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Tomasz Sikora and Rafał Majka

“NOT-SO-STRANGE BEDFELLOWS”: CONSIDERING QUEER AND LEFT ALLIANCES IN POLAND

ABSTRACT

It is often taken for granted that there exists a more or less “natural” link between left-wing politics and the progressive social movements referred to as “cultural”, such as feminist, ecological or LGBT struggles. This article argues that if an alliance between the Left and the LGBTQ movement is to be real and operational, it must be worked out, rather than presupposed, via a thorough rethinking of the political as such, of its axioms, goals and ethical frameworks. The authors see a parallel between the dissatisfaction that recent grassroots left-wing movements feel towards more established parties and institutions, and the dissatisfaction that a new wave of queer activism feels towards more traditional policies of mainstream LGBT organizations. Much of this dissatisfaction can be derived, in both cases, from the perceived neoliberalization of the political and social spheres and the subsequent cooptation of leftist / queer politics and activism to the neoliberal, or even neoconservative, agenda. This moment of shared dissatisfaction should be used creatively to devise common strategies, rather than maintain the artificial and disadvantageous division (which only seems to work to the benefit of the neoliberal hegemony) between the so-called “economic” and “cultural” lefts. Regrettably, at the moment there is very little understanding of queerness on the Left, just as there is little dedication to countering the disastrous effects of capitalism among LGBT activists. The New Left and the queer movement have much to learn and gain from each other, but to make this happen new leftists must rethink the political through the sexual, whereas the queer movement (seen as separate from LGBT or uneasily attached to it) must rethink the sexual through the economic, to put it simply. The article ends with an outline of a new comprehensive ethical and political model from which an anti-exclusionary and pro-social ethics could be derived as a common ground for a workable queer and left alliance.

Keywords: New Left; LGBT; queer; politics; neoliberalism; ethics.

Beginning with women's emancipation movement in the 19th century, gender and, later, sexuality have become increasingly recognized as political issues, even if the actual nature of their political engagement remains contested. The prevalent trend, following the liberal model of modern polity, has been to thematize gender and sexuality, mostly in the "rights" tradition, which requires positing relatively stable, well-defined groups of interest, or constituencies—such as LGBT—who struggle for formal recognition and the bestowal of certain rights. The feminist movement, for instance, eventually managed to win women's suffrage throughout the Western world; a recent development in the Polish context is the campaign for gender parity in the election system. Other, non-liberal lines of thinking would argue that just as gender and sexuality are not simply "attributes" of an otherwise universal political subject, but rather part and parcel of every particular instance of political/human subjectivity, so the dominant model of polity should not so much (or not only) thematize gender/sexuality as additional, to-be-annexed areas of an otherwise neutral political regime, but rather it should recognize the multifarious ways in which gender and sexuality (and desire) are among the very *structuring* factors of that polity, even if largely unacknowledged. To put it simply, the debate addresses the question of what exactly is the level at which gender and sexuality should be "paired" with issues of democracy, or how deeply (or superficially) gender and sexuality cut (or should cut) into modern political axiomatics, and, consequently, how radical the corresponding adjustments of the political system should be.¹ While the aim of this short article is not to delve into this complicated argument and offer informed conclusions, it is important to bear that debate in mind, as it is one of the prisms through which the troubled and troubling difference between the LGBT and queer movements can be seen more clearly.²

¹ Similar questions have been brought up by thinkers as diverse as Georges Bataille and Herbert Marcuse, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, Guy Hocquenghem and Lee Edelman, Judith Butler and Lisa Duggan, among many others. In the Polish context one could mention Paweł Leszkowicz and Tomek Kitliński's book *Miłość i demokracja. Rozważania o kwestii homoseksualnej w Polsce* [Love and Democracy. Reflections on the Homosexual Question in Poland] (Kraków: Aureus, 2005), which calls—through numerous references to visual and literary culture—for a democratic recognition of all kinds of love and advocates love's great transformative power within the political and the social. Though clearly the scope of the book transcends the narrow-mindedness of much of LGBT mainstream and invokes many forms of "queerness", by and large it seems to remain within the rights/tolerance/diversity/homo-hetero discourse. (The book contains a lengthy summary in English.)

