Project MUSE®

Feminine Masculinities: Scientific and Literary Representations of "Female Inversion" at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

CLAUDIA BREGER
University of Indiana, Bloomington

THROUGHOUT MODERN EUROPEAN HISTORY articulations of gender and sexuality have been closely intertwined. At the turn of the twentieth century the interconnection between both categories played a crucial role in redefining cultural identities at what contemporaries perceived as a historical moment of accelerated modernization. Discourses of women's emancipation, antifeminist responses, and emphatic assertions of masculinity overlapped with the categorization of "perverse" and "normal" sexuality in science and literature. Together these themes mapped the terrain of a contemporary obsession that placed the categories of sexuality at the center of modern definitions of identity. A point of focus in this field was the trope of inversion. Developed by the emerging sciences of sexuality, it soon became the dominant, albeit not the only, paradigm for imagining "same-sex" attractions as well as "deviant" gender configurations.[1] Sometimes articulated in the notion of a third sex, the category of inversion opened up a terrain for imagining both "feminine men" and "female masculinities."[2] Initially, scholars focused primarily on "male" inversion, rendering "female masculinities" more or less invisible. Gradually, however, the scientific mapping of perversion did come to include "the other sex," which, at the same

I would like to thank Julian Carter and the anonymous reviewers for *JHS*, whose suggestions were tremendously helpful in further developing the initial draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Kate Brooks for her help with smoothing out my English prose and translating the German quotes. Of course, I am responsible for all remaining problems.

[1]For an account of these complex discursive topographies see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, 1990), 83–90.

[2]My quotation marks are to suggest that these notions are inadequate. The essentialist distinction between "men" and "women" encounters trouble in the discourse of gender inversion. At the same time, this discourse is deeply embedded in modern epistemologies of nature and essence, and the texts discussed use the essentialist terminology quoted here.

Journal of the History of Sexuality, Vol. 14, Nos. 1/2, January/April 2005
© 2005 by the University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819

time, figured more prominently in literary depictions of inversion than the "male" invert.[3] In my article I address these scientific and literary representations of "female" inversion, which have not been sufficiently studied in historical works about European sexuality.[4] In particular, I focus on the dialogue between late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scientific texts and the 1901 novel *Sind es Frauen? Roman über das dritte Geschlecht* (Are These Women? Novel about the Third Sex) by Aimée Duc.[5] Duc's novel has been praised as extraordinary for its early positive representation of lesbian love in modern European literature, but it has not received much scholarly attention so far.[6]

[3]Of course, male "homoeroticism" has a long tradition in Western literature and has been much more visible than that of its female counterpart (see, e.g., Christopher Lorey, "Warum es sinnvoll und notwendig ist, die Lesbenliteratur zu kanonisieren," in Dirck Linck, Wolfgang Popp, and Annette Runte, eds., *Erinnern und Wiederentdecken. Tabuisierung und Enttabuisierung der männlichen und weiblichen Homosexualität in Wissenschaft und Kritik* [Berlin, 1999], 149–67, 158). At the same time, it seems worth noting that around 1900 the emerging figure of the "lesbian" was very prominent in literature, not least in works written by men. In various shades and configurations it was used as both an exoticist image of otherness and a medium for openly imagining deviant sexual identifications. Famous examples include Henry James's *The Bostonians* (1886), Émile Zola's *Nana* and Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* in French literature, and the different versions of Frank Wedekind's *Lulu* tragedy in German literature.

[4]Over the course of the last decade a growing body of work on lesbian histories and literatures has begun to close the gap. However, most studies still focus on the later twentieth century and on Anglo-American or French contexts. Despite the fact that Berlin and Vienna were leading centers of European sexuality research at the turn of the twentieth century, many aspects of the German (language) contributions to the discourse of "female" inversion have yet to be explored. A couple of small contributions from the beginnings of critical sexuality studies are collected in Verein der Freunde eines Schwulen Museums in Berlin e.V., ed., *Eldorado. Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin 1850–1950. Geschichte, Alltag und Kultur,* 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1992); more recent contributions include Sabine Ayshe Peters, "Von der 'weiblichen Konträrsexualität' zur 'pansexuellen Frau.' Lesbische Liebe im Spiegel sexualmedizinischer und psychologischer Fachterminologie," in Ursula Ferdinand, Andreas Pretzel, and Andreas Seeck, eds., *Verqueere Wissenschaft? Zum Verhältnis von Sexualwissenschaft und Sexualreformbewegung in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Münster, 1998), 119–28; Geertje Mak, "Wo das Sprechen zum Schweigen wird. Zur historischen Beziehung zwischen 'Frauen' und Lesben," in Kati Röttger and Heike Paul, eds., *Differenzen in der Geschlechterdifferenz/Differences within Gender Studies. Aktuelle Perspektiven der Geschlechterfoschung* (Berlin, 1999), 316–30. See also the chapter on "The Lesbian Figure" in James Jones, *We of the Third Sex: Literary Representations of Homosexuality in Wilhelmine Germany* (New York, 1990), 143–72; and specifically for Austria see Hanna Hacker, *Frauen und Freundinnen. Studien zur weiblichen Homosexualität am Beispiel Österreich 1870–1938* (Weinheim, 1987). Two editions have made contemporary documents available to North American audiences: Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Eriksson, eds. and trans., *Lesbian-Feminism in Turn-of-the-Century Germany* ([Weatherby Lake, Mo.], 1980); and *Lesbianism and Feminism in Germany, 1895–1910* (New York, 1975).

[5]Pseudonym of the writer, journalist, and editor Minna Wettstein-Adelt (see below).

[6]For example, Faderman and Eriksson state that this text "has absolutely no peer as an early, emphatically positive lesbian-feminist statement—with a happy ending" (vi). The one

As my article aims to show, Duc's novel presents not only a positive representation of marginalized sexual identities but also a critical contribution to the discourse of sexology. "Critical" in this context means both "crucial" and "involving criticism." By virtue of the ways in which it engages scientific categories, the literary text reads as part of sexologist discourse itself. At the same time it reflects on the production of scientific knowledge. Reading the novel closely thus helps me to develop the major point of this article: I argue for a new reading of "female" inversion. On a theoretical level my contribution addresses the relations of the history of sexuality to gender (in particular, transgender) history and to feminist as well as queer theory. The discursive terrain of inversion, where figures of gender and sexuality are obviously constituted through one another, has been mapped quite differently by scholars with a feminist, lesbian-feminist, queer, or transgender focus. My intervention into the debate may reflect my own agenda as an attempt to negotiate these different perspectives; nonetheless, I defend my reading as historically more adequate than other recent interpretations of inversion. On a methodological level this argument includes some reflections on the politics of reading historical texts and on the relationship between literary and scientific texts. I begin by outlining recent critical perspectives on the discourse of inversion, introduce my own argument in this context, and develop its different implications in a close reading of the novel's dialogue with sexological texts.

Female Masculinity, Feminine Masculinities

"Female masculinity" has received some attention in recent cultural studies. In 1995 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggested the need for a closer examination of masculinities that have nothing to do with "it" (i.e., maleness), and in 1998 Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* presented the first book-length investigation of these masculinities.[7] In the study Halberstam criticizes the way in which previous scholars discussed the historical concept of inversion.[8] As Halberstam argues, lesbian and feminist-identified scholars such as Terry Castle have tended to read the "third sex" model as not much more than an ideologically flawed response to the nonacceptance of homosexuality. Against these readings Halberstam insists that "the invert

---

major scholarly work on the novel that we have, Biddy Martin's "Extraordinary Homosexuals and the Fear of Being Ordinary," *differences* 6, nos. 2–3 (1994): 100–25, is discussed in detail below.

[7]Eve K. Sedgwick, "'Gosh, Boy George, You Must Be Awfully Secure in Your Masculinity,'" in Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, eds., *Constructing Masculinity* (New York, 1995), 11–20, 12; Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, 1998). See also Jean Bobby Noble, *Masculinities without Men: Female Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Fictions* (Vancouver, 2004).

[8]Halberstam, 50, 72.

may not be a synonym for 'lesbian'"; instead, "the concept of inversion both produced and described a category of biological women who felt at odds with their anatomy."[9] In the context of a growing transgender movement at the end of the twentieth century Halberstam suggests that many of the experiences described in historical case studies "seem much more closely related to what we now call a transsexual identity than . . . to lesbianism."[10]

In a much more definite manner Jay Prosser has suggested that the historical experience described as inversion "was" essentially our contemporary phenomenon of transgender, by which he means a way of expressing the desire to "become the 'other' sex . . . for the sake of self-identity."[11] Prosser argues that this historical experience has been obscured by twentieth-century mainstream theorizing, in the context of which contemporary lesbian-feminist responses can be situated. Beginning with Freud, Prosser suggests, transgender has been "configured—with the emphasis on figure—as homosexuality's fictional construct: not referential of actual transgendered subjects, but metaphoric of homosexuals falsely transgendered."[12] Against this privileging of sexuality (as the cause of identity) over gender (as its form) Prosser suggests the opposite move. In his reading queer desire figures as "only one aspect" within "a much larger gender-inverted condition."[13] Thus, sex is subordinated to gender, even if not altogether relegated to the status of transgender's fictional construct. While I agree that the critique of previous readings of inversion in terms primarily of sexuality is important, Prosser's singular move of reversal is no less problematic. Not only is (trans)gender privileged over sexuality, but Prosser's definition of transgender also provides the "referent" in question with very clear boundaries. In making the term "transgender" refer to those (alone) who coherently identify with the sex opposite to the one initially assigned to them, Prosser reserves the historical legacy of inversion for parts of the contemporary movement only.[14] Rather than joining the search for one such definite "referent" of inversion, I would like to investigate the variety of metaphorical—or, more generally, rhetorical—processes that configure historical accounts of gender and sexuality. That is, I believe that we should look more closely at the ways in which different categories of gender and sexuality are articulated through one another in particular historical texts.

[9]Ibid., 82.

