

## Underbelly

Human sexuality is not comprehensible in purely biological terms. Human organisms with human brains are necessary for human cultures, but no examination of the body or its parts can explain the nature and variety of human social systems. The belly's hunger gives no clues as to the complexities of cuisine.

—Rubin

The problem with bringing up biology is that you're taken to somehow endorse it.

—Kipnis

Gayle Rubin's two canonical essays, "The Traffic in Women" (1975) and "Thinking Sex" (1984), were watershed moments for feminist and queer theory. In her interview with Rubin in 1994 in this journal, Judith Butler begins by noting that with these essays, Rubin "set the methodology for feminist theory, then the methodology for lesbian and gay studies" (62). And indeed, it is clear that Rubin's work was influential for some of the most important theorists of gender and sexuality who emerged in the generation following, including Butler herself. If we were to think of Rubin's contributions to feminist and queer theory in axiomatic form, we could say that in 1975 she argued for a disarticulation of biological sex from gender and in 1984 she argued for a disarticulation of the study of gender from the study of sexuality (Sedgwick, "Axiomatic"). In the 1994 interview, Rubin demurs from the presumption that she *instigated* these theoretical and political changes. Instead, she notes that both essays emerged out of an already existing set of concerns in her political and intellectual communities: the lack of an adequate analysis of gender in Marxism and the rise of antisex feminism. Rubin's essays set a new methodological tone by

clearly articulating a conceptual shift that her feminist and queer cohort already craved.

Rubin also mentions in the 1994 interview that there is no direct line connecting “The Traffic in Women” to “Thinking Sex.” Her political concerns in 1984 had arisen in a manner somewhat orthogonal to those that had motivated her in 1975: “I was trying to get at something different” (67). The sometimes stormy relation between a politics of gender and a politics of sexuality that followed from “Thinking Sex” (e.g., I. Halley; Wiegman) has tended to accentuate the ways in which these two essays, and their two constituencies, can be set apart. In this essay I want to travel along a different axis of analysis, one that binds “The Traffic in Women” and “Thinking Sex” more closely together. It is Rubin’s orientation to biological explanation (or, rather, her turn *away* from biological explanation) that interests me here. I will argue that, despite their differences, these two essays share a common commitment in relation to biological substrata and politics. I am turning to Rubin in order to explore one route by which biology became the underbelly of feminist and queer theory: how it became both a dank, disreputable mode of explanation and a site of political vulnerability. By examining the dynamics of antibiologism in Rubin’s influential essays, I am hoping to broaden the base of what can count as theory and what can count as feminist and queer innovation.

My argument orbits around Rubin’s curious assertion in 1984 that “the belly’s hunger gives no clues as to the complexities of cuisine” (276). This claim emerges early in “Thinking Sex.” It arrives as Rubin situates her work on sexuality and the work of people like Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks as “an alternative to sexual essentialism” (276). The specific form of essentialism that she targets is the idea that sex and sexuality are natural forms (i.e., fixed biological or psychological types) that exist prior to social life. Rubin rejects this formulation of sex and sexuality as her first matter of business: sexuality, she argues, “is constituted in society and history, [it is] not biologically ordained” (276). The sentences that immediately follow are instructive: they are emblematic of the fraught, contradictory efforts to inaugurate politics by holding sociality and biology apart. Rubin continues:

*This [social and historical constitution of sexuality] does not mean that biological capacities are not prerequisites for human sexuality. It does mean that human sexuality is not comprehensible in purely biological terms. Human organisms with human*

*brains are necessary for human cultures, but no examination of the body or its parts can explain the nature and variety of human social systems. The belly's hunger gives no clues as to the complexities of cuisine. The body, the brain, the genitalia, and the capacity for language are all necessary for human sexuality. But they do not determine its content, its experiences, or its institutional forms. (10)*

