

BEING INAPPROPRIATE: QUEER ACTIVISM IN CONTEXT

By
Amy Watson

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Department of Gender Studies*

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Supervisor: Professor Allaine Cerwonka

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Abstract

This thesis offers a genealogical approach to queer activism. Starting from the gay liberation movement in the late 1960s, I end with what materialized of queer activism in the form of Queer Nation. Out of theoretical discourse, political events and conceptual problems in the United States, queer activism and theory emerged as a disruption. I depict deliberations of identity as essence and as basis for political action which shifted into the concept of identity as a relational process of practices, as can be seen in the political undertakings of ACT UP.

Yet, queer activism is not without its limitations. Specifically, I consider particular practices of Queer Nation as well as mainstream gay and lesbian pride parades. These limitations largely depict queer activism as being class- and race-blind. Moreover, I engage with a critical view of the pink economy and the commodification of queer/gay and lesbian social identities. I take into account the speculation that consumerism has the capacity to depoliticize queer subjects.

Contemporary queer activist networks are reformulating as a response to critical engagements with queer activism, the pink economy and a portrayal of the queer subject as commodified. They are engaging in “power-to-do” as part of a relational process. As such, the practices that these sites of activism engage in are indicators that there is an ongoing critique against identity politics, homonormativity and consumerism. Furthermore, as these contemporary queer activist movements are found within the larger context of an anti-capitalism discourse, they offer a critique on consumerism and commodification and can be seen as turning toward an engagement with the political economy.

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Introduction

That queer has taken so many turns, twists, u-turns is not surprising. It is paradoxical in its nature. That queer can be compared to nature is a paradox. Yet, the nature of the word, the root of the word is to twist. What I put forward in this thesis is a twist on queer. Specifically, on queer activism. Not because it needs to go forward, but because it needs another twist. What I am not offering here is a teleological account of queer activism or theory production. I offer a glimpse into what can be seen as a shift, a twist, in queer activism by drawing on moments of specific contemporary queer activism. As a genealogical approach to queer activism, my effort here is to locate influences which motivate and compel particular moments of queer activism. That certain sites of queer activism are now largely concerned with the effects of neoliberalism and anti-capitalism is a noteworthy twist.

In this thesis I will start by giving a reading on how queer activism emerged from theoretical perspectives, political actions and conceptual problems in the United States. Starting from the gay liberation movement in the late 1960s, I end with what materialized of queer activism in the form of Queer Nation. I depict deliberations of identity as essence and as basis for political action which shifted into the concept of identity as a relational process of practices, as can be seen in the political undertakings of ACT UP.

Following *Outing Queer*, *Queer Limited*, is a deliberation on critical engagements with queer activism as it was/is seen in the 1990s. Specifically, I consider particular practices of Queer Nation as well as mainstream gay and lesbian pride parades. These limitations largely depict queer activism as being class- and race-blind. Moreover, I engage with a critical view of the pink economy and the commodification of queer/gay and lesbian social identities. I take into account the speculation that consumerism has the capacity to depoliticize queer subjects.

My last chapter, *Twisting in Paradigm*, offers a reflection on how queer activism, as coming from specific sites, can be seen as reformulating in response to the critical engagements in chapter two. I examine radical queer networks and various sites of activism which seek to disengage the queer subject as inhabiting a depolitized, commodified positioning. Specifically, I consider Queeruption and the queer networks which organize this gathering, as well as the Schwarzer Kanal, a queer trailer squat in Berlin. Furthermore, I locate specific influences coming from larger socioeconomic and political contexts in order to offer proposals on what underpins their activism.

I do a cross-textual analysis of academic literature for the majority of the thesis. As my methodology varies for chapter three, I outline my methodology in the appropriate places.

Outing Queer

My aim in this chapter is to locate what led to the emergence of queer activism and theory. This will entail an interweaving of academic theory and activism stemming from various movements, as each informs the other. I lead the reader through a specific trajectory I deem the most relevant to reveal the emergence of queer theory and activism. It is one imbued with an understanding of feminism's problematization of gender-based identity and hierarchy. While Gayle Rubin held that, "Feminist thought simply lacks angles of vision which can fully encompass the social organization of sexuality" (1984: 34), I tend to think that queer, as an affiliation which guides activism, as a theory of sexuality and problematization of identity, owes a lot to feminism's consistent questioning of the subject's position in society, in politics, in power. Certainly, Rubin was not dismissing feminism. She was calling for an examination into a hierarchical structure of sexuality which valorized certain sexual expressions and stigmatized others.¹ She maintained that "feminism's critique of gender hierarchy must be incorporated into a radical theory of sex" (ibid). I think, perhaps, queer, as a radical theory of sex and as a questioning of gender identity, may help to serve this call. In this chapter, I briefly sketch an historical account of the major influences and events which lead to queer activism and subsequently to theory. I draw on Judith Butler and Diane Fuss to discuss gender subversion and the "problem" of identity, both of which gave impetus to queer activism. After which I outline two queer activist groups which reclaimed queer as a sign of mobilization.

Writing about the origins of a concept that evades definition necessitates running up a slippery slope. David Halperin suggests that when the term "queer theory" was first uttered in

¹ She was writing in reaction to the so-called "sex-wars" when feminism was split on how to deal with sex, especially on issues involving pornography, sadomasochism, promiscuity, lesbianism, etc. Essentially she pointed out that certain types of sexual practices were valorized over others. She detailed what she saw as a sexual hierarchy whereby, "Individuals whose behavior stands high in this hierarchy are rewarded with certified mental health, respectability, legibility, social and physical mobility, institutional support, and material benefits. As sexual behaviors or occupations fall lower on the scale, the individuals who practice them are subjected to a presumption of mental illness, disreputability, criminality, restricted social and physical mobility, loss of institutional support, and economic sanctions" (Rubin 1984: 12).

an academic setting in 1990 by Teresa de Lauretis, nobody knew what it was; yet, it was disruptive (2003: 340). Queer theory and activism can not be pinpointed as stemming from one event, time, or place. It is best described using the language of moments and ideas, movements and paradoxes, tensions. Yet, of course, there are some events, theorists, times and place that have received hallmark status. One such place is the bedroom² and from there I begin this tale. The gay liberation movement of the Stonewall era marked a revolutionary moment for not only exposing what one did in the bedroom, but demanding that people get out of it. Activism that took place during this time began to demand sexual freedom which included privacy (in the bedroom) and the right to publicly display sexuality. Yet, before I continue with the gay liberation movement, I will first set it more in context.

Steven Seidman (1993) gives an historical account of the rise of “‘postmodern’ gay culture”, (what can now be called queer “culture”) in which he outlines various gay and lesbian movements in the United States from pre-Stonewall to the early 1990s. The goals of the movements, he describes, changed from being ones aimed at assimilation to liberation to one which claimed an ethnic/essentialist minority status before he finally arrives at queer. This is not to imply that there has been a neat, chronological “progression” of sorts. Indeed, there are overlaps and dissonance in any historical account. The ongoing conflict between queer politics and gay and lesbian identity politics attests to this.

The first movement, the homophile movement, as represented by Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis, was shaped by a medical community who saw homosexuality as an abnormal condition—a disease. As such they viewed homosexuality as a trait and sought to alleviate discrimination against homosexuality by eliminating it as a social identity, thereby seeking assimilation (Seidman 1993: 111). The gay liberation movement varied its approach significantly from the homophile movement arguably due to it the surrounding social situation of the late 1960s and early 1970s when political and social movements proliferated. It is

² A North American bedroom.

therefore not surprising that Seidman describes the theoretical framework of the gay liberation movement as being a “post-Marxian left discourse that leans in a postmodern direction yet retains much of the modernist legacy, in particular its millennialism and vanguardism” (ibid: 116). In other words, Seidman locates gay liberation in context with new social movements which were, and still are, largely informed by a postmodern suspicion of knowledge and science as being totalizing institutions which act as moral forces shaping society (ibid: 106). As such, NSM broke from Marxist politics which privileged working-class struggles over racial, gender and sexual struggles. As a NSM, gay liberation sought exactly that—liberation—from sexual and gender social constraints. Sounds pretty good, actually. Yet, Seidman faults gay liberation for striving for “human liberation” and being incompatible with postmodernism as a thought which sought to create “social spaces that encourage the proliferation of pleasures, desires, voices, interests, modes of individuation and democratization” (ibid). In other words, gay liberation was too utopian and dismissive of difference. In the mid 1970s, an ethnic/essentialist model emerged from gay liberation that characterizes the subsequent, dominant gay and lesbian movement of the 1970s to the present day. This model is based on the idea that gay men and lesbians constitute (a) minority group(s). As such, membership in the minority group had to be defined—ensuing in a consolidation of gay and lesbian identities based on “gay essence” or “lesbian essence”—which ultimately naturalized sexuality as being inherent. As this turn of events fundamentally sets the stage for the emergence and conflicts of queer politics, from here I go into a more detailed account.³

What the ethnic/essentialist model inevitably invokes is the debate between essentialism and constructionism. This ultimately brings us to the question of identity—an

³ Due to space constrictions, I leave out a discussion outlining differing trajectories of lesbian movements. Such movements include lesbian feminism, as exemplified by Adrienne Rich’s “lesbian continuum” (1980). In doing so, I also omit details on the tensions between lesbian feminism and lesbian separatism with lesbians/women of color who viewed lesbian separatism as “only viably practiced by women who have certain kinds of privilege: white-skinned privilege, class privilege” (Smith in Seidman 1993: 118-119). Yet, I allude to this tension later in this chapter.

area compromising a central debate between queer politics and gay and lesbian identity politics. In “The Question of Identity Politics” Diane Fuss draws on the ethnic/essentialist model of the gay movement by stating “few other issues have been as divisive and as simultaneously energizing in gay and lesbian theory as the question of whether ‘gay identity’ is empirical fact or political fiction” (1989a: 97). Fuss has been influential in this debate and for this I draw on her analysis of essentialism and constructionism within feminist theory.

By showing that even Lacan and Derrida, the great deconstructionists inhabiting the poststructural world of academia, relied on essentialism in their theoretical concepts, in “The Risk of Essence”, Diane Fuss demonstrates that essentialism is the backbone to anti-essentialist discourse. It seems, then, according to Fuss, that social constructionism and essentialism intertwine in antagonistic fashion. This makes sense on a linguistic level for how can we talk about “woman” as “always already” outside the Symbolic order without evoking essentialist undertones? While this seems to bring us to an impasse in the debate between essentialism and social construction, it is here where Fuss counters this hurdle by arguing between the difference of “falling into” and “deploying” essentialism (1989b: 20). “Falling into” essentialism construes it as an irreconcilable problem, while “deploying” essentialism underpins potential with its utilization.

The necessarily problematic necessity of using essentialist notions as a strategy is easier to comprehend when placed in the context of identity. Fuss argues for a fictitious use of identity in a reconceptualized and *dehierarchized* political realm of identity politics (1989a: 104). She is able to make this claim after leading us through the historical shifts behind the meaning of identity from Aristotle to Derrida and Lacan, from certainty to uncertainty, from language as a container of meaning to language being the producer of meaning. She shows that deconstruction has the ability to constantly shift and reshift identity so as to circumvent the danger of re-reification. The point Fuss makes here is that while claiming an identity can lead to political action, the identity must always be questioned to stop it from becoming a

static entity within a chain of hierarchized identities. She states that “Such a view of identity as unstable and potentially disruptive, as alien and incoherent, could in the end produce a more mature identity politics by militating against the tendency to erase differences and inconsistencies in the production of stable political subjects” (ibid). Thus, the acceptance of (fictitious) identity, as based on essentialist notions, is only strategic in so far as its volatility and power effects are also rendered productive in not erasing differences. That identity must be dehierarchized is of importance here for pointing out the tensions of the ethnic/essence model of sexual identity and I will return to that later.

Bringing this debate specifically into the realm of sexual identity, Judith Butler’s hesitant acknowledgement that claiming the sign “lesbian” might be necessary to make visible “an oppressed political constituency” (1993b: 309), forces us to think of what sexual identity actually is. For, claiming a sign entails the risk of being “recolonized by the sign”, which is the very thing that she calls into question in her article (ibid: 308). Elsewhere, she falls back on Gayatri Spivak’s notion of the “necessary error of identity” to point out that while identity may be unavoidable, it is always an inaccurate appropriation (1993a: 230). Thus, identity (or the essence thereof) is not only a “risk” as Fuss explains, it is also an “error”. This is further expounded on by Butler who, when speaking about the specific sign, “queer”, she states, again using Spivak, “if identity is a necessary error, then the assertion of ‘queer’ will be necessary as a term of affiliation, but it will not fully describe those it purports to represent. As a result, it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term” (ibid). She makes the important point here that identity is an affiliation and extends Fuss’ deployment of essence (read: identity) further by asking the even more pertinent questions, “Which version of lesbian or gay ought to be rendered visible, and which internal exclusions will that rendering visible institute?” (305). In other words, who gets to decide which (sexual) identities are affirmed and who is rendered invisible as an effect?

