

# **THE FEMALE PHALLUS: On Alfred Kinsey's sexual vitalism, the theo-political reinstatement of the male/female divide, and the postmodern de-finitization of sexualities.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study examines anthropology's ongoing neglect of the theoretical challenges posed by Alfred Kinsey's (1894-1956) critique of binary sexuality and his re-definition of sexual difference. Focusing on the universal variability of life and the many-leveled continuities of the sexual, Kinsey propounded a deconstructive approach of sex research conducive to a paradigm shift at the core of sexology that allows grasping sexuality as a matter of individual differences within a continuous scheme of sexual distribution. While Kinsey's disruptive contentions have been mostly disregarded by anthropologists for decades, they continue to incite, on the one side, infuriated reactions from the proponents of a Bible-inspired re-instatement of the clear-cut male/female divide, and, on the other, enthusiastic recognition from post-modern advocates of a queer unsettling and rethinking of traditional conceptualizations of sexuality that operate with closed sets of sexual alternatives.

**KEYWORDS:** anthropology and sexuality, life/vitalism, male/female divide, sexology, sexual categories

'Pour nous, il existe semble-t-il non pas un ou deux sexes mais autant de sexes (cf. Guattari/Deleuze) qu'il y a d'individus' (Wittig 2001: 107 – 108).

'C'est cela, les machines désirantes ou le sexe non humain: non pas un ni deux, mais n... sexes' (Deleuze and Guattari 1999: 352).

'Ainsi l'humanité dans le temps humain, anti-animal, du travail est-elle en nous ce qui nous réduit à des choses et l'animalité est alors ce qui garde en nous la valeur d'une existence du sujet pour lui-même' (Bataille 1988: 354).

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## 1. Introduction

Eric Wolf's often-quoted depiction of anthropology as '[...] the most scientific of the humanities, and the most humanistic of the sciences' (1974: 88) is hardly validated by the discipline's response to the theoretical challenges posed by sexology and gender studies. Indicatively, contemporary anthropology has mostly shunned revisiting its assumption and implementation of binomial sexual schemes and the ensuing same-sex and other-sex combinatories. Prefiguring this questionable self-reliance, Max Scheler (1874-1928), Helmuth Plessner (1892-1985), and Arnold Gehlen (1904-1976) – the founders of anthropology as a philosophical discipline<sup>1</sup> – blatantly ignored the overwhelming evidence against the binary conception of sexuality adduced by Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) in his 'doctrine of sexual intermediaries' (see Bauer 1998/2003, 2007). When anthropology was already well established as a social science in the middle of the twentieth century, an analogous reaction took place with regard to the work of Alfred C. Kinsey (1894-1956). While generally acknowledging the scientific import and cultural impact of Kinsey's reports on male and female sexual behaviour (see Kinsey 1948, 1998),<sup>2</sup> the leading social and cultural anthropologists of the time conveniently avoided confronting his deconstructive approach of dichotomous sexual schemes. Despite the early focus on sexuality in studies such as Bronislaw Malinowski's *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927), later generations of anthropologists who could have benefited from Kinsey's sexological insights consistently neglected his principled disruption of closed sexual schemes, and contented themselves with – at most – supplementing the traditionally-sanctioned sexual binary with an allegedly 'third sex' inclusive of all forms of sexual deviancy. Such half-hearted strategies of theoretical modernization add plausibility to Carole S. Vance's contention that 'anthropology as a field has been far from courageous or even adequate in its investigation of sexuality' (2007: 41).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The philosophers' main works that may be consulted in this connection are: Scheler 1973, 1976; Plessner 1981, 1983; and Gehlen 1983, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Although the first Report was formally co-authored by two, the second by three of his associates, Kinsey actually wrote almost single-handedly the two volumes. Wardell Pomeroy, one of the co-authors, points out: 'Kinsey did the actual writing himself, dictating the last portions of the *Male* volume to a stenotypist imported from Chicago. [...] The rest of us read every word, of course, several times over, but relatively few of the suggestions we made were taken. Kinsey always listened attentively to us, and occasionally he nodded his head and agreed, but more often he was convinced that he was right and we were wrong' (1972: 261).

<sup>3</sup> In view of the general stance taken in this essay regarding the treatment of sexuality within anthropology, it is significant that Vance also remarks that 'it is perhaps not surprising that the recent development of a more cultural and non-essentialist discourse about sexuality has sprung not from the center of anthropology but from its periphery, from other disciplines (especially history), and from theorizing done by marginal groups' (2007: 42).

## 2. Anthropological misprisions of Kinsey's work

In the rather uneventful reception of Kinsey's work within anthropology, it is doubtless significant that Edgar Gregersen dedicated his impressive anthropological survey of *Sexual Practices* to the memory of Alfred C. Kinsey, whom he epitomizes as 'still the most spectacular light in the history of the study of human sexuality' (1984: [2]). Discussing the sexologist's *Wirkungsgeschichte*, Gregersen pertinently indicates that 'there still remains virtually nothing even remotely approaching a Kinsey Report for any non-western society. Anthropologists, however, tend to be quite free with their criticism of the work of the Kinsey team' (ibid.: 37). This attitude is well illustrated by Kinsey's contemporary Margaret Mead (1901-1978), who, despite her voluminous study titled *Male and Female* (1996), disregarded Kinsey's attempts to disrupt binary schemes of sexual distribution. Obviating any in-depth discussion of Kinsey's ground ideas, Mead stated that 'the principle things that make the Kinsey [*Male*] report a cultural phenomenon of sorts are two: its scale and the amount of publicity it has received, not its findings' (1948: 58). On these assumptions, she went on to expatiate on what she considered Kinsey's mechanistic reduction of sex to 'the category of a simple act of elimination' (ibid.: 61). Complementary to Mead's assertion that Kinsey's view of sex is 'excremental rather than sacramental' (ibid.: 64) is her contention that the sexologist obliterates the interpersonal context and biological significance of sexuality for the sake of 'quantification, justification by numbers, atomization' (ibid.: 67).<sup>4</sup> In contrast with Mead's prevalently idiosyncratic assessments, Gilbert Herdt seems to be one of the first anthropologists to have sensed the critical import of Kinsey's focus on sexual categorizations. In this regard, he acknowledges that

Kinsey – that great quantifier of American sexuality, who was trained in zoology – could well understand the difficulties involved in the classification of [sexual] acts, as we see when he remarked that it is the human mind, not nature, that classifies (1994a: 15).

Notwithstanding his recognition of Kinsey's epistemological perceptiveness, Herdt proceeds to portray the sexologist as an

[...] unerring dimorphic thinker, who never questioned the idea of male and female as a fundamental classification of humans, even as he helped to deconstruct the received biologism of homosexual and heterosexual in sexual study (ibid.).

As to the genesis of Kinsey's shortcomings, Herdt suggests that his notion of human sexual types constitutes '[...] a survival of the realistic zoological penchant of nineteenth-century thought in twentieth-century thinkers' (1994b: 35). Regardless of their brevity, Herdt's objections betray an astounding misprision of the decisive role taxonomy played in Kinsey's grasp of the sexual uniqueness of individuals.

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<sup>4</sup> For a brief depiction of Mead's contentions and critical strategies in this regard, see Jones 1997: 579-580.

### 3. Sexual uniqueness

Only recently, a pioneering collection of essays titled *Out in Theory. The Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Anthropology* has sought 'to situate gay and lesbian anthropology in the larger history of the discipline' (Lewin & Leap 2007: 5). In her contribution to the volume, Gayle Rubin is keen to acknowledge '[...] the enormity of the contributions of Kinsey' (2002: 55), and asserts that 'Indiana University, where the Kinsey Institute was located, served as major intellectual loci for redefining sexuality and resituating sexual deviance' (ibid.: 22). In her further elaborations, Rubin underscores the importance and influence not only of Kinsey's distinction between sexual acts and named sexual identities (ibid.: 57), but also – and perhaps more importantly – of his postulation of the heterosexual/homosexual continuum and the anti-dualistic stance it implies (ibid.: 37, 57). Despite her lavish praise of the sexologist, however, Rubin neglects – not unlike Herdt – the relevancy of Kinsey's taxonomic approach of nature to his sexological apprehension of the individual. In view of Herdt's and Rubin's oversights, it is all the more significant that Bill Condon, the writer and director of the critically acclaimed motion picture *Kinsey* (see Feld 2004: 215-16), stressed the significance of the sexologist's oeuvre for contemporary reassessments of sexual individuality. As Condon asserted in a 2004 interview, 'Dr. Kinsey was a scientist who tried to categorize everyone [...] and then used that process to prove that everyone was different' (Feld 2004: 216). Moreover, Condon maintained:

Kinsey's basic idea, if you were to put it in a nutshell, is that everyone's sexuality is unique. Having collected over a million gall wasps, he discovered that none of those tiny insects was identical to another. He then took that notion of individual variation and applied it to human sexuality. The problem, as he saw it, was that, though we're all different, we all need to feel part of the group to feel reassured that what we do is *normal*. But there's no such thing as normal – there's only common or rare. That's all that Kinsey was trying to figure out: what was common and what was rare (ibid.: 224).