² The biggest mainstream LGBT organization in Poland is KPH (Campaign Against Homophobia), established in 2001. Queer has certainly a smaller following, especially outside of Academia, and due to its aversion to large-scale, formalized organizations its initiatives are usually small and scattered, often carried out in (oppositional) cooperation with/at the margins of mainstream LGBT events; the two most "organized" and persisting groups are the UFA Centra in Warsaw and Love without Borders in Kraków. A queer critique of identity politics utilized by main Polish gay and lesbian organizations can be found in Rafał Majka, "Polityka tożsamościowa organizacji gejowsko-lesbijskich w Polsce a polityka 'queer'" [Identity Politics of Polish Gay and Lesbian Organizations versus Queer Politics], *InterAlia* 3 (2008/2009), http://www.interalia.org.pl/en/artykuly/20082009_3/08_polityka_tozsamosciowa_organizacji_gejowskolesbijskich_w_polsce_a_polityka.htm.

To be sure, most political parties in Poland, both left and right, still attempt to treat sexuality as a non-issue, for "ideological" or "pragmatic" reasons (or both). In other words, they claim (at least in the official register) a prelapsarian innocence not unlike the one noticed by James Baldwin in his 1955 essay "Stranger in the Village": just as Europeans proudly celebrate their centuries-old cultural grandeur on the pretence that black folk do not (or did not) exist,³ so the Polish political establishment still celebrates certain forms of national communality failing to acknowledge the laborious erasure of gender and sexual otherness that carves this socio-political body into what it is. Not surprisingly, then, much of the LGBT and queer "battle" over the last decade has been simply over visibility and recognition; in this respect, one should mention street marches or parades in major Polish cities since 2001; the "Let Them See Us" poster campaign featuring same-sex couples (2003); the demands to legalize same-sex partnerships (since 2004); and, of course, a number of eminent comings-out. Even though the parliamentary parties are still very reluctant to take any actual legislative action, the "visibility" work has certainly borne some fruit; hardly a day passes without some reference to homosexuality in the mainstream media. (In the 2010 presidential campaign, for instance, candidates are routinely asked about their opinion on same-sex unions.) One may conclude, then, that the innocence is slowly crumbling, even though the conservative political façade still holds strong.

Among the biggest parties it is the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)—together with some satellite parties—that might be perceived as the most sympathetic toward a legal recognition of LGBT rights; or at least, some of its prominent members have made occasional public statements to that effect. But despite the party's program, which vows to protect civil rights irrespective of "political views, religion, skin color, sex or sexual orientation" (<http://www.sld.org.pl/program>), its actual policies are far from dedicated to issues of sexual equality. The individual efforts of a handful of SLD parliamentarians (home or EU)—such as Maria Szyszkowska (in the years 2001–2005), Joanna Senyszyn or Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka⁴—may gain some visibility, yet without the party's broader support they remain completely ineffective. The half-hearted support for LGBT rights at best amounts to an instance of tokenism in the midst of "business as usual". Not that the LGBT electorate fails to notice the party's underlying conservatism behind the occasional lip-service: there is hardly any substantial commitment to SLD (or any other leftist formation, for that matter) among LGBT folk, although individual party leaders may be able to

³ James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village",

<https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/gjay/www/Whiteness/stranger.htm>.

⁴ Jaruga-Nowacka—tragically killed in the recent plane crash in Smolensk, Russia—was never formally a member of SLD. An unquestioned authority on the left side of the political scene, she consistently pursued non-exclusionary, socially sensitive and pro-solidarity politics, which bought her a great deal of sympathy among many underprivileged groups, including LGBT people.

win LGBT's favor. In fact, much of the LGBT community shares with the larger society a certain "soft conservatism" combined with a nearly unconditional approval for capitalism, which should come as no surprise considering that the history of the relative LGBT "liberation" in Poland (e.g. the emergence of openly gay/lesbian press) coincided with the onset of the neoliberally-inflected capitalism in 1989, not to mention the well-argued thesis that the very emergence of homosexual identities in the 19th century was largely made possible through the expansion of the free market and a corresponding loosening of traditional families and communities.⁵ Indeed, some LGBT leaders (e.g. Paweł Leszkowicz) have repeatedly emphasized the liberatory and emancipatory force inherent in capitalism. Put together, the circumstances seem to make LGBT folk almost "natural voters" for the Civic Platform (PO),⁶ which is economically neoliberal (with vague references to "social solidarity"), and otherwise balancing between moderate moral conservatism and "civilizational", strongly pro-EU aspirations to modernization. The flagrantly conservative, nationalistic, euro-skeptic Law and Justice party (PiS), as well as the agrarian Polish People's Party (PSL), attract few LGBT votes, understandably.

