



## DUAL-UNITY OR DICHOTOMY? ANDROGYNY AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER BIPARTITION<sup>1</sup>

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The paper concerns mythology, rites, philosophical tradition and other intellectual inspirations, which have influenced the Western culture's approach to the male-female dualism in social categories and the culture's attitude towards the phenomenon of androgyny. This male-female bipartite category and the occurrence of transgressing it, or not fitting it, is analysed in relation to divergent philosophical and sociological theories, like the thought of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michael Foucault, Judith Butler, etc. The purpose of the paper is to expose – and search for the reason for – Western culture's ambivalent attitude towards androgyny: perceived either as something odd and stigmatized for not matching the traditional dichotomy in cultural categories, or a perfect dual-unity integrating the two polar opposites in one being.

Keywords: androgyny, culture, dichotomy, gender, sex, structure, transgenderism.

### Androgn and the division of sexes

According to Plato:

“The original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman and the union of the two, of which the name survives but nothing else. Once it was a distinct kind, with a bodily shape and name of its own, constituted by the union of the male and the female: but now only the word ‘androgynous’ is preserved, and that as a term of reproach” (Plato 1953: 521).

Those mighty human creatures had great “strength, and the thoughts of their hearts were great, and they made an attack upon the gods” (Plato 1953: 521). And thus Zeus

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the author's lecture “The Phenomenon of Androgyny and Transgenderism as Opposed to the Discourse of Dichotomous Cultural Categories” which she gave at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University in May 2013 and her Polish publication “Do we Truly Need Gender? The Phenomenon of Androgyny as Opposed to Gender Dichotomy” (Kłonkowska 2012).

decided to “cut the men in two, like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling, or as you might divide an egg with a hair” (Plato 1953: 522). And since that moment people seem to have forgotten that once they were whole, and now each human being “is but the tally-half of a man” (Plato 1953: 522–523).

In ancient societies the split into male and female categories used to be fundamental and indisputable. Even in the oldest mythologies one can see a division of the universe, world and humankind into two genders. The dichotomy and opposition of male and female elements used to be accentuated so strongly that almost isolating one from another (Imieliński 1989: 27; Bachofen 1861: v–xxxiii)<sup>2</sup>. According to Lévi-Strauss, human perception of the world is subordinated to our inclination towards creating structures and organizing it with a reference to pairs of contrasts, distinctions and oppositions. “The practico-theoretical logics governing the life and thought of so-called primitive societies are shaped by the insistence on differentiation” – claims Lévi-Strauss (1974: 75). He is convinced that “the logical principle is always to be able to oppose terms which previous impoverishment of the empirical totality, provided it has been impoverished allows one to conceive as distinct” (Lévi-Strauss 1974: 75). According to him, this is generally typical for human thought: “The savage mind is logical in the same sense and the fashion as ours<sup>3</sup>. <...> Its thought proceeds through understanding, not affectivity, with the aid of distinctions and oppositions” (Lévi-Strauss 1974: 268). And one of those pairs of opposition, which can be found in the structure of every social system, and which is fundamental for building the kinship structure, is the opposition between male and female. A social structure appealing to this binary opposition may be created in a more or less conscious way. The male–female dichotomy may be based on a diametric type of structure as well as may be expressed by the use of a concentric perspective – “also conceived in terms of opposition, with the one difference that the opposition is, with regard to social and/or religious prestige, necessarily unequal” (Lévi-Strauss 1972: 139).

Those binary divisions into male and female, in ancient mythologies used to be combined with attributing gender to the cosmic elements and the elements of the sur-

<sup>2</sup> As Riki Wilchins (2004: 40) claims: “Western thought tends to cast any difference into opposing halves that between them exhaust all meaning. Binaries treat the world like a pizza on which you’re only allowed to make one cut. Anything that doesn’t fit one half or the other gets lost, squeezed out. <...> At first these binaries look like two halves of a whole. <...> If you look closer, most binaries look suspiciously like covert extensions of the series ‘good/bad’, in which one term is always the defining one while the other is derivative”. This concerns the dichotomy of gender, where masculine is the defining one, while feminine is derivative. Here occurs this kind of supplementation, where – as Jacques Derrida states – “the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of emptiness” (Derrida 1997: 145). What is more, “whether it adds or substitutes itself, the supplement is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it. Unlike the *complement*, dictionaries tell us, the supplement is an “*exterior addition*” (Derrida 1997: 145).

<sup>3</sup> “<...> though as our own is only when it is applied to knowledge of a universe in which it recognizes physical and semantic properties simultaneously” (Lévi-Strauss 1974: 268).

rounding world. Female was to be the moon, earth, coolness, humidity, darkness, etc. Male was supposed to be the sun, warmth, dryness, brightness, etc. Apart from those justifications of the male – female opposition, there were many other divisions emphasizing this dichotomy. These were divisions based on: directions in space – the upper and the lower, or the vertical and the horizontal; activity and passivity; spirituality and corporeality; etc (Imieliński 1989: 28).

