**Trans\* Is Natural**

Georgie Preston

Traditionally, the “natural” world has been used symbolically to represent and justify existing social relations amongst humans. To state that something is “natural” is to argue that because non-human animals or plants practice the same methods, it must be acceptable for humans to as well. However, as highlighted by Maya J. Hird (2006,) it often matters less how animals actually behave, and more how we perceive and categorise their behaviour in relation to our own. Furthermore, she argues that the act of invoking nature to defend our cultural and social norms is a technique used only when natural behaviours are considered morally superior (Hird, 2006.) This renders comparisons as futile, as they are only called upon when they suit an argument, which is often from a Judeo-Christian standpoint of patriarchal and heteronormative values, thus derived from culture. This is exemplified by the schism between right-wing fundamentalist Christians in the United States and the North American LGBTQ+ community over the metaphorical power of penguins, particularly in the film “March of the Penguins.” Noël Sturgeon (2010) uses this instance to explain how fractured human use of animal “symbolism” has become; as while penguins were at once a representation of the “normality” and “naturalness” of gay marriage for one community, they represented Christian values and intelligent design for another simultaneously. Therefore, the argument that trans is “natural” by using the example that trans exists in the “natural” or non-human world, does not provide adequate reasoning. We cannot distinguish nature and culture from one another; they are instead entangled. Moreover, the tendency of androcentric thought towards realism isolates human culture from having any impact on what exists both prior to and independent of human interactions (Tuana, 2008.) It fails to acknowledge what social constructivism admits: that some ideas that have been considered “natural” phenomena have actually been socially constructed, and vice-versa (Tuana, 2008.) Thus, the definition of trans as a “natural” experience is an idea that has been significantly influenced by Judeo-Christian values of what is ‘pure’ or ‘meant to happen’ – looking to the non-human “natural” world only when what is seen bolsters its own argument.

However, while defining sexuality and gender as “naturally occurring” due to examples of non-human animals is a falsity, it continues to be worthwhile to analyse theorists of biology such as Darwin, in his writing on evolution to test feminist theories against. According to his work, variation is the key to life (Grosz, 2005.) This can be read to suggest that diversity in genders and sexualities, such as cisgender and transgender, is required to produce the best outcome of survival for as species. Furthermore, he identifies that sexual selection is not the only necessary tool for the successful reproduction and survival of a species, often at once hindering survival whilst aiding the chance for the individual to be chosen to reproduce due to having characteristics that are seen as attractive (Grosz, 2005.) This is exemplified by a peacock; whose bright feathers aid sexual selection while also making it a target for predators (Grosz, 2005.) Therefore, if reproductive success does not equal survival, traditional Judeo-Christian arguments surrounding the “unnatural” nature of homosexual and trans individuals due to their inability to produce children without intervention fall short.

As pointed out in a study (Hird, 2006,) there has often been a negative view of trans people amongst feminist theorists, tending to argue that trans people reify the pre-existing and rigid patriarchal constructions of gender that feminists aim to dismantle. Theorist Wilton is specifically cited for her explanation of the ‘authenticity’ of the experience of gender (Hird, 2006.) Her theory contains two parts: in the experience of gender as phenomenology and of embodied or physical gender as corporeality (Hird, 2006.) According to this theory, a trans woman’s vagina cannot possibly be “real,” due to its having been surgically constructed for the purpose of penile penetration, rather than for delivering a baby (Hird, 2006.) However, this argument completely neglects the complexities of gender, reducing a major part of being female to reproductive capability. Furthermore, this argument inherently defines women who are unable to have a baby as no longer female. It is also problematic to separate trans women from cisgender women, as it excludes a group, thus creating more boundaries and suggesting that trans and cisgender women cannot coexist. To combat this segregation, Elizabeth Grosz (2005) asserts that feminist theory must ‘put itself at risk’ if it is to be confronted with its own shortcomings and become transformed into a stronger school of thought in a broader context. Therefore, trans people must be included and discussed by feminists to strengthen the validity of feminist arguments as well.

**References**

Grosz, Elizabeth (2005) ‘Feminism and Darwin: Preliminary investigations into a possible alliance’, In *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*, pp. 13-33, Durham: Duke University Press.

Hird, Myra (2006) ‘Animal trans’ in *Australian Feminist Studies* 21(49): 35-48.

Sturgeon, Noel (2010) ‘Penguin family values: the nature of planetary environmental reproductive justice’, in C. Mortimer-Sandilands and B. Erickson (eds) *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, pp. 102- 133, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Tuana, Nancy (2008) ‘Vicious porosity: witnessing Katrina’, in S. Alaimo and S. Hekman (Eds.) *Material* *Feminisms*, pp. 188-211, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.