

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

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This essay attempts to think through some of the larger methodological issues that currently face the field of lesbian history. It is motivated by the belief that the future of this field depends on reconceptualizing some of the issues that thus far have informed our construction of the past. Given the interdisciplinary nature of lesbian/gay/queer studies, it is odd that reflections on historiographic method often seem silently embedded in our scholarship, present implicitly in the mode of argumentation and the means of marshalling evidence, rather than being fully aired. To the extent that historical method has been a topic of debate, it largely has taken the form of the by now notorious distinction between acts versus identity, and its corollary, alterity versus continuism. Scholars whose historical accounts take a continuist form have tended to emphasize a similarity between past and present concepts of sexual understanding; those who instead highlight historical difference or alterity (as it is termed by literary scholars) have tended to emphasize problems of anachronism, changing terminologies and typologies, and resistance to teleology.<sup>1</sup> I believe that the relative weight one accords to alterity or continuism has had a more pronounced impact on the practice of lesbian history than any other issue (including debates about what counts as evidence of same-gender desire). It has, I submit, outlived its utility.

Let us recall how this debate evolved within lesbian history. The first implicitly continuist approach was Lillian Faderman's groundbreaking 1981 *Surpassing the Love of Men* which, as its subtitle announced, traced romantic friendship and love between women from the Renaissance to the present. Terry Castle's 1993 *The Apparitional Lesbian*, although it opposed Faderman's desexualized paradigm of romantic friends, nonetheless reiterated her continuist premises by provocatively collapsing eighteenth-century representations with twentieth-century cultural formations.<sup>2</sup> More recently, the continuist approach has been extended backward in time through Bernadette Brooten's magisterial *Love Between Women*, which, even as it treads cautiously through the historical specificities of ancient Rome, in its effort to demonstrate a lesbian identity in antiquity nonetheless maps representations of 1970s lesbianism onto the early Christian West.<sup>3</sup>

Castle and Brooten, in particular, are critical of the influence of Michel Foucault on the periodization of homosexual identity, including his notorious pronouncement in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* that "The sodomite was a temporary aberration; the homosexual is now a species,"<sup>4</sup> which has served as a point of departure

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

for the alterist position – a position, it must be said, that has enjoyed more prominence in studies devoted to men than to women. The critique of methodologies that stress historical difference, however, has also taken a form less dismissive of Foucault and the historical methods he has inspired. In a thoughtful challenge to the practices of women's history, Judith Bennett has argued that a "patriarchal equilibrium" has "worked to maintain the status of European women in times of political, social, and economic change."<sup>5</sup> Writing as a social historian who views history as necessarily a story of both continuity and change, Bennett proposes a distinction between changes in women's experiences and structural transformations of women's social status, while also proposing the term "lesbian-like" to resolve the issues of alterity posed by the distant past.<sup>6</sup> Diagnosing various reasons for gender historians' penchant for focusing on change, Bennett suggests that European women's history may be profitably viewed as "a history of change without transformation."<sup>7</sup> From a rather different angle, Carla Freccero and Louise Fradenberg, editors of the collection *Premodern Sexualities*, critique the fascination with alterity that, they argue, has taken hold of queer historical studies. Suggesting that identification with the past is an important motivation for historicist work, they advocate a practice that observes "similarities or even continuities" while eschewing "an ahistoricist or universalizing effect."<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval* similarly advocates the affective need for apprehending similarities, this time through the metaphor of "touches across time."<sup>9</sup> And most recently, Martha Vicinus has echoed these sentiments in *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928*, maintaining that "attitudes toward and behaviors by lesbians show a rich combination of change and continuity."<sup>10</sup> Arguing that "we gain a better sense of intimate friendship by tracing repetitive patterns," she notes that "[e]ven though the structures of intimacy remained in place, their meanings changed over time."<sup>11</sup>

I rehearse these forays into lesbian, women's, and queer history because I believe they indicate that, methodologically speaking, we are poised to enter a new stage, wherein some of the theoretically-motivated and archivally-supported claims that have absorbed the attention of scholars over the past 20 years can be reassessed. As archival materials come to light that support more nuanced concepts of identity and orientation than early social constructivist accounts allowed, debates about acts versus identities, alterity versus continuism, have, for some scholars, begun to recede in importance, while other scholars have given these debates new life in reconfigured forms.<sup>12</sup> I shall return to the problems posed by their reconfiguration at the end of this essay. For now, I want to suggest that what I call the present future of lesbian historiography – by which I mean those methods that might enable us to imagine a future historicist practice – necessitates analyzing recurring patterns in the identification, social statuses, behaviors, and meanings of women who erotically desired other women across large spans of time. Doing so, I believe, could result in a new methodological paradigm for lesbian history.

I thus want to register a shift in my own thinking (which had fallen more on the side of emphasizing alterity) toward an engagement with the following tripartite hypothesis:

- 1 There exist certain recurrent explanatory meta-logics that accord to the history of lesbianism over a vast temporal expanse a sense of consistency and, at times, uncanny familiarity.

Valerie Traub

- 2 These explanatory meta-logics draw their specific content from perennial axes of social definition, which become particularly resonant or acute at different historical moments.
- 3 The recurring moments in which these meta-logics are manifested might profitably be understood as *cycles of salience* – that is, as forms of intelligibility whose meanings recur, intermittently and with a difference, across time.

Such cycles of salience are what lead us to an encounter with what can look a lot like “lesbianism” in the distant historical periods in which we work. They indicate instead what I want to suggest, symptomatic preoccupations about the meanings of women’s bodies and behaviors. The appearance of consistency and familiarity produced by these meta-logics, the axes of social definition from which they draw their content and energy, and the cycles of salience during which they reappear are not, therefore, simple or self-evident. Nor are these cycles, precisely, continuity – if by that we mean an unbroken line connecting the past to the present. It is less that there exist transhistorical categories that comprise and subsume historical variation than that certain perennial logics and definitions remain useful, across time, for conceptualizing the meaning of female bodies and bonds. Emerging at certain moments, silently disappearing from view, and then re-emerging as particularly relevant (or explosively volatile), these recurrent explanatory logics seem to underlie the organization, and reorganization, of women’s erotic life. Sometimes these preoccupations arise as repeated expressions of identical concerns; sometimes they emerge under an altered guise. As endemic features of erotic discourse, these logics and definitions, as well as the ideological faultlines they subtend, not only contribute to the existence of historically specific figures and typologies, but also ensure correspondences across time. At the same time, the forms these meta-logics take, their specific content, the discourses in which they are embedded, and the angle of relations among them all are subject to change. Social preoccupations come in and out of focus, new political exigencies emerge, discourses converge and the points of contact between them shift – and in the process, the meanings of female–female desire are reconfigured.

The methodological reassessment I am offering is made possible by a steady publication of studies over the past decade. Thanks to social and cultural history, as well as to an even larger body of work by literary critics analyzing cultural representations, we now possess a densely textured picture of what it might have meant for women to love, desire, and have sex with each other at various times in specific locales.<sup>13</sup> The research that has taken place in almost every historical period, particularly for England, France, and North America, thus offers a heretofore unimagined opportunity to confront the conceptual challenges of change and continuity on a larger, more capacious scale than has typically been tried – including pushing against the analytical paradigms and geographic boundaries of the West. Lesbian history will continue to locate its subjects in specific temporal and spatial contexts, while also addressing how such histories intersect and diverge across national, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and geographical borders. However, by identifying certain axes of definition that have developed largely in respect to white women in Western Europe and the US, analyzing the reasons for their recurrence, and then submitting these narratives to comparative analysis across the boundaries of race, religion, language, and geography, it may, over time, be possi-

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

ble to fashion a broadly synoptic account of historical regimes of eroticism – without losing sight of each regime’s specificity, complexity, relative coherence, and instability. In short, recognition of these periodic cycles of salience could provide us with a means to write that which, for good reason, has not been attempted since Faderman’s inaugural study: a transnational history of lesbianism over the *longue durée*.