In the decades after this declaration, Rubin's political gesture (*for* the social and *away* from the biological) became second nature to feminist and queer critique, and the act of peeling biological influence away from social principles became critically habitual. Indeed, without such action, it has often been difficult to see how any argument can lay claim to being feminist or queer or, more broadly, political (Kipnis). In a surprising number of contemporary feminist and queer texts that have very little, or nothing at all, to do with biology, one of their core conceptual commitments is a repudiation of biological explanation. An antibiological gesture is often the ignition that starts the theoretical engine. At the beginning of *Split Decisions*, to take one example of a text that is directly indebted to Rubin,<sup>1</sup> Janet Halley provides a definition of her key terms: sex, gender, sexual orientation, sexuality. What she means by sex is "penis or vagina, testicles or ovaries, testosterone or estrogen and so forth" (24). She calls this sex<sub>1</sub>, to differentiate it from sex<sub>2</sub>, by which she means fucking. Sex<sub>1</sub> is tightly defined around discrete biological units: organs and chemicals. In contrast to this, Halley defines gender as "everything else" (24) that differentiates men and women: it is a "whole system of social meaning" (24). Following in the tradition set down in "The Traffic in Women" and consolidated in "Thinking Sex," Halley's definition of gender is significantly more capacious than her definition of sex<sub>1</sub>. Gender is a sizeable, intricate semiotic formation; sex<sub>1</sub> is narrow and inert and immaterial to the politics at hand. Importantly, Halley does not return to ponder the nature of these biological monads (penis, vagina, testicles, ovaries, testosterone, estrogen) that lie mutely at the beginning of her analysis. While her arguments about sex<sub>2</sub> (and its quarrels with gender) are not simplistically derived from, or reducible to, this antiorganic gesture, there is no question that her politics have been rendered legible and legitimate in part by that gesture. The importance of Rubin's work is not that she single-handedly authored this course of action, but rather that she was able to so lucidly articulate it and noiselessly embed it within larger, more urgent

arguments about gender and sexuality. While the political and theoretical questions raised in “Thinking Sex” are still being discussed, the potent rhetorical gesture that made these arguments viable (“no examination of the body or its parts can explain the nature and variety of human social systems”) has been less closely examined. Consequently, many feminist and queer theories still rely on this core contradiction: biology is both a prerequisite and politically irrelevant. It is peripheral to our political concerns, yet it bears down on them dangerously. It is to an examination of that problematic that this essay turns.

In recent years, there has been some restlessness about the need to rebuff biology: there is a growing feeling that the antibiologism on which feminism cut its teeth has now become politically and intellectually restrictive. Laura Kipnis, for example, in her comments marking the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of “The Traffic in Women,” voices her disquiet about how anatomy has come to be regarded in feminism: “[R]ereading the essay made me reflect that the scope of its influence—echoed in a range of feminist work that followed—has made it rather unacceptable to interrogate truisms such as ‘the body is a social construct’” (437). There are certain kinds of anatomical data (about bodily pain, for example) that Kipnis feels have been dismissed under the rubric of social constructionism, and she wonders if we might be able to talk about these biological experiences more candidly, less suspiciously. Yet, even as Kipnis articulates her fretfulness about the uses of anatomy in feminist politics, she is unable to fully dislodge the antibiologism that underlies that quandary. Wary of Rubin’s dissociation of anatomical facts from social arrangements, Kipnis nevertheless still sees biology as inflexible stuff: “[T]he problem with bringing up biology is that you’re taken to somehow endorse it [. . .]. Please understand that I *don’t* endorse these anatomical facts, I’m just stuck with them” (435–36). In both Rubin and Kipnis, there is an anxiety about biology’s power to determine form and control politics. Rubin wants to push biology away, Kipnis wants to draw it closer, but neither has yet displaced the shared fantasy that biological matter is sovereign, intransigent, bullying. Is there not a shared belief in Rubin and Kipnis that to engage with biology is to find ourselves stuck?

