GENDER OPEN REPOSITORIUM

„I cannot imagine a world in which gender makes no difference“ : Richard Dyer im Gespräch

Leinfellner, Stefanie; Dyer, Richard

2018

https://doi.org/10.25595/2183

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Leinfellner, Stefanie; Dyer, Richard: *„I cannot imagine a world in which gender makes no difference“ : Richard Dyer im Gespräch* , in: Journal Netzwerk Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung NRW (2018) Nr: 43, 60–67. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/2183.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here: https://doi.org/10.17185/DUEPUBLICO/72172

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY 4.0 Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY 4.0 License (Attribution). For more information see:

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en

GenderOpen – Repositorium für die Geschlechterforschung: www.genderopen.de

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

„I cannot imagine a world in which gender makes no difference" – Richard Dyer im Gespräch

Stefanie Leinfellner interviewt den Film- und Kulturwissenschaftler

Richard Dyer lehrte im Sommer 2018 als Marie-Jahoda-Gastprofessor für Internationale Gender Studies an der Ruhr-Universität Bochum (RUB). Der britische Film- und Kulturwissenschaftler gilt mit seinen Büchern zu den Themen Unterhaltung, Stars und Repräsentation als Pionier in der Befassung mit dem Lesbian und Gay Cinema, dem populären europäischen Kino und dem Forschungsschwerpunkt Critical Whiteness. Im Interview mit Stefanie Leinfellner, Koordinatorin der Marie-Jahoda-Gastprofessur an der RUB, erzählt Richard Dyer über seinen wissenschaftlichen Weg zwischen gesellschaftlichen Herausforderungen, fachlicher Ausdifferenzierung und logischen Konsequenzen. Das Interview wurde im Juni 2018 an der RUB geführt.[1]

Stefanie Leinfellner: You are the Marie Jahoda Visiting Professor at the Ruhr University Bochum for this summer term. Celebrating its 25th anniversary next year, the guestprofessorship has been established in 1994 to support research and teaching that is focused on gender and to encourage international cooperation. What was your visit so far like? What are you doing as a Marie Jahoda Visiting Professor? And was there something that surprised or challenged you?

Richard Dyer: Well, I'm really enjoying my stay and I'm very glad to be invited. On one hand, I was not surprised being invited as it came through my colleague, Prof. Eva Warth, and I know her work. On the other hand, I have never quite thought of myself as being in gender studies. I have always thought that what I do is being informed by the issue of gender. But I have never thought of myself as being a gender studies person in quite that way. It is very interesting to be

[1] Eine gekürzte Version dieses Interviews findet sich auf www.gender-blog.de unter dem Titel "'Everything has to be informed by gender issues' – Interview mit Richard Dyer"

thinking things in that context. It is almost like thinking: Well, I suppose that it is about gender, almost without necessarily having thought of this being about gender. But you also wanted to know what I've been doing as a Marie Jahoda Guestprofessor. A lot of things, actually. I gave an inaugural lecture about my work on the film "La Dolce Vita" and on the ideal of marginality. I did a workshop on "La Dolce Vita" as a documentary and then I am going to finish a course on melodrama. In some way, you could say that that is probably the thing that is most recognizable gender studies. All the interest in melodrama came from feminism and it has always put the interest of gender very strongly on the agenda.

And I have also been giving talks on different topics. One was about the idea of lesbian and gay studies, one was about the idea of white masculinity in relation to serial killing, which is a very obvious gender studies question, and the other one was about queer celebrity. And I am going back to saying that I have not really thought of me as being a gender studies person. I suppose, being interested in lesbian and gay issues is always necessarily an issue about gender. And I have always shared the view that you cannot do lesbian and gay studies without gender. It is about the sense of self. And the sense of self is very bound up with object choice and so once again gender comes into that. So one way or another, it is gender studies even if I got into it more through lesbian and gay studies.