### Sacrum, carnival and the suspension of male-female bipartition

On the other hand, the same mythologies seem to provide many examples of suspension of this male-female binary opposition. One of them is recalled by Lévi-Strauss in his writings: it is the Pawnee Indians of the North American Plains myth of a “pregnant boy” (Lévi-Strauss 1972: 232–241). Lévi-Strauss explains the idea of the boy’s androgyny that may come to one’s mind, with the fact that this myth “is built on a long series of oppositions” (Lévi-Strauss 1972: 234), and one of them is:

*“confusion of sexes versus differentiation of sexes; [as] all of Pawnee metaphysical thought is actually based on the idea that at the time of the creation of the world antagonistic elements were intermingled and that the first work of the gods consisted in sorting them out. The young child is asexual or, more accurately, the male and female principles co-exist in him”* (Lévi-Strauss 1972: 234).

Surprisingly, such suspensions of the male-female opposition are to be found in many other mythologies, also those that have (more or less directly) influenced the Western culture: Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Phoenician, Syrian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite, Phrygian, Lydian, Thracian, Celtic, Etruscan, <...> etc (Kostuch 2003: 12). These mythical sacred stories and created representations of gods, often recall the motif of androgyny.

Quite often this motif appears in figures of androgynous creators: the Great Mothers-and-Fathers of the whole universe who had the potential to create other gods and the world of themselves only, uniting in one person the male and female aspect of progeny creating. The examples are: Egyptian Aton, Ptah, Mut, Neith, Greek Gaja, Roman Jupiter, etc.

Sometimes this motif is recalled in the form of hermaphroditism – a physical dual-unity – like in the myth of Hermaphroditos, whose name has become a general term for this phenomenon. It is present in a form of intersexual images of gods and goddesses, portrayed with the physical attributes of both sexes, like: ithyphallic representations of the Roman Venus, Greek Aphrodite, Agdistis, Babylonian and Assyrian Ishtar, Phoenician Astarte, hermaphroditical images of Egyptian Ptah and Nu-Hapi, Phrygian Men (identified with Selene), Pirwa – the god of Kanesh, Priapus from Lampsacus<sup>4</sup>, or a dual-unity of married couples: Roman Liber and Libera, Egyptian Tephnut and Shu – who existed in common imaginary as a one, hermaphroditical person.

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<sup>4</sup> In Hellenic period identified with Hermaphroditos (Kostuch 2003).

Sometimes this motif is presented in the form of transsexualism, like in the story of Tiresias. Sometimes – transvestism: like in the case of Atlanta, Dionysus (Bacchus) or some episodes in the myths of Heracles (Heracles and Omphale), Achilles, Theseus.

The myths also supply us with stories of heroes and heroines crossing over the border-lines of gendered social roles, possessing social and psychological features attributed to the opposite gender. The examples are: the Amazons, Athena, Artemis, Nerio, Roma, Virtus, Disciplina, Lua, Bellona, Boudana, Ma, Enyo, Litavis, Epona, Shaushka, Inana, Inara, Anath, Mafdet, Nekhbet, Adonis, Apollo, Attis, Hyacinth, Cypress (Kostuch 2003).

According to Lévi-Strauss' theory, the appearance of this motif in mythology may be explained in such a way that a myth expresses doubts important for human culture. Yet, its fictional motif – the story it tells – is of little importance here, as for Lévi-Strauss this is the level of “speech”. What matters – is the opposed categories themselves, like: sexual explicitness vs. ambiguity, and the structure which they refer to – for this is the equivalent of the level of “language” (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 206–231).

What is more, suspending or questioning within a myth (by introducing a category of confusion vs. differentiation of sexes) an opposition (man vs. woman) that is binding in human reality is – at the same time – pointing out its presence in human reality. As we read in Umberto Eco's *Absent Structure*: in a particular structure, a certain thing reveals itself through its negation (see Eco 1996: 14–15). That is why a particular order, binding in human reality, is sanctioned by an opposing, contradictory order, attributed to the domain of sacrum. Thus, questioning the bipartition of sexes or genders in the reality of myth, or in particular moments in a society's life – is tantamount to the awareness of its applicability in human reality, as something so inherent that can not be doubted without reaching beyond this reality or suspending its “normality”. And reaching beyond human reality may occur when recalling a myth, which – according to Mircea Eliade (1961) – always refers us to a reality of sacrum, exceeding and preceding the human reality.

Suspending or questioning the differentiation of sexes or genders may also take place in other references to sacrum, like in relation to the person of a priest, shaman or a ruler, who did not only represent the higher order of the sacrum, but were the link between the female Earth and the male Sky<sup>5</sup> as well. What is more, a ruler and a priest were tools in the hands of both: male and female gods. This fact was sometimes manifested by emphasizing the androgynous features in ritual robes decorated with male and female gods' attributes, and sometimes (like in case of Kybele's priests) even by self-castration (Eliade 1965a: 116–117; Kostuch 2003: 44–45, 131–144).

