CHALLENGING THE HETERONORMATIVITY OF TOLERANCE PLURALISM. ARTICULATIONS OF NON-NORMATIVE SEXUALITIES[1]

Antke Engel

> ...we refuse the discourse of identity that seeks to allocate belonging through a certain articulation of difference – the type of discourse whereby difference is tolerated by the dominant order as long as it is encountered only in ethnic restaurants, incarnated in hairdressers but not sons; difference taught in its own separate class but not across the curriculum; difference eulogized in the liberal strains of 'being' it does not matter which' ...'Some of my best friends are___' (Probyn 1996: 29).

In late modern western societies the regulation of sexuality occurs not so much as repression and exclusion, but rather as normalization and integration. Homosexuality, for example, enjoys a certain cultural visibility and social acceptance. However, as Elspeth Probyn points out above, this is issued as an advocatory and complacent gesture from a majoritarian position. In this way, Anne Phillip explains, tolerance enforces rather than challenges inequalities and power differences between majorities and minorities. She writes: "... since majority groups rarely conceive of themselves as requiring equal doses of tolerance from the minority they may come to wear their toleration as an additional badge of superiority" (Phillips 1999: 129). According to Phillips tolerance promotes indifference in the form of the 'live and let live' principle that supports the avoidance of the dominant group to confront its own privileges and values or to gain an understanding for other positions.

This is why queer theory and politics aim to shift attention from the so called minorities to the dominant order. Rather than demanding inclusion according to the rule of given values and institutions the strategy is to disrupt and/or subvert the norms and practices of hetero-normalities (Warner 1993; Berlant/Freeman 1993; Bower 1997). In contrast to minority or lobby politics queer strategies try to avoid reference to identity categories, because categorization and classification are seen as normative procedures that provide the ground for exclusions as well as for the homogenization of the included (Probyn 1996; Bower 1997; Warner 1999; Engel 2002).[2] But this does not answer the more difficult question of how to articulate differences – as valued and searched for or disliked but unavoidable – without referring to identitarian concepts. Therefore the challenge for queer theory and politics consists in what I call the aporia of difference, namely to fight differences as effects of relations of domination while simultaneously claiming to express differences and have them socially recognized. A queer productivity evolves from the fact that these strategies are in tension with one another, sometimes contradicting each other, but nevertheless combined.

How does the queer aporia of difference question established forms of politics? Which understanding of the political provides space for the aporia of difference? What kind of social and political practices match with the aporetic requisitions and deal with the power relations involved? Taking, for example the value systems and social practices concerning the public display of homosexuality, I do not think that societies will ever develop a common understanding nor that striving for a consensus is desirable. But this does not mean adhering to an established *status quo*, because *the status* quo consists of processes of othering and discrimination, reproduces heterosexism and legitimizes homophobia on the grounds of moral righteousness. How can conflicts over the public display of non-normative genders and sexualities be recognized and appreciated as political questions and transformed into political struggle? In the following I will criticize tolerance pluralism and argue in favour of a model of agonistic pluralism (Mouffe 2000a/b) as the more adequate form of organizing society in order to counter heterosexism and homophobia. Agonistic pluralism expects different value systems which are conflicting and possibly incommensurable, while tolerance pluralism submits itself to a unifying principle: It implies a universal and coherent horizon of

values in relation to the definition of what is 'different' and what kind of difference should be tolerated (Phillips 1999, Brown 2004).[3] On the contrary, agonistic pluralism understands dissent and conflict as the very precondition of democratic politics: "To make room for dissent and to foster the institutions in which it can be manifested is vital for a pluralist democracy, and one should abandon the very idea that there could ever be a time in which it would cease to be necessary because the society is now "well-ordered'" (Mouffe 2000b: 105).

What interests me is the question of whether the concept of ago-nistic pluralism confirms a democratic culture of conflict and dissent in the field of sexual politics and approves of incompatible forms of socio-sexual existence. Considering this means working with the fact that different opinions, embodied subjectivities and ways of existence do have different social power; power to express their own values, or power to recognize versus to devalue, suppress, criminalize or even reject others. So, the point is not only to appreciate the ongoing and never-ending processes of political struggles as productive moments of a democratic condition, but to understand and organize the field of politics in a way that hierarchies, relations of power and domina-tions, and even conditions of violence do not hinder people claiming political agency.

