

To Come: Queer Desire and Social Flesh

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There is only desire and the social, and nothing else.

(Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 29)

... and something always escapes.

(Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 217)

STRESZCZENIE: Artykuł "To, co nadchodzi: odmienne pożądanie i ciało społeczne" jest próbą przeformułowania idei społeczności (sociality) za pomocą aparatu pojęciowego zaproponowanego przez Deleuze'a/Guattariego, a zwłaszcza ich koncepcji pożądania jako podstawowej siły produkującej to, co społeczne. Pożądanie jest w artykule zdefiniowane jako odmiencza tendencja do powstawania nowych formacji i podmiotowości w polu społecznym. Tej tendencji przeciwstawiony jest "popęd śmierci", który dąży do utrwalania (ossyfikacji) istniejących esencjalizujących się tożsamości, nabierających cech "przeznaczenia". W tym ujęciu odmienczość

byłaby samym procesem namnażania się różnicy, natomiast jednym z istotnych zadań teorii *queer* byłoby uważne obserwowanie tego, co dopiero "wyłania się" na horyzoncie praktyk społecznych. Nie odrzucając tego, co istnieje, *queer* skłania się w stronę tego, co nadchodzi. Traktując podejrzliwie wszelkie inwestycje w instytucjonalność i społeczną użyteczność, teoria *queer* powinna raczej skupiać się na tym, co (jeszcze) niespołeczne, co wirtualne, co niezaprężone w rozliczne funkcjonalności organów/organizmów/organizacji.

Deprywatyżacja / uspołecznienie pożądania, jego "de-edypalizacja", może być jednym ze sposobów wyjścia poza obecną konfigurację władzy, w której głównymi aktorami są indywidualistyczny i konsumpcjonistyczny neoliberalizm oraz autorytarny neokonserwatyzm. To, co społeczne, da się pomyśleć (za Hardtem i Negrim) jako niedający się okiełznać "cielesny" żywioł, w którym możliwe stają się nowe, nieprzewidziane połączenia i "asamblaże", nowe zbiorowości zespolone podług innych niż dotychczasowe parametrów przynależności. Umożliwiając nowe przepływy pożądania, *queer* destabilizuje każde rzekomo skończone, zamknięte i zunifikowane pole społeczne, zorganizowane w indywidualną tożsamość, w rodzinę, w społeczeństwo, w elektorat. Żadne takie "grodzenie" tego, co społeczne, nie jest nigdy do końca skuteczne: coś zawsze umyka - po to, aby mogło wyłonić się coś innego.

How do things emerge? How do we notice, how do we rise up to, how do we name them? How can we know *what* is emerging, if knowing presupposes a complete object? Can a "what" be determined at all in relation to emerging? Is it already here? Will it ever be? And is it going to kill me?

The way many scholars and activists practice it, queer theory is highly attentive to that which is emerging. If the drive behind more traditional LGBT activism is to create and solidify the "gay" constituency, to stabilize social and psychic entities so they can be easily managed, regulated, protected, instrumentalized, capitalized on etc., queer is never satisfied with one established constituency or another, and instead it constantly seeks new connections, alliances and coalitions, or - to use my favourite phrase - it constantly seeks new "bedfellows." LGBT thinks in terms of molar "wholes," such as sexual minorities or homosexual persons, while queer is actively engaged in the "becoming-queer" of sociality at large.[1] In other words, LGBT concentrates on the struggle for the rights of existing subject-positions, whereas queer stands for the basic right for new subjectivities to emerge. Paradoxically, then, the subject of queer movements is a subject that does not quite exist yet, that is yet-to-come (ex-statically), always in the process of becoming.[2] Formulaically speaking, from a queer perspective

the founding myth of "coming out" (the revelation of one's "true nature") must be replaced with, or followed by, an ethos of the "yet-to-come," with the sexual connotations of the phrase most welcome. It is not that "gay" does not exist for queer - but it is certainly not a final destination/destiny, not a *telos* happily (to be) achieved; it is a transition phase at best, a historically produced platform for other sexual formations to emerge. To be sure, queer is not simply about anticipating and registering new forms of sociality and subjectivity that may emerge: it is actively assisting certain emergings[3] (always careful not to perform an act of *capture*, i.e. of pushing the inherently multiple and diverse into a unitary category, a *one*); indeed, it is itself part of those becomings, it is itself always in the state of emerging. Turning away from the social work of reproduction, queer becomes an agent of a tireless social production. Queer agents generate, enable and turn into new subjects, individual as well as collective. Arguably, this production does not follow any institutional, state or family logic, but the ever productive forces of desire.