The temporal suspending of “normality” and its principles, differentiations and oppositions (including the abolishment of the stiff male-female dichotomy) could also take place in some rites, ceremonies, feasts and during the carnival. Cultural transvestitism was sometimes a part of wedding ceremonies, New Year feasts and celebrations

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<sup>5</sup> In Egyptian mythology, unlike in most others, the attribution is opposite: the Sky is female (Nut) and the Earth is male (Geb).

of other crucial moments in human life and the life of the universe (Eliade 1965a: 111–114; Kostuch 2003: 38). Ritual elements – recalling today, with its form of expression, associations with the phenomenon of transvestism – were also present in the rites and feasts performed to worship Dionysus (Bacchus), Hera, Heracles, Theseus and some other gods and heroes (Eliade 1965a: 112–113; Kostuch 2003: 38, 144–149). Also, during the later carnival celebrations, men and women were allowed to wear the opposite genders' cloth, because the binding “normal” social order became temporarily suspended during the carnival. According to Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) theory: “The logic of carnivals is essentially the logic of reversals, of the world upside down, of burlesque coronations and dethronings, and of the substitutions of high for low <...> and vice versa” (Meletinsky 2000: 110), where the symbolic destruction of the former order is supposed to serve its rebirth and reconstruction. That is why the carnivalesque laughter and its festiveness “buries” and “resurrects” the social ideals (Meletinsky 2000: 110). But dressing up (cross-dressing) during the carnival and reversing the everyday rules, just like suspending the “normal” order in rites and myths, emphasizes its indisputability in everyday, “normal” human reality. A similar phenomenon is to be noticed in the extraordinary reality of theatre performances (Ramet 1996: 5–7), where spectators are taken away from their ordinary everyday life to the reality, where actors performing gender sometimes (like in Medieval Christian Europe) assume a stage gender opposite to their own.

As it is to be noticed – according to Eliade – feasts, rituals and myths reach beyond the ordinary time and reality, temporally suspending it (Eliade 1961). A similar rescinding of everyday rules takes place also during the carnival and in the reality created on a theatrical stage. And, being a “break” or a moment of rest from an “ordinary” time and reality – those events contrast it at the same time, by overstepping or reversing its rules and its binding order. Similarly: the rulers and priests could combine the non-combinable, opposite elements in one person – they were extraordinary beings performing their roles in the ordinary reality and the unusualness of their persons had to be emphasized.

Thus, in the reality of sacrum, the strict division into two genders could be abolished, while in a human reality – except for temporal suspending during particular feasts, rites, ceremonies and during a carnival – this principle was to be in effect and breaking it was not allowed, as it constituted violating an immemorial order. But, as Mary Douglas claims: “any given system of classification must give rise to anomalies, and any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions. <...> We find in any culture <...> various provisions for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events” (Douglas 1984: 40), like sexual or gender ambiguity. If such “anomaly” could not be sacralized or moved to the domain of rituals, it could be dealt with by settling for one or another interpretation, like repeated classification. Instead of accepting an exception from gender dichotomy and allowing to break its stiff borderlines and attributed social roles – an additional classifying category could be created for those whose ambiguity could disturb the established dual-division. The examples are: Hijras (third gender in India), Two-Spirit People among Indigenous Northern

Americans, Mexican Muxe, Thailand Kathoey, or Albanian Sworn Virgins. And, even though they break from the binding man/woman opposition – nevertheless (in accordance to the Lévi-Strauss’s assumption about creating structures in our perception of the world and organizing it in pairs of contrasts) they do not destruct it, as they become part of a different opposition: sexual explicitness vs. ambiguity (differentiation vs. confusion of sexes).

Sometimes, the existence of “anomaly” was physically controlled: for instance hermaphroditic (intersexual) newborns used to be killed in many ancient cultures, as a sign of the gods’ wrath (Eliade 1965a: 116). Since, while the hermaphroditic, or in a different way androgynous deities were omnipotent in their capabilities of procreation, the intersexual human individuals – on the contrary – apparently incapable of conception (Kostuch 2003: 40–41). Thus, while the hermaphroditic deities seemed to represent here the mystery of sacrum, the hermaphroditic human individuals seemed to be its unacceptable profanation.

The gods – being perfect creatures – could be androgynous, as Androgyn was a symbol of a whole, perfect being, a dual-unity of the two aspects of human condition. However, the human reality – being imperfect – could not be permitted such an aspiration. According to Eliade, “for mythical thought, a particular mode of being is necessarily preceded by a total mode of being. The androgyn is considered superior to the two sexes just because it incarnates totality and hence perfection” (Eliade 1965b: 26). This may also explain the asexuality of Judaic and Christian angels as superior beings, the collapse into sexuality of the fallen angels and the asexuality of resurrected bodies in Christian believes<sup>6</sup>. Even though in the Old Testament one can find a parallel prohibition on overstepping the gender boundaries, even in the case of ritual transvestitism (allowed in many ancient cultures)<sup>7</sup> – this difference between Judeo-Christian tradition and other cultures may be explained by the dissimilarity of its attitude towards suspending the secular time by recalling the reality of sacrum (see Eliade 1961; Kłonkowska 2010).