A search for “types” has framed much of the scholarship on lesbian history of England and the US. From my own book on the relations between the “masculine tribade” and the “chaste feminine friend” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to Susan Lanser’s work on the “sapphist” as a flashpoint for modernity in the eighteenth century,<sup>14</sup> to Martha Vicinus’ early delineation of four antecedents to modern lesbianism and, more recently, her exploration of nineteenth-century familial models for female intimacy such as mother/daughter and husband/wife,<sup>15</sup> to Judith Halberstam’s exploration of twentieth-century forms of female masculinity,<sup>16</sup> an implicit typological impulse has framed our efforts to render female–female desires intelligible – both in their own historical terms, and in ours.

In part this typological inclination results from the medical taxonomies from which the modern category of homosexuality was derived.<sup>17</sup> Thus, a reliance on systems of classification similarly has dominated studies of male homosexuality, both within the West and cross-culturally.<sup>18</sup> David M. Halperin has provided the most explicit description and theorization of typologies of male homosexuality across a broad temporal expanse. Halperin – previously one of the most influential advocates of historical discontinuity – attempts in *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*

to rehabilitate a modified constructionist approach to the history of sexuality by readily acknowledging the existence of transhistorical continuities, reintegrating them into the frame of the analysis, and reinterpreting their significance within a genealogical understanding of the emergence of (homo)sexuality itself.<sup>19</sup>

Revisiting his own historicist practice in order to balance the conceptual appeals of historical continuity and change, Halperin offers a sophisticated analytical paradigm based on four “transhistorical” “pre-homosexual categories of male sex and gender deviance”: effeminacy; paederasty or active sodomy; friendship or male love; and passivity or inversion.<sup>20</sup> This rehabilitation implicitly relies on classical models of male–male relations, which are viewed as variously applicable at different times and places. Halperin proposes, however, a transhistorical model only up to the emergence of modern homosexuality – when, owing to a “long historical process of accumulation, accretion, and overlay,” the relations among these categories definitively changed.<sup>21</sup>

Although I have been inspired by Halperin’s engagement with continuist arguments, my current interest lies not in creating a transhistorical taxonomy of categories or figures – or at least, this would only be one task in a larger project I envision. I am less interested in describing the *contents* of typologies and exposing the conceptual strands that contribute to them, than in investigating the cultural conditions that render such types culturally salient at particular moments.<sup>22</sup> This reflects my desire to build methodologically on the project pursued in *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* while also moving beyond it. There I argued that, under the auspices of divergent discourses circulating in England, a symptomatic break in the

representation of female homoeroticism occurred over the course of the seventeenth century, a shift in the terms of female embodiment, which led to a “cultural perversion” of female–female desire. This process of perversion, which involved particular negotiations of significance and insignificance, articulation and negation, intelligibility and unintelligibility, provided some of the primary materials out of which modern identity categories were fashioned. I also argued, however, that early modern representations are definitively estranged from modern conceptual categories. Rather than attempt to forge links between the tribade, the tommy, the invert, and the butch, for instance, I focused on certain conceptual axes that, within the temporal parameters of two centuries, organized the meanings of tribadism and female friendship. Building on the work of Annamarie Jagose on the terms of “lesbian inconsequence,”<sup>23</sup> the book attempts to expose the fragile nature of a governing regime of visibility (and its corollary, invisibility) by focusing on the specific incoherences that have governed the intelligibility – and lack of intelligibility – of female–female desire.

The two figures whose genealogies I traced nonetheless appear strangely similar to subsequent emanations of female homoerotic desire. Figures that, since the foundational work in lesbian history, have been treated as prototypical for the nineteenth century (the passing woman and the romantic friend), as fundamental to the pathologizing discourses of sexology and early psychoanalysis (the invert and the pervert), and as vital to twentieth-century self-definitions (butch and femme), seem to have been cut from much of the same cloth as the early modern tribade and friend. Noting such resemblances linking various manifestations across time, I asked in closing: why do such apparent resonances assert themselves?

It would seem that certain representational features of female bodies and bonds slip into and out of historical view; some acquire more importance and visibility as others decline and fade, only to reappear in a different guise under changed social conditions. The discourses in which they are articulated shift and mutate as well. By the late eighteenth century, for instance, the sexually deviant figure that arguably had the most potential to signify transgressively – the tribade who supposedly used her enlarged clitoris to “imitate” the sex acts of men – had almost disappeared from the medical discourse that first gave her prominence. Given the changes during this period to the practice of anatomy and physiology, it makes sense that she waned as an object of medical curiosity; but why did she linger in other genres, such as literature, and then later reappear in medicine (albeit in much different form) as the invert of sexology and psychoanalysis? The differences between the tribade and the invert, of course, are as considerable as those between Galen and Freud, but the meta-logic of a figure composed by a masculinized style of desire persists. No longer diagnosed routinely, as she was in the early modern period, through the presence of an oversized clitoris, the tribade’s “monstrous” abuse of her body and other women was refigured by sexology as the mannish invert’s hypervirility, her masculine characteristics imbuing not only her physical nature, but her very soul.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the common recourse to a physiological explanation for a masculinized desire, as well as the projection of such desire onto women of Africa and the Middle East in both the seventeenth- and nineteenth-centuries, has been striking enough to invite continuist narratives.

In order to defend the hypothesis of continuity, however, one would need to analyze the intervening period and the discursive regimes at work within it. What happened to

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

the terms of cultural representation between the production of the masculine tribade and the masculine invert? For one thing: the emergence of a new type: the sapphist. Susan Lanser has located the cultural production of the sapphist in a historical moment when “private intimacies between women became public relations.”<sup>25</sup> Rather than residing in the pages of medical textbooks, the sapphist’s “publicity” was largely a construction of a variety of fictional forms, from picaresque novels to satiric pornography, which alternately celebrated and condemned her.<sup>26</sup> By the latter part of the eighteenth century, so common was the figure of the sapphist that, as Martha Vicinus maintains, “women’s intimate friendships were divided into two types, sensual romantic friendship and sexual Sapphism.”<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, as Lisa Moore argues, sapphism and romantic friendship “continued to exhibit a dangerous intimacy.”<sup>28</sup> What separated romantic friendship from suspect sapphism, contends Lanser, was less the sapphist’s masculinized gender performance than her deviation from class propriety. Indeed, Lanser argues that it is only through a kind of backformation that figures suspected of sapphism – because of their violations of genteel respectability – were later deemed “masculine.”<sup>29</sup>

