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## ‘The Third’ – A Hindrance to Diversity?

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### Abstract:

This paper interrogates ethnological research into intersexuality from the 1970s onwards. In these ‘narratives’ one can see how certain terminologies lead to the manifestation of ‘sexed dimorphism’ and ‘gender dichotomy’ and also to the pathologisation of intersexuality. In particular the addition of ‘the Third’ (as either *third sex* and/or *third gender*) ironically leads to the reinforcement of the categories of male and female as natural, normal and also ‘globally’ universal. The societal organisations of non-Western societies are placed together under one rubric - the notion of ‘the Third’ becomes ontologically universalised. Principally in this paper, the conflation of biological and cultural ideas about gender, sex, sexuality in the construction of the category of ‘the Third’ is addressed. Moreover, this paper investigates the theoretical and political limitations of the application of such a category in ethnological, medical and psychoanalytical research through the lenses of feminist and queer theories.

**Keywords:** Intersexuality, Ethnography, Gender Identity, Body, Naturalization



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Over the last 15 years, most feminist researchers will have heard about research into *intersexuality* or *hermaphroditism* or even research into *third sexes* or *third genders*. These different terms are used by various disciplines namely anthropology, medicine and psychology.<sup>1</sup> The earliest critical writings appeared in 1990 when scholars started to tackle the issue from a feminist perspective (Kessler, 1990; Butler 1990), and now accounts based on intersexuality fill the feminism and gender studies section in bookshops. Intersexuality is used to serve various theories of gender, sex and sexuality from a variety of perspectives – each with their specific aim. This paper will make explicate one version of intersexuality through interrogating the anthropological accounts which draw on intersexuality. Thus the aim is to highlight the implications of the use and exploitation of intersexuality within anthropology.

Anthropology aims to describe the workings of human culture and as such they have exploited cultures which have been seen as more primitive in an effort to understand the ‘basic’ human society. The organisation of gender, sex and sexuality within these different cultures seem to offer a basis for understanding, and for some challenging, the more ‘complexly’ organised western society. Anthropologists have always been fascinated by the organisation of gender, sex and sexuality in other cultures. Especially in recent years there was a growing interest in social worlds that recognise more than two sexes and/or genders. The investigation of symbolic organisations in cultures other than the West has been used to demonstrate that sex is not simply given to us as an obvious biological fact. In the light of the constructivist versus essentialist debate anthropologists have contributed to the notion that how we apprehend sex is shaped by cultural, symbolic and structural features. However, ethnographers from all over the world and the US in particular have travelled to find populations in which intersexuality is a common feature.

It is important to note that my focus is not intersexuality itself, but rather academic research into intersexuality. I am of the view that it is of greater importance to interrogate the specific modes of research that lead us to specific assumptions than the ‘object’ itself. By investigating the history of research into intersexuality, I will explore the indication of these

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Medicine uses a multitude of terms for the different ‘syndromes’, these have been changing through time according to technological development namely in endocrinology and genetics which have served to diagnose a variety of conditions that can be subsumed under intersexuality (the most complete compilation by Fausto-Sterling 2000). Psychology and Psychoanalysis since the 1950s also use a variety of terms. The most common one of ‘psychosexual emergency’ is the foundation for the ‘medical management’ of intersexuality (Money 1955).

theoretical developments concerning the interconnection between gender, sex and sexuality. My aim is to identify some of the discourses that enabled the construction of the specific concept of ‘the Third’ in anthropology, which I will do through a queer analysis of inherent theories on gender and sexual identity. Finally I will ask for further implications of the use of ‘the Third’ as a theoretical and political concept.