The professorship has always been held by eminent and outstanding scholars with expertise in gender studies. You just talked about how you situate yourself within the gender studies or even more within lesbian and gay studies. But when we talk about Richard Dyer, we also talk about pioneered work in the field of whiteness, film and sexuality studies. How did you become a media scientist and moreover concerned with gay, lesbian and sexuality studies?

I originally studied French, but then moved from French to cultural studies, which was almost nonexistent. I mean, I went to the Birmingham Center of Cultural Studies, which was a very new organization within the English department at Birmingham University. It was at its third or fourth year of its existence and that is where I did my PhD. So I moved into cultural studies first and was actually looking at ideas of entertainment and show business. Although it is called cultural studies, I actually looked at films, and obviously film is part of media studies in that sense. And in relation to gender studies and me becoming concerned with the issue of gender, it was especially the impact of feminism within the cultural studies. Within the cultural studies department, I would say that when feminism arrived, it was very disturbing to a lot of the people, especially to a lot of men at that time. Feminism resisted and was maybe seen as a distraction. But I suppose, I felt an immediate affinity for it and an immediate feeling of its importance. At the same time, I had always felt it was not for me as a man to start doing work on feminism or to say that I am a feminist. Therefore, I suppose the next thing is to think about: What was or is the consequence of feminism for me? And that makes me think about masculinity and so on. From the impact of feminism on cultural studies I took two concerns: Thinking what you have to think about masculinity – because gender studies comes later. And I have also always thought: Everything I do must be informed by the issues raised by feminism. The next move was that lots of people were doing work on the representation of women and the representation of people of color. All that was very much part of what we did in the cultural studies. And then I thought as I was involved in the gay movement, I should also look at the representation of lesbians and gay men. Partly because gender studies has often been a good home for work on lesbians and gay men and for queer studies, and partly because even the idea of being lesbian or gay is a gendered notion because it is a notion about male and female identity in relation to sexual object choice.

But which was also an influence of feminism, in some sort of way, is that I was very committed to an idea of lesbian and gay. I did not think: I will just do gay. And I certainly do not think the situation of lesbians and gay men is exactly the same. But nonetheless, I have always felt, it is politically a coalition, if you like. So I always wanted to do work that did embrace lesbians as well as gay men. I would say the trajectory into gender studies was: moving into cultural studies and into media studies, then the impact of feminism and then the idea of working on lesbian and gay studies.

That is how you would trace your way into gender and especially into lesbian and gay studies?! Well, thank you! You then got interested in queer and whiteness studies? How and why? And where do you situate yourself in relation to gender, queer and whiteness today?

Yes, right. Well, I mean, I have also always thought I never got into queer. It depends on what you think what queer is. But I feel I have remained at lesbian and gay. Queer is often associated with what I would call high theory. It is a

kind of style and I just do not like that style. I feel it is an obscure thing. It is intimidating. I mean it alienates more students than it does excite students. That is my opinion! I think one should try to be as clear and straight forward as possible. And queer was also wanting to move beyond the issue of same sex desire and identities based on same sex desire, which is a perfectly thing to do. But I particularly did not want to move, I wanted to stay with those identities and with those desires. And I have always felt that I did not quite recognize myself within all these developments in queer theory. One other reason is that, you know, I was brought up being told that I was a queer, which was a kind of very negative, homophobic word. And there was that idea that you could somehow cleanse the idea of queer. Only one time, I have used the term "queer" in my writing. It was in a book I wrote that is sometimes said to be about queer culture. But it is deliberately not called "Queer Culture", it is very deliberately called "The Culture of Queers". And it is about the culture that was produced in the period in which gay men were called queers in a very negative way. It is a book that is very specifically about gay men, but in a way it is not about gay men because it is about queers as men who were brought up as queers. That was what same sex male identity was in that period. So that is how I situate myself in relation to queer.

