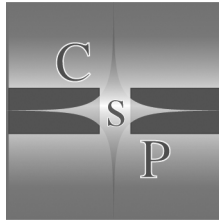


Out Here

Out Here
Local and International Perspectives
in Queer Studies

Edited by

Dominika Ferens, Tomasz Basiuk
and Tomasz Sikora



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INTRODUCTION

TOMASZ SIKORA, TOMASZ BASIUK,
DOMINIKA FERENS

The present volume is a sequel to *A Queer Mixture / Odmiany odmieńca* (2002), which documented the first two queer studies conferences in Poland in 2000 and 2001. Three subsequent annual conferences took place in Warsaw (2002), Bielsko-Biała (2003) and Wrocław (2004), every one of them bringing together close to a hundred scholars and queer activists from Europe and North America. We are pleased to see these events become something of an institutionalized presence in a predominantly conservative Polish cultural and academic landscape, one in which LGBTQ undertakings are always exposed to political, economic and legal threats. For it is impossible to ignore that each of our last three conferences coincided with a crisis around queer people's rights.

In December 2002, in Warsaw, we devoted one panel to a discussion of a series of homophobic articles and antihomophobic responses published by the biggest Polish daily, the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* edited by Adam Michnik. In May 2003 we met in Bielsko-Biała on the night of Poland's EU accession referendum; we had cast our votes before coming to the conference and were all glued to TV screens that night at the hotel, waiting for the preliminary results to come in. The vote passed by a substantial majority.

Earlier that year, the artist Karolina Breguła collaborated with an organization called Campaign Against Homophobia in photographing 15 lesbian couples and 15 gay male couples. Each couple is shown standing in a city street, holding hands. A red stamp in the corner reads: "Let them see us." These 30 photographs were exhibited in galleries across Poland. Two images: one of a lesbian couple and one of a gay male couple, were selected for display on billboards in major cities. In many locations, homophobes managed to prevent the posters from being mounted by decrying them as "visual aggression," and virtually everywhere the posters were torn down or smudged with paint in a matter of days. But there was a heated media debate about whether these images should be allowed to be displayed, and some of the photographed subjects were interviewed about the personal consequences of their courageous exposure. In

effect, even though the campaign was cut short, its ripple effect gave a new level of visibility to the Polish lesbian and gay male community.

The May 2004 conference was in Wrocław, only days after Poland joined the European Union. A week after the accession Cracow had its first gay parade ever. It was interrupted by the All-Polish Youth (MW: Młodzież Wszechpolska), a nationalist militia of the League of Polish Families (LPR: Liga Polskich Rodzin), an extreme right-wing party with deputies in the Polish and the European parliaments. In the 1930s, the anti-Semitic All-Polish Youth was outlawed. Today it has been resurrected, in part to target queers, and has even brought eleven members into the Polish parliament under LPR auspices in the 2005 election. At the time of the violent outbreak in Cracow, a conference on homosexuality at the sociology department of Poland's oldest university, the Jagiellonian, was relegated from the main campus to a distant location on the outskirts of Cracow. That same month, May 2004, the fifth annual Warsaw Equality Parade, which has always had a primarily gay presence, was to take place. We were at the Wrocław conference when we heard that the parade had been banned by the politically ambitious right-wing mayor of Warsaw, recently elected president of Poland. During the same conference, a late-night discussion on queer strategizing taking place in a local bar was disrupted by two homophobic thugs who identified themselves as members of NOP, a right-wing political organization. This unfortunate, if minor, incident seemed merely symptomatic of the deteriorating conditions for a rational discussion on LGBTQ rights in the country, but it has confronted us directly with the harsh reality outside the ivory tower of academia, and sometimes within. Like many other organizations and individuals, we sent the Warsaw mayor a letter of protest, which had no effect. This parade was banned three times because the regional governor twice reversed the mayor's homophobic decision. In the end, a political rally took place in front of the mayor's office on the scheduled day.

Tomek Kitliński and Paweł Leszkowicz have commented on the violent assaults on the Cracow gay march in May 2004 and the subsequent ban of the Warsaw Equality Parade that same month by calling homophobia in Poland "one symptom of a larger social crisis of failed justice" (19). Since 1989, when a new democratic regime changed the context for gay activism, a double logic of increased openness toward and a backlash against queers has been in place. Our series of conferences has been paralleled by an increased gay activism and visibility, as well as by a moral panic around homosexuality, sexual abuse, paedophilia, and HIV. These phenomena are frequently superimposed in public discourse, and occasionally serve as a smokescreen obscuring even more shameful topics, like anti-Semitism. Thus, a Catholic archbishop was forced into retirement for his homosexuality rather than for his actual transgression of molesting clerics who answered to him. Another distinguished clergyman,

whose anti-Semitic statements and flamboyant lifestyle were known but drew only mild criticism, lost his parish when he was accused of seducing an altar boy. A famous choir conductor, charged with sexually molesting boy singers, had his seropositive status exposed by the mainstream liberal daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which acted illegally but, allegedly, in the public's interest. And a theatre director writing regularly for the same daily, in which he courageously came out as a gay man, was soon after attacked by his own paper for volunteering to donate blood. He had been entrapped by his colleagues from the newspaper who first invited him to participate in a blood drive and then turned against him in editorials in which they explained that a gay man's blood is a public health risk. As we were writing the present introduction, two things have happened simultaneously: another collection of essays, *Homofobia po polsku*, the first-ever book on homophobia in Poland, published in October 2004, sold out within just a few weeks, and the "Equality March" in Poznań was attacked and disrupted by the All-Polish Youth militia on November 20, 2004. In the spring of 2005, as a parallel Polish volume was going to press, the Warsaw parade was banned for the second year running. Activists took to the streets anyway, joined by many supporters, some prominent Polish and German politicians among them.

