

Let Go of Laqueur: Towards New Histories of the Sexed Body¹

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For nearly thirty years, historians and theorists of gender, sex, sexuality, and the body working in a wide range of disciplines have labored under the tenacious influence of a premodern “one-sex” body that has served as the historical Other to what is posited as our familiar two-sex body, grounded in a bedrock of biological difference. The powerful historical narrative of the one-sex/two-sex body owes its creation to Thomas Laqueur’s *Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud*, published in 1990².

1 — I would like to thank Emma Bianchi, Caroline Bynum, and Erik Fredericksen, as well as the anonymous readers for *EuGeStA* and for the Norwegian Institute at Athens, and Reinert Skumsnes and Jorunn Økland, for their incisive and generous feedback. I am also grateful to Reinert, Jorunn, and the other organizers of the conference “Hierarchy and Equality: New Perspectives on Textual, Visual and Material Representations of Sex/Gender in the Ancient World”, for the invitation to present this material, and to the audience there for stimulating questions.

2 — Laqueur 1990. The argument that the eighteenth century is decisive for a radical shift in how “sex” is naturalized has been made independently by the early modern historian Londa Schiebinger, who has focused on how eighteenth-century anatomists were pioneering a new understanding of sex on the basis of arguments about skeletal differences between men and women: see Schiebinger 1989 and Schiebinger 2003 (responding to Stolberg 2003). See also Jordanova 1980 on early modern arguments to make sexual dimorphism a natural fact. As my main target in this article is the premodern, one-sex body, I focus on the specific narrative of Laqueur, which has also been

Laqueur claims that the very idea of the body as sexed emerges in the eighteenth century, before which time men and women were thought to share the same basic body. “For thousands of years” prior to the eighteenth century, Laqueur writes, “it had been a commonplace that women had the same genitals as men except that, as Nemesius, bishop of Emesa in the fourth century, put it, ‘theirs are inside the body and not outside it’”³. The flesh offers only a continuum of qualities – wet and dry and, especially after Aristotle, hot and cold – that can change and, in changing, flip the sex of a body, making the body too unstable to ground sex. It is not that in premodern Europe there were no men and women. Rather, the difference between male and female was stabilized by principles at once metaphysical and social. These principles are mapped by Laqueur onto the terrain occupied by gender in the late 1980s and 1990s. What we end up with, then, is a reversal of modern expectations. Whereas “the moderns” hold that the biological body secures sexual difference, “the ancients” locate the difference between male and female elsewhere – namely, in “gender”. Laqueur’s narrative of historical rupture, dividing the premodern “one-sex” body, deliriously fluid and anatomically inverted, from the modern “two-sex” body, where difference is secured by a biology that goes all the way down, continues to structure many of the stories that are being told about sex, gender, the body, and embodiment in the past as well as the ways in which we imagine the relationship between bodies and identities in the present.

What makes the durable impact of Laqueur’s narrative so remarkable is that it is riddled with problems, distortions, and consequential omissions. The arguments of *Making Sex* have been thoroughly criticized by specialists in each of the historical periods that it covers and especially by those historians working on material (ancient Greco-Roman, medieval, Renaissance, early modern) supposedly structured by the “one-sex” model on Laqueur’s analysis. The year after the book appeared, Katharine Park and Robert Nye published an unflinchingly critical review in the *New Republic*: “a more complete reading of the sources shows that there never was a one-sex model in Laqueur’s sense – not in Aristotle, not in Galen, not in Paré”; they go on to say that “the argument that it was only in the eighteenth century that medical theorists began to conceive of a two-sex model is simply false”⁴. The challenges have continued to come surely and steadily. A few years later, the medieval historian Joan Cadden published a book-length study entitled *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* that quietly set itself against

disseminated the most widely.

3 — Laqueur 1990: 4.

4 — Park and Nye 1991: 54.

Laqueur by offering a more variegated picture of the medieval evidence and by tracking models that could not be reduced to those Laqueur had offered. Park has gone on in subsequent publications to emphasize the dependence of Laqueur's claims for the "one-sex body" on a single text of Galen's, *On the Usefulness of Parts*. Like the majority of Galen's works, *On the Usefulness of Parts* was in very limited circulation in the Latin West prior to 1500, when the epicenters of engagement with the Greek medical tradition were in Alexandria and, after the eighth century, the newly built capital of 'Abbasid dynasty, Baghdad, home of a revolutionary, state-sponsored Greco-Arabic translation movement which devoted particular energy to Greek medical texts, and Galen, in particular⁵. The block of time between late antiquity and early modern Europe spanning more than a millennium thus turns out to offer little to support Laqueur's thesis of a premodern one-sex body and much to controvert it.

What if we move earlier, to "the Greeks" with whom Laqueur's story begins? Here, too, specialists in ancient medicine, myself included, have contested his account of the evidence as a misleading portrait of sexed bodies in Greek medical and philosophical material from the Hippocratic Corpus through to Galen, where sexual difference is often grounded in bodies⁶. They have emphasized Laqueur's myopic fixation on the anatomy of the reproductive parts, and, in particular, Galen's account of the organs of reproduction in *On the Usefulness of Parts*, at the expense of exploring the many ways in which bodies are sexed in ancient and medieval medical texts at the level of the flesh, fluids, qualities, and the faculties, as well as through many forms of anatomical difference. Helen King has recently published a thorough and well-documented book-length critique of Laqueur's narrative, *The One-Sex Body on Trial*, that crosses conventional scholarly boundaries between the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods, allowing her to target Laqueur's errors and misrepresentations in his readings of the early Greek material and in the reception of Galen's idea of genital homology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. King, like Park, has shown just how shockingly little evidence Laqueur has for his claims about the monolithic dominance of the premodern one-sex body and detailed at length the problems with his use of the evidence that he does have. She concludes that in both ancient Greek medicine and in the early modern period, different models of the sexed body, which she

5 — Cadden 1993; Park 2010. See also DeVun 2015, rejecting the one-sex model in an analysis of surgery for atypical sex in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europe. For the nature of the Greco-Arabic translation movement, see Gutas 1998 and on medicine, in particular, Pormann and Savage Smith 2007: 6-40.

6 — See Flemming 2000: 12-17, where she faults Laqueur for ignoring "the various ways the past has worked in its own terms, with its own orderings of its own concepts and categories" (12); Holmes 2012a.

continues to call “one-sex” and “two-sex”, were in circulation alongside one another, invalidating Laqueur’s claims of a moment of radical historical inversion⁷.

Yet, despite the barrage of criticism, the premodern one-sex body keeps going. It stalks the scholarship on the history of sex, bodies, sexuality, and gender like a zombie. The one-sex premodern body has continued to be a starting assumption for many historians working on later periods⁸. Even more problematically, it has become a bedrock of gender and sexuality studies, compromising the theorization of the sexed body with a blinkered and simplistic myth of historical difference at a moment when such a project has become one of the field’s great challenges⁹. The irony that the reception of *Making Sex* has enacted one of its central premises – that models and worldviews have a way of enduring despite evidence to the contrary, especially when they conform to widely held hopes and expectations – has not been lost on Laqueur’s critics. The history of scholarship is not so unlike the history of medicine.

The past thirty years have made it clear that dislodging the authority of *Making Sex* is harder than it looks. There are good reasons why the book has proven so stubbornly influential despite the criticisms. The greatest challenge in disrupting the hegemony of Laqueur’s story is that it is so neat and, as result, so exportable across academic disciplines: first there was the one-sex body, then there was the two-sex body; sex resides in bodies, gender in culture (understood broadly as not-body so as to encompass metaphysics in the premodern material). The clarity that it promises, moreover, disciplines an enormous scope of time, roughly twenty-five hundred years (from “the Greeks” to Freud, per the subtitle), and the book is a convenient way of dispensing with the vast “premodern” period in short order. Due to the sweep of time that the book covers, the critiques of its claims tend to target parts of Laqueur’s narrative rather than the whole (the early review of Park and Nye and King’s book are exceptions).

Yet the challenge goes beyond offering counter-evidence and counter-arguments for specific periods. It is as much about offering a narrative that can break the seductive appeal of the story of one-sex and two-sex. The task is harder than it looks; the stakes are arguably higher. Part of the problem is the intractable difficulty of honoring the *messiness* of the

7 — King 2013.

8 — See King 2013: x, on encountering the assumption among scholars of other periods that Laqueur’s one-sex model is unproblematic and must be the starting point for making sense of the sexed body historically understood, an assumption I have met with repeatedly as well, including among younger historians of antiquity at the conference where this paper was first presented.

9 — See, for example, Colebrook 2004: 26-28; Chanter 2006: 69-71. Laqueur is re-enshrined in Preciado 2013. See also below, n.45.

past, especially when we are talking about millennia, while still producing compelling narratives. Park emphasizes the need to see the medieval period in terms of Cadden's "plotless story"¹⁰; King flattens Laqueur's history and populates it with a cacophony of voices in order to argue that the one-sex body and the two-sex body co-existed from the Greeks onward. Such stories are always a hard sell¹¹.

In the case of *Making Sex*, the problem goes even deeper due to the narrative's dependence on, and reaffirmation of, two entrenched and enormously powerful binaries: one that divides history into a monolithic modern, on the one hand, and what comes before ("premodern"), on the other; and one that partitions difference into (embodied) sex and (cultural) gender. Each of these analytic structures has been tenacious in its own right. In their mutual reinforcement, they have made Laqueur's narrative virtually invincible for nearly three decades. By examining them together and showing something of what is at stake in overturning the hegemony of Laqueur's model, I aim to clear space for telling different histories of how bodies have been seen and felt to materialize categories of woman and man, male and female, feminine and masculine – and to move beyond these categories – within long traditions (not only European – or Latin – but also Arabic and Byzantine) arising out of early Greek medical and biological writing.

One reason it is important to train our focus on the stakes of the historiography of Laqueur's story as much as on its use and interpretation of evidence is that doing so can help us understand why scholars' refutations of his arguments have had little impact on their circulation. Such an approach can open up, too, historiographical modes better suited to the challenges, complexities, and promise of the available evidence. Much of the power of the binaries of sex/gender and premodern/modern can be attributed to the seemingly crucial support they lend to a historiographical project, closely allied with Michel Foucault, that has promised an understanding of the present that would allow us to live it out differently. By recognizing the historical contingency of sex as a concept formed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the argument goes, we will be better positioned to unburden ourselves of the reduction of a range of forms of bodily difference to the airtight categories of male and female under the aegis of biology and with all the force of medical authority. No wonder so many people have wanted to believe the story of *Making Sex*.

10 — Park 2010: 97.

11 — As reviews of King's book attest. See, e.g., Santing 2015: 693-94, observing that King's "convoluted argument proves that simplicity is extremely hard to battle". King herself points to "a clear central thesis" as one of the major reasons why Laqueur's argument has proven so popular (2013: 13-14).

