

Procreation— life and death

In 1976, the year of America's bicentenary celebrations, when it promoted itself internationally as a model liberal society, the job of executioner came back on to the list of official occupations. That was just five years after the Supreme Court had ended the death penalty and put the executioner out of work. As prison cells on death row kept filling up in the early 1970s, there was little enthusiasm for sending the convicted to the gas chamber, electric chair or gallows. But in 1976 all that changed, the popular mood showed an appetite for horror, and the death penalty was reinstated. Perhaps it began with the shock of Elvis Presley's debauchery, or *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Hollywood's cinematic version of London's experimental stage success; perhaps it was the American mistake of Viet Nam, or the surge in capitalism that starkly divided rich from poor, First World from the Third World, or perhaps it was the civil rights movement and black consciousness that changed the mood. Whatever the origins, the shifting zeitgeist was evident, in a myriad of forms. Consider the long list of violent, frightening, vengeful and blood-thirsty mainstream films that reached audiences in the hundreds of millions *Rosemary's Baby*, *Clockwork Orange*, *The Exorcist*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Taxi Driver*, *The Shining*, *Friday the Thirteenth*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Dressed to Kill*. It was evident, too, in the changing material conditions of the city—the deterioration of the urban infrastructure; random street violence and the demonisation of the public domain as dangerous space.

The US Supreme Court's ruling on capital punishment may seem a remote point to begin a study of the future trends in sex and procreation, but representations in the popular imagination of such singularly important acts illustrate how the State enters individual subjectivity and helps to shape ways of thinking.¹ The televising of the circus crowd that gathers outside a prison where an execution is to about to take place, the images of the Ku Klux Klan in traditional robes, Christians who oppose the death penalty, women's groups decrying the justice system, blacks protesting racism in the judiciary, all brandishing hand-held signs with angry and aggressive jingles and slogans, contribute to public opinion on matters of life and death. It is impossible to map how a popular mood changes, yet it is possible, then and now, to see at work the massive apparatuses that help produce the *zeitgeist* that in turn influences individual subjectivity.

The modern State is a giant machine that frames individual life as a problem to be managed. In so doing, the State helps produce types of subjectivity, values, attitudes and feelings that are consonant with the demands of a technologised and rational society. Through the application of laws and regulations on citizenship, and through the circulation of ideas, desires and images inherent in cultural products, the State determines the conditions under which humans shall live. We are familiar with the idea of the State as a machine, a massive apparatus purpose-built for the maintenance of a collectivity of individuals. To some extent, America is the template for the western industrialised world; it is an advertisement for modernity, for liberalism, cultural plurality, ethnic diversity, self-determination and civic responsibility. It is also an exemplar of the contradictions of modernity, of what can go wrong. America, like other industrialised and technologised societies, is troubled by undiagnosed social pathologies, antinomies and mistakes. While most other industrial nations have lost the zest

for capital punishment and have either abolished the practice by legislation or leave it in disuse, in America, the death penalty is enjoying a resurgence. And this resuscitation of the State's willingness to kill its citizens is a revealing feature of the prevailing mood (McFeely, 1999).²

If a function of all governments is the determination of who shall live, who shall not, and under what conditions, then the control of procreation is, by any other name, the engineering of human life. For thousands of years, humans have attempted to control reproduction and fertility as part of social planning. Early records of contraception are found in the Egyptian Kahun Medical Papyrus, dated about 1850 BC (Riddle, 1993) and in Pliny, who advises on population control by recommending the hunting down of a particular hairy spider that harbours inside its head two small worms, which can be extracted, then wrapped in deerskin and attached to a woman, before sunrise, in order to provide effective contraception for a year (Pliny, 1980, 29, 85). Such are the lengths to be pursued to control the population. Similar procedures develop around capital punishment, abortion, conscription into the military, and marriage. All societies attempt to order life. In liberal societies, such controls become easily freighted with the burdensome terms eugenics and moral expedience. Yet it is naive to imagine that taking measure of a human life, giving it a value, is not an everyday occurrence in liberal as well as more dictatorial societies. Wherever there is government, there is population control in a variety of forms.