This essay does endorse biology. It vouches for the capacity of biological substance to forge complex alliances and diverse forms. It also examines how we got ourselves so trapped in relation to biology. If, as I argue, there is no intrinsic orthodoxy to biological matter (if it is as perverse and wayward as any social arrangement), why have we so readily

joined with conventional biologism to name biology deterministic? What conceptual payoff, what secondary gain, have we received for this? I begin by working through a small section of “Thinking Sex” to map out some of the conceptual and political effects of Rubin’s aversion to biological explanation. In particular, I am interested in how the belly figures in her attempts to forge new directions for feminist and queer theory. It is the belly that will be central to my Kleinian interest in biological phantasy in the latter part of the essay.

### *The Traffic in Biology*

Rubin’s claim that “human sexuality is not comprehensible in purely biological terms” is, I think, uncontentious if we keep the focus on the word *purely*. It is true enough that sexuality is not comprehensible in purely biological terms. But then again, nothing is comprehensible in purely biological terms—especially not biology itself. The work of feminist theorists of science (Anne Fausto-Sterling, Evelyn Fox Keller, Donna Haraway) has been able to show how the gene, or the neuron, or the hormone is from the beginning a biologically *impure* object. There are no entities or events, they argue, that can legitimately lay claim to being biological but not cultural or economic or psychological or historical. Let’s take tryptophan as an example. Tryptophan is one of the building blocks of serotonin, and by current neuroscientific reckoning, serotonin is one of the chemicals that modulates mood (Miller et al.; Pérez-Cruet et al.). Tryptophan is an essential amino acid, which means that the body cannot make it from scratch: it has to be obtained from outside the body. It has to be eaten. Bananas, milk, eggs, lentils, nuts, soybeans, tuna, and rice are all high in tryptophan. A diet dramatically low in tryptophan will leave that individual or that group unable to generate adequate amounts of serotonin. When folded in with other events (personal grief; cultural trauma; transgenerational poverty), low levels of serotonin may have significant, negative effects on individual and group well-being. Serotonin levels in the nervous system, then, are intimately tied to the belly and to cuisine. In this important sense, serotonin is a biological object impurely constituted through relations to other entities and events, each of which is also impurely and relationally fabricated. The traffic in tryptophan is one way that mood is regulated and modified and rehardwired within a wide variety of ontological systems.<sup>2</sup> One corollary of this argument—and this has received much less feminist attention than it deserves—is that there

are no objects or events or sexual identities or modes of embodiment or cuisines that can legitimately claim to being cultural but not also biological. Our social objects and structures emerge from systems of relationality that include, among other things, neurons and hormones and genes. How could it be otherwise? We have been perhaps too concerned with which party gets the upper hand in determining behaviors, traits, and proclivities, when we could have been exploring the ornate intra-actions that build the material universe (Barad).

What Rubin seems to be getting at, however, is not so much an argument about what kind of biology (pure/impure) there could be in our theories of sexuality. Rather, at this moment, she is consolidating the notion that in feminism and in queer theory there should be no biology at all. This political principle was so widely shared that in 1984 it needed little more than a paragraph or two to be elucidated. Rubin confidently claims that biological substrata (our brains, in this instance) do not determine the content, experience, or institutional form of sexuality. Crucially, she makes this claim without consulting empirical evidence. That is, she does not examine a neurological theory of sexuality; the reader of “Thinking Sex” does not know what the neuroscience data might disclose about the nature and variety of human neurological systems. This neglect of empirical evidence is a curious turn for Rubin. It violates her own strong commitment, beautifully articulated in the 1994 interview with Butler, that data are the lifeblood of robust feminist research:

*There needs to be a discussion of what exactly is meant, these days, by “theory,” and what counts as “theory.” I would like to see a less dismissive attitude toward empirical work. There is a disturbing trend to treat with condescension or contempt any work that bothers to wrestle with data [. . .] it is a big mistake to decide that since data are imperfect, it is better to avoid the challenges of dealing with data altogether. I am appalled at a developing attitude that seems to think that having no data is better than having any data, or that dealing with data is an inferior and discrediting activity. A lack of solid, well-researched, careful descriptive work will eventually impoverish feminism, and gay and lesbian studies, as much as a lack of rigorous conceptual scrutiny will. (92)*

