Nothing Personal ?!
Essays on Affect, Gender and Queerness

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Essays on Affect, Gender and Queerness
Omar Kasmani, Matthias Lüthjohann, Sophie Nikoleit and Jean-Baptiste Pettier (Eds.)

The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

This book was made possible by the Collaborative Research Center *Affective Societies* funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG-SFB 1171).

Coordination: Çiğdem Inan
Copy editing: Anna R. Winder, Eric Sinski
Layout and cover: Kristof Trakal
Printed and bound by hinkelsteindruck, sozialistische GmbH, Berlin

Erste Auflage 2022

Lübbenerstr. 14, 10997 Berlin
ISBN 978-3-942214-43-8

This book was also published as an open source digital file available on https://bbooks.webflow.io/nothing-personal/affect-gender-queerness

Funded by DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft German Research Foundation

AFFECTIVE SOCIETIES

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ten scattered scenes
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Preface

Personal, but not a personal thing: affect is at the heart of some of the most pressing issues of social and political life. Is what we feel always an inward issue, which in the end, remains opaque to others? Or do affect, emotion and feelings rather constitute *us* from the outside - staying hazy to ourselves? If how and what we feel indeed shape and form the ways we live and vice versa, how does this dynamic relate to the experience of gender and queerness? The essays in this book straddle this tricky line and also embrace the methodological difficulties which come with traversing these questions. Affect, in this context, *is* personal and *is* social. And yet it cannot be assumed to be universal in an all too easy way. Is it then possible to keep a "we" at bay without abandoning it altogether? Affect comes with histories, but not in the sense of roots and origins – its genealogies are anything but straight. What it is *not* is a personal thing; a property, which would imply a relationship of ownership and mastery. Still, the configurations of feeling are political; affect, in this understanding, is not the other of normativity and power, nor is it necessarily synonymous with hope and change. As a theoretical concept, it is indebted to the Civil Rights Movement and the feminist and queer movements, which in their distinct ways have stressed the political and public dimensions of feeling as well as the critical value of personal experience.

Echoing the title of a text by James Baldwin, *Nothing personal?!* is a collection of essays, most of which are organized around three themes: *Genealogies, Normativities* and *Methodologies*. Each of these

themes is accompanied by an introduction that creates a space for thinking through shared and individual trajectories of its various essays. On closer look, however, the reader will discover a surplus of performative essays woven through the book. These aren't interstices, in the sense of gaps or intervals between sections, but rather performances that glide independently or hang aslant to the book's defined gatherings. *In Before U Ever Even Heard of Oedipus*, Eric Taggart creates and conjures a primal *mise en scène* for social theory. Through an assemblage of fragmented text, image-making and drawing, arrives a rumination on attachment, intimacy and critical proximity. Next, across planes of text and photographs, Noemi Veberič Levovnik divulges an incredibly bodied archive of affect. Both felt and enfleshed, *Let my pussy speak* is as much a public viewing of Levovnik's practice as it is a robust expression of sexual desire and intimacy. Finally, *Queer affect is … ten scattered scenes* is a Konvulut of singular meditations by Omar Kasmani. Strewn across the book, this non-linear and interruptive ruminating on queer affect is also a cruising for chance encounters with others' thinking in the volume. Though each distinct and while not belonging in a cluster per se, the occasioning of the three performances is announced by elements of design and layout. However, we do not wish to create a hierarchy between contributions. In fact, we understand questions of style and form to be constitutive dimensions of theory. Whether text, assemblage or performance, each of the contributions, however different their stylistic persuasions, share an engagement with the essay form as a mode of intellectual elaboration and inquiry.

This book has taken shape in the interstitial spaces that leaving one's own discipline can open. It has sprung from the research activities of our working group on affect and gender at the Collaborative Research Center (CRC) *Affective Societies: Dynamics of social Coexistence in mobile worlds* at the Freie Universität Berlin. In this context, we organized a two-day conference "Gender & Affect between Arts, Academia & Activism" in May 2019, graciously co-hosted by aquarium/Südblock in Berlin. We greatly appreciate

the impulses and contributions at the conference, many of which have continued into the book. We are in debt of JC Lanca, whose intellectual engagement has been central to the conceptualization of the project. This book would not have been possible without the commitment and energies of the contributors, who agreed to take this journey with us - thank you! We are grateful to the CRC and its members for their continued support. Ulrike Geiger's engagement with the project and her excellent administrative support have been crucial - Danke! We acknowledge the funding received from the German Research Foundation (DFG). Last but not least, we wish to thank b_books for making this project a reality, in particular Kristof Trakal for design and layout, and Çiğdem Inan for shepherding this book through the production process.

GENEALOGIES

Introduction

Genealogies against the Grain – Affect and Gender in Critical Aesthetic Practices

Matthias Lüthjohann

The traditional usage of the word *genealogy* refers to a method as well as a fabrication; it refers to following and tracing the lines of kinship as well as to the construction of a family tree. In this use of the word, invoking the Greek γενεά and the Latin *gens* and *genus*, as well as the French *genre* or the German *Geschlecht*, the nexus of gender and history is already saturated with affect: Doing genealogy, in this traditional understanding, implies an affective relation of kinship formed by the institution of the family. Its feudal heritage refers to gender as a line of ancestry (*gens*), which served to legitimate power and estate; its modern inflections are to be found in the murderous politics of racism and antisemitism as well as the bourgeois family, that robust institution which brings into form the dominant heterosexual gender dichotomy. It has been an insight of feminist critique from its beginning that this institutional relation,

far from being a "natural" order of things and beings, relies on and works through affect. The deeply political nature of supposedly "merely" personal feelings has not only been a decisive point of theoretical analysis, but inspired and informed feminist and queer practices. By inventing new and experimental ways of doing gender, social relationality and kinship, this polyvocal history, in turn, has been affecting the notion and the practice of genealogy. The development of genealogy as a critical inquiry into the history of the present, initiated by Michel Foucault, needs to be seen in this light: It re-invented genealogy as a method and an epistemological style against the grain of the arboreal logic of roots and origins and under the sign of affective relationality beyond the institution of the family. It is in this spirit that the essays in this section explore genealogies of feminist, queer and anti-racist literature, film and critique: James Baldwin's essays and Audre Lorde's poetry, Annie Ernaux's autobiographical/auto-fictional writing as well as the films by Chantal Akerman, Yvonne Rainer and Su Friedrich, all perform and reflect upon affect in different ways, adopting different stances in different historical situations. Yet, they all address the centrality of affect, feeling and emotion for queer and feminist critique.

A contested theoretical relation

Affect and gender, in the context of feminist and queer theory, also comes with a rich history of arguing and debating this relationship. Two focal points appear to be especially significant in the context of this book: the focus on the discursive construction of gender, in the wake of poststructuralist theory, and the later discussion on affect and relationality in feminist and queer studies, which were a driving force in the turn to affect, feeling and emotion across the humanities and the social sciences. Looking at the genealogies of these debates themselves, one encounters a productive tension between theories of gender and of affect. The poststructuralist moment centered on the study of discursive normative regimes, laying open their mechanisms of naturalization and

essentialization, in the hope to undermine their power. Genealogy, as a mode of critique, played a crucial role here: The work of genealogy and deconstruction underscored the historical contingency of gender, of the family and of the formation which Judith Butler famously called the heterosexual matrix.

The project of genealogy, following this understanding, put the study of language, discourse and symbolic orders at the heart of the study of gender – likewise, the focus on language proved to be crucial for the critical project of de-essentializing and deconstructing gender regimes and their binary underpinnings. In doing so, notions of experience, feeling and affect were put under critical scrutiny: Regarded as forces which naturalize ("ontologize") the contingency of gender relations by conveying a sense of immediacy, concepts centering on affect and, more broadly understood, feeling and experience came to be viewed with a certain skepticism and suspicion. For good reasons, affect seemed to cause trouble and even to work against a critical understanding of gender.[1]

When, beginning in the 2000s, new attention towards affect in the humanities and social sciences inspired rethinking of the role of language, feminist studies took issue with some poststructuralist commonplaces, including some of their own critical uses of these theories. They were asking: Has the obligatory notion of historicizing turned into an imperative? And does the pre-dominant understanding of language threaten to exclude other vital perspectives on gender? In the opening essay of this section, Christa Binswanger revisits significant theoretical interventions of this "affective turn" in feminist and queer theory. Reading Annie Ernaux's autobiographical writing *through* this debate, she discusses the relation of affect, sexuality and gender in a way that focuses on the dynamics of multiple, overlaying "scripts." Ernaux's writing programmatically intertwines her autobiographical account with the social and societal history of France. Affect, in her writing, is always personal – the feeling of shame is a visceral relation to the self, as Binswanger shows, one that bears the potential of violently affecting the living body. At the same time, affect is nothing "merely" personal and

certainly not a personal thing. Binswanger's concept of sexual affective scripts and her method of a "palimpsestic reading" reflect this social, historically structured dimension of feeling. Drawing upon theoretical interventions in feminist and queer affect studies, by Eve Sedgwick, Elspeth Probyn and Ann Cvetkovich, she contours an understanding of affect which attends to the multiple "layers" of palimpsestic sexual scripts. In light of this, she argues that sexuality and desire should be understood as co-assemblies: interactions of those multiple layers, which can be conflicting and can include traumatic events, but cannot be reduced to them. From this perspective, Christa Binswanger interprets Ernaux's writing as a way of "writing shame" (Elspeth Probyn), a practice that connects writing her own personal life with a unique literary way of doing the history of the present.

The affect-sensitive attention to social history which is at the heart of Annie Ernaux's whole œuvre also constitutes her engagement with language itself. Beginning her life writing project in the 1970s, her practice of authorship is informed by the backdrop of the social and cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s. The claim that experience, feeling and affect are not "merely" personal, but rather that the "personal is political" formed a common element in this polyvocal, multifaceted critique; starting with the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and including the feminist and queer movements of the 1960s and 1970s. With the unflattering benefit of hindsight, the trouble with affect in (poststructuralist) theories of gender might seem much less self-evident, given that affect and emotion play such a crucial and hotly debated role in the new social movements, which have unfolded across Western societies since the 1950s. More recently, Sara Ahmed has highlighted the "sensational" dimension of feminism as a social practice, paying attention to both negative as well as positive feelings. As Ahmed also shows, inside and outside academia, these histories are met with a new aggressive quality – in the polemics against queer-feminism or intersectionality, or in the rash dismissal of "identity politics," which is also gaining some currency on the left. At the same

time, "anti-genderism," as Sabine Hark and Paula-Irene Villa have named it, is one of the constitutive features of the (new) right-wing movements across Europe and the US – and clearly forms a key element of their affective structure.[2]

In her reading of James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, Annette Bühler-Dietrich argues that categories such as gender, class, race or sexuality have an affective life. Rather than signification alone, the notion of affect can help understand what happens when these categories "meet," as she formulates it. In Baldwin's writing on the racism of the U.S. South, she finds a theoretical engagement with the role of affect in the context of an analysis of rigid and violent categorization – one that at the same time reflects upon the role and the affective life of the Black public intellectual himself. Bühler-Dietrich links the movement of Baldwin's writing to the essays and the activist poetry of Lorde, who embraces this "meeting" of categories as a necessary intellectual and political challenge. By insisting on the "uses" of anger and love, as well as by elaborating and performatively invoking their political force, Lorde's writing, as Bühler-Dietrich underscores, is of central importance for any critical genealogy of affect and gender. In her subsequent analysis of recent queer interventions by Black writers like Kai Green and Michaëla Danjé, Bühler-Dietrich traces this genealogy further. Following a "trans* analytic" (Kai Green), she charts how the affective life of categories and their practical and theoretical contestation inform and, in fact, form our present.

Genealogies from below

Affect brings to the fore a theoretical attention for relationality next to and beyond signification, highlighting somatic, feeling bodies and the dynamics unfolding between them, including atmospheres, voices, timbre, and likewise, corporeal violence. This does not mean to take affect as unmediated, ahistorical or even pre-social points of reference or "events." On the contrary, problematizing the "evidence of experience" (Joan Scott) by paying attention to the molding of

this experience by discourses and social forms has to be itself part of genealogical projects. Yet, affect is not a quasi-linguistic code, ready in place to determine interactions before they take place. Rather, in feminist and queer theory, affect has emerged as a perspective on what happens between bodies and what in turn co-constitutes their gendered existence.

It might be this approach from below, which contrasts most productively with the analytic terminology prevailing in theories of structuralist and psychoanalytic provenience, which are starting at the top and, thus, running the risk of knowing in advance.[3] Engaging in the project of genealogy, as Michel Foucault proposed in the 1970s, entails questioning some of the assumptions about history connected to the etymology of genealogy: the family line, filiation, ancestry, kinship. Rather than drawing a straight route from the archives into our present, undertaking genealogy calls into question this conceptualization – tracing the emergence of problems and following the practices of problematization often heeds to the fringes of archives, to relations which were not officially recorded, which have been forgotten or not recorded at all. Approaching affect this way can call for taking small steps, working from the bottom up, attending carefully to the practical, open and ambivalent inventions of forms of life.[4] As Deborah Gould has shown in her work on AIDS activism, this might include investigating the different and subversive politics of doing kinship, public affect and mourning in subcultures or counter-publics. She harks back to notions of social experience and "structures of feeling," which were central to the initiation of British Cultural Studies, for instance by Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. Taking up Joan W. Scott's critique against the seeming self-evidence of these concepts, however, Gould is critically queering the understanding of relationality, which is enclosed in this terminology. Thereby, she provides insights into the political "structures of feeling" of feminist and queer affect theory itself and shows ways of doing genealogy with affect.[5]

Rather than writing the history of events, genealogy often attends to that which is taken for granted in its pragmatic form:

Practices and structures which change so slowly that their motion is barely perceivable at all. Things that are in plain sight in such a way that they easily evade the senses and are overlooked, unheard, not being noticed. In her essay, Johanna Renard traces a like-minded attitude across the works of feminist film makers Chantal Akerman, Yvonne Rainer and Su Friedrich. In different ways, these three pioneers of feminist and queer cinema have explored the experience of time and everyday life in and through their works – a relation that is not only deeply entangled in the Western gender regime, but also one that challenges some of the most prominent aesthetic common-places of modernity. With her concept of an "aesthetics of radical boredom," Renard brushes against notions that connect aesthetic experience all too easily and too quickly to the moment, the "event", the extra-ordinary. Instead, as she argues with Akerman, Rainer and Friedrich, the experience of time in their films reflects upon these aesthetic regimes and pushes the limits of the medium – and the capacity of the viewers.

Renard's conceptualization of an aesthetics of radical boredom also implies a challenge to the theorizing of affect: Its engagement with time, both conceptually and performatively, shines a light on the different genealogies in affect theory itself. Looking at affect theory, one could also easily conclude that an understanding of time prevails that privileges "events" and "encounters." However, Renard's essay reminds us that this would indeed be too easy and too quick a conclusion. As important as the openness of events and the hope that they can invoke are – here, one can think of the Occupy Wall Street movement as one important affective scene of affect theory itself, arising out of the US-American context and traveling beyond it[6] – her genealogy of feminist and queer film brings to the fore a different engagement with time. It is one that stresses the affectivity of the ordinary, the mundane and the "boring," also one that dares and brings up the non-heroic muscle to perform that stress. Engaging with the history of feminist aesthetic practices and queer cinema, Renard's essay thus shows how they can be mobilized as resources for thinking, and re-thinking, the relationship of affect

and time. Genealogy, in this context, might not so much call for stepping off a certain track (in affect theory) and following a radically different route, but rather to pause, slow down the step and attend to its rhythm and texture.

This is a theoretical point just as much as it is a political one. Like the critical project of genealogy itself, which rejects bloodline-thinking, the notion of affect developed by feminist and queer theory implies forms of relationality beyond and (often) against institutions like the family, heterosexual kinship and the biopolitical "value" of citizenship. Just as the nexus of gender and history is saturated with affect at every point, affect itself comes with many feminist and queer histories, some clamoring and some quiet. The ways in which these histories inform and resonate in the present are anything but straight lines. By carefully following some of these lines and carving out their way, the following essays throw this changing relation into relief.

1 This movement is at the heart of Joan W. Scott's seminal critique against the "Evidence of Experience" (*Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1991, pp. 773-797) and informs her introduction of the concept in "Gender: A useful category in historical analysis." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 91, no. 5, 1986, pp. 1053-1075. She provides an insightful perspective back on that period of theorizing and its political stakes in "Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?" *Diogenes*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2010, pp. 7-14. As Anne Fleig has pointed out, in the German speaking realm the debate on the categories "Gender" and "Geschlecht" was highly influenced by the strong focus on language and signification and yet, in its dynamic, took some different turns. For a multifaceted critical account see her introduction "Die Zukunft von Gender und das Subjekt des Feminismus" in Anne Fleig, ed. *Die Zukunft von Gender. Begriff und Zeitdiagnose*. Campus, 2014, pp. 7-17. I'm grateful to Anne Fleig for critical comments on a previous version of this text.

2 See Sara Ahmed. *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 21-42. Ahmed inquired into the affective dynamics of right-wing politics throughout her *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd edition. Edinburgh University Press 2014. For the concept of "Anti-Genderismus" see Sabine Hark and Paula-Irene Villa, eds.

Anti-Genderismus. Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen. transcript, 2015. Gudrun Axeli-Knapp provides a pointed reflection on the situation of materialist feminist theory in this context and stresses the need of engaged feminist controversy in her essay "Mut zur Kontroverse! Feministische Kritik zwischen Antigenderismus und akademischer Spezialisierung." *materializing feminism. Positionierungen zu Ökonomie, Staat und Identität*, edited by Friederike Beier, Lisa Yashodhara Haller and Lea Haneberg. Unrast Verlag, 2018, pp. 19-38.

3 In a careful and engaged manner, this point has been made by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading. Or, Your're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You.", reprinted in her collection of essays *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 123-151. This essay has been translated and published alongside other contributions and critical interventions in the first volume on gender and affect in the German speaking realm: Angelika Baier, Christa Binswanger, Jana Häberlein, Yv E. Nay and Andrea Zimmermann, eds. *Affekt und Geschlecht. Eine einführende Anthologie.* Zaglossus, 2014. Judith Butler has been (self-critically) scrutinizing the top-down epistemology which comes as a legacy of the "structuralist paradigm and its Hegelian precursors" in *Antigone's Claim. Kinship between Life and Death*. Columbia University Press, 2000, see especially pp. 18-25.

4 This formulation takes its clues from the late interviews and texts by Michel Foucault. In his critical, yet careful approach to the collective efforts to invent new ways of life in the context of gay and lesbian culture also lies a resource for a more open epistemological stance in the practice of genealogy. See "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity: Interview with B. Gallagher and A. Wilson" and "Friendship as a Way of Life: Interview with J. Danet de Ceccaty and J. Le Bitoux", both reprinted in Michel Foucault. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow. New Press, 1997.

5 See Deborah B. Gould. *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*. University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 26, for the reference to "structures of feeling." Gould reflects upon the methodological dimension of doing genealogy with affect in her essay "When Your Data Make You Cry." *Methods of Exploring Emotions*, edited by Helena Flam and Jochen Kleres. Routledge, 2015, pp. 183-191. Genealogy can also involve inquiring into the outside of archives, as Saidiya Hartman's *Lose your Mother. A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) does. Hartman reflects upon her method of "critical fabulation" in her work on the history of slavery: "This writing is personal, because this history has engendered me, [...] because of the pain experienced in my encounter with the scraps of the archive, and because of the kinds of stories I have fashioned to bridge the past and the present and to dramatize the production of nothing – empty rooms, and silence, and lives reduced to waste." Saidiya Hartman. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe*, vol. 26, 2008, pp. 1-14, here p. 4 and p. 11.

6 On the politics of geography and the US-centering drive in much of affect and queer theory see the Coda in Omar Kasmani. *Queer Companions: Religion, Public Intimacy and Saintly Affects in Pakistan*. Duke University Press, forthcoming in 2022.

Entanglements of Affect and Desire
A Palimpsestic Reading of Annie Ernaux's *A Girl's Story*

Christa Binswanger

"I was dogged by the idea that it would take control of my life and drive me to ruin."
- Annie Ernaux

Autobiographical writing has long been and still is an important archive for feminist and queer theorizing. Autobiographical sources give proof of the complexity of self-perceptions and perceptions by social contexts – always entangled with each other and always embedded in norms, expectations and possibilities for change. Autobiographical accounts are also important for affect studies, as they point to affective intertwinements of the personal and the political. In *A Girl's Story*, Annie Ernaux gives special attention to the affect of shame as a driving force for her autobiographical writing. According to her, shame is not "merely" a

feeling, but rather her way of existence.[1] In her writing – a lifelong endeavor of approaching the self – she expresses the many and complicated entanglements of shame and desire in her life.

In this essay I will bring theoretical debates from gender studies, queer studies, affect studies and critical sexualities studies into dialogue with Ernaux's autobiographical work *Mémoire de fille* (2016), translated into English as *A Girl's Story* in 2020. The title of Ernaux's book consciously echoes Simone de Beauvoir's *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* from 1958, but the English translation *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* does not preserve the symmetry between de Beauvoir's and Ernaux's titles in French. De Beauvoir's and Ernaux's stories are autobiographical coming-of-age narratives. Both writers are female and French, and both are feminist voices of crucial importance to French and Western European debates. Still, Ernaux grew up in a different social milieu than de Beauvoir. Ernaux is not a "jeune fille rangée;" she is not a well-educated young girl from a bourgeois family, she grew up in a working-class environment. This is why she calls herself simply "fille" – a girl. The year 1958 is of great importance to Ernaux's novel, as it is the year that changes her life. It is the year of her sexual initiation, the year in which she feels like she loses control of her life and is even driven to ruin. Why did a young working-class woman in 1958 consider her first sexual encounter as a reason to lose control and maybe even fall into ruin? In what ways was sexuality gendered in French society in the late 1950s and how have debates in gender, queer and affect studies developed with regard to feminist genealogies since de Beauvoir?

In what follows, I will discuss some feminist genealogies in Ernaux's text in relation to the account of her own story of harmful initiation into what I understand as female sexual and emotional scripts. Analyzing *A Girl's Story*, I make use of palimpsestic reading: I read theory and literature "through each other," as I will develop later.

Shame has been deeply entangled with female desire in Western societies in the twentieth century.[2] As such, shame is a

suitable arena to discuss feminist genealogies with regard to queer and affect studies as well as with regard to critical sexualities studies in dialogue with Ernaux's text. My dialogical, palimpsestic reading of fiction and theory will take up some foundational contributions from the field of queer affect studies that give special attention to shame, considering that shame within this field is theorized in different manners. I ask: how is intimacy entangled with gendered sexual and emotional scripts and in which ways might Ernaux's story about female shame and desire count in general terms for her generation in France and Western Europe. De Beauvoir's writing has played a crucial role in Ernaux's life to acquire a feminist approach to the girl she used to be in 1958. Yet, there are also differences in the way Ernaux perceives female sexuality, the female body and female desire in comparison to de Beauvoir.

In *A Girl's Story*, shame is involved in a further, intersectional dimension. Many of Ernaux's literary texts are concerned with the intersection of gender and class, due to her personal experience of being a working-class child with outstanding performance at school. Her writing is deeply embedded in the social questions of boundaries; as such her private life becomes "political."[3] Her shame is not only gendered, it is equally shaped by her social background. This is why she calls her shame a socially induced "class-shame" of not belonging, of not being in one's place.

In my reading of Ernaux's novel, I return to sexual script theory, developed by John H. Gagnon and William Simon in *Sexual Conduct. The Social Sources of Human Sexuality* in 1973.[4] Interactionist script theory as a methodological approach not only enables theoretical understandings of sexual fantasies, norms and behaviors, the notion of script is also methodologically applicable to affects. Interactionist sexual script theory, as developed by Gagnon and Simon, differentiates three levels of scripts: intrapsychic, interpersonal and cultural scripts, which can be analyzed separately, but which are, at the same time, always entangled. In my palimpsestic reading of Ernaux's literary text, I go beyond sexual

script theory: I also read affective and sexual scripts "through each other," thus, I read them as a palimpsest. In the literal sense, a palimpsest is a manuscript page from a scroll or a book in which the original text is overwritten with a new script. If at a specific historical time, the underlying, but now obscured script, acquires greater importance, it has to be deciphered through the overlying script. Deciphering and interpreting a palimpsest requires simultaneously reading the legible script on top as well as the overwritten script below. The layers of a palimpsest create an illusory intimacy because they use the same space; yet often this intimacy also provokes deviance.[5] Affects engender "in-between-ness," the human bodily capacity to be emotionally affected,[6] whereas sexual scripts capture the intrapsychic fantasies and imaginations, interpersonal activities and normative, cultural dimensions of sexual encounters.[7] Sexual and affective scripts are deeply gendered: they are riddled with hetero-normative expectations. I read affective and sexual scripts as palimpsestic layers of the self that show their effects simultaneously and might provoke contradictions and ambivalences within the self. Thus, my palimpsestic reading of Ernaux's text sheds light on idiosyncrasies, processuality and potentiality always entailed in approaching the self by writing one's own story.