Since 1991 SLD (first as a coalition of parties, then as one party) has been occupying a dominant position on the Polish left, despite an internal split in 2004⁷ and a plethora of alternative left-wing initiatives. The latter could be labeled collectively as "New Left movements",⁸ which is not at all to suggest a more or less unified political vision. On the contrary, the debates on the New Left continue to be fierce. One major division is that between the "cultural" New Left and various socialist, anarcho-syndicalist or anarchist groups dedicated to the primacy of economic issues over anything "merely cultural".⁹ The former is represented mainly by the so-called "Political Critique" which de-

⁵ See John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity", in *The Columbia Reader on Lesbians and Gay Men in Media, Society, and Politics*, ed. Larry Gross and James D. Woods (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 48–55.

⁶ In March 2009 an LGBT (but mostly gay) web service gejowo.pl conducted a survey among its readers on behalf of the business monthly *Marketing&More*. The leftist SLD received 21,9% of the votes, whereas the neoliberal PO got twice as much, i.e. 43,5% (http://gejowo.pl/index.php?&pid=2&a_gid=4&a_id=954).

⁷ A new leftist party, Social Democratic Party of Poland (SDPL), was established as a result. Actually, the formation of the party followed the vacating of a group of SLD members in protest against the party's walking away from leftist, social democratic values into a rather pragmatically conservative and economically liberal politics.

⁸ This is not to be simply identified with the Western "New Left" originating in the 1960s/1970s. While some of the Polish new leftist groups—more culturally inclined—draw from this tradition, others are strongly opposed to it and often advocate a return to more classical Marxist positions. To be very precise, the New, or radical, Left movement of today might be referred to as the "new New Left", characterized by a great ideological diversity and internal contention; as a whole, it is primarily opposed to the mainstream, pragmatic, (nearly) neoliberal parties that identify themselves as leftist.

⁹ See Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural", http://courses.washington.edu/com597j/pdfs/Judith%20Butler_Merely%20Cultural.pdf.

scribes itself as "Poland's largest left-wing circle of intellectuals and activists" (<http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/English/menu-id-113.html>), but is continually downplayed by the latter as elitist, simply an intellectual "fad" devoid of any deeper insight or social commitment. The "cultural" Left is sometimes perceived as part of the same malady that brought neoliberalism to such prominence in the contemporary world, as impotent cultural contestation that deflects people from the "real issues". At the same time, Political Critique is the left-wing milieu most consistently dedicated to LGBT and (occasionally) queer issues. Other lines of conflict among the New, or radical, Left movements involve the extent to which alternative groups should or should not cooperate with mainstream parties, and particularly with SLD, which is accused of conformist and corrupted "pragmatism" and/or a basically neoliberal agenda hidden under a neat social-democratic façade. Finally, if most New, or radical, Left groups are vehemently critical of the excesses of neoliberalism, they differ substantially in their stance toward capitalism, with views ranging from mild reformism to a Marxist denunciation of capitalism as such. To make the picture roughly complete, one should not omit various movements that are often loosely associated with the traditional Left, though in many respects may differ from it substantially, such as the Greens 2004 party or various anarchist and alterglobalist groups.

Where does queer fit in all this?¹⁰ In the first place, it is important to dismiss the allegedly "apolitical" (or depoliticized) nature of the queer movement. True enough, in Poland the term "queer" is used predominantly in "avant-garde" academic and cultural contexts, hardly ever in an openly political context.¹¹ This is somewhat paradoxical given that the original impulse for queer theory is usually claimed to have come from actual social practices (self-help organizing and political mobilization in the face of the AIDS crisis). In our opinion, this "grass-roots" dimension should remain a distinctive feature of queer activism. Second, queer should be seen as fundamentally different from any kind of political action proceeding from liberal and neoliberal assumptions—whether in the LGBT movement or among political parties and organizations. True: in some contexts—where a particular project seems to have the potential to considerably broaden the sphere of social and/or individual freedom, in one area or another—

¹⁰ A useful and up-to-date introduction to many aspects of sexual politics in the Polish context can be found in the series of commentaries published in issue 4 of *InterAlia*, a journal of queer studies,

http://www.interalia.org.pl/en/artykuly/current_issue_2009_4/02_the_manchester_seminar.htm.