There is a wide spectrum of heteronormativity, of homo- and transphobia. Butler (2004a) points out the violence that lies in calling some lives 'unreal', a violence consisting of the power of dehuman-izing somebody (218). But we also have to consider the violence that is perpetrated in the name of tolerance, and we have to ask whether this violence is a structural moment of (certain forms of) tolerance (Forst 2003; Brown 2004). Therefore in the first part of this essay I will reflect on tolerance pluralism and the different forms of integration that we find in late modern western societies. Not all of them reproduce the advocatory gesture of tolerance, but none of them challenges the de-fining power of a majoritarian, i.e., a heteronormative perspective. In the second part I shift the perspective to those who are supposedly in need of tolerance, and ask for possibilities of self-representation that subvert the binary of the tolerant and the tolerated, of norm and other. How can we understand these self-representations as acknowl-edging the aporia of difference? In this context the term 'articulation' (Laclau/Mouffe 1985) proves useful, because it links the constitution of social identities to social change. In part three I will introduce the

concept as it is suggested by Laclau/Mouffe, and apply it to articulations of non-normative sexualities and genders, which neither issue from nor affirm the dominant social order. To what extent and under which conditions can they develop political relevance? Finally I will argue in favour of agonistic pluralism, because it affirms a concept of non-essential identity and reveals difference as product and process of power struggles over meaning and resources.

The logics of integration and tolerance pluralism

The critique of tolerance pluralism underlines that in order to be tolerant one has to safely inhabit the hegemonic order and feel legitimized to offer space to 'the others.' Tolerance is articulated from a dominant position and fixes the other as 'the one in need,' the one 'deficient,' or even 'deviant' (Probyn 1996; Phillips 1999; Forst 2003; Brown 2004). Tolerance harmonizes very well with a concept of integration, since integration also takes place according to the conditions of the dominant order (Engel 2006). But we should not confuse this with 'assimilation.' In fact, the minority might be called upon to inhabit or embody a difference – so that it can be differentiated and there is no danger of blurring the boundaries. Tolerance and integration constitute niches – particularly through devalued social positions – that provide visibility and speaking positions, but neither justice nor equality. This is why others speak in favour of recognition rather than tolerance (Young 1990; Fraser/Honneth 2003). But even if we translate tolerance into recognition, (recognition of 'the other' according to her or his own definition and condition), and combine it with politics of redistribution that expand possibilities of social participation, we face the same problem all over again: It is the dominant position's power to provide or refuse recognition which defines the conditions of social participation. While the dominant position, according to the Hegelian concept, might also depend on the recognition by the subordinated position, the relationship is nonetheless asymmetrical. What if we agree with Butler's notion that we are not asking to be recognized for what we already are, but "to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other" (Butler 2004b: 44)? Quite different possibilities open up, depending on the question of who is the Other issuing recognition. Nevertheless,

devalued position does not have the same power to open up or fore-close futures in issuing recognition, but is on all counts dependent on recognition.[4]

But perhaps all these forms of toleration, integration, and recognition organized around a defining centre, are no longer up-to-date. Anil Jain (2003) claims that the traditional construction of difference as a binary of identity and alterity loses its relevance in late modern societies and postmodern cultures. According to the traditional model, hybrid and ambivalent modes of difference that do not fit into one of the mutual exclusive binary categories of 'self' and 'other' are seen as a threat. They have to be averted or even destroyed. But today hybridity and ambivalence hold a promise – they provide a model for the creation of one's own 'fashionable' identity. Or, to formulate the same idea the other way round: Those who today still stick to a model of stable, coherent identities are at the least old-fashioned, but also in danger of becoming losers in the neoliberal competition over flexibility and individuality. Thus by now, we have to ask how flexibility and ambiguity create new hierarchies and forms of subordination and exclusion (Hennessy 2000; Engel 2002, Ha 2006). However, there is of course no clear-cut distinction between these understandings of difference; rather they form ambiguous alliances. Also, if we talk of 'mainstream society' or a 'dominant order' these are not coherent entities. Therefore, we have to consider thoroughly what we mean by 'integration' and I suggest that we find different models:

An *assimilatory model* demands that 'the other' fits as neatly as possible into existing institutions and value systems, so that the moral majority will not have to fear having to transform its notions of, for example, the holy family, of phallic sexuality, or of the division of privacy and politics. This model expels difference and follows a (universalistic) logic of 'just the same.' A *model of tolerance* underlines difference and a distinction between 'we' (who do not share your view) and 'you' (whom we accept nevertheless). It generously offers certain niches and proposes to occupy a position of difference that cannot be confused with the norm, but keeps borders clearly cut. Anti-discriminatory laws that reiterate possible sites of discrimination, or a second-class marriage in form of a registered partnership would be examples of this redeployment of a subordinated difference that follows the (particularistic) logic of multicultural 'otherness'. Last but not least we can recognize what I will call a *projective model of integra-*

tion (Engel 2006a; 2007) – a model that takes into account that flexible, hybrid, ambiguous forms of identity/difference have gained high cultural value and support in a neoliberal capitalist system (Ha 2006). This model of integration affirms non-essentialist forms of difference, which are not to be assimilated nor tolerated, but function as a screen for the projection of mainstream desires: 'homos' as the incarnation of a flexible, hybrid, and maybe even sexy, difference.

