

Wild Gender

‘‘The vanishing of taken-for-granted assumptions about natural process, about continuity and change, and about individuality will make the future for us’ Strathern, *Reproducing the Future* (1992), 180.

This chapter draws on Marilyn Strathern’s early characterization of gender emerged after her fieldwork in Melanesia, in the wider context of the emergence of a feminist anthropology, to explore ways in which this could be understood to relate to trans perspectives on embodiment. Particularly, reading the evolution of Strathern’s gender thinking after being in the field in Melanesia from 1969 to 1976 and rewriting those arguments from *Women in Between* to the *Gender of the Gift*, the notion of gender brought forward a kind of thinking that has been termed speculative and intensively differential. Whereas her original intention as an ethnographer had been to investigate conflicts and disputes between men and women, and how these played out in civil court processes, in dialogue with the material collected, Strathern’s ethnography of gender relations evolved by entangling the dynamics under description and meta-reflections emerged around the task of doing anthropology. As ‘gender’ became normalized as a key analytic in anthropological analysis, however, it opened up a way of thinking through and across natural categories that ultimately challenged its own existence. This chapter invokes some threads in Strathern’s thinking to reframe some of the key questions that animate trans and queer studies today: How did gender, as a category, become a productive threshold capable of attuning abstract sensibilities towards sets of relations and associations not hitherto understood to be attuned? If multiplicity marked the beginning of gender, opening up ways to study relations which did not take for granted binary gender (See Franklin in Strathern, 2016), is this notion now obsolescent? What forms of thinking emerge after gender?

Arguably, at the time of its normalization in anthropology ‘gender’ had been used as a clinical marker in the biomedical and the psy- sciences, from the 1970s it also became a ‘shock to thought’, particularly of a shock to scientific thinking, as well as a conceptual and political evolution of anthropology’s engagement with relations. Indeed, Strathern’s long lost thesis - now re-edited as *Before and After Gender* (2016)- has recently reopened, again, a space to think gender through and against semantics and semiotics of representation. Gender, for Strathern, was always a ‘whole society’ issue (ibid), a generative notion that rooted mythologies and genealogies in the thinking processes on which social hierarchies rest. Following Anne Oakley, Strathern delved into western assumptions that ‘the differences between the sexes are more important than any qualities they have in common’ (Oakley quoted in Strathern 2016, chapter seven). Strathern’s project was framed as a study social worlds shaping differences between kinds, a project chiefly concerned with how these differences, in turn, shaped fundamental aspects of social structure. In fact, in the *Gender of the Gift*, Strathern relates the problem of gender to the fiction of singular persons, which ‘only emerges as a holistic unitary state under particular circumstances’ (1988, 15). Singular persons, understood as a derivative of multiple substances or identities, may only be transformed in distinct male or female elements under particular modes of thinking. Indeed, the type of thinking that results in binary gender is analogous to the kind that produces individuals from society – a fiction that produces homogeneity by way of eclipsing difference or through detachment. For Strathern the genders contain each other, as individuals contain societies, but the existence of one ‘individual’ or ‘society’ is predicated on gender, as gender ‘provides a form’ through which visions of individuality are realized, while at the same time it is formed by them (1988, 17). In this context, figurations of nature and individuality bring to life the continuities and discontinuities underlying structures and animacies of social worlds. Categorical relations, and relations mediated by categories, naturally truncated as they may be (Sedgwick, 2015), bring forward ways in which knowledge and practice are often productive *together*, highlighting that boundaries must be conceptualized at the right level of complexity (see Valentine 2007, for instance). Strathern shows that the relations between these realms implicate

and produce the analyst. In the field, knowledge is always grounded in a particular body and its chance encounters, its condition of being ‘in place’ (Strathern 2002, 91).

Three decades after the notion of gender opened up new social idioms of identity and relations, the notion of gender as a marker of differentiated social identity is arguably becoming a sign of times past (Thurer 2005, cf. Moore 1988). Not only have gender specific perspectives been mainstreamed and absorbed within traditional academic disciplines, but the promise of emancipation from the limitations of reproductive biology has become testament to how categories demonstrate the inherent artificiality of gender as a system of relations, while pointing to the forces that persistently sustain it in place. Reading herself backwards, Strathern identifies as elements of her early field guide, including gender signs and symbols, stereotypes, families and roles in reproduction, as heuristics that enable an analyst to think with relations about the different kinds of environments that enable the practical functioning of social worlds, which can include anthropological writing practices. Strathern shares with feminist technoscience scholars, such as Susan Leigh Star, a concern with the moral consequences of representations¹. She maps out this relational field of symmetries between worlds and thought, such as those that preoccupied Charles Sanders Peirce and Gregory Bateson, productive frictions where homologues, affinities, and symmetries define complexity, mental and organic systems (see Parisi 2012; Bateson 2000). After all, as Viveiros de Castro has noted, an investment in multiplicity constitutes ‘the main tool of a ‘prodigious effort’ to imagine thought, an activity other than that of identifying (recognition) and classifying (categorization), and to determine what is there for thought to think as intensive difference rather than as extensive substance’ (2010, 223).