### Longing for androgyn

In common notion, human beings – as imperfect creatures (unlike the beings participating in the reality of sacrum) – were condemned to being parted into those two opposed male-female categories, and allowed to experience just one of the aspects of being a human: either a man or a woman. They were allowed to possess features and to perform a social role that has been attributed to their gender only. This bipartition – for generations remaining inherent in our notion of the human reality – excluded the

<sup>6</sup> “For when they rise from dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in the heaven” (*Holy Bible* 1993 [Mk 12,25]). For differing opinions in the discussion on the asexuality of resurrected bodies (see Jan Pawel II 2001).

<sup>7</sup> “A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the Lord your God” (*Holy Bible* 1993 [Deut. 22,5]).

phenomenon of “anything between” and “anything two-fold” or “anything beyond”, making us the “tally-halves of a human”.

The awareness of the lack of wholeness of a human being, when restricted to one polar of this binary opposition, can be found in alchemical tradition. An androgyne seems to be perceived in alchemical thought as a fulfillment of an immemorial human dream of wholeness and perfectibility (Jung 1963). Depicted as a hermaphrodite<sup>8</sup>, the androgyne used to be one of central motifs in the alchemical heritage, identified with *lapis* – the Philosophers’ Stone. This alchemical hermaphrodite symbolized the dual-unity of the opposite elements, united in *opus magnum*. It is a phenomenon of “two natures conjoined and married together, the Masculine and the Feminine”, as Nicholas Flammel (1624 [1995]: 27) states.

“Then thou hast here two natures married together, whereof the one hath conceived by the other and by this conception it is turned into the body of the Male, and the Male into that of the Female; that is to say, they are made one only body, which is the Androgyne, or Hermaphrodite of the Ancients, which they have also called otherwise, the head of the Crow, or natures converted” (Flammel [1995] 1624: 28).

As a symbol of *coincidentia oppositorum*, the alchemical Hermaphrodite was presented in many allegoric illustrations and stories as a Philosophers’ Son – the one who is a fruit of *hieros gamos* between the Sun (gold or sophic sulphur, that was the male element represented by a symbol of a king) and Moon (silver or sophic mercury – the female element represented by a figure of a queen). The union of the king-brother and his queen-sister created *Rebis* (Two-Thing) – a perfect dual-unity of the man and the woman, as two opposing elements that have united in a Philosophers’ Bath and constituted a new wholeness. According to John Read:

“The recurring idea of the Bath of the Philosophers is connected with mythological story of the son, whom ‘gentle Venus bore to Hermes’. The incorporation of this beautiful youth with the nymph Salmacis, while bathing in a fountain, gave rise to the single being Hermaphroditus. The property acquired by these mythological waters, of imparting a bisexual nature to those who bathed in them, was supposed to be shared by sophic mercury, and the stage of the Great Work attained after the alchemical process of conjunction was sometimes called Hermaphroditus, Rebis, or Androgyne” (Read 1937: 266).

“In the operations of the Great Work, the union of masculine and feminine principles was associated with the process known as conjunction; <...> represented by hermaphroditic designs” (Read 1937: 102).

The longing for the lack of differencing divisions and the necessity of enclosing a human being in one of the two options of sexual and gender binary, still – as it seems – returns, inspiring with this idea authors of different epochs. Just to mention a few examples: in Christian gnosis the first human was depicted as an androgyne

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<sup>8</sup> Alchemical hermaphrodite is depicted in a different convention than most of the ancient androgynous gods and goddesses, whose upper part of the body used to be female, and the lower part – male. In case of alchemical hermaphrodite – it is the left and right side of the body.

(Eliade 1965a: 104). Johannes Scotus Eriugena wrote about the division of sexes as a part of a cosmic process, which finally will end with a reunification of all divided substances. For Eriugena:

“the disintegration of the unity of a human being into diversity and multiplicity of that which naturally inheres in a human being is a result of sin. But the perceivable world, human corporeality and sexual partition are not only a punishment, they also make a necessary ground for probation. <...> This process begins ontologically with division of the whole of reality from the reasons for its coming into being. It ends with the division of humanity into man and woman. Yet, in the human and through the human the multiplicity will be brought back into the original unity <...>” (Heinzmann 2008: 134)<sup>9</sup>.

