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Desire as a Mode of Border Crossing.

The queer strategy of undisambiguation as a challenge to violent border regimes

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Abstract

One cannot think borders beyond conflict and violence. Yet there are at least two different forms of conflict and violence to be considered: conflicts over putting up borders and conflicts over transgressing borders; the violence of exclusion due to borders and the violence of not respecting borders. In this sense border crossings also have a double meaning: they can be enriching, emancipatory, or subversive acts, but they can also be violations. In thinking about desire as a mode of transgressing borders (border crossing) one has to take into account these different meanings of border crossing and the different forms of violence involved.

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Donna Haraway presents the now famous Cyborg Manifesto as „an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction“ (Haraway 1991: 150). I would like to take this combination of confusion and construction, of pleasure and responsibility as a starting point for some queer-feminist reflections on border regimes and transgressive movements and the role of desire in crossing borders. Could we say, as Margrit Shildrick suggests, that some desire „entails a inherent transgression of boundaries“ (Shildrick 2009:125)? What kind of desire would that be? And are transgressions boundlessly desirable? What are queer visions concerning borders? Do we want to transgress, transform, transcend, cross, dissolve, overcome, conquer, or respect borders and boundaries? Do we envision a world without borders? Or a world that allows for multiple, creative, and most of all, non-violent forms of border crossing? Haraway does not suggest a world without boundaries. She also does not suggest that boundaries „just happen to us“ or are the products of nature, god(ess), or alien forces, to which one has to submit or which are

encountered through fate. Rather, she claims that all of us are taking part in their construction – and this is why one can take on responsibility in the first place.¹

Undisambiguating borders

In my 2002 book *Wider die Eindeutigkeit* I focus on the *transgression* of boundaries when proposing undisambiguation (*VerUneindeutigung*) as the most adequate strategy of queer politics. Queer Politics try not to repeat identitarian closures and thus hope to avoid the exclusions, hierarchizations and normalizations that go along with it. For this reason, I argue that undisambiguating is a more convincing response to heteronormativity than strategies of proliferating or dissolving binary categories of sex, gender, and desire. This strategy is not caught in the alternative of either endlessly repeating the construction of bounded identities or getting rid of boundaries altogether. Rather it focuses critically on processes of constructing clear-cut borders (disambiguation). The exclusionary, normative and sometimes violent processes of creating “truth” may be challenged by another process, namely undisambiguation. Undisambiguation does not simply reverse the process but tries to create a situation where the striving to disambiguate is deferred and pleasure in ambiguity, polysemy, and paradox gains space. Yet I also point out that undisambiguation is not worthwhile

¹ While I agree with Haraway’s double-gesture of pleasure and responsibility I am sceptical about the opposition between playfulness and domination she offers, when she writes: „we risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up the confusing task of making partial, real connection. Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. ‘Epistemology’ is about knowing the difference.“ (Haraway 1991: 161) From my point of view even bigger challenges for knowing and taking responsibility appear when regimes of dominations work with playful differences, so that playful differences become part of regimes of domination. Accordingly, I would argue that in neoliberal times contradictions are no longer external but internal to subjectivity/ies, and conflict no longer develops as an antagonistic opposition, but contains paradoxes and ambiguities (Engel 2009).

in itself, but only insofar as it supports processes of dehierarchization and denormalization (Engel 2002: 204-11).²

While created in the field of cultural politics I would claim that undisambiguation may also be important as a strategy for challenging geo-political borders – even those which present themselves as sites of expulsion and violence. In challenging the understanding of borders as clear-cut lines it fits in very well with recent approaches that conceptualize borders as liminalities, as sites of transition, exchange and transformation, or as ongoing activities.³ These approaches are by no means necessarily counter-hegemonic but can be found in official politics. The *European Charter of Border and Cross-Border Regions*, for example, states that borders in today's Europe have a new quality as “meeting spaces” which transcends their original function as obstacles and barriers, and that they serve as “bridges in the process of European unification”.⁴ Therefore I would like to ask what it means to acknowledge borders not as given facts but as performatively enacted as well as in constant transformation, if taking up the aforementioned aims of dehierarchizing and denormalizing existing regimes of normalcy. It would mean to underline the necessity

² A queer-feminist perspective, I would say, aims at challenging existing power inequalities and regimes of normalcy and domination. For this task, “dehierarchization” and “denormalization” provide relative, though clearly defined ethical criteria, without universalizing a normative aim.

