

A_ SOCIALITY AS A MODEL FIGURE OF AMBIGUITY

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Abstract

Ambiguity has been the guiding motive of my queer theoretical considerations from the very beginning. Early on I propose to characterize queer politics through strategies of undisambiguation or equivocation (VerUneindeutigung) rather than diversification or abolishment of heteronormative sexual difference (Engel 2002). In the essay I will reconstruct the different epistemological steps from undisambiguation through queer politics of paradox to what I call today 'queerness as lived ambiguity'. I will explicate how the notion of ambiguity fulfills a double function in queer theory, namely underlining ambiguity's livability (multidimensional identities are neither stable nor coherent) and explaining its political potential (overcoming clear-cut borders and simplified antagonisms). In the main part of the essay I will focus on *a_sociality* as figure of ambiguity, arguing that queerness as lived ambiguity goes along with an understanding of relationality and kinship defined by a continuum or simultaneity of sociality, anti-sociality, and asociality, named *a_sociality*. My thesis is that in avowing the ambiguity of *a_sociality* it becomes possible to move towards forms of cohabitation under conditions of social and global heterogeneity. However, *a_sociality* is defined not only by ambiguity but also by ambivalence. It is from this proximate though distinct relation that politics evolve. What Judith Butler (2020) discusses as an ethical attitude of 'aggressive nonviolence' turns out to be an ambiguous term that fosters decisions that simultaneously acknowledge and overcome ambivalence.

1_Introduction

Being queerly social and cared for holds a promise of belonging. Belonging beyond heteronormativity and coercive normalcy.¹ Yet social relations, no matter how queer they are, are never devoid of indifference, unpredictability, aggression, conflict, or the risk and reality of violence.² It is illusory to hope for safe spaces, pure peacefulness or pleasure in bonding and care without aggression or messiness.³ Therefore, I present queerness as lived ambiguity and argue that it goes along with an understanding of relationality and kinship defined by what I call *a_sociality*: a continuum or simultaneity of sociality, anti-sociality, and asociality. This essay will discuss ambiguity through the lens of *a_sociality*. In order to capture ambiguity as a political terminology, I will draw on *a_sociality* as a model figure. My thesis is that only in avowing the ambiguity of *a_sociality* it becomes possible to move towards forms of cohabitation that acknowledge social and global heterogeneity. However, the question is how ambiguity unfolds its political potential, and what is its reach. Ambiguating fixed categories undermines normative orders. Though, does it also provide for complexity? And does providing for complexity also challenge hierarchies and social inequalities? Which

forms of violence, if any, are targeted by ambiguity? And how do ethical dilemmas and struggles over justice find recognition?

2_ From Strategies of Undisambiguation to Queer Politics of Paradox

From early on, ambiguity has been the guiding motive of my queer theoretical considerations. My proposition to characterize queer politics through strategies of undisambiguation or equivocation (*VerUneindeutigung*)⁴ rather than diversification, normalization, abolishment, or generalization of (gender and sexual) difference, still informs my current thinking. While today I tend to use the term queering, undisambiguating and equivocating hold slightly different connotations: the former underlining that what gets ambiguated has, indeed, some earlier time been disambiguated and now needs a reverse process; the latter implying what I later call programmatically ‘taking pleasure in confusion.’⁵ However, already in *Wider die Eindeutigkeit (Against Unambiguity)* my focus was on arguing that a non-normative queer politics needs to subscribe to simultaneous processes of denormalizing and dehierarchizing social relations in order to challenge structural inequalities, discrimination and violence in all its expressions.⁶ In particular, when critically analysing mutual implications of neoliberal and queer politics,⁷ it became necessary to understand how normalizing diversity and turning certain individualized modes of difference into social capital asks for new forms of resistance.