In German Romanticism the idea of androgyn returns in writings of Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1906), who was in favour of reintegration of genders and abandoning imposed cultural factors sustaining its division. The idea of androgyn appears also in Franz Xaver von Baader’s works, who – inspired by Jakob Böhme – perceives the partition of sexes as the first fall of Adam and believes that we will return into the state of androgyny at the end of times (Benz 1955). The idea of androgyny often returns also in literature, in the form of human longing for the lack of differencing divisions, but also in the form of grotesque (see Heilbrun 1973: 43), becoming a part of carnivalesque translocations.

Probably, as Judith D. Singer states, the idea of androgyny

“comes from the mythic theology, which is nearly universally diffused, about an androgynous god or goddess as creator-creatix. Humanity was supposed to be modeled after this divine image, but somehow mankind fell away from or was severed from the original wholeness and degenerated into the imperfect men and women of this world – ever in search of completion through integration of the alienated opposite. The representation of human androgyny as an ideal state of being is but a mythic image today, lost in the remoteness of forgotten eons” (Singer 2000: 24),

as Plato’s story – quoted at the beginning of this article – suggests. Characteristic for the Western culture has always been an assumption of an extra temporal, harmonious, happy initial condition of humankind, which was “broken” in a certain moment, shattering this primordial, harmonious wholeness. That moment gave rise to misfortunes and their source is the diversification, including the differentiation of the sexes (Imieliński, Dulko 1988: 20).

But, in spite of this longing for the primordial wholeness and lack of differentiations,

“the tradition of Western thought is primarily linear and analytical. When faced with opposites, we tend to see them as irreconcilable or, at the very least, as problemati-

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<sup>9</sup> English translation by Klonkowska. In original: “Die Aufspaltung der Einheit des Menschen in die Verschiedenheit und Vielheit des in seiner Natur Begründeten ist Folge der Sünde. Die wahrnehmbare Welt, die Lieblichkeit des Menschen, seine geschlechtliche Differenzierung sind aber nicht nur Strafe, sondern zugleich als Ort der Bewährung erforderlich <...>. Ontologisch nimmt dieser Prozeß der *divisio* der Gesamtwirklichkeit von den Entstehungsgründen seinen Ausgang. In der Aufteilung des Menschen in Mann und Frau kommt er zu einem Ende; im Menschen und durch den Menschen wird aber die Vielheit auch wieder zu ursprünglichen Einheit <...> zurückgeführt”.

cal. It is difficult to accept holistic thinking, in which opposition is only apparent, and opposing forces are only aspects of the same things seen from different points of view. And so we drive wedges between the black and the white, between consciousness and the unconscious, between the masculine principle and the feminine principle” (Singer 2000: 19).

Those “principles called ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, respectively, are well defined within our particular social structure” (Singer 2000: 14). As a result – we divide and separate the masculine and feminine elements, not only preventing their coexistence in one human being in the form of a dual-unity of ostensible oppositions, but also reaching beyond those distinguished categories.

### Do we need gender?

At this point the question arises whether our way of perceiving the social reality has to be structured in a way which assumes the necessity of these male-female dichotomous categories. The answer can be searched in reference to Derrida’s deconstructionist theory. As Harriet Bradley notices: “Derrida’s work has promoted a critique of these categories, especially those based on binary oppositions such as ‘man/woman’ <...>, which are used to describe the world. Such categories do violence to the variety of potential experience by forcing it to cohere to one of the polar options. The ‘submerged middle’ of the range of positions in-between is suppressed” (Bradley 1996: 101).

Derrida’s postulate of an abolition of the binary categories (which, according to Lévi-Strauss, are to be characteristic of our mode of organizing the world), when applied to the male/female opposition, may produce an open space for a non-binary gender or sexual identity of those who do not fit the binding, dichotomous system. As “beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine” (Derrida 1995: 108) is a space for those, who are androgynous in one or another way: who combine the apparent oppositions, who do not identify with any of the two genders, who constantly balance between them, or are temporally suspended in-between – a space for transgender<sup>10</sup> and hermaphroditic (intersexual) people. As Derrida claims:

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<sup>10</sup> Definitions of terminology used in this article: *transvestitism* – (properly: transvestitism with double role type) wearing clothes of the opposite gender in order to experience a temporary feeling of belonging to that gender; not characterised by the desire for permanent gender correction, especially surgical; often (wrongly) confused with fetish transvestitism; *cross-dressing* – wearing clothing associated with the opposite gender, not necessarily indicating transgender identity; a broader notion than transvestitism; *transsexuality/transsexualism* – a phenomenon pertaining to the situation of a person whose experienced gender identification does not correspond with one’s physical gender, but with the opposite one. It is related to the striving for correction of one’s body using hormonal therapy and surgical treatments, most often including the final surgery of sex organs, and striving for legal gender correction; *transgender/transgenderism* – a collective term for persons who fall beyond the traditional, unequivocal classification of male and female gender; includes transvestitism, transsexuality, and other forms beyond gender convention (Dynarski, Klonkowska 2012). The term *transgender* is used in this article in the meaning it took on in 1992 in Leslie Feinberg’s book (1992), as an umbrella term for transsexuals, transvestites and other people, whose sexual identity escapes the traditional male-female binary in different ways. About the history and evolution of the meanings of the trans-terminology there are some important sources of literature (see Valentine 2007: 32–35; Stryker 2006: 4–6; Ekins, King 2006: 13–28).