Over this same period, the intimate female friend was reconstituted as something both akin and alien to the innocent, chaste, yet desiring adolescent who is represented widely in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature. By the late eighteenth century, under the auspices of a culture of manners, sensibility, and taste, the idioms of chastity and innocence that figured early modern friendship seem to have been channelled into the twin virtues of propriety and sentiment. Fictionally immortalized by that hyper-virtuous exemplar of moral womanhood, Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*, the “particular friend” of the Enlightenment appears to be both libidinally attached to, and tragically barred from, those female intimacies that might protect her from the worst abuses of patriarchal masculinity.<sup>30</sup> A real-life *Clarissa* may have had access to “sensual romantic friendship” with such a friend as Anna, but it is the project of Richardson’s text – as it was of many eighteenth-century novels – to explicitly frustrate such desire.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, in their attempts to contain and stave off intimate female friendships, such texts had more in common with early modern literature than with what was to come. For, by the next century, sensual romantic friendship – or, to invoke its function as an effect of domestic ideology, the “female world of love and ritual” – subsisted hand-in-glove with the Victorian bourgeois ideal of female passionlessness. Bolstered by a socio-economic investment in women’s domesticity and the separation of spheres, the expectation of women’s lack of interest in sex with men paradoxically fostered the fervid expressions of love and desire among girls and women characterized by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg as “socially acceptable and fully compatible with heterosexual marriage.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the nineteenth century, in Vicinus’ terms, “saw a concerted effort to spiritualize all love.”<sup>33</sup> Out of the contradictory idioms of romantic friendship and sapphic sexuality, women in the nineteenth century were, as Vicinus asserts, able “to fashion something new – a personal identity based upon a sexualized, or at least recognizably eroticized, relationship with another woman.”<sup>34</sup>

This eroticized personal identity and public persona often depended on a form of gender inversion signified through sartorial and behavioral style. As both objects of, and agents in, the formation of modern identity categories, sapphists and inverts sought to make themselves legible (to themselves and to others) through the adoption of masculine dress. Yet, at the beginning of the modern era, as Vicinus argues, “gender inversion

## Valerie Traub

was the most important signifier of same-sex desire, but interpretations of the so-called mannish woman varied considerably.<sup>35</sup> As Laura Doan has shown, especially during the relaxation of gender conventions during World War I, certain British women who adopted masculine fashion neither perceived themselves, nor were perceived by others, as sapphists.<sup>36</sup> Following the post-war tightening of gender ideology, however, and especially after the notorious 1928 obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall, many sapphists proclaimed their erotic independence by means of closely cropped hair, starched shirts, jackets, ties, cigarette lighters, and monocles.<sup>37</sup> Their manipulation of the tropes of masculine dress drew upon prior preoccupations with the cultural signification of gendered clothes, yet did so within the context of a different gender regime and by means of different material technologies. Tribades, in other words, did not smoke.

Why do certain figures and tropes of eroticism (and gender) become culturally salient at certain moments, becoming saturated with meaning, and then fade from view? Why do suspicions of deviant behavior sometimes seep in to the most innocuous-seeming of friendships and why are such friendships at other times immune from suspicion? Why do specific figures, separated by vast temporal expanses, appear to adumbrate, echo, or reference one another? Which characteristics of their social formation actually recur? Which social forces foster an interest in bodily or expressive acts among women, and through which discursive domains and by means of which material technologies are such intelligibilities circulated?

A focus on lesbian typologies, I have come to feel, enables only partial answers to these questions.<sup>38</sup> For instance, from one set of concerns, the all-female “Society of Friendship” formed by seventeenth-century poet Katherine Philips looks a lot like an avatar of late nineteenth-century Boston marriage; both social forms spiritualize female emotional bonds; both derive sustenance from women’s intellectual capacities; both arise from within the confines of feminine domesticity; both defer to class decorum in matters of the desiring body. But from another angle – say, the freedom to advocate for female intimacy as a political alternative to patriarchal marriage – the gulf between them is profound.

Or consider the ways that the same-sex intimacies that occurred among certain women living in medieval and early modern convents appear to provide a prototype for the fervid romantic friendships of nineteenth-century women. In both cases, intimacies were authorized by a tight relation between spirituality and eroticism, and both were materially supported by gender segregation. Yet the erotic spirituality of the nun has a different focus from that professed by romantic friends, and the domesticity enforced on bourgeois women as they were shunted out of the public sphere enjoined a different order of privacy than did the rigors of monastic life. Whereas the “particular friend” of the medieval monastery was debarred by the rules of her religious order to embrace or even hold hands, her nineteenth-century counterpart was likely to be encouraged by family and kin to kiss and caress her “particular friend.”

So too, the gender bending common to the medieval virago, the early modern tribade, the female husband or the passing woman of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, the mannish invert of sexology, the 1950s bar dyke, the stone butch, and the transgender subject of today suggests one powerful line of connection. Yet, several other lines – including concepts of bodily morphology, gender identification, extent of gender passing, relations between secrecy and disclosure, economic imperatives, and claims of an erotic subjectivity – cross-cut them in such a way as to disrupt the

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

appearance of similitude.<sup>39</sup> In this respect, rhetorics, vocabularies, and conventions matter as much as do wide-scale changes in material conditions. Within the frame of a particular set of identifications, for instance, a lesbian drag king might claim as historical precursor the passing woman of eighteenth-century narrative; but if she were to submit herself to the narrative conventions structuring earlier discourses of gender passing, she quickly would find that the gulf of history is wide.<sup>40</sup> For one thing, as Sally O'Driscoll has argued, the passing woman depicted in eighteenth-century ballads is associated almost exclusively with *heterosexuality*.<sup>41</sup>

The ideological utility of body parts to social discipline is another case in point. The metonymic logic that governed the representation of the early modern tribade's enlarged clitoris can be seen in the determination of nineteenth- and twentieth-century sexologists to discover the reasons of behavioral aberrations in a particular bodily source. Like the tribade's clitoris, the essentialized characteristics attributed to the invert attest to a will to discover in the body an explanatory mechanism for its own deviations. From this perspective, the quest, during our contemporary age of biogenetics and psychobiology, for a "gay gene" (supposedly manifest in a specific gene on the X chromosome or in the hypothalamus) and for hormonal sources of sexual orientation reiterates a desire to pin the mystery of sexuality onto a discrete physical essence. This twenty-first century means of understanding the relation between desire and biology, psychology and the body echoes earlier cultural formations, as Siobhan Somerville has argued: "the current effort to re-biologize sexual orientation and to invoke the vocabulary of immutable difference" has its origins in the "historically coincident" yet "structurally interdependent" discourses of nineteenth-century sexology, comparative anatomy, and scientific racism.<sup>42</sup> Those nineteenth-century discourses, I would add, trace some of their structural components – for instance, their anatomical essentialism – back to early modern attempts to diagnose the tribade's transgression as a function of bodily morphology and, at times, racial difference.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, the material technologies by which gay genes can even be thought *as such* – much less investigated – are profoundly modern in orientation. Nonetheless, material technologies need not be particularly sophisticated or "scientific" to affect the range of available discourses. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, for example, tales of tribades would have remained a fairly elite knowledge had they not made their way through the new genre of travel literature into vernacular medical advice books. So too, an even wider array of print media – newspapers, scandal sheets, published trial records, novels and pornography – disseminated an epistemology of suspicion about alleged sapphists in the eighteenth century.<sup>44</sup>

Equally important is the role of textual traditions in influencing subsequent articulations of erotic knowledge. Anne Lister's diaries record her efforts to track references to sapphic allusions in Juvenal, Martial, and Horace, references she used to gauge the extent of her potential sexual partners' erotic knowledge; Katherine Philips boldly appropriated classical tropes of male friendship, including their expressions of mutuality, equality, and similitude, to authorize her own ideals of female intimacy.<sup>45</sup> Yet to date, the ways that social agents deploy prior rhetorics to legitimize their own desires and practices (or to delegitimize those of others) has been thus far an underappreciated aspect of how the past was able to be queer.<sup>46</sup>

Resemblances, then, shimmer unsteadily and unevenly, moving closer or receding,

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Valerie Traub

depending on the axes of definition that inform one's perspective or capture one's attention. Such attention may be the result of forces extrinsic to sexuality itself. Certain axes of social definition may become more pronounced during eras when social discourse about sexuality draws into its orbit concerns and signifiers external to it. Like the periodic moral panics first adduced by Gayle Rubin and Jeffrey Weeks,<sup>47</sup> cycles of salience may be linked temporally and conceptually to moments of social crisis which have their source in anxieties peripheral to eroticism, such as reactions to feminism and changing gender roles, reservations about redefinitions of the family, nationalist or racist fears of contamination, concerns about morality and social discipline, and violent upheavals in the political order.<sup>48</sup> Conversely, a resurgence of relevance for other axes of social definition may be more likely to occur precisely when such anxieties are absent.

