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Conceptuality in Relation: Sarah Franklin in conversation with Silvia Posocco, Paul Boyce, and  
EJ Gonzalez-Polledo

Editors' Note: In preparation for the interview, we worked together to develop a set of questions which we shared with Sarah Franklin in advance of our meeting. We met Sarah Franklin in Cambridge in March 2018.

EJ: Would you like to contextualise for us when your relation with Marilyn Strathern's work began?

Sarah Franklin:

I took a somewhat unusual path through academia because I did an undergraduate degree in women's studies a long time ago I graduated in 1982, and there weren't really any graduate programmes in feminism, gender or women's studies in the early 1980s in the United States. There were things like gender and history, women and history, women in philosophy things like that. So I took a year off. I was working in Paris for a year and I noticed that the British Universities have a much later application deadlines and they were much cheaper because they just had home fees for everyone and there was a women's studies postgraduate programme at the University of Kent. I went to Kent in the autumn of 1983 and started the women's studies programme there with Mary Evans and that was a sensational programme. By that point I had pretty much decided that I would really like to do a PhD, and I wasn't going to be able to do one in women's studies, so one of my former tutors suggested that I apply to the new NYU programme in social anthropology that was being headed up by Annette Weiner. I applied was accepted, I got a scholarship I moved to New York in the autumn of 1984s. Annette Weiner was one of the first feminist anthropologists to work on reproduction, so she invited her colleague, Carol Delaney, to come give a presentation at NYU in the spring of 1985 which was based on her paper 'The Meaning of Paternity in the Virgin Birth Debate', which showed how ideas about conception aren't straightforward in any sense of the term; that was when I started to get very interested in the possibility of doing an anthropological project on changing ideas of conception in western societies. Instead of going to New Guinea or Australia, I wanted to do a "talk-back" to the virgin birth debate based on a very detailed ethnographic study of in vitro

fertilization. I proposed that to my PhD committee and for various reasons they basically said that wasn't going to be acceptable.

So I converted my early PhD into an MA and as my dissertation I wrote 'Conception among the Anthropologists' juxtaposing IVF and virgin birth debates.

And then I moved to the UK in 1986 and I got a place at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and

I started doing the Phd, and my supervisor Maureen McNeil, was a historian of science who did her degree at the University of Cambridge. She worked on ideas of progress in the work of Erasmus Darwin, Charles Darwin's grandfather. So that kind of fitted, interestingly with exploring ideas about biology and reproduction and scientific objectivity and all that. Maureen and I started a Science and Technology Sub-Group and we were doing a lot of work on reproductive politics in the UK; that was a time when they were trying to repeal the abortion act and human fertilization and embryology bill was going through Parliament. It was also the time when Clause 28 was enacted, so it was a very interesting period mid-way or towards the end of Thatcher's career. And we wrote a lot about Thatcherism and reproductive politics in *Off Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies (1991)*. I was also working on my PhD at this time, and I interviewed around 30 women in Birmingham about their experiences of IVF and that was the basis for my later book *Embodied Progress (1997)*.

In 1989 when I was finishing my Phd I saw a job advertised in the Manchester Anthropology department and I applied for it. It was for a Lectureship in Gender and Kinship. I wasn't finished with my PhD, so obviously it was a bit of a long shot, but Marilyn wrote me a note and she said 'I read your very interesting application and I read that you wrote your MA on the question of the virgin birth debate and reproductive technology so could you send me a copy?' So I sent that to Marilyn and she read it and then invited me to come to Manchester. So that was the first time I met Marilyn, in June of 1989, and we talked for about three and a half hours. As if that wasn't amazing enough she then handed me the manuscript of *After Nature* and asked me if I would be willing to read it and give her some feedback!! So I took it back to Birmingham and I remember walking back to my house from the bus stop with this manuscript in my bag and thinking 'Wow! I can't believe that just actually happened!' Because she totally got the whole entire idea of the disturbance

to 'the biological facts' caused by IVF and all that. She was the first person I ever met who got it. You know like why you would want to do a project that was deconstructing biology via reproductive technology in relation to these debates about conception in Anthropology. It made total sense to her. So we started working together.