There is more than one way to tell the story of this volume, just as our activist and intellectual strategies are diverse, and as we are learning more than one thing from one another. But perhaps one general point can be made, that the context in which we have to function makes our work (and the present book in particular) politically incorrect in our own country. Ironically, our work is often dismissed as tainted with "political correctness." Some of us have never intended to be politically correct or politically incorrect, to cast ourselves in the terms of this particular binary, but at the moment it feels like the matter is out of our hands.

The concept of "political correctness," which constitutes one of the barriers for—or parameters of—queer desire, has tremendous currency in Poland's intellectual and political debate. Given the recent conservative backlash in this country, Kinga Dunin, one of Poland's most outspoken feminists, wrote in a December 2003 editorial: "I choose what ill-meaning people would surely call political correctness. . . . I wish for political correctness" (46). Rather than knowingly choose the misnomer "political correctness" we may want to examine it critically. During the two decades since it was coined, the term has been used to deter women, non-whites, queer people, and others from reaching for privileges traditionally reserved for white heterosexual men. The intellectual work of those "others," perceived as usurpers of public space, has routinely been devalued as "politically correct."

The cultural conservatives who coined the American term “political correctness” brought to life a phantom power that supposedly stands behind the usurpers. “Political correctness” is a smokescreen obscuring the fact that the cultural conservatives themselves constitute the dominant majority and dictate the terms on which queers enter the public sphere. In Poland, those who use the term insist that they are being gagged by a powerful pressure group. For instance, in an article titled “The Gay Men’s Bishop” published in the weekly *Polityka* Adam Szostkiewicz used the consecration of the Episcopalian Bishop Gene Robinson in New Hampshire as a pretext to lash out against “the practitioners” of political correctness, “a false doctrine that silences “the voices of Christians who want to speak about poverty and moderation” (57). Located somewhere in what Szostkiewicz calls the “American-European West” there is a phantom power that has turned Poland’s moral order upside down. “The issue of homosexuals’ rights has become. . . a litmus test of the degree of desirable consciousness change. According to the adherents of [political correctness], whoever is in favor of full legal equality understands what the modern liberal society is all about. Whoever opposes such equality deviates from the pluralistic norm. Whoever is uncertain is an intellectual sloth who hasn’t done his homework” (57).

The common rhetorical strategy of invoking a phantom enables Szostkiewicz and other cultural conservatives to deflect attention from the fact that it is both “politically correct” and politically advantageous in Poland today to deny queer people the right of public assembly and free speech, to erase queer histories and to deny the existence of queer cultures. No phantom stopped the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* from giving prominence to pundits defending homophobia as reasonable. No phantom managed to dissuade the Chancellor of the Jagiellonian University from removing an LGBTQ studies conference out of sight, to a campus on the outskirts of Cracow. No phantom prevented the All-Polish Youth from pelting LGBTQ rights demonstrators with stones in the streets of Cracow, and then in Poznań. No phantom stopped the Mayor of Warsaw from banning the 2004 and the 2005 Equality Parades.

This neo-conservative rhetoric—dressed in very “progressive” terms—has also found its way into the Polish academic environment. Polish academia did not have the time to critically investigate the stakes of “political (in)correctness” when a symptomatic conference, ominously entitled “Mouth Wide Shut,” was announced, boldly declaring political correctness to be “democracy’s policeman” in a call for papers that offered foregone conclusions rather than an invitation to critical analyses and open-minded debates: “The many tongues of multicultural discourse speak all the more loudly since the potential opponents, having been successfully bound and gagged, dare not express any contradictory opinion.” Ironically enough, the “Call for Papers”—itself totally unrealistic

about the political balance of power in Poland and elsewhere—ends with the invocation to “take up the challenge before the academe itself is declared a reservation [asylum] for the realistically challenged.” The sarcasm directed at the “politically correct” revision of linguistic conventions itself defers to a fantasmatic Realpolitik. This deferral is motivated by the hope—which we think is false—that academics can make themselves publicly relevant by adopting widespread stereotypes.

The eminent Polish law historian Jan Baszkiewicz was one of the few to see through the phantom of “political correctness”—albeit in a context unrelated to non-normative sexuality. During a recent ceremony at which he received an honorary doctorate from Wrocław University, Baszkiewicz told an anecdote set in the 1960s in which he described as a bold act of “political *incorrectness*” a Chancellor’s defiance of the socialist party’s orders to suppress a symbol of the university’s German past. He thus implied that being “politically correct” means aligning oneself with whoever happens to represent the hegemonic order.

Clearly, given the habitual (mindless or malign) misuse of the term “political correctness” we might do better to drop it altogether. And if we cannot get rid of this slippery term we should aim to reverse its current usage, and seek to clarify its meaning as “hegemonic correctness.” It may be tempting to pretend, along with the homophobic majority, that there is a phantom power watching over the Polish queer community and enabling Poles to resist racism, sexism, homophobia and extreme nationalism. But perhaps instead of endorsing phantoms we should draw strength from being “politically incorrect,” and focus on preventing the gay-rights debate from being dismissed with the facile charge of its “correctness.”