The history of population studies, from the C17th predictions of Antoni van Leeuwenhoek to the current estimates of the United Nations, is a euphemistic way of speaking about who shall live and who shall not. Demographic studies show that the crucial question to ask is not one of size, not how large a population can the planet support or how old this population can be, but a question of what standards of living are to be enjoyed. How many people the earth can sustain depends on how many want to eat McDonald's hamburgers as a protein source rather than, say, cockroaches; how many want to wear cotton and not polyester; how many want a car, and access to reproductive technology and life-support systems. These personal habits and social practices are the factors that will create the circumstances of the future. While there are natural constraints on population size, it is human lifestyles that have much greater and more immediate impact.

To excavate the assumptions that drive the regulatory systems of society and provide the justification for their consequences is to clarify which ideas shape and determine everyday life. Thinking about capital punishment, for example, is not at odds with thinking about procreation and the future of society. The practice of killing criminals in order to make human violence go away is based on an underlying logic that generalises to other situations and forms part of the *zeitgeist*. To employ the death penalty as a deterrent that preserves civilised society and allows the expression of moral outrage and the venting of anger that is thought to erupt whenever a society's most important rules are violated, is to assume that the individual and the State exist in a mutually defining, dyadic relationship. It is proper to ask whether this manner of thinking is correct, whether there is a flaw in the logic, but even if there were, and even if the *zeitgeist* shifted away from this particular position, still the fundamental point would remain—the modern State is in the business of arbitrating human life.

The same can be seen with the example of human reproduction. Current researchers into genetics now speculate on the end of death. Organisms need not age or deteriorate. A Faustian world of immortality lies just ahead. The Human Genome Project (initiated by the US Department of Energy and the National Institute of Health) is an instance where technoscience is being applied to the problem of life. The HGP will map

human DNA; this new knowledge of the genetic make-up of humans will slowly become embedded in the social fabric at the microlevel of various discourses such as medical practice, contraceptive or procreative techniques and biosociality or social planning. Just as science has made nature seem natural, and penology has made capital punishment seem sensible, so can genetic mapping make procreative engineering appear to be a solution to the problems of life.

A large-scale scientific initiative such as the Human Genome Project evidences a popular manner of thinking. It demonstrates how understanding the pathological can lead to understanding the normal. Just as cultural forms like violent films can function as aesthetic renunciations of a displaced anti-humanism, just as studies in criminology and sexology have produced theories of social normalcy, so scientific enquiry, by its very nature as a problem-solving form of ratiocination, encourages us to think we can improve the quality of life, and rectify some of its 'natural' mistakes and weaknesses. The Human Genome Project with its incorporation of procreative science promises to improve human society. It makes it seem possible and desirable to perfect the next generation. The assumptions and values that underlie these social, scientific and technological practices become the platforms from which a better future is imagined. Gone are the days of haphazard reproductive coupling that were loosely governed by the cultural rituals of marriage, incest taboos and laws against miscegenation. We are now on the brink of using technological hardware to ensure a scientifically improved next generation, a better result.

But technological capability alone does not determine how we will behave or what we want. It is not so much the accomplishments of science and technology that will determine the conditions under which human life will endure, but the political institutions governing individual liberty, the economic arrangements regarding markets, taxation and income distribution, family size, migration, child care, urban sprawl and the infrastructure of the city, that will do so. The real factors that ultimately give value to human life are the largely unconscious decisions we make every day—such as turning on the television, the computer and electric light and leaving them on in an empty room, driving a car, washing daily, and having an appetite for industrially prepared foods like Coca-Cola, McDonald's and Nestle's.

