procedure will no longer be gay history as John Boswell tends to conceptualize it (i.e., as the history of gay people), but it will not fail to be gay history in a different, and perhaps more relevant, sense: for it will be history written from the perspective of contemporary gay interests—just as feminist history is not, properly speaking, the history of women but history that reflects the concerns of contemporary feminism. In the following paragraphs I shall attempt to exemplify the approach I am advocating by drawing, in very crude outline, a picture of the cultural formation underlying the classical Athenian institution of paederasty, a picture whose details will have to be filled in at some later point if this aspect of ancient Greek social relations is ever to be understood historically.

IV

Let me begin by observing that the attitudes and behaviors publicly displayed by the citizens of Athens (to whom the surviving evidence for the classical period effectively restricts our power to generalize) tend to portray sex not as a collective enterprise in which two or more persons jointly engage but rather as an action performed by one person upon another. I hasten to emphasize that this formulation does not purport to describe positively what
the experience of sex was "really" like for all members of Athenian society but to indicate how sex is represented by those utterances and actions of free adult males that were intended to be overheard and witnessed by other free adult males. Sex, as it is constituted by this public, masculine discourse, is either act or impact (according to one's point of view): it is not knit up in a web of mutuality, not something one invariably has with someone. Even the verb *aphrodisiazetein*, meaning "to have sex" or "to take active sexual pleasure," is carefully differentiated into an active and a passive form; the active form occurs, tellingly, in a late antique list (that we nonetheless have good reason to consider representative for ancient Mediterranean culture, rather than eccentric to it) of acts that "do not regard one's neighbors but only the subjects themselves and are not done in regard to or through others: namely, speaking, singing, dancing, fist-fighting, competing, hanging oneself, dying, being crucified, diving, finding a treasure, having sex, vomiting, moving one's bowels, sleeping, laughing, crying, talking to the gods, and the like." As John J. Winkler, in a commentary on this passage, observes, "It is not that second parties are not present at some of these events (speaking, boxing, competing, having sex, being crucified, flattering one's favorite divinity), but that their successful achievement does not depend on the cooperation, much less the benefit, of a second party.

Not only is sex in classical Athens not intrinsically relational or collaborative in character; it is, further, a deeply polarizing experience: it effectively divides, classifies, and distributes its participants into distinct and radically opposed categories. Sex possesses this valence, apparently, because it is conceived to center essentially on, and to define itself around, an asymmetrical gesture, that of the penetration of the body of one person by the body—and, specifically, by the phallus—of another. Sex is not only polarizing, however; it is also hierarchical. For the insertive partner is construed as a sexual agent, whose phallic penetration of another person's body expresses sexual "activity," whereas the receptive partner is construed as a sexual patient, whose submission to phallic penetration expresses sexual "passivity." Sexual "activity," moreover, is thematized as domination: the relation between the "active" and the "passive" sexual partner is thought of as the same kind of relation as that obtaining between social superior and social inferior. "Active" and "passive" sexual roles are therefore necessarily isomorphic with superordinate and subordinate social status; hence, an adult, male citizen of Athens can have legitimate sexual relations only with statutory minors (his inferiors not in age but in social and political status): the proper targets of his sexual desire include, specifically, women, boys, foreigners, and slaves—all of them persons who do not enjoy the same legal and political rights and privileges that he does. Furthermore, what a citizen does in bed reflects the differential in status that distinguishes him from his
sexual partner: the citizen’s superior prestige and authority express themselves in his sexual precedence—in his power to initiate a sexual act, his right to obtain pleasure from it, and his assumption of an insertive rather than a receptive sexual role. (Even if a sexual act does not involve physical penetration, it still remains hierarchically polarized by the distribution of phallic pleasure: the partner whose pleasure is promoted is considered “active,” while the partner who puts his or her body at the service of another’s pleasure is deemed “passive”—read “penetrated,” in the culture’s unselconscious ideological shorthand.) What Paul Veyne has said about the Romans can apply equally well to the classical Athenians: they were indeed puritans when it came to sex, but (unlike modern bourgeois Westerners) they were not puritans about conjugality and reproduction; rather, like many Mediterraneans, they were puritans about virility. 20

When the sexual system of the classical Athenians is described in that fashion, as though it constituted a separate sphere of life governed by its own internal laws, it appears merely exotic or bizarre, one of the many curiosities recorded in the annals of ethnography. But if, instead of treating Athenian sexual attitudes and practices as expressions of ancient Greek “sexuality” (conceived, in modern terms, as an autonomous domain), we situate them in the larger social context in which they were embedded, they will at once disclose their systematic coherence. For the “sexuality” of the classical Athenians, far from being independent and detached from “politics” (as we conceive sexuality to be), was constituted by the very principles on which Athenian public life was organized. In fact, the correspondences in classical Athens between sexual norms and social practices were so strict that an inquiry into Athenian “sexuality” per se would be nonsensical: such an inquiry could only obscure the phenomenon it was intended to elucidate, for by isolating sexual norms from social practices it would conceal the sole context in which the sexual protocols of the classical Athenians make any sense—namely, the structure of the Athenian polity.

In classical Athens a relatively small group made up of the adult male citizens held a virtual monopoly of social power and constituted a clearly defined elite within the political and social life of the city-state. The extraordinary polarization of sexual roles in classical Athens merely reflects the marked division in the Athenian polity between this socially superordinate group, composed of citizens, and various subordinate groups (all lacking full civil rights, though not all equally subordinate), composed respectively of women, foreigners, slaves, and children (the latter three groups comprising persons of both sexes). Sex between members of the superordinate group was virtually inconceivable, whereas sex between a member of the superordinate group and a member of any one of the subordinate groups mirrored in the minute details of its hierarchical arrangement, as we have
seen, the relation of structured inequality that governed the lovers’ wider social interaction.*

Sex in classical Athens, then, was not a simply a collaboration in some private quest for mutual pleasure that absorbed or obscured, if only temporarily, the social identities of its participants. On the contrary, sex was a manifestation of personal status, a declaration of social identity; sexual behavior did not so much express inward dispositions or inclinations (although, of course, it did also do that) as it served to position social actors in the places assigned to them, by virtue of their political standing, in the hierarchical structure of the Athenian polity. Far from being interpreted as an expression of commonality, as a sign of some shared sexual status or identity, sex between social superior and social inferior was a miniature drama of polarization which served to measure and to define the social distance between them. To assimilate both the senior and the junior partner in a paederastic relationship to the same “(homo)sexuality,” for example, would have struck a classical Athenian as no less bizarre than to classify a burglar as an “active criminal,” his victim as a “passive criminal,” and the two of them alike as partners in crime*: burglary—like sex, as the Greeks understood it—is, after all, a “non-relational” act. Each act of sex in classical Athens was no doubt an expression of real, personal desire on the part of the sexual actors involved, but their very desires had already been shaped by the shared cultural definition of sex as an activity that generally occurred only between a citizen and a non-citizen, between a person invested with full civil status and a statutory minor.

The social articulation of sexual desire in classical Athens furnishes a telling illustration of the interdependence in culture of social practices and subjective experiences. It thereby casts a strong and revealing light on the ideological dimension—the purely conventional and arbitrary character—of our own conceptions of sex and sexuality. The Greek record suggests that sexual choices do not always express the agent’s individual essence or reveal the profound orientation of the inner life of a person, independent of social

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*This account of the principles that structured sexual and social roles in classical Athens does not capture, of course, what the sensation of being in love was like: I am interested here not in erotic phenomenology but in the social articulation of sexual categories and in the public meanings attached to sex. Hence, my discussion of the male citizen’s social and sexual precedence is not intended either to convey what an erotic relation felt like to him or to obscure the extent to which he may have experienced being in love as a loss of mastery—as “enslavement” to his beloved or to his own desire. Such feelings on a lover’s part were evidently conventional (see Dover [1974], 208; Golden [1984], 313–16; Foucault [1985], 65–70) and possibly even cherished (see Xenophon, Symposion 4.14 and Oeconomicus 7.42). Indeed, the citizen-lover could afford to luxuriate in his sense of helplessness or erotic dependency precisely because his self-abandonment was at some level a chosen strategy and, in any case, his actual position of social preeminence was not in jeopardy.
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and political life. Quite the contrary: the sexual identities of the classical Athenians—their experiences of themselves as sexual actors and as desiring human beings—seem to have been inseparable from, if not determined by, their social identities, their public standing. If the Greeks thought sex was "non-relational” in character, for example, that is because sex was so closely tied to differentials in the personal status of the sexual actors rather than to the expressive capacities of individual subjects. Thus, the classical Greek record strongly supports the conclusion drawn (from a quite different body of evidence) by the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier: "it is not sexuality which haunts society, but society which haunts the body’s sexuality."73

Even the relevant features of a sexual object in classical Athens were not so much determined by a physical typology of sexes as by the social articulation of power.79 Sexual partners came in two significantly different kinds—not male and female but “active” and “passive,” dominant and submissive.75 That is why the currently fashionable distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality (and, similarly, between “homosexuals” and “heterosexuals” as individual types) had no meaning for the classical Athenians: there were not, so far as they knew, two different kinds of “sexuality,” two differently structured psychosexual states or modes of affective orientation, corresponding to the sameness or difference of the anatomical sexes of the persons engaged in a sexual act; there was, rather, but a single form of sexual experience which all free adult males shared—making due allowance for variations in individual tastes, as one might make for individual palates. This "universal" form of sexual experience could be looked at differently, to be sure, according to whether one viewed it from the perspective of the "active" or the "passive" sexual partner, but its essential nature did not change with such shifts in point of view.