To the extent that it has helped destabilize the notion of biological sex, the story's impact has been undoubtedly positive.

But if the costs of that story have always been high – in essence requiring a reductive and misleading reading of over two thousand years of source material – we have reached the point where adhering to such a story is, in fact, constraining our capacities, both to analyze the ways in which bodies, identities, and collectivities are entangled and to imagine futures different from the present. The debates around the affective turn in queer history and what has been called “queer unhistoricism” offer new resources for challenging the binary of premodern and modern upheld by the *Making Sex* narrative, thereby allowing us to attend more closely to the more specific and surprising differences of our historical sources. And in the light of the trenchant critiques of the sex/gender binary by trans theorists, queer theorists, and new-materialist feminists and the richer conversations and debates they have opened up around the body, it is past time to retire the sex/gender binary as a transhistorical category organizing historical evidence. In short, it is not just that the reduction of the premodern material to a one-sex body model is a myth. It is no longer even a noble lie. Especially in the history of sex, gender, sexuality, and the body, where the theorization of difference has been so profound, we should resist an account of a premodern Other who is simply the inversion of the modern. We should resist it especially when the terms of difference require the opposition of (embodied) sex and (cultural) gender to ossify into an unquestioned transhistorical truth that straitjackets our capacity to imagine, conceptualize, and reflect on the intersection of bodies and embodied identities.

In what follows, I build on the readings of the sexed and gendered body in ancient Greek medicine and philosophy and the critique of Laqueur in my book *Gender: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (2012) and those of other scholars working on the Greek medical and biological tradition in order to lay out the historical evidence against seeing the premodern body as unsexed. I go on to situate the critique of *Making Sex* within ongoing debates, largely ignored by scholars of Greco-Roman antiquity, about the historiography of sex, gender, and sexuality and the relationship of these categories to the body and embodiment. The historical analysis I offer reviews work done in more depth elsewhere and by other scholars, while the analysis of the current theoretical climate is provisional and necessarily cursory. Nevertheless, I have brought these two lines of analysis together here in the conviction that what is needed to clear space for other histories of the sexed body is not only a critique of Laqueur on historical grounds but also a historiographical critique that shows how *Making Sex* has constrained the imagination of the sexed body today, most notably

– but not only – through its entrenchment of the sex/gender binary. In describing the materialization of bodies as male or female under conditions that cut across the divide of biology and culture, ancient medical and biological texts offer complex ways of thinking about the constraints imposed by bodies alongside the lability of bodies and the opportunities afforded for interventions into bodies (therapeutic, normative, creative). It is in their complexity that these texts offer more robust resources to the bracing discussions and debates underway about historical time and the conundrum of the body's entanglement in the living out of multiply gendered identities today.

The Myth of the One-Sex Body

Making Sex, I have suggested, draws much of its strength from the analytic power of the binary between sex and gender that structured so much work in feminist and queer theory and the history of sexuality in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s and that, despite challenges, remains internal to a good deal of how we conceptualize identity, both inside and outside the study of sex, gender, and sexuality. On this model, sex is located in bodies largely cordoned off from the vagaries of culture and history within a space identified with biology. By contrast, gender, however easily naturalized as given, is malleable and can be claimed as a site of personal and political transformation.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the field of gender was increasingly expanded into the terrain of sex, an expansion in which *Making Sex* took active part by seeking to expose the historical contingency of the very idea of a biological body defined by sexual difference. These encroachments on sex had reverberating implications both conceptually and politically. For they marked out more of what had been taken as biologically given as conditional and contingent and therefore available to modification and manipulation. Indeed, theorists of gender have been wary of admitting any biological basis for the difference between the sexes out of fears that biology always entails determinism and, thus, essentialism (the idea that male and female are categories given by nature and must therefore be lived out in accordance with nature). Nevertheless, the expansion of gender into sex did not eliminate the binary itself as much as it tended to isolate bodies in a “real” domain unavailable to analysis¹². In other words, below shifting accounts of the body lies the bedrock of *the* body.

12 — In the preface to *Making Sex*, Laqueur takes it that “to have a penis or not says it all [sc. about sex] in most circumstances” (instances of what women have and can do that men do not have and cannot do – menstruation, lactation, childbearing, a uterus – are added “for good measure” [viii]). The “real” body here should be distinguished from the body as “real” in the Lacanian sense, where the real is defined as what remains after passage through the symbolic, that is, what resists

Beyond reinforcing the distinction between constructions of the body and its reality, however, Laqueur fortifies the sex/gender binary in an even more effective way. By aligning the opposition between sex and gender with the opposition between premodern and modern, he elevates the sex/gender binary to a transhistorical category that organizes historical difference rather than being produced historically. In the past, he argues, sex and gender were exactly the opposite of what they come to be in the eighteenth century. Before the eighteenth century, on this analysis, it is gender that is fixed and unchallenged in the form of principles of masculine and feminine that are at once social and metaphysical. The difference between the genders is *not* grounded, however, in a radical difference between bodies. All bodies, rather, exist on a spectrum that presumes the same basic stuff and structures. There is, then, only a “one-sex” body, whose different but unstable inflections produce men and women. The concept so counter-intuitive to contemporary readers of a fluidly sexed body generates the story whereby the alterity of the premodern past is read as the mirror image of a modern period that we are still imagined to inhabit.

The difference of the past thus becomes legible only when it is incorporated into a model that assumes if bodies are fixed, what is read from our vantage point as not-body will necessarily be unstable (and hence, depending on the observer, either require grounding in bodies or open up opportunities for creativity and reinvention), and, crucially, *vice-versa* (if bodies are unstable, not-body will provide fixity). The terms of comparison remain unquestioned. Laqueur recognizes that in a number of ancient Greek medical and philosophical sources, masculine and feminine are principles that are seen as part of nature (*φύσις*). But because bodies are seen to enact these principles only imperfectly, they cannot, according to the terms of the sex/gender binary, be seen as materializing difference in any essential way. They must be unstable, as if denying this were to deny, too, what for half a century has been virtually beyond denial – namely, the instability of gender on the other side of the looking glass. Hence, we are forced to conclude that the premodern body has only one sex, or no true sex at all. The very fluidity of how bodies enact the fixed coordinates of ancient “gender” comes to license an equation between the sexed body in antiquity and our notion of malleable gender.

The need for symmetry, however, entails considerable violence to the evidence from Greco-Roman antiquity. It requires that we drive a wedge

metabolization by the symbolic, rather than what is cordoned off from it altogether. The extent to which “the body” was left out of sex and gender studies in the 1980s and 1990s is a matter of debate but the rise of new materialist feminism and trans theory has undeniably recharged conversations around the nature of the body.

in our ancient sources between a nature aligned with masculine and feminine *principles* and the fleshy body, despite all the ways in which natures and bodies are entangled in our sources. These entanglements cannot be seen without violating the “quarantining” of gender from “the infections of biological sex” in the conventional formulation of the sex/gender binary¹³. The one-sex/two-sex flip assumes, too, that in the absence of a model of sexual difference founded primarily on fixed anatomical difference, there simply is no embodied difference that is not contingent and reversible. Yet fluids and qualities can indeed sex bodies in early Greek medical and philosophical texts in essential ways, including by irreversibly forming the genitalia through degrees of heat. From this angle, there are plenty of permutations of the “two-sex” body in the ancient evidence (though the very language of “two-sex” risks foreclosing a robust engagement with this conceptual landscape). In any case, the strict binary between “sex” and “gender” that is used to organize the evidence from the ancient world so that a fluid one-sex body can be opposed neatly to the modern, stable two-sex body is, instead, a product of the framework that Laqueur takes for granted and imposes on the premodern material from outside. It is worth taking an all-too-brief look at some material from the Hippocratic Corpus to press the point.

Consider a now well-tread example from the fourth-century BCE medical treatise *Epidemics VI*, written in Greek and transmitted under the name of Hippocrates:

In Abdera, Phaethusa the wife of Pytheas, who kept at home, having borne children in the preceding time, when her husband was exiled stopped menstruating for a long time. Afterwards pains and reddening in the joints. When that happened her body was masculinized (*ἡνδρώθη*) and grew hairy all over; she grew a beard; her voice became harsh; and though we did everything we could to bring forth menses they did not come, but she died after surviving a short time. The same thing happened to Nanno, Gorgippus’ wife, in Thasos. All the physicians I met thought that there was one hope of feminizing (*γυναικωθῆναι*) her – if normal menstruation occurred. But in her case, too, it was not possible, though we did everything, but she died quickly¹⁴.

For both patients, things go wrong when they acquire attributes that typically marked out an adult male in public space in fifth- and fourth-century BCE Greek society: body hair, a deep voice, and especially the beard. These attributes, normal for men, are pathological when they appear on the body of a woman. For the author, both women can sur-

13 — I quote from the formulation at Haraway 1991: 134.

14 — [Hippocrates] *Epidemics VI* 8.32 (Littré 5.356).

vive only if their bodies are made female once again, a process seen to be contingent on the return of the menses. But in both cases, the physicians' efforts fail, and the women die.

Note that the transformations in play here are enacted at the site of the body (*σῶμα*), which is the subject of the verb "to be made masculine". The two patients, Phaethusa and Nanno, are essentially passive, as is the case with virtually all the patients in the *Epidemics*. The problem would seem to be that the body's hold on femaleness is simply too loose to keep it from drifting towards maleness under certain conditions. But if the sexed body turns out to be surprisingly fluid, its fluidity is not absolute. The metamorphoses, after all, are ultimately not viable. The bodies of the women can neither survive their inclination towards maleness nor can they be compelled to return to their original condition. That is, the bodies do not simply resist being "re-feminized" but are marked by something ineradicably female that prevents them from becoming male. It is true that some early modern readers of the story saw the account as a description of incipient hermaphroditism or sex change¹⁵. But, on examination, that is not the narrative on offer. The Hippocratic author and his colleagues do not only believe that menstruation is the only hope for recovery. In the original Greek, the author uses the feminine participle to refer to Phaethusa right up to the moment of her death, confirming that he views her as a woman to the end. What we have, then, are nominally female bodies caught in a no-man's land of sex mapped as pathological – indeed, fatal – by the attending physicians.

The puzzling "case stories" of Phaethusa and Nanno show at a glance the challenges of squaring ancient Greek concepts of the sexed body with contemporary ideas about sex, gender, and the body¹⁶. It is extremely difficult to figure out what is happening to these patients in terms of the standard formulation of the binary between (biological) sex and (cultural) gender. On the one hand, in the *Epidemics* text, the sexed body is unstable; matter is slippery. In this respect, the ancient Greek material does indeed offer a view of the sexed body that looks very strange to us. On the other hand, even after their transformations, Phaethusa and Nanno continue to be identified as female by doctors who are trying to force their bodies to conform to the behaviors and traits proper to the female sex (how the women themselves understand their situation is elided from the historical record). Despite its plasticity, the physical body is represented

15 — See King 2013: 73-125 for a full history of the story's reception (as supporting both a "one-sex" body and a "two-sex" body, she argues) in early modern Europe.