This was when I came up with a queer politics of paradox. In “Desiring Tensions,” I suggest understanding the paradox as an intermediate figure that can be either antagonized into a *contradiction* or relativized into *ambiguity*, or taken as a thoroughly *non-identitarian* figure in its own right.⁸ The political potential lies in the fact that paradox, contradiction, and ambiguity do not need to be played out against each other, but may combine as context-specific strategies of hegemonic struggles: In a situation organized through rigid normative closures, (undis)ambiguation would be the choice, because it creates space for prohibited or disavowed plurality and complexity. Under conditions of socio-historical normalization or even celebration of depoliticized diversity, it would rather be necessary to antagonize the field and point out contradictions that legitimize power inequalities and domination under the guise of neoliberal individualism. Politics of paradox allows shifting between these options of ambiguizing and antagonizing, without one or the other claiming final, all-encom-

passing answers. The paradox seen as a dual figure of circular (rather than linear) tension furthermore provides an ideal tool of reworking rigid binary orders into dynamic constellations, where elements of the two combine, merge, and create thirds or multiplicities. This is, what Xairong Xiang in referring to gender orders calls *transdualism*, or *either/and*,⁹ or what Cynthia Weber calls *plural logoi* that depend on the ability of upholding the simultaneity of *and/or* (rather than *either/or*) in understanding social realities as social complexities.¹⁰ Both authors are taking seriously the ongoing relevance and persuasiveness of the male/female dualism, while neither fixing it nor isolating it from what is beyond, including its own otherness, and Other of the Other.¹¹

Thus, for politics of paradox ambiguity plays a particular, though subordinated role. In this article, however, I would like to invite ambiguity center stage, and this also, because I have recently coined the definition that queerness is lived ambiguity.¹² I wish to explicate how the notion of ambiguity fulfils a double function in queer theory, namely underlining ambiguity's livability and explaining how its potential for subverting clear-cut borders and simplified antagonisms initiates taking pleasure in complexity, confusion, and even conflict.¹³ Lived ambiguity takes seriously the intersectional critique of anti-identitarian queer theory, insisting that multidimensional identities are neither stable nor coherent, but are exactly the position from where intersectional politics fights complex and sometimes contradictory relations of power and discrimination.¹⁴ Sharing ambiguous identities in social inter- and intra-action¹⁵ may not only acknowledge complexity, but, indeed, invite conflictual heterogeneity. Yet, how are conflicts dealt with in ways that simultaneously provide for open futures (securing a multiplicity of perspectives, and multiple worlds) and for justice (overcoming social and global inequalities, domination, and violence)?

While fostering complexity, multiplicity, and open futures through the epistemic, aesthetic, and semiotic potential of ambiguity, politics nevertheless consists of taking decisions under conditions of undecidability.¹⁶ How does one come to a decision? What is it that enables and justifies limiting possibilities, saying yes to certain values, interests and desires, and saying a decisive no to others? I will later argue, that for this matter it needs a distinction between ambiguity and ambivalence. For the moment, however, let me stop over at queerness as lived ambiguity.

3_ Queerness as Lived Ambiguity

In order to avoid the traps of minority politics I, for long, insisted that queer is neither an adjective nor a noun, but a verb.¹⁷ If one, however, asserts the figure of the paradox, one may very well embrace queerness as a noun and declare queer as being inhabited by a circular dynamic that leads to a continuous shifting between queerness and queering. Thus, while queerness will not stabilize as an identity category, it can nevertheless be claimed as an embodied subjectivity, a self-concept, or a way of existence. When I suggest that queerness is lived ambiguity, my idea is to create an intertwinement of queerness and queering, an ongoing stabilizing as queerness while destabilizing through queering. Rather than proposing this in primarily discursive or epistemic terms, the verb ‘to live’ indicates the embodied character of queerness/queering. In pointing here towards the intersubjective tension between othering and self-description as well as desire’s inherent tension between bonding and assertiveness, it becomes clear that queerness as lived ambiguity also takes up and refines notions of queer sociality. Queerness can be the effect of power relations and normative institutions, also called heteronormativity. As such, it can be a source of pain or shame, or it can be taken up with defiance or pride. The latter means that queerness can be subverted by queering. It can, however, also be the effect of queering in the first place: of a process or practice that results in queerness as the effect of disrupting the rule of normalcy in any specific context.

Queering, when I use the term as a political strategy, means an aesthetic_epistemic practice that makes use of language, imagery, or embodiment in order to subvert or disrupt the rule of normalcy¹⁸ — and often so through taking pleasure in complexity and confusion. Hereby queering works on the interplay of power, desire, and truth. Each of these terms is embraced by ambiguity: power as a mode of dominance and oppression as well as resistance and transformation; desire as drawing but also breaking connections, herein respectively supporting or undermining powerful normalcies; truth as a claim of singularity versus universality, of absoluteness versus socio-historical relativity. While the interplay of desire and power can also be found in Deleuze/Guattari’s desiring-machines¹⁹ or the de- and reterritorializing of assemblages,²⁰ in processes of queering it is what fosters ambiguity as a source of pleasure.²¹ However, taking pleasure in complexity and confusion is not an end in itself. Neither of the terms mentioned above stabilizes in a single meaning, promises purity or simple an-

swers, nor is, indeed, immune against domination and violence. So, how can ambiguity's potential of disrupting clear-cut borders, homogenized identities, or one-dimensional truth be activated towards fostering equality, freedom, and justice? How is this going to happen under conditions defined by structural violence?