“I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices. I would like to believe in the masses, this indeterminable number of blended voices, this mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each ‘individual’, whether he be classified as ‘man’ or as ‘woman’ according to the criteria of usage. Of course, it is not impossible that desire for a sexuality without number can still protect us, like a dream, from an implacable destiny which immures everything for life in the number 2 and should this merciless closure arrest desire at the wall of opposition, we would struggle in vain: there will never be but two sexes, neither one more, nor one less. <...> But where would the ‘dream’ of the innumerable come from, if it is indeed a dream? Does the dream itself not prove that what is dreamt of must be there in order for it to provide the dream? <...> The desire to escape the combinatory itself, to invent incalculable choreographies, would remain” (Derrida 1995: 108).

It is this desire to “invent incalculable choreographies” and escape the “destiny which immures everything for life in the number 2” that places particular emphasis in Derrida’s thought on the “submerged middle” consisted of all shades of human experience, which do not fit into the binary oppositions. However, the deconstruction of the binary gender category cannot be limited to adding some new subcategories like transsexual, dual-role transvestite (cross-dresser) to the traditional binary: man and woman. Since those additional subcategories, marked as: “transsexual”, “dual-role transvestite”, etc, would also be nothing but artificial “labels”, another structure trying to organize the variety of human experience; just replacing the number two for gender or sexual identities with the number of four, five, or any other.

Indicating the presence of such groups of people like transsexuals, dual-role transvestites and others, was supposed to point out the artificiality of the dichotomous, stiff male/female categories. Yet, even broadened with the new, “additional” categories, such a view on gender or sexual identification remains a pursuit of a well-structured, divided into a definite number of named and labeled groups, well-recognized social reality. An example of such a division was, for instance, the typology of sexual identity created in the 1960s by Harry Benjamin (1966), aimed at indicating definite categories of people, each well classified, defined and named. And, as Donna Haraway claims, classifying something or somebody and assigning names – brings exclusions: “consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic” (Haraway 1990: 196–197). What is important, “these oppressive categories need deconstructing, if a ‘reality’ is to be built allowing individuals to think [and express themselves – A. M. K.] in different and freer ways” (Bradley 1996: 101).

The tendency towards categorizing people and their experience (no matter how may categories would be constructed) also fails to discern that human gender or sexual identity may alter and evolve in a lifetime: that the way we describe ourselves in reference to sex and gender is a process, not a product; something we gradually acquire, not something that we possess (see Plummer 1996: xiv). This tendency also eliminates a question of justifiability of a term “identity” in reference to the issue of gender identity or transgender identity (see Valentine 2007) and any kind of permeability between the “named” subcategories.

Who seemed to be aware of both: the possible flexibility and instability of human sexual and gender identity, was Foucault. Foucault believes in the lack of constancy of individual identities and, according to him, “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (Foucault 1979: 100) and the social identities are created. Discourses influence human behavior and shape their ways of acting and thinking. In this way – according to his theory – also sexual identity is constructed. Thus, Foucault asks an essential question: “Do we *truly* need a *true* sex?” (Foucault 2010: vii) and comments on it as follows:

“With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, modern Western societies have answered in the affirmative. <...> Biological theories of sexuality, juridical conceptions of the individual, forms of administrative control in modern nations, led little by little to rejecting the idea of a mixture of the two sexes in one body, and consequently to limiting the free choice of indeterminate individuals.<sup>11</sup> Henceforth, everybody was to have one and only one sex. Everybody was to have his or her primary, profound, determined and determining sexual identity. <...> From the legal point of view, this obviously implied the disappearance of free choice. It was no longer up to the individual to decide which sex he wished to belong to, juridically or socially. Rather, it was up to the expert to say which sex nature has chosen for him and to which society must consequently ask him to adhere. <...> Sexual irregularity is seen as belonging more or less to the realm of chimeras. That is why we rid ourselves easily enough of the idea that these are crimes, but less easily of the suspicion that they are fictions which, whether involuntary or self-indulgent, are useless, and which it would be better to dispel. <...> And then, we also admit that it is in the area of sex that we must search for the most secret and profound truths about the individual, that it is there that we can best discover what he is and what determines him” (Foucault 2010: vii–x).

As Butler comments on Foucault’s discussions: “The notion that there might be a ‘truth’ of sex <...>, is produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms” (Butler 1990: 17). And the division of sexes and genders seems to be a very effective way of social control. After all, as early as since our birth, we are all being accustomed to this dualistic structure, maintained by the institutions that govern our social lives (MacKenzie 1994: 1).