In the Third Dithyramb by the classical poet Bacchylides, the Athenian hero Theseus, voyaging to Crete among the seven youths and seven maidens destined for the Minotaur and defending one of the maidens from the advances of the libidinous Cretan commander, warns him vehemently against molesting any one of the Athenian youths (tin’ ēthēōn: 43)—that is, any girl or boy. Conversely, the antiquarian littérature Athenæus, writing six or seven hundred years later, is amazed that Polykrates, the tyrant of Samos in the sixth century B.C., did not send for any boys or women along with the other luxury articles he imported to Samos for his personal use during his reign, "despite his passion for relations with males" (12.540c-e).77 Now both the notion that an act of heterosexual aggression in itself makes the aggressor suspect of homosexual tendencies and the mirror-opposite notion that a person with marked homosexual tendencies is bound to hanker after heterosexual contacts are nonsensical to us, associating as we do sexual object-choice with a determinate kind of “sexuality,” a fixed sexual nature,
but it would be a monumental task indeed to enumerate all the ancient documents in which the alternative "boy or woman" occurs with perfect nonchalance in an erotic context, as if the two were functionally interchangeable. 78

A testimony to the imaginable extent of male indifference to the sex of sexual objects,* one that may be particularly starting to modern eyes, can be found in a marriage-contract from Hellenistic Egypt, dating to 92 B.C. This not untypical document stipulates that "it shall not be lawful for Philiscus [the prospective husband] to bring home another wife in addition to Apollonia or to have a concubine or boy-lover. . . ." 79 The possibility that one's husband might decide at some point during one's marriage to set up another household with his boyfriend evidently figured among the various potential domestic disasters that a prudent fiancée would be sure to anticipate and to indemnify herself against. A somewhat similar expectation is articulated in an entirely different context by Dio Chrysostom, a moralizing Greek orator from the late first century A.D. In a speech denouncing the corrupt morals of city life, Dio asserts that even respectable women are so easy to seduce nowadays that men will soon tire of them and will turn their attention to boys instead—just as addicts progress inexorably from wine to hard drugs (7.150–152). According to Dio, then, paeontery is not simply a pis aller; it is not "caused," as many modern historians of the ancient Mediterranean appear to believe, by the supposed seclusion of women, by the practice (it was more likely an ideal) of locking them away in the inner rooms of their fathers' or husbands' houses and thereby preventing them from serving as sexual targets for adult men. In Dio's fantasy, at least, paeontery springs not from the insufficient but from the superabundant supply of sexually available women; the easier it is to have sex with women, on his view, the less desirable sex with women becomes, and the more likely men are to seek sexual pleasure with boys. Scholars sometimes describe the cultural formation underlying this apparent refusal by Greek males to discriminate categorically among sexual objects on the basis of anatomical sex as a bisexuality of penetration** or—even more intriguingly—as a heterosexuality indiferent to its object; † but I think it would be advisable not to speak of it as

* I wish to emphasize that I am not claiming that all Greek men felt such indifference; on the contrary, plenty of ancient evidence testifies to the strength of individual preferences for a sexual object of one sex rather than another (see note 53). But many ancient documents bear witness to a certain constitutional reluctance on the part of the Greeks to predict, in any given instance, the sex of another man's beloved merely on the basis of that man's past sexual behavior or previous pattern of sexual object-choice.

† This is not so paradoxical as it may at first appear. Whether the object of a free adult male's desire turns out to be a woman, a boy, a foreigner, or a slave, it remains from his point of view "hetero"—in the sense of "different" or "other"; it always belongs to a different social category or status.
a sexuality at all but to describe it, rather, as a more generalized ethos of penetration and domination, a socio-sexual discourse structured by the presence or absence of its central term: the phallus.

If that discourse does not seem to have looked to gender for a criterion by means of which to differentiate permissible from impermissible sexual objects (but to have featured, instead, a gender-blind distinction between dominant and submissive persons), we should not therefore conclude that gender was unimplicated in the socio-sexual system of the ancient Greeks. Gender did indeed figure in that system—not at the level at which sexual objects were categorized, to be sure, but at the level at which sexual subjects were constituted. Let us not forget, after all, that the kind of desire described by Greek sources as failing to discriminate between male and female objects was itself gendered as a specifically male desire. Now, to define the scope of sexual object-choice for men in terms independent of gender is almost certainly to construct different subjectivities for men and for women, to do so specifically in terms of gender, and thus to define male and female desire asymmetrically. For women and boys will qualify as equally appropriate sexual targets for adult men only so long as they remain relatively stationary targets (so to speak), only so long as they are content to surrender the erotic initiative to men and to await the results of male deliberation. A sexual ethos of phallic penetration and domination, in which the gender of the object does not determine male sexual object-choice, requires the differential gendering of both desire and power: if women and boys had the kind of wide-ranging, object-directed desires that men have, and if they had the social authority to act on those desires, they would be more likely to frustrate or to interfere with men’s sexual choices.

Desire appears to have been gendered in precisely this way in classical Athens. Neither boys nor women were thought to possess the sort of desires that would impel them to become autonomous sexual actors in their relations with men, constantly scanning the erotic horizon for attractive candidates uniquely adapted to their personal requirements. On the contrary: both women and boys, in different ways and for different reasons, were considered sexually inert. Boys did not (supposedly) experience any erotic desire at all for adult men, whereas women’s desire was not directed in the first instance to individual male objects: it did not present itself as a longing for

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* Even at this level, however, gender had an impact: it can be felt in the male liking for some physical characteristics of boys which Greek culture associated with women (e.g., smooth and hairless skin [for details, see “The Democratic Body,” in this volume]); the courtesan Glyeira went so far as to claim, according to Clearchus, that “boys are attractive for as long as they resemble a woman” (Athenaeus, 13.605d). Dover (1978), 68–81, however, argues convincingly that in a number of other departments besides hair and skin boyish good looks, as Greek males defined them, included features that qualified as specifically “masculine” by contemporary standards.
one or another man in particular but as an undifferentiated appetite for sexual pleasure; it arose, in other words, out of a more diffuse and generalized somatic need, determined by the physiological economy of the female body, and even then it was fundamentally reactive in character—it appeared in response to a specific male stimulus (whereupon, of course, it immediately became insatiable) and it could be aroused, allegedly, by anyone (even a woman)\textsuperscript{46} with the proper phallic equipment.\textsuperscript{47} As Andromache remarks, with pardonable skepticism, in Euripides’s \textit{Trojan Women}, “They say that one night in bed dissolves a woman’s hostility to sexual union with a man” (665–66).

The \textit{sexual} system of classical Athens, which defined the scope of sexual object-choice for adult men in terms independent of gender, was therefore logically inseparable from the \textit{gender} system of classical Athens, which distributed to men and to women different kinds of desires, constructing male desire as wide-ranging, acquisitive, and object-directed, while constructing female desire (in opposition to it) as objectless, passive, and entirely determined by the female body’s need for regular phallic irrigation.\textsuperscript{48} Instead of associating different sorts of sexual object-choice with different \textit{kinds of} “sexuality,” as we do, the classical Greeks assigned different forms of desire to different genders. The relation between sex and gender in classical Athens, then, was perhaps just as strict as it is in modern bourgeois Europe and America, but it was elaborated according to a strategy radically different from that governing the relation of sex and gender under the current régime of “sexuality.”