Annie Ernaux's *A Girl's Story*

Ernaux's narrative bridges her two selves: the eighteen-year-old girl from 1958 and the adult woman who in 2014 – fifty-six years later – writes the story about changing meanings of subjectivity and selfhood. The self-reflective question of how selves of different historical and societal contexts can be merged is kept up throughout Ernaux's account: "Must I, as of now, move back and forth between one historical vision and another, between 1958 and 2014? I dream of a sentence that would contain them both, seamlessly, by way of a new syntax."[8]

The search for a self that contains her lifelong development

all at once is linked to a search for language. In an interview about *A Girl's Story* in 2018, Ernaux refers to the importance of writing, the importance of the search for words, in order to gain access to oneself. In most parts of the book, she can talk about the eighteen-year-old girl she used to be only in the third person. She needs to distance herself from the teenager she used to be in order to be able to understand and describe herself in those times. Annie Ernaux calls Annie Duchesne – her name and surname in 1958 – the girl of S or "she." Her eighteen-year-old self could not be reached due to female shame, characteristic of the late 1950s, a shame evoked by her first sexual experience. Ernaux highlights that her shame was even more powerful because this experience was marked by her consent and made her feel happy: "I do not know exactly when she inwardly consents to losing her virginity. It is not from resignation; she wants to lose it" (42). Her first sexual partner, Ernaux calls him H, was the instructor in charge of the summer camp in 1958 where she worked as a young group leader. When he took her to his room after a party, she willingly followed him and let him act upon her body, not even considering that it was possible not to do so and to leave. It is her first time seeing a man naked and finding herself naked beside him on a bed. However, their sexual encounter fails, he is not able to penetrate her and the encounter ends with a "jet of sperm […] in her face" (41). After this first experience – which was not pleasurable for her, it was painful when he tried to penetrate her – she falls in love with H: "It was unimaginable that he had not chosen, *elected* her over all the other girls" (41). Still, at the same time, she highlights: "In my memory I am unable to find a single emotion, let alone a thought. The girl on the bed watches things happen to her that she never would have imagined happening an hour before" (41). Equally, on their second night he takes her to his room a few days later and tries to penetrate her, she describes the sexual act as a "lack of meaning in the things that happened" (43). The next day, she discovers blood in her underpants and decides that she had lost her virginity that night.

According to Gagnon and Simon, sexual scripts are deeply embedded in social meaning. They emphasize that everybody has to learn sexual scripts in order to be able to turn sexuality into lived experiences. As already mentioned, their understanding operates on three levels – intrapsychic scripts, interpersonal scripts and cultural scripts – and opens up possibilities for a multi-dimensional understanding of sexuality that is always located in the social.[9] The eighteen-year-old girl of S had not experienced any interpersonal sexual scripts so far in her life. Her intrapsychic sexual and emotional scripts were shaped by reading romantic love stories, such as Victor Hugo's accounts in *Les Misérables* or women's magazine serials about "true love." Before the summer camp, she attended a catholic school for girls only, her mother kept her away from boys and she had never even seen a man naked before. She sees being desired by a man and losing her virginity as an initiation into a new selfhood, a rebellious act she ardently desires, following intense emotional scripts, inextricably entangled with intrapsychic sexual scripts, characterized by her readings: "No words but those of a mystical variety can possibly transcribe what the girl of S feels. Only in a kind of novel now become unreadable, women's magazine serials of the fifties […], can we touch the immensity, the immeasurable significance of the loss of one's virginity, the irreversibility of the event" (69). Still, during the sexual interactions with H, she could not give meaning to what happened to her: she felt pain and she did not experience any joy. She became completely passive and submissive. I read the lack of meaning as well as the lack of agency that happens to her during the sexual encounters as originating in a lack of knowledge and a lack of mutuality, a lack of interpersonal exchange. As such, the girl of S consented to a gender order, in which agency was scripted for the male part, submission for the female part. H expected her consent and she followed his expectation. The sexual encounter was entirely dominated by him; he did not support her in any way, even though he knew it was her first time. After the first encounter, she turned to the cultural script of falling in love with the

man who had chosen her. It was her way to gain meaning, following the cultural and emotional script of her time, even if the sexual interaction was marked by failure. In the second encounter, when once again he did not manage to penetrate her, she satisfied him by fellatio. After this initiation into womanhood – this was the meaning she gave to the second encounter with H – she felt devoted to him. She fell madly in love with him. Her desire did not contradict the complete "lack of meaning in the things that happened" (43), even though H left the camp the next day without saying goodbye to her. Nevertheless, she felt as happy as never before (cf. 53). After he had touched her the first time, she ignored his lack of affection and respect for her and also her peers who started to shame her whenever they could. When they noticed her involvement with the head instructor, she became the "whore" (59) of the summer camp, the word was even written on her mirror by someone with her own toothpaste. The insults did not affect her, however, and she was proud of her experience and considered the indignities negligible (cf. 74). In her self-reflection, Ernaux asks: "Should I write that, ten years before the May revolution, I was sublimely bold, a pioneer of sexual freedom […] Should I judge the girl […] according to the mores of today, when nothing sexual apart from incest and rape, is reprehensible […]? Or should I adopt the view of French society in 1958, which reduced a girl's entire worth to a question of 'conduct', and say that in her naiveté and lack of guile she is pathetic, laying the entire blame at her feet?" (53–54). All of these rhetorical questions have to be answered with "no," as no single answer could explain the complexity and messiness of her experience. In most strata of the French society of the late 1950s, female sexual pleasure was subordinated to male sexual pleasure.[10] As such, male dominance was no exception, as Ernaux states: "Her submission is not to him but to an indisputable, universal law, that of a savagery in the male to which she would have to be subjected, sooner or later" (42). Nevertheless, in Ernaux's catholic rural context, a girl had to "save" her virginity for the man she would marry – whereas a

young man should enter marriage sexually experienced.

After the summer of 1958, the girl of S entered a boarding school in Rouen, a *lycée*. For the first time, her daily school life was separated from her parents. Then, she becomes aware that her summer experiences affected her in painful ways. The affect of shame gains more and more power over her life. At the *lycée,* Ernaux becomes aware of her social position at the margins of an educated middle-class environment. She is lonely and she experiences social shame, as she does not seem to fit well into this context. Her parents are hard-working owners of a grocery store with a pub at Yvetot, a small village in the north of France. She is their only child, "a spoiled little girl" and a "brilliant pupil" (47), who had attended a catholic convent school in her village, where she was encouraged and affirmed by her teachers. In the rural working-class milieu of her home village, she had been considered an exception. At the *lycée* in Rouen, she is silenced and invisible, she experiences a violent and unspeakable lack (cf. 84). The social shame she experiences merges with shame about her behavior at the summer camp. She desperately misses H, the man she had fallen in love with. She begins to shame herself – not him. She starts out on a path to try to become the girl he might love. She plans to change for the next year, the next opportunity to meet him at the summer camp. Even the readings in her philosophy course deepen her shame: "all of philosophy condemns the conduct of the girl of S. Because it makes no provision for the imperative of 'coming, instead of kicking up a fuss,' sperm in her mouth, whores around the edges, […] all philosophy makes her feel ashamed" (95). At this time, she describes herself as being obsessed with the fear that her desire would take control of her life and drive her to ruin (cf. 57). She suffers and her body reacts: "I seize the reality of my experience at S through the ways in which it affected my body. My period stopped in October" (85). Many years later, reading an article on eating disorders, Ernaux began to understand what had happened to her at the *lycée*: she became bulimic and her period stopped for two years as a bodily reaction to "the event" at the summer camp (cf. 98).

Ann with golden shoes [1/10]

It was something like a queer affect wish-list that Ann Cvetkovich was reading to a room full of affect enthusiasts. These were keen listeners like himself who as bait for a week-long summer school in middle Pennsylvania were promised a Wednesday date with Ann. And a date it was though he cannot for the life of him recall how long the list was, or at which number he had stopped counting or when she had stopped reading. He sat in the first row, like he remembered doing as a school kid. Partly because he was shorter than other kids but also because he was just that kind of kid. Ann spoke. He listened. Where was he to look for affect. Was it in the words she used or in the passages she read? Was it in the meanings they carried or the feelings they evoked? Was it folded in her voice or wrapped around her manner? Was it in what he grasped or in precisely that which evaded him? Was it a thing conspiring then and there or also in the moments leading to it? Was it colored with expectations that listeners brought to the room or did it grow by what they took away from it? Was it in the question he asked or the answer he had wished for? Was it lingering closer to him than her, a thing coming from one towards the other or transpiring all this while between them? Did it cross-fade from what she said to what he heard, between what she knew and what he knew of her? He wouldn't know, neither back then nor thereafter. What he pictures returningly, what still endures veeringly (in a wish-list of his own, these ten scattered scenes), what moves him now is Ann in a lime dress, Ann on a high stool, Ann with golden shoes.

Omar Kasmani

This was a bodily refusal of anything related to desire or sexuality, as Ernaux puts it in an interview from 2018.[11] More than fifty years after "the event," the author highlights that for her, as a writer, the self-narrative was the only way to gain access to the young woman she used to be: "our failure to understand what we experience, at the moment we experience it; the opacity of the present, whereby every sentence and every assertion ought to be riddled with holes. The girl […] does not know, cannot put a name to 'what the matter is'. She just eats" (110).

In April 1959, she finds a copy of de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. For her, as for many French and European women in the second half of the twentieth century, reading this book changed the way she perceived the world. De Beauvoir's critique of male-female relations and female subordination affected her monumentally. Her reading propelled her into a lifelong dialogue with de Beauvoir. However, there was and still is a reason for questioning de Beauvoir: Ernaux does not agree that "the first penetration is always a rape" (104). In her literary dialogue with de Beauvoir, she asks if the girl reading de Beauvoir in 1959 might have agreed with the judgement that her first sexual experience had to be considered rape. "That I still find it impossible to use the word 'rape' with regard to H may mean that she doesn't […] To have received the key to understanding shame does not give one the power to erase it" (105). Ernaux's *A Girl's Story* illustrates de Beauvoir's importance for feminist genealogies in the second half of the twentieth century, linking sexuality, the body and intellectual work to self-defined female freedom from submission and devotion to men. Still, Ernaux's statement about the shame she could never erase and the term "rape" she could never use because of the ambivalent feelings ingrained in "the event," expresses the complexity of gaining insight to her initiation into female sexuality. Even if the sexual act was violent and she submitted completely to her first sexual partner, the way it happened and her consent to let it happen was not considered an exception in the French society of 1958.[12] The different layers of sexual and emotional scripts and meaning-making, including layers

of happiness in parallel to shame and harm, hinder her to date to name her experience in unambiguous terms.

Co-assembly of affect and sexuality (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank)

In their idiosyncratic reading of Silvan Tomkins's affect theory model, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank bring critical queer feminist genealogies to bear on the interweaving of affect with desire. Their theoretical structure develops an understanding of the complex interplay of desire and affect within sexual encounters that goes beyond a "digital" on/off mode of experience, characterized by a simple digital understanding of either success or failure. Going beyond Tomkins's affect theory Sedgwick and Frank have developed a model in which sexuality is characterized by a binary understanding of potent/impotent, replacing the "digital" on/off mode.[13] In this model, they consider affects as necessary amplifiers in sexual encounters – if the encounter fails affectively, sexual encounters become "impotent." Thus, Sedgwick and Frank theorize a co-assembly of affect and sexuality. They state that qualitatively different possibilities occur in relation to the affect system, and these are far more multi-faceted than on/off. In light of this co-assembly, the sexual encounters the girl of S experienced in the summer of 1958 were "impotent" for her as well as for her male partner H, but they were impotent in very different, gendered ways. For H, the sexual encounter remained in an on/off mode. Even if he could satisfy himself, he did not engage affectively with the young girl he tried to penetrate. He carried out a male script of dominance and one-sided self-satisfaction. This one-sided male understanding of sexuality, originating in bourgeois gender roles, was widespread in Western European societies such as France after the Second World War. In the case of the girl of S, the script of male dominance leaves very harmful traces: physically – her period stopped and she developed bulimia – and affectively, as she became more and more overwhelmed by

shame. The desire for H after being touched by him and the happiness she felt in 1958 about being chosen by him, later make her feel deeply ashamed. This shame lasts for more than fifty years. If H's sexual behavior can be considered impotent with regard to emotions, the girl of S can be considered impotent with regard to sexual agency. On the level of emotions, she was overwhelmed – not in the moment the encounter happened, but afterwards. As already mentioned, Ernaux talks about the opacity of the present, the impossibility of understanding events the moment they happen. Following Gagnon and Simon, I would like to add: this opacity is characterized by the impossibility of giving social meaning to sexual scripts that had never been experienced, learned or explained.

In the aftermath of "the event" her body exemplified the fact that she had been deeply harmed by the experience, but it took her a long time to understand why she had been affected in such harmful ways. In her account of 2014, writing about the girl of S, Annie Ernaux still feels ashamed. Following Tomkins, Sedgwick and Frank give special attention to the affect of shame. In their affect system, shame is considered more complex than other affects such as startle, fear, interest, anger, distress, and joy.[14] If the other affects are characterized as being either positive or negative, shame is characterized by the drawing of a boundary line towards the positive affect of interest: "[S]hame operates only after interest or enjoyment has been activated, and inhibits one or the other or both."[15] Shame entails a bodily knowledge, a "switch point for the individuation of imaging systems, of consciousness, of bodies […] shame is characterized by its failure ever to renounce its object […], its relation to the desire for pleasure as well as the need to avoid harm."[16] Reading Ernaux's story through this theoretical lens gives further answers as to why it was so difficult for the writer to gain insight into what had happened to her as a young woman. The double quality of interest and refusal by the boundary line of shame is what makes it so hard to find a perspective from which the story could be told. Shame not only

affected the girl from 1958, it equally affected the writer throughout her adult life.

Ethics of shame (Elspeth Probyn)

In *Blush: Faces of Shame* (2005) Elspeth Probyn follows Sedgwick and Frank's understanding of shame. Developing the double quality of shame further, she considers shame as either reintegrating or stigmatizing. Historically, women and queers have been made to feel ashamed due to the common sense that women are more emotional and men more rational.[17] This emotional script is deeply embedded in the hetero-normative gender order of Western societies, such as Ernaux's environment in the aftermath of the Second World War. In this context, shame developed in specifically gendered ways. "Common facts of women's lives […] are framed as shameful and may make some forms of shame more contagious among women. It is undeniable that repeated exposure to scenes of shame reactivates and feeds the individual's capacity to experience shame. It's equally undeniable that a collective history of being shamed will affect the scripted responses to shame of individuals within the shamed group."[18] Probyn makes use of the notion of scripts in order to describe collective forms of responses to shame as typically female emotions. Considering affective and sexual scripts as a co-assembly, the shame the girl of S experienced in 1958 is a specifically female shame, bound to historical and societal norms leading to specific gendered sexual and affective scripts – a palimpsestic shame hard to decipher for the girl of S. Ernaux highlights: "It is the shame of having once been proud of being an object of desire. […] Of having considered her life at camp an emancipation. […] A girl's shame" (95). As already mentioned, however, shame is not only considered as stigmatizing, and Probyn highlights the reintegrating aspect of shame. She emphasizes that the engagement with shame opens up possibilities for reflection, articulation and reintegration. Her term "writing shame" engenders the notion of an ethics of

writing. "My claim […] is that shame is positive. […] It is productive in how it makes us think again about bodies, societies, human interaction."[19]

Writing shame means engaging with the boundaries and inhibitions that cause stigmatization. "Ideas and writing about shame seek to generate new ways of thinking about how we are related to history and how we wish to live in the present."[20] At some point in her story, Ernaux states that her writing about the girl of S was able to break "the spell that kept her prisoner for over fifty years" (74). Writing shame made it possible to find the new syntax she was looking for. In *A Girl's Story*, the author focuses on her initiation into sexuality and the shame entangled with "the event." In other works, such as *La honte* [Shame] (1997) and *Les années* [The Years] (2008), shame is more closely linked to class-shame, to her social positioning at the "lowest margins of society"[21] in her youth. Across her work, Ernaux's new syntax entails the impossibility to get rid of shame. In her writing, shame keeps the double nature of rejection and attraction, leading to ambivalence, as discussed earlier. At the same time, as palimpsestic subjectivities are always embedded in social relations, they change over the course of life. Yet, these lifelong changes of self-perception and self-understanding cannot be captured in chronological terms. Queer temporalities seek to conceptualize multiple temporalities in the present. According to Carolyn Dinshaw, queer temporalities are "thinking nonlinearity over and against linearity [… by] figuring out the criteria by which different nonlinear temporalities might meaningfully be brought together."[22] If memory traces and related affects are understood as, on the one hand, situated in historically shaped sexual and emotional scripts, and on the other hand, marked by queer temporalities, genealogies and archives become more complex. The search for language as an affective encounter with an earlier self entails reflecting upon interpersonal encounters from those earlier times depending on the intensity of the encounter. In the light of queer temporalities, the new meaning Ernaux describes as "breaking the spell" can be read

as multi-layered ethical self-reflection of shame, making "the event" meaningful in new ways more than fifty years after it had happened.[23]

"Sex positivity which can embrace negativity, including trauma"[24] (Ann Cvetkovich)

In *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), Ann Cvetkovich discusses queer trauma. Her understanding of trauma bridges psychoanalytical notions of trauma with considerations in affect studies, connecting trauma to the textures of everyday experience. Accordingly, she places "moments of extreme trauma alongside moments of everyday emotional distress that are often the only sign that trauma's effects are still being felt."[25] As such, Cvetkovich develops a broad notion of queer trauma. It includes the history of slavery and the African diaspora, where trauma is still alive in contemporary racism, while at the same time facing the challenges of a missing archive. According to Cvetkovich, intergenerational transmission from past to present within everyday life keeps trauma pivotal for contemporary identity formations.[26] Her broad understanding seems useful for my reading of *A Girl's Story* because Cvetkovich sees many similarities between the pathologization of trauma and the pathologization of sexual identity. She highlights that these similarities require that we establish a connection between our analyses of historical cases of trauma. In brief, for Cvetkovich, trauma is clearly sexualized and gendered: "The violation of bodily boundaries need not be a literal moment of penetration, but it is experienced as equivalent to invasive physical contact because it is so emphatically a visceral or sensational experience – in other words, an experience of being touched."[27] Focusing on the ways one can be affected, she holds that the physical, as well as the emotional, are two sides of being traumatically touched.

A Girl's Story attests to the overwhelming consequences of being traumatically touched – physically as well as emotionally.

Reflecting on her own story, Ernaux asks herself if it would have helped her to know more about bulimia at that time when her period stopped and she began to lose control over her eating habits. Cvetkovich's understanding of trauma as a breach that impacts the body rejects purely medical notions of pathologization. According to her, trauma as a breach needs to be included in a general understanding of sexuality. Cvetkovich insists on the cultural notion of gendered domination: "It is possible to ask how penetration comes to mean domination or trauma without presuming that these are natural connections, and how it can materialize not just gendered and sexualized forms of power but hierarchies of race and nation as well."[28] The story that the girl of S has experienced is clearly marked by her domination by a male figure in a position of leadership. As such, H has exploited his position of power. Ernaux's story highlights that the absence of meaning in the sexual encounter was embedded in her social context. Cvetkovich also stresses the impact of the historically embedded social order, and she sees affect and desire within this order as overlapping. She contends that affect and sexuality are not merely analogous categories but co-extensive ones with shared histories.[29] My palimpsestic reading of affective and sexual scripts points to the inextricable entanglement of affect and desire, which chimes well with this understanding of co-extensiveness. Cvetkovich renews the feminist slogan about the personal being political with regard to affect as well as sexuality, as does Ernaux in her autobiographical writing. According to Cvetkovich, sexuality requires "a sex positivity which can embrace negativity, including trauma."[30] She de-essentializes the gendering of sexual behaviors such as activity/domination and passivity/receptivity, but still agrees with historically contextualized male sexual domination in Western societies in the twentieth century. This way, her broad understanding integrates the notion of trauma into everyday sexuality. This allows a queer reading of sexuality that questions the pathologization of sexual trauma: trauma becomes part of sexuality. Even if Ernaux's story remains within a binary gender order,

she always situates sexual and emotional scripts socially and historically. She highlights that neither contemporary casual sexual encounters or sadomasochistic rituals of security could be compared to the desire brought forth by her experience from 1958 (cf. 57). Her experience was framed by historical, familial, religious, societal and literary contexts in which negative feelings and traumatic consequences of the violation of bodily boundaries remained a blind spot and could not be expressed in words.

Has affect replaced desire?

Several affect studies scholars have been suggesting a replacement of desire with affect. According to Patricia Clough, the affective turn constitutes a move in critical theory away "from a psychoanalytically informed criticism of subject identity, representation and trauma, to an engagement with information and affect."[31] Clough focuses on immediacy, which she links to a Deleuzian understanding of potentiality. In a similar vein, Marie-Luise Angerer expounds a shift from desire to affect. In her opinion, this shift is most evident in the move "from sexuality as 'little death' to sexuality as biodigital cell division; from a desire that draws on lack to desire understood as pure movement in time."[32] Focusing on technological changes, theorists like Clough and Angerer insist on replacing psychoanalytically informed understandings of the unconscious with cybernetics, neurobiology and theories of digital media.[33] In their understanding, this shift is marked by a loss of significance of sexuality.

In my readings of literary autobiographical sources such as Ernaux, it does not seem useful to separate affect from desire. Following Sedgwick and Frank, affects are necessary amplifiers in sexual encounters: desire and sexuality form a co-assembly.[34] In Ernaux's *A Girl's Story* the irresolvable entanglement of affect and desire, leaving marks and traces on body and psyche for more than fifty years, points to the complexity of this co-assembly. Even if understandings of sexuality have changed dramatically since

1958, and even if Ernaux admits that the so-called second sexual revolution after 1968 and the "freeing of sexuality" had a big impact on her, the "girl's shame" remained embodied throughout her life. Taking up Cvetkovich's theorizing of "sex positivity, embracing negativity," negative affects such as fear, pain and difficulty remain part of everyday sexuality.

In current times, the fiction of romantic love may have lost significance, and the trivialization of sexuality may have freed sexuality from certain gendered glorifications, as Volkmar Sigusch puts it.[35] Sexuality may have been freed from "the immensity, the immeasurable significance" (69) attributed to the first sexual encounter, other than Ernaux expected as a young woman. But as long as gendered inequalities remain deeply embedded in Western societies and as long as power positions are at play in sexual scripts, feminist genealogies in affect theory give valuable answers to the ways in which desire and affect are gendered and entangled. My reading of Ernaux's text points to changing meanings of sexuality throughout a lifespan. Nevertheless, the co-assembly of affect and desire changes its meaning, but it is not dissolved.

My palimpsestic reading of *A Girl's Story* makes use of theoretical strands that bridge psychoanalysis and affect theory rather than replace desire with affect. In this context, I sketched out Sedgwick and Frank's co-assembly of affect and sexuality as well as Cvetkovich's inclusion of negative affects, taking up queer theory and developing "a sex positivity which can embrace negativity, including trauma."[36] This understanding of sexuality includes unexpected breaches, related to affect and trauma. In other words, affects are deeply relational and are substantial components of desire. Combining affect theory with sexual script theory, my approach opens up ways to relate the personal to the political: the individual to the social; and the complexity, opacity and messiness of sexual encounters to gendered emotional layers of meaning making.

In my reading of Ernaux's story, the harmful dimension of sexuality can be approached by Cvetkovich's understanding of

queer trauma. Since the layers of sexual and emotional scripts are intertwined, sexual events can be hard to interpret and understand, in other words, they can be marked by the opacity of the present. Gagnon and Simon's script theory offers ways to think of the intrapsychic, the interpersonal and the cultural sexual scripts interwoven with affective scripts, not only within but also between subjects. The long-lasting effects of shame in Ernaux's life gain contours when reading sexual and affective scripts as a palimpsest "through each other."[37] In writing the narrative, Ernaux's search for words entails the many layers of the co-assembly of affect and desire causing her shame: for her as a young woman engaged in readings of fictional scripts of romantic love; for her as a young convent pupil, growing up mostly separated from boys; for her as a young girl with a rural working-class background; and for her as an author many years later. Writing shame enables her to break "the spell that kept her prisoner for over fifty years" (74).

Nowadays, female shame may have lost its power with regard to certain cultural and societal sexual scripts, as gender relations have been increasingly democratized. At the same time, the meaning of shame may have shifted and still form part of many coming-of-age stories. Probyn's claim for writing shame, in order to gain access to the causes for the boundary lines of interest touched by shame, still seems very useful. Writing and reading shame as a queer-feminist methodology might enable the acquisition of sexual agency for all genders in moments when the opacity of the present is hard to understand – the opacity of the entanglement of affect and desire.

1 Annie Ernaux. "Wenn nicht die Scham gewesen wäre." Interview by Salome Müller. *Tages-Anzeiger. Das Magazin*, 14 November 2020, p. 20.

2 Elspeth Probyn. *Blush. Faces of Shame*. University of Minnesoty Press, 2005, p. 20; cf. also Christa Binswanger. *Sexualität – Geschlecht – Affekt. Sexuelle Scripts als Palimpsest in literarischen Erzähltexten und zeitgenössischen theoretischen Debatten*. transcript, 2020, pp. 114-149.

3 Cf. "Unlike great writers of the French canon such as Marcel Proust, for whom the discovery of truth through writing involved a turning inwards, a focusing on the inner life, the truth sought by Ernaux is primarily social." Lyn Thomas. *Annie Ernaux. An Introduction to the Writer and Her Audience*. Berg, 1999, p. 35.

4 John H. Gagnon and William Simon. *Sexual Conduct. The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*. Aldine, 1973.

5 Cf. Christa Binswanger and Andrea Zimmermann. "Queering the Palimpsest. Affective Entanglement beyond dichotomization." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality,* vol. 19, no. 2, 2018, p. 110.

6 Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Duke University Press, 2010, p. 2.

7 John H. Gagnon and William Simon. *Sexual Conduct.* Cf. also Christa Binswanger. *Sexualität – Geschlecht – Affekt*, pp. 33-42.

8 Annie Ernaux. *A Girl's Story*. Translated by Alison L. Strayer, Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020, p. 54. In the following, citations from this text are made in-text, with reference to the page number.

9 John H. Gagnon and William Simon. *Sexual Conduct.* Cf. also Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott. "Rehabilitating Interactionism for a Feminist Sociology of Sexuality." *Sociology*, vol. 44, no. 5, 2010, pp. 811-826.

10 Cf. Annie Ernaux. "Annie Ernaux über MeToo und ihr Buch *Erinnerung eines Mädchens*." Interview by Kathrin Hondl, translated by Nadine Püschel. *Suhrkamp Verlag Youtube-Channel*, 6 November 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqMXkARLgvM. Accessed 15 August 2020. Minute 15.

11 Ibid., minute 17.

12 Ibid., minute 15:20.

13 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank. "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins." 1995. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Duke University Press, 2003, p. 100.