Although it cannot simply separate itself from that which already exists, queer situates itself closer to the realm of the possible, the potential, and the virtual. We have seen, recently, a vindication of "utopianism" in queer theorizing, most prominently in Jose Munoz's latest book, *Cruising Utopia*. Many of his insights are relevant to my

conceptualization of queerness, particularly his reevaluation of ephemeral and momentary forms and identities against the tradition of prioritizing solid and permanent ones. Munoz argues that "utopia exists in the quotidian" (9), that certain spaces or acts are "outposts of an actually existing queer future existing in the present" (56). He regards queerness as "a potentiality" (21), a term he borrows from Agamben's reading of Aristotle. More in a deleuzoguattarian vein, I would rather consider queerness in terms "virtuality" as distinct from possibility and potentiality. Deleuze defined the virtual as "real without being actual"; it has a creative capacity of its own that potentiality - always dependent on the actual - lacks (cf. Boundas 86-7). The virtual is internal to the real, but external to the actual, and thus that which is emerging does not simply depend on what is, but comes from the virtual outside, from the realm of the unpredictable. Queer is not an entity, a "whole" (like the figure of the homosexual or a sexual minority); instead, it is tendency and event, it resides between the virtual and its actualizations; it sits at the peripheries of the existing LGBT constituency and scans the horizon, internal as well as external, for that which is emerging. "The actualisation of the virtual is not a matter of closure, but openness," Thanem and Linstead assert (52); it is an event, i.e. "the capacity to open up the future and make things happen. In other words, the event is defined as event by virtue of its capacity to *change*, to make a difference" (51).[4] The LGBT

movement as we have known it relies mostly on potentiality. Where the possibility to legalize same-sex marriages springs up, much as they reproduce the Oedipal organization of the social, LGBT activists will invest heavily into this struggle. Queer does not necessarily downplay LGBT activism, but it is oriented more towards virtual subjects and communities. In this sense, queer politics does not have a proper constituency of its own, it cannot even claim an actual subject; rather than a politics of representation (who, on earth, does queer represent?) it is a politics of the virtual; its sense of what is possible and what is socially desirable is far more extensive than that of the more classical, mainstream forms of activism.

The molar investments of the LGBT movement should be countered with the molecular movements of queer desire. Risking perhaps a simplification of Deleuze's account, I would link such molar investments with the death drive, to which I would ascribe a greater importance than more standard readings of Deleuze would allow.[5] Not that I subscribe to a crude dualism of the struggle between life and death that Freud advocated late in his career. What I find interesting in Freud's thinking, however, is the perplexing connection of hate, aggression and the death drive with self-preservation (cf. Storr 58-60). Self-preservation means keeping oneself within one's boundaries, and so the hatred directed

against external objects helps to maintain and reaffirm those differentiating boundaries. As I see it, then, the death drive is about the tendency of an organ/organism/organization to preserve itself in its boundaries, in its structure, in its "pure essence" which can only appear to it as *fate* itself. [6] I certainly agree with Deleuze's contention that the death drive is closely bound to the Oedipal system of reproduction, but to me this bond is just a particular historical form the death drive has taken in specific social circumstances. My "dualism" is far from Manichean or dialectic: desire and the death instinct are neither reducible to each other, nor dialectically opposed; rather, I see them as codependent principles that jointly sustain and propel organic/psychic/social life. They do not fall neatly into the "positive" versus "negative" categories; the death drive ensures a relative stability and permanence of the molar system, but is simultaneously bound up with destructive impulses, whereas desire is more about molecular becomings of flesh and the incessant redrawing of boundaries, which sooner or later spells the end of any given molar entity, a "death." They are both life-giving and life-taking, but they project a different image of "the end": for the preservation/death instinct "the end" can only appear as a void, a nothingness, while for desire it is a breaking up of boundaries and structures, a release and re-orientation of flows.

It seems commonsensical that an organization/a structure should

seek its own continuation and preservation, but why should pure matter, in its desiring flows, desire organization and structure? Why should the matter that constitutes us and flows through us "agree" to sustain us as an organism? The molar/structural "needs" the death drive to counterbalance its degree of organization and complexity; the purely material/molecular does not need the death drive, but instead it desires organization as such in order to enhance its flows, to create Deleuzian machines. We should differentiate, it seems, between the desire for organization as such (which is of the order of desire) and the desire to preserve a given organization (which is of the order of the death drive). The death instinct is what organization generates - the impulse to defend itself against all the forces of dis- and non-organization, internal and external. The defense mechanism of the structure - of the "self" as fate - is so ferocious that it may take the form of self-aggression, a kind of "autoimmune disease" (or fascism): the structure (or its ghostly "imprint") must survive even at the cost of destroying its own substance.[7] (Deleuze and Guattari mention Hitler's telegram: "If the war is lost, may the nation perish"; I read this as an ultimate expression of the death drive which is ready to sacrifice the substance for the purity of the perfect idea - here, the idea of *Das Volk* .) Self-aggression (which to Freud was more primal than aggression against the "outside") is intimately, if paradoxically, tied up with the self-preservation of the organized structure.[8] Both kinds of aggression - external and

self-oriented - enhance the organism's boundary (don't we all pinch ourselves sometimes to confirm the reality of our existence?). Aggression is crucial for the establishment of a rigid inside and outside, and it inevitably works in both directions. It is through the inherent aggression of a structure that the structure defends itself against losing its boundaries, against the hybridizing movements of desire.