³ Anzaldúa (1987), Gabilonda (2002), Massey (2005), Luibheid (2007), *Transit Migration* (2007), Wikinson (2010), Aaron (2010). Sarah Green (2009) coins the term borderli-ness (recently transposed to borderness) thus referring „to border as a *quality*, rather than as an object, and more as ongoing activity, rather than a fixed 'thing.' [and aiming at, ae] understanding the multiple qualities of borders, and how those qualities constantly change“. <http://wiki.manchester.ac.uk/eastbordnet/index.php/Borderli-ness> (accessed 31 January 2011).

⁴ *Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), European Charter for Border and Cross-Border Regions, New Version, Gronau 2004:* http://www.aebr.net/publikationen/pdfs/Charta_Final_071004.gb.pdf (accessed 1 September 2009), p. 7.

of power analysis that examines exchanges in liminal spaces, for example transfers of people and goods and information, as negotiations or struggles over resources, social conditions, and political influence, rather than simply applications of national laws, rules of trade, or technologies of control. This said I would like to point out that I see new forms of conflict developing in relation to borders as liminal sites of transition and exchange. Former understandings of borders as clear-cut lines or disambiguated definitions conceptualize conflicts as conquering or defending borders, relocating them or getting rid of them altogether. In contrast to this borders as liminalities and sites of transition and exchange suggest agonistic rather than antagonistic conflicts and involve practices or processes that transform qualities, quantities, and constellations. Accordingly, crossing borders takes place as transforming power relations rather than dis/acknowledging ruling regimes. However in theorizing conflicts, one also has to ask about violence. What happens when border conflicts turn violent? Are we thinking about the violence of putting up borders? Or the violence of disrespecting borders? To what extent do different conceptualizations of border influence possible ways of answering violence? In the following I will argue that the queer strategy of undisambiguation provides answers for dealing with border conflicts in non-violent ways, and that it connects with notions of desire, which allow us to face and transform the ambiguities of border violence.

It might be surprising that I introduce the notion of desire as mode of border crossing under conditions of conflict and violence. Although in the following I will present desire as helpful for conceptualizing border crossings, I will definitely not offer desire as a cure to or an adversary of violence. Rather, I will look at intimate or implicated relations between desire and conflict, in order to examine how from this implication possible answers to situations of violence may emerge. Furthermore I will

argue that undisambiguation goes along with a shift in understanding desire and that it is queer re-articulations of desire – as they are proposed for example by Judith Butler (1993, 2004), Teresa de Lauretis (1994), Elizabeth Grosz (1994), and Elspeth Probyn (1996) – that are at work in undisambiguation. It is precisely these re-articulations that allow for notions of border crossing that challenge the border as a clear-cut boundary. However, the boundaries themselves are still respected, which results in a non-violent approach to border crossings.

Queering heteronormative desire

Heteronormativity and desire are central categories of queer theory (Hartmann 2007, Engel 2010). While both of them open up the analysis and critique of relations of power and domination, the latter also carries an anticipatory potential. Desire can be a mode of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Shildrick 2009; McCormack 2009) or a tool of an “analytics of the present” that, as Foucault explains, derives its critique from a genealogical approach while always already envisioning/practicing the future (Foucault 2000; Engel 2002, 2006). It is characteristic of queer approaches to desire that they undermine the subject/object distinction that commonly introduces the gendered hierarchy to desire by expecting someone to embody the *object* of desire in order to secure the position of a desiring *subject* (Butler 1993; Grosz 1994; Engel 2006). For Teresa de Lauretis (1994) desire is taking place in “shared fantasy scenarios” made up out of historically shaped, publicly available and biographically gained imagery. Lauretis understands fantasy not as an individual’s capacity, but as a socio-historic practice bound up with power relations and constitutive of society. As such it may effect identification as plausibly as repulsion, alienation or self-alienation, and it may also enable the infusion of queer images and practices into the social field. In re-reading the phallus not as the exclusive signifier, but as a fetish competing with