To me it seems that this last form is most adequate to describe what happens nowadays in western metropolises, where one can find images and representations of gays and lesbians everywhere in mainstream media and culture. These images are most attractive exactly because they can be seen as 'similar' and 'different' at the same time. These images present a difference that is highly valued, a difference not in opposition, but in relation to an identity that is non-coherent and different-in-itself. Gays and lesbians supposedly not only occupy, but incarnate it – they cannot be fixed in categories of same, similar, other; they belong and do not belong; they are just-like-you and completely different. They prove that hybridity is liveable – one need not stay stuck to a stable identity. So maybe it is most interesting for mainstream heterosexuals when lesbian and gay ways of life are not assimilated.[5]

Nonetheless, all these models of social integration and cultural visibility define the field from a heteronormative position without reflecting on its conditions and privileges. Any of these models objectify non-normative sexualities and de-thematize the power struggles that evolve around cultural representations and social practices. If we take for example, Rainer Forst's concept of "tolerance in conflict" (2003), which builds on a respect-conception of tolerance rather than a simple toleration, in the end it leaves the privileges of his own speaking position unquestioned and ignores the working of power differences in conflicts over tolerance. By his repudiation of an endorsement (*Wertschätzung*), because it breaches the neutrality in a conflict, a socially dominant contempt retains its place:

> The alternative tolerance notion according the respect-conception on the other hand does not require (in contrast to an endorsement-conception) that the relevant ways of life are regarded as ethically valuable or socially enriching; it requires only the drawing of the borders of tolerance according to the principles of *justice*. Tolerance is not thereby abolished for the

benefit of a completely equal regard, it is founded only in the morally bidden respect for individuals, whose practices and convictions can be nonetheless ethically dismissed. (Forst 2003: 741; transl. John Smale, Melissa Pritchard)

If indeed, as Forst claims, a mutuality of the conflict were given, then this would be an acceptable conclusion. Because then the missing ethical endorsement would be simply invertible, and the danger that it suddenly changes into ethical rejection or even discrimination or violence, would probably be averted through a logic of mutual deterrence. But lesbians and gay men do not have the equal chance to contest heterosexuals' normality. Therefore they remain either dependent on an intercessor like Forst, or they have to rely upon the reciprocal general rationale or a universal, moral norm. This however, becomes a problem when it is presupposed that someone is recognised as a (political or moral) subject of the system of norms before s/he can operate therein. In the meantime this recognition may be granted to some normalized forms of lesbian and gay lives. It misconceives however, that this is not the case for modes of existence which escape social or moral intelligibility. For them it might – for the simple necessity of survival, not from conviction – be required to submit to the given cultural norms in order to take part in a tolerance conflict in the first place. This is neither the logic of integration nor tolerance pluralism but the subtle dominance of heteronormativity. How is it possible to counter these forms of heteronormative domination?

Articulations of non-normative sexualities

Queer strategies of denaturalizing heterosexuality and the binary of sex and gender rely on provocatively shifting the problem – from the so-called minority to those who safely occupy a naturalized position. It is no longer gays, lesbians or transgenders who have to explain their desires and ways of existence, but the heterosexualized family that takes its normality for granted. The queer shift from minority politics to challenging the hetero-norm might express itself in imploding the concept of tolerance by applying it to the mainstream. One could, for example, concede tolerance to the heterosexual white male by performing the coming-out rite on him when he presupposes that

to talk about 'his lover' automatically suggests a female partner. Or one could simply presuppose that he is gay: one could, without any hesitation, refer to his male partner and ask, for example, if they know who gave birth to their child or whether it was an anonymous adoption. This is an example of an intervention into the dominant field that challenges its naturalized normality. But to question the norm does not automatically mean that other voices gain space and alternative representations and social practices arise. Therefore I would now like to ask for articulations of non-normative sexualities, which cannot rely on words, images, and names provided by the dominant culture, who might not even be intelligible on the dominant screen, or who do not want to submit to the available codes.

When I ask for articulations of non-normative sexualities this implies an acknowledgment of conflict and struggle within the individual as well as within society. As soon as I do not speak exclusively from my own perspective – a problematic assumption in itself, as it is questionable whether there is something like 'my own' perspective and whether politics is not always about exceeding the limits of individuality – I have to face the difficulty of how I can speak for others without appropriating or othering them. This is not a new question (Spivak 1988). But it gains a new dimension when we agree that there are positions of unintelligibility, positions that are nevertheless inhabited (Butler 1993), and claim to participate in political struggles – the claim that motivates a queer movement. One answer to this problem is the conviction that there cannot be any representation other than self-representation. This does not mean getting stuck in an individualistic perspective. Rather, I would argue that this voluntary self-restriction (to speak for oneself and to let others do the same) promotes a pluralistic view of the social and supports a corresponding politics.[6]