While feminists have engaged carefully with, say, ethnographic data to build new theories of gender and sexuality, we have been less enthusiastic

about data from the natural sciences. In relation to that kind of data we remain almost uniformly disparaging.<sup>5</sup> Halley, for example, uses the words *purported* and *supposedly* to describe conventional (dimorphic) theories of biological sex: “supposedly irreducible fact” and “purported bodily differences” (*Split* 24). The disdain she has for narrow, morally policed definitions of gender is also mobilized in relation to biology. But where her scorn for gender is expansive (it occupies the entire book), her rejection of biology is massively abbreviated. Short and sharp, the adjective *purported* and adverb *supposedly* stand in for a shared ground of feminist and queer skepticism about biological data and biological theories.

It is this twin movement that interests me most: the expansion of feminist and queer argument, on the one hand, and the massive contraction of interest in biological substrata, on the other. My central claim is this: feminism has presumed a kind of biology—a biology that is fixed, static, and analytically useless—as one way of securing its critical sophistication. It is the second part of this claim that carries the real punch. It is not simply that feminism often misreads biology (that we misunderstand it or ignore it, both of which are in themselves fairly trivial events). I have a stronger claim to make: these misreadings and repudiations of biology have had the particular effect of making feminism *smart*. These misreadings and repudiations are not obstructions. On the contrary, they have been very constructive: they have helped build our theories and affirm our politics. Consequently, our theoretical innovations (like everyone else’s theoretical innovations) have at their heart an unacknowledged and effective repudiation. My goal, then, is not to read Rubin as having fallen into error, for, after all, the refutation of bigoted biological theories of gender and sexuality has been, and remains, vital. Neither am I campaigning for a feminism that would refuse to make such a repudiation, as if good intentions and prudence would wash the difficulty away. Rather, I am interested in thinking about the extent to which certain mainstream modes of feminist theory require these repudiations: if we want to engage more directly with biological data, what kinds of feminist and queer theory would that breed?

The implications of feminism’s conventional antibiologism are neatly folded inside Rubin’s cogent declaration that “the belly’s hunger gives no clues as to the complexities of cuisine.” What I think Rubin means here is that physiological data about hunger will tell us nothing about the production and consumption of food. Contractions of the stomach walls, changes in blood sugar, liver metabolism, hormonal cascades, nervous

activity: these things give us no sign, no evidence, no insights into the rituals of eating or the histories of cooking. She made the same claim back in 1975, when she noted that “hunger is hunger but what counts as food is culturally determined and obtained” (“Traffic” 165). Two effects (at least two) ripple out from this kind of statement. First, the trade between nature and culture is greatly diminished, if not halted altogether. Biological systems and cultural systems become autonomous, each operating according to its own internal logic: one “gives no clue” about the other. The conceptual foundation for this division was formalized in the “The Traffic in Women,” where Rubin defines the sex/gender system as “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity” (159). That is, biology is passive substrate: “raw material” (165). Kinship—the core conceptual device in that essay—is described as “the imposition of cultural organization upon the facts of biological procreation” (170–71), and psychoanalysis explains “the transformation of the biological sexuality of individuals as they are enculturated” (189). This notion of torpid materiality would be brought into question by feminist theorists of embodiment in the 1980s and 1990s, but those theories often entrenched our primary suspicions that biology is treacherous material even as they breathed life into “the body” (Wilson, *Psychosomatic*). Thus Kipnis’s sense of being stuck.