The twentieth century has been characterised by the historian Eric Hobsbawm as the "age of extremes." It recorded episodes of unprecedented human destruction through war, poverty and scientific experimentation, at the same time that the secrets of life were enthusiastically sought through psychological, philosophical and cultural probings. It was an age where death as much as life had become the subject of direct State intervention. It was a century that evidenced yearnings for utopia alongside experiments in social engineering and eugenics. While every society attempts to control life and death—and the repeated occurrences of marriage and war have been the most obvious mechanisms for doing so—now science and technology are being applied to this function in the industrialised countries. Medical heroics, biotechnology, demographic analyses and the scientific study of how societies work, have provided the modern State with increased managerial and administrative control over individuals. To use modern platforms of knowledge to engineer or predict the future, however, is to defy the lessons of history and expect that techno-administrative rationality will prevail over the chaotic. We need only consider the history of sex to be reminded of how resistant human beings have been to such forms of management by external agencies. In the short time that sex has been systematically examined, there are enough instances of the irrational, confounding, surprising and unpredictable to show that trying to govern society through science will be disappointing. The history of sex

is a history of insinuation that shows time and time again how human pleasure cannot be governed. As enthusiastic as the modern State has been in problematising life and administering techno-scientific solutions, individuals have been equally resistive. Even the scientific studies of sex, in all their diversity and complexity, fail to convince us that a “natural” and ordinary force like sex can be harnessed.

Sex—next and last

Understanding the role of sexuality in human life has had a relatively short history. The Kinsey Report was not the first so-called scientific and empirical study to be undertaken of human sexual conduct. In 1929, Catherine Davis published *Factors in the Sex Life of 2,200 Women*, George Hamilton published *A Study in Marriage* based on interviews with 200 men and women, and in the early 1930s, Robert Dickinson and Louise Beam wrote *One Thousand Marriages*. Kinsey’s study, though, was the first of the large-scale sample surveys. He conducted about eighteen thousand interviews that formed the basis of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948 and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953. The reports were criticised from the beginning. Kinsey’s data was flawed because his respondents were volunteers; they had not been randomly selected from a cross-section of the population. Amongst the interviewees were Kinsey’s wife and children, his students, large numbers of prison inmates, and Kinsey’s own casual sex partners, men now identified with the tearroom-trade. Despite these sampling problems, Kinsey’s work was immediately popular and widely read. The tone of the writing, his own scientific credentials, and the generosity of the prestigious Rockefeller Foundation that partially funded The Institute of Sex Research at Indiana University, all contributed to the authority of the work.

History has slightly tarnished Kinsey’s image. While he looked like a very ordinary man, and was a properly qualified scientist with a respectable university job, a recently published biography has revealed his fascination with paedophilia, anonymous homosexual sex, and diverse coupling such as wife and husband-swapping amongst his colleagues who then became the subjects of the home movies made in the attic of his suburban house (Jones, 1997). When he died in 1956 at the age of sixty-two, Kinsey was suffering from a massive pelvic infection that may well have resulted from his life-long masochistic, masturbatory practices. While these revelations have prurient appeal and do much to reclassify Kinsey as another of the oddball Victorian sexologists that included Havelock Ellis, Krafft-Ebing and Austria’s own Freud his research still has importance. He demonstrated that sexual preferences were linked with social conditions such as childhood and family more than with biological drives. He documented a wide variety of sexual practices that would have been considered taboo, deviant, unconventional, unpopular and perverted. He showed that sexual preferences shift over time and circumstance. All this gave a new understanding to sexuality that it was not a natural condition, it was not a presocial biological urge, and could be better understood as a correlate of demographic influences such as age, gender, ethnic identity, class and education.