Whereas in Herdt's estimate Kinsey merely mirrors the pervading dualisms of Western thought in his allegedly classificatory zeal, Condon salutes his disruptive strategies against taxonomical closures on behalf of the categorially non-subsumable individual: '[...] that's what's so moving about Kinsey. He was always speaking out for the individual' (ibid.: 225). Corroborating Condon's views, Rob Feld, the interviewer, contributed in due course the illuminating comment: 'By using the mob's own tendency to categorize and label, Kinsey subverted that very process by showing its impossibility' (ibid.: 216).

### 4. Kinsey's 'individuals'

Condon's views on the overall demarche of Kinsey's sexology are suggestive of a careful reading of texts mostly disregarded, but highly relevant to the epistemic premises of his research and oeuvre. Indeed, Condon clearly draws in his elaborations on a text that was published under the title *Individuals* by Cornelia Christenson at the opening of her Kinsey biography, and is considered to be the first exposition of Kinsey's 'sexual philosophy' (Gathorne-Hardy 1999: 152). Despite being originally only an address delivered by Kinsey as president of the Indiana University chapter of Phi Beta Kappa to its newly elected

members in 1939, the text in question offers an indispensable hermeneutical key for determining the ground assumptions of his sexology. As Christenson underlines,

[...] this brief statement, written when he had spent twenty years studying gall wasps and was just embarking on the study of sex, epitomizes the philosophy that underlay all of Kinsey's work. As a taxonomist he was impressed by the limitless variety of living creatures, whether gall wasps or human beings, and by the scientific and social import of recognizing their differences (1971: 3).

In his speech, Kinsey highlights the universal variability of life and remarks that the endless re-combinations of biologic characters in different individuals '[...] swell the possibilities to something which is, for all essential purposes, *infinity*' (1971a: 5; emphasis added). On these premises, Kinsey goes on to make a decisive critical assertion: 'The failure to recognize this unlimited nonidentity has, even in biology, vitiated much of our scientific work' (ibid.). Although the text does not mention explicitly the sexual variability of human beings, it is apparent that Kinsey's axioms regarding the 'multiplicity of types which range continuously' (ibid.: 8) are not only directly applicable to sexual taxonomy, but conducive to the disruption of 'dichotomous classifications' pervasive in sexology.<sup>5</sup> Against the backdrop of Kinsey's clearly formulated stance, Herdt's depiction of the sexologist as a 'unerring dimorphic thinker' evinces itself as groundless.

## 5. Natural continuities and classificatory conveniences

Despite the ongoing questioning of the male/female divide throughout the humanities and social sciences, anthropology has evinced little interest in exploring and assessing Kinsey's subversive outlook and findings. Disinclined to undertake close readings of Kinsey's biological, entomological, and sexological writings, his few commentators and critics within the discipline have mostly overlooked the critical potency inherent in the postulation of a natural sexual continuum as opposed to the clear-cut distributional schemes of binomial sexuality. As though sensing the need to guard against such possible misprisions, Kinsey stressed in the *Male* volume that reality is a continuum (1948: 647) and that '[...] the continuum [...] is the reality in nature' (ibid.: 656). Moreover, on the assumption that '[...] only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon – holes,' Kinsey refers to the living world as 'a continuum in each and every one of its aspects' (ibid.: 639). Although the following *Female* volume was no less critical of the tendency of '[...] the human mind [...] to dichotomize in its classification of phenomena' (1998: 469), Kinsey conceded that, at times, pragmatic considerations make it necessary to implement dichotomous schemes. Elaborating in a significant passage on physiological and psychological distinctions, Kinsey asserts that such 'distinctions can never be sharp, and they probably do not represent reality; but they are convenient distinctions

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<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Kinsey points out toward the end of his address: 'Scholarly thinking as well as the laymen's evaluation still needs to be tempered with the realization that individual variations shape into a continuous curve on which there are no sharp divisions between normal and abnormal, between right and wrong' (1971a: 9).

to make, particularly in regard of human behavior' (ibid.: 642). Thus, despite his general scepticism vis-à-vis categorial compartmentations and his insistence on their artificial character,<sup>6</sup> Kinsey eventually recurs to such disjunctive conveniences at decisive junctures of his sexology. In this regard, the most prominent locus is obviously the ur-binomial to which the very titles of the sex Reports appeal: that between *Male* and *Female*. Given the radical consequences of criticizing '[...] the tendency to categorize sexual activities under only two heads, and [the] failure to recognize the endless gradations that actually exist' (1948: 650), Kinsey seems to have no more cogent explanation or justification to offer for reverting to the old sexual binary than the constraint to organize new knowledge utilizing historically predetermined, and thus lastly inadequate instrumentalities. Since Kinsey never recanted his views on the pervasiveness of natural continuity, the groundwork of his sexology is marked by a tensional field whose resolution would necessitate the thorough dismantlement of the binomial divide that constellates the two sex Reports. While the scope of this self/deconstructive task is clearly beyond the argumentative deployments of Kinsey's published work, his incipient articulation of the problem is sufficient to convey what Paul Robinson terms Kinsey's 'extreme nominalist position' (1977: 68) and James Jones his 'radical antiessentialism' (1997: 531).

## 6. A new distributional scheme of behavioural sexuality

The parallel chapters of the sex Reports titled 'The Heterosexual-Homosexual Balance' (see Kinsey 1948: 636-55; Kinsey 1998: 468-76) comprise what can be considered the epistemic core of Kinsey's views on behavioural sexual difference. Discussing the relation between the sexual continuum and its possible partitions, Kinsey points out in the corresponding chapter of the *Male* volume:

While emphasizing the continuity of the gradations between the exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual histories [i.e. the empirical sources of the Report], it has seemed desirable to develop some sort of classification which could be based on the relative amounts of heterosexual and of homosexual experience or response in each history (1948: 639).

The resulting classificatory scale based on both psychological reactions and overt experience includes seven gradations depicted as follows:

0 = Exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual. 1 = Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual. 2 = Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual. 3 = Equally heterosexual and homosexual. 4 = Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual. 5 = Predominantly homosexual, but incidentally heterosexual. 6 = Exclusively homosexual (ibid.: 638).

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<sup>6</sup> Kinsey's contentions in this respect correspond *mutatis mutandis* to his views concerning the artificiality and provisoriness of taxonomy as expressed in his 1936 treatise on Cynips: '**The maintenance of a system of higher categories is still warranted as a classificatory convenience.** Even if it must be a system of artificial conventions, it is a means of cataloging knowledge. The importance of the classificatory function of taxonomy increases with every increase in the number of described species and in our understanding of their biology. We need a system of even greater complexity than was needed in any earlier stage of the science' (1936: 60; bold type in the original).

Although the basic seven-fold partition<sup>7</sup> has the advantage of differentiation and nuance over the merely binomial sexual distribution, Kinsey does not ignore the inadequacies of his own alternative scheme when applied to the concrete diversity of individuals. On the contrary, he unequivocally relativizes its merits in a pregnant passage of the *Female* volume:

While the scale provides seven categories, it should be recognized that the reality includes individuals of every intermediate type, lying in a continuum between the two extremes and between each and every category on the scale (1998: 471).<sup>8</sup>

In light of Kinsey's distributional paradigm, both the postulation of '[...] merely two types of individuals, heterosexual and homosexual,' and '[...] the characterization of the homosexual as a third sex' (1948: 647) lose whatever theoretical forcibleness they might have had in the past. Since, moreover, no categorial compartmentation can do justice to the profusion of sexual varieties in the continuum Kinsey's new scale does not pretend to be a definitive substitute for the binomial scheme, but only a heuristic – and thus lastly provisory – improvement. While superseding the behavioural sexual binary by offering a more differentiated pattern (ibid.: 642) for tackling the complexities of concrete sexualities, Kinsey's seven-fold scheme is ultimately designed to efface itself in the face of the individual.

## 7. Taxonomy and individual differences

In view of Herdt's objections against the dimorphic patterns Kinsey allegedly inherited from nineteenth-century zoology, it seems appropriate to recall that the sexologist considered having attained his decisive deconstructive insights not despite his taxonomical outlook as a biologist, but thanks to it. As the leading expert of his generation in the hymenoptera family of Cynipidae, Kinsey assumed from early on the standpoint that the infinite re-combination of the biological traits in any given species renders possible the emergence of radically unique individuals. Thus, in correspondence with the seminal ideas expressed in his Phi Beta Kappa address (1971a: 5), Kinsey declared in the *Male* volume that '[...] the technique of this research has been taxonomic' (1948: 16). Moreover, he remarked that his reiterations concerning variation and variability (see Kinsey 1948: 21, 195, 203, 209, 506, 515, 521, 533, 537, 582) were designed to reinforce the 'most important fact' of individual difference, in accordance with his ground contention that

[...] modern taxonomy is the product of an increasing awareness among biologists of the uniqueness of individuals, and of the wide range of variation which may occur in any population of individuals (ibid.: 17).