The death instinct construed in a more standard Freud-Lacanian way has enjoyed quite an important status within recent Anglo-Saxon queer theory, especially in the work of such leading theorists as Leo Bersani, Tim Dean or Lee Edelman. Admittedly, Lee Edelman's influential 2004 book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* brought "queer negativity" to its limit. His alignment of queer with "the social order's death drive" (3) seems to be a logical extension of Lacan's "negative" definition of desire as lack. In Edelman, queerness "figures [...] the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form" (9) and the queer subject is structurally bound to negativity and anti-production, which position they should acknowledge and embrace. I do not underestimate the strategic usefulness of situational appeals (ironic or other) to negativity, e.g. in the form of the cultural politics of queer shame and abjection. In fact, embracing "non-productivity" often proves very productive. What I do object to, however, is a tendency towards an

absolutization of (queer) negativity and stabilizing it through assigning to it a *structural* place within *the* (or every possible) social order. Behind Edelman's theorization there seems to lurk the assumption (which Deleuze and Guattari call "amusing") that "a society is identical with its structures" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 116), and particularly its Oedipal structures. Without recognizing the productivity of desire, "radical negativity" - a gaping void - seems to be the only alternative to the social order, and the only place of true resistance.

Deleuze and Guattari propose a perspective in which one may or should stand against molar social set-ups, but not against sociality as such (this would be an impossibility, since the desiring-production of the social remains operative even when desire desires its own repression, as is the case with fascism). Antonio Negri states succinctly that Deleuze and Guattari's political line in *A Thousand Plateaus* is "that which brings the molecular apparatus of desires to resist the molar order, to avoid it, to circumnavigate it, to flee it" (1191). He elaborates:

"The goal of the molar order is to absorb the force of desire and to reshape the apparatuses towards the sole end of blocking the [...] flux of the molecular: the molar is by definition the ontological obstacle of the molecular. On the other hand, molecular flux is

elusive, it perpetually seeks to upset the apparatuses of blockage and open the way to historicity. [...] (1190-91)"

Yet we cannot simply do without the molar. Without molar investments any effective opposition to, say, the neoliberalization of societies seems hardly possible, given capitalism's exceptional ability to reterritorialize and re-privatize any deterritorialized flows of desire. Thus, what I am arguing for (among other things) are molar investments that are *not* aligned with the Oedipal organization of the social and/or the death drive. Politics and activism must be carried out at both levels simultaneously, molar and molecular, actual and virtual (and I am not suggesting that LGBT activism is *all* about molar investments, while queerness is *all* about the molecular workings of desire). The molar dimension must not be simply dismissed, or opposed in absolute terms, and perhaps some Deleuzians have been a little too quick to combine it with paranoiac/fascist investments. Deleuze and Guattari warned not only against fascism at the molar level - it is easy to be antifascist in this way - but against microfascisms as well, "the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 215). Yes, we do desire "the great molar organization that sustains us, the arborescences we cling to, the binary machines that give us a well-defined status, the resonances we enter into, the system of overcoding that dominates us" (216).

Politics - especially revolutionary politics - must take place between the molar and the molecular; after all "molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes, and parties" (216-17).

In his article "Administering Sexuality; or, The Will to Institutionality" Roderick A. Ferguson looks at recent examples of formalization and institutionalization of "sexual orientation" in the university administration context. On the one hand, he notices a libidinal investment in such institutionalization on the part of "minority" subjects - who, in a way, only become fully authorized subjects through this process (in other words, it is an investment into *being a subject*), and on the other hand he emphasizes contemporary global neoliberalism's "effort to cannibalize difference and its potential for rupture" (162). "Formalizing certain forms of difference gives those forms permanence and institutional protection" (167), but at the same time it's a moment of subjugation, as a result of which queerness - rather than a vehicle for "collective, oppositional, and redistributive" policies (163) - becomes "the engine for a series of exclusions and alienations, particularly around class, gender, and race" (165). I would also stress the fact that claiming and being granted (or refused) "rights" from an institution legitimizes as much the petitioner as the institution itself. Institutions live in fear of losing

their legitimacy which consists in so much more than simply legal procedures; crucially, it is derived from molar axiologies (how does an institution reflect "our" values?), affective investments and trustful affiliations. By seeking recognition, formalization and institutionalization, queerness allies itself with the forces of Oedipalization and the death drive. Yes, institutions sustain social life (much like organs sustain the organism); yet, driven by the death instinct, they are opposed to the transforming forces of desire. In effect, queers become subjugated rather than subject groups, where the subjugated group investment "socially and psychically represses the desire of persons" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 280), while the subject group "causes desire to penetrate into the social field, and subordinates the socius or the form of power to desiring-production" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 348).[9] Resisting the will to institutionalization, then, the queer impulse should work against the subject itself as an institution (or the institutionalization of molecular flows of desire), against the desire to be further institutionalized, subsumed, regulated, made into a "whole" that becomes an organ of a bigger "whole."