From Kinsey’s research in the 1950s, the following facts have circulated; about 85% of men have premarital sex, about 50% engage in extramarital sex, 30% confess to some adult homosexual encounter, 4% are exclusively homosexual. With regard to women, about 50% have premarital sex, and about 25% have extramarital sex. From the next Kinsey study published in 1970 and revised in 1989, the reported trends are that a large percentage of people think there should be laws against adultery, about 83% of men and 90% of women think homosexuality is ‘almost always wrong’, and about 60% believe it should be illegal. Interpreting these facts is subject to the same kinds of

sociological influences that are most other behaviors, that is, we accept as true and meaningful what we already believe, and what reflects our own social position. To accept Kinsey is to accept also the arbitrary view that we live in a liberal social climate, where heterosexual coupling and long-term romance-based relations are the normal paradigm.

The research work of William Masters and Virginia Johnson (1966) follows in the path of Kinsey insofar as it treats sexuality as a proper topic for scientific study but, unlike Kinsey, it does so without asking much about the human experience. In the Reproductive Biology Research Foundation established in St. Louis, Missouri, Masters and Johnson undertook a comprehensive study of the physiology and anatomy of human sexual activity under laboratory conditions. Biochemical equipment, such as electrocardiographs and electroencephalographs, was used in recording sexual stimulations and reactions, as was direct research observation. Masters and Johnson also conducted clinical marriage counseling, focusing on problems of sexual performance, but their main emphasis was on the material body and the question of physical reactions. They understood sex for men to be about the functioning of the penis and the production of testosterone and androgens, and for women to be about vaginal pulsations and the arousal cycle. They relied upon data gathered from 382 white female and 312 white male adults aged in their twenties to thirties—a group that was fairly uniform, largely upper middle class and urban.

The work of Masters and Johnson has limited applicability as it repeatedly excises from its reports the social meanings of sexual practices. They emphasised the essential nature of physical responses, even when comparing specific practices between heterosexuals and homosexuals whose lifestyles often differ sharply. So, for example, they would conclude that the mechanics of sexuality were the same irrespective of who was engaging in the practice. They missed out on understanding the different meanings assigned to kissing or anal intercourse when performed by men, or women, or by self-defined heterosexuals or homosexuals. By emphasising the body and its natural processes as the best way to understand human sexuality, the work of Masters and Johnson now seems curiously disengaged from the human experience. Nonetheless, in its time, it was popular, widely read and publicly supported—clear evidence that the ‘scientific’ study of sexuality seemed possible and purposeful.

Shere Hite’s research during the 1970s and 1980s does not make the same mistake of concentrating on sex as a physical process. She wanted to know how women felt about sex and love. In three reports, she gathered information from interviews and surveys from about five thousand women. She asked open-ended questions such as—Is having sex important to you? What do you think about during sex? Do you have fantasies? Does pornography stimulate you? What do you think of sado-masochism? Do you go for long periods without sex? Who sets the pace and style of sex—you or your partner? How old were you when you had your first sexual experience? What type of person usually attracts you? (Hite, 1976 p. 573 – 588).

Shere Hite became a celebrity for some time after the publication of her research and a great deal of controversy, largely over the methodology and conclusions, has persistently surrounded the work. Since the three Hite publications (but not necessarily because of them), there is a general sense that we live in a moment of social latitude about sexual arrangements. The weakening of legal strictures against the publication of increasingly explicit materials, the proliferation of published confessionals from sexaholics, pornographic film-makers, telephone sex workers, journalistic exposés of the sexual proclivities of politicians, artists and celebrities, the pornography industry burgeoning on the Internet, all contribute to the impression that norms and practices

around sexuality are increasingly flexible (Chapple & Talbot 1989). With more reportage on sexual matters in the mass media, more commercialisation of sex and more sex in commerce (D'Emilio & Freedman 1988), the questions are worth asking—what do we really know about sex? And what role does it play in social life?