My first job was working as a researcher on what became the ESRC project Technologies of Procreation (1993). It was a joint project with me, Marilyn, Eric Hirsch, Frances Paton and Jeanette Edwards. That research went from 1990 to 91, it was just one year.. And that's when I decided that I wanted to work on the human embryo, I wanted to work on how the technologisation of reproduction actually queers our understandings of biology. And I think that's basically what I've been working on ever since. Except I don't think its often legible as that. I think if you're working on fertility it's such an incredibly heteronormative area, it's not really clear why that would be a queer topic. But of course it is.

Paul: There's a convergence between the re-thinking of the anthropological tradition and the re-thinking of reproductive technologies. Can you say a little more about how that convergence came about in your experience?

Sarah: You use the same word for knowledge and for procreation you know, to *conceive* an idea. I think if you take seriously you have to understand that of course it will affect knowledge practices. But I think where you go with that is really a slightly different question. If you want to go back into the disciplines you have in front of you a rich reproductive world, because that's what the disciplines are doing. They're reproducing themselves. So as soon as you start to look at disciplinarity of any kind you're looking at lineages of inherited ideas, you're looking at the protection of that legacy, you're looking at the insides and the outsides of the disciplines, you're looking at the gatekeeping practices, you're looking at the generally quite patrilineal structure of a descent system that is profoundly anthropological. So if you are an anthropologist and you're doing that, then you have a lot of grist for your mill as it were. And you are going to see disciplines in terms not only of reproductive politics, but of reproductive conflicts. So, yeah, I think that's one of the things that Marilyn has done – to link together gender, knowledge, reproduction, identity and power differently. But Marilyn, as she notes in *Before and After Gender*, also has a very generous idea about conflict. She thinks that conflict is essential to the social life of say, a discipline or scholarly community. So she's not looking to end conflict as it

were, but she is looking to understand gender much more in those terms, as something that's fundamentally a part of any social world. And indeed almost synonymous with how the social world is built.

EJ: It's interesting that the work before *Women In Between* was actually about conflict, about disputes...

Sarah: Yeah, her early work was about disputes as well. The settling of disputes in courts.

EJ: I wonder if you could frame for us what or how you see the object of queer anthropology developing in those intervening years between the period you've talked about and *Before and After Gender*...

Sarah: You mean from the 80s and 90s onwards

EJ: Right. How do you see that development?

Sarah: I think it was very important from the end of the 1980s and in 1990. Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble* and when I read it I definitely thought that is clearly the most articulate version of trying to say that gender comes before sex which is an even more radical claim than most people think and very parallel to what I was trying to do in my own work at the time. I don't know how useful it is to do a sort of genealogy of queer because that's a kind of oxymoron, but I definitely think the impulse to undo the apparent fixity of the biological is a very, very strong theme in a lot of feminists' work and it's a theme that does get picked up in some feminist science studies. But I think it really is articulated most powerfully by Butler in *Gender Trouble*; and I think that book marked a real turning point. Once that book was published and had the impact that it did people really started to think quite differently about sex and gender. The book in some ways describes something that had already happened - it is in some ways a book review, you know? Of other books? But it described it so articulately and so powerfully that it made something appear before your eyes even though you knew it was already there. That's kind of the magical thing I think about really powerful conceptual writing, really powerful scholarly writing. And Marilyn's writing has a lot of that in it too. It's incredible to think what would have happened if *Before and After Gender* had been published in 1974.

So... yeah, it depends a little bit what you mean by queer, obviously. I think at that time in the 1990's a lot of people were still using the feminist language of women

and using the feminist language of sexual difference and using terms that belong to a really important history of work in psychoanalysis and a lot of really important feminist activist work. And of course all that legacy of the seventies. People like Shulamith Firestone. So that was still around and that was still influential, but you could feel, definitely, I felt, definitely that there was a shift going on away from those categories. And Donna Haraway would be one of the other key people who began to articulate a very, very different political script for feminism. And like a lot of people, when I first read the 1978 articles that Haraway wrote, I did not really appreciate the scale of her intervention, and even when I reviewed her first book in 1988, *Primate Visions*, I was still struggling. The first time I read her 1985 article 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', yeah I was definitely kind of like, what?

I had to read that over several years to really appreciate its implications. I still re-read that article. It has so much in it.

Silvia: Do you think a similar reaction is reached when one first reads *The Gender of the Gift*?