And concerning whiteness, well, I think that is the next logical conclusion. Partly, it was obviously the impact of work on black studies and on colonial and postcolonial thought. It was the call from people like Stuart Hall – who had been my supervisor – to say: White people should not spend all that time writing about black people, about being liberal and nice about black people. They have to think about themselves first! And I thought, well, I should also think about myself, I should think about myself as white and think about that category of whiteness as a whole. And from there, you cannot really think about whiteness without thinking about gender. The image of whiteness and of any racial group is also different according to white men and white women, black men and black women. You cannot not think about it and you also you cannot not think about it in relation to sexuality. And I do not mean people talking about sexuality in a sense of desire. In what way are white women seen as desirable? That is certainly important and something I wrote about, but I really meant sexuality in a sense of sexual reproduction. The concept of race is a concept of sexual reproduction and of bodies that reproduce themselves. That is the idea of race. And sexual reproduction is a concept of men and women. So once again: You cannot not have gender on your mind! But once again: I have never thought I was doing gender, though I have also never thought you can do things without doing gender. And it is just as true of whiteness as it is of lesbian and gay sexuality.

That is so true! We are fully in the topic and you already included your biographical background. Maybe you can also tell us about your career and your career stages in research and in relation to your main research interests, in relation to your gender and your media perspective. How did perspectives and foci maybe change throughout the years?

Yes, there is a whole lot there. My PhD was about entertainment and about the kind of pleasures that are offered through entertainment. People say that something is just entertainment. What do they mean by that? I had a look at musicals and looked at the ideas of happiness that are embodied in the musical. Actually, what was very important and remained important to me was: As important as cultural issues are, I also think you must think of media as art. You cannot forget that films and other media are offering pleasures, experiences, things of beauty. The next thing I did was to write about „stars" – far from writing about lesbian and gay things. Analyzing entertainment and the entertainment quality of films is indeed looking at the stars in it; that is such an absolutely defining aspect of the way popular cinema works – especially Hollywood. So I started to work on that and, of course, again there were male stars and female stars. You cannot just say "stars", you have to be conscious of that. And maybe it was an influence of feminism – as well as of the methodology of cultural studies – that I started to do case studies. The first extended case study I did was a case study about Jane Fonda who had been a star of a kind of French sex comedies. That material was very interesting in terms of a feminist critique concerning the objectification of women. She was an interesting star as someone who seemed to embody deliberately dealing with gender issues. Therefore that first case study was itself a kind of response to an interest in having icons of feminism.

Afterwards I wrote another *book about stars which was called "Heavenly Bodies" including a very gender conscious chapter on Marilyn Monroe – in relation to ideas of female sexuality and the ideas of the 1950s when Marilyn Monroe was a star. And within that book, I wrote a chapter about Paul Robeson and about him in terms of masculinity. I was very conscious about him as a black star in the 1930s when there obviously*

were not many black stars. I suppose in writing that, it must have been the stuff about whiteness. If I write about Robeson as a black star, why am I not writing about Marilyn as a white star? And similarly you could put it the other way round. When writing about Marilyn Monroe as a female star, why am I not writing about Robeson as a male star? The Marilyn chapter is much less good on her whiteness, but at least there is something there – the beginning of the attempt to do it. And similarly the Paul Robeson chapter is fine on the race issue and rather weaker on really thinking about a male black image – but it also does have a bit of that. Both chapters are not quite what they should be, but at least starting to think about these things. The other chapter was very different; it was about Judy Garland who was even then recognized as a star that gay men liked. And it was an attempt to look at the cult around Judy Garland and what it was about this female star that seemed to resonate so much with gay men. I actually partly involved letters from people, advertising in gay newspapers to get people to write to me about their feelings and memories about Judy Garland. It was quite a new idea to do it that way. But mainly I was analyzing the image of her in relation to different aspects of gay male culture. One of the things that was missing, again I only glimpsed it, is the kind of complexity of thinking about gay men and women and that particular relationship. I have never quite really grasped it. I wrote a book about the British film "Brief Encounter" and there I did raise the issue of gay men's relationship to work that is beloved by women. And the very first thing I wrote about that issue was in fact an early piece I wrote about "The Sound of Music" concerning entertainment values. What connects both films, "Brief Encounter" and "The Sound of Music", is the fact that they were my mother's favorite movies. The audience at that time was older women. Although, I wanted to avoid to talk about me and my mother because that is such a kind of cliché about gay men, that they love their mothers. I did not really want to deal with that. I wanted to deal with the wider issue of the complexity of the relationship of gay men and women. And the complexity is that they love women but they do not desire them. And I think that is a very complex thing to think about. I mean I have not really faced that, I faced it in my life but I have not written about it.