Freud demonstrated the protean character of sexual desire by bringing attention to childhood sexuality and by identifying the invasiveness of sex into various everyday occurrences such as dreams, jokes, manners of speech and slips of the tongue. Even though he conceptualised the sex drive as a biological or instinctive condition common to all humans that was analogous in many ways to other physiological needs, he observed and wrote about sex in ways that succeeded, ironically, in weakening that assumption. His case studies repeatedly show how adult sexuality emerges from a long and complex process of individual observation and experimentation. Sexual identity and functionality come slowly, even stealthily. Despite the recognition he gives to genital primacy and the importance of procreative sexuality, Freud portrays human sexuality as a socially constructed contingency.

The nineteenth century sexologists recognised a continuum of sexual activity but they remained clear that deviations from the norm were signs of pathology. Havelock Ellis (1897) and Krafft-Ebing (1886) acknowledged that sexual proclivities included a range of interests but when many of these desires were enacted to become visible behaviours, then an inversion of the natural sexual order had taken place. This is much the same legacy provided by the early twentieth century anthropologists and ethnographers whose encounters with the traditional and exotic societies of the non-western world annotated a myriad of examples of divergent sexual customs and gender classifications. Bronislaw Malinowski (1927) and Margaret Mead (1935), for instance, gave accounts of how sexuality was a fusion of both nature and culture, how all sexual practices, despite their variety, were solutions to the universal problem of how to control natural human needs and produce civilisation. Their documenting of cultural variety did not challenge the view of a standard human nature; instead, it explained the variety as polysemic expression. These early anthropologists, like the Victorian sexologists, did not recognise the essentialist assumptions underlying their own thinking about sex. This is the great irony. Even though they supplied the theoretical and empirical research that challenged and contradicted such essentialist thinking they failed to see beyond their own assumptions of sexual dimorphism, gender identification and biologically determined human nature.

Michel Foucault was not the first to consider the history of sexuality and the body but his influence is currently the most prominent. From his early works (1978, 1980) on psychiatry, criminality, sexual deviance, hermaphroditism, the law, and so on, he has progressively developed the position that scientific knowledge and systematic procedures of administration concerning the body become the frame that supports each individual's particular social, cultural and sexual knowledges. To think about sexuality as a 'natural given' that must be held in check by external forces (as Freud, Mead and Malinowski, might have thought) or to consider it an 'obscure domain' that scientific enquiry must uncover (as Masters and Johnson might have thought) is to misunderstand the social significance of sex (Foucault, 1978: 105–6). For Foucault, sexuality is part of a 'great surface network' in which there are competing interests that continually influence how individuals understand and experience the pleasures and attributes of their own body. In western societies, the discourses that have developed around the body also function as systems of law enforcement, economic systems that determine the circulation of wealth and property, and classificatory systems that attribute social status and privilege to the individual (pp 107–110). As these discourses are used and

proliferate, new systems of classification take form, producing, for example, new personages—"the nervous woman, the frigid wife, the indifferent mother ... the hysterical or neurasthenic girl"—who were the very case studies that probably stepped over Sigmund Freud's Viennese doorstep.

When we understand that sexuality has more to do with cultural history and social practices than it does with an essential or native human response, we recognise more readily the instances in the public domain where there are discourses of sex at work manufacturing our particular habits of mind. The mass media, popular culture and consumer trends have important functions in these regards as they transpose the abstract forces of the cultural and historical into the immediate experiences of the self-conscious individual. Take for example the popularity of the cinema, television soap operas and sitcoms. Generally speaking, the dominating interests of these entertainments are love and sex. As such, they can better be seen as having a didactic function. They replace, in form but not function, the written manuals popular with the new bourgeois classes of the industrial period. These ubiquitous programmes are the equivalent instruction manuals on how to think and behave. They answer questions that supposedly everyone wants to know—what should we do when romantic love enters the professional workplace? when a colleague asks an impossible favour that might be ethically compromising? when greed, envy, competition, and professional ambition affect the domestic, private sphere of home? how many years difference can there be between sex partners? are threesomes enjoyable? how important is penis size? who has anal sex? who has oral sex?