Cohen and Ramlow argue that desire, "if it is anything at all besides this relentless movement toward multiplicitous connection, is queer" (para. 29). They describe it as consisting of "small

assemblages constantly bumping into each other, conjoining and forming bigger assemblages, falling apart and moving toward other combinations," as ubiquitous and inescapable, "constantly [...] forced into the molar or statistical identities that comprise the realm of the social" (para. 29). Yet for the combinations and recombinations of assemblages to take place, for contagious desires to spread, molar entities must likewise come into touch, collide, make love, interpenetrate, impregnate each other. A kiss between molar humans holds a very different story for the micro-organisms inhabiting the kissers' mouths, and their sexual exchanges. Mainstream molar activism is certainly useful: it produces new languages, new positions, new alliances. But "being useful" may be part of the problem, as well; elaborating on Deleuze's assertion that homosexuality's liberating capacity stems from having "no *social utility* whatsoever" (quoted in Conley 27), Conley writes: "A utilitarian model tends to be exploitative and thus, being close to capital, disables real desire. [...] To be 'useful', would be tantamount to entering into an existing society defined by hierarchies of categories and dominant, often expressive desire" (27). As long as the representatives of the species called "homosexual" keep to their prescribed social role (whatever that role be) and to their constituency, they are subject to, and a vehicle for, the social codings of desire. But the farther removed from social orderings, from their proper "place," the closer queers come to the

living social element, which I see, perhaps paradoxically, as the sphere of the "non-social," a notion analogous to that of "non-organization," as developed by Thanem and Linstead. Not to be confused with disorganization,

"non-organization is not reducible to organisation. Instead, it refers to that which is not organised, but nevertheless caught up with organisation in a complex and intricate relationship. Non-organisation is the dynamic forces that exist independently of organisation in that it subverts and resists, contradicts and interrupts, escapes, precedes and exceeds organisation. It is part of the rhizomatic movement of desire which is both imperceptible and yet makes its presence felt. (54-5)"

By being multiply "non-social" within a particular historical form of social organization, queers may in fact constitute a virtual outside (however "caught up with organisation in a complex and intricate relationship"), a non-utilitarian resource, as it were, of new flows of desire, new connections, new forms of social organization, and new subjectivities.

The non-social of queerness is related to virtuality and multiplicity as society's living tissue. As Lazzarato rightly points out, "the conversion of multiplicity into classes and of the thousand sexes into

heterosexuality functions both as the constitution of types and the repression of multiplicity, as the constitution and coding of the norm and as the neutralisation of the virtualities of other becomings" (175). He concludes that "to confine the outside, to confine the virtual, means neutralising the power of invention and codifying repetition so as to drain it of all power of variation, thereby reducing it to a simple reproduction" (176). The same forces of normative codifications operate within the "gay community" and have been dubbed "homonormativity" by Lisa Duggan. Majoritarian and minoritarian are relative terms: there is no minority that does not (or may not) constitute, at another level, a majority. Since the deterritorializing movement of desire always proceeds from the minoritarian "outside" ("For me desire is always "outside"; it always belongs to a minority"; Guattari in Genosko, 213), queer emerges the moment the desiring impetus of the LGBT movement turns against itself and the revolutionary becomes merely reformist. Queer comes out of the insatiable desire for difference, desire as difference; it is a necessary outflow or escape of desire from a social field that is becoming more and more heavily coded, territorialized, regulated and normativized.

Although queer interventions into hetero- and homonormativities at the molar level are often relatively easy to acknowledge, it is much more difficult to register actual shiftings and re-orientations of

desire, the imperceptible molecular social movements that queerness enables. Still, it seems possible to devise a heuristic method that marks the presence of a (micro)current or a vector of change, even before any new category emerges and, possibly, solidifies into an identity. My example is taken from the ostensibly trivial, or even absurd, practice of extending the LGBT acronym to include new social identities or sexual modalities that emerge out of the social field to claim visibility and recognition. My argument is that even if this practice stems from the identitarian logic of the early gay and lesbian movement, with time it brings that very logic to an aporia, to a point where it breaks down and shows its internal inadequacies. Rather than as the usual designate for an archival catalogue of ontological identities, my analysis aims to (subversively) read the multidirectional expansion of LGBTetc as indicating the inevitable failure of the regulatory logics of subsumption, part-to-whole structuration, taxonomic cataloging etc.[10] My example is certainly not meant to stabilize and legitimize the existing categories; rather, it illustrates the processes through which new formations arise (as a result of the workings of desire), and then often congeal into an "ontological status." Queerness may, of course, claim "life beyond categories," but such claims ring a somewhat naive note. It seems more productive to assume that the only way the "non-categorical" can make itself seen or felt is precisely *through* categories, or rather through their inevitable

discontent (non-closure, inadequacy, internal fracture etc.). Consequently, my point is that queer politics in some "pure" form is impossible: the processes of "ontologization" seem inevitable (at least in the present socio-epistemic environment), and so queer politics cannot simply ignore them or declare their rejection, but should rather actively engage with them, work *in* them and *through* them in order to get beyond them. I do not merely invoke an evolutionary process through which the existing categories will slowly evolve into new ones, whether through queer's active subversions or "naturally." The existing categories can never fully determine that which comes, but what they do, importantly, is provide a horizon of the possible, thus constituting a virtual, unpredictable outside (exactly the realm of the *impossible*) from which the "new" may emerge.