I do not propose that we create rubrics (e.g., a paradigm of bodily morphology or gender inversion or intimate friendship) under which all historical variants would be gathered, organized, and codified. To offer the tribade, the invert, and the romantic friend, for instance, as transhistorical figures of lesbian history would move us only a small step beyond models of a single, unified lesbianism. To do the history of sexuality is not to turn a blind eye to perennial features of the erotic system in the name of historical alterity. But neither is it to too quickly assume homology when not every facet repeats.

Since Faderman's foundational survey, a history of homosexuality over the *longue durée* largely has been avoided.<sup>49</sup> Such avoidance stems from the association of overarching historical narratives with the "gay ancestors" approach to history, as well as from the extent to which the postmodern suspicion toward the explanatory power of meta-narratives has taken hold in those subfields where the history of sexuality is most often written (social and cultural history, gender history, cultural studies, literary studies).<sup>51</sup> There have, to be sure, been histories of sexuality more generally that traverse several centuries (such as Estelle Freedman and John D'Emilio's *Intimate Matter*, and Richard Godbeer's *Sexual Revolution in Early America*); Leila Rupp's introductory overview, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America*; as well as sourcebooks such as Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull's *The Lesbian History Sourcebook: Love and Sex between Women in Britain from 1780 to 1970*.<sup>51</sup> There also have been temporally broad, theoretically inflected studies such as Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence*, Lee Edelman's *Homographesis*, and Annamarie Jagose's *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence*.<sup>52</sup> None of these, however, has explicitly theorized the implications of connecting the strands of gay or lesbian history across multiple historical periods. To the extent that the suitability of assuming a longer vantage has been raised as a methodological or theoretical question, it largely has been framed within the context of the acts versus identity debate. Dominated by the impulse to create densely local and socially contextualized interpretations, the field's center of gravity has resulted in some remarkable period-based studies that will inform our understanding for a great while.

But note the phrase: period-based studies. Since the move away from the famous-gay-people-in-history approach, the history of homosexuality – both male and female – mainly has been written by means of research segmented along traditional period lines. Even as queer theory, poststructuralism, and the "linguistic turn" have pressured many of the methodological premises of literary critics and traditional historians

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

the power of periodization has not been shaken – as titles such as *Queering the Renaissance*, *Queering the Middle Ages*, and *Queering the Moderns* attest.<sup>53</sup> Although it has become a tenet of historicist queer theory to disrupt the “straight,” reproductive logic of sequential temporality, to expose periodization as a fetish, and to keep one eye on our contemporary situation, the ensuing conversation between past and present generally has been accomplished by relying on a period-bound concept of the past: one historical moment, situated in proximity to modernity (or postmodernity). To queer the Middle Ages, for instance, is also to historicize the modern – with the injunction to “get medieval” pursued by considering how medieval concepts inhabit, resonate, or are at odds with contemporary categories and crises: the US military policy of don’t ask, don’t tell; the sexual politics of the Clinton impeachment; the discourse of HIV/AIDS; the love lyrics of rock star Melissa Etheridge.<sup>54</sup>

Queer historiography, in other words, has enabled a provocative conversation between the past and the present, history and (post)modernity. Notwithstanding this provocation, the retrospective fiction of periodization has functioned as an epistemic force field, permitting certain questions while occluding others.<sup>55</sup> In particular, the common sense of periodization has kept our analytical attention off those problematic areas where historical boundaries meet: the ragged edges, margins, and interstices of periodization that frame our narratives. It is here that historical claims, especially about the advent of change or novelty, can rub uncomfortably against one another – sometimes calling into question the basic premises and arguments of temporally discrete historical studies, and sometimes leading to charges of scholarly ignorance or special pleading. Yet, as understandable as is the desire to expose other scholars’ epistemic privileging of their own turf, a strategy of border surveillance does not help us learn to speak across period divides.<sup>56</sup>

I want to suggest a different strategy – one based on the acknowledgment of perennial axes of social definition and their temporal appearance as cycles of salience, and which is in pursuit of the explanatory meta-logics that such definitions manifest. Many of the issues in gay/lesbian/queer history that have structured the asking of questions and the seeking of answers traverse historical domains. Whereas these issues may not all function as axes of social definition, they provide one means of access to them, as well as to a better understanding of the moments when they accrue social significance. Presented as a large set of substantive themes, they include:

- the relationship between erotic acts and erotic identities;
- the quest for causes of erotic desire in the physical body;
- the status accorded to the genitals in defining sexual acts;
- the relations of love, intimacy, and friendship to eroticism, including the defensive separation of sex from friendship;
- the fine line between virtue and transgression, orderly and disorderly homoeroticism;
- the relationship of eroticism to gender deviance and conformity;
- the symbolic and social functions of gendered clothing;
- the relevance of age, class/status, and ethnic/racial hierarchies to erotic relations;
- the composition and effects of familial, marital, and household arrangements;
- the role of voluntary kinship and familial nomenclatures in mediating and expressing erotic bonds;
- the relationship of homoeroticism to homosociality;

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**Valerie Traub**

- the role of gender-segregated spaces, including religious, educational, criminal, and medical institutions;
- the existence of communities and subcultures, including public sexual cultures and spaces;
- the division between public and private sexualities;
- the effects of racial, geographical, religious, and national othering;
- the effects of social and geographical mobility and “travelling” sexualities;
- assessments of appropriate erotic knowledge, including the ambiguous line separating medicine from obscenity;
- the credibility of religious, medical, scientific, and legal discourses in the production of sexual categories, including definitions of nature, the unnatural, normality and the abnormal;
- the differences between concepts of erotic identity, predisposition, and habitual behaviors;
- the dynamic of secrecy and disclosure, including covert signs, coding, and open secrets;
- the efficacy of representations of (homo)sexual contamination and/or predation to the body politic;
- the impact of sexually transmitted diseases on anxieties about mortality and social catastrophe;
- the interdiction against sexual prostheses and supplemental technologies of sex;
- the relationship of hermaphrodites and the intersexed to same-sex desires and practices;
- the attractions of aesthetic conventions of erotic similitude versus erotic difference and/or hierarchy;
- the effects of narrative, poetic, and visual form on representations of homoeroticism.

Because of pervasive gender asymmetries, additional themes have had more consequence for the history of female bodies, experiences, and representations:

- the misogynist logic of female imperfection, inconstancy, excessive appetite, and susceptibility to seduction;
- the role of female anatomy, especially the clitoris, in cultural representations;
- the import of chastity, marriage, and the sexual double standard on women’s erotic options;
- women’s unequal access to sex education and sexual knowledge, including sexual language, anatomical definitions, and medical taxonomies;
- the effects of reproductive choice and constraint on women’s erotic welfare;
- the gendering of propriety, emotion, and sensibility;
- the derivative, secondary order of lesbian visibility, which underpins conceptual misrecognitions such as lesbian “impossibility” and “imitation”;
- the social power of lesbians (and representations of female homoeroticism) relative to that of men;
- the relation of women’s erotic ties to their political subjectivity – that is, to feminism;
- the potential threat that female–female eroticism poses to patriarchal relations and male dominance.