These are questions at the heart of queer politics that refer to queerness as *lived ambiguity* as well as to queering *embraced by ambiguity* and, indeed to the way queer sociality is organized and strives towards providing alternatives to relationships and institutions ruled by normalcy. While queerness is transgressing hetero- (and homo-)normative and hierarchized understandings of temporal development and social location,²² and queer care is happening despite dependency or messiness,²³ Elizabeth Povinelli is cautioning us, that this is by no means a promise of overcoming the histories of violence and structural inequalities that condition our friendships and intimacies.²⁴ Yet, when ambiguously perceiving the *proximity* of the other as unbridgeable *separateness*, there is nevertheless a chance of facing violence conjointly. This, of course, would not change the fact that we take incompatible positions in suffering and perpetuating structural violence, as Povinelli argues in sharing experiences of her friendship as a white academic with Ruby Yarrowin, an indigenous elder from the Northern territories of Australia. José E. Muñoz develops a similar argument when talking about “queerness as the incalculable,”²⁵ asking for relationships that allow for “sharing the unshareable”²⁶ and “a relational schema that is based not on commensurable singularities, instead on a vaster commons of the incommensurable. [And still, the] crisscrossing trajectories of singular being are certainly full of violent collision.”²⁷ In order to take seriously such intimacy of pleasure and pain, aggression and love, bonding and violence, I suggest using the term a_sociality. A_sociality is a concept meant to embrace ambiguity.

4_A_Sociality

A_sociality names sociality as being entangled with indifference, aggression, and violence. The underscore signifies a continuum between social and asocial, which never simply shifts to one extreme or the other. The term takes seriously the fact that violence cannot be overcome but remains an everlasting potential, due to the aftermath of violent histories but also to a psychic tension of self-assertion and bonding.²⁸ Nonetheless, nonviolence is also an option that will not be lost but, when practiced as

bodily endurance or collective resistance, reminds us that change and repair remain possible.²⁹ Furthermore, a *_sociality* connotes and contains the anti-social, acknowledging that life does not necessarily strive for preservation or even some theological kind of development or progress. Emphatic nihilism or negativity, or what psychoanalysis calls the death drive, are as much part of social worlds, or of cohabitation as are love, and care, and hope.

From a queer perspective, a *_sociality* is also the terrain where a dynamic interplay of power and desire draws well-known or new and unexpected connections. Desire as movement and mode of connectivity is a decisive force of what I term a *_sociality*.³⁰ Desire can surely be a conservative force, which justifies (violent or seductive) appropriation and domination of the so-called object of desire. Yet, queer(ed) desire re-orientates itself towards “the Other of the Other”³¹ — not the one whom we wish to possess and control, but whom or which we will never fully know, who or which further unsettles our already contradictory, puzzling selves. A process one may also experience when sharing into Lauren Berlant’s and Lee Edelman’s conversation in *Sex, or the Unbearable*.³²

A *_sociality* is a decisively ambiguous concept, grown out of contradictory positions in queer theory: Queerness is sometimes presented as promising new forms of sociality, which overcome heteronormative restraints; queerness also stands in for irresolvable alterity. Edelman’s anti-social thesis, which under the title *No Future* invokes queerness as an embrace of negativity rather than a path towards viability,³³ inhabits a *_sociality* as much as José E. Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, which insists that “we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds.”³⁴

Extensive debates took place over the question what kind of politics, or none, evolve from positions for or against the so-called anti-social turn.³⁵ A *_sociality* eludes the alternative of social or anti-social. It does, nonetheless, insist on political transformations without negating negativity. It dares to claim, redefine, and queer the derogatory term *asociality*, countering its devastating and often deadly biopolitical use. If the term ‘*asocial*’ has the function to secure a terrain of assumed sociality through disavowing what is called *asocial* or, for that matter, *perverse*, could it be that destigmatizing the so-called *asocial* helps turning aggression into political anger³⁶ and provoke structural change?