¹¹ Anna Laszuk, editor-in-chief of the feminist-lesbian journal *Furia*, comments on queer theory and practice—with its deconstruction and renunciation of "stable," emancipatory identities—as depoliticizing and emancipatorily demobilizing. Depoliticizing queer herself and placing it somewhere in the reactionary and escapist realm, Laszuk calls for such a rendering and reworking of queer in Poland that would (theoretically and practically) recognize a diversity of identities, and help them be recognized by, and "liberalized" within, the system (*Furia. An irregularly-published feminist-lesbian journal* 1, vol. 2 (2009)).

it might be legitimate to say that queer is in a way "liberal, only more so"; but in many other contexts this claim would simply not stand up.¹² Unlike "mainstream" LGBT and Left movements, queer contests not only particular legal norms and solutions, but the very erroneous liberal notions in which modern polity has come to be grounded.¹³ (Paradoxically, this situates queer closer to certain neoconservative contestations of the "received order", based on a distrust of the ever-increasing regulatory and disciplinarian usurpations of the modern state, than a liberally-minded person would expect, although clearly the neoconservative emphasis on traditional "family values" and other familial and religious community structures is very far from any queer agenda, as yet.) Third, queer has been and should remain staunchly dedicated to an intersectional anti-exclusionary ethics, whether the social exclusions involve gender, sexuality, race, material status, place of residence or anything else; in other words, it situates itself on the margins and peripheries rather than in any "center" (hetero- or homonormative, middle-class, white, male, etc.). Insofar as the actions of the LGBT and left-wing movements counteract exclusions, queer is always ready to back them up, but the moment they become too limited in their emphasis on one form of exclusion at the expense of another, queer begs to differ. Last but not least, queer endorses the sexualization of the public sphere (or a deprivatization of sexuality), i.e. it posits social actors as always already sexual (because materially embodied), rather than rational citizens first, and private sexual beings secondarily. In this, again, queer coincides with much of the LGBT movement, yet with the latter's growing tendency toward a middle-class, desexualized respectability (probably the price to be paid for legal recognition and social acceptance), queer's trajectory is sure to depart from the route of mainstream LGBT activism.¹⁴

From this very brief overview there follow a number of practical conclusions with regard to possible alliances between the queer and (new, or radical) left movements. However, before we specify areas of possible convergence and discord, it might be useful to first illustrate some of the contentious issues with a brief summary of the polemic which the authors of this article led not so long

¹² While liberalism often remains blind to the multiple and overlapping identities and socio-cultural positions we inhabit simultaneously as, for instance, a working class, rural homosexual, or a Roma lesbian woman, positing instead a neutral, universal subject, uprooted from the contexts of here and now, queer is committed to the so-called intersectional politics, recognizing and embracing that multiplicity, and aware of the multi-faceted oppression that is usually exercised on an individual, and ready and willing to combat the oppression/s.

¹³ For a critique of the liberal foundations of democracy see, for example, Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London and New York: Verso, 2000).

¹⁴ For example, one of the leading Polish LGBT web services—one that readily employs, and thus capitalizes on, the term "queer"—has recently removed the "sex offers" section. Queer carries on the promise of the sexualization of society rather than the desexualization of the homosexual. As Guy Hocquenghem put it, "the essential effect of the gay movement is first of all its crude sexualisation of the social field; the most common criticism made of it is that it speaks only about sex, and not about love" (*Homosexual Desire*, Durham and London: Duke UP, 1993, p. 144).

ago with some "new leftists" using one of the most popular mediums of the New Left (alongside Political Critique), i.e. the Lewica.pl website, and a leading feminist web service Feminoteka.pl.¹⁵