In the figure of the intersexed, or the hermaphrodite, scholars have constructed the perfect site for the investigation of the concordance between sex and gender (Money, 1955; Stoller, 1968). Especially in ethnographic endeavours one can find the attempts to prove or disprove this presumably universal concordance (Herdt & Davidson 1988; Herdt, 1990, 1994). When examining the social, biological or psychological conditions for gender, bodies, and desire in other cultures, scholars tend to construct new categories for mediating their research paradigms. The term *berdache* for example, has been used for people in North-American indigenous societies who dress differently and fulfil the tasks of the ‘opposite’ gender. *Rites de passage* in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere have been seen in the light of western concepts of sexuality and have been termed ‘ritualised homosexuality.’ In the case of intersexuality the new category has become ‘the Third’ as an all encompassing and cross/cultural term (Herdt, 1994). In the incidence of third sexes/genders anthropologists, who are writing as advocates of a liberal sexual agenda, view these societal structures as superior to those that structure their social life in accordance to the principle of two sexes/genders. Holmes in her paper detects that these constructions of cultures that recognise third sexes/genders are ‘simplistic visions’ (Holmes, 2004). The present paper wants to extend this critique to some hidden mechanisms that occur in ethnography concerned with figures of ‘the Third.’

Within research into intersexuality we find medical models, which at the birth of a child whose genitals do not fit the aesthetics of a clear cut sexual dimorphism, declare a ‘psychosexual emergency’. The treatment paradigm dictates the necessity to operate on these children’s genitals to provide the bodily precondition for ‘normal’ gender identity development which obviously is supposed to operate through those parameters (first stated in Money, 1955). While the treatment paradigm is not the focus of this paper, one can see an illustration in figure 1 there is an unacceptable space created that needs to be eradicated.

