**Is trans\* natural?**

As Myra J. Hird (2006) showed, non-human animals, as natural inhabitants of this world, are often seen as symbolic performers of human animals’ moral qualities. These framed observations try to legitimate human categories as natural. They include for example the division of a feminine and masculine sex, followed by fidelity, family and caretaking of the offspring. Approaches to disrupt this Judeo-Christian notion of nature being morally superior, have shown that there are in fact ‘homosexual practices’ amongst non-human animals. Holding against this, anthropomorphic notions try to explain that sex dimorphism is restricted to higher life forms and thus reproducing a divisive gap between human and non-human species (human exceptionalism).

These debates show that the categorization of gay, queer or trans\* as a natural phenomenon would mean to make a clear distinction between what is natural and what is cultural. Hird states in her text that in cultural analyses trans\* is often seen as a solely cultural phenomenon. These debates often revolve around the question of the naturality of sex. This is also a rather problematic notion, since it leads to the depiction of trans\* as inauthentic, based on the conviction that trans\* is not common among non-human species and therefore not a natural phenomenon

To approach this discussion from a different perspective, Hird brings evidence for existing trans\* behaviour of unfamiliar non-human species. In doing so she challenges the conceptions of strict division of nature and culture. Thus, undermining hierarchal categorizations based on pure nature. Hird draws from Haraway’s understanding of trans\* as a crossover between nature and artifice and therefore a concept challenging the strict definitions of western cultures.

To overcome the misleading conception of trans\* as a reproducing performance of patriarchal notions of femininity and masculinity and the understanding of trans\* as inauthentic, which is rooted again in a distinction of natural and artificial sex, Hird points out that we should not ask, whether trans\* is natural, but what would non-human species think about trans\*. She shows the complexity and wide variations of sex and sexual behaviour of non-human species and concludes that “most living organisms on this planet would make little sense of the human classification of two sexes, and certainly less sense of a critique of transsex based upon a conceptual separation of nature and culture.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Hird also stresses that we cannot simply call behaviours and morphologies of living organism queer and therefore think to undermine heteronormativity in this way, because it would neglect that queer is still a socio-culturally constructed term defined from human perspective. Although queerness can be used on less familiar non-human species to connote our perception of human, cultural and social phenomena with more deviancy and with a natural and biological force. If we start thinking queer from a non-human perspective, i.e. from the point of view of the unfamiliar diversity of sex amongst living organisms like bacteria, the motivation behind debates about the authenticity of trans\* might be annulled. [[2]](#footnote-2)

Therefore in an inclusive conception of human and non-human species, trans\* can be seen as challenging tool situated between and within the coexisting, interconnection of nature and culture. With this understanding hierarchal categorizations of dimorphism and strict schism of nature and culture may be overcome. We can substantiate this argument with Nancy Tuana’s (2008) proclamation that the entrenched distinction of gender and sex derives from the dichotomy of culture and nature and leads to sexist and racist structures. She highlights that we should rather think in bodies and sexes, which are active and changing, emerging and fluid.[[3]](#footnote-3) To explicate this idea may contribute to overcome rigid notions of trans\* as inauthentic and therefore not natural and amoral.

A fluid understanding of bodies and trans\* is connected to the trans-corporeality of naked protesters described by Stacy Alaimo (2009). The performed vulnerability leads to interconnected process of material exchanges between human bodies and the environment (Mitwelt - Withworld). Thus proclaiming humans perspective, not as looking on the planet from afar, but as organisms, materially situated on earth and therefore participants of planetary processes. These performances question, not only the hegemonic masculinity of aggressive consumption and the ignorant distancing of science, where responsiblities are erased, but also highlight human’s corporal proximity to the more-than-human world. [[4]](#footnote-4)

With combining these examples of theoritical approaches, I want to show that questions about naturality, from the human species’ perspective is linked to the porblematic idea of inauthenticity and the rigid schism of culture and nature, which potentially inherits a variety of discrimination like sexism and racism. As emphasised there are ways to rethink this division and form a more inclusive consciousness on the base of a interconnected relationship between human bodies and the more-than-human-world.

1. Myra J. Hird, “Animal Transsex”, *Australian Feminist Studies* 21/49, 2006, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hird, “Animal Transsex”, p. 35-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Nancy Tuana, “Vicious Porosity: Witnessing Katrina”, *Material Feminism*, ed. Stacy Alaimo/Susan Hekman, Indiana: Bloomington & Indianapolis 2008, p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Stacy Alaimo, “Insurgent Vulnerability and the Carbon Footprint of Gender”, *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*, 15.10.2009, https://doi.org/10.7146/kkf.v0i3-4.27969, 16.03.2020, p. 22-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)