For many post-modernists sexual identity and gendered subjectivity are no longer constant and stable. And when the essentialist concept of gender is rejected, it is perceived as a social construct and becomes a discursive phenomenon (Bradley 2008: 88–89). And where does the conviction of sexual identity’s and gendered subjectivity’s constancy and stability come from? According to Butler – from its performativity, from constant “acting” and performing gender. According to her, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 1990: 25). Yet, Butler goes even further and claims, that

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<sup>11</sup> Foucault means here: hermaphrodites.

“If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. <...> At this juncture it is already clear that one way the internal stability and binary frame for sex is effectively secured is by casting the duality of sex in a prediscursive domain. This production of sex *as* the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*” (Butler 1990: 7).

And – as an effect – we are used to consider gender as founded on (biologically rooted) sex.

The concept of gender and sexual identity that Butler polemicizes with, derives from the discussed Lévi-Strauss’ theory and its differentiation between nature and culture. According to this theory, “‘sex’ is to nature or ‘the raw’ as gender is to is to culture or ‘the cooked’” (Butler 1990: 37) and gender would be constructed on the basis of sex with the use of various cultural mechanisms. Thus, Butler denies the prediscursive, primal (and separate) character of sex in relation to gender. At this point she is close to a radical stand taken by Monique Wittig, for whom “the category of sex is neither invariant nor natural” (Butler 1990: 112). But Wittig seems to go even further and she brings the explicitness of biological sexual differences into question – being aware of its apparent counter-intuitiveness (Butler 1990: 114). Whereas for Butler the questioned term “sex” seems to denote rather an “original identification”: a sexual identification prior to “added” culturally specified, culturally determined and determining gender indicators (Butler 1990: 138)<sup>12</sup>.

### Transgenderism and moving across the boundaries

Let us try though to depict the term “sex” as constituted of two different (and not always consistent with each other) factors: the anatomical sex<sup>13</sup>, and the already mentioned “original identification” (defined as a feeling of sexual identity or dis-identity). The culturally settled “gender” would appear in this case as socially granted on the base of anatomical sex<sup>14</sup> and/or one’s sexual identity. This would imply, that gender and original identification do not necessarily have to be the same and that the original identification does not have to be a construct designed by gender, as Butler suggests. Since, in spite of the phenomenon of gender performativity, an argument for the lack of secondary character of one’s original identification and its explicit constructing by the cultural discourse, seems to be the example of transsexual people – who are often strongly socialized for the major part of their lives to the gender corresponding with

<sup>12</sup> “In place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices <...>” (Butler 1990: 138).

<sup>13</sup> Described on a few levels, that do not necessarily have to be consistent with each other.

<sup>14</sup> The anatomical sex is usually assigned at the moment of birth on the basis of the exterior reproductive organs and it determines the formally (legally) attributed gender.

their biological sex recognized at the moment of birth. Yet, – in spite of all the cultural and social influence – their feeling of *their own* original identification (in this case disparate from their anatomical sex) remains and is unsusceptible to the attempts of social adaptation<sup>15</sup>. However, among transgender people other than transsexuals, the sexual identity seems to be more flexible and evolutionary. Quite often the transgender people seek for a long time for their own “ego” and their identity undergoes some transformations<sup>16</sup>. In this case the mentioned evolution of identity may be caused by the lack of ready cultural patterns and the necessity of self-reliant quest. In this situation, crossing over the traditional dichotomy is not connected with moving from one socially existent category to another and accepting the rules of its performativity – as it is in case of transsexual people, – but with the necessity of defining oneself *in between* or *beyond* the mentioned two existent categories.

Certainly, the sexual identity and gender identity is not entirely dichotomous. Also, it does not create a structure, where the traditional male/female categories may simply be broadened with some new categories to create a new structure organizing individuals and their experience, since the emerging picture would still be related to the same binary structure. The only modification would be “adding” a few new categories like transsexuals, dual-role transvestites, whose characterizations would still be rooted in the male/female dichotomy, describing the mentioned group of people simply as moving across (temporality or permanently) from one opposite pole to another, repeating and duplicating at the same time the socially acknowledged way of performing it.

Thus, in spite of taking the people transferring the male/female borderline into account, such a concept of sexual and gender identity would still make a stiff structure, based on the male/female binary opposition. It would fail to encompass the whole spectrum of people combining in one person and blending in different proportions and different aspects the elements of both genders; people situated in-between genders; and people situated beyond genders, not identifying themselves with any gender at all. Such a concept would also overlook the difference e.g. between those, who definitely want to have a sex reassignment and an explicit identity; those who decide to undergo the process of transition just because of a social role they want to perform; those who do not want to have to choose between the two genders, etc.