Sarah: I think it really depends on your training. Because I was formally trained in feminist anthropology and the question of the exchange of women was just so prominent. I mean Gayle Rubin is the one who shows how important that question is in her 1975 essay on 'The Traffic in Women'. It was a standard reading for any undergraduate doing anything remotely related to feminist anthropology in the 1970s and the 1980s. And it's so clearly written. It's so vividly clear. And in that article she wants to know about what she calls the 'exact mechanisms' of how sex, sexuality, and the 'sex/gender system' are reproduced and that's her question really. And one of my favourite pieces that Marilyn wrote is her review of Melanesian marriage exchange, in which you can really hear this kind of puzzle of how to deal with Levi Strauss and how to deal with the exchange of women constantly driving her analysis; she produces a really elegant way to move beyond trying to explain the traffic in women by giving it a somewhat positive aspect, which is what Annette Weiner tried to do by showing that women have their own exchange systems. You know, women have their own value system and that makes sense up to a point. But Marilyn took a much more radical approach to that. When I read *The Gender of the Gift* I was so excited about the chapter where she talks about reproduction and how you have to make men and women first before you can make a baby. Because what she was doing was situating the whole question of exchange in relation to a very different

understanding of gender; she took the 'sex/gender system' apart, she claimed that gender didn't adhere to the person in any sort of neat one to one fashion but that it was more like a kinetic identity that you could use partially and also 'backwards' – in which the effect becomes the cause. It's a great counterintuitive model on one level, but if you take it from the point of view of reading Monique Wittig or from the point of view of being a lesbian or queer, actually it makes perfect sense! (Laughs).

And I think that's probably one of the things about queer -- that queer is partly about what is there, but partly queer is about how you are reading. Because if you are reading with a sensitivity to being very intensively othered within your own society – ontologically, grammatically, constantly -- then of course you're going to read very differently than if you are reading from the point of view of being part of the status quo. .

Paul: There's another convergence again around the shifting contexts in which gender becomes the shifting context of knowledge production, where the same device [gender] becomes something else, as very much put forward again in Strathern's work.

Sarah: Context is very important to Marilyn Strathern's work. But it's quite a sophisticated reading because she also wants to get out of the binary habit of thinking about context as external to whatever it is that's being contextualised and she actually wants – I think it's one of the things she does really skilfully- she wants us to think about context as something that's much more part of what is seemingly shaped by it. She wants us to be able to think of that relation in a less binary way.

Paul: In a post-plural kind of a way?

Sarah: Yes, in a post-plural, which is also backwards, way. I think what she means by post-plural (and that's one of the terms she talks a lot about in *After Nature*) is the way context is used in what you might call the western imagination, in that you can always talk about the individual in relation to society or the individual in relation to biology or biology in relation to society – that contextualising move pluralises everything for the Euro-American. So in *After Nature* she's concerned about what happens when you pluralise everything, you know, what's your ground. *After Nature* is all about what happens when the formative means of distinction are themselves unhooked as it were.

EJ: So how has that way of thinking influenced your work and that way that you've engaged with multiple kinds of knowledge?

Sarah: Well, because I work a lot in biology labs, I think one of the really surprising things for me was, you know, how queer they are. Because the thing is, the way biology is used as a kind of 'dominant logic', you might say, is all about fixing things, you know and it's about how things are determined. And if you're coming from a feminist background the way that biology is used is really political because it's constantly being used to justify patterns of behaviour using a totally circular logic like, "well that's because it's biological and there's nothing you can do about it", and also the biological comes to mean the universal and innate... Also it's used in a punitive way like, "how could you question that?" you know, "how could you possibly question that?". Even Shulamith Firestone (1972) in the first part of *The Dialectic of Sex* says, 'they'll think you're mad if you question things like that'. So, when you go into a biology lab and you start talking to scientists about something basic like how fertilization occurs, I mean it's just so different from the mainstream narrative, the kind of normative narrative that Emily Martin talks about (1991) that very powerful, very deterministic, overarching and oddly ubiquitous gendered narrative about male agency and female passivity, which then quickly becomes a narrative about violent male aggression being necessary for the survival of the species and all those things that Donna Haraway writes so beautifully about in her work.. But when you go into the lab it's just so totally different. Fertilization itself turns out to be still a bit of a riddle, and a bit of a fiddle. You've got cases where it happens and others where it doesn't and nobody really knows why. And so what the actual, professional scientific world of a lot of bench biology is all about, if you're going to use Marilyn's description, is 'things not reproducing themselves exactly'. One theory about why certain biological functions are so highly conserved is precisely because they don't always work the same way. And this is a very different world from the world where half your genes come from your Mum and half from your Dad and that makes you a unique individual, you know. I mean that is so not what is happening in an actual biology lab where you'll be sitting with an embryologist and she'll be like, "so, sometimes when I'm training post docs I want to show them how resilient and tough these little embryos are". So she'll rip them apart, she's in her micromanipulator and she rips apart an embryo and says "I could take half this embryo and half that embryo and stuff it all back in, and it's just like putting it all in a big shopping bag,