On the background of histories of colonialism, racism, sexual violence, genocides, and eugenics one cannot assume that relationships will ever be free from tensions and conflicts. Yet, this is exactly why it is challenging to invent practices that acknowledge the aggressions and histories of violence that form our intimate, social, global, and planetary relationships. However, the question remains: Does upholding ambiguity find a limit, if structural change (of a rule of normalcy, an oppressive law, an institutional hierarchy, systemic inequality or violence) is desired and meant to happen? In politics, or in social situations of striving for justice, decisions need to be taken, and one can find criteria why one decision is more convincing or more just than another, even though these criteria remain contested. Ambiguity of meaning or multiplicity of perspectives make sure that there is no universal answer and the future remains open to further contestations. However, concerning the concrete decision it is competing wishes or desires, a collision of values, or doubts concerning the effects, in short, ambivalence rather than an ambiguity organizing the field. My thesis is that upholding ambivalence might be as useful as upholding ambiguity in order to avoid premature closures of — psychic or social — conflicts,³⁷ but in order to secure agency, ambiguity and ambivalence should not be taken as synonymous. Ambivalence ‘asks’ for a decision — even if it is postponed or rejected.

5_Ambiguity and Ambivalence

Why do I think it useful to distinguish between ambivalence and ambiguity, when considering the politics of a_sociality? The multiple, sometimes contradictory, meanings that characterize the ambiguity of a term, a phenomenon, or a situation, do not hold the option of decision. Ambiguity, a semiotic, aesthetic and political term refers to an inherent complexity: Foregrounding one meaning does not wipe out the other(s). Concerning politics, contexts fetishizing unambiguity, homogeneity, reduced complexity, simple truths, and clear-cut borders are ready to ignore or suppress ambiguity. Queerness teaches us that ambiguities are not simply given, but can be brought about. Ambiguity invites shifting perspectives — though, not in order to settle for one.³⁸ We have to take ambiguity into consideration when taking a decision. However, the decision does not change the fact that ambiguity exists.

Ambivalence, in comparison, consists of (two or more) options, between which it seems hard to decide, yet, in principle, a decision is possible. The decision is hard, be-

cause different options seem equally valid, or valid for competing reasons. Given this, ambivalence names a psycho-social state of inner conflict over values or wishes. This might be a psychic tension of love and hate, or a social or political conflict resulting from struggles over justice, for example under conditions of limited resources: How to decide when there are various needs of different people, and not all can be fulfilled; or if there are contradictory needs of the same person in tension with each other; e.g. a need for help and a need for self-reliance? Furthermore, the inner psychic strife of ambivalence may hold a political dimension: An inner conflict between self-interest and care, between fear and admiration may play out on the political floor of institutions, nation states or global relations, possibly turning from ambivalence to aggression and from aggression to war. Taking a decision for one option or another, influences the dynamic. Even though the ambivalence may very well persist after a decision is taken.³⁹

Miriam Haller provides a clear distinction between ambivalence as double value (*Doppelwertigkeit*) and ambiguity as double meaning (*Doppeldeutigkeit*), the former a term of psychology, the latter one of linguistics.⁴⁰ Then, however, she undermines the distinction through constructing a mimetic, or at least functional connection between them. In Haller's account ambivalence and ambiguity are two aspects of the same process of deconstruction. They are not the same but supporting each other: Ambiguity is either an expression of ambivalence, or ambivalence is the performative effect of ambiguity.⁴¹ In referring to Derrida's deconstruction and Butler's concept of performativity this allows Haller to develop a powerful argument for breaking up hierarchical binarisms. The term ambivalence becomes important in this context because it allows focusing on hierarchies of value, on denigration and exclusion inherent to binary oppositions.⁴² This is helpful and convincing in order to understand the potential of deconstruction, because it underlines the interplay of linguistic (ambiguity) and psychological (ambivalence) dimensions. For poststructuralist politics (or ethical practices concerned with doing justice) however, I would argue that it needs a tension between ambiguity and ambivalence rather than a mimetic or supportive relation. The ethico-political paradigm of poststructuralism is not simply about undecidability, but about taking decisions under conditions of undecidability. Therefore, my suggestion would be to conceptualize a paradoxical tension between ambiguity and

ambivalence that allows for cherishing a multiplicity of meanings while taking a decision — and this, without necessarily overcoming the ambivalence.