14 Ibid., p. 116.

15 Ibid., p. 97.

16 Ibid., pp. 116-17.

17 Elspeth Probyn. *Blush*, p. 88.

18 Ibid., p. 85.

19 Ibid., p. xviii.

20 Ibid., p. 162.

21 Annie Ernaux. "Wenn nicht die Scham gewesen wäre." Interview with Salome Müller, p. 20-22.

22 Carolyn Dinshaw et al. "Theorizing Queer Temporality. A Roundtable Discussion." *GLQ*, vol. 13, no. 2-3, 2007, pp. 177-195, here p. 186.

23 Cf. Christa Binswanger and Andrea Zimmermann. "Queering the Palimpsest," p. 113.

24 In the following part of the essay, I take up reflections published in Christa Binswanger and Andrea Zimmermann. "Queering the Palimpsest," pp. 113-115.

25 Ann Cvetkovich. *An Archive of Feelings. Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2003, p. 3.

26 Ibid., p. 38.

27 Ibid., p. 50.

28 Ibid., p. 51-52.

29 Ann Cvetkovich. "Public Feelings." *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*, edited by Janet Haley and Andrew Parker, Duke University Press, 2011, p. 173.

30 Ann Cvetkovich. *An Archive of Feelings*, p. 63.

31 Patricia T. Clough, ed. *The Affective Turn. Theorizing the Social*. Duke University Press, 2007, p. 2.

32 Marie-Luise Angerer. *Desire after Affect*. Translated by Nicholas Grindell, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015, p. xv.

33 Patricia T. Clough. "Forword." *Desire after Affect*, by Marie-Luise Angerer, p. xi.

34 Cf. Christa Binswanger. *Sexualität – Geschlecht – Affekt*.

35 Cf. Volkmar Sigusch. *Sexualitäten. Eine kritische Theorie in 99 Fragmenten*. Campus, 2nd edition, 2015, p. 152-53.

36 Ann Cvetkovich. *An Archive of Feelings*, p. 63.

37 Cf. my readings of contemporary German literature: Christa Binswanger. *Sexualität – Geschlecht – Affekt.* Cf. also Christa Binswanger and Andrea Zimmermann. "Queering the Palimpsest."

GENEALOGIES

Radical Boredom
Feminist and Queer Politics of Affect in Experimental Film

Johanna Renard

At the dawn of the 1960s, boredom has appeared as a new terrain of artistic experiment in Europe and North America. No longer regarded as an emotion either to be avoided or sublimated, *ennui* was at the center of artists' new concerns with ordinary everyday life. From John Cage's groundbreaking music experiments with time and repetition to the extended duration, the monotony, and the flatness in Andy Warhol's sixties films, intentional boredom became a formal and radical aesthetic premise. Deliberately trying to make their work boring, some Northern American experimental filmmakers, such as Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton, used boredom as a way and a means of putting emphasis on the very structure of film. Within the structural cinema, a cinema of structure, materiality, and anti-illusionism which was theorized by the film critic P. Adams Sitney, boredom was used as a tool for calling into question the temporality of the "society of spectacle" (Guy Debord).[1]

Similarly, boredom as an aesthetic held a powerful place in the European experimental and independent cinema created by women from the 1960s onward, as can be seen in the films of Agnès Varda, Jackie Raynal, or Marguerite Duras. As highlighted by the seminal work of Patrice Petro on feminism and film history, boredom is an essential dimension of western women's experience of modernity and postmodernity. [2] The feeling of *ennui*, combined with an exceedingly prosaic audiovisual language, is indeed inherently linked to women's cinema aesthetic. I also realized that intentional boredom was a recurring affect in lesbian avant-garde films, ranging from Chantal Akerman to Barbara Hammer, from Abigail Child to Yvonne Rainer, and from Su Friedrich to Ulrike Ottinger. Redefining the modes of narrating and representing, their cinema challenges heterosexual spectatorial expectations by working against mainstream cinematic conventions. Minimalist *mise-en-scène*, streams of voiceover narration, found footage, slowness, silence, and duration: a large part of lesbian avant-garde movies encourage intensified *ennui*.

In the context of the turn to affect in the humanities and social sciences, feminist and queer theories have provided important insights into the gendered dimensions of emotions in films.[3] Approaching cultural practices from a minoritarian perspective, the work of Ann Cvetkovich on affects and trauma in lesbian subcultures shows that cultural objects are repositories of feelings and emotions.[4] Following the lead of her inspirational project to build a vast archive of queer emotional cultures, my investigation raises questions about the affective aesthetics and politics in underground lesbian films. How does boredom matter in queer women alternative cinema? To address this issue, I will look more closely at the films of three lesbian movie directors: *Je tu il elle* by Chantal Akerman, *Sink or Swim* by Su Friedrich, and *MURDER and murder* by Yvonne Rainer. In connection with my PhD thesis on the poetics and politics of boredom in the film and dance of Yvonne Rainer, I argue that these filmmakers have explored this peculiar emotion as an aesthetic response, a phenomenological

"too short to spoon you" [2/10]

'I am too short to spoon you!' He had said it aloud. It was, as he now remembers, the first thing he said on that morning in February, their bodies still wrapped in sleep. They both knew he had tried (his best). How else, if not like this, would tender failures in thin attachments look, he had thought, his body tending towards him but coming short of its own expectations: Stretching outwards from itself but just not enough to enfold he who lay beside him. This wasn't a dream, neither an intimate moment in the dark, occurring while asleep or easily overlooked. The witnessing morning light was evenly white in this room on *Naunynstraße* – that fabled street of migration where lay *"hinter jedem Fenster / verschiedene Sorgen und / frische Hoffnungen."*[1] There would be no recourse to a night in a single bed, no turning back from his own thoughts – it would eventually turn out. Though even in its passing, he had thought the serendipity poetic, telling. Like migrant characters of Aras Ören's poem, he knew well that the night on *Naunynstraße* held in its folds many such failings of the kind, invisibly obvious, not exactly carried over to the day, not entirely forgotten to waking life either. In fact, on his way home in the morning, he would find himself a copy of the *Berliner Trilogie* – not one but three migrant poems. Still, weeks on, he would ask himself how does it feel to be too short to spoon an object of desire. What manner of failures lay folded in the tenderness of night, he wondered. Then, on another night in March, as they were taking a short stroll in Berlin-Wilmersdorf he

was reminded of other shortcomings. This was a part of the city he had little feeling for but contrary to his indifference it was pretty much where he had grown up. He listened to him describe his childhood haunts. He had found but fascinating his ordinary sense of history, his knowledge of *Straßenecken*, his familiarity with fancy foyers and ornamented facades, or the ease with which he was able to describe from memory characters of homes on that street, the high ceilings, the roomy rooms, the centered doors opening into other rooms, his immaculate detailing of interiors, antique objects, carpets, histories and conversations that filled those chambers. So abundant in character, so rich in detail that it would fill him with feelings of loss, displacement, not having enough history of himself, no street corner to call his own. When does a city begin to haunt, he asked without saying it aloud this time, how long till memories reside, return. Was he just short, he wondered, or forever short of history in the city.

1 Ören, Aras. 2019. *Berliner Trilogie: Drei Poeme*. Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag

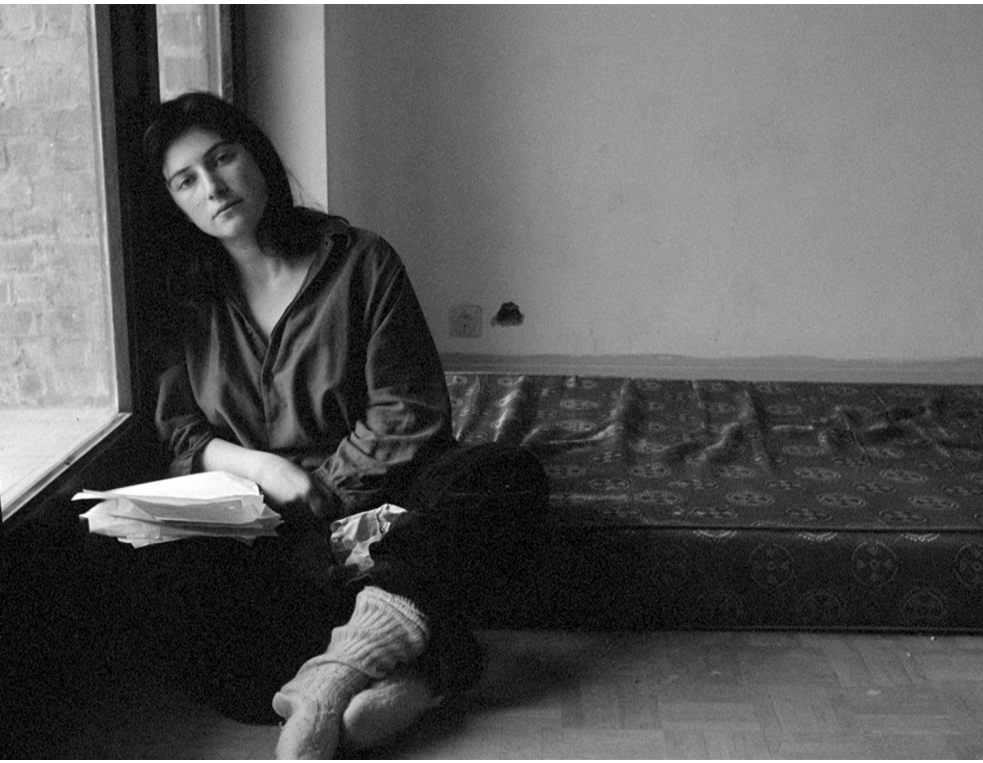
problem, and a political strategy.[5] In what follows, I analyze how these movies put forward a critical as well as a radical use of the experience of boredom by evoking the complexities of lesbian representation and desire.

As a complex and ambivalent phenomenon, boredom is the subject of increasing interest across the areas of the humanities and social sciences. From a few landmark publications, primarily in the fields of philosophy and literary studies,[6] it has evolved into an independent area of research.[7] Following Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Georg Simmel, most of recent scholarly treatments read boredom as a key concept for exploring subjectivity in modernity and in contemporary capitalism, as a response to a highly mechanized and hyperactive life, or as a state of mind resulting of a general loss of meaning and or social and economic change.[8] Traditionally dismissed as a threatening "psychic inadequacy" or inertia, boredom is often considered as an unpleasant and negative state of mind in the Western context. Nevertheless, if one considers the history of the multifaceted manifestations of this feeling, some of its variations have been dignified and considered as a noble suffering of the soul, as through Baudelaire's spleen or the sublime *ennui* described by Musset, Flaubert, or Stendhal. At the opposite end, excluded from this European metaphysical definition of "ennui," women's boredom has been stigmatized and dismissed as a pathological state of the body, exemplified by the bodily/psychic symptoms of the female neurasthenic or the tedious and inane daily life of the housewife confined at home. The gendered nature of modern boredom in literature, as a seemingly negative state, has notably been strongly emphasized by Patricia Spacks or Allison Pease, revealing that the lower "form" of boredom has been associated with materiality, banality, and femininity.[9] With the advent of the contemporary women's movement, feminist theoreticians, such as Betty Friedan in the *Feminine Mystique* (1963), have pointed out that gender and sexual differences produce boredom, in the way that patriarchal

Chantal Akerman. *Saute ma ville*, 1968, 35 mm, black and white, sound, 13 minutes. Film still.

structures limit and contain desires for sexual transformation and social change.[10] As Patrice Petro brought to light in her seminal article "After Shock, Between Boredom and History" (1993), the rise of boredom as "both an aesthetic response and a phenomenological problem" is at stake in feminist art practices, particularly in avant-garde performance and film.[11] Elaborating a counter-cinema, in opposition to the heterosexist visual and narrative standards perpetuated by the movie industry, women filmmakers have investigated the formal and political radicalness of boredom. Through text, sound, and image, their works explore the experience of an endless, stagnant, and fruitless temporality.

Chantal Akerman is amongst the most widely recognized female filmmakers who have developed an aesthetic of boredom. Until her suicide in 2015, she devoted most of her cinema to the close and realist examination of women's lives. At the age of eighteen, she made the short-film *Saute ma ville* (1968), in which a young woman performs a frantic rebellion against the rituals of feminine domesticity. Confined in her small kitchen, humming constantly, she obsessively but oddly carries out her tasks: cooking and eating quite properly, then polishing her socks and legs or duct-taping the door, before opening the gas to blow up the apartment and herself. Already fiercely minimalist, the Belgian filmmaker's aesthetic was then strongly affected by the prominent Northern American structural film movement, which she encountered during a lengthy stay in New York in 1971-72. In the following decade, Akerman shared with Andy Warhol and Michael Snow the ambition to explore cinematic hyperrealism, literal representation of everydayness and extended duration. Nevertheless, unlike the experimental filmmakers, she maintained narrative and character construction. Made in Belgium in 1974 with a tight budget, her first full feature film, *Je tu il elle*, was shot in eight days in a grainy black and white. With a cast of three actors (including Akerman herself), the film is divided into three equal-length segments: abandoned by *tu* (you), *je* (I), played by Akerman, briefly encounters *il* (he), a lonely truck driver, before ending her journey at the house of a girlfriend, *elle*



Chantal Akerman. *Je tu il elle*, 1974, 35 mm, black and white, sound, 90 minutes. Film still.

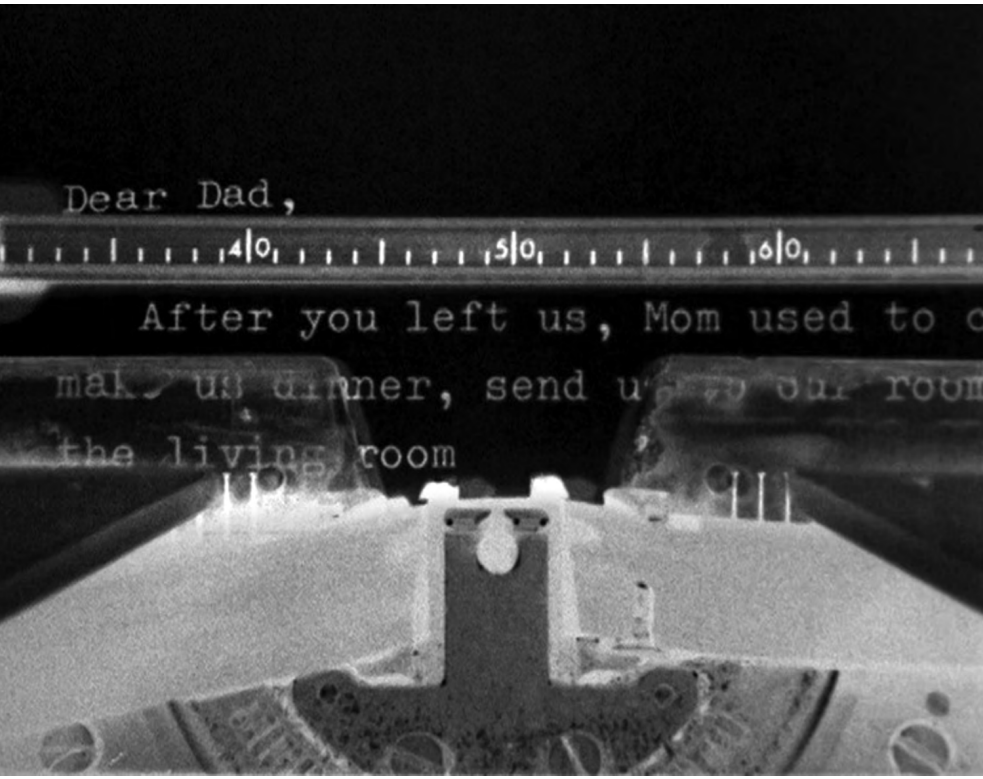
(she). Consisting of very minimal actions, enclosed in a small and austere room, the first half an hour of *Je tu il elle* is made of a series of very long fixed frames. Akerman's monotone voice-over narrates her desperate desire to write to *tu* (you) after their breakup, describing meticulously her self-inflected twenty-eight days confinement and her avoidance activities. All this time, we watch her rearranging the furniture, undressing, sleeping, and thinking. In some kind of rigorous asceticism, she spends a long time naked, lying on the mattress, eating spoonfuls of sugar, and arranging the many pages of her letter on the floor. But, at the end, she is merely waiting for something to happen, for something to end this sickening litany.

Starting a movie with such a deceptive and minimalist sequence, entirely shaped by real time, the stance of waiting, austerity, and descriptive narration, is a very strong and committed filmic gesture. The complete section disrupts the traditional idea of cinematic time. Indeed, films traditionally manipulate temporality in order to artificially fit the time of the things narrated. In *Je tu il elle*, even the usual need for maintaining the viewer's focus is discarded. This creates an effect of "nothing happening," conveyed through factual information and movements, relentless repetitions, and duration.[12] The movie provides a deeply ontological experience of *boredom*: the boredom that a young woman "waiting for something to happen" inflicts on herself and on the viewers, between apathy and masochism. The distilled boredom is built in a diffuse manner, like an affective tone covering the real as a whole: gray days that succeed each other indiscriminately, a time that extends without limit, a dismal space, the repetition of the same ordinary gestures, a blank voice-over. If, as Gaston Bachelard asserts "time is a reality confined to the instant" and "being is conscious of itself only in the present instant,"[13] Akerman makes the viewers experience the present moment on a physical as well as on an affective level, or more precisely, in a corporeal way. For the thirty minutes in which seemingly *nothing happens*, the film reveals the blossoming of the protagonist's "I" (*je*), through a corporeal experimentation of her being-in-the-world, through the body and voice. The

Su Friedrich. *Sink or Swim*, 1990, 16 mm, black and white, sound, 48 minutes. Film still.

narrator voice-over seems to represent the reality and temporality of feminine consciousness, rarely explored in the male-dominated film narratives and representations. It is precisely by the use of an empty and unproductive state of mind, by the production of strong boredom, that Akerman provides a room of one's own to express a dissenting queer woman's subjectivity.

It seems to me that the relationship between boredom and waiting, that is to say waiting without purpose, is crucial to feminist and queer aesthetics. This is particularly evident in the U.S. experimental filmmaker Su Friedrich's under-recognized work. She has produced and directed twenty-three 16mm films and digital videos, mostly made in black and white, including *Hide and Seek* (1996), *Rules of the Road* (1993), and *Damned If You Don't* (1987).[14] A melancholic and ambivalent autobiographical meditation, *Sink or Swim* (1990) is a collage of black and white images, mostly found footage in association with voice-over narration. The film consists of twenty-six episodes dealing with the broken relationship of the narrator with an absent and abusive father. The narrative is structured by the alphabet in reverse, echoing the profession of Friedrich's father, a linguist. As suggested by the film's title, his behavior was often cruel: in the "Realism" chapter, Friedrich recounts how her father taught her how to swim by tossing her into the deep end of a swimming pool. Told in the third person, the little girl's painful memories are shared in a distant tone of voice, without ever forcing the spectator to experience empathy. Throughout the movie, most of the video footage consists of idealized sitcoms or mundane images of fathers and daughters. In a combination of formal inventiveness, *Sink or Swim* separates the soundtrack and the image track while developing a range of intersections between them. Nevertheless, the majority of what we see in the film does not document or dramatize what the narrator is recounting. The affect of boredom is pervasive, remarkably in the part entitled "Ghosts," in which there is no spoken narration. Raising the question of representation and the word-image relationship,



Su Friedrich. *Sink or Swim*. "Ghost." Film still.

this sequence purely consists of a close-up and negative image of a typewriter, while an invisible hand types a letter to the father. Expressing a deep sense of loss, the text reminisces about a record of Schubert's *Lieder* that her mother listened to tirelessly after her husband's departure. By choosing to present this memory through text rather than through images, Su Friedrich offers a "cinema of the mind," wherein the film takes place in the viewers' imagination. During this slow and long sequence, the task of reading imposed on the audience makes it possible to keep a distance from the traumatic memory. The viewer's lengthy wait echoes the painful expectation of an illusory return of the father. Simply accompanied by the sound of the typewriter, "Ghosts" highlights the difficulty of self-representation. As the Canadian film theorist Catherine Russell expresses it, "difficulty of lesbian representation becomes that of cinematic representation. 'Identity' becomes dispersed across a cultural spectrum of 'positions' and discourses."[15] Throughout the film, the various sources *of* visual and auditory imagery create a psychic flow, refusing to convey any evident and clear linear narrative or emotion. In other words, by mobilizing materials in ways that allow for complex identifications and that open up temporal relations, the film shows a preoccupation with ambivalence. As Judith Mayne has observed, Friedrich's work opens up "space for contemplation, for reflection on both the specificity of lesbian desire and the impossibility of fixing that desire to one specific image or narrative."[16] Narrating her personal history in third-person, questioning the very nature of heterocentric representation itself and the male tradition of autobiographical narrative, she archives and exposes the fragmented queer childhood memories. In order to distance herself from her own traumas, Su Friedrich achieves a decentering of the authorial voice as well as a narrative and visual emotional detachment. Since trauma is fundamentally unspeakable and unrepresentable, since its structural foundation is permanent absence and perpetual presentness, it seems that the specific temporality of boredom is well adapted to encompass the traces of it. Through narrative time, repetition, sound-image

Yvonne Rainer. *MURDER and murder*, 1996, 16 mm, color, sound,113 minutes. Film still.

disjunctions, Friedrich engages with the specific temporality of subjectivity, which does not follow the logic of linear development. By inspiring boredom and frustration, Su Friedrich's film enables a "will-to-connect differently" to the audience, provoking its capacity for waiting and reflection. Regarding the films of Antonioni, Roland Barthes wrote: "To look longer than expected [...] disturbs established orders of every kind, to the extent that normally the time of the look is controlled by society."[17] Speaking from the position of a lesbian subject, Friedrich uses the experimental process to allow for a critical force of transgression, providing an alternative to productive time, affect, and bodies.

As the very affect of empty time and as a dull feeling, boredom is commonly associated with negativity. Mention should be made in this respect of feminist and queer genealogies which have strongly emphasized the importance of seemingly negative affective states such as shame, sadness, or anger.[18] These works highlight queer affective capacities to embrace failure, discomfort, and uncertainty. In this critical regard, boredom could hold a powerful place as an ambivalent feeling, providing a space for social discontent and critical reflection. Nevertheless, there are very few critical studies of feminist and queer boredom in contemporary cultural objects. If the aesthetics of boredom cultivated by a certain type of lesbian independent cinema appears to be a set of deliberate strategies, it is worth mentioning that boredom is incidentally a trope within mainstream media portrayals of lesbian coming-of-age stories. As it is shown by Whitney Monaghan in *Queer Girls, Temporality and Screen Media: Not "Just a Phase,"* queer love "is depicted as a means of rebelling or experimenting in the face of monotonous teenage boredom" by teen movies such as *My Summer of Love* (2004) by Paweł Pawlikowski.[19] According to the structuring logics of heteronormative temporality, queerness is nothing more than a temporary distraction. As the common saying goes, "it is just a phase." Both linked to homosexuality and adolescence, the dull monotony of boredom is regarded as *unproductive*. A wasted emotion

Yvonne Rainer. *MURDER and murder*. Film still.

according to heterosexual norms, boredom thus shares affinities with theories of queer temporality. In that respect, Jack Halberstam argues that queerness' temporality develops "an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices."[20] Along with Lee Edelman and José Esteban Muñoz, Halberstam draws attention to the potentiality of queerness to destabilize a linear conception of time.[21]

If heteronormative representations of love and relationships seem to promote (re)productive values, queer boredom deviates from the norm by embracing useless and meditative time. This critical mode of boredom is particularly significant in Yvonne Rainer's movies, and notably in *MURDER and murder* (1996). A celebrated American dancer, choreographer, and experimental filmmaker, Rainer has constantly investigated the mundane and the banal in her dance and film. In her choreographies, the complex exploration of ordinary gestures, actions, and objects, is conducive to the emergence of a more concrete dancing physicality. In the early seventies, galvanized by feminist writings, Rainer began to examine her experience as a woman as well as the complexity of emotions through the moving body and moving images. Turning to cinema from the 1970s to the 1990s, and completing seven feature-length films, from *Lives of Performers* (1971) to her last movie *MURDER and murder*, she mobilized the most radical strategies of structural experimental cinema: ranging from repetition of images to extreme duration, from the dismantling of narrative to the privileging of discourse over image. In most of her movies, she made a radical use of voiceover through the disjunction of sound and image. At the end of the 1980s, Rainer started to claim her lesbian identity, first politically and then personally. Very broadly inspired by her love relationship with the queer and feminist theorist Martha Gever, *MURDER and murder* marked her return to storytelling and dealt with queer identities in a heteronormative society.[22] In addition to exploring what it means to be or become a lesbian, it gives visibility to sexuality and love between aging women, a subject that is almost completely inexistent in cinema, since it concerns two taboos: the

body and the sexuality of older women, on the one hand, and lesbianism, on the other hand. However, this coherent narrative is intertwined with the story of Rainer's own battle with breast cancer and with political denunciations of homophobia, stigma, medicine abuse, and toxic chemicals.