A drive to understand divorce practices through anthropological conventions of the time –particularly through a perspective influenced by Leach and Meyer

¹ For Strathern, as for Star, the possibility of life, and of science, depends on membership of multiple, ecologically connected ecologies of knowledge, and communities of practice. See for instance Strathern (2004)

Fortes- led Strathern on a path of exploration primarily concerned with understanding ‘all kinds of hidden political choices that arise when we activate our knowledge’ (2013, 244), while enmeshed in the bureaucratic and everyday rhythms of academic life. Strathern’s method is as concerned with aesthetics, as with the pragmatics of knowledge². While we can talk about gender norms in contexts where gender is taken for granted, or *given* in particular relations, but when by association with analytics that destabilise the boundaries, practices, and infrastructures of gender, the notion of gender becomes a proxy for both engaging with locality and utopian, conceptual, deterritorialised forms of anthropology. Strathern uses concepts and ‘the concreteness of certain forms’ to connect multiplicity while preserving the stability of particular formations. Categories extend heuristics to social process: without elucidating these models, one cannot frame the problem of their effects. Categorical analysis brought Strathern to compare the symmetries and asymmetries of nature and culture through relations of analogy that hinge on the possibility of reversibility, a figure-ground reversal in dialogue with Roy Wagner. Wagner illustrates this analytic leap in relation to anthropological thinking:

Coyote: “We come to a point where the difference between organic and inorganic SYMMETRIES disappears—the vanishing point between what the old anthropologists used to call ‘nature’ and ‘culture.’ All ‘cultures’ merge with one another—as you say, holographically—and so, in fact, do all ‘natures.’”

Roy: “The anthropologist wants to be the figure as well as the ground. And so, in fact, the figure-ground reversal itself honestly believes it is an anthropologist.”

Coyote: “Though it is really the interference-patterning between the two that counts most: the way in which any two polarities interfere with one another.” (Wagner 2010, chapter 4)

² Although not as a necessary consequence, reflecting on her contribution to human rights organisations Strathern felt that enquiry reciprocated the gift of knowing by opening up engagement with community practitioners, a space of intellectual liberation that could in many ways outperform the gains of a model of engagement based on making the anthropologists’ expertise available as a set of expert recommendations or an issue handbook.

Gender, rather than a unit predicated on presence or experience, suggests both disjunction and conjunction, a composite of the relations that make up persons and things. Strathern writes: ‘The succession of images allows no between: for a person or body is either the inside our outside of another person/body or else its pair form, its other half (...) If forms are thus conceived in an either/or mode, both are always present’ (1992, 81). Strathern notes that the task of knowing ethnographically reveals something about how something becomes understood. After all, Strathern is concerned with workings of relations, including genealogies, conceptual infrastructures and analogies; the capacities of thought to conjure up relations and dispositions, orientations, binaries, bodies, and persons, the commoning and practice of knowledge. Gender can be understood through its capacity to conjure up multiple, combinatory ways in which a problem can be grappled with, an iterative process which could be seen to work not unlike an artists’ composition (see, as my own suggested illustration, fig. 1).