A remarkable difference between *Out Here* and its predecessor is that many more Polish and other East-European authors in the present volume have undertaken direct political and cultural reflection on the historical contingencies of the local context. Unlike the previous bilingual volume, this one contains only those papers which were originally presented in English; a parallel volume of papers in Polish will be published by the Cracow Universitas publishing house. Among the essays in English, Tomek Kitliński and Joe Lockard offer a polemical diagnosis of homophobia and misogyny embodied in various Polish state and cultural institutions, Irina Kupriyanova describes the difficulties in implementing proper standards for counseling lesbian women in Russia, and Anna Borgos writes about bisexuality and biphobia from a Hungarian perspective. Alfons Gregori i Gomis undertakes a queer-political critique of Spanish and Catalan pop, and Els De Vos explains the spatial and cultural complexities of cruising in a Belgian park. Krzysztof Fordoński is interested in how the question of authors’ well-documented or alleged homosexuality is (or—

more often—is not) addressed in Polish handbooks and anthologies of English literature. Antke Engel starts by outlining the concepts of desire in Foucault and in Deleuze/Guattari, and argues that desire can be politically effective only if we attend to the ways in which singularities are transformed into specific categories. Tadeusz Rachwał's "Normally," the keynote address of our Bielsko-Biała conference in May 2003, is also a philosophical argument which draws on Kierkegaard, Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti, and Irigaray for the possibility of redrafting the present regimes of queer intelligibility. Tadeusz Rachwał's contribution, Anna Branach-Kallas's reading of Shaym Selvaduri's *Funny Boy*, Ewa Macura's reading of Vernon Lee's *Lady Tal*, Zuzanna Szatanik's paper on Chandra Mayor's poetry, and Krzysztof Fordoński's survey of Polish handbooks of English literature remind us that English and American studies departments in Poland were not only among the first places where interest in queer subjects was allowed to flourish, but that they remain interested and supportive. The English-language section also includes two short stories by Ruth DyckFehderau, one of a number of queer scholars who have recently stayed in Poland as visiting professors. Chris Bell is another such scholar, and his contribution to this volume, which tackles the psycho-social knot of sexuality and race/ethnicity, is one that inspired in us a sense of future direction.

Looking through the prism of sexuality and gender, the authors of *Out Here* offer analyses remarkably in sync with the present historical moment. For we are at a cross-roads, requiring that we look in more than one direction. Intersections of gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity, are familiar to many in academia but not always a staple in intellectual debates and teaching. While the concurrence of gender and queer issues in Poland seems well established, though not exactly in the center of the political arena—even as it seems, remarkably, to be the country's longest-standing coalition since 1989—this coalition is marginalized not only by the hegemony of cultural conservatives, but also by its own difficulty in addressing issues of economic inequality and other forms of discrimination. There is no adequate cultural criticism of the remnants of class-based distinctions in our post-Communist society, or of the new forms of such distinctions. Also the nationalistic projection of Poland as an ethnically homogeneous country that has no real need to address questions of ethnicity is perniciously widespread. It seems symptomatic to us that issues of class and race/ethnicity are more readily raised by non-Poles contributing to this volume.

We recognize these limitations, as we recognize that the breakthrough billboard campaign of 2003, mentioned above, was limited by the somewhat gentrified, vanilla look of almost all photographed couples, the young age of all but one, and the notable absence of a single photograph taken in the countryside (in a country where a full quarter of the population lives in rural areas). One should note, however, that the photographs are an archival record of the state of

LGBTQ activism in Poland today, and that the lives of some individuals who were photographed as part of the campaign have changed for it. While analogous claims should not be made for the present volume, some of the essays ring with a sense of urgency, reflecting the tone of current debates about Poland's LGBTQ activism. The analyses contained herein are elements in the landscape of such debates, in Poland and elsewhere.

The 2004 Wrocław conference was marked by fault lines in our discussions of sexuality in relation to gender, class, ethnicity, and other categories which define positionality. As at other conferences, we ended with an open forum whose goal was to propose a topic for the next event. In this discussion, positionality was again pointed out by many as a crucial question for further debate, and it became the focus of our next annual meeting, in September 2005.

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NORMALLY

TADEUSZ RACHWAŁ

My suspicion is that the universe
is not only queerer than we
suppose, but queerer than we can
suppose.

Physiologist and Geneticist J.B.S.
Haldane, *Possible Worlds*, 1927
(qtd. in Goddwin)

“Normally” is an adverb which is normally used with reference to regular, repetitive occurrences of things and events in normal and ordinary conditions. The very fact of the word’s use in natural languages testifies to an existence of “sets of facts or fixed limits which establish or limit how something can or must happen or be done” (*Freesearch Dictionary*)—that is to say, to the existence of parameters which normalize our acts and actions and thus enable a harmoniously repetitive existence. Though, as Kierkegaard claimed, “in reality as such, there is no repetition” (Kierkegaard 275), the parametrisation of the social space translates repetition into the normal, a normally frequented furrow which determines what “must happen or be done.”

In Kierkegaard repetition occurs only when “ideality and reality touch each other” (Kierkegaard 275), ideality being the sphere of sameness which, like reality as such, also excludes repetition. Though Kierkegaard does not explicitly gender either ideality or reality, he does claim that creative, philosophical natures should be somehow feminine, so as to be capable of being inseminated by the unchangeable masculine ideal. What is thus produced in the mutual touching of the ideal and the real is the “normally” of repetition, the regulative parameter which is a trace, or a seed, of the ideal within the creatively effeminate masculine philosopher. Repetition proves the existence of the ideal sameness through a touching contact with men rather than women, the latter slipping away from the parametrization and remaining within the real which, without the ideal, constitutes an undifferentiated difference without any stable criteria of a repeatable identity:

. . . for I have rarely seen a girl whose life could be comprehended in a category. She usually lacks the consistency required for admiring or scorning a person. Before a woman deceives another, she first deceives herself, and therefore there is no criterion at all. (Kierkegaard 218)

Capability to repeat constitutes the possibility of identification, of being identified, the identifiable always holding a privileged position over the deceitful feminine which, as lacking criteria, demands a parametrization so as to become mappable upon some public space. In Kierkegaard this “mappability” is determined by the openness to the masculine insemination by ideas available only to creative and philosophically minded feminized creatures who desire the touch of ideas so as to be able “to be comprehended in a category.” The touch of the clearly masculine ideal in fact masculinizes the feminine philosophers and sublimates them above the reality, normalizes them as bearers of the ideal, of the unchangeable norm. What thus becomes desired is the touching union with the ideal which represses the real, that which cannot be repeated, which does not happen normally.