While the film shows a series of turmoil and upheavals, the concluding scene of the movie depicts a plain everyday life moment between the two lovers, Mildred and Doris, in a kitchen furnished with the bare necessities. Mostly silent, this episode consists of a long sequence shot, showing the two women making dinner. While the film is mainly characterized by a dynamic rhythm, Rainer reconnects here with her fondness for extended duration, nothingness, and the hyperrealist everyday. In this long and slow scene, one has to pay attention to ordinary words, gestures, and perceptions. Mildred attempts to sing; Doris laughs; Mildred warms up the soup while Doris sets the table; they wait together until the dinner is ready, in silence, then they sit opposite one another at the kitchen table to eat. In this non-diegetic and non-dramatic time, the duration becomes pervading and lumbering, reaching the depths of boredom. Titled "the rest of this life," the film's conclusion prevents any heterosexual male voyeurism by showing plain lesbian everydayness. Additionally, this film section appears as strongly political at a time when the discrimination of homosexuals was legal and the domestic partnership was denied in the majority of the United States. In this regard, Rainer turns away from what Sara Ahmed describes as the everydayness and affectiveness of compulsory heterosexuality "wrapped up […] with moments of ceremony (birth, marriage, death), which bind families together, and with the ongoing investment in the sentimentality of friendship and romance."[23] According to Ahmed, heteronormativity functions as a structure of domination as well as a structure of emotions: heterosexuality is represented as the primordial condition for a good life and thus also for happiness.[24] Writing about the politics of slow cinema, Karl Schoonover declares: "Queerness often looks a lot like wasted time, wasted lives, wasted productivity. Queers luxuriate

while others work. Queers seem always to have time to waste."[25] By ending her film on a scene of seemingly wasted time, far from the mainstream assumption of what should be a romantic happy ending, Rainer claims the hyper-presentness of queer life. Through the enduring feeling of the present and ordinary experience, through daily rituals and humble gestures, she emphasizes how boredom allows for a queer visual, emotional, and temporal emancipation from the logic of heterosexuality. Chantal Akerman, Su Friedrich, and Yvonne Rainer have in common a desire to confront the audience with some exceedingly uncomfortable moments as an artistic gesture against a prevailing mode of passive reception. In many ways, boredom opens space and temporality emancipated from straight scripts and mainstream cinematic aesthetics, thus shaping the bodies of a dissenting community. From the affective perspective of sexual and gender minorities, intense boredom mingles with a queer ontological and political pleasure.

In her essay "Historical ennui, feminist boredom" (1996), Patrice Petro claimed that the feminist aesthetic of boredom is an attempt "to create spaces for reflection, renewal and change."[26] Depicting waiting situations, favoring temporal distension, disabling fascination and voyeurism by giving the mundane its proper and heavy weight, Chantal Akerman, Su Friedrich, and Yvonne Rainer have taken over a complex and ambivalent feeling as a way to open up alternative configurations *within* film for queer and feminist subjectivities and affectivities. Their works highlight how boredom enables the emergence of dissenting spectatorial communities by challenging the cinematic and emotional norms. In this regard, boredom offers reflexive and critical space-time, lying outside of the paradigmatic markers of the dominant temporal regime.

1 P. Adams Sitney. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000.* Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 348.

2 Patrice Petro. "Historical Ennui, Feminist Boredom." *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event,* edited by Vivian Sobchack, Routledge, 1996, p. 187-199.

3 Dijana Jelača. "Film Feminism, Post-Cinema, and the Affective Turn." *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender,* edited by Kristin Lené Hole, Dijana Jelača and E. Ann Kaplan, Routledge, 2017, pp. 446-457; Anu Koivunen. "The Promise of Touch: Turns to Affect in Feminist Film Theory." *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures,* edited by Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers, Amsterdam University Press, 2015, pp. 97-110.

4 Ann Cvetkovich. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press, 2003.

5 Johanna Renard. *Poétique et politique de l'ennui dans la danse et le cinéma d'Yvonne Rainer*. PhD Dissertation, Université Rennes 2, 2016; published under the title *Outrageous Boredom: politique et subjectivité dans la danse et le cinéma d'Yvonne Rainer*. De l'Incidence éditeur, forthcoming in 2022.

6 Patricia Meyer Spacks. *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind*. University of Chicago Press, 1995; Elizabeth S. Goodstein. *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity*. Stanford University Press, 2005.

7 See the recent publication of the *Boredom Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2017), a Canadian anthology edited by Michael Gardiner and Julian Halaydin, bringing together the seminal works of Elizabeth Goodstein, Frances Colpitt and Lars Svendsen.

8 Walter Benjamin. *Charles Baudelaire*: *A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism.* Verso, 1997; Siegfried Kracauer. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. 1963. Harvard University Press, 2005; Georg Simmel. "Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben." *Gesamtausgabe 7.1: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908,* ed. by Rüdiger Ramme, Angela Rammstedt, Otthein Rammstedt. Suhrkamp, 1995, p. 116-131; Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani, eds. *Essays on Boredom and Modernity.* Rodopi, 2009.

9 Allison Pease. *Modernism, Feminism, and the Culture of Boredom.* Cambridge University Press, 2012; Patricia Meyer Spacks. *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind.*

10 Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique.* Norton, 1963.

11 Patrice Petro. "After Shock, between Boredom and History." 1993. *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History,* Rutgers University Press, 2002, p. 57.

12 On this question, see Ivone Margulies. *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday.* Duke University Press, 1996.

13 "Le temps n'a qu'une réalité, celle de l'instant. Autrement dit, le temps est une réalité resserrée sur l'instant et suspendue entre deux néants." Gaston Bachelard. *L'intuition de l'Instant.* Stock, 2003, p. 16.

Thin, as he has already argued elsewhere, is not a figure of weak or watered-down relations, rather a queer figure of endurance in non-linear figurations of time, amid conditions of porosity and affective passage. Thin as a figure of relation stretches the experience of being in time, in place, a long now as it were. To speak of the long now is not so much to gesture at the pace at which one experiences the present or the duration of a passing moment, slow time so to speak, as it is to sense fully the character of the here and now, its affective depth and experiential breadth: a now that is not bracketed or passing present but remains in the wake of what has passed and tarries with tidings of what is yet to be/come. It is a being in time made dense through intimacy, to "hold out a hand across time and touch the dead or those not born yet, to offer oneself beyond one's own time."[2] At once a thinning and a growing bigger, the long now dilates as it endures orders of space and time, the way we divide the here and the elsewhere, the then and the now. Thin attachments, it follows, are intimate relations bearing abundance, heterogeneously arranged and diversely oriented – forward and sideways, alongside and backward – and which, in enduring, push borders between bodies, traffic across species, and enfold into refrains of the contemporary, distant places and removed constellations of time.

2 Elizabeth Freeman. "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory." *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies,* edited by George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 299.

14 See Scott MacDonald. "From Zygote to Global Cinema via Su Friedrich's Films." *Journal of Film and Video,* vol. 44, no. 1-2, 1992, p. 30-41.

15 Catherine Russell. "Culture as Fiction: The Ethnographic Impulse in the Films of Peggy Ahwesh, Su Friedrich, and Leslie Thornton." *The New American Cinema,* edited by Jon Lewis, Duke University Press, 1998, p. 365.

16 Judith Mayne. *Framed. Lesbians, Feminists, and Media Culture.* University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 208.

17 Roland Barthes. "Dear Antonioni ..." Reprinted in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *L'avventura,* BFI Film Classics, Palgrave Macmillan, 1997, p. 67.

18 See for example Sara Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion.* Edinburgh University Press, 2004; Ann Cvetkovich. *Depression. A Public Feeling*. Duke University Press, 2012; Sally R. Munt. *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame.* Ashgate, 2008; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.* Duke University Press, 2003.

19 Whitney Monaghan. *Queer Girls, Temporality and Screen Media: Not "Just a Phase."* Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 42.

20 J. Jack Halberstam. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York University Press, 2005, p. 1.

21 Lee Edelman. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2004; José Esteban Muñoz. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity.* New York University Press, 2009.

22 Catherine Lord. "Looking Like a Lesbian: Yvonne Rainer's Theory of Probability." *Documents*, no. 10, 1997, pp. 31-42.

23 Sara Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 153.

24 Sara Ahmed. *The Promise of Happiness*, Duke University Press, 2010.

25 Karl Schoonover. "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator, and the Queer." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2012, pp. 65-78.

26 Patrice Petro. "Historical Ennui, Feminist Boredom." *Aftershocks of the New*, p. 93.

"Our sameness will not protect us." How Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Affect Meet

Annette Bühler-Dietrich

Kai Green's statement, which I cite in the title above, echoes a famous statement by Audre Lorde, "your silence will not protect you."[1] The "us" Green addresses, refers to the Black community and is more specifically directed to the Black lesbian community which refused him* access after he* had transitioned. Taking up Lorde's call not to be silent, not to hide one's anger about discrimination, he* scrutinizes the exclusionary coherence of categories. Green wants to mobilize a "Trans* analytic," using "trans*" not as an identity marker, but as a term which transgresses set categories: "A Trans* method asks that we not be so invested in what follows black is or black ain't but rather that we be attuned to the ways in which black is made present or not, when, where, how, why, and, most important, in relation to what."[2] Green's article brings together many of the questions which motivate this essay: How do gender, sexuality, race, and affect meet? How do affects, or for that matter, our affective relations to the world

around us make us subjects; how does the way we are affected by the human or non-human other form who we are? In order to address these questions in a genealogical perspective, I turn to Black queer writers, notably to James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, both of whom figure frequently in writings by Black, queer, and feminist scholars. In a genealogy of reflections on affect and gender these two writers cannot be left out. Their writings raise the necessity for taking into consideration the political category of race if one reflects on gender, affect, and sexuality. As their writings and those of the many contemporary Black queer writers who read them show, it does make a difference if you are Black or white when it comes to the relation of affect and gender.[3] These writings can lead to an interrogation of existing categories and to a vision of change.

While writing the first draft of this essay, at a time when I was also revising an article on reactions to racism in contemporary French-language theatre, the murder of George Floyd happened and waves of demonstrators rose to protest and to commemorate victims of police violence, many of them young men. Audre Lorde's poem "Power," published in 1978 and written on the occasion of the police murder of a Black boy, resonates with these events. It is not only affect but downright violence that impinges on Black lives – all of the writers discussed here know this. The ties between 20th-century writers like James Baldwin and Audre Lorde and contemporary writers and scholars like Michaëla Danjé or Kai Green are formed by similar experiences on the one hand and by a genealogy of reading on the other. Lorde's prominence among BIPoC scholars attests to how her essays and poetry capture Black women's experience in a paradigmatic way. The renewed attention paid to James Baldwin in the 2010s acknowledges his importance as a writer and witness to the Civil Rights Movement. Raoul Peck's 2017 documentary *I am not your Negro* enhanced the author's current visibility and might imply that Baldwin is one of the writers of the moment.

On affect

Affect Studies and their combination with Black, Feminist, Queer, and Environmental Studies are pervasive in contemporary Cultural Studies. They make us think of the ways subjects come about differently. While reflections on "The Psychic Life of Power"[4] remain valid, the focus on power is being supplemented by the fundamental relationality between human beings and their surroundings. The use of the term affect juggles two different concepts: affects as non-specified micro-sensations which come into being through an encounter, and affects such as hate, fear, shame, and joy, which are attributed to human beings as feelings. Both understandings of affect share the fact that what happens between two entities *does* something. In the following, I use these two notions of affect, especially since James Baldwin and Audre Lorde repeatedly turn to specific affects in their writings. There, they discuss the emergence of the Black subject in a white heteronormative society. The affects they pinpoint, namely anger, fear, and hatred, keep on being discussed in the writings of succeeding generations in the United States as well as in France. In order to follow these affects in current writings, I consider Léonora Miano's 2017 edited volume *Marianne et le garçon noir* on Black masculinity in France as well as chapters from *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, edited by E. Patrick Johnson in 2016.[5]

"Categories – race, gender, sexuality – are considered as events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than as simply entities and attributes of subjects," writes Jasbir Puar.[6] Her suggestion to look at categories as events or encounters instead of entities guides my reflections in the following. Puar focuses on assemblage, a term translating Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's term "agencement." As Erin Manning writes: "*Agencement* connotes a doing doing itself. You have to understand the event itself as agency-ing."[7] This activity is less visible in the English translation, which connotes both, the act of assemblage and the state of

being assembled. In the context of this essay, I have this aspect of *doing* in mind, which creates categories through and as events.[8]

James Baldwin

James Baldwin (1924-1987) wrote novels and essays, gave speeches and considered himself to be a witness, not a leader of the Civil Rights Movement. Friends with the leading activists of his time, he was never in the line of fire as they were, and survived to give testimony. His essays *The Fire Next Time* (1963) and *No Name in the Street* (1972) are frequently cited in writings by younger Black scholars and writers, be they African-American, African or Black French. Between the two books lie the assassinations of Medgar Evers in 1963, of Malcolm X in 1965, and of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968; Erica Edwards calls *No Name in the Street* "an autobiography of mourning."[9] It stretches across a time span from the late 1940s, when Baldwin left for Paris, to the moment of the book's writing in the early 1970s, covering several stages in Baldwin's life and American history. *The Fire Next Time* is focused on the early 1960s, with a look back at Baldwin's growing up in Harlem. Both essays share the awareness that the difference between the Black American subject and the white American subject is not the result of an essential, inherent difference but rather of a political and historical process: "Color is not a human or a personal reality; it is a political reality."[10] At the beginning of the 1960s, with American society founded on racial segregation, this observation is radical. Baldwin pleads for a change of political direction in order to prevent "historical vengeance" (*Fire*, p. 105) which is sure to come:

> If we – and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others – do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. (Fire, p. 105)

In this crucial statement which concludes his treatise, Baldwin uses the keyword of love. In his writings, it is the one feeling which counterweighs all the formative negative affects such as hate, fear, and shame. While they, as I point out below, erect barriers to fix categories, love breaks these barriers down: "Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word 'love' here […] *in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth*" (*Fire,* p. 95, emphasis mine). Although Baldwin advocates taking off these masks, he also knows that clinging to privileges prevents all but "the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks," upon whom he calls now, from changing their behavior.

The goal "to achieve our country" is at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement. In *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin documents his steps in the movement as well as his remembrance of 1950s France on the verge of the Algerian liberation war (1954-1962). "The Algerian and I were both, alike, victims of this history, and I was still a part of Africa, even though I had been carried out of it nearly four hundred years before."[11] In spite of his American passport, which protects him from the state violence Algerians have to suffer, Baldwin sides with the oppressed, irrespective of skin color, highly aware of this shared history of oppression.[12]

No Name in the Street is divided into two parts, which form a phrase and answer to the title: "Take me to the water [I] to be baptized [II]." With baptism, one does receive a name, just as this name can be withheld, "and he shall have no name in the street." (Job 18:17, quoted after *No Name*, n.p.) The book narrates how Baldwin is baptized through the events of the 1950s and 1960s. He continues his analysis of the white American psyche as well as of his own affects when he agrees to go to the American South in the 1950s in order to report on the Civil Rights Movement. This journey leads to meditations on Black and white masculinity, which focus on fear, terror, pride, and rage. In the South, Baldwin experiences physically how categories are encounters between bodies. One night, he is sexually molested by a powerful

white Southerner. He realizes that this is not primarily a homosexual act, but "as my identity was defined by his power, so was my humanity to be placed at the service of his fantasies" (*No Name,* p. 61). Not only power but desire makes for an encounter in which the Black man is either treated as unmanned or hypervirile: "When the loveless come to power, the sexuality of the object is either a threat or a fantasy." (*No Name*, p. 63) Yet threat and fantasy are flip sides of the same coin, giving rise to the image of the Black man as a potential rapist.[13] Due to the fact, however, that the Black and the white man are locked in this fantasy together, the only potential way out is love – as pointed out in *The Fire Next Time*.

Baldwin testifies to the atmosphere of fear and terror in the South. Looking for something to eat, he is kicked out of the "whites only" section of a restaurant. "What you want, boy" asks the waitress, and a man directs him to the section for non-white people with the words "Right around there, boy." To be a Black man in the South in the 1950s still means to be called the infantilizing "boy" and to be sent to a space apart, both speech acts taken for granted by the white speakers. Baldwin comments: "I really had not had time to feel either fear or anger. Now, both began to rise in me." (*No Name*, p. 72.) His feelings are directed towards white people in the South, whose attitude threatens him, whose behavior rouses his anger. While the situation at the restaurant is of the latter kind, other situations cause fear. Specific situations and settings act on him. The situation at the restaurant turns him from a free adult into a "boy," subdued to certain restrictions of space, food, and company. Both fear and anger articulate this trespassing of identity frames only seemingly firmly in place.

It is in the physical reaction, when he is unable to leave the apartment upon the return from the South, that the impact these encounters had is finally released. In reaction to the loss of free movement in the South, he shies away from moving around in New York City upon his return. The void created by his experience

of the South swallows him and is named "terror" (cf. *No Name*, pp. 56-59). It results from an encounter that annihilates him as a male person, a situation condensed in the scene of sexual harassment. This struggle over personhood and notably manhood is embodied, as Baldwin also registers in his musings and observations on the difference between Black and white men walking along the streets: While Black men "have balls" and fight daily to maintain their manhood, white men have "shriveled faces" (*No Name*, p. 65) and not only that. Maleness as struggle between Black and white turns out to unman the white supremacist first. In the second part of the essay, Baldwin remembers the battle called for in *The Fire Next Time*, its losses, and the less prominent battles he fought. Deadly shortcomings of the juridical system and the foul behavior of the police are addressed here. Police violence towards Black men and the ever-present suspicion of the Black man as rapist are part of growing up Black and male, an argument Baldwin corroborates with episodes from his own young adult life. It is this act of confrontation which provokes terror as well as pride and rage (*No Name*, p. 58).

In Baldwin's writings, the Black male subject is the result of a complicated encounter with the white male and the white female subject, on the one hand, and with Black male subjects and very few female ones (mother, sister), on the other. Taking into account both privilege and social, political, legal, and economic power relations, Baldwin shows that it is affects and desire, as lived in physical encounters with bodies and spaces, which form the category of the Black male. For Baldwin, it is love as a transgressive movement that could change this situation. Baldwin does not discuss his own homosexuality in either essay, instead he refers to episodes of his first heterosexual encounters with white women and the fear of white castigation, which went along with these relationships. His desire for and relationships with white men largely remain out of the picture in his essays. Audre Lorde's tribulations as a Black lesbian in the 1970s and 1980s show that, had Baldwin not relegated discussions of homosexuality to his

fiction, it might have weakened his position as a public intellectual in the Black and white community of his time.

Audre Lorde

Poet and feminist Audre Lorde (1934-1992) is a solid reference in feminist writing, whether explicitly dedicated to her work as a poet, novelist and essayist, or in publications that address overall feminist and queer issues. The essays collected in *Sister Outsider* (1984) figure both frequently and prominently in feminist, queer and afrofuturist writings indebted to her voice.[14] Lorde's essays unite the personal and the political in a way different from Baldwin. Unlike him, she does not understand her task to be bearing witness to the Civil Rights Movement. Instead, she bases her essays on her personal struggle to be accepted as a Black lesbian feminist and poet in the Black community and in the predominantly white feminist community of the 1970s and 1980s.

While Baldwin reflects upon the assemblage of the Black male subject whose outline is being fixed by affects, Lorde breaks down this frame by articulating the affects Baldwin at first suppresses, namely, anger and fear. Her famous phrase "your silence will not protect you," directed towards other women, calls for an expression of affects in order to change things: "My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also." (*Uses of Anger*, p. 124.) Lorde points out that categories persist in the way history – which Baldwin calls "an intolerable yoke" (*No Name*, p. 47) – has set them up because anger is not transformed into action. In her address to the participants of the National Women's Studies Conference in 1981, titled "The Uses of Anger," she emphasizes the shared oppression of all women and the necessity to face the anger between them. She distinguishes between hatred and anger. Whereas hatred leads to destruction, anger can lead to change: "Anger is a grief of distortions between peers and its object is change." (*Uses of Anger*, p. 129) When she envisions "a future of pollinating difference," (*Uses of Anger*, p. 133) this future

is one of contact. Lorde's unusual botanical metaphor requires interpretation. Pollination transfers pollen from one part of the plant to another so that seeds are the result. If difference pollinates, firstly, it *does* something instead of simply *being*. Secondly, it creates contact instead of separation. Therefore difference, following the metaphor, is fruitful: new subjects and alliances could grow from it, firstly, in the community of all women. Lorde develops a vision of difference which is aware of categories but wants to surmount them. Not to say that they do not count but to emphasize rather that they intersect: "As a Black lesbian mother in an interracial marriage, there was usually some part of me guaranteed to offend everybody's comfortable prejudices of who I should be." (*Learning from the 60s*, p. 137.)

The long penultimate essay in *Sister Outsider*, "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger," takes up the question of anger and hatred once more. Whereas in many of the essays published in *Sister Outsider* Lorde speaks to a non-specific community of women assembled on the occasion of specific conferences, in this essay she addresses Black women first and foremost. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that here, in contrast to her other essays, she does not distinguish Black women by categories such as class, sexuality, or age. In her introduction to the essay, she lays out a history of hatred and deadly violence suffered by Black women. The oft-quoted episode of her own encounter with a white woman from uptown New York who eyes the five-year-old with blank hatred in the subway is put next to other episodes from Lorde's childhood and then placed in the larger context of violence perpetrated against Black women and girls.[15] The result, according to Lorde, is an internalized hatred that surfaces between Black women as anger. This is fundamentally different from the anger between Black and white women. Instead of having Black women bond as an imperative precipitated by virtue of the permanent and indiscriminate threat from the white world, they vent their anger out on one another. While articulated anger is useful between people who are different, it is destructive when they are alike:

> When there is no connection at all between people, then anger is a way of bringing them closer together, of making contact. But when there is a great deal of connectedness that is problematic or threatening or unacknowledged, then anger is a way of keeping people separate, of putting distance between us. (*Eye to Eye*, p. 168.)

Hence anger for Lorde is related to two different kinds of feelings: pain which is turned into rage and articulated towards the one causing the pain, and shared, yet locked-off pain which is vented on a replacement object, the other Black woman, instead of being directed towards the one whose hatred caused it. In the earlier essay, "The Uses of Anger," Lorde shows how anger helps to tear down categories; it allows for contact and hence for new encounters between Black and white women. Now, Lorde wants her readers to understand that the anger towards the other Black woman is the result of unacknowledged and internalized experiences of racial hatred. She distinguishes between pain and suffering. Where pain is momentary, "an event, an experience that must be recognized," suffering is permanent, "the nightmare reliving of unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain" (*Eye to Eye*, p. 171). Her call is to scrutinize that pain and to transform it in order to "establish authority over our own definition." (*Eye to Eye*, p. 173.) Lorde repeatedly uses the metaphor of metabolism when she talks about the experience of hatred or that of pain. The metaphor points to the fact that the hateful event has physical consequences: if your metabolism manages to transform it, you can cope with it but if it is not metabolized properly, it can kill or poison you. The metaphor highlights Lorde's insight into the permeable boundaries between subjects and into the existential exposure of life of each to the other.[16]

In "Eye to Eye," Lorde's play with pronouns is striking. She alternates between I, we, you, she, or they, talking about Black women in the third person, observing them from the outside, but also appealing to a "we" when talking about shared experience. Her essay, like all of her essays, not only describes a situation, but

also appeals to the reader or listener in order to provoke change. In referring to countless situations of white hatred as well as of Black rejection, Lorde literally fleshes out her argument. Her detailed descriptions of interactions as well as her metaphors of anger visualize her reasoning: To be a Black woman is an event between bodies (Puar) which is made up of hatred and anger – and which instead should be an event of care and love. Presumably by editing mistake, Lorde jumps from section VI to section VIII in her essay. This jump, however, articulates the paradigm shift she calls for, namely love: "I have to learn to love myself before I can love you or accept your loving." (*Eye to Eye*, p. 174.) "The first step toward genuine change" (*Eye to Eye*, p. 175) only takes place when the abyss of self-hatred will be overcome, when the leap from section VI to section VIII will have been taken – an endeavor, like any leap across an abyss. The only reservoir of self-confidence that the Black female child is endowed with is maternal care. In her essays, Lorde repeatedly focuses on motherly care as the counterweight to mistreatment. This ethics of care which fosters the well-being of the other could open up a different space of encounter which allows for the Black woman to *be*.[17]

Both Baldwin and Lorde emphasize love as one remedy to overcome hatred and self-hatred, as the feeling which makes one take off masks, break down barriers.[18] Another form of creative encounter is provided by the erotic. The erotic, to Lorde, is a form of affective intensity; it is not equal to the sexual, even though it may happen in the realm of sexuality.[19] The key term Lorde links with the erotic is joy: "The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference." (*Uses of the Erotic*, p. 56) Replacing the term erotic with joy, Lorde shows how the feeling of joy allows people to meet without eradicating differences; instead, it makes contact possible in spite of differences, because it "lessens the threat." Difference is threatening, whereas joy gives access to an understanding of what

lies on either side of the bridge. If the affect of joy creates community, it transcends difference and forms a new, if only temporary, category. In contrast to happiness and optimism,[20] Lorde's erotic joy allows the subject to defy situations, which fix it in harmful ways. It brings about courage but also contact and the sharing of something, namely joy, which is not owned individually. As Lorde emphasizes, differences will not vanish, but can then be approached differently.[21] Elsewhere she writes, "we must allow each other our differences at the same time as we recognize our sameness" (*Learning from the 60s*, p. 142). If differences replace difference and the threat which, as Sara Ahmed shows, goes along with difference in the singular, then differences can be "allowed" – they do not necessarily impose themselves – while sameness is recognized. "To recognise means: to know again, to acknowledge and to admit," writes Ahmed.[22] While she ties the "again" to the already preformed matrix of recognizing the stranger, Lorde's recognition of sameness works as a reminder to recognize, to know again and perceive but also to acknowledge a sameness which needs to be known again over and above difference. When Kai Green in his* 2016 article claims "our sameness will not protect us,"[23] he* shows how sameness can take on a different meaning, that of a restrictive community which excludes. Lorde, by contrast, envisions this sameness as all-encompassing: "What we must do is to commit ourselves to some future that can include each other and to work toward that future with the particular strengths of our individual identities." (*Learning from the 60s*, p. 142.)

"Trying to make power out of hatred and destruction"

Lorde's repeated emphasis on feeling over and above understanding aligns with her insistence on poetry. In her poem "Power" she writes:

> The difference between poetry and rhetoric
> is being
> ready to kill
> yourself
> instead of your children.[24]

"Power" addresses the murder of an unarmed ten-year-old Black boy by the police and the acquittal of the police officer by a jury which consisted of eleven white men and one Black woman. The opening paragraph of the poem distinguishes between the radical self-questioning of poetry and the political strategy of rhetoric. Whereas rhetoric might comply with the system and sacrifice the future (children) for the present, poetry resists, even if it implies death. The intensity of joy might seem far away from the devastation and desperation of suicide, yet feeling intensely makes them structurally similar, as Baldwin points out. He talks about the moment when terror turns into "pride and rage," which makes the subject willingly face the oppressor even if this means death. He describes the strength which is related to this readiness for death – a strength that the oppressor is unable to perceive.[25] Such strength flares up in the poem's reference to suicide.

