The Sexual Politics of Exuberant Intimacy

As I have shown, dyke+queer BDSM provided a semi-contained space that enabled interview partners to explore boundaries, intimate difference and ways of becoming. I have discussed instances of dyke+queer BDSMers becoming-other in desiring moments of disability, vulnerability, becoming-child, alien, vampire, fag, object and, finally, gender trickster. The emotional and erotic dynamics of dyke+queer BDSM reject the ideal of harmonic sex and relationships, prioritizing experiences of social difference, intensity, non-innocence, disidentification, excess, polyfidelity, insanity and exuberance. In this chapter I will discuss the potentials of dyke+queer BDSM in terms of transformative, rather than just transgressive, micropolitics. I will also expand on my conceptualization of dyke+queer BDSM as a social space of excess, abundance and exuberance.

Historically, excess has been the antidote to reason, and a judgment of excessive sexuality has been assigned to those who were constructed as irrational, especially Black men and women (McClintock 1995: 113). Therefore, excessive erotic practices, like dyke+queer BDSM, with its focus on boundary transgression, intensity and pleasure for its own sake, as well as its eroticization of everyday social worlds, may serve to disrupt the hegemonic notions of reason and sanity (Derrida 1976). Furthermore, these practices also reject enlightened and modernist imaginings of relationships as egalitarian or ‘pure’ (Giddens 1992), which leads to the creation of various kinds of alternative intimacies. These non-innocent forms of social relations, which do not fall prey to the myth of equality (Klesse 2007) but, rather, acknowledge the ubiquity of power dynamics, may lead to acknowledging one’s own social positions and one’s emotional investments in them, such as eroticizing power relations. At the same time, they may provide access to excesses of sexualities that may be used productively to infuse socially devalued practices with erotic value and to create desires for subjugated and subversive social positions, not in the sense of eroticizing one’s own oppression, but of imagining and experiencing spaces beyond hegemonic values and subject positions. For my interview partners, desire was a strong incentive...
to disrupt normalizing processes, and they took pleasure in practices that deconstructed and reconstructed the gender binary. If we can come up with ways of desiring to become-other without appropriating this other and reinscribing social hierarchies, our sexual desires might thus create new political affinities and solidarities.

**Power-sensitive transgressions and social transformations**

According to Foucault, pastoral power turns individuals into subjects. It is a technology of power that guides subjects through ‘truth’, and often it is the individual’s sexuality that is constructed as that which reveals a person’s innermost truth and secrets, and therefore determines who they are. Biopower works through (flexible) normalization rather than exclusion, and makes direct resistance obsolete (Foucault 1976; 1978; 1982). Therefore, one path of resistance is to subvert processes of normalization by cultivating marginal practices and embodying alternative social relations (Stephenson & Papadopoulos 2006: 127). These kinds of micropolitics can take part in processes of social transformation and, therefore, deserve the attention of sociological research. This study has taken an empirical look at a set of social practices, subjectivities and phenomena collected under the umbrella of dyke+ queer BDSM, interrogating whether and how they contribute to social transformations. More specifically, are these practices and identities simply transgressing social norms and cultural taboos, or are they actually transforming or transmogrifying embodied subjectivities and social relations?

Weiss holds that the circuits of BDSM work when connections are made between realms imagined as being isolated from each other, such as sexuality and politics (2011: 7), and that BDSM can be transformational when it connects what happens in a BDSM encounter to social contexts (227). I have demonstrated that dyke+ queer BDSM is a social and political space that produces new marginal embodiments and (temporary) identities and practices; it transmogrifies processes of subjectification. Furthermore, it produces alternative intimacies that may serve as a foundation to create alternative social relations, which becomes evident in a sexual culture that values difference and develops out-of-the-ordinary notions of gender, sexuality, consent, beauty, friendship, relationship and intimacy. A lot of dyke+ queer BDSM connects the semi-contained space of BDSM with other social realities and with spaces of ongoing social hierarchies and processes of normalization, partly transferring realities from play to everyday life, especially when it comes to gender, but hardly ever when it comes to race.

My interview partners were often simultaneously located in different realities, such as the reality of a multiplicity of genders in dyke+ queer BDSM spaces and the reality of a binary gender society. On the one hand, they functioned as bridges between these worlds, connecting them and facilitating