

INTRODUCTION

Queer Anthropology

Foundations, Reorientations, and Departures

In 2010, the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists (SOLGA)—a section of the American Association of Anthropology (AAA)—officially changed its name to Association for Queer Anthropology (AQA). I was on the task force charged with navigating this transition; at the annual meeting and on the listserv, there had been vigorous debate, mostly around the word *queer*. To some, *queer* could never shed its origins as a slur or insult; to others, it could never adequately or appropriately describe those to whom it was applied. Many more embraced the change, in part to reposition the section away from what seemed to some an identitarian and exclusionary *lesbian* and *gay*, and in part to align with newer queer and trans anthropology. Indeed, some recall a (transphobic) thread in the debates concerning the place of *trans* in LGBT/queer anthropology.¹ AQA'S new mission statement emphasized intersectional queer and trans anthropology, linking

“culturally-constructed categories of gender and sexuality” with “race, class, disability, nationality, colonialism and globalization.”

Was this the start of queer anthropology? Indeed, no, not by any reckoning.

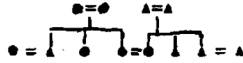
The first use I have found of the phrase “queer anthropology” was in 1994, in Florence Babb’s published reflection on teaching her course, “Teaching Anthropologies and Sexualities.” Babb distinguished between two approaches to the anthropology of sexuality: one more ethnocartographic (in Kath Weston’s [1993] term) that sought “descriptions of sexual variability” in cultures around the world; the other a *queer* “analysis of the social construction of sexuality” (Babb 1994, 126). For Babb, *queer* meant “nondominant sexualities that have been marginalized,” and *queer anthropology* was anthropology “informed by queer theory and analysis and attentive to cultural difference” (1994, 122–23).

Babb’s reflections provide one snapshot of early 1990s queer anthropology. One year before, in 1993, in a review of what she was still ambivalently calling “gay and lesbian anthropology,” Kath Weston took a stand for queer anthropology, writing, “In the wake of the deconstruction of homosexuality as an analytic category, the field I have called ‘lesbian/gay studies in anthropology’ looks much more like queer studies than gay studies as conventionally conceived. If lesbian and gay take a fixed sexual identity, or at least a ‘thing’ called homosexuality, as their starting point, queer defines itself by its difference from hegemonic ideologies of gender and sexuality” (1993, 348).

Babb and Weston were not alone—many anthropologists embraced the new *queer*. In 1993, for instance, a mere two years after the first use of “queer theory” in print, the T-shirt SOLGA sold at the AAA annual meeting was emblazoned with “QUEER THEORY” above a “cute little queer kinship chart,” available in black, white, “pretty in pink,” or “lesbian purple” (see figure I.1).

As it emerged in the 1990s across the humanities and humanistic social sciences like anthropology, queer studies heralded a profound skepticism toward stable, cross-historical or cross-cultural identity categories (like “gay”). It advanced a multifaceted analysis of sexuality as it intersected with multiple modes of power, from the most granular level of subject formation to the broadest level of global power and political economy. In anthropology, scholars deconstructed sex, gender, and sexuality across cultures; took up antifoundational critiques of the categories “gay,” “lesbian,” and “homosexual”; queried the multiple modes of subjectivity that may or may

1993 SOLGA T-SHIRT: QUEER THEORY



ALSO AVAILABLE: THESE NATIVES CAN SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

INDICATE BELOW: **DESIGN (QUEER THEORY, OR THESE NATIVES)**
 SIZE (MED, LG, XL, XXL)
 QUANTITY (1-?)

<u>colors</u>	<u>design</u>	<u>size</u>	<u>quantity</u>
basic black (white lettering)	_____	_____	_____
basic white (black lettering)	_____	_____	_____
pretty in pink (white lettering)	_____	_____	_____
lesbian purple (white lettering)	_____	_____	_____

- I.1 SOLGA's T-shirt order form for the 1993 "QUEER THEORY" shirt and the 1992 "THESE NATIVES . . ." shirt. (*Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Newsletter* 16[2]: 32)

not rest on sexed and gendered difference; and theorized the challenges of linguistic categorization as concepts, representations, and practices moved across borders.

The first flush of queer anthropology in the 1990s includes Martin Manansan's (1993, 1995) postcolonial and transnational challenge to "gay" Filipino subjectivities; Gloria Wekker's (1993) analysis of nation, diaspora, and class in Afro-Surinamese *Mati* work; Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis's (1993) oral history of working-class butch/fem lesbians in Buffalo, New York; Rosalind Morris's (1994) critique of Orientalism and Thai sex/gender systems; Deborah Elliston's (1995) antifoundational critique of the category "homosexual" in Melanesia; Lawrence Cohen's (1995) articulation of desire against hetero/homo categorization, inflected through a West/rest binary in India; and David Valentine and Riki Anne Wilchins's (1997) analysis of the queer visibility politics of trans embodiment in the United States (see also Rofel 1999; Kulick 1998; Boellstorff 1999).² It includes work on the queer erotics of fieldwork (Newton 1993; Seizer 1995) and volumes such as *Taboo* (Kulick and Willson 1995), *Queerly Phrased* (Livia and Hall 1997), *Female Desires* (Blackwood and Wieringa 1999), and Ellen Lewin and William Leap's canonical trilogy, especially the slightly later *Out in Theory* (2002)—even when their editors explicitly rejected the term *queer* (e.g.,

Blackwood and Wieringa 1999, 20–21; Lewin and Leap 2002, 10–12). In the 1990s, *queer*, for many anthropologists, seemed to offer a new way to consider the “wide range of genders, sexualities, and oppositional identities that are emerging in various post-colonial contexts,” as Deborah Amory put it (1997, 10 see also Bustos-Aguilar 1995; Povinelli 1994).