16 — I adopt King's idea of the "case story" rather than "case history". The "case story" is, she writes (building on the work of I. M. Lonie), "a piece of writing from the earliest stage of the development of ancient Greek prose, where compiling lists led to the grouping together of similar items, thus opening up the possibility of thinking about why they are similar" (2013: 88).

as grounding sex in some way, and not through its anatomy but through the process of menstruation¹⁷. The stories of Phaethusa and Nanno, then, neither offer us an inverted picture of our own ideas of sex and gender, nor do they conform to those ideas. Rather, they suggest a complex concept of difference between the sexes that is realized through the body, offering a spectrum of traits that range from the contingent to the essential within a medical framework that is therapeutic, normative, and materialist, by which I mean a framework organized around embodied norms glossed with the language of health and often requiring technique and care to maintain. At the center of this paradigm is a body (*σῶμα*) understood as the proper object of the medical art or science (*τέχνη*) and known only through its epistemic frame, even to the embodied subject.

These case stories throw into stark relief the challenges of using a conventional rubric of sex and gender aligned with nature and culture to talk about Greco-Roman antiquity and the premodern period more generally. The point I want to make is not that these terms, “sex” and “gender”, are entirely meaningless when we apply them to ancient Greek and Roman texts¹⁸. Indeed, they have some analytical purchase insofar as they can help us pick out different ways in classical antiquity of classifying persons as male or female, but also as more or less “true” to or consistent with their sex – that is, as masculine or feminine¹⁹. But the sex/gender opposition as it has been conceived of in the twentieth century raises real challenges as a transhistorical binary.

We can begin by pointing to the ways in which bodies can be seen as essentially sexed in ancient Greek medical and biological writing. If we go back to the earliest Hippocratic material from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, it seems easy enough to find the idea that the two sexes correspond to two different bodies. In the corpus of texts that were attributed to Hippocrates in the Hellenistic period, we find an entire subgenre of treatises devoted to “women’s things” (*τὰ γυναικεῖα*): gynecology. The clinical significance of differences between men and women is clearly discussed by the author of the Hippocratic *Diseases of Women I*:

17 — The very fact that menstruation is cyclical means that its disappearance, unlike that of a body part, is always open-ended: it may return. Thanks to Erik Fredericksen for this point.

18 — See further below, pp. XX.

19 — It is something more of a challenge to mark out “man” and “woman,” given that the Greek terms usually translated in this way are age-specific (e.g., *γυνή* = adult female; *παρθένος* = female prior to either menstruation or defloration). See further Griffith 2001 and Gilhuly 2009 on the way terms like “woman” and “feminine” occlude differences that mattered deeply in archaic and classical Greek culture. In this respect, the very notions of “male” and “female” as they operate in Greek owe much to their articulation as categories in Greek medical, biological, and natural history genres in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

At the same time, the physicians also err in not learning through accurate inquiry into the cause of the disease, but they heal as though they were treating men's diseases. I've seen many women die from these kinds of troubles. But you have to interrogate the cause right away, and accurately. For the cure of women's diseases differs enormously from that of men's. ([Hippocrates] *Diseases of Women* I 62 (Littré 8.126))

The author makes clear that some physicians go about treating men and women as if they were the same. But in the light of his recommendations to treat female diseases on their own terms, it seems fair to say he believes that the female body has a nature (*φύσις*) requiring specialized care²⁰. The classical-era medical writers play an instrumental role in grounding the natures of men and women in a concept of the physical or biological body emerging in the fifth century BCE, understood as a mostly hidden terrain of fluid stuffs²¹. It is worth emphasizing that fluidity is not synonymous with malleability. Rather, it is in fluids and qualities and not primarily anatomy that the differences between the sexes are established, both in the early material from the Hippocratics but also after the rise of systematic human dissection and the professionalized practice of anatomy in the Hellenistic period and in Galen.

Though heat will come to play a decisive role in differentiating bodies in Aristotle, its importance in the Hippocratics and the Presocratics in general is more negligible, with some thinkers, including Parmenides, even arguing that women are constitutively hotter than men²². Far greater consensus is reached on the proposition that women are wetter than men²³. The author of one embryological text explicitly chalks up the excess moisture of the female body to the *φύσις*, "nature", of women, asserting that, even *in utero*, the female is wetter than the male, with the result that the female embryo is slower to take shape (forty-two versus thirty days for a male embryo)²⁴. Most writers, however, think the wetness of women only becomes excessive when they start menstruating. Their thinking finds specific justification in the idea that the female body starts to accumulate excess blood, understood as a byproduct of food, only at a later point in its development. If all goes well, in puberty the vessels inside the girl's body widen in order to allow the excess blood to circulate and move to the uterus for evacuation. But if the vessels do not expand, blood gets trapped in the body, a situation that may lead to the potentially

20 — There are explicit references to the *φύσις* of women in other texts: see, e.g., [Hippocrates], *On Seed – On the Nature of the Child* 15 (Littré 7.494); [Hippocrates] *On Diseases of Young Girls* 1 (Littré 8.466).

21 — I argue this point further at Holmes 2010b: 121-227.

22 — Aristotle, *Parts of Animals* 648a29-30.

23 — For further discussion of the evidence, see Hanson 1992, esp. 48-56.

24 — [Hippocrates], *On Seed – On the Nature of the Child* 15 (Littré 7.494).

fatal “disease of young girls” – to which a short text in the Hippocratic Corpus is devoted – characterized by night terrors and suicidal ideations. The cure is simple: the girl should be married off and impregnated as soon as possible, presumably on the principle that sexual intercourse and pregnancy dilate the internal passageways, and enable the proper circulation of blood²⁵. Indeed, a number of early Greek medical writers believed that sexual intercourse is necessary for keeping these paths open throughout the woman’s life. Recall that Phaethusa’s problems begin when her husband goes into exile and she is assumed to enter a protracted period of celibacy. Normal menstruation is the *sine qua non* of women’s health in the eyes of the classical medical writers. One of the most important aspects of the female body that fixes it as female, menstruation seems to be the only surefire way to correct an inherently pathological surplus in the female body²⁶.

The accumulation of blood in the maturing woman is due, in part, to the specific nature of her flesh. Porous and spongy, it absorbs food in the form of blood, as we have just seen: “the body of a mature woman [is] one big gland”²⁷. One writer suggests observing the sponginess of the female body analogically by comparing the absorbent qualities of wool with those of “thickly-woven” garments²⁸:

For if anyone should set clean wool and a piece of cloth which is clean, thickly-woven, and equal in weight to the wool, over water or on top of a damp place for two days and two nights, when he takes them off and weighs them, he will discover that the wool is much heavier than the cloth...Now the wool, on the one hand, because it is both porous and soft, receives more of the escaping water, while the cloth, because it is solid and thickly woven, will be filled up, although it does not take on much of the escaping water. It is in this way, then, that a woman, because she is more porous, draws more moisture and draws it with greater speed from her belly to her body than does a man. ([Hippocrates] *Diseases of Women* I 1 (Littré 8.12), trans. Hanson)

The sedentary lifestyle and weak regimens typical of them saddle women with even more of a surplus of nourishment, as Galen believed well over half a millennium later²⁹.

25 — [Hippocrates], *On Diseases of Young Girls* 1 (Littré 8.468). The text is available in an English translation, with commentary, in Flemming and Hanson 1998.

26 — See further King 1998, esp. 21-39; Dean-Jones 1994: 43-45, 55-65, 124-25; King 2013: 43-48.

27 — Dean-Jones 1994: 56.

28 — King 1998: 29 persuasively suggests that the experiment also betrays an association of the woman with “raw material” (here, wool) and the man with the finished product.

29 — Galen, *On Venesection against Erasistratus* 5 (Kühn 11.164-65).

The Hippocratic writers' attention to the nature of the flesh as male or female shows us one way that the early medical writers understood sexual difference to be embodied. There is room in the model for variation. The flesh of some women is denser, while for others it is more porous, depending on the woman's individual constitution and sexual and reproductive experience (intercourse and pregnancy "break down" the flesh). Moreover, some women (those who are young and paler) are wetter while others (older and darker women) are dryer³⁰. And yet, even if some female bodies take on masculine traits under certain conditions, like those of Phaethusa and Nanno, the model assumes that nature imposes a boundary that cannot be crossed (the author still sees Phaethusa as a woman in death). The idea that each sex has its own nature is reflected as well in the occasional observations, like that of the gynecological author we saw above, that women suffer from different affections from men or suffer affections in a different way, and it is confirmed by the use of different treatments for male and female bodies³¹.

What we find, then, is a way of embodying difference as non-negotiable that is irreducible to anatomy. Instead we are in a foreign land of qualities and fluids. But this is not to say anatomy plays no role. The uterus looms large in Hippocratic gynecology, despite the fact – or perhaps *because* of the fact – that the classical-era medical writers had little direct knowledge of its anatomy. The medical writers kept a close eye on its functionality, suggesting that they saw their primary task as enabling women to fulfill their social role through reproduction. Unsurprisingly, the uterus is one of the most recalcitrant signifiers of difference between male and female bodies. Far from marking male lack, it tends to act as a liability for women. It is the usual suspect for the majority of female diseases, even in cases where the symptoms resemble those of diseases such as epilepsy that would not seem to be sex-specific. These sometimes stem from a condition that comes to be called the "wandering womb", triggered by the womb's dehydration. Driven to seek moisture, it wanders around the body, attaching itself to the liver, the heart, and even the head and producing a wide range of physical and mental symptoms that often cause the woman to lose control over herself³². Sexual intercourse is once again seen as therapeutic in that it keeps the uterus moist and healthy. What we find in the medical writers, then, is an account of female nature that strongly subordinates the woman to the physical body and, more specifically, to its reproductive function. We might therefore see the subordination of

30 — Dean-Jones 1994: 123.

31 — See Bonnard 2007: 163-66; Von Staden 1992.

32 — See, e.g., [Hippocrates] *Diseases of Women* II 123 (Littré 8.266). For further discussion, see Dean-Jones 1994: 69-73, 112-19, 135-36; Faraone 2011.

women to their bodies as another marker of sexual difference in ancient medical writing, one that resonates with the representation of women in other classical genres as enslaved to appetite.