all kinds of other objects and signs in signifying desire Laretis subverts the hierarchizing and normative effects of phallogocentrism. Elspeth Probyn's (1996) notion of "desire travelling in images" is inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2004) in presenting desire as drawing connections on the surface of the social and forming assemblages of objects, signs, and bodies. It subverts any kind of naturalized desire caught in the depth of a subject. Yet it also avoids ontologizing desire as a pre-discursive force. Rather, as Probyn points out, power analysis is necessary and may show whether concrete connections repeat well-known patterns of identity, difference, and their stratified power relations, or whether desire is travelling in images that confuse and disrupt established normalities and invoke surprising assemblages. Margrit Shildrick (2009) presents a similar idea when she, like Probyn, proposes a queer reading of Deleuze/Guattari:

"Desire is not an element of any singular subject; it is not pre-given; it is neither possessed nor controlled; it represents nothing; and nor does it flow directly from one individual to another. Instead it comes into being through what Deleuze and Guattari call 'desiring machines', assemblages that cannot be said to exist outside of their linkages and interconnections, and which may encompass both the animate and the inanimate, the organic and the inorganic." (Shildrick 2009: 124)

Yet these understandings of desire have to be seen as the product of queer re-articulations. It would be implausible to argue that desire is queer in itself or that there is something ontologically queer inherent to desire. This would mean ignoring the critique that has been developed from feminist perspectives showing how phallogocentric and heteronormative desires contribute to installing hierarchies, inequalities, and even ground violent practices (Rubin (1984), Irigaray (1985), Butler (1993), Laretis (1994), Cornell (2000)). J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006) takes up the contradictory moments when pointing out that desire is – somehow paradoxically – a

most conservative force that keeps people in place and impedes daring new forms of being or acting, while simultaneously also carrying the potential of inciting “an interest in unpredictability, contingency, experimentation, or even an attachment to the limit of understanding and the possibilities of escape” (xxiii). This paradox – providing it is played out as a productive tension – holds the promise of linking Foucault’s insights into desire as a product of historical power/knowledge with a Deleuze/Guattarian understanding of desire as movement and becoming. The former sees desire as a regulatory force, disciplining bodies, regulating populations, and constituting normative sexual identities (Foucault 1980; 1990), whereas the latter underlines the potential of desire to break up established power relations (Deleuze 1997).

Things become tricky when Gibson-Graham loses sight of the paradoxical moment in desire and shifts to understanding desire as predominately a promising force that opens up space for the celebration of communities of difference (Gibson-Graham 2006: 138; 160). A delight about difference that avoids seeing and handling the difference of conflict, or contradiction, or competition, of privileges, or antagonistic political views or interests, idealizes desire and limits its potential of drawing and destroying connection (Engel 2010). Thus in thinking about desire one also has to take into account intersections between desire and violence, as they may take shape in sexual abuse, rape, or torture, but also in sexualizations of racism or nationalism (Gabilondo 1996; Cornell 2000).

Adi Kuntsman (2009), for example, analyzes the sexualization of violence in an Internet forum in Israel run by Russian-speaking LGBT migrants. Paradoxically, violence functions as a technology of belonging (126), when it exerts the function of drawing borders and defining the positions of friend and enemy: marking some as a