Posing such questions brings emphasis to specific forms of conduct; answering them defines acceptable modes of male and female sexuality. The representations of social life found in popular television programmes are discursive readings of the historical and cultural. They prescribe practices by the technique of seemingly reflecting what is acceptable, what everybody else seems to be doing. Often they pathologise in order to normalise. They inform by posing important questions then supplying the unambiguous answers. No sitcom, soap opera or mainstream film ends in a genuinely unstructured manner. To do so would be to elude the "great surface network" of classification and instruction that Foucault identified as part of the modern techniques through which our ideas on sexuality (and much more) are structured.

To comprehend that biological needs and human capacities are historical and social constructs requires an acceptance of the absence of universalities in human experiences. The anthropologist Gilbert Herdt, for example, gives an account of ritualised homosexual fellatio that is a socially required part of routine life that is adhered to by all men, but is not seen as a violation of a strict heterosexual culture. In New Guinea, a hunting and horticultural tribe known as the Sambia have an exact dimorphism embedded in their beliefs and practices that clearly separates the sexes from each other, and culture from nature. The society is strongly patrilineal and patrilocal. "All marriages are arranged; courtship is unknown, and social relations between the sexes are not only ritually polarised but often hostile" (1996:432). Sambia has "a men's secret society that ideologically disparages women as inferior, dangerous creatures who can pollute men and deplete them of their masculine substance" (433). The relations between the sexes are further strained by the different cycles of maturation and status that young girls and boys follow. Even though men have greater social value, women have superior status in terms of reproduction because their bodies are, according to this cosmology, inherently more fertile.

Men, on the other hand, cannot attain maturity without external help. Semen is believed to be the fundamental spark of life, but it is not naturally produced by the

human body. It has to be artificially and externally introduced. Sambian males, then, practice same-sex fellatio that allows young boys to ingest semen from older youths. All males participate in these practices at various stages of maturation. The ritual function of fellatio is to consume semen and thereby produce maleness. Inseminations over many years enable men to “catch up” with females, and assume their rightfully superior social status. These same-sex homoerotic encounters continue between Sambian males until after marriage and the birth of their first child. In some instances, they continue beyond the conventions. Thus a married male may continue relations with young boys as well as maintain a public and conventional marriage to a woman (436). As Herdt notes this practice, it is easy enough to see how the pursuit of pleasure has in this case found a way, even when it is against the grain of the mainstream. We can take this as an instance of the ungovernability of human sexuality.

The practices and classifications of sexuality found in Sambian culture illustrate the absence of any standard meanings of human behaviour. The practices of fellatio between Sambian men would be regarded in westernised cultures as homosexual paedophilia. For the Sambians, however, with their strict beliefs in gender dimorphism, the idea of homosexuality per se is difficult to comprehend, and furthermore, interpreting their rituals of gender socialisation in these terms would be inappropriate. Anthropology and history provide a myriad of examples where the use of sexual behaviour as a means of universalising individual identity is meaningless. Is an identity as a heterosexual or a homosexual or a bisexual the same now as it was in the Netherlands in 1700, or in classical Greece, or in contemporary Iran? Obviously not. Judith Butler (1993) tells us “gender is neither a purely psychic truth, conceived as ‘internal’ and ‘hidden’, nor is it reducible to a surface appearance; on the contrary, its undecidability is to be traced as the play between psyche and appearance” (p. 234).

Sexual knowledges are situational and self-referential. We learn as we go along and what we learn enables us to keep going along. Knowledge of sex is neither consistent nor true. Its rules keep changing; at one point in history it is regarded as a fundamental of all human experience, at another time, it is a de-civilising impulse that must be managed and administered, and at yet another time it is a legitimate experimental field for the advances of science, medicine, psychochemistry and the like. The multifariousness of sex stands as an open invitation to contemplate what is sex at this and any other particular moment. Hence the historical inevitability of the question posed here—what is sex in an age of its procreative superfluosity?