For those inhabitants of the ancient world about whom it is possible to generalize, “sexuality" obviously did not hold the key to the secrets of the human personality.\textsuperscript{49} The measure of a free male in Greek society was most often taken not by scrutinizing his sexual constitution but by observing how

\textsuperscript{46} I must point out, once again, that I am speaking about Greek canons of sexual propriety, not about the actual phenomenology of sexual life in ancient Greece. It would be easy to come up with many counter-examples to the generalizations I am making here in order to show, for instance, that women sometimes were considered capable of pursuing men. Thus, in Euripides’s \textit{Hippolytus}, Phaedra becomes erotically obsessed by one man in particular without having ever received much direct encouragement from him; her example, however, far from refuting the picture I have drawn, might actually corroborate it, if we remember that it was precisely by portraying such instances of female “shamelessness” that Euripides earned his ancient reputation for misogyny. His portrait of Phaedra was interpreted by his contemporaries, in other words, not as realism but as slander. Hanson notes, further, that if Phaedra had followed her Nurse’s advice and consulted a male doctor (295–96), he would most likely have prescribed phallic penetration (real or simulated) to ease her hysterical symptoms.

\textsuperscript{47} In fact, the very concept of and set of practices centering on “the human personality”—the physical and social sciences of the blank individual—belong to a much later era and bespeak the modern social and economic conditions (urban, capitalist, bureaucratic) that accompanied their rise.
he fared when tested against other free males in public competition. War (and other agonistic contests), not love, served to reveal the inner man, the stuff a free Greek male citizen was made of.89 A striking example of this emphasis on public life as the primary locus of signification can be found in the work of Artemidorus, a master dream-analyst who lived and wrote in the second century of our era but whose basic approach to the interpretation of dreams does not differ—in this respect, at least—from attitudes current in the classical period.90 Artemidorus saw public life, not erotic life, as the principal tenor of dreams. Even sexual dreams, in Artemidorus’s system, are seldom really about sex: rather, they are about the rise and fall of the dreamer’s public fortunes, the vicissitudes of his domestic economy.91 If a man dreams of having sex with his mother, for example, his dream signifies to Artemidorus nothing in particular about the dreamer’s own sexual psychology, his fantasy life, or the history of his relations with his parents; it’s a very common dream, and so it’s a bit tricky to interpret precisely, but basically it’s a lucky dream: it may signify—depending on the family’s circumstances at the time, the postures of the partners in the dream, and the mode of penetration—that the dreamer will be successful in politics (“success in politics” meaning, evidently, the power to screw one’s country), that he will go into exile or return from exile, that he will win his law-suit, obtain a rich harvest from his lands, or change professions, among many other things (1.79). Artemidorus’s system of dream interpretation resembles the indigenous dream-lore of certain Amazonian tribes who, despite their quite different socio-sexual systems, share with the ancients a belief in the predictive value of dreams. Like Artemidorus, these Amazonian peoples reverse what modern bourgeois Westerners take to be the natural flow of signification in dreams (from images of public and social events to private and sexual meanings): in both Kagwahiv and Mehinaku culture, for example, dreaming about the female genitals portends a wound (and so a man who has such a dream is especially careful when he handles axes or other sharp implements the next day); dreamt wounds do not symbolize the female genitals.92 Both these ancient and modern dream-interpreters, then, are innocent of “sexuality”: what is fundamental to their experience of sex is not anything we would regard as essentially sexual,* it is something essentially outward, public, and social. Instead of viewing public and political life as a dramatization of individual sexual psychology, as we often tend to do, they see sexual behavior as an expression of political and social relations.93 “Sexuality,” for cultures

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* Note that even the human genitals themselves do not necessarily figure as sexual signifiers in all cultural or representational contexts; for example, Bynum (1986) argues, in considerable detail, that there is “reason to think that medieval people saw Christ’s penis not primarily as a sexual organ but as the object of circumcision and therefore as the wounded, bleeding flesh with which it was associated in painting and in text” (p. 407).
not shaped by some very recent European and American bourgeois developments, is not a cause but an effect. The social body precedes the sexual body.

V

If there is a lesson that we should draw from this picture of ancient sexual attitudes and behaviors, it is that we need to de-center sexuality from the focus of the interpretation of sexual experience—and not only ancient varieties of sexual experience. Just because modern bourgeois Westerners are so obsessed with sexuality, so convinced that it holds the key to the hermeneutics of the self (and hence to social psychology as an object of historical study), we ought not therefore to conclude that everyone has always considered sexuality a basic and irreducible element in, or a central feature of, human life. Indeed, there are even sectors of our own societies to which the ideology of "sexuality" has failed to penetrate. A socio-sexual system featuring a rigid hierarchy of sexual roles that reflect a set of socially articulated power-relations rather than the determinate sexual orientations of those involved has been documented in contemporary America by Jack Abbott, in one of his infamous letters written to Norman Mailer from a federal penitentiary; because the text is now quite inaccessible (it was not reprinted in Abbott’s book), and stunningly apropos, I have decided to quote it here at length.

It really was years, many years, before I began to actually realize that the women in my life—the prostitutes as well as the soft, pretty girls who giggled and teased me so much, my several wives and those of my friends—it was years before I realized that they were not women, but men; years before I assimilated the notion that this was unnatural. I still only know this intellectually, for the most part—but for the small part that remains to my ken, I know it is like a hammer blow to my temple and the shame I feel is profound. Not because of the thing itself, the sexual love I have enjoyed with these women (some so devoted it aches to recall it), but because of shame—and anger—that the world could so intimately betray me; so profoundly touch and move me—and then laugh at me and accuse my soul of a sickness, when that sickness has rescued me from mental derangement and deserts so black as to cast this night that surrounds us in prison into day.

I do not mean to say I never knew the physical difference—no one but an imbecile could make such a claim. I took it, without reflection or the slightest doubt, that this was a natural sex that emerged within the society of men, with attributes that naturally complemented masculine attributes. I thought it was a natural phenomenon in the society of women as well. The attributes were feminine and so there seemed no gross misrepresentation of facts to call them (among us men) "women." . . . Many of my "women" had merely the appearance of handsome, extremely neat, and polite young men. I have learned, analyzing my feelings today, that those attributes I called feminine a moment ago were not feminine in any way as it appears in the real female sex. These attributes seem
now merely a tendency to need, to depend on another man; to need never to become a rival or to compete with other men in the pursuits men, among themselves, engage in. It was, it occurs to me now, almost boyish—not really feminine at all.

This is the way it always was, even in the State Industrial School for Boys—a penal institution for juvenile delinquents—where I served five years, from age twelve to age seventeen. They were the possession and sign of manhood and it never occurred to any of us that this was strange and unnatural. It is how I grew up—a natural part of my life in prison.

It was difficult for me to grasp the definition of the clinical term "homosexual"—and when I finally did it devastated me, as I said."

Gender, for Abbott, is not determined by anatomical sex but by social status and personal style. "Men"* are defined as those who "compete with other men in the pursuits men, among themselves, engage in," whereas "women" are characterized by the possession of "attributes that naturally complement masculine attributes"—namely, "a tendency to need, to depend on another man" for the various benefits won by the victors in "male" competition. In this way "a natural sex . . . emerge[s] within the society of men" and qualifies, by virtue of its exclusion from the domain of "male" precedence and autonomy, as a legitimate target of "male" desire. In Abbott’s society, as in classical Athens, desire is sparked only when it arcs across the political divide, when it traverses the boundary that marks out the limits of intramural competition among the elite and that thereby distinguishes subjects from objects of sexual desire. Sex between "men"—and, therefore, "homosexuality"—remains unthinkable in Abbott’s society (even though sex between anatomical males is an accepted and intrinsic part of the system), whereas sex between "men" and "women" does not so much implicate both partners in a common "sexuality" as it articulates and defines the differences in status between them.