and it'll be fine. It'll grow, it'll develop, it'll be fine". They're so robust human embryos it's remarkable what you can do to them. Mammalian embryos in general. I mean they do actually have a shell, it's actually quite hard the outside of the embryo, which is why it has to be cut in order to do a biopsy or to do micro-injection. And when you dump out what's inside of this shell it just sits there like an empty container, and you can fill it back up again and make a new whole, and that's just a very, very different take on the biological 'rule book' than the one where everything is predetermined and there are strict laws that apply like "DNA makes RNA makes protein". Now, after Dolly, we know that even that's not true. I mean Dolly was a very fascinating project because it was one of those projects that was thought to be impossible, like human IVF was thought to be impossible by many people, and it turns out that biology can do all these things that nobody expected it to -- and that just goes to prove Butler's point that it's your perception that's actually the determining thing not the perceived. It's the perception that's driving the production of a specific world -- including its 'fixed' possibilities. It's not like that world is just there and that's why you perceive it that way.

Paul: You spoke of some of your conversations with biologists here and their struggle to understand what you were doing; their struggle to perceive their own perceptions after your view.

Sarah: Well, I think biologists are highly varied. Some of them are very interested in the social, ethical, philosophical domains of their work, and some of them are quite interested in critical perspectives on their work. Some scientists really don't like that, they find it bothersome and pointless. So when you're an anthropologist and you're working with biologists in labs you're mainly working with the biologists who want you there and think that it's interesting.

It's kind of weird how many biologists from Cambridge I'd worked with before I came to Cambridge. I'd never really made that connection until after I came to Cambridge but I think part of it is that when they're trained here they do get this college experience with lots of other disciplines, and it's considered to be quite important that you can sit down at lunch or dinner and have a conversation with someone in a completely different field from you. That's actually considered to be a highly valued skill.

I So as an ethnographer, I mostly ended up working in biology labs with a head of lab being someone who was signalling to the other people in the lab that I was a respected guest and then of course the team were willing to take their time and show you things. I remember I did a study of preimplantation of genetic diagnosis at Guy's Hospital in London in 2001 or 2002, and I was very, very nervous of going to give my presentation there about the outcome of my field research. I felt that I had got a very good sense of what they do in the lab. I had learned a lot, I had shed a lot of my preconceptions about what pre-implantation of genetic diagnosis is about, but I hadn't really had time to analyse the data or tell them anything significant other than what I had learned from them about how they do what they do. Which all seemed rather obvious and underwhelming. So I went to see Marilyn, which I usually do when I'm really having a lot of difficulty with something. I said I don't know what I'm going to tell them. I've spent a year in their lab observing their practice and I don't know what to say other than that this is what they're doing. And she said well just say that. That's exactly what you should tell them. That you have learnt what they're doing. So I did. I went and I told them my perception of what it was they were doing and they were totally impressed. It really helped to build trust and they were like "oh yeah, you understand what we're doing don't you?". And they were so surprised and reassured. Once that connection happens then you can go to a very different set of questions. It takes a long time to build up those kind of relationships and it has really instilled in me a deep respect for the power of description. I mean people might think it's pretty straightforward to describe a scientific experiment but I think it's very, very difficult to describe one in a way that the scientists themselves would agree it's a good description. That's actually quite difficult to do. But I have learned that it's one of the most important things to be able to do if you want to be respected as someone who does ethnography in labs.

It's kind of interesting on the reproduction question because what it means is that if you can give them back a version of something that they've given you, it creates a bond -- as opposed to if you can't give back a version of something that they've given you. Then it does the reverse it creates more of a mistrust.

EJ: But in a sense that's what good anthropology should do, right? Give back that sort of image of the social world?