Second, Rubin’s separation of belly and cuisine is not analytically neutral. This gesture attributes complexity to cultural production (to cuisine), and it attributes simple-mindedness to biological events (to hunger). This sets in motion a whole series of other rifts that have become routine in feminist theory. Most of us trade in the difference between things that are complex and things that are reductive, things that are political and things that are conventional, things that are theoretical and things that are empirical. Is it not within such systems of distinction that feminism has forged much of its analytic sophistication? Joseph Litvak makes a compelling argument against this tendency to oppose the sophisticated and the vulgarly literal. He argues that, despite appearances, sophistication is intimately connected to basic bodily appetites, particularly culinary and sexual cravings: “In talking about sophistication, one needs to keep all these terms—the culinary, the erotic, the linguistic, the economic—in play; [because there is] a certain tendency toward abstraction in academic commentary, the [terms] that risk dropping out first are the more literal or corporeal ones rather than the more symbolic or social ones” (8). Rubin’s work could hardly be said to lack corporeal or erotic interests. But it does

lack interest in bodily matters (hunger, mastication) deemed less cultured. In 1975, Rubin argues—in a somewhat utopian vein—that “a full-bodied analysis of women [. . .] must take everything into account” (“Traffic” 209). However, the transition from 1975 to 1984 actually sees her taking less biology into account. Without question, there is a proliferation of sexualities in 1984 (transsexuals, fetishists, sadomasochists, transvestites, pederasts, and prostitutes: a gathering of the clans of perversity), but there has been a dramatic narrowing of the biological character of politics. A surprising amount of biology is at play in the 1975 argument. By 1984, however, there is little left: the role of biology has been cheapened to being simply the marker of the place away from which analytic elegance and political acuity have evolved. The key difficulty is not simply that these two essays narrow the stuff that we might see as political material; it is also that this narrowing provoked a rapid development in the sophistication of our theoretical projects.

Rubin’s wish for less biology rather than more is clearly signaled at the end of the 1975 paper: “I personally feel that the feminist movement must dream of more than the elimination of the oppression of women. It must dream of the elimination of obligatory sexualities and sex roles. The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one’s sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love” (“Traffic” 204). It is this peculiar wish to be rid of anatomy that I have explored elsewhere (see “Gut”). Using the work of the psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi, I have argued that anatomy, no less than a text, an image, an identity, a population, an institution, or a law, can be a site of striking complexity and can be the source of many different kinds of political projects. One of Ferenczi’s most famous analysands was Melanie Klein. I want to turn now to her work to see how anatomy (specifically the hungry belly of an infant) may be politically and intellectually compelling.

### *The Biology of Phantasy*

One response to the charge that feminism got smart by refusing biology is that we might take more interest in the debris that sophisticated feminist theory leaves in its wake: the concrete, the literal, and the reductive. Who better for this task than Melanie Klein? Who else immerses us in the concrete, the literal, and the reductive with greater effect than Mrs. Klein and her followers? One of the things that will strike

psychoanalytically informed readers when they first encounter Klein is that her work is hardly theoretical at all. In comparison to the gorgeous conceptual machinery that is Freud's writing, Klein's work is much more phenomenologically concrete in its examples and much less concerned with theoretical finesse. A theoretically sophisticated reader might be alarmed by the repetitive, reductive interpretations of clinical material that form the core of Klein's work. But in truth, she does most of her best work with simple analytic pairs: love and hate, introjection and projection, envy and reparation, part objects and whole objects, phantasy and reality.

To be engaged with Freud is to be in love with theory. To be engaged with Klein is to be intrigued by what it might be like to get by with hardly any theory and to be thrown back to data that seem too raw. To work with Klein is to learn how one can build very compelling accounts of the world with theoretical tools that are surprisingly blunt. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls Klein's work "chunky," and she means this as a compliment. She compares Klein's corpus to the kind of oversized doll she (Sedgwick) had once demanded as a young child: "I needed [. . .] something with decent-scale, plastic, resiliently articulated parts that I could manipulate freely and safely [. . .] where the individual moving parts aren't too complex or delicate for active daily use" ("Melanie" 627–28). It is this aspect of Klein's work that provides Sedgwick with another route for intellectual engagement: "As someone whose education has proceeded through Straussian and deconstructive, as well as psychoanalytic, itineraries where vast chains of interpretive inference may be precariously balanced on the tiniest details or differentials, I feel enabled by the way that even abstruse Kleinian work remains so susceptible to a gut check" (628).