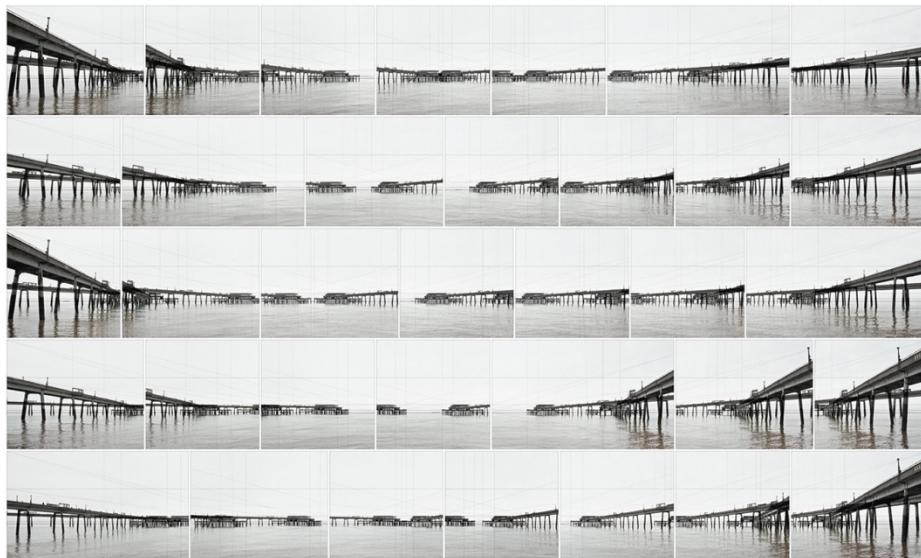


Figure 1: Nishimura – Random Structures 01-B, courtesy of the artist.

Holbraad and Pedersen (2009) have argued that Strathern’s thinking and method relies on making visible the space of distance to perform anthropology through theorization and abstraction. But where Holbraad and Pedersen describe Strathern’s contribution as playing on the conflation between

analytics and objects in the figure and work of the analyst– M, for Marilyn or Melanesia, and a reference to Alfred Gell’s description of Strathernian analytics in ‘Strathernograms’)-, here I read her conceptual toolkit as a field guide that purposefully evades classification and makes a point of not fitting in, queering its position vis a vis other responses to the problem of representation. Conflation and detachment between object and analytic form, in other words, need not necessarily produce either alienation or convergence, but, rather, a perspectival diversity and multiplicity, a movement of thought that provides a sense of continuity between modes of being and knowing -³. Here the task of writing anthropologically, as Corsin Jimenez notes, ‘amounts to an incursion into and out of the social in order to de-stick it from its own internal recursions. It is the reversibility –the inside-out- that accomplishes the analysis’ (2013, 22). Indeed, optical games and interpretative shifts are a key to how anthropologists perform a figure-ground reversal, which, for Strathern, ‘takes a divergent form: at some moments it seems as though there is nothing beyond interpretation, for there is nothing that is not amenable to human comprehension and in that sense the product of it, whereas at other moments one appears to see through the practice of interpretation for the very artifice it is.’ (2002, 88).

Gender after the fact

Looking back at the history of the gender category in the biosciences, the ‘facts’ of gender include quantifiable traits and classification; capacities, clinical and observational, that constituted gender’s performative prerogative. This facticity run through the course of gender’s multiple scientific histories. Fausto-Sterling (2000), points at how the distinction between sex and gender in fact provided solid ground for a populational biopolitics⁴, a trend historians

³ Strathern argued for anthropological description itself to be conceptualized as a kind of intervention. Self-description, as a mode of self-accountability, ‘is seen as a precondition to change things (2004, 24), it duplicates description and institutional dynamics in ways that ‘brings anthropologists and bureaucrats into proximity’ (2004, 25)

⁴ Multiplying bodily categories, and mechanisms, the science of sex was built on observing physical and psychosocial continuities, using the framework of pathology to classify bodies

trace back to scientific cultures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Facts allowed thinking gender, against a continuous experiential form, around categories, diagnostic strata and classifications, as alternate figures *and* grounds of experience. In its becoming fact, gender was *de facto* anthropomorphized, linking physical attributes and social function through standards that enforce social, sexual and aesthetic conventions. Endocrinological, mental health and surgical protocols not only directly affected transsexual and intersex populations, as they became important regulators of gendered bodies and sexualities (Roberts 2007). Sexology, as a self-proclaimed ‘science of dimorphism’ reemerged in an enduring form in post World War II North America as a group of practitioners

‘engaged publicly in such matters sexual as were, in those days, politically, legally, and morally suspect: trial-tests of the contraceptive pill; overt advocacy of the positive value of recreational sex in or out of marriage; endorsement of hormonal and surgical sex reassignment of patients whose diagnosis of transsexualism had formerly been medically unrecognized; explicit sex therapy for people in trouble with their sex lives as well as their love lives; and advocacy of the rights of women to legal abortion’ (Money 1976, 84).