Sarah: Yeah. I mean those are the kinds of questions that I would ideally like to bring into the lab a bit more. Because I think that what's happening to biology right now is quite dramatic. I mean there are really dramatic changes happening in biology right now, and of course I'm at Cambridge so I see this all the time. Some of the very foundational understandings of how biological processes work are being abandoned. Because they are being replaced by new means of doing things that supersede those older orders. For example the ability to make an induced, pluripotent stem cell with only two or three additional elements. You know, to take a skin cell and to add two or three additional factors and turn it into a gamete And then to use one of those for an egg and make a new animal. I mean that is way beyond where it was thought biology could go even just ten years ago. And that's a technological accomplishment, a superb technological accomplishment that is the outcome of decades of craft work in the lab; profoundly artisanal work with the components of the lab, including all of the living things that are in the lab. And that level of technological control is quite astounding. But what's happened at the moment is that scientists aren't really sure what to do with these new abilities. OK you can make an induced pluripotent stem cell and yes, you can do loads of different things with it and yes, it sort of up-ends the apple cart of biological assumptions, but then what? And you've got that revolutionary overturning of previous ideas at the same time that you have this very intense concentration on what's called translation which is turning a scientific technique or product into a highly applicable device or procedure.

So then you start to get more interdisciplinary kinds of scientific approaches to specific problems, and at places like Stanford they won't fund any new scientific buildings unless it's for some kind of interdisciplinary project that's essentially topical. And it's so clear that now is the point when the social sciences should really be making a greater contribution than ever to the understanding of bio-scientific translation. I mean I can't really think of a time when it was more obvious... Scientists need to be able to understand exactly the sort of question like how are their perceptions are affecting what they're doing, what are the knowledge systems that they're using, and what are the assumptions that are built into those, what is their black box and how do they open it? All those questions from science studies. This is really the moment when those kinds of questions should be asked, but it's still very, very hard to make those links. We'll see.

Silvia: And can you speak perhaps about, or towards the question of the conceptual element that is built into our re-descriptions? So that when we do ethnography in the lab or in another setting, that the description that emerges from that, and that might be understood by those who are actually doing the technical work, might also entail the development of conceptual elements which shift and open up that which we have observed.

Sarah: Yeah. That's a really good question. Yeah, the elementary forms of conceptual life - that's what we should be writing at this very moment. Traditionally within the social sciences there is something called social theory that has been used as the source of overarching analytical approaches to things like economy, society, culture, and I feel at the moment that's one of the things that's really shifting because we're kind of in the same situation as the scientists in that there are a lot of things happening to our worlds for which we don't really have adequate conceptual resources. Or maybe I should say, theoretical resources, because I've started to distinguish between what you might call the level of the theoretical and the level of the conceptual. When you're doing ethnographic work what you're trying to do is to get people to give you their descriptions of the things that are happening in their world, you're trying to get them to explain to you how they know what they know, you're getting them to introduce you to their key concepts. And their key theories. Because any embryologist who's talking about how to handle an embryo in a dish has a theory about how that embryo is developing and what it does, and what you can do to it or what you can't do to it or what will happen. I remember I did an interview with Austin Smith, it must've been nearly twenty years ago, and I asked him, well, how do you characterise a cell line? And he gave me a really clear and detailed explanation about how it takes a really long time because you have to keep comparing and comparing and comparing to see if this cell line that you think is A is always A, or whether sometimes it's B. In which case you have two different lines. And so you can learn from scientists what are their key conceptual points of reference, their landmarks, and how those ideas are embedded in their practice. Characterisation is a theory it's a concept, it's a practice, it's all of those things. Characterisation, like translation is absolutely fundamental to the sciences today. You cannot standardise something unless you know what it is. You cannot know what it is until you've characterised it. So this is really really key. But there isn't really like a social theory you could use to explain that repetitive, artisanal work of getting to know your cell

culture – so you know when it's happy, when it's unhappy, when it wants to be left alone, when it needs your attention PDQ or else. I mean you could use Bruno Latour for whom the concept of translation is very important. He has the concept of translation, he has the concept of purification, and we could take these and we could apply them as it were to the lab, but it's a little bit like getting dressed for the party after you've gone home. There's not really much point. What you need when you're in the lab is to be able to extract some of the conceptual resources that are operative there and *then* use them to produce a sociological model of what's going on. I mean that's what I do, and that's what I teach my students to do.