"Power," a poem in five paragraphs in free verse, approaches the issue of hatred, love, and resistance from the angle of poetry, one different from the discursive writing in essays. The programmatic first paragraph is followed by a nightmare, where the poetic subject moves in a white desert, a paradigmatic non-social space, made up of "raw gunshot wounds," in a battle between healing kisses and the bleaching sun, "trying to make power out of hatred and destruction." Caught between the desire to quench the thirst with the dying child's blood and recoiling from this, the double-bind between hatred and healing figures. Then Lorde inserts one paragraph quoting the horrifying phrases of the policeman who shot the child and another one which sums up his acquittal and the position of the one Black woman in the jury. Finally, the poetic subject continues the reflections in the last paragraph:

I have not been able to touch the destruction within me.
But unless I learn to use
the difference between poetry and rhetoric
my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold
or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire […].[26]

If this happens, the poem implies, retaliation is sure to follow. "The difference between poetry and rhetoric" is a categorical difference. Poetry and rhetoric do different things, their difference needs to be acknowledged. Yet it is difference which can be used, which must be used in order to connect and not to retaliate. Lorde's poem commemorates the murder of a child at the hands of a racist white policeman and the utter failure of a Black woman to claim her rights. "Power" is an ambiguous signifier. Whose power is the poem talking about? The abusive power of the police is countered by the radical stance of the poetic subject who answers to this murder in her own poetic way, in fact making "power out of hatred and destruction."

How does one learn to use the difference between poetry and rhetoric, how does one make power out of hatred and destruction? What effects do hateful encounters have on the subject? In 2017, Cameroonian-born writer Léonora Miano published the anthology *Marianne et le garçon noir* (Marianne and the black boy), in which she as well as other female and especially male writers explore Black masculinity in France, a masculinity whose experience and shape is intimately tied to the above questions. The intention of the book is "to examine the possibility for those whose masculinity is continuously offended to build the latter nevertheless on healthy ground."[27] The publication testifies to the many incidents of police violence at airports and train stations, often suffered by the writers themselves.[28] It is interesting to note that these events occur when Black bodies move, from one country to another, arriving at a train station, strolling through the street. The spaces they arrive in, patrolled by the state, are by unspoken definition, white. The moving assemblage of bodies

[Queer affect is …]
a poem transpiring
on Grindr [4/10]

So sexy auch nicht, Weird fish
Yes no maybe, We will see
Only fun, Fun & drinks
UFO, Latino
Silver guy, Make me fly
Younger please, Gym_panzee
Two4more, Flexible slut
21/5 in ur face
Big one, Normal
Add some fun
Brain is sexy, T4b
Catch me, Domino
All_at_sea
Call me cupcake, Dust from Space
No pic no chat, Walk me through
Behind blue eyes
I give head
Now

Omar Kasmani

and spaces is at this point brought to an antagonistic standstill.

Michaëla Danjé's "Et nous fûmes des écorces" (And we were bark) is the first essay after Miano's introduction. Her* writing and her* story answer to the connection of affect, gender, race, and sexuality in a peculiar way which makes it possible to link up her* essay with both Baldwin's and Lorde's writings. Danjé is a Black transgender woman*. In her* essay, which combines poetry and prose, historical research and autobiographical experience, she* shows how becoming a Black transgender woman* is also motivated by the racism she* experiences as a Black man. Danjé's dated but nonlinear entries of crucial episodes of her* growing up as a biracial boy and living as a Black homosexual man depict the violence perpetrated by white male youth, the nervous breakdown suffered during military service, the nanoracism of a girl calling him* a potential rapist, and the racism suffered in the white queer community: "The queer or white LGBT circles have always been a trap for me. White men who come on to me think they are on safari."[29] Danjé dates this entry in 2009 and then jumps forth in time, to 2015, when the accusation of being a rapist occurs. This leads her* to remember, upon her* visit to Nantes, a major former slave trade harbor, the history of Emmett Till. The Black boy, killed by white men in 1955 because he might have looked at a white woman, is an iconic victim of racist violence and his mention also conjures up the unfinished struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. Danjé shares the ascription "potential rapist" with the boy, and she* also brings yet another history of false accusation into the picture: the history of Emmett Till's father Louis, a soldier who was executed without evidence for raping a French woman. When she* realizes the proximity of her* story to that of the Till family, she* is terrified: "While I write these lines, tears fall down and all these resonances fill me with terror."[30] Similar to the belated terror Baldwin experiences, Danjé realizes that her* structural and biographical/geographical proximity to Louis Till's burial ground has been there all along. To recognize and research the Black man as a victim of hypersexualization and abuse stands

next to the terrifying realization of how much this story is also her* own. Danjé, however, closes her* essay on the hopeful and defiant note of her* strolling the streets of Oakland as a woman*, the date of the entry is 2014, thus one year before the Nantes incident. This order might emphasize that male* and female* body coexist and that their coming into existence is dependent on what they come up against. Danjé shows that gender and race are made present differently in different settings and circumstances: as a boy, she* is perceived as the "stranger danger," an object of violence to others.[31] During military service she* is not allowed to appear at all, not as a Black subject, certainly not as a gay subject. Within the gay community, she* is exoticized, desired, and held at bay at the same time. When seen as a Black man, she* is perceived as a rapist. Finally, she* can only appear as a woman* elsewhere, not in her place of living.

Danjé's essay refers back to Lorde, even though she* does not quote her, and to Baldwin, whom she* quotes. It also chimes with recent publications on Black queer sexuality. Lorde criticizes her Black environment for shunning lesbian women in particular, but also all homosexuals. Danjé, by contrast, feels excluded from the white gay French community, and her* homosexuality is rejected by her* white father. What it means to be queer or trans, so Danjé's life story shows, depends on the color of your skin because of the obstacles you face. Danjé's essay juxtaposes the different ways of feeling as a Black man and as a Black transgender woman*: enraged and ashamed, caught in deadly stereotypes as a man; proud and defiant as a woman*. Eventually she* comments: "I didn't renounce being a black boy. It's only that all these days of chaos stole my enthusiasm, kept me from making room for my unrest. Your visions of the black man, your contempt, your clichés."[32] Her* coming out as a trans woman* happens in Oakland, not in any of the French towns she* lived in.[33] The experiment of going out in female attire needs a new surrounding and can be "taken back" in France. Affects count for the assemblage of the subject. They are tied to people but

also to spaces, a fact already highlighted in Baldwin's writings about his experiences in the American South and in Paris. Danjé speaks of a space in which she* never fit as a man, where she* was always replaced by an image of him*, and exchanges it for another space with a better fit.

In *The Right to Maim*, Jasbir Puar looks at bodies and subjects with a focus on capacitation. "Capacity is not discretely of the body. It is shaped by and bound to interface with prevailing notions of chance, risk, accident, luck, and probability, as well as with bodily limits/incapacity, disability, and debility."[34] Such notions, as the writings of the writers cited in this essay show, differ strongly with regard to the body in question. Risk and accident are distributed unequally between white and Black men, as racial profiling and police violence demonstrate, no matter whether these men* are straight, queer, or trans. As Lorde stresses, in a different way, the Black woman's and especially the Black lesbian woman's capacity is even more at risk than that of the Black man – a fact which resurfaces in the attack on Black trans women* in Boystown, Chicago, which Zachary Blair examines.[35] How gender, sexuality, race, and affect meet and intersect is therefore dependent on the spaces and the power structure of these spaces – be it the 1950s American South, French provincial neighborhoods, or ostensibly diverse American neighborhoods, but also the temporary communities one is part of. How one is embodied as male* or female*, Black, queer, depends on Green's "when, where, how, why, and, most important, in relation to what," because these questions point to different ways to be affected. When gender, sexuality, and race meet, it is affect which ties them together. The tenacity of unequal social conditions brings about the same affects today as in the 1950s – an appalling observation for the white scholar I am. Malcolm X's effort "to make power out of hatred and destruction," to quote Lorde once more, is much closer to the demonstrations after the death of George Floyd in 2020 than his death in 1965 would make a white public think.

Where to meet?

In the course of this essay, I have repeatedly alluded to Jasbir Puar's claim that "categories – race, gender, sexuality – are considered as events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than as simply entities and attributes of subjects." While working with this citation, I noticed that it works both ways: events, actions, and encounters between bodies shape categories. Categories do not exist on their own; they evolve through physical (or mediated) encounters, because color, just like sexuality or ablebodiedness, is a political reality, to refer back to Baldwin. It is, however, also categories that act; the category that dominates an encounter influences the encounter. Different categories might lead to different events. "The world does not need categories. We human beings need them. We create categories to navigate this complex, contradictory world, to understand it somehow and to communicate about it," writes Kübra Gümüşay in her recent publication *Sprache und Sein* (2020, Language and Being).[36] If categories are, or are made from, encounters and events, then the terms of the current encounters still need to be altered – it seems as if too little has changed since the time of Baldwin and Lorde. How affects impact gender in ways that one gender is not enough, how affects shape Black and white masculinity and Black and white femininity differently, and how sexuality is affected by race and gender can be learned from the writings here discussed. Subjects are assemblages, situated in a web of relations, not monadic identities. Therefore, to focus on gender and affect makes it necessary to complicate the field, to look for the many ways gender is affected. And to take into account how fluid gender has become as a category.

1 Audre Lorde. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches*. 1984. Foreword by Cheryl Clarke, introduction by Nancy K. Bereano, Crossing Press, 2007, pp. 40-44, p. 41. In the following I will use the short titles of individual essays whenever I cite this collection.

2 Kai M. Green. "Troubling the Waters. Mobilizing a Trans* Analytic." *No Tea, no Shade. New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, edited by E. Patrick Johnson, Duke University Press, 2016, pp. 65-82, p. 79.

3 I choose to capitalize Black in line with Audre Lorde's essays and in order to mark it as a political category.

4 Judith Butler. *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection*. Stanford University Press, 1997.

5 I would like to thank playwright and scholar George Seremba for his comments and questions on earlier versions of this chapter.

6 Jasbir Puar. Interview by Ben Pitcher and Henriette Gunkel, *Darkmatter*, May 2nd 2008, www.darkmatter101.org/site/2008/05/02/qa-with-jasbir-puar, accessed March 15, 2020.

7 Brian Massumi with Erin Manning. "Immediation." Interview by Christoph Brunner. *Politics of Affect*. Polity Press, 2015, pp. 146-176, p. 157.

8 Puar clearly distinguishes between intersectional identity and assemblage. See Jasbir Puar. *Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times*. 2007. 10th anniversary expanded ed., Duke University Press, 2017, p. 212.

9 Erica R. Edwards. "Baldwin and Black Leadership." *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, edited by Michele Elam, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 150-163, p.156.

10 James Baldwin. *The Fire Next Time*. 1963. Vintage Books, 1993, p. 104. All further references to this publication will be in parentheses in the text. A recent article by Natalie Etoke corroborates his thesis with regard to France. She says: "The We: Blacks of France does not reflect a racial identity but a form of organization, a series of actions and behaviors whose aim it is to destroy the mechanisms which reproduce inequality and oppression." Natalie Etoke. "Du Noir dans le bleu, blanc, rouge." *Marianne et le garçon noir*, edited by Léonora Miano, Pauvert, 2017, pp. 149-164, p. 160. All translations from the French are my own.

11 James Baldwin. *No Name in the Street*. The Dial Press, 1972, p. 41. All further references will be in the main text.

12 On the relation between the plight and fight of the African nations and the battle of the American Black see Malcolm X's speeches, notably "Not just an American Problem, but a World Problem." *Malcolm X. February 1965. The Final Speeches*, edited by Steve Clark, Pathfinder Press, 1965, pp. 143-170.

13 On the relation between fear and desire see Sigmund Freud. "Hemmung, Symptom und Angst." 1926. *Studienausgabe Bd. 6*, 7th ed., edited by Alexander Mitscherlich et. al., S.Fischer, 1989, pp. 233-308.

14 Ahmed refers to Lorde in all of her publications; I will mention some of them below. See also Kara Keeling. *Queer Times, Black Futures.* University of New York Press, 2019, who starts out her book with a reference to Lorde in her preface. What I find particularly noteworthy in Lorde is her awareness of interlocking categories and oppressions well before Kimberly Crenshaw's seminal article on intersectionality. Kimberle Crenshaw. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1, 1989, pp. 139-167.

15 Ahmed quotes this scene in its entirety in her chapter on hate. Sara Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed., Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p. 53. It already features prominently in the introduction of her chapter "Embodying Strangers" in *Strange Encounters*, where she considers embodiment as a result of encounters. Sara Ahmed. *Strange Encounters. Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Routledge, 2000.

16 See Judith Butler. *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2006.

17 On the quest for new spaces where being can happen, see Kübra Gümüşay. *Sprache und Sein*. Hanser Berlin 2020.

18 Yet they do not talk about romantic love, which does not protect from these masks, as Wilfried N'Sondé's story "Faux-semblants," published in Miano's *Marianne et le garçon noir*, pp. 199-214, shows.

19 In "Re-membering Audre," Amber Jamilla Musser looks at Lorde's concept of the erotic in order to refocus on the erotic as not only an affect for queer community building, but as a specific concept related to Lorde's being a Black lesbian feminist mother and poet. Lorde's initial audience for her talk was a women's conference – we could hence assume that the joyful community could first of all be one between women, where, according to Lorde, joy as well as anger can be felt and articulated. It is more difficult to see how downright sexism, racism, and homophobia could be transformed by the erotic. Amber Jamilla Musser. "Re-membering Audre: Adding Lesbian Feminist Mother Poet to Black." *No Tea, no Shade. New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, pp. 346-361.

20 Both terms are scrutinized by Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant and unmasked in their capacity to keep people stuck in oppressive life situations. See Sara Ahmed. *The Promise of Happiness.* Duke University Press 2010; Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.

21 Massumi's description of joy corresponds with Lorde's description of the erotic as intensity. He writes: "Joy in the Spinozan sense refers to the intensity of the affective encounter. The intensity of the encounter in turn refers to an augmentation in powers of existence – capacities to feel, act and perceive – that occurs through the encounter." Brian Massumi. *The Politics of Affect*, p. 208.

22 Sara Ahmed. *Strange Encounters,* p. 22.

23 Kai M. Green. "Troubling the Waters," p. 79.

24 Audre Lorde. “Power.” *The Black Unicorn. Poems*. 1978. Norton, 1995, pp. 108-109, p. 108.

25 Baldwin talks about the moment when terror turns into “pride and rage” which make the subject willingly face the oppressor even if this means death. He describes the strength which is related to this readiness for death – a strength which the oppressor is unable to recognize. See Baldwin, *No Name*, pp. 58-59.

26 Audre Lorde. “Power,” p. 109.

27 Léonora Miano. “Noire hémoglobine.” *Marianne et le garçon noir*, pp. 9-34, p. 27.

28 See the following essays in Miano’s anthology *Marianne et le garçon noir*: Amzat Boukari-Yabara. “Pour des lendemains noirs d’éclats de soleil,” pp. 77-109; Elom 20ce. “Dokuishinono. Reprendre possession de nous-mêmes,” pp. 111-148; Insa Sané. “Fais ce que l’on attend de toi,” pp. 183-198. On racism in France see also my article “Fighting Racism on the Contemporary Francophone Stage.” *The Palgrave Handbook of Theatre and Race*, edited by Tiziana Morosetti and Osita Okagbue, Palgrave Macmillan. 2021, pp. 307-326

29 Michaëla Danjé. “Et nous fûmes des écorces.” *Marianne et le garçon noir*, pp. 35-75, p. 65.

30 Ibid., p.72.

31 Ahmed coined the term “stranger danger.” See especially *Strange Encounters,* Chapter 1.

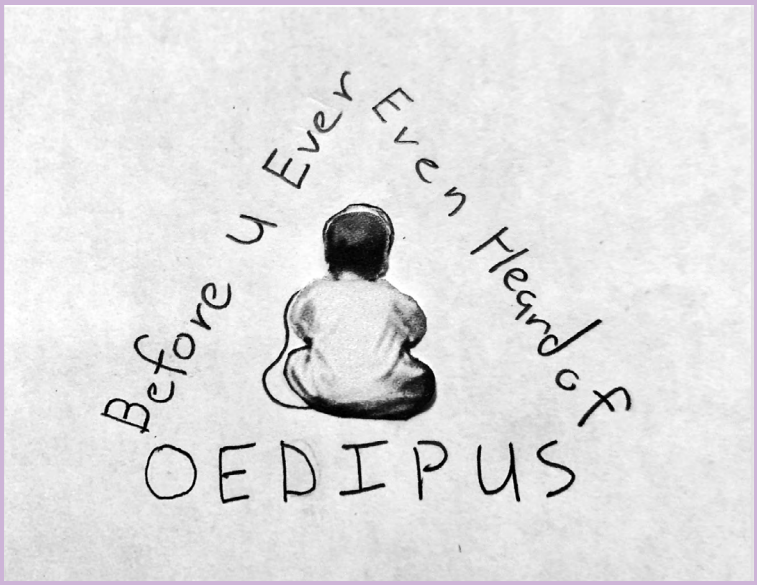
32 Michaëla Danjé. “Et nous fûmes des écorces,” p. 73.

33 In an interview Kortney Ryan Ziegler, director of the film *Still Black*, mentions that to transition in California is comparatively easy; he* himself, a Black female to male trans person, lives in Oakland, too. “Still Black. A Portrait of Black Trans Men with Director Kortney Ryan Ziegler, Moderator Jennifer Tyburczy.” *University of California Television*, 23 Mai 2017. www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAuBtcHDlcA. Accessed May 15, 2020.

34 Jasbir Puar. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability.* Duke University Press, 2017, p. 19.

35 Zachary Blair. “Boystown. Gay Neighborhoods, Social Media, and the (Re)production of Racism.” *No Tea, no Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, pp. 287-303. By contrast, Black trans men call themselves invisible. They seem to melt with the group of Black men. Yet there also is little documentation on them, as Kortney Ziegler asserts, when he* notices that his* 2008 documentary *Still Black* on Black female to male trans people is, in 2017, still the only one. See also “Invisible Trans Men.” *The Root*. www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUHcpdJZRuM. Accessed May 15, 2020.

36 Kübra Gümüşay. *Sprache und Sein*, p. 133. Translation from German mine.



Before U Ever Even Heard of Oedipus: Attachment, Remediation and the Strange Situation Procedure

Eric Taggart

Rethinking where and how the human comes into being will involve a rethinking of both the social and psychic landscapes of an infant's emergence.

- Judith Butler

What if we derived our social theory from scenes of ambivalence...the scenes of attachment that are intimate, defined by desire, and overwhelming.

- Lauren Berlant

I'd first thought to title this essay *I Miss the Terror of the Possibility of Touching You*——because proximity is always a kind of risk and already difficult. But also because love, in the time of pandemic, has fallen ill. What happens to intimacy after proximity? Or in its excess? With the sudden surplus of some bodies and the absence of so many others? When our social need is the very vector of disease? It's an approach-avoidance conflict, a paradoxical injunction, a double-bind. We all just need some space; we all just need to be held. So, be tender with yourself. And in the meantime, zooming around in the glitchy screenlight of we-can't-be-alone-and-we-can't-be-together, I made a preoedipal scene for you:

but we're not there yet
and I want to explain

In the beginning, we coded the heavens and the earth. Data was without form and void——hovering over the deep preoedipal goo. And it was good. Enough. And it made you.

Now here——before you ever even felt like a self——what really mattered most was proximity. And in fact, the most familiar childhood games are just so many ways of playing with it: peek-a-boo, hide-and-seek, yo-yo, jack-in-the-box. It almost seems like it's the hyphen that does it. But even a ball——so long as it can bounce back or roll away——is an affordance for playing with proximity. And what, for an infant, could be more critical? It's their only hope really——to fashion some kind of makeshift sense and form from the here/gone that marks life outside the womb. Before this, there wasn't even any inside or out, no 0 or 1, nothing like together or anysuchthing as a part. Proximity arrives out of no/where for the newborn, now/here. A developing situation:

come closer
so we can talk

Critical proximity, we might call it. And during your preoedipal years——roughly 0-3——you are consumed by it. It's why babies are usually cute and smell so good. And why the cry of an unsettled one quickly starts to feel so unsettling. We've got biotechnology for contact maintenance already on board, long before language and voluntary motion arrive. Because we're mammals. And we neeeeeed each other.

But, by about a year old, most of us are moving around and talking a bit. Transforming sense into signal into symbol. Rubbing objects and affects and words together, suturing the ones that work. We stop putting things in our mouths to figure them out and start putting them together. This early research is not just a receptive process, of course, but a productive one: a kind of primal creativity. And it feels good-enough to keep going. And whether or not the good-enough is actual, it assembles the `virtual` you:

and here we are
almost together

In response to Judith Butler's work——and in remembrance of Lauren Berlant and her ongoing invitation to look toward ***scenes of attachment***——this essay offers the archive of attachment research and the Strange Situation Procedure as a primal mis-en-scène for social theory. ***The task***, writes Butler, ***is doubtless to think through primary impressionability and vulnerability with a theory of power and recognition. To do this would no doubt be one way a politically informed psychoanalytic feminism could proceed.***

This essay wants to be more like an art object than a case study, but I'm a clinical psychotherapist by training and practice, so you'll have to forgive me for a brief foray into some of the primal tools/toys/tricks of the trade. And also for (re)considering your (m)other. I promise not to lose you unless you let me.

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Psychoanalysis, as we all know, still has a mother fixation. It's a problem, it's complicated, and we're working on it. When I write mother as (m)other, I am trying to suggest a primary figure before you cared about sexual difference or knew what gender was. The figure cared for you in time. The figure could have been more than one——in a sense always is——an assembly of objects, a configuration of care. The configuration was felt to be you before you knew any different. Any difference.

Psychoanalysis also has a long history of calling other people objects. Especially——but not only——the (m)other. So, when Freud writes something like, ***the finding of an object is also always a refinding of it***, he's not talking about socks. He's talking about love. As a kind of primary aesthetic form. With a personal history. Because your first object world was inherited, not chosen. You loved it——in a sense——because you had to. Because——in a sense——it was you. Any agency you have now, is in how you do or don't and will or won't remediate it.

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Now, a quick look at three familiar household objects from the psychoanalytic hall-of-fame: a spool, a mirror and a blanket. They are individuation technologies for the infant and theoretical tools for us. I include them to illustrate how objects help us to become subjects and work preoedipal things through.

Freud's Fort/Da: A boy——about 18-months——has come into possession of a wooden spool tied to the end of a string. He gleefully casts it from his crib cheering *!FORT!* only to pull it back in again with an equally joyful *!DA!* fort / da / gone / there. The boy: Freud's nephew. The game: a ***dramatization*** of the mother's comings-and-goings. A ***cultural achievement***, he writes, in which the emotional contours of involuntary separation and reunion are actively remediated in play: Tada!!! Fort/Da!!! Or, I sometimes think: fort/data. Because it's replicable. And reliability comes to count as data. As evidence of something.

Lacan's Mirror Stage: A full-length mirror——Lacan's of course ——assembles all your messy senses into a clean and singular image: It's you!!! Sort of. Because it also makes you into an object. Displacing your senses into an ***imago***, a kind of external first-avatar. Oh, and your (m) other is there too. Behind you in the mirror. Triangulating what you feel and what you see and what you see-feeling-you.

Winnicott's Transitional Object: That particular blanket, stuffed doll or bear to which many young ones become especially attached around 12-18 months. ***The first not-me possession***, he calls it. And it also marks our primal dispossession, remediating absence. Which is to say, remediating the presence of the (m)other in absentia. Something we can hold onto as a kind of portable security. And which holds us together when we're coming undone. Not exactly a substitution for the (m)other's body, but a medium for learning to feel-ok-without it.

Freud's spool, Lacan's mirror and Winnicott's blanket are gathered together as examples of how early encounters with objects produce the feeling-of-being-a-subject. Of how objects are technological participants in our subject formation. And part of what makes objects so interesting is that they are also obstacles, objecting to our subjection. They facilitate our in/dividuation not only as subjects but also as other objects. Reminding us——in a sense and in our senses——of our objectness. It's not the hammer's fault when you hit your finger. It's the way a hammer works.

Technology is sometimes considered a prosthesis, an extension of our body and what it can do in the world. And whether it's a hammer or a smartphone or a spaceship, technology allows the circle of the survivable world to grow. An auxiliary placenta we might call it, (re)mediating life outside the womb. That's why social media calls it your feed.

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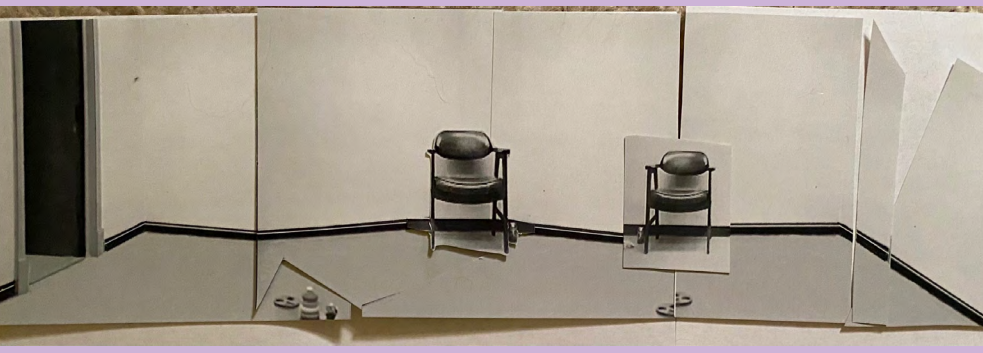

The Strange Situation Procedure

In an office-sized room, two chairs are placed on the far end of the room from the entrance door, one for the child's primary caregiver and another for a "stranger," separated so one can tell who the baby is looking at. At about one step away from both chairs, towards the middle of the room, there is a set of toys.

