10. Queer Envy of Recognition

Questions as to why Queer Studies, or indeed other research on gender, sex and sexuality is needed in the first place, expose perfidious strategies, embedded in past, present, and future power structures, of tabooing elementary areas of life, thus blocking necessary processes of recognition. Opponents and critics abruptly demand an obligation to present arguments for, and thus justify this area of studies—while papering over the fact that no such necessity for this justification exists. These forms of hierarchization and recognition have been researched only too well. They're well-known strategies, and part of powerful, societal confrontations.

The sociocultural areas of life presented here are not only real and essential, but also provide, in their very existence, arguments enough for a scholarly investigation of the subject matter. In a manifold world, with a high number of explanatory approaches to match, there simply are many possible points of departure on the journey of representing connections. The queer departure point is neither more illuminating nor, in itself, more profound than other perspectives. But it is nearer the lifeworlds of some subcultures and thus possibly more relevant. Pressure is put on this argumentative clarity, which has combined with a rejection of social-historical colonialism, by culturally dominant standard values. This is why taking on and keeping hold of a queer standpoint means a form of exertion relevant to our subjects: personal, cultural, social, political, and academic.

Recognizing a subject does not automatically and immediately mean a demand that values acceptance of the same. Rather, the first step is

to develop a differentiated perception of the subject itself. Wealth, success, entertainment, sexuality, beauty, and culture, and the peculiar exaggerations and confrontations pertaining to the same, are all queer appearance forms, represented in a subcultural community, and reflected by—and reflected on—by many individuals. Queer recognition means providing reflective space for facts, contextualizations, and a flowing discourse. The visibility of these elements encompasses both majority-based and subcultural dimensions, and real and virtual ones. It is co-shaped by every utterly personal action, and not just from superordinated collectives. Positive appreciations, but also disdain and slights, permanently contribute countless facets to queer dynamics of recognition, and decide at an individual level, and in observing a group, which recognition mechanisms assume clear outlines, and which evaporate or become marginalized. Actors attribute slights and contempt all too easily to societal majorities. But, as demonstrated in the deliberations presented here, this doesn't quite fit the bill. Instead, passing the buck for one's own mistakes, and a general lack of solidarity, onto others, is an established appeasement strategy used by queer community representatives. There are those who move within queer communities in a conformist ways, and there's also the option of experiencing some of queerness's social and cultural facets, while ignoring other areas that seem inappropriate or unpleasant. This strategy allows actors to see their own *otherness* as the right kind, and gives people the strength of showing solidarity for one cross-section of the queer community that fits them—and for individuals to master the task of establishing themselves within nonqueer everyday society.

However, it's precisely out of such a strategy that two well-known danger zones can develop: oppressive heteronormativity, and overwhelming queerness. Participants are threatened with existing precariously between both worlds. Nonqueer, achievement-based society on the one hand, in which one can take part, on an equal footing, without an admission of queerness. And queer subculture on the other, which provides opportunities for sexual, emotional and cultural desire, but which can overstretch possibly existing areas of tolerance for accepted queerness. Thus, it's not merely so-called Minority Stress, the stress of

being constantly decoded and judged as a minority,[1] which unleashes repercussions to match, but also internalized norms held by social majorities, which are accompanied by a major lack of understanding for the unconventional totality of queer subculture. In consequence, the thought of belonging to a minority is only oppressive because the minority expands—in manifold, expressive ways, and so uncontrolled by its own ideals, and normative idealizations.