I have been focusing on some of the ways that Greek medicine sees female bodies as discontinuous with male bodies. But the medical writers also recognize continuities between male and female bodies. We have just seen how excess moisture establishes the specificity of female nature in the Hippocratic writings. But despite its greater dryness, even the male body in the early medical treatises is defined by the liquid humors and their fluxes through the passages and structures of the body. It is understood more in terms of its constituent stuffs – bile and phlegm, or fire and water, or an indefinite number of juices defined by their qualities (acid, sweet, salty, and so on) – than in terms of its organs, as is increasingly the case after Aristotle, although in Galen, humoral explanation remains dominant, working in tandem with anatomical demonstration and explanations based on the faculties of the human body³³. The medical writers tend to blame disease on qualitative changes in these stuffs under the influence of changes in the environment, food and drink, and the seasons. In the fourth century BCE, these authors are increasingly inclined to classify types of individuals by the humor believed to dominate their constitution. But what we do not see is the medical writers using the humors to divide male from female bodies. The humoral body is common territory.

Besides the humors, other stuffs move through the body according to what Laqueur aptly calls “the free-trade economy of fluids”: food and blood, milk and semen³⁴. These fluids circulate through the same set of vessels inside the body. They share orifices as well: blood that should be evacuated as part of the menstrual cycle, for example, might exit through the nose. Finally, these stuffs participate in ongoing processes of transformation: food becomes blood; blood becomes milk or seed. Given that these kinds of fluids are so fungible, they can easily be turned away from one purpose toward another. The wet nurse, for example, was supposed to abstain from sexual intercourse to keep the blood targeted for milk from getting diverted toward pregnancy. If we go back to the cases of Phaethusa and Nanno, we can imagine that their suppressed menses have been redirected towards the production of beards and body hair³⁵.

From another perspective, the transformation of fluids from one into another can be organized hierarchically, as Laqueur emphasizes. Aristotle’s biology is dominated by stuffs distinguished by being increasingly cooked

33 — On the relationship of humoral explanation in Galen to anatomical and faculty-based explanation, see Holmes 2014.

34 — Laqueur 1990: 35.

35 — See on this also King 2013: 95-96.

or, more technically, “concocted” by an inborn heat. When, at the highest level of transformation in Aristotle’s physiology, gender-neutral blood gets concocted into either sperm or its colder, wetter, female equivalent, τὰ καταμήνια, it is just one more step along a process of refinement shared by the male and the female. These material transformations, together with the shared humoral economy, suggest that the fluid substratum of the physical body as it is imagined by the Hippocratic writers and Aristotle – and indeed, as it continues to be imagined for centuries – is itself unmarked by sexual difference.

These last observations confirm that Laqueur’s analysis of the body in ancient Greek medicine and philosophy that is in some sense shared by both sexes is not flat-out wrong. But it clearly does not give the full or best picture, as we have seen in this necessarily brief review of the Hippocratic material. I do not have the space here to review the Aristotelian material in detail. Suffice to say that there, too, although Laqueur claims that Aristotle offers the Western tradition “a still more austere version of the one-sex model than did Galen”, the reality is more complex³⁶. When we find a review of differing medical and philosophical views on the specificity of female bodies in the *Gynecology* of Soranus of Ephesus, dated to the second century CE and not discussed by Laqueur, Aristotle is, crucially, allied with those on the side of the radical difference between men and women, not those who defend a “one-sex” body. Indeed, Aristotle is the patron saint of the two-sex team³⁷.

Galen himself can be read in different ways – and indeed, he himself offers a range of not always compatible opinions – on the question of the relationship of the body and matter more generally to sexual difference. He at times notices homologies between male and female anatomy. For example, as Laqueur emphasizes, he affirms, in *On the Usefulness of Parts*, the Aristotelian position that “the female is less perfect than the male”, pointing to the position of the female reproductive parts (the “same” as men’s) inside the body³⁸. Yet even in the realm of anatomy, Galen at times sees more entrenched forms of sexual difference. The male body is muscled, while the female body is a network of ligaments; the vascular system “must be outlined bearing in mind the existence of both male and female bodies”³⁹. Galen’s commitment to a fundamentally humoral body

36 — Laqueur 1990: 28. Aristotle does see material bodies as unpredictable and subject to contingency: on this contingent body, see Bianchi 2014. But he also, like the author(s) of *Epidemics VI*, establishes lines that cannot be crossed: the eunuch, for example, “falls only a little short of the form of the female”, but still “falls short” (*Generation of Animals* 766a27-28). For a more detailed discussion of the Aristotelian evidence, see Holmes 2012a: 40-45.

37 — Holmes 2012a: 37-40.

38 — Galen, *On the Usefulness of Parts* 14.5 (2.295,24-25 Helmreich).

39 — See Holmes 2012b on the sexing of the vascular system in both the Hippocratics and

leads him to continue categorizing male and female bodies according to wetness and heat, as in the Hippocratic Corpus: flesh itself remains sexed. His explanation of the “faculties” (*δυνάμεις*), too, divides the human body into male and female, sexing the pulse and even the use of the hands (a woman, Galen insists, cannot be ambidextrous)⁴⁰. Over and again, Galen views sexual difference as necessary and real, observing in the embryological treatise *On the Seed* that male differs from female “in its entire body”⁴¹. The divergence between male and female bodies begins in utero. Lodged on the less perfect left side of the womb, the female fetus is fed by watery, impure blood rather than by the finer blood that feeds her male counterpart⁴². For, like Aristotle, Galen is a devoted teleologist, committed to the belief that every part of nature has been created for a purpose and that nature always produces the best outcome, given the conditions of the physical world. He thus insists that both men and women are required for sexual reproduction, claiming, for example, that the excess fluids of the female body are needed for the nourishment of the fetus. “The reason humanity is as it is, is divided as it is”, writes Rebecca Flemming, “is that this is for the best”⁴³. If the human body is seen through a teleological lens, sexual difference is crucial, as it is for Aristotle. And so, by focusing exclusively on Galen’s remark about the inversion of the reproductive parts in female bodies in *On the Usefulness of Parts* exclusively, we miss far too much in a sprawling corpus of evidence, where sexual difference is much more frequently affirmed by Galen than it is downplayed⁴⁴.

What are the costs of these omissions? One significant problem is that they allow the radical opposition between bodies (nature) and not-bodies (culture) to structure our understanding of the Greek medical and philosophical evidence in ways that require ignoring large amounts of material and often distorting what is introduced. By setting aside the opposition between biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) that Laqueur’s work

Galen. On muscles as male in Galen, see Flemming 2000: 295-96, and, more generally, Kuriyama 1995.

40 — For the claim that a woman cannot be ambidextrous: Galen, *Commentary on Hippocrates’ Aphorisms* 7.43 (Kühn 18a.148).

41 — Galen, *On the Seed* (180,20-21 De Lacy), cited at King 2013: 37. King also cites the remarkable passage in *On the Seed* (182,10-11 De Lacy) where Galen says that it is possible to distinguish male and female animals even at a distance, and that the difference between men and women is also obvious even without taking their clothing off.

42 — Flemming 2000: 308-10.

43 — Flemming 2000: 303 (emphasis added). See further pp. 306-16.

44 — Flemming rightly emphasizes Galen’s tolerance for different accounts of sexual difference in his texts and the lack of a single, coherent system: “there is basically a process of accumulation in which nothing is rejected, but some things are reiterated, rewrought, and expounded upon more than others, creating a kind of sedimented centre and more fluid periphery” (2000: 325). We should therefore resist, all the more, the extraction of one single statement of Galen’s as definitive when it is at variance with others in this complex system.

entrenches, we no longer have to define “metaphysical” nature or abstract principles of male and female in ancient Greek sources as *the opposite* of indeterminate and malleable flesh when dealing with our ancient sources. Moreover, the conceptualization of the body in ancient medical and biological writing – and in later periods, too, influenced by the tradition of learned Greek medicine – shows itself to be more complicated than is allowed by the privileging of anatomy evident not only in Laqueur but also in some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers of early Greek texts. Finally, we are forced to navigate a more complex idea of a body imagined in large part as composed of fluids. The very liquidity of the humoral body works together with our own notion of “fluid” gender (which it implicitly mirrors) to project the idea that in the tradition of medical and biological writing deemed premodern, the body is unconstrained by the biological categories of male and female that will come to fix sexual difference in the “modern” period⁴⁵. As we saw earlier, the idea of a premodern body freed from sex is alluring. It is alluring because the discourses of biology and the practices of the medical-industrial complex around the sexed body that operate so robustly in late-capitalist societies are responsible for so much harm and suffering. Nevertheless, the monolithic premodern one-sex body is a myth. The conceptualization of the body, and the sexed body, in particular, in early Greek sources does differ in many ways from how that body is conceptualized in the eighteenth century or the nineteenth or the twentieth or the twenty-first, as this very brief survey has at least indicated. But we can only appreciate these differences by working harder to get outside of our own frames and categories, and especially those recalcitrant yet oh-so-convenient notions of sex vs. gender and premodern vs. modern.

45 — The conflation of these ideas is especially pronounced in the introduction to Claire Colebrook’s primer on gender (Colebrook 2004) where, on the second page, the reader is told that “the concept of maleness and femaleness as primarily sexual and biological is a relatively modern notion. Indeed, the very concept of ‘biology’, as a body of brute matter without form or spirit only occurred with the development of science and medicine” (2004:2). Though Colebrook is right to emphasize the metaphysical dimension of gender in our Greek sources, this statement about the Greek body is misleading. She goes on to cite Jean-Pierre Vernant ostensibly claiming that “the ancient Greeks did not have a distinct word for ‘body’ as we know it today” because the word *sōma* referred only to corpse; there was “no sense of a separate body or sexuality before culture” (*ibid.*). (Note the way that the nature/culture opposition comes into play here: if the modern body sits on the side of nature, then the Greek body will have to exist only “through culture”). Colebrook here misreads the (in)famous – and, I believe, correct – claim first made by Bruno Snell that Homer lacks a concept of the living body as a claim about “the ancient Greeks”, thereby crucially misunderstanding Vernant’s argument (in which Snell is acknowledged) and missing the formation of the physical body in early Greek medicine (see also 2004: 41, “there was no separate discourse of biology or the body”, also credited to Vernant, but not accurate for the classical period onwards). On Snell’s argument, see Holmes 2010b: 29-37 and on the formation of the biological body, see below, pp. XX. Colebrook’s account exposes the assumptions harbored by the idea of the “one-sex” body: that its “fluidity” is incompatible with a biological notion of the body or a concept of embodied sexual difference.

Freed from the binary of (modern) biological bodies and (ancient) one-sex bodies, we can better see the ways in which “masculine” and “feminine” principles and traits, on the one hand, and bodies classed as “male” and “female”, on the other, interact in classical antiquity. One point made by Laqueur and many others is worth emphasizing here – namely, gender *does* operate in our ancient sources metaphysically, as a set of given principles. What is male is, above all, agency and reason, with the feminine signifying passivity and disorder. Translated into physical qualities, the male typically aligns with dryness, hardness, strength, articulation, and heat; the feminine with wetness, softness, weakness, formlessness, and cold.