What gave rise to a great deal of discussion about the strategies of the contemporary Left, its un/desirable alliances and political directions, was Majka's article entitled "A Left without Ethics?", in which he critiques the very widespread tendency within the Polish (New, or radical) Left to dismiss the pressing issues of feminism or the LGBT community as planted by the neoliberal mass media, mere substitutes for the *real*, life-and-death issues. A great number of anarchists and socialist or social democratic activists within the New, or radical, Left, following the trail of economism and class reductionism, reduce the leftist agenda to the one-way "base" perspective. And what is the most striking is the fact that when the leftist, or alternative, activists refer to those oppressions, discriminations and injustices of the Euro-Atlantic world-system (to use a Wallersteinian term) that they do not thematize as class- or economic-based (but consider gender-, sexuality-, or ethnicity-based), they employ a discourse that parallels right-wing, neo/conservative, and neo/liberal discourses in such supposedly "merely cultural" matters. And so, whereas, with regard to economy and workers' movement/s, those activists utilize anti-capitalist, socialist, Marxist, or Marx-influenced perspectives, which pushes them towards a radically leftist direction, they, often *uncritically*, take a dominant ideological and ethical stand (conservative, Catholic, or classically liberal at best) on the issues, debates, and demands put forth by the new social "identity politics" movements that emerged after 1968. This bizarre doublethink (which could perhaps be explained away with local peculiarities and the ongoing worldwide "cultural" versus "economic" left debate) does nothing but caricatures and incapacitates the twenty-first-century critical, radically leftist, or alternative, paradigm for social change.

The polemics that followed orbited around the sensational "cultural" versus "economic" left split, a kind of debate that has already been going on for a few decades and has involved such prominent neo- or post/Marxist and, generally, leftist critics and theoreticians as, among others, Louis Althusser, Ernesto Laclau or Judith Butler. From the critical perspective we adopt, it is necessary for the Left to reclaim all the dimensions of human social activity in a cohesive and comprehensive project of ethicality. To mend its way away from the ideological

¹⁵ The polemic includes the following articles: Rafał Majka, "Lewica bez etyki?" [A Left without Ethics?] (<http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=20561>); Tomasz Sikora, "Kto się boi lewicy kulturowej?" [Who's Afraid of the 'Cultural Left?'] (<http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=20629>); Piotr Ciszewski, "Lewica moralizatorska" [The Sanctimonious Left] (<http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=20623>); Tomasz Sikora, "Lewica jednowymiarowa" [One-dimensional Left] (<http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=20685>); Piotr Ciszewski, "Radosne szarżowanie" [Joyful Recklessness] (<http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=20687>); Jarosław Pietrzak, "Ciesz się swoją fiksacją!" [Enjoy Your Fixation!] (<http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=20807>); and Rafał Majka, "Lewica, równość, solidarność. Spór o wartości i strategię" [The Left, Equality, Solidarity: a Dispute over Values and Strategies] (http://feminoteka.pl/readarticle.php?article_id=839).

aporias, or tactical cul-de-sacs, of the classical and orthodox¹⁶ totalizing Marx-influenced enterprises or anarchisms, the Left must unthink its discursive position that situates it within a more or less modified base-superstructure model. In “Who’s Afraid of the ‘Cultural Left’?” and “One-dimensional Left”, Sikora argues that the distinction is theoretically wrong and politically harmful, and that such a *status quo* keeps the Left disarmed in the face of ever-threatening neofascism. While Majka and Sikora call for merging the “cultural” and “economic” perspectives into an intersectional politics, one with no hierarchies of socio-cultural issues but attending to the multitude of them evenly, justly and earnestly, there have been those, such as the anarcho-syndicalist Piotr Ciszewski, who would prioritize the economic-based oppression, downplaying the new “identity politics” movements and critical contribution of postmodernism as mere liberal make-up applied to the monstrosities of capitalism.

From the standpoint of the “economic” left movement, constructed on an orthodox Marxism or anarchism, once capitalism—the structure—has been brought down, all kinds of prejudices and discriminations will vanish into thin air, as they are deemed superstructural. Feminisms and sexuality-driven movements are, thus, relegated to the sphere of “progressive” neo/liberalism; with such an orthodox gesture, they are positioned away from the radical leftist, or alternative, perspective, and, within that perspective, the socio-economic agenda is prioritized and narrativized as the proper and most effective way into a “better world”. Those who (simultaneously) deal in “cultural” left issues (new social “identity politics” movements, feminist and critical theories, gender and queer studies) have been met with a rather impertinent (and *critically* false) assumption that they descend from the middle, or upper, class and, as a result, most probably have never lived through the experience of a life below the subsistence wage, so they cannot understand or sympathize with the workers’ movement/s and the pleas of those who have been victimized by the capitalist system. That is why the “cultural” left and intersectional activists are narrated as irresponsibly performing the so-called “joyful countercultural contestation”; but as soon as they are educated into the most effective way of recalibrating the Western world-system, they are certain to occupy themselves with “more serious” social action. Nevertheless, with the “economic” left taking such a position, the destabilizing dichotomy between the “economic” and “cultural” perspectives becomes even more cemented, and this is the reason why, in our view, the New, or