Deleuze and Guattari find in this repression a defensive gesture of the society for which an un-parametrized desire is threatening:

If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire. . . is capable of calling into question the established order of society. . . it is revolutionary in its essence. . . It is therefore of vital importance for a society to repress desire, and even to find something more efficient than repression, so that repression, hierarchy, exploitation, and servitude are themselves desired. (Deleuze 116)

The repressed desire puts on a mask of reproductive activities whose function is, as Foucault claims in *The History of Sexuality*, to discourage useless waste of energy which would obstruct capitalism. Translated into ethical terms, unproductive activities become immoral and perverse, naturally unnatural things which you, normally, do not do. Yet, as Shannon Roberts notices writing on Bataille, “Even in a monologue that condemns sexual immorality, the silent figure which it addresses stands outside of the norm, its existence being justified and noticed by the sole fact that its alterity is emphasized” (Roberts). The alterity enters the discourse through repression and thus, paradoxically, also enters the repeatable pattern of the parametrization of desire with all its categorizations, criteria, and hierarchies. More importantly, it thus also becomes a part of the repressive normalcy.

An interesting attempt at parametrising desire comes from Alan Sinfield, who notices “confusion in many current ideas of gayness” and attempts at clarifying that confusion making use of Freud’s distinction between *desire-for* and *desire-to-be* (Sinfield 120). Beginning with the heterosexual model in which

A man has: desire-to-be M desire-for F

A woman has: desire-to-be F desire-for M

and going through various possible combinations of it he ends with the possibility in which

man has: desire-to-be not-M desire-for God

He adds: “For the point of a taxonomy, I have said, is not to confine identity or desire but, rather, to offer a framework within which the specificity and multiplicity of the potential combinations and interactions may coherently emerge” (Sinfield 137).

This coherence of emergence of identity and desire, regardless of its more or less endless paradigmatic potential, introduces the regulatory repetition to the functioning of desire thus making it parametrical. As taxonomically repeatable, Sinfield’s parameters of desire make desire a matter of a certain survival enabled by the coherent pattern of the possible fulfillments of desire. What this survival promotes is the permanence of the forms of desire which Zygmunt Bauman opposes to happiness as life strategy. “Survival,” he writes, “is about sticking to the norm; happiness is an inherently anti-normative power. Survival dreams of ultimate rest and finds its fulfillment in standing still. But the moment of rest is the agony of happiness” (87).¹

Perhaps it is the very idea of fulfillment of desire, of accomplishment, which renders desire as always already parametrized, this or that oriented. With the orientation at stake, desire becomes a way to repeat, a normally followed path, a matter of survival which leaves happiness behind, in the realm of Kierkegaard’s reality, for example. For what comes along with survival and repetition is value, the measurable and identifiable measure of things which also harbours appropriation, the ownership of oneself and of the satisfaction of their desire which is rooted, as we have seen, also in Kierkegaard’s homosocial, and in fact Platonic, vision of repetition.

Perhaps Rosi Braidotti’s economy which conceives of desire ontologically— not as mediation between a subject and a desired object, but as transcending the subject, as a “desire which functions as the threshold for a redefinition of a new common plane of experience” (Braidotti 203)—is a non-species of desire which the homosocial discourse of Kierkegaardian philosophy leaves unmentioned within the feminine real to which “normally” does not normally apply. A surfacing of this desire happens on the threshold of the real, slightly away from

the technology of desire which parametrizes it into, let us repeat, “a set of facts or a fixed limit which establishes or limits how something can or must happen or be done.” For what comes with repetition is also distance, the clarity of objective vision in which even things queer are, say, normally queer. A disturbance of this normality, a really common plane of experience, is thinkable only along with the possibility of there being a non-objective economy, an economy which, by way of overcoming distances, will blur the clear-cut division into the public and the private through a certain de-privatization, or perhaps deprivation, of the private whose hope Luce Irigaray envisages in the feminine:

Ownership and property are doubtless quite foreign to the feminine. At least sexually. But not nearness. Nearness so pronounced that it makes all discrimination of identity, and thus all forms of property, impossible. Woman derives pleasure from what is so near that she cannot have it, nor have herself. She herself enters into a ceaseless exchange of herself with the other without any possibility of identifying either. This puts into question all prevailing economies. (Irigaray 31)

How? Normally?

Notes

1. I have found an interesting “survival kit” of sorts which also in a way epitomizes the Kierkegaardian parametrization of desire in a letter published on the *Christian Woman Today* webpage: “Children need love, affection and guidance and parameters. Women respond to love and gentleness, but we too, need parameters. Many times the satisfaction of momentary pleasures can be tempting, but the results can be devastating. God has set up boundaries in His word because He loves us. They are there to keep us safe. Practicing self-control means saying “No” to the things that God says “No” to. God’s rules are for our benefit. We can follow them fearlessly.”

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TRAVELING IMAGES: DESIRE AS MOVEMENT. DESIRE AS METHOD?