What we have been tracking is how these gendered principles are realized through bodies. Laqueur is usually read, in part because of the logic of historical inversion, as saying that they are only contingently realized: the humoral body skews male, then female, but never settles into sex. This line of argument, however, misunderstands how bodies conceptualized largely in terms of qualities can be both dynamic and irrevocably fixed as male and female. It is this misunderstanding that makes the label “one-sex” so misleading. Ancient views of the body are very often as committed to the rigid division of bodies into male or female as later ones are, even as the nature of the humoral body means that these “sexed” bodies participate in “gendered” principles of masculinity and femininity. For it is the dynamism of matter that creates conditions for bodies to fail to conform fully to the sex assigned at birth. The very idea of a lack of conformity speaks to a notion of the body in which “the” body is thought to be, in fact, multiple, organized by “gender” (that is, principles of masculinity and femininity) at countless points that do not always (or even often) align. Yet, at the same time, these points are organized hierarchically. The imagined fixing of “sex” at one key point, *in utero*, determines how the expression of gendered principles will be governed henceforth, in the life that emerges. More specifically, the sexing of the child largely determines which gendered ways of looking and acting will henceforth be classed as pathological and so requiring intervention, whether medical or social. What I want to emphasize is that the analytic categories of “sex” and “gender” here do not map onto nature/culture or body/not-body but onto embodied lives – where “embodied” very much references a “body” defined largely by medico-biological discourse and practice – located at different points of becoming.

It is worth unpacking this claim. In a number of early Greek medical authors, a baseline of maleness or femaleness seems to be determined at

the moment the embryo is formed⁴⁶. Before that decisive moment, sex is up for grabs. But after the outcome of the struggle between male and female seeds or stuffs in the uterus has been reached, what we might call “sex”, closely associated with but not fully reducible to the genitalia, is fixed⁴⁷. The ancient accounts of changes of sex are very limited and mostly mythological⁴⁸. Nevertheless, the fixing of sex does not limit the expression of gendered principles henceforth, due to the material instability of bodies, as the case stories of Phaethusa and Nanno make clear. There is abundant evidence of the worry about male bodies, in particular, becoming all too feminine, especially in non-medical texts, which abound with references to the various practices required to stabilize masculinity over the course of a life lived in a body that is subject to drift. The work of stabilization begins in infancy, when Greek and Roman wet nurses were known to mold the foreskin to standards of propriety, and extends through the disciplinary regimens of adolescence to the cultivation of the right habits and desire and in adulthood⁴⁹. The fact that masculinity in both Greece and Rome requires such vigilance points to a plastic notion of gender identity beyond the medical writers that is, nonetheless, increasingly explained by a range of elite authors from the fifth century BCE onward in what I described above as materialist, normative, and therapeutic terms derived from medical discourse and exploitative of its authority. It is because medicalized notions of the self are so dominant in elite discourse from the fifth century BCE onwards that practices of acting on the body and the (often physicalized) mind are so important to how gender is thought to be realized – by elite men, in particular – within the coordinates of a life⁵⁰. Being male is, on the one hand, a given; on the other hand, it requires work. The gap that opens up between being sexed male and failing to achieve masculinity through practice and care is usually where the “effeminate male” (*κίναιδος/cinaedus*) is located⁵¹.

There are plenty of complications within this picture. The manifestation of gendered traits that are not aligned with one’s sex at birth is not always a question of how the body is managed after birth. The embryo-

46 — Either through the meeting of male and female seed, as in “two-seed” theories such as that found in the fourth-century BCE Hippocratic text *On Regimen* or in Galen’s embryology, or through the meeting of a male seed and female residues, as in Aristotle’s embryology.

47 — In some extant embryological theories, whether the fetus develops on the left or right side also determines its sex, although it is hard to reconcile this picture with the struggle between male and female generative matter.

48 — On ancient accounts of changes of sex, see King 2013: 102-107.

49 — On molding the foreskin, see Soranus, *Gynecology*, 2.34. See similar practices, see Holmes 2010a: 169.

50 — See further Holmes 2012a: 76-125.

51 — For debates among scholars over the figure of the *κίναιδος/cinaedus*, see Holmes 2012a: 94-97.

logical theory found in the Hippocratic text *On Regimen* complicates the idea that a single sex is fixed *in utero* and points to the desire of some medical authors to trace what they would have classified as pathological expressions of gender (e.g., effeminacy in a male) back to the very formation of the person. If the male seed issued from the mother conquers the female seed issued from the father, the author writes, for example, the child turns out to be an “androgynous”⁵². By this the author means a male – for the androgynous type is classed among the three kinds of men – who is nevertheless deemed to be congenitally effeminate. Here, an embryological theory that assigns male and female seed to both the mother and the father creates a situation where “sex” and “gender” can be misaligned at conception. The male wins out in one sense, resulting in a body that is sexed male. But because the male seed comes from the mother, maleness is permanently haunted from within by the feminine. In accounts of physiognomy, we also often find the assumption that a person may have a particular “gender identity” by nature (again, the *κίναιδος/cinaedus* is a persistent threat), which no amount of artifice or practice can alter⁵³.

These cases suggest that persons could be imagined to be formed out of conflicting materializations of gendered principles (of which one is always presumed dominant and so capable of fixing sex). Nevertheless, alongside what I have been calling “sex”, the expression of gender was largely seen as variable and unstable regardless of the sex of the body. It was determined by environmental influences; behaviors deemed bad (such as, for men, shaving or acting female characters on stage); relations both social and sexual; dietary regimen; and various other practices of self-fashioning. What has to be stressed above all is that the *σῶμα* is a common denominator. The body is the matrix of variability in how well one realizes masculinity or femininity (coded as agency or passivity, strength or weakness, hardness or softness, dryness or wetness) *but also* the ground of sexual difference (itself coded not only as the possession of certain parts but as the *given* and *non-negotiable* presence of agency or passivity, strength or weakness, hardness or softness, dryness or wetness, heat or cold, in a body).

What is at stake here is not only how we read the past. It is also a question of whether the practice of history legitimates or challenges the

52 — [Hippocrates], *On Regimen* I 28 (Littré 6.502 = 144,30-146,2 Joly-Byl). Cf. [Hippocrates], *On the Seed/On the Nature of the Child* 6 (Littré 7.478 = 48,11-20 Joly) where both males and females contribute strong (= male) and weak (= female) seed and the sexing of the embryo is determined by the dominance of strong or weak seed. This text had an influential reception in the medieval Islamicate medical tradition, although the complex intersection of sex and gender identity in the theory of sexual differentiation in al-Rāzī, described at Ragab 2015: 432-35 looks closer to what is found in *On Regimen*.

53 — See Gleason 1995.

assumptions of the present, and how historical inquiry participates in the dynamics of desire, pleasure, and hope. I have been especially focused in the preceding pages on showing how the binary between sex and gender as it has been structured in recent and still powerful discourses of sex, gender, and sexuality is implicitly strengthened by Laqueur's narrative and its dissemination as received wisdom. One consequence of that narrative's persistence, then, is that it enables the sex/gender binary to persist as transhistorical. Another is that it collapses the spectrum of historical difference to an inverted version of the present. Rereading the ancient Greek medical and biological texts without Laqueur's terms does not yield a straightforward liberating vision of a time before the sexed body. Nevertheless, if they are read differently, with an investment in the multiplicity of perspectives offered not only in the learned Greek medical tradition but also in its long and complex reception and with an even more basic investment in *the difference of their difference*, these texts challenge our assumptions of how bodies, identities, and communities interact in the present. They may offer resources for imagining other ways of living out gender in bodies both responsive and irreducible to various strategies for classifying male and female in biological terms.

Of course, any comparison requires the mapping out of common ground. Moreover, the common ground is never truly held in common but is always shaped by the taxonomies and the grammars of the person doing the comparing. Laqueur can hardly be faulted for not finding terms that are authentically transhistorical for the simple reason that these terms will always elude us. Rather, the problem that I have sought to emphasize is that *Making Sex* assumes the common ground of the one-sex/two-sex model and thus encourages the reification of a transhistorical truth about sex (bodies) and gender (not-body), a reification that has reinforced, in turn, a historiographical trope of a premodern that serves as the inverted doublet of the modern. I want to turn now to look more closely at how historiographical questions about the alterity of the past, rupture, continuity, difference, and "the Greeks" interact with questions about sex, gender, sexuality, and bodies in Laqueur's book but also, more broadly, within any attempt to undertake histories of the sexed and gendered body. And in addition to insisting on the difference of the early Greek material, I also want to suggest another way of imagining continuity.

How to Do the History of the Sexed Body

The central argument of *Making Sex* exemplifies the practice of history as *denaturalizing*. It identifies the ostensible fact of sexual dimorphism grounded in the body and tries to show the conditions of its appearance as a fact and, hence, its historical contingency. By challenging the trans-

historical validity of the sex/gender binary as it is implicitly affirmed by the structure of Laqueur's model and, more specifically, by discounting its applicability to the premodern evidence, I am in an important respect endorsing Laqueur's historicizing position and taking it one step further, by historicizing his categories. Such a line of argument would seem to concede that "sex" is a product of the eighteenth century and then, on the basis of that claim, insist that its very emergence at this historical moment blinkers our view of the past. That is, the modern hegemony of sex trains us to see only its absence or, more precisely, to see only an inverted version of it in the past (namely, a body that is in essence unsexed).

By committing to the historicity of the sex/gender binary, however, we are not required to read the formulation of the binary as coeval with an epochal, eighteenth-century rupture between a one-sex and two-sex model. The history of the sex/gender binary intimately embedded in the structure of Laqueur's narrative is dense and layered and, in the aspects most salient to the distortions of the ancient evidence that it produces, it is far more recent. For the delineation of gender as irreducible to the body owes much to the divorce of nature and culture in the new discipline of anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the prying apart of sex, gender, and sexuality in mid-century American medical, psychological, and scientific literature on what was then referred to as transsexuality, where gender came to stand for what had been called "psychological" sex or the sex of the mind⁵⁴. But it is in second-wave feminism and cultural studies in the 1980s that gender comes into its own as divorced from biology and nature. Therefore, while concerns about the use of the biological body to establish essential differences between the sexes undoubtedly participate in a history that extends backward to the eighteenth century, they emerge as especially formative for the sex/gender binary as it functions in *Making Sex* in the three decades prior to the book's publication because of the rise of gender as the counterweight to sex, understood as an essential property of a body. It is worth stressing, moreover, that in acknowledging the complexities and layers that are occluded by the monolithic notion of a "modern" that stretches from the eighteenth century to now, we can also recognize the heterogeneity of the many ways of thinking about bodies and the differences between the sexes in the centuries that fall under the "before" part of Laqueur's story.