¹⁶ One should differentiate between the classical and orthodox position within Marxisms or anarchisms, or any other Marx-influenced social change project. For example, a classical Marxism would be a system that was worked out within a certain framework of materialist-historical and socio-cultural conditions, “invented” and meant for the *then* and *there*. The orthodox position, in turn, is not interested in rethinking (a classical position of) Marxism within the contemporary materialist-historical and socio-cultural context, but it uncritically takes that classical Marxism from the *then* and *there* and attempts to apply it, unadapted, to the *now* and *here*.

radical, Left remains politically paralyzed, with nothing to counter the economic and cultural politics of neoliberal capitalism.

In "How to Win the War of Ideas. Lessons from the Gramscian Right", Susan George,¹⁷ using Gramsci's notion of "cultural hegemony", shows how neoliberalism has penetrated the minds and lives of Westerners over the course of merely a few decades. It has not been all about economy, but the triumph of neoliberal economy has been facilitated and secured with a very vibrant "cultural", or "identity", politics, reproduced by a multiplicity of social, cultural, and political, neoliberal institutions. Similarly, Lisa Duggan claims that it is not until the New Left recognizes that debilitating fiasco of maintaining the "cultural" and "economic" split and starts to fashion a vibrant intersectional "identity politic", will it be able to pose any threat to the neoliberal *status quo*.¹⁸ Yet, the "economic" left activists we have approached seem to fall victim to the dominant (neo/liberal) economies of activism. Instead of winning the gender-, sexuality-, ethnicity-, or race-based oppressions over to the radical leftist perspective, they would leave them over to non-governmental organizations of different kinds, each "specializing" in particular discriminations, trying to "liberalize" the discriminated identities and accommodate them into the system. Next, there is this capitalist "time-trap" overlapping with the logic of neoliberal specialization at play here: there is no time and/or space for a multi-faceted agenda—if the radical Left wants to further the move towards a "better world" seriously, it should not get distracted with liberal particulars, but it should concentrate on the (*one*) strategy proper, that is the socio-economic field.

The polemic has clearly demonstrated how little understanding of queerness there exists on the radical Left; but it is probably equally true to say that the queer and LGBT movements have, likewise, a meager (socialist) economic awareness. The authors of this article believe that the alliance between queer and Left is not only viable, but highly desirable (particularly in Poland), yet to make it possible the Left must first recognize the sexual as central to the political, just as queer must learn to think more economically.¹⁹ One good starting point is the recognition that both have common enemies: one is the liberal political theory in general (which entails ethical, social, institutional, economic and many other consequences) together with its most recent variation, neoliber-

¹⁷ See Susan George, "How to Win the War of Ideas. Lessons from the Gramscian Right" (<http://www.globallabour.info/en/Dissent%20Summer%201997%20-%20George.pdf>).

¹⁸ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

¹⁹ In this respect, let us mention a very promising conference "Desiring Just Economies/Just Economies of Desire", which took place in Berlin in June 2010. One of its main concerns, in the words of the organizers, was "to explore how desire not only sustains current economies, but also carries the potential for inciting new forms of understanding and doing economy" as well as "to invent queer conceptions of desire [...] in order to ask what they offer in view of just economies of desire, of a desire for economic and sexual justice" (<http://www.desiring-just-economies.de/concept.html>).

alism²⁰; and the other is the neoconservative political project that usually invokes religious fundamentalism(s) and an exclusionary philosophy of nation- and community-building which often borders on (crypto) fascism. The New Left often lacks a distinct and comprehensive ethical vision that would be alternative both to liberal “progressiveness” (based mostly on the minority and individual rights rhetoric) and conservative reliance on communitarian and religious traditions, although it does cultivate a sensitivity to the injustices and inequalities produced by capitalism. Moreover, drawing its knowledge from mainstream LGBT activism, the Left assumes, unsurprisingly, that “sexual politics” is merely about “tolerance” and the legalization of same-sex partnerships.