Fast forward to today: it is safe to say that queer anthropology has arrived. From courses to book prizes to AQA itself, queer anthropology is a dynamic and growing subfield of contemporary anthropology in and beyond the United States—even as the book you are reading is the first edited volume of its kind.³ Yet, as the AQA debate might suggest, queer anthropology has its own contested histories and formations, inclusions and exclusions, digressions and deviations. “Far from being a monolithic field of inquiry,” Martin Manalansan writes, queer anthropology is “characterized by messy genealogies, incomplete and uncomfortable transitions, divergent strands, and contentious debates” (2016, 596). This volume invites you into the diverse foundations, reorientations, and departures shaping queer anthropology today.

Unsettling Queer: Orientation Points

Why *queer*? As a student of queer theory in the late 1990s, I am partial to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s classic definition of queer as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” (1993, 8). My own investments in queer were shaped in relation to these possibilities, excesses, and dissonances—elaborated by José Esteban Muñoz’s reading of queer as “that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing,” “the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality for another world” (2009, 1).

Queer was meant to point beyond or beside identity—specifically gay and lesbian—and instead signify transgression of, resistance to, or exclusion from normativity, especially but not exclusively heteronormativity. From Michael Warner’s insight into queer as “resistant to regimes of the normal” (including the “normal business of the academy” [1993, xxvi]) to Cathy Cohen’s rereading of queer as a site of racialized and classed deviance (1997), queer focalizes the problem of normativity—sexual/gen-

dered, but also the boundaries of racialization, embodiment, class, and nation—in relation to shifting social institutions. The paradoxes of queer’s antinormativities emerge in important analytics like Lisa Duggan’s “homonormativity” (2002), Robert McRuer’s “crip theory” (2006), Jasbir Puar’s “homonationalism” (2007), Scott Morgensen’s “settler homonationalism” (2010), C. Riley Snorton’s *Black/trans* (2017), and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s rereading of the human in an anti-Black world (2020), to name just a few.

Thinking this way, *queer* is less an object of study (a *who* we might study) than an analytic (a *how* to think sexual/gendered norms and power). It is not shorthand or a substitute for LGBTQIIA+ but rather a lens, a provocation, a horizon, or a way of reading. As David Eng, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz note, there is no “proper subject *of* or object *for*” queer studies; it has “no fixed political referent” (2005, 3; see also Eng and Puar 2020). Instead, queer is epistemological: a desire to trouble taken-for-granted assumptions and normativities. As I’ve written elsewhere, queer, like anthropology, is a project of defamiliarization—it seeks to provide an opening or way to think differently (Weiss 2016a). And yet, even as it has this aspirational orientation toward new, Muñozian queer horizons, queer continues to refer back to its core foundational objects: sex, gender, and sexuality. In this way, queer anthropology can be read both as a critique of gay and lesbian anthropology and as its continuation, especially when it centers same-sex desires, gender transgression, and other forms of queer anti- or nonnormativity rooted in gender and sex/sexuality.⁴

This volume does not straighten out what *queer* can or should mean. Rather, it embraces these divergent threads as what makes queer anthropology *queer*—an intellectually dynamic area of inquiry. *Unsettling Queer Anthropology* is grounded in queer’s challenge to identitarian logics that take sexuality as a singular and self-evident category; and it insists that racialization, gender, Indigeneity, nation, and disability are co-constitutive formations. The following chapters show how the *queer* in queer anthropology has served as a provocation to reinvigorate canonical anthropological problematics like kinship, subjectivity, language, and human “nature,” while also querying/queering the boundaries of anthropology’s proper forms, methodologies, and objects of study. Queer is (or can be) a call to reimagine normative anthropological ways of knowing—to center analyses of how power moves through sex, gender, and sexuality as contingent historical, political, and embodied cultural formations, shaped and reshaped by colonialism, capitalism, and globalization.

Even as *Unsettling Queer Anthropology* celebrates three decades—or more—of innovative work in queer anthropology, it also grapples with the ways that queer anthropology—like queer studies and anthropology more broadly—rests on white supremacist and colonial epistememes. As Jenny L. Davis and Krystal A. Smalls write, “As long as our field(s) do not account for anti/Blackness and anti/Nativeness, for colonialism and slavery, for White Supremacy, we are not only analytically and theoretically incomplete but we also enable the perpetuation of these foundational structures by default. So, the question is not, ‘are they connected?’ but ‘how?’ and ‘since they are connected (and always have been) how do we (anthropologists) dismantle what we have helped create?’” (2021, 277).

This volume takes up queer anthropology—our field and its histories— as a site of *both* queer innovation and possibility *and* coloniality and white supremacy. Some of the threads of this history can be glimpsed in the story of the T-shirt that SOLGA sold in 1992, the one proclaiming THESE NATIVES CAN SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES (see figure I.1). The slogan was part of SOLGA’s vibrant protest of a panel at the 1992 AAA in San Francisco called “AIDS and the Social Imaginary,” which featured “star” anthropologists yet excluded LGBT/queer anthropologists, people with AIDS, and AIDS researchers—in other words, those who had dared study AIDS, sexuality, and queerness before it was acceptable (facing years of homophobia and scholarly delegitimation, including career precarity, harassment, professional scorning, even suicide). As the SOLGA cochairs at the time, Jeffrey Dickemann and Ralph Bolton, wrote in a letter to the AAA president and executive director after the meetings, “The elitism of famous anthropologists arrogating to themselves the role of legitimizing the issues of AIDS for anthropologists, in ignorance or disregard of all the work already undertaken and in process by qualified AIDS researchers, is unconscionable. To our knowledge, none of the participants listed had done work on AIDS, nor were any of the impacted populations represented. . . . Where were the voices of the ‘natives’ in this session?” They continue:

It is hard to imagine that in 1992, a session addressing social problems that impact Native Americans or African Americans would have been planned without some participation of members of those groups. Most members of our profession have finally recognized that the “informant,” as well as the specialist, has a critical contribution to make to our discourse. But gays and transgendered members of the

discipline have not yet been granted that recognition, a fact reflected in the discrimination against us in anthropological professional life. The “natives” in this case were not only in the discipline, and at the Meetings, but in the very room. And once again we were denied the opportunity to speak for ourselves.⁵

Looking back at this controversy today, it is striking how some of the same problems of power and knowledge are with us, still: from the heteronormativity and white saviorism that bolster anthropology’s “star” system; to how whiteness (as queer exceptionalism) undergirds analogical slides from Indigenous to Black to queer; to questions of who might speak “for” whom, and whose knowledge counts as “expert.”⁶ Grappling with this history might prompt us to explore how the ways we produce our knowledges, even in politically motivated, marginalized, sensitive, and breathtakingly innovative fields like queer anthropology, can continue to work with and within white supremacist and colonial logics that normalize some forms of objectifying and colonial representation, even as they contest others.

In 1993, in the aftermath of the panel and protest, Deb Amory curated a series of reflections on “the future” of queer anthropology in SOLGA’s newsletter, asking, in part, “What would a queer critique of anthropology look like?”⁷ *Unsettling Queer Anthropology* takes up this question thirty years later. In the context of newly (re)vitalized calls to reckon with the white supremacy and settler logics that continue to shape our discipline, this volume considers both a queer critique of anthropology and a critical queer anthropology.

What does that queer critique look like?⁸ In the chapters that follow, although each chapter takes a critical approach to queer anthropology, there is no single line on what that might mean. Some contributors reach back to what Jafari S. Allen (2016) has called the “decolonizing stream” of Black, Indigenous, feminist/queer anthropology, which finds an important precedent in Faye V. Harrison’s (1991) volume *Decolonizing Anthropology*. Some explore the edges of what Savannah Shange (2019) has called “abolition anthropology,” a call for an anthropology so transformed as to no longer *be* anthropology. Some take up antifoundational critiques of “anthropology of” epistemologies, queering ethnographic method and practice to refuse knowledge projects of extraction and the objectification of our “objects of study.” Some explore what queer anthropology looks like when it centers different political-intellectual genealogies, including Black feminism, transnational postcolonial theory, Indigenous critique, crip of color critique, and

feminist nature/culture theory. Others consider a queer anthropology that might refuse English and Euro-American hegemonic epistemes; follow Black theory to reconsider relationality; foreground anthropology's political responsibility to our interlocutors and communities; take up queer, postcolonial, and Indigenous critiques of the nation-state; and highlight vitality or the unruliness of life against static or objectifying epistemologies. Decades after Kath Weston's crucial critique of "ethnoscapes," which marked a turn toward a *queer* anthropology (see below), many authors critically reappraise problematics of difference/sameness: how queer anthropology wrestles with its legacy of providing exotic/erotic difference that might be thickly described for others.⁹ These are not discrete endeavors; many contributors take up both/and to surface other ways of doing anthropology that might be in better alignment with our political, ethical, and intellectual desires, and perhaps do (more) justice to our objects of study (see Wiegman 2012). *Queer* and *anthropology* take many forms in the chapters that follow, but each contributor, in different ways, seeks to disrupt the normalized racism and settler colonial logics that undergird our epistemologies—to unsettle the grounds of a white- and US-centered theory and practice of anthropology.

In my invitation to each contributor, I shared my desire for a volume that would center critical, queer of color, and decolonizing approaches to queer anthropology.¹⁰ While the resulting volume explores the contours of queer and trans lives in Cuba, Canada, India, China, Brazil, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Iran, Turkey, Ghana, Haiti, Wet'suwet'en First Nation, and the United States, among other locales, my focus was not on representational regional expertise, world atlas-style. Instead, I invited anthropologists whose work attends to the ways sex, gender, and sexuality retain multiple relations to power—including the normative operations of the discipline, which often marginalizes critical perspectives from Black, Indigenous, and other anthropologists of color, and from scholars working in postcolonial, feminist, crip, and trans studies. And even as I hoped to refuse queer anthropology as usual, I also hoped each chapter would reimagine crucial topics and analytics—not so much to "review" them as to rethink what *queer* can do—in ways useful, provocative, and generative to budding and experienced queer anthropologists alike. *Queer* as topic, theme, approach, method, way of reading, way of being, refusal, politics, ethics, pleasure, field of contestation—these multiple, overlapping models of *queer*, grounded in feminist, postcolonial, Indigenous, Black, and queer of color critique, unsettle the grounds of queer anthropology. The resulting

volume shows how *queer* and *anthropology* both contest and perpetuate colonialism, racism, capitalism, xenophobia, heteropatriarchy, ableism, and cisnormativity. Its chapters illuminate queer anthropology's brilliance, its interventions and insights, even as they emphasize the need for queer anthropology to continue to reckon with legacies of white supremacy, settler colonialism, extractive modes of knowledge production, and normative assumptions of embodiment within anthropology and beyond it.