I have been arguing that the sex/gender binary, by compelling us to read the body prior to the eighteenth century as fluidly sexed or, simply, unsexed, obscures this heterogeneity. The evidence from the "premodern" period turns out to support a far more complicated picture, as we have

54 — See Descola 2013: 68-85 (on nature/culture in anthropology), Meyerowitz 2002, esp. 127-28 (on scientific research on transsexuality).

just seen. Even more important, in the material from the learned Greek medical tradition stretching from the Hippocratic Corpus to Galen (fifth century BCE to second century CE), we see plenty of evidence of a commitment to the idea of the sexed body, a body whose innate maleness or femaleness is determinative and constraining of the life to be lived.

Still, one can ask, what do we make of Laqueur's most influential model of the one-sex body, in which the female reproductive parts are just like those of men, but turned inside out? Laqueur illustrates the model, based primarily on a passage from Galen's *On the Usefulness of Parts*, but also on the popular early modern text on pregnancy and childbirth, *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, with Vesalius' striking drawing of the female genitalia looking very much like a penis. It is in this form that the one-sex body has appealed most intuitively to Laqueur's readers⁵⁵. Perhaps another reason why the rhetorical force of the "inversion" model has been so powerful is because readers today are more comfortable with anatomical models of the body than with the humoral logic of fluids and qualities, though the spike of interest in and familiarity with sex hormones is changing that situation. Yet it is precisely the privileging of anatomy as decisive – and indeed an anatomical illustration nearly fourteen hundred years after Galen – that is the problem. By contrast with Galen's recourse to anatomy here, the variability of qualities is a recurrent and powerful motif in ancient Greek medical and biological writing on the embodied materialization of sex difference⁵⁶. Moreover, as we saw earlier, Galen frequently articulates a strong view of differently sexed bodies, discussing sexual difference not only in terms of the humors but also in anatomical terms⁵⁷. And Galen's discussion in *On the Usefulness of Parts* is, as King and others have noted, hardly decisive. It amounts more to a thought experiment than to a maxim summing up premodern views on the sexed body⁵⁸.

These considerations all point to the problems with taking the evidence from *On the Usefulness of Parts* as shorthand for the entire Greek learned medical tradition. I want to take a brief look now at another set of problems that plague Laqueur's equation of a "Galenic" model of genital inversion with the monolithic premodern view of the sexed body. These problems, raised primarily by medieval and early modern historians,

55 — King 2013: 16 notes that the success of the one-sex model owes much to Laqueur's use of images and, in particular, Vesalius' representation of the uterus, vagina, and pudenda in *De humani corporis fabrica* published in 1543 (= 1990: 82, Fig. 20). King offers a systematic critique of Laqueur's use of the image to illustrate the one-sex body (2013: 52-60). She also demonstrates Laqueur's misleading use of the *Masterpiece* (2013: 8-13).

56 — Though for Galen and his later readers still working in a humoral tradition, it is a change of quality that affects anatomical difference: the female reproductive parts are "inside" because they are colder, lacking the sufficient heat to push them outside, like those of the male.

57 — See above, pp. 16-17.

58 — King 2013: 34-38.

show how important the dynamics of reception can be in shaping *our own* representations of “the ancients” or “the premodern” as a monolithic period of history. I then use these questions raised by Galen’s reception to open up a larger conversation around the contrast of the ancients and the moderns and the historiographical figures of rupture and radical alterity.

What is easy to miss in Laqueur’s account of a “premodern” period is the way it relies on the assumption of a unified, unbroken, static, geographically stable tradition—not an uncommon view when what is at stake is the radical newness of European modernity. If premodern time is imagined in this way, then readers do not notice that there is simply little evidence for the dominance of a one-sex model in the Latin West in the period between Galen (second century CE) and approximately 1500CE, either in Laqueur or anywhere else, and while scholars of the medieval Islamicate learned medical tradition have pointed to the commitment of the early eleventh-century philosopher and physician Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) to a version of Galen’s idea of inverted sex organs in males and females, more recent study of this tradition has shown a much richer “sexscape”, to adopt Ahmed Ragab’s evocative term, and one that does not offer wide support to Ibn Sīnā’s model⁵⁹. It is also easy to miss that the story Laqueur is telling about the one-sex body after antiquity has to be read in the context of the reception of ancient Greek medical and philosophical material in Western Europe in the centuries leading up to his alleged point of rupture. More specifically, the reading of the ancient Greek material in *Making Sex* is driven primarily by what Laqueur’s early modern European medical sources construe as given by way of the inheritance from “the ancients” and, more specifically, Galen. By extension, it is driven by the narrow reading of Galen delivered by these sources. As a result, what Laqueur posits as a worldview that persisted for fifteen hundred years is better seen as an idea – a thought experiment, even – that is put forth by Galen and regains importance under conditions of reengagement with the authority of ancient Greek medical material in the wake of a surge of translation from Greek into Latin in the sixteenth century.

In fact, a Galenic one-sex model may have flourished for only fifty years, as King suggests⁶⁰. The representation of its unbroken dominance

59 — See Park 2010: 4-5 on the near absence of engagement with Galen’s model of genital homology before 1500. *On the Usefulness of Parts* is translated from Greek to Latin in the early fourteenth century and printed in 1528, though a version of the Galenic homology was transmitted via Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Qānūn fi al-tibb* (*The Canon of Medicine*), translated into Latin in the twelfth century. On the “sexscape” in the medieval Islamicate world, see Ragab 2015, who also writes that “the argument for an inverted similarity between the sexes that Ibn Sīnā presents in *al-Qānūn* seems to have been entirely unique in the Islamicate medical literature of his day” (443) and points to the arguments for sexual difference in Ibn Sīnā’s writings in physiology and pathology.

60 — King hypothesizes that the “glory days of the one-sex body” may have lasted only from c. 1500-1550 (2013: 32); see further King 2013: 49-70. On the debate about when the one-sex body is

in the premodern West or premodern Europe glosses over, among other things, the reception history of ancient Greek medical and biological texts – and the texts of Galen and Aristotle, in particular – which are transmitted in Syriac and Arabic in the medieval period⁶¹. The myth of the monolithic one-sex body in the Latin West is thus bolstered by – and reaffirms, in turn – another myth long overdue for discard – namely, that of a continuous classical tradition that excludes the medieval Arabic and Byzantine worlds. The exclusion is especially untenable when it comes to the history of the body and medicine⁶².

I want to emphasize again, at the risk of becoming repetitive, that the women-as-inverted-men model offers a distorted framework for reading the early Greek medical evidence, especially the complex logic of difference within bodies organized by humors and qualities that we saw earlier; moreover, it misrepresents Galen's own varied views on sexed bodies, which tend more towards a commitment to sexual difference than towards an affirmation of the "one-sex" body. It is true that Galen's model from *On the Usefulness of Parts* was treated by many physicians in the early modern period as an authoritative ancient view on embodied sexual difference and often as *the* view held by all the ancients, both by authors who upheld the model and by those who wanted to challenge it. Yet we should hardly mistake these early modern perceptions of what "the ancients" believed as

trumped by a two-sex body, it is worth looking at Stolberg 2003, who dates the shift a century earlier, and Laqueur's response (= Laqueur 2003). Importantly, the line of critique adopted by Stolberg does not challenge the claim of the hegemony of the one-sex body in a vast premodern period. In a letter to the editor submitted in response to the special *Isis* forum that featured Stolberg's challenge to the periodization of both Laqueur and Schiebinger, four distinguished historians of premodern medicine challenged the narrow historical parameters of the forum, which effectively precluded any serious interrogation of what Laqueur claims for the majority of the historical period that he covers (Cadden, Flemming, Green, and King 2004). The editor at the time, Margaret Rossiter, issued a testy reply in which she claimed that commissioning a fourth contribution would have been too unwieldy and complains that one of the letter writers was too busy to review Stolberg's initial submission – hardly an acknowledgment of those narrow parameters, or the enormous claims that Laqueur makes about the premodern period. In essence, Rossiter implies that expertise in the nearly two-thousand-year period covered by Laqueur under the heading of "premodern" is subordinate to that of scholars of the early modern period.

61 — Laqueur writes "Across a millennial chasm that saw the fall of Rome and the rise of Christianity, Galen spoke easily, in various vernacular languages, to the artisans and merchants, the midwives and barber surgeons, of Renaissance and Reformation Europe" (1990: 63). This passage is cited by King 2013: 34, who makes the point not only about the Arabic transmission but also queries the reference to "various vernacular languages", given that in Renaissance and Reformation Europe, if Galen was translated, it was into Latin.

62 — It is going to take a lot more work to reverse the damage, and I have been at fault in my own work of suggesting false continuities in the history of the physical body (that is, a body with a nature, φύσις), particularly through the use of the language of "Western", as in Holmes 2017. The exclusion of the Greco-Arabic tradition is embedded in the very idea of Classics as Greek and Latin. Dimitri Gutas writes, "One can justly claim that the study of post-classical Greek secular writings can hardly proceed without the evidence in Arabic, which in this context becomes the second classical language, even before Latin" (1998: 2).

uncontroversial statements reporting a monolithic worldview on the sexed body over the past two thousand years. The reception of ancient Greek medical authors in this period is multi-faceted, partial, and strategic, with early modern readers negotiating between the authority that still accrued to “the ancients” and the desire to claim independence from tradition and the authority of autopsy⁶³. If sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors who criticize Galen’s views of the sexed body at times position themselves as rejecting ancient authority, the critique of Galen could also be abetted by physicians’ recourse to the ancient authority of “Hippocrates” on embodied differences between the sexes⁶⁴. Laqueur neglects such shifting alliances and different appeals to “the ancients” in favor of a model that diametrically opposes the ancients and the moderns according to terms that are shaped by readers in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries (the reduction of ancient material to the powerful image of genital inversion supplied by Galen’s *On the Usefulness of Parts*). He then sharpens the lines of opposition by incorporating the twentieth-century binary of sex versus gender as the idea to be turned on its head by premodern authors.

Laqueur in short fails to grapple with the reception of Galen within the context of a lively opposition between the ancients and the moderns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it is precisely the fixation of his early modern sources on Galen’s *On the Usefulness of Parts*, and their own framing of their relationship with Galen, that lends crucial support to his claim that the one-sex body defines the premodern period over a millennium-and-a-half. That said, the early modern opposition of “ancients and moderns” does not simply persist unchanged into Laqueur’s argument. Much as there lies a layered history between eighteenth-century changes to how bodies are understood as sexed and the twentieth-century formulation of a sex/gender binary, so are earlier concepts of the “ancients” as fundamentally Other to an intellectual or scientific community in the

63 — To take only one example, the sixteenth-century French physician André Dulaurens writes in his “Controverses Anatomiques”, having acknowledged that the homology of the male and female genitalia was a belief held by “the ancient period” and “still today almost all physicians hold it for certain”, that “I have always held in great regard what the ancients taught. However, not having sworn to follow the views of who ever it may be, I will say and declare as briefly as I can what I think of the matter, having been brought to my beliefs as much by inspection and experience as by reason, which are the only means scientists use to determine natural causes. The genitals of the two sexes are different not only by location, but also by number, form, and structure” (cited and translated in Schleiner 2000: 185). Schleiner situates Dulaurens, an outsider to the mainstream French medical tradition, in relationship to the prevailing conservatism regarding Galen in Paris (2000: 188). On the variety of strategic negotiations of authority among learned physicians in the medieval Islamic world, see also Gadelrab 2011, esp. 43-44; Ragab 2015.