- General Procedural Details

Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure (devised 1964) is meant to reveal patterns in the strategies infants use to ellicit care and affect regulation through proximity to their (m)other/primary caregiver. It is the foundational experiment of attachment theory (Bowlby 1958) and the most productive research protocol in the history of developmental psychology (see Cassidy and Shaver 2016). In the filmed procedure, a 12-18 month-old infant and their (m)other enter a room with some toys on the floor, encounter a stranger, and proceed through two separations and reunions. The eight episodes of the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) unfold over 21 minutes and follow a distinctly narrative structure. The procedure continues to replicate many times each year around the world. It continues to find/(re)produce the following patterns:

Attachment Security
is marked by the ability to easily seek + receive affective regulation from the (m)other, and then forget-them-enough to return to creative exploration of the object-world: the toys, the stranger and the affordances of the room in space and time.

Attachment Insecurity
is marked by a difficulty requesting +/or receiving affective regulation from the (m)other, compromising a full return to creative exploration of the object-world: the toys, the stranger and the affordances of the room in space and time.

It's the reunions, not the separations, that are of primary interest. And the researchers are primarily coding four behaviors: proximity seeking, contact maintenance, avoidance and resistance. [B] is used to designate infants with a secure classification, and there seem to be two primary strategies of managing insecurity: [A] dismissive avoidance, as a kind of suppression of attachment need; and [C] preoccupied ambivalence, as a kind of anxious and amplified expression of it. In regard to clinical work with adults, the [A] and [C] patterns of insecurity are sometimes translated as the withdrawer and pursuer positions.

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Attachment security doesn't feel like sovereignty. It isn't about autonomy, but rather a kind of feeling-ok-with one's healthy dependency needs. With the tender assembly of healthy codependency. In a fundamental sense, attachment is about affect regulation. Or, more precisely, affective co-regulation. Because affect doesn't occur in a vacuum. And neither do we.

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A handful of unprotected examples of the SSP are available to view on the internet, but training and reliability certification require hundreds of hours with protected footage. New films require even well-trained attachment researchers many hours of close attention to reliably code. Just ten seconds of subtle movement, for example, might take them an hour to understand. As if life depended on it.

My own first encounter with training footage of the SSP left me utterly haunted. I spent the next eight years returning to this primal scene of attachment, getting saturated in the sound and image of departure and return, possession and dispossession. I watched the babies. I watched the (m)others. I watched the strangers. I watched the researchers watching the babies. I even watched the rooms and the toys. Over and over again: fort / da / fort / data / for social theory.

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Developmental attachment theory and the SSP have been subject to valuable critiques by anthropologists and feminist scholars as ethnocentric and essentialist in privileging the infant-mother dyad at the expense of other configurations of care (see Quinn and Mageo 2013; Vicedo 2013). This work illuminates important problems with the scientific device and the field of attachment research more broadly. Nonetheless, the empirical power of the SSP has allowed researchers to use patterns of infant-(m)other relating to reliably predict a variety of mental health effects throughout the lifespan (see Sroufe, et al. 2005). This predictive capacity has also led to an extensive instrumentalization of attachment research in family court as well as international public health and policy arenas (see Duschinsky 2021). Experimental replication is, of course, a kind of compulsive repetition. And a site of cultural reproduction. But, the field of attachment research is also a configuration of care: a pastoral apparatus involved in both subjection and subject-formation. Attachment-based caregiver sensitivity training, for example, seems to produce beneficial intergenerational effects. And it's not only the research subjects but also the researchers, who are animated by the apparatus. Which funds conferences, collaborations and public health interventions around the world. Affectively organizing everyday lives. The SSP is not only an empirical apparatus but also an aesthetic one: a transitional object, a mirror, a fort/da for the researchers themselves, forever configuring the triangle of the infant/(m)other/stranger in space and time, in a controlled, reliable and replicable manner. Remediating attachment.

Managing proximity isn't only the interest of every infant, after all, but the subject of every love song. And I'm willing to bet that your favorite film or novel has something to do with separation and reunion, and maybe a stranger. Something to do with searching or finding or living with loss. Scenes of attachment are also scenes of ambivalence, as Berlant notes, ***intimate, defined by desire, and overwhelming.*** Attachment induces a slippage between subject and object, between object and affect, between here and there, figure and form, violence and care.

We are beings in need of support, writes Butler, ***dependent, given over to an infrastructural world in order to act, requiring an emotional infrastructure to survive.***

<<<>>>

Our present, and any possible future, depend upon affective infrastructure, the way we build the code that carries us: human, nonhuman, robot, rock. Not equally perhaps, but urgently, and less inequitably. We are no longer the only ones that are code-dependent.

<<<>>>

Attachment dynamics are not oedipal or anti-oedipal, but preoedipal and posthuman. It's not just about how we hold and are held by each other, but about how we care for the more-than-human ecologies that care for us. We've each been encoded by 0's and 1's and all the ways we've been carried, supported, dragged, dropped or expanded in the world. We endlessly remediate our experience for, into, and through other objects. Both human and nonhuman alike. We are walking algorithms of care. And carelessness.

What I mean to say is, we are remediating attachment from the moment we arrive. And perhaps it's not a mommy issue or repetition compulsion that we've got, but a remediation drive. It's how we configure things out. And of course, it also configures us.

NORMATIVITIES

Introduction

Between "Welcome!" and "No entry!" – Affective Norms in Social Spaces

Sophie Nikoleit

Queer theory was predicted to last only for a short time and yet there has been a proliferation of writings on queer topics since the 2000s. This has to do with the increasing production, reception, and archiving possibilities in the digital age. In addition, thinking about feelings has long been a central concern for queer theorists: from the early days of Gay Liberation, queer and gender non-conforming people realized that eradicating homophobia in others could begin only when they examined their own fears, desires, and hopes. This is not just linked to political struggles but also to affective work. It functioned both as a challenge to the heteronormative world and as a project of self-empowerment and self-love, because the very acts of resistance and non-conformity to societal norms may generate discomfort and self-doubt. Queer theory places hope in this missing aspect, in the non-repetition, the shifting and reworking of norms.

Nevertheless, this hope must not be misunderstood as *sentimental*. This is constitutive for growing critiques of normative notions of sex and gender that queer theory strives to undertake: to address issues of sex and intimacy and to think differently about the privilege and struggle one embodies across multiple layers of power relations. Differentiated concepts of affect are therefore important in order to address a whole range of non-normative and minoritarian experiences. There are many kinds of examples of contemporary affect theory grounded in feminist, postcolonial or Marxist perspectives because when trying to understand and address situations of injustice, it is important to describe the ways in which everyday experience is structured by inequality and power relations. Affect theory succeeds best when combined with other types of analyses – legal, political, economic, linguistic, etc. However, without any attention to affect, it is very difficult to articulate and explain the ways in which oppression manifests in small scales: in everyday interactions, in gestures, in a tone of voice and so on. Affect theorists have attempted to solve this problem by developing rigorous and specific explanations for feeling structures.

So, while in early queer studies the ties to (hetero-)normativity were to be deconstructed, contemporary scholars focus on thematizing the conditions of involvements with "the normal." Thus, queer studies today take seriously the longings for normality or ordinariness and belonging.[1]

Attachments, belonging, longings for identity and normativity are relevant topics that also characterize the affective turn which is therefore significant as a current genesis because the theories of the affective amalgamate with other theoretical trends – like new materialism or postcolonial studies.

The gendered norms of emotion management and gender-specific modalities of affective expressions have been at the heart of ground-breaking studies in social theory. Yet, the reverse question of how the construction of gender norms is put to work through affect, has been discussed less intensely. The many heated debates concerning heteronormative social orders, the shaming of non-normative

positions and the use of outrage as a tool in struggles for diverging gender politics provide vivid examples of both the stabilizing and the transformative capacities of affect regarding gender norms. How can this affective life of gender norms be better understood? In what way can affect be understood as a means of gender normalization? What is the significance of the deeply entrenched normative dimensions of gender roles for affective experiences?

The socially constructed notion of gender-specific modalities of affective expressions, shaped by culture, social milieu, intertextualities, and history, have been often emphasized. Altogether, this analytical lens allows for a better comprehension of the ways in which gender norms shape individual affective experiences and emotional lives, and also the manner in which these norms are socially expressed and perceived. Moreover, it reveals gender inequalities in the attribution of distinct social roles to women and men within a gender-binary framework, informing also the political debates around it.

Affects play a key role in individual lives with regard to the performance of gender roles, sexual desires, and gendered interpersonal relations – with significant impact on how they support, re-negotiate, bend, or question norms in the private and the public spheres.

In the context of this book, the intention is to address the issue directly by questioning the role that affect plays in the (re) production of gender(s). How does it correlate with different sexual orientations and gender identities? How do individuals' affectivities influence the social processes of gender norm construction as well as their reproduction and/or transformation over time? Such questions tackle affect as a means of gender normalization and transformation as well as the significance of deeply entrenched normative dimensions of gender roles for affective experiences.

One of the most affective terms I can think of is that of *the home*. You can have bad or good feelings about it. Your favorite bar can be your living room. Regular meetings with other people can make

you feel safe and supported, and that can make you feel at home. Just being with a specific person can make you feel at home. But home is the place where you learn the first rules, how to behave or what the norms of your society are. Queer spaces are often referred to as home, marking the idea that such spaces are safe for queers. Homes can be the biggest sites of trauma but also places of love, intimacy and other types of affection. Who do you let into your home? Which homes are you not allowed to enter? In this sense, the three essays of this section approach the home as a conceptual model for the different micro and macro power relations, as well as the often difficult dynamics of solidarity and dissonance, empowerment and disempowerment. They not only ask how people are connected but also query the ways in which they are excluded.

Plewa's text searches for teleoaffective regimes and possibilities in Jane Fonda's aerobic videos for private homes in the 1980s. With the example of the favorite bar serving as a living room and for intimate practices such as tattooing or haircutting during parties, Mader's essay similarly explores how queer homes are produced through affective dynamics, while Schmechel thematizes queer fitness practices in queer groups. Both Schmechel's and Mader's essays describe spaces in which a queering of everyday norms becomes possible, each through a particular arsenal of strategies of affectations. In all three texts, affects serve as the bonds between different elements, between practices and bodies, and allow rooms to emerge as a queering space. Hence, various affects produce many (and) different agencies. For example, welcoming/warm affects can be connecting elements that create an atmosphere of respectful intimacy – maybe just like in a bright and shiny home?

In his essay, Moritz Plewa takes us back to the 1980s when Jane Fonda's videotapes of her aerobics classes conquered the living rooms of primarily white, heterosexual, middle-class women. These videos represented a break with previous gendered body ideals, as showing and exercising the muscular body had previously been reserved mainly for men, and that the traditionally "delicate" female

bodies were not trained in this way. On the other hand, this aerobic *movement* also produced the new slim, toned, and youthful female body ideals which remain in vogue today. As Plewa's text demonstrates, this reproduced gendered social norms and by no means radically challenged the gender dichotomy. Fonda's aerobic videos were an element for a so-called new hegemonic femininity, which clearly differed from the heteronormative standards that existed at the time. As such, many women experienced aerobics and its associated physical transformation as liberating and empowering, while others saw it as a reterritorialization of the female body in the domestic sphere. What is specific about this *movement,* however, is that it was not (only) "decreed from above" or a product of mere discursive interpellation or performative speech acts, but that it was the result of a teleoaffectively grounded process: Plewa argues for Schatzki's notion of teleoaffective formations, which unites configurations across diverse practices in addition to ordering their affective engagements. The essay contends that the approach allows for the consideration of large-scale configurations of practices and discourses, and therefore also allows for a re-examination of various concerns of consumer culture – including issues of cultural transmission, consumption norms, and motivational structures of consumption – from a practice-theoretical perspective. The living room as a private place becomes interesting here for its role in the emergence of new norms, but also because self-optimization is practiced "only for oneself," in contrast to most institutionalized modern sports, especially team sports. The videos encouraged the use of the comfort, security, and privacy of the home environment for the practice of aerobics: home, in a sense, had the potential to rearticulate the meaning of female body space, for example, around the television and VCR and/or in a shared or dedicated domestic space. Moreover, the new technology brought the potential to play with and appropriate itself, for example, by fast-forwarding, sampling, overdubbing. In such socio-technical micro-practices, embodied experiences, discourses, and material phenomena become affectively effective and simultaneously generated. Gender

and technology are thereby successively placed in opposition to each other. Gendering thus becomes graspable as a continuous, situated, and relational process of "being-with." Emotions and affects are articulated in this process as modes of action of power and difference, enabling engagement with everyday practices and their affective, material, and symbolic articulations, as well as the associated modes of gender production. Accordingly, through their affective effect on the users and the willingness to further test (one's own) limits, which is partly linked to this, regardless of normative guidelines, individuals are also accorded with agentive capacities under this framework.

Corinna Schmechel also takes us to the sports field. She observes how contemporary queer-feminist fitness groups negotiate the ambivalent role of body and beauty norms and the potential of sport for (dis)empowerment: working with one's own body has always been a concern of feminist and queer politics. Bodies are spaces for the expression of prevailing norms and ideals. Sexist, racist, ableist, and queer-phobic attitudes are adopted in the form of shame and self-hatred. Politics, whether body politics or queer politics, are always also politics of emotions, as it is always about who can legitimately feel certain emotions and what emotions are necessary in order to belong to a certain community. That also means that politics that claim to be emancipatory and empowering risk the establishment and reification of their own feeling rules. A central concept in Schmechel's essay is the notion of "body feeling." She uses the term to name emotional relationships to one's own body. A body feeling is not a specifically qualified emotion such as joy or sadness, but a shifting and flexible repertoire of feelings that encompasses a range of diverse affects and emotions. It is not just something very private, subjective, and individual, but necessarily social and political. Every self-body relationship, be it self-hatred and shame or self-love and pride, is thereby a product of social, cultural, and historical circumstances. Using Arlie Russel Hochschild's concept of feeling rules, she argues that body and beauty ideals can be described as such. As in childhood homes, rules are taught and learned here concerning

which feelings are attributed to certain situations (e.g. marriage, funeral) as well as to certain genders, because feeling rules are shaped by social power structures. Another important element in Schmechel's text is Ahmed's concept of "happy objects." This describes objects – even in the non-materialist sense – that are associated with a promise of happiness in hegemonic culture, for example marriage and children. We are induced by these promises to orient our way of life towards these objects in order to become happy. Schmechel also sees a fit, slim, and youthful body as such an object of happiness. A fit and healthy body is very much associated with the promise of having a positive self-body relationship and being successful and happy in our professional and personal lives. Hegemonic objects of happiness and rules of feeling thereby also determine alternative and queer social contexts and ways of thinking of individuals. Therefore, the empowering self-work of the transformation of one's own body-self-relationship can also be disempowering if the genuine dependence and attachment of all of us to hegemonic norms and standards is denied, as well as structuring opportunities to do well with one's own body. Queer (and) body-positivity politics must not mute the unhappy stories of failure, self-loathing, and shame, Schmechel argues, but be aware of who might be excluded from the promise of happiness or empowerment in sport, and become affect aliens to the empowered queer community.

In their essay, Esto Mader explores how agency is produced through practices in queer spaces. They point out that in order to understand the production of agency with regard to collectivity and normativities, one cannot ignore affects and feelings and their role in the empowering effect of queer spaces. A variety of feelings and affects in specific queer spaces in Berlin come to the fore, as Mader asks what the function is of affects within the production of agency. As mentioned earlier, the text starts with an example of homemaking practices within the queer community which are produced through affected dynamics and shared ideas and values – Mader uses the term imagination – of this space. It turns out that social norms also inscribe themselves into a space, and that these influence

the production of space, which means that changes in the scene's own norms are accompanied by changes in that space. If agency is defined by transformation processes that expand the life possibilities of subjects, here it emerges in the process of spatial production. Places are turned into queer spaces with their own aesthetic-affective logic, but also with an aesthetic "play" towards which the affects are directed.

Along with the queering of practices and spaces, new normativities emerge: queering space practices follow and produce intra-scene norms and, on this basis, produce spaces differently. This also means that exclusions happen. With the figure of the space invader, Mader argues that materializations of non-hegemonic norms in queer space do not only empower those who are present but also generate counter-discourses that resist the hegemonic norms of gender and body: what is not intelligible in hegemonic discourse is given a temporary position of power on the queer stage through the spatial arrangement and the resulting visibility. Hegemonic logics are crossed and affectively processed. Once again, this text also shows through body and beauty regimes that norms and affects are interconnected. Here, affects become charged by norms and norms are affectively transmitted. "Bodies feel norms, which are expressed in queer spaces as feelings of belonging." (quote is from Esto Mader's essay, see p.169) As a result, affects are not just ambiguous, but they can also be stabilizing and community building as much as transformative, in addition to being ordering and normative.

Again, speaking with the picture of the home, these three texts are crucial for furthering the field of affective research: they show how social structures and power relations are (re)produced in everyday practices via affects, emotions, and embodied knowledge as well as through the orientations associated with them. In this sense, they are suitable as modes of perception and cognition, and they likewise open up a queer-feminist potential for action. A deconstruction of the affective and embodied modes of power in micro-practices can thus provide impulses for concrete changes. In doing so, the

structural involvement of subjects in power relations becomes clear. Affects connect subjects not only with each other, but also with spaces, technology, and social relations, but in a non-deterministic and multiple way.

Changes in affect are also the result of multiple relationships between subjects: Subjects in these contributions literally *move* through various states of feeling and being that compel or prevent them from acting. At the same time, affects function like a (house) door which opens and closes the distance between subjects, bringing them closer together and distancing them from each other. Subjects are connected to the social through lived affective experiences that are situated in time and embedded in specific social contexts. Affect therefore constitutes and is constitutive of social relations; it forms the very material of relations between embodied subjects.

Tensions between individuals and collective(s) are important in theorizing the ways in which affect generates social change, or to put it in another way, while individual reactions and engagement are significant, here it is rather the *movement* of the members of/as a collective that makes it possible to be read as queer *movement*. Similarly, affect and emotions are individually experienced sensations, but they gather and bundle into a collective *movement* that engages with social structures and discourses: They are (nothing) personal.

I wish to close this text with the thought "that queer refuses to take a fixed form."[2] It is by far my favorite definition for the term queer. It points us to the crucial fact that even within queer homes and practices, the emergence of new, different norms, must be constantly questioned. As these three contributions show us: queer also means constantly *moving*, never standing still.

1 Here, I want to refer to the fact that the queer exploration of the every-day is at the heart of the feminist films which Johanna Renard analyzes in the previous section.

2 Kerstin Brandes and Sigrid Adorf, eds. "'Indem es sich weigert, eine feste Form anzunehmen' – Kunst, Sichtbarkeit, Queer Theory." *FKW // Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur,* vol. 45, 2008. www.fkw-journal.de/index.php/fkw/article/view/1118. Accessed 8 April 2021.

"Going for the burn." Teleoaffectivity and Gender in Jane Fonda's Aerobics Videos

Moritz Plewa

Sports cultures in organized modernity (ca. 1920-1970) were highly regulated, formally codified and achievement-oriented. The material and architectural arrangements where modern sports traditionally took place were mostly functionally designed "sportscapes" like stadiums, swimming pools and gyms.[1] These sportscapes constituted insular spaces with sport-specific multi-sensory stimuli and appeals, strictly separated from the everyday lifeworld and guaranteed a fixation of attention on the sport-specific sequences of movement.[2] This demarcation correlated typically with a high level of organization of movement cultures in sports clubs. Formal standards to ensure performance measurements and an orientation towards competitiveness and benchmarking along abstract quantitative criteria were key features of the modern sport regime. First and foremost, this regime was a male preserve, or more precisely, a preserve of heterosexual masculinity, that either excluded women

entirely (especially from team sports) or divided its subjects into gendered performance categories.

Having its genealogical roots in the late 19th century, modern sports were strongly shaped by a dualistic metaphysics of gender that attributed different natures, preferences and abilities to the genders[3] and proclaimed a "delicate" female nature and a "myth of female frailty," that "became a defining feature of ideas about women, gender and physical activity" in general.[4] The highly physical nature of sports facilitated a prioritization of gender differences, that, just like other differentiating categories such as ethnicity for instance, directly inhere in the human body and are practically interpreted as invariable over time.[5] The differentiation of humans according to performance, based on ordinal scales that is constitutive of modern sports, always interfered with the gender dichotomy. This model is still in existence in traditional sports and particularly in professional sports. However, while organized modern sports practices were strongly marked by functionality and techniques of abstract benchmarking, in late modernity, i.e. around the 1980s, new sportive leisure practices emerged, that not only pluralized and diversified the sports cultures in western societies but generated a different form of sports. These "unconventional" sports and bodily movement practices are informally organized and tend to emphasize the aspects of lived experience of the self as well as the expressivity and virtuosity of bodily movements themselves. The involved artifacts, which include the sports gear as well as the spaces where these sportive practices take place are often stripped of their former functionality and/or are recoded. To a large extent, the increase of women in the field of leisure sports activities was due to the fitness boom of the 1970s and 1980s and the emergence of these informal sports cultures evolved mainly outside the hierarchically ordered and male-dominated structures of organized sport.

17 July 2018, 19:11. He wrote: Dear A. I've had the opportunity today to think over our exchanges from last night. Hard as it is for me, it is only fair that I tell you that I'm struggling to return your affections. I don't seem to know why, or perhaps I do. Or perhaps because a declaration as grand as yours demands a clear answer and not just a 'let's see how it goes!' In writing the letter, you did what you thought was right for you (and I wouldn't change that; you already know it had moved me to tears) but now I must do the same for myself. I can imagine my message being hurtful but it would be disrespectful of your feelings if I were to play along for the time being. In order to be fully truthful to the situation, I would have to decline the beautiful, rather, grand offer you have made in the letter. I'm sorry, dear A. I wish I had a kinder if not better response. We can meet and discuss this in person if you like but wasn't sure if you had wanted to see me or preferred to hear this in person. There's no ideal setting for such a thing of course.

18 July 2018, 12:37. [A responds in 396 words]

19 July 2018, 12:20. He wrote back: Matters of the heart as you know well are best not argued and counter-argued. So, A, I'd say just two things in response to your careful deliberations. One, that I'm sorry if I came across as assuming to know your feelings. I don't. What I meant was that my response has to do with the way I have perceived those feelings; how I came to view myself in relation to its intensities; what I felt in wake of its

pressures and how little space I was left with after all. I, too, can see the impulse in my reaction. And two, more important I guess: I do not believe you have acted entirely independent of what I have also felt and conveyed in the past. You are right, I have found our earlier engagements special and sticky. You might be more advanced in the journey but it hasn't been one-sided, I know this much. That we were not able to recreate it is my loss too. I hope you will believe that. Affected as I am these days, I will remain grateful for what you brought and for the duration it worked.

Jane Fonda's aerobics

Within this transformation of body and bodily movement cultures, Jane Fonda's aerobics videos played a pioneering role in many regards. These aerobics videos are a unique historical source for the analysis of "doing gender" as well as for the retracing of currently dominant body and movement cultures. Jane Fonda released her first exercise video on VHS called *Jane Fonda's Workout* in 1982, which was the first of its kind. Subsequently, she released 23 further aerobics videos selling 17 million copies in total. Fonda can probably be called the first late modern celebrity fitness guru. Her popularity was so large and the demand for her exercise videos so high that it significantly fueled the incorporation of a new media device into middle-class domestic spaces. While in the early 1980s, the Videocassette Recorder (VCR) was still a rare luxury appliance, by the 1990s, it had become a typical entertainment device in the American middle-class household. Fonda's videos were flanked by top-selling guidebooks in which she offered a sort of moral lifestyle counseling for middle-class women. This counseling included nutritional and training advice best condensed in the message that "exercise teaches you the pleasure of discipline," one that was embodied by Fonda herself.[6] The success of the aerobics movement initiated by Fonda was not least due to a crossing of the flourishing genre of self-improvement literature within the traditional medium of the book and the new media-technological devices of the videotape/VCR. The latter not only fundamentally changed the practice of exercising, but functioned as a "belt of transition" of the entire star and media culture by reconfiguring the "boundaries of awe" between celebrities and fans as well as between the sporting celebrities and the consumers of mass media.[7] Unlike traditional media formats, the aerobics videos provided the practitioners with the idea of working out *with* the celebrity at home and the idea of becoming alike. It created the illusion of reducing the distance between the sporting public figure (who also served as a sex symbol) by inviting the consumers into the celebrity's

everyday workout routine or vice versa. Rather than interpreting the moving images on the screen as a copy of the real, the viewers were invited to immerse themselves by imitating the choreography on the tape and to strive to alter their appearance to resemble their model.[8] Instead of being passive, merely admiring consumers, the home practitioners of aerobics were trained in a form of mediated "kinesthetic sympathy."[9] In this sense, the VCR and its practical involvement in late modern "technologies of the self,"[10] I argue, can be seen as a precursor of today's social media and influencer culture. Prior to VCR technology, the media consumer was limited in her choices and consumption habits by the schedule of broadcast and cable programming on television or on the radio. The use of VCR technology opened up a great amount of temporal flexibility and disclosed a variety of degrees of self-determination. It made it possible to individually determine the time of the training and to integrate the workouts into one's daily routine at home.[11] Until then, aerobics classes were typically held at a gym under the supervision of an instructor. The Video Cassette Recorder and Fonda's videos allowed the consumer to repeat certain exercises at will, to stop the video in order to take a break or to quit at one's own discretion without feeling subjected to the critical gaze of others. The videos encouraged the use of comfort, security and privacy of the domestic environment for practicing aerobics: "'Doing Jane' at home allowed to re-articulate the meaning of female body space around the television and video recorder and/or in a shared or dedicated home space where the focus was on learning to be fit through instruction from exercise manuals."[12] Furthermore, Jane Fonda's aerobics tapes along with the VCR technology disclosed the potential of bricolage within the material arrangement of the typical middle-class home: it was possible to fast-forward videos over movements, to create different individual soundtracks and to add them to the moving images, etc.