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<sup>7</sup> The depiction of the basic scale is very similar in both Reports (see Kinsey 1998: 470). However, the *Female* volume includes a supplementary gradation termed 'X' that encompasses individuals who '[...] do not respond erotically to either heterosexual or homosexual stimuli, and do not have overt physical contacts with individuals of either sex in which there is evidence of any response' (ibid.: 472).

<sup>8</sup> The parallel passage in the *Male* volume reads: 'It should be emphasized again that the reality is a continuum, with individuals in the population occupying not only the seven categories which are recognized here, but every gradation between each of the categories, as well. Nevertheless, it does no great injustice to the fact to group the population as indicated above' (Kinsey 1948: 647).

Even fifteen years after the 1939 address, Kinsey insisted on his basic insights regarding individual difference in a brief passage included in the *Female* report under the heading ‘The Combination of Variables’ that runs:

The sexual history of each individual represents a unique combination of these variables [ranging from the incidences and frequencies of erotic response to the sources of sexual outlet.] There is little chance that such a combination has ever existed before, or ever will exist again. We have never found any individual who was a composite of all of the averages on all of the aspects of sexual response and overt activity which we have analyzed in the present volume. This is the most important fact which we can report on the sexual histories of the females who have contributed to the present study (1998: 543).

By assuming ‘[...] that the phenomenon of variability is universal in the living world’ (1971a: 7), and that ‘[...] individual variation [...] is the most persistent reality in human sexual behavior’ (1998: 538), Kinsey was setting forth the coordinates of a new conception of sexual difference beyond the male/female dichotomy and its ad hoc supplements. Since *re vera* only individuals constitute warranted excisions within the sexual continuum, their subsumption under any predetermined, finite set of sexual categories can claim at most the status of purposive provisionality.

## 8. Individuals, acts, and sexual categories

If continuity is – as Kinsey contends – pervasive in nature, then sexuality in all its descriptive layers counters the male/female dichotomy that dominates Western thought and the sexology it has brought about. Given the Reports’ programmatic concentration on the behavioural layer, however, the thorough dissolution of the many-layered sexual disjunction was bound to remain, in the last resort, out of their reach. It is thus first and foremost for reasons of method that Kinsey circumscribed his critical task to the disruption of the exclusive heterosexual/homosexual combinatorics of individuals subsumed under the male/female dichotomy. In his arguments against the ‘[...] all-or-none proposition, as heterosexuality and homosexuality have ordinarily been taken to be’ (1948: 661), Kinsey underscores that ‘[...] there is every gradation between complete homosexuality and complete heterosexuality’ (ibid.: 664), whereby these gradations are not designed to serve as ‘[...] marker[s] of identity’ (Jones 1997: 530) of human beings. Critiquing the unwarranted subsumption of individuals under categorical schemes, Kinsey points out in the *Male* volume:

It would encourage clearer thinking on these matters if persons were not characterized as heterosexual or homosexual, but as individuals who have had certain amounts of heterosexual experience and certain amounts of homosexual experience. Instead of using these terms as substantives which stand for persons, or even as adjectives to describe persons, they may better be used to describe the nature of the overt sexual relations, or of the stimuli to which an individual erotically responds (1948: 617).

Accordingly, Kinsey asserts in the *Female* volume that terms such as masturbatory, heterosexual or homosexual ‘[...] are of value only because they describe the source

of the sexual stimulation, and they should not be taken as descriptions of the individuals who respond to the various stimuli' (1998: 447). On these premises, the term homosexual, for instance, is used throughout the volume 'primarily to describe *relationships*, and [...] not [...] to describe *individuals* who were involved in those relationships' (ibid.; italics in the original). By restricting the use of the term 'the homosexual' (or, alternatively, 'the heterosexual') to designate either a specific component in the sexual history of individuals or a determinate factor in their erotic constitution (see Kinsey 1948: 261, 396, 397, 617, 657),<sup>9</sup> Kinsey detached the individual from the constrictions of categorizations, and there-with paved the way for his key contention regarding the 'omniphile' (Condon 2004: '88.').<sup>10</sup> polymorphous sexuality of all human beings. Hinting at his principled critique of sexual repression through culture, Kinsey wittily remarked in this connection:

Considering the physiology of sexual response and the mammalian back-grounds of human behaviour, it is not so difficult to explain why a human animal does a particular thing sexually. It is more difficult to explain why each and every individual is not involved in every type of sexual activity (1998: 451).

## 9. The many-layered continuities of the sexual

Given the scarcity of close readings of Kinsey's main theoretical articulations, it is not surprising that hardly any critical attention has been paid to the methodological circum-scription of his research and the resulting theoretical shortcomings in his treatment of non-behavioural sexual continuities. Despite his innovative application of taxonomical insights to the study of human sexuality and his acknowledgement of the continuity inherent in all its descriptive layers, Kinsey did not envisage the dismantlement of the binary conception of the pre- and para-behavioural sexual layers that contribute to the configuration of the individual's sexual ethology. Notwithstanding the overall anti-dualis-tic thrust of his sexology, Kinsey barely reflected on the male/female disjunction referred to in the very titles of the two sex Reports, and apparently never considered dealing with the issue in the books he planned to work on after the publication of the *Female* volume (see Kinsey 1948: 7; Pomeroy 1971: 445-48).

Even when reviewing the history of sexology, Kinsey was keen to highlight earlier treatments of behavioural continuity, but easily overlooked previous efforts – especially those of Magnus Hirschfeld (see Bauer 2002, 2006a, 2006b) – to challenge the

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<sup>9</sup> It should be remarked, however, that Kinsey is not always consistent with his own stipulations, since at least on one occasion he uses expressions such as 'homosexual individuals,' and 'heterosexual/homosexual male[s]' (1948: 632). Nevertheless, upon consideration of the immediate context, it becomes apparent that these expressions are meant to designate *heterosexually* or *homosexually experienced* individuals.

<sup>10</sup> The pagination of Condon's 'Script' does not follow the general pagination of the book. The 'Script' has been inserted between pp. 230 and 339 with a pagination of its own running from '1.' to '108.' For the sake of clarity, all references made in the text to the page numbers of the 'Script' will be followed by a period (as in the original) and set in quotation marks.

binomial distribution of somatic sexuality.<sup>11</sup> Kinsey's inadequate account of the biologic complexities that underlie sexual behaviour is most conspicuous, when, in a discussion of the term 'bisexual,' he contents himself with the imprecise – and thus misleading – assertion that there is no correlation between the bisexual behaviour of individuals and the occurrence of 'both masculine and feminine qualities within their single bodies' (1948: 657). Unwilling to question systematically the dichotomies of corporeal sexuality, Kinsey was not in a position to elucidate the problematic links between his hypothetization of clear-cut male and female objects of sexual response, on the one hand, and the postulation of behavioural gradations that bridge the allegedly dichotomous sexes, on the other. Since Kinsey never explored in depth the bio-sexual variability he assumed in principle, he tended to revert to dichotomous assumptions that allowed him to depict the continuous diversity of sexual behaviours as expansible combinatories of two mutually exclusive somatic sexes.

## 10. Dichotomous sexuality and the female phallus

Notwithstanding the deficiencies and ambiguities in his treatment of the bio-sexual continuum, Kinsey provided specific facts and arguments clearly designed to undermine the binomial divide of corporeal sexuality. In this respect, his elaborations on female sexuality are especially relevant. While contending that the female cannot maintain her arousal without physical stimulation, and that therefore her response to psychosexual stimuli differs from that of the male (see Kinsey 1998: 688),<sup>12</sup> Kinsey asserted that men and women 'are alike in their basic anatomy and physiology' (ibid.: 641). He underscored furthermore that 'the anatomic structures which are most essential to sexual response and orgasm are nearly identical in the human female and male' (ibid.: 593). As regards their few ascertainable differences, Kinsey maintained that these 'are associated with the different functions of the sexes in reproductive processes, but they are of no great significance in the origins and development of sexual response and orgasm' (ibid.). Anticipating this strand of argument, Kinsey had already drawn attention in an earlier passage of the *Female* volume to the fact that '[t]he embryonic phallus becomes the penis of the male or the clitoris of the female' (ibid.: 572). More importantly, he reminds his readers that 'the clitoris [...] is the phallus of the female' (ibid.: 574), and goes on to mention speculations on the sexual response of a '*female* who had a *phallus* as large as the average penis' (ibid.: 573; emphasis added).