David Bell and Jon Binnie continue with an elaboration on the question of identity, in particular, the conflict between queer politics and lesbian and gay identity politics by stating that the latter is primarily concerned with pushing the “good gay citizen” (2000: 37). In other words, according to Bell and Binnie, lesbian and gay political organizations are mainly concerned with assimilating and gaining acceptance in the hegemonic, “mainstream,” society by presenting themselves as valuable, respectable contributors. This line of reasoning follows that lesbians and gay men are just like everyone else and can and should receive the same rights and recognition status as heterosexuals. While the value of rights is not something which can or should be easily discredited, the discourse surrounding ‘rights’ is problematic in and of itself (Elam 1994). We might ask for whom and to what purpose are rights utilized; on whose terms are equal rights defined? What is important to point out is that these rights are granted on the basis of certain ways of behavior and ethics which fail to disrupt underlying structures of repressive power. Furthermore, in order to fight for rights and liberties, gay and lesbian politics must establish clear constituencies of who counts as gay and lesbian individuals, something queer politics is suspicious of, as highlighted by Butler.

Steven Seidman suggests that those who are made visible, those who were made to count as gay and lesbians within the ethnic/essentialist model, was (is) limited to the white, middle-class. Thus, we see that Fuss’ call to make identity dehierarchized is often missing from this model of sexual identity. Seidman locates the impetus for a re-examination of identity politics as having come from “people of color, third-world-identified gays, poor and working class gays, and sex rebels to the ethnic/essentialist model of identity and community that achieved dominance in the lesbian and gay cultures of the 1970s” (1993: 106).⁴ These groups, not only marginalized by their sexuality, called into question the politics of identity and representation as the dominance of white, middle-class concerns within lesbian and gay politics failed to address their needs or concerns. For Seidman, this problematization of

⁴Cathy Cohen, who I will discuss more in detail in chapter two, also sights this as being a limitation of queer politics.

identity is what ultimately gave rise to the “postmodern gay culture” and is what, again, differentiates queer politics from gay and lesbian identity politics. Drawing on the poststructuralist suspicion of identity, Seidman goes onto further state:

Poststructuralism aims to destabilize identity as a ground of politics and theory in order to open up alternative social and political possibilities; poststructuralism seems to be positioned as a sort of theoretical wing of Queer Nation, with its insistent opposition to normalizing, disciplining social forces; with its disruptive politics of *subversion*; and with its opposition to both the straight and gay mainstream” (Seidman 1993: 131-132 emphasis mine).

In other words, queer activists, as embodied at the time of Seidman’s article by Queer Nation (which I will explain later more in detail), are interested in “resistance to regimes of the normal”, to borrow an often cited phrase from Michael Warner (1993: xxvi). This resistance to the normal,⁵ however, is not based on a stable identity or a further perpetuation of the “good gay citizen” which, it can be argued, as I do in chapter three with my discussion on homonormativity, would ultimately thwart attempts to engage in alternative social and political structures. For now, as I have led you through the debate surrounding essentialism and constructionism within the politics of identity, we are left with the question of what subversion and problematization of identity look like in queer activism and theory. In an attempt to answer this question, I draw on Judith Butler.

Butler’s influence on queer theory and activism is substantial. Her book, *Gender Trouble*, influenced, she states, by her involvement with the lesbian and gay community in the United States, is still one of the most widely cited sources for queer theorists and activists alike (1999: xvi). Hall contends that Butler’s emergence in the early 1990s inspired the course of queer theory and activism and fed “intellectuals and theory-hungry activists” a “strategy”

⁵ Unfortunately, due to space constrictions, I leave out an analysis of Michel Foucault’s (1990) insights of sexual ‘normality’. In his book *History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I*, he traces the trajectory of discourses which formed what was thought to be the “truth” about sexuality. In doing so, he exposed that sexuality was as much of a social construction as the construction of truth itself. Instead, he showed how knowledges produced the notion that there is a truth of sexuality. His work was enormously influential in queer theory. Yet, as I do not draw on his work, I leave his theory underdeveloped.

to expose the social constructiveness of gendered roles (2003: 73). As I described above, the essentialism/social constructionism debate has inspired an examination of identity. While many theorists were able to theorize about the “error” of identity, or call on us to deconstruct it, there was still little conceptualization on how one could reshift an identity. Butler changed that, and not only for the academy. To simplify it, her idea was that the repetition of specific gender acts (gender performativity) constructs gender as a naturalized essence. As such, subversive gender performatives⁶ have the potential to disrupt this naturalized essence. In other words, as it was and is still often understood, in parodying a gender norm, one has the potential to resist and to change normative structures. For, if “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being”, then, Butler posits, it is possible to disrupt this repetition and expose its assumed naturalness (1999: 43-44).

Drawing on Esther Newton’s suggestion that female impersonation has the ability to reveal the social constructiveness of gender, Butler states, “I would suggest as well that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” (1999: 174). Her claim being that drag not only exposes the belief that there is an essential gender identity as being correlative with an expression of femininity or masculinity, but also “fully subverts” it. She goes on to state: “The critical task is...to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them” (ibid: 188). Herein lays her call to action which impelled those disenchanted with gay and lesbian identity politics. As I stated above, it

⁶ She draws on Austin’s (1962) notion of performative utterances which holds that certain utterances are not simply descriptive speech, but are rather utterances which perform a doing or an action. It does what it names or says. Performative utterances are only successful if they follow a script which has gained consensus in society. Consensus is gained through the very act of its repetition, which in turn makes it seem natural.

offered a strategy to break out of the essentialist understandings of rigid gender identities which had been plaguing them. Drag and subversive gender performatives came to be seen as political acts of resistance. The implications of Butler's theories were enormous, and as Hall notes, the possibilities opened up by *Gender Trouble* were incorporated by Queer Nation, which I will describe below, and can be seen in their theatrical spectacles of "queer-presentation" in the malls and at kiss-ins (2003: 83).

However, this sort of strategy, this parodic subversion of gender was taken by some to be a dismissal to the historicity of power mechanisms enforcing gender norms. In a sense, Butler's theory led to the notion that the subject has an unlimited amount of agency in picking and choosing one's gender, as if it were that easy. Butler was quick to jump on criticism which suggested that she reduced gender to something that you can simply put on, something that you can radically alter at will. In an interview in 1992, she states:

The bad reading goes like this: I can get up in the morning, look in my closet, and decide which gender I want to be today. I can take out a piece of clothing and change my gender, stylize it, and then that evening I can change it again and be something radically other, so that what you get is something like the commodification of gender, and the understanding of taking on a gender as a kind of consumerism (in Hall 2003: 74).

Yet, this "bad reading" is still seen at contemporary queer events with slogans on posters that state, "We are all born naked. The rest is just drag." Although this phrase originally came from popular culture icon and drag queen, RuPaul, there is a definite Butlerian ethos underpinning it. This 'just' takes for granted that the subject is never fully outside of power structures. This falls in line with Rosemary Hennessy's critique on Butler's notion of subversive gender performatives as she claims that the historical "context" within which gender norms are formed is missing from Butler's analysis (2000: 117). Despite these critiques, the empowering effect Butler's theorizations have had in queer activism can not be dismissed. I do not mean to over-exaggerate Butler's influence. Certainly, drag shows, acts of

subversive gender display had been happening long before Butler came around. However, she received a sort of cult of personality status and her influence has motivated years of conscious gender play and subversion of identity.

As I have mentioned above, Queer Nation has often been cited as an embodiment of queer activism. The road to Queer Nation first involves a detour into the center of a crisis for the gay community. As Gayle Rubin states, “Just when homosexuals have had some success in throwing off the taint of mental disease, gay people find themselves metaphorically welded to an image of lethal physical deterioration” (1984: 26). What she is depicting is AIDS; and essentialized identity or not, the events of the late 1970s and early 1980s had profound impact on gay and lesbian and queer movements. Two activist groups, AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation were the result of this crisis.

That AIDS was first called GRID—Gay Related Immunodeficiency, is telling of the stigmatization that gay men received when the affects of the disease started to be acutely felt in the early 1980s. (Hall 2003: 51-52). The U.S government, as represented by Margaret Heckler, the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services, shuffled AIDS off as being a disease which only affected at-risk groups, specifically, those not in the “general population” (read: heterosexual) (Nunokawa 1991: 311). That AIDS was pegged as a gay disease resulted in gay men becoming “*marked* men” (ibid: 312, emphasis in original). It was gay sex, it was thought, that caused HIV/AIDS. And since gay sex is practiced by gay men, these men (gay men) were defined by their sexual practices (gay sex), and condemned, in a manner of speaking, to death. Thus, a stigmatized sexual identity was reduced to stigmatized sexual acts. If we remember Rubin’s concern, at the beginning of this chapter, about the valorization of certain sexual practices over others, AIDS (GRID) meant further slippage on the hierarchy of sexual expressions. For the gay community, this meant not only mourning the loss of their friends and lovers, but it also meant that they had to bare further stigmatization from the general (straight) public as being *marked*.

The U.S. government's negligence in responding to the pandemic and failure to offer support to those dying from AIDS related diseases (they were not yet "living with AIDS", or known as "people with AIDS", they were simply dying from AIDS) was the unfortunate impetus for the formation of ACT UP. Founded in 1987, the aims of ACT UP were, and continue to be, to demand action from the government, improve safer-sex education, increase visibility of health concerns, and contest the representation of HIV/AIDS as being a gay disease. They employed tactics ranging from civil disobedience to public pedagogy on safer-sex. In a word, they have forced sex out of the bedroom and in-your-face. As a result of safer-sex programs (as well as needle exchange programs), ACT UP aimed to shift emphasis away from certain populations being pegged as at risk of contracting HIV to certain practices. They sought to denaturalize axiomatic perceptions of sexuality by dismantling the misperception that gay sex causes a gay disease. As HIV/AIDS affected many realms of life, and all types of people engaging in practices other than specific sexual acts, the crisis brought a coalition together under ACT UP's non-hierarchical and decentralized structure. This resulted in political action being done not based on particular, separated identities; rather, ACT UP activist Douglas Crimp states, "new political identification began to be made...across identities" (1993: 316). As such, identity ceased to be the basis of action. Affiliation, based on affinity, took its place. Under ACT UP, identity became relational. "And if identity is relational", Crimp states, "then perhaps we can begin to rethink identity politics as a politics of relational identities formed through political identifications that constantly remake those identities" (1993: 313). This might be Fuss' call for a reconceptualization of identity politics.

Gayle Rubin suggests that AIDS was used as a moral panic to "incite virulent homophobia" (Rubin 1984: 25). As ACT UP became more visible in the public, Crimp portrays the organizers of the group as being overwhelmed with dealing with "the battles AIDS required us to take on, ACT UP couldn't fight the homophobia anymore" (1993: 316). Out of this desperation, Queer Nation was formed. As one of the most comprehensive

descriptions of Queer Nation, Berlant and Freeman, themselves activists in the movement, explain:

Founded at an ACT UP New York meeting in April 1990, Queer Nation aimed to extend the kinds of democratic counterpolitics deployed on behalf of AIDS activism for the transformation of public sexual discourse in general...Queer Nation [took] up from ACT UP [a] complex understanding of political space as fundamental to its insistence on making all public spheres truly safe for all of the persons who occupy them, not just in psychic loyalty but in everyday and embodied experience. To be safe in the national sense means not just safe from bashing, not just safe from discrimination, but safe for demonstration, in the mode of patriotic ritual, which always involves a deployment of affect, knowledge, spectacle, and crucially, a kind of banality, ordinariness, and popularity (1993: 198).

Thus, informed by ACT UP's coalition strategies and direct action tactics in the public sphere, angry Queer Nationals mobilized under the banner of queer shouting "We're Here, We're Queer. Get Used to It". They invaded malls in queer decadence, ran around with Queer Nation T-Shirts, and staged kiss-ins. In a word, they sought to "dismantle the standardizing apparatus that organizes all manner of sexual practice into 'facts' of sexual identity" (Berlant and Freeman 1993: 196) by behaving inappropriately. Drawing on Butler's "strategy" of subversive gender performatives, they exposed modes of appropriate public conduct. In doing so, they undermined gender and sexuality norms underpinning the heteronormative status quo guiding dominant social, political and cultural spheres and practices of representation. As Berlant and Freeman succinctly put it, "Gone the assimilationist patience of some gay liberation identity politics; gone the assertive rationality of the 'homosexual' subject who seeks legitimacy by signifying, through 'straight' protocols, that 'civilization' has been sighted on the cultural margin" (1993: 200). Arising out of a tired debate of gay and lesbian essence, inspired by a poststructuralist destabilized identity as a ground of politics, claiming identity as relational; they pushed the "good gay citizen" out of the way. Not only did queer activists claim that they did not want be a part of the center, but they also attacked and tried to subvert it.