ANTKE ENGEL

By now, it is not only liberal but also conservative voices who accept homosexuality as a sexual identity and a certain life-style—as long as it remains private and “they” do not claim civil rights or political participation. In quite a few countries homosexuals receive official state recognition of their right to private freedom, but this does not mean that they enjoy full and equal citizenship. The inclusion is bound to a distinction between the public and the private. It relegates homosexuality to the private sphere, which is understood in terms of rights as the free choice of consenting adults, and in terms of capital as commodified desires and commercialized spaces that pay into? capitalist economy. The “law” of these private spheres says: Do not question the superiority of heterosexuality and its privileges like marriage and parenting rights, tax benefits and legal heritage. In the discourse of privatization, a gesture of liberal tolerance is easily combined with homophobic stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion.

Desire: The Challenge to the Public/Private-Distinction

Queer Theory deploys “desire” as an important category of political analysis. I would like to ask if there is a concept of desire that challenges the opposition of the public and the private—a concept that values the diversity and singularity of desires, while also looking at desire as a normative category organizing subjectivities and the social. In fact, I am not so much interested in desire as a category of subjectivity, of sexual practices or intimate relations. Rather, I try to understand how desire is productive in the social and of the social—including macro-political processes and institutions. How far is desire at work where we don’t expect it, in the state, in capitalism, in global relations? Does heterosexual desire rule here?

To consider these questions I turn to Elspeth Probyn, who in her book *Outside Belongings* (1996) deploys desire in a way that does not reassert

normative heterosexuality or rigid gender binaries. Probyn avoids reducing desire to a moment of identity or to relationships organized by a subject/object dynamic, and she looks for a concept of desire which challenges the psychoanalytic perspectives of lack and interiority. In this vein she refers to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in order to understand desire as movement and productivity. Personal as well as broader cultural images are seen as modes of “transportation” which link individual and social, virtual, material, mental, and psychic “bodies.” Movements of desire, traveling in images, effect a complex, dynamic and interrelational “surface.” Desire becomes a way to question the concept of identity and binary distinctions, including the distinction of public and private.

Starting from here I will explain how Probyn’s concept links power and desire and can be used to analyze governance and state policies. Finally, I will discuss Probyn’s suggestion that we understand desire as a method. Is she referring to methods in social sciences or cultural or political practices? Is “desire” a convincing ground for queer social analysis? What does it mean if we want to understand, or to challenge, or to change social regulations of gender and sexuality or the gendering and sexualization of social power relations? Does she use “method” in the sense of “strategy”?

Desire as Movement

Outside Belongings is the programmatic title of Probyn’s book. But just how might such a program propose an alternative to an identity-based model of subjectivity and social relations? In Probyn, the term “belonging” evokes two different associations: “belongings”—this means goods, memories, the history one carries (while moving or staying on) as well as “longing”—the yearning for something or someone or somewhere—perhaps even the longing to belong. While Probyn eschews an identity model that captures subjectivity within the limits of normative categories and a demand for authenticity, she still takes the wish to belong seriously. For her, this is a wish that people cultivate while knowing that it is challenged by various forces and can hardly ever be fulfilled:

Simply put, I want to figure the desire that individuals have to belong, a tenacious and fragile desire that is, I think, increasingly performed in the knowledge of the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging, along with the fear that the stability of belonging and the sanctity of belongings are forever past. (Probyn 8)

So much for “belonging.” And how are we to understand “outside”? “Outside” is not defined in relation to an inside or interiority, but actually challenges the opposition of in and out. It is rather to be understood as “surface,” which has no organizing center, but flees in all directions, as Deleuze/Guattari would put it.

Thinking on the surface—or surfacing, as Probyn proposes in order to avoid an objectivation of the surface—offers an alternative to modes of thinking which dig for an inner truth, a cause, a ground in the depths of an unknowable history:

One of the central arguments of this book is that the outside is a more adequate figure for thinking about social relations and the social than either an interior/exterior or a center/marginal model. The notion of the outside supposes that we think in terms of “relations of proximity,” or the surface, “a network in which each point is distinct. . . and has a position in relation to every other point in the space that simultaneously holds and separates them all (Foucault 1987: 12).” (Probyn 11)

Within this model of thinking on the surface (rather than searching for reasons or causes or identities) desire becomes a force of movement, a principle that translates across things, words, bodies, and meanings, creating connections, tracing lines of flight and lines of belonging (45).

Traveling Images

While in psychoanalysis it is a single sign, the phallus, that signifies desire, for Probyn it is complex images that travel within and between social, cultural, and material worlds that produce connections and meanings. Those images are always singular. They have neither an essence nor a fixed reference, but they trace lines of flight and they are productive. These lines of flight are not virtual, but show up as material-semiotic effects on social surfaces: Images relate bodies and incite desire; they alter “categorized notions of being” and open up new notions of becoming and belonging:

The image, thus freed from its post within a structure of law, lack, and signification, can begin to move all over the place. It then causes different ripples and affects, effects of desire and desirous affects. Turning away from the game of matching signifiers and signifieds, we can begin to focus on the movement of images as effecting and affecting movement. (59)

Desire is the force that incites and fuels this movement, these transports. The complexity of an image illustrates that in a specific situation there is more than one power axis involved in desire’s social productivity. Power, in this case, is the condition and effect of these movements of transportation inspired by desire: “this is to render desire entirely social, as lubricating lines of governance and power, and those of subjectivation” (45).