In this context, enabled by gender idioms, plasticity was perceived as an attribute of humanity (Morland 2014; Kessler 2002). This projection of anthropomorphism⁵ became a form of political physics (see also Barad 2007, Parisi 2006) concerned with regulating bodies. Not only did sexology’s emphasis on plasticity inform gender politics (see Stryker 2008, Preciado 2002), but, as the acclaimed sexologist John Money put it, sexology became ‘difficult for medicine to accommodate’ because of its concern with a sexual system that attempted to normalise a balance between social non-conforming behaviour and views of natural dimorphism that sexologists, including Money

and identities that did not conform with ideal standards, while at the same time, bringing forward their social recognition.

⁵ For example, drawing on Lauretis’ conceptualization of gender as a technology, Preciado (2008) notes how ‘gender is the effect of a system of signification that includes modes of production and decoding of politically regulated visual and textual signs’ (2008, 108), making gender possible only insofar as a subject simultaneously produces and interprets these signs, and remains involved in a corporeal process of signification and representation.

himself, saw as resting on universal principles of reproductive physiology (many of Money's key scientific texts refer to dimorphism and to the complementarity of sexual identities, but see particularly Money 1976). Sexology's interactionist paradigm furthered an ideological agenda drafted around principles of humanist psychology (Adler 1927). Here, notions of sex and gender emerged as complementary (see Kessler 1998; see also Namaste 2000), and gender became a mode of communicating of sexual capacity long deployed in clinical and legal contexts to naturalise human practices⁶. Indeed, gender was often framed as a form of originary humanicity, one that, as Kirby put it, frames the subject as it arrives, as it has come into being (2011, 20). Gender was now both the origin and the effect of methods and optics that classified, enhanced, simplified or trivialized, corrected and fetishized conditions of life.

Indeed, for Strathern, not only gender but modernity signified a shift defined by 'the sense of being after an event, of being post-' (1992b, 7). 'After nature', Strathern thinks through gender at a time when idioms about the relations between men and women were beginning to change in anthropological thinking, and in public life, a shift toward structural connected to movement for the rights of women, and the emergence of 'a new era of self-made selves' (Franklin 2016, xxxvii), sustained by the principles and practices of modernity. In this context, Strathern grappled with gender as a form of elementary relationality that 'deals equally with the definition of boundary and the establishment of communication' (Strathern quoted in Franklin, 2016, xliii). These transferences marked the emergence of gender, allowing a shift in thinking from which new transferences between domains such as subjectivity, materiality and politics could be newly effected. Yet these transferences, in instantiating the processes gender was good to think with, marked the emergence of gender as an 'immutable mobile' (Latour 1986); a representation that 'convey[s] information over a distance (displacement) without [itself] changing (immutability)' (Star 1995, 91). Immutable mobiles,

⁶ These gender stories were inevitably racialized and linked and linked to other social technologies, including projects of racial and environmental domination (see Weheliye 2014; Snorton 2014)

as Latour emphasizes, hold an internal tension between the need to be instantiated and adapted in context, and the need for standardization, becoming the go between practice and the conventional grammar of formalism operating through the regularities that structure communication. Star argued that immutable mobiles manage this tension through their own layered structure that conveys not only the content of representation but facts about the representational process. For Star, ‘different parts of the representational process are allocated (or displaced) to different strata of the artifact being constructed; in the end, these strata must be aligned and made to function together in a mutually structuring way’ (1995, 94).

Consider the following illustration of gender politics, where Strathern draws on Young and Wilmott’s first description of the wedding of Sylvia Hanbury and Harry Buxton in Bethnal Green. Strathern illustrates how the ceremony must perform a social function to enact the coming together of families, and how it is, in the end, through lineage membership that a man gains access to a livelihood. Becoming an in-law provides the right to make specific demands on a group of other in laws, as well as draw specific obligations between them. Thinking through the language of gender, its mythologies and stereotypes, Strathern points out how these can obscure hidden debates around biological facts cannot be answered by overemphasizing biological function in producing two different kinds of persons, men and women. This overemphasis fails to explain the complexity and shifting nature of gender systems:

‘In our emphasis on biology we dismiss culture too lightly. The assumption is that a man-made thing can be unmade. But it can only be unmade if “it” is properly identified. To say that gender differences between men and women are basically cultural and not biological in origin does *not* lead to the automatic conclusion that they are therefore malleable and weak. They may be very strong. Proving that there is no genetic basis for gender discrimination does not even begin to approach the problem that such discriminations may be embedded deeply in society—not just in those institutions which allocate this or that range of roles to men and women, but in our whole perception of mankind’s place in the world. At

the present, the idea of sex and gender is providing a potent focus for the individual/society problem. Its use will be a vehicle for constant redefinition. In fact, the more we work the concept of gender, whether by denial or affirmation, the more nourishment we give it. Gender, for us, is like a mandrake. Pull it up for its poisonous or for its medicinal properties, and you find the root has human form' (ibid).