By appropriating the very sign that had been historically used to deride, shame and ostracize them, queer activists confronted the violence of their invisibility in the public sphere and demanded recognition on their own terms. In doing so, they set out to disrupt the implicitly (due to its assumed “nature”) hierarchized order of sexuality, as Rubin called for, and also the hierarchized political realm of identity politics that Fuss sought. That “queer” eludes definition, promotes a proliferation *and* celebration of desires, pleasures and voices. As such they did not seek to erase difference, as the “human liberation” of the gay liberation movement would have us do. Together Queer Nation and ACT UP aspired to radically reshape notions of sexual and gender identities through challenging cultural and social productions of signification.

Yet Queer Nation’s practices, as we will see in the next chapter, have not been received by all to be as unproblematic as I have depicted above. While I have concentrated on queer activism as coming from Queer Nation, I do so because they signify a turning point in gay and lesbian movements. As Warner maintains, queer politics did not simply replace already established modes of lesbian and gay politics (2002: 213). Yet, it is difficult to conceptualize what queer politics/activism looks like. Queer Nation helps fill that gap. In my third chapter I will continue filling that gap with contemporary sites of queer activism, however, before I do this, I will outline some limitations of queer activism.

Queer Limited

The aim of this chapter is to critically engage with limitations of queer activism. I do so in order to set the tone for the next chapter in which I will engage with sites of contemporary queer activism to reflect on how queer activism is being reformulated in response to these critical engagements. One such critical engagements with queer activism and theory is that it is based on cultural production in so far that it then becomes divorced from other material and social realms of society that get pushed aside. Another limitation is that queer politics reduces oppression to the sexual thereby marginalizing race and class inflected identities. Furthermore, the influence of the pink economy in queer culture tends to depoliticize queer politics as it becomes based on the commodity and consumer spaces. These limitations can be seen in the activities of Queer Nation and in contemporary mainstream gay pride parades (hereafter Pride) in most parts of North America and Western Europe. I draw on academic theorists Rosemary Hennessy and Cathy Cohen and queer activist Mattilda (aka Matt Berstein Sycomore) among others for this endeavor.

Queer Nation has come, it seems, to represent the paradigmatic site of queer activism for many people. As the most vocal and visible organization of activists affiliated under the banner of queer, it is no surprise that they have received canonical status. Yet, Queer Nation's use of consumerist spaces and commodities to engage in a de-heterosexualization of public space and icons has prompted critical engagement from some academic theorists such as Cathy Cohen and Rosemary Hennessy. Before I go into their engagements, I will first outline specific Queer Nation's actions which will be used for analysis. Berlant and Freeman describe two groups under the banner of Queer Nation: the Queer Shopping Network in New York and the Suburban Homosexual Outreach Program (SHOP) in San Francisco (1993: 210). Their goal was to make the queer subject visible in public space. These groups infiltrated shopping

malls in urban and suburban cities dressed in highly camp inflected outfits, enacting spectacular “miniature parades” by chanting “We’re Here. We’re Queer, We’re Not Going Shopping” or “We’re Here. We’re Queer. You’re Going Shopping” in order to “disrupt the antiseptic asexual surface of the malls” (ibid: 211). By invading the mall, SHOP and Queer Shopping Network aimed to insert an overtly queer visibility in what Berlant and Freeman call “asexual” space; asexual to the extent that its heterosexuality is not contested. Queer Nation also sought to question the implicit heterosexuality of American national icons by producing T-shirts with “Queer Bart” or replacing the ‘p’ in the name brand ‘GAP’ with a ‘y’.⁷

While Cathy Cohen states that such tactics were able to disrupt the implicit normality of heterosexual, family-orientated space, her discontent with the practices of Queer Shopping Network and SHOP lies in her consideration of “poor and working-class queers” who experience the space of the suburban mall through the lens of different intersecting power structures other than just sexuality minority status (1997: 211). She states that these queers experience “exclusion and alienation” not only “limited to the normative sexual codes associated with the mall” but also to “the assumed economic status of those shopping in suburban malls” (ibid). Furthermore, a “queer of color” might also experience the mall differently due to “racial norms and stereotypes that construct you as a threatening subject every time you enter this economic institution” (ibid). As such, the actions of Queer Shopping Network and SHOP by white queer activists failed to take into account that overlapping axes of power are imbued with racial, class-inflected *and* sexual identities *all at the same time*. This echoes Cohen’s overall critical engagement with queer politics as being too invested in what she calls the “single oppression model”. This follows that because heteronormativity is

⁷ While Berlant and Freeman claim that such actions were made to be ironic and to show “resistance to the liberal ‘gay business’ approach to social liberation” (1993: 213), the theorists with whom I engage here, disagree, and as my focus is on their critical engagement, I leave Berlant’s and Freeman’s argument underdeveloped.

also informed by institutional racism, patriarchy and class exploitation, identities can not be reduced to one feature.

Furthermore, Cohen questions the effectiveness of queer politics, because although emphasis is placed on destabilization or deconstruction of sexual categories, queer politics still seems to gain its impetus by defining who is queer and who is heterosexual (1997: 203). In this sense, heterosexuals are being targeted and not heteronormativity. This can be seen with the “I Hate Straights” manifesto that was circulated by Queer Nation. This came from an anonymously written essay, which was widely circulated to the “gay population”, deriding procreating heterosexuals because queers were being denied the “privilege” to family life, especially from the “public fantasy” of visible family life (Berlant and Freeman 1993: 200). While this slogan came out of what Berlant and Freeman have called queer “rage” from being consistently marginalized and rendered invisible by heterosexual privilege (ibid), Cohen points out that “I Hate Straights” is a “reconstruction of a binary divide between heterosexuals and queers” as heterosexuals are targeted and *not* heteronormativity (1997: 209-210). While “I Hate Straights” contests the privilege of the heterosexual family, the rage expressed at not being able to visibly take part in this institution, ultimately calls for inclusion into it. Furthermore, it assumes a coherent heterosexual identity, one which apparently does not engage in “‘nonnormative’ procreation patterns and family structures” (ibid: 210).

While Hennessy, like Cohen, admits that Queer Nation’s tactics had the ability to create cracks in heteronormative assumptions, she problematizes Queer Nation’s use of the spaces of commodity consumption as being counterproductive to their claims of anti-assimilation. For “If the aim of mall visibility actions was to make the pleasures of consumption available to gays too, and to commodify queer identity as ‘the most stylish of the many attitudes on sale at the mall,’ then inclusion seems to be precisely the point” (Hennessy

2000: 128). Furthermore, the use of the commodity further facilitates its fetishization.⁸ While Queer Nation's tactics exposed the invisible heterosexual meanings assumed in the commodity, they failed to disrupt its material implications. In other words, and this is Hennessy's main contention with queer theory and activism, these actions only had the potential to shift the cultural meaning or significance of the commodity (i.e. exposing that there is implied heterosexual meaning in everything) and not to disrupt or question the material process of the commodity (i.e. exposing the abstract labor or conditions that went behind its production). This follows her claim that queer does not engage with the social realm⁹ and relies only on the cultural;¹⁰ or rather, she contends that queer "praxis" erroneously collapses the social into the cultural, meaning that material conditions which *also* construct power structures are lost along the way. Hennessy's problem with the queer project speaks to a larger discontent with poststructuralism, postmodernism and the splintering between cultural materialism and historical materialism¹¹ which can not be solved here, nor does it need to be. Hennessy's approach as a Marxist feminist can potentially be seen as incompatible with the postmodern overtones of the queer project, which ultimately brings us to a theoretical impasse.¹²

Yet, her critique on the commodified queer identity can be taken further if we return to her assertion that the aim of the mall invasions was contradictory to their claims of anti-assimilation; that they were indeed aiming for inclusion by making themselves visible. Her

⁸ Commodity fetishism is a Marxist term which describes how the human activity invested in producing an object is rendered invisible and the object takes on the illusion of having value of its own (Hennessy 2000: 129).

⁹ Stevi Jackson identifies four intersecting levels of the social: 1) structural—marriage, law, state 2) meaning—everyday interaction 3) routine—everyday social practices 4) subjectivity—how we experience desire, emotions and how we perceive our embodiment. For her, as well as I might argue for Hennessy, cultural production ignores the first level altogether, thus causing an incomplete rendering of social construction processes. (2005: 18-19).

¹⁰ Discursive and symbolic meaning making practices and structures.

¹¹ Hennessy contends that, unlike historical materialism, cultural materialism ignores the causal link between the mode of production and cultural production. In other words, the capitalist division of labor is overlooked as being important in how society is structured. Yet, while cultural materialism often pinpoints capitalism as an enemy, it does so without historicizing how the division of labor affects power structures in contemporary society. Hennessy contends that these processes must be historicized if these power structures are to be understood (and changed). Historical material feminism is also known as Marxist feminism, which Hennessy positions herself as (Hennessy 2000: 27-29).

¹² There are, however, some who try to bring them together (Sears 2005).

misgivings are, of course, not that they demanded visibility, but that they based this visibility by appropriating consumer spaces. If we consider the rise of the pink economy, which was also expanding during the same time as the excitement of Queer Nation, then we might better understand Hennessy's qualm. Jeffrey Escoffier has remarked that contemporary gay and lesbian communities are experiencing an era of "hyper-commodification, as mainstream corporations target the homo/market niche with consumer goods and advertising" (in Bell and Binnie 2000: 96). This is emblematic of what can be labeled the pink economy which is based on the assumption that gay men and lesbians have a higher disposable income. Gay and lesbian couples, apparently freed from the financial burden of having children, are known as DINKS (Dual Income No Kids). As such, winning gay and lesbian customers is seen as lucrative business. Bell and Binnie refer to the supposed higher spending power of gay men and lesbians as a "myth" and point out that the proliferation of this discourse tends to homogenize gay men and lesbians as "model consumer-citizens" and obscures class and racial differences within the gay community and between lesbians and gay men (2000: 97). While Bell's and Binnie's sentiments ring true, there is no denying the influx of marketing targeting gay and lesbian clientele, or businesses marketed as being run by gay men and lesbians themselves, in the past twenty years in North America (Chasin 2000: 29) and Western Europe and has infiltrated virtual spaces as well.

This influx of identity-based marketing has led to increased visibility of gay and lesbian presence in consumer culture and has increased the opportunities for gay and lesbians to participate in identity-based consumption. Of course, as Chasin points out, gays and lesbians have always consumed, yet what makes this sort of consumption different, is that it constitutes and consolidates "a social identity in the marketplace" (2000: 24). Yet, the effect of this consolidated social identity in the marketplace renders certain less-assimilated or welcomed identities even more invisible. Hennessy suggests that increased visibility in consumer culture has led to "an imaginary, class-specific gay subjectivity for both straight

and gay audiences” (2000: 112). This echoes Cohen’s discontent with the mall invasions as being exclusionary of “poor and working-class queers”. And while speaking of the increased visibility of gay and lesbian culture on television shows in the UK, Joshua Gamson points out that this constructs an image of “‘appropriate’ forms of sexual identity” thereby rendering more deviant sexualities invisible (in Bell and Binnie 2004: 1811). Indeed, we may comment on the absurdity of imagining mainstream advertisements targeting butch lesbians to receive a 10% discount on a new suit or those involved with BDSM (bondage/domination and sadomasochism) to come in and try on leather.

What is further concerning for Hennessy, regarding both the mall invasions and, I would imply, the implications of the pink economy, is the assumption that increased visibility or presence in consumer space takes on the appearance of social change. Referring to Danae Clark’s study on the commodification of lesbians, she states that “the intensified marketing of lesbian images is less indicative of a growing acceptance of homosexuality than of capitalism’s appropriation of gay ‘styles’ for mainstream audiences” (2000: 112). As such, Hennessy calls this a “limited victory for gays who are welcome to be visible as consumer subjects but not as social subjects” (ibid). Telling of this is a *New York Times* article, “San Francisco Toasts Gay Weddings”, in which same-sex marriages, at that point sanctioned by a judge (later overturned), were hurrahed as bringing in capital for several businesses ranging from luxury hotels offering honeymoon specials to restaurant caterers offering “on-the-spot mini wedding cakes” (Murphy, 2004). Gay marriage, it seems, buttresses the economy as a new niche market and gay and lesbian couples are welcomed with open arms *as consuming citizens*.