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

This list may be unwieldy, but even so, it is not comprehensive. Each of these themes assumes different contours, contents, and emphases when examined from historically specific locations. Some of them have been discussed at length in gay/lesbian/queer scholarship; others hardly have been raised. Some have settled in one or another historical location; others have been assumed to possess no past. Not only does each one provide a specific angle for investigating how subjects might have understood – or not understood – themselves, but in the aggregate they allow us to appreciate the extent to which their powers of definition extend across discrete historical moments, and thus, beyond the subjects so defined by them. They are substantive and constitutive: organizing the self-perceptions and contributing to the intelligibility of same-sex desire (as both representation and lived experience) for people in the past, while also providing the terms by which we have identified those subjects and made the past intelligible to ourselves. To the extent that they precipitate the establishment of temporal patterns of meaning-making, they have been complicit in framing historical investigation as an inquiry into an already constituted object: as Laura Doan has put it, “identity history” as “a hunt for x.”<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, the range and diversity of these themes enable us to see that social constructivist claims regarding the emergence of modern homosexuality – whatever the date proposed – have been founded on the basis of a relatively limited set of preoccupations (e.g., identity, subcultures, medical concepts and legal codes) which have been used to stand in, metonymically, as evidence of homosexuality *tout court*. In the aggregate, they prod us to query whether the different dates that have been proposed for the “birth” of the modern homosexual may not result from these themes’ separate temporal arcs. Upsetting the premises of identity history by proliferating the range of relevant issues, they urge us to ask whether what is sometimes presented as whole-scale diachronic change (before and after sexuality, before and after identity, before and after modernity) might rather be a manifestation of ongoing synchronic tensions in conceptualizations about bodies and desires (and their relations to the gender system). As these tensions are confronted with the material realities of new social formations – for instance, attacks on monastic culture, the rise of empirical science, the emergence of print and media technologies, the public sphere, political satire and pornography, secularism, mandatory schooling, scientific racism, transnational gay and lesbian movements, the resurgence of religious fundamentalisms – they are played out, differently, yet again.

This argument, I hope, goes some way toward addressing a few of the objections recently made by Carla Freccero, Jonathan Goldberg, and Madhavi Menon to what they identify as an implicit teleology underpinning much queer historicist work on early modern sexuality.<sup>58</sup> Purporting to find in the arguments of several scholars (including me) a lingering attachment to identity that unduly stabilizes sexuality, they call for a queering of history that would be, in Goldberg and Menon’s words, an “unhistoricism” – or, to use Freccero’s term, an “undoing” of the history of homosexuality (an ironic homage to David Halperin’s work, one of the primary targets of her critique).

In many respects, “unhistoricism” is defined in very familiar terms. Goldberg and Menon, for instance, call for “acts of queering that would suspend the assurance that the only modes of knowing the past are either those that regard the past as wholly other or those that can assimilate it to a present assumed identical to itself.” “We urge,” they

say, “a reconsideration of relations between past and present that would trace differential boundaries instead of being bound by or to any one age.” Further, we should not “take the object of queering for granted,” and we “should be open to the possibility of anachronism.” Nor should we “sacrifice sameness at the altar of difference nor collapse difference into sameness or all-but-sameness.”<sup>59</sup>

Although similar claims have informed the projects of other scholars, including some they critique, Freccero, Goldberg, and Menon charge these scholars with a failure to deliver: “the ideal of telos continues to shape even the least homonormative studies of Renaissance sexuality.”<sup>60</sup> This alleged “ideal of telos” is symptomized, in their view by an implicitly developmental narrative that unwittingly treats early modern figures as unproblematic precursors of a “preemptively defined category of the present (‘modern homosexuality’).”<sup>61</sup> Much of their critique hinges on uncovering in prior scholarship a homogeneous fiction of “modern homosexuality” that inadvertently impinges on our readings of the past.

I concur that one of the aims of queer historiography should be to deconstruct modern identity categories, indeed, to insist on all identity as unstable, contradictory and in flux.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, a queer genealogy that does not attempt to account for, much less credit, the existence of the category “modern homosexuality” is, I believe, a contradiction in terms. Whatever the incoherencies of modern identity categories – and there are many – this does not obviate their force as palpable social constructions.<sup>63</sup> It is for this reason that a “genealogical analysis of homosexuality,” as Halperin has characterized it,

begins with our contemporary notion of homosexuality, incoherent though it may be, not only because such a notion inevitably frames all inquiry into same-sex sexual expression in the past but also because its very incoherence registers the genetic traces of its own historical evolution. In fact, it is this incoherence at the core of the modern notion of homosexuality that furnishes the most eloquent indication of the historical accumulation of discontinuous notions that shelter within its specious unity. The genealogist attempts to disaggregate those notions by tracing their separate histories as well as the process of their interrelations, their crossings, and, eventually, their unstable convergence in the present day.<sup>64</sup>

As a paradoxical corollary to the assertion that modern identity categories should be bracketed off from the subject of analysis, Goldberg and Menon advocate the creation of “homohistory,” which they define as a history that “would be invested in suspending determinate sexual and chronological differences while expanding the possibilities of the nonhetero, with all its connotations of sameness, similarity, proximity, and anachronism.”<sup>65</sup> Privileging all that is conveyed linguistically by the term “homo,” they insist, as Menon later writes, that “[t]he temporal version of decolonization – what may be termed dechronologization – would involve taking anachronism seriously and defying difference as the underwriter of history.”<sup>66</sup> Rather than history being defined as the tension between continuity and change, difference, in this view, is rendered irrelevant to queer historiography – indeed, it is something to be “defied.”

The difference *internal to texts*, however, is another matter: it is something to be celebrated. Indeed, both “unhistoricism” and historical “undoing” uphold deconstruction as the privileged technique of queer historiography. As Goldberg’s readings of Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World*, Menon’s of Shakespeare’s “Venus and

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## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

Adonis,” and Freccero’s of Louise Labé’s love lyrics reveal, deconstructive readings yield ample evidence of queerness located within ostensibly heterosexual literary texts; they enable us to ascertain the “imbrication of alternative possibilities within normative sexualities.”<sup>67</sup> Illuminating as these readings are in expanding our awareness of the nonhetero, however, they do little to elucidate the forms of queerness *across*, rather than *in*, time. Although Freccero, in particular, emphasizes non-sequential associations between the early modern and the modern in order to reveal how these two eras mutually manifest what she calls “queer time,”<sup>68</sup> this procedure fails to break out of the temporal binary of “then” and “now” that thus far has constituted queer history’s engagement with the past. Insofar as it tends to produce synchronic, not diachronic, interpretations, deconstruction may be pre-eminent in its capacity to reveal and analyze textual difference, but it has not, at least not yet, offered an effective means for analyzing processes of historical temporality.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, it seems disingenuous that these critics’ engagement with the discipline of history, even in the postmodern modes through which it is often practiced in the work under critique, partakes of caricature. Posing “unhistoricism” against what they call “hegemonic history,” Goldberg and Menon take as “axiomatic” the critique of the traditional historical enterprise proffered by Hayden White<sup>70</sup> – as if his critique had not been widely integrated into gender history and the history of sexuality, transforming their strategies, questions, modes of evidence and narration. Likewise, Freccero proposes to not “take seriously the pieties of the discipline that would require the solemn, even dour, marshalling of empirical evidence.”<sup>71</sup> But, given the widespread influence of the linguistic turn in history departments – especially those that employ historians of gender and sexuality – just what *is* that discipline that is currently dominated by the solemn marshalling of empirical evidence? This mischaracterization of the historiographic enterprise is not only guaranteed to stall the productive convergence between literary and historical studies; it deflects attention away from the substantive methodological challenges faced by those interested in crafting a queer historiography. Achieving the difficult and delicate balance between historical sameness and difference, continuism and alterity; of resisting teleology while tracking change; of recognizing both the relative incoherence and relative power of past and present conceptual categories; of integrating questions of representation with questions about lived experience; of attempting to create knowledge of the past while keeping the past productively unknown – all of this demands something other than an “unhistoricism” which sees in the effort to account for change over time only a hegemonic, if defunct, disciplinarity.<sup>72</sup>