[10]Ibid., 85.

[11]Jay Prosser, "Transsexuals and the Transsexologists: Inversion and the Emergence of Transsexual Subjectivity," in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds., *Sexology in Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago, 1998), 116–31, here 117–18 (the emphasis is Prosser's).

[12]Ibid., 117.

[13]Ibid.

[14]For an alternative perspective, see, for example, Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York, 1994).

This investigation uncovers complex, "messy" scenarios of sociosymbolic labeling. For the context of "female" inversion it is crucial that at the turn of the twentieth century the notion of the third sex was used not only as a way of theorizing sexual preference and/or as cross-gender identification but also with regard to women's emancipation. In the context of the fierce debates on female access to university education the "invert" designated women who, according to misogynist discourse, were "masculinized" by their entry into previously male realms of research and professional life.[15] This use of the term cannot simply be conflated with the others. Many contemporary authors insisted that such "masculinization" produced an "asexual" identity.[16] At the same time, these different uses of the notion cannot be neatly separated either. In the discourse of the era the emancipated woman was often also perceived as sexually dangerous—and (potentially) a lesbian.[17] In following the uses of these figures we therefore hardly find a single, clearly defined meaning of sexological narratives. Instead, we may be able to map a more complex production of less coherent meanings and identities.

This methodological plea for looking at the articulation of incoherence is, of course, not new. In the field of gender and sexuality study its "postmodernist"—or "queer"—agenda has been prominently argued by Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick. Butler's *Gender Trouble* started out with a critique of the "gendered norms of cultural intelligibility" that "institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire."[18] In this heteronormative matrix a "female" sex assignment requires a feminine gender identity and the articulation of desire for a member of the opposite sex and gender. In her introduction to *Tendencies* Sedgwick expanded Butler's triad of identity components by differentiating between one's self-perceived gender assignment and that perceived by others and between one's preferred sexual acts and fantasies.[19] Both Butler and Sedgwick call for critical gender, or queer, studies to investigate "the specters of discontinuity and incoherence" that are both prohibited and produced in the heteronormative order of gender and sexuality.[20]

[15]For an overview of these debates see Patricia M. Mazón, *Gender and the Modern Research University: The Admission of Women to German Higher Education, 1865–1914* (Stanford, Calif., 2003).

[16]See, prominently, Ernst v. Wolzogen, *Das dritte Geschlecht* (Berlin, 1899). This text was published with the same publisher as Duc's 1901 novel, which uses the term clearly for sexual inversion while at the same time playing with the emancipation connotations as well.

[17]See Hanna Hacker, "Zonen des Verbotenen: Die lesbische Codierung von Kriminalität und Feminismus um 1900," in Barbara Hey, Ronald Pallier, and Roswitha Roth, eds., *Que(e)rdenken. Weibliche/männliche Homosexualität und Wissenschaft* (Innsbruck, 1997), 40–57.

[18]Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), 17.

[19]Eve K. Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C., 1993), 7.

[20]Butler, 17.

Halberstam's study situates itself as part of this project. Her book intends to discuss a wide range of masculinities beyond white, middle-class, male bodies and to produce richer, more "precise classifications of gender" beyond the "compulsory gender binarism."[21] However, Halberstam's use of the notion "female masculinity" as an organizing focus of the book confirms this very binarism.[22] To be sure, Halberstam's paradoxical use of essentialist distinctions may reflect a contemporary condition marked by the continued hegemony of the modern, biology-based model of two sexes, or, in Halberstam's words, by "the flourishing existence of gender binarism despite rumors of its demise."[23] At the same time, the conceptual focus on "female masculinity" restricts Halberstam's investigation of alternative masculinities. Thus, the book's theoretical narrative focuses on the ways in which female masculinity "can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity" by virtue of its nonnormative embodiment.[24] As I would emphasize, however, not all female masculinities are equally challenging to norms. Some of them may end up reinforcing hegemonic models of masculinity by paying homage to rather than parodying masculinity or also by parodying marginalized rather than hegemonic masculinities.[25] Beyond the difference between sex and gender or body and performance, a broader look at the "specters of sexual incoherence" could help to map these politics of (female and other) masculinities. Any given performance itself may be constituted through and potentially deconstructed by multiple breaks with sociosymbolic coherence standards. Analyzing these individual configurations could show how different strategies of performing different forms of masculinity challenge hegemonic concepts of masculinity in more or less successful ways.

With regard to the historical discourse of inversion, such a broader focus allows for a more complex and more adequate analysis of the ways in which sexologists' discourse constructed sexual identities. I show that many of the "female inverts" described in scientific and literary texts around 1900 cannot adequately be conceptualized as transgendered in the sense of coherently masculine-identified individuals. At the same time, I do not intend to repeat the gesture of reading inversion as homosexuality. In this article I highlight gender aspects of the rhetoric of inversion without, however, neglecting their constitutive intersections with sexuality. More specifically, I argue that the historical figures of "female inversion" in my

[21] Halberstam, 27.

[22] Despite her critique of its essentialist distinction between differently embodied masculinities, Noble, too, reuses Halberstam's notion of "female masculinity" (xxxix).

[23] Halberstam, 22.

[24] Ibid., 9, 32–33.

[25] In more detail I argue this point in "Queens und Kings, oder: Performing Power," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 46, no. 1 (2001): 105–21. The argument is inspired by Carole-Anne Tyler's work on femininity performances, now available in book format: *Female Impersonation* (New York, 2003).

texts present “feminine masculinities” rather than “female masculinities.” To thus turn the methodological plea for an investigation of incoherence into a concept in its own right may look like a somewhat precarious move. In making it I do not claim to capture the totality of all historical uses of “female inversion.” However, I do believe that my notion captures crucial aspects of most of them.

As I use the term, “feminine masculinities” refers to configurations of gender identification and performance that are constituted through the combination of elements commonly associated with masculinity and elements commonly associated with femininity. In today’s language it might correspond to something like “partial” rather than complete transgender identifications. Thus, the term possesses some common ground with those uses of the notion of transgender that stress that the departure from one gender does not necessarily lead into the haven of the other.[26] The “in-between space” to which I am referring is not primarily constituted by a discrepancy or clear-cut tension between sex assignment and gender identification but rather by complications within the latter field.[27] Or also within both of them: we will see that “incoherence” in the field of bodily constitution is often part of the historical description of what I call “feminine masculinities.” Furthermore, the notion emphasizes that the “in-between” space is not a space beyond gender but rather a space occupied by individual elements more or less closely associated with one of the two genders that modern European society makes knowable. In this frame of thought “feminine masculinity” is therefore marked by contradiction; it is difficult if not impossible to articulate it in terms other than those of sexual incoherence.

As these explanations suggest, “feminine masculinity” is also related to current discussions of intersex identities, even if my notion highlights gender performance rather than questions of anatomy and hormones in their own right. “Feminine masculinity” certainly has some common ground with “fuzzy gender” as introduced by Ashley Tauchert for the context of intersex. It “takes us beyond” the “either/or” of Aristotelian logic or rather onto the middle ground excluded by a binary understanding of difference.[28] At the same time, the term “feminine masculinity” also strives to escape the idea of a linear continuum between the two gender poles and does not privilege the “precise midpoint” of the “gender line” where “intersexed embodiment

[26]See Bornstein; also Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (Boston, 1998).

[27]See Bornstein. Feinberg also takes a step in that direction when expressing a hesitation “to label the intricate matrix of my gender as simply masculine” (9). However, s/he also emphasizes the strategic decision to “reduce the totality of my self-expression to descriptions like masculine female, butch,” and so on that label “literally social outlaws” in our society (10).

[28]Ashley Tauchert, “Fuzzy Gender: Between Female-embodiment and Intersex,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002): 29–38, here 34.

materializes," according to Tauchert.[29] Rather, my notion seeks to capture a variety of configurations of multiple gendered elements that we may be unable to represent graphically in a space restricted to two or even three dimensions. As I intend it, "feminine masculinity" does not equal "androgyny" but rather includes, among others, combinations of "strongly masculine" and "strongly feminine" elements in one gender performance.[30] I argue that this open (non)definition may be the most adequate way of translating into our contemporary theoretical language what many historical uses of the "third sex" and "inversion" categories say about gender.

As articulated in the last paragraph, the notion can, in principle, refer to both "male" and "female" members of the "third sex." By virtue of its affiliation with an anti-essentialist agenda, it is also open to reversals; that is, we could use the notions "feminine masculinities" and "masculine femininities" interchangeably and do so for gender performances from both subcultures.[31] While similar exchanges happen in some of my sources, it is nonetheless important that the articulation of "male" and "female" third sex identities is not altogether symmetrical in the historical texts. Distinctions between "men" and "women" of the "third sex" do matter socially and politically, even while the texts develop paradoxes in thus essentially speaking about the "third sex" within a two-sexes framework. My article develops these political contexts in focusing on those members of the "third sex" or "feminine masculinities" that are, more or less paradoxically, labeled "women" or "female" at the same time.

These political contexts are rather complicated. Despite my affiliation with the "postmodernist" queer intervention in favor of (perceived) gender incoherence, I do not claim that the historical discourse of inversion was in and of itself politically radical.[32] The replacement of "female masculinity" with "feminine masculinities" does not simply do away with the political complications I pointed out in the context of Halberstam's argument. In further pursuing these complications my investigation will disturb straightforward stories of subversion. Instead, I will discuss intricate combinations of radical and conservative, hegemonic and marginalized articulations, in the stories of sexual incoherence. But first of all we need to look more

[29]Ibid., 36.

[30]Another contemporary term that comes to mind is *bigender*. However, as I understand its use, for example, in Feinberg (e.g., 16), bigender refers primarily to people who perform masculinity and femininity, respectively, in different contexts of their life; my "feminine masculinities" are characterized by the coexistence of both at the same time.

[31]Because of its introduction as a substitute for "female masculinity" I stick to the notion of "feminine masculinities" in this article.