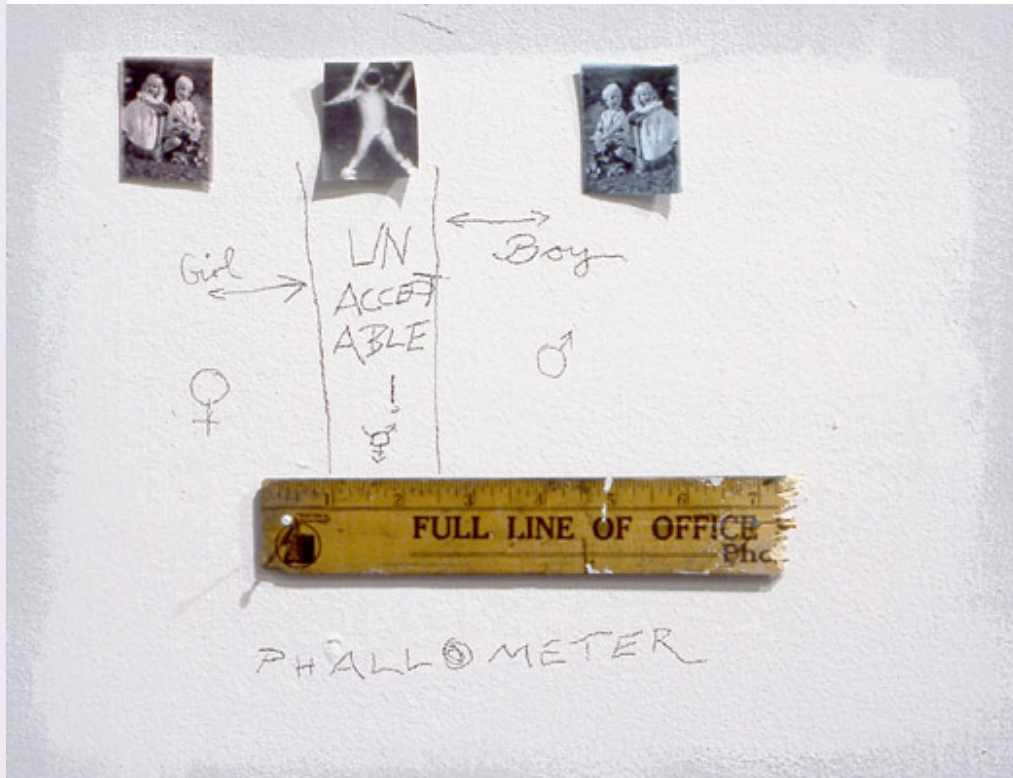


Figure 1 by Ins A. Kromminga

In 1993 the feminist biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling has published ‘The Five Sexes’ in *The Sciences*. In this groundbreaking article (the title is programme) she provocatively advocates the categorisation of sexual conditions into five states (Fausto Sterling 1993). The five sexes are categorised by Fausto-Sterling as firstly the so-called true-hermaphrodites, whom she calls *herms*, who possess one testis and one ovary. Then there are the male pseudo hermaphrodites, called the *merms* who have testes and some aspects of the female genitalia but no ovaries. Lastly, there are female pseudo hermaphrodites, which are called *ferms* who have ovaries and some characteristics of the male genitalia but lack testes. Fausto-Sterling suggests that: ‘the three intersexes, herm, merm and ferm, deserve to be considered additional sexes each in its own right.’ She further argues that ‘sex’ is a ‘vast, infinitely malleable continuum that defies the constraints of even five categories’ (Fausto-Sterling 1993; 21). Supposedly, the last two ‘sexes’ are male and female, which Fausto-Sterling appears to take for granted as the two poles that define and restrict this continuum by their reproductive ability. The idea of the continuum is based on a notion from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that classified people according to their



reproductive organs. This concept has been prevalent for the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Dreger writes in her book on ‘Hermaphrodites and the medical invention of sex’ (Dreger, 1998) and means that sex and gender have mainly been assigned according to the existence of sexed gonads. The ‘Age of Gonads’ seems to have a comeback in Fausto-Sterling’s proposal.

In 1876, the German pathologist Theodor Albrecht Edwin Klebs (1834-1913) created a classification system in his ‘Handbuch der Pathologischen Anatomie’, which served to drastically decrease the number of people who could be defined as hermaphrodites. In Klebs system, the ‘Age of the Gonads’ became manifest: True hermaphrodites had to have both at least one ovary and at least one testicle. Moreover, he divided them further into ‘true bilateral hermaphroditism’ (with one ovary and one testicle on each side), ‘true unilateral hermaphroditism’ (with one side ovary and testicle and the other side one of them) and ‘true lateral hermaphroditism’ (a testicle on one side and an ovary on the other). Finally, ‘false hermaphroditism’, the so-called *pseudohermaphroditism*, was defined as ‘doubling of the external genital apparatus with a single kind of sexual gland’. This false hermaphroditism was further divided into two separate categories, the ‘masculine pseudohermaphrodite’ testicles and female genitals, and the ‘feminine pseudohermaphrodite’ ovaries testicles and female genitals and masculine genitals. This attempt to ban the threat of a vanishing of a clear-cut two-sexed/gendered society could be called the actual ‘elimination of *true* hermaphroditism’ (cited in Dreger, 1998; 146 my emphasis). Klebs thus reinforced the popular conception that there were two and only two sexes/genders, with a very rare and unusual exception in the case of *true* hermaphroditism which actually is not so far away from Fausto-Sterling’s proposal from 1993.

There are other historical concepts of the classification of the intersexed that are revived in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Amongst others, in the case of anthropological studies these notions have emerged from the investigation of homosexuality in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Karl Ulrichs, a German scholar published his first accounts on ‘Uranism’ in 1890;<sup>2</sup> he spoke about a *third sex*, which was hermaphroditic in the soul not in the body. But growing evidence of homosexuals’ anatomical ‘normality’ increasingly challenged the hermaphroditic model imposed by advocates of the *third sex/gender* and the emphasis laid on the body shifted to the mind. In the following decades, the terms hermaphroditism and homosexuality became

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<sup>2</sup> Ulrichs coined that neologism for homosexuality.

intermingled. The notion of the anatomically deviant transformed into the psychologically deviant. Homosexual invert came to be seen as inhabiting the status of either a masculine woman or an effeminate man according to their sexual orientation. In the notion of Darwinism, hermaphrodites *and* homosexuals were considered to be unfinished specimens of stunted evolutionary growth (as for example one of the early sexologists, Havelock Ellis has stated).