Although the deconstructive approach advocated by Freccero, Goldberg, and Menon has much to offer, then, I am suggesting an alternative way to confront the challenges posed by teleology, chronology, and periodization. Taking seriously the questions posed by Carolyn Dinshaw and Karma Lochrie in their response to Goldberg and Menon – “How do we . . . trained in literary [or historical] periods, create and use nonlinear histories? How do we articulate them with one another?” – I suggest that, rather than “dispense with periodization,” as Dinshaw and Lochrie suggest,<sup>73</sup> we instead use the significant period-based studies published over the past 20 years in order to piece together the questions, concepts, and propositions that have emerged from them into a multilayered genealogy of sexuality. Poised between the options of attempting to manufacture a coherent, seamless, successionist meta-narrative or of eschewing

## Valerie Traub

chronological temporality altogether, the genealogy I envision would derive out of, and retain, the questions, issues, arguments, and contradictions of our fragmented, periodized, discontinuous research. This process of piecing together would encourage us to scrutinize multiple points of intersection, both temporal and spatial, forged from a variety of angles, among different erotic regimes, while also requiring analysis of the ways these linkages are disrupted or cross-cut by other angles of vision. Viewed from a wide angle but with all the rough edges showing, this genealogy of fragments would necessitate a method of historiography that is literally dialogical; it would be motivated, in both form and content, by the question: how might we stage a dialogue between one queer past and another?<sup>74</sup>

It is, admittedly, difficult to imagine how such a multifaceted dialogue might happen or take place. Given the highly periodized institutional conditions within which we pursue our scholarly work, and given, as well, the mandate to examine such an enormous temporal and spatial expanse, its creation clearly is not the task of any one scholar. Such a complex act of creation would require a collective conversation, or rather, many conversations imbued with multiple voices, each of them engaged in a proliferating and contestatory syntax of “and, but, and, but.” This collaboration, born of a common purpose, would not erase friction, but embrace and use it. I imagine such voices and the histories they articulate coming together and falling apart, like the fractured images of a rotating kaleidoscope: mimetic and repetitive, but undergoing transformation as each aspect reverberates off others. Such a kaleidoscopic vision of historiography is, no doubt, a utopian dream. But like all dreams, it gestures toward a horizon of possibility, provocatively tilting our angle of vision and providing us with new questions and, perhaps, new ways of answering them.

Moving toward this horizon is not the sole direction for lesbian historiography; our approaches need not, indeed should not, be mutually exclusive.<sup>75</sup> Not all questions related to the writing of queer history would be resolved by joining in this effort. Gaps in our knowledge remain to be filled; archives remain to be investigated; different racial, national, geographic, and linguistic traditions call out for specification and comparison.<sup>76</sup> Significant methodological problems require more analysis, including the complex role of emotional affect in our construction of the past.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the largest questions of the moment concern how to develop methods appropriate to investigating homoerotic desires and experiences specific to various ethnic and racial groups<sup>78</sup> (especially the construction of female–female desire in non-Western cultures<sup>79</sup>) as well as how to best situate our histories of sexuality in a transnational and comparative frame.<sup>80</sup> Just as the historical object of study is implicated in the temporal issues addressed above, so too it is framed by spatial configurations. To the extent that teleological history has positioned non-Western sexualities as anterior, primitive, and inevitably developing toward Western models, our resistance to that paradigm must involve a decolonization that is simultaneously archival and methodological.<sup>81</sup>

It is my hope that the identification of perennial axes of social definition and the meta-logics they reflect will help scholars investigating different racial, ethnic, national, linguistic, and religious traditions to further develop methodological tools appropriate to their own questions and contexts. Which of these axes function across cultural as well as historical lines? Which are culturally specific to the West? What do such differential presences and absences tell us about indigenous modes of comprehending

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

and organizing sexuality, and how does our recognition of them promote alternative genealogies of sexual modernity?

The implication of lesbian historiography in such questions of space and time thus raises some final questions regarding its present future. Most pertinent to the dialogue I have advocated: would its aim be to create a single lesbian historiography which produces multiple histories that intersect at different points? Or would its goal be to create multiple lesbian historiographies which refract and bounce off of one another in continual oscillation? Finally, how might a reconceived lesbian historiography pressure the development of a global history of sexuality?<sup>82</sup> Whatever our answers to these questions, the future of lesbian historiography will require a more ambitious and capacious response to our growing historical knowledge. The past deserves no less than this; the future demands this and more.

### Acknowledgments

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### Notes

- 1 The terms of the debate about continuism versus alterity have emerged from within the subfield of the history of homosexuality largely as constructed by literary scholars; historians more likely would frame the issue as one of continuity versus change over time. For most historians, the issue is not whether the past is other or different, but how, when, and if change does occur, which continuities remain or persist. Within history as a discipline, alterity often is reduced to antiquarianism and a fetishizing of the past for its pastness; it thus is fundamentally conservative. Within literary studies, conversely, the assertion of alterity often has had a radical cast. I am indebted to Dena Goodman for pushing for clarity on this matter.
- 2 Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women, from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- 3 Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homosexuality* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 4 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1976): 43.
- 5 Judith M. Bennett, "Confronting Continuity," *Journal of Women's History* 9:3 (1997): 73–94, at p. 73.
- 6 Judith M. Bennett, "'Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9 (2000): 1–24.
- 7 Bennett, "Confronting Continuity," 88.

## Valerie Traub

- 8 Louise Fradenberg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996): xix.
- 9 Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
- 10 Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004): xxii.
- 11 *Ibid.*, xxiv and xxix, emphasis in original.
- 12 Recent attempts to move beyond the impasse produced by these debates have demonstrated that it is the precise nature and interrelations of continuities and discontinuities that are of interest, not the analytical predominance of one over the other. Classical, medieval, and early modern medicine, astrology, and physiognomy, for instance, describe some homoerotic behaviours, especially those associated with gender deviance, as linked to, and sometimes caused by, anatomical aberrations, diseases of the mind, or habituation owing to sexual practices. Although this view does not constitute “homosexual identity” in its post-sexological construction, neither is it an undifferentiated concept of sin to which all were subject. See, for instance, Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002) and Anna Clark, “Twilight Moments,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14:1 & 2 (2005) 139–60. Despite these advances, too often the concept of identity remains undertheorized and hazily defined, associated with such different concepts as sexual inclination, tendency, preference, predisposition, orientation, consciousness, subjectivity, self-perception, and subculture – listed here according to a spectrum from “soft” to “hard” identity claims. Several problems and questions arise from this definitional confusion and associational logic. Are identity, orientation, and subjectivity synonymous? If they are, do they mean the same thing as inclination, predisposition, and tendency? Does an inclination, even if defined as innate, necessarily signify something causal, or is it merely probabilistic? Does the subcultural grouping of like-minded persons necessarily constitute an identity or subjectivity? Does the *content* of a homoerotic subjectivity alter historically?
- 13 Much lesbian history has been written by scholars trained as literary critics (e.g., Andreadis, Castle, Dinshaw, Donoghue, Faderman, Halberstam, Lanser, Moore, Rohy, Traub, Vicinus, and Wahl). This disciplinary training has affected not only the ways such histories are written (including their narrative shape and their explicit and implicit aims), but also criteria for what counts as evidence and the relative weight one accords to genre differences among texts. Why this dominance of lesbian critics is truer of lesbian than gay male history raises the question of whether lesbian history poses particular or distinctive problems in the history of sexuality. In addition, the turn toward cultural history within the discipline of history has effected a transformation of social history that has allowed it to speak to, and at times intersect with, intellectual history; this has allowed cultural history to address questions of power, politics, and representation in ways that social and intellectual history did not. I am grateful to Laura Doan for the first point and Dena Goodman for the second.
- 14 As part of a manuscript in progress, “The Sexuality of History: Sapphic Subjects and the Making of Modernity,” Susan S. Lanser has published a series of important articles on eighteenth-century sapphism: “Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32:2 (1998–9): 179–98; “Singular Politics: The Rise of the British Nation and the Production of the Old Maid,” in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800*, eds. Judith Bennett and Amy Froide (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999): 297–323; “Sapphic Picaresque, Sexual Difference and the Challenges of Homo-adventuring,” *Textual Practice* 15:2 (2001): 1–18; “‘Queer to Queer’: Sapphic Bodies as Transgressive Texts,” in *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Katharine Kittredge (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