64 — See King 2013: 18-19.

present not *synonymous* with the concept of the premodern that functions in *Making Sex*.

The rupture with “the ancients” that structures Laqueur’s story in fact owes much to Foucault’s history of sexuality, especially the first volume of the three-volume *History of Sexuality* that remained incomplete at the time of his death in 1984⁶⁵. In Foucault, too, one finds an epochal rupture, in this case dated to the nineteenth century, that divides a time “before sexuality,” when the figure of the homosexual as a category did not exist, and a time after the creation of the homosexual in the crucible of nineteenth-century biopolitics as a pathological identity. Foucault’s rupture acquired newfound structural power within the history of sexuality through the work of Jack Winkler and especially David Halperin, who, in amplifying the opposition between (premodern) sexual acts and (modern) sexual identities, reinforced Foucault’s ancient/modern dichotomy in ways reminiscent of Laqueur’s story of the “before and after” of the sexed body⁶⁶.

The argument for rupture advanced by Foucault, Winkler, and Halperin was, from the beginning, in tension with a narrative that sought to extend “identity” throughout history so as to create continuities and communities, a narrative associated in particular with the work of John Boswell and reworked for Greco-Roman antiquity by scholars pushing back against the work of Foucault, Halperin, and Winkler (sometimes labeled the “essentialists”, though that label conceals the diversity of their arguments)⁶⁷. In the past couple of decades or so, alterity’s status as the dominant trope in the history of sexuality has been challenged more vigorously by the turn to “queer unhistoricism” in medieval, Renaissance, and early modern studies⁶⁸. One of the core tenets of the queer unhistoricists is that the privileging of difference over similarity is “the peculiarity of our current historical moment,” and one that it is long past time to set aside in favor of what the literary and cultural historians Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon have called “homohistory”, defined as “not the history of

65 — Foucault 1978; 1984; 1985.

66 — See Halperin 1990 and 2002; Winkler 1990. The third classic text extending Foucault’s thesis within Classics was the highly influential edited volume *Before Sexuality* (Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin 1990). Note that these three key texts were published the same year as *Making Sex* (1990).

67 — See especially Boswell 1981. See also Cohen 1991; Richlin 1993; Taylor 1997; Davidson 2001 and 2007; Hubbard 1998 and 2000, all arguing for the importance of continuity within the history of sexuality in its treatment of ancient material. Cf. Blondell and Ormand 2015: 5-8 for a response to the use of “gay” as a transhistorical category (focusing on the arguments of Richlin and Davidson). The critique of social constructionism in studies of ancient Greco-Roman sexuality largely precedes the turn to queer unhistoricism, whose adherents have distinguished what they are doing from “essentializing” approaches (e.g., Freccero 2007: 486-87).

68 — The category “queer unhistoricism” is used by Traub 2013, responding to the advocacy for “unhistoricim” in Goldberg and Menon 2005: 1609.

homos”, but rather a history “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”⁶⁹. Homohistory is a direct rebuke to narratives of historical rupture aligned primarily with Halperin (and sometimes Foucault) and the logic of alterity and distance. In rejecting these tropes, its adherents seek commonalities and communities across a messier past pluralized by co-existing and fluid materializations of sexual identity. They aim to resist, too, what they see as a teleological rip tide within social constructionist accounts of sexuality (a reading of the past only through the lens of an endpoint located in the present, akin to what historians of science call “Whiggish” history). And they contest the “mapping of sexual difference onto chronological difference such that the difference between past and present becomes also the difference between sexual regimes”⁷⁰.

The queer unhistoricist line of argument extends an early critique of Foucauldian genealogy by the pioneering queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who had raised the concern that one “unfortunate side effect” of queer histories of sexuality had been to take the contemporary understanding of homosexuality as “a rhetorically necessary fulcrum point for the denaturalizing work on the past done by many historians” that nevertheless risked “reinforcing a dangerous consensus of knowingness about the genuinely *unknown*”⁷¹. Of course, any historical inquiry seeks to coax something of “the genuinely unknown” into the light. We necessarily begin from the coordinates of the present, as Halperin had already eloquently emphasized in his response to Sedgwick in *How to Do the History of Sexuality*, published in 2002⁷². The key term here is not “known” or “unknown” but “knowingness”. What Sedgwick argues is that by taking our own categories for granted and then straitjacketing the alterity of the past into inversions of those categories, we foreclose sensitivity to the surprising and unruly differences between past and pre-

69 — Goldberg and Menon 2005: 1609.

70 — Goldberg and Menon 2005: 1609.

71 — Sedgwick 1990: 45. Sedgwick is cited at Traub 2013: 25 as part of her genealogical analysis of queer unhistoricism and again at Blondell and Ormand 2015: 5. Blondell and Ormand rightly point out that within Classics, “critics have largely assumed that ‘homosexuality as we know it today’ is a coherent definitional field”, making Sedgwick’s critique especially incisive.

72 — “A genealogical analysis of homosexuality 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” (2002: 107, cited at Traub 2013: 25).

sent (and the differences within historical periods, including our own). It is precisely such a foreclosure, I suggest, that results from Laqueur's reification of the sex/gender binary and the distorted view it presents not only of ancient and medieval views of the sexed body, but also of the very history of that body within the Western European tradition. Sedgwick's critique and its afterlife thus open up a challenge to the place of Laqueur's narrative within the history of gender, sexuality, and the body on historiographical grounds in addition to historical ones.

Over the past decade or so, a number of historians and theorists active in the affective turn in queer history have been shifting attention away from the difference between past and present and towards identifications with the dead, transhistorical forms of queer kinship, and melancholic attachments. What Goldberg and Menon call "homohistory" resonates with what Carla Freccero has called "queer spectrality", the past's haunting of the present, and what Carolyn Dinshaw figures as "touching the past"⁷³. In exploring the twists and turns of queer temporality, these historians and theorists have compellingly articulated the value of identifying with figures from the past, both historical and fictional, and of articulating commonalities, rather than adhering rigorously to a discourse of alterity. In probing the historian's desire for identification, they have also challenged its logic, as in Heather Love's diagnosis of the queer historian's wish to rescue the past – what she calls "feeling backward" – together with her emphasis on the figure from the past who refuses recuperation, turning her back on the present in a gesture of difference that affirms Sedgwick's recalcitrantly unknown and unknowable past⁷⁴. In response to these challenges to the privilege of alterity, Valerie Traub has persuasively defended genealogy as a strategy for engaging not only "queerness in time" but also "queerness *across* time"; she has advocated for the particular pleasures enabled by recognitions of difference and distance while insisting on the tenacious "heterotemporality" of history⁷⁵. Even those who have made powerful cases for the dangers of casting the past in terms of radical difference recognize the strategic value of what Freccero calls "Old World otherness"⁷⁶.

73 — Freccero 2006: 69-104 and 2007; Dinshaw 1999 and 2012.

74 — Love 2007, esp. 31-52.

75 — Traub 2013: 31-32. Traub goes on to argue that instead of practicing queer theory as that which challenges all categories – she is quoting Menon here – "there remain ample reasons to practice a queer historicism dedicated to showing how categories, however mythic, phantasmic, and incoherent, came to be" (35).

76 — Freccero 2006: 49, who is critiquing what she sees as Halperin's normalization of the past via the terms of radical alterity, but then suggests that the "Old World otherness" of gender might disrupt contemporary theoretical discussions of gender and sexuality.

These debates offer rich inquiries into the historiographical tropes of sameness and affinity, on the one hand, and rupture, difference, and distance, on the other. At the same time, in practice, the readings from which these debates emerge often negotiate between continuity and discontinuity in the relationship between the past and the present, the figures of kinship and love but also gestures of distance and refusal, thereby mapping generative spaces outside familiar binaries. The fact that the debates around queer unhistoricism have been primarily between specialists working on the periods conventionally designated medieval, Renaissance, and early modern (though notably not ancient Greco-Roman, the battleground of so much debate in the 1990s) has meant that it is not only the divide between past and present that is being queered by non-linear temporalities and affective investments but the more specific divide, so entrenched in the history of sexuality, between modern and premodern⁷⁷. By problematizing the logic of symmetrical alterity, the energies of queer unhistoricism have generated alternative models and experiments for trying to make sense of the premodern past in its wild complexity as part of the work of creating conditions for the flourishing of queer subjects and queer communities in the present.

The history of sexuality and the history of how bodies have been labeled male and female, as well as masculine and feminine, are inquiries necessarily related to one another. It was precisely by elevating gender over sexuality, through their analysis of the figure of the *κίναϊδος/cinaedus* as gender deviant, that Halperin and Winkler established the radical difference of ancient Greco-Roman sexuality vis-à-vis the present. Nevertheless, sexuality has also often overshadowed gender in queer theory, despite eloquent challenges to the analytic uncoupling of sexuality and gender⁷⁸. Moreover, the history of medicine and the body has not

77 — Though classical studies have played a central role in the history of sexuality to which queer unhistoricism is responding, historians of ancient Greco-Roman sexuality and classicists more generally have been largely absent from current debates in queer history. Blondell and Ormand 2015: 14 take it as given that the Foucauldian position has been incorporated into the mainstream of ancient sexuality studies while, in a nod to the affective turn in queer historiography, arguing that historicist positions do not preclude “moments of identification and political mobilization” (20). Halperin 2015, the epilogue to Blondell and Ormand’s edited volume, responds to the queer unhistoricist critique directly and concludes “identification is motivated by the erotic appeal of difference and distance as much as by a sense of shared identity, so it is not blocked or baffled by a recognition that same-sex behaviors in the past were differently organized from the dominant ways in which they are organized in many modern societies today” (323). It is telling that the embrace of queer unhistoricism in Matzner 2016 occurs within the rubric of reception studies rather than within the subfield of ancient sexuality studies. The articulation of “deep classics” in Butler 2016, in its resistance to historicism within the history of sexuality (see esp. 32-40) can also be seen as a form of queer unhistoricism, but again one emergent from classical reception studies.