From “Flora and Fauna” to Queer: Queer Anthropology’s Prehistories

Before we dive in, however, I’ll back up to give a brief history of queer anthropology’s prehistory—the crucial context for this volume. Following Andrew Lyons and Harriet Lyons’s (2004) history of the anthropology of sexuality, I start the story before the founding of anthropology proper, with Victorian-era social evolutionism and scientific racism, in which fantasies of “primitive sexuality” and concerns about “miscegenation” guided colonial governmental, ethnological, medical, and missionary reports about “sexuality.” What Kath Weston characterized as the “flora and fauna” approaches of colonial-era anthropology (1998) located the core of inferiority in the “exotic sexual customs” of purportedly “primitive” Others (Fitzgerald 1977, 386). As anthropology institutionalized in the academy between 1880 and 1910, what Michel Foucault (1990) would call a *scientia sexualis* took up and transformed earlier understandings of “primitive sexuality.” Work such as Edward Carpenter’s (1914) *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, or “Homosexual Love” (1917) by Edward Westermarck (Bronislaw Malinowski’s teacher) simultaneously challenged a singular understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality *and* relied on and bolstered colonial racist typologies that projected ideas about promiscuity, inversion, and morality onto Others elsewhere.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a brief flourishing of interest in sexuality and gender included well-known scholarship like Margaret Mead’s (1928) *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Malinowski’s (1929) *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, and E. E. Evans-Pritchard’s 1920s research on woman-woman marriage among the Azande (published in 1970), as well as work by others such as Ruth Benedict, Ruth Landes, Georges Devereux, and Cora Du Bois. As “flora and fauna” approaches waned, cross-cultural surveys

of sexual behavior emphasized sexual variation beyond Euro-American norms. Not yet an autonomous “field,” studies of “sex” or “sexuality” (often as gender) appeared in a range of approaches—British functionalist, American culture and personality, ethnopsychiatric, structuralist—sometimes, as Fitzgerald put it, as “titillating bits of sexual esoterica . . . to spice up an otherwise ‘dry’ research report” (1977, 391). Simultaneously groundbreaking, conceptually sophisticated, essentialist, and colonialist, this work tended to view “homosexuality” or “sex drive” as universal and transhistorical in essence (see Vance 1991), even as it attended to a range of “exotic” sexual customs or attitudes in ways paradigmatic of what Michel-Rolph Trouillot called the “savage slot” as a foil of “Western” sexuality, morality, and civilization (2003).

Lyons and Lyons describe the 1930s through the 1960s as a relatively quiet period, during which studies of sexuality (and gender) were “subsumed into other projects,” such as kinship or culture and personality studies (2011, 5). Vance (1991) and Weston (1998) similarly argue that, in this period, sexuality became an unrecognized center of canonical “non-sexual” anthropological topics—a form of what queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) would later characterize as queer’s minoritizing/universalizing dynamic. In these years, those who focused on the study of (homo)sexuality or trans/gender expressions more centrally—especially LGBT anthropologists—were subject to professional scorn and virulent homo- and transphobia.

It was in this context that the organization now called AQA was founded. As AQA notes on its website:

Folk narratives place the very first beginnings at San Diego, in 1970. It was an era when academic conventions across the country were characterized by protests, walk outs, sit ins and demonstrations. In 1970, women’s rights, Chicano rights, and homosexual rights were all topics of resolutions at the AAA annual meeting. According to reports, Clark Taylor stood in the business meeting, chained to another man, and announced a resolution on homosexuality.

In 1971, three resolutions were passed, demands that the AAA recognize the “legitimacy and immediate importance” of research on homosexuality and stand against homophobia (“homoerotophobia”).¹¹ Informal organizing gave way to the formal founding of ARGOH—Anthropology Research Group on Homosexuality—in 1979. ARGOH’s first convener and chair was Kenneth

Read; its mission was to advance and legitimate research on homosexuality and counter the heteronormativity of the discipline. While founded by and dominated by men for its first few years, early members included luminaries of lesbian/queer and feminist anthropology: Ellen Lewin, Esther Newton, Carole Vance, Unni Wikan, Liz Kennedy, Gayle Rubin, and Evelyn Blackwood. Blackwood was the first woman cochair of ARGOH; her groundbreaking (1985) collection *Anthropology and Homosexual Behavior* sought to advance anthropological analysis of the “cultural construction of homosexual behavior,” noting that substantive “ethnographic and theoretical analysis” was lacking—especially of women and lesbians (2).

Through these interventions, the cross-cultural study of homosexuality, long treated with a combination of prurient titillation and scholarly contempt, became, in the 1980s, both a (quasi)valid research area within anthropology and potentially useful outside of it, fodder to “directly address contemporary gay political issues” at home (Lyons and Lyons 2004, 293–94). Illustrating the prevalence of same-sex sexualities and gender nonnormative roles through cross-cultural comparison had an impact on nascent gay and trans activism and political imaginations in the United States (and beyond). And yet, as Kath Weston argues, some work in what would become “gay and lesbian anthropology” in the 1980s tended toward “ethnography”: “looking for evidence of same-sex sexuality and gendered ambiguity in ‘other societies,’” an approach that treated concepts like “homosexuality” as stable, portable, and universal (1993, 341). At the same time, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, there were important debates within gay and lesbian anthropology on the relationship between gender and sex/sexuality, feminist critiques of the anthropology of sexuality, and warnings about the relevance of Euro-American terms like “homosexuality” to non-Western societies.¹² Lyons and Lyons locate the transformation of ARGOH to SOLGA (the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists) in 1987 as part of this shift away from the more clinical, “objective” or “scientific” language of “homosexuality” toward a more political stance informed by feminist and gay and lesbian rights movements.

