

Sexuality and social science as seen from Brazil: a critical reading of conventions

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Sexuality, culture and politics A South American reader

Although mature and vibrant, Latin American scholarship on sexuality still remains largely invisible to a global readership. In this collection of articles translated from Portuguese and Spanish, South American scholars explore the values, practices, knowledge, moralities and politics of sexuality in a variety of local contexts. While conventionally read as an intellectual legacy of Modernity, Latin American social thinking and research has in fact brought singular forms of engagement with, and new ways of looking at, political processes. Contributors to this reader have produced fresh and situated understandings of the relations between gender, sexuality, culture and society across the region. Topics in this volume include sexual politics and rights, sexual identities and communities, eroticism, pornography and sexual consumerism, sexual health and well-being, intersectional approaches to sexual cultures and behavior, sexual knowledge, and sexuality research methodologies in Latin America.



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1. Introduction

While the field of social sciences increasingly broadens in scope, it simultaneously becomes ever more specialized and differentiated. This implies that a series of more or less tolerant and dialogic standards and trends co-exist. As the polymorphous epistemology that is characteristic of the social sciences becomes further pronounced (in contrast to the relatively linear and univocal disposition of the natural sciences), more restrictive dispositions become reinforced, ready to defend new emerging orthodoxies from the field's dominant pluralism.¹ In order to understand any specific discursive or analytical element within this framework, we need to apply a fundamental 'historicising strategy', which allows us to comprehend the conditions of emergence and evolution of topics within the meandering tangle of epistemological 'schools', movements and tendencies.

The establishment of 'sexuality' cannot escape this requirement. Its investigation, in fact, needs to be even more specific, precisely because it is not central among the categories instrumental for the social sciences. This prevents many active voices in the field from articulating their position in an explicit, necessary manner, or as is the case sometimes, prevents them from even considering the category relevant or of structural importance to their analytical aims. Nevertheless, in recent decades a burgeoning body of literature has developed. This has focused on the place of sexuality in the social world, or on phenomena that depend on or coexist with sexuality, more or less intrinsically. We will, as much as possible, make use of this literature, and will emphasize the Brazilian participation in international debates.

For the purposes of the present analysis, we will only consider anthropology and sociology within the field of humanities and social sciences. We will exclude sexology as we see it as a liminal area, with greater ambiguity and a lesser degree of institutionalization. It therefore deserves its own specific interpretation (cf. Vance 1995:9; Béjin, 1985 and

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¹ Not only in a descriptive sense, but also in the prescriptive sense in which Mariza Peirano proposes a "plural anthropology" —a sign of a reflexive universalistic trend (Peirano, 1992: 250).

Russo & Carrara, 2002). While political science has a minor presence in this area, history, in contrast, occupies a prominent place (cf. Vance, 1995: 9). It is included here, however, only by virtue of the repercussions of its development within the social sciences, as narrowly defined. The social sciences did not evolve in a vacuum; they drew from a myriad of external influences and in turn propagated waves of meaning that were incorporated into the fabric of the numerous intersections between sexuality and medicine, psychiatry, law, psychology, psychoanalysis, criminology, etc. These subjects (which are also 'social') will only feature here in as much as their mark can be recognised within a strictly delimited field. This act of demarcation is always highly arbitrary, especially at present, when the intention of many new analytical tendencies is to spill over the once watertight boundaries of different anthropological subjects.

It is academic common sense to consider anthropology as being more closely related to sexuality than sociology. To J. Pierret, for example, sexuality would have emerged as a sociological topic only due to the challenges of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Pierret, 1998: 49). This would, however, imply ignoring its presence in the work of, for example, G. Simmel, W. Thomas, or N. Elias. As it is ultimately impossible to draw a line between the two disciplines (especially as they are understood today in Brazil), one can claim that both contributed, albeit in discrete ways, to the present range of ideas and research on sexuality.² C. Vance claims that, despite being seen as having an interest and competency in the topic, anthropology was in fact 'not very courageous or even adequate in its investigation of sexuality' (Vance, 1995: 8). Her description of a climate of discouragement and mistrust in this area may, however, be specific to the US academic scene; perhaps linked to a departure from the School of Culture and Personality (within which sexuality had a prominent place) prevalent in the U.S.A. since the 1960's.

Our aim here is to present and contextualize the main propositions—the structuring conventions—from which the theme of sexuality developed in our field. This will include, in particular, an analysis of what I call the 'disembeddedness' of sexuality as an object of modern reason (with the consequent invention of the non-modern 'embeddedness' and the neo-Romantic programme's 're-embeddedness');³ the delineation of the continuous tension between 'physicalism' and 'symbolism' in the definition of sexuality-related phenomena; and—finally—the ideological weight of the values of 'pleasure' and 'interiority' (with its myriad connotations) in cultural configurations, both lay and learned (social sciences included).

It is in this sense that I should reiterate that only through 'historicizing' the presence of sexuality and the social sciences within the wider-ranging cultural processes that led to the emergence of those same sciences and the category of sexuality itself can we

² 'The former [sociology] has contributed extensive surveys on the sexual behavior of populations, while the latter [anthropology] has mostly opted for detailed descriptions of values and practices of specific social groups' (Heilborn, 1999: 7).

³ These cumbersome words will return too often in this text. Albeit awkward, this excess is supposed to impress upon the reader a much necessary distance from our current ideas about sexuality.

understand the phenomenon. The 'disembedding' (in relation to family, reproduction, religion, morality, etc.), the emergence of ideologies that portend 'physicalism' (universalism/rationalism) and 'symbolism' (romanticism), and the hegemony of values of interiority (psychologization) and pleasure (hedonism) are broad processes which have defined the development of our whole culture—not only of sexuality.

2. Modern Western culture and the invention of sexuality

An understanding of the specificity of 'modern Western culture', 'sexuality' and the historical relationship between them can only be outlined here—with references to a specialized and comprehensive bibliography. It must also be emphasized that this is merely a sketch or tentative proposal, a meshing together of interpretations among many other possible ones—although strictly indispensable for critical thinking.

Elsewhere I suggested that 'perfectibility', 'experience' and 'physicalism' (Duarte, 1999:24) are the fundamental categories for an understanding of the relationship between sexuality and sensibility in the construction of the modern Western Person. Indeed, suspending the belief in the holistic conception of the world—characteristic of the great transformation towards modernity—resulted in a cosmological emphasis on the convenience, interest and inevitability of a definition of human beings as transformable and mutable, given their continuous experience of the sensorial world—a world which guarantees a relationship with the concrete, tangible sphere of immanent realities. One of the clearest implications of such a disposition was the invention of the *body*, in its modern sense: a concrete machine (*res extensa*), endowed with an informational apparatus (senses, sensoriality, a *sentient being*), adapted to specific animal functions (*res cogitans*, understanding, reason, mind, *Geist*, *esprit*, etc.), often associated to a 'will', that is, to a propensity to intervene positively in the world. The crucial character of such 'moral' dispositions, however, simultaneously encouraged a peculiar emphasis on the 'interiority' of this body, ambiguously understood both as a set of autonomous characteristics and as a peculiar dimension of the fundamental physicality of all things.⁴

⁴This established the conditions for the hegemony of the modern concept of 'nature' (cf. Gusdorf, 1985; Thomas, 1988; Descola, 1992 and Strathern, 1992) and for the development of the complex and ambivalent concept of 'human nature'.

The nature of the corporeal senses, human feelings and sensibility, was a privileged object of 17th- and 18th-century philosophical and scientific thought (for example, on the physiology of the nervous system). This thoroughly demonstrates how this new dimension of the human being's characteristics became autonomous (cf. Figlio, 1975; Lawrence, 1979; Le Breton, 1988; Duarte, 1986). In the context of investigations

⁴ I suggested elsewhere that this cosmological configuration could be seen as giving continuity to a model which was present in pre-modern European culture and which emphasized a joint 'commandment of truth, will and interiority' in the construction of the ideal Christian Person (cf. Duarte and Giumbelli, 1994).

into the composition of such a complex and mysterious informational system, a new ontological dimension has emerged from the old moral and philosophical models of love, desire and lust (e.g. *libido*, in Saint Augustine). The possibility to observe a desiring and erotic disposition in the human body was being built on the basis of this sensorial machine. The classic theme of male 'involuntary erection', the basis of the Augustinian interpretation of the Fall (cf. Foucault & Sennet, 1981), became, towards the close of the 18th century, one of the speculative topics of the new corporeal physiology.⁵ We can consider this increasing scholarly emphasis on sensibility as one of the steps in another process that was crucial to modernity: the emerging and progressing hegemony of an hedonistic ethics, simultaneously derived from and opposed to the original Christian cult of pain (cf. Sahlins, 1996). The endorsement of a base criterion of 'satisfaction' and 'pleasure' as a justification for human life is one of the most characteristic traits of modern Western culture and is certainly associated with the process of redefining 'eroticism' within the framework of specific sources of pleasure (see for example the myth of Don Juan, and the concept of 'licentiousness', which was so significant in the 18th century). Within this process, the connotation of 'transgression' in the obtainment of pleasure is fundamentally important. The ultimate status of this association is a point of controversy. Here we can only highlight that its representation is common in modern Western culture and it increases as the ideal of an autonomous individual vis-à-vis society (seen as an external repressing authority) imposes itself.