### Conclusions: return to androgyny

Thus, perhaps, instead of presenting transgenderism as “subtypes” situated in-between the binary male-female opposites, we could assume – as Richard Ekins and

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<sup>15</sup> Observations based on my qualitative and quantitative social research carried out among transgender people in Poland since 2010 until present (in-depth interviews and survey based research (see Klonkowska 2013; Kryszk, Klonkowska 2012; Bojarska, Klonkowska 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Observations based on my qualitative and quantitative social research carried out among transgender people in Poland since 2010 until present (in-depth interviews and survey based research (see Klonkowska 2013; Kryszk, Klonkowska 2012; Bojarska, Klonkowska 2014).

Dave King claim – that the phenomenon of transgenering<sup>17</sup> “refers to the idea of moving across (transferring) from one pre-existing gender category to another (either temporarily or permanently); to the idea of living between genders; and to the idea of leaving ‘beyond gender’ altogether” (Ekins, King 2006: xiv). In my opinion, the crux of the matter is not only to open to the idea of sexual and gender ambiguity, or the notion of post-transsexualism (inspired by the work of Sandy Stone (1991)), or even the idea of post-genderism and post-sexualism at all. It is to open to (or maybe rather return to) the idea of an androgynous human being, if the term “androgyny” was to be understood in its broad meaning: not just as a “category” of people combining in one person the features of both genders, but as a capacious, elastic term, that comprises the whole spectrum of identities excluded from the male-female bipartition. Every identity that is situated “in-between” or may be described as “two-fold”, which is transgressing the male-female division, or just not fitting it – could belong here. It would include identities situated close to the traditional male/female categories, as well as those in-between genders and beyond gender at all – similarly, as in the 1970s Sandra L. Bem (1974) suggested in reference to the personality features in her concept of psychological androgyny. But we may go further than Bem did, and take into consideration the concept of an androgynous human being, where the poles of masculinity and femininity would no longer be the outermost ends of a continuum and the points of reference for characterization of individual people on account of their sexual or gender identity. In this concept, the three already mentioned dimensions: biological sex, original identity and gender: 1) would not be necessarily connected with each other and described independently from each other; 2) in each of those three dimensions an individual would be able to freely choose and combine elements from the whole spectrum of features previously divided into male and female – either explicitly choosing one of the previous categories, or freely combining them, or remaining neutral towards them.

The discussion on androgyny as a social project, has started in the feminist thought in the 1960s, and its conclusions may be highly instructive also for current social research on gender. As Carolyn G. Heilbrun claims: “I believe that our future salvation lies in a movement away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender toward a word in which individual roles and the modes of personal behavior can be freely chosen. The ideal toward which I believe we should move is best described by the term ‘androgyny’” (Heilbrun 1973: ix–x).

Perhaps, for many people, the anatomical sex, original identity and chosen gender would be identical, quite unambiguous and situated close to one of the traditional poles of masculinity and femininity. Perhaps not. But certainly a space would be created for those people, whose sexual and gender mosaic would be more complex. The necessity of adapting oneself to any cultural gender categories or subcategories and the harmful pathologizing of their experiences would be avoided. The transgender

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<sup>17</sup> “We prefer the gerund ‘transgenering’ to the noun and adjective ‘transgender’ because of its focus not on *types* of people, but on behavior and social *process*” (Ekins, King 2006: xiv).

people would no longer function as an “anomaly”, as Douglas (1984) describes this term, or as individuals socially stigmatized in comparison to the Erving Goffman’s (1963) “normals”, who are adapted to the obligatory, bipartite male-female structure.

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## DVILYPIS VIENINGUMAS AR DICHOTOMIJA? HERMAFRODITIZMAS IR LYTIES DVEJOPUMO SOCIALINIS KONSTRUKTAS

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### Santrauka

Straipsnyje susitelkiama ties mitologija, ritualais, filosofine tradicija ir kitomis intelektualinėmis inspiracijomis, turėjusiomis įtakos Vakarų kultūroje įsišaknijusiam požiūriui į vyriškumo ir moteriškumo dualumą socialinėse kategorijose bei kultūros pozicijai hermafroditizmo fenomeno atžvilgiu. Ši vyriškumo ir moteriškumo dvidalė kategorija bei jos pažeidimo ar neatitikimo atvejais analizuojami remiantis divergentinėmis filosofinėmis ir sociologinėmis teorijomis, pavyzdžiui, plėtojamomis Claude'o Lévi-Strausso, Michaelio Foucault, Judith Butler ir kt. Straipsnio tikslas – atskleisti ir nustatyti Vakarų kultūros ambivalentiškos pozicijos hermafroditizmo atžvilgiu priežastis. Hermafroditizmas suvokiamas arba kaip kažkas keista ir gėdinga, nes tai neatitinka tradicinės dichotomijos kultūros kategorijų požiūriu, arba kaip tobulas dvilypis vieningumas, sujungiantis vienoje būtybėje dvi visiškas priešybes.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: hermafroditizmas, kultūra, dichotomija, lytis, lytiškumas, struktūra, translytiškumas.