We might pause here, at the dawn of the 1990s and what would become queer anthropology. As Weston writes, the 1990s saw the “deconstruction of homosexuality as an analytic category,” leaving questions about what it is we mean by *sexuality* and *gender* as deeply cultural classifications that connect to power, normativities, erotics, practices, and more (1993, 348). As an aspirational intervention, *queer* was meant to break from what

Weston called ethnocartography and what Tom Boellstorff calls the “logic of enumeration”—the presumption “that concepts name preexisting entities and relations” (2007b, 19). Both are knowing-as-owning colonialist epistemologies (ethnocartography is mapping as knowing; the logic of enumeration is naming as knowing); and both regularize the anthropologist’s gaze on an “Other” as object and frontier: “data on the half shell,” as Weston put it, “pure content” awaiting our discovery and collection like “driftwood on the beach” (1998, 21). *Queer*, instead, opens up sexuality itself as a contested field of power and knowledge. As we consider the transition from ARGOH (a more detached study *on* homosexuality) to SOLGA (a more political and identitarian society *of* lesbian and gay anthropologists) to, finally, AQA (an association *for* queer anthropology), we see a move into queer as not only a break with “on” and “of,” but also into the aspirational desire “for” a queer(er) anthropology.

And yet one danger of rendering over one hundred years into a linear capsule history is that it might seem to present queer anthropology as the apex of progress—a shining future in which we have left behind the racisms of our past. What of colonial-era object-making, complex transits between “us” and “other,” or the use/abuse of comparative exotica today? Where are the political investments in *queer* working with, and against, this history? How and when must we revisit earlier work to find resonances and legacies with which we must still reckon?

Kadji Amin (2020) argues that as long as we seek to move beyond queer theory’s formative exclusions without working through them, we will be doomed to repeat them. I think, too, about Michael Hames-García’s critique of queer theory’s canonical origin story, one that consolidates the whiteness of *queer* by locating Black, postcolonial, and women of color interventions as derivative or peripheral, rather than preceding and formative. Amin and Hames-García foreground how genealogies are political and how revisiting their legacies might give rise to different futures. And so although I have provided a more or less canonical history of queer anthropology—moving from colonial era pre-anthropology flora and fauna, to anthropology of homosexuality, to gay and lesbian anthropology, and then finally to queer—that straight narrative is bent in the volume that follows. Contributors attend to different critical genealogies that open other possibilities for queer anthropology’s futures—sometimes leaning in to the break that *queer* seeks, sometimes finding *queer* elsewhere and otherwise.

Volume Overview

This volume has three sections: (1) “Foundations: Queer Anthropology’s Contested Genealogies”; (2) “Reorientations: Queering the Anthropological Canon”; and (3) “Departures: Reworlding Queer Anthropology.” The three chapters in “Foundations” explore queer anthropology’s multiple and contested genealogies, including legacies often obscured. They consider histories of queer anthropology beyond or beside canonical frameworks, as well as the displacements and racial and colonial legacies that queer anthropology has inherited. The five chapters in “Reorientations” put a queer spin on some of cultural anthropology’s most enduring topics and thematics: kinship and family, cross-cultural comparison, language, culturally constructed gender, performance/performativity, the culture concept and the transnational turn, the scape/scale of globalization, nationalism and geopolitics, and human rights and the state. They show both what queer anthropology has contributed to these canonical topics and how queer critique might reorient, challenge, and transform them. The six chapters in “Departures” experiment with queer reworldings and relations beyond the normative parameters of ethnography. They consider how a queer anthropology grounded in Black/queer study, trans vitalities, crip epistemologies, more-than-human queer ecologies, Indigenous sovereignty and land activism, and the unfinished edges of the infra-ordinary might reshape ethnographic praxis toward community accountability, horizontality, and collaboration with wider webs of relation beyond the field, the discipline, or the university.

Foundations: Queer Anthropology’s Contested Genealogies

The volume opens with Jafari Sinclair Allen’s “The Anthropology of ‘What Is Utterly Precious’: Black Feminist Habits of Mind and the Object (and Ends) of Anthropology.” Allen shows how the Black intellectual tradition, and in particular radical Black feminist and lesbian intellectuals, artists, and activists, offer an alternative methodology, analysis, and theorization of anthropology as what Marlon Riggs called “the unending search for what is utterly precious.” This is an embodied, intersectional, ethical ethnography outside of the disciplinary enclosure of professionalized “Anthropology” and its Eurocentric canon, in solidarity with Black queer lives across borders.

The next chapter is my own, “Queer Theories from Somewhere: Situated Knowledges and Other Queer Empiricisms.” I reframe the canonical origin story of queer anthropology by disrupting the hierarchical binary of queer theory (from the humanities, and purportedly universal, unsituated, portable) and ethnographic data (from the social sciences, and particular, emplaced, a-theoretical) to show not only that queer theory depends on prior queer anthropology, but also that queer theory’s disavowal of empiricism has effaced both its own historical situatedness and its accountability to its subjects and sources. Aiming to dislodge the universalist aspirations that produce queer theory’s canonical white- and American-ness, I read a genealogy of situated, queerly empirical theory back in to queer theory.

The final chapter in “Foundations” moves further back into the social science of sexuality. Scott L. Morgensen’s “Intimate Methods: Reflections on Racial and Colonial Legacies within Sexual Social Science” shows how, even as a primitivist, racializing, and colonialist ethnography gave way to a deracialized modernist ethnography, the “intimacies” of sexuality, social science, race, and colonialism (in Lisa Lowe’s terms [2015]) continued to produce a white, gay, Western/Euro-American liberal sexual subject as the subject of freedom. Morgensen explores the obscured intimacies of racism, white supremacy, class, and colonialism that condition and inflect the very formation of the category “sexuality” and its modern subject.