Technology—more or less

Historical studies of humans have repeatedly identified liminality as being a fertile source of social change. Travellers who linked remote communities through trade exchanges; third-sex individuals who challenged the natural assumption of dimorphism; court-jesters, celebrities, parvenus, cross-dressers, etc., who have occupied the gaps that separate social groupings, and in so doing, breach the divides that otherwise seem too solid—these interstitial creatures are new life-forms who interface with diverse social worlds and propel them in various directions. Much can be made of our being in such a liminal position now.

In the C21st, in the age of the cyborg and the scientifically studied body, we are beginning to occupy comfortably the techno-social, the intersection between technical virtuosity and social adaptability. Just as the telephone and radio once marked this intersection, now the electronic products of video, computer programmes and virtual realities do so. And just as the telephone, radio, television, motor car and motion picture disturbed the habits of social life, so the new telecommunications and biotech-

nologies, with their infinite versions of reality, have radically shifted our thinking about society and the nature of human identity. We easily accept now that there are complex interconnections between technology, science, biology and the social. It is evident from the efficient and ingenious ways we have adapted to the modern experience (living as we do partially in the material world and partially in the abstract dimension of hyperreality) that there are no separable and distinctive worlds. All our social and biological activities are mediated by technology; we can tele-conference, shop by computer, send e-mail communications, and experience intense pleasures and amusement by conjuring up a playmate to enact the fantasies of the Marquis de Sade or Lara Croft. Technologically provided substitutions for the real thing are too popular to be called substitutes. They are the real thing, and they have moved human sociality into a new dimension, a hyperreality. Thus, we are beginning to look like liminal beings existing simultaneously in a material world, an abstract cyberspace and an imagined future. If this is so, according to the rules of liminality, we are on the brink of substantial social change.

Yet haven't we always been so poised? In the nineteenth century, the body was thought of as a machine inhabited by an interior force, a self or psyche or consciousness. Over the century, the body was observed, measured and mapped, and its topography scanned. Phrenological bumps on the head revealed its competencies, physiognomic features such as the size of the nose, ears, hands, feet, the fullness of the lips, the width of the forehead, were taken as signs of honesty, intelligence, temperance, aggression, and so on. Character was regarded as being immanent in appearance, as if the inside was becoming increasingly visible on the outside. This was a remarkable social change that resonated through styles in public conduct as well as in private experiences of pleasure. By the early twentieth century, the body had been evacuated of any significant residues of nature, character and impulse. It was a mechanical body fully captured in Frederick Taylor's time and motion studies from which "scientific management" would direct the work activities of individuals for the next half century. This knowledge, too, created consequences. The mechanical human body, like other automata, had points of stress. These were seen in nervous collapse, hysteria, mental illness and psychosomatic symptoms. By the late C20th, the body had divided—in part it was the elegant and efficient machine that could dexterously build giant skyscrapers, conquer land, air and sea, perform virtuoso tasks, and in the other part, it was a frail vessel that required surgery, electrotherapy, psychotherapy, drug therapy, physiotherapy, prosthetic augmentation, hormone replacement, sexual reassignment, and organ replacement. The frailties of the body made it a site of constant reconstruction. Its needs and attributes were neither natural nor artificial; they were simply part of a fluid landscape. The new liminal body is one that must be harnessed, groomed, husbanded and trained in accord with the kinds of social worlds it inhabits—just as the body has been throughout history.

The heightened attention paid to the human body, by the entertainment and culture industries, by the biomedical and technology industries, produces a spreading network of knowledges and practices that continuously rewrite us. These regulatory devices define the body and prescribe its various functions, but always in a context of historical uncertainty. Ultimately, this means there can be no answers to questions about the next sex, or, for that matter, the last sex. There can be no definitions of what is excessive or superfluous, of what practices are vital and sustaining to an historical moment, or what habits of living will produce the best possible social world. As Oscar Wilde quips, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "anything becomes a pleasure if one does it too often."

