H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Donna J. Drucker. *The Classification of Sex: Alfred Kinsey and the Organization of Knowledge.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014. Illustrations. 256 pp. $30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-6303-5.

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Published on H-Histsex (January, 2015)

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Naked-Eye Observation

Donna J. Druckerâs book aims to put classification at the center of an analysis of Alfred Kinseyâs work. She distinguishes her project from numerous other publications on Kinsey that focus on, among other things, sexology, gender, and survey methods. The book is a work of detailed scholarship; she burrowed into numerous institutional archives and plumbed countless letters. It covers Kinseyâs taxonomic practice in his gall wasp research; his work on edible wild plants; his school textbooks and life sciences teaching guide; his biology, evolution, and marriage courses; and the methods and technologies he used to develop his *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) (hereafter *Male* and *Female Reports*).

One of Druckerâs main aims is to show a significant continuity across all of Kinseyâs varied work. She writes that a scientistâs âintense focus and emphasis on naked-eye observational techniques and practices can configure an entire career even through a seemingly dramatic shift in study objectâ (p. 13). This emphasis on continuity can be suggestive: for instance, in the analogy between Kinseyâs concern with unhelpful classifications (such as âweedâ) in his edible plants work, and the demoting of classificatory structures in the *Male* and *Female Reports*. The heterosexual-homosexual rating scale in the reports in effect eliminated the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual; it decoupled desire, behavior, and experience from identity, placing all behavior on an equal footing. (This also amounted to reworking the uses of classification; classification need not be hierarchical.)

Kinseyâs methods for gathering millions of gall wasps, and the punch-card technology for ordering and manipulating sex behavior data, also chime well with Druckerâs continuity thesis. Elsewhere, however, Druckerâs insistence on Kinseyâs âfocus on individual variation,â as well as his âdetailed labeling and recording of each data object, the maintenance of flexibility for the manipulation of each object, and his prioritizing of mass yet targeted collecting,â can feel forced, especially when she invokes Kinseyâs âcommitment to naked-eye observationâ (pp. 13, 86)âsomething she does not define, and which sustains the continuity thesis mainly through

vagueness.

Kinsey was well aware of problems with his interview methods (primarily around deceit, memory, and anxiety), but remained insistent that these could be addressed within the technique itself, rather than being profoundly intermingled with it. However, âface-to-faceâ interviews are not equivalent to naked-eye observation, and not an unproblematic source of âinformation.â Nor are interviews uncharged sexually; they might themselves be enmeshed with transference, projection, fantasy, and pleasure. Drucker fails to probe how Kinseyâs classificatory urges may have encouraged him *not* to press his methodology harder and to examine the epistemological and ontological questions posed by the subject matterâsexâitself.

Drucker states that while many of his peers in biology shifted to studying evolutionary processes in laboratory-created experimental animals, Kinsey shifted to studying the sexual behaviors of humans âin their natural environment.â This phrase, ânatural environment,â reveals her lack of scrutiny of the particularities of interview processes, and her failure to consider the intervieweeâs location in an ontologically and epistemologically ambiguous space between pure observable data and lab-created creature.

Given Druckerâs emphasis on naked-eye observation, it is odd that she skims so lightly over Kinseyâs films of sexual acts, disclosed only in 1972 in Kinseyâs coauthor Wardell Baxter Pomeroyâs book. While Drucker writes that âmany are intrigued by the highly sexed and voyeuristic Kinsey, who quietly filmed sex acts ... in his attic, while his wife Clara served coffee and persimmon pudding,â she also states that âmaking films of human sexual behavior made sense to Kinsey, as he wanted to be able to study human behavior using the same media that animal behavior scientists usedâ (pp. 164, 155). One does not need to endorse problematic psychohistory or prurient psychological speculation to want more here. The risks, challenges, and epistemological questions involved in this far-from-neutral observation are just as worthy of exploration as the punch cards on which Drucker has much interesting material. And as Drucker notes but does not explore, the filmsâ occlusion within the *Male* and *Female Reports* does not preclude their epistemological significance in the knowledge whose technological and classificatory shaping Drucker is keen to trace.

Drucker rightly emphasizes Kinseyâs desire not to pathologize human variation, and rightly criticizes his failures in this regard (a blindness to specific reproductive anxieties and sexual stigmas for women, and a perpetuation of comparison to a norm, particularly a class norm). But her criticisms do not penetrate her account of classification; nor does she place Kinsey sufficiently in sexological or scientific context. He may have been radically non-moralizing, but he was also highly invested (whether strategically or deeply) in a progressive politics of biology, and in marital sex as both barometer and enabler of social harmony. And while Drucker concedes that Kinseyâs rhetoric of neutrality is naÃ¨ve (âEqualizing the nature of many of the topics he covered was itself a bias, but one that Kinsey was more comfortable with than the behavior-specific biasesâ of other studies [p. 92]), she does not reveal how deeply Kinseyâs âscientific methodâ (a phrase used many times, without unpacking) is suffused with what Paul Robinson has called Kinseyâs âethic of abundance in sexual mattersââhis emphasis on quantity of orgasms, and his bias toward sexually active lives.[1] Kinseyâs privileging of simultaneous orgasm as a key goal of marital sex identifies him as one of the centuryâs sexological figures involved in a project of sexual injunction that is as ideological as any other. This project, with its injunction not this time to propriety or parenting, but rather to pleasure, is one we can easily be uncritical of, because we are, whether we like it or not, its inheritors.

Drucker is right to inject into analyses of Kinsey some recent historiographical developments, such as the âmaterial turnâ within science and technology studies, with its emphasis on technologies of data recording and mobilization. And her book is full of fascinating detail, some of it refreshing and new, on Kinseyâs working life, reading, and collegial relationships. But every book faces its own problems of focus and frameâquestions, indeed, of classification. And her concern to prioritize classification, albeit understood rather narrowly, combined with a reluctance to dwell on the âhighly sexedâ Kinsey, allows Drucker to gloss over the sexuality that Kinsey studied in such detail, and which cannot be so neatly separated from the epistemological practices that seek mastery of it. For all its rich and detailed focus on Kinseyâs methods, the overall result is a rather narrow work.

Note

[1]. Paul Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 45.

Citation: Katherine Angel. Review of Drucker, Donna J., *The Classification of Sex: Alfred Kinsey and the Organization of Knowledge.* H-Histsex, H-Net Reviews. January, 2015.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=42340