Each “Foundations” chapter tells a different part of the story of queer anthropology. Allen explores how Black gay and lesbian radical intellectual traditions in and outside the academy that predate the 1990s “queer turn” might offer better collective, ethical, and aesthetic models for anthropological attention, engagement, and representation. My chapter challenges the displacements embedded in the commonly told origin story that queer anthropology emerged from anthropologists’ application of 1990s humanities-based queer theory to our particular ethnographic locales, and rereads queer theory as grounded in queer empiricism. Morgensen’s chapter shows how queer anthropology must reckon with the racial and colonial epistemological legacies of sexual social science methodologies that produce modern sexual subjectivity as what Roderick Ferguson has called the “one dimensional queer” (2019). Taken together, the section reexamines queer anthropology’s foundations, displacing some canonical histories and legacies to enact other formations.

Reorientations: Queering the Anthropological Canon

The five chapters in “Reorientations” explore queer critiques of canonical topics and approaches in anthropology. The section starts from the insight that sex and sexuality have been central to anthropology since its inception; as Cymene Howe writes, “anthropology has always been a little bit ‘queer’” (2015, 752). Yet if sexuality/gender is at the heart of foundational anthropological concepts like kinship, subjectivity, age grade, religion, morality, primitive versus civilized, and cultural difference/variation (see also Weston 1998), “one could also argue that the discipline of anthropology has been quite un-queer” (Howe 2015, 752). Howe is pointing to the illegitimacy faced by scholars who work more directly on queer and trans topics (as discussed above), but we might wish to consider as “un-queer” the normative orientations of these fields of study: often heteropatriarchal, cisnormative, ablebodied, ethnocartographic or voyeuristic, colonialist, white, and American- and Western-centered. This section asks: How might queer critique reorient these canonical areas?

The section starts with Lucinda Ramberg’s “Kinship and Kinmaking Otherwise.” Ramberg gives new life to the “tired” topic of kinship, rethinking relatedness beyond the intelligible. Beginning from the insight that the classificatory schemas of kinship have long been central to discourses of “civilization,” Ramberg denaturalizes a white, colonial, and heterosexual matrix to illuminate kinmaking as a social and material practice intimately intertwined with race, gender, and sexuality. Putting contemporary interventions from Black, feminist, queer, postcolonial, and Indigenous critiques into critical conversation with canonical figures, Ramberg reorients the study of kinmaking as a site of both exclusion and queer worldmaking.

The next chapter, “Pronoun Trouble: Notes on Radical Gender Inclusion in English,” by Tom Boellstorff, outlines—in a playful, provisional list form—a queer/feminist argument for replacing *she* and *he* pronouns with the epicene (nongendered) *they*. Boellstorff queers one of anthropology’s longest-standing analytics—the comparative method—to denaturalize a political horizon dominated by English-language hegemony. Combining intralinguistic comparison (including the long history of the epicene *they* in English) and interlinguistic comparison (between English and the many epicene languages, including Chinese, Finnish, Ojibwe, and Indonesian), Boellstorff’s provocation brings structural linguistics into conversation

with queer/feminist theory to challenge contemporary gender exclusionary politics.

Brian A. Horton's "Stylization in the Flesh: Queer Anthropology and Performance" takes up performance as the stylized and embodied cultural construction of gender. Thinking across performance studies, queer of color critique, and anthropology, Horton emphasizes self-presentation and -determination: how people endure, play with, make beauty from, and live categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Following queer of color critique, Horton calls for accountability to the material lives of our interlocutors, rejecting the discursive figuration of dissident genders and sexualities (like the *travesti*, *hijra*, or drag queen) as symbols of transgression, and instead reorienting queer ethnographers toward performance as a grounded repertoire of embodied critique.

In "Worldly Power and Local Alterity: Transnational Queer Anthropology," Ara Wilson unpacks the "transnational" in transnational queer studies, considering the spatial scales of sexual/gendered variation beyond ideas of "culture" as discrete, local, or bounded by nation-states. Wilson explores the multiplicity of queer and trans life on the ground—attending to scales, spaces, and circulations, including the archipelagic, diasporic, and regional. Against work in queer studies that risks reproducing Western hegemony *through* a critique of its domination (via flows of Euro-American capital, media, activism, etc.), she considers transnational queer alterity beyond both Western *and* non-Western hegemonic constructions.

The final chapter in this section, Sima Shakhari's "Queer States: Geopolitics and Queer Anthropology," focuses on the civilizational narratives of international human rights and refugee regimes. Shakhari shows how the geopolitical deployment of sexuality in the name of purportedly universal LGBT rights reifies liberal and Eurocentric sexual/gender identities, vilifying "queered" third world states as unruly and sexually perverse. They call for a queer postcolonial anthropology of the state that decouples "queer" from LGBT identity and attends to homonational geopolitics, revealing the contradictions of interventions (such as sanctions and wars) that, in seeking to straighten queered states in the name of LGBT rights, punish their most marginalized populations.

The chapters in "Reorientations" highlight the contributions queer anthropology makes to foundational anthropological problematics: kinship, comparison, gender, culture, difference, nationalism, geopolitics, West/rest. They open up fresh new interpretations of these thematics by reorientating

them toward feminist and queer of color, postcolonial, and transnational/Global South critiques grounded in non-Euro-American, non-white epistemologies of queerness. As a whole, the section decenters purportedly universal concepts and configurations of difference while advancing a distinctively *queer* anthropology.