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<sup>11</sup> Without referring to Hirschfeld or Kinsey, Betty Roszak has elaborated in a noteworthy essay titled 'The Human Continuum' on the reasons why the masculine/feminine dichotomy should be overcome on both the biological and psychological levels. In the concluding passages she points out: 'There is a good biological basis to this [Platonic] myth [of the androgyne]; although the sexes are externally differentiated, they are still structurally homologous. Psychologically, too, the speculations of George Groddek are apt: "Personal sex cuts right across the fundamental qualities of human nature [...]." The dichotomizing of human qualities can thus be seen as a basic error in men's understanding of nature. Biologically, both sexes are present in each' (1969: 306).

<sup>12</sup> For a critique of this contention, see Robinson 1977: 114-15.

Kinsey's striking depiction of the clitoris of an adult woman as a *female phallus* contrasting with the *male penis*, as well as his memorable dismantlement of the Freudian postulation of a non-clitoral, vaginal orgasm (ibid.: 582-84)<sup>13</sup> reflect his grasp of morphologic and physiologic homologies between the allegedly binomial sexes as tokens of the biological male/female continuum,<sup>14</sup> whose critical implications, however, he counterproductively neglected at decisive junctures of his sexology. Against this backdrop, it is no wonder that Kinsey – despite his pregnant clues concerning sexual continuities – failed to conclude from his own premises that the so-called physical intersexes do not constitute mere exceptions to the traditional sexual-distributional binary, but reveal *ad oculos* the need of its definitive supersedure. Instead of drawing upon his collected case histories to reinforce a thorough deconstruction of the binary conception of the pre-behavioural layers of sexuality, Kinsey mostly operated with a binomial scheme of somatic sexuality that underlies the sexual variability of the 'psyche' and its ascertainable responses and behaviour.

## 11. The transsexual challenge

Not assuming the challenge posed by his own postulation of the natural continuum of sexuality, Kinsey went at times beyond the mere heuristic use of dichotomous 'conveniences,' and actually fell back on binomial sexual conceptualizations not only in salient passages of his two Reports. Demonstrably, he also resorted to dichotomous schemes when providing private advice concerning sex change surgery. In a letter addressed to a prospective transsexual in 1951 Kinsey wrote: 'A male cannot be transformed into a female through any known surgical means. In other words, it would be very hopeless to attempt to amputate your male organs and implant a vagina,' adding: 'We humans are either heterosexual or homosexual' (quoted in Jones 1997: 622). Contradicting his own ground premises, Kinsey's advice not only leaves unquestioned the male/female and heterosexual/homosexual binaries, but seems to re-invest them with their validity of old. As though he had never postulated the sexual polymorphousness of all human beings, the gradations in sexual response, and the distinction between sexual acts and individual, Kinsey argues within a clearly disjunctive framework of other-sex and a same-sex hypostatized combinatories, and implicitly reduces the transsexual problem at stake to an issue of mere sexual attraction or orientation. Thus, his further advice reads:

There is no disgrace to being in the latter category [of homosexuals] and a great many important successful people have been homosexual. If you cannot adapt yourself to a heterosexual existence in which you

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<sup>13</sup> It is relevant to note in this regard that the third and last part of the *Female* volume was devoted – as Pomeroy underscores – 'to something we would not have been able to do in the first book, that is, comparing male and female response and behavior. These chapters [of the third part] were perhaps the book's outstanding contribution, since they constituted a body of original scientific research not available anywhere in the literature before' (1972: 331).

<sup>14</sup> For the penis/clitoris homology among spider monkeys as supporting evidence in this connection, see Kinsey 1998: 574.

adopt the role of a male, I would certainly advise you to go to London and to find a homosexual colony [...]. Fighting the problem, hoping for physical transformation is certainly not a satisfactory solution (quoted in Jones 1997: 622).<sup>15</sup>

Some years later, in 1955, Kinsey counselled an American soldier who was also considering a sex change operation. According to Jones, 'Kinsey advised against it [...]. No operation, he insisted, could make a man into a woman' (1997: 622).<sup>16</sup> This second case is all the more relevant for it reveals Kinsey's unchanged stance on the transsexual issue, even after having met and extensively interviewed two years before, in 1953, Christine (formerly George) Jorgensen, an ex-GI who had had in Copenhagen one of the earliest successful sex-change operations on record (see Gathorne-Hardy 1999: 391-92; Bullough 1994: 217-21). Despite remembering warmly her encounter with Kinsey in Bloomington, she wrote in her autobiography that he '[...] left [her] with the impression that he believed his books on sexual behavior were the definitive ones, and there was not much left to be said on the subject' (Jorgensen 1968: 202). Apparently, Kinsey's principled contentions regarding sexual individuality and the continuum of sexuality played no role in their exchanges, for not even the bio-psychological and biographical complexities of the very forthcoming Christine Jorgensen sufficed to move Kinsey to disavow the sexual disjunctions that the most critically radical passages of the two sex Reports had set out to debunk.

## **12. Sexual histories and the dismantlement of sexual normalcy**

Kinsey's lack of understanding for the specific quandaries of transsexual individuals is all the more striking since the major impact he achieved on Western intellectual history and mores ensued from the incontrovertible ascertainment of sexual diversity based on the case histories of thousands of individuals he and his collaborators had interviewed since 1938. Widely acknowledged as 'Kinsey's most brilliant creation' (Robinson 1977: 44), the interview was a highly sophisticated and adaptable method designed to obtain all sexual information available to the memory of the interviewee in an average of two hours.<sup>17</sup> While Kinsey had set himself as goal to collect 100,000 sexual histories, he actually never got even near that number.<sup>18</sup> Of the 18,000 individual histories taken over a period of eighteen years, Kinsey secured approximately 8,000, and his three associates Wardell Pomeroy,

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<sup>15</sup> Jones refers to: 'ACK [i.e. Alfred C. Kinsey] to Anon[ymous], May 5, 1951, KIA [i.e. Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction Archive, Indiana University, Bloomington].'

<sup>16</sup> Jones refers to: 'ACK to Anon., Oct. 10, 1955, KIA.' For the abbreviations, see previous note.

<sup>17</sup> Concerning Kinsey's 'technical devices of interviewing,' see Kinsey 1948: 47-59.

<sup>18</sup> While the Male volume was dedicated 'TO the twelve thousand persons who have contributed to these data' (Kinsey 1948: iii) and the Female volume 'To the nearly 8000 females who contributed the data on which this book is based' (1998: v), it is only the first of the two dedications that ends on a decidedly expectant note: 'AND TO the eighty-eight thousand more who, someday, will help complete this study' (1948: iii).

Clyde Martin, and Paul Gebhard were responsible for the remainder (see Pomeroy 1972: 4, 137). Of all the interviewees, the most memorable seems to have been a sixty-three years old man – '[...] quiet, soft-spoken, self-effacing – a rather unobtrusive fellow' (ibid.: 122) – whose history took Kinsey and Pomeroy seventeen hours to get. As Pomeroy records, [...] this man had had homosexual relations with 600 preadolescent males, heterosexual relations with 600 preadolescent females, intercourse with countless adults of both sexes, with animals of many species, and besides had employed elaborate techniques of masturbation. He had set down a family tree going back to his grandparents, and of thirty-three family members he had had sexual contacts with seventeen. His grandmother introduced him to heterosexual intercourse, and his first homosexual experience was with his father (ibid.).

Among the staggering sexual proficiencies of this interviewee was his ability '[...] to masturbate to ejaculation in ten seconds from a flaccid start' (ibid.), an ability which he calmly demonstrated to the interviewers to counter their disbelief.<sup>19</sup> Apart from the data based on personal histories and covering all imaginable varieties of sexual behaviour, Kinsey gathered information coming from sources as diverse as sexual calendars and diaries, photographic collections, toilet wall inscriptions, sado-masochistic materials and mammalian studies (see Kinsey 1948: 73-4; 1998: 83-97). Given that the sex Reports were based on the statistical analysis, systematization and correlation of a profusion of data, their relevancy lay primarily – as Cornelia Christenson has pointed out – '[...] in the fact that science for the first time had been provided with a wide, systematic, and detailed body of knowledge on human sex activity' (1971:125). From then on, the disquieting fact could no longer be obviated that sexology – differing from historical religions and traditional morality – has no reassurances to offer as to what is sexually normal or abnormal behaviour. For this reason and in view of his pleas for sexual tolerance, it seems appropriate to underscore that Kinsey's theoretical instrumentalities fell short of grasping and assessing the alterations effectuated by medical and aesthetic technologies of the body on the purportedly naturally given sex. Disregarding the old Aristotelian insight into the ways in which φύσις surpasses itself in and through γ, Kinsey seems to have been at a loss for an adequate response to the challenges posed by the emergence of the transsexual phenomenon.<sup>20</sup>

### 13. Statistics and individuality

In assessing the results of the two Reports, it is indispensable to keep in mind Kinsey's own caveats regarding the scope and limits of his statistical findings. In the *Male* volume,

<sup>19</sup> For further elaborations on this case, see Jones 1997: 507-512; Gathorne-Hardy 1999: 220-26.

