

Race and the Integrity of the Line

Sexology and Representations of Pleasure

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In sexology the question of deviance is always nestled within that of pleasure—pleasures reside within categorization, identification, pedagogy, and the acts or thoughts themselves. However, sexology’s ideological investment in severing this connection produces a gulf between “normal” pleasure (often aspirational) and deviant behaviors (usually reduced to types). While the discourse of deviance prefers the detail, which characterizes the case study, as scientists seek to classify and specify difference, the norm, which is its other side, is often presented statistically through averages, numbers, and visually through the chart and diagram. Focusing on the line, this article traces the movement toward the precision promised by charts and diagrams within examinations of female pleasure, before culminating in the excesses of the zigzag.

Unpacking this centripetal force as it moves toward a representation of linear accuracy shows how norms were visually established in the early to mid-twentieth-century United States and how epistemological violence underlies the erasure of the “abnormal.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of this excess, what we might think of as errant lines or blur, is racialized.¹ In this intertwining of race and representation, however, what emerges is not a fascination with the racialized sociological subject but, instead, a form of racialized compression that veers asymptotically toward erasure, producing racial residue and possibilities for resignification.² That the matter of these aesthetic negotiations is sexual is not insignificant; it grants us another point of entry into thinking about the knot of representation, race, and sexuality where the history of spectacular, violated Black (or BIPOC) flesh hovers but is ultimately excised to maintain the desirability and (false) universality of the norm.³

Sex and therefore sexology have been considered tools to understand not only the working of society writ large but also what underlies the very matter of the self. Indeed, the politics underlying the desire for a science of sex has historically been embedded in attempts to optimize pleasure to strengthen heterosexual marriages, which would presumptively align with a goal of fostering more robust nation-states and healthier populations. Female sexual happiness, in turn, is a crucial part of that equation because it is assumed to be the glue holding these marriages together.⁴ Further, this emphasis on female pleasure is particularly focused on the idea of the female orgasm. To be sure, this taming of female pleasure into a graspable quantity—mysterious though it has remained—can also be registered as a fetishization of a moment of a lack of control in relation to femininity. That is, sexology’s approach to the idea of the female orgasm is both an attempt to regularize it (and female pleasure) and a tacit acknowledgment that something uncontrollable remains. Here, we already hear an echo with the attempts to erase racialization’s effects from the project of normalization and situate it within the realm of deviance. This produces an oscillation between the possibility of control through scientific means (notably in the service of helping men and nations) and a perpetual noncontrol. We can see this tension in a popular marriage manual’s description of orgasm: “A sexual orgasm is a nervous spasm, or a series of pulsating nervous explosions which defy description. The action is entirely beyond the control of the will, when it finally arrives, and the sensation it produces is delectable beyond telling.”⁵ Despite this, attempts to figure out what orgasm was and how it could be induced remained a central part of sexological discourse.

Annamarie Jagose names this contradictory assemblage the “twentieth century orgasm,” and her book *Orgasmology* is dedicated to making meaning from some of its contradictions. This entity, Jagose argues,

is biological and cultural, representable and unrepresentable, as well as personal and impersonal, it is also and at once worldly and out of this world. . . . : twentieth-century orgasm is also innate and acquired; voluntary and involuntary; mechanistic and psychological; literal and figurative; trivial and precious; social and asocial; modern and postmodern; liberating and regulatory; an index for autonomy and self-actualization as well as for interpersonal and communal attachment; the epitome and the extinction of erotic pleasure; and indifferent and intrinsic to taxonomic categories of sexual difference and sexual orientation. These oppositions are not entirely specific to orgasm or without precedent: they draw their contradictory charge from the historic processes whereby sexuality has come to constitute a framework of intelligibility for sex.⁶

In identifying orgasm’s relationship with sexuality, Jagose also points us toward the particular relationship among sexology, heterosexuality, and

orgasm: “The utility of heteronormativity is not that it functions as a kind of ahistorical one-size-fits-all descriptor for relations between the sexes, but that it indexes the emergence of heterosexuality as a category internal to the normalizing protocols of the modern disciplinary system of sexuality itself.”⁷ In representational terms, this means that focusing on female orgasm as the signal of female pleasure allowed for a false equivalence between it and ejaculation, which sexology took as the most important aspect of male pleasure because of its correlation with procreation. This presumed correspondence led to efforts to discern reproductive purpose for female pleasure (a conundrum that continues to have abysmal political effects in relation to reproduction and rape) in addition to attempts to suture it to the same logic of the visible ejaculation—though only ever fitfully, as Linda Williams has famously described with respect to the particular tension between the idea of female orgasm and its representation in pornography.⁸

We arrive at the question of how to represent female orgasm with several challenges, the first being definitional (what actually constitutes orgasm?) and the second, a related quandary: what, then, constitutes visual evidence? Making orgasm visible entails making orgasm into a tangible event in which psychic changes, since they cannot be mapped in an “objective” scientific manner, are grafted onto physiological symptoms to become more easily readable. Robert Latou Dickinson, an illustrator and gynecologist, created innovative drawings of human sexual response in the early twentieth century, but he admitted gaps in his knowledge, particularly with regard to female orgasm. By 1966, however, William Masters and Virginia Johnson’s *Human Sexual Response* claimed mastery over the physiology of orgasm.