Departures: Reworlding Queer Anthropology

The six chapters in “Departures” queer ethnographic epistemology, considering relational practices, accountabilities, and worlds beyond anthropology’s normative model of knowledge production: the anthropologist (distanced, disciplined, autonomous, expert) and their (human, bounded, subordinate) object of study. The section starts with “Black Queer Anthropology Roundtable: Speculations on Activating Ethnographic Practice in and for Community,” curated by Shaka McGlotten and featuring Black queer anthropologists Lyndon Gill, Marshall Green, Nikki Lane, and Kwame Otu. In this wide-ranging conversation about art, activism, and Black study (Moten and Harney 2013) as abolitionist practice, McGlotten, Gill, Green, Lane, and Otu consider the possibilities of a Black queer anthropology beyond the enclosures of the neoliberal academy and beyond ethnography as a method of capture/consumption of queer, racialized difference. They look toward a Black/queer nonuniversality: open to the world, in relation with and accountable to community.

In “The Subject of Trans Lives and Vitalities: Queer and Trans Anthropological Object-Making,” Elijah Adiv Edelman challenges “transgender” as an object of study in academic research and global LGBT rights activism. Edelman argues for “trans vitalities” as a model of participatory, activist, and coalitional research that centers lived experience at the intersection of race and class as the basis for knowledge, and forefronts the messy contradictions of trans life-making, rather than neat, researcher-derived categories like “the trans community.” Arguing that research and activism “on” trans play a powerful role in categorizing lives as either livable or disposable, Edelman argues that trans knowledges must benefit and be held accountable to their subjects.

Erin L. Durban’s “Doing It Together: A Queer Case for Crippling Ethnography” takes up anthropology’s ableism, noting that while disability sometimes shows up as an object of study or theoretical insight, traditional ethnographic fieldwork relies on a normate bodymind and an ableist, white,

colonialist model of anthropological knowledge production: “a single researcher using their own hypermobility to navigate informants’ immobilities.” Durban makes the case for a more promiscuous queer/crip methodology, providing examples of accessible, mixed-ability, collaborative ethnography. They argue that challenging *how* we do our work, making space for queer disabled anthropologists, is a necessary step toward a decolonial, antiracist, anticapitalist, feminist, *and* anti-ableist anthropology.

In “When Our Tulips Speak Together: More-Than-Human Queer Natures,” Juno Salazar Parreñas considers multispecies ethnography as a way into sexual/gender diversity among nonhuman life forms: queer sexualities, trans embodiments, and asexual modes of reproduction among tulips, apes, slime mold, starfish, bears, primates, and more. Parreñas urges queer and feminist anthropology to move beyond a suspicion of biology and instead consider how thinking with nonhuman life forms opens up new critiques of hetero- and cisnormativity. Parreñas pursues queer ecology without biological essentialism, an approach to more-than-human life that revels in the queer diversity of life forms on earth.

Anne Spice’s “Queer (Re)generations: Disrupting Apocalypse Time” considers the Indigenous land defense movement against oil and gas pipelines as a site of relations beyond compulsory heterosexual monogamy and the straight time of extractive capitalism and settler colonialism. Grounded in her ethnography/activism at the Unist’ot’en Camp on Wet’suwet’en Territory, Spice explores intersections of queer and Indigenous temporality as they point to alternative futures “at the end of the world.” Linking ethnography and activism, Spice finds land defenders and water protectors model a sovereign, queer, Indigenous future that centers reciprocity, accountability, and responsibility to the land, earth, and plant and animal kin, against the straight, capitalist/colonial time of resource extraction.

Finally, Martin F. Manalansan IV’s “The Queer Endotic: Experiments on the Infra-ordinary (Or seeds for a worlding),” the last chapter in this volume, considers the small, the fleeting, and the infra-ordinary as modes of attention that might reworld queer anthropology. Manalansan attends to the unfinished form of queerness, the affective, visceral, embodied modes of attention that shape not only queer anthropology, but also ordinary queer lives (our own included). Manalansan’s attention to process, affect, and form grounds queer anthropology in the quotidian rather than a more

spectacular exotic, offering less a “finished, complete set of methods, concepts, theories, and arguments, and more an experimental and inspirational resource for thinking, building, and living” in our precarious present and toward our uncertain future.

These six chapters imagine the practice of queer anthropology otherwise, resituated in a mesh of relations and responsibilities that exceed the field or discipline, the academy, or a human-centered community. Drawing from the undercommons of Black/queer study, reckoning with accountability for trans life-making, exploring collaborative crip methods that decenter the lone (white, able-bodied, male) fieldworker, celebrating other-than-human queer life forms, living toward Indigenous nonheteronormative futures, and reflecting on quotidian forms of queer life, this section shows how a Black, trans, crip, feminist, Indigenous, queer of color-centered queer anthropology provides models for reworlding anthropology.

As I make the final edits on this introduction, I note that *Unsettling Queer Anthropology* was written and edited between January 2020 and May 2023, high pandemic times. The real costs of our labors were evident in its making, for every one of its queer contributors, and especially for disabled, Black, Indigenous, and trans scholars, scholars who are parents and transnational immigrants, and others who face uneven burdens of carework in and out of the academy. This time of crisis ordinary and exceptional impacted all those who wrote for the volume, as well as those who needed to bow out partway through, and those who regretfully were unable to accept my invitation. I’ll end this introduction as Manalansan begins his chapter—“I aim to offer an embodied sense of queerness as a vulnerable refuge, a refusal, a placeless nowhere-ishness, and a hopeful elsewhere-ishness . . . a queerness that is tacitly embedded in these uncertain scenes and precarious times”—in the hopes that such an “unfinished and open-ended” queer anthropology might, as Manalansan writes, serve as a “resource for thinking, building, and living.”