Assemblages of Desire and Power: Deleuze vs. Foucault

Probyn's concept does not know a private realm that is not always already connected to public discourses, practices, and institutions. Even the most closeted subjectivities and desires cannot be understood apart from those socio-cultural forces that demand their hiding and limit their access to or visibility on social surfaces. But while Probyn understands desire as entirely social and rejects any kind of naturalized or essentialized view, she is still hesitant to adopt Michel Foucault's view of desire as solely a product of power relations. According to Foucault, desires are constituted within systems of power/knowledge which deploy desire as the inner truth of an individual and as constitutive of subjectivities, social relations, knowledges, technologies of the self, and forms of governance. Probyn would agree to this, but still cede importance to Deleuze/Guattari's argument that desire cannot be reduced to a product and a productive means of power relations, but should be seen as a force in its own right.

According to Deleuze/Guattari, desire is a force that connects and disconnects objects and enunciations, a force that produces "lines of flight" and "assemblages" of "things," and "enunciations," and "affections." To describe an assemblage one has to ask how enunciations and things connect—this is one axis of analysis. Another line of inquiry concerns the mode of movement taking place: Is it a "deterritorialization" that breaks up well established connections, or is it a "re-territorialization," that hegemonizes a formerly provocative or subversive assemblage? Interestingly, from Deleuze's perspective, power is primarily at work in reterritorializations and not so much in deterritorializations:

Systems of power would emerge everywhere that reterritorializations are operating. . . . Systems of power would thus be a component of assemblages. But assemblages would also comprise points of deterritorialization. In short, systems of power would neither motivate, nor constitute, but rather desiring-assemblages would swarm among the formations of power according to their dimensions. (Deleuze 4)

Foucault, on the contrary, would argue that any form of deterritorialization is no less involved in and conditioned by power relations than any reterritorializations. But, in fact, the advantage of Deleuze/Guattari's model is that it differentiates power and resistance, which is certainly a useful step for political analysis. Probyn, who combines Foucault and Deleuze/Guattari, agrees with Foucault that there is no social apart from power relations, but suggests that we understand power as one force next to other forces, e.g. desire, which interconnectedly constitute social relations. She would probably agree with Deleuze, who writes: "Of course, a desiring-assemblage will include power

systems. . . , but they would have to be situated in relation to different components of the assemblage” (4).

Thus what has by now become clear is that Probyn’s *Outside Belongings* challenges the “double privatization” of desire: desire to be kept in private space, and desire seen as a person’s innermost identity. Rather, we can explore its productivity in and of social relations, including relations of power and resistance. Countering the critique that the metaphor of the surface enforces a certain superficiality, Probyn argues that surfaces are not flat and can very well capture hierarchical, uneven relations, dominating or subordinated positions (Probyn 18, 34). Still the question remains whether desire and movement are a value in and of themselves, or whether one must also ask what kind of desire is in question here and where it is moving to?

In *Profit and Pleasures: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, Rosemary Hennessy is most skeptical about celebrations of the mobility of desire, which are, from her point of view, caught up in a capitalist logic of consumer society. Desire, within her materialist-feminist frame, primarily stimulates consumption and enforces reifications of social relations. For her it is “desirable” that we analyze the socio-historical forces that produce desire, that we ask, who profits, who extracts surplus value, who gets exploited while we are enjoying the pleasures of being a desiring subject. This project appears to provide a useful way of understanding how desire and power are co-implicated.

But Hennessy’s argument implies an assimilation of consumers’ desire and sexual desire, leaving no fissure, no gap between them. The “new consuming subject of desire” (Hennessy 110) in Late Capitalism translates its sexual desire into consumption, where practices of consumption function as a form of sexual stimulation and—unfulfillable, permanently deferred—satisfaction. While Hennessy is certainly right that today we can hardly imagine any desire independent from capitalism, it is neither convincing that there are no other forces at work in desire (forces which might contradict or subvert a capitalist logic) nor that consumption can be reduced to a logic of desire. The question remains: Can desire be reduced to being a product—be it a product of capitalist processes or of power/knowledge systems? What if this product conditions further productions? Do they necessarily replicate the logic of their becoming or can we expect forms of resistance?

Public Space, Social Relations, and the State’s Desire

Liberal tolerance proudly offers a variety of private and commercialized leisure-time pleasures to deviant sexualities. If one wants to oppose this gesture of generosity, this means occupying public spaces and loudly/proudly articulating those various desires that won’t stay in the closet any longer. But more

important than demanding recognition and taking up public space would be the transformation of a hierarchized hegemonic public which, up to now, functions along the lines of discrimination, normalization, exclusion, and violence. Can we conceptualize desire as a productive force in power struggles over sexuality's social existence? Can we reject the smooth fit of desire into the public/private divide or even challenge this divide? Is it possible or promising to make use of the metaphor of space in order to "deterritorialize" desire?

Thinking about the public as "public space" refers to the very materiality of space without creating an opposition between the material and the discursive. Space, from a political as well as a geographical point of view, is seen as "semiotic materiality." Rural and urban areas, gay ghettos, lesbian lands, heterosexualized malls, and sanctified churches—all of these spaces simultaneously hold material, symbolic, and imaginary dimensions. Gill Valentine, a British geographer, supports the use of the concept of performativity in order to understand space not as a given, not as "stages or pre-existing places where [something, e.g. sexuality] is played out" (Valentine 154), but rather as an effect of performances and performative articulations (see also Gregson and Rose, cited by Valentine):

The repetitive performances which produce everyday heterosexual space take the form of many acts: from heterosexual couples kissing and holding hands as they walk down the street, to advertisements and shop window displays that present images of contented "nuclear" families; and from heterosexualised conversations that permeate queues at bus stops and banks to the piped music articulating heterosexual desires that fill shops, bars and restaurants. . . . These acts are produced within regulatory regimes which serve to discipline and constrain the performances that are possible. . . . The power of heterosexuality therefore depends on being able to repeatedly define people and spaces in particular ways. However, because spaces do not pre-exist their performance but rather are iterative, there are always possibilities that disruptions and slippages may occur in their production, or that the disciplinary regimes that regulate them might fail, with the consequence that powerful discourses are not replicated but changed or done differently. (Valentine 155)