[32]Martin Scherzinger and Neville Hoad argue that as opposed to theorists of homosexuality, inversion theorists "shared a resistance to the binary structuring of gender" and, despite their insistence on two poles of identification and desire, "de-essentialised" gender by "infusing one with the other" ("A/Symmetrical Reading of Inversion in Fin-de-Siècle Music, Musicology, and Sexology," in Christoph Lorey and John L. Plews, eds., *Queering the Canon: Defying Sights in German Literature and Culture* [Columbia, S.C., 1998], 36–72, 41).

closely at the way in which "feminine masculinity" was conceptualized a hundred years ago.

ARE THESE WOMEN? AIMÉE DUC'S FEMININE MASCULINITIES IN THE DISCOURSE OF SEXOLOGY

The 1901 novel *Sind es Frauen?* (Are These Women?) by Aimée Duc has been noticed primarily for its positive and nontragic representation of love between women.[33] The text introduces us to a group of friends from different European countries. Most of them met as university students in Geneva, Switzerland, where the institutions of higher learning were already open to women by 1900. The friends refer to themselves as belonging to the "third sex," and the reader understands that this label includes a reference to their "intense passion" for "women"—other "female" members of the "third sex."[34] In the context of the group's educational life and sexual politics the novel then develops the love story between two of the group members, the protagonist Minotschka, an ambitious academic, and Marta, a rich aristocrat who studies music simply for pleasure (9). While most contemporary texts staged the lesbian as a "ghost effect" in which passion is linked to death, this love story results in a happy ending.[35] Although Marta temporarily leaves Minotschka in order to live with a man, he conveniently dies quickly thereafter, and the lovers are reunited.

This plot per se is not that extraordinary. The happy ending fits with the usual classification of the novel as "trivial" within the German system of "high" and "low" culture.[36] And despite this happy end, the plot actually does show effects of what Julie Abraham has described as the "narrative disenfranchisement" faced by lesbian writers.[37] According to Abraham, there is no "lesbian plot" in what Judith Butler calls the "heterosexual matrix." "Lesbian novels are inevitably based on the heterosexual plot," and in this

[33]Born in Strasburg in 1869 and raised in France, Minna Adelt married the Swiss writer Wettstein. She lived in Berlin as well as other cities and published widely, not least in women's venues and on feminist issues (e.g., *Macht euch frei! Ein Wort an die deutschen Frauen* [Berlin, 1893]). She edited several journals, including the *Berliner Modekorrespondenz* and *Draisena: Blätter für Damenfahren*, a journal on women's biking (see *Deutsches biographisches Archiv*, microfiche edition, ed. Bernhard Fabian [Munich, 1982]). I continue to use the pen name since it offers itself as the name of—in the language of literary theory—the text's "implicit author," that is, the authorial instance that can be inferred from the text. Its views and norms are not necessarily identical with those of the biographical author.

[34]Aimée Duc, *Sind es Frauen? Roman über das dritte Geschlecht* (Berlin, 1976), 10, hereafter cited in text. Part of the novel is translated in Faderman and Erikkson, 1–21; however, the translations used here are mine.

[35]Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York, 1993), 2.

[36]See, for example, the preface to the 1976 edition and also Jones, 151.

[37]Julie Abraham, *Are Girls Necessary? Lesbian Writing and Modern Histories* (New York, 1996), xix.

plot lesbian love is necessarily represented as a problem.[38] In structuring its dramatic story around Marta's temporary marriage *Sind es Frauen?* stages this problem by using the "chief method of creating lesbian narratives out of heterosexual plots . . . , triangulation." Despite the happy ending, Minotschka's crisis during the separation from her lover can also be read as a form of punishment, which, according to Abraham, completes "the formula of the lesbian novel."[39]

However, the text not only varies this formula by allowing the lesbian relationship to triumph, it also supplements the "trivial" plot with critical reflections on the "third" as well as the "second" sex. Part of this critical reflection is produced by the narrator, but even more important is the way in which the text juxtaposes the voices of its different characters. The theoretical and political debates staged in the novel take up more narrative space than the actual romantic plot. In the group of friends issues of the third sex, of femininity, feminism, and related matters, are debated fervently. In exemplary ways the group struggles to map those "messy" terrains of contemporary discourse and experience, where different categories of gender and sexuality are articulated through one another. In the way in which the text engages contemporary scientific categories it can be read as part of sexological discourse. By virtue of its genre, moreover, the novel also presents a critical look at sexology. More specifically, notions developed in Richard Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the then-hegemonic scientific account of sexual "perversion," are questioned both implicitly and explicitly.[40]

In saying this I am not arguing that there is some categorical difference between literature and science that more or less guarantees the subversive status of the former. I would rather stress that the literary text and its scientific counterpart use overlapping modes of representation—notably, narrative. In *Psychopathia Sexualis* the majority of textual space is devoted to the case stories collected by colleagues, discovered in Krafft-Ebing's own medical and forensic practice, or received from readers whom he invited to share their experiences.[41] In recent critical literature these case stories have been discussed as presenting a moment of excess vis-à-vis Krafft-Ebing's theoretical model of inversion. Recording a diversity of sexual styles and gendered identifications, they show heterogeneous experiences that are not

[38]Abraham, 3.

[39]Abraham, 5–6.

[40]Krafft-Ebing taught psychiatry in Graz and later Vienna and also served as a writer of forensic-psychiatrist reports in court. First published in 1886, his *Psychopathia Sexualis* went through multiple editions in the following decades and was widely regarded as the standard work on deviant sexuality at the turn of the twentieth century. For a detailed analysis see Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago, 2000).

[41]Oosterhuis, 149.

adequately captured in Krafft-Ebing's theoretical concept of inversion.[42] Despite this moment of "resistance to theory," however, the case stories are certainly not "the other of science." A crucial part of Krafft-Ebing's positivist approach, they do not record unordered, "raw" experiences. Even where the author refrained from editing, the stories he heard were already shaped by specific sociosymbolic protocols.[43] In turn, they helped to model sexual identities according to hegemonic scripts.[44]

Autobiographical as well as fictional narratives fashion identity, and case stories had a central role in the complex, often dialogic process of constructing sexological accounts of "inversion."[45] In telling their stories both the scientific and the literary text thus contribute to the transformation of historical experiences into sexologist discourse and vice versa. Even while fiction has particular imaginative license in concocting its stories, the critical perspective offered by Duc's text vis-à-vis that of Krafft-Ebing should not be explained with literature's general status as a necessarily subversive space. Rather, I am interested in the concrete ways in which the text rearranges topoi of sexual difference. As a first step in this investigation, the genre difference between the two texts can be described in more subtle ways: if Krafft-Ebing's book presents a theoretical account supplemented by unruly case stories, Duc's novel presents a particular fictional case story supplemented by intradiegetic theory.

How, then, can we describe this contribution to the discourse of inversion? My reading of the text partially builds on but partially also disagrees with the one major critical article on the novel. In her 1994 "Extraordinary Homosexuals and the Fear of Being Ordinary" Biddy Martin discusses

[42]Merl Storr, "Transformations: Subjects, Categories and Cures in Krafft-Ebing's Sexology," in Bland and Doan, 11–26.

[43]According to Oosterhuis, Krafft-Ebing often used relatively unedited autobiographical material for his reports. He did not necessarily censor descriptions and opinions that complicated his medical model, and he even included explicit criticism. However, Oosterhuis also emphasizes that this dialogue did not include Krafft-Ebing's female patients to the degree it included his male patients (166–67, 206–7).

[44]Ibid., 229.

[45]Whereas early literature tended to describe sexologist discourse as a unified hegemonic power that unilaterally forced marginalized sexual subjects into repressive subject positions (see, e.g., Hacker, *Frauen und Freundinnen*, esp. 33–40), recent studies suggest that the force of sexologist discourse was created in the dialogue between individuals with different desires, identifications, and social positions. (See Doan and Bland's plea against the reading of sexology as monolithic: Laura Doan and Lucy Bland, "General Introduction," in Laura Doan and Lucy Bland, eds., *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* [Chicago, 1998], 4. For the exemplary case of Krafft-Ebing, the interplay of individual agency and the disciplinary force of scientific norms is pursued in Oosterhuis.) Obviously, there were often decisive power imbalances between the contributing voices, for example, a female patient in a clinic and her male doctor. At the same time, many of those who came to identify as "inverts" did have substantial amounts of social agency, and the categories of sexology were generated in processes of their cooperation as well as dissent in the definition of sexual identities.

Sind es Frauen? in the context of a theoretical argument about the then-emerging field of queer studies. Martin cautions against what she perceives to be a new critical tendency to supercede gender, especially femininity, in the celebration of radical and fluid, more or less explicitly "phallic" queer sexualities.[46] In this context Martin develops an interpretation of the novel that dovetails, in some respects, with the lesbian-feminist readings of inversion criticized by Halberstam. However, Martin does take the issue of female masculinity seriously. Using the vocabulary of the later twentieth century, Martin reads the "third sex woman" as a "butch" who is defending herself against the weakness associated with femininity. Thus, Martin suggests that the novel stages the "masculine" woman, Minotschka, as the prototypical lesbian heroine. However, Martin also points out that Duc's novel "makes room for the most feminine of women in the category of the third sex."[47] Martin then enlists psychoanalysis to argue that the romance plot deconstructs the heroine's "manliness," which the novel initially seemed to support, by exposing it as a defense against vulnerability. When her lover leaves her for a man, "Minotschka's mannish independence (or defense) suffers an enormous blow."[48]

For Martin, the novel thus eventually proves the relative stability of gender identity as constituted within the realm of (female) embodiment. Martin distinguishes her argument from the simple suggestion that Minotschka's breakdown exposes "the real woman underneath," which would turn her butch performances into mere "strategic masquerades." "Underneath Minotschka's butch defenses is not 'a woman' but a butch," and this butch does not turn into a "femme" by confronting her emotionality, even if society associates the latter with femininity.[49] Thus, Martin emphasizes that the meanings of gender—and sex—are not stable. At the same time, she wants to affirm "what has been lost or disavowed in the effort to define female homosexuality against female afflictions," that is, the "givenness of bodies and psyches in history" or "the Real of sexual difference."[50]