threat and excluding them from participating in the national community (rhetorically employing the figure of “the Terrorist”) while installing others as protectors, whose violence is legitimized for its function of securing home (rhetorically employing the figure of “the Soldier”). Kuntsman avers that both figures are not only co-dependent (99) but actually constitute each other through sexualization and being sexualized by those for whom these figures provide screens of projection of their own desires. This sometimes means employing a simple contrast of normalized sexiness and perverse sexuality (123), as also Jasbir Puar (2007) points out. Yet sometimes it also means creating a hybrid space where „pretending, passing, and disclosing“ (143) become sexualized processes providing for erotic encounters, which are nevertheless thoroughly entangled with the violence of „claiming the authority to stop or let through, [...] violence towards those who are denied passage [passing, ae], or subjected to a possibility of such denial“ (154).⁵ The lgbt immigrants’ desire for national and sexual belonging, for “Israel as a gay fantasy in which the sexy masculinity of the colonisers [...] comes to constitute the nation” (105) confronts them, yet also allows them to deal with the ambiguity of their own position: As immigrants they are positioned as dwelling on the threshold between privilege (in comparison to Palestinians) and marginalization, and as those who could as easily be perceived as embodying “the Soldier” as embodying “the Terrorist” or, maybe worst, denied both. In the face of ambiguity violence provides a means of effecting disambiguation and clear-cut lines. Combining sexuality and violence, as for example in the sexiness of violence found in militarism and nationalism, promises a coherence

⁵ Important for Puar as well as Kuntsman is the fact that the participation of lgbt people in the nationalist and racist consensus of post-9/11 Western societies effects the normalization of Western gay and lesbian sexualities as signifiers of liberalism, a phenomenon called ‘homonationalism’ by Puar.

of identification and desire and thus overcoming the ambiguity of being “‘white but not quite’ [Kuntsman borrowing a phrase from Homi Bhabha, ae] – as this is the case of Russian-speaking Jewish newcomers who are constituted as almost, but not quite Jewish; almost, but not quite European and Western; almost, but not quite Israeli (yet).” (100)

For Kuntsman “the Soldier” and “the Terrorist” are “border figures” (97ff.), who in their interplay demonstrate how borders are not given facts but effects of performative practices: “The border itself [...] always comes into being through violent encounters between those who cross it and those who are assigned – and/or feel entitled – to protect it.” (99) Yet focusing on the sexualization of violence in border crossings and border protection Kuntsman also draws attention to the ambiguity of these borders, and the various ways their pretended clear-cut lines are blurred. I find Kuntsman’s considerations interesting not only because she subverts any euphemistic understanding of desire or queerness, but also because Kuntsman convincingly shows how analyzing the symbolic, psychic, and socio-sexual processes enacted within subcultural communities provides insights into the working of geopolitical border regimes, nationalism, and military violence. Still, in the end I am skeptical that Kuntsman relies on an understanding of border as – at least phantasmatically – a clear-cut line, as such linking desire almost exclusively to racist and nationalist technologies of belonging. Probyn’s concept of “outside belonging” which understands desire as subverting identitarian closures and exclusions cannot be found in Kuntsman’s account. Therefore I would now turn to Judith Butler’s latest consideration on desire in order to contrast both, a too harmonious understanding of desire as always already transgressing border regimes, and of desire as always entangled with violent border regimes.

Entering stage: the Other of the Other

In *Undoing Gender* Judith Butler presents a re-reading of Lacan, where she insists that desire is not “the desire of the Other” – as Jacques Lacan suggests in order to undermine the illusion of the self-contained subject – but it is the affectedness by “the Other of the Other” which becomes relevant in desiring relations (Butler 2004: 131–151). One has to take into account that the Other is shifting between the social or concrete Other, my fantasy of the Other, and the Other as an ‘ek-static self’ who is not in control of her/himself. The Other (just as myself) is occupying all these positions simultaneously, yet none ever fully. Encountering the Other together with the Other of the Other thoroughly complicates processes of identification and desire, which can no longer rely on clearly defined positions of subject and object. Accordingly, identification finds multiple entrance points, and desire and identification may combine in various, also contradictory ways. Thus interdependency indicates a never-ending process of dynamic tensions between identification and desire, desires prompting or subverting identifications, identifications inciting or stabilizing desires. This clearly subverts a heteronormative understanding that captures desire and identification as mutually exclusive: Whom I identify with, I am not supposed to desire; and whom I desire I am not supposed to identify with. Challenging this normative expectation, Butler says, opens up possibilities of “thinking gender beyond complementarity and reducing the risk of heterosexist bias implied by the doctrine of complementarity” (135).