This sounds promising. But "the consequence" Valentine is suggesting is not quite necessary: Why, how, and under what circumstances do failures, or disruptions, or a sabotage of proper performances not only interrupt, but actually transform hegemonic discourses? When does a deterritorialization occur? Here it might be useful to turn again to Probyn, who at least offers a method for recognizing and mapping transformations. Her project of looking for images that travel and creating empirical interrelations on social surfaces enables her to indicate how slippages and disruptions deterritorialize a traditional territory, form new territories, and, maybe, effect reterritorialization. From her point of

view, desire can be seen as the driving force of those productive movements, although this demands a break with traditional concepts—of desire as well as of politics:

For desire is a profoundly upsetting force. It may totally rearrange what we think we want: desire skews plans, setting forth unthought-of possibilities. But as a term within traditional models. . . desire has tended to reassure the established order of things. It has either been totally missing or has served to operate as the ever unattainable referent: the lack that guarantees signification, a lack that is traditionally figured as women or other. (Probyn 43)

Here Probyn talks about psychoanalytic as well as poststructuralist models of communication. But what if we transfer her analysis to the field of the political and try to understand “desire as a profoundly upsetting force”? Traditional models of the political, the political as a mode of organizing society, deploy the opposition of public and private. They construct the public as an arena of the political, distinguished from a private that serves as its supposedly pre-political ground. Innumerable critiques have been articulated against this distinction; in fact, this critique might be no less constitutive of the political than the distinction itself. Feminist thinkers in particular have promoted the politicization of the so-called private. They have pointed out how “private tasks” like reproductive and emotional labor (including sex-work and love, including the reproduction of exploitable work-power as well as of individuals, their socialization into language, culture, and skills as well as their hetero-gendering and hetero-sexualization) are not only regulated by public norms and institutions, but also co-produce the public in its androcentric, racist and classist normativity, its border controls, its exclusions.

. . . and the State’s Desire?

However, Queer Theory alone has consistently posed the question of the relevance of desire for installing and reproducing a binary-gendered and hetero-sexualized sphere of the political. Here I am not only talking about “the public,” about a cultural sphere, or civil society; I would also like to draw attention to the organizing principles of political institutions, of the legal field, of capitalist processes, and forms of citizenship. Even nation-building can be analyzed, as Jacqui Alexander (1994) does in the case of postcolonial Bahamas, demonstrating its dependence on a dialectical heterosexualization of state-institutions and gendered subjectivities. She points out how state-politics serve a heterosexualized tourist industry while safeguarding patriarchal violence and homophobic abjection. Similarly Davina Cooper (2002) exposes the “sexualized character of the state itself” when she maps state scholarship in lesbian and gay

studies, and studies the image of the state in queer theory and activism. For her, the concept of “the desiring state” will be a main field of interest for future queer studies. She points out three main aspects of this research yet-to-come: first of all “the way erotic energy can be found in projects and technologies of governance,” secondly, “the extension of capitalist market relations within modern liberal states” (246), since they mobilize sexuality and desire, and, thirdly, a more explicit sexual citizenship that introduces erotic desires and intimacies into the public sphere. This last aspect seems to be the most provocative, but also the most hypothetical. Unfortunately, Cooper does not indicate how this might help to explain and democratize the state’s desires.

Even though Nico Beger tends in the same direction when he focuses on “the desire for rights” as a driving force in l/g/b/t politics, he is more skeptical of its revolutionary effects. For him, desire induces political change while at the same times affirming hegemonic concepts of love, intimacy, and kinship; it never simply escapes the structuring force of heteronormativity: “Any analysis of rights politics needs to centralize desire as the motor of taking up oneself as a person belonging to a community in law or in social or political orders. Claiming rights becomes an appropriation of desire made relevant in the discourses of participation and citizenship, which are—among others—based on the regulatory practices of a gender order” (Beger 74). When Beger makes the concept of desire central to his analysis of l/g/b/t and queer politics in the European Union, he does so because it enables him to connect “the desire for the expression of one’s sexuality and gender and the desire for equal rights” (71) as equally and interconnectedly constituting politics. Desire here is to be understood as an outcome of discursive practices and unconscious processes. As such it is productive of social realities, including identities, and it connects subjectivity and politics.

Shane Phelan does not use the concept of desire in her discussion of “queering citizenship.” But when she votes for the end of the “phallic citizen” she implicitly reminds us that this phallic citizen relies on a notion of desire that nourishes his (!) illusion of self-sufficiency by engaging women/other as his affirming mirror (Phelan 159). Instead of rescuing desire from its phallicentric function Phelan uses the term “passion” to promote her project of queering citizenship. Like Cooper, she opens up the idea that passions are not absent from governance and state policies, though they are denied by a supposedly rational and neutral liberal state. This works so well, because especially “the passions of adhesion—love (whether homosocial, familial, sexual, or all of these), empathy, desire” (Phelan 160) are delegated to the realm of the private. Therefore, Phelan suggests that we make explicit the hidden passions in public policies, that we problematize them and introduce these privatized “adhesive passions” into the public.