<sup>20</sup> In *Protrepticus* 11 (W.D. Ross) Aristotle asserts: μιμείται γὰρ οἴτην τέχνην ἢ φύσις ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ τὴν φύσιν, καὶ ἔστιν ἐπὶ τῷ βοηθεῖν καὶ τὰ παραλείπομενα τῆς φύσεως ἀναπληροῦν. τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἔοικεν αἴτη δύνασθαι δι' αὐτῆς ἢ φύσις ἐπιτελεῖν καὶ βοηθείας οἴδεν δεῖσθαι, τὰ δὲ μόλις καὶ παντελῶς ἀδυνατεῖν. (Aristotle 1958: 44). // 'For nature does not imitate art, but art imitates nature; art exists to aid nature and to fill up its deficiencies. For some things nature seems able to complete by itself without assistance, but others it does with difficulty or cannot do at all.'

for instance, he asserts that the calculations presented '[...] should be taken as approximations which are not to be pushed in detail' (1948: 119) and that

[...] one needs to be continuously conscious [...] that it is impossible to get more than approximations of the fact on the incidences and frequencies of the various types of human sexual behavior (ibid.: 120).

Kinsey's relativizing approach of his own statistical results was intended not only as a warning to 'the statistically inexperienced reader' (ibid.: 153), but also as a general reminder that the function of population analysis is not to establish paradigmatic models of sexual behaviour, but '[...] **to help in the understanding of particular individuals by showing their relation to the remainder of the group**' (ibid.: 20; bold type in the original). On these assumptions, showing 'statistical sense' meant for Kinsey having the '[...] capacity to distinguish the specific from the universal and to recognize the difference between a phenomenon which is common and one which is rare' (ibid.: 21). Although Kinsey did not discuss philosophical subtleties regarding the status of the individual in the kind of statistical research he pursued, he unequivocally affirmed that the statistical averages of sexual behaviour in the Reports were not designed to underpin or consolidate any given criteria of individual conduct, but rather to depict the common traits of social groups in order to determine the specific variance of their individual members. Given that the sexual designations applied to them 'can, in any objective analysis, refer to nothing more than a position on a curve which is continuous' (ibid.: 199), the sexual frequencies of an individual differ only in '[...] a slight degree from the frequencies of those placed next on the curve' (ibid.). Due to this continuity, sexology has no means of determining whether specific sexual acts or sexual responses are 'natural' or 'unnatural,' 'normal' or 'abnormal' (see Kinsey 1948: 199-201). Well aware that '[...] too often the study of behavior has been little more than a rationalization of the mores masquerading under the guise of objective science' (ibid.: 203), Kinsey rejects on principle any moralistic or theological encroachments on sexological terminology, and opts for the sober depiction of individuals as being only '[...] frequent or rare, [...] conformists or non-conformists with the socially pretended custom' (ibid.). On this issue, the 'Kinsey' in Bill Condon's film script offers the perspicacious comment:

Why are some cows highly sexed, while / others just stand there? Why do some / men need thirty orgasms a week, and / others almost none? Because everyone / is different. The problem is, most / people want to be the same (2004: "55.").

Regardless of the theoretical deficiencies that Kinsey's work may evince, they do not invalidate his insights into the 'unlimited nonidentity' (1971a: 5) of life as the actual bedrock of his path-breaking deconstructive endeavours *in sexualibus*.

## 14. Sexual compartmentations and societal constrictions

While categories of sexual difference/s have been implemented throughout history as a cohesive criterion to configure closed sexual groups and classes, Kinsey underscores – in correspondence to his taxonomic views – that sexual difference is first and foremost a marker of individuals occupying a unique position in the continuous scale of life. Since,

on principle, the concrete sexual behaviour of any given individual results from its double share in the hetero/homosexual poles of the continuum, it does not differ in quality from the sexual behaviour of any other individual, but only in the proportion in which the sexual poles combine. On this account, the possible segments that partition the continuity of the sexual should not be regarded as emanating from a pre-existing natural order (and even less so from a divine design), but as the outcome of more or less arbitrary societal constructions and constrictions. As the many topical elaborations and extensive bibliographies of both Reports show, Kinsey supplemented his depictions of pre-human, zoological sexuality with anthropological and historical insights, in order to provide a broad basis for critiquing and relativizing the sexual paradigms and standards prevalent in the puritanical cultural setting that the Reports reflect and unsettle. Accordingly, the main protagonist in T.C. Boyle's novel *The Inner Circle* appositely attributes to 'Kinsey' a fundamental critique of culture purporting

[...] that man in a state of nature is pansexual, and that only the strictures of society, especially societies under the dominion of the Judeo-Christian and Mohammedan codes, prevent people from expressing their needs and desires openly [...] (2004: 38).

Since it is '[...] only convention [...] that kept [man] from expressing himself with any partner that came along, of whatever sex or species' (ibid.: 355), the partially biographic novel stresses that for Kinsey '[...] religion was antithetical to science. The religious simply couldn't face the facts' (ibid.: 499). These assertions echo adroitly the views of the historical Kinsey when he maintained that sex is '[...] a normal biologic function, acceptable in whatever form it is manifested' (Kinsey 1948: 263). Consequently, Kinsey pleaded – as James Jones has underlined – '[...] for an end to hypocrisy and for a new ethics of tolerance' (1997: 772), implicating therewith a standard of human decency that provoked the indignation of so-called Judeo-Christian preachers and pamphleteers. Sustained by his somewhat cliché conviction that '[...] nature will triumph over morals' (1948: 385),<sup>21</sup> Kinsey contended that the adequate perception and understanding of the 'facts' of natural sexuality would help overcoming the unethical intolerance based on ignorance that tinges the very foundations of human sociability. Recognizing that the meagerly available sexual knowledge has been massively repressed or disregarded in Western culture in the name of conventional moralism, Kinsey avoided adducing moral arguments in his pleas for sexual tolerance. Basically, he sufficed himself with drawing attention to the fact that the concept of sexual normalcy is the outcome of arbitrary moral evaluations without biological warrant, and that the categorization of certain forms of sexual behaviour as perversions only reflects the '[...] disparity between the basic biologic heritage of the human animal, and the traditional, cultural codes' (1949: 32). On these premises, Kinsey could concur with Sigmund Freud's diagnosis of a pervasive maladjustment between the individual and society, while taking a distinct anti-Freudian stance in his castigation of the subdual of the individual to the extraneous mechanisms of cultural teleologies.

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<sup>21</sup> Clearly, this expectation reflects Kinsey's Rousseauistic confidence in an original naturalness that has been lost for the most part in the current state of civilization.

## 15. 'Our central enemy'

As Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy pertinently notes, '[...] "philosophically" was a term of abuse in Kinsey's vocabulary' (1999: 115). In the *Female* volume, for instance, he recurs to the expression 'man-made philosophy' when depicting the totally unwarranted belief '[...] that infra-human mammals more or less confine themselves to heterosexual activities' (Kinsey 1998: 448). Moreover, since Kinsey assumed that '[...] we operate under a system of sex law which is basically the Talmudic Code of the seventh century B.C.' (1971b: 215), he also uses the term 'philosophy' to designate religious *weltanschauungs* in phrases such as 'the religious philosophy of the authors of the Old Testament' (1948: 415), 'the sexual philosophy of the Jews' (ibid.: 473), 'the pervading asceticism of Hebrew philosophy' (ibid.: 486), or 'Jewish and [...] Christian philosophies' (ibid.: 563).<sup>22</sup> In a telling passage typifying the existent approaches of sexuality, Kinsey – broadening the application of the term – remarks that '[...] in social and religious philosophies, there have been two antagonistic interpretations of sex' (ibid.: 263). After dealing with the contrast between the hedonistic approach to sexual pleasure and the Judeo-Christian legitimization of sexuality through procreative finality, Kinsey – without referring to 'philosophy' anymore – elaborates on a third possible interpretation of sex as a normal biological function advocated, among others, by Sigmund Freud, to whom Kinsey pays tribute for having '[...] contributed more than the biologists toward an adoption of this biologic viewpoint' (ibid.). Although he rejected creedal systems and the ideologies of intolerant sociability they brought about, Kinsey reportedly preferred to keep his devastating views on religion to himself (see Pomeroy 1972: 114). Notwithstanding Kinsey's personal reserve in this connection, his reply to Wardell Pomeroy's question as to whether he believed in God was a peremptory: 'Don't be ridiculous. Of course not' (1972: 29). Concerning the related issue of life after death, Kinsey held similarly opinionated views: 'I believe that when you're dead, you're dead, and that's all there is' (quoted in Pomeroy 1972: 29). Despite the atheistic naturalism he adhered to, Kinsey regarded religion as an essential factor in the sexual lives of most people. In accordance with his assumption '[...] that there is nothing in the English-American social structure which has had more influence upon present-day patterns of sexual behavior than the religious backgrounds of that culture' (1948: 465), Kinsey relates throughout the *Male* and *Female* volumes the different types of sexual activities to the three faiths that 'embrace most of those Americans who recognize any church affiliation' (ibid.: 468): Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. Against his backdrop and in consideration of the critical edge that marks his sexological program as a whole, it is no wonder that Kinsey deemed 'the whole army of religion' to be 'our central enemy' (quoted in Wolfe 2004: 35).