Thus, if queers, as Hennessy contends, were seeking inclusion by trying to “make the pleasures of consumption available to gays too” by commodifying “queer identity as ‘the most stylish of the many attitudes on sale at the mall,’” then they were doing so at face value. As what this visibility attests to is capitalism’s flexibility in expanding its markets into once

“criminalized” and “stigmatized” communities which can be at once affirming and “potentially problematic” (Casey 2007:126). And let’s be honest, it is affirming. Yet, we might ask if this affirmation carries with it a hefty price-tag. Many people have welcomed the increase of the pink economy and have claimed that if the intersection of community and capital is always apparent to formation of a community,¹³ then the commodification of queer identities could render a “So what?” (Pellegrini 2002: 141). Yet, what this “so what” fails to take into account is that “institutions such as gay marriage and consumption practices associated with the pink economy become symbols of how sexual minority groups obtain power in a society based on the market” which has the effect that “those who are socially excluded and economically disadvantaged” will continue to be marginalized (Bell and Binnie 2000: 73). Again, echoing Hennessy’s reference to Clark’s assertion that market visibility does not always necessarily mean social recognition, we can see that visibility might also actually entail a violent exclusion. Furthermore, if, as Bell and Binnie allude to, groups are coming to gain power through the market, then we might ask what those who do not have access to the market have left at their disposal. That gaining acceptance on the marketplace has become a symbol of power is concerning, if we consider that under neoliberalism, the marketplace is dictating politics. I will go into a more detailed discussion on neoliberalism in the next chapter. Yet under this logic, some might contend that consumer culture might actually have a depoliticizing effect; something along the lines of, if consumers are “seduced rather than repressed by power,” what would “make people want to resist, to practice alternative lifestyles and generate alternative meanings” (Burkitt 2004: 225)? Not that all people (gay or straight) need be concerned with practicing alternative lifestyles or generating

¹³ John D’Emilio has pointed out that capitalism provided the material conditions for the gay community to exist as the family ceased to be the unit of production. This, however, led to the “elevation of the family to ideological preeminence” and guaranteed that “capitalist society will reproduce not just children, but heterosexism and homophobia” (1979: 474). Yet Donald Hall, drawing on D’Emilio, remarks that “capitalism both enables contemporary notions of lesbian and gay identity and, inevitably, helps determine its least laudable aspects (consumerism, blindness to class inequalities, etc.)” (2003: 88).

alternative meanings, but this was the aim of Queer Nation. Yet by using the commodity as their base, according to Hennessy, they fell short.

I would like return to a moment to Casey's assertion that visibility can be "potentially problematic". I will explore this potentiality through an examination of the very visible and very pink economized realm of mainstream gay pride parades in order to elaborate on the limitations of queer politics. It is here though where I must interject to admit that language has become a bit slippery and categories and naming do seem to take on significance as the line between gay and lesbian politics and queer politics must be negotiated. As Steven Epstein notes, "Queerness is frequently anti-assimilationist; it stands in opposition to the inclusionary project of mainstream lesbian and gay politics, with its reliance on the discourses of civil liberties and civil rights" (Epstein 1996: 153). Yet, while queer often stands in opposition to gay and lesbian, it can never be entirely detached. Thus, while at the beginning of this chapter I stated that my intention was to highlight the limitations of queer activism, my engagement here with the limitations of gay and lesbian politics extends this scope. With this said, if Hennessy strings the terms queer and gay and lesbian together based on their shared "homosexual identities" (2000: 113), she does not do so in error. However, Queer Nation, as I explained in the previous chapter, and Gay Shame and Transgenialer CSD, which I will explain below, as well as the contemporary queer activist networks and groups I detail in the next chapter, tend to dismiss this conflation as being misplaced and distance themselves from what they call mainstream gay and lesbian politics, not only in claims for equal rights, but also with their participation in consumer culture.

Pride in most parts of North America and Western Europe are good examples of the pink economy in spectacular¹⁴ exhibition. They are often used as platforms to push equal

¹⁴ I use the term 'spectacular' noting that I am placing judgment on it and devaluing the political and social implications of Pride. Furthermore, the use of the word sets up the problematic notion of the 'authentic', as in, spectacular as 'inauthentic' (Bell and Binnie 2004: 1813). I understand that these are ethical, political and theoretical traps and that I am oversimplifying Pride; however, I use 'spectacular' to acknowledge the degree to which the alternative-prides and queer networks that I will shortly explain distance themselves from Pride.

rights such as marriage¹⁵ or equalization of same-sex civil partnership benefits¹⁶ and inclusion into the military. Yet, regardless of the political agenda of the organizers of Pride, some might question how much politicizing is achieved when sponsors such as the ones highly visible and active in Berlin's Pride—Smirnoff, Berliner Pilsner, and Red Bull—set the stage for a party atmosphere. Furthermore, targeting of gay and lesbian tourists can be seen by sponsors such as GermanWings airline, Sixt car rental and a plethora of hotels which provide tourists convenient access to Berlin and accommodation once there. Further local and transnational companies also make use of the influx of gay and lesbian visitors by buying advertising space in order to market to the “free-spending, travel enthusiastic and brand-conscious” target group found in Berlin, the “El Dorado for homosexuals”.¹⁷

Queer activists involved with numerous networks and ‘off-prides,’ or alternatives to Pride, consciously critique and expose the limitations of the dominant gay and lesbian political trend towards assimilation and consumption as a basis for identity. Gay Shame, started in New York in 1998 and Transgenialer CSD,¹⁸ in Berlin in 1997, are two such examples. They reject buying into the so-called ‘queer label’ as a mere presentation of one’s gayness based on commodified representation and participation in the pink economy. They have taken note of capitalism’s recuperation of the gay ‘lifestyle’ as manifested in corporate sponsorships of Prides and tourist packages targeted at gay people for Pride.

Mattilda (aka Matt Berstein Sycamore), co-instigator of Gay Shame states, “Gay Shame emerged in New York as a challenge to the assimilationist agendas of mainstream

¹⁵ While same-sex marriage carries with it the possibility of deconstructing “the gender requirements of family forms” (Gamson 1995: 403), there is the counter notion that it supports assimilationist tactics which promote normalization of certain kinds of state recognized forms of kinship and love while still excluding others. The latter of this polarization fits with the ethics of the queer networks (while noting that individual opinions may vary) later in the paper.

¹⁶ Germany, for example, recognizes same-sex civil partnerships with notable differences in rights’ claims that the institution of marriage affords. These differences deal in areas such as income tax benefits and adoption rights among others. <http://www.lsvd.de/230.0.html>; accessed May 20, 2009.

¹⁷ <http://www.csd-berlin.de/index.php?m=17&>; accessed December 30, 2008.

¹⁸ Unique to Germany and Switzerland, the term “Christopher Street Day” (CSD), is used to commemorate the 1969 uprising in New York on Christopher Street against police violence against gay men, lesbians, and transsexuals.

pride celebrations” and became “a direct action group that centered on challenging the hypocrisy of a mainstream gay elite that sees their desire as everyone’s needs” (in Ruiz 2008: 241). She goes on to further state that “It was our goal to challenge the violence of the happy gay consumer that lies beneath all of those glamorous, sweatshop-produced rainbow flags, Tiffany wedding bands, Grey Goose Cosmo-tinis, and all of the rabid consumption” (ibid). The participants of Gay Shame try to sabotage mainstream Prides by disrupting the event with counter-discourses, banners¹⁹ and chants, and they hold Gay Shame Awards. This last event is a highly camp-inflected award’s ceremony held in San Francisco’s Castro district with awards going to: Best Target Marketing, Best Gender Fundamentalism, Best Racist-Ass Whites-Only Space, Exploiting Our Youth, Helping Right-Wingers Cope, The “In” Awards (Celebrities Who Should Have Never Come Out of the Closet), Gay for Pay Award, and Making More Queers Homeless.²⁰ The purpose of the awards ceremony is to make a spectacle of the spectacle in order to call people’s attention to what Mattilda refers to as the “violence of assimilation” (ibid: 238), which was alluded to above .

Likewise, Transgenialer CSD’s call for demonstration attests to a critique of the “violence of assimilation”. The call for demonstration bluntly positions the ethos of the alternative pride as refusing to be a part of the “status quo,” and to wanting a “piece of the pie.” In doing so, the organizers and those attending the event distance themselves from Berlin CSD’s assimilationist political tactics, utilization of corporate sponsorship buttressed in consumerism, and blindness to economic inequalities. This is most apparent in their inclusion of a critique of “globalized exploitation,” “poverty,” and for calling Berlin CSD a “for-profit parade”. Instead of aiming for inclusion into society, the call for demonstration attests to a desire for “want[ing] a different recipe”.

¹⁹ “Vomit Out Budweiser Pride and the Selling of Queer Identities”: <http://www.gayshamesf.org/slingshotgayshame.html>; accessed May 18, 2009

²⁰ <http://www.gayshamesf.org/slingshotgayshame.html#4>; accessed May 18, 2009

In this chapter I have shown that both *Gay Shame* and *Transgenialer CSD* expose the limitations of the pink economy as a representation of gay and lesbian culture. I have drawn on Hennessy's assertions that queer disproportionately dismisses the material in favor of the cultural. I have also shown that basing politics on the commodity is not without its implications. Furthermore, Cohen's suggestion that queer neglects racial and class oppression in favor of a "single oppression model" has also been highlighted. While Hennessy's claims have been dismissed by some to be "oversimplified and outmoded" (Bell and Binnie 2000: 70) and unproductive by pitting the social versus the cultural and the real versus the discursive (Probyn 1996: 140) and Cohen's critical engagement with *Queer Shopping Network* and *SHOP* can be seen as expecting too much from one particular political action, their claims attest to a discontent with queer activism and point out limitations that I think can not be so easily dismissed. Their contentions attest to queer activism's tendency to disengage with issues surrounding the political economy (even more, in Cohen's opinion) in favor of cultural production, or as Hennessy states, drawing on Berube and Escoffier, "to make trouble and have fun" (in Hennessy 2000: 115). Thus, the queer, for Hennessy is depoliticized and caught up in "the circuits of late capitalist consumption, [where] the visibility of sexual identity is often a matter of commodification, a process that invariably depends on the lives and labor of invisible others" (ibid: 111). The valorization of the pink economy does the same while channeling a desire for assimilation. And the queer for Cohen is not interested in anything but sex(uality), as long as it is not hetero(sex)uality.

The limitations I have delineated in this chapter do not signal the demise of queer activism. There are indications that specific sites of queer activism are engaging with these limitations. Mattilda (aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore) from *Gay Shame* highlights what she saw as the "violence of assimilation". This term can also be coined homonormativity and it is with this in mind that I will engage with sites of contemporary queer activism to reflect on how queer activism is being reformulated in response to these critical engagements.

Twisting in Paradigm

“I don’t want to say, please, please give me some space in there”.

The above quote was taken from one of the narratives of the film documentary directed by Sophie Grohmann, Line Köhl, and Bettina Mooshammer in 2008 called, *The Fridge under the Kitchen Wagon: Der Schwarzer Kanal*.. While I will attend to the particularities of the Schwarzer Kanal later in this chapter, this quote, which attests to a refusal of taking a prescribed place in society, highlights what can be seen as a shift in queer activism and engages with the critiques of queer activism as outlined in the previous chapter. This shift can be characterized by the recent tendency within queer theory as well as in activism to recognize an opposition to homonormativity as well as heteronormativity as central to queer politics. I will start with the most widely utilized definition of the word as coming from Lisa Duggan who states that homonormativity “is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depolitized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2002: 179). The key words here are demobilized, depolitized, domesticity, and consumption. Rather than question heteronormative political and socio-economic values, practices and constraints, groups seek inclusion into the institutions which would render them ineffectual as political actors. Such institutions are normally pegged as marriage and military, but mainstream society, capitalist practices such as neoliberalism, consumerism and commodification fall under this realm as well.