In many ways both research projects overlap significantly. Their mutual desire to preserve the fabric of the (white) American family led them (via the logic of eugenics) to sex and the female orgasm. Unlocking the physiological and anatomical secrets behind orgasm was thought to provide the tools necessary for societal social engineering. In addition, both Dickinson and Masters had been practicing gynecologists before dedicating themselves to sex research: their attention to precise detail offers testament to years of medical practice, while their continued insistence on the nonerotic (scientific) nature of their work illustrates the pains taken to maintain a veneer of scientific integrity and professionalism. Beyond empiricism, both projects are unique in their attempts to represent the orgasm visually.⁹ Though their methodologies differed—Dickinson preferred illustrations of normal orgasms (in specific women), while Masters and Johnson used photographs, diagrams, and charts to model a typical orgasm (belonging to a generalized “woman”)—both attempted to capture movement and emotion in two dimensions. These are questions not just about science but about race and the politics of representation.

Anatomical Expertise and the Pleasures of the Line

Robert Latou Dickinson believed that many problems, including insomnia and menstrual pain, had their root in genital anatomy. To keep a record of his gynecological patients' current and potential difficulties, he made sketches of their uteri, cervixes, and vulvae, which he kept updated throughout their time with him. In 1932, the first edition of his *Atlas of Human Sex Anatomy* was published; it was a large compendium of his clinical illustrations of anatomical and physiological abnormalities alongside written descriptions of these case studies. The purpose of Dickinson's atlas is twofold: it is meant to serve a pedagogical function—the demystification of sex—while simultaneously distancing his research from pornography. This wielding of the illustrator's pen was in part a reaction against tactics of marriage manuals, which sought to titillate their readers with graphic descriptions, but the stated goal—to provide information that could help better marriages—was the same.

In the preface, Dickinson makes explicit the objectivity that underlies his pared-down lines and attachment to the norm: “Our protests against the sensual detail and the exaggerations and credulities of pornographic pseudo-science lose force unless we ourselves issue succinct statistics and physiological summaries of what we find to be average and believe to be normal, and unless we offer in place of the prolix mush of much sex teaching the simple statements called for in any sane instruction.”¹⁰ In Dickinson's argument for the pedagogical import of illustrating genitalia, we also find a critique of excess detail, which he calls sensual, that characterizes the literary.¹¹ This means eschewing realism in the drawings—despite Dickinson's work elsewhere producing realistic three-dimensional anatomical models—favoring instead schematic line drawings. He explains his choice: “By avoidance of realism in the illustrations, by minimal graphic statement, and diagrammatic representation wherever possible, it was thought that the erotic suggestiveness could be largely eliminated.”¹² The moral and scientific arguments against sensuality, both visual and literary, are critical to Dickinson's attempts to assert himself as a legitimate researcher.

Dickinson used three different types of illustrations to make his arguments about sex. The first type demonstrates the quantity of observations made; most often these are drawings in profile, meant to suggest both a norm among his patients and the extent of their variation. Through these illustrations, Dickinson is teaching us about the value of the norm—he is showing readers the breadth that it can encompass and making an argument for the utility of a schema based on it. The second type of illustration comprises specific examples of various portions of the body; these offer evidence of Dickinson's ability to make specific, detailed

observations. Both of these types of illustrations gesture toward Dickinson's professional authority by signaling his breadth of experience and observational expertise.

The third type of illustration, however, relies on the viewer's trust in Dickinson's knowledge; they are diagrammatic presentations of his hypotheses regarding sexual response. These schematic drawings are unfalsifiable because Dickinson acknowledges that he did not have access to what happens physiologically during intercourse—he was not a witness and could only speculate. His hypotheses were born from his use of wax cylinders and glass phalluses with subjects to visualize their sexual response. He relied on these instruments to measure both specific details and general changes that he observed: the wax allowed him to visualize the muscular workings of the vagina, which in turn allowed him to model vaginal movement during penetration and birth, while the glass phallus provided a way for him to exert force on the vagina so he could observe (by looking through it) how other internal organs respond to penetration. It is important to note that he treats these sessions not as simulated sex but, rather, as methods of providing an approximation of vaginal penetration. From these experiments, he creates a multitude of illustrations of different sexual positions, two of which explicitly treat orgasm.