A strong plea for self-representation is issued by Jacob Hale, who in his essay "Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch / FTM Borderlands" (1998) reflects on the 'necessity of being named' and the mis-representations and erasures this produces in relation to transgender individuals – particularly when they live a gender ambiguous embodiment that cannot be covered by the given binary pronouns. He describes the various political and journalistic forms of violent appropriations and comes to the conclusion that the only adequate way is to listen carefully to and follow the self-representations of the individual. Concerning *Brandon Teena*, a young per-

son who was murdered because of his/her non-normative sex and gender performance he suggests the term 'border-zone dweller' in order to articulate a way of existence that is eradicated by the common media coverage:

> In a necrophagic feeding frenzy, the living have sliced this corpse into at least five different pieces: cross-dresser, transvestite, transgender, transsexual, and butch lesbian. The living likewise bury any aspects of the embodied self this youth constructed that do not fit their own constructions. In so doing, the living refuse to acknowledge that this person was a border-zone dweller: someone whose embodied self existed in a netherworld constituted by the margins of multiple overlapping identity categories. Perhaps Brandon or Teena – or the same person by another chosen name – would have stayed in the borderlands; perhaps she or he would have sought and found a more solid categorical location and language with which to construct and speak that self. We simply do not know. To do more than speculate about this is to collude with the foreclosure of future self-constructions that was so abruptly enacted by murder. (Hale 1998: 318)

Hale's claim for self-constructions acknowledges the difficulties of this undertaking, but also insists that it is possible to speak of the complexity of lived ambiguities and inconsistencies. One is not condemned to speechlessness, even if one misses out on social intelligibility: One can even claim subject positions. This I would like to emphasize, because, though it is important to insist on the 'deadly' consequences of abjection, as Judith Butler does in *Bodies that Matter*, one also has to seek strategies that actively subvert these effects. This is why Hale underlines: "Our dislocatedness provides us with subject positions. This might sound paradoxical but it is not, for dislocatedness is not absolute absence of location." (ibid.: 336)

Hale insists that it is possible to speak quite specifically about the overlapping zones of social categories that constitute a border-zone dweller's subjectivity. So subject positions arise, but they need a 'new' language that transcends the dominant symbolic order. The problem is that: "Such lengthy, detailed specifications do not provide the discursive material for full occupancy of social existence, which at present requires more central, less multiple instantiations of social categories." (ibid.) Therefore, to struggle for (non-normative) self-rep-

resentations is one thing, the other would be to focus on the present regimes of categorizations and the way they are socio-culturally institutionalized and/or normalized.

From the perspective of a Black lesbian feminist who is sceptical about whether she should add another adjective, namely queer, to her self-description, Evelyn Hammonds writes:

> But in overturning the 'politics of silence' the goal cannot merely be to be seen: visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence nor does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines what can and cannot be seen. The goal should be to develop a 'politics of articulation.' This politics would build on the interrogation of what makes it possible for black women to speak and act. (Hammonds 1997: 152)

So Hammonds focuses on public discourses and practices that define and regulate visibilities and invisibilities, participation and exclusion. It is her demand for a politics of articulation I would like to take up. I will do that by referring to and explaining the concept of articulation as it is used by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their 1985 classic *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

Re-articulations of the Political: Agonistic Pluralism

Articulation, according to Laclau/Mouffe, does not mean expression, which would imply that there is something given, an authentic being, an inner truth, a political belief – seen as stable entities independent of their context and conditions of emergence. 'Articulation' takes into account that there is no self-same identity, or rather that the process of articulation itself is productive and constitutes the identities it claims to express. Seen like this the concept of articulation is qua definitionen connected to transformation: "In the context of this discussion we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of articulatory practice" (Laclau/Mouffe 1985: 105). Articulations take place within a discursive formation that is simultaneously constituted by those articulatory practices. But it is important to note that for Laclau/Mouffe there is no dichotomy of discourse and materiality. Rather, within discourse

there are discursive and non-discursive practices, 'elements' that are not discursively articulated, and that turn into 'moments' once they are. To change the discursive formation implies changing its materiality. Therefore a practice of articulation must "...pierce the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals, and practices through which a discursive formation is structured" (109). Articulations, from this point of view, can neither be reduced to a linguistic nor to an individual practice, but it always refers to social changes and political struggles.