In anthropological accounts on intersexuality (and also in studies on the *berdache* and other cultural gender variant people) ‘the Third’ became installed as an ontological and even a cross-cultural entity. This entity was employed to depict the assumption of a third possible formation of subject(ivity)s – unfortunately on the grounds of biology. The ‘sex/-ual difference’ between man and woman was likewise mediated through the newly discovered body of theories of intersexuality. This mysterious *third* entity is a dangerous localisation of ‘truth’ in respect to the materiality of bodies and the formation of subject(ivity)s. Foucault has exemplified this by discussing the term ‘sex’, but it depicts what the construction of the very idea of any ‘truth’ of the materiality of bodies might mean: we cannot think of either the body or the subject(ivity)s as freed from ‘sex/-ual difference’ (Foucault, 1978). Moreover, regarding research into other cultures, it is assumed that all cultures recognise the same anatomical markers and also recognize them as ‘natural’, as the common Western perception does.

The hermaphrodite/intersexed has repeatedly been ‘disciplined’ in Western countries. Scientific investigations into sex, gender, and sexuality since the middle of the 19th century have been merging in the figure of the intersexed. Since then, the very notion of the continuous evolution of human species which has its origin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has itself deeply inscribed in any interpretation of the human body and mind. The idea of a continuum on which human sex/uality is to be located is a consequence of this notion. One end of the continuum is reserved for the ‘perfect’ (meaning ‘fittest’ to beget offspring) male and the other for the ‘perfect’ female (meaning ‘fittest’ to bare offspring).

The category of the ‘third sex/ third gender’ detected by Western researchers needs to be theorised as implicitly related to Western modes of research. The Third as a category is hereby allocated somewhere in-between the sex/-ual continuum that Klebs, Fausto-Sterling and Ulrichs advocate. This specific mode of investigation relies on the formerly mentioned view on the development of human nature (concerning either sex, gender, or sexuality).

Yet, the ‘third’ has been discussed as a theoretical option. Marjorie Garber in her book *Vested Interests* looks on aspects of cross-dressing and argues that ‘thirds are analytically useful because they upset the binary and encourage flexibility’ (Garber, 1992). Garber emphasises that

the ‘third term’ is *not a term*. Much less is it a *sex*, certainly not an instantiated ‘blurred’ sex as signified by a term like ‘androgyne’ or ‘hermaphrodite’, although these words have culturally specific significance at certain historical moments. The ‘third’ is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self sufficiency, self-knowledge. (Garber 1992: 11)

Garber rejects the idea that the ‘third’ is principally a word, sex, or specific referent of any kind. For her, it is rather a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Garber is particularly interested in the ability of multiple kinds of ‘thirds’ to disrupt multiple binary categories and symmetries by placing them in larger, messier contexts. In Garber’s eyes, the ‘third’ is what is able to question binary thinking and introduces crisis. But still the ‘third’ has more often been used to establish ONE notion of the ‘third’ as I hope to show.

In analyses of intersexuality one can see how argumentative and conceptual terminologies lead to the manifestation of ‘sex/-ual difference’. During the 1990’s ‘The Third’ re-appeared in ethnological research as an overall term for a variety of different forms of human experiences and social and cultural existence. One very influential book was published in 1994 entitled, *Third Sex Third Gender. Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*. This book was a collection of essays by prominent anthropological researchers, and edited by Gilbert Herdt, a famous ethnographer from Berkeley. Its content spans various historical periods as well as the universal *two-sex/gender system* and the pathologisation of intersexuality as we will see in the following. The volume has had a huge impact on later studies into the global variety of sexualities around the world. Herdt is the author of a chapter entitled ‘*Mistaken Sex: Culture, Biology and the Third Sex in New Guinea*’ (Herdt 1994). This chapter is a variation and extension of an article from 1990 which is called ‘*Mistaken gender: 5-alpha reductase deficiency and biological reductionism in gender identity reconsidered*’. What strikes one most is the renaming of the title which is linked to the beginning of the de-medicalization of

intersexuality and the theoretical developments that have taken place during those 4 years concerning the *gender concept*.<sup>3</sup>

Herdt, in the first article from 1990 '*Mistaken gender*' (Herdt, 1990), refers to a paper by Imperato-McGinley, a physician from New York who has conducted research in the Dominican Republic from 1974 onwards. Herdt reports that these researchers identified a 'syndrome in which hermaphroditic males were sometimes mistakenly assigned to the female sex' in the Dominican Republic. This syndrome has been termed *5 alpha-reductase deficiency hermaphroditism*. Children are raised as girls but in puberty they develop some masculine features like facial hair, deep voice and enlargement of the penis (which was formerly termed clitoris). Some of these people would change to a male gender role and marry women.