VI

To discover and to write the history of sexuality has long seemed to many a sufficiently radical undertaking in itself, inasmuch as its effect (if not always

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*Abbott, of course, uses quotation marks only to surround women, not men. But one could hardly ask for a better illustration of the post-structuralist doctrine that when meaning is not fixed by reference but is determined solely by the play of differences within a system of signification, all hierarchical binaries are potentially reversible: although Abbott defines "women" by reference to "men," as a supplement to the definition of masculinity, and assumes "men" to represent an unproblematic term, it is obvious that his definition of masculinity is a highly specialized, tendentious one whose criteria are determined by opposition to his definition of femininity. Therefore, in discussing Abbott’s text, I have placed both men and women within quotation marks.
the intention behind it) is to call into question the very naturalness of what we currently take to be essential to our individual natures. But in the course of implementing that ostensibly radical project many historians of sexuality seem to have reversed—perhaps unwittingly—its radical design: by preserving "sexuality" as a stable category of historical analysis not only have they not denaturalized it but, on the contrary, they have newly idealized it. To the extent, in fact, that histories of "sexuality" succeed in concentrating their focus on sexuality, to just that extent are they doomed to fail as histories (Foucault himself taught us that much), unless they also include as an integral part of their proper enterprise the task of demonstrating the historicity, conditions of emergence, modes of construction, and ideological contingencies of the very categories of analysis that undergird their own practice. Instead of concentrating our attention specifically on the history of sexuality, then, we need to define and refine a new, and radical, historical sociology of psychology—an intellectual discipline designed to analyze the cultural poetics of desire, by which I mean the processes whereby sexual desires are constructed, mass-produced, and distributed among the various members of human living-groups. We must acknowledge that "sexuality" is a cultural production no less than are table manners, health clubs, and abstract expressionism, and we must struggle to discern in what we currently regard as our most precious, unique, original, and spontaneous impulses the traces of a previously rehearsed and socially encoded ideological script. We must train ourselves to recognize conventions of feeling as well as conventions of behavior and to interpret the intricate texture of personal life as an artefact, as the determinate outcome, of a complex and arbitrary constellation of cultural processes. We must, in short, be willing to admit that what seem to be our most inward, authentic, and private experiences are actually, in Adrienne Rich’s admirable phrase, "shared, unnecessary and political."49

A little less than fifty years ago W. H. Auden asked, "When shall we learn, what should be clear as day, We cannot choose what we are free to love? It is a characteristically judicious formulation: love, if it is to be love, must be a free act, but it is also inscribed within a larger circle of constraint, within conditions that make possible the exercise of that "freedom." The task of distinguishing freedom from constraint in love, of learning to trace the shifting and uncertain boundaries between the self and the world, is a dizzying and, indeed, an endless undertaking. I should like to propose the upcoming homosexual centenary as an appropriate deadline to set ourselves for learning a more modest version of the lesson that Auden has assigned us, one that three generations of feminist scholars have shown us how to approach. The project before us has been well articulated, albeit in a comparatively prosaic idiom, by Jeffrey Weeks: "Social processes construct subjectivities not just as ‘categories’ but at the level of individual desires. This perception . . . should be the starting point for future social and historical studies of ‘homosexuality’ and indeed of ‘sexuality’ in general."50


11 See Kennedy, 43–53.

12 J. A. Symonds, A Problem in Greek Ethics, being an inquiry into the phenomenon of sexual inversion, addressed especially to medical psychologists and jurists (London, 1900); the essay was originally composed in 1873, privately circulated in an edition of ten copies in 1883, later revised, and posthumously appended to the first printing of Havelock Ellis’s Sexual Inversion in April, 1897. Ellis’s work had to be withdrawn from sale, however, when its publisher was convicted on a charge of obscenity, and it has not been published in England since.

13 For further information, see the partial bibliographies supplied by Boswell (1980), 17n.; the Editors’ general introduction to Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin; and the notes to “Two Views of Greek Love,” in this volume.


15 “Law, Society and Homosexuality in Classical Athens,” Past & Present, 117 (November 1987), 3–21. This has already proved to be an influential essay, but its arguments and conclusions should be treated with considerable caution.

16 Foucault’s theoretical approach to sexuality has been turned back and applied to gender by Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction (Bloomington, 1987), esp. 1–30.

17 Foucault (1978), 127.

18 Dover (1988).

1 One Hundred Years of Homosexuality

Earlier versions of this paper have appeared, under the present title, in Diacritics, 16, no. 2 (Summer 1986), 34–45, esp. 34–40; under the title, “Sex before Sexuality: Pederasty, Politics, and Power in Classical Athens,” in Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past, ed. George Chauncey, Jr., Martin Bauml Duberman, and Martha Vicinus (New York: New American Library, 1989), 37–53, 482–92; and under the title, “Is There a History of Sexuality?” in History and Theory, 28.3 (October 1989), 257–74. The present essay is closely based on those earlier works; it was first recast for delivery at a conference on “Homosexuality in History and Culture, and the University Curriculum,” held at Brown University on February 20–21, 1987, and was later given as a public lecture at Duke University on April 20, 1987. Subsequent versions have been presented at a conference on “The Body and Literature” at the State University of New York at Buffalo; at the University of California at Santa Cruz, the University of New Mexico, the University of California in San Francisco, Ohio State University, Babson College, Rice University, Harvard University, Wesleyan University, Brown University, and Northwestern State University of Louisiana. I am grateful to the organizers of these conferences and events for having invited me to speak as well as to my audiences for their sympathetic but rigorous scrutiny. I owe a considerable debt of gratitude to George Chauncey, Jr., who urged me to revise and expand this paper and suggested how I might go about it. I also wish to thank Barry D. Adam, Judith M. Bennett, Mary T. Boatwright, John Bodel, Elizabeth A. Clark, Ann Cumming, Kostas Dencils, Judith Freyster, Ernesteine Friedl, Maud W. Gleason, Madelyn Gutwirth, Jean H. Hagstrum, John Kleiner, Richard D. Mohr, Glenn W. Most, Cynthia B. Patterson, Daniel A. Pollock, H. Alan Shapiro, Marilyn B. Skinner, Emery J. Snyder, Gregory
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1 See R. W. Burchfield, ed., A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford, 1976), II, 136, s.v. homosexuality. Inasmuch as the same entry in the OED records the use of the word by J. A. Symonds in a letter of the same year, it is in fact most unlikely that Chaddock alone is responsible for its English coinage. The first use of the term "homosexual" in an American medical journal also dates to 1892, according to Jonathan Katz, Gay/Lesbian Almanac (New York, 1983), 232n; the passage in which the word occurs, however, turns out to have been lifted in its entirety from Chaddock's translation of Krafft-Ebing (see note 17, below, for a full citation of the relevant article).

2 The terms "homosexual" and "homosexuality" appeared in print for the first time in 1869 in two anonymous pamphlets published in Leipzig and composed, apparently, by Karl Maria Kertbeny. Kertbeny (né Benkert) was an Austro-Hungarian translator and littérateur of Bavarian extraction, not a physician (as Magnus Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis—mired by false clues planted in those pamphlets by Kertbeny himself—maintained); he wrote in German under his acquired Hungarian surname and claimed (rather unconvincingly), in the second of the two tracts under discussion, not to share the sexual tastes denominated by his own ingenious neologism. For the most reliable accounts of Kertbeny and his invention, see Herzer, Kennedy, 149–56; also, Féray. The earlier of Kertbeny's two pamphlets is reprinted in the Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen, 7 (1905), 1–66. Dykes, 67, notes that Kertbeny's term "might have gone unnoticed had not [Kertbeny's friend] Gustav Jaeger popularized it in the second edition of his Entdeckung der Seele (1880)." In fact, "homosexuality" owes its currency to Krafft-Ebing, who employed an adjectival form of it in the second edition of his Psychopathia sexualis (Stuttgart, 1887), 88, explicitly acknowledging Jaeger as his source for the word; he came to use the new terminology with increasing freedom and frequency in subsequent editions. See Herzer, 6–9, esp. 6: "For Jaeger . . . the same thing holds as for all later users of Kertbeny's terms, including Kertbeny himself: nowhere is a reason given for using these new words. The new nomenclature is introduced without discussion; information on the origin of the words is omitted, as are definitions."

The year 1869 also witnessed the introduction of a terminological competitor (subsequently favored over "homosexuality" by both Krafft-Ebing and Moll), die konträre Sexualempfindung ("contrary sexual feeling"), by Carl Friedrich Otto Westphal in an article which Féray, 16, and Michel Foucault take to be the inaugural event of the new era (see note 52, below). C. Westphal, "Die konträre Sexualempfindung, Symptom eines neurothypischen (psychopathischen) Zustandes," Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten, 2 (1870), 73–108 (the first fascicle of this volume, in which Westphal's article appears, was actually published in the latter part of 1869, according to Féray, 256; also, Herzer, 17–18). See Foucault (1978), 43, who goes on to provide an entertaining list of the lexical novelties fashioned in this period to catalogue the newly discovered varieties of sexual behavior. On nomenclature generally, see Claude Courroux, Vocabulaire de l'homosexualité masculine (Paris, 1985).

3 Chauncey (1982–83), 116. See Foucault (1978), 37–38; Féray, esp. 16–17, 246–56; Weeks (1981/2), 82ff.; Marshall, Davidson (forthcoming). To be sure, the formal introduction of "inversion" as a clinical term (by Arrigo Tanassia, "Sull'inversione dell'istinto sessuale," Rivista sperimenterale di femminista e di medicina legale, 4 [1878], 97–117: the earliest published use of "inversion" that Ellis, 3, was able to discover) occurred a decade after Kertbeny's coinage of "homosexuality," but Ellis suspected the word of being considerably older: it seems to have been well established by the 1870's, at any rate, and it was certainly a common designation throughout the 1880's. "Homosexuality," by contrast,
not really begin to achieve currency in Europe until the Eudenburg affair of 1907–1908 (see Féray, 116–22), and even thereafter it was slow in gaining ascendency. The main point, in any case, is that "inversion," defined as it is by reference to gender-deviance, represents an age-old outlook on sexual non-conformity, whereas "homosexuality" marks a sharp break with traditional ways of thinking.