Even though I find this a provocative move that holds the possibility of challenging established norms and stereotypes, I am nevertheless skeptical about Phelan's idealistic understanding of love, empathy and desire. First of all, she runs the danger of condemning or devaluing all distancing or aggressive passions as well as sexual or kinship-relations that include anger, fear and hate in their repertoire. Also, she overestimates the transformative power of compassion over conflict. Thus she reproduces a gendered binary of "masculine" and "feminine" passions, which, even if she puts them in inverted commas, create an opposition of a "masculine state" versus a promising "queer community." The latter is idealistically characterized as "capable of acknowledging and thriving on the adhesive passions, using them to overcome fears and angers that have been signature passions of our times" (Phelan 160). In my opinion it seems more desirable to affirm contradictory and conflictual movements and to find non-violent ways to live them rather than to try to overcome them altogether.

Desire as Method?

All the above suggestions make it clear that it is not adequate to simply break up the public/private divide if it means that we gain access to the public only under the conditions of an ongoing heterosexualized superiority or a universal capitalist logic. Rather, the challenge is to rework the public so that it may embrace formerly privatized practices of reproduction, sexuality, intimacy, as well as to fight hierarchies, exclusions or normative inclusions, covert or overt? normalizations, and violence. How far does Probyn's suggestion of understanding "desire as a method" support this task? Why is it interesting for her to think about desire's methods? Why does she insist, that desire is not a metaphor but a method?

If we consult *Webster's International Dictionary* we learn that a "method" is a "procedure or process for attaining an object. . . a systematic procedure, technique, or set of rules employed in philosophical inquiry. . . a way, technique, or process for doing something. . . a body of skills and techniques." According to these definitions, what is convincing about "methods" is that they can be used to solve theoretical as well as practical problems. They might even transform into a "strategy" for reaching a political goal if we call the goal an "object." Thus, looking at Probyn's aim to use desire as a method, one can show how this enables her to combine analysis and anticipation within the same process. To figure out variable relations on social surfaces also means to create new images of the social as well as to anticipate a different future. Desire, if we recapitulate Probyn's view, is a productive force that works as a movement. It travels in images and creates connections between words and things and bodies.

Accordingly, to understand desire as a method means “to put desire to work in lines of flight, lines that scramble the subjective, the sexual, the social.” To use this method as “a theoretical strategy, and a mode of cultural criticism” (62) means to engage and be engaged by desire, to “write within the engagement of desire [and to be] beyond interpretation. . . that seek[s] the origin of meaning” (61). Instead, one seeks for becomings and for new lines of flight.

Explicitly, Probyn mentions that she is not interested in just any kind of desire, but specifically seeks queer desire: a desire that cannot be defined by classificatory logic, that cannot be essentialized within individuals, but (to use a Deleuzian term) spreads itself over things: a desire traveling in queer images, creating queer images. Though:

To be absolutely clear about it, the image is queer not in and of itself but in relation to other images and bodies—a movement that refuses to be policed at the same time that it says come to me, as it bends the line, causing changed relations of proximity. (60)

Does this become useful for macro-political analysis and socio-structural transformations? Central to Probyn’s task is the question of how social categories translate into singularity. Social categories like race, class, and gender, the “zones of difference” available and enforced by a certain society, define the “specificity” of a certain context. They define the position from where lines of flight can evolve, they propose certain directions, certain speeds, certain modes of transportation; yet, they never endanger the contingency of desire’s movement:

The movement from specificity to singularity can be understood as processes that render the virtual actual—the ways in which the general becomes realized by individuals as singular. Simply put, we do not live our lives as categories: as a lesbian I should do this; as a feminist I ought to do that. (22)

To “render the virtual actual” also means that there is no clear-cut distinction between desire as a theoretical and as a practical method; to think singularity without referring to identity models or classificatory logic is a way of making connections that can be actualized in texts, and thoughts, as well as in practices and social relations. I find it very convincing that Probyn’s method is simultaneously theoretical as well as practical, discursive as well as material, personal as well as social. But it seems to me, concerning the question of singularity, one should not so easily give up on a movement in the other direction: to render the actual virtual. The task would hereby be to create “specificities” that condition the way singularities relate and intersect, without reactivating a logic of classification and exclusion.

If we try to understand and transform institutions, formalized and legally regulated processes, governance and state practices, it can be useful to strengthen singularities in order to subvert the rule of institutionalized or hegemonic power, but it also seems to be necessary to know how specificities are constituted, secured, and reproduced. Of course, we can point out how specificities are rendered singular, and how in this process they produce unforeseen effects and assemblages. But assemblages are not necessarily dynamic formations: they stabilize and become hegemonic. This would mean turning the coin around and asking how singularities transform into specificities. Not only from an analytical but also from a transformative point of view it is interesting to know how singularities interact as forces in power relations and form specificities. Political activism that aims to intervene on a structural level cannot simply break up specificities into singularities and celebrate their contingent relations without taking up the “contingent necessity” to produce closures and to decide what exactly it “desires” to enforce.

Politics means that even if I know that I cannot overcome the arbitrariness of my own perspective, decisions have to be made—decisions which in the political arena are decisions that concern others—and, most probably upset others, provoke others, enrage others. If we do want to understand desire as a force of social transformation and not give away the chance to “design” public space and socio-political processes we not only have to ask how specificity translates into singularity, but also how we want singularity to translate into specificity.

“How we want”—another question of desire. Here again, Probyn might offer desire as a mobilizing force and images as modes of transportation. Images create assemblages of and in public spaces, assemblages which are singular even if they desire specificity. Therefore, in every single instance we would have to ask how queer resistance against identity categories and normative classifications produces material-semiotic effects on social surfaces: Do these effects shatter traditional value systems, scandalize? social inequalities and rearrange hierarchies? Do they irritate well-established, hegemonic habits? Do they subvert institutionalized versions of heterosexuality and binary gender arrangements? And then it might just turn out that we perceive new productive movements: private desires spill over into the public sphere; queer images connect with hegemonic practices; queer practices infuse images of the state.

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