In contrast to most institutionalized modern sports, especially team sports, it was not mandatory or even common to wear uniform jerseys while practicing aerobics. Yet, in a short amount of

time, easily distinguishable aerobics outfits emerged, and a typical aerobics style took shape, becoming trendy. It was marked by an informal and casual aesthetics that departed from the aesthetics of functional wear characteristic of formally organized modern sports. Here again, the brand Jane Fonda was a trendsetter. The cover photo of her first aerobics tape, released in 1982, is already marked by some features that became distinctive for female aerobics outfits for the next decade: bright colors that signified self-confidence, tight-fitting clothes, striped leotards, leg warmers, tights and accessories like rainbow headbands, voluminous sweatbands, belts that highlight the leanness and curves of the fit female body as well as earrings and the obligatory smile. Moreover, the photographic snapshot aesthetics of the covers suggested that aerobics could be practiced ad-lib, "along the way" with fun. Certain accessories of the outfits subsequently were "threading through" the practice bundle of aerobics and integrated into everyday outfits indicating the belonging to a community of aerobic practitioners, i.e. of healthy, trendy and fit people. The aerobics outfit left space for aesthetic playfulness but simultaneously introduced the imperative to create one's own distinctive style for training. It might be difficult to relate to this from our current point of view, but it was exactly the excess of meaning signified by these artifacts that lead to a reconfiguration of the still highly gendered material arrangement of the domestic space in particular, and to the transformation of sportive practices in general. At the same time, Fonda's aerobics processed discursive elements of medical and health science typical of modern sports. They equated a physically active lifestyle with the improvement of health, while also embracing well-being and physical attractiveness in accordance with hegemonic beauty ideals. In doing so, Fonda inserted her aerobics workouts into more general trends within the fitness boom of the 1980s. It was within this fitness movement, that leading figures emerged who increasingly declared themselves as experts for the competent surveillance and promotion of bodily health of the population, locating themselves within biopolitical discourses which fell outside of official governmental institutions.

The workouts integrated techniques and methods from classical, scientific sports training theory like multi-intensity systems, the abstract fragmentation of the body in isolated muscle groups and target zones. Yet, these techniques and methods were not teleologically oriented towards quantifiable performance progression, as is typical for modern sports, but rather towards looks, appearance and sexual attraction. Thus, the exercises were explicitly framed and gendered, the body techniques put in gendered formats by identifying allegedly typical female body's "problem areas" and targeting women to use aerobics as a method of fat burning and weight loss, thereby pathologizing the overweight condition, while neglecting the risk of being underweight.[13] The popular slogans that framed Fonda's workout videos of the early 1980s like "going for the burn" or "no pain no gain" likewise resembled tropes of classic modern sports which were originally closely tied to "culturally exalted" forms of male subjectivity.[14] Yet, they were repositioned in a new practical as well as discursive context, and thereby evolved different meanings and incorporated different teleoaffective structures. Like traditional modern sports, aerobics was aimed at the pleasures of deferred gratification, the increase and decrease of psychosomatic tension, and becoming different on a continuum of perfectibility, but unlike traditional sport, it was not teleoaffectively tuned towards winning, breaking records or numeric benchmarking.

Although not only women practiced aerobics, and even though Fonda assembled more or less mixed-gender groups in her videos and books, the female body was put explicitly at the center of a self-disciplined lifestyle as a means to a happy, successful and fulfilling life. It is the active toning of the external, that is, the visible surface of the body that promises satisfaction, well-being and happy heterosexual relationships once the adequate shape and tone of the body is achieved.[15] Thus, the "aerobic body,"[16] its appearance and shape, the incorporated skill as well as the accessories and outfits migrate from the practice bundle of aerobics to other contexts. In this manner, aerobics could form an entire lifestyle. The key to a fulfilled life, to a desirable existence, to the "truth of the

self" is not sought "within" the subject, neither in its consciousness or personal integrity as was typical for the former modern subject cultures and their introspective technologies of the self, like reading and self-reflection. Instead, as a result of the active handling of visual media technologies and the abundance of circulating images, late modern subjectivity is much more oriented towards the interpretation, codification and molding of surfaces. The body and its appearance increasingly serve as a personal business card of the late modern self.[17] Jane Fonda's aerobics movement was a symptom and accelerator of this general transformation that applied to white, heterosexual, middle-class femininity in particular. It was the style of the often highly sexualized movements like hip-swiveling or the pelvic thrust as well as the slim, firm and contoured body images along with the aesthetic play towards which affects were directed. The appearance while and through practicing aerobics became the "sign of feel, so if you look good you must feel good."[18]

Theorizing modern sports cultures

As I outlined at the beginning of this essay, historically, the regime of modern sports has been predominantly a "male preserve."[19] Up until the second half of the 20th century, sporting activity in modern Western societies was primarily a celebration of "meritocratic manliness." The sporting body techniques targeted class-specific regulatory ideals of gender-specific body shape and tone, that discounted ambiguity at all costs.[20] Through processes of scientification, standardization and rationalization, Western modernity pursued a project of purification of premodern popular movement cultures. The (male) athletic body was conceptualized within and through modern sportive practices as the epitome of "progressive" industrial modernity and became a sign of disciplined mastery of mind over body and of virtuous self-denial.[21] Following Erving Goffman, one could even argue, that sport is the only field within post-heroic societies, where traditional masculinity is still unsurpassed: "sports are the only expression of male human

nature – an arrangement specifically designed to allow males to manifest the qualities claimed as basic to them: strengths of various kinds, stamina, endurance, and the like."[22] Admittedly, this view on the history of Western sporting culture and its arrangement of genders is still valid in many regards. The perception of many sports as a social field of gender segregation and disambiguation in which the late modern self is interpellated to enact its bodily movements and affective expressions in modalities that follow and materialize traditional gender norms continues to be widespread. However, the case of Jane Fonda shows in exemplary fashion, that this model is too schematic to comprehend the dynamics of late modern bodily movement cultures. Masculine athleticism is by all means still the cultural "gold standard" of desirable physicalness in sports culture.[23] This is especially true in the realm of professional sport where a great effort is made to reproduce the polarization of gender within a dominant "heteronormative matrix" and to keep the boundary between the genders as stable and clean as possible.[24] However, this is not necessarily the case in the expanding field of popular leisure sports activities.

In late modern societies, sporting cultures function increasingly as specialized branches of the entertainment and experience economy. Particularly in the post-1980s fitness culture, but also in sportive subcultures of late modernity, discipline is discursively transformed from constraint to liberation. Within this process, new types of bodily movement emerge(d), that appear more explicitly as style cultures, transcending at least some "classic" features of modern sports that served as "flagships" of traditional (heroic) masculinity.[25] Bodily movement practices in late modernity do not necessarily adopt the logic and teloi of classical modern sport anymore (faster, better, stronger) but function more explicitly as forms of cultural expression. Sports cultures or, more precisely, late modern bodily movement cultures in particular, now play an integral role in the production of desire and the construction of (culturally potent) experiences of emancipatory empowerment and self-fulfillment which, to a certain degree, challenge the purified

gender binary of the classic modern sport regime.

In sport studies, the perspective delineated briefly above is still in vogue though. With its focus on processes and methods of quantification and rationalization, purification (of gender), performance enhancement, benchmarking and personal self-optimization, however, it not only lacks the dimension of modern sports as a specific form of aesthetic (self-)experience (for example the lived experience of self-transcendence and transgression), that was inherent to modern sports from the beginning.[26] What is more, it does not take into account the fuzziness and ambivalences that are integral, particularly for late modern bodily movement cultures, to gender and affect. As convincing and tempting as a perspective on (late) modern sports that conceives of it as a biopolitical playing field, in which modern technologies of surveillance and discipline condense, this interpretation still narrows the perspective in a way that makes it difficult to think of fitness and sports cultures other than as practice fields where subjects are trained in a conformist, methodical conduct of everyday life. This interpretation also goes along with the neglect of affect, or rather with the traditional notion of modernization that equates modern culture with a process of rationalization and neutralization of affect. Furthermore, it unwittingly reifies the idea of stability and fixity of gender arrangements within the heteronormative matrix itself.

In order to avoid this disciplinary dead-end of theorizing sports cultures, I will now turn to a short outline of practice theory that opens up an alternative view that is more sensitive to affect and the (in)stabilities of gender arrangements. This will allow me to analyze what I will call teleoaffectivity and thus the specific form of normativity in Fonda's aerobics.

A praxeological take on affect and gender

Praxeological approaches share a common interest in the everyday lifeworld. Practice theories claim to offer a socio-theoretical vocabulary well-positioned to analyze the social in its empirical

manifoldness, without falling into the common traps of classic sociological theory. By stressing the relationality, corporeality, materiality and processuality of the social world and moving towards the empirical, they find themselves in an elective affinity with Actor-Network-Theories and pragmatist approaches to the social. They share the assumption that social order emerges via the interplay of things, artifacts, cultural codes and human bodies. They usually stand for a posthumanist notion of distributed agency that is launched against classical sociological theories of social action that associate human action with or deduce it from intentionality, reflexivity and/or an inner subjective core.[27] More importantly even, practice theories generally reject the metaphysical idea of positioning the source of agency within the inner mental sphere of the human subject, i.e. they renounce the notion of *stable* "inner" properties of the individual (like "presocial" interests, needs, desires) as an explanatory source of action.

In addition to a reevaluation of (media) technologies and an emphasis on their role within processes of subjectification in modernity, practice theories engage in a widening of the spectrum of elements that count as "social."[28] While the grand sociological narratives of modernity – modernization, division of labor, (normative) rationalization, functional differentiation, and so forth – tended to neglect the material (artifacts, things) and corporeal dimension of the social, practice theories advocate for their consideration. However, even in this respect, socio-ontological abstinence is necessary. Every social practice involves (and produces!) things, artifacts, material arrangements and infrastructures, a (more or less) practice-competent human body in general and, more specifically, a bodily hexis as well as sets of incorporated dispositions in Pierre Bourdieu's sense. Every social practice also involves human bodies in some way and therefore requires the fabrication of "docile bodies" (Foucault).[29] But to which degree and in what way exactly the human body is involved varies highly with different practice bundles. It is therefore heuristically beneficial to venture another micro-sociological step towards socio-ontological thinning and to

distinguish different *degrees of practical involvement* of the body. After all, a pornographic film shooting usually requires more (explicit and spectacular) human bodily involvement than listening to a scientific talk on Youtube.[30] Besides differentiating between diverging *levels of activity* with regards to the constituents of a practice, we should be able to locate varying practices on a *continuum of explicitness* in relation to the elements and meanings involved.[31] Different social practices are not only held together by commonly shared tacit knowledge, but they also vary strongly by the degree to which specific incorporated skills and know-how are made explicit. What I mean by the different degrees of explicitness does not necessarily refer to explicit norms, for example to codified rules in written form, but rather to the regularity of making something explicit within particular social practices themselves. Sportive and fitness practices, for instance, precisely stand out due to the high degree to which they make incorporated knowledge explicit as (reflexive) body techniques.[32] In fact, the high level of explicitly performed, incorporated knowledge is a distinctive feature of sport and bodily movement cultures in general, one which makes them recognizable as such in the first place. It even distinguishes late modern bodily movement cultures which are defined by the fact that they often lack any codifiable rules.

The praxeological endeavor tries to provide a vocabulary that operates as an analytical framework for the research of the overlap, crossings, creations, but also invalidations of cultural distinctions. This includes an inquiry of the "classifications of the classifiers"[33] that can be practically set contingent (or not), in other words: they are practically reflected (and this means at this point: not in the ivory tower of social scientists) as not necessary but not impossible. In fact, it is important to emphasize that the contingent nature of conventionalized social differentiation in the everyday lifeworld – old/young, attractive/unattractive, man/woman, ascriptions of ethnicity etc. – does not only mean that they are socially fabricated (socially constructed in a vulgar sense). Culturally prevalent classifications of humans are not only bound to specific sociohistorical

contexts and can be constantly contested but their social composition also implies that they can be practically omitted, transformed or removed in practice. Contrary to recent trends in the social sciences and cultural studies that tend to pick out one of the countless existing categorizations in order to generalize them, I would advocate a praxeological research design that stays sensitive to the multiplicity and entanglement of differentiation and classifications made in different bundles of practice. This, however, requires a heuristic that operates as a sensorium for processes of *doing* differences and social classifications, as well as for their *undoings*.[34]

What does this mean with regard to gender and the question of how to deal praxeologically with gender and affect? Gender differences in particular have been strongly binarized, naturalized and culturally immunized against any form of ambiguity throughout the modern history of Western societies. As Judith Butler has shown, these conventionalized discursive practices of gender ascriptions tied to sex do not only result in a naturalization of the binary gender distinction on the level of discourse (what is thinkable/expressible in a certain context and manner, and what is not). In addition, the constant practice of binary gender attribution within the culturally dominant discourse is performative in the sense that it predefines the spectra of legitimate bodily existence. According to Butler, it is through the process of repetitive performances of gendered movements, speech acts, comportments and gestures, that gendered "corporeal styles"[35] are (re)produced. Within the process of performative materialization, gendered bodily forms "stabilize […] over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter."[36] It is important to highlight though, that these stabilizations are always temporary and precarious to some degree precisely because they are objects and products of cultural struggles about what forms of gendered subjectivity count as desirable and worthwhile. The "roots" of gendered subjectivities, including what we call bodily matters and styles, are not to be found in the "identitarian core" of an individual or of a group, that unfolds more or less freely. They are the product of the individual's interwovenness in

culturally contested practices that involve possibly gendered affective attunements. Subjectivity within this praxeological framework is, as I already indicated, radically decentered. The subject appears as an ever hybrid practitioner, an intersection or crossing point of more or less stable social practices.[37] Thus, the human subject in practice theory is not defined by any inner properties but is conceived as a crossing point of practices. What we used to call individuality is, from a praxeological point of view (incorporating a concept of Georg Simmel), a particular combination of practical skills, a "unique crossing point of practices, of bodily and mental routines."[38] Subjectivity in praxeological terms is a cluster of practically trained and socialized dispositions that allow the subject to engage more or less competently in different practices. Social order, patterns of regulated behavior and action – and thus also hegemonic forms of gendered subjectivity (subject cultures) – are always more or less precarious and contested consolidations/solidifications. The different concrete modi operandi and mechanisms of these (de) stabilizations, then, are the objects of praxeological research.[39] To retrace the power relations and conflicts that arise in concrete practical contexts is its ambition.

Different practices not only require diverse skills and competences, as well as varying types of affectively tuned individuals willing and able to participate but also involve the different entities that constitute a social practice to different degrees. (Media) technological devices and artifacts are constitutive parts of the social "sites where a given practice is to take place."[40] Hence, it is necessary to detect and distinguish what is empirically made relevant in the flow of practices at what time and place and under which circumstances. This challenge includes a differentiation between distinctions that are made relevant and meaningful in a given social practice and those that are made irrelevant. Or, to put it in Gregory Bateson's terms: it is about the detection of "differences that make a difference" in a particular practice bundle.[41] What latent cultural codes and distinctions are actualized in certain practice bundles and in relation to what possible distinctions is indifference practically

cultivated? Hence, with respect to gender the inquiring attitude should be: where is gender made practically relevant, to which degree of explicitness and how does the distinction overlap or intersect with other significations? The reason for this heuristic caution lies in the necessity to avoid the trap of theoretically presuming the permanence, consistency and omni-relevance of a given classification and signifying practice and thereby reifying it, thus mimicking a dominant-oppressive cognitive style.[42]

What is the theoretical position of affect in this praxeological setting? From a praxeological perspective, affects are genuinely social, they are socially fabricated in social practices. Hence, they are not subjective phenomena, nor interior properties of the human subject. Rather, they are conceptualized as relations with different grades of intensity that evade the classic inside (individual)/outside (society) dichotomy. They attach, or "stick"[43] to some individuals and not to others, due to different moldings of affective receptivity that are at least in some part the product of the individual's practical biography, i.e. the history of practices the individual participated in. The transformation and stabilization of gendered subject cultures and their correlating affects are closely tied to discursive practices and media technological artifacts like movies, television and novels, but also to scientific and popular scientific discourses where affect-displaying codes are represented. What becomes desirable and attractive within a hegemonic subject culture is therefore only understandable within a culturally and historically specific system of meaning and signification as well as its corresponding media technological condition.[44] Every social practice is affectively tuned in a particular way and has "a built-in affective dimension."[45] Consequently within every social practice, the synchronizations of affected and affecting human and non-human bodies take place. Yet, the affective dimension is not reducible to pure relationality or the intensity of associations either. In fact, social practices also contain particular inherent teleologies that are interlinked with specific moldings of affect. In a way, their teleologies are affectively grounded. This is not to say that social practices are strictly

goal-oriented in a utilitarian sense. Practices and their affects are not necessarily directed to predefined outputs, but they often provide the practitioners with teloi and orientations of affects that are open to modification in practice. Theodore Schatzki's concept of teleoaffectivity, of "teleoaffective structures" takes this interlinkage of practical directedness and affect into account. Schatzki defines teleoaffective structures as a "range of normativized and hierarchically ordered ends, and tasks, to varying degrees allied with normativized emotions and even moods."[46] Hence, the arrangement of a social practice likewise constitutes a particular affective arrangement – an orchestration of affective relations, so to speak. By participating in a social practice, the subjects are practically trained to attune affectively with the processed meanings and discourses, the involved artifacts and their affordances, typical interior designs or outdoor settings, dominating fashion trends within a given practice community et cetera. From a praxeological perspective, affects are teleologically orchestrated within particular social practices and the practitioners are trained in specific – often gendered – affective receptivities proper to certain practice bundles.

Late modern normativity and Jane Fonda's aerobics

Returning to Fonda, this praxeological understanding of affect can throw into sharper relief the specific late modern forms of gender normativity embodied in her influential videos. The cultivation and display of a muscular female body clearly signaled a discontinuity with the culturally dominant gendered body ideal, one which attributed strength and visible musculature almost exclusively to men. Within this traditional gender regime, the delicate feminine body was not supposed to be trained. This changed increasingly over the course of late modernity, not least due to the aerobics movement that targeted mostly middle-class women and produced a female body ideal characterized by muscular strength, slenderness, tightness and eternal youthfulness simultaneously. Viewed from a feminist standpoint, Fonda's aerobic videos and self-help

books were an ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, aerobics represented a break with traditional ascriptions like the "natural weakness" of women. On the other hand, it reproduced gendered social norms and in no way radically questioned the dichotomic gender order. The aerobic body that Jane Fonda represented was "a hybrid of the prevailing delicate woman's body and a body displaying strength and regular training in the form of muscles."[47] Fonda's aerobic videos were a crucial element in the fabrication of a new hegemonic femininity, that differed significantly from the given heteronormative standards at that time. Thus, while many women experienced aerobics and the correlating bodily transformation as liberating and as empowering, others, in turn, perceived it as a reterritorialization of female bodies within the domestic space that represented a continuity of instilling feelings of shame and aesthetic inferiority.[48] Aerobics challenged the sexist paternalistic idealization of female passivity and weakness; on the other hand, it (re-)produced oppressive beauty ideals. A new form of femininity was literally built up via the "differential materialization of bodies"[49] while *undoing* certain elements of former middle-class femininity at the same time. Aerobics manifested a new form of "intense femininity" on the spectrum of gender constructions, that was not "decreed from above," nor a product of mere discursive interpellation or performative speech acts, but which was the result of a process of several practical shiftings, rearrangements, and hybridizations of formerly stabilized and sedimented elements that were teleoaffectively grounded. Aerobics was about becoming different – about becoming different within the heteronormative gender matrix, however. It allowed for a process of self-transformation that, in the case of Jane Fonda's aerobics, remained located squarely within the heteronormative gender matrix.

1 John Bale. *Changing Geographies: Sportscapes*. Geographical Association, 2000. The term "organized modernity" for the historical period ca. 1920-1970 goes back to Peter Wagner. *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline*, Routledge 1993.

2 Thomas Alkemeyer. "Bewegung und Gesellschaft. Zur 'Verkörperung' des Sozialen und zur Formung des Selbst in Sport und populärer Kultur." *Bewegung. Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaftliche Konzepte*, edited by Gabriele Klein, transcript, 2004, pp. 43-78, here p. 59.

3 Nancy Theberge. "Gender and Sport." *Handbook of Sport Studies*, edited by Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning, Sage, 2000, pp. 322-333.

4 Jennifer Hargreaves. *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*. Routledge, 1994, p. 322.

5 Stefan Hirschauer. "Undoing Differences. Die Kontingenz sozialer Zugehörigkeiten." *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2014, pp. 170-191, p. 171.

6 Melanie Woitas. "'Exercise Teaches You the Pleasure of Discipline'. The Female Body in Jane Fonda's Aerobics Videos." *Historical Social Research*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2018, pp. 148-164.

7 Margaret MacNeill. "Sex, Lies, and Videotape: The Political and Cultural Economics of Celebrity Fitness Videos." *Sport and Postmodern Times*, edited by Geneviéve Rail, SUNY Press 1998, pp. 163-184, pp. 163-164.

8 Barry Glassner. "Fitness and the Postmodern Self." *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1989, pp.180-191, p. 184.

9 Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. Basic Books, 1973, p. 423.

10 Michel Foucault. "Technologies of the Self." *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, edited by Luther Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick Hutton, Massachusetts University Press, 1988, pp. 16-49.

11 Melanie Woitas. "'Exercise Teaches You the Pleasure of Discipline'," p. 151.

12 Louise Mansfield. "'Sexercise': Working Out Heterosexuality in Jane Fonda's Fitness Books." *Leisure Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2011, pp. 235-277, p. 250.

13 Margaret MacNeill. "Sex, Lies, and Videotape," p. 176.

14 R.W. Connell. *Masculinities*. Polity Press, 1995, p. 77.

15 Margaret MacNeill. "Sex, Lies, and Videotape," p. 177.

16 Pirkko Markula. "Firm but Shapely, Fit but Sexy, Strong but Thin. The Postmodern Aerobicizing Female Bodies." *Contemporary Issues in Sociology of Sport*, edited by Andrew Yiannakis and Merril Melnich, Illinois University Press, 2001, pp. 237-58, p. 240.

17 Gabriele Klein. "Soziologie des Körpers." *Handbuch spezielle Soziologien*, edited by Georg Kneer and Marcus Schroer, VS Verlag, 2010, pp. 457-473.

18 Margaret Carlisle Duncan. "The Politics of Women's Body Images and Practices: Foucault, the Panopticon, and Shape Magazine." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1994, pp. 48-65, p. 57.

19 Eric Dunning. *Sport Matters. Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence and Civilization*. Routledge, 1999, see especially pp. 219-236.

20 Pierre Bourdieu. "Sport and Social Class." *Social Science Information*, vol. 17, no. 6, 1978, pp. 819-840.

21 John Hargreaves. *Sport, Power and Culture*. Polity Press, 1986.

22 Erving Goffman. "The Arrangement between the Sexes." *Theory & Society*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1977, pp. 301-331; p. 322.

23 Philipp Sarasin. *Reizbare Maschinen. Eine Geschichte des Körpers 1765-1914*. Suhrkamp, 2001, p. 27.

24 Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990; Marion Müller. "Unvergleichbarkeitskonstruktionen im Sport. Von Frauen mit Hyperandrogenismus und Männern mit Carbonprothesen." *Un/Doing Differences. Praktiken der Humandifferenzierung*, edited by Stefan Hirschauer, Velbrück, 2017, pp. 205-233.

25 Concerning the emergence of new sporting practices as style cultures in late modernity see: Martin Stern. *Stil-Kulturen. Performative Konstellationen von Technik, Spiel und Risiko in neuen Sportpraktiken*. transcript, 2010.

26 Anne Fleig. *Körperkultur und Moderne. Robert Musils Ästhetik des Sports*. De Gruyter, 2008; see especially pp. 28-84.

27 Hilmar Schäfer. *Die Instabilität der Praxis. Reproduktion und Transformation des Sozialen in der Praxistheorie*. Velbrück, 2013.

28 Andreas Reckwitz. "Medientransformation und Subjekttransformation." *Unscharfe Grenzen. Perspektiven der Kultursoziologie*. transcript, 2008, pp. 159-176.

29 Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Pantheon, 1995, pp. 135-169.

30 Stefan Hirschauer. "Verhalten, Handeln, Interagieren. Zu den mikrosoziologischen Grundlagen der Praxistheorie." *Praxistheorie. Ein soziologisches Forschungsprogramm*, edited by Hilmar Schäfer, transcript, 2016, pp. 45-70; p. 51. In his reconstruction of the recent debates within and on sociological practice theory, Passoth has convincingly shown, that the latest history of praxeological theorizing can be characterized as a process that has led towards a 'thinning' of the vocabulary. Jan-Hendrik Passoth. *Soziologie der Umstände. Entwurf einer symmetrischen Praxistheorie*. transcript, forthcoming.

31 Stefan Hirschauer, "Verhalten, Handeln, Interagieren," p. 57.

32 Nick Crossley. "Reflexive Body Techniques. On Body Modification and Maintenance." *Body & Society*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2005, pp. 1-35.