With the academic institutionalization of homonormativity came the widespread academic engagement with it as can be found in a variety of sources. Judith Halberstam (2005) uses it in her analysis of the implications of normative temporalities and spatial forms for the queer subject. Sarah Ahmed engages with homonormativity in her phenomenological

approach to sexual orientation as something that would “straighten up queer effects” by making them fall in line with prevailing notions of heteronormative institutions (2007:173). And Lee Edelman (2004) calls on the term in his concept of “reproductive future” or an “affirm[ation of] a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of the Child” (in Ahmed 2007: 173). In an issue of *The Radical History Review* in 2008, dedicated to critiques of homonormativity, theorists and activists alike commented on the pervasiveness of anti-homonormativity in what the editors see as “part of a broader turn toward political economy in contemporary queer academic and activist work” (Murphy, Ruiz and Serlin: 1). The anthology, *Geographies of Sexualities* (2007), makes wide use of the term in a series of articles exploring sexualities, space and place. One article in particular in this anthology by Gavin Brown (2007a) couples queer activist practices in a theoretical setting and sets the stage for my analysis of this “turn toward political economy in contemporary queer academic and activist work”.

In this chapter, I will examine radical queer networks and various sites of activism which seek to disengage the queer subject as inhabiting a depolitized, commodified positioning such that was presented and critiqued by Hennessy among others. By looking at secondary sources of very real and imaginary communities of radical queer networks such as those involved with Queeruption and Schwarzer Kanal, I seek to engage with specific time-spaces which go beyond the discursive and seep out into the realm of social structures and everyday interactions. While these examples are situated in relatively small movements and not without limitations, they are also located within a larger anti-capitalist movement which has mobilized in the past two decades. Furthermore, they offer counter points to critiques on queer theory and activism and indicate how activism is being reformulated in response to critical engagements with queer politics.

Queeruption and Schwarzer Kanal, have a specific engagement with spatial form which plays an influential role in their critique of hetero- and homonormativity. Calling on

Bell and Binnie's (2000) assertion that alternatives to gay and lesbian consumerist spaces are few and far in-between, mainly limited to back alleys and cruising spaces, Gavin Brown (2007a) examines Queeruption as another alternative. Brown engages in an ethnographic detailed account of Queeruption 2002 in London and calls it "a specifically queer tactic of constructive direct action—a space where radical queer activists from different countries can come together to share information, skills and community for a short time" (2007a: 195). I couple his ethnographic analysis together with sources about Queeruption found on the internet, and my involvement with their mailing list.

Queeruption

The first Queeruption took place in 1998 in London when a network of anti-capitalist queer activists squatted an abandoned building in order to create a politically inspired gathering based on creative and active participation. Since then, varying anti-capitalist and/or anarchist queer networks have organized Queeruptions in New York City, San Francisco, Berlin, Amsterdam, Sydney, Barcelona, Tel-Aviv and Vancouver. Each Queeruption differs from the last as they are based on the people who organize them, but generally each gathering squats land or buildings between seven to ten days to provide space for political discussions, skill-sharing, sex parties, communally cooked vegan meals, a “home-base” for political direct actions, workshops, bands, spoken word, drag shows, and film screenings. Queeruption in Barcelona described itself as “a meeting for queers”, not as a festival or free party, but rather “a space un espacio and an opportunity to think, study, work and create together para pensar, trabajar & crear juntos”.²¹ In Tel-Aviv, Queeruption was “an anarcho queer gathering of workshops, actions and parties right in the heart of the middle east [sic]”.²² Since organization revolves around the ethos of DIY (do-it-yourself) culture, the events on the gatherings are participatory, often spontaneous, and completely non-commercial as there is a call to not “just consuming a lifestyle sold to us”.²³

The activists networks involved with Queeruption are not, according to Brown, interested in gaining equal rights or inclusion into institutions which have historically excluded sexual dissidents; rather, they seek to “celebrate and defend the diversity of people who are attempting to live outside the confines of heteronormativity” (2007a: 196) As such, activists associated with Queeruption offer not only a critique of heteronormativity but also of

²¹ <http://www.queeruption.org/barcelona/programaq8.html>; accessed May 13, 2009.

²² <http://queeruption.org/q2006/nologo.html>; accessed May 13, 2009.

²³ <http://queeruption.org/>

homonormativity. The tactics they employ to do so, range from active engagement with sexual and gender politics to what falls outside this realm as well.

As I have discussed previously, one of the points where queer politics differ from lesbian and gay politics is on how to approach the notion of identity. Gay and lesbian politics concentrate on solidifying a homosexual identity, which, by default, relies on correlating gender and sexuality identities and buttresses a division between heterosexuality and homosexuality, men and women, female and male. While gay and lesbian activists were fighting for tolerance and inclusion, earlier moments of queer activism fought with rage to be accepted on their own terms. Yet the tactics they employed, could, in hindsight, be seen as counter productive to the queer project of questioning reified identities. I ask you to recall Queer Nation's utilization of slogans such as "I Hate Straights" which I discussed in the previous chapter. I explained that this slogan assumes a coherent heterosexual identity, one which apparently does not engage in "'nonnormative' procreation patterns and family structures" (Cohen 1997: 210). I have called on this example to illustrate the complexities of dealing with gender and sexuality identities within sites of queer activism and to offer a counter point to the politics that queerruptors engage with.

As Brown articulates, one of their obvious engagements with sexual and gender identity politics can be seen in the preparation of the sex party.²⁴ Queerruptors spend a lot of time outlining, planning and promoting the sex parties which inevitably leads to a lot of discussion about how to approach the complications of gender and sexuality identities, if, as is promoted at the gatherings, "gender identity is self-determined" (Brown 2007b: 2694). An example of this can be seen in the room separation in the sex party during the London Queeruption where a room for women only and a room for men only were set up. While this

²⁴ Brown also points out that a group who felt alienated by the "overly sexualized" atmosphere of the gathering culminating around the sex party started an ironically named "Frigid Youth Alliance" for the Queeruption in Berlin the following year (2007b: 2695). Brown suggests that this served to provoke discussion on how "radical queer" if based only on "sex radicalness"—BDSM (bondage, domination and sadomasochism), sex in public, polyamorous relationships—can also serve to exclude those, who, for whatever reasons (he names celibacy, asexuality, religion, culture) do not want to be involved with such practices (ibid).

may not seem to be a very queer thing to do, Brown describes the signs posted everywhere throughout the gathering that emphasized gender identity as being self-determined and that the participants “should not assume that they would find the genitals on their playmates that they expected from external appearances” (ibid). The seemingly essentialized sex-gender system that necessitates that genitals must match a person’s gender expression is directly called into question here. If this necessity is brought to attention as being one that is socially constructed, as the signs in the Queeruption do, this not only serves to be affirming for some, but also holds the potential to be liberating for all. Of course, I would add, signs are limited in their capacity to liberate. Yet, the collective, active organization of and/or participation in sex parties with this in mind, goes beyond a semiotic engagement with assumptions about gender and sexuality and offers room for transformative lived experience.

The sex parties are not the only occasion to engage with assumptions about another person’s sexual or gender identities. Language is another site of contestation and one participant of Queeruption Amsterdam describes the numerous discussions on the ways in which one should use pronouns when speaking to or about someone whose gender was ambiguous or unknown (Vanelslander 2007: 8). Suggestions ranged from asking the person which pronoun to use, using variations such as “ze” or “hir”, or trying to avoid the use of pronouns all together. The same participant noted that not everyone was mindful of their assumptions of other people’s gender identities, but described the experience of Queeruption as “an enormous challenge not to assume or even define people’s identity (especially their gender), either in language or in thought. If queers want broader society to break down gender boundaries, I experienced Queeruption as an occasion to start with myself” (ibid).

These measures reflect an engagement with the limitations of identity and the social constraints enforced through reified identities. As such, Queeruption offers a safe space for subverting gender and sexuality norms as the queeruptors are “Freed from the sexual and gender constraints of the quotidian world” (Brown 2007a: 201). This results in, Brown

suggests, a “questioning [of] the social relations that normally restrict the free expression of their desires” (ibid). The implication here is that what happens during these Queeruptions has the potential to carry over outside the space of the gatherings, thus gently affecting how some approach social structures.

Political discussions that take place at Queeruptions have resulted in direct action outside of the queer gatherings. Plans for a ‘queer barrio’ at the G8 (Group of Eight) meeting, in Gleneagles, 2005 (which I will return to later), were concretized at the Barcelona Queeruption the year before (Brown 2007a: 204). The queer barrio acted as a sort of ‘home base’, or camp, for queer activists whose goal was to set up a blockade on the motorway to prevent G8 leaders from entering the summit. The barrio was complete with a makeshift kitchen and provided queer activists with a safe space to sleep, eat, and network with other activists part of the larger protest against the G8. The queer barrio was further organized at the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, 2007 and attests to a reflection of queer politics outside of the realm of the ‘merely cultural’ and of sexuality.

Furthermore, discussions on the mailing list are, at the time of this writing, organizing a queer bloc to take part in the No Borders²⁵ camp in Calais, France²⁶ in June 2009. Borders used to keep people out (or in), enforce a dominant order and reinforce a racist mentality of us/them, citizen/stranger, reflect the borders also found between man/woman, straight/gay, male/female which the queer perspective seeks to expose and explode. Indeed, the so-called “border wars” between butch and FTM (female to male) transgender/transsexuals are reminiscent of uneasy tensions between borders (Halberstam 2006, Rubin 1992). Queer

²⁵ The No Borders network was created in 1999 in protest to detention centers for and deportation of migrants and asylum seekers. They fight for freedom of movement and against repression from nation-states in the enforcement of national borders. www.noborder.org; accessed May 28, 2009.

²⁶ In Calais there is a shelter called the Sangatte which “houses” 2000 migrants. The French government does not give support to the people there and a French law forbidding anyone to help “illegal” migrants makes the situation even more precarious not only for those living there but also for the people who do try to help them. <http://bristolnoborders.wordpress.com/2009/03/06/no-border-camp-calais>; accessed May 28, 2009.

activists have reflected on these borders and have placed them in the larger realm of social structures. This is shown in the *Queers without Borders* manifesto:

As queer our understanding of borders is clear: we reject the borders imposed between sexualities, between genders, between our abilities to live our lives as we wish and the strictures imposed by the state, that attempt to prevent us defining our own ways of living. In a society which always attempts to strengthen the position of institutionalized power by marking someone as 'other' (whether this be by race / sexuality / gender or any other means) we refuse to accept this condition of nations and borders, of the containment of people by false boundaries that serve only to profit those who hold power (in Moon and Woodland 2006: 31).

Protests at the G8 summits and at No Border camps are a direct response to other forms of inequalities and divisions between people and queer activism, in this light, ceases to be centered on a "single oppression model" as Cohen posits queer to be. As Brown states, "The value of these queer political actions is not found in their transgression of heteronormative sexual mores but in their modest steps towards the development of alternative sexual *and* social values" (2007a: 202).

The DIY culture so heavily emphasized by the queerruptors has been linked to "counter-culture" movements of the 1960s (McKay 1998: 2). Indeed, social upheaval in the 1960s and after were enacted by people taking matters into their own hands in their respective struggles and an ongoing frustration with "modernist and rationalist politics and values" can still be detected today (Muncie 2004: 179). Yet, what appears to make some of the forms of activism of the networks involved with Queeruption different is their conjuncture with larger scale anti-capitalist movements which can be seen as a reaction to neoliberalism, a strategy of late capitalism centering on a restructuring of financial politics away from the government to the private sector. This is achieved through privatization, deregulation and an increased dismantling of trade barriers. The result of which means that the market governs politics, social services are economized, large, transnational corporations dominate a globalized economy through help from "tax breaks and more profits for businesses at the expense of

those most in need” (Hennessy 2000: 75). Notes from Nowhere²⁷ suggests that what neoliberalism ultimately produces is a growing gap between the rich and poor, deprivation of power and a growing sense of alienation for the majority who are pushed to the periphery while the few with capital, as represented by transnational corporations, the G8, IFO (International Monetary Fund) and WTO (World Trade Organization) shape the world (2003: 26). Growing resistance to neoliberalism, while not particular to the late 1990s and 2000s, has resulted in massive organized protests and movements against the organizations mentioned above.²⁸

The active and collective anti-capitalist stance of the networks in Queeruption is ultimately what differentiates them from mainstream gay and lesbian politics and what entails their critique on homonormativity—the “privatized, depolitized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption”. Furthermore, the emphasis against consumption falls into the realm of anti-capitalism and is a jab at the growing pink economy. Brown states:

The investment in consumption means that people no longer relate to each other as active participants in the creation of society, but as the owners (or not) of things that are divorced from the processes by which they came into being. The social relations of production, of ‘doing’, are converted into ‘being’—in this case, *being gay*. For Holloway (2002) capitalism is precisely that: the separating of people from their own doing. This is the crux of Queeruption’s anti-capitalist critique of hegemonic gay identities, culture and politics (2007a: 197).