In both illustrations we see Dickinson's attachment to the norm working in peculiar ways. While he does not attempt to describe a norm for all orgasms, he does use the idea of the norm to describe the response of two patients. The illustrations, then, are specific to individuals but do not indicate any one particular incident of orgasm. The threat of titillation is mitigated by these illustrations' relationship to the accumulation of knowledge. The first, figure 147, is Dickinson's attempt to illustrate the varied sexual responses that correspond to different positions—"woman above," "woman below," and "woman beneath his body high up on hers." The illustrations show a series of numbered curved lines, meant to show the range of clitoral movement, against the outline of a penis with an arrow meant to show the direction of penile movement. Here, Dickinson is using anatomical illustration to teach readers that "male induces maximum vulval responses by providing fullest clitoris excursion (and pressure desired)." The second illustration, figure 158, focuses more explicitly on the particularities of what happens during orgasm. It is culled from Dickinson's patient files and includes a brief case history in addition to many illustrations from different stages of the subject's life. Again, the woman's internal structures are defined against the outline of the glass phallus, whose measurements are given. Dickinson describes the movement of the uterus and clitoris during orgasm and notes the measurements of the woman's posterior and anterior vaginal wall. He also notes the patient's behavior during orgasm: "Orgasms vaginal and/or vulvar:

no levation grasp or throb; moaning, gasping, often powerful thrashing”; her favorite posture (woman on top) “explains the length of anterior wall of vagina.” A biographical sketch of the woman is provided, along with confirmation of her facility for orgasm with her husband, a matter that Dickinson confirms with his visual analysis: “Vagina and quick vulvar color suggest [subject’s] history.”

Even as Dickinson searches for a visible marker of orgasm, his illustrations make clear that, beyond what he considers individual variation, he has been able to discern only patterns and postures of stimulation. Dickinson freely admits the difficulty of describing the orgasm: “If this is typical orgasm, then orgasms have not occurred more than a half dozen times in many millions of office examinations nor have they been noted in their wives by doctors familiar with the cervix, or else physicians have consistently hidden knowledge of such action.”¹³ Furthermore, female sexuality is considered only against penile activity. Even as Dickinson notes the importance of clitoral stimulation to orgasm, his techniques of visualization show that he understands female sexual response as intricately linked to penetration. In the absence of Dickinson’s ability to describe a norm of sexual response, his illustrations display his notion that the sources and manner of stimulation are more important and more relevant than what exactly happens during orgasm. His emphasis on the intersubjective aspect of orgasm is reflected in how he presents his patient’s description of her own sexual response:

Married at 20, he partly impotent, she unawakened. Two children: widow. Second marriage at 26. He a reservatist statistician good for intromission an hour and 100–120 vigorous thrusts in succession, by count. Her crescendo was from breast to vulvar caress and increasing vigor of orgasm. As height close to the preceding, each 20, 24, 27, up to maxima of 40, 56, 63, 65 even 83 seconds: 7 or 8 in 205 seconds; 30 in half hour at times, 5 to 10 in sequence for a month at rates of 2, 3 times a day. No exhaustion, alert.¹⁴

Though her response is shaped in large part by the questions he asks her, the emphasis is on what her husband did to induce response rather than on her actual response. Though Dickinson is describing a female orgasm, his focus on context (marriage) and intersubjectivity (the orgasm could not take place without a partner) is more aligned with an investment in masculine agency. The intended pedagogical audience here is male.

This emphasis on what men can do to induce orgasm in their wives is not just reflective of the heteronormative ideology of early twentieth-century sexology; it also carries implications for thinking about race by invoking particular prescriptive norms around white femininity. Dickinson’s invocation of a feminine passive receptivity centers on impressibility, which Kyla Schuller describes as “the capacity of a substance to

receive impressions from external objects that thereby change its characteristics.”¹⁵ The concept of impressibility allows us to tangibly grasp the multiple levels on which these discourses of pedagogy function within sexology. The sexological reader, after all, must be sensitive to the surrounding world and able to incorporate its subtleties into sexual performances to maximize marital happiness. In these texts, this capacity for learning is the precondition for being able to attain the norm. This capacity is, however, profoundly racialized. In emphasizing learned responsiveness, Dickinson has implicitly centered white femininity while moving other forms of perceived response, which might be racially coded as more active or less reactive, outside the norm.

This logic extends to anatomy as well. Although the texts are geared toward teaching male partners how to induce orgasm, it is white women’s bodies that have a particular responsiveness toward appropriate vaginal stimulation. Schuller examines this argument, in a more extreme form, as it plays out in the work of Elizabeth Blackwell and Mary Walker, two of the first female physicians in the United States. There, Schuller uncovers a reading of the vagina as “a crucial neurological structure.”¹⁶ In their arguments for racialized difference, Blackwell and Walker “extended the logic of binary sexual differentiation to incarnate the racialized capacity of openness and responsiveness in the vagina of the white woman.”¹⁷ Importantly, this openness “afforded white women greater capacities of stimulation and therefore development in both body and brain than their male counterparts or the sexually undifferentiated primitive.”¹⁸ Schuller’s analysis reminds us that receptivity is not a race-neutral concept but something that is part of a set of hierarchized relations of gender, race, and sexuality.