However, if we acknowledge, in the Deleuzian vein, the primacy of desire in the social field (which capitalism does very well indeed, harnessing desire to its own purposes), the question for both queer and left movements will be how to redirect social desire(s) in accordance with a different, radically leftist life-ethics. What is needed, therefore, is a radical reconceptualization and prioritization of the social, which will call for redefinitions of all kinds of social “connections” and collective bodies (such as families, unions, partnerships, etc.)—redefinitions that must also reach deep into our thinking about statehood and economy. Queers have always lived on the margins of established social structures and economies, never fully and simply belonging to a family, a nation or even a state. Together with similar socialist and anarchist traditions, this ability to create self-organizing collectives and communities may become an inspiration for novel ways of “being social”. Besides vindicating the social—as opposed to the familial, the national, the free market, or the atomistic individual—the ethico-political framework we are sketching out here should pay special attention to the following:

- all kinds of (tacit) social privilege and entitlement in correlation with various forms of economic and social capital (in the Bourdieuan vein);
- various mechanisms of exclusion (as related to privilege and capital);
- the complex webs of (multiple) oppression, the forms of which are not reducible to each other, but always combining and recombining with, intersecting with, reinforcing and conditioning each other;
- the materiality of bodies, as they are forced to work within capitalistic economy, but also to act normatively within a sociality; as they feel (or are not allowed to feel) pleasure and pain, as they (are allowed, or not, to) live and die;
- a systemic approach to all of the above, i.e. one that recognizes the inter-relatedness of privilege, capital, exclusion, oppression and the materiality of variously positioned and regulated bodies.

²⁰ For queer critiques of neoliberalism see, e.g., Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, and the articles in Kevin P. Murphy, Jason Ruiz, and David Serlin, *Radical History Review. Queer Futures* 100, no. 3 (2008).

For lack of space, we are unable to elaborate on the above aspects; let us notice in passing, however, that the "systemacity" of social domination and exploitation seems to call for equally systematic kinds of oppositional action, which may indeed collide with queer's Foucauldian distrust of (and reluctance to have recourse to) the regulatory functions of modern states and societies. Hence a possible area of conflict between queer and the Left, with the former often approaching anarchist denunciations of any forms of social coercion (including, e.g., legal norms), and the latter's traditional emphasis on the state as the guarantee of a more "just" redistribution of resources and a regulator of social life. To some, this may prove a fundamental and insurmountable antagonism, yet it could also be used as a starting point for productive negotiations on novel and alternative ways of "doing politics".

If there is to be any effective link between queer and Left, it must be worked out. In other words, there is no essential bond between the two, not (as yet) much of a common history to resort to, not (as yet) a shared experience nor a political vision for the future. In fact, much of the language of the Left, old and new, in reference to "ideological" issues, such as gender and sexuality, is—at best—hardly distinguishable from the language of liberalism (if not outright misogynistic, homo- and xenophobic). It is not only common enemies that may bring queer and Left closer, it is also certain strains of utopianism (bordering on the revolutionary) present in both traditions, as opposed to the narrow pragmatism of much of recent social and political activism.²¹ At the same time, if the two are to work out a common ethical platform, it is clearly not enough to declare prescriptively that the Left simply *should* be sensitive to all kinds of oppression, in the name of some abstract social solidarity (although it could very well be a legitimate "pragmatic" argument to say that having a distinct ethical vision would be much to the Left's benefit); rather, it seems crucial to develop a comprehensive theoretical model from which such an anti-exclusionary ethics would logically follow. At some level it could be said that queer may significantly contribute to the creation of a (radical) leftist ethics, while the Left will provide the queer movement with a much more informed (socialist) economic agenda; however, in order to fully overcome the detrimental split between "cultural" and "economic" approaches, a more comprehensive framework is needed, so that social solidarity is not simply a question of individual empathy, but appears as a *systemic necessity*. Upholding the split, on the other hand, will continue to severely debilitate both the Left and the queer movement.

²¹ For a recent reclamation of the utopian strand in queer theory and practice, see José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York UP, 2009).

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