It is important to highlight that this broader tendency is contemporaneous with four other related phenomena, which were also significant at the dawn of modernity. The first being the universalist classification of the living world, proposed and initiated by Linnaeus, in which the devised system hinges precisely on differential modes of 'reproduction' in 'nature', of the 'sexed' or otherwise condition of those processes and their implications for the development of new beings (vegetable and animal). The second phenomenon is the emergence, in that period—as demonstrated by T. Laqueur—of the 'two sex model', that is, of the essential physical ('natural') distinction between the two sexes, against the backdrop of the traditional theory of modulated fundamental unity (cf. Laqueur, 1987). The third phenomenon is the work of the Marquis de Sade, in which sexuality appears for the first time (in a fictional form of strong political character) as an institution characteristic of the human condition, independent of religion and morality, and sufficiently crucial to determine, by itself, the career of social subjects (in an active or passive way) (cf. Sade, 1995). The final phenomenon is the formation, along the 18th century, of the first systematic formulations of a political economy, that is, of a theory of collective reproduction of the human species. Physiocracy, commonly seen as the first of such formulae, particularly emphasized the preeminence of 'natural' production off the

⁵ J. Jamin's (1979 and 1983) recount of the surprise of the natives of a Polynesian island with the involuntary erection of the sailor they had forcefully undressed is illustrative of the many interpretations that the status of 'primitive' sexuality would receive. The whole context of the Expedition, promoted by the *Idéologues* (in the context of the radical version of empiricism that we call 'sensualism') is expressive of the disembedding of 'sensibility'; stretched between De Gérando's culturalist and Buffon's physicalist inspiration.

land—agriculture (cf. Polanyi, 1980). In the four cases, we witness what Polanyi called the disembedding of a new human dimension, which previous classificatory systems maintained in an integrated relation.⁶ In the first and second cases, it is the rupture of the physical-moral quality of the Great Chain of Beings (with divine providence at the apex) that is at stake; there is an attempt to establish the determination of phenomena (species difference and gender difference) on the basis of their immanent physical characteristics—most importantly their reproductive structure.⁷ In the case of Sade and physiocracy, the rupture reaches the physical-moral quality of human condition, whether by emphasizing ‘natural’ conditions of collective reproduction (and its political enforcement), or by emphasizing the hedonistic condition, ‘non-reproductive’ (even destructive), of desire (and its revolutionary praise): *‘Français, encore un effort...!’* (Sade, 1995).⁸

In connection to the first dimension of our theme, we can see, along the 19th century, the linear development of biological research, including the physiology of reproduction at all levels of nature. It is part of the most direct lineage of contemporary biomedical knowledge—and its intrinsic physicalist reductionism. Another dimension shows us how difference is increasingly taken up again, mostly as a consequence of degeneration theory,⁹ in which the theme of the normal condition of sexuality and its vicissitudes is increasingly present. In its physicalist focus, the category ‘sexual instinct’ becomes more preeminent, constructed originally to express the ‘natural’ condition (at its limit, ‘animal’) of the phenomena of reproduction and sexuality. The concept of ‘perversion’ came to express, at the end of this period, the preoccupation with so-called ‘anomalies’ of the ‘sexual’ or ‘genetic instinct’. The literature celebrates Von Krafft-Ebing’s monumental and influential *Psychopathia Sexualis* [first edition 1888] as the culmination of this production (cf. Loyola, 1999: 11; Duarte, 1989a). We can consider, as a third dimension of the 19th-century processes, the one that led from psychology to psychophysics and conferred to it the responsibility for the pursuit of research on the reaction of sensorial systems—including ‘sexual excitement’.

⁶ Heilborn and Sorj termed the result of this process ‘autonomized sexuality’ (1999: 219). The category of ‘autonomy’ in this phrase expresses the liberalizing motive of ‘disembeddedness’. Even in the most abstract cases, the idea of witnessing the liberation of a being that was incarcerated in the previous totality is always present: sexuality in relation to morality; orgasm in relation to the set of erotic pleasures; homosexuality in relation to diffuse eroticism among equals, etc... Another, more methodological manner of referring to disembeddedness is ‘de-contextualization’, as for example in Singly (1995: 162).

⁷ I use the term ‘physical-moral’ to refer to any system of representation of the person that does not presuppose an exclusive logic of the body, of physicality, such as the one at the basis of the ideology of Western biomedicine.

⁸ Sade led a truly personal crusade for the disembedding of sexuality from morality (decency), in the defense of categories such as licentiousness, lust, depravation, pleasure. The argument of ‘nature’ was crucial therein, as in this excerpt from *Philosophie du Boudoir*. ‘*S’il était dans les intentions de la nature que l’homme fût pudique, assurément elle ne l’aurait pas fait naître nu...*’ (Sade, 1995: 40) [If nature intended man to be modest, she would certainly would not have delivered him naked].

⁹ The process of constitution of new differentialist theories against the backdrop of the egalitarian ideal of individualist ideology was broad and complex; affecting especially issues of race, gender and disease, throughout the 19th century. The crux of this restored difference resides in its ‘scientific’ and localized argument, in opposition to the ‘cosmological’ status of hierarchical difference. On this topic, see especially Laqueur, 1987; Costa, 1992; Carrara, 1996; Russo, 1997; Duarte, 2001, and Rohden, 2001.

Along these three routes it is also possible to follow the disembedding of a 'sexuality' from more extensive corporeal properties associated with 'reproduction' (see the concept of 'reproductive system', fundamental to the affirmation of sexual difference) and 'sensibility'. Here, however, in contrast to the previous corpus, the ideological process leads to a progressive and unforeseen re-approximation towards the 'moral'. Both 'instinct' and 'excitement' are hardly contained within the limits of a strict physicality. The definition of these categories itself presupposes moral dimensions, of value attributed to sexual practices. Successive crusades against onanism, prostitution, pornography, proletarian promiscuity or the moral relaxation of the elites were fed by erudite rationalizations based on more or less logically consistent fragments of biomedical and psychiatric knowledge—within the general sphere of degeneration and its retinue of ghosts (atavisms, manias, danger of racial miscegenation, etc.) (cf. Foucault, 1975 and 1979; Donzelot, 1980).

Within the established Christian churches even doctrine itself adapted strategically to this immanentist, physicalist and determinist environment. A good part of the intense family (and moral) pastoral within the Roman Catholic Church fed on this 'scientific' knowledge, in a curious alliance with materialist and reductionist doctrines, both on the right and the left. The concept of a 'given' nature, with direct implications on human life, under the species of a 'natural right' and a 'human nature', supported these doctrinarian developments, as well as other hegemonic developments in the culture of the period.

Finally, it is necessary to refer to the extremely influential developments that the theme of sexuality stimulated in the arts in general and in literature in particular. Romanticism promoted the emergence of the modern conception of art, one that expresses the interior forces of 'creative' subjects, individualized in authorship and audience, strongly engaged with promoting private emotions and with a general sensitization of the public. The theme of love (typically considered as 'romantic') initially concentrated on the conventions that related to the public exchange of affection and the adherence to interiority. However, throughout the 19th century it turned to the explicit presentation of sexuality (mostly through illicit love affairs and—at its limit—'anti-natural' ones). What was essential about the passage to a supposed 'realism' in 19th-century Western literature was a greater explicitness of the conditions and exercise of sexual desire, in opposition to or at the margins of official family conventions. In many cases, the developments were fed by the formulas available in medical and psychological knowledge—and not merely within the explicit reach of 'naturalism'. This process of thematic transformation—which reached its zenith in the literature of the first half of the 20th century—did not continue to advance indefinitely because the evolution of the formal and expressive characteristics of art ended up by privileging manner and style to the detriment of any descriptive content. It passed, however, in its most substantive characteristics, more or less linearly, to cinema and television, where it still flourishes today.¹⁰

¹⁰ One of the most radical manifestations of disembeddedness is the emergence of an intensive industrial production of a highly specialized pornography (with its own broadcasting means and audiences). The difference between this pornography and the *ars erotica* of other cultures is a topic for rich debates.