Unsettling Queer Anthropology is part of an ongoing conversation about queer anthropology’s histories and futures. In its pages, you will find interventions, disagreements, passionate engagements, reorientations, refusals, deviations, and departures. Let this be an invitation to all those who desire another *queer* anthropology.

Notes

- 1 The role of *trans* vis-à-vis *queer* has a longer and complex history in anthropology, where (often Indigenous) gender “inversion” *was* queerness. Thomas Fitzgerald writes in his 1977 review of “anthropological research on homosexuality” that previous scholars took a “disproportionate” interest in “the so-called berdache (loosely defined as any individual who assumes the role and/or status of the opposite sex),” an interest that, to Fitzgerald, reflected analytical confusion between gender and sexuality (387, 389). For more on the misuse of Indigenous gender categories within anthropology, see Towle and Morgan 2002, Morgensen 2011, Davis 2014, and Laing 2021. David Sonenschein, ten years earlier (and pointing at Alfred Kroeber), wrote that “some speak of berdache, transvestitism, and homosexuality as all one and the same thing” (1966, 76). Even as the model of “inversion” waned, questions around cross-cultural “trans” categories—sometimes glossed as “cross-dressing,” “third gender,” “transvestitism,” or “effeminacy”—remained a (if not the) central topic in the (still quite sparse) anthropology of homosexuality. As David Valentine shows, this reflects a larger cultural history of the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality, where “queer” *is* simultaneously “trans” and yet “trans” is the secondary, excluded category (2007; see also Edelman 2021).
- 2 As I hope will become clear, there is not a strict dividing line between the “gay and lesbian” anthropology of the 1980s and the “queer” anthropology of the 1990s, and certainly some earlier work—for instance, Esther Newton’s (1972) *Mother Camp* or Gayle Rubin’s (1993; originally published in 1984) “Thinking Sex” (both of which I take up in chapter 2)—might be considered “queer.” Yet, for the purposes of an initial timeline, I focus on queer after 1990.
- 3 For prior reviews and analysis of queer anthropology, see Weston 1993, 1998; Morris 1995; Boellstorff 2007a, 2007b; Howe 2015; Weiss 2016a, 2016b, 2022; and Wilson 2019. For a short introduction, see Society for Cultural Anthropology’s (2018) podcast “AnthroBites: What Is Queer Anthropology?” See also *Cultural Anthropology*’s two special sections on queer anthropology (Boellstorff and Howe 2015; Manalansan 2016).
- 4 I’ve characterized this as queer’s constitutive polarity in Weiss 2022. Crucial analyses of the tension between a more expansive (racialized, classed, gendered, national) queer and a narrower (sex/gender) queer include C. Cohen 1997, Hames-García 2011, Mikdashi and Puar 2016, Gill 2018, and Ferguson 2019.
- 5 Letter from January 19, 1993, reprinted in a 1993 issue of *Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Newsletter* 15(1): 21–23.

- 6 For more on the panel and protest, see especially Deb Amory's feature story "The 1992 AAA Panel from Hell: AIDS and the Social Imaginary" (1993), in *Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Newsletter* 15(1): 20–32. The analogical slide of Native:queer should be read in conversation with concurrent complaints about SOLGA's whiteness. These are issues with which SOLGA had long wrestled—in the pages of its newsletter, at meetings, and at moments such as when Karen Nakamura (as a graduate student) ran for cochair of SOLGA first as the "male cochair" and then as the "female cochair" to "emphasize issues of inclusiveness for bisexuals, people of color, and people with disabilities," asking, "What steps will it take for the organization to be more inclusive?" (*Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Newsletter* 19(2): 3).
- 7 *Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Newsletter* 15(2): 26.
- 8 I take "critique" as generative, mobilizing—not what Ryan Cecil Jobson called a liberal "fix," where queerness elides or excuses coloniality and white supremacy (2020; see also Morgensen 2011). Indeed, these chapters illuminate "intimacy" (Lowe 2015) with global, historical interrelations as a way to contend with, rather than refuse, the complicities that shape our research, writing, and work (see also Allen and Jobson 2016).
- 9 For a critique of Geertzian "thick description" as a form of ethnographic mastery, see J. Jackson 2013. Queer anthropology is both central to the history of exotic/erotic representations of difference or Otherness and, because of its relationship to gay and lesbian anthropology, historically shaped by a search for others "like us"—a projected sameness that is sometimes appropriated into political projects at "home." Work on "sex in the field" has taken up this sameness/difference paradox; for recent takes, see Martin and Haller 2019 and Weiss 2020.
- 10 I cautiously use "decolonizing" to refer to work in line with the approaches outlined above (and in this volume)—both acknowledging that, as Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) argue, "decolonizing" is too often an empty promise without a commitment to Indigenous sovereignty or institutional change *and* that the project of decolonizing anthropology has a long genealogy in work by Black, Indigenous, queer, disabled, trans, and feminist anthropologists of color, which should not be sidelined (even as some have refused anthropology as a site for such work).
- 11 The full text of all three AAA resolutions are in *Anthropology News* 12(1) (1971), as well as the first issue of the *Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists Newsletter* (1979). Resolution 11 encouraged research and training about homosexuality; Resolution 12 opposed homophobia within the discipline and discussed heteronormativity as "ethnocentrism"; and Resolution

13 put AAA “on record as urging the immediate legalization of all consensual sexual acts.”

- 12 Important reviews and collections of gay and lesbian anthropology from various time periods include Lewin and Leap 1996, 2002, 2009; Robertson 2005; Fitzgerald 1977; Blackwood 1985; Weston 1993, 1998; Blackwood and Wieringa 1999; Rubin 2002; and Boellstorff 2007b. See also note 3.

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