Looking at ambivalence and ambiguity in relation to a *_sociality* I would argue that in talking about livability and political potential it is important that a *_sociality* simultaneously captures the psychic inner strife and intellectual doubt of ambivalence as well as the readiness for polysemy and multiple perspectives characteristic of ambiguity. In order to recognize power inequalities and not prematurely let them define the field, it might be useful to uphold ambivalence, ambiguity and conflict, at least for a while. However, in order to transform power inequalities and provide structural and systematic change, it is necessary to overcome ambivalence, while upholding ambiguity, to take decisions and resolve a conflict in a way that systematically guarantees a more just, less violent world.

6 *_Aggressive Nonviolence*

In *The Force of Nonviolence* Judith Butler construct their argument around the ambiguous term aggressive nonviolence.⁴³ Nonviolence is not about peacefulness, “is not refraining from committing violence, but [...] a sustained commitment, even a way of rerouting aggression for the purpose of affirming ideals of equality and freedom.”⁴⁴ Yet, in order to foster nonviolence, Butler also asks us to engage with “ambivalence [...] as psychic feature[s] of social relations.”⁴⁵ Thus, ambiguity and ambivalence combine in Butler’s argument, yet without ever being equated. According to Butler, we struggle with ambivalence, e.g. the ambivalence of love and hate, of self-assertion and bonding, and will never fully overcome it. This is, because ambivalence in psycho-social life is due to interdependency and vulnerability, a common feature of life not limited to childhood. It is not only forceful resistance that turns aggressive nonviolence into an ambiguous term, but also the fact that there is an ambivalence in nonviolence, which commits itself to vulnerability and interdependency, but “expresses rage, indignation, and aggression.”⁴⁶ It carries the risk of becoming violent itself, but simultaneously holds the promise of turning rage into political resistance. If going along with an egalitarian imaginary, nonviolence is the practice of the disenfranchised or marginalized transforming power inequalities. Yet, how do we know that an egalitarian imaginary is driving aggressive nonviolence, how can we be sure that it is af-

firming ideals of equality and freedom, particularly, if ambivalence is ever present as is the risk of aggression turning into violence?

The term *a_sociality* may capture well the ambiguity of aggressive nonviolence, and also draws attention to ambivalence. However, in order to not only recognize but work on ethical dilemmas and struggles over justice it needs a confrontation with the call for decision inherent to ambivalence, and to account for the decision (that might turn out to be preliminary, doubtful, or even wrong). In case of conflict — in the mode of inner strife, an agonistic social, or full-scale war — aggressive nonviolence may inhabit *a_sociality* with a readiness to take decisions under conditions of undecidability. These decisions can only be estimated *a posteriori* from their results, and those results are not to be found in individuals, their intentions, aims, and practices, but in interdependent social relations.

7_Conclusion

A_sociality not only describes but insists on the necessity of calling out discriminations and transforming complex power inequalities, structures of domination, and systematic violence. My considerations on *a_sociality* lead me to the conclusion that ambiguity and ambivalence need to be distinguished while being acknowledged in their interplay. Both can be cherished for creating confusion, which may function as productive moment in challenging power relations. While ambiguity provides a pathway towards taking pleasure in complexity and bearing conflictual heterogeneity, ambivalence carries the chance of taking decisions under conditions of psychic conflict or intellectual doubt — striving towards justice while upholding a future's openness. Confusion, be it gained from ambivalence or ambiguity, combines emotional (psychic) and mental (intellectual) dimensions. Making sense of a situation needs facing both. Yet, facing them also means figuring out potential reactions and their presumed outcomes — a context-specific and power-sensitive agency answering to a particular situation.

If one anticipates how one's action or a collective practice, how a specific measure, the reorganising of a field, or the reconceptualizing of a so-called truth may contribute to *un_learning* violence, reducing inequalities, providing for gains in global justice and shared freedom, then ambivalence can (and should) be overcome through

taking a decision. While this might or might not be the end of doubt and inner strife, it undoubtedly rearranges a constellation of a sociality.