3. Romantic science and sexuality

While the flourishing of sexuality in the context of literary fiction can be considered as an aspect of the 'research' on sensitivity and interiority resulting from the physicalism intrinsic to modern universalism, nevertheless, and as mentioned above, this flourishing is also evidence of a romantic turn.

I clarified my working concept of 'romanticism' elsewhere—a term that has been rendered banal within academic common sense (cf. Duarte, 1995, 1999a, 2004). By this term, I refer to all movements that reject, refuse, denounce or challenge the universalism/rationalism/physicalism essential to the cognitive exercise of individualistic ideology since the 18th century. The 19th-century German *Naturphilosophie* movement was one of the most prominent ones. Its reactive disposition against rationalism did not stop it from considering the advance of scientific knowledge a necessity. What it aspired to, was the production of an alternative science, engaged with totality, flux, subjectivity and sensibility—as Goethe typically proposed by writing his *Farbenlehre* against Newton. The preoccupation with subjective mediations of knowledge is precisely what led to the development of physiology and several psychologies that were open to clarifying the processes of sensibility (encompassing senses and feelings). Between *Elective Affinities*, understood by Goethe as a real investigation about the dynamics of interior life, and W. Wundt's psychology or S. Freud's psychoanalysis, there is a whole century of intense speculation about what G. Simmel so opportunely termed 'qualitative individualism'. He understood it as a paradoxical version of the original, political or socio-political individualism (which he termed 'quantitative'), engaged with the intimate life of subjects, the breadth of their interior horizons (to use N. Elias's typical expression, as an epigone of this movement). The modern citizen was not only free and equal in the public realm; he should also be autonomous, intense and creative in his intimate circumstances, in his vital dispositions. The model of romantic *Bildung*, the ideal process of self-formation of subjects, envisaged a considerable propensity for self-examination and self-criticism, which was essential for the flourishing of expressive art, confessional literature, psychological introspection and psychological dynamics modeling. This process of objectification of 'subjective life' was always – notoriously—opposed to physicalism, denounced by romantic ideologues as a devitalizing materialism. Methodical opposition to physicalism was certainly an ultimate goal, but it involved a systematic passage through physicality, aiming at recovering the *Geist* (the precious 'spirit').

It is in this context that we can understand the presence of sexuality as a 'scientific' theme within erudite knowledge at the end of the 19th century. After all, the manifestations of will (*voluntas/voluptas*), of desire (*libido*) and of love—continuous preoccupations of romantic research—were inextricable from what was being termed 'sexuality'. Its understanding as an inner pulse (*Trieb*) which was essential to understand subjective engagement, radically cut across the tension between physical and moral, in a way that is ideally expressed in the widely cited *Psychopathia Sexualis*, by Krafft-Ebing. As I showed elsewhere (Duarte, 1989a), the tension between the fundamental physicalism of medical-psychiatric thought (of which Krafft-Ebing was an eminent spokesperson) and the value of spiritual or moral life in which *fin-de-siècle* high culture thrived (directly

inspired by romanticism) imposes great complexity and dynamism on the proposed model of a *vita sexualis*.¹¹ The theory of perversions that developed in this context, paid typically degenerationist attention to the physical conditions of reproduction and descent, but—simultaneously—attributed a status ambiguously superior to certain experiences, such as the so-called ‘antipathetic sexuality’ (what would then come to be called ‘homosexuality’), considered more ‘moral’ or ‘psychological’ than fetishism or bestiality, for example (cf. Duarte, 1988: 24). This representation of sexuality can be considered as a variation on the theme of *Homo duplex*: human beings carry, among other instincts, the ‘primary instinct’ of sexuality, which places them close to animals but can, simultaneously, awaken a process of spiritualizing ‘sublimation’ (between the meaning of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* and the Freudian *Sublimierung*). This process is associated with the supposed progress of collective moral controls of civilization over ‘nature’—which pulled Europeans away from animals as well as from children and ‘primitive peoples’. Simultaneously, however, on the other hand, the ‘malaise of civilization’ is feared; that is, the symptoms of a sensibility that is excessively excited by modern, urban, artificial life.¹²

This complex interplay between scientific inclination and moral evaluation was fed, at an abstract level, by a more or less continuous transfusion of empiricism to the theoretical corpus of romanticism (e.g., the influence of Stuart-Mill on Nietzsche). This resulted in several interesting epistemological formulae—for example the opposition between ‘natural sciences’ (*Naturwissenschaften*) and ‘moral sciences’ (*Geisteswissenschaften*), which was consolidated by Dilthey and left as a legacy for the then recent justification for the existence of ‘human’ or ‘social sciences’. In this way, positivist notions compartmentalizing different sciences were established. This imposed new directions on the development of the status of sexuality. First and foremost, the opposition between ‘psychological’ knowledge and ‘social’ knowledge, particularly pertinent to the history we are tracing here, had a profound impact on the 20th century.

Before we explore this issue, however, it is worth recalling how the heavy moral connotations of the topic of sexuality most certainly constrained, to a great extent, public, systematic research and reflection. The fear of explicit police censorship was merely the most visible part of a more generalized cultural disposition to keep the awareness of phenomena to which all agreed in attributing profound qualities and

¹¹ ‘If, on the one hand, it is true that moral issues should be considered, within the model’s logic, as ‘functional’ or ‘epiphenomenal’ in relation to physical determination, there is also, on the other hand, a return effect of the moral level over the physical level, so long as—supposedly—such ‘functions’ are not totally obfuscated or subverted by the gravity of the state of degeneration’ (Duarte, 1988: 16).

¹² The topic I termed ‘malaise of civilization’ (Duarte, 1986) appears early within the emergence of civilization itself. As early as the 18th century, criticisms were raised about the excess of stimulus to sensibility present in court and urban life, loci of civilization par excellence. By the end of the 19th century the topic stops being cultivated by preachers, social reformers and novelists alone, and becomes the target of systematic analysis (in Simmel, in 1976, with regard to blasé character; and in Freud, 1959, with regard to ‘modern nervous diseases’). Its relation to sexuality was particularly highlighted within the context of degenerationism: ‘Exaggerated tension of the nervous system stimulates sensuality, leads the individual as well as the masses to excesses, and undermines the very foundations of society, and the morality and purity of family life’ (Krafft-Ebing, 1965: 7, apud Duarte, 1988: 21).

challenges, as something private, veiled, imprecise. The most superficial evidence of this—nevertheless the most revealing—is the curious injunction to express the subject in Latin, even by the end of the 19th century—at least a century after the transition of scholarly writing to modern languages. *Psychopathia Sexualis* already represented a significant departure from that injunction. However, significantly, the title, as well as generic and descriptive phraseology, were kept in Latin (from *vita sexualis* to *coitus inter homines*).¹³ Malinowski's introduction to his *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929) still features several paragraphs justifying the possibility and utility of publishing a text dealing with such matters (and with such an explicit title), which were for the natives, as he finds compelled to state, 'a thing serious and even sacred' (Malinowski, 1929: xxiii-xxiv). This shows how several characteristics of human life represented by the new category of 'sexuality', disembedded at a scholarly level, were still embedded within the inclusive dimension of a 'morality'.

It is certainly not going too far to highlight the significance of the work of Freud in the speeding up of this disembedding and turning it into an explicit and controversial public question. The emergence of sexuality as a theme in the social sciences, for example, is certainly due to the impact of the work of Freud and the role that sexuality played within his work. Notoriously, the spread and reception of psychoanalysis were greatly conditioned by the reactions to the emphasis on sexuality in its development. The accusations and disqualifications aimed at psychoanalysis as a 'pansexualist' knowledge crossed the world and weighed heavily on the paths of its original institutionalization (cf. Russo, 1998 and 2000).

This is not the place to review the complex way in which sexuality is presented in the development of psychoanalysis. Some main traits will allow us to understand how psychoanalysis appropriates preceding scholarly knowledge (in the spirit of the time) and readjusts it for our future consumption. In Freud there is a complex combination of universalism (and a physicalism intrinsic to a neurologist in training) and romanticism, with immediate implications for our question (cf. Loureiro, 2002).