- Press, 2003): 21–46; and “The Political Economy of Same-Sex Desire,” in *Structures and Subjectivities: Attending to Early Modern Women*, eds., Joan E. Hartman and Adele Seeff (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, forthcoming 2007): 157–75.
- 15 Martha Vicinus, “‘They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong’: The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity,” in *Lesbian Subjects: A Feminist Studies Reader*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996): 233–59; and Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*.
  - 16 Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).
  - 17 George Chauncey, Jr., “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” in *Homosexuality: Sacrilege, Vision, Politics*, eds. Robert Boyers and George Steiner, *Salmagundi* 58–9 (1982–3): 114–46. See also the way typology functions in Randolph Trumbach, “London’s Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture,” in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994): 111–36.
  - 18 See Everett Rowson, “Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists,” in *Body Guards: The Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, eds. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (London: Routledge, 1991): 50–79; Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling, “The First Medicalization: The Taxonomy and Etiology of Queers in Classical Indian Medicine,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3:4 (1993): 590–607; Charlotte Furth, “Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender Boundaries in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century China,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993): 479–97; Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1982); Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Vol 1: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998); George Chauncey, Jr., *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994); Peter A. Jackson, “The Persistence of Gender: From Ancient Indian *Pandakas* to Modern Thai *Gay-Quings*,” in *Australia Queer*, eds. Chris Berry and Annamarie Jagose, *Meanjin*, 55:1 (1996/1): 110–20; Alan Sinfield, “Lesbian and Gay Taxonomies,” *Critical Inquiry* 29:1 (2002): 120–38.
  - 19 Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 106.
  - 20 *Ibid.*, 109. One of the virtues of Halperin’s account is that it brings some systematicity to the scholarship on male–male desire that has proliferated over the past 20 years.
  - 21 *Ibid.*, 106.
  - 22 It may be useful to think of typologies as second order epiphenomena, whereas the conceptual logics that give rise to them are of the first order.
  - 23 Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2002).
  - 24 This is not to suggest that hypervirility was an invention of the late nineteenth century; hypervirility is characteristic of the Latin tribade and the medieval virago.
  - 25 Lanser, “The Political Economy of Same-Sex Desire.” 157.
  - 26 See, in addition to Lanser, Lisa Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).
  - 27 Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, xvii.
  - 28 Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies*, 152.
  - 29 Lanser, “Befriending the Body.”
  - 30 On the intimacy between Clarissa and Anna Howe, see Theresa Braunschneider’s University of Michigan PhD dissertation, “Maidenly Amusements: Narrating Female Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century England” (2002).
  - 31 See Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies*.

## Valerie Traub

- 32 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1 (1975/76): 27–55, at p. 34.
- 33 Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, xviii.
- 34 *Ibid.*, xviii–xix.
- 35 *Ibid.*, xxix. See also Marylyne Diggs, "Romantic Friends or a 'Different Race of Creatures'? The Representation of Lesbian Pathology in Nineteenth-Century America," *Feminist Studies* 21:2 (1995): 1–24.
- 36 Laura Doan, "Topsy-Turveydom: Gender Inversion, Sapphism, and the Great War," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay History* 12:4 (2006): 517–42.
- 37 Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
- 38 An earlier problem with typological methods was diagnosed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who critiqued teleological models of historical succession in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); her critique was expanded by Cameron McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire 1660–1750* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
- 39 Currently, the category of transgender is pressuring old typologies. See, for instance, the implicit contest over typologies for Radclyffe Hall and her fictional alter-ego, Stephen Gordon, in the collection *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness*, eds. Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), especially Esther Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," 89–108; Jay Prosser, "Some Primitive Thing Conceived in a Turbulent Age of Transition: The Transsexual Emerging from *The Well*," 129–44; and Judith Halberstam, "A Writer of Misfits: 'John' Radclyffe Hall and the Discourse of Inversion," 145–61.
- 40 For an astute analysis of eighteenth-century narrative conventions, see Braunschneider "Maidenly Amusements." For differences between popular representations of passing women in ballads and newspapers in the eighteenth- and twentieth-centuries, see Alisor Oram, *'Her Husband Was a Woman!'* *Women's Gender Crossing and Twentieth-Century British Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, forthcoming, 2007).
- 41 Sally O'Driscoll, "Word on the Street: Eighteenth-Century Pamphlets and the Popular Language of Gender" (work in progress).
- 42 Siobhan B. Somerville, "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body," in *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires*, eds. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 60–76; at pp. 73 and 62.
- 43 Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*.
- 44 See Lanser, "The Political Economy of Same-Sex Desire," Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies* and Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*.
- 45 On Lister, see Anna Clark, "Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7:1 (1996): 23–50; on Phillips, see Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*.
- 46 One exception is the recent work of Caroline Gonda, "What Lesbians Do in Books 1723–1835: Narrative Possibilities" (unpublished paper); "Ledore and Fanny Derham's Story," *Women's Writing* 6:3 (1999): 329–44; and "Lesbian Narrative in *The Travels and Adventures of Mademoiselle de Richelieu*," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29:2 (2006): 191–200.
- 47 Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole Vance (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984): 267–319; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (New York: Longman Press, 1981).
- 48 See Katherine Binhammer, "The Sex Panic of the 1790s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6:3 (1996): 409–34; and Lynn Hunt, "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution," in

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

*Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991): 108–30.