Endnotes

- ¹ In my essay I refer to queer theory as informed by poststructuralist modes of thinking difference beyond binary oppositions. Queer *critique* of normative heterosexuality and binary sex and gender is supported by the politics and aesthetics of *queering*, that is practices or processes that render unusual or strange (queer) what used to be ‘normal.’ For a queer notion of belonging see Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- ² See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 131–151; Elizabeth Povinelli, “The Part That Has No Part: Enjoyment, Law, and Loss,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, no. 2–3 (2011): 287–308; Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers And Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); and José Esteban Muñoz, “Race, Sex, and the Incommensurate: Gary Fisher with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,” in *Queer Futures: Reconsidering Ethics, Activism, and the Political*, eds. Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Kilian, and Beatrice Michaelis (London: Routledge, 2016), 103–116.
- ³ For messiness in queer care see Martin F. Manalansan IV, “Messy Mismeasures: Exploring the Wilderness of Queer Migrant Lives,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (2018): 491–506.
- ⁴ See Antke Engel, *Wider die Eindeutigkeit: Sexualität und Geschlecht im Fokus queerer Politik der Repräsentation* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2002); and Antke Engel, “A Queer Strategy of Equivocation: The Destabilisation of Normative Heterosexuality and the Rigid Binary Gender Order,” *InterAlia: A Journal of Queer Studies* 1 (2006). Doi: [10.51897/interalia/JEEV3692](https://doi.org/10.51897/interalia/JEEV3692).
- ⁵ See Antke Engel, “Queering Desire Through Serendipity and A Sociality,” in *Love Spells & Rituals for Another World*, eds. Lilly Markaki and Caroline Harris (London: Independent Publishing Network, 2021), 17–20.
- ⁶ Engel, *Wider die Eindeutigkeit*.
- ⁷ See Antke Engel, “The Surplus of Paradoxes: Queer/ing Images of Sexuality and Economy,” in *Social Inequality & The Politics of Representation: A Global Landscape*, ed. Celine-Marie Pascale (London: Sage, 2013), 176–188.
- ⁸ Antke Engel, “Desiring Tension: Towards a Queer Politics of Paradox,” in *Tension/Spannung*, ed. Christoph Holzhey (Wien: Turia+Kant, 2010), 227–250, here: 243–44: “A paradox puts divergent or incompatible elements in a relation that can be equally described as ‘neither/nor’ and ‘as well as,’ thus inscribing a tension of ‘reconciled irreconcilability’ that is inextricable (*unauflösbar*). As such the paradox [...] stands in contrast to thinking of tension as ‘contradiction,’ which suggests oppositions that cannot exist simultaneously, but occupy clearly separate positions. It also differs from ‘ambiguities,’ which are continuously shifting perspectives, unfixable and characterized by polysemy, while the paradox can still be defined by certain elements, which inspire the agonistic dynamic.”
- ⁹ See Zairong Xiang, “Transdualism: Towards a Materio-discursive Embodiment,” *TSQ Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018): 425–42. Doi: [10.1215/23289252-6900795](https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-6900795).
- ¹⁰ See Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). For Weber, gender does not necessarily follow the pattern of *either* female *or* male, but might come along as female *and/or* male. You might like to call this transgender, yet, if you prefer to avoid another label (which would, anyway, only re-

turn to an either/logic — either female or male or trans), you would instead claim simultaneity or undecidability: “both *either* one thing *or* another or possibly another while [...] simultaneously [...] one thing *and* another *and* possibly another” (196).