Sedgwick notes that in comparison to the Freudian landscape that is populated with representations, the Kleinian landscape is populated with things (objects). She calls this orientation in Klein a "literal-minded animism" ("Melanie" 629). The advantages of this literal-mindedness are nowhere better played out than in the Kleinian account of phantasy in the very young infant. Phantasy at this age is coterminous with concrete physiological states. Specifically, it is events in the infant belly that are a central part of Klein's theory of mind. She recognizes, of course, that the infant uses its whole body to take in the world: "[T]he child breathes in, takes in through his eyes, his ears, through touch and so on" (291). Nonetheless, the gut is a privileged site for the operations of infant phantasy. Where Freud's theory of mind speaks to the importance of the surfaces and openings of the body in early infancy (the mouth and the anus), Klein digs down into

the center of the body, into the stomach: “The first gratification which the child derives from the external world is the satisfaction in being fed [. . .]. This gratification is an essential part of the child’s sexuality, and is indeed its initial expression. Pleasure is experienced also when the warm stream of milk runs down the throat and fills the stomach” (290).

Klein disputed the idea that this experience is autoerotic or narcissistic in the sense that the infant takes itself as its own object, oblivious to the world. The infant is certainly internally directed, for Klein, but not in a solipsistic way. Rather, the infant is in intensive relations to internal objects—to parts of the world, parts of its body, parts of other people that have been taken in through the gut. Right from the beginning, other things are a core part of me. Right from the beginning, I am impurely, relationally constituted.

The infant’s mind emerges out of phantasmatic relations to these incorporated shards: are these objects good or bad, do they hurt me or soothe me, do I want to take them in or spit them out? Attachments that emerge at a later date have as their prototype these early relations to the things the infant has swallowed. The hunger pangs of the infant’s stomach are crucial to the development of mind and the capacity to be attached: they are among the first stimuli the newborn will negotiate, and the enormous psychic force of an empty stomach or a full stomach is the reason why Klein and her followers claim that phantasy is present from birth. Where hunger is, there phantasy shall be. The gnawing of hunger inside the body will be felt as a persecutory object that is inside me: not inside me in an abstract kind of way (an idea in my head), but a destructiveness that is literally inside my belly. The belly is home, then, to both good and bad objects in concrete, animistic ways. Put another way, we could say that the belly is psychically alive to the infant. The first mind we have is stomach-mind.

Susan Isaacs—one of Klein’s key supporters—notes that at this time the difference between a phantasy and a physiological process is moot for the infant. Quoting her fellow analyst Clifford Scott, Isaacs notes: “[T]he adult way of regarding the body and the mind as two separate sorts of experience can certainly not hold true of the infant’s world. It is easier for adults to observe the actual sucking than to remember or understand what the experience of sucking is to the infant, for whom there is no dichotomy of body and mind, but a single, undifferentiated experience of sucking and phantasying” (86). Eventually, the infant begins to distinguish between sensation and feeling, phantasy and reality, inside and out. The composite existence of “sucking-sensing-feeling-phantasying” becomes “gradually