Additionally, for Laclau/Mouffe there are no privileged political agents. Referring to the *New Social Movements* of Western societies in the 1980s they recognize a plurality of different struggles which have a right of their own, but for Laclau/Mouffe still share the similarity of politicizing social fields that have formerly been privatized. They emphasize, though, that not every kind of resistance against a relation of power or subordinations becomes political (153). 'Subordination' would be any relation where an agent is subjected to the decisions of another. Only when those relations of subordination are 'negated' and turned into sites of antagonism, is the relation politicized into a 'relation of oppression'. From this point of view we can criticize tolerance pluralism, because it impedes the translation of a relation of subordination into a relation of oppression. Therefore, from Laclau/Mouffe's point of view, social antagonisms are a positive sign of a society whose relations of domination are not fixed but a matter of ongoing conflict and reworking. In this context Laclau/Mouffe ask how resistance translates into collective struggles. They propose: "what allows resistance to assume the character of collective struggles is the existence of an external discourse which impedes the stabilization of subordination as difference" (159). This is exactly what brings us back to our original question of how the aporia of difference translates into politics. While on the one hand subordinations have to be politicized first before they can be contested, on the other hand one has to take care not to reproduce normative classifications in these processes of politicization. What kind of 'external discourse' might subvert identitarian constructs? Can self-representations be understood as articulations rather than associating some kind of authenticity? Can we hold "the name open as a site of hegemonic articulation" (Butler/Laclau 2004: 341)?

I would like to suggest that one of these 'external discourses' could be Drucilla Cornell's declaration of an imaginary domain (Cornell

1998) that supports a person in creating a self-representation of her 'sexuate being' – which, if we do not want to naturalize sex and sexuality, has to be seen as a product of social and psychic activity. Cornell insists on distinguishing the imaginary domain as a 'sanctuary of personality' from liberal claims to privacy which function according to the principle of 'being-left-alone by the state.' This principle, Cornell emphasizes, frequently legitimizes relations of domination and violence in the private sphere and does not adequately protect the right to live one's sexuate being (40). So for Cornell there is a responsibility of the state to provide the conditions of freedom, but at the same time it has to be radically abstinent from promoting or judging any concrete forms of sexuate being. From this perspective it violates the sanctuary of the imaginary domain of those deciding for another form of life, if the state privileges heterosexual, monogamous marriage (39). On the contrary, the state has the responsibility to provide fair chances for anyone to develop her or his forms:

> Simply demanding that the state leaves us alone inadequately protects what is at stake in the right to self-represent one's own sexuate being. First and foremost, the right to self-represent one's own sexuate being cannot meaningfully separate speech from action, expression from actualization. [It; ae] involves not only representing oneself in and through a sexual personae but setting forth a life that expresses one's moral and affective orientation in matters of sex and family (40).

It is important to note that this self-representation – even if Cornell uses formulations like 'a sexuate being that is truly ours' (65) – does not become a self-same identity. On the contrary, self-representation can be seen as a "process by which the differential nature of all identity is at the same time asserted and subverted" (Butler/Laclau 2004: 334), and it can, as I would like to suggest, provoke politicization and turn antagonistic. Cornell gives us the example of conflicts over the participation of lesbians and gays at St Patrick's Day Parades in various US-American cities: We find an open clash between those who see a contradiction between Irishness and Gayness and those who understand their Irishness as a call to fight domination. In contrast to Forst Cornell underlines the unequal power relations in this struggle when she characterizes the difference between those two groups as follows:

"A homophobic Irishman may be deeply offended by having to march in a parade with gays and lesbians. But he is not degraded. He is allowed to be openly straight and Irish" (61). Here Cornell is referring to a principle called 'degradation prohibition'. It impedes the idea that the liberal principle of free expression of anyone's sexuate being leads to indifference or relativism, since it acknowledges power differences between social positions. But this attention to power differences does not lead Cornell to the conclusion of state intervention, since this would reproduce the advocatory power of the dominant position. Rather, she suggests: "The conflict should be left to the street ..." (ibid.). She does not explain this any further, but referring to Laclau/Mouffe it could be argued that to leave the conflict to the street allows antagonism to arise, while to take it to the court or to call for a law would hinder the politicization of the relation of subordination.

Laclau/Mouffe's theory of hegemony suggests that once a relation of subordination has been politicized and turned into an antagonism, collective struggles emerge over discourses and their power to define social practices. To accept the plurality of those struggles fragments society into diverse social spaces, which are neither stable entities nor pacified into some kind of imaginary consensus, but consist of permanent challenges. This is what Chantal Mouffe sees as a precondition of radical democracy. She promotes the model of 'agonistic pluralism', which acknowledges that the social is constituted by relations of power and that we will never be able to eradicate them. Still, she finds it necessary to develop forms of power struggle more compatible with democratic values. Therefore she proposes to accept that in politics there is always a distinction of 'us' and 'them', but that we construct 'them' not as an 'enemy' to be destroyed, but as an 'adversary': "somebody whose ideas we combat but whose rights to defend those ideas we do not put into question" (Mouffe 2000a: 15). Mouffe invites us to understand political struggle not as something to be overcome, but as the promise that an ineradicable pluralism of values can actually be lived once we accept the social as a field of conflict and develop forms to institutionalize a never-ending openness of social identities and power struggles: "Breaking with the symbolic representation of society as an organic body […] a democratic society acknowledges the pluralism of values […] and the unavoidable conflicts that it entails" (16).