Butler develops her post-lacanian position through reading Jessica Benjamin’s feminist object relations theory (1998). Benjamin introduces the notion of ‘over-inclusiveness’, this is, experiencing myself as part of the other and/or the other as part of me, in order to argue that we can have multiple, even contradictory identifications

simultaneously. In order for these identifications to become part of desiring practices, the process of triangulation that invites difference into the formerly identificatory love has also to acknowledge this multiplicity. Therefore it may not be monopolized by the father (as the Oedipal narration suggests) or the monolithic phallus; rather, an abstract figure of “the third” allows for various desires to enter the scene. Taking up Benjamin’s term of “the third” Butler writes: “The third is not the concrete Other, who solicits desire, but the Other of the Other who (or which) engages, motivates, and exceeds a relation of desire at the same time that it constitutes it essentially.” (135) As Butler insists, things become even more difficult, since first of all it might also be me, an ek-static self or “the Other of myself” who desires (149ff). And secondly, the concrete Other would not be reducible to fantasy, as it is the concrete social Other who embodies the fantasy and functions as a screen for the projection of fantasies.

This is how misunderstanding, conflict, abuse, and violence become part of the picture. Also Benjamin suggests that social interdependency is characterized by irreducible tensions between *self-assertiveness* and *recognition of the other*. Thus practices of desire, which intertwine self and Other have to dwell on the threshold of aggression and adhesion. Nevertheless Butler is skeptical whether Benjamin does not create a too harmonious solution to internal and interrelational conflicts (135). Butler avers that one can never rely on a smooth, coherent image of the Other in practices of sex, and love, and desiring enactments, but one always acts under conditions of undecidability: I, whom I am also Other to myself, address my fantasy in the social Other. Or I rework my fantasy, because the social Other subverts my projection. I agree to become the Other’s fantasy. Or I start to rebel in the gap between social and phantasmatic being.

When taking into account this queer-feminist re-reading of psychoanalytic notions of desire I see two moments of conflict coming into view. On the one hand conflict comes up when the concrete social Other collides with the fantasy, or when identity categories are offered that claim to resolve contradictions into a single, coherent being. On the other hand Benjamin proposes an even more implicated relation between desire and conflict in saying that there is a constant tension between self-assertiveness and recognition of the other, played out as an ambiguity of aggression and adhesion. Thus conflict is not seen as antagonism between clearly defined entities, but as agonistic struggles that thwart clear-cut distinctions between self and other.

Concerning conceptualizations of border Benjamin and Butler not only offer an understanding of subjectivity that does not rely on clearly defined and stable boundaries of the self or rigid identity categories but on relationality and interdependency. Furthermore, they acknowledge desire as a constitutive moment of social relations, desire that not only invites difference to enter into identificatory forms of love but is affected by the Other of the Other. If one takes up Benjamin's formulation that desire acts upon the tension between self-assertiveness and recognition of the Other, then the psychoanalytic model might very well also be interesting for considering geo-political borders and border crossings. Desire as being affected by the Other of the Other may provide alternative routes to rigid border formations or violations.

Undisambiguation in geo-political terms

The strategy of undisambiguation, which I introduced earlier by praising it for its quality of subverting rigid border formations and identities, might be a promising

measure if one wishes provide space for the Other of the Other and uphold rather than resolve tensions – in intimate and social relationships as much as in the geo-political field. For example claiming the ‘autonomy of migration’ (Transit Migration 2007; Bojadzijeve 2008), that is saying that migration will always take place and people will find ways to migrate whatever system of border control tries to regulate movement, is a form of undisambiguating the border. Here undisambiguation is a strategy of challenging power relations through shifting the perspective of analysis and understanding. In their book *Escape Routes* (2008) Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos take up Deleuze/Guattari in order to reconsider regimes of regulation and control under conditions of the globalization of transnational neoliberalism. The authors proclaim “the primacy of escape”, thus proposing a reconceptualization of postliberal sovereignty in transnational governance by claiming that it is refusals and subversions that incite power and control, rather than state power determining agency and possibilities of resistance:

“We cannot understand social change and people’s agency if we always see them as *already* entangled in and regulated by control. We can understand the formation of power only from the perspective of escaping people, not the other way round.” (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 43)

Accordingly, the border seems no longer exclusively defined by national sovereignty and its authorities and measures of control, but is simultaneously the liminal space of (solidaric or exploitative) border crossings, of creating networks of social and economic exchange, of self-organized labor and survival, of cultural translation and the permanent invention of unregistered mobilities.⁶ Regulatory or disciplining measures of hegemonic authorities are seen as reactions to rather than preconditions

⁶ Gayatri A. Menon (2010) employs a similar idea when she suggests that Mumbai pavement dwellers develop political activities from a position of abjectivity, which are based on subversion rather than antagonism and follow a logic of accommodation and becoming rather than exclusion and belonging (163).

of these “fluid, streamlined, clandestine, multidirectional, multipositional and context-dependent forms of mobility” (163). The contemporary regimes of mobility control also do not stick to an understanding of borders as demarcating the boundary of a territory. “[R]ather they are erected wherever there is a need to solve and to organize social space and political governance.” (27), and they appear in the form of electronic and administrative policing procedures, taking place at neuralgic points like government agencies, train stations, and mobile police patrols. Borders are often drawn within populations in the form of differentiated legal status and hierarchized social positioning, rather than between nationally defined populations. And also the understanding of territory shifts. Even in state politics it is coming closer to a Deleuze/Guattarian view according to which a territory is never fixed, neither by the borders of a nation state, nor by scientific definitions, or geological materialities. Rather, as Kylie Message puts it: “The concept of ‘territory’ evades easy categorisation because rather than being a sedentary place maintaining firm borders against outside threat, the territory itself is a malleable site of passage. As an assemblage, it exists in a state of process whereby it continually passes into something else. However, it also maintains an internal organisation.” (Message 2005: 275).

This internal organization becomes a challenge of doing politics, since it is in analyzing the internal organization and its transformations that one can figure out whether or not undisambiguation actually dispels rather than upholds hierarchies, exclusions and normative violence. Here it also is necessary to acknowledge contradictory forms of border politics, some of which aim at getting rid of borders altogether while others fight for respecting borders. For example, the violence of border control and rigid migration regimes is answered in activist contexts by the

slogan “No borders, no nations, stop deportations”, while feminist politics against sexual abuse and violence claim the power to define borders, signified by the slogan “No means no”.

Queerβstrategy

Ana Vujanović's and Marta Popivoda's (2008) ideas on what they call *queerβstrategy* take place within the contradictory demands of getting rid of borders altogether versus claiming respect for borders. Their concept is interesting for this discussion, since *queerβstrategy* translates queer critique of identitarian closures into the geo-political realm of borders and border crossings, yet also claims a constitutive role of sexual politics in anti-globalization struggles. Vujanović/Popivoda present *queerβstrategy* as a dispositif for the new gender politics/theory of the multitude and take up Antonio Negri's understanding of the “multitude as a whole of singularities“ thus rejecting any kind of identitarian or totalizing politics. Instead, Vujanović/Popivoda explicitly ask for thinking connections between the disciplining of subjects, bodies and desires, migration regimes, and neoliberal capitalist globalization – something they call “connection politics-sexuality“:

“*queerβstrategy* is not a quest for emancipating special sexes and sexualities. Its quest is to display the regimes of connections between politics and sexuality, and of existing sex/ual/-political technologies in the field of material and symbolic economy.” (Vujanović/Popivoda 2008: 398)

Within this field “border-hacking” becomes an important moment of *queerβstrategy*, which “does not take the world as a total system, without borders or with easily transitive borders. It hacks the borders, prolonging the situation of liminality from everyday life to seminal political events. *queerβstrategy* doesn't accept the postmodern idyll of a borderless inter-cultural world, because this is a new image of an notorious old regime – a hegemonic seamless world, a total consensual system. The

queerβstrategist takes the materiality of borders deadly seriously. She/he/it... is a ‘border-hacker’: a politically active monster coming from the wrong side of the border (from the East, the South, from the female, the exploited, from the margin), but very interested in and acquainted with borders.” (398)