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<sup>22</sup> See also the expression 'Catholic philosophy' (Kinsey 1948: 477).

## 16. On nature and life

Differing from the 19<sup>th</sup> century radical utopian Charles Fourier as well as from Wilhelm Reich, the post-Freudian denier of *Thanatos*, the adult Kinsey was too much of a Darwinian to consider the possibility of an erotic drive unchecked by insurmountable finitude. In this respect and despite his strong anti-psychoanalytical bias, Kinsey shows affinities to Sigmund Freud's sober elaborations on the life and death drives. Far from assuming that sexuality and eroticism could be conducive to a form of universal harmony transcending mortality, Kinsey was clear in his convictions regarding the definitiveness of death. Regardless of his renunciation to the comforts of a godly design and an immortal soul, however, some pregnant passages in his writings are indicative of a marked sense of awe towards Life and Nature. Contrasting with the speculative *Weltanschauung* characteristic of New England transcendentalism, Kinsey's brief aperçus in this regard convey a sovereign disinterest in accessing hidden layers of the real, or in attaining personal integration into cosmic totality. At the same time, they suggest a quasi-quietistic apprehension of the ambit that Karl Jaspers termed *das Umgreifende* (1958: 47-222; 1963: 111-51).<sup>23</sup> Given that all of Kinsey's major biographers suffice themselves with commenting on his allegations of atheism, but offer no close examination of the subtleties implied by his sense of the Encompassing, it is all the more significant that in one of the early scenes of Bill Condon's film script, *Kinsey*, recalling his youthful discovery of the natural world, remarks: 'Yes, biology. The science of life. / The fields and the woods became my new / place of worship. My cathedral' (2004: '5.'-'6.'). Insisting on the sexologist's post-religious sensibility, the script locates the closing scene of the film in the Californian *Muir Woods*, specifying: 'Kinsey glances around, his powers of observation as keen as ever. Some deer. An owl. He takes a deep breath and shuts his eyes, as close to reverence as we have seen him' (ibid.: '107.'). Interestingly enough, these and other fictionalized elements of biography in the film resonate with Kinsey's scattered observations on Nature, such as those comprised in *An Introduction to Biology*, his first book-length publication. In a passage facing a picture of the *California Redwoods*, for instance, Kinsey remarks propaedeutically: 'It seems an **immortal** thing, this life which we are about to study' (1926: 6; bold type in the original). Shortly after he exclaims: 'Common as **life** is about us, it is apparently **an uncommon thing** in the universe as a whole. What fortune that we own a share of it!' (ibid.; bold type in the original). Much later in the book, Kinsey reiterates his praise of Nature, advising his young readers: 'Look about you, and see what an interesting world you are in. **Be glad that you are alive in it!**' (ibid.: 161; bold type in the original). Although the *Male* and *Female* volumes hardly give any hints of the reverential aspects of the sexologist's attitude toward Nature, it is apposite to recall that in his 'Last Statement' – a pregnant

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<sup>23</sup> The following passage taken from Jaspers' main oeuvre offers a brief elaboration on the meaning of the concept: 'Das Umgreifende der Welt ist das, was in seinem dunklen Sein durch nichts deutlicher werden kann. Es ist Ursprung aller Realität, dessen was wir Materie nennen. Aber mögen wir es Realität, Materie, Substanz und wie sonst immer nennen, es ist immer das Anstoßen unseres Denkens an dieses Undurchdringliche, uns Umfängende und Durchdringende' (1958: 89).

document on his life as a sexual researcher written in his deathbed – Kinsey mentions an incident during his 1954 trip to South America that is apt to throw some light on the issue under discussion. The brief depiction runs:

The Franciscan friar whom I meet on the mountain trail in Peru looks at me with puzzlement for a time and then says, ‘Ah, es el señor Doctor Kinsey, no?’ Then he wants to know why we are doing this research, and when I reply, ‘Porque padre, es una parte de la vida’ – ‘because, father, it is a part of life’ – he instantly responds, ‘Sí, es una parte de la vida.’ And for the rest of the mountain journey we are good friends (1971b: 225-26).

## 17. Christian critics of the Kinseyan project

The harmonious encounter with the mendicant friar must have been for the sexologist all the more significant, as Protestant circles in America had been especially harsh in their rejection of his Reports. Symptomatically, shortly after the publication of the *Female* volume, the evangelist Billy Graham preached a sermon to a nationwide radio audience denigrating Kinsey’s work. In a newspaper article titled ‘Graham Sermon Blasts Dr. Kinsey,’ an anonymous journalist reported that the sermon ‘[...] proved so popular the public already has requested 50,000 reprints and additional thousands of requests are pouring in daily to the Billy Graham Evangelic association headquarters’ (Anonymous 2004: 125). In the published transcript, Graham makes clear from the outset his basic objection: ‘It is impossible to estimate the damage this book will do to the already deteriorating morals in America’ (1953: 1). Assuming that ‘[...] immorality is rampant throughout the [American] nation’ (ibid.: 4), Graham deplors that Kinsey’s ‘[...] report for wholesale public consumption, appealing to the lower instincts of human nature, is aggravating the situation’ (ibid.). As the preacher conveys, Kinsey’s *Female* volume is cause and consequence of America’s pervasive moral degeneration, evinced, among other things, by the ‘acceptance with the American people’ of ‘behavioristic philosophies’. Giving clear indications of his rather poor education, the evangelist contends that such philosophies are epitomized by Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and – of all people – Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher and the German theologians with their ‘subjective theology’ (ibid.: 3). On the general premise that ‘[...] humanism and behaviorism’ have misled people to believe that ‘[...] salvation is to come through man and not through Christ and morality is relative and not absolute’ (ibid.), Graham considers the *Female* volume to be ‘[...] an indictment against American womanhood’ (ibid.: 2), and dreads that ‘it will teach our young people terrifying perversions they had never heard before’ (ibid.). While Graham’s bilious attacks betray a deeply-felt disregard for epistemic and philosophic issues in general, and for Kinsey’s actual contentions in particular, Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the most reputed American theologians in the twentieth century, offered the prime example of a more sophisticated reaction within Protestants circles in his essay ‘Kinsey and the Moral Problem of Man’s Sexual Life.’ Despite his acknowledgment of Kinsey’s scientific honesty in collating his data, Niebuhr (1954: 69) castigates not only ‘[...] the crude physiological naturalism which governs [his] inquiry’ (ibid.), but also ‘[...] the absurd hedonism which informs [his] thought’ (ibid.: 66). Rejecting on principle the very structure and scope of Kinsey’s

project, Niebuhr maintains that the sexologist's '[...] basic presupposition is that men and women face a rather purely physiological problem in their sex life' (ibid.: 63), and that 'the infinite complexities of the human spirit are in fact unknown to Kinsey, if they are above the level of refinements in erotic pleasure' (ibid.: 66). While Niebuhr is careful to underscore that he argues on behalf of a freedom that 'makes for the uniqueness of the individual' (ibid.: 69), he consistently overlooks that Kinsey's methodological behaviourism serves the dismantlement of the sexual dichotomizations that have been instrumental in stifling the individual's sexual freedom in all cultural settings where the spirit of Christianity is pervasive. Evincing striking similarities with Margaret Mead's 'anthropological' line of argument, Niebuhr dexterously disregards Kinsey's path-breaking attempt to grasp the individual's sexual uniqueness, in order to refer all the more freely to the liberalities of Christian love.<sup>24</sup>

## 18. Re-instating binary sexuality

Given the U.S. theo-political constellations, it could not be expected that the attacks on Kinsey and his legacy would subside with the passing of time. Sharply aware that '[...] no man in modern times has shaped public attitudes to, and perceptions of, human sexuality more than the late Alfred C. Kinsey', Judith A. Reisman (1990: 1) has become the most vocal of all his current critics and detractors. In books with titles such as *Kinsey, Sex and Fraud* and *Kinsey: Crimes and Consequences*, she has spared no pains to discredit the sexologist's personal and academic reputation. Tellingly, even the compulsory pamphlet based on Reisman's work and published by Susan Brinkmann – a journalist and member of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites – follows without hesitation the denunciative design of its source, as is already indicated in its title: *The Kinsey Corruption* (2004). Reisman's undiscerning approach of complex historical configurations is especially apparent in her ideological invectives against twentieth-century sexual critics who allegedly have had a devastating effect on the transmission of sexual values. She surmises, for example, that

Were Kinsey [and] Hirschfeld [...] alive today (or for that matter, those of the Marxist 'Frankfort School' including the USA college guru, Herbert Marcuse) they would no doubt be delighted to find their model of sex education dominating the media, the arts, and permeating most of our schools (2003: 289).