For Strathern, although the status of gender may vary from culture to culture, the distinction between public and domestic affairs structures hierarchical relations between the sexes. The division between nature and society sets out the domain of gender as a figure against ground: all relationships between the genders exist in the realm of the domestic, and are by this opposition social *and* political. Gender boundaries are marked by their outside, a realm where human beings and spirits exist by virtue of continuities and differentiations⁷. The domestic is indeed a relational realm which bears the dynamics of culture, but this does not mean that gender relations are conceived as either/or: rather, the domestic slides up on a scale or a continuum where things can be more or less cultural and more or less hierarchical, more or less expressible. The existence of such difference in activity accounts for the divisibility of gender – the fact that in multiple spheres (such as the equality between women and men as members of the lineage, but their inequality when faced by external relations of various kinds)⁸. Boundaries become a necessary trope that destabilise both objects and ways of knowing by making and breaking equivalences. In 1977, Strathern set off to conduct additional work on a shared anthropological and statistical project which recorded data around the North

⁷ Strathern does not in fact imagine that the distinction between *mbo* (the domestic) and *romi* (the wild) are collapsible, though these binaries are more readily amenable to be rendered analogous to that between *korpa* and *nyim*. *Nyim* and *korpa* grossly tally up to qualities of successfulness and worthlessness: *nyim*, associated with big men and things of prestige, and *korpa*, associated with women who are tardy in returning debts, who is a bad wife and does not mind her husband, or a man who fails to allocate a woman's pigs and is thus unsuccessful in domestic life, and with things which are rubbish). Instead, while the wild can be seen as anti-social, anti-political, or a space of madness, it is a source of extra-social power, where men can 'present their individual achievements as the ability to step beyond social bonds' (1980, 206). It is a sign of unrootedness – the capacity to roam with a force opposite to the grounding effects of cultivation, of remaining planted.

⁸ In *The Gender of the Gift*, Strathern writes: 'Society and individual are an intriguing pair of terms because they invite us to imagine that sociality is a question of collectivity, that it is generalizing because collective life is intrinsically plural in character' (1988, 12)

West Essex village of Elmdon. Although she had met the Elmdon villagers in 1962, she did not, upon writing the book renew their acquaintance, which in part determined her distance from the ‘distinctions’ that were important to villagers in terms of occupation, styles of life, networks, and so on, to open up a new space of engagement with ‘real’ villagers, their relation to British society at large and, of course, their connection with the anthropologist. It is in this sense that Strathern laments the possibility that, in their ethnographic encounter, the ethnographer might have ‘violat[ed] people’s images of themselves’. Indeed, in this early work, Strathern argued that alongside the important distinctions through which people relate to each other in Elmdon, their imaginary identification with an idea of the village –itself a relation-preceded the actual relations between them. The identification as village insiders, unlike family or social adscription, became a veritable proxy for the real, at the same time a set of intra-village relations, and a relative distribution of the right to exist. ‘Real Elmdon’ invoked around itself a boundary of inclusion that provided a formal model of the relation between parties, their preferred labels, as well as a focus for this relation. For Strathern, this identification was not, however, the mark of a static set-theory combinatory that placed the individual neatly as part of a whole; rather, it marked and kind of ingression and movement. Gender acted as a kinetic multiplier through which alternation between cultural forms was enacted, repeated and patterned an in a vision of social life in perpetual movement that did not necessitate individuality. Rather, persons, as products of relations, are always partial and internally differentiated. In this way, gender became patently anti-individual, opposed to the logic that characterized English individualism after the idea of nature.