The story of the LGBTetc acronym is a rather familiar one. Initially, GL would simply mark a separate homosexual constituency, as opposed to "straight." Neither the subdivision of the "homosexual" into male gay and lesbian (with their distinct histories and social positionings), nor the addition of bisexuality seemed to jeopardize the basic binary system, the "scientific" conclusion being that there exist three "sexual orientations." This seemed to bring the LGB acronym to a closure, a completion. But soon the "transgender" sprang up and glued itself to the acronym - a rather messy category

that defies any neat systematization in terms of a unified identity or the alignment between gender identity and "sexual orientation." The advent of queer added a Q to the acronym (LGBTQ), thus proving that Q does not simply equal LGBT, but offers a new quality, constitutes a difference. The story did not stop there, as we know: showing utter disregard for structural consistency, the acronym kept growing: I was added for "Intersexual," raising a completely new set of questions concerning the ethics of social and medical practices; A was added for "Asexual" or "Allies" (this ambiguity is itself quite telling); "asexual" (like transgender) deconstructs the gay-straight binary, while "allies" indicates a broader social context for gender- and sexuality-based difference, the emergence of new connections, coalitions, and constituencies. Thus some people choose to use the acronym LGBTQIA. But we could go on and on, almost infinitely; one could come up, for instance, with something like LGBTIQQNN2SAAPPNASC, which would stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, non-normative, two-spirit, straight-ally, asexual, pansexual, polyamorous, none-of-the-above, all-of-the-above, some-of-the-above, constantly-changing.[11]

What do we learn from this amusing letter game? First, let us notice that the categories which are made to stick so neatly together in fact pertain to different "orders of things," to different systematizations

following different parameters of difference. It is very legitimate to ask "what does an asexual person have to do with a promiscuous gay male?" or "what does a declared intersex person have to do with a post-op transsexual who rigidly adheres to the gender binary?" The acronym points to new hybrid constituencies, to "strange bedfellows," cutting across received taxonomies, across genres, species and identities. Second, the acronym started out as a closed catalogue, with the relation between the component terms being that of exclusive disjunction: you could be either this or that (with the originary disjunction between "gay" and "straight"). But - because "something always escapes" - the acronym has kept expanding ever since, indicating a never-ending proliferation of positions, subjectivities and collectivities, while the relation between the terms became more and more uncertain, allowing the "and-and" conjunction (one can be lesbian and queer, for instance), or even "neither-nor" (some self-declared, category-hating queers would embrace this option). One could argue for one open-ended category instead of this potentially infinite proliferation of categories; actually some people do use the term "queer" in this most general, open-ended sense (but this makes particular groups and identities invisible again, after they have struggled so hard to gain social visibility), while others come up with alternative terms, such as "non-heterosexual persons" (which is very problematic on too many accounts to mention). However, the point of this ever-growing

nature of the acronym is exactly that it is neither a closed catalogue nor an open-ended one, or it is both at the same time: at any single moment in time it seems relatively closed, but simultaneously it is always open to the emergence of new, unforeseen formations and visibilities; it opens up into the virtual and reaches out beyond the apparently finite social field. The categories inevitably multiply, testifying to an enormous queer productivity in the social field (almost fulfilling the biblical commandment "Go and multiply"). Besides, the relationship between "part" and "whole" gets redefined: "queer" sometimes stands for the whole of the acronym, but it is otherwise a part of it; the closed catalogue contains, as its element, an open-ended catalogue (Q) that is capable of "swallowing" the whole of which it is part. Another point is that the "uncontrolled growth" of the acronym prevents administrative forces from a convenient "flattening out" of the multiplicity of categories into a common master category, whose subcategories would be subjected to a generic parameterization. Categorizations are as necessary at the molar level of social and psychic life as they are arbitrary, reductionist, and ultimately *always* insufficient and inadequate; do we really want to see ourselves reduced to a single letter? Through this orgiastic multiplication, categories lose their apparent ontological status and become vehicles of social production, vehicles of desire. Last but not least, I think that the expanding acronym reveals the additive logic of desire, which

progresses through an infinite horizontal conjunction: and... and... and... and... There is no filiation, no reproduction, no heredity involved between the constituent terms: "gay" is in no way a parent category for "intersexual," for example; instead there is the movement of contagion, the productive spread of an epidemic.[12] All of this is quite a lesson for our understanding of "the social" and its productive processes.