Martin's reading of the novel is both complex and thorough. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest an alternative view. As represented in the text, the "female member of the third sex" is not really a "butch" defending against "female afflictions," just as she is not a transgendered subject in the sense of a subject identified with the "other" gender.[51] Rather, she constitutes a subject of "mixed" gender identity, or feminine masculinity, regarding both her physicality and other aspects of her performance. The first page of

[46]Martin, 100–101.
[47]Ibid., 110.
[48]Ibid., 119.
[49]Ibid., 120.
[50]Ibid., 119, 102.
[51]I decided to stick to the pronoun "she" despite the fact that a case could be made for "s/he" as well. This novel's "third sex" does remain bound to the "second" in terms of primary reference, even while this relationship includes doubts (are these women?) and dissent.

the novel presents the "masculinized" Minotschka in the following terms: "The young woman, strong and well built, voluptuous, looked interesting enough. A mixture of youthful tomboyishness left its singular stamp on her air of unconscious feminine coquettishness."[52] This description may seem to support Martin's reading in that Minotschka's "feminine coquettishness" is characterized as "unconscious." I am, however, not convinced that this textual clue allows us to read her character coherently in terms of a repressed femininity. The explicit theoretical reference point of the 1901 novel is not Freud, but, as suggested above, Krafft-Ebing. Freud's development of the unconscious in terms of repression cannot be taken for granted as an available theoretical model in the context of the novel's production.[53]

Of course, the text could nonetheless function along the lines spelled out by Freud. Regarding the above quote, however, it seems important that Minotschka's "masculine" element—to be more exact, her youthful tomboyishness—is introduced as an ingredient that develops rather than represses or negates the "unconscious" femininity in a particular way. Should this tomboyishness be just as "deep-seated" or natural as Minotschka's femininity? And could the latter, in turn, have "artificial" components to it as well? The following pages support such suspicions. The circumstance that Minotschka's attire is partially feminine, partially masculine may simply be a concession to society. But other elements of her bodily presentation are mixed as well. Her gait is "energetic" (6), and her hand the "soft," "small" one of a boy (11). At the same time, Minotschka uses a "penetrant" perfume (7).

According to Krafft-Ebing, the female invert shows only "disdain" for such signs of artificial femininity.[54] Nonetheless, readers familiar with sexological theory may have felt reminded of his case stories. Minotschka is very much described like one of the "female inverts" portrayed there. Just like many of these medical cases, however, the literary one does not fit very well into Krafft-Ebing's overall theoretical model. According to the general section of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, "female inverts" come in four categories: "psychic hermaphroditism" (equivalent to later concepts of bisexuality), "homosexuality," "viraginity," and "gynandry." According to Krafft-Ebing, "psychic hermaphrodites and also many homosexual

[52]"Das junge Weib, kräftig und gut gebaut, mit runden Formen, sah interessant genug aus. Ein Gemisch von Burschikosem, Jugendlichem, Knabenhaftem gab der unbewussten weiblichen Koketterie und Pikanterie, die über ihrem Wesen lagen, ein eigenes Gepräge" (5).

[53]Freud's *Traumdeutung*, which developed this model paradigmatically, was first published in 1900.

[54]Richard v. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der conträren Sexualempfindung. Eine medizinisch-gerichtliche Studie für Ärzte und Juristen,* 12th improved and expanded ed. (Stuttgart, 1903), 283. I also used an English translation of this edition: *Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct. A Clinical-Forensic Study*, ed. Brian King (Burbank, Calif., 1999), 329.

women do not betray their anomaly either by external appearances or by mental (masculine) sexual characteristics."[55] The third group, however, gets its name from such masculinization, and the "woman" belonging to the fourth category, gynandry, "only possesses the female qualities of the genital organs; sentiment, thought, action, and external appearance are thoroughly masculine/male."[56]

In this way, Krafft-Ebing locates a concept of almost complete sexual coherence at the end of his scale, where it suggests both its central normative function and its marginality in his empiricist text. Of the fourteen numbered cases of "female inversion" included in the twelfth edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, two are categorized as "psychic hermaphrodism," five as "homosexuality," one as at the transition from homosexuality to viraginity, four as "viraginity," and again two as "gynandry." Thus, there is a clear concentration in the middle of the scale. But the extensive case stories included in *Psychopathia Sexualis* suggest not only the inadequacy of assuming sexual coherence; they also exceed the attempt to contain deviation by arranging it on a linear scale.[57] Rather than steady progression from one end of the scale to the other, the cases provide different configurations of feminine masculinity. For example, there is a "psychic hermaphrodite" with unusually large, masculine arms and legs who "always" feels herself "in the role of the man" with other women.[58]

Similarly, Minotschka would be awkwardly placed in any of Krafft-Ebing's categories. On the one hand, she shows physical as well as psychological signs of "viraginity"; on the other hand, both her body and self-presentation are very feminine in some regards. Apparently, "female inversion" cannot be represented on a singular scale. The voluptuous woman with the hands of a boy presents a combination of seemingly contradictory gender elements. While Minotschka can certainly be read as partially "masculinized," a notion of coherent female masculinity or butchness seems to be a misleading designation of her identity.

In this context it is also important to take a look at Minotschka's partner, Marta. The final reunification scene supports Martin's "femme" label in that it stages Marta as Minotschka's "feminine" object of desire, complete with coquettishness and rustling silk clothes (91–92). Her self-stylization as "your obedient Marta" in the process of convincing the skeptical (ex-)lover of her future fidelity may also suggest that her character be read in terms of a slightly ironic, normative femininity. However, Marta's initial presentation is in terms of class rather than gender. For most of the novel, all we know

[55]Krafft-Ebing, 283 (English version, 328).

[56]Ibid. (English version, 329).

[57]While discussing multiple instabilities in the concept of inversion as developed by Krafft-Ebing, Storr emphasizes that the categorical containment was still effective in clinical practice (in particular 20–21).

[58]Krafft-Ebing, 287 (English version, 333).

about Marta's appearance is that she is "not really pretty, but thoroughly aristocratic" (9). This presentation of the countess resituates her femininity in the context of modern European discourses of aristocratic "effeminacy." To be sure, the class stereotype may provide the very ground of her feminization vis-à-vis Minotschka, but at the same time it makes Marta an unlikely candidate for the embodiment of dominant (bourgeois) gender concepts. More important, the final scene of reunification also mentions the short haircut of the silken lady (91). Furthermore, it is Marta who, in the stereotypically masculine role, proposes to Minotschka in this scene: "Will you believingly entrust your life to me?" In this context Marta promises to "auf Händen tragen" her lover (95). This expression, translated literally as "to carry [her] on her hands," means taking good care of someone, protecting and spoiling her, and connotes masculinity in the sense of (the loving use of) superior physical strength. In short, there are "masculinized" elements to Marta's performance as well, and rather than the positions of "butch" and "femme," the two partners seem to articulate two different compositions of feminine masculinity.

Despite Krafft-Ebing's attempts to contain such apparent incoherence, a quick look at other authors confirms its central role in the discourse of "inversion." To be sure, other nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scholars of sexuality besides Krafft-Ebing were psychologically invested in fictions of gender coherence. Nonetheless, the significance of incoherence in these texts is not merely an effect of our retrospective deconstructive examination but an integral, constitutive part of modern narratives of sexual identity. A case in point is the early voice of Carl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825–95), the lawyer and political activist for sexual emancipation. Ulrichs's sociojuridical and anthropological treatises imported the classical notion of the "third sex" into nineteenth-century discourses of sexuality.[59] His *Urnings*, as he called (nominally male) inverts,[60] are members of a "third sex" since they are "not fully men or women, but by nature . . . different."[61] Unlike Krafft-Ebing, Ulrichs did not theorize inversion as affecting body and mind equally; the

[59]Regarding the Greek genealogy of the term see Magnus Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*, new printing of the 1st (1914) ed., with an introduction by E. J. Haeberle (Berlin, 1984), 29. I have also used the following translation: *The Homosexuality of Men and Women*, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (Amherst, N.Y., 2000), 60.

[60]Ulrichs was not interested in "female inversion"; his writings focus almost exclusively on the *Urning*, not on the *Urningin*, the *Urning*'s nominally female counterpart. At the same time, Ulrichs's theorizing resulted in a configuration of gender trouble that is pertinent to our discussion of nominally female inversion.

[61]Carl Heinrich Ulrichs, "'Vindex.' Social-juristische Studien über mannmännliche Geschlechtsliebe," in *Forschungen über das Rätsel der mannmännlichen Liebe,* reprint of the 1898 Leipzig ed. (New York, 1975), 25. The treatises collected in this edition have individual page numbers. I also reference the English translation: *The Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love: The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality* by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash, 2 vols. (Buffalo, N.Y., 1994), 36; however, my translations differ from those provided by Lombardi-Nash.

Urning is bodily male, while mentally s/he is a "feminine being."[62] Or maybe rather a "female" being,[63] since Ulrichs's distinction between body and mind does not correspond to our sex-gender distinction. As he argued, the mental organization is also part of a human's inborn—and, as he insisted, not pathological but natural—condition.[64] The existence of the *Urning* therefore shows that nature occasionally deviates from its rule to "develop the entire individual" in the way in which it sexually "develops an essential part of the individual," thus "mixing" heterogeneous elements.[65]

Of course, Ulrichs's argument is based on the idea of coherence between what he called the two parts of an individual's mental sexual organization, "character" and "desire." In the bodily male members of the third sex the "female"—that is, fundamentally heterosexual—desire for a man corresponds to the "femaleness" of his character.[66] In this regard Ulrichs's writings seem to support the reading of inversion in terms of coherent transgender. Actively downplaying evidence for the existence of masculine *Urnings*,[67] Ulrichs declared that the masculinity that the *Urnings*' appearance may often suggest is a product of nurture. Based on education and social pressure, it is artificial: "We only play the man."[68] However, there is a flipside to this argument. As it seems, the *Urning*'s "theatrical" performance of masculinity functions as a gender performance that, in part, constitutes the very identity it stages.[69] "[A]s a child only," Ulrichs wrote, the *Urning* "has a purely feminine/female habitus." As an adult "his habitus is less that of the regular woman than that of the emancipated woman."[70] The theatrical act of masculine gender performance constitutes the "female" invert's gender identity as a form of feminine masculinity.