5 See Hubert C. Kennedy, "The 'Third Sex' Theory of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs," in *Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality,* ed. Salvatore J. Licata and Robert P. Petersen (*Journal of Homosexuality,* 6.1–2 [1980/81], 103–111; now, Kennedy, 43–53. In the light of the current self-representations of so-called transsexuals, I should point out that Ulrichs was attempting to account for his own pattern of sexual object-choice, not merely for his personal sense of sexual identity (some of the various issues that have figured in the history of efforts to distinguish sexual identity from object-choice are treated by Dave King, "Gender Confusions: Psychological and Psychiatric Conceptions of Transvestism," in Plummer, 155–83).

6 See Chauncey (1982–83), 122–25; Marshall, 137–53; Davidson (1986/87), 258–71; Neu, 153ff. For the modern distinction between "inversion" (i.e., sex-role reversal) and "homosexuality," see Tripp, 22–35.

7 For the lack of congruence between traditional and modern sexual categories, see the suggestive comparative material discussed by Herdt (1984), viii–x; De Martino and Schmitt, 3–10. The new scientific conceptualization of homosexuality reflects, to be sure, a much older habit of mind, distinctive to northern and northwestern Europe since the Renaissance, whereby sexual acts are categorized not according to the modality of sexual or social roles assumed by the sexual partners but rather according to the anatomical sex of the persons engaged in them: see Trumbach, 2–9, with notes. This habit of mind seems to have been shaped, in its turn, by the same aggregate of cultural factors responsible for the much older division, accentuated during the Renaissance, between European and Mediterranean marriage-patterns; northern and northwestern Europe typically exhibits a pattern of marriage between mature coevals, a bilateral kinship system, neolocal marriage, and a mobile labor force, whereas Mediterranean societies are characterized by late male and early female marriage, patrilineal kinship organization, patrivitrolocal marriage, and inhibited circulation of labor; see R. M. Smith, ""The People of Tuscany and their Families in the Fifteenth Century: Medieval or Mediterranean?"" *Journal of Family History,* 6 (1981), 107–28; recent work has produced evidence for the antiquity of the Mediterranean marriage-pattern: see M. K. Hopkins, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage," *Population Studies,* 18 (1964/65), 309–27; Richard P. Saller, "Men's Age at Marriage and its Consequences in the Roman Family," *Classical Philology,* 82 (1987), 21–34, esp. 30; Martha T. Roth, "Age at Marriage and the Household: A Study of Neo-Babylonian and Neo-

8 E.g., K. Freud, “A Laboratory Method for Diagnosing Predominance of Homo- or Hetero-Erotic Interest in the Male.” Behavior Research and Therapy, 1 (1963–64), 85–93; N. McConaghy, “Penile Volume Change to Moving Pictures of Male and Female Nudes in Heterosexual and Homosexual Males,” Behavior Research and Therapy, 5 (1967), 43–48. For a partial, and critical, review of the literature on testing procedures, see Bernard F. Reiss, “Psychological Tests in Homosexuality,” in Marmor, 296–311. Compare the parallel tendency in the same period to determine the “true sex” of hermaphrodites: see Foucault (1980/0), vii-xi; Vanggaard, 17 and passim, differentiates further between normal (or “pseudo”) and abnormal (or “inverse”—i.e., inverted) homosexuality, in this he follows a taxonomic tradition that originated with Iwan Bloch (see Ellis, 4) and that derived, in turn, from the mid-nineteenth-century physiological distinction between (acquired) “perversity” and (congenital) “perversion.” Similarly, Lionel Ovesey, Homosexuality and Pseudohomosexuality (New York, 1969), attempts to move beyond the constitutional model of sexual preference towards an adaptive one by arguing that sexual fantasies may be rooted in “dependency needs” or “power needs” rather than in a determinate sexual orientation. On this point, see Takeo Doi, The Anatomy of Dependence, trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1973), 113–21.

9 See Foucault (1972), 190, for the introduction of this concept; for its application to the history of sexual categories, see Davidson (1987/88), 48.

10 On the emergence of the concept of homosexuality, see Jeffrey Weeks, “Sins and Diseases: Some Notes on Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century,” History Workshop, 1 (1976), 211–19, and Weeks (1981b), 96–121; also, Marshall; George L. Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 23–47; now, Ed Cohen, “Legislating the Norm: From Sodomy to Gross Indecency,” South Atlantic Quarterly, 88.1 (Winter 1989), 181–217. For a lucid discussion of the sociological implications, see McIntosh, who also examines some of the quasi-theological refinements (“biosexuality,” “latent homosexuality,” “pseudo-homosexuality”) that have been added to this intellectual structure in order to buttress its central concept.


12 While condemning "homosexuality" as "a bastard term compounded of Greek and Latin elements" (p. 2), Ellis acknowledged that its classical etymology facilitated its diffusion throughout the European languages; moreover, by consenting to employ it himself, Ellis helped further to popularize it. On the philological advantages and disadvantages of "homosexuality," see Féray, 174–76.

13 This passage, along with others in a similar vein, has been well discussed by Marshall.

14 Marshall, 148, who goes on to quote the following passage from the preface to a recent survey by D. J. West, *Homosexuality Reassessed* (London, 1977), viii: "A generation ago the word homosexuality was best avoided in polite conversation, or referred to in muted terms appropriate to a dreaded and scarcely mentionable disease. Even some well-educated people were hazy about exactly what it meant." Note, however, that Edward Westermarck, writing for a scholarly audience in *The Origin and Development of the Moral Idea*, could allude to "what is nowadays commonly called homosexual love" (vol. II, p. 456) as early as 1908. Westermarck’s testimony has escaped the *OED* Supplement, which simply records that in 1914 George Bernard Shaw felt free to use the word "homosexual" adjectivally in the *New Statesman* without further explanations and that the adjective reappears in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1921 as well as in Robert Graves’s *Good-bye to All That* in 1929. The French version of "homosexuality," by contrast, showed up in the *Larousse mensuel illustré* as early as December, 1907 (according to Féray, 172).

15 The only meaning attested for "lesbian" in the first edition of the *OED* pertains to carpentry, not to sexuality. This suggests that the *OED’s* omission of "homosexuality" from its original edition is not a mere oversight that can be entirely accounted for by the word’s recent coinage.

16 The earliest literary occurrence of the German loan-word "homosexualist," of which the *OED* is similarly ignorant, took place only in 1925, to the best of my knowledge, and it illustrates the novelty that evidently still attached to the term: in Aldous Huxley’s *Those Barren Leaves* we find the following exchange between a thoroughly modern aunt and her up-to-date niece, who are discussing a mutual acquaintance.

   "I sometimes doubt," [Aunt Lilian] said, "whether he takes any interest in women at all. Fundamentally, unconsciously, I believe he’s a homosexualist."

   "Perhaps," said Irene gravely. She knew her Havelock Ellis [Part III, Chapter 1].

(The earliest occurrence of "homosexualist" cited in the *OED* Supplement dates from 1931.)

17 According, once again, to the dubious testimony of the *OED’s* 1976 Supplement, II, 85, s. v. heterosexuality. The *OED* does establish, to be sure, that the adjective "heterosexual," like the adjective "homosexual," appeared in print for the first time in English in 1892. But what did the word actually mean at that date? Those who employed it seem to have
been far from unanimous in their understanding of it. A distinguished American alienist, for example, summarizing in 1892 Krafft-Ebing’s taxonomy of sexual disorders, uses “heterosexuals” as an alternate designation for “psychical hermaphroditism” and defines “heterosexuals” in a note by explaining, “In these inclinations to both sexes occur as well as to abnormal methods of gratification” (here, in other words, “heterosexual” signifies approximately what we now mean by “bisexual”); Jas. G. Kieman, “Responsibility in Sexual Perversion,” *The Chicago Medical Recorder*, 3 (1892), 185–210 (quotation on pp. 198–99n.; I am indebted to Vernon A. Rosario III for calling my attention to this usage). Note that Kerberen, the coiner of the term “homosexual,” opposed it not to “heterosexual” but to *normosexual* in his published writings; the earliest printed occurrence of “heterosexual” (in German, of course) therefore had to wait until the second edition of Jäger’s *Entdeckung der Seele* in 1880. Nonetheless, Kerberen did employ both *heterosexual* and *homosexual* as early as May 6, 1868, in the draft of a letter addressed to Karl Heinrich Ulrichs; see Kennedy, 152–53; Herzer, 6–9; Féra.write, 171; and note 2, above. On the dependence of “heterosexuality” on “homosexuality,” see Féra.write, 171–72; Beaver, 115–16; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet (I),” *Rantant*, 7.4 (Spring 1988), 39–69, esp. 53–56.