Maybe that is an idea for another book?

Right. I think it is an interesting thing to think about. And it is also interesting when putting it the other way around. In the context of misogyny and womanizers, in many ways, a lot of heterosexual men have problems around women because they do desire them. That is also very interesting. There is something very interesting to unpick – but I have not done it so far.

Concerning my main research topics, the changes have not been huge like paradigm shifts. I just moved into doing the same thing in different areas. I suppose that three in one is that I became increased in Italian things. I have always been very European in my orientation for a British person. I had the period of being an American cinema person, but that was maybe the first ten years. I moved back into being interested in European cinema issues, specifically the Italian cinema. One example is "La Dolce Vita". Though I would not call it a gender studies book, I am talking about the way men and women are represented in the film. In a lot of Fellini's films women are seen as the only good thing in the world, it is a kind of patronizing. They are often seen as more innocent and uncorrupted by the world. It is one of those compliments that is not such a great compliment when you think about it. Again: it is the idea that everything has to be informed by gender issues.

And another book I most recently published is about serial killing, and you might think that is not really relevant to gender. But actually one of the things that interested me about serial killing is that although about 20–30 % of serial killers in fact are women, practically no serial killers are woman in the cinema, except in the Italian cinema – which is itself interesting. Actually, it is about organizing the pleasures of a film. A lot of them are supposed to enjoy seeing women being killed. These films are built around that. And the center of the book is concerned with the seriality and with the notion of seriality, but I did not abandon the gender and race issues either. Though I suppose the other thing that was always there and came back to me strongly was that we have to look at media and films as art. We must also see their beauty. And one book that came out of that was the one about the composer Nino Rota. That was really a kind of treat to myself. I have done all these things that have a kind of political implication along the importance of looking at whiteness and at lesbian and gay issues, the importance of informing everything by feminism. Telling myself to just write about something that is wonderful is the reason for writing about Nino Rota. It is also very important to appreciate the pleasures of serial killing in terms of the pleasure of repetition. And I was looking at that especially in the Nino Rota book.

In the end – also when analyzing "La Dolce Vita" as a very buoyant and delightful film –

I have always wanted to combine politics and the aesthetics, though it is very hard to do both equally together. One always tends to be stronger than the other. In the Nino Rota book I wrote, there is stuff about representation and stuff about his sexuality, but it is quite secondary about the aesthetics. "The Culture of Queers" is way more political and my book on "whiteness" is very much focusing the questions of what is the exact construction of the images of whiteness. It does try to be political and aesthetic at the same time.

You mentioned the topic of your inaugural lecture at the Ruhr University. Your first lecture as the Marie Jahoda Visiting Professor this summer term was titled „The Aesthetics of Marginality: Blacks and Queers and *La Dolce Vita*". You analyzed marginal characters of Fellini's film *La Dolce Vita* and marginality as a social category. You have been giving examples of characters in other films like *Lady Macbeth* and *The Wizard of Oz.* And you also gave examples of characters in real life: royals, stars, famous people, politicians and even intellectuals, but also blacks, gays, queers and transgender people. You said they are people seen as the exotic, the extraordinary, the excluded, the other ones because of what they look like or because of what they behave like. Why is the discourse on marginality, but also its aesthetics and politics that important and probably even very up to date?