Paul: That comes back to what you were saying about your new respect or valuing of good description and the ideas emerging from that.

Sarah: That's right. Yeah I have this concept I've developed of interliteracy. Interliteracy is when you can describe the scholarly literature of a particular discipline well enough that someone in that discipline will recognise your description of it as equivalent to that of a competent insider. Like, I can tell you what the main point of this scientific article is, and you'll agree that that's the main point or more or less. And I can tell you in the methods section what are the slightly dodgy bits. And I think a situation where a scientist could read Marilyn Strathern and the ethnographer in that lab could read their latest article in *Cell*, and they were working together, I think that's the interesting direction we could be headed in – a much greater ability to generate genuine high-level conceptual exchange.

EJ: So in a sense, what you're saying, is it what you're saying that's really conceptual and theoretical is a false dichotomy, because at the end of the day what you're doing with your ethnographies is to produce a kind of response to that...

Sarah: That's right. I'm maybe not making quite so broad a statement as that but I'm saying that I have begun to distinguish between the theoretical and the conceptual because I have found that working at the level of the conceptual, working with what you might call 'conceptual elements', is a very important part of sharing knowledge. It's a very important part of enabling us to work in areas where there isn't really any sort of available theoretical edifice and also because, like I was saying, we are a little bit where the scientists are, we're living in a period of extremely rapid and substantial technological change. I mean if you think about it every single aspect of our identities from how we communicate to how we make decisions to how we

write how we get news has all been hugely affected by new technologies. It's almost like our generation is in a blur of technological reinvention and I think that makes it hard for us to acknowledge things that are very obvious and right in front of us but hard to name. I have a word for it. I call it technological bewilderment. I sometimes wonder if Brexit was partly fuelled by a sense of being left out, being left behind that was partly to do with technology, but that's another matter... I think as a result we don't have what you might call the theoretical tools that might be fit for purpose. I heard a lecture a very prominent Cambridge scientist recently, Azim Surani, who is probably one of the most famous scientists in his field of developmental biology, and he was basically saying it was very important to work with the animal models (mice) he was using through his entire career but he could now see why they were quite misleading. Which is a pretty major statement by a very senior scientist that he can now see how most of his work was based on a very dated, and in some ways quite inappropriate model system. And that he's not working with that any more and he's going to be working with new model systems. That's a real question for us I think, what is the model system that we'll be using to analyse whatever it is we're looking at, you know? Let's say you want to write about why BREXIT happened, you know, what is the theoretical model you're going to use? I mean I don't really think you can use Gramsci. You can use Stuart Hall up to a point but I feel like I've backed off from using theory the way I used to and even the way I was trained to, because it just feels that it's not actually engaging with the things that need to be explained. I mean I'm working on fertility transitions right now and I think most people think they know what fertility is, and one of the main arguments about fertility over time, is the demographic argument that as people begin to perceive that their children will live longer and that there are benefits to having fewer children they begin to exercise more control over their family size, which gets smaller. Demographic transition was one of the main features of modernity – when people started to have much smaller families, to invest more in the children and that's where a lot of the changes associated with the modern era supposedly came from. It's a very contested theory but the basic idea is that people's *perceptions* of fertility affect their reproductive *behaviour*. And at the moment what we are seeing are some pretty significant changes in how fertility is perceived both in terms of who is thinking about fertility because now a lot of queer and trans people are thinking

from a much earlier age about possibly having a family, or even assuming that they would, which even twenty years ago would have been a very different picture.

Meanwhile in the heterosexual population egg freezing is being marketed to mostly young presumed to be fertile women, and fertility is coming to be seen as much more precarious. So from a situation where it was precarious not to use contraception, it's now become precarious not to have children before you're thirty-five. So I don't think we have a sociological theory of fertility that can explain that. It's not available. It doesn't exist. But for really basic questions about 'what does reproduction mean to people' and 'how are reproductive politics central to the functioning of the state', you have to know more about those questions. So you have to be generating those new conceptual resources. And something like fertility anxiety is a concept, it's a new conceptual approach to fertility, but it's not like it's being introduced from some overarching body of theory: it's being produced from aggregate observations about a very curious sociological phenomenon that is very much in our midst.

Silvia: Given the distinction you propose between the conceptual and the theoretical, how do you read the repositioning of Strathern within anthropological theory?