Queerβstrategy is a politics of simultaneities: equally questioning rigid and stable identities as well as identifications flexibilized by the logic of the market; opposing totalizing as much as micro-politically fragmented politics, and binary pairs as much as assimilation and homogenization. Instead Vujanović/Popivoda focus on the multiplicity of norms and suggest challenging them from various positions, creating movements in multiple directions. Thus, rather than being stuck with entities/identities defined by boundaries, border hacking acknowledges the relevance of borders as constitutive moments of socio-political and sexual relations while at the same time imploding them through ex-centricity.

Queerβstrategy has striking similarities to what I call the strategy of undisambiguation. Both allow taking up Haraway’s contradictory demand of finding pleasure in the confusion and taking responsibility for the construction of boundaries. Yet how can one deal with conflicts, power struggles and above all the potential of violence? What can be the role of desire, particularly if one understands desire as a constitutive force of society, which may ambiguously uphold or undermine social relations of power, domination, and violence? Taking up Benjamin again one is reminded that conflict is an inherent moment of desire, which is spanned between self-assertiveness and recognition of the other.

I would suggest understanding power struggles as dynamic constellations in which agency may be redistributed (Becker 2008), so that hierarchies, asymmetries and the power of normalcy become transformable. Dynamic power relations stand in stark

contrast to situations of violence, where at least one party (sometimes only the violated party, sometimes both or all parties) loses agency and experiences powerlessness and surrender. Dealing with violence means finding ways of regaining agency, of reinitiating a power struggle and thus of turning powerlessness into agency.⁷ This is where conflict becomes promising, because in conflict all parties involved have some amount of agency available. Thus conflict is by no means problematic and does not have to be seen as the first step toward violence. On the contrary, without conflict there would not be any power struggles that change hierarchies or inequalities or intervene into the rigid border constructions or secure borders where they are violated. Agency means acting within the tensions of conflict and desire; and desire might turn into a mode of redistributing agency. Rather than foreclosing the situation through control or disambiguation the challenge lies in upholding the tensions of ongoing power struggles, the tensions in undisambiguation and between aggression and adhesion, between power and violence.

Introducing queer-feminist notions of desire into the geo-political field may provide for a readiness of virtuously dwelling on the threshold. While focusing on subjectivity as interdependency, desire may provide for connections with the Other as well as the Other of the Other. Furthermore, “on the surface of the social” (Probyn) desire forms assemblages, which may lead to surprising constellations – constellations that challenge given hierarchies and normalities. As such, agency is no longer a capacity

⁷ Menon (2010) insists that this process does not necessarily follow liberal models of politics or sticks to the ideals of public visibility and recognition. Analyzing the politics of Mumbai pavement dwellers who are forced to act while facing permanent threats of eviction, dispossession and demolition of their homes, she writes: „Not only are pavement dwellers rendered invisible by violence, but they must remain invisible in order to avoid being subjected to further violence. For, what is distinctive about the conditions under which pavement dwellers have to stake their right to the city is that they actually *live* in public.“ (152) Still, this is not simply a private practice, but a way of doing politics and transforming violence into dynamic power relations.

of subjects, but *agencement* (Deleuze/Guattari), assemblages of dynamic divisions and redistributions. Drawing, crossing, dissolving, transcending, hacking ... borders can then be analyzed in relation to the question how hierarchies, normative exclusions and normalizations as well as violence are challenged. Obviously, a lack of agency carries with it the danger of violence, because the desire for control and for disambiguating the tensions and complexities of socio-sexual life and global interdependency may take hold. Yet in acknowledging that the tension between aggression and adhesion, between self-assertiveness and recognition of the Other can only be upheld once there is space for “the Other of the Other” desire turns out to be a mode of border crossing that does not leave the border intact but confuses it by multiple unexpected and unruly exchanges, transfers, and connections.

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