differentiated into its various aspects of experience: bodily movement, sensations, imaginings, knowings, and so on and so forth” (Isaacs 86), although these events are never fully autonomous from each other at any time in life. At a particular tipping point in the infant’s development, the stomach-mind cedes ground to the capacity for abstraction. Robert Hinshelwood calls this moment, hyperbolically, “a glittering moment in the history of each individual” (352). At this point, Hinshelwood notes, something crucial changes in mind-body relations: “[P]hantasies *about* the bodily contents stand for the actual primary bodily sensations” (38). That is, metasomatic capacities (the ability to think about the body, to represent the body, to stand at an affective distance from the body) become part of the mind alongside rudimentary somatic states. The body no longer has to act out what cannot be tolerated: it can be cognized and spoken and reformulated. Pleasures, too, can be transmuted from primal sensations to socially viable events. As Hinshelwood continues, however, these various psychosomatic states, hitherto cohabiting in the mind, are organized into a conventional developmental schema in which higher symbolic and cognitive expertise arises out of, and leaves behind, a primordial soup: “Subsequently, the infant emerges into the social world of symbols in which phantasies are composed of non-bodily and non-material objects. The movement from a concretely felt experience of an object, constructed in unconscious phantasy, to a non-physical symbolic object is a major developmental step” (38). What tends to drop out of this picture, as Litvak might remind us, is the psychic force of concrete bodily states. There is a tendency to proceed as if higher capacities are autonomous from their primitive bedrock and as if the bedrock itself has no phantastic capability.

As I read Hinshelwood, I am reminded again of Rubin’s conviction that the move away from the biological and toward the social epitomizes a more evolved political attitude. In this kind of developmental schema, somatization tends to be read as regressive and infantile; in this kind of intellectual schema, the soma is the very last thing with which you would want your politics implicated. Moreover, the Kleinian soma is a different kind of animal from the Freudian body with which feminist theory is already familiar. The classical hysterical body is the very embodiment of the social world of symbols and its vicissitudes. Kleinian somatization, in contrast, is more psychotic than neurotic. In these cases, the soma concretizes mental activity and affect states that are cut off from symbolic or social expression. For this reason, many clinicians have claimed these bodies and these patients are unanalyzable. This is the kind of inflexible,

disorganized, angry somatization that we would see most frequently these days under the rubric of narcissistic disorders.

Is there a way to think about the stomach-mind that does not wrap us up entirely in orthodox expectations about development and its unanalyzable failures? And can this be done while understanding that existence in the social world of symbols is vital to human life? There are moments in Isaac's defense of her work on phantasy where she insists on the Ferenczian character of infant life: she describes how phantasy is latent in impulses, sensations, and affects; how phantasy is an implicit talent of biological substrate; and how phantasy is phylogenetically bequeathed to the infant by those members of the species who came before.<sup>4</sup> At these moments, Kleinianism is at the very edges of scientific respectability. Most often Kleinians have drawn back from this precipice and have secured for themselves more orthodox epistemological foundations. Perhaps, paradoxically, a contemporary scientific theory may be able to keep the Kleinian character of biological substance alive. The curious datum that 95 percent of the body's serotonin is in the gut, for example, could be a rallying point for politically astute theories of somatic action. If the governance of serotonin is the job of the new generation (i.e., those in use since 1989) of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), and if 95 percent of our serotonin is in the gut, and if SSRIs are distributed systemically through the gut and viscera before crossing the blood-brain barrier, then much of the work of antidepressants is to be had in accessing the phantastic Kleinian substrata of the stomach-mind (Wilson, "Gut"). In a strange turn of events, a concrete and reductive theory of depression makes visible to us a body that phantasizes as it symbolizes as it hungers. Rather than a biological theory being the very antithesis of politics, perhaps, in this instance, it could be the means of turning anew to feminist accounts of the body. It would be my argument that our politics are at their strongest when belly and phantasy are seen to cohabit. We seem to be at our greatest disadvantage when we rely too fully on distinguishing between something complex (seemingly, cuisine) and something rudimentary (seemingly, the belly). Instead, we might become more interested in how belly and phantasy map each onto the other; and we might be able to think of their imbrication as something other than a configuration where one dominates or determines the other. These kinds of stomach-minds could be mapped under the name *kinship* (following Rubin), and they could—with a little bit of extra bother—also be mapped under the name *serotonin*. It seems to me that a feminism that could think of biology in the mode of kinship-serotonin-phantasy

affiliations would be a very powerful, engaging, and intellectually hungry beast.

