Gender, Nature, Culture

Discussion Essay Trans Natural

Laila van Berge

16-03-2020

 **Is trans\* natural?**

*“A molecular structure in which two particular atoms or groups lie on opposite sides of a given plane in the molecule, in particular denoting an isomer in which substituents at opposite ends of a carbon–carbon double bond are also on opposite sides of the bond.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

To answer the question if trans is natural it is important to first define what is trans and what is natural or nature is, and because nature and natural are often regarded as the opposite of culture, it might be helpful to describe that as well. The upper quote is one of the definition for trans given by the Oxford dictionary. It is the definition used within the biological discourse, in this regard one can already state that trans is natural, but this conclusion is very unsatisfactory and is not the exactly the same concept of trans that I will cover in this essay. Although the meanings show a clear relation to one another.

 Trans is also used to denote something that operated through or across multiple entities or layers. For example transnational, this operates across national borders, instead of international which is between nations. Another example of trans most obviously connected to gender studies is the idea of transgender, which implies the state where the gender or personal identity does not correspond with their birth sex. It denotes a transitional state from one into another. It denotes a constant shifting and movement of matter in-between not solid entities.

 Hird argues in her paper on animal transsex that the ideas about gender and sex were for a long time not debated because they were perceived to be part of the physical sciences, of nature, and thus resistant to socio-historical change. At the same time feminist theorists were hesitant to dive into the more materialist approaches because of this assumption.[[2]](#footnote-2) A similar argument is Made by Grosz who claims that the darwinist theory was usually avoided by feminist scholars and often misinterpreted or misused with the popular idea of the survival of the fittest.This idea assumes determination and a justification for the dominant role of the ‘winners’ and hereby can be used to justify patriarchy as a result of the natural proces of selection. But according to Grozs the actual theory is way more complex, wherein cultural elements play a prominent role and randomness, adaption and the ability to adjust play a big role.[[3]](#footnote-3) The commonsensical *winners discourse* is a misinterpretation or selective reading of the darwinist theory that is held agains feminist theory while the full understanding can actually serve valuable tools for a deeper theoretical understanding. And the idea of natutal-cultural evolution based on adaption and selection can make space for a prominent acceptation of the concept and state of trans, as transitional.

 This idea of trans breaks with the dichotomous and dualist conception of positivist categorisations, dominant in andromorph science. For example in the general assumption about nature and culture. The most common definition of natural is all that is existing in or derived from nature and not made or caused by humankind. Nature is thus that what was in the world before human interference. The term culture derives from cultivation, the alteration of lands for the biggest growth as in agriculture, and is hereby tightly connected to the interaction between nature and the human intellect. Culture is in general used to describe all that men creates. Culture is seen as a form of interference and adaption in the organic ways of going.

 Nature and culture are thus divided by the role of humans, or more precisely the interference of mankind. But this would almost seem like culture is taking over nature when humans come into action, while actually these concepts are not that strictly divided and constantly interact and influence one another to great extend. We should not forget that humans are themselves part of nature, and other mammals have also ways of doing to interfere or alter the organic ways of going in nature. This interrelationship can be substantiated by the idea of transcorporeality. Trancorporeality means the interrelationality of humans with the earth. Wherein for example human made products enter the human body and thereby become part of the natural physicality of the body. But the same count for nature in the broad spectrum and vice versa in the way that nature can influence cultural decisions or tendencies.

 The natural ecological system is wholistic and organic system based on the interaction between the elements or actors present in the system. Hereby all elements are constant in movement, thereby matter is not essentially a site but rather a process of materialisation or mattering.[[4]](#footnote-4) Matter is rather dynamic entanglement of relations, always in relation and part of these complex ecologies. Hereby one matter goes over in the other, for example in the form of erosion or insemination. The idea of solid matter and hard borders are not in nature nor in culture very tenable, neither is it valuable to discard all these distinctions and categorisations.

There are of course obvious differences between elements in nature, just as in culture, a rock is not a chicken and would probably never become one. But a chick will probably become a chicken, but this is a gradual transition and does not happen over night. Just like the rock that might become dust by the slow process of erosion.

 With the idea as the world as a network does not imply that there are no distinctions at all.

As humans we need a structure to think in, in order to make sense of the world around us. Just like the all living beings need semiotics and categorisation in order to survive. A prey needs to recognise its predators and vice versa. In order to recognise danger and potential resources for survival and reproduction, human-beings and other living beings need to make distinctions and categorisations.[[5]](#footnote-5) This semiotic and categorising ability is characteristic for living beings and can be seen as a form of culture, since it entails the interpretation, and thereby the mental alteration, of the surrounding world. Thereby I would argue that classifications and categorisations of all sorts are a cultural product, whereby the transitional state of mattering can be seen as the natural whole. Even though trans is another human made description and categorisation.

 In a sense trans is not natural, but cultural, because the term trans is a cultural matter, while the concept where it points to can be seen as natural state of being. Nature and culture are no strict binary or dichotomies, but are in a constant interaction and entanglement, whereby the in between position, like trans, plays a prominent role. In fact, all is in constant motion, transition, all is trans. Maybe in the end it is not so much if trans is natural, but more if the natural-cultural is trans.

1. Oxford dictionary, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hird, Myra J. “Animal Transex.” *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 21, no. 49, 2006, pp. 35–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Darwin and Feminsim:Preliminary Investigation into a Possible Alliance.” *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*, by Elizabeth Grosz, Duke University Press, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tuana, Nancy. Viscous porosity: Witnessing Katerina. Material Feminism, Stacy Alaimo & Susan HEKMAN, INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2008 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Deely, John. The Semiotic Animal, A postmodern definition of human being superseding the modern definition ‘ res cogitatans. Congress Tomista Internazionale, Rome 21-25/09/2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)