In this way, as a mechanism through which the social operates a kind of inscription in biology, and vice-versa, gender becomes not only detached from any claims to nature, but a testament of intrinsic dividuality: ‘the point at which persons appear as composite of male and female elements and the point at which a single gender is definitive are also temporal moments in the reproduction of relations that take a mode imagined across Melanesia’ (1992, 97). The starting question is not necessarily based on positions, but on

perspectives from which positions may or may not seem negotiable. As an anthropologist, the starting question ‘What kind of text?’ brings the anthropologists to the task of assemblage – dismantling the layer of narrative so that it reveals that ‘all texts are put together in the same way; susceptible to multiple reading, containing traces of other texts, partial utterances that evoke what has not been said’ (1992, 65). Like a text, artifice is partial, never completely describing the body (ibid). Rather, the text becomes an analogue of reproduction: a vivid image of the partial construction of wholes and societies, and a representation of sets of relations between things. Strathern sharply distinguishes her own method of deconstruction from analysis as ‘cultural critique’ popularized by some of her feminist critics. Gender thinking, for Strathern, implied not simply evoking a new conceptualization of culture, a utopia or an alter possibility of emancipation, but rather a deconstruction that drew on the ways constructivism could account for collective activities which are apparently aimed at the opposite effect. Instead, theorizing brings Strathern to relate to the experience of interpretation, a modernist knowledge practice ‘that takes as axiomatic the idea of a continuum of characteristics as the background (ground) to any singular specific one (figure)’ (2002, 89). Figure and ground relate through instability, so that the distinction between figure and ground is only marked when an excess on either direction generates transitions between and within modes of representation. After all, the process of representation creates a movement or oscillation that generates further interpretative movements that relate only partially to the first (for example, an image which may be re-interpreted beyond its author’s original vision, see Strathern 2013), specifying new conditions that distinguish figure from ground. The effect of interpretation, then is to ‘make things move subsequently, as a result of attention to them’ (2002, 94). Each figure ground configuration provides characteristic depth to ethnography.

Thus, for Strathern, the value of thinking gender ethnographically pits gender against, *and* works through, binary thinking, since it is through binary abstractions that make sense in particular times and places that gender matters, through cosmopolitics, imaginaries and relations that come into being. In her fieldwork in Melanesia, for example, nature and culture are brought to bear on

the analogy between domestic realms and the wild, a distinction which makes sense in relation to particular social worlds rather than a universal, and where the domestic is contraposed by an outside that draws on a different image of the real. Indeed, the opposition between the domestic and the wild maps not so much onto gender as a manifestation of nature and culture, but to gender as a bearer of individuality. In Melanesia, for instance, once a dual gender identity has been discarded, a person is no longer considered as androgynous but considered, instead, single sex. As people activate relations during their lifetimes, as a composite of maternal and paternal kin, relations become intrinsic to the living person, to the point that gender becomes one only at the time of a person's death, when there is an oscillation between androgeneity and single sex, such as, for example, 'when groups from elsewhere in Papua New Guinea conceptual shed members of one sex (in marriage) in order to reconceive themselves as one person composed of the members of the other' (1992, 97), or when, at the time of a person's death, the person is divided and 'the descent group achieves unitary form as a collection of ancestral spirits waiting to be reborn' (ibid, 98).

Indeed, in the Melanesian context that Strathern pits against EuroAmerica, , only at the time of death is a person stripped of relations, which at this point dissolve into kin. Thus, more than facts of *kind*, gender stages a relation between model and reality that can only emerge, as Strathern put it, 'after a fact': 'In this theory that is also a model', she writes, 'values can be seen as constructions after social facts, or societies can be seen as constructions after natural facts' (1992, 2). As an abstraction that speaks to cultural formation and transformation, Strathern thinks through gender through a categorical comparison between 'western' and 'other' models of nature, proposing a critical ontological stance reframes gender's technicity. Gender becomes a technology, as Strathern suggests, by adopting the form of the relation, troubling stable ontologies of the sexes. In pursue of gender relation that Strathern's analytics become a particularly useful field guide – since the making of facts, and their classification in abstract oppositions, is a premise of their undoing. Strathern was concerned not with finding specific local contexts for events and behaviour, but elucidating a general context for those contexts –

the nature of sociality (1988, 10). Extending previous positions rather than simply refuting them, the ‘lifetime recursive’ movement between flesh and representation marks the making of convention and invention, through manipulating received usages of terms rather than erasing binaries.