[62]Upon further investigation this distinction may be a little too clear-cut as well. While generally, Ulrichs claimed, the body of the *Urning* is "fully male," some have a "girlish facial coloring" and "delicate hands shaped like a woman's" ("'Formatrix': Anthropologische Studien über urnische Liebe," 43 [English version, 152]). "Nature fancies itself in producing a thousand shades" (44 [English version, 152]).

[63]Ulrichs, "Vindex," 25 (English version, 36). The German *weiblich*, which is used here, signifies both "feminine" and "female."

[64]Ibid.

[65]Ulrichs, "'Inclusa.' Anthropologische Studien über mann-männliche Geschlechtsliebe," 16 (English version, 53), 23 (English version, 57). Thus, nature creates the *Urning* as a "quasi-man" or "half-man," analogous to hermaphrodites, in whom physical attributes of both sexes are "mixed" (Ulrichs, "Vindex," 25 [English version, 36]; "Inclusa," 16–25 [English version, 53–58]).

[66]Ulrichs, "Inclusa," 32 (English version, 61).

[67]In response to a reader who reported himself as such evidence Ulrichs claimed, "This combination is conceivable, but I have never witnessed it, and certainly not in the one who introduced himself to me as proof of its occurrence" ("Formatrix," 61 [English version, 162]).

[68]Ulrichs, "Inclusa," 26 (English version, 58).

[69]See Butler, 25.

[70]Ulrichs, "Formatrix," 42 (English version, 151). In nineteenth-century medical discourse the Latin notion of habitus was used for the "constitution" of a person as manifested in his

Apparently, the third sex was not a phenomenon of coherence, not in "real life experience," and not in representation either.[71] Political pamphlets on the third sex, published around the turn of the century, usually suggested that the notion be understood in terms of gender "impurity" and linkage. Thus, the "female members of the third sex" are "not pure women, but rise into the sphere of masculinity."[72] According to Anna Rüling's 1904 speech, "What Interest Does the Women's Movement Have in the Homosexual Question," homosexuality represented "the bridge, the natural and obvious link between men and women."[73] In addition to her masculine characteristics "each homosexual woman possesses more or less feminine characteristics," and the "combinations of masculine and feminine characteristics vary so much from one person to another."[74] Magnus Hirschfeld defined the third sex as "different from the endogenous full male and full female."[75] Hirschfeld's *The Homosexuality of Men and Women* (1914) pledged to do justice to "the unending, individual multiplicity" of gendered sexual expression.[76] Modernizing Krafft-Ebing's approach, Hirschfeld more fully developed the positivist, "pre-Kinseyan" ethos of collecting human diversity.[77] In this way he explicitly theorized the heterogeneous cluster

---

or her body (Meyers, *Großes Konversations-Lexikon*, vol. 8, 6th ed. [Leipzig, 1908], 588). Ulrichs distances himself from this use by emphasizing character rather than body. Nonetheless, habitus signifies something more stable than (superficial) "mannerism[s]," as Lombardi-Nash translates. In the context of discussing the bodily maleness of the *Urning*, Ulrichs explains that his use of the notion of habitus so far referred to the "character habitus, including [*sic*] the mannerisms of a person," and not the structure of the body ("Formatrix," 42–43 [English version, 152]).

[71]"The perfectly formed inversion of Stephen Gordon is a fiction," Storr concludes at the end of her reading of Krafft-Ebing (23). However, as we can see in Duc's novel, fiction participates in the representation of third sex incoherence as well.

[72]Arduin, "Die Frauenfrage und die sexuellen Zwischenstufen" (The Woman Question and Intermediate Sexual Types), in *Lesbianism and Feminism in Germany*, 211–23 (the edition retains the pages numbers of previous publications), 220 ("in die Sphäre des Männlichen hineinragen").

[73]"Welches Interesse hat die Frauenbewegung an der Lösung des homosexuellen Problems," in ibid., 129–51. I have also used the English translation in Faderman and Eriksson, 81–91; again, my translations are partially different. For biographical information on Rüling, whose real name seems to have been Theo A(nna) Sprüngli, see Christiane Leidinger, "'Anna Rüling': A Problematic Foremother of Lesbian Herstory," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 13, no. 4 (2004).

[74]Rüling, 131, 134, 142 (English version, 81, 83, 87).

[75]Hirschfeld, 30 (English version, 60–61).

[76]Ibid., iv (English version, 24).

[77]Thus, Hirschfeld insisted on differentiating between gender and sexuality: not all "womanly men and manly women . . . are homosexual, just as homosexuals are not always effeminate, or homosexual women do not have to be virilized." At the same time, he affirmed the connection by saying that "sexual incongruence [i.e., effeminacy/virility] nevertheless weighs heavily in the balance in the decision whether inborn homosexuality is present" (30, 42 [English version, 61, 78]). The connecting factor here is the concept of "average," which allowed Hirschfeld to reconcile his devotion to multiplicity with his belief in the model of

of apparently incoherent "feminine masculinities" that became visible in Krafft-Ebing's case studies while remaining conceptually subordinated to the notion of sex-gender-desire coherence. At the same time Hirschfeld was also a mostly affirmative participant in the scientific discourse dominated by Krafft-Ebing. In some respects Duc's novel presents a more radical supplement to his hegemonic theorizing.

"Mixing" Matters: Discourses of Hybridity

After establishing this reading of female inversion as "feminine masculinity," we need to take a closer look at its implications. In which words, with which effects, and to what ends do texts like Duc's novel talk about feminine masculinities? What are the work's meanings and political stance in the discourse of inversion and its larger sociosymbolic context? And how do we, consequently, want to read such works today? First of all, consider matters of language. As the initial description of Duc's protagonist suggests, the gender positions of the third sex heroines are articulated as a "mixture" (*Gemisch*). In German this notion has the same word stem as the "hybrid" (*Mischling*). In a similar way Ulrichs talked about "mixing," and one of the other texts quoted above used the notion of "(im)purity." Based on this evidence, it seems logical to propose a theoretical question that I have carefully avoided so far: should we read the gender performances of "female members of the third sex" as practices of gender hybridity?[78]

As developed in recent critical theory, the notion of hybridity is highly controversial, and the terms of this controversy are pertinent to the issues being explored here. In postcolonial studies "hybridity" is used both as an analytic tool and a critical concept with normative force. Describing the necessarily heterogeneous character of identity, "hybridity" may promise alternative forms of identification. According to Homi Bhabha, hybridity "is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities."[79] In the present Bhabha suggests "the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy."[80] By virtue of its genealogy, however, the notion of hybridity is embedded in histories of racism and colonialism. In nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European discourse the hybrid's nonidentity signified his or her status as a cross between two races that were considered to represent two different species.[81] Even when used in the context of gender rather than

inversion: "Among homosexual women, two-thirds are more muscular than the average heterosexual women" (145 [English version, 185]).

[78]With Laura Doan, Noble uses the related trope of "grafting" for the concept "female masculinities," which emphasizes the (cultural) process that constitutes the "hybrid" (xxvi).

[79]Homi K. Bhahba, *The Location of Culture* (New York, 1994), 112.

[80]Ibid., 4.

[81]Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London, 1995), 9.

race the notion may signify or be understood as hate speech. Its resignification through contemporary affirmations of hybridity is certainly far from complete at this point and will possibly never be complete. Therefore, alternative notions may be better suited for conceptualizing positive visions of nonidentity in that they bypass these histories of violence and exclusion. For example, we could consider the notion of "bricolage," which, in literary studies, describes processes of composition from and resignification of available (textual) fragments.[82]

A related set of concerns transcends the debate over terminology but has prominently been discussed with regard to the notion of hybridity as well. This discussion will help to elaborate on the question of politics introduced in the beginning section of this paper. Many critics have warned that the celebration of hybridity as indicating a critical or even radical position is problematic. On a historical plane, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue in *Empire* that "postcolonial" and "postmodernist" affirmations of hybridity fail to respond adequately to current conditions of globalization. "In contrast to imperialism, Empire . . . does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. . . . Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command."[83] I believe that their interpretation underestimates the continuities between classical imperialism and the present condition. Strategies of exclusion and homogeneous identification are still of importance at the beginning of the twenty-first century; therefore, the affirmation of hybridity may continue to have critical value. At the same time, Bhabha and others have shown that imperialist discourse relied not simply on the affirmation of homogeneity and exclusion of "the hybrid." Rather, it actively produced hybridities as part of its mechanisms of authority. Therefore, practices of hybridity have never been necessarily radical. With regard to gender performances, Butler suggests in *Gender Trouble* that even the parodistic staging of incoherence "can serve to reengage and reconsolidate" hegemonic configurations of gender.[84] Thus, the ambiguous "nature" of anti-essentialist politics of incoherence has been acknowledged throughout postcolonial and postmodernist discourses. What has been less systematically pursued in these discourses, however, are the conditions and modalities through which concrete practices of hybridity win their radical or normalizing character. As I believe, we need to look more closely at the ways in which incoherent identifications are staged and used in different texts and contexts for a variety of political agendas.

In their concrete articulations these "hybridities" show the complexity of historical discourses and practices. Their use attests to the multilayered

[82]It could, however, be argued that even this notion is embedded in colonial histories, since Claude Lévi-Strauss developed it for the context of mythic as "savage" thinking (*La pensée sauvage* [Paris, 1962]).