The first issue is exactly disembeddedness. Notoriously, Freud hesitates in what status to attribute to sexuality, although he does not seem to depart at any time from the contemporaneous representation of an entity that is separate from the rich fabric of human life. The definition of a 'sexual' etiology of nervous disease, the anchoring of a psychological dynamics within the relational vicissitudes of a 'sexual' drive (later associated to a 'pleasure principle'), or any other characteristic of this crucial dimension of the human being presupposes the possibility of understanding it in

¹³ German, in contrast to Romance languages, clearly faced, at the end of the 19th century, the semantic disembedding brought about by the conceptual disembedding of sexuality. The old category of *Geschlecht*—which included the connotations of species, (grammatical) gender, sex, race, family, generation, lineage and genealogy—gave place to new terms derived from the Latin *sexus*, as is apparent in Freud (cf. Duarte, 1989a). H. Marcuse presents another example of the greater slowness or resistance of the German language to express disembeddedness in this area: the word *Sinnlichkeit* still (to this day) includes the meanings of 'sensoriality' and 'sensibility' which were autonomized in Romance languages. (cf. Marcuse, 1968: 163).

isolation, disembedded—at least as a being of reason. In this sense, he is in harmony with the spirit of his time. He also gives continuity to the representation of the enormous structuring potential of this phenomenon, of its cruciality. Like Krafft-Ebing, he places it at the root of the best, as well as the worst, of subjective behavior. He gives new status to the romantic idea of sublimation within the framework of a systematic psychodynamics.

There is a point, however, at which he departs radically from the view of his time—adding to the critical richness of his proposal: sexuality is denaturalized; it is conceived as a *sui generis* psychological force, which cannot be assimilated by a biomedical representation, that is, a physicalist representation; the representation of ‘instincts’ and organic ‘function’.¹⁴ This is a polemical issue, in which the romantic dimension of Freud’s thought is explicit, bringing with it inevitable difficulties of understanding and assimilation by hegemonic science. The variations in the translation of the category *Treib* to the Romance languages are exemplary as testimony to this tension.

Apart from precise analytical characteristics of sexuality as a category within Freudian theory, we should note the way the generalized and gradual diffusion of psychoanalytic literature could serve a more general cultural process. The first effect was certainly, once again, to confirm the tendency to disembeddedness, to name the phenomenon as a specific entity (even if with imprecise borders). But it also served to confirm its cruciality within the human horizon (both in a positive and negative sense), which contributed to an emphasis on interiority (in general, the psychologization process can be viewed as an intensification of modern interiorization) and on modern hedonistic ethics. Even if the main psychoanalytic schools do not see it as a process of linear embracement or facilitation of pleasure, we should not forget the variations that came to be closer to this sense, as in the work of W. Reich, whose influence returned throughout the century (cf. Béjin, 1985).

The first systematic manifestation of sexuality as a theme in ethnology is found in the work of B. Malinowski.¹⁵ The complex career of this pioneer of modern anthropology is well known today. The weight of the romantic tradition in his work, in general, and his reading of Freud, in particular, are also acknowledged (cf., e.g., Stocking, 1986; Strenski, 1982). This perception was for a long time obfuscated by the greater explicitness of empiricist influences on Malinowski’s thought. The posthumous publication of Malinowski’s fascinating fieldwork notebook certainly contributed to this contemporary reevaluation (cf. Malinowski, 1967).¹⁶

Even a superficial analysis of his 1929 book is revealing. The author declared in the

¹⁴ Sexuality would be *cosa mentale*, paraphrasing the notorious expression of Leonardo da Vinci about painting (*la pittura è cosa mentale*).

¹⁵ This was not, however, the first manifestation of the influence of psychoanalysis on ethnological knowledge, as made clear in Duarte, 1989b. The status of dream and trauma had previously inspired W. H. Rivers and C. G. Seligman.

¹⁶ In his preface to *The Sexual Life of Savages*, Havelock Ellis refers to ‘the fertilizing value of Freud’s ideas’ in Malinowski’s thought (apud Malinowski, 1983: xi).

Introduction that 'to the average normal person, in whatever type of society we find him, attraction by the other sex and the passionate and sentimental episodes which follow are the *most significant events in his existence*, those most deeply associated with his *intimate happiness and with the zest and meaning of life*' (Malinowski, 1929: 1, my emphasis). Independently of the ethnographic appropriateness of such a statement, it emphasizes the dimensions mentioned above: cruciality, interiority and pleasure.

The book's structure reveals the complex relationship between the disembeddedness involved in writing a book about the 'sexual life' and embeddedness, as ethnographically understood and described. After all, the first chapters are successively dedicated to what we nowadays call 'gender relations' ('relations between the sexes, in the original; including basic information about the 'kinship system'), marriage (including preliminaries) and reproduction. Only then do the counterpoints of 'license' and 'erotic life' appear and culminate in data about '*morals and manners*', as well as a curious final chapter about an 'incest myth'. A more detailed analysis of the book's internal developments would reveal Malinowski's solution to the challenge that I see as the most typical of the presence of sexuality in the social sciences; the tension between embeddedness and disembeddedness.¹⁷

The structure of *Sex and Repression* reveals ever more clearly this tension between the practical and conceptual levels: under such an explicit title the author mostly presents a minute demonstration of the character of a matrilineal system of kinship and a long dialogue with psychoanalysis about the need to contextualize (to recognize the embeddedness, in my terms) the purported universal 'Oedipus complex'. The only issue showing actual ethnographic disembeddedness is child sexuality, addressed for the first time in ethnology.

The reading of Malinowski's diary, on the other hand, reveals how much the cosmological qualities of modern sexuality (cruciality/ interiority/ pleasure) constituted a structuring dimension of Malinowski's personal 'zest and meaning of life', as well as the extent to which they were present in an intense fieldwork experience. Here I will only mention the significant reference to his perception of an 'undercurrent of desire' (Malinowski, 1985: 102) running through all conventional social life (including his own). The typical *fin-de-siècle* tension between a 'primary instinct' and 'spiritual' or 'moral' force seems to present itself here as the basis of vital experience, including in the form of a belief in the capacity of propitiatory action of the latter over the former.¹⁸

¹⁷ I suggested elsewhere that this dilemma of the status of sexuality only reiterates Anthropology's structuring aporia, easily exemplified by the historical polemic between 'formalism' and 'substantivism' in economic anthropology (cf. Duarte apud Heilborn, 1999: 62): to what extent can the beings of reason characteristic of modern Western culture—which form the basis of our comparison of universalist character—be applied to the comprehension of other cultures?

¹⁸ On this topic, see A. Loyola's analysis of the 'plasticity of instincts' in Malinowski (Loyola, 1998: 21). It is interesting to bring this point close to Pulman's suggestive analysis of the contradiction between the rhetorical affirmation by Malinowski of the existence of 'sexual freedom' among the Trobriand Islanders and his recurring ethnographic data on an intense and constant social conditioning of its manifestations (cf. Pulman, 2003).

Malinowski's voluminous works on sexuality did not institute a tradition.¹⁹ What can be seen as a first 'tradition' in this sense is the one formed by F. Boas's disciples. Although there is no evidence of specific work on this theme in Boas's output, it can be understood that it emerges within the intellectual environment he opened up in the USA, with similar motives to those of Malinowski: romantic influence stimulated an awareness of subjective sensibility, including sexuality (and its implications of cruciality/ interiority/ pleasure).

Among Boas's disciples, Margaret Mead was the one who most explicitly dealt with sexuality. The title of her most famous work (*Sex and Temperament*, published in 1935) is, however, a misleading clue. In fact, the author deals fundamentally with differential constructions of the 'genders' in relation to styles of behaviors and typified psychological attitudes. There is plenty of information about issues that can be linked to sexuality throughout her book, but they have a subordinate role (cf. Mead, 2001). It was in other works, dealing especially with the socialization of 'gender' roles that the theme was addressed more directly (cf. especially Mead, 1923). The tension between embeddedness and disembodiedness was once again fundamental. The status of sexuality in Meadian ethnography is subordinated to the more structuring and permanent task of relativizing gender roles, inseparable from ideological battles for equality in North-American society.

The presence of sexuality is also noticeable in many other dimensions of the work of Ruth Benedict, or in *Naven*, by Gregory Bateson (a work that echoes the influence of Boasian culturalism,²⁰ among others). They already appear, however, as ethnography's inseparable dimensions of native life (alongside the holistic implications of the so-called 'monographic method'). The disembodiedness of sexuality as a category of thought appears in this field, possibly for the first time, subordinated to the principle of a kind of 'ethnographic re-embeddedness', that is, of the anthropological strategy of attempting to subvert the watertight classificatory systems of Western thought through a supposedly 'integral' presentation of other cultures (an echo of romantic emphasis on totality and subjectivity).²¹ Information on sexuality issues thus begins to permeate ethnological works in classic areas such as cosmology, kinship, reproduction, construction of the body, gender difference or ritual.²² We need to highlight, however, that the disposition to re-embedding cannot correspond to an effective embedding (at the level of ethnography):

¹⁹ Also in the sense that the recognition of the strategic significance of Malinowski's work for the anthropological tradition—as it tends to be seen today—does not usually involve his two works dedicated to sexuality.