78 — The divide between gender and sexuality in queer studies’ is why Susan Stryker has called trans theory “queer theory’s evil twin” (2004: 212). For arguments in favor of keeping gender and sexuality together, see Freccero 2006: 31-50, who observes the negative consequences of such a split

witnessed the same kinds of challenges to periodization and linearity that the history of sexuality has. These are perhaps just a few of the reasons why Laqueur's narrative has been largely spared the critiques of temporality that have flourished in sexuality studies and queer theory.

Yet, as I have already observed, the critiques of rupture and alterity feel particularly apt when applied to *Making Sex* and its reification of the sex/gender binary as a lens for organizing material from the past as symmetrically Other. If the historiography of *Making Sex* has not been challenged on these grounds, it may also be because the historicizing of "sex" and the promise of an unsexed or fluidly sexed body has generally been embraced in gender studies and feminism as more straightforwardly liberating, as we have seen, than the denaturalization of homosexuality within queer studies, where there has been so much attention to affective modes of historiography and the dynamics of desire, identification, and affinity. What has long been at stake in the history of sexuality is whether a history of homosexuality or gays or lesbians or queers is even possible or desirable and what it would mean to write a queer history of sexuality. There has thus been a good deal of searching, sophisticated discussion in queer studies about the political stakes of how we do the history of sexuality. By contrast, given the longtime status of the biological body in sex and gender studies as necessarily deterministic, a premodern fluidly sexed body has for the most part felt more obviously promising. That promise has led to the continued refusal to take seriously the painstaking critique of the "one-sex" myth. To be fair, Laqueur's portrait of the premodern period is not utopian. One of his major points is that the one-sex body constructs the female body as a lesser version of the male: "a metaphysics of hierarchy"⁷⁹. Nevertheless, the claim to fame of *Making Sex* is a narrative of radical historical rupture that makes the idea of biologically sanctioned sexual difference contingent, thereby undermining its status as a scientific fact immune to contestation and helping displace sex together with gender. Who wouldn't be on board with such a project? The numbingly crude politics of sexual difference – scientific findings on the "female brain" or natural deficits in men's capacity to nurture, but also reductive ideas about normal bodies and sexualities – have hardly gone away.

Let me be clear, then, on what I understand to be the stakes, both historiographical and theoretical, of letting go of Laqueur once and for all. Put simply, it is time to stop instrumentalizing the monolithic figure

for trans theory (41).

79 — Laqueur 1990: 6. Later in the introduction he argues that both the biology of hierarchy and the biology of incommensurability "have constrained the interpretation of bodies and the strategies of sexual politics for some two thousand years" (23).

of the premodern one-sex body as a foil to the biologically sexed body of the moderns. For one thing, caricatures of the premodern Other are just too easy, and they enable in turn accounts of what happens once we are on the terrain of “the modern” that are also too easy: we historians have to learn to tell stories that are not myths without giving up the plot altogether. More specifically, by fashioning the premodern past as symmetrically different from the present and by failing to historicize the very terms of historical difference, the one-sex model imposes our own categories of sex and gender on the past unthinkingly, assuming their universalism with an ease that allows us to remain blind to the ways in which these categories also constrain our capacity to “take seriously” – to adopt the language of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro – thought worlds beyond “mononaturalism”⁸⁰. If we instead take seriously the difference of the premodern material – its difference from our own assumptions and categories, but also the heterogeneity and messiness of this vast (nevertheless very limited) corpus of material – we may find new ways into thinking about the complications inherent in our own categories of sex and gender as they intersect with “the” body, precisely because the difference of the Greek material is not absolute. I want to say a bit more in closing about the conceptual tangle of imagining difference in this way.

The project I have just been describing owes much to the spirit and method of Foucauldian genealogy. But it navigates the rupture of the modern differently than it has conventionally been handled in the history of sexuality. On the one hand, I have sketched a more layered and more recent, twentieth-century history behind the dominance of the sex/gender binary and, in more detail, shown the ways in which it distorts our analysis of early Greek material. But on the other hand, I want to suggest that the premodern/modern binary obscures the ways in which the Greek material is in fact *more embedded* in our thinking about the sexed body than Laqueur’s story acknowledges. Foucault is interesting here insofar as he himself frames his turn to classical antiquity in the second and third volumes of the *History of Sexuality* not only as an exercise in getting “before” sexuality, understood as a construct of the nineteenth century in the first volume, but also as an inquiry into the formation of sexuality as an ethical substance⁸¹. But what Foucault, who did so much to ground the genealogy of the modern body, does not do in the second volume is

80 — See Viveiros de Castro 2014, esp. 40-43, 194-96 on “taking seriously”. On “mononaturalism”, see also Descola 2013. See also Stryker and Aizura 2013: 8-10, where the risk of the extension of transgender as a universalist category rather than a category that emerges from “a specific understanding of sex, gender, and identity with a recent and local past” is that we render “other understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality unintelligible” and “eras[e] as well violent colonial histories of knowledge production about sex and gender” (8).

81 — Foucault 1985.

give a genealogy of the physical or biological body itself. Without that genealogy, we do not notice how the very concept of “the body” works as a false universal, rather than as a concept which is itself historical and, thus, contingent in important ways, however difficult – even impossible – it is for us to get outside its rubric.

For, as I have argued elsewhere, the physical body (*σῶμα*), by which I mean a body structured by a nature (*φύσις*), emerges as a conceptual object in fifth-century BCE Greece, primarily in naturalizing medical and biological discourses that form the body according to terms that are, as I have already emphasized, at once materialist, therapeutic, and normative⁸². Indeed, the physical body as it is articulated in medical and biological writing, plays a formative role in broader cultural discourses and practices of gender in both the Greek and Roman worlds, at least in the elite texts to which we have access. These histories matter deeply to how we incorporate “the Greeks” into contemporary conversations about bodies, embodiment, sex, gender, and sexuality, for they require that in addition to attending to the non-symmetrical differences of ancient texts, we notice, too, that the physical body helps create a common conceptual vocabulary between these texts and contemporary debates about sex, gender, and sexuality, which remain structured by the figure of the physical body – a body with a nature.

The persistence of the physical body, especially as an object of biological knowledge, in these debates has become even more important in the decades since the publication of *Making Sex*. For over those years, the ban on thinking with the biological body has slowly been lifted, yielding often-fractious debates about biology, essence, identity, bodies, desire, and the ontological status of these terms, male and female. It is becoming more evident than ever that the very language of the body is woefully limited⁸³. For if “*the*” body was ever a term with any sense, it was as the counterpoint to culture or mind: these oppositions have begun to collapse. Theorists working in new materialist feminism and trans theory have sought to develop more robust and productive concepts of the body, reworking the terrain of the biological and exploring the forms of technicity overseen by the medical-industrial complex as the means not only

82 — See Holmes 2010b and, on the materialist-therapeutic frame, Holmes 2017. It is true that the very privileging of medical and biological evidence, both in Laqueur and in responses to his work, including my own, can be seen as a consequence of the dominance of techno-biological regimes and the language of naturalization in contemporary debates about sex and gender: see esp. the cogent discussion of “naturalization” in Flemming 2000: 5-21. But see also the remarks at Ragab 2015: 430 about the importance of seeing “sex” as “a historically contingent category that is rooted in a specific discourse about nature, a discourse that was produced and dominated by particular groups whose claimed expertise was the human body”, such as learned physicians.

83 — As it always has been: see Bynum 1995.

for biopower's impositions of norms but also for the recursive remaking of selves to which subjects lay claim⁸⁴. In these new spaces of discourse, bodies are read as agential *and* thoroughly enmeshed in forms of practice, conscious and unconscious: unpredictably plastic and capable of overwhelming our narratives of ourselves, bodies are also critical participants within the stories of the self that subjects tell in response to these ruptures in experience⁸⁵. These bodies exist in dynamic feedback loops with a world that has never been modern⁸⁶. Within these debates, the difficulty of maintaining mind as a space apart from the physical body shows up the limits of using "the" body to stabilize sex against gender. The oppositions that allowed "the" body to be defined against not-body are collapsing, opening up anarchic traffic across old boundaries and creating conditions for more productive but also messier histories of sexed bodies that move from ancient Greece to the present in non-linear, multiply layered ways.

Against this backdrop, two powerful questions, in particular, persist from the ancient Greek writings on the physical body: first, whether the body is coextensive with "me" or not – that is, whether there is something else beyond body (soul, mind, person, subject); and second, the extent to which the *nature* of the body is fixed *in utero* or at birth and the extent to which it shifts, because of its materiality, in relationship both to practices and to external influences (social, cultural, environmental). The ancient texts that we have offer a range of strategies for defending claims of both radical sexual dimorphism and a contingently sexed body. In antiquity, in ways not entirely unfamiliar to the present, gender identity is caught within a regime that is both materialist and therapeutic. If we are far from the hormonal therapies and surgical manipulations that are now part of our corporeal vernacular, technologies of gender are not only about empirical techniques. They are also about the aspirations and demands introduced by the very idea of a *τέχνη* of bodily control. With the accelerated collapse of oppositions between sex and gender, nature and culture, the contemporary theoretical terrain starts to resemble more the field of multiple possibilities that we see at play in a full examination of material from Greek medical writers, the reception of those texts, and in all the genres of non-medical material that I have not been able to analyze here.

Yet I do not want to end by affirming only continuity, no more than I want to end by defending radical difference. What the debates that

84 — For new materialist approaches, see, e.g., Barad 2003; Hird 2004a and 2004b; Grosz 2005; Wilson 2008. Hayward 2008 and Hird 2008 bring together new materialist and trans theory on the sexed body. Critiques of the "wrong body" narrative have been especially productive in trans theorizing about the body: see, e.g., Vaccaro 2010; Chu 2017.

85 — The challenges of thinking gender identity together with other forms of embodiment classed as dis-abled or dis-eased are richly mapped in Clare 2017.

86 — Latour 1993.

have emerged from queer historiography affirm with lucidity is the way in which stories of genealogy or rupture, resonance and refusal, are shot through with affect and desire. Sameness and difference are not absolute terms. History is a practice of making relations even if, to paraphrase Lacan (“there is no sexual relation”), there is no historical relation. The stakes have been especially high for the stories we tell about modernity. They are just as high for the stories we tell about the Greeks. If, as I have sought to show here, there are deep risks involved in positing a premodern Other, there are equally great risks to finding common ground with the Greeks, an enterprise that cannot be disentangled from the dynamics of Philhellenism⁸⁷. These dynamics, I would suggest, are constitutive of any attempt to offer a history of the sexed body, as much because of the category of “the body” as because of that of “sex”. We therefore owe it to the complexities of sex and gender today to tell stories that recognize these complexities not just *in* the past but, more fundamentally, *in the relation* of past and present. By addressing the radical dimorphism of premodern and modern as it has been implicated in the opposition of sex and gender, we may begin to address that relation more consciously, creatively, and productively.

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87 — For these dynamics with specific respect to life and normativity, see Holmes 2019.

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