Reading Dickinson’s focus on modes of stimulation rather than female response in conjunction with Schuller’s reminder that female vaginal responsiveness was racialized allows us to see why Dickinson did not dwell on female response. It was unremarkable, a racialized given, as long as white men learned appropriate modes of stimulation. Importantly, this complex system of racialized bias was transmitted through the mechanism of the line. Although the schematic line drawings do away with the threat of sensuality, this amorphous quality of sensuality is also where fleshiness or any quality of difference lies. This excision of difference manifests in several ways. First, there are Dickinson’s explicit ways of excluding racial difference from his work in his atlas. In the entire compendium, there are two drawings of Black women—neither of which is credited to Dickinson. One, attributed to a French source, shows the position of the vulva relative to the chair while seated. Blackness is indicated not only in the caption, which is in French, but also by the shading of the skin with cross-hatching. The other drawing is of labia majora, described as a “Negress

specimen from the Surgeon General's Museum published by Dr. Lamb." In this way Dickinson makes it clear that these are not data points that he consulted for his production of the sexological norms that emerge from his clinical work. Within the *Atlas of Human Sex Anatomy*, Dickinson included his composite of averages as drawings of "Norma" and "Norman." These measurements and the resultant figures, later transformed into white alabaster statues, were described as versions of "normal" Americans. This assertion of continuity between average measurements and normative behavior illuminates the multiple axes on which sexological representation operates. In this tautological structure, Dickinson gathers physiological data from white subjects and creates a "national" average, which becomes a way to divide normative and deviant people. Anna G. Creadick describes the movement between the representational and behavioral as endemic to this prewar moment: "Journalists and scientists regularly anthropomorphized the plaster figures, moving beyond their surfaces to hypothesize about their interiors. Such slippage from bodies to minds was not surprising; inquiry into the 'normal' American character was another significant academic project of the interwar and early postwar years."¹⁹ That freedom from the pollution of eroticism and pornography manifests through a line that excludes blackness is an important reminder of how racialization enacts pressures on representation even and especially through its exclusion.

Triumph of Physiology and the Opacity of the Diagram

In contrast to Dickinson's hand-drawn illustrations, William Masters and Virginia Johnson used the diagram to present their information about orgasm. This layer of abstraction transformed physiological data into a combination of prose and lines that were tethered not to the anatomy of intercourse (as was the case with Dickinson) but to an argument about the physiology of response itself, an argument that, importantly, did not differentiate between sources or types of stimulation but instead posited a universal form of female response.²⁰ Race here is elided in different ways. Though Masters and Johnson did include some people of color in their analysis, their emphasis on the universality of physiology is emblematic of a logic of colorblindness and shift toward statistical thinking.²¹ Here, the line severs the possibility of a racial analysis in part because it emphasizes the responses of particular organs rather than any individual's entire response, but this in turn leads to the questions of what kind of structure race is and how it manifests through representation.

Masters and Johnson's research presents a quantitative/numerical rendering of the orgasm, alongside a photographic/diagrammatic depiction and a qualitative/narrative representation. Like Dickinson, Masters

and Johnson strove to achieve an aura of scientific objectivity to lend their project legitimacy. To this end, they used a vast array of technologies to collect the desired data on sexual response. They used multiple recording techniques, including film and photography, and their subjects (members of the academic community of Washington University in St. Louis) were asked to make multiple visits to their research laboratories. Generally, the subjects, who were predominately female, were taken to a room equipped with film cameras and told to engage with a thrusting machine, the technologically enhanced dildo Ulysses. This machine, calibrated to record measurements at various times during the encounter, provided penetration and could be adjusted for both speed and strength. The thrusting machine also had photographic capabilities so that various theorized stages of orgasm (excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution) could be mapped onto specific physiological moments. In subsequent interviews with the women, their recounted experiences were mapped onto Ulysses's data.

Human Sexual Response, the first book published from this research in 1966, is a combination of dense prose, diagrams, charts, and photographs, each geared toward the representation of orgasm. While the text dwells on details the images cannot capture, such as color variation, texture, smell, and sound, the images attempt to present a dynamic process. The images work to capture a body, but more precisely organs, in action. Though Masters and Johnson's research techniques involve analyzing the whole body's response to sexual stimuli, their presentation of the data takes each organ in turn, moving from external female genitalia to the clitoris, then the vagina, and finally the uterus. This process of internalization locates the orgasm simultaneously inside, outside, and on the body. As the scope of investigation moves inward, Masters and Johnson provide more diagrams to make these internal processes visible. This prioritizing of visual evidence, garnered through Ulysses's mechanical, "neutral" mediation, is meant to signal objectivity, while other ways of experiencing and documenting orgasm are seen as subjective.