The central point of Imperato-McGinley's article is that 'exposure of the brain to normal levels of testosterone in utero, neonatally and at puberty appears to contribute substantially to the formation of male-gender identity' (Imperato-McGinley et al., 1979: 1233). Imperato-McGinley et al. conclude that the surveyed subjects demonstrate that 'in the absence of sociocultural factors that could interrupt the natural sequence of events, the effect of testosterone predominates, over-riding the effect of rearing as girls' (Imperato-McGinley et al., 1979: 1233).<sup>4</sup> The study represents an argument against the importance of nurturing in the form of '*sex of rearing*' (which is a term that derives from John Money's research into intersexuality from the 1950s (Money, 1955)) in favour of prenatal and post pubertal hormones. This means that gender as a matter of socialisation was defeated and biological factors were given prevalence in the development of gender identity. Herdt compares this study with his own work from 1988. This is a research that he conducted with Julian Davidson; a physician from Stanford University (California) in Papua New Guinea where they state that they found evidence that the 'Sambia [the 'tribe' they investigated] epitomize a three-sex category culture: the gender differentiation of the pseudohermaphrodite cannot therefore fail to be ambiguous, for it is intermediate between the male and female categories' (Herdt, Davidson 1988: 54). They do not seem to be clear on

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<sup>3</sup> Pressure came from a variety of theorists not just from feminism but also from other disciplines like biology, philosophy (Butler 1990; Kessler 1990; Epstein, 1990; Fausto-Sterling 1993; etc ).

<sup>4</sup> It remains unclear, what Imperato-McGinley et al. mean by an environment that is characterised by an 'absence of sociocultural factors'. Presumably they mean that there has not been any medical intervention through e.g. hormonal treatment. Later on in the paper Imperato-McGinley use the term *laissez-faire* for their perception of their 'field' (Imperato-McGinley, et al., 1979)



their use of sex and gender as they in some cases use them interchangeably. However, what Herdt and Davidson emphasize is ‘the profound social learning and reinforcement aspects of the Sambia gender-role change’ (Herdt, Davidson 1988: 53). However, to ground this argument, they rely on the Victorian classification of true and pseudo hermaphrodites. Herdt reviews the formerly mentioned studies and attempts to provide new data on the Sambia case, he states that ‘while Sambia recognize three sexes and at birth sex-assign them as such, their world view systematically codes only two genders, masculine and feminine in cultural discourse’ (Herdt 1988: 434). Herdt here elaborates on the deeply inscribed common sense notion that ‘sexual dimorphism’ seems so ‘natural’ which exercises with ‘absolutism’ over sex research’ (Herdt, 1988) in Western culture and science. As useful as this realisation is, Herdt seems to not or only partially adopt this critique into his own research. However, in 1990 and 1994 he argues for the category of the ‘third gender’ that he grounds on the medical identification of a ‘third sex’: The contradiction lies in the term of ‘mistaken sex’ or ‘mistaken gender’. This term actually implies that there is a truth either in the body or the mind which is either really male or female. This is postulated even though evidence suggests that not all people change their gender role according to their change in appearance and standards of appearance are judged by supposedly universal factors. Herdt concludes his article from 1990 with the claim of inventing a third category, not just for human society but also for the animal world. The specification Herdt undertakes for this political endeavour is that ‘as a cultural ideal this category may be perceived and projected into the order of nature.’ (Herdt, 1990: 442) The question that arises here is: *Why does it seem necessary to project a new category into the orders of nature if one wants to emphasize that orders of nature are subject to our interpretation anyway?*

Unpacking statements like the quotation above reveals a proposition which is that gender is based on the ‘natural facts’ of sex. Anatomy again is given primacy over gender and gender is again not an ontologically distinct category but merely a reiteration of sex. Hereby sex as a biological given becomes naturalized by reference to cross cultural ‘evidence’ of ‘additional’ versions of human existence interpreted through the Western focus on sex, gender, and desire as central categories for the interpretation of societal organisation.