²⁰ He published an article that was more explicitly about sexuality (*Sex and Culture*) in 1947, which was cited in Vance's (1995) thorough review of anthropological literature on the topic.

²¹ Gilberto Freyre's Boasian training is surely to be found behind the notable presence of sexuality in his first analyses of Brazilian culture (*Casa Grande e Senzala* [Freyre, 1943] was originally published in 1933).

²² Marcel Mauss' classic text on 'body techniques' (presented in 1934 and published in 1936; Mauss, 2005), although commonly considered as a precursory sign of anthropology's interest in sexuality, since it includes a paragraph about 'sexual positions' in the section on 'reproduction techniques' (cf. Loyola, 1998: 26), should in fact be included in the program of this integrating, totalizing disposition to which Mauss greatly contributed, at a theoretical level (*'l'homme total'*).

the observer possesses a classificatory grid in which sexuality is a discrete category (valued in a certain way) and any analytical act presupposes that condition.

It is necessary to mention, however briefly, the status of issues associated with sexuality in the direct tradition of German romantic sociology. Both in G. Simmel and in N. Elias we can recognize how sexual life is valued as an important dimension of the subjective forces at play in social dynamics. In Simmel this thematic is almost omnipresent under the phenomenology of forms of modern urban sociability (eros, love, dyad, seduction, prostitution, coquetry, etc.). Its presence, however, is always greatly embedded within the inclusive social processes under examination. Although one can recognize an increasing explicitness over the strictly sexual dimension of social loving bonds between his 1892 article about female prostitution, and the 1921-22 fragments (published posthumously) about 'erotic nature' (Cf. Simmel, 1984), the impression of embeddedness prevails—at least in comparison to later works.

With the second author (a long generation younger than Simmel), the direct influence of Freud causes a much more disembedded presentation of these issues, in the construction of his theory of the 'civilizing process'. Here one can see—as in the typical *fin-de-siècle* model—social controls (and progressively, self-control) contributing to the modulation of primordial human forces in sublimated expressions, devoid of their original aggressive or destructive potential (cf. Rohden, 2003).

An interest in a systematic evaluation of the issue in the work of Max Weber is accentuated by the discrepancy between the brevity of his two single texts which are explicit about sexuality (cf. Weber, 1991 and 1978), and the extension and depth of the analysis of the other behavioral ethics in his work.²³ Weber displays a trans-historic appreciation for 'sexual love' ('the greatest irrational force of life'—1991: 343), embedded in primordial forms of religion (the so-called 'orgiastic' ones). It remains a permanent source of tension with the general rationalization of the social world (and particularly religious rationalization). Many fundamental themes of religious ethics are thus defined, according to him, as barriers to sexuality, as in the obvious cases of the battle against prostitution and the defense of sacerdotal chastity. Here, Weberian analysis depends on an interpretation of the relation between sexuality and social life, which is strongly based on a theory of sublimation (more general in contemporaneous thought and certainly parallel to Freud's, on whose work he would only become interested later in his life). The confrontation between the ethics of mysticism and asceticism (as ideal types) and sexuality would therefore seem to result from a competition for the intimate forces of social subjects. A very rich point in his argument on sexuality is that this force can be opposed to rationalization, on the one hand, but it can also offer itself to rationalization, on the other. The result of the latter process would be 'eroticism', as

²³ On the relation between these characteristics of sexuality in Weber's work and the predominance of the rationality issue, as an expression of issues deriving from his own troubled personal life, see Mitzman, 1970 and Schwentker, 1996.

a 'consciously cultivated sphere, and therefore, non-routinized' (Weber, 1991: 343), which would characterize the superior stages of 'mature love of intellectualism' (ib id: 347). This is a picture of suggestive ambiguity, which would greatly gain from being compared to Foucault's analytical proposition to distinguish between *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*.

The status of sexuality within the Chicago School and its later developments is also highly ambiguous. Although pioneering work such as Paul Cressey's *The Taxi-Dance Hall* (originally an M.A. thesis at the University of Chicago) had already addressed the hot topic of prostitution in a sociological perspective in 1932, studies of urban problems, of 'social problems' and 'deviant behavior'—so inclusive in their remits—did not involve systematic research on sexuality until the 1970s.²⁴ An exceptional case to evoke is William Thomas, an eminent member of the first generation of the School, who published six articles on sexuality in his early career, between 1897 and 1907 (still between the period of the *Völkerpsychologie* learned in Germany and the institutionalization of sociology in Chicago), without any lasting influence in this area.

4. Social sciences and sexuality today

The publication of the first volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* in 1976 ('The Will to Know) is as significant to the topic of sexuality in the social sciences as Freud's work.²⁵ Saying this amounts to recognizing, firstly, that the imprint of romantic thought in Foucault landmark piece meant a fundamental affinity with the neo-romantic crisis of the 1960s—either because of the preceding importance of psychoanalysis (as theory and as a worldview) or because of the fundamental influence of Nietzsche's philosophical thought.

Among the signs of that crisis there was an explicit assumption of sexuality's attributions of cruciality, interiority and pleasure,²⁶ cited above. The so-called 'liberation of social behavior' represented the transposition of its disembeddedness to the sphere of generalized, public behavior. This is not the place to develop an analysis of this 'romanticism of the masses', but one can certainly highlight the importance of new, globalized media and the new levels of consumption of goods for sensorial satisfaction (cf. Duarte, 1999b). The process of 'modern consumerism', so finely analyzed by C.

²⁴ The influential volume *The Other Side*, edited by Howard Becker in 1964, contains two articles on homosexuality, for example (by John Kitsuse and John Reiss Jr.). Homosexuality is treated, however, as merely an instance of deviant behavior in the urban milieu. Brazilian urban anthropology, which started with Gilberto Velho's systematic research program, also involved issues of sexuality, which remained included in the broader field of deviance and stigma (cf. Velho, 1974). Under his supervision, pioneer theses were produced in this area, such as, for example, Guimarães (1977, published in 2004) and Gaspar (1984, published in 1985).

²⁵ C. Vance argues against Foucault's strategic significance as univocal in this field; reminding the concomitant weight of Anglo-Saxon activists (cf. Vance, 1995: 12).

²⁶ It is essential to recall here the influence of the philosopher H. Marcuse' and his *Eros and Civilization* (a discussion with Freud, mostly)—Marcuse, 1987 [1955].

Campbell (1995), reached its 20th Century apex—and an increasing and particular emphasis on the issue of ‘sexual satisfaction’ separated from the relational and moral conditions of its practice.²⁷

Foucault’s proposition was not restricted, however, to a repetition of romantic jargon. On the contrary, he demonstrated—against common sense—that sexuality was not a universal value, victim of an obscurantist repression within Western culture. It was rather a value obsessively cultivated, in reverence to what he came to term ‘sex-asking’. That was the first precise and inclusive historical-cultural analysis of the process that I have been calling ‘disembeddedness’. The ‘history’ of sexuality was, therefore, its ‘genealogy’—the demonstration of its ‘social construction’. As Foucault (1979) demonstrated so well, the modern construction of personhood depended on the emergence of ‘sexuality’ as a new instance of the subject’s truth—a paramount and subtle truth. Sex and power would not be at opposite poles, and, contrarily to what the repressive hypothesis proposed, modern Western societies could only very superficially be classified as anti-sexual. Indeed, under bourgeois moralism from the 19th Century onwards, sex was placed within discourse, as something that, coming from within the subject, had the power to tell the truth about the Person, and—when neglected—could lead to one’s ruin and the ruin of one’s family, race and nation. Combining the individual and the collective, the ‘sexuality apparatus’ proceeds by a generalized sexualization, with an intense focus on children, turning families into a permanent locus of observation, reflection and control of sexual behavior.

Due not only to Foucault’s great reflexive and historicizing stimulus, but increasingly in reference to it, in the 1970s we see a rather intense process of intellectual production on sexuality in its most diverse facets and levels. Given the breadth of this bibliography, here I will emphasize Brazilian contributions, not least because they echo the main investments in the international development of this field.