[83]Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), xii, see also 137–46.

[84]Butler, 146.

implications of hegemonic and marginalized identities. For example, in conceptualizing gender incoherence as hybridity, advocates of the "third sex" drew on their society's hegemonic notions of race as well as gender. Rather than utopian practices to be rescued from their historical and theoretical suppression, incoherent identifications are an integral part of all kinds of identity games. For the purposes of critical theory today, the most crucial function of "hybridity" may therefore be analytical. In this regard, however, the historically tainted notion can serve our purposes as well if not better than its alternatives. Analyzing the way in which Duc's novel articulates notions of gender and racial hybridity will help us to understand how exactly the text participated in contemporary discourses. This investigation will result in a differentiated account of its politics. While showing how the novel was implicated in hegemonic discourses of its era, this analysis will also lead to the conclusion that there are, in fact, critical moments in its particular uses of "hybridity"—or bricolage. In skeptically investigating the conditions for such critical interventions my reading confirms that the postmodern affirmation of incoherence was not altogether mistaken. Within the complex modern regime of identity and difference the rhetoric of homogenization has always had a special status. Wherever this rhetoric claims to regulate fictions of identity the emphatic insistence on identifications that look incoherent in this framework can be of critical use as long as we remember that the full picture is more complex.

Tropes of Degeneration—Textual Strategies of "Regeneration"

Nineteenth-century sexology emerged in an intellectual context marked by the prominence of racial theories, and in multiple ways its concepts were fed by those theories.[85] Krafft-Ebing, for example, was strongly influenced by the French psychiatrist Benedict Auguste Morel, who had adapted the Lamarckian idea of the inheritance of acquired characteristics.[86] In his *Psychopathia Sexualis* Krafft-Ebing discussed inversion as part of a nervous condition of "degeneration." Developed not least through "degenerative" practices, notably, masturbation, Krafft-Ebing also described "inversion" as "hereditary." Duc's novel adapted this discourse of degeneration. Minotschka has a "nervous weakness" in her left foot (6). From our contemporary perspective this significant detail seems quite disturbing. Should we conclude that despite its attempt to provide positive representation Duc's novel attests to the overpowering force of pathologizing paradigms?

In our own day it may be difficult to read Krafft-Ebing's theory without placing it within the genealogy of recent histories of state-supported

[85]See Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, N.C., 2000).

[86]Oosterhuis, 52–53.

murder for "eugenic" reasons. However, his contemporaries considered Krafft-Ebing to be a liberal. He believed that inversion should be pitied and possibly cured rather than punished.[87] Some of Krafft-Ebing's readers seem to have perceived his interpretation of inversion in terms of illness as helpful vis-à-vis previously dominant religious and moral categories.[88] Some also appreciated his work for simply establishing a vocabulary and a scientific space to talk about homosexuality.[89] Thus, Krafft-Ebing had to offer more than pathologizing verdicts to self-identified members of the "third sex" at the turn of the twentieth century. His contemporary reception certainly helps to explain the way in which Duc's novel referred to Krafft-Ebing's notions. In one scene Duc's characters discuss whether they should boldly proclaim themselves as belonging to "those 'Krafft-Ebing types'" (54). The context is a conversation with unwelcome male company (of, apparently, the "first sex") in a restaurant. As it turns out, an actual self-outing is not necessary. Simply mentioning the name of Krafft-Ebing, the one "who stands up for perverse people," proves effective in quickly chasing the men away (54).

Partially, the text seems to be narrated from within the discourse that Krafft-Ebing helped to establish. This does not mean that the novel ignores the discriminatory aspects of his *Psychopathia Sexualis.* As we will see the debates staged in the novel explicitly question his theoretical frame of reference. But even when operating from within Krafft-Ebing's discourse the narrator finds ways to "speak back." If Minotschka's nervous weakness in her left foot is a sign of her problematic nature, she does not allow this nature to confine her. An elegant "phallic" stick serves Minotschka as a walking aid. More important, the weakness does not prevent her from biking, and she is a passionate practitioner of that sport (6, 28–29). In this way Minotschka is presented as a subject who excels within the regime of health or, in Foucault's words, the "bio-politics" established by modern science.[90] Within the logic of that discursive regime her subjectivity is thus affirmed by the narrator.

[87]He supported pleas for the abolition of Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code that punished homosexual acts between men with prison sentences as well as potentially with the loss of civil rights. Late in his life he became a supporter of the homosexual rights movement founded by Hirschfeld in 1897 (ibid., 170, 172).

[88]In dialogue with Hirschfeld Krafft-Ebing eventually also relativized his position regarding the degeneracy articulated by inversion. In his last article on contrary sexual feeling, published in Hirschfeld's *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, he declared that "contrary sexual feeling in itself must not be considered to be a psychic degeneration or even a disease" (quoted from Hirschfeld, vii [English version, 26]).

[89]See Oosterhuis, 10; E. Krause, "Die Wahrheit über mich. Selbstbiographie einer Konträrsexuellen," in *Lesbianism and Feminism in Germany*, 292–307, 305. However, other readers felt less encouraged by the tropes of degeneration and pathology (see Oosterhuis, 155, 264).

[90]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1990), 139.

Even if the novel is not "overpowered" by the force of Krafft-Ebing's negative concepts, however, it is certainly bound up with discourses that are highly problematic from today's perspective. The text seems to present inversion in metaphors of cultural if not "racial" hybridity.[91] Minotschka's father is Russian, her mother French. The novel was written in an imperialist era in which racialized discourses of cultural hybridity were extremely prominent in the European imagination. Knowing these ideologies, we are easily tempted to connect the information on Minotschka's cultural background to the novel's tropes of degeneration. Does her nervous weakness signify racial degeneration as well?[92] The presentation of Minotschka's friends, among them a Jewish woman from Prague, also seems to support the hypothesis that the novel links inversion to racial hybridity. In analyzing these connections, however, it is worth noting that the distribution of racialized signifiers in the text does not completely follow stereotypical routes. For example, the Jewish member of the group is blonde and "taller and stronger than everyone else" (8). Thus, the anti-Semitic notion of "degenerate" Jewish corporeality is counteracted in the very move that emphasizes the sexual difference of this protagonist.[93]

More generally, it seems fair to say that the novel does not foreground the language of race. In this context it is crucial that, as Martin points out, the emphatic cosmopolitanism of the protagonists has exclusively European points of reference. While Martin suggests that "the limits of that specifically European modern cosmopolitanism" are shown by "the novel's few allusions to the exoticism and foreignness of the Orient and Australia,"[94] I would rather stress the surprising lack of exoticism in the text. Australia comes into the picture toward the end of the novel, when Minotschka is offered a position as headmistress of an international school there. Her decision to stay in Europe is based on her unwillingness to go to a place so far away from her friends and previous life but not on any notions of Australia's cultural difference from Europe. In fact, we do not get any image of this faraway country apart from the implicit suggestion that, by virtue of its international schools, it participates in some kind of cosmopolitan exchange.

Regarding the "Orient," there is a short discussion on polygamy, one of the most common topoi of Orientalist discourse. In this discussion members of Minotschka's circle argue against the hegemonic position that Western

[91]I would like to thank my spring 2003 graduate seminar, especially Faye Stewart with her presentation on the novel, for an important discussion of this issue.

[92]For the central role of degeneration in the discourse of racial hybridity see Young.

[93]The association between Jewish women and inversion or gender trouble is, of course, stereotypical itself, albeit not quite as prominent as for the male Jew. In the modern European imaginary the Jewess is associated not least with "excessive femininity" (Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini, "Strange Bedfellows: An Introduction," in Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini, eds., *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* [New York, 2003], 1–18, here 5–6).

[94]Martin, 109.

cultures are superior to Muslim cultures by virtue of monogamy and the accompanying "emancipation" of women. While Krafft-Ebing makes exactly that point in his introduction to *Psychopathia Sexualis*,[95] one of Minotschka's friends aligns herself with the relativist counterposition in the tradition of Lady Montague's enlightened discourse.[96] According to her feminist statement, there is no essential East-West difference in the situation of women; the "apparent freedom" of women in the West constitutes merely a "different packaging" of their subordinate status (52). Apart from this scene, the Orientalist discourse of the novel consists mostly of its references to the Russian anarchist movement to which one of Minotschka's friends belongs. The presentation of the underground organization, which is slightly uncanny in its secretiveness, contributes a minor element of narrative suspense to the novel. However, the metonymic relationship between the political outlaws and the protagonists is crucial here. In its construction of its third sex heroines the novel does employ cultural stereotypes, but it does not do so by contrasting some "Oriental" or "exotic" other to the "civilized," "high-cultured," or "Western" selves of its protagonists. Rather, the text focuses on the "otherness" of its "mixed" heroines themselves.

In doing so the text challenges the hegemonic notion that cultural hybridity is problematic. The narrator describes Minotschka's cultural identity as characterized by a double identification. Born and raised in France, she was "really" (*eigentlich*) French, but she felt herself to be "just as much Russian" (8–9). This hybrid identification is not subjected to any discourse of conflict or even crisis. In the given context the narrator simply adds that in Minotschka's circle of mostly German and Russian friends different languages were spoken "all at once" (*durcheinander*). Significantly, "they understood each other excellently this way" (9).

Biddy Martin argues that in the course of the novel this "initial celebration of cosmopolitan rootlessness" is displaced by "what becomes an ultimately melancholic longing for attachments that recapitulate identifications with home, family, and nation."[97] It is true that in the final scene in Paris the figure of home (*Heimat*) is used as an allegory for the reestablishment of the love relationship between Minotschka and Marta. Upon her return to Paris, the city where she was born, Minotschka experiences intoxicating happiness (88). However, when this sudden joy mediates her decision against going to Australia, Minotschka loudly declares this decision in German—to the utter confusion of her local coachman, who does not understand a single word (87). Furthermore, it is important that Marta, when making plans for their common future, suggests spending half of the year in each partner's home place. Thus, Minotschka will live for half of each year on Marta's

[95]Krafft-Ebing, 5 (English version, 7–8).