*The analysis in this essay was first drafted for a master class at Monash University in February 2008. It was later expanded for the 2008 Feminist Theory Workshop at Duke University. My thanks to Steven Angelides, Annamarie Jagose, and Robyn Wiegman for their good humor and their smarts. Wendy Chun gave me astute feedback at the Critical Theory Today seminar at the Pembroke Center, Brown University, in April 2009.*

ELIZABETH A. WILSON is Professor of Women's Studies at Emory University. She is currently working on a project ("Gut Feminism") on depression, feminism, and biology.

## Notes

- 1 "The Traffic in Women," Halley notes, is "the locus classicus of the crucial feminist idea—I rely heavily on it in this book, and so does everyone in this lineage from here on out—that sex<sup>1</sup> and gender are distinguishable. Rubin powerfully demonstrated that the distinction would give feminism a remarkable new range of explanatory powers" (114–15).
- 2 I borrow the term *rehardwired*, with delight, from Berlant.
- 3 A notable exception to this tendency is the meticulous work of Vernon Rosario. His impressive concatenation of hormonal, activist, and theoretical concerns ("Quantum") is exemplary of the kind of new political ground that can be broken once biology is brought into the game as a valued player:  
*The form of sex that emerges out of this quantum cloud of biological and environmental effects is at once culturally defined and personally discovered [ . . . ] [T]he complex new molecular genetics*
- 4 For example: "It has sometimes been suggested that unconscious phantasies such as that of 'tearing to bits' would not arise in the child's mind before he had gained the conscious knowledge that tearing a person to bits would mean killing them. Such a view does not meet the case. It overlooks the fact that such knowledge is *inherent* in bodily impulses as a vehicle of instinct, in the excitation of the organ, i.e., in this case, the mouth" (Isaacs 86).

## Works Cited

- Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Neither Monstrous nor Pastoral, but Scary and Sweet: Some Thoughts on Sex and Emotional Performance in *Intimacies* and *What Do Gay Men Want?*" *Women and Performance* 19.2 (2009): 261–73.

- Halley, Ian. "Queer Theory by Men." *Duke Journal of Gender, Law, and Policy* 11 (2004): 7–53.
- Halley, Janet. *Split Decisions: How and Why to Take a Break from Feminism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006.
- Hinshelwood, Robert. *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1991.
- Isaacs, Susan. "The Nature and Function of Phantasy." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 27 (1948): 73–97.
- Kipnis, Laura. "Response to 'The Traffic in Women.'" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34.1–2 (2006): 434–37.
- Klein, Melanie. "Weaning." *Love, Guilt, and Reparation, and Other Works 1921–1945*. New York: Free Press, 1975. 290–305.
- Litvak, Joseph. *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.
- Miller, H., et al. "Acute Tryptophan Depletion: A Method of Studying Antidepressant Action." *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 53 (1992): 28–35.
- Pérez-Cruet, J., T. Chase, and L. Murphy. "Dietary Regulation of Brain Tryptophan Metabolism by Plasma Ratio of Free Tryptophan and Neutral Amino Acids in Humans." *Nature* 248 (1974): 693–95.
- Rosario, Vernon. "Quantum Sex: Intersex and the Molecular Deconstruction of Sex." *GLQ* 15.2 (2009): 267–84.
- Rubin, Gayle. "Sexual Traffic." Interview with Judith Butler. *More Gender Trouble: Feminism Meets Queer Theory*. Spec. issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6.2–3 (1994): 62–99.
- . "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Ed. Carole Vance. Boston: Routledge, 1984. 267–319.
- . "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. Ed. Rayna Reiter. New York: Monthly Review, 1975. 157–210.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Axiomatic." Introduction. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Durham: Duke UP, 1990. 1–63.
- . "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.3 (2007): 625–42.
- Wiegman, Robyn. "Dear Ian." *Duke Journal of Gender, Law, and Policy* 11 (2004): 93–120.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. "Gut Feminism." *The Question of Embodiment*. Spec. issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 15.3 (2004): 66–94.
- . *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.