Early on, in her first book on Kinsey, Reisman had already referred to his growing estrangement from religion while attending college, highlighting that his readings on religion and culture eventually led him '[...] to be "indignant" about the effect of Judeo-

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<sup>24</sup> Although the Quaker-raised Margaret Mead once asserted that 'it is absolutely urgent that Christians should take as a first responsibility to know what is known' (1972: 53), and contended furthermore that 'the time has come [...] when we must recognize bisexuality as a normal form of human behavior' (1980: 269), she seems to position herself in questionable vicinity to the obscurantist views of Billy Graham when, in Appendix II of *Male and Female*, she critiques 'the way in which the [*Male*] Kinsey report was permitted to become a best-seller,' adding: 'The sudden removal of a previously guaranteed reticence has left many young people singularly defenseless in just those areas where their desire to conform was protected by a lack of knowledge of the extent of non-conformity' (1996: 450).

Christian tradition on society' (1990: 6). Moreover, her elaborations suggest that she was inordinately alarmed at the indications that Kinsey was not just trying to find out what people were doing sexually, but '[...] to provide a statistical base for a new morality' (ibid.: 197). Given that the so-called 'Grand Scheme' (ibid.: 197-214) that sustains Kinsey's critical programmatic entails the rejection of normative heterosexuality and the unsettling of the traditional sexual order, Reisman's declared intention was to show that Kinsey's research is ideologically biased and methodologically flawed. For Reisman, the epistemic  $\pi\rho\omega\tau\omicron\nu$   $\psi\epsilon\ddot{\upsilon}\delta\omicron\varsigma$  of Kinsey's pursuits resides in his core premise that

[...] sexual differences – in orientation – [are] simply points on a continuum, [that] the differences [are] a matter of degree, as opposed to being differences that could be defined as abnormalities or pathologies (ibid.: 203).

A champion of disjunctive exclusions, she deems most reprehensible that '[...] Kinsey's view of human sexuality involved a continuum from heterosexual to homosexual', and disapproves with sarcastic understatement that '[...] he did not believe in distinct categories of sexuality or in trying to force facts about behavior into 'separate pigeon-holes' (ibid.: 212). Facing what she considers to be the moral corrosiveness of Kinsey's ground assumptions, Reisman pleads for the consequent and immediate re-investment of the binary conception of sexuality and normative heterosexuality with the societal validity they have mostly lost.

Although her diatribes against the attempts 'to undermine the Judeo-Christian concept of sin and eliminate the distinction between right and wrong' (ibid.: 214) are strongly reminiscent of the platitudes with which Graham disguised his disregard for critical knowledge, Reisman clearly recognizes in the idea of sexual continuity the theoretical crux of Kinseyan sexology, and reveals therewith having a more perceptive grasp of Kinsey's ground contentions than Graham and Niebuhr. In their critiques of Kinsey, neither of the Christian theologians called as outspokenly for the re-installment of the male/female divide as Reisman does in her arduous expatiations. This is certainly not the least of the reasons why her work is deemed ideally suited to serve as a cornerstone of the 'new evangelization' (West 2004: 5), which – as the author of the foreword of Brinkmann's pamphlet suggests – is indissolubly linked to the discovery of '[...] the glory of sex in the divine plan: God created us male and female' (ibid.: 4).

## **19. Anthropology, homosexuality, and sexual difference**

In correspondence with her overall views, Judith Reisman is keen to condemn anthropology's relativization of Western axiology, especially as it seems to concur with Kinsey's own critical pursuits. Tellingly, Reisman maintains in her 1990 book that '[...] the Kinsey "grand scheme" is just now finding its way to the cutting edge of the U.S. government's initiative against AIDS, with a little help from selective anthropological data from primitive tribes' (1990: 208). The origins of such subversive anthropological aid can be traced back, according to Reisman, to Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), a work that she denigrates on account of its '[...] attack on conventional sexual mores' and of its '[...] efforts to find role models for an ideology' of sexual dissidence (Reisman 1990: 212). In this context, Reisman offers further proof of her defamatory strate-

gies when she mentions that in a chapter of an AIDS report published by the U.S. National Research Council, its lead author, former project director at the Kinsey Institute John H. Gagnon, used as one of his sources Gilbert Herdt's book *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (1984). As if arguments would be unnecessary at this point, Reisman contents herself with the cautious remark: 'Herdt, it should be noted, is editor of the book *Gay and Lesbian Youth* (Harrington Park Press, 1989), which suggests a specialized point of view' (1990: 208). Moreover, to underpin her contentions concerning the mutual impregnation of Kinsey-inspired sexual heterodoxy and anthropology, Reisman reminds her readers that:

Psychologist and sex researcher C.A. Tripp, a friend and colleague of the late Alfred Kinsey, wrote in his 1975 book *The Homosexual Matrix* (McGraw-Hill) that anthropology was one branch of science where homosexuals may be able to 'extend the parameters of [the] field' (ibid.: 211; for the quote, see Tripp 1975: 276).

To judge by her elaborations in his regard, Reisman seems to have sensed that the challenges posed by Kinsey's homosexual openings and their repercussions on anthropology are, as such, less formidable than the disruptive scope of Kinsey's ground positions.

Thus, Reisman – like most Kinsey critics and commentators – prudently avoids dealing in-depth with the tensional relation between the sexologist's insights into the formation and constitution of sexual groups and segments, on the one hand,<sup>25</sup> and his impassioned advocacy of sexual individuality, on the other. Although Paul Robinson, for instance, is attentive to the import of Kinsey's findings for homosexual emancipation, he hardly addresses the critical implications of envisaging, as Kinsey did, the radical liberation of individuals from the yoke of sexual categorizations (see Robinson 1977: 67-71, 116-17). Having rejected the idea that 'we're all bisexual' as 'fuzzy thinking' (ibid.: 117), Robinson tends to conflate sexual-political and strictly sexological contentions into one argument, failing thereby to assess properly Kinsey's radicalism in redefining sexual difference as a matter of individual variation within the sexual continuum. In view of the prevalent unwillingness to tackle the ultimate design of Kinsey's sexual programmatic, it is all the more significant that, in the already cited interview, Bill Condon mentions having asked Clarence Tripp what Kinsey would have made of the gay movement (Feld 2004: 224). Condon quotes Tripp as having retorted: 'Oh, he would have been horrified' (ibid.). Shortly afterward, Condon elaborates on Kinsey's stance in this regard, stating,

He was shouting to people: Be yourself! Break away from the group! So for him there's no freedom in defining yourself by your sexual acts. We live under the delusion that we've come so far, but I think Kinsey would say that – while the group imposes different expectations and demands today – the impulse to belong still overwhelms our individual desires (ibid.).

On these assumptions, the alleged overcoming of the sexual categorization of human beings for the sake of sexual acts granting group appurtenance evinces itself as an

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<sup>25</sup> Indicatively, Lionel Trilling draws attention in his often-cited piece of 1948 to 'the long way [the *Male* volume] goes toward establishing the *community* of sexuality' (1963: 213; emphasis in the original).

insufficient move toward the liberation of the categorially non-subsumable individual. To use a term already quoted, the ‘mob’ (ibid.: 225) – even if purportedly emancipatory – obeys, in the last resort, the logic of categorial reductions and therewith condones the subdual of sexual uniqueness to an archetypical – i.e. non-existent – commonality.

## 20. Queer pursuits and clitoral subversions

Since Kinsey’s contentions regarding natural continuity and sexual individuality lead to the supersedure not only of binomial sexuality, but of any distributional scheme operating with a closed set of sexual categories, the number of sexualities becomes open-ended and co-extensive with the number of sexed individuals. Ultimately, Kinsey’s line of argument entails the radical de-finitization of sexualities, inasmuch as it posits their potentially infinite variability as a condition for the emergence of sexually unique individuals. From this perspective, Kinsey’s ground assumptions converge with the basic postulates of Magnus Hirschfeld’s *sexuelle Zwischenstufenlehre* (‘doctrine of sexual intermediary stages’) (see Bauer 2005a), and anticipate the critical endeavours of post-modern queer thought to dismantle age-old categorial fixtures deriving from unexamined subsumptive procedures. Certainly not by chance, Gore Vidal, the renowned American writer who met Kinsey as a young man and remained influenced by his sexual thought throughout his life, asserts in his *Collected Sex Writings*,

The American passion for categorizing has now managed to create two nonexistent categories – gay and straight. Either you are one or you are the other. But since everyone is a mixture of inclinations, the categories keep breaking down; and when they break down, the irrational takes over. You *have* to be one or the other (1999c: 116; emphasis in the original).