- ¹¹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 151.
- ¹² Antke Engel, “Queeruliert?,” video talk (4:24 min) presented at the conference “QUE(E)RULIERT? Praktiken des Störens in Kunst/Medien/Wissenschaft” (University of Oldenburg, Germany, July 3, 2021), accessed November 14, 2021, <<https://www.fernuni-hagen.de/bildungswissenschaft/bildung-differenz/team/antke.engel.shtml>>.
- ¹³ As I explain in Engel, “Queering Desire,” both dimensions depend on the interplay of power and desire, where desire has been reconceptualized as movement and productivity (becoming), leaving behind the hierarchical constellation of subject-desires-object. Instead, movements of desire are defined by multiplicity, serendipity, and the ambiguity of functioning as a transformative as well as a conservative social force. In addition, one might like to detect an ambivalence, namely the tension between self-assertiveness and bonding (see Butler, *Undoing Gender*) in desire.
- ¹⁴ See Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 437–465; Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Haritaworn, Jin, *Queer Lovers And Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).
- ¹⁵ Intra-action is a term suggested by Karen Barad that extends iterability (constitutive repetition) from the linguistic field towards matter and processes of materialization, thus decentering the human subject. Agency counts no longer as capacity, but as shared enactment. See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), here: 179.
- ¹⁶ See Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’ [Force de Loi: Le ‘Fondement mystique de l’autorité],” *Cardozo Law Review* 11, no. 5–6 (1990): 920–1045. The undecidable is a central figure in Derrida’s thinking. Articulated as *différance*, the continuous shifting of the signifier, it provides for an unsurmountable ambiguity on the level of meaning. Fostering this ambiguity through deconstruction undermines hierarchical binarisms. In “The Force of Law,” Derrida discusses the undecidable not as a question of meaning but of justice. Striving for justice demands that decisions have nevertheless to be taken, even if they do not have any reliable ground: “The undecidable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions, it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged — it is of obligation that we must speak — to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules. A decision that did not go through the ordeal of the undecidable, would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process. It might be legal; it would not be just” (963). However, taking a decision does not overcome the principle undecidability that is due to the ambiguity of meaning. This is why, for Derrida, justice is always to come, and politics is defined by an open future.
- ¹⁷ See Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); and Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- ¹⁸ I say ‘strategy,’ ‘practice,’ and ‘in order to;’ However, queering is not necessarily intentional, but may also evolve from play, or from interspecies sympoiesis (Haraway), or from animate and inanimate (Chen) intra-action (Barad). See Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Mel Chen, “Toxic Animacies,

- Inanimate Affections,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, no. 2–3 (2011): 265–286. According to Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, intra-actions, involving not simply human or nonhuman agents but all “matter-in-the-process-of becoming” (179), are not intentional at all. Nonetheless, they are not beyond politics, because “our intra-actions contribute to the differential mattering of the world. Objectivity means, being accountable for marks on bodies, that is, specific materializations in their differential mattering. We are responsible for the cuts we help enact not because we do the choosing (neither do we escape responsibility because ‘we’ are ‘chosen’ by them), but because we are an agential part of the material becoming of the universe” (178).
- ¹⁹ See Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia 1*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Continuum, 2004 [1972]).
- ²⁰ See Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia 2*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 [1980]).
- ²¹ See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) and Povinelli, “The Part.” Both authors take up the Lacanian notion of *jouissance*, a paradoxical simultaneity of pleasure and pain, for understanding queerness. However, for Edelman *jouissance* is indicating an unsurmountable separation and negativity, while Povinelli suggests that *jouissance* may be shared, when it points towards a common, though differently experienced historical violence.
- ²² See J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
- ²³ Manalansan, “Messy Mismeasures.”
- ²⁴ Povinelli, “The Part.”
- ²⁵ Muñoz, “Race,” 153.
- ²⁶ Muñoz, “Race,” 164.
- ²⁷ Muñoz, “Race,” 163.
- ²⁸ Butler, *Undoing Gender*.
- ²⁹ See Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London: Verso, 2020).
- ³⁰ Probyn, *Outside Belongings*.
- ³¹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*.
- ³² See Lauren Berlant, and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
- ³³ Edelman, “No Future”.
- ³⁴ See Jose E. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), here: 1.
- ³⁵ See Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Kilian, and Beatrice Michaelis, eds., *Queer Futures: Reconsidering Ethics, Activism, and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- ³⁶ Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger. Women Responding to Racism,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 124–131.
- ³⁷ This is a very important point for Miriam Haller, who provides a deconstructive reading of ambivalence in order to counter positions that see ambivalence as a problem to be overcome, but foster a rigid understanding of subjecthood and the exclusion of otherness. See Miriam Haller, “Dekonstruktion der ‘Ambivalenz’: Poststrukturalistische Neueinschreibungen des Konzepts der Ambivalenz aus bildungstheoretischer Perspektive,” *Forum der Psychoanalyse: Zeitschrift für psychodynamische Theorie und Praxis* 27, no. 4 (2011): 359–371, here: 363.

38 Resulting complexity and contradictions might provide confusion or discomfort or pleasure or fear — it might, indeed, provoke ambivalent feelings. Which might or might not gain clarity, but this does not influence the ambiguity itself.

39 Haller, “Dekonstruktion.”

40 Haller, “Dekonstruktion,” 363.

41 Haller, “Dekonstruktion,” 362 (ambiguity produces ambivalence), 363 (ambivalence expresses ambiguity), and 368 (ambiguity produces ambivalence).

42 Haller, “Dekonstruktion,” 361.

43 Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*.

44 Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*, 27.

45 Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*, 60.

46 Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*, 21.