In this sense, the queeruptors are not only reacting against alienation, in the Marxist sense, but also against the alleviation from this alienation through means of consumption which merely perpetuates the system creating alienation in the first place (Griffin 2004: 116). Instead, alleviation is sought through regaining a sense of ‘power-to-do’.

²⁷ Notes from Nowhere is a collection of stories written by activists engaged in the anti-capitalism movement.

²⁸ Notes from Nowhere marks the Zapatista uprising in 1994 to be a key tuning point in the anti-capitalist movement (2003: 22) and disruption of the WTO meeting in Seattle, Washington in 1999 brought the anti-capitalist movement “visible to the Northern media” (ibid: 24-25).

The concept of ‘power-over’ versus ‘power-to-do’ is a central distinction to make within anti-capitalist movements, as it is also echoed in the DIY ethos and non-hierarchical organization practices of the networks involved with Queeruption. For this distinction, I draw on feminist scholar Judith Squires (2004) to outline these concepts. She describes ‘Power-over’ as being centered on control and dominance. This places the subject as always being under control from an external force—be it overt, covert, or latent. The basic concept behind ‘power-over’ is that it is exerted by an entity (individual, institution, ideology) over another. ‘Power-to-do’, on the other hand, implicates the subject as an active agent within power structures, noting, however, that the subject is never fully outside power relations. Yet, the theoretical implications of this concept displace the notion that the subject is a victim. What Brown suggests is that queeruptors, within the larger realm of the anti-capitalist movement “are interested in making modest, low-key attempts to re-engage their ‘power-to-do, which is always part of a social process of doing with others”, thus emphasizing queer as a “relational process and not as a simple identity category” (2007a: 197).

Yet this *doing*, for Brown, falls far from engaging with “demands-based politics that is orientated towards the state” because such “politics perpetuates other separations—the separating of leaders from led and ‘serious’ political activity from ‘frivolous’ personal activity” (2007a: 197). Thus we see queeruptors, as Brown presents them, are obviously disengaged with mainstream gay and lesbian politics which place emphasis on equal rights as given by the state: an institution embedded with heteronormative assumptions of what makes a good (sexual) citizen. Instead, through *doing*, the very *process* of collectively organizing and participating in sex parties, queer barrios and queer blocs that “create a less alienated and more empowered space in which to explore a multiplicity of sexual and gendered potentialities” (ibid) among others, queeruptors explore, develop and embody the “turn” that I mentioned earlier in this chapter, “toward political economy in contemporary queer academic and activist work.”

One phenomena that I would like to comment on is that the geopolitical cities in which Queeruption have taken place are seemingly ‘gay-friendly’. In comparison to other parts of the world, sexual and gender deviants in these queerupted areas already enjoy a certain degree of recognition and freedom of mobility without immanent threat of violence. Yet, this is not to say that the violence of homophobia and heterosexism is not felt in ‘gay-friendly’ cities. Gay-bashings and attacks against gender deviants and outlaws are, regardless of where one lives, always a concern.

Another critical engagement concerning these gatherings when considering their location is that as, John Weir (1996) puts it, “their” queer politics are only available for the “metropolitan elite,”—those already in-the-know, not only “unintelligible to the majority of ‘people with homosexual urges’” (in Bell and Binnie 2000: 48) but also only available to those who possess the legal ability and financial means to cross borders to participate in the events. While I think Weir’s critique is problematic as I wonder if it can or should be the goal to represent everyone who has “homosexual urges”, whatever that may mean, I think the other claims are valid to an extent. This assumes, however, that participation in Queeruption only entails physical attendance and participation at the gatherings. While this is an important aspect of the alternative world-making strategy of Queeruption, this would fail to account for the extent to which information, idea sharing and networking also occur through participation in the mailing list. Furthermore, I think it is dangerous to stigmatize this queer project in particular, or dismiss queer networks altogether because they only beckon to a few who are “in-the-know”. Not only do these networks act as supportive bases for people who engage in other areas of activism which are not generally seen as related to sexuality, such as No Border politics and anti-capitalist movements, but I think one of the strengths in radical queer movements lies in its willingness to address these critiques, although this is obviously not without limits.

Thus, while these gatherings occur in gay-friendly locations, they can be seen as reactionary towards gay and lesbian metropolitan scenes which are caught up in consumerism and a commodified gay culture. Indeed, the bigger and more metropolitan the city, the more gay and lesbian spending power is sought. David Bell and Jon Binnie (2004) have pointed out the connection between “urban competitiveness” and “commodified gay space”. The authors state, “Cities have to respond positively to gay culture in order to maintain their competitive edge...That means that every city that considers itself a player must have the requisite features—ethnic quarters, hi-tech corridors, festivals, gay villages” (2004: 1814). In other words, any city wanting to compete in a globalized world, must actively promote themed gay spaces which means ultimately mainstreaming an image of the happy [read: gay], trendy cocktail drinker.

Yet what this ultimately entails is that “The new publicity of more mainstream manifestations of gay consumer cultures—thoroughfares, street cafes, trendy bars, themed gay villages—has driven the less-assimilated queers underground, back into subterranean, back-street bars and cruising grounds” (ibid: 1810). The groups of gay men and lesbians who are supposed to be made visible are therefore the ones who consume, or those, who, while not having the ability to consume, strive to do so and therefore uphold the bourgeois ideal. I do not mean to make light of the positive aspects of these spaces as they undoubtedly offer refuge for gays and lesbians, among others, from harsh realities of homophobia and heterosexism. Furthermore, these spaces foster community building and social networking. However, following the concept of homonormativity, we can see that by packaging gay and lesbian space into the sphere of consumerism, into an accepted form of space specifically designated for the representation of homosexual citizens, “‘undesirable’ forms of sexual representation” are weeded out (Duggan in Bell and Binnie 2004: 1811). This is the pink economy at its finest. It is therefore not surprising that radical queer networks are amassing in

areas where a strong gay and lesbian presence is seen and where businesses compete for mainstream gay culture in order to win their spending power.

Queeruption's reaction to gay consumer culture as manifested in "commodified gay space" is to appropriate their own space by means of squatting and to creatively form their surroundings. In addition, in light of their anti-capitalist ethos and practices, their emphasis on 'power-to-do', the eruption in Queeruption can be seen as creating a rupture in the commodification process; an answer to the very alienation and commercialization that the anti-capitalism movement criticizes. By refusing to "buy into it", queeruptors and the community at the Schwarzer Kanal, as I will shortly explain, seek to disembody capitalism's disregard for environment and labor division concerns. As Brown succinctly states, "queeruptors are not interested in perpetuating a situation where sexuality is reduced to the acquisition of commodities that have been separated from the conditions of their production and from the experiences of those that produced them" (2007a: 197). It is therefore not simply a matter of not wanting to "fit in" to the capitalist conception of society, rather, it is a critique about how society is (re)produced and is an effort to change it, however small that effort may be. Thus, while these social changes are small in scale and are not perhaps what some may envisage when they speak of social change (and why should they be?), they are, however, tactics to not only resist and question oppressive, normative social structures, but are also optimistically productive in channeling more conscious awareness toward inequalities. In this section I have outlined the practices, surrounding political impetus, and ethos which situate Queeruption and the people involved with the mailing list and gatherings as being indicators of critiques against identity politics, homonormativity and of a broader engagement with political economy. This specific trajectory of queer activism must be seen in light of the anti-capitalist movement and critique on the pink economy and the commodified gay subject. While Brown focuses on temporary spaces and the reprieve from the constraints of quotidian life these gatherings offer to activists to experiment and engage on their desires, another

aspect which is left unexamined is the possibility of a longer term space where the quotidian world is met head on. This brings me to my engagement with the Schwarzer Kanal.

The Schwarzer Kanal

“Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (Foucault 1991: 252).

In “Space, Knowledge and Power” Foucault writes about a shift in public policy starting in the 18th century when architecture was discussed in political writings and the focus turned to the question of how to address the order of the city to prevent epidemics and revolts and to promote “a decent and moral family life” (1991: 239). In the same line he then goes on to posit the question, “In terms of these objectives, how is one to conceive of both the organization of a city and the construction of a collective infrastructure?” (ibid). In other words, how does the state organize space if the intent is to create the good citizen? With this question in mind, I would like to return for a moment to the quote at the beginning of this chapter from a participant of the Schwarzer Kanal community as recorded in the film, *The Fridge under the Kitchen Wagon: Der Schwarzer Kanal*. The quote emphasized a refusal of taking a prescribed position in society and can be regarded as countering homonormativity or the “violence of assimilation” Mattilda from Gay Shame pinpointed. Indeed, this statement was said after highlighting the plethora of family advertisements in Siegesssäule, the widely-read mainstream gay and lesbian magazine in Berlin where articles, nightlife, personal ads and ‘gay-friendly’ or gay-operated advertisements for businesses are posted. Mentioning the magazine and remarking on the distance between her desires and the ones as seen in the family ads places the Schwarzer Kanal, and this individual quite specifically, in marked opposition to mainstream society. Elsewhere, the same person stressed the importance of creating space in order to build a community because without that opportunity, she “would kind of perish”. This description brings us closer to the quote at the heading of this section from Foucault, but first let me continue.

Another interviewee, reflecting on the fact that the Schwarzer Kanal is acutely threatened by forceful eviction from the police, stated that “We’re not simply going to vacate this place only because the police will come one day or another.” She goes on to further state that “Locations like this are extremely important, and for these kinds of locations I will continue fighting...The will is there, we have support from outside and somehow or another we will have an area.” Now I return to Foucault. The first part is quite clear: community needs space to grow. While a community can be imagined, virtual or abstract, the community at the Schwarzer Kanal is very real. The Schwarzer Kanal offers space for and is, in part, run by “a wider community who use it for events, workshops, art, film evenings, bike fixing, concerts, Vokü [public kitchen], cabaret or as base for political actions”²⁹ all of which foster and support this notion of community and communal life. The second part of Foucault’s quote, “space is fundamental in any exercise of power,” is a little more abstract, but can be summed up by saying that appropriating space is an exercise of power and if I can remind the reader of my description of ‘power-to-do,’ the Schwarzer Kanal’s appropriation of space by means of squatting is an enactment of power-to-do, an exercise of political freedom and critique on social constraints.

Before I further engage with the Schwarzer Kanal using a textual analysis of the film documentary mentioned above, a cross textual examination of media and internet sources and my own experience as visitor at the queer film festival held at the Schwarzer Kanal in the spring of 2008, I will first take you on a brief historical excursion and introduce the Schwarzer Kanal. After which I will engage with the Schwarzer Kanal as a moment in queer activism to show, as I did with Queeruption, how they are reformulating queer activism in light of the limitations I laid out in chapter two.

²⁹ <http://www.schwarzerkanal.squat.net/Project.html>

A Brief History

We start our story in southeast Kreuzberg in the 1960 and 1970s when “immigrant workers, students, radical political activists, artists, hippies and other drop-outs—also known as the Kreuzberg mix” filled the neighborhood (Bader and Bialluch 2009: 94). Situated on the periphery of West Berlin and bordered on three sides by the Berlin Wall, this area was known, according to “official policy,” as the “slums” (Ladd 1997: 107), resulting in massive restructuring plans to replace or renovate the rent-controlled buildings dating back from the 1860s and 1870s in exchange for higher rent. However, this lively “mix” of people, supplemented in the 1980s with punks and a growing autonomous scene, enacted a “strong and partly militant squatter movement,” along-side neighborhood councils and tenant organizations, and squatted 80 houses alone in Kreuzberg from 1980-1981 in an effort to thwart the city’s plan to redevelop the area (Bader and Bialluch 2009: 95). This sort of from-the-ground-up movement, enacted on such a large scale, and with many types of people involved attests to the kind of protest particular to Kreuzberg still seen today. The actions of the squatting movement, as well as the neighboring public support of preventing massive demolition and restructuring led to a shift in policy as being participatory and based on the needs and desires of the inhabitants.

Alongside the wave of squatting buildings, there was another movement consisting of trailer squatting (Berg 2001). A trailer squat (German: wagenplatz)³⁰ can be described as something akin to ‘travelling people’, yet travelling people often, as the name implies, move from place to place. Wagenplatzs are generally more sedentary and consist of people living in caravans, construction-site trailers, circus wagons, and lorries who form communities of various sizes on unused plots of land. Sometimes the squatters have permission from the land

³⁰ As do the narratives in the film, I use the terms wagenplatz, trailer squat or simply squat interchangeably as the term is not well known in the English speaking context.

owners to 'squat' and they sign annually renewable contracts which permit them to stay on the land. Other times, however, they squat the land illegally and are eventually evicted from the area by the police. As living in a trailer does not conform to the building regulations in most federal states of Germany, eviction is generally inevitable. The reasons for establishing a wagenplatz vary and range from the desire to have adequate space for performing arts, being able to physically design the social environment independent from already established architectural structures, cheap or free living space, closer proximity to nature, and the freedom of mobility (Berg 2001).