18 For a parallel argument, see Greenblatt, 32: “Though the term ‘individualism’ is relatively recent, a nineteenth-century coinage, the existence of individuals has long seemed to be a constitutive, universal element in the natural structure of human experience and hence more the basis than the object of historical investigation. But the belatedness of the general term for the phenomenon of individuals should make us wary of assuming the stable existence of individualism as a category of human life...” See Davidson (1987/88), 44–47, on the “link between sexuality and individuality”; also, 17: “the history of sexuality is...an area in which one’s historiography or implicit epistemology will stamp, virtually irrevocably, one’s first-order historical writing.”

19 Some doubts about the applicability of the modern concept of homosexuality to ancient varieties of sexual experience have been voiced by DeVereux, 71–76; MacCary, 178–85; Patzer; Richardson, 16–07; Sergeant, 46–47; and by Fernando Gonzalez-Reigos and Howard Kaminsky, “Greek Homosexuality, Greek Narcissism, Greek Culture: The Invention of Apollo,” *The Psychohistory Review*, 17.2 (Winter 1989), 149–81, esp. 168.


21 Boswell (1982–83), 93. Proponents of this view (which Boswell himself rejects; even more baldly categorical is Bullough, 2, 62: “homosexuality has always been with us; it has been a constant in history, and its presence is clear”) include Hocquenghem, 36–37; Veyne (1978), 52; Padigau; Weeks (1981b), 96–121; Brax, 8–9; 13–32; Patzer; Rubín (1984), 285–86; De Martino and Schmitt; Rousseau (1986), 259–61; Davidson (1987/88); most pertinently, the contributors to Plummer (1981); and, now, Greenberg. Additional fuel for the fires of historicism can be found in the writings of those who relate the rise of homosexuality to the rise of capitalism; see Hocquenghem; Weeks (1980); Dennis Altman, *The Homosexualization of America* (New York, 1982), esp. 79–107; John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson, 100–13; Adam (1985/b). For a different emphasis on the connection between capitalism and the oppression of homosexuals, see Pearce and Roberts; David Fernbach, “Toward a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation,” *Socialist Revolution*, no. 28 = 6.2 (April–June 1976), 29–41; Ingrat (1985/b), 192–97; David F. Greenberg and Marcia H. Bystrun, “Capitalism, Bureaucracy and Male Homosexuality,” *Contemporary Crises: Crime, Law and Social Policy,*

22 So Dynes, vii–viii.

23 Boswell (1982–83), 94–101, ingeniously noting that "The problem is rendered more difficult in the present case by the fact that the equivalent of gravity [in sexual matters] has not yet been discovered: there is still no essential agreement in the scientific community about the nature of human sexuality." Bullough, 3, similarly appeals to Aristophanes’s myth as "one of the earliest explanations" of homosexuality.


25 Something like this point is implicit in Brisson, 42–43; see, also, Neu, 177, n. 1. My own (somewhat different) reading of Aristophanes’s speech is set forth in greater detail in Halperin (1985), 167–70; I have reproduced some of my earlier formulations here.

26 The term "boy" (*pais* in Greek) refers by convention to the junior partner in a pederastic relationship, or to one who plays that role, regardless of his actual age; youths are customarily supposed to be desirable between the onset of puberty and the arrival of the beard: see Dover (1978), 16, 85–87; Buffêtre, 695–14; Kay, 120–21.


28 For an explication of what is meant by "a certain (non-sexual) pleasure in physical contact with men," see note 31, below.

29 See Dover (1978), 73–109; a general survey of this issue together with the scholarship on it can be found in Halperin (1986).

30 Public lecture delivered at Brown University (21 February 1987).

31 In Halperin (1986) I argued that the picture drawn by Plato’s Aristophanes is a historically accurate representation of the *moud convention* governing sexual behavior in classical Athens, if not of the reality of sexual behavior itself. To be sure, the pederastic ethos of classical Athens did not prohibit a willing boy from responding enthusiastically to his lover’s physical attentions: Aristophanes himself maintains that a philerast both "enjoys" and "welcomes" (*khairein, aspazesthai*: 191c–192b) his lover’s embraces. But that ethos did stipulate that whatever enthusiasm a boy exhibited for sexual contact with his lover sprang from sources other than sexual desire. The distinction between "welcoming" and "desiring" a lover’s caresses, as it applies to the motives for a boy’s willingness, spelled the difference between wanting to cooperate and wanting to submit—hence, between decency and degeneracy (so, also, Rouselle [1986], 260); that distinction is worth emphasizing here because the failure of modern interpreters to observe it has led to considerable misunderstanding (as when historians of sexuality, for example, misreading the frequent depictions on Attic pottery of a boy leaping into his lover’s arms [see Dover (1978), 96], take those paintings to be evidence for the strength of the junior partner’s sexual desire). A very few Greek documents seem truly ambiguous on this point, and I have reviewed their testimony in some detail: see Halperin (1986), 64, nn. 10 and 11, and 66, n. 14; also ambiguous, but very interesting, is a fragmentary painting on a tripod-pyxis from a sanctuary on Aegina, reproduced in Dietrich von Bothmer, *The Amasis Painter and His
World: Vase-Painting in Sixth-Century B.C. Athens (Malibu, 1985), 237. For an example of how the vase-painters could play with the conventions, see the tondo of a kylix by the Carpenter Painter (Getty Museum 85.AE.25), recently published by Bothmer, in which an amorous boy grabs his sedate—and evidently astonished—adult suitor: the image is reproduced as the frontispiece to this book. (See Addendum.)


33 The notable exceptions are Bullough, 3–5, who cites it as evidence for the supposed universality of homosexuality in human history, and Boswell (1980), 53n., 75n.

34 See Schrijvers, 11.

35 I have borrowed this entire argument from Schrijvers, 7–8; the same point had been made earlier—unbeknownst to Schrijvers, apparently—by Boswell (1980), 53, n. 33; 75, n. 67.

36 Translation, with emphasis added, by Drabkin, 413.

37 As his chapter title, "De mollibus tise subatis," implies. For an earlier substantive use of mollis in this almost technical sense, see Juvenal, 9.38. On the meaning of mollis, see the rather enigmatic discussions by Boswell (1980), 76, and Philippe Ariès, "St Paul and the Flesh," in Ariès and Béjin, 36–39; for the word's later technical use in the mediaeval penitentials, see the citations provided by Boswell (1980), 180, n. 38, and by Winkler, 170, nn. 113, 114 (with discussion on pp. 40–41).


39 Compare Aeschines, 1.185: Timarchus is "a man who is male in body but has committed a woman's transgressions" and has thereby "outraged himself contrary to nature" (discussed by Dover [1978], 60–68); for a similar formulation, see Hyperides, fr. 215 Kenyon = Rutilius Lupus, 2.6, and compare the Greek Anthology, 11.272. On the ancient figure of the krateides, or cimardus, the man who actively desires to submit himself passively to the sexual uses of other men, see Winkler (1989/a) and Gleason. Davidson (1987/88), 22, is therefore quite wrong to claim that "Before the second half of the nineteenth century persons of a determinate anatomical sex could not be thought to be really, that is, psychologically, of the opposite sex."

40 The Latin phrase quod ultraquem Venerem exercerant is so interpreted by Drabkin, 901n., and by Schrijvers, 32–33, who secures this reading by citing Ovid, Metamorphoses 3.323, where Telitesas, who had been both a man and a woman, is described as being learned in the field of Femus uitaque. Compare Petronius, Satyricon 43.8: omnis minerva homo.
I follow, once again, the insightful commentary by Schrijvers, 15.
1 quote from the translation by Drabkin, 905, which is based on his plausible, but nonetheless speculative, reconstruction (accepted by Schrijvers, 50) of a desperately corrupt text. For the notion expressed in it, compare Proust, III, 204, 212 (French text) = III, 203, 209 (English); discussion by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet (II),” *Ruskin*, 8.1 (Summer 1988), 102–30.

Anon., *De physiognomonia* 85 (vol. II, p. 114.5–14 Förster); Vertius Valens, 2.16 (p. 76.3–8 Kroll); Clément of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.21.3; Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* 6.30.15–16 and 7.25.3–23 (esp. 7.25.5).