I think the idea of marginality is very important, no matter whether "La Dolce Vita" is very important. The film is a classic and still seen. It is one of those films the people know more about than they have seen. The film is an example of the issue of marginality. And that reminds me of something that is a consistent thing through all the work I have done: It is the idea that you should look at common sense. I have often asked: Why do we say that? What do we mean by saying that? Like the term "stars". Everyone talked about stars in ordinary life, but no one talked about stars analytically. The same with "whiteness": Why do we say people are white and clearly they are not white. What does it mean to use that term? My book is about thinking about what is the white of whiteness. Or what is the seriality of serial killing? I was always interested in these every day terms. The same with „pastiche": You have to have a certain level of education to use that term, but everyone of a certain level of education does use it all the time. What do we really mean by that is a question of my book on "Pastiche". So I am following the idea of taking something that seems obvious that appears to be this or that, in order to have a look at the exact implication of a term. What do we mean by saying something is marginal? In a way there are rather different uses of the term but at the same time they are not straight forward. Marginality is a term you use in relation to characters in books and films. Furthermore, it is a term that people use in relation to society. You talk about people in society being marginal figures. Therefore the thing I wanted to bring out at the beginning of my lecture is: It is much less clear what is going on when talking about marginality. Marginal mainly means that characters are not central; they are just there to serve the purpose of the story. But then there are marginal characters that you do *remember because they are vivid, extraordinary, fascinating or fun. On the other hand, concerning marginality as a social category, I thought it is very interesting that in practice marginality means a certain kind of character who is not seen as mainstream. It tends to be a prostitute, a hippie, a homeless person or someone somehow seen as the colorful other and as an object. Whereas I thought that you could also think of people as definitely marginal, one would* not *define as marginal, like the British Royal Family. They must be marginal because they probably represent the tiniest percentage of the population. Yet, you would not think of them as marginal because they are central to the symbolic culture of Britain and indeed of the world. In a way, there was a similarity between the idea that, on the one hand, you could talk about a technical marginality including people that are not most typical. Nonetheless, some marginal figures in novels, films or in society have a kind of presence and significance very different from the fact that they are not very representative. In "La Dolce Vita" I did a comparison of two kinds of groups who would be regarded as socially marginal, namely queers and gays. Being marginal in the literal sense means that characters are often in the margins of the image, and they are not really important characters in terms of the development of the plot. However, when you look at it closer, the black characters really remain marginal. If they have any function, it is to indicate how white the film is. Whereas the queer characters have their own role; partly they are also more vividly realized, they are given more space. All in all, the film is very concerned with the decline of society, a society that is going nowhere. And part of that is at the level of reproduction. The very few children in the film are either corrupted by the cheapness of the society or they are being killed. There is no positive image of the reproduction of society. And the film – following a cliché of lesbians and gay men in that*

period – assumes that they have nothing to do with sexual and human reproduction. One of the effects of these marginal figures is that they are not marginal as queers, because they represent in a kind of vivid way the prospect of a society that is doomed and cannot reproduce itself. And that is all part of the explanation of the decline of western society.

But to answer your question: I do not know if "La Dolce Vita" itself is an important film in terms of the argument of marginality. And whether it is an important film for today is another question. But the issue of thinking about marginality is *a major issue because it is so much part of how we think in terms of people being marginal or not. The attempt of my lecture was to put together marginality as an issue of how a film text is organized and how that relates to what is part of the discourse about how society is organized.*

And towards the end of your inaugural lecture you said you would finish analyzing the political aesthetics and implications of marginality. So what about political issues when we have a look at marginality and today's society? You said „outside implies an inside". What is Fellini with La Dolce Vita maybe telling us concerning today's societal topics?

What I meant by the political aesthetics in the film is that there is a kind of politics of making blacks truly marginal, seeming to have nothing to do with the organization of the world and, in fact, reinforcing the whiteness of the world. Whereas the politics of gays and queers are that they are very negative figures in the film's term. Certainly it would be interesting to look at: What is the significance considering some people as marginal and others as not marginal? It is a category that implies a kind of comfortable world. You are the gender you are born into, you have a home, your sexuality is understood, you do not sell your sex for money. Seeing people as marginal implies a center. It implies: I am not marginal. It is implicitly affirmative, in a way it probably does not want to be affirmative. It probably thinks it is very generous. But there is a danger in that generosity mainly reinforcing a very standardized view of what is central to society.