Considering the present configuration of power in much of the Western world, in which the two dominant political modes are neoliberalism's entrepreneurial individualism that commodifies and consumes difference as "local color," and neoconservatism's reliance on structures of normative authority and a communitarianism regulated by charismatic leadership (with a weak left that either emulates the liberal humanist rhetoric, or else remains distrustful of queerness and other "trendy" ideas), queer can help build a new social ethos based on the primacy of the social over privatized "individuals" or proto-fascist "communities" - however hard it may be to give up the liberal language of individual rights without automatically falling into a crude communitarianism that easily sacrifices the individual to the "interests" of a majority. One of the strategies towards this aim is an emphatic deprivatization of desire, for instance through a direct sexualization of the social field (a point stressed repeatedly by Guy Hocquenghem).[13]

Today, social and political life concentrates predominantly on "persons," their rights and interests; to change this, queer should stress the non-personal modes of social existence.[14] The non-personal not only escapes the Oedipal organization of the social, the capture of desire in the institutions of the Oedipal symbolic order, but it also calls for an ethics of communal sharing and a deprivatization of social tissue. To be sure, the non-personal has broader connotations than the pre-personal: the latter is already caught up in an organizational process, a condensing teleology, a developmental scheme, of which a larva may serve as an apt example. Not everything that is non-personal is destined to become personal (and, consequently, post - personal). The larval/pre-personal is, of course, part of the process, but it refers to matter getting captured in an organizing/organized structure, whereas the non-personal points to elements not yet attached, or subsumed, or related, within a system. I would venture to say that the pre-personal/larval belongs with potentiality (the larva may only develop into a certain form, or a distortion thereof), while the non-personal belongs with the virtual.

In my analysis, a queer vision of society is close to that proposed by Hardt and Negri in their notion of social flesh, which is "common living substance, [...] pure potential, an unformed life force, and in this sense an element [like earth or water] of social being, aimed

constantly at the fullness of life" (192). Such elemental social flesh resists "the hierarchical organs of a political body" (192); instead, it is "an open, plural composition," never "a unitary whole" (190). As a figure of the endlessly productive multitude, social flesh is self-organizing matter, with the outcome of these organizational processes never final or fully determined; it can always "organize itself otherwise" (189). This unpredictable open-endedness is what accounts for the monstrosity of social flesh in that it "always exceeds the measure of any traditional social bodies" (196). In his insightful discussion of Hardt and Negri's conceptualization of social flesh, Steven Shaviro describes the multitude as "irreducibly diverse: it cannot be identified according to any criterion of identity politics, or even of social class" (para. 2). Hardt and Negri "celebrate the multitude's tireless productivity [...] and its drive to push beyond all limits and violate all norms" (para. 5). At bottom, the notion of social flesh refers us back to the production of *the common* as that which defies all boundaries and existing categories, even as it keeps producing persons and (groups organized around) social categories, including sexual categories. One might recall Margaret Thatcher's infamous statement that there is no such thing as society, there are only individual men and women and there are families. The queer/deleuzoguattarian conceptualization of society is just the opposite: there are no indivisible persons and there is no Oedipal "family"; "there is only desire and the social, and nothing else"

(Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 29).

Rather than seek recognition and protection through (and thus lend legitimacy to) existing social institutions, with their castrating and hierarchizing machines, queer will create its own modes of non-phallic connectivity and collectivity, its own ephemeral institutions and groupings that go far beyond the family, the nation, or even "the human race." Cutting across every pure genre and category, queer will oppose the death drive through hybridization and creative transformation; it will form "unnatural alliances," to use Patricia MacCormack's phrase,[15] or "monstrous families" in which the drive to identify and belong will be replaced by the desire to connect and mutate. Queer production takes place through enabling new flows of desire and new connections, through hybridization and contagion, and thus it opposes Oedipal reproduction through filiation. It is not even new connections as such, actually, but more: new modes of connectivity; not simply molar alliances and coalitions, not conjugations of deterritorialized flows,[16] but a mode of connection in which the pre-existing entities cease to exist. As such, queerness (often reduced to "homosexuality") cannot be simply another organ in society's body, another instance of the same underlying (genetic) structure that produces social institutions; rather, it must be "the bad gene," an intervention in the entire field of sexuality as such, in the entire social

field. It is not about a nice gay couple living next door; if queer exists at all, we must all be queer on the molecular level; if it is happening somewhere within the social, it is (virtually) happening everywhere (but of course effective walls and blockages are created to prevent the free propagation of the flow, the spread of the queer epidemic).[17] A glimpse of a similar vision can be found, I think, in Walt Whitman's celebration of a perfectly horizontal, never-ending procession of comrades and lovers ("Do you know what it is as you pass to be loved by strangers?" 122) - but also in everyday queer practices in all parts of the world. Facing a stranger, a queer subject is always aware of a potential (or virtual) bond between them; "we could be lovers" is her introduction to everything he encounters, "we could hybridize." This attitude counters what Žižek called, in an interview, the evilness of love (which to me is just an Oedipal notion of love): to love means to choose one from among many and thus disturb the universe's equilibrium; "it is you I love, rather than him or her or it or them." Hence it seems to me that the polyamorous movement is a natural next step in the proliferation of social bonds, relations and subjectivities.