Gleason trenchantly analyzes many other examples of this outlook, which even today remains largely unchanged in Mediterranean cultures: see Gilmore (1987/b), esp. 10–12.


For a similar insistence on the distinction between sex and sexuality, see Davidson (1987/88), 23–25; Henderson (1988), 1250. Because so much of my argument derives from Foucault, I should point out that Foucault himself decisively abandoned the distinction between sex and sexuality, as I have drawn it. Not only is Foucault’s final conception of “sex” much less positivistic (he categorically denies that “sex” is a biological fact), but his own understanding of the distinction between “sex” and “sexuality” reverses the sequence postulated here: “sexuality,” on his view, arises in the eighteenth century and eventually produces “sex,” as an idea internal to its own apparatus, only in the nineteenth century. See Foucault (1978), 152–57; (1980/b), 190, 210–11.

Padgug, 16. Compare duBois (1984); Moodie, 228: “We tend to think of sexuality as a psychological unity. Different aspects of the self such as ‘desire’, ‘moral ideals’, ‘proper conduct’, ‘gender attitudes’, ‘personal relationships’, ‘mental images’, and ‘physical sensations’ tend to be tied together by us to form a particular sexual character. With the self thus sexually defined, homosexuality and heterosexuality . . . are seen as specific personality types.”

Padgug, 8, analyzes the connection between the modern interpretation of sexuality as an autonomous domain and the modern construction of sexual identities thus: “the most commonly held twenty-first-century assumptions about sexuality imply that it is a separate category of existence (like ‘the economy,’ or ‘the state,’ other supposedly independent spheres of reality), almost identical with the sphere of private life. Such a view necessitates the location of sexuality within the individual as a fixed essence, leading to a classic division of individual and society and to a variety of psychological determinisms, and, often enough, to a full-blown biological determinism as well. These in turn involve the enshrinement of contemporary sexual categories as universal, static, and permanent, suitable for the analysis of all human beings and all societies.”

See Féray, 247–51; Laqueur; Davidson (1986/87), 258–62; also, Weeks (1980), 13 (paraphrasing Foucault): “our culture has developed a notion of sexuality linked to reproduction and genitality and to ‘deviations’ from these . . . .” The biological conceptualization of “sexuality” as an instinct is neatly disposed of by Tripp, 10–21.


See Foucault (1978), 45: “As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history,
and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. Cf. Trumbach, 9; Weeks (1977), 12; Richard Sennett, The Fall of Public Man (New York, 1977), 6–8; Padug, 13–14; Féray, 246–47; Schnapp (1981), 116 (speaking of Attic vase-paintings): "One does not paint acts that characterize persons so much as behaviors that distinguish groups"; Payer, 40–44, esp. 40–41; "there is no word in general usage in the penitentials for homosexuality as a category. . . . Furthermore, the distinction between homosexual acts and people who might be called homosexuals does not seem to be operative in these manuals. . . ." (also, 14–15, 140–53; Bynum (1986), 406; Petersen.)

In this light, the significance of Westphal's famous article (see note 2, above) is clear: the crucial and decisive break with tradition comes when Westphal defines "contrary sexual feeling" not in terms of its outward manifestations but in terms of its inward dynamics, its distinctive orientation of the inner life of the individual. Apologizing in a note for the necessity of coining a new formula, Westphal explains, "I have chosen the designation 'contrary sexual feeling' at the suggestion of an esteemed colleague, distinguished in the field of philology and classical studies, inasmuch as we were unable to succeed in constructing shorter and more apt correlatives. The phrase is intended to express the fact that 'contrary sexual feeling' does not always coincidentally concern the sexual drive as such but simply the feeling of being alienated, with one's entire inner being, from one's own sex—a less developed stage, as it were, of the pathological phenomenon." (p. 107n.; my emphasis: I wish to thank Linda Frisch and Iris Levine for assisting me with the translation of this passage; a nearly identical version has now been provided by Herzer, 18.) See Davidson (1987/88), 21–22, who identifies a "psychiatric style of reasoning that begins, roughly speaking, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a period during which rules for the production of true discourses about sexuality change radically. Sexual identity . . . is now a matter of impulses, tastes, aptitudes, satisfactions, and psychic traits."
the human personality than dietary preferences, but his argument remains circumscribed, as Putnam himself emphasizes, by highly culture-specific assumptions about sex, food, and personhood.

56 Hence, some students of classical Greek medicine prefer to speak of the authors of the gynaecological treatises in the Hippocratic corpus as concerned exclusively with human "genitality" rather than "sexuality": see, for example, Maoli (1980), 394; (1983), 152; Rouselle (1980), 1092. For similar arguments about Renaissance painting, to the effect that it is concerned (pace Leo Steinberg, The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion [New York, 1983]) not with Jesus's sexuality but with his genitality, see Bynum (1986), 405–10; Davidson (1987/88), 25–32.

57 I accept, in this sense, the point insisted upon by K. J. Dover: "The fact that the object of homosexual desire in the Greek world was almost always, like Ganymede, adolescent does not justify . . . [the] denial that [paederasty] is homosexuality. Homosexuality is a genus definable by the sex of the person participating (in reality or in fantasy) in action leading towards genital orgasm, and the predilections of a given society at a given time constitute one or more species of the genus" (Journal of Hellenic Studies, 104 [1984], 240).

58 Thus, Boswell (1982–83), 99n., argues that the term "paederast," at least as it is applied to Gnathon by Longus in Daphnis and Chloe 4.11, is "obviously a conventional term for 'homosexual,' " and he would presumably place a similar construction on paiderastes and philasteres in the myth of Plato's Aristophanes, dismissing my interpretation as a terminological quibble or as a misguided attempt to refer lexical entities into categories of experience.


64 See Winkler (1989/b).

65 Artemidorus, Oneirocritica 1.2 (pp. 8.21–9.4 Pack).


67 I say "phallus" rather than "penis" because (1) what qualifies as a phallus in this discursive system does not always turn out to be a penis (see note 83, below) and (2) even when phallus and penis have the same extension, or reference, they still do not have the same intension, or meaning: "phallus" betokens not a specific item of the male anatomy simpliciter but that same item taken under the description of a cultural signifier; (3) hence, the meaning of "phallus" is ultimately determined by its function in the larger socio-sexual
discourse: i.e., it is that which penetrates, that which enables its possessor to play an "active" sexual role, and so forth: see Rubin (1975), 190–92.

Foucault (1985), 215, puts it very well: "sexual relations—always conceived in terms of the model act of penetration, assuming a polarity that opposed activity and passivity—were seen as being of the same type as the relationship between a superior and a subordinate, an individual who dominates and one who is dominated, one who commands and one who complies, one who vanquishes and one who is vanquished."

In order to avoid misunderstanding, I should emphasize that by calling all persons belonging to these four groups "statutory minors," I do not wish either to suggest that they enjoyed the same status as one another or to obscure the many differences in status that could obtain between members of a single group—e.g., between a wife and a courtesan—differences that may not have been perfectly isomorphous with the legitimate modes of their sexual use. Nonetheless, what is striking about Athenian social usage is the tendency to collapse such distinctions as did indeed obtain between different categories of social subordinates and to create a single opposition between them all, *en masse*, and the class of adult male citizens: on this point, see Golden (1985), 101 and 102, n. 38.


I have borrowed this analogy from Arno Schmitt, who uses it to convey what the modern sexual categories would look like from a traditional Islamic perspective: see De Martino and Schmitt, 19.

See Dover (1978), 84; Henderson (1988), 1251: "Social status defined one's sexual identity and determined the proper sexual behavior that one was allowed."


On this general theme, see Golden (1985). For some comparative material, see Adam (1985/a), 22; De Martino and Schmitt, 3–22; Gill Shepherd, "Rank, Gender, and Homosexuality: Mombassa as a Key to Understanding Sexual Options," in Caplan, 240–70.

The same point is made, in the course of an otherwise unenlightening (from the specialist's point of view) survey of Greek social relations, by Bernard I. Murstein, *Love, Sex, and Marriage through the Ages* (New York, 1974), 58.

So Padgug, 3–4; Sartre, 12–14.

See Padgug, 3, who mistakenly ascribes Athenaeus's comment to Alexis of Samos (see *FGrHist* 539, fr. 2).

See Dover (1978), 63–67, for an extensive, but admittedly partial, list. For some Roman examples, see Richardson, 111. For ritual regulations, see Parker, 94; Cole (1991).


