**Lyudmila Sharko**

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Department of Gender Studies

Faculty of Humanities

Charles University

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**Week 3. Thinking Trans\* with Nonhuman Animals**

*Topics*: human/animal; natural/unnatural; sex change; Trans\*, queer; intersex; nonhuman animals; sexual reproduction; trans/queer politics,

**Is trans\* natural?**

To answer this question, first of all it is necessary to define the meaning of “trans\*” [and then the meaning of natural!] for the purpose of this writing. t XX [name author/s] suggest that “trans\*” and “transsex” refers [to the ability to change sex and more widely to] “the diversity of sexual behaviors” that is characteristic for both human and non-human animals – the phenomenon that unites people and non-human animals into a single group and challenges the natural/unnatural dichotomy as regards the sexual practices.

Also, the answer to this question requires reverting to the historical accounts and modern debates on which sexual practices that exist in the human and non-human world are considered by human cultures as natural and unnatural. Mortimer-Sandilands and Erikson (? 2010)write that historical accounts show how the beliefs about natural processes are intertwined with the understanding of sexuality in public discourses:

“the historical origins of modern understandings of sex, sexuality, sexual identity, and sexual orientation are grounded in biological discourses that are heavily influenced by evolutionary thought, and conversely, that evolutionary thought is supported by modern understandings of sex as an internal and essential category, and also by notions of natural sexuality from which nonreproductive sexualities are understood as deviant. (Mortimer-Sandilands and Eickson, 2010, 7).

The dichotomy “natural versus unnatural” became part of the political and religious western discourse starting from the seventeenth century. These discourses and understandings were largely influenced by Darwin’s evolutionary theory, read to be claiming that natural and sexual selection ensures survival of species through reproduction and thus heterosexual behavior is normal or natural. Therefore, heterosexual practice became a “natural” norm, equal to reproduction, while other sexual practices like same-sex pairing were considered unnatural or against nature since they had nothing to do with procreation. In this sense there appeared “the other of nature” – queers whose sexual practices were considered unnatural as they did not conform to the accepted heterosexual norms (Gaard, 1997, p. 129; Grosz, 2005; Hird, 2006; Mortimer-Sandilands et al., 2010).

Despite the attempts in Western discourse and practice to naturalize sexuality and declare and in the 19th and 20th centuries to incarcerate … queers unnatural, appealing to the theory of natural selection, these attempts are disproved by the ample evidence of non-reproductive sex practices existing among the non-human animals. In fact, ‘homosexual’ behavior has been observed in the multiple groups of animals, birds and insects, and on the whole the sexual practices in the non-human world are more diverse and go beyond the natural/unnatural frame. The dichotomy of natural/unnatural is mostly used as the argument to maintain the dominant social (heterosexual) norm and support the social construction of sexuality instead of exploring and acknowledging the sexual diversity in the human and non-human world (Gaard, 1997). By constructing the opposing dichotomy of natural/unnatural the humanity made a bad service to itself by overlooking the real life of animals and the existence of sexual diversity. Therefore, the exploration of variations of sexual behaviors in non-human world presents a challenge to that dichotomy and to the idea of nuclear heterosexual pairing as natural (Alaimo, 2009; Mortimer-Sandilands et al., 2010). Sturgeon’s writing about the modes of sexual behavior of Antarctic penguins further illustrates the “challenge to the cultural production of a heterosexist evolutionary format, whereby survival equals heterosexual reproduction” (Mortimer-Sandilands et al., 2010, p. 33). The enormous diversity of sex in non-human world also challenges the understanding of “natural” or heterosexual behavior as morally superior. Suffice to mention a pair of female Japanese macaques who lived in a long-term union, as an example (Hird, 2006).

Considering this diversity and taking into account that humans are part of the animal world, the debates about what sexual behavior is natural or unnatural lose any meaning as “[h]omosexual behaviour is part of our evolutionary heritage” (Hird, 2006, p. 40). Therefore, concluding the above, the naturalness of transsex should be discussed only from the following perspective: transsex is not a purely human phenomenon, but it is what proves once again that despite our culture humankind is part of nature/animal world (Hird, 2006).

You make good arguments following gaard and some of Hird and Mortimer Sandilands. But are you ultimately extending the category of natural (to humans too) or are you querying the viability of the nature culture divide itself? More emphasis has to be put (with Grosz e.g. ) on changeability, instability and inventiveness within ‘nature’ (that includes culture); otherwise you ignore the history of adverse effects to define women and queers as natural.

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