Even though the body seems to be our first and most natural technical object and instrument, it is constantly removed from our account by public knowledge systems that make it something else. We are trained to walk, talk, think, sit, eat, dance, swim, take drugs, want sex, listen to music, and so on, by the historical moment in which we live. The urbane Marcel Mauss tells us that “in every society, everyone knows and has to know what s/he has to do in all conditions. Naturally, social life is not exempt from stupidity and abnormalities ... The French navy only recently began to teach its sailors to swim” (1934). He goes on to explain that the conquest of the body, through the ways in which we think of it, is the fundamental gesture necessary to all social life. And this is the basis from which all conclusions on the nature of the body must be drawn.

Whether the body is represented as a scientific field for biotechnology, a site of cultural anxiety ripe for therapeutic intervention, a Baudrillardian television screen programmed to play only images of hyperreality, or a superfluity in an age of procreative superfluity, it does not matter. Whenever we ask questions about what will happen next, whenever we attempt to project into the future, we find ourselves being successful only in the pleasures provided from discoursing on the historical present.

Notes

- 1 The term State is used throughout and interchangeably with empire, civilisation, zeitgeist, culture, discourse and so on. This may seem too inclusive but it is necessary when theorising about individual experience to have a concept that refers to an external ideational unity, and this is the State (Helliwell and Hindess 1999). The State and the individual exist in a binary on the understanding that both terms are impossible to define. Linking them together, however, does not necessarily presume the over-socialised concept of the individual as described by Dennis Wrong (1976).
- 2 Auburn Prison, New York was the site of the first execution by the electric chair on 6 August 1890. The prisoner, Willam Kemmler, died slowly. The execution went badly; the electric voltage applied was too small; the electrodes conducting the charge were poorly attached. But less than a year later, at Sing Sing prison, more deaths by electrocution were taking place.

References

- Berman, Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1982
- Butler, Judith, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, London: Routledge, 1993
- Chapple, Steve and David Talbot.
- Burning Desires: *Sex in America, A Report from the Field*. New York: Doubleday, 1989
- D’Emilio, John and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988
- Ellis, Havelock and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*. London: Wilson and Macmillan, 1897
- Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality*, New York: Vintage, 1978
- Foucault, Michel, *Power/Knowledge*. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980
- Freccero, Carla, *Historical Violence, Censorship and the Serial Killer*. *Diacritics*, 27. 2., pp. 44 – 58, 1997
- Helliwell, Christine and Barry Hindess, *Culture, society and the figure of man*. *History of the Human Sciences*, 12. 4., pp. 1 – 20, 1999
- Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Extremes*. New York: Vintage, 1996

Jones, James, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life*. Boston: Norton, 1997

Kinsey, Alfred, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia: WB Saunders, 1948

Kinsey, Alfred and the staff of the Institute of Sex Research, Indiana University, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*. Philadelphia: WB Sanders, 1953

Klassen, A., C. Williams, E. Levitt and edited by H. J. O'Gorman, *Sex and Morality in the U.S.: an empirical enquiry under the auspices of the Kinsey Institute*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1970 & 1989

Krafft-Ebing, Richard von. (trans 1892), *Psychopathia Sexualis*. New York: Stein and Day, (1965), 1886

Malinowski, Bronislaw, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*. Cleveland: Meridien, 1927

Masters, William and Virginia Johnson, *Human Sexual Response*. Boston: Little Brown, 1966

McFeely, William, *Proximity to Death*. New York: Norton, 1999

Mead, Margaret, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. New York: Morrow, 1935

Pliny, The Elder, *Natural History*. London: (ed W.H.S. Jones) Heineman, 1980

Riddle, John, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993

Wilde, Oscar, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Philadelphia: Sullivan, 1890

Wrong, Dennis, *The Oversocialised Conception of Man. In his Skeptical Sociology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976