Warum machen wir die Augen zu? The Sufi sheikh's son repeats the question in the exact terms he had put to him. "Why do we close our eyes?" He has had to think of how to feel that what evades the eye each time as part of his Berlin fieldwork, he has participated in the Sufi ritual of godly remembrance (*Zikr*) with his eyes closed. Or, each time his interlocutors, all post-migrant Turkish-German men, have reminded him that there are figures in the circle – saints, spirits, djinns, angels – that he cannot see. "At some point you lose it, you begin to scream, you can't control yourself! And it's better for you, if others don't see. Because that's a situation between you and Allah, why should anyone see that? And the most important thing is… when Zikr has begun to take its course, and this spiritual feeling is so strong, it's possible that one, that a few, see things which one normally doesn't see. What, for example, a saint normally sees. He sees angels! he sees people who have lived 500 years ago! Saints, they are there and they do zikr with us."[3] He has struggled to make sense of that what is not ordinarily visible in the mosque or untactfully given to the anthropologist but he also knows that despite his not seeing the saints in the circle invisibility cannot be proof of a thing's absence. Invisibility can also be "simply the presence of things that were not readily visible to our eyes, not because they were not present, but because they were no longer valued by the world in which we lived."[4] Over the years, what he has come to see though is how Sufi encounters in the contemporary with

transtemporally moving saints in Berlin upset and queer the dominant terms of publicness in the city; or, how and why visibility is not always more political than its counterpart. In his cross musings on religious feeling, queer affect and migration in the city, he is often led to wonder if in a place like Berlin, proverbially godless and insufficiently sacralized as it is, Muslim saints are like their followers, migrants of some manner, present for some, invisible to most. They do not roam around visibly neither are their figures anchored in the city's tomb shrines. Akin to migrant workers of nightshifts or the *Gastarbeiters* he recalls from Aras Ören's poem, saintly figures, he thinks, likewise suspended between folds of empty and filled time slither sheepishly in the urban, swiftly, "*mit schnellen Schritten / den Kopf tief zwischen den Schultern.*"[5] Whether removed from its rhythms or lost to the ordinary consciousness of the city, they are made present only through effortful performances of religious remembrance, if not durable outside ritual, barely intelligible in the city save to those who let themselves be affected by way of feeling.

3 Excerpt from author's field interview in Berlin, 2016. For more, see Omar Kasmani. "Feeling Sufis: An Essay on Intimate Religion in Berlin." *Urban Religious Events: Public Spirituality in Contested Spaces,* edited by Bramadat et al., Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, pp. 189-202.

4 Ann Armbrecht. *Thin Places: A Pilgrimage Home.* Columbia University Press, 2009, p. 215.

5 Aras Ören. *Was will Niyazi in der Naunynstraße.* Rotbuch Verlag, West-Berlin, 1973, p. 5.

33 Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge, 1984.

34 Stefan Hirschauer. "Undoing Differences," pp. 170-191.

35 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 139.

36 Judith Butler. *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* Routledge, 1993, p. 10.

37 Andreas Reckwitz. "Toward a Theory of Social Practices. A Development in Culturalist Theorizing." *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2002, pp. 243-263, p. 256.

38 Ibid.

39 Hilmar Schäfer. *Die Instabilität der Praxis. Reproduktion und Transformation des Sozialen in der Praxistheorie*. Velbrück, 2013, p. 51.

40 Theodore Schatzki. *Social Practices. A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 189.

41 Gregory Bateson. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Chandler, 1972, p. 276.

42 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 13.

43 Sara Ahmed. "Introduction: Feel Your Way." *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Duke University Press, 2004, p. 1-16.

44 Andreas Reckwitz. "Practices and their Affects." *The Nexus of Practices. Connections, Constellations, Practitioners*, edited by Allison Hui, Theodore Schatzki, and Elizabeth Shove, Routledge 2017, pp. 114-125, p. 118.

45 Ibid.

46 Theodore Schatzki. *The Site of the Social. A Philosophical Account of the Constitution and Change of Social Life*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 80.

47 Melanie Woitas. "'Exercise Teaches You the Pleasure of Discipline'," p. 149.

48 Mary Duquin. "Gender and Sport." *Handbook of Sport Studies*, edited by Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning, Sage, 2000, pp. 477-489, p. 481.

49 Judith Butler. *Bodies that Matter,* p. 22.

Working Out on Body Feelings or Ambivalent Feeling Rules and Killjoys in Queer Fitness Groups

Corinna Schmechel

> *"We believe that everyone should feel comfortable with and have a second home in the fitness world to create a body and fitness level they need to stay happy, healthy, and to ensure a well-rounded lifestyle."*[1]

> *"The program isn't about altering your appearance to conform to the norm. It is fitness for self care and self love."*[2]

These are lines, posted by US-American queer fitness providers in their online self-representations. They blame the fitness industry for being "rife with body shaming, racism, enforcement of gender binaries, ableism, and a lack of representation by queer folks,"[3] but at the same time declare the importance of training for one's mental

and physical health and for a happy relationship with one's body. This, the presentation implies, seems to be especially important for marginalized people who suffer from internalized body shame due to racialized, ableist and (cis-)sexist body norms and standards in hegemonic culture.

Sport has the ambivalent potential to foster an objectifying and quantified, rigid, and unkind relationship towards bodies in general and one's own in particular. At the same time, sport also gives the opportunity to experience one's own physical potentials and abilities and therefore to generate feelings like pride and enjoyment in, with and for one's own body. This general ambivalent potential of sport for empowerment and disempowerment has been a challenge for feminist and queer sports organizations ever since. Feminist and queer sports clubs claim to not work on sportive success, on medals and trophies primarily, but on fun and social inclusion, on the improvement of people's self-esteem and body-self-connection. But this has never been as easy as slogans like "Riots not Diets!" may suggest, since also in these contexts, people are influenced by hegemonic concepts of beauty and attraction, of fitness and sportive performance, of competition and comparison.

In my personal biography as an athlete and trainer in conventional as well as in feminist and queer sports clubs, and as a social science scholar, I have been occupied by the topics of body- and beauty-norms, the self-body-relationship and feminist body politics. In my sociological dissertation project, I ethnographically observed how contemporary queer-feminist fitness groups negotiate the ambivalent role of body and beauty norms and the potential of sport for (dis)empowerment.[4] In this essay, I will particularly focus on fitness. Fitness as a sport, compared to football, ballet or combat sports, for example, does not have any other goal than bringing and keeping the body in a certain state. There are usually no games or fights to win, no performances to give, no system of rules and techniques to learn. *Fitness* as a term does name the practice and its goal at the same time. It is, therefore, an especially interesting sport when it comes to the topic of beauty norms and of

sport's potential for the (dis)empowerment of diverse bodies.

This essay introduces some empirical findings concerning the complex and ambivalent relationship towards body and beauty norms in sportive empowerment politics. I will first explain the basic terms of my approach, before giving an overview of the role of the emotional body-self-relation in feminist sports politics, in order to show the normativities and exclusions that are inherent to them. My goal is to promote a self-reflected and differentiated perspective of the potentials and pitfalls of feminist and queer body politics that work with the claim of empowerment through sports.

Body feelings

A central term in my empirical material as well as in the analyses is the *body feeling (Körpergefühl)*. This term is used by the people I work with to name their emotional relation to their own bodies.[5] Hence, a body feeling is not a specifically qualified feeling such as joy or sadness, but a shifting and flexible set of feelings, in a range going from love, pride and joy to shame, anger and disgust. It is something very private, subjective and individual and, on the other hand, highly social and political. Every self-body-relation, may it be self-hatred and shame or self-love and pride, is a product of social, cultural and historical circumstances. The mere point of thinking of an *I* that *has* a body and some feelings towards this body is already a result of historical social processes.[6] As we are social beings, how we feel in and with our body depends on how others treat it: how they speak about it, to which existing representations we can relate, how we are treated regarding our physical appearance and abilities. Therefore, the body feeling might also vary according to times and spaces. Hegemonic culture often leads subordinated subjects, as females, trans*- and nonbinary gendered or intersex people, persons of color and disabled people to incorporate their devaluated social position through a shameful and even hateful relationship towards their own bodies.[7]

Body and beauty norms can therefore also be regarded as *feeling rules* since they define which bodies are admirable and should be desired, which bodies are unattractive and threatening and in which body one should feel shameful and unlikable. The term feeling rules was originally coined by Arlie Russel Hochschild.[8] It describes a system of collectively shared, albeit often not consciously known, rules concerning which feelings are reasonable and justified in which moments and for whom. One should be happy on one's own wedding day and sad at the funeral of one's parents. To conform to these rules, we constantly do emotional work. *Emotional work* is the intentional action of managing and manipulating the feelings of others and of oneself. It is analytically split into *surface acting*, which means for example to smile in order to make someone else feel comfortable and *deep acting* which describes the aspects of "inner" management of one's own feelings, for example, to try to be relaxed in order to create a relaxed atmosphere for everyone else too. Hochschild intensively investigated the field of commercial emotion work, which she calls emotional labor. Examples in her work are cabin crew members and bill collectors, who must create either safe and pleasant atmospheres or fear and guilt and therefore also have to manage their own feelings of anger, frustration or pity. In the private sphere too, we constantly do emotional work to be thankful for Grandma's ugly birthday present or happy at our friend's engagement party, even if we are in deep heartache.

Feeling rules are shaped by social power structures, which are often inclusive of sexism and racism. For females, it seems appropriate to cry when watching a romantic drama movie, while it is not for males. Men can show a greater range of anger and rage which for women are seen as inappropriate and "hysterical". In White[9] dominated societies, Black people have a low range of possibilities to show anger without appearing aggressive and dangerous to White eyes. A lot of national and ethnic identification is based on collective feelings which define who belongs to the group and who does not, for example, who feels the correct religious awe, national pride or sexual desires. This is a major focus in the work of Sara

Ahmed, who coined the terms of *affect aliens* and *(feminist) killjoys*, which will be important in this essay later.[10]

Another important element in Ahmed's work is the concept of *happy objects*. This describes objects – also in a non-materialistic sense – which are associated with a "promise of happiness" in the hegemonic culture, for example, a marriage and children. We are led by these promises to orientate our way of living toward these objects. Even after several unhappy heterosexual monogamous romantic relationships, people usually keep sticking to this concept as their only chance to find happiness in love, even if this makes them unhappy over and over again. Lauren Berlant introduced the term of *cruel optimism* for that kind of relation to an object of desire.[11] The counterpart is unhappiness-threats, such as powerful cultural images of an unhappy, lonely gay or queer life, or the childless single woman who regrets her way of life once she turns 40.

Another happy object is the fit body. Having a slender, healthy and sportive body is very strongly connected to the promise of having a positive self-body-relation, of feeling pride and self-love and of being successful and happy in professional and private life. A cruel optimism has gone viral in western hegemonic culture: it keeps people counting calories and jogging miles, attending fat-burning-classes and buying low-carb-food and alike for years, even if they either never reach the body of their dreams, or if they do, do not experience the expected happy life ever after. Moreover, the unhappiness-threat of being unfit appears nearly omnipresent in mainstream media, crystallized in the threat of being fat, which is strongly associated with being unhappy, unloved and unable to build a positive body-self-relation.

But there is also resistance against these narratives and rules. Body Positivity and Fat Acceptance Movements fight against these negative projections on body fat, and therefore also for a right to love one's own fat body. Similar political campaigns can be found regarding ableist and racist beauty standards. In that sense, politics concerning body norms are always also concerning emotional norms and feeling rules.

The work on one's body feeling in feminist sports politics

The emotional relation to one's own body has been a major topic for second-wave feminism. Feminist politics challenged beauty norms and standards for female body conducts, crystallized for example in the famous slogan "Riots not Diets!" Feminists fought and still do fight against internalized shame concerning one's own body, one's own feelings and sexuality.

The fight against internalized body shame and restricting gender norms has been central in the feminist sports culture which developed in the 1970s and 1980s. It developed out of autonomous feminist self-defense-training groups, which explicitly did not define themselves as sport but as survival skills against male violence. Feminist sports culture tried and still tries to find new ways of defining and doing sports, which should not be oriented towards performance, results and victories, but towards fun and a good feeling about and within one's own body. In a wave of Alternative Sports Culture that developed in the 1980s, a gay sports movement and independent women's training groups as well as official feminist sports clubs were founded. Terms of sports performance, competition and success in sport have been discussed and re-defined with the rise of a feminist approach in academic sports science, as well as in feminist sports practice. Many of these structures and sports clubs still exist today and have experienced a history of constant growth and professionalization since then.

Most of them changed their target group policy from women only to WomenLesbianTrans*Inter* (WLTI*). For the feminist sports groups of the 1980s, a main aspect of feminist sports was the exclusion of men, which was seen as a liberation from "manly" behaviors and male gazes. This was regarded as necessary for women to experience sports as empowering and for them to gain a positive self-body relationship. In current queer fitness groups, the policy is not as simple as women only; it is mainly divided between WLTI* only and all-gender queers and allies/friends groups. The aim is not to be safe from men but rather from gender norms and heteronormativity.

Hence, similarly as in the feminist sports movement, a strict self-demarcation from 'normal' sports- and fitness culture is here central here. These clubs claim to be safe(r) spaces, "islands outside of the normative fitness world" or position themselves "outside of normative physical culture."[12] The declared goals of (queer-)feminist sports clubs is not to change participants' bodies but the feelings they have towards and in their own bodies, to overcome "gym-phobia" and "Physical Education trauma" (in-vivo) and to gain a certain emotional autonomy from body- and beauty-norms and from the judgements they face in society. One participant of my study describes it like this: "It's actually an ongoing permanent process to free myself from those [norms, the author] and to continuously question those and again and again to tell myself: I am ok the way I look. And it's ok to have a belly." (Alex[13])

With reference to Arlie Russel Hochschild's concept of emotional work, Alex is doing emotional work in the modus of deep acting – the conscious and direct management of one's own feelings. Several of my interviewees themselves conceptualize this as work, and so does Alex, who states in another interview passage: "I actually did *work* a long time to change the way of thinking about or of relating to myself."

Another field-participant, Aaron, who is a trainer of a queer fitness group, describes similar issues:

> A.: That's actually something I am training with myself: to not always try to get the optimum out of myself. That really sucks. Instead, I also wanna live for myself what I try to teach in my classes. But I feel a certain discrepancy there, that's interesting.
> I.: You mean between your claims and how you…?
> A.: …exactly, this discrepancy between what I try to teach and what I do to myself, yes. That's really sometimes…It's an Eigenarbeit with yourself.

With the term *Eigenarbeit*, Aaron points out that in the working on one's own body-self-relation, the working object and subject

coincide: the self must work on itself. What also coincides in this moment is the emotional work and emotional labor in the terms of Hochschild. Aaron is working on his body-self-relation to authentically present himself to others in his role as a body-positive trainer, and at the same time does so for the sake of his own well-being. Contrary to Hochschild's theory of emotional labor, which in her work is analyzed in terms of alienation and suppression of "real" or "authentic" feelings, the emotional working task Aaron is confronted with here is not framed as alienating. It is not forcing him to produce any kind of 'unnatural' feelings but supporting him to get rid of 'unnatural' socially produced competition and striving for optimization. The emotional work that is done in the queer training groups, as well as in other sorts of self-empowerment settings, is not regarded as an alienating outer force but as liberating. Yet, this is a work that can succeed or fail. Furthermore, as will be shown in the following, the relation of a good body feeling to aspects such as body fat or muscles in praxis turns out to be much more complex than a slogan like "Riot not Diets!" might suggest.

Happy bodies

The following "Members Story" of a queer fitness gym in the US[14] serves as an example of the complex and ambivalent relationship towards body- and beauty-norms in sportive empowerment politics. In this personal narrative of how he came to become an enthusiast athlete, John explains:

> The truth is, I've never really felt good about my body. I was a chubby kid and an overweight, gay teen. I was bullied for both. That bullying made me hate my body and hate the gym. Exercise wasn't fun. It just meant looking weak and out-of-shape in front of other people followed by anxiously changing in a locker room full of straight dudes who could kick my ass.

After he found the queer gym and started to train there, he describes the following results: "Since joining, I've lost 40 pounds, 7% body fat, and 6 inches from my waist." He continues:

> This hasn't just helped me meet my fitness goals, it's also lead to positive internal changes I wasn't expecting. I've started to internalize the spirit of encouragement I found at The Queer Gym. […] I'm very happy with the changes I'm seeing in my body, but I'm happiest in the changes I'm experiencing in my relationship to my body.

This narration is illustrating the contradictory role that hegemonic concepts of healthy and attractive bodies play in the empowerment through sport concept in my observed field. On the one hand, the gym itself takes position against fatphobia explicitly and serves the discourse of empowerment against body- and beauty-norms. In addition, John points out the *inner* changes, the change *of the relationship* to his body, not within the body itself. On the other hand, the narration is also filled with clear quantitative information on loss of body fat and volume, which is also accompanied by fitting photographs in the well-known before-after format.

The gaining of a good body feeling seems to be strongly connected to, if not dependent on, the material body changes of losing body fat and inches from the waist. The promise of happiness seems to be strongly stuck to the fit body as a happy object, even in social and political contexts that try to overcome hegemonic concepts of body and beauty norms.

Affect aliens and killjoys of empowerment through sports

The ideal to detach oneself from society's norms can become a normative ideal that devalues and silences the hardness, suffering and maybe impossibility to achieve it. Communities that question and reject hegemonic norms can at the same time establish their own norms within that rejection. As social beings, we are all dependent

on others and what they see in us. A claim for complete emotional autonomy from beauty norms is therefore highly questionable. A risk of celebrating the autonomy from hegemonic beauty standards is to create *affect aliens:* "those who experience alien affects."[15] In this sense, affect aliens of queer and feminist body politics are the ones who are not able to feel the claimed body pride and joy that is said to be a central trait of the community.

An example can be found in Kimberly J. Lau's study *Body Language.*[16] Lau did ethnographic research in a US-American Fitness Gym for Black women only. She shows how the claim of Black women generally having better self-esteem than White women – symbolized for example in the image of the proud Big Mama or of the iconographic young Black woman being proud of her butt – works as a mechanism that silences and sanctions Black women who fail to feel comfortable in a big body and seek for a small and slender one, which is marked as being a White beauty norm. In Lau's study, the women who are not able to feel the suggested Black pride, who cannot make themselves free from White beauty ideals become affect aliens in the sense of Sara Ahmed. They experience alien affects and violate the feeling rules of the community.

Similar kinds of feeling rules and taboos can be found in my empirical material from German predominantly White communities when it comes to the topic of losing weight or body fat. In many interviews of my study, the interviewees confess after a range of anti-diets-statements that they would like to lose weight or have been happy about losing some body fat. But the desire to become slender, to lose body fat, is something that is worked against strictly. "Not diets!" is a constant imperative, supposed to be empowering. Yet, it can also silence and disempower those who do not manage to feel good with their bellies in the long run. Instead of talking about the power of internalized body and beauty norms over one's self-esteem and body feeling and about the difficulty to overcome internalized standards of beauty, often an ideal of a strong and empowered emotional autonomy

from societies' norms and standards is proclaimed. As shown above, to gain this autonomy, individuals have to work on themselves and on their (body) feelings. A failure in that emotional work is often perceived as an individual one.

Moreover, "Riots not Diets!" is much more easily stated when wearing a sports dress size S than XXL and the joy of one's sportive achievement needs some achievement in the first place. There is evidence that the chance for empowerment in sports varies depending on diverse physical conditions.

In an interview, a participant of my study, Jannis, explains to me how multiple chronicle diseases influenced his physical ability. Therefore, he cannot participate regularly and ambitiously in the queer fitness training. Instead of experiencing joy over sportive achievements, for him, training is about using the times his body can do sports because often he cannot do any exercise at all. This difference of experience makes him feel alienated from the rest of the group: "Honestly, I have to say that this group showed me how disabled I am. Because I really got on my boundaries, my physical boundaries, and that sometimes made me sad."

Other participants describe their experience in queer community training as fun. They explain how they have learned to overcome "gym-phobia" and "Physical Education trauma" and learned to enjoy sports. Many could escape society's ascriptions related to gender or to body fat and were able to overcome culturally imposed shame and self-hatred. In the same context, during exercise, Jannis is in contrast painfully confronted with the fact of being chronically ill and experiences himself as disabled. Jannis does not experience fun and empowerment. On the contrary, as an affect alien, he experiences sadness. Though he is careful with asking for special consideration for this issue, because:

> I often feel that I am kind of on the outside when it comes to fun. That people might think 'It's enough now with the critics and we wanna have room to just let it go easy.' And I am like this too in other contexts, so I understand. It's just part of my consideration about bringing in claims.

In Ahmed's theoretical concept, one sort of affect alien is the *killjoy*, the one whose alien affect also affects others, the one who destroys the cheerful atmosphere. Ahmed speaks explicitly about the feminist killjoy, whose critique of sexism and heteronormativity stands in the way of hegemonic promises of happiness which are based on heteronormativity, and about Women of Color being the killjoys of White feminism:

> The angry black woman can be described as a killjoy; she may even kill feminist joy, for example, by pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics. She might not even have to make any such point to kill joy. […] you can be affectively alien because you affect others in the wrong way: […] functioning as an unwanted reminder of histories that are disturbing, that disturb an atmosphere.[17]

Here, Jannis is afraid of becoming a *disabled killjoy*, the one disturbing the ease of the group when signaling his needs and boundaries. Even though his training group, as part of feminist and queer sports culture, claims itself to be inclusive and open to diverse levels of physical fitness, Jannis does not perceive the atmosphere as welcoming enough to talk about his feelings and needs. Moreover, he feels himself to be disturbing the joyful atmosphere for everyone else when he asks for special needs and confronts others with his reality and perspective. Instead of being a supportive and empowering surrounding, the training setting is a field of emotional work that Jannis must do to feel accepted and included. In order to not disturb the atmosphere, Jannis must keep his sadness to himself, his wrong way affection, to let others be happy and not affect them in a negative way.

Unhappy endings

More or less explicitly, body feelings have always been an issue of feminist and queer politics. Sexism and misogyny, as well as racist, ableist and homo- and trans* hostile attitudes, are incorporated

in the form of shame and self-hatred. For good reasons, some of the main terms of queer empowerment are pride, self-love and body positivity. Body politics or queer politics are always politics of emotion as they are about who has the right to feel certain feelings, and which feelings are required in order to belong to a certain community, may it be national or subcultural. However, this also means that politics that claim to be emancipatory and empowering as well run the risk of setting up feeling rules. Hegemonic happy objects and feeling rules are also forming alternative and queer cultures and participants' mindsets. The empowering work on transforming one's body-self-relation can reveal itself as being very disempowering if our own dependency and attachment to hegemonic norms and standards are denied. These limit the chances of coming to good terms with one's own body. Queer culture and politics must not silence non-happy-ending stories about failure, self-hatred and shame, but should rather be aware of who might be excluded from the promise of happiness when it comes to empowerment in sports and who become the affect aliens of the empowered queer community.

1 https://www.facebook.com/pg/transformfitnessaustin/about/?ref=page_internal (last checked 08.02.2021).

2 http://buffbutch.com/welcome-2/ (last checked 08.02.2021).

3 http://buffbutch.com (last checked 02.03.2017).

4 I did participant observations in three training groups and 14 interviews with participants in Berlin. Moreover, I analyzed field documents of contemporary global queer fitness culture and of the West-German feminist sports culture of the 1980s, which is the ideological and structural basis of the observed current German queer sports culture.

5 This is called in-vivo in the following.

6 This has been extensively shown in the oeuvre of Michel Foucault or in the subsequent work of Philip Sarasin: Philip Sarasin. *Reizbare Maschinen. Eine Geschichte des Körpers*. 1765-1914, Suhrkamp, 2001.

7 Famously, Frantz Fanon has analyzed this for Black People in: *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952. Grove Press, 2008. Iris Marion Youngs well-cited the essay "Throwing like a Girl" deals with the consequences of female socialization for the body-self-relation, see Iris Young: "Throwing like a Girl" *On Female Body Experience. "Throwing like a Girl" and other Essays.* Oxford University Press, 2005. You can also find evidence of this in the work of Pierre Bourdieu concerning class: *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* 1987. Routledge, 2012.

8 Especially in her first, often cited, book *The Managed Heart*. 1983. University of California Press, 2012.

9 I use the terms White and Black in capital letters to mark it as political positions, not color-related adjectives.

10 Ahmed is well known for *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), *The Promise of Happiness* (Duke University Press, 2010) or *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017). Her phenomenologist work focusses on the question of what emotions do with us.

11 Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism.* Duke University Press, 2011.

12 https://www.seitenwechsel-berlin.de/sportangebote/powerfitness/ (last checked 08.02.2021).

13 For reasons of anonymization all participants' names are pseudonyms.

14 https://thequeergym.com/john/ (last checked 14.02.2018).

15 Sara Ahmed. "Feminist Killjoys (and Other Willful Subjects.)" *The Barnard Center for Research on Women*. http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/ahmed_01.htm. (last checked 08.02.2021).

16 Kimberly J. Lau. *Body Language. Sisters in Shape, Black Women's Fitness and Feminist Identity Politics*. Temple University Press, 2011.

17 Sara Ahmed. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press, 2010, p. 67.

If affect, whether called out or not, is given in the ordinary gathering of elements –"a gangly accrual of forms, rhythms and refrains"[6] – that inhere in a context, he locates its queer agencies in the localized persistence of affect or rhythms and refrains that insist against the tyranny of straight place or work against "the sedimented conditions that constitute what is in place in the first place."[7] Just as queer here is not a placeholder for identitarian politics clustered around sexuality, his aim is not so plain as to add queer to affect as a project of queering something might demand. Rather, following Arondekar and Patel,[8] he evokes a theoretical refusal that tackles geopolitical flattenings in queer and affect studies through modes of forgetting and foregoing analytical habits, the seductions of homing devices and its salutary pathways in hope for epistemological gatherings elsewhere and otherwise. He is enchanted by the promise of other inheritances and non-Euro-American geographies of theory curious as to what these might yield in political and analytical terms – or, what in other words, it would take to extend the archive of queer and affect studies. In so long as queerness is "a doing for and toward the future,"[9] queer affect as he evokes it, is equally a geopolitical pursuit whereby queerness is no longer located /locatable in one place any more than it is situated in another, which is to say "that it is not in any way more here than there, more now than before; that it is tied to the logic of cities and secularities in a way that it is unmappable in religious or non-metropolitan lifeworlds."[10] He seeks a queer elsewhere!

6 Kathleen Stewart. "Worlding Refrains" *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg & Greg Seigworth, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 39.

7 Avery Gordon. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination.* University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 4.

8 Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel. "Area Impossible: Notes toward an Introduction." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* vol. 22, no. 2, 2016, p. 155, 159.

9 Jose