Anna Marie Smith (1994), Didi Herman (1994), and Angela Wilson (1997) are early approaches that translate Laclau/Mouffe's theory of hegemony into the field of queer politics and explain its usefulness concerning a queer critique of lesbian and gay single issue and minority politics. Nonetheless, the problematic of all these approaches, who support diversity and 'multi-subjectivities' (Wilson) is that in the end they stick to the idea that self-representation consists of articulating and rearticulating identities: "It enables us to continually challenge the voice, or voices, that claim to represent 'the community.' But it is in the proclamation of identities that voices of difference are heard" (Wilson 1997: 107). This, I would criticize, side-steps the aporia of difference and avoids the challenge of developing new forms of articulating differences, which do not rely on the principle of identity. But exactly this is necessary, if we do want to expand politics and socio-cultural agency to those who are not seen as subjects or political subjects, who lack intelligibility according to the symbolic order, or who cannot or do not articulate themselves according to the rules of the occidental political. This is where I am heading, when I ask for self-representations of non-normative subjectivities. This is also what I am suggesting with the strategy of equivocation as a moment of a queer politics of representation that does not rely on the principle of identity as the only option of articulating difference.[7] Elspeth Probyn (1996) with her idea of 'outside belongings' and desires travelling in images on social surfaces subverts the concept of identity while simultaneously proliferating possibilities of articulation.[8] And Lisa Bower (1997) with her plea for a politics of direct address rather than official recognition asks, quoting Lisa Duggan: "Can sexual differences, understood 'not in terms of naturalized identities but as a form of dissent … as a constellation of non-conforming practices, expressions and beliefs' (Duggan 1994:1) create a renewal of political practice" (108)? These approaches refer to a queer politics that does not ask for tolerance or recognition, nor wait for an allocation, but takes its share and claims the ability to define public representations as well as to invent social practices. It proves to be competent in political agency even under conditions of exclusion and social inequality, since it makes use of conflict and confrontation as productive moments of social transformation.

In his latest book *On Populist Reason* Laclau works on exactly this idea of expanding the field of the politcal by focusing on social het-

erogeneity (2005, 129ff.). Social heterogeneity consists precisely not of differences that share a common discursive field even if they are opposed in antagonistic relations. It also does not signify the particularities not taken into account when a chain of equivalence is formed. Heterogeneity points to what is – under the given historical circumstances – outside of representation, which is, as Butler would say, not intelligible in the given symbolic order, but which, and that is the decisive point in Laclau, not only inhabits social space but has to be acknowledged as a political force. Laclau's provocative thesis is that the antagonistic field itself does not hold any potential of resistance; resistance depends on the heterogeneity of the social: "This can only mean that the points of resistance to the antagonizing force are always being external to it" (Laclau 2005: 150). Hegemonic domination can take two different forms: Either an opposition stabilizes itself (e.g., a complementary social gender arrangement) or a hegemonic consensus evolves (e.g., gender is ideologically dismissed as a relevant category of social hierarchization). But in order to politically challenge the discursive field that founds the hegemonic arrangement it needs an impulse that is not already part of the arrangement. While in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* this was an 'external discourse' now Laclau suggests working on the idea that nothing is entirely inside or outside of representation. If we accept that what is outside of representation can very well become effective within representation, this implies the "widening of discursive-strategic operations" (153). Rather than depending on a logic of inclusion, which restricts political articulations to those who are already accepted as political subjects and submitted to the discursive rules of the hegemonic field, Laclau proposes challenging the field of the political by no longer negating the political agency evolving from social heterogeneity.

Laclau's considerations tie in very well with queer politics that support articulations of difference that are not restricted to but rather subverting the dominant socio-symbolic order. It offers a view that can understand these queer politics of representation as profoundly political without assimilating it into given understandings of the political. Laclau's proposal might be a radicalized Hegelian version of recognition by simply expanding the mutual dependencies. But beyond this it disqualifies any gesture of tolerance and integration – even those who invite conflicts in order to widen their integrative reach – by pointing out its depoliticizing effects. So let us understand

agonistic pluralism as a perspective that invites social heterogeneity into the field of the political, and be optimistic that it is possible to create conditions under which this invitation can be taken up and turned into power struggles whose contingency is not foreclosed by regimes of privileges, domination and violence.

NOTES

1. This essay is the revised version of a paper presented at the 11th Symposium of the International Association of Women Philosophers (Internationalen Assoziation von Philosophinnen) IAPh Symposium "Human Good - Dignity, Equality and Diversity" in Göteborg, 17-19 June, 2004. I would like to thank the participants of the discussion for their inspiring questions, Melissa Pritchard for proof-reading and solving tricky translation problems, and the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments that inspired a critical revision of the text.