The most important thing that Masters and Johnson's visuals convey is the idea that organs move during orgasm. The chart was one of their favored techniques for representing this dynamism, among them, an electrocardiogram of a female subject throughout sexual response, with the orgasmic time frame noted on the chart; a reading of orgasmic platform contractions against heart rate for the same time; and an intrauterine electrode measuring uterine contractions in orgasm against normal uterine irritability. Though Masters and Johnson attempted to provide a frame of reference for each chart, extracting useful information from them is challenging. The veneer of precision reveals only the fact of organ movement. The charts affirm the existence of a physiological change around what

one terms *orgasm*, thereby establishing the utility of instruments, and not experience, for discerning orgasm.

Unlike the charts, which show the importance of data, the task of the diagram is to remap this information back onto the body. Masters and Johnson, in particular, use these schematic anatomical drawings to show readers where to locate orgasm on an abstracted body. Diagrams of the breast, clitoris, vaginal barrel (multiparous and nulliparous, surgically and nonsurgically constructed), female pelvis, and uterine elevation are shown during preexcitement, excitement, plateau, orgasmic, and resolution stages. These drawings are often accompanied by text describing physical transformations and by arrows indicating direction of the body parts' movements. On the one hand, their existence as a series points to an attempt to isolate movement. On the other hand, how this movement is represented makes it appear as though the body passes through a series of ideal "poses," the fluidity of its motion disturbed. The imposition of stages onto sexual response creates a clash between precision, which Masters and Johnson strive to achieve through their detailed anatomical renderings, and the temporal imprecision created by the fluid nature of movement. Effectively, the drawings represent nothing: they cannot capture the dynamic aspect of sexual response because they are limited by their static nature and their limited scale.

Masters and Johnson's reliance on measurement and statistics to create the fact of orgasm is testament to the power numbers possess to legitimate information. This tactic was common among several American sexologists; in addition to Dickinson and Masters and Johnson, Alfred Kinsey also famously favored numerical data. In part, we can attribute this use of evidence to the rise of statistics in the twentieth century. As Alain Desrosières argues, statistics allowed social scientists to "transcend individual or conjugal *contingencies* and to construct *more general things* that characterize for example the social group (for the sociologist) or the long term (for the historian or the economist)."²² The loss of individuality in quantification is a double-edged sword: "On the one hand, it constitutes an 'obligatory passage point' . . . and is of extreme social import, but on the other hand it is implicitly considered to overlook the essential, to be impoverished, simplifactory and to explain nothing."²³ Eliminating the individual forges a sense of equality since the idea of the universal makes everyone equivalent (i.e., interchangeable) but simultaneously unable to actually embody the norm, which has become its own ideal. One manifestation of this impossible embodiment can be seen in Masters and Johnson's refusal to show the images that were actually taken by Ulysses or images of the setup required for their data retrieval—photographs or drawings of couples or individuals masturbating. These images, which provided Masters and Johnson with a more holistic image of sexual response, are exempted

from public view. While we might argue that this has to do with a possible kinship to pornography, this omission reinforces the scientific status of the research. While their data is public, it is almost inscrutable—it is difficult for someone who is not an expert to understand what exactly is going on. Rather than employ visuality as a method of clarification, it becomes a tool of mystification. The body and its workings become vexing puzzles, better left to the domain of others to describe.

Complicating this representational terrain is the argument that the emergence of the statistical fact and removal of the individual have facilitated the conceptualization of a new type of subjectivity, what Gilles Deleuze terms the *dividual*.²⁴ While the emergence of sexuality as an entity to examine through sexology enables the construction of certain individuals such as the homosexual, the pervert, and so forth, statistical models of subjectivity rely on eradication of the individual in favor of a virtual figure who is impossible to actually materialize. The intersection of these ideas within *Human Sexual Response* produces a complex image of sexuality. It is divorced from aim and object, which locate sexuality within the subject, but at the same time this sexuality is held to be universal, a physiological response, and a statistical invention of mythic proportions. Masters and Johnson portray orgasm as a social fact held together by statistics and family therapy. Individual variation ceases to matter; what is important is the fact of orgasm. Its achievement is the most relevant piece of data; its nonachievement is the risk to be managed. This shift away from the individual (and the case study) toward organs and statistics is embodied through the aesthetics of the line. Masters and Johnson's diagrams and charts produce an affect of clarity even as they do not index anything in particular.

How, then, does race circulate in this system, and what does this tell us about what kind of entity it is? Masters and Johnson have made an argument that physiological response is the most important factor in theorizing sexual response while also rendering the actual matter of bodies opaque. Here, their use of the line severs sexual response not only from the whole individual but also from the sociological, which is one arena where Dickinson might argue the residue of difference lies. In making an argument that organs are the only thing that one should attend to, Masters and Johnson make it impossible to think with the larger landscape of sexual response where frameworks of intimacy and history might reveal themselves. As Janice Irving wrote, "They go one step beyond Kinsey, who based his notion of 'naturalness' on what people did, in that they base their idea of 'naturalness' on the physiological responses people exhibit."²⁵ Since Masters and Johnson's emphasis on physiology served the dual purpose of making their data appear both objective and the only observation worth noting, to imagine that race is physiological is to risk collusion

with racist myths, but to imagine that it does not matter produces its own form of violence. In this schema, inclusion is not the question; instead, race hovers as a problem of scale. The precision of Masters and Johnson's lines, which abstract bodies but cannot represent particularities, cannot be thought in relation to the two scales: the metascale (sociological) and the individual, through which race matters.