As already described, it was suggested that restructuring plans of Kreuzberg mobilized various forms of resistance and produced a shift in city planning policy. This policy radically changed with the fall of the Berlin Wall as the periphery suddenly became the center (Bader and Bialluch 2009: 95). All eyes turned towards Kreuzberg and what were once in the shadows of the Wall, according to Norbert Schmidt, a former representative of the Senate for Internal Affairs, were now on valuable city center property which were needed for other purposes (in Berg 2001). A new battle for restructuring and gentrification began in Kreuzberg and continues today.

Within this battle, and out of this tradition of squatting, the trailer squat, Wagenplatz Schwarzer Kanal took root on a piece of land, recently home to the Berlin Wall, on the bank of the Spree River in 1990. A group of twenty people squatted what was once a highly secured borderland with their vehicles and containers. They built an ecological toilet out of a telephone booth and settled in making due without electricity and running water. Depicted as being idealists and romantic dreamers in the midst of frantic construction of Berlin since the fall of the Wall (Rada 2001: 219), they described themselves as an alternative cultural/housing project pursuing the possibilities of a self-organized community based on consensual and participatory ethics. For twelve years, they organized and regularly held concerts, vaudeville performances and film-screenings for groups up to 300 people and

charged no entry fee. They emphasized their return to nature by calling themselves a biotope in the middle of concrete desert.³¹

In 2002, this all changed when the Schwarzer Kanal was forced to move a few hundred meters up the river to give way to a new office building. The film documentary suggests that this move caused a shift in dynamics in the squat as many people decided to leave. The end thus became the beginning, as all things happen, for the queer wagenplatz. As a result of the move, and due to the mix of people who either stayed or joined the community, the Schwarzer Kanal called themselves a women/lesbian/transgender wagenplatz. Within the last few years, they changed the label of the wagenplatz to 'queer' because as one interviewee put it, "expansions are always good." Yet, he goes on to state, "We also want women/lesbian/transgender to remain a term, as there is an important word in it for us." I will come back to this statement later.

Currently, as I mentioned before, the wagenplatz is acutely threatened by eviction. While they had signed a lease contract with the owners of the land which gave them permission to stay there, the neighboring companies DAZ (German Architecture Center) and the Office Grundstücksverwaltungs GmbH have repeatedly sued the Schwarzer Kanal to vacate the land. They accuse the wagenplatz of causing depreciation of their property and business value, of posing safety risks, of being too loud³², of potentially causing a ghettoization of area, and of not meeting building regulations (Holm 2004). Only through a formal error in court proceedings and the sympathy of city councilor for building and planning has the Schwarzer Kanal been able to avoid eviction (ibid). Yet, as of March 6th, 2007, according to the film, the final decision of the court in favor of the companies places the wagenplatz with no more legal recourse to take.

Their struggle for existence also takes place in a larger struggle currently underway in Kreuzberg. As I mentioned earlier, the participatory, or as Bader and Bialluch call it,

³¹ www.schwarzerkanal.ev.de

³² Noting, however, that noise levels rise during parties at night when the office buildings are empty.

“cautions urban renewal” policy has been supplanted by an “urban renewal west” policy which focuses on economically driven “large-scale redevelopment” in order to restructure this “traditionally poor district” in Kreuzberg (2009: 93). This “urban renewal west” policy is currently headed by Mediaspree, a lobby group, who with public funds, try to attract high-spending investors to the area. In Kreuzberg spirit, there are massive protests and a grassroots initiative entitled “Mediaspree Versenken”³³ (sink Mediaspree) aimed at gathering enough public support to stop the redevelopment plans which would, if carried through, displace numerous alternative living co-ops, squatted buildings and wagenplatzs, such as the Schwarzer Kanal. It would also massively replace the “Kreuzberg mix” in favor of what one person active in the struggle calls, “Aufwertungsfamilien”, or “up-graded families” (Holm 2009), or even better, the “decent and moral family life”, something I return to later.

The Schwarzer Kanal is therefore in the middle of a warzone of profit, city restructuring and angry neighbors. That the wagenplatz has mobilized under the banner of queer is emblematic of its critique against the heteronormative bourgeois “Aufwertungsfamilien” and its existence outside of the logic of regular housing, business, profit and capitalism plays a role in this critique. I outline the history of the Schwarzer Kanal in broader context of the historical significance of Kreuzberg because it sets the stage for my engagement with queer activism as something which has the ability to be re-mobilized and re-politicized while considering hetero- and homonormative critiques. As I showed in chapter two, one of the critical engagements with queer activism and theory is that it is based on cultural production in so far that it then becomes divorced from other material and social realms of society that also need to be critiqued. I posit that the Schwarzer Kanal can be seen as offering a counter point to these critical engagements. I now turn my attention to the implication of squatting queerly.

³³ Although Mediaspree Versenken delivered a petition with 300,000 signatures against the plans to the city government, parts of the restructuring plans stay intact.

(Re)Negotiating Norms: the squatting queer

The spatial form of the squat is a good place to start as it is an obvious critical engagement with neoliberal orders of living where individuality, private property and the nuclear family ethos are fore fronted. While this is not particular to this wagenplatz in particular, as other squats and alternative housing/living projects arguably offer the same critique, the underlying ethos of a squat, mobilized under the banner of 'queer' suggests an engagement with heteronormative concepts of space and ways of living. What I am certainly not suggesting is that living alone, with a partner or partners, with children, in a house or in an apartment entails an adherence to heteronormativity as this would be a dismissal of lived experiences and internal or unrecognizable sites of resistance to norms. Yet, if we remember Foucault's assertion that the state organizes space to promote "a decent and moral family life", appropriating space immediately provokes an inquiry into how social life is structured (Bieri 2002: 212). Furthermore, it provides opportunities for the squatters to make alternative social structures which would not be realized otherwise. Before I engage with these opportunities, I will first discuss the discursive power that (queer) squatting disrupts.

The notion of property, as in, what we think of when it comes to land and housing has been theorized by Engels and taken up by some feminists to be central to patriarchy's hold over women (Tong 1998). While this conception is arguably out-dated, the notion of having something to bequeath as central to the heterosexual, nuclear family remains etched in property and marital laws. Yet, if we were to disrupt the notion of bequeathing, as based on property, we would disrupt the implicit heteronormativity and heterosexism as Engels presents it. Although many feminists have shown Engels' analysis to be flawed in its assumption of an "original sexual division of labor" (ibid: 106), it still offers food for thought as to what is inherent with property and how power is exercised through property

Indeed, ownership of property is not without its historical implications. As articulated by Lehrer and Winkler, the seemingly fixed notion of land ownership is socially constructed and is enacted through “legal deliberations, social discourse, and government interventions” (2006: no page). They draw on Nick Blomley’s (2004) observation that property is assumed as “ownership rights [which] are created at one moment in time and immutable thereafter. However, it is useful to recognize that property is not a static, pre-given entity, but depends on a continual, active 'doing'" (in Lehrer and Winkler *ibid*). Thus, property and space are enacted through cooperation and performative motions between institutions and persons.

The connection here with Butler’s notion of performativity is unmistakable and Gill Valentine calls upon it to venture into the concept of “performative space” (2002: 155). She claims that the repetition of actions in space is what makes space seem to be fundamentally heterosexual (*ibid*). Space is not a priori heterosexual. Space is not a priori anything. It is only through actions such as “heterosexual couples kissing and holding hands..., to advertisements and shop windows that present images of contended ‘nuclear’ families” which “produce a host of assumptions embedded in the practices of public life about what constitutes proper behaviors and which congeal over time to give the appearance of a ‘proper’ or ‘normal’ production of space” (*ibid*). She goes on to contend that codes, “gayspeak”, “knowing” or “cruising glances”, recognition of the homosexual other “are productions of space that unsettle the presumed hegemony of heterosexuality and disrupt public/private dualism” (*ibid*). Thus, the presence and open visibility of the queerness of the squat (while perhaps only recognizable to those in-the-know) thwart reproduction of normative space and reproduction of bourgeois heterosexual space not only because it is queer, but also because it hinders city redevelopment centered on the *Aufwertungsfamilien*. Thus, the queer squat engages not only with implications of heteronormativity but also with class structure. If the “up-graded” version of the family is supposed to take over Kreuzberg, then this ultimately entails a removal of a “down-graded” version of the family or the “Kreuzberg mix”. In this light, and

with Schwarzer Kanal's active participation and affiliation with Mediaspree Versenken against the ongoing gentrification process of Kreuzberg in mind, we might say that the Schwarzer Kanal is consciously engaging in a critique of the bourgeois ideals of proper living and (heterosexual) family.

I remind the reader about Foucault's statement that space is fundamental in communal life and simultaneously an act of power. What I might add to Foucault's statement is that seizing space, in this case squatting, is not only an exercise of power-to-do, a turn toward the political, but that it holds enormous potential for opportunities for making alternative social structures. Chatterton and Holland have stated that squatting "illuminates a collective and creative use of urban space which sketches out possibilities for radical social order" (2005: 224). Indeed, Hakim Bey (1991) highlights the political potential behind temporary³⁴ autonomous zones (TAZ) as being libratory spaces from the everyday where participants can experiment with spatial form and social constructions (in Chatterton and Hollands 2005: 213).

One narrative in the film highlights this experimentation in social constructions by stating:

I'm convinced that everybody harbors sexism, homophobia, transphobia and racism. We don't come from the moon, but we are part of the system and that's why we have to work on these issues. That's where a queer trailer squat is able to approach these issues, to approach and handle homophobia and transphobia...and that "we here" are able to try to deal with racism and sexism and to examine ourselves more closely and to be open for criticism.

³⁴ While Schwarzer Kanal has existed for 19 years, it is always in a perpetual state of temporariness due to its precarious legal status. A narrative in the film suggests that this temporariness has caused a lack of 'development' of the squat; things are not being built, for example, a fridge under the kitchen wagon (hence the name of the film). This is due to the "belief that we're [not] going to be here enough to really put things physically into place". Yet, two narratives in the film suggest that they have changed their approach to how they handle the present in face of an uncertain future. One stating, "recently I think I've just started to live ... for now and I like living for now...Enjoy the moment now while it's here and just get on with thinking, yeah, ok, it might take me half a day to build a fridge under the kitchen wagon, we might be evicted tomorrow, but then, oh well, then we had a fridge for a day, that was nice". Furthermore, the perpetual state of temporariness has caused a perpetual state of uncertainty whereby "the stress of eviction" has caused many people to move out. An interviewee states, "at the same time, it's also not so negative that new people come in all the time and old people leave because you get this constant renewal of energy". This film suggests that the "stress of eviction" has led to a constant flow of people, ideas and energy. In this sense, this state of uncertainty and temporariness can also be seen a productive.

What I believe this quote ultimately implies is that the possibility of engaging with these prejudices in order to break their perpetuation can be distinctively dealt with by taking oneself out of “the system”. By living in or placing oneself in a space where these prejudices are actively engaged with, where it is collectively agreed upon that sexism, homophobia, transphobia and racism will be dealt with as part of a political, living project, the exposure and transformation of one’s harbored prejudices can be potentially realized. Yet, by stating “we here” the narrator implies that is not only personal transformation, but also a collective one. This echoes my reference to Queeruption and my highlighting that it is the *process* of *collectively* participating in and organizing sex parties and engaging with language limitations that are fundamental to creating potential change in conceptions of social constraints. In the same token, turning toward (as in, the “turn toward the political economy”) the prejudices that the interviewee stated is what entails the same potentiality for those engaged in the squat. That this turn is made under the mobilization of a queer squat, as a living project, is an indication that certain sites of queer activism are not only engaging with oppression based on sexuality, but are breaking out of the “single oppression model” that Cohen referenced.

A further indication of this is the Dyke-Trans-March-Berlin that the Schwarzer Kanal participates in and helps organize. The motto of the march being, “We put Gender back on the Queer Agenda”.³⁵ This seems to be an indication that there is a certain amount of recognition of different positionalities in the “queer agenda”. A critique that is prevalent about queer theory and activism is that ‘transgender’, ‘women’ and ‘lesbian’³⁶ are identity categories or subject positioning based on gender presentation with specific political, material and social histories which often get absorbed under the ‘queer’ banner dominated by men, the criticism mainly being that lesbians are rendered invisible (Jeffreys 2003). If as one interviewee states,

³⁵ <http://www.myspace.com/dyketransmarchberlin>

³⁶ While critiqued by Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), she pointed out that sexual identity is based on the gender of one’s sexual object choice (in Sullivan 2003:38)

“We want those who have a queer self-conception—whatever that might mean—to move in. We also want women/lesbian/transgender to remain a term, as there are important words in it for us”, then it appears as though there is an engagement with the ensuing importance of these concepts, even as queer is said to destabilize identity categories. Thus, although they mobilize under the banner of queer, there is an open understanding of it, “whatever that might mean”, as being a self-defined label. Furthermore, this open understanding and reluctance to let women/lesbian/transgender deconstruct completely away allows them to engage with the misogynistic queer.