Actually, what "La Dolce Vita" has to offer us today is that it is a film about celebrity. And in a way, it is about fake news – to use another contemporary. The film shows what the problem of celebrity, of fake news and of that kind of decadence is, but it also conveys the fascination and pleasure of it. I think it is no good dismissing celebrity as trivial. It is no good dismissing Donald Trump as an idiot. It is always very important to understand the appeal and the feeling of the appeal of these powerful things in our society at the time. I do not think the film "La Dolce Vita" teaches us that, but you can unpick its willingness to embrace the fascination of things it nonetheless disapproves. That kind of complexity is really important politically, for example when dealing with Trump and with what he represents. What is the appeal of what he represents? It is important when dealing with Kim Jong Un claiming the world is a safer place now. It obviously is not a safer place, that is complete nonsense. But: It is important to recognize how warming it is to have someone say (with such confidence) that the world is a safer place now, and not to be dismissive of that. We all want the world to be safer. Part of our politics has got to be a kind of cultural engagement with those kinds of feelings.

Another question is if Trump himself is marginal?!

That is such a good point you are making! That is a very good example of the question of marginality. One of the things that is interesting about him is, that people often say that Trump was voted by people who felt marginal. There is that group of white working class men who have felt marginalized – partly by the political establishment and partly by the decline of their power in terms of their ability to earn money – including implications for gender relations between men and women. We have been talking about research results from the social sciences that describe how persistent the importance of being able to provide further for their family is for men nowadays. That obviously remains a persistent part of gendered identity. Well, if that is true and you cannot do that (providing for your family), no wonder you are feeling marginal. I think that does feed into Trump's success. It is important to acknowledge that complex.

Then marginality is a big issue concerning political power, using marginality or reproducing marginality in terms of political power?

Absolutely. And what I also think, what Trump does is represent that marginality – to then say: No, it is not marginal! Look, I am president, look, I *am the typical person! It almost magically centralizes people who have been anxious about feeling marginal.*

Towards the end of our interview I am going back to what you have been stating at the end of your lecture on *La Dolce Vita.* You have been

talking about reproductivity and also about the reproductivity of race. What did you mean by that?

Answering your question in terms of the issue of reproduction, I think perhaps not that much has changed since "La Dolce Vita". I mean there have been changes concerning different kinds of parenting including, of course, lesbian and gay parenting, and also huge changes concerning reproductive technology. You could *say that the problem of reproduction today is that we got too many people. The problem is population growth, also if you think about poverty and ecological implications and so on. There is a certain kind of queer theory saying: We should cherish the non-reproductivity of lesbians and gay men because they at least are not contributing to population growth. I would not say it quite as crudely as that.*

Well, and as I said the concept of race is a concept of bodies reproducing themselves through sexual reproduction. Now some say, you should not even use the idea of race. On the one hand, I would say cultural studies is about studying the concepts that circulate. So if race is a concept that circulates, you have to study it. In terms of analysis it is a notion. And then there is the question if race is really anything. Yes and No. In a strong sense, no, it is not anything, they are just people. But it is also true that if you go through immigration at an airport, it is obvious that people are treated differently because of what they look like, because of what color they are, because of what the shape of their eyes are and maybe because of what they are wearing. So it is not like there is nothing material there at all. And that needs to be addressed.

And what would you say about the future of society concerning reproduction and gender issues?