Arguably, the heavy oedipalization, regulation and repression of homosexual desire (in the sense given to the term by Guy Hocquenghem[18]) only testifies to its subversive and revolutionary force, capable of redefining any social order. The

invention of the "homosexual" (and other sexual deviants) in the 19th century was the system's concession to homosexual desire with a view to containing its power, castrating and inscribing it within existing social institutions (gay marriage is thus a very logical consequence of that original move). But although it was the system's strategem to uphold and reaffirm its control, the invention of the homosexual also proved productive in unpredicted ways, redirecting flows of desire within the social field. If, arguably, queer can claim a ("structurally") privileged position in the enabling of desire's productivity, it is because queerness is one of the "(non)places" where the Oedipal machine is likely to fail, so that *something escapes*. As a vehicle for the de-oedipalization of the social field, it is also capable of producing ever new modes of connectivity/collectivity. By opening up new flows of desire, queer brings into the social a multiplicity that always underlies any apparently "complete," unified, compartmentalized social field, organized neatly into a self, a family, a society, a constituency. I have argued above that the LGBTetc acronym's queer logic can be construed as one of the manifestations of sociality's multitude, or desire's ability to override any apparently stable historical structuration of sexuality, sex, gender etc. - defended, as it were, by the death instinct's insistence on the structure's "being" (and its antithetical void) as its very "fate." Social formations do emerge, yet they are never fate, never God-given essences, however

institutionalized and naturalized and sanctified. Within social flesh, virtuality's open field that produces the social, something always escapes - for something always to emerge.

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[1] "Gays have to make pronouncements on sexuality it it. At the
same time, their critique has to bear on the *entire* social field. By
escaping the heterosexual model and the localisation of this model,
gays can be leading a micropolitics of desire that changes what
organises, dominates and represses all of society [...]" (Conley 27).

[2] "[O]nly a minority is capable of serving as the active medium of
becoming, but under such conditions that it *ceases to be a definable
aggregate in relation to the majority* " (Deleuze and Guattari,
A Thousand Plateaus 291; emphasis TS). Cf. also Anna
Hickey-Moody and Mary Lou Rasmussen's evaluation of the
Butlerian and Deleuzian accounts of subjectivity.

[3] Not every new emerging is equally welcome, of course: as
a midwife of that which comes, queer must sometimes perform an
act of abortion.

[4] Mikko Tuhkanen connects Deleuze's virtuality with Michel
Foucault's theorization of homosexuality as practical
experimenting with new kinds of relationality; he quotes Foucault:
"Sexuality is something that we ourselves create-it is our own
creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our
desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our
desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms
of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it's a possibility for creative life. ...
[W]e have to create a gay life. To *become* " (382). Cf. also Heiner's
discussion of Foucault's later work, particularly pp. 42-44.

[5] To oppose Freud's dualism and reaffirm the primacy of desire,
Deleuze construes the death instinct as desire's own "trick," as the

"perverse" desire for, and production of, lack and anti-production. As such, it is not fundamental, but derivative, it is "historical and political, not natural" (Baugh 63). I agree that the death drive is an instance of repressed desire, but I would still see this repression as more fundamental to the functioning of desire than in some other Deleuzian accounts.

[6] It is not by coincidence that, as Christian Kerslake points out, "the death drive [...] has origins in Freud's discussion of fate" (146).

[7] A rhizomatic extension of my argument into Jacques Derrida's elaboration of the concept of autoimmunity needs a thorough consideration that the limited space of the present paper does not allow me to undertake. What Derrida finds in the biological phenomenon of autoimmunity is his (and deconstruction's) perennial theme: the aporetic undecidability between same and other or between any opposing terms. My purpose here is somewhat different as I consider the identity preservation impulse in relation to the work of desire, and I certainly do not see the two as a binary. It is the death drive that can be argued to follow the logic of autoimmunity: it is the pharmakon that guards the individual system's permanence even as it condemns it to an inevitable extinction (the logical corollary of an identity is a void, just as one must be eternally opposed to zero). But the death drive is itself a result of desire turning against itself, so

the autoimmune condition can be seen, at bottom, as desire working to override the organism's death drive, destroying the "living unit" in the act. If desire is always the desire to become other (rather than protect any integrity/health/wholeness), autoimmunity is an appropriate illustration of the self's own molecular "war with itself" and the urge to become other. Thus, desire is as much involved in the processes of life's self-perpetuation, as in the dissolving of life's received forms. Desire always problematizes the "self" that the death drive works so hard to legitimate and preserve. (See also Ed Cohen's use of autoimmunity to propose an alternative conceptualization of identity.)