[96]See *Embassy to Constantinople: The Travels of Lady Mary Montagu*, ed. Christopher Pick (New York, 1988).

[97]Martin, 109.

property in the Polish countryside. In this way her own Eastern European background is indirectly preserved in the couple's future as well. Cultural hybridity is reinvigorated in the name of *Heimat*.[98]

Privileged "Hybrids"? Masculinity Issues

Minotschka's gender hybridity seems to be more problematic than her cultural hybridity. As we have seen above, the novel opens by introducing Minotschka's "mixed" gender performance as an occasion for public curiosity. Perhaps it is even irritation: the people in the street stare at her. In staging this scenario, however, the narrator makes sure that the public's discriminatory gaze at Minotschka's feminine masculinity does not triumph. Thus, we are assured right away that she does not seem to mind the looks that she gets in the streets. She is confidently aware of her "particular"—or "special" (*besonderen*)—"personality" (6). The narrator also insists that despite its "masculine elements" Minotschka's overall appearance is "harmonic" (6). This does not mean that the heterogeneity of her appearance is dissolved by subsuming it under the conciliatory trope of androgyny. As we have seen in the initial description of Minotschka's appearance, the "androgynous" boyishness is only one aspect of her gender presentation, combined with flamboyant femininity. In calling this performance "harmonic" the narrator does not negate its heterogeneity but rather challenges the negative connotations of hybridity. In this way the protagonists' acts of gender bricolage are affirmed as a livable position.

Given its cultural context, the self-confidence displayed by this gesture may seem surprising. What is the sociosymbolic basis for such assertiveness? Or, in the words of speech-act theory, how does this performative win its force to resignify dominant concepts?[99] As I would like to suggest, part of the answer to this question may be that apart from its connections to race theory not all gender hybridity was equally radical at the turn of the twentieth century. Unlike "effeminacy," "masculinization" was not necessarily a bad thing in a masculinist society. This tendency can be observed in Ulrichs's mid-nineteenth-century theorizing about the third sex, in which he curiously insisted: "You consider an *Urning* to be an effeminate

[98]Regarding the hegemonic discourse of *Heimat* in German (language) literature see Gisela Ecker, "'Heimat': Das Elend der unterschlagenen Differenz (Einleitung)," in Gisela Ecker, ed., *Kein Land in Sicht. Heimat—weiblich?* (Munich, 1997), 7–31. Whereas *Heimat* is imagined as a space of presymbolic unity in hegemonic discourse, Duc's novel refutes such fantasies. Thus, the narrator momentarily assumes the perspective of the people of Paris to point out that Minotschka, the "stranger with her tomboyish clothes," attracted even more attention than usual in the "elegant city" (86). As such a city Paris also counteracts the emphasis on rural simplicity that dominates conservative *Heimat* discourse. In this way the concept of *Heimat* is resignified in the novel.

[99]See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York, 1997), 141–63.

man when you belittle his feminine/female habitus. However, just as the emancipated woman, he is a virilized female being. He is not feminized, but virilized."[100] Thus, Ulrichs combined his claim regarding the "male" *Urning*'s "essential" femaleness with an assertion of hybridity in the attempt to ward off charges of feminization. Ulrichs's gender politics was ambiguous. His response to society's nonacceptance of *Urning* identities included a partially positive reassessment of femininity.[101] At the same time, his use of the "female" invert as a means of redeeming the "effeminate" invert attests to the cultural hegemony of masculinity throughout the nineteenth century. At the turn of the twentieth century antifeminism had become even more dominant. In this discursive formation the "female member of the third sex" ironically became a trendy being.

As such, the "third sex woman" was tangled up in highly intricate gender politics. Otto Weininger, whose 1903 dissertation "Sex and Character" is known today as one of the most notorious antifeminist (and anti-Semitic) works of the period, highly praised the "virilized female." Weininger's variation on inversion theory, the "law of sexual affinity," postulated a strict correlation between gender and (again, heterosexual) desire. Thus, "the inclination towards lesbian love in a woman is the outcome of her masculinity, which, in turn, is the condition of her higher degree of development [*Höherstehen*]."[102] Weininger's symbolic politics of foregrounding the masculine woman is connected to feminist politics at the time. Weininger himself argued for female access to institutions of higher learning on these grounds. Furthermore, his book was widely used in feminist circles, despite the fact that his position was fundamentally ambivalent and contradictory.[103] The feminist authors who used Weininger did not necessarily accept all of his

[100]Ulrichs, "Formatrix," 42 (English version, 152).

[101]In the bipolar frame offered by hegemonic nineteenth-century gender discourse he praised the *Urning*'s feminine strengths as "a purity of sentiment, a mild and humane character, loyalty, noble-mindedness, patience and the readiness to renounce" ("Inclusa," 33 [English version, 62]). However, Ulrichs also insisted that "the softness of female/feminine character does not preclude courage, enthusiasm, and bravery" (34; the paragraph is omitted in the English translation). In other words, women and *Urnings* can excel even in ways that are generally associated with masculinity. While this argument opposes a generalized exclusion on the basis of bodily or mental gender, it seems to accept the social privileging of masculinity.

[102]Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter. Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung,* 1st ed. (1903); 25th unchanged ed. (Vienna, 1923), 78–79. Again, I have used an English translation and also reference it (English version) but do not always follow it in my translations (*Sex and Character* [no translator given] [New York, 2003], 66).

[103]On the one hand, Weininger defines the female invert as an individual who has approximately as much maleness in her as femaleness or often more. On the other hand, he insists defensively that "even the malest female being scarcely ever has more than 50 percent masculinity to her" and that "not a single woman in the history of thought, not even the most manlike, . . . can be truthfully compared with men of fifth or sixth-rate genius" (53–54, 85, 82 [English version, 47, 71, 69]). See Judy Greenway, "It's What You Do with It That Counts: Interpretation of Otto Weininger," in Bland and Doan, 27–43.

claims. For example, Rüling explicitly criticized Weininger for valuing only homosexual women and insisted that all women are of "equal value."[104] At the same time, she herself suggested that "homosexual women are specially suited for the sciences because they have those qualities lacking in feminine women: greater objectivity, energy, and perseverance."[105]

Rüling's distinctions between different kinds of women did not fail to attract harsh criticism from second-wave lesbian-feminists.[106] With its masculinist bias, the act of distinguishing the third sex woman could serve as a way of naturalizing the women's movement and confining its potential impact through anti-universalist gestures. "Everybody according to his or her nature," suggested the author of an early pamphlet on "contrary sexualism in relation to marriage and the women's question."[107] Rüling, too, used differentiation between women in order to reassure male audience members who were afraid of mass female competition; not every woman will choose emancipation, she insisted.[108] With an antifeminist twist, Weininger suggested that "given the great imitative capacities of women," the women's movement was "unnatural" and harmful from a standpoint of "hygiene," since it induced women to study or write "who never had any real original desire for it."[109]

In summary, the image of the masculinized female did not necessarily convey an egalitarian agenda in German-language discourse at the time. Her relative popularity may suggest that we cannot really theorize the female member of the third sex as a subject position made unintelligible or logically impossible by hegemonic discourse within that historical context.[110] More intricately, she enjoyed a certain sociosymbolical presence and also served as a figure of partial privilege in a masculinist imaginary. From one angle this circumstance may help to explain why some self-identified female members of the third sex felt proud rather than ashamed of what they saw as their special nature.[111] From another angle the same circumstance invites a critical investigation of their politics. Martin emphasizes this aspect in her reading of Duc's novel. Relating it to Rüling's speech, she criticizes the literary text for participating in contemporary discourses that privileged masculinity over femininity. Thus, Martin argues that Minotschka and her

[104]Rüling, 144 ["gleichwertig"] (English version, 88).

[105]Ibid., 143 (English version, 87).

[106]See Faderman and Eriksson, 81.

[107][Trosse], "Der Konträrsexualismus in Bezug auf Ehe und Frauenfrage, 1895," in *Lesbianism and Feminism in Germany*, 1–31, 23. In this pamphlet the stated belief in nature's power comes with the explicit threat that those trying to invade spheres into which they do not belong will be punished with failure and misery (27).

[108]Rüling, 143 (English version, 87).

[109]Weininger, 84 (English version, 70).

[110]See, for example, Valerie Rohy, *Impossible Women: Lesbian Figures & American Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2000), 1–4 (with reference to Butler).

[111]See, for example, Krause, 292.

friends try to distinguish the "masculinized" third sex from the (weak) "second" sex. According to this reading, the "fragility of the boundaries around the category of the third sex" becomes visible only later in the novel when Minotschka's defenses break down. Eventually, the text suggests the futility of attempting to separate the "third sex" from the "second."[112]

I agree that in articulating its emancipatory project Duc's novel makes use of the structures of masculinist privilege. As Martin critically points out, it distinguishes its "third sex" women in terms that were associated with masculinity in contemporary society. More than once the text emphasizes Minotschka's strength (e.g., 32) and her hatred of weakness or lack of energy in other women (46). As Martin points out, Minotschka on one occasion claims that the women's question is "no women's question" after all "but a question of the third sex" (16). It is crucial, however, that the reader does not have to wait for Minotschka's breakdown in order to get alternative perspectives. As presented in the novel, the discourse of Minotschka and her friends cannot be reduced to the gestures of fortifying borders between women (in general) and the third sex. Rather, the novel's third sex talk is just as heterogeneous as Minotschka's gender identification. Her feminine masculinity includes a double affiliation with both "third" and "second" sex (i.e., feminist) politics.

The Rhetoric of Identity: Debating Sexual Categories

In one scene the circle of friends has gathered for food and drinks in the evening. Minotschka is upset at the news that a member of the group has become engaged to a man. As the discussion moves on to academic subjects, one of the friends mentions that Minotschka initially studied medicine but later turned to philosophy and literature instead. The protagonist defends her decision by arguing that the current power configuration within the discipline does not allow for the production of what she believes to be "true" knowledge. "Would you," Minotschka asks Dr. Kassberg, a friend who did complete her medical degree, "would you dare to write a doctoral dissertation about the positive, scientific proof for the existence of a third sex?" (17).