In Brazil, until the 1960s, only two authors had invested explicitly and systematically in the sociological analysis of sexuality: Gilberto Freyre (cf. Bocayuva, 2001) and Roger Bastide.²⁸ In both we find a disposition to deal with the ‘subjective’ dimensions of social life; the fruit of romantic influences, rather uncommon within Brazilian intellectual milieu (cf. Duarte, 2005; for a demonstration of this argument in R. Bastide). In both cases, their aim was to identify a relational ethos specific to certain cultural manifestations that characterized the Brazilian social universe (‘patriarchal culture’, for Freyre; ‘Afro-Brazilian

²⁷ The supposedly definitive overcoming of the challenge of sexually transmitted infections by the invention of penicillin, contemporaneous with World War II, is usually taken as a very relevant factor (cf. Carrara, 1996).

²⁸ Margareth Rago highlights the role of *O Retrato do Brasil* by Paulo Prado [1928], and *Macunaíma*, by Mário de Andrade [1928] as pioneers of what she terms as the ‘centrality conferred to sexuality within the discourse of historians interested in the scientific interpretation of Brazilian reality and the definition of national identity...’ (Rago, 1998: 178). Due to their clear essayistic or literary character, as isolated interpretations, albeit eminent ones, I will not address Prado’s or Andrade’s works here. I will limit this analysis to the two other intellectual projects cited above.

culture', for Bastide), as a dissonant counterpoint to the official norm at that time.²⁹ In their work, not only disembodiedness, but also the axis cruciality/ interiority/ pleasure can be clearly found in action. This axis is particularly tainted by its connotations of transgression or opposition to official mores (as an aspect of his own work in the intellectual field, in the case of Freyre; as a supposed and valued characteristic of the object of research, in the case of Bastide).

The conditions for the emergence of these works differ drastically from the ones that characterize post-1960s investments. Apart from the counter-cultural neo-romantic atmosphere mentioned above, one can recognize in the critical literature an emphasis on the significance of the progressing dissociation between sexuality and reproduction (especially, at first, contraception); of the battles for the application of the individualist ideal to the female condition; of the organized struggle for the enjoyment of non-conventional sexualities; and—finally, in the 1980s—of the advent of a new, unexpected, terrifying epidemic linked to sexuality (cf. Heilborn, 1999: 7-8). These empirical factors would radically reinforce sexuality's crucial role and the emergence of an institutionalized field of systematic sociological reflection on it. This field would even maintain a relationship—albeit a strained one—with the social movements that proliferated in this area during the same period.

In Brazil in particular, aside from these general circumstances, the challenge of sociologically interpreting marked intranational cultural differences would reinforce the will to study sexuality, not least because of its implications on social processes seen as broad national problems (health, birth rates, etc.) (cf. Heilborn, 1999: 42-43).

Within this bountiful post-1960s Brazilian literature, I will refer to four cases that I believe express (or are symptomatic of) the repercussions of the great conventions specified above on the national output in this field. Inevitably, all four presuppose thematic (or conceptual) disembodiedness and therefore address so-called 'sexuality issues' directly. Moreover, they actively thematize the challenge of 'ethnographic disembodiedness', by exploring different dimensions of sexuality in contemporary representations and practices in Brazil. One of the pieces is authored by a psychoanalyst, but its tone is in fact sociological, not least due to the author's fluency in social philosophy.

This first case is Peter Fry's article on the co-existence and relationship between two contrasting models of sexual practices among men in Brazil (cf. Fry, 1982 [1974]). The first of these two models refers to relations between 'active' and 'passive' men, where only the latter are considered 'homosexuals', thus becoming targets of the contempt, derision and potential violence that accompany this social role. The second model refers to relations between men who see themselves as *gay* ('homosexuals'), more on the basis

²⁹ Despite their great historic and epistemological distance, Roberto Da Matta's texts on sexuality in Brazil can be placed within this tradition (cf. Da Matta, 1983 and 1986).

of a 'subjective' identity than as a result of any specific behavior. The first model, which is considered the most traditional (and, thus, more present within the working classes, for example), would have been gradually replaced, progressively in modernity, by the second, which can be associated to the sphere of individualist representations, with its emphasis on equality (the article's title is revealing: 'from hierarchy to equality') and interiority. This is a case in which intranational cultural differences impose themselves as an issue, in a clear intersection with the issue of embeddedness. Fry describes a hierarchical model in which (homo)sexuality is immersed, that is, embedded in the broader code of gender relations; and surely does not represent the interiorizing disposition I have highlighted as an attribute of modern sexuality. Although sensual pleasure is certainly involved in the actualization of this model, we should note how it is subsumed by what can be termed a 'feeling of domination' (here, pleasure, both active and passive, involves experiencing a preferred specific position). It is also significant that, by preserving a supposedly ambisexual disposition by the active agent, (homo)sexuality remains included as a subset within the broader realm of reproduction (involving heterosexual hierarchical relations). The 'egalitarian' model, on the opposite pole, depends on a full development of the disembedding process and bears the characteristics of cruciality/³⁰ interiority/ pleasure. Below we shall see the structuring role of this opposition between 'behavior' and 'identity' in contemporary debates on sexuality.³¹

The second text is one I published myself in 1987, on 'sex and morality among the working classes' (cf. Duarte 1987). My main interest was in support of a broader argument that Brazilian working classes (or 'popular' classes) did not share the individualist premise of official, educated or hegemonic culture, as, in principle, the middle and elite classes did. My aim was to show that the experience of 'sex', or 'sexuality', within this cultural milieu, was indissociable from 'morality'. By demonstrating the fundamental embeddedness of the values and practices that modern thought associates with sexuality, I aimed to clarify the profound implications of such condition on the relation between modernizing dispositions and agents, on the one hand, and the working classes on the other (as I did elsewhere with the equivalent processes involving the access of 'the people' to resources such as psychoanalysis and modern citizenship). As in Fry's analysis, disembeddedness was prominent as a topic in the demonstration of the legitimate presence of the opposed model within Brazilian society.

The third contribution is Jurandir Freire Costa's proposal of the inconvenience of the social reification of the category 'homosexuality' (as an 'identity') and his defense of the category 'homoeroticism' (as a 'behavior') to designate same-sex sexual practices. His hypothesis in fact unfolds in two books (cf. Costa, 1992 and 1995), addressing

³⁰ The author explicitly discusses what I term the 'cruciality' of this issue, alluding to Freud: 'the notions of hierarchy and equality, when expressed in the language of sex, carve more deeply in people's convictions than any other language' (Fry, 1982: 112).

³¹ Fry's bibliography includes J. Weeks (1977), whose role as pioneer is highlighted by C. Vance (Vance, 1995).

historical, cultural and clinical arguments. His demonstration of the psychological suffering produced and accentuated by the incongruence between the broad vital condition of the subjects and the need to identify themselves as a 'homosexual' (with all the private and public implications of such an act) corresponds, in my own model, to a defense of a 're-embeddedness' of (homo)sexuality within the broad (psychological) vital fabric. Although intranational cultural boundaries are not an issue for him, there is for Costa a clear opposition between a traditional and a modern (disembbeded) mode of subject construction. His interest does not reside, as it did for the two previous authors, in speaking up for the legitimacy of an embeddedness that is present (and socially at hand), but in defending a therapeutic re-embeddedness (on the basis of arguments that historically evoke past embeddedness, or that ethnographically note a present, distant and alternative one).³²

The fourth case is Maria Luiza Heilborn's thesis (1992, published in 2004) on differential conjugality patterns among heterosexual, male and female homosexual couples (mostly within urban middle classes). The author shows that male homosexual couples present a pattern of relational behavior and expectations symmetrically inverse to the pattern of female homosexual couples' (heterosexual couples being in an intermediate position). The most interesting point of her analysis is that homosexual conjugal arrangements—apparently an alternative; contrary or even antagonistic to, hegemonic conventions—actualize, or are, indeed, almost a caricature of, the models usually associated to a male and a female sexual ethos: emphasis on the partners' individuality and on the 'sensorial' dimension of relationships in the case of men; emphasis on partners' relatedness and the 'affective' dimension of relationships in the case of women. This all points to a differential 'disembbededness' among the genders within our culture. The author interrogates the status of this process at length, based on several arguments regarding the structuring symbolic condition of such a challenging 'difference'.

The four cases above provide interpretations of Brazilian ethnographic material from a period that was critical for the institutionalization of sociological research in the area of sexuality. They all act out—I argue—the different facets of the academic conventions that I am attempting to delineate. They are an adequate basis for the topical analysis that follows.