[8] For Freud, the original death instinct is the drive towards the self's return to, dissolution in, matter after the "detour" that life is. Yet Freud passivizes matter, he thinks of it as a *stasis*, and connects movement to life, while it is life-structures, in fact, that ensure a relative stasis in the midst of constant flows of matter. Cf. Freud, *passim*.

[9] Cf. Hocqenghem: "The gay movement can be the producer of subject groups [...]. In the subject group, the opposition between the collective and the individual is transcended; the subject group is stronger than death because the institutions appear to it to be mortal" (147).

[10] In psychoanalytic terms, I would say that my reading distinguishes between the social "ego" (Lacan's "subject of the enunciated") which speaks the language of identities and rights, and the social "subject of enunciation" - i.e. the performative subject whose analysis reveals the desiring production of the ego . Or else, the difference is between the ontologizing predicates (L stands for Lesbian stands for me, etc.) and the entire "field of speech" which has a logic of its own and makes the production of the acronym (with its constituent identitarian categories) possible in the first place. By looking at the whole context of the speech act (or even better: a series of speech acts), the analyst is able to determine an underlying force or structuring principle behind the speaking subject(s). It is the desiring "social" itself that communicates through the growth of the acronym, more than through the individual categories that the acronym aspires to designate. In other words, the "structuring history" of the acronym has its own story to tell, very different from what each "letter" would have to say.

[11] The order of the letters in the acronyms corresponds loosely to certain historical developments, but is in fact arbitrary; it points not only to the randomness of desire, but also its productive temporal nature.

[12] "We oppose epidemic to filiation, contagion to heredity,

peopling by contagion to sexual reproduction, sexual production. Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 241).

[13] "The special characteristic of the homosexual intervention is to make what is private - sexuality's shameful little secret - intervene in public, in social organisation. It demonstrates that alongside (and perhaps in opposition to) conscious political investments which are based on the broad social masses united by their interests, there is a system of unconscious or libidinal investments whose repression depends precisely on the capacity of the political system to think of itself as the only possible one" (Hocquenghem 136).

[14] "The task of schizoanalysis is that of tirelessly taking apart egos and their presuppositions; liberating the prepersonal singularities they enclose and repress; mobilizing the flows they would be capable of transmitting, receiving, or intercepting; establishing always further and more sharply the schizzes and the breaks well below conditions of identity; and assembling the desiring-machines that countersect everyone and group everyone with others. For everyone is a little group (*un groupuscule*) and must live as such [...]." (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 362).

[15] "Unnatural alliances are molecular entrances into something else's politics, desires, alliances that traverse proportion and proportionality rather than swap it or change places within the maintained hierarchy. [...] Hybrids are not nouns, but verbs. They are inherently unnatural and resist naturalisation because they cannot be placed within taxonomy - they move too fast and transform too quickly and, especially when they enter into imperceptible participations, cannot perceive themselves. [...] The medical and social study of aberrations - from congenital monsters to queers - could be resisted through a politics of hybridity, which requires the hybrid to be part of a pack that collects those who do not resemble each other" (McCormack 145-5).

[16] "Since real transformation requires the recombination of deterritorialised elements in mutually supportive ways, social or political processes are truly revolutionary only when they involve assemblages of connection rather than conjugation" (Patton 71).

[17] "[N]o 'gay liberation movement' is possible as long as homosexuality is caught up in a relation of exclusive disjunction with heterosexuality, a relation that ascribes them both to a common Oedipal and castrating stock, charged with ensuring only their differentiation in two noncommunicating series, instead of bringing to light their reciprocal inclusion and their transverse

communication in the decoded flows of desire (included disjunctions, local connections, nomadic conjunctions). In short, sexual repression, more insistent than ever, will survive all the publications, demonstrations, emancipations, and protests concerning the liberty of sexual objects, sources, and aims, as long as sexuality is kept-consciously or not-within narcissistic, Oedipal, and castrating co-ordinates that are enough to ensure the triumph of the most rigorous censors [...]" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 350-51).

[18] Guy Hocquenghem never tires of making the distinction between the homosexual and homosexual desire. As he explains, "Homosexual desire becomes homosexuality and falls into the trap of the Oedipus complex" (112). The alternative kind of social bonding that homosexual desire produces is, according to Hocquenghem, a "grouping of the anus," reminiscent of "primary sexual communism" characterized by "plugging in of organs [...] subject to no rule or law" (111), which is a trope that brings us back to Hardt and Negri's concept of social flesh as an embodiment of the common. This grouping "causes the 'social' of the phallic hierarchy, the whole house of cards of the 'imaginary', to collapse" (111). What collapses, in particular, is the logic of sublimation as well as the distinctions between the private and the public, the individual and the social. Hocquenghem's Deleuzoguattarian account of desire

seems not very far from the one I have been developing in this paper: it is desire desiring itself and its own productivity rather than its own Oedipal lack which produces the death drive and the identitarian logic of (among others) the "homosexual," seeking institutional legitimization and stabilization.

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