After Gender

The move to think through gender in registers other than the relations between men and women has been crucial to queer and trans analysis that have troubled the definition and limits of gender in the past decades. Bringing attention back to the ways in which gender makes and remakes medical, legal and social categories, the history of gender categories in the sciences have become widely contested, for example, in the context of the management of intersex and trans health programmes, and, indeed, after an technoscientific epistemic shifts emerged from both feminist and critical trans analyses (Moore, 1988; Preciado 2013; Kessler 1985) . A key question raised by critical trans activists and trans cultural producers is now whether the notion of gender makes sense, after all, once its medico-legal underpinnings wither out. Paisley Currah, whose work addressed transgender rights in the United states (Currah, Juang and Minter 2006), has recently speculated that the transgender rights of the future may not need to be anchored on a preexisting, totalizing theory of gender based on distinctions between men and women. Instead, looking through the lens of employment equality legislation, Currah finds fault in that cases argued on the basis of gender discrimination which appeal for a rigidity of traditional roles, emphasize status and the immutability of gender identity. Currah argues that contemporary legal approaches uncritically moored on social norms and values are in fact never neutral, but political orientations to maintain deep-seated hierarchical divisions in place. Tensions between the minoritizing and universalizing capacities of the notion of gender as protected by the law opens up spaces to think through what these worlds make possible, as well as ‘to think through the terms of their incommensurability’ (2017, 451). Indeed, as Currah, notes, ‘agreement on the

origin of gender is not required to challenge the ability of employers and judges to force people to agree to gender norms. What is required is a shared commitment to the political value of gender equality' (ibid).

The drive to theorise alternative gender ontologies that has transformed (trans)gender studies in recent years also reveals hidden joints that make particular structures – as well as the forms and processes that make them work. Like an infrastructure, gender works across scales and analogies, drawing on capacities that originate in interactions between organs, people, inanimate objects and social worlds (see also Dunn 2011, cf. Zizek 2016). Lucas Crawford's architectural infrastructures subvert the 'privatization' of gender in the domestic sphere (2014). Crawford's metaphor of transition, 'derivative plumbing', figures through bodily processes as substance transmission mechanisms by twisting the common phrase 'original plumbing', reading gender experience through modernist architectonics that derive function from the citational processes that become essential in the necessary practices of making space. For Crawford these citations are themselves 'an act of transing' (2014, 626), not only because they contextualize space against ideology, but because they 'jolt feigned stabilities back into ceaseless movement (ibid.). The focus on the washroom, as an enclosed, policed, modernist room, matters not only because it promotes an individualist view of gender but because this is based on obvious economies of shame and erasure. If washrooms are devices that make public notions of living in the wrong body or gender, the erasure and transmission that characterizes its social function may also allow for material exchanges. Producing an illusion of totality, gender ontologies drive attention to the consequences of representation. If 'theory is what is constructed after a fact', as Strathern put it (1992, 2), the consequences of binaries that become important in framing correspondences, (mis)recognitions and (ex)communications, that recast relational politics of knowing (Butler 2005).⁹ In this context, human and non-human practices that

⁹ For example, adding to a long history of discussions of trans recognition (v.g Spade 2015, Hines 2013) that think through the perverse effects of normalcy, thinking through recognition against a politics of real diversity. After all, as non-binary performing duo Darkmatter succinctly asseverated, 'much of what we call trans *issues* are just issues that cis people have

constitute the biological, scientific and cultural facts of gender, including hormones, cells, genomics and metabolomic identities are but routes of complex biopolitical entanglements (TallBear 2013; Davis 1995).

These visions open up assemblages in place of traditional objects of knowledge¹⁰. The work of decomposition and recomposition of relations and social worlds these assemblages do is driven by a need to reflect biopolitics against through highlighting the ‘trickster’ language of analysis. For example, reflecting on the category transgender as it is mobilized by *waria* in Indonesia, Hegarty (2017) reflects on how *waria* reflect on transgender as a fragmented identity categories that is in fact entrenched in particular sets of structural inequalities that shift along the life course. Indeed, gender realities are framed by regimes of value and visibility that respond to global capital forms and inequalities, situating class aspirations, identity politics, embodiment and aesthetics in relation to global conditions of insecurity and economic regimes. Gender draws a cartographic imagery concerned with transits and ad hoc discovery, a process where invention, in the Tardean sense, generated in the ongoing practice of thinking, a process generative of spaces between strange and familiar mythologies. These spaces, infrastructurally and formally, are an arrangement of priorities: the result of ordering with respect to a set of questions; a practice of arranging more important things closer to the centre, less important ones farther away. For David (2017), transgender has become a consumer object tied to practices that anchor trans people in material relations and cultural production. For David, the location of transgender amid these affective economic flows supports the emergence of elites, as well as individualist agendas that profit from vulnerabilities of trans people in the labour market. From this perspective, trans ontologies are inextricable from global organisations and commodity cultures, as well as regimes of labour and

with trans people’ (my emphasis, see also how performing issues may stage fieldwork practice in Castaneda 2006).