Various psychological tests have attempted to do justice to these perceptive worlds, and their internal and external changes:

> More recently, scales have been designed to include assessment of attitudes toward and among bisexuals as well as gay men and lesbians … or to address this group specifically … . The stigma associated with bisexuality, though similar to homosexual stigma, has an added component of perceived instability or lack of legitimacy … . Indeed, bisexuals are often targets of prejudice from heterosexuals as well as gay men and lesbians who perceive bisexuality as a transitional or opportunistic identity … . Discrepancies between low levels of self-reported homophobia and observed behaviors have been documented and are arguably due to the fact that existing scales assess specific types of homonegativity that are no longer endorsed among the undergraduate samples typically studied … . Indeed, cultural acceptance has quickly outdated older scales, such that many items … appear extreme and are unlikely to be endorsed, particularly among university students. Rather than disappearing, LGB-bias has transformed over time. Hence, newer scales have been designed to assess these more subtle, modern attitudes toward LGB individuals … .[2]

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1   See: Ilan H. Meyer, "Minority Stress and Mental Health in Gay Men," in: J*ournal of Health and Social Behavior* 36, no. 1 (1995), 38ff., https://doi.org/10.2307/21372 86.

2   William S. Ryan and Jim Blascovich, "Measures of Attitudes towards Sexual Orientation: Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Internalized Stigma, in: *Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Constructs*, ed. Gregory J. Boyle et al., (London: Elsevier Academic Press, 2015), 721.

Minority stress can easily be understood as a logical outcome, when the absence of equal recognition for alternative forms for relationships, and for lives, are considered. But the lack of understanding for the non-conforming totality of queer subculture is harder to grasp. This is why, in the following, I name this phenomena the queer envy of recognition, and attempt to explain the same.

The model of a queer, recognition-based envy is the theoretical attempt to explain why certain queer individuals refuse an apparently logical queer solidarity. In so doing, the crossing of boundaries pertaining to heteronormative appreciation constitutes decisive corridors of demarcation for emotional transfer: regarding disdain, rejection, and aggression. These corridors are only positions in an ostensible sense: the queer game surrounding heteronormative recognition is much more like an individually constructed island, surrounded by fluid possibilities. On this island, participants search for political, social and cultural commonalities, but also mark down where distinctions should be made, but without even being able to name an opponent in the discourse. The only thing that's accepted as a solid foundation is desire, and it's out of this desire that the individual island expands into a collective terrain. This location is not merely a delimited and constrained space, but also a terrain of silent desire. The stability of the island soil may communicate a feeling of purchase and of clarity, and may therefore feel more pleasant than the endless depth and vastness of the waters surrounding, but the feeling of comfort is deceptive: the shifting sands of a heteronormative continental shelf provide neither constant certainty nor sufficient space for the multifariousness in the ocean depths. People on the island are permanently in danger of either sinking into the sands, or of being swallowed up by the rising tides.

The desire to be completely *normal* remains unfulfillable in queer existence, and yet it's a concept that some want to chase after forever—or feel they have to. But concurrently, the desire exists for that other life, for queer freedom, for life without bourgeois obligation. Actors look up with envy to those who manage to keep their distance from this normative terrain, thus enjoying gender-based and sexual fluidity to the full. But the coercions, expectations and structures of the heteronormative

everyday can be felt all too often: the unknown depths that are encountered reflect both anxiety and attraction. It's only the thought of betraying opportunities for subcultural participation to normative majority-backed structures that prevents participants from giving in to this envious desire.

Queer, recognition-based envy reveals people's greed for superordinated appreciation, meaning that all esteem attached to queer disorder is eyed up enviously. Recognizing queer others means reducing one's own capacity to conform to the norm, and reduces the appreciation shown for the subjugation presented. This humiliation leads to distancing, disdain, and animosity within the queer community—if only through this, it knows it will be appreciated by its own heteronormative equivalent. Queer, recognition-based envy is a pendulum swinging between one's own wish to unfold freely as an individual, and the overwhelming greed/need to be valued for conforming. The reference object thereby is as both arbitrarily selected and exchangeable, part of a fluid queerness surrounding the island of the heteronormative personality: well-being, wealth, success, entertainment, sexuality, beauty, culture, and communal accentuations bear witness to the (un)-articulated discourses that envelop queer, recognition-based envy.