- 49 For a recent magisterial exception, see Alan Bray's *The Friend* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- 50 This critique focuses on such metanarrative's retrospective investment in progress, causality, and supersession; its sequential requirements of the pre- and the post-; its tendency toward false synthesis; and its press-ganging of all prior formations of same-sex desire into modern identities. See, for instance, Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger, eds., *Queering the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN, and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- 51 John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989); Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1999); Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull, *The Lesbian History Sourcebook: Love and Sex between Women in Britain from 1780 to 1970* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).
- 52 Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence*.
- 53 In addition to Burger and Kruger, *Queering the Middle Ages*, see Jonathan Goldberg, ed., *Queering the Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) and Anne Herrmann, *Queering the Moderns: Poses/Portraits/Performances* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2000). These studies are in fact more temporally broad than their period-bound titles might suggest.
- 54 In addition to Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, see Karma Lochrie, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Murderous Plots and Medieval Secrets," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1995): 405–17, "Presidential Improprieties and Medieval Categories: The Absurdity of Heterosexuality," in Burger and Kruger, *Queering the Middle Ages*, 87–96, and *Heterosynchrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); as well as Steven F. Kruger, "Medieval/Postmodern: HIV/AIDS and the Temporality of Crisis," in Burger and Kruger, *Queering the Middle Ages*, 252–83; and Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2006).
- 55 The major monographs on lesbianism, including my own, are generally respectful of broad period boundaries. In addition to those listed above, see Emma Donoghue, *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668–1801* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993); Julie Abraham, *Are Girls Necessary? Lesbian Writing and Modern Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Valerie Rohy, *Impossible Women: Lesbian Figures and American Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550–1714* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn, eds., *Same-Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
- 56 For examples of such border skirmishes, see Carolyn Dinshaw and Karma Lochrie's Letter to the Editor, "Queering History," and Madhavi Menon's Reply in "Forum," *PMLA* 121:3 (2006): 837–9, as well as Lochrie's critique of my work and that of Katherine Park in *Heterosynchrasies*. Dinshaw and Lochrie's insistence that "The issues are more complex than simple turf battles" elicits Menon's reply: "What they deny is a turf war is exactly that by any other name" (*PMLA*, 838).
- 57 Laura Doan, "Undoing Identity History" and "Sexuality Under the Searchlight," unpublished papers.
- 58 Freccero, "Undoing the Histories of Homosexuality," in *Queer/Early/Modern*, 31–50; Jonathan Goldberg, "Margaret Cavendish, Scribe," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay*

Valerie Traub

- Studies* 10:3 (2004): 433–52; Madhavi Menon, “Spurning Teleology in *Venus and Adonis*,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11:4 (2005): 491–519; Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, “Queering History,” *PMLA* 120:5 (October 2005): 1608–17. Although Freccero, Goldberg, and Menon evince some differences in their approaches and in the criticisms of other scholars, their arguments are closely aligned.
- 59 Goldberg and Menon, “Queering History,” 1616.
- 60 Menon, “Spurning Teleology in *Venus and Adonis*,” 496.
- 61 Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, 31.
- 62 In addition to *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*, see “The Joys of Martha Joyless: Queer Pedagogy and the (Early Modern) Production of Sexual Knowledge,” in *Renaissance Culture and the New Millennium*, eds., Leonard Barkan, Bradin Cormack, Sean Keilen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).
- 63 So much is made clear by contemporary debates about the globalization of gay identity. See, for instance, Martin F. Manalansan, IV, “In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2:4 (1995): 425–38; Jasbir Kaur Puar, “Circuits of Queer Mobility: Tourism, Travel, and Globalization,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8:1–2 (2001): 101–37; Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV, eds., *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2002); and M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2005).
- 64 Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 107.
- 65 Goldberg and Menon, “Queering History,” 1609. Valerie Rohy’s “Ahistorical,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12:1 (2006): 61–83, also attempts to rehabilitate anachronism by advocating “a backward, ‘ahistorical’ approach” (65).
- 66 Menon, reply in “Forum,” *PMLA*, 839.
- 67 Goldberg, “Margaret Cavendish, Scribe,” 435.
- 68 Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, 5.
- 69 Menon, in particular, seems to conflate any analysis of change with arguments for causality or what she calls “consequence,” “Spurning Teleology in *Venus and Adonis*,” 496.
- 70 Goldberg and Menon, “Queering History,” 1615–16.
- 71 Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, 3.
- 72 These, it must be said, are questions that all historians face, not only those who work on sexuality.
- 73 Dinshaw and Lochrie, Letter to the Editor, “Forum,” *PMLA*, 837.
- 74 This project is made all the more urgent by the proliferation of anthologies of gay and lesbian literature, which tend to recuperate traditional teleological schemas without explicitly arguing for them: see, for instance, Stephen Coote, ed., *The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse* (London: Penguin, 1983); Emma Donoghue, *Poems between Women: Four Centuries of Love, Romantic Friendship, and Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Terry Castle, ed., *The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). On the other hand, certain sourcebooks flout such periods in order to collect under conceptual categories primary source material on lesbian lives in the past: see Alison Hennegan, ed., *The Lesbian Pillow Book* (London: The Fourth Estate, 2000).
- 75 Other scholars of lesbianism have also been pressing against the paradigm of identity history. In addition to Doan’s essays on “undoing” identity history, Freccero’s *Queer/Early/Modern*, and Lochrie’s *Heterosynchronasies*, see Clark’s “Twilight Moments,” which

## The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography

begins to write the history of sexuality by focusing on desire rather than identity. In addition, Lanser's manuscript in progress proceeds along a very different route than the one I have advocated, but it, too, pushes in a more ambitious direction. By correlating the eruption of printed discourses about sapphism in England, France, and Holland to changes in the public sphere, political economy, and colonial conquest, Lanser focuses not "on how seventeenth- [and eighteenth-] century sapphism fits into a diachronic account of lesbian existence," but rather on "how lesbian representation fits into a synchronic account of the seventeenth [and eighteenth] century" ("The Political Economy of Same-Sex Desire"). She thus turns "the screw of interpretation . . . from the history of sapphism to the sapphism of history," in effect arguing that lesbian history between 1560 to 1830 *is* the history of European modernity ("The Sexuality of History").

- 76 For comparative work, see, in addition to Elizabeth Wabl, *Invisible Relations*, and Lanser, "The Sexuality of History," Sharon Marcus, "Comparative Sapphism," in *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*, eds. Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002): 251–85; and *Comparatively Queer: Crossing Time, Crossing Cultures*, eds. Jarrod Hayes, Margaret Higonnet, and William Spurlin (forthcoming).
- 77 See, for instance, Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2003); and Heather Love, "Emotional Rescue," in *Gay Shame*, eds. David Halperin and Valerie Traub (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).
- 78 Although not often concerned explicitly with history prior to that of the twentieth century, queers of color have developed their own modes of analysis. See, for instance, E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, eds., *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2005); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN, and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2001).
- 79 On the history of Islamic lesbianism, see Kathryn Babayan, "The *Aqâ' id al-Nisâ'*: A Glimpse at Safavid Women in Local Isfahani Culture," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, Piety*, ed. Gavin R. G. Hambly (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998): 349–81; Kathryn Babayan and Asfaneh Najmabadi, eds., *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal and Geographical Zones of Desire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). On South Asian lesbianism, see Ruth Vanita, ed., *Queering India; Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).
- 80 On transnational queer scholarship, see, in addition to those listed in the note on globalization, Carolyn Dinshaw, "The History of *GLQ*, Volume 1: LGBTQ Studies, Censorship, and Other Transnational Problems," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12:1 (2006): 5–26; Elizabeth A. Povinelli and George Chauncey, eds., "Thinking Sex Transnationally," special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5:4 (1999); and Phillip Brian Harper, Anne McClintock, José Esteban Muñoz, and Trish Rosen, eds., "Queer Transexions of Race, Nation, and Gender," special issue of *Social Text* 52–3 (1997).
- 81 For further thoughts on the methodological challenges posed by traveling sexual categories and epistemologies, and in particular the politically loaded significations of tradition and modernity, see Valerie Traub, "The Past is a Foreign Country?: The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies," in *Islamicate Sexualities*.
- 82 This question is indebted to my colleagues at the University of Michigan, especially Scott Spector, Helmut Puff, Hannah Rosen, Kathryn Babayan, Jarrod Hayes, Nadine Hubbs, and David Halperin, as we work together to enact such a project in the classroom.