¹⁰ In response to the lives of technologized images in the context of a ‘third vision’ of the body in late modernity, Edwards, Harvey and Wade not only find that ‘visualization and communication technologies are implicated in what it is possible to know and in how the body mediates such knowledge’ (2010, 3), but highlight that the consequences of these ruptures stage ‘a shift of attention from the molar to the molecular’ (Rose in Edwards, Harvey and Wade, *ibid*, 3) and give rise to a new attention to ‘life itself’ that now has the life of information at its chore.

value. As an interface, gender works as a generative force across scales and domains, transversing knowledge and politics through selective recognitions and analogies enabled by boundaries between domains. To make explicit, as Strathern noted, has an effect: an out movement of ‘outliteralisation’, that forces us to apprehend an event by virtue of its intrinsic qualities. Thinking through the worlds that become as an effect of binaries, particularly in queering ‘the personal biological’ (Franklin 2015, 178) may be a binary ‘license’ that gender studies can now take from Strathern¹¹. In fact, gender thinking gender beyond enumeration opens up new gender grammars and vocabularies to think with relations, bringing forward a deconstructive practice that may displace substance and meanings. Yet rather than being the inversion of western form, gender enacts connections around a basic premise: ‘to make evident people’s social (cultural) capability, or sociality’ (1992, 74). The fragmentation of gender is located in dichotomies that work through inversion and negation, presenting gender as ‘kinetic’ (Franklin, 2016: xvi), generative within and across forms.

Coda

The relevance of a model of gender that shifts gender away from the reductive medical and legal definitions is now more urgent than ever as forms of gender critique are mainstreamed in advocacy and education environments, fueled by social scientific ways of knowing. However, anthropology, particularly in Europe, anthropology ‘has yet to do more’, broadening its remit to recognize knowledge practices, identities and contexts that relate to queer utopias and modes of existence, a ‘work of enumeration’ (Boellstorff 2007) which must remain at the core of the queer anthropological project. In the American context, at a time when queer theory and anthropology were beginning to cement mutual objects of interest, Boellstorff lamented anthropology’s refusal

¹¹ As Strathern finds, ‘affinity, by derivation connoting “on the borders: or “bordering on” and thus neighbouring or near to others, gives the viewpoint of the speaker as an ego in a center looking outward. Indeed, there is, in this respect, no ontological difference in the radiating spheres of affinity and of consanguinity’ (2014, 33).

to include terms such as ‘queer’ (as in ‘queer studies’ or ‘queer theory’) in its routine practices of enumeration. Even though many anthropologists working around queer issues and epistemologies associated the term with unsolved histories of violence, not naming queer implied an omission, an erasure subjectivities, practices and relations that effectively effaces them. Boellstorff writes that ‘this logic of enumeration thus points toward a frontier for further research analogous to the project of transcending ethnocartography—“looking for evidence of same-sex sexuality and gendered ambiguity in ‘other societies’— more than a decade ago” (2007, 19). As a consequence, Boellstorff argues, recuperating these enumerations through a reimagined task of ethnocartography, anthropology must resist the temptation to defer theorization to reinterpret subject and object relations that emerge from queering knowledge, of *queering* as a way of thinking, situated in practices, histories and subjectivities. In this context, thinking gender opens up ecologies of thought where there is ‘no clear starting point or finish line; [where] it’s all cycles within cycles’ (Hayes 2014, 5, see also Ong 198).

As a relational capacity, allowing for transmissions and politics, wholes and parts, gender thinking holds all new relevance particularly as relations between anthropology and queer and trans studies, as well as between anthropology and various forms of feminist and decolonial thinking. This immediacy links through the practice of knowing the determination and indeterminacy of relations, constructing the field of knowledge. The end of gender, from this point of view, recasts the ruins of modernity’s conceptual apparatuses through conceptual modelling and the productive value of critique. It is in this sense that thinking with Strathern queer and trans anthropological thinking can newly recast gender as a relation as concerned with expanding the parameters of realism. Thinking past gender, as trans studies research demonstrates, implies thinking against the totalizing qualities of particular external forms, and recasting uncertainty about the external analogues of gender thinking to framing multiplicity as an ontological hold. As Strathern put it: ‘So we imagine that we shall learn more by dismantling those forms – undoing them to see what they are made of, an activity always proliferating, always incomplete’ (1992, 86).

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