On these assumptions and given that the straight/gay binary is to a large extent a contemporary variation of the hetero/homosexual dichotomy,<sup>26</sup> it is apparent that Vidal’s

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<sup>26</sup> In a related passage, Vidal affirms: ‘I have often thought that the reason no one has yet been able to come up with a good word to describe the homosexualist (sometimes known as gay, fag, queer, etc.) is because he does not exist’ (1999b: 110). Clearly echoing Kinsey’s arguments, Vidal contends that ‘there is no such thing as a homosexual or a heterosexual person. There are only homo- or heterosexual acts’ (1999c: 138). While underlining his fundamental agreement with Kinsey’s positions in this regard, Vidal seems to suggest a slight precedence in time of his own critique of the hypostatization of the homosexual over Kinsey’s parallel pursuits in the *Male* volume. Thus, after noting in the ‘Afterword’ to the revised edition of *The City and the Pillar* (1965) that in the original version of 1948 he had sought to make the point ‘that there is of course no such thing as the homosexual’ (ibid.: 155), he touches briefly on the issue of chronology: ‘Later that year in a statistical report, Dr. Kinsey revealed what American men are actually up to, and I was somewhat exonerated for my candor’ (ibid.: 156-57). Notwithstanding his nominalist approach of the binomial scheme of sexual combinatories, Vidal does not extend his criticism to the overall dichotomous conception of sexuality. Thus, after negating in the passage quoted above the existence of homosexual individuals, Vidal goes on to assert categorically: ‘The human race is divided into male and female’ (1999b: 110). Although he acknowledges that Kinsey ‘revealed for the first time the way things are. Everyone is potentially bisexual’ (1999a: 53), Vidal does not advocate the consequent dissolution of the binomial sexual divide on which the dichotomous conceptualization of sexual ‘orientations’ and their possible combinatories are based. On these assumptions, Vidal could hardly concur with the assumption of radical sexual diversity in the Kinseyan corpus, nor with Magnus Hirschfeld’s ‘doctrine of sexual intermediaries’ and the ensuing postulation of potentially infinite sexualities.

critique concurs with Kinsey's unequivocal dismissal of sexual identities. More importantly, in light of Vidal's elaborations, it becomes even more apparent that Kinsey would have rejected the current identity politics propounded by the gay and lesbian movements, as C.A. Tripp and Bill Condon have surmised. In view of Kinsey's overall deconstructive pursuits, it seems safe to assume that he could have wholeheartedly agreed with William B. Turner when he states in *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*:

Queerness indicates [...] the failure to fit precisely within a category, and surely all persons at some time or other find themselves discomfited by the bounds of the categories that ostensibly contain their identities (2000: 8).

On account of this kind of insights, there are good reasons to expect that, if divested of its 'gay'-identificatory bias, queer theory will eventually contribute to a better grasp of the 'unlimited nonidentity' that, according to Kinsey, is concretized in the irreducible uniqueness of sexed individuals. Taken as '[...] a resistant relation rather than as an oppositional substance' (Halperin 1995: 113), 'queerness' seems apt to help forward a conceptual framework in which Kinsey's reference to the *female phallus* loses its oxymoronic aura and becomes a pregnant clue to a symbolic order beyond the opposition between female (vaginal) lack and male (penile) plenitude. It is doubtless significant that post-Kinseyan radical feminists – well aware of the phallic commonality inherent in the clitoris/penis continuum – advocate the liberation of the female body from the mark of lack that (not only) Western cultures have inscribed in the female genitals and therewith contributed to the perception of the vagina as a 'negative phallus' (Laqueur 1992: 152).<sup>27</sup> As though insisting on the reality (as opposed to the mere fantasy or metaphorization) of a privileged phallic presence in the non-male body, Anne Koedt drew attention to the fact that '[...] the clitoris has no other function than that of sexual pleasure' (1973: 202), and Monique Wittig, using an almost identical phrasing, asserted that the clitoris is '[...] the

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<sup>27</sup> Laqueur specifies: 'In the one sex model, dominant in anatomical thinking for two thousand years, woman was understood as man inverted: the uterus was the female scrotum, the ovaries were testicles, the vulva was a foreskin, and *the vagina was a penis*' (1992: 236; italics in the original). This model of isomorphic equivalents of male and female sexual organs goes back to Galen, who contended that 'women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat – of perfection – had resulted in the retention, inside, of structures that in the male are visible without' (ibid.: 4). In this connection, see Sándor Ferenczi's brief note on 'Ein analer "Hohlpenis" bei der Frau' included in his article: 'Erfahrungen und Beispiele aus der analytischen Praxis' (1964: 56). For a discussion of Ferenczi's theory of sexual difference, see Bauer 2005c.

<sup>28</sup> There is no corresponding entry for 'Clitoris' in the French version of the book (see Wittig and Zeig 1976). For an analysis of Wittig's overall emancipatory contentions, see Bauer 2005b. Interestingly, Koedt's and Wittig's views on the clitoris are echoed in Eve Ensler's play *The Vagina Monologues*, a world success that has been translated in over 45 languages. In the act titled 'Vagina fact,' Ensler quotes a passage from Natalie Angier's 1999 book *Woman: An Intimate Geography*, stating: 'The clitoris is pure in purpose. It is the only organ in the body designed purely for pleasure. [...] Who needs a handgun when you've got a semiautomatic' (2001: 51). In her 'Foreword' to the 'V-Day Edition' of Ensler's play, the brilliant essayist Gloria Steinem presents a further variation of the same theme: '[...] I didn't hear words [for referring to the female genitalia] that were accurate, much less prideful. For example, I never once heard the word *clitoris*. It would be years before I learned that females possessed the only organ in the human body with no function other than to feel pleasure. (If such an organ were unique to the male body, can you imagine how much we would hear about it—and what it would be used to justify?)' (2001: x-xi).

only organ in the body to have pleasure as its function' (Wittig & Zeig 1980: 33).<sup>28</sup> The shifts in sexual perspective that such ascertainments bring about constitute powerful incentives to reassess the anticipatory valence inherent in the remote human origins, when parts of the buccal-assimilatory organs gradually became the physiological basis for the emergence of the λόγος - the specifically human articulation of the voice. If those 'origins' can be taken as a token of future patterns in the progressive humanization of the species, the contemporary need to differentiate between the somatic basis of sexuality and the related excretory-reproductive systems may well be marking the inception of a phenomenon *sui generis*: the emergence of a self-sustaining ambit of individual phallic αἰσθησις aiming at overcoming the originary (and thus primitive) male/female divide that has attempted – always anew, but lastly in vain – to replicate the divide between Being and Nothingness (see Aristotle 1968: 34 [= Metaph. I.v.6. (986a22-27)]; Wittig 1992: 49-51). 'Anthropo/logy' being first and foremost a privileged locus where the Logos of the Human may come to fruition, there seems to be no cogent reason for its ongoing disregard of Alfred Kinsey, one of the few sexual thinkers capable of enhancing a new grasp of the truth encapsulated in the etymology of 'sex': the ur-secession of the individual from the alienatory abstractions of all-too human identities.

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## **POVZETEK**

Študija obravnava še vedno pristno zanemarjanje teoretskih izzivov, ki jih je v svoji kritiki binarne seksualnosti in s svojo redefinicijo spolnih razlik, postavil Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956). S tem, ko se je Kinsey osredotočil na univerzalno variabilnost življenja in na več nivojsko seksualnost, je sprožil dekonstruktivistični pristop k raziskovanju spolnosti, ki je pripeljal do paradigatskega obrata v samem jedru seksologije. Po tej paradigmi je mogoče seksualnost razumeti kot stvar individualnih razlik znotraj neskončne sheme seksualne distribucije. Medtem, ko so antropologi desetletja ignorirali Kinseyeva moteča pričkanja, pa je Kinsey na eni strani sprožal razjarjene reakcije zagovornikov biblično navdihnenih prenoviteljev jasnega razločevanja med moškimi in ženskami, na drugi strani pa navdušeno priznavanje post-modernih advokatov rušenja in premislekov glede tradicionalnih razumevanj seksualnosti, delujočih v zaprtih okvirih seksualnih alternativ.

**Ključne besede:** antropologija in seksualnost, življenje/vitalizem, ločitev moški/ženske, seksologija, spolne kategorije.