Blackness and the Sexological Project

The close-up of a face is as obscene as a sexual organ seen from up close. It is a sexual organ. The promiscuity of the detail. . . . takes on a sexual value.

—Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*

The suturing of selfhood and sexuality goes beyond Jean Baudrillard's quick observation relating the face to genitals. It is the logic that underlies the construction of sexuality itself, as part of a transition toward linking sexuality with the unconscious in ways that both include and exceed genitalia.²⁶ I bring Baudrillard, theorist of spectacle, into the conversation here because his observation connecting the face and genitals enables us to more fully comprehend the working of sexology as a type of dual portrait. The interchangeability of faciality and genitality becomes indicative of sexologists' attempts to abstract sexualities (and subjectivities) into describable essences while also speaking to sexology's sociological and scientific functions. As scientific discourse, it is intended to portray either idealized or demonized sexual behavior, but it also inadvertently reveals much about the social and cultural mores of its practitioners and their milieu. The production of sexological discourse, then, traffics in multiple versions of the self: that which is idealized and that which lurks in shadows. In asking us to look for the set of relations (the promiscuity) to which the detail attaches, Baudrillard invites us to think robustly with the multitude of twentieth- and twenty-first-century possibilities of representation that emerge through the dual: What happens when pleasure and selfhood bypass the genitals? Where can the residue of racialization find release?

This is to say, there are other ways to use the line that do not produce racialized exclusions. Here, I turn toward a portrait of me painted by Jevijoe Vitug, a contemporary Filipino American artist working in Queens (fig. 1). Like Masters and Johnson, Vitug works from photographs, but he uses abstraction to illuminate what the "objective" might miss. These lines do not offer racialization as a project of cross-hatched marks, nor are they part of a project to extract physiological data under the guise of precision. Instead, Vitug plays with the form of the line, using thick zigzags to compose the image. Unlike the lines produced by Dickinson and by Masters and Johnson, Vitug's lines are not seeking to excise race through (or in favor



Figure 1. Portrait of the author, by Jevijoe Vitug. Photograph by the author.

of) scientific rationalism; instead, they are markings from his indigenous Filipino heritage. He uses them to bring racialization explicitly into the grounds of representation. Here, the lines' thicknesses and curves convey opacity, not clarity. This foregrounding of the racialization of the lines highlights the amorphous representational space in which race circulates—it is present, but not reducible to identity (of either artist or sitter).²⁷ Instead, we can register racializing circulating as a theory of expressivity—both Vitug's and my own.

We might especially think with Jean Luc Nancy's meditation on the pleasure of drawing and the politics of representation. For Nancy, drawing is related both to the act, insofar as it involves an extension of self, and the result, which operates as its own enclosed form: "One draws—one traces or extracts—in order to show. One shows by extending or spreading out in front of oneself. Better, in order to show something well, in order to render it fully manifest, one must not cease drawing (if only to draw attention), and in order to draw out (trace or pull), one must not lose sight of the invisible extremity of the mark, the point by which the line advances and loses itself in its own desire."²⁸ For Nancy, drawing is not about mimesis but is instead a process of interpretation that reveals a form with its own representational logic (what we might call desires): "Drawing is therefore the Idea—it is the true form of the thing. Or more exactly, it is the gesture that proceeds from the desire to show this form and to trace it so as to show the form—but not to trace it in order to reveal it as a form already received."²⁹ In his deliberate separation between process and product, we find the space between representation and the object that sexological diagrams and charts want to collapse but that Vitug's painting allows to breathe. That space is what acknowledges both my and Vitug's racialization but does not demand that they become interchangeable. Instead, there is an ethical negotiation between them. Vitug's employment of Filipino zigzag lines signifies his attachment not only to his Filipino heritage but also to its unique representational system, which manifest in his use of symbols within the zigzag, spatial orientations, and pressure on the canvas. I do not have access to all of the ways that the painting signifies, but as Nancy suggests, the portrait is not an attempt to contain—it exists as its own form, distinct from that which it represents.

In this context, the zigzag might register as emblematic of the freedom of the line and the unruliness that Vitug permits. It offers a form of extension that is about not capturing the subject but expressing his own relationship to the concept of representation. Vitug's painted lines are echoes of those tattooed on him by Whang-od, the oldest *mambabatok* (traditional Kalinga tattooist). Many of her designs are geometric and applied using a traditional hand-tapping technique; each tattoo contains symbolic meaning specific to the Kalinga ethnic group.³⁰ In this case, Vitug's extension of self through the line is multiple: it is an extension of his indigenous heritage and of his body onto the canvas. The liveliness of the lines is unmistakable, too. They exist not for contour or shade but as forms of expressivity replete with their own joy and symbolic ecosystem.