"Une bissexualité de sabrage": Veyne (1978), 50–55; cf. the critique by MacMullen, 491–97. Other scholars who describe the ancient behavioral phenomenon as "bisexuality" include Brisson, Schnupp (1986), 116–17; Kelsen, 40–41; Lawrence Stone, "Sex in the
West," The New Republic (July 8, 1985), 25–37, esp. 30–32 (with doubts). Contra, Padgug, 13: "to speak, as is common, of the Greeks, as 'bisexual' is illegitimate as well, since that merely adds a new, intermediate category, whereas it was precisely the categories themselves which had no meaning in antiquity."

81 Cf. Robinson, 162: "the reason why a heterosexual majority might have looked with a tolerant eye on 'active' homosexual practice among the minority, and even in some measure within their own group [...] is predictably a sexist one: to the heterosexual majority, to whom (in a man's universe) the 'good' woman is heta phisin [i.e., naturally] passive, obedient, and submissive, the 'role' of the 'active' homosexual will be tolerable 'precisely because his going-on can, without too much difficulty, be equated with the 'role' of the male heterosexual, i.e., to dominate and subdue; what the two have in common is greater than what divides them." But this seems to me to beg the very question that the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality is supposedly designed to solve.

82 An excellent analysis of the contemporary Mediterranean version of this ethos has been provided by Gilmore (1987/b), 8–16.

83 By "phallus" I mean a culturally constructed signifier of social power: for the terminology, see note 67, above. I call Greek sexual discourse phallic because (1) sexual contacts are polarized around phallic action—i.e., they are defined by who has the phallus and by what is done with it; (2) sexual pleasures other than phallic pleasures do not count in categorizing sexual contacts; (3) in order for a contact to qualify as sexual, one—and no more than one—of the two partners is required to have a phallus (boys are treated in paederastic contexts as essentially un-phallised [see Martial, 11.22; but cf. Palatine Anthology 12.3, 7, 197, 207, 216, 222, 242] and tend to be assimilated to women; in the case of sex between women, one partner—the "tribad"—is assumed to possess a phallus-equivalent (an over-developed clitoris) and to penetrate the other: sources for the ancient conceptualization of the tribad—no complete modern study of this fascinating and long-lived fictional type, which survived into the early decades of the twentieth century, is known to me—have been assembled by Friedrich Karl Forberg, Manual of Classical Erotology, trans. Julian Smithson [Manchester, 1884; repr. New York, 1966], II, 108–67; Brandt, 316–28; Gaston Verbrugge, Glossarium eroticum [Hannau, 1965], 654–55; Werner A. Krenkel, "Masturbation in der Antike," Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Wilhelm-Pick-Universität Rostock, 28 [1979], 159–78, esp. 171; sec. now, Judith P. Halpert, "Female Homoeroticism and the Denial of Roman Reality in Latin Literature," Yale Journal of Criticism, 3.1 [1989], forthcoming).

84 I owe this insight to the acute criticisms of an earlier version of the present essay by Sylvia Yanagisako, "Sex and Gender: You Can't Have One Without the Other," Paper presented at the first annual meeting of the Society for Cultural Anthropology, Washington, D.C. (20 May 1988).

85 Halpern (1986), 63–66; also, note 31, above, and section 6 of "Why is Diotima a Woman?" in this volume.

86 See Lucian, Dialogues of the Companions 5. On "tribads," see my discussion of Caelius Aurelianus as well as note 83, above.


89 I am indebted for this observation to Professor Peter M. Smith of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who notes that Sappho and Plato are the chief exceptions to this
general rule. See, further, Paul A. Rahe, "The Primacy of Politics in Classical Greece," American Historical Review, 89 (1984), 265–93, who makes a similar point in the course of an otherwise schematic and idealized portrayal of the political culture of classical Greece.

90 Compare, e.g., Herodotus, 6.107.


92 See Waud H. Kracke, "Dreaming in Kagwahiv: Dream Beliefs and Their Psychic Uses in an Amazonian Indian Culture," The Psychosocial Study of Society, 8 (1979), 119–71, esp. 130–32, 163 (on the predictive value of dreams) and 130–31, 142–45, 163–64, 168 (on the reversal of the Freudian direction of signification—which Kracke takes to be a culturally constituted defense mechanism and which he accordingly undervalues); Thomas Gregor, "Far, Far Away My Shadow Wandered . . . : The Dream Symbolism and Dream Theories of the Mehinkaku Indians of Brazil," American Ethnologist, 8 (1981), 709–20, esp. 712–13 (on predictive value) and 714 (on the reversal of signification), largely recapitulated in Gregor, 152–61, esp. 153. Cf. Foucault (1986), 35–36: "The movement of analysis and the procedures of valuation do not go from the act to a domain such as sexuality or the flesh, a domain whose divine, civil, or natural laws would delineate the permitted forms; they go from the subject as a sexual actor to the other areas of life in which he pursues his [familial, social, and economic] activity. And it is in the relationship between these different forms of activity that the principles of evaluation of a sexual behavior are essentially, but not exclusively, situated."


94 Jack H. Abbott, "On 'Women,' " New York Review of Books, 28.10 (June 11, 1981), 17. It should perhaps be pointed out that this lyrical confession is somewhat at odds with the more gritty account contained in the edited excerpts from Abbott's letters that were published a year earlier in the New York Review of Books, 27.11 (June 26, 1980), 34–37. (One might compare Abbott's statement with some remarks uttered by Bernard Boursicot in a similarly apologetic context and quoted by Richard Bernstein, "France Jails Two in a Bizarre Case of Espionage," New York Times [May 11, 1986]: "I was shattered to learn that he [Boursicot's lover of twenty years] is a man, but my conviction remains unshakable that for me at that time he was really a woman and was the first love of my life.")

95 See Davidson (1987/88), 16.

96 See Padgug, 5: "In any approach that takes as predetermined and universal the categories of sexuality, real history disappears."

97 See, now, Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Couze, and Walkerdine. Also, Rubin (1975), 178–83; Godelier (1976), 295–96: "The process of reproducing life—sexuality, that is, in its broadest sense—can only exist if it is subordinated to the reproduction of other social relations; that subordination takes the form, first of all, of the subordination of sexuality to the reproduction of kinship relations. The subordination of sexuality of which I speak here is not yet the subordination of one sex to the other in their personal relations, it's rather the subordination of a domain of social practices to the conditions of the functioning of other social relations—it's the position that that domain occupies by virtue of its role in reproducing the deep structure of the society, not the position it occupies, at the surface of social reality, in the visible hierarchy of institutions. But that subordination of sexuality, of the process of reproducing life to the process of reproducing the deep structure of social relations, has concrete effects on the person of individuals and on the personal relations that they establish with one another according to their sex. The sexuality of individuals must submit to the constraints posed by the functioning of kinship relations or, to put it

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differently, the desire of each individual is not authorized unless it is directed to those 'others' who fit in with the functioning of kinship relations and, through them, the reproduction of the ensemble of social relations. For a similar argument, see Donald L. Donham, History, Power, Ideology: Themes in Marxism and Anthropology (Cambridge, forthcoming). Further empirical support for this approach is provided by Moodie as well as by the anthropological studies of Herdt (1981) and (1984), whose import is well summarized by Adam (1985/a), 29: "Most remarkable in the Melanesian examples is the way in which the kinship code functions successfully to create categories of the attractive and the erotic. These structures do work, such that sexual arousal occurs and is consumed repeatedly for most participants. . . . Sexual interest does arise at the prescribed structural locations and prescribed categories of people, regardless of gender, are eroticized."


101 Weeks (1981/a), 111.

2 "Homosexuality": A Cultural Construct
(An Exchange with Richard Schneider)

An earlier version of this interview was published in the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Newsletter, 5.2 [= 3] (Fall 1987), 3–7. I wish to thank its editor, Richard Schneider, for the stimulating discussion that led up to this exchange. I also wish to thank Edward Stein for a thoroughgoing and searching critique of the revised text.

1 Epstein, 11. See, also, Rubin (1984), 275–76, who defines "sexual essentialism" as "the idea that sex is a natural force that exists prior to social life and shapes its institutions. Sexual essentialism is embedded in the folk wisdoms of Western societies, which consider sex to be eternally unchanging, asocial, and transhistorical. Dominated for over a century by medicine, psychiatry, and psychology, the academic study of sex has reproduced essentialism. These fields classify sex as a property of individuals. It may reside in their hormones or their psyches. It may be construed as physiological or psychological. But within these ethno-scientific categories, sexuality has no history and no significant social determinants." Boswell (1989), 74, rightly observes that "essentialism" is a retroactive and pejorative label applied by constructionists to the outlook they oppose: "no modern specialists in any field call themselves essentialists," he points out.