In recent social science literature, sexuality appears subordinated to the polemics of 'constructionism', or 'theory of cultural construction', as C. Vance calls it (2005). By this we mean the disposition to consider all phenomena within the field as culturally instituted, rather than 'natural' facts modulated by culture. C. Vance terms the latter the 'model of cultural influence' (2005), which is certainly considered insufficient

³² Moreover, this programmatic attitude is a significant issue in the two final volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. Under the pretext of visiting the model of 'the care of the self' in classic Mediterranean culture, the disembbededness implied in modern *scientia sexualis* the author scrutinizes.

and out of date: 'sexuality is seen as a kind of universal Play Doh—on which culture works, a naturalized category which remains closed to investigation and analysis' (2005: 21). Notwithstanding, this latter model is a response to the permanent threat of 'essentialist' interpretations of sexuality (determinist physicalist models) (2005: 21). C. Vance also finds it necessary to distinguish between 'radical' and 'moderate' versions of constructivist theory, in circulation since the 1970s. The former considers all levels of the phenomenon as culturally constructed, included the levels of 'desire', 'impulse', 'pulse' or 'sexual appetite' (2005:17). The latter only sees as constructed the modalities of exercising such 'desire'. A. Loyola argues that despite its opportune de-naturalizing disposition, constructionism 'does not eliminate the problem of sexuality's invariants'. She invokes F. Héritier's denouncement of the solipsism intrinsic to the cult of singularity current in contemporary social thought (cf. Loyola, 1998: 31).

The way M. Heilborn and E. Brandão summarize the controversy of 'constructionism' is particularly interesting, in so far as this crosses over with 'disembeddedness'. When the authors state (while explaining the position of constructionism) that 'the sexual meanings and, especially, the notion of sexual experience or behavior itself could not be generalized since they are anchored in webs of meaning involving other modes of classification, such as kinship system and gender, age groups, social hierarchy and wealth distribution structures, etc.', they are in fact describing the ethnographic embeddedness mentioned above (cf. Heilborn and Brandão, 1999: 9). 'Constructionism' can, in fact, be viewed as the 'disembedded' way to discuss 'embeddedness'. That is, an anthropological estrangement from the 'naturalization' hegemonic in our culture, in a culturalization of compared phenomena.

Observing the controversy over constructionism in the contemporary field of sexuality studies thus allows us to better understand the contemporary conditions for the embeddedness I focused on throughout this article. Indeed, constructionism develops at a particular stage within the process of disembedding, as a radical response to the universalist, physicalist reduction to 'nature'. As stated above, the tradition of studies on sensibility bifurcates, on the one hand, via the rationalist, physicalist, biomedical route and, on the other, via the romantic, symbolizing, psychosocial route. The latter is structured initially as a 'model of cultural influence' (Vance sees it as dominant in the period between 1920 and 1990; cf. Vance, 2005:18). By then, however, the political demands of radical autonomy by identity movements, in relation to supposedly natural determinants, lead to a restructuring of academic arguments, expressed in the text by C. Vance so often cited in this piece. She is very clear about the opportunity and urgency of such an assertive attitude vis-à-vis biomedical essentialism (:24), always a threat to an increasingly pluralistic and welcoming understanding of human difference.

One specific point in the debate on the 'constructed' character of sexuality and its 'universal' qualities is the status of 'gender difference'. Although it can be treated as a broader issue than sexuality, it is inextricable from it. Many of the arguments involved

in this issue also refer to the supposed 'natural' status of all or part of such difference, based—in this case—mostly on the 'reproductive' condition of the female body. This is one of the most explicit manifestations of the egalitarian element in individualist ideology, its constant questioning of difference, as Heilborn and Sorj (1999) summarize. Two great opposing tendencies express this dynamic. The first uses the theme of 'domination', developed initially in our culture around 'class difference'. Here we find several more or less academic variants of feminism, reflected in often cited analyses by P. Bourdieu and M. Godelier (cf. Heilborn, 1999; Loyola, 1998). The other tendency points towards a symbolic understanding of difference. M. Heilborn exposed this clearly in her doctoral thesis, cited above. She refers to the pioneering aspirations of F. Héritier and M. Moisseff, and goes on to use L. Dumont's 'hierarchy' theory and R. Hertz' 'preeminence' theory (Heilborn, 1992). F. Héritier's argument of a 'differential valency of the sexes' is also referred to in A. Loyola's thematic review (cf. Loyola, 1999: 35).

Another 'phenomenal form' of the disembeddedness problematic recurrent in the field is the opposition between sexual 'behavior' and 'identity'. It was present in a crude form in the Brazilian texts reviewed above, but it has returned more explicitly (and under such designation) in recent literature (cf. Vance, 2005: 13; Heilborn, 1999: 40-41). The works of J. F. Costa focus exactly on this point, denouncing the transformation of 'behaviors' into 'identities' by virtue of the 'cruciality' and 'interiority' (in my own terms) active in our hegemonic culture. Although nowadays the topic is discussed especially in relation to homosexuality and the issue of *coming out*, it was already present, for example, in M. Mead's programmatic proclivity to denaturalize the association between gender identity and certain patterns of attitudes and behavior. The category of identity may appear in its substantive sense, as 'personal identity', but it can also prompt, in the lighter sense of 'social identities', a series of analytical tools for ethnographic or sociological work. I refer particularly to theatrical metaphors in relation to social manifestations of sexuality in the life of 'actors': sexual scenarios, sexual careers, sexual scripts, etc. M. Heilborn reminds us of Simon and Gagnon's (1973) pioneering work in this area.

The dimensions of 'interiority' and 'pleasure' in the configuration of modern sexuality have implications for some specific conventions. The first and most significant of these is the correlation between sexuality and 'intimacy' or 'privacy' (cf. Heilborn and Brandão, 1999: 8; Pierret, 1998: 66; Loyola, 1999: 35).³³ The ultimate status of this correlation is controversial even at this juncture. Crucially, it informs several properties of the concrete manifestations of sexuality as a category. The most immediate and revealing one refers to the sociological objectivization of sexual issues, especially in research investments within modern Western societies, both from the point of view of

³³ M. Bozon rightly recalls N. Elias lucid presentation of the privatization of sexuality in European culture within the wider 'civilization process' (Bozon, 1995: 40).

the researchers' own values and that of the 'natives' (cf. Bozon, 1995).³⁴ Here we can perceive an apparent contradiction between the level of our cultural manifestations that led Foucault to refer to an 'incitement to speak about sex', and another level that prompts a retraction of speech or even of reflection on the topic. Sociological and anthropological research involving sexuality thus tends to be hyper-reflexive when at a methodological level, since the quality of the materials is severely constrained by the legitimacy of its public flow within specific conditions (interactions that are intercultural, inter-gender, inter-class, inter-age group, etc).³⁵

Interiority as a dimension also involves another rich area of meaning and negotiation: the tension between 'sensual' and 'sentimental'. This has already been mentioned above, in relation to the four authorial investments presented as illustrations. This tension richly combines disembodiedness, interiority and pleasure. Indeed, it is a question of firstly thematizing the separation or autonomization of two levels of experience supposedly combined in their origin: a sensorial pleasure of sex (which we call sensual) and an affective or sentimental pleasure (which in our culture corresponds to the ideology of love) (cf. Singly, 1995). Disembodiedness is, here more than ever, a cultural construction—and any analysis around the occurrence of such a separation in our culture is tainted by ethnocentrism. The issue, however, is more serious, since it affects the deeper representation of a correlation between 'sensual' and 'masculine', on the one hand, and between 'affective' and 'feminine' on the other (cf. Heilborn, 1992). It is also expressed in a common trait of the ideology of love within our culture: the contradiction between feeling and money. Simmel's analysis was pioneering in this area, since he even dealt with the phenomenon of 'prostitution', hotly debated throughout Western history. It evidences, precisely, the challenge of the positive correlation between 'sexuality', 'interiority' and 'pleasure'. The good prostitute/bad prostitute trope, capable of undermining the adequate social construction of social subjects, tended to turn, in the 19th Century, into the opposite version, that of the good prostitute, embedded, able to sacrifice herself for the sake of collective morals, by force of the romantic imaginary of transgression (see Alexandre Dumas's *The Lady of the Camellias*, revisited in Verdi's *La Traviata*, Guy de Maupassant's *Boule de Suif*, and again in Chico Buarque's *Geni*). The dedication of social sciences to this inescapable topic is significant, from classics by G. Simmel, W. Thomas and P. Cressey to the prolific studies on 'commercial sex work' of our day (cf. Bozon, 1995: 46).