The photograph on which the portrait is based was taken by an official National Women's Studies Association photographer in November 2014, during a panel discussion at the annual meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Vitug came across the photograph and made the portrait

several years later, while preparing a series that features his coworkers in casual situations. Though this is a portrait of me at work, I am happy. It is important, I think, that the presentation of comfort and pleasure is a through line linking this portrait and his later series. Given the elusiveness of representing Black female pleasure that I have discussed throughout this article, its presence in this portrait is significant. It allows us to rethink what constitutes pleasure, especially as it is tied to gender and race and as it brings us toward the possibilities of excess that inhere within representation itself.

In Dickinson's description of orgasm, blackness is explicitly excluded from his dual projects of revealing a norm and teaching men how to induce orgasm in women. The sensitivity toward stimulation, impressibility, implicitly tilts this aspect of the sexological project toward white women, imagining that Black sexual response is more closely related to nature, something unthought. In Masters and Johnson's focus on physiology and particular organs, the work of racialization cannot be parsed; its lines of force escape these particular contours of representation. In thinking with the places that racialization does appear, we encounter a history of extractive relationships that include the reliance on enslaved women for knowledge about anatomy and as the subjects (unable to consent) of gynecological surgery.³¹ This focus on Black anatomy is further reflected in determined searches for racial difference in the clitoris and buttocks, which then become grafted onto imaginaries of behavior, as Margaret Gibson and Siobhan Somerville have argued.³² Despite Dickinson's exclusion of Black anatomy from his *Atlas of Human Sex Anatomy*, his drawings do appear as part of the Sex Variant Study on homosexuality in New York in the 1930s, which Jennifer Terry argues attempted to map difference onto genitalia.³³

That this exclusion and deviance are both transmitted through the line helps us reflect on how sexology itself gives us insight into the nature of portraiture and the power dynamics in which it can be mired. In Dickinson's and Masters and Johnson's failure to grapple with race, we see they are attempting to work with a concept they consider other. Portraiture born outside of this hierarchical, classificatory framework, as is the case with Vitug, might begin with the question of who is empowered to author knowledge and veer elsewhere. In the context of the sexological, Julian Carter reminds us that marginalized populations have always also attempted to author their own theories of knowledge that follow their own representational schemas:

Anything queers (of varied races) sought to say about their own lives could be brushed off as reflecting a "savage" inability to comprehend the realities of civilized modern life, while self-representations by people of color

(of many sexualities) could be equally easily dismissed as skewed by their allegedly innate sexual coarseness and immorality. In short, racism and homophobia were mutually reinforced by their common reference to developmental failures that worked to disqualify people of color/queers from participating in the pursuit or communication of knowledge.³⁴

Vitug's portrait, then, offers a corrective on multiple levels. It allows us to reread Baudrillard's description of the face as a sex organ, of which Annamarie Jagose notes, "It turns out the facial close-up is more emphatically comparable not to the genital close-up but to the genital organ per se: 'It is a sexual organ.'"³⁵ Jagose's reading allows us not only to reconsider the relation between portraiture and sexology but to also rethink what we think we know about sexuality. Vitug has not portrayed ecstasy in the conventional sense (or where a focus on orgasm might be expected to lead), but his portrait does illuminate a fleshiness that exists in excess of representational capture, what I have elsewhere called *brown jouissance*.³⁶ This brown jouissance oscillates between objectification, Thingification, and the production of provisional porous selfhood. In this case, intellectual labor is the cause for this excess sensuality, and I use this occasion deliberately to point to inhabitations of Black femininity that might exist outside the traditional capture of sexuality but that still traffic in erotics. This shift in perspective leads us to reimaging frameworks for thinking sexuality; we can expand what sexology's technologies of portraiture might consist of, and we can theorize the qualities of sensuality of which sexology tries to speak. In this turn toward brown jouissance we also find a theorization of race as expressive in a way that does not altogether avoid representational capture and yet does not become sedimented into something necessarily knowable. Race is part of both the negotiation of circumstance and the embodied knowledge that emerges from having lived. The shift toward expressivity as a framework allows for multiple permutations and possibilities for pleasure, sexuality, race, and representation. Each of these categories becomes unruly. The work of the portraitist, here Vitug, is ethical. Through his painted lines, he is negotiating modes of presenting these forms of expressivity while keeping them dynamic and how to make knowledge while staying attentive to the pleasures of the flesh.

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Notes

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1. I am deliberately using words that contain echoes within Black studies' focus on fugitivity, errancy, and excess.