Concerning theories on gender identity development, Herdt has been working very closely with the US-American psychologist Robert Stoller. Stoller’s work centred on transsexuality, intersexuality and ‘perversions’, and explored the ‘naturalness’ of the categories

of sexual identity and gender identity. Herdt and Stoller have co-published a range of accounts on hermaphroditism and intersexuality which due to limited space I can not take under consideration here (e.g. Stoller & Herdt, 1985, 1990). In Herdt's accounts on intersexuality, the assumption of the stability and naturalness of female and male gender identity developments seem not to be tackled at all. On the one hand 'sexual identity' is imposed onto 'gender identity' and on the other hand sex and gender as ordering systems are manifested, established and naturalized through their correlation and universality. This means that a male sex, a female sex, and a hermaphroditic sex become the preconditions for the existence of a masculine identity, a feminine identity, and a hermaphroditic identity. Sex - as a now threefold biological category- becomes sexual identity and hereby replaces gender as a construct in general. In general it is to state, that with most uses of the concept of 'the Third', anthropologists are complicit in creating the very categories they seek to understand and deconstruct.

The problem is a very basic one: while arguing that there is a 'Third', the 'sex/-ual difference' between 'male' and 'female' is not tackled (neither in biological terms nor in cultural/social ones). Moreover, as Hird argues: 'replacing a two-sex model with a 10-sex (or 20 or 30) model does not in itself secure the abolition of gender discrimination, only perhaps that the mental gymnastics required to justify such discrimination becomes more complex.' (Hird, 2000: 358).

This rhetorical move re-inscribes the very notion of the naturalness of the categories of male and female and positions 'the Third' as an all encompassing term for 'gender variant' versions. A similar critique to Hird's and mine can be found concerning studies of the *berdache* in North America which was aired by Epple in 1998. The *berdache* was also used in ethnological research to challenge the two-sex/gender order of Western societies. Epple writes that

ronically, casting them [the people subsumed under the term berdache] as such does not subvert but reifies – indeed is based upon – the very system it is intended to dismantle: the binary gender system and its assumed natural coherence among sex, gender, and desire. In setting up nadleehi (and presumably others) as belonging to a "third (or fourth, fifth and so on) gender," theorists reify Man and Woman as binary opposites, using them as standards by which to identify "alternates". (Epple 1998: 273)

Therefore, by creating ‘the Third’, anthropologists attempted to fill that created ‘space’ with a positive connotation. Yet, the reference system they hereby draw on only reproduces the dimorphic model of sex and the dualism of ‘normal’ gender identity development. In contrast to ‘other’ societies and their practices of categorizing humans, Western societies reveal themselves as being subjected to increased disciplinary practices, which Foucault has, for example described in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977). In the case of research into intersexuality in non-Western cultures, Western researchers took biological classifications defined by the medical establishment in their own countries and imposed them onto the social categories of non-Western societies. The modes of Western biopower were extended to cultures that formerly did not know fragmenting bio-medical categorisations. The formation of subjects in non-Western cultures was thus interpreted by Western scholars through the focus on bio-medical categories.

The studies considered here reveal that some Western scholars have attempted to define ‘gender identity’ in terms of biologically identified categories. The ‘syndromes’ defined by Western bio-medical discourse were applied to social forms in response to social behaviour (change in appearance, interest in certain working duties, etc). ‘Biological forces’ to which the subject has been exposed (supposedly) before birth (or later during puberty - theories contradict each other) were employed to explain ‘gender identity’ as a psychological category. While the underlying assumption that there are just two ‘sexes’ that are basically distinct from each other has formed many approaches to psychological and social factors that might contribute to human subject(ivity)s a specific rhetoric was needed to hold up this very hypothesis.