Sarah: You're better placed to answer that question because I'm now the chair of a sociology department. I think gender and kinship are seen has been a huge part of how anthropology has changed over the past 20 years because it was kinship that turned out to be other area that came to be associated with rapid technological transition. You might of thought it was mainly sex and gender but it was actually when gender and *kinship* got put together -- in particular by Yanagisako and Collier, but also by Marilyn -- that we began to see a much bigger uptake within anthropology of a whole new approach to what I call relationality as technicality. I remember Marilyn and I talking, it was a while back, about 20 years ago, when it started to be obvious that the anthropology of new reproductive technologies was being very widely taught. It's in a lot of course curricula, and even in textbooks, and we had a bit of a laugh because obviously when we started out doing it, nobody was doing it and we did not *at all* expect it would become mainstream within the discipline so quickly. I think in general what happens is that when there are major contributions from feminist scholars they do tend to be kind of side-lined, unfortunately. I mean I think that 1970s feminist literature and the 1980s feminist anthropology literature is fantastic. It's so interesting to read, it's all about economy,

property, identity... It's very political it's all about materiality, kinship exchange, gender identity and power, it's about hierarchy, it's about the state, it's about sexuality, it's about everything. But that literature has just kind of vanished. Hardly anybody reads it or uses it or refers to it or cites it anymore however. I don't think anybody teaches 'The Traffic in Women' (Rubin 1975) any more, I don't know. So then what happens is there'll be these new high profile areas –and I won't name any in particular –that become associated with the emerging or important theoretical questions, which are mostly theories by men, and then there's sort of an effort to fit some of the powerful women in the discipline – like Strathern or Haraway -- into those '-isms'. But they don't really fit, because it isn't really what they're doing. So it doesn't really work very well and you get these really stupid debates about "is she part of that –ism or or isn't she?" It's like when you give a paper and you finish and someone says "so are you basically making a sort of Foucauldian argument?" They have to name it with this other –ism category that isn't anything to do with what you're doing, and even if you haven't even mentioned Foucault. And then you have to say "well, no not really, I mean Foucault's very interesting but actually I wasn't doing a Foucauldian analysis" I just think that is so tiresome and unhelpful.

It is rare even for hugely influential and original women scholars to just be seen on their own terms – to be their own ism! I think that Marilyn is now, and so is Donna Haraway, but it took a long time, much longer than it should have done. And I think your book will be really important in helping to make that clear. I really hope that people continue to come back to Marilyn's work on its own terms and think about the questions we're dealing with today. It's a consistent pattern that very powerful feminist arguments have been side-lined and feminist literature has been side-lined, or re-aligned under some other male –ism that just detracts from their own work.

EJ: I just want to ask one of our last questions about how you conceive of this question of queer genealogy both in your work and your trajectory.

Sarah: Thank you for this question about queer conceptions and genealogies. I think that queer genealogies can be defined by what you might call a lack of loyalty. Because I think a lot of the way of academia's genealogies work is through loyalty. And through a kind of implicit exchange: In exchange for your loyalty we will give you this and this. I think what a lot of feminist academics who've tried to challenge the system have done is to be loyal up to a point, but then to be disloyal. I think it's also true of queer. Queer in the academy is about the forms of disloyalty that you wear



publicly. That doesn't just mean your physical self-presentation, how conformist you are to say, normative gender expectations, but also about what you say, what you spend your time doing, who you include in things, where you put your attention. It's about who and what you want to be loyal to in the sense of extending your trust and energy towards certain things and not others. Similarly it's about what you *don't do* and what you *won't* participate in when you withdraw your attention and energy. I think creating a queer space within the academy is very important and that doesn't just mean queer people. In my research group even trying to eat different kinds of food, or breaking with conventions – so we don't go to the college dinner but to a vegetarian buffet after the talk instead. I bring my dog to work, we have poems and songs and dances, and I have involved several artists with our group. Things like that are part of breaking down the reproductive mechanisms that keep certain kinds of expectations operating, and thereby opening up the space for a different set of expectations to thrive. So queering the academy is about being queer *in* the academy. It's about institutional non-compliance and deviance, and creating different ways to be, to survive and to thrive in the academy. Audre Lorde has that great poem about being in doorways, and being inside and outside, and yeah you do have to develop queer group survival tactics, they're very important. And it's equally important for them to be shared, collectivised and maintained. Because if you don't have that you can't keep going and do the work that needs to be done.