While, as seen on their webpage, the Schwarzer Kanal participates in and helps organize more obvious sites of queer activism such as the aforementioned Transgenialer CSD, ‘queer barrio’ at the G8 meeting in Heiligendamm, No Border protests, Dyke-Trans-March-Berlin, the narratives in the film attest to a different sort of activism through everyday engagement with an alternative social structure. When Warner asks what it is that queers want (1993: vii), it is obvious for everyone, Warner included, that a monolithic answer can not be given. However, what these squatters, mobilized under the banner of queer, want is to experience everyday life in a community, in a physical space where a sexist, homophobic and racist mentality is actively engaged with. Furthermore, for one interviewee, “the conception of a queer trailer squat makes it somehow a special thing. And what makes living together here so pleasant, all the small details that come so naturally”. For another, living on a queer wagenplatz means not getting “stupid looks when I say my name, that I am a “he”, that that this is accepted”. Or it is about living “with people who are not automatically straight and who live their lives thinking that this is the way the world works. Rather, [it is about living] with a lot of different people who have diverse politics and live different loves”. For another it is about taking “away all hierarchies” and trying to “build up again, a way of living without hierarchy” which would entail being “conscious” and “very questioning if hierarchies might spring up inequalities between people”. “Small details”, not getting “stupid looks”, having

“diverse politics”, living “different loves” and being “questioning if hierarchies” arise, attest to an everyday engagement with what these squatters understand as queerly living and it is this attempt to build alternative social structure that can be argued to make them activists in their own right.

While writing in the framework of alternative forms of nightlife, Chatterton and Hollands describe various sorts of marginal spaces, such as squats, which define themselves against a corporate ‘other’ (2005: 203). This tendency can also be seen at the Schwarzer Kanal. Indeed, narratives in the film disidentify with “boring yuppies”, “mainstream society”, “glossy office blocks”, “investors”, and “Mediaspree”. This attests to their anti-profit, anti-capitalist stance which reverberates with not only the act of squatting itself, and therefore a reaction to the logic of private property, but it is also seen through many of the activities the squat plans as well. One example is an event that was held in 2007 and in 2008 called “Queer and Rebel Days”, an event similar to Queeruption, where an anti-consumerist walkout was planned. The call for the action is detailed below:

Somehow, big corporations manage to train us believe that the only way to feel love is by buying things and the best way to be free is to consume. Advertisements brainwash us and make us the rich’s slaves and to pay for it all we must work like donkies. **The damage is critical.** We work to buy more and fill the world with trash that destroys our environment and future. We give the rich money so they can build more shopping centres and bigger billboards – to make us all better trained for the next shopping journey. **Don’t be a trained puppy. Buy your freedom – stop shopping!** (bold in original).³⁷

The refusal to alleviate alienation through consumerism is again highlighted here. Due to space constrictions and the close similarity this event has to Queeruption, I have chosen to leave out a description of this event. Yet, I would like to highlight another event, the queer film festival.

³⁷ <http://www.schwarzerkanal.squat.net/QueerAndRebel.html>; accessed on January 11, 2009

The Schwarzer Kanal is hosting its 3rd annual 'Entzaubert' queer film festival in June, 2009. Similar to Gay Shame's linguistic play on gay 'Pride', the film festival 'Entzaubert' (English: disenchanting) is an obvious jab at Berlin's week long, internationally acclaimed queer film festival, 'Verzaubert' (English: enchanting). Verzaubert's program for 2008 promised a diverse line of films aimed, among other things, at portraying an array of gay and lesbian families.³⁸ The festival receives massive publicity and is sponsored by Siegessäule (the mainstream gay and lesbian events magazine in Berlin mentioned before), Timm (a television channel targeted at gay men), LSVD (the Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany), and CineStar (a chain of large block buster movie theatres). Tickets for one film cost eight Euros with a pass for unlimited film screenings running at 125 Euros.

In sharp contrast, Entzaubert is a DIY event run on donation basis and does not feature commercial films. The event lasts for four days and is complimented by daily Vokus (public kitchen), workshops for skill-sharing in filmmaking, editing, directing, subtitling, etc. as well as music and dancing at night. Distinct from Verzaubert's advertised emphasis on gay and lesbian families and coming out stories, in 2008, films at Entzaubert ranged from lesbian SM, pornography in free spaces under threat of eviction (squatted buildings or land), "trans man porn", BDSM to experimental films, a documentary on intersex persons, an experimental documentary on Iranian feminist and left-wing political opposition groups who fled to Germany in the 1980s, films parodying children's educational videos with camp-inflection, and an exposé on Queer Tango. The array of subject matters of these films ranged from the political to the cultural, and the erotically transgressive to the comedic. This is not to charge that Verzaubert's film of films might not have featured any of those things. Yet, Verzaubert's promotional call for the film festival in 2008, where "coming out stories belong to gay and lesbian film festivals just as film stars belong on the big screen,"³⁹ shows a sharp juxtaposition of gay and lesbian subjectivities with commodified blockbuster entertainment.

³⁸ <http://www.verzaubertfilmfest.com/2008/pages/festivalinfo.html>; accessed on May 30, 2009

³⁹ http://www.verzaubertfilmfest.com/media/V09_Berlin.pdf ; accessed on May 30, 2009

We are then left to ask if this film festival is promoting what Hennessy called, “an imaginary, class-specific gay subjectivity” (2000: 112), consolidated by a “social identity” as found in the marketplace (Chasin: 2000: 24).

The organizers behind Entzaubert might seem to think so as their promotional call beckons something else:

Entzaubert is non-commercial. Entry to all screenings is by donation. We support the idea of copyleft and creative commons. Entzaubert offers a platform for movies, films, documentaries that might not get screened in mainstream commercial festivals. Entzaubert is a radical queer festival. We think that queer is about living your life in a political way which challenges gender and power structures; also that fucking with gender normativity, abolishing borders and fighting for migrants’ and workers’ rights are all part of one struggle. The capitalist system is based on social inequality, so for us, opposing capitalism is connected to the fight against transphobia, homophobia and sexism as well as racism, fascism and militarism. With entzaubert we want to encourage all the rad queers and feminists out there to get their images and word out to celebrate our community and diversity. Come and be part of it!⁴⁰

Yet the film festival is not only a cultural event to watch free movies that would otherwise not get screened. It also offers a chance to network, build community and strengthens a certain political ethos under the radical queer, anti-capitalist perspective that the promotional call endorses. If queer for the squat is also about, as one interviewee puts it, exercising “a political agenda, a radical critique on the system as it is” and if the “system as it is” is one of alienation and consumerism where she would “perish” without having the opportunity “to network and do things together with others [she] think[s] are important”, then cultural events such as the film festival are important for moving political agendas forward while supporting alternative social structures. In this light, we might say that this is a counter point to the critical engagement with queer activism which holds that an emphasis on cultural production dismisses other material and social realms of society. “Material” in this sense gets translated to “the system” and a critique on consumerism for these queer activists. Cultural production

⁴⁰ <http://www.schwarzerkanal.squat.net/termine.html>

then becomes the site for critical engagements with material and social realms. To further cement this notion, another interviewee stated that through these cultural events, he is “able to live out a part of [his] political self-conception”. Another emphasized the importance of Schwarzer Kanal precisely “because it’s queer, because it does politics and culture, because one can look at things non-commercially or do them oneself.” Here we see the merger of different realms of social life as endorsed under the queer banner of this queer squat. Cultural, material and political are not separate.

In this chapter I have outlined two sites of queer activism to offer counter points to critical engagements with queer activism. I have shown that the Schwarzer Kanal and the networks involved with Queeruption are (modestly) engaging their power-to-do as part of a relational social process in order to create alternative social structures. Furthermore I have located specific influences coming from larger socioeconomic and political contexts in order to offer insight into what is guiding the reformulation of queer activism as coming from these sites. These influences are the anti-capitalist movement and disengagement with the pink economy and the commodified gay subject.

Conclusion

Queer activism in the United States in the early 1990s was propelled by postmodern thinking and dismissal of grand narratives and a poststructuralist dismantling of stable identities. Yet, ultimately, the impetus for queer activism was the unfortunate crisis of AIDS and the U.S. government's response, or rather, homophobic negligence in handling the pandemic. ACT UP evolved out of this crisis and sought to denaturalize sexuality on the basis of specific sexual acts. Identity became a relational process for politics instead of being bound up in essentialism. Queer activism, as coming from Queer Nation, celebrated diverse desires and identities through resistance to normality. They sought visibility and behaved inappropriately in public space in order to expose underlying heteronormative imperatives.

Yet, their practices were not without their limitations. In pursuing destabilization of heteronormative meaning through use of the commodity and consumerist spaces, their actions were deemed as counterproductive in their claims to anti-assimilation. Furthermore, queer activism was seen as being too invested in a "single oppression model". The assertion was that queer activism has/had the tendency to disengage with issues surrounding the political economy in favor of cultural production. I suggested that valorization of the pink economy has led to a depolitization of the queer subject and channels a desire for assimilation

The Schwarzer Kanal, the networks involved with Queeruption and the gathering itself, can be seen as offering counter points to these critiques and, as being part of a broader turn towards an engagement with the political economy, they offer a critique to homonormativity. The moments of queer activism that I have highlighted are engaging in "power-to-do" as part of a relational process. As such, the practices that these sites of activism engage in are indicators that there is an ongoing critique against identity politics, homonormativity and consumerism. The Schwarzer Kanal, through engaging in everyday interactions in a squat, specifically offers a critical engagement with neoliberal orders of

living where individuality, private property and the nuclear family are fore fronted. These specific trajectories of queer activism must be seen in light of the anti-capitalist movement and critique on the pink economy and the commodified gay subject

Final Twist

I end here to propose here that to “turn toward an engagement with political economy” might also ultimately entail a turning away from an engagement with a specific logic of the political and economic if we also bear in mind a refusal to participate in homonormative practices; as Duggan’s definition of homonormativity leaves us with little room to maneuver in the neoliberal, dominant order of society. We might ask if this turning away would mean simply slipping into transgressive tactics or if the community at the squat or the people involved in the networks at Queeruptions are transgressing norms simply for the sake of it. It is feasible to consider that the squatters are squatting and queeruptors erupting not merely to be transgressive rebels in order to say “fuck the system”. Rather, they are being transgressive in order to try to produce new realities in what can be seen as a practice of prefigurative politics, or the attempt to collapse the means and the ends (Brown 2007a). In other words, they are doing now what they imagine for the future. If we were to conjure up an understanding of prefigurative queer politics, as I believe Queeruption and Schwarzer Kanal do, we will see that their transgressions are not simply done to oppose or deride the hetero/homo dichotomy; their transgressions aim to generate cultural resources, networks, relationships, types of organization that while acting as resistance towards normalization, also in turn facilitate and sustain different realities altogether (Heckert 2005: 53).

This engagement or rather, disengagement with the neoliberal “political economy” is what consequently further offers a construction of alternative social structures. While Hennessy, as a Marxist feminist, might call for a more systematic class-based analysis in order to change social structures, Brown points out that this engagement holds the “pretension

that the future of the world [can] be carefully and rationally planned” (2007a: 203). In contrast, drawing on Thrift’s assertion that “uncertain outcomes built upon partial knowledges are a constant of human life”, Brown suggests that “the ... movements of the last decade or so are becoming more comfortable with realizing” that there can be no constants (ibid). As such, the networks involved with Queeruption as well as the Schwarzer Kanal, as part of a larger anti-capitalism movement, “are engaged in a re-imagining of political practice that is revelatory, rather than programmatic” (ibid). I follow Brown’s statement that the practices and ethos of the networks involved with Queeruption and of those of Schwarzer Kanal, are not only “a refusal to engage in mainstream circuits of capitalism”, but they are at the same time also “creatively experiment[ing] with alternatives in the here and now, rather than slipping into a nihilist stupor or postponing all dreams until some ‘post-revolutionary’ future” (ibid: 198). As one interviewee of the film states, “Live your dreams even though, you know, your dreams are ... dreams. Just try it anyway. That has a beauty in itself somehow that is positive”.

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