The developments of these theories are nourished by two distinguishable modes of rhetorical gymnastics. Firstly, the very presupposition that ‘normally’ there are but two ‘sexes’ which are clearly distinguishable from each other needs to be verified by the ‘deviant’. And secondly, the nature-culture-debate has been replaced by a system of two sexes versus a system of three. Concerning the first one; In Foucauldian terms the ‘deviant’ as the ‘pathological’ serves to establish the notion of the ‘normal’ and vice versa.<sup>5</sup> The tools that serve the discussion about ‘sex/-ual difference’ and ‘gender’ (as biological or cultural) are not just used to separate the two but also to shift the influences of both on the formation of (sexed) subject(ivity)s. This is a very mighty apparatus which gains its power through making itself invisible while recurring

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<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault elaborately explained this mechanism in the *History of Sexuality* and also in *Birth of the Clinic*. (Foucault, 1977 and 1978)

over and over again in daily-life (sexist as well as heteronormative). However, the shifts in the attribution of power to either cultural *or* biological forces disguise the very move toward the essentialization of both factors in regard to the essentialization of a dimorphic psychological and biological nature of human subject(ivities). Therefore, one characteristic of modern scientific inquiry is that in many cases the ‘abnormal’ has to serve as the proof for the ‘normal’. This means that bodies and psyches that are deemed aberrant or deviant face investigation which is conducted in order to define the norm. Research into intersexuality thus, has a very specific place in the order of theories on ‘normal gender identity development’ and ‘normal sexual differentiation’.

Concerning the second rhetorical mode; there are varying mechanisms to be detected: Insisting on the development of a hermaphroditic gender identity on the grounds of a hermaphroditic sexual identity seems to mess up the initial attempt to create the possibility of a more liberal society in the ‘others’. In the end this only manifests the assumption that a male body causes a male gender identity and a female body causes female identity which is stable throughout life. The third gender becomes the cultural but necessary expression of a ‘third sex’. By naturalising ‘the Third’ any kind of non-conforming (meaning non-body-conforming) gender expression therefore becomes once again pathologized.

Neither the studies examined here, nor their investigation resolves the controversy over biological determinism of gender identity. We can only see that, by referring to the medical categorisation of a possible three-sex system in other cultures this specific system becomes exoticised and the two-sex one becomes newly institutionalised as hegemonic. The culture versus nature debate shifts from having male and female on the one hand and hermaphroditism on the other.

There surely was potential in the use of ‘the Third’ as an identificatory category: it allows transgender activists to argue, that they were ‘born [not into the wrong body but] into the wrong culture’ (Wilchins, 1997: 30). However, ‘the Third’ in this context takes the absurd position between ‘naturalisation’ and ‘normalisation’. Towle and Morgan, for instance in their essay on ‘Romancing the Transgender Native. Rethinking the Use of the “Third Gender” Concept’ argues that the ‘third gender’ concept is

by nature flawed because it subsumes all non-Western, nonbinary identities, practices, terminologies, and histories. Thus it becomes a junk drawer into which a great non-Western gender miscellany is carelessly dumped” (Towle & Morgan 2002).

Ironically, the emphasis on ‘third gender’ types also threatens to diminish the richness and complexity of peoples’ lives, flattening their lived realities while putting them (all the various subject(ivity)s) under one term and only offering a single identification. The universalising and excluding mechanism which is at work here has also been detected in feminist research in the 1970s when the term ‘woman’ as an all-encompassing term has been criticized. The critique applied here also concerns Western ‘gender variant’ people, transgenders, and intersexed people. They all become subsumed under one category and unified by one term. It remains questionable if a single category that has been added can challenge the mighty construction of the two ‘natural’ categories. People might have different aims and objects they want to consider in political action. Some might not be able to identify as third as they consider themselves as totally distinct from the parameters applied to man and woman and therefore also from the parameters applied to ‘the Third’ as they are derivative from the formerly mentioned.

I now want to come back to the question of my title: ‘The Third’ as a hindrance to diversity? As we have seen, the answer needs to be ‘yes’ as there are several factors that limit the subversive potential of this supposedly liberating category. ‘The Third’ as a political and theoretical position is subject to essentialization and universalization which cause marginalisation and exclusions. Intersexuality (and transsexuality) are political, social and cultural positions with different and varying meanings and needs; political actions can be performed together as long as categories of identity are not tied to bodily features and/or processes but rather political standpoints that aim at temporary and local modifications of societies.



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