³⁴ For some researchers, their ethnographic experience seems to indicate that, in Western societies (or at least in metropolitan contexts) the embeddedness of the experience of 'sexual practices' is still the rule, despite the 'sexual revolution' and sex having been placed in discourse: 'la majorité des individus trouvent insupportable l'idée d'autonomiser les pratiques qui ont lieu pendant un rapport sexuel, de les séparer de leurs significations affectives. Cela entraîne un refus d'en parler précisément, qui est une indication précise sur la manière dont l'activité sexuelle est vécue et 'prise' dans les relations' ['most individuals find the idea of extricating the practices that take place in relation to sexual intercourse, of separating their affective meanings, unbearable. This idea embodies a refusal to speak with precision, which is a precise indication of how sexual activity is lived and "taken" within relationships.'] (Bozon, 1995: 42—my emphasis).

³⁵ There is even a topic rejection of the association between sexuality and intimacy in the context of a public phenomenon such as prostitution (understood as 'sex work')—cf. the idea of 'sexual but not intimate' in Miller (2000: 97).

The more abstract epistemological implications of the correlation between sexuality and pleasure are delineated on another equally relevant level. The apogee of romanticism corresponded to an apotheosis of the subject's individual life, with its characteristics of singularity (individual totality), interiority, intensity (creativity), potency and flux. F. Nietzsche gave us in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the most radical version of the ideal subject, supposedly in contrast to the 'slave' of the Western philosophical and religious tradition. To do so, he reified the Dionysian myth, as a mode of original pre-Socratic Greek embeddedness. In this myth, pleasure is not subordinated to the piecemeal and disembedded conventions of Western life; it corresponds to the explosion of pleasure, terror and ecstasy—whose potency and intensity we would have since been barred from. This powerful model, since it attempts to integrate the autonomous expressive and reflexive modes of modern Western culture (philosophy, art, science, etc.), influenced several imagistic developments of modern sexuality. The irreducible character of 'experience' is emphasized ever since, particularly in the context of those dimensions more radically revealing of individuality/ interiority, such as art, religion and sexuality. Even Foucault himself, so significant a figure for the development of this field, is an heir of this tradition, albeit in a less 'Dionysian' way than G. Bataille or M. Maffesoli, for example. Other contemporary developments are inspired by the philosophical program of G. Deleuze's and F. Guattari's *Anti-Oedipe*. This piece, specifically set up to paraphrase Freud's theories, is the most significant manifesto of contemporary romanticism, whose reinterpretation focused on the status of the social bond, making use of categories such as 'desire', 'libido' and 'sexuality'. An example of a Dionysian convention within our culture is N. Perlongher's study of young male sex workers in São Paulo (cf. Perlongher, 1987). This reference incidentally reinforces the extent to which the topic of 'prostitution' combines all the cultural threads specified here.

All the problems we have raised so far are reflected in the research strategies and organization of the field, today essential for the development of any academic undertaking. It also shows the dilemma of 'specialization' vs. 'integration'; that is, as a pragmatic version of the disembeddedness problematic. A. Loyola, for example, expressing a tendency certainly predominant within anthropology in relation to many topics, argues against specialization in sexuality studies (1999: 18), in detriment of their integration within several areas of proximal meaning (she herself cites gender studies,³⁶—1999: 22, and the love/passion issue—1999: 35). Heilborn and Brandão address the topic, including its methodological implications, as they deal with the 'non univocity of sexual meaning' (1998: 8). Likewise, C. Vance summarizes the fundamental relations between 'reproduction' (2005: 19-22), 'gender' (2005: 10) and 'identity' (2005: 12).

I have not focused on ethnological developments over the past few decades. The situation in that field of studies has very specific resonances: within it, the strategic re-embeddedness of the monographic method mentioned above prevails in a more

³⁶ See a detailed and thorough review of 'gender' in Scott, 1995.

systematic and regular way. The only work of weight that I know, within ethnology, addressing 'sexuality' in an explicit and detailed manner in the past few decades is that of Gregor (1985). Aspects of human life that can be classified as part of sexuality from a modern Western point of view are, nevertheless, obviously present in most works on the critical areas of kinship and reproduction (but not only there). Gregor himself justifies his willingness to focus specifically on sexual life as a means to access the embedded perception of a native culture: 'a description of Mehinaku sexuality is also an account of their culture' (1985: 3). It would be particularly interesting to compare the strategically relative stability of ethnographic re-embeddedness of sexuality in the past few decades with the emergence of the disembeddedness of other dimensions previously submerged in ethnographic totalities: 'emotions', 'feelings', 'nature', the child condition, etc.

The interaction between the dynamics of academic research, political activism and public policy on sexuality has, since the 1970s, been intense and somewhat challenging. The dialogue between those three perspectives can even be considered an essential strategic challenge, given the intensity of coexisting similarities and discrepancies therein. A whole new vocabulary, which advances conceptual disembeddedness and aspires to a political re-embedding,³⁷ has been forged in this interaction, both at the international and national levels: from dated categories such as 'sexual education', 'sexual satisfaction', 'sexual minorities', 'sexual violence' and 'sexual orientation', to recent ones, such as 'sexual freedom', 'sexual rights' (World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993) or 'sexual health' (International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994) (cf. e.g., Petchesky, 2000, and Miller, 2000).

Although one cannot expect a univocal conclusion to an article assessing the state of the art in one of the most dynamic frontiers of contemporary social sciences, I shall briefly summarize what I have considered as the primary conventions or lines of enquiry in this field. Despite the intense plurality of present literature,³⁸ I insist that it is primarily bound to the challenging scheme of disembeddedness/ embeddedness/ re-embeddedness I have described.

I would also reiterate, in order to address the idea that sexuality does not exist as an entity autonomous from the other forces of human life in other cultures or in different periods of our own tradition, that 'embeddedness' is a strictly modern construction,

³⁷ Note the expression of such re-embedding disposition in a recent programmatic document by PAHO/WHO: "*Sexuality refers to a core dimension of being human which includes sex, gender, sexual and gender identity, sexual orientation, eroticism, emotional attachment/love, and reproduction. It is experienced or expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, activities, practices, roles, relationships. Sexuality is a result of the interplay of biological, psychological, socio-economic, cultural, ethical and religious/spiritual factors. While sexuality can include all of these aspects, not all of these dimensions need to be experienced or expressed. However, in sum, our sexuality is experienced and expressed in all that we are, what we feel, think and do.*" (PAHO/WHO 2000: 6—my emphasis)

³⁸ The high incidence of edited volumes, often the result of conferences on sexuality, can be seen, I argue, as an index of such plurality.

which has revealed a strategic construction for much academic work in our disciplines. 'Re-embeddedness' is a more prospective construction, with two types of objectives: either to address the ethical and behavioral implications of some current specific manifestation (as in the case of homoeroticism for J. F. Costa); or to generate protocols for the consideration of sexual phenomena combined with other analytical dimensions (cf. footnote 36). In this sense, it constitutes an anti-disembeddedness rather than a re-embeddedness. That supposed combination is evidently an *ex-post* construct, which maintains its original conceptual isolation untouched. Another fundamental index of the distinction between disembeddedness and re-embeddedness processes is the degree of 'freedom' they involve. In the latter, the 'critical conscience' of a specific being (or subject) supposedly prevails—in symmetrical opposition to an original embeddedness, conceived as pre-critical, non-conscious. The willingness to consider sexuality issues in an 'interdisciplinary' vein, or to emphasize the 'corporeal' (as well as the symbolic) in the experience of sexuality, are attempts to re-embed, at a more abstract, reflexive level, a previously autonomized being.

The dimension of cruciality continues to operate at all levels, between the two opposite poles of physicalist essentialism and absolute symbolism (such as the ones of 'radical constructionism' and 'Dyonisianism' mentioned above). The topic of sexuality has been reinvested with cruciality (not least by its negation or its unexpected absence) in the many investments on new reproductive technologies, which are capable of taking the dissociation between pleasure and gender, as well as between pleasure and reproduction, to the limit (cf. Luna, 2002; for example, regarding the recent disembedding of 'reproduction' in relation to 'sexual intercourse' itself).

The topics of interiority and pleasure have been addressed in more detail. They involve, as highlighted, the critical foci of intimacy, privacy, enjoyment and transgression. I must also point towards the intense social negotiations around the 'normalization' of sexual practices that were objects of intense rejection or repression (such as adultery, masturbation, pornography, prostitution, sodomy and homoeroticism) and the 'criminalization' of others which used to be more embedded or invisible (such as 'sexual violence' and pedophilia). In all cases, new aspects and frontiers of social research materialize in view of disembedded sexuality, involving the values of individuality, freedom, equality and satisfaction—the crux of the specific cosmology in which we move and address ourselves.

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