The statement about whether the women's question was really a question about the third sex is made in this context. For Minotschka, the conversation about her career decisions, combined with the unwelcome engagement news, seems to have put the very intelligibility of her sexual identity at stake. Her solution to this existential issue is a double move. On the one hand, she strongly criticizes the scientific establishment. On the other hand, she authorizes her own position as the truly scientific one, implicitly allying herself with sexological avant-garde positions like that of Krafft-Ebing, who

[112]Martin, 119.

did articulate the existence of a "third sex." Importantly, Minotschka's talk on this issue is staged as being very affective. Her monologue makes ample use of strategies evoking pathos, which, as her body language suggests, seem to be supported by strong affect. After the sentence in question her speech culminates in a forceful plea that her friends, who "feel the way I do," should "fight against despotism and tradition." The narrator adds: "She had become deadly pale; her dark eyes were gleaming uncannily" (16).

The dominance of affect in Minotschka's speech does not necessarily delegitimize her position. The novel repeatedly highlights her superior rhetorical skills as well as their effect on others (18, 23, 25, 39). Rather than accepting the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century era's critique of rhetoric, which had banned explicit rhetoricity as "hollow artifice,"[113] the text stages Minotschka's art of speaking as a powerful means of existential articulation. In today's critical vocabulary this rhetoric presents an effective tool of the identity politics that helps Minotschka in the given situation. Nonetheless, the narrator's highlighting of affect in Minotschka's speech also underscores that her position is contestable. As the conversation continues Dr. Kassberg challenges the claim that the existence of the third sex is a scientific fact. She asks, "Who can establish this [fact] scientifically, and how would you want to do that?" (17). Minotschka quickly replies that it is the psychiatrists' business to do so, although, as she immediately adds, it is disgraceful to be classified by them (17–18).

If that is true, however, who would be able to talk authoritatively about the sexual identity of our heroines? In the absence of such an authority all identity talk is necessarily strategic and provisional. In the same speech in which Minotschka suggests that the women's question is really a question of the third sex she also articulates a feminist critique of how the medical establishment deals with "woman, be she woman in her thoughts and feelings or not" (15), thus including the "female" inverts in the category of women. In the attempt to map a sociosymbolic space for feminine masculinity Duc's heroine and narrator make use of both the universalizing and the separatist models of mapping sexual identity, which, according to Eve Sedgwick's analysis, have coexisted throughout modernity.[114] The novel shows that at the turn of the twentieth century not only "male inverts" were torn between the competing paradigms of third sex and gender-separatist politics.

In this sense the text in fact portrays "female members of the third sex." It combines the fight for the human rights of all those who are "neither man nor woman" (20) with moments of a universalizing feminism, which means the demand to emancipate women of all classes and sexualities. Not surprisingly, the articulation of this feminist agenda turns out to be conflicted. It not only is crisscrossed by the coexisting agendas of sexual

[113]For an overview see, for example, Elias Torra, "Rhetorik," in Miltos Pechlivanos et al., eds., *Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1995), 97–111.

[114]See Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 83–90.

minority politics but also masks existing class and other hierarchies. Nonetheless, this rhetoric of (all) women's emancipation has an important place in the novel.[115] It includes a critique of women's objectification and male violence as well as the "disgraceful" education of women for marriage only (18, 23, 34). In one of her speeches Minotschka demands job training for "every healthy woman, just like for men," and consequently every woman's right to choose marriage—or not (36, 40).

The articulation of the novel's two political agendas is, of course, contradictory in the sense that the available categories of sexual identity are not employed consistently in the text. The title question, Are these women? is implicitly answered with both "yes" and "no." In the categories provided by modern European society the sexual identities of the protagonists can only be described in terms of contradiction. While the narrator affirms their feminine masculinities as possible life choices and locally successful political practices, the struggle to articulate these identities remains incoherent on the level of theoretical conceptualization. In that regard, however, the novel reminds the reader very much of its contemporary scientific texts and their female male *Urnings* (Ulrichs) or cases of feminine viraginity (Krafft-Ebing). The discourse of "female inversion" was equally conflicted and heterogeneous in literature and science. What distinguishes the novel from contemporary scientific literature is that the former more extensively and systematically stages the processes of sociodiscursive contestation that produce the available sum of contradictory knowledge. In presenting a fictional case story supplemented by intradiegetic theory rather than a theoretical account supplemented by unruly case stories, the novel highlights the process of fashioning identities through stories as well as categorizations. The debates staged in *Sind es Frauen?* expose, relativize, and question the tropes and topoi from which its narrative constructs sexual identities. At the same time, theory itself is put into a narrative context, allowing the reader to understand its development and function within specific sociosymbolic and psychological contexts.

As we have seen, *Sind es Frauen?* thus exposes the rhetoricity of sexual identity. In using this vocabulary I do not mean to suggest that the text explicitly displays postmodernist beliefs in the "essential rhetoricity" of gender. Such a claim would not necessarily be altogether unhistorical. After all, Nietzsche's works initiated the postmodernist reading of all linguistic

[115]A good example is the character of the actress who is less educated than the other women in the circle. When the actress asks Minotschka to take her to Germany and take care of her there, Minotschka responds that she is willing to be her guardian only temporarily, until the actress has become independent herself. The actress emphatically thanks her, stating that she will "belong to" Minotschka, but the latter replies: "No human being may make herself voluntarily unfree" (48). Later on, the narrator tells about the success of Minotschka's plan—not, however, without linguistically affirming the existing hierarchy once more: the "small [*sic*] actress" has "become a completely different being" (66).

performance in terms of rhetoric at the end of the nineteenth century.[116] However, the novel does not radically question the belief in any natural foundation of identity. Rather, it mostly seems to operate from within the modern episteme (Foucault), which grounds identity in nature. But the text certainly engages the rhetorical in a more traditional sense: as the art of speaking, scientific and otherwise, which opens up a space of sociodiscursive contestation.

In exploring the rhetorical construction of sexual identity the novel also investigates the possibilities of attacking hegemonic significations. Potentially, this art of "talking back" could even solve the novel's basic conceptual—second and/or third sex—dilemma. At least, Minotschka finds a witty response to an unwelcome male suitor who claims that "unfeminine women are, after all, an atrocity for all of us." "Doubtlessly," Minotschka concedes, and adds, "We simply define unfeminine women differently. . . . After all, what is the notion 'femininity'? A wish dictated . . . by man, to model woman according to his taste." Based on this critique of "phallocentric" representation, Minotschka then concludes that in opposition to the thus contaminated hegemonic concept of femininity, "real" (*eigentliche*) femininity is to be found with those "who keep their own individuality to themselves, and who constitute their own species, psychologically as well as physically" (36). In other words, the third sex is the second sex, but only by virtue of its dissidence from the latter's hegemonic definition. Of course, this is "rhetorical flourish," as Martin states,[117] but this "flourish" certainly helps to perform Minotschka's intellectual and political victory over the rhetorically less accomplished suitor. And it helps the text to open up a discursive space in which feminine masculinities, the sexual identities of "female members of the third sex," can be explored.

Conclusion

My article has pursued this discursive space in both scientific and literary texts at the turn of the twentieth century. Addressing the relations of the history of sexuality to the overlapping but often also conflicting projects of writing feminist, queer, and transgender history, I have argued that our reading of the historical concept of inversion needs to move beyond its interpretation as either homosexuality or (coherent) transgender identification. Instead, I suggested that we look more closely at the different uses of this figure in which the categories of gender and sexuality are articulated through one another. Focusing on gender aspects without disconnecting them from the issues of sexuality, I argued that incoherence is of central

[116]Friedrich Nietzsche, "Verhältniß des Rhetorischen zur Sprache," in Fritz Bornmann, ed., *Darstellung der antiken Rhetorik. Vorlesungsaufzeichnungen* (= Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 2. Abt., vol. 4) (Berlin, 1995), 425–28.

[117]Martin, 116.

importance for the representation of the third sex in modern European culture. As represented in Duc's novel as well as scientific literature of the period, the gender performances of "female members of the third sex" combine elements commonly associated with masculinity and femininity. While the novel forcefully articulates them as livable and in that sense harmonic gender positions, these identities remain conceptually heterogeneous if not contradictory configurations in the context of modern Europe's two-gender system. Therefore, I suggested the term "feminine masculinities."

The "hybridity" involved here is far from being necessarily radical or a force of critical deconstruction. Rather, it functions as an integral element of complicated, and conflicted, theories and histories of sexual (non)identity. The "female member of the third sex" is a figure that participates in different albeit overlapping political projects. I have begun to map these messy terrains of signification by situating Duc's novel in the context of discourses that include Krafft-Ebing's degeneration theory and the politically ambiguous uses of the "masculinized female" in Ulrichs's, Weininger's, and Rüling's works. As I argued, Duc's 1901 novel *Sind es Frauen?* distinguishes itself from this background by virtue of the ways in which it connects history (and story) to theory. On the one hand, the text highlights how theory is constituted through stories (and in history). On the other hand, it supplements a more or less "trivial" lesbian love story with theory. While critically exploring the ways in which "female members of the third sex" belong, and don't belong, to the "second" sex, this novel still belongs to the discourses on which it reflects. As we have seen, it shows traces of the masculinist agenda that carries the contemporary distinction of the "third sex female," as well as traces of the language of degeneration, which constituted sexology and race theory as intertwined endeavors. The radical moments of this novel are not to be found in its break with its historical or discursive context, just as they are not to be found in some categorical difference of literature from science. Rather, these radical moments consist in the concrete ways in which the text rearranges topoi of sexual difference, asking and only provisionally answering its questions about identity. Are these women? Yes and no. As I suggested, we can read their gender performances as feminine masculinities.