2. In "Queer Form," Kadji Amin, Roy Pérez, and I elaborate on the importance of thinking with aesthetics in order to speak back to this racialized demand: "Artists of color are often assigned the role of testifying to the sociological conditions of their own disempowerment. They are the 'native informants' of the art world, tasked with producing art that transmits information rather than pushing aesthetic boundaries. Such a colonial tasking, however, undermines or even silences analysis of their aesthetic aims is liable to be precluded or questioned. Aesthetic innovation and formal manipulation are, however, the very substance of many of these artists' engagement with legacies of social violence. Aesthetic form offers resources of resistance to the violences of interpretation that prematurely fix the meaning of minority artistic production into prefabricated narratives" (227).

3. For more extended arguments about this, see Musser, *Sensational Flesh*; and Musser, *Sensual Excess*.

4. For a history of intimacy and marriage in the United States, see D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*.

5. Wright, *Sex Factor in Marriage*, 101.

6. Jagose, *Orgasmology*, 34.

7. Jagose, *Orgasmology*, 46.

8. Williams, *Hardcore*.

9. Though it was common in anatomical texts to illustrate the morphology of the clitoris and vagina, physiological illustrations of orgasm did not exist prior to Dickinson. Most sex research that occurred after Dickinson and before Masters and Johnson is more sociological in nature and presents data in numerical form. For an example, see Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male*.

10. Dickinson, *Atlas of Human Sex Anatomy*, vii.

11. For further investigation of the relationship between the literary and the pornographic, see Bennett and Rosario, *Solitary Pleasures*.

12. Dickinson, *Atlas of Human Sex Anatomy*, 3.

13. Dickinson, *Atlas of Human Sex Anatomy*, 92.

14. Dickinson, *Atlas of Human Sex Anatomy*, fig. 158.

15. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 7.

16. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 101.

17. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 109.

18. Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*, 109.

19. Creadick, *Perfectly Average*, 42.

20. This precision was achieved through Masters and Johnson's employment of Ulysses, a dildo with photographic capabilities and a Plexiglas window, to literally create a window into female sexual response. In part, this shift toward film and photography was due to the belief that machines could provide unbiased "objective" data—not the subjective accounts on which Dickinson had to rely. By documenting various stages of response, Ulysses allowed Masters and Johnson to witness what happened during penetration. Extrapolating from these data, they built a case for a universal type of female sexual response. Ulysses, as a dildo, was meant to represent sex—actual sex could happen only between two people (for Masters and Johnson,

sex also happened to be heterosexual and reproductive). Though they acknowledged the potential for different responses with Ulysses versus with a partner, Masters and Johnson used data from their research to argue for its sameness: “In view of the artificial nature of the equipment, legitimate issue may be raised with the integrity of observed reaction patterns. Suffice it to say that intravaginal physiologic response corresponds in every way with previously established reaction patterns observed and recorded during hundreds of cycles in response to automanipulation” (*Human Sexual Response*, 21–22). Simultaneously arguing for the data’s difference and sameness articulates the dilemma at the heart of simulation. Using the machine to simulate sex opened sex as a category and made its definition fluid. Since copulation with a machine provided the same result as human intercourse, all orgasms, no matter what the cause, were considered to be the same. This was a major contrast to Dickinson’s view that intercourse could only be approximated, not replicated.

21. In outlining the parameters of their study, Masters and Johnson include “11 Negro family units” in addition to two Negro women who were evaluated without marital partners because one was a “surgical castrate” and the other had an artificial vagina (*Human Sexual Response*, 15). This is in addition to the 369 white female and 301 white male participants. In explaining this aspect of their study population, Masters and Johnson describe three of the Negro families as being of privileged backgrounds and eight as hailing from underprivileged backgrounds. The Negro sample also comes with a small disclaimer: “In view of the small number of Negro families in the study-subject population, it is obvious that the population has, over the years, been weighted toward the Caucasian rather than the Negro race” (15). The residue of race, however, is barely to be found in the rest of the study, which presents a unified portrait of female and male sexual response.

22. Desrosières, *Politics of Large Numbers*, 196.

23. Desrosières, *Politics of Large Numbers*, 214.

24. Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control.”

25. Irving, *Disorders of Desire*, 90.

26. Davidson, *Emergence of Sexuality*.

27. Ricardo Montez’s analysis of artist Keith Haring’s use of line as a way to grapple with racial dynamics is especially helpful here. See Montez, *Keith Haring’s Line*.

28. Nancy, *Pleasure in Drawing*, xii–xiii.

29. Nancy, *Pleasure in Drawing*, 10.

30. Lowe, “Reviving the Art of Filipino Tribal Tattoos.”

31. For more on this history, see Ivy, “Bodies of Work”; and Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*.

32. Gibson, “Clitoral Corruption”; Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*.

33. Terry, *American Obsession*.

34. Carter, “On Mother-Love,” 124.

35. Jagose, *Orgasmology*, 145.

36. Musser, *Sensual Excess*.

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