To me the main problem is population growth as I said. Obviously we need to go on having people, we have to have reproduction. So how do you reconcile reproduction with the fact of population growth and all the policies? How do you have a policy of limited reproduction in ways that are not oppressive – after the history of attempts to limit population growth that have been pretty awful. Eugenics is when you look at it closely about white middle class people controlling the reproduction of other people which is and was not a good thing – similar to the one-child-policy in China that lead to very much unhappiness. And the only current policy I know about is to educate women. I think the pattern is very clear right across the world that the more educated women are, the fewer children they have. And it is an empowerment of women, too. Well, I think it is a very hard topic to talk about. You do not want to be telling people you should not have children. Who is saying that and why are they saying that? All of that is very problematic. But I still think that population growth is terrifying. I suppose there are other solutions of curbing population growth, for instance to stop making it easy for people to go on living at such a late age. As someone who is 73 perhaps I am not entitled to talk about that. I do not want to die; I want to be kept alive. Bit one of the sources of population growth in the last 50 years is partly people living longer and that is an issue. I do not know what the answer is. I think one of the gifts of lesbian and gay sexuality is that it does not entail children. And one of the gifts of contraception is that heterosexual sexuality does not have to entail children any longer.

On the one hand, concerning reproduction, we have the growth of population. And on the other hand, and that is also a big topic in Germany, we are confronted with the demographic change. Both, public growth and the demographic change, are current issues being discussed as problems or even threats to our society and our social systems.

Yes, you are right, the whole problem and fear is who will look after the old people: There are for example Indian women in Italy that are permanently living in the house when family members are getting too old to look after themselves. And they are often not being paid very well. What kind of answer is that? There will always be lots of people from poor countries to take care of us? That is problematic. And at the same time, the other side of the discourse in Britain and also in Italy (that is the two countries I can really say I know from the inside) is: Of course, it is the wrong people reproducing.

Right, that is what I am having on my mind, too.

I still think it is really important to acknowledge the problem of population growth and its implications to global warming, for instance. But on the other hand, how do you get policies that deal with the demographic change in the sense of the age issue, and in the sense that is not about one group telling the other group not to reproduce themselves?

I think it is an important issue to think about who is being seen as the "right" reproducers and who is not. On one hand, education for

women is discussed as an 'instrument' to lower the growth of population and to lower fertility rates. And on the other hand, well educated women are discussed as the ones that are not fertile enough in Germany and other European countries. Especially educated women do not have that many children anymore and they are being blamed for that in case they are seen as the welcome reproducers within a society based upon the idea of human capital.

The population, for example in Germany or Italy, is declining, right? So the problem of the world is over-population, but the problem of some countries is a very low fertility rate? Am I right? So perhaps maybe immigration is the answer, it is not the problem but the answer. Certainly Britain is not a declining population numerically, but the reason for that is the increasing immigration.

We are already talking about where we are going and how societies are transforming. Last but not least, my question is: What do you see or think is currently transforming concerning "gender", concerning gender research, gender in the media or concerning gendered identities? Or what would you like to be transformed in the future?

I have never been very future oriented. I have never thought about my future or anything like that. I would like the world to be fair and I would certainly like the world not to be like it is now. But concerning gender? In an ideal world gender would be a much softer set of distinction. I do not imagine a world that does not make a distinction between men and women. I think it is too deep in the DNA how people feel about the relationship to their body and their relationship to other people. I think there are hormonal differences. Some people menstruate and some do not, that makes the difference. I cannot imageine a world in which gender makes no difference. I think we all enjoy gender difference too much just to abandon it. But I would like a world in which gender is less hysterical and less rigid. There might be a transitory moment: There is a developing interest in non-binaries and in various kinds of identity, which I hope will also mean a kind of reembrace upon identities that were pioneered mainly by lesbians and gay men. I mean it would be good if those were not confined to lesbians and gay men. People would feel much easier to work out a huge range of things that do not deny the gender difference, but nor insist upon it being so rigidly separate. I think that would be great to explore. It is not the end of gender but the softening of gender!

A more relaxed idea of gender?! Great. Well, thank you. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and for thinking through a whole lot of different aspects and ideas. It was a pleasure for me to interview you. Thank you for your time, for allowing me to raise lots of questions and, of course, for having you over in Bochum as our Marie Jahoda Visiting Professor.

Kontakt und Information

Prof. Richard Dyer, PhD
http://www.sowi.rub.de/jahoda/profs/s2018_dyer.html.en

Stefanie Leinfellner
stefanie.leinfellner@rub.de
https://www.sowi.rub.de/internationales/jahoda.html.de