

International and interdisciplinary conference

**“B/ORDERS IN MOTION: Current challenges and future perspectives”**

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**PANEL A2: Blurring boundaries from a trans\*researching perspective**

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Following an European imperialist logic, issues of national and cultural differences are widely researched and negotiated, while the categories of *gender* and *sexuality* are mostly taken as human universals. Consequently it is often overlooked, how forms of normalized *heterosexuality, masculinity and femininity* contribute to the formation of national and cultural entities. The ideal of heteronormative sex/gender-binary, that establishes its order by marginalizing alternative formations of gender and sexuality, holds the place of the (un)marked norm\_al. What by this often remains unseen, is, how powerful processes of drawing borders around *race, gender, class, origin, culture, religion* intersect and mesh with each other. From a trans\* perspective in Cultural Anthropology we address those complex entanglements and their simultaneities: To what extent *trans\** bodies consistently act as boundary objects through which the interdependent order of *heteronormative binary gender* is produced and maintained? How does the construction of boundary objects and the observing of border processes through precarious bodies contribute to the invisibilities of their interdependencies? And how enable exactly those processes of reduction the clarity of borders? Following those questions we approach the role of *trans\** bodies and – stories for the production, negotiations, questioning and eroding of heteronormative binary gender orders.

PANELISTS:

**Configurations of Trans\* and the De/Stabilisation of the Medical Authority**

**Eric Llaveria Caselles** (Berlin)

Between 1950-51, a debate unfolded between 24 renowned doctors in Germany and Switzerland regarding the medical treatment of a “transvestite”. The discussion was initiated by Mitscherlich, who published a critique of Medard Boss for consenting to the surgical removal of the penis and testicles of the patient. Boss’ decision was motivated by the threat of suicide and self-harm, and by Boss’ phenomenological understanding of the patient’s Dasein as bi-gendered, uniting both manhood and womanhood in one being. Mitscherlich thought this overstepped the boundaries of medicine. Mitscherlich argued that the correct therapeutic decision would have been to “lead the patient to the possibly inevitable tragedy of his Dasein”, that is, to let her commit suicide. Mitscherlich’s disregard for the life of the patient is surprising given that he participated as an observer at the Nuremberg Doctors’ Trials and saw himself as a defender of a humane medicine. The

diverging configurations of “transvestitism” by Boss and Mitscherlich exemplify the destabilizing effects of transness as “boundary object” for a medical authority that upholds the dominant biopolitical/necropolitical interests of society. The rationalizations of Boss and Mitscherlich entangle conflicts in epistemology, anthropology, pathology and therapy and reveal that the category at stake is the one of the human/sub-human. As this category has historically been constructed in relation to racialized Others, this case shows the way that whiteness has been central to the construction of the transvestite / transsexual subject in the German medical discourse.

### **Gender Trouble in Weimar Republic's Visual Culture: Magnus Hirschfeld's Imaginings of transvestite Humans**

**Josch Hoenes** (Oldenburg)

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century war, revolution and the founding of the Weimar Republic had destabilized norms of gender and sexuality fundamentally. There had been attempts to redefine images of masculinity and femininity during the revolution of 1918 as well as strong emancipatory movements, such as the Sexual Reform Movement and the feminist movement, that campaigned for legal reforms and liberalizations of the sex/gender-regime on one hand. On the other hand right-wing conservatives and a broad spectrum of people convinced of christian morality strived for the reestablishment of the traditional patriarchic order of gender and sexuality. Corporeal representations were ubiquitous in this context, symbolizing the common enemy, the political collective, the violence of war and the truncation of nation or sovereign agency likewise. Conservative forces, that worked on a recovery of Germany as a military nation, inscribed themselves in representations of combative masculinity and campaigned ideal nudity as a new form of aesthetic racism. In contrast the sexologist and reformer Magnus Hirschfeld worked on the representation of sexual and gender variant people as not pathological but as examples of nature's variety. By analyzing the images and aesthetic strategies of Hirschfelds illustrated book volume in the context of Weimar Republics visual culture, I will argue, that the gender messiness it shows, affirms identities and lives of gender variant people and by the same time destabilizes the heteronormative order of gender and nation – instead articulating an utopian moment of cosmopolitanism.

### **Negotiating trans\* gender in current Germany – on gendered boundaries and belonging**

**Marek Sancho Höhne** (Frankfurt/Oder)

Trans\* gender seems present in various spheres of public life in recent Germany. There are TV shows with trans\* gender protagonists, newspaper – from serious to yellow – that report about trans\* gender people and even trans\* violence. The established parties try to cover trans\*gender topics and promote on trans\* specific events during the last elections that we should all overcome gender as a category. Even the right wing parties accept trans\* people as part of their organisations on the one hand and reject trans\* rights on the other. Trans\* specific organisations become more visible and influential and even the medical and legal discourse about trans\* people is changing and social

sciences try to include trans\* realities not just as an exotic other or a threat for the abolishment of gender.

In my presentation I follow those different negotiations of how trans\* gender is negotiated in recent Germany among a great variety of actors based on my current research. I work with discourse analysis, ethnographical observations, autoethnographic writing and biographical interviews. I follow aspects and problematics of negotiations of trans\* gendered borders in recent Germany departing from and through bodies at the edge of the normative binary gender order. I draw attention to the different imaginations and makings of trans\* gender and how in these processes not just boundaries of the normative binary gender order are negotiated but rather also those of (national) belonging, normalcy and ability.