2. In Engel (2002) I outline my critique of the notion of identity as follows: The principle of identity or self-sameness (A=A) is a logical figure underlying the binary concept of difference. Binary logic is a specific, and by no means the only, way of understanding difference, namely: One term is declared the defining centre, the universal (call it: "the phallus", "the hetero-norm", ...) , so that difference can only be thought of in relation to the defining centre, as "deviant from" or as "other". There is only A or non-A (Jay 1981). So, within a binary logic the principle of identity is used to set up a hierarchy; categorization and hierarchization function together neatly (Engel 2002, 101ff.). In socio-cultural contexts the logical figure of identity is installed as a norm that functions as a demand for coherence. It only comes into being performatively and is bound to fail due to its very need of reiteration (Butler 1993; Butler/Laclau 2004, 342). If I use the term identity I refer to the logical figure or the idealizing norm, while assuming that in social life identities are always complex, internally contradictory, and fragmented.

3. Interestingly, even Rainer Forst, who with his concept of "tolerance in conflict" (2003) proves to be an advocate of pluralist societies and is prepared to regard their immanent conflicting nature as productive, sticks to the presumably consensual norm of social integration. Thus the leading figure of unity and the rules for dealing with conflicts are presented as unquestionable. They are to be accepted by all - without the merest chance of the many to contribute to the design of the underlying value ranges.

4. In "Wounded Attachments" Brown (1995) problematizes that "identity's desire for recognition" (55) binds identity, even in its politicized version, to its genealogy of suffering and victim position.

5. See Pelligrini (2002), Wagenknecht (2003), Woltersdorff (2004) for lesbians and gays being interpellated into the avantgarde subject position of incarnating the idealized neo-liberal subjetivies – self-reliant, flexible, malleable, individualistic. Ha (2006) makes a similar argument concerning the appropriation of migrant cultures.

6. Pulkkinen (2000) calls this "the politics of names" (172ff.) For her this is a specific form of identity politics, since she does not understand identity as a restrictive, normative concept, but as a contingent product of historical and individual contexts and power relations, and thus an alternative to the transcendental notion of the modern per-

son. This makes her ask: "What is an identity politics that is not based on the conception of identity as either inborn or chosen, identity not as an universal characteristics, but as something relevant here and now, something formed as a political entity against the hegemonic power?" (173) While I am sceptical of her use of the concept of identity, I think in answering her own question she indeed takes up the challenge presented by the aporia of difference: "This kind of identity politics is concerned with difference and the right of different people to live different lives. It is the politics of assigning the different positions names and in this way granting them a socially recognized existence. I refer to this as 'the politics of names' (173).

7. The strategy of equivocation (*VerUneindeutigung*; Engel 2002) is set up as an alternative to dissolving or proliferating gender categories. It aims at deconstructing contexts that are organized by a normative ideal or a restrictive law, e.g., the rigidly binary, heteronormative gender orders. Relying on the poststructuralist understanding of representation as a production of meaning and a construction of reality it works through intervening in the principle of identity: It renders ambiguously where a single truth is claimed, it subverts where a clear line is drawn and an entity is stabilized. It favours representations and practices that materialize the processes of the construction and the conditions of power at work in these processes. Equivocation is not a descriptive category that claims a given ambiguity or plurality of genders and desires, nor does it install ambiguity as a new ideal, but it is a conceptual category that takes up and draws consequences from a critique of identity by pointing out that representations cannot be pinned down to a single meaning, and by inviting a process of permanent reconsideration of the specific 'normalities' that form a social context.

8. Since Probyn does not explicitly consider political articulations in Engel (2006b) I suggest ways to apply her ideas for the critique of relations of power and domination, including institutionalized formats like the public, citizenship and state politics.

REFERENCES

Berlant, Lauren/Freeman, Elizabeth (1993): Queer Nationality. In: Warner, Michael (ed.): *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis/London: 193-229.

Bower, Lisa (1997): Queer Problems/Straight Solutions: The Limits of a Politics of "Official Recognition". In: Phelan, Shane (ed.): *Playing with Fire. Queer Politics, Queer Theories*. New York: Routledge: 267-291.

Brown, Wendy (1995): Wounded Attachments. In: Brown: *State of Injury*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP: 52-76.

Brown, Wendy (2004): Tolerance as/in Civilizational Discourse. *Redescriptions. Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History*, vol 8: 52-84.

Butler, Judith (1993): *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York/London: Routledge.

Butler, Judith (2004a): *Undoing Gender*. London/New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith (2004b): *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London/New York: Verso.

Butler, Judith/Laclau, Ernesto (2004): The Uses of Equality. In: Critchley, Simon/Marchart, Oliver (eds.): *Laclau. A Critical Reader*. London/New York: Routledge: 329-344.

Cornell, Drucilla (1998): *At the Heart of Freedom. Feminism, Sex, and Equality*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP.

Duggan, Lisa (1994): Queering the State. *Social Text* vol 39, no 1: 1-14.

Engel, Antke (2002): *Wider die Eindeutigkeit. Sexualität und Geschlecht im Fokus Queerer Politik der Repräsentation*. Frankfurt/M.: Campus.

Engel, Antke (2006a): A Queer Politics of Representation: Exploring the Intersections of Sexuality and Economy. *framework: the finnish art review*, no 5: 18-22.

Engel, Antke (2006b): Traveling Images. Desire as Movement. Desire as Method. In: Basiuk, Tomasz/Ferens, Dominika/Sikora, Tomasz (eds.): *Out Here: Local and International Perspectives in Queer Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press: 13-24.

Engel, Antke (2007): No Sex, No Crime, No Shame. Privatized Care and the Seduction into Responsibility. *Nora. Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, vol 15, no 3 (forthcoming).

Fraser, Nancy/Honneth, Axel (2003): *Recognition or Redistribution. A Philosophical Exchange*. London: Verso.

Forst, Rainer (2003): Toleranz im Konflikt. Geschichte, Gehalt und Gegenwart eines umstrittenen Begriffs. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.

Ha, Kien Nghi (2006): Crossing the Border? Hybridity as Late-Capitalistic Logic of Cultural Translation and National Modernisation. http://eipcp.net/transversal/1206/ha/en (accessed 10-06-2007).

Hale, Jacob (1998): Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/ftm borderlands. GLQ vol 4, no 2: 311-348.

Hammonds, Evelyn (1997): Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality. In: Weed, Elizabeth / Shor, Naomi (eds.): *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana UP: 136-156.

Hennessy, Rosemary (2000): *Profit and Pleasure. Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*. New York/London: Routledge.

Jain, Anil K (2003): Differenzen der Differenz. Umbrüche in der Landschaft der Alterität. In: Steyerl, Hito/Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Encarnación (eds.): *Spricht die Subalterne Deutsch? Migration und Postkoloniale Kritik*. Münster: Unrast: 259-269.

Jay, Nancy (1981): Gender and Dichotomy. *Feminist Studies*, 7,1: 38-56.

Laclau, Ernesto/Mouffe, Chantal (1985): *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack. London: Verso.

Laclau, Ernesto (2005): *On Populist Reason*, London/New York: Verso.

Mouffe, Chantal (2000a): *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*. Wien: Institut für Höhere Studien.

Mouffe, Chantal (2000b): *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.

Pellegrini, Ann (2002): Consuming Lifestyle: Commodity, Capitalism, and Transformations in Gay Identity. In: Cruz-Malavé, Arnaldo / Manalasan IV, Martin F. (Ed): *Queer Globalizations. Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. New York: New York UP: 134-145.

Phillips, Anne (1999): The Politicisation of Difference. In: Horton, John/Mendus, Susan (eds.): *Toleration, Identity and Difference*. Houndsmill/London: McMillan: 126-145.

Probyn, Elspeth (1996): *Outside Belongings*. London/New York: Routledge.

Pulkkinen, Tuija (2000): *The Postmodern and Political Agency*. Jyväskylä: Sophi [1996].

Wagenknecht, Peter (2003): "Always be yourself!" Männlichkeit, Klassenposition und Normative Heterosexualität in der Formierung von Subjektivität. In: Guttiérez Rodríguez, Encarnación/Pieper, Marianne (eds.) *Gouvernementalität. Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Debatte im Anschluss an Foucault*. Frankfurt/M.: Campus: 196-223.

Smith, Anna Maria (1994): Hegemony Trouble: The Political Theories of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Judith Butler. In: Weeks, Jeffrey (ed.) *The Lesser Evil and the Greater Good: The Theory and Politics of Social Diversity*. London: Rivers Oram Press: 235-252.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988): Can the Subaltern Speak? In: Nelson, Cary/Grossberg, Lawrence (eds.): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: Illinois UP: 271-313.

Warner, Michael (ed.) (1993): *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis/London: Minnesota UP.

Warner, Michael (1999): *The Trouble With Normal. Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP.

Wilson, Angelia R. (1997): Somewhere Over the Rainbow. In: Phelan, Shane (ed.): *Playing with Fire. Queer Politics, Queer Theories*. New York/London: Routledge: 99-111.

Woltersdorff, Volker (2004): Zwischen Unterwerfung und Befreiung. Konstruktionen schwuler Identität im Coming Out. In: Helduser, Urte et al. (ed): *under construction. Konstruktivistische Perspektiven in feministischer Theorie und Forschungspraxis*. Frankfurt/ M.: Campus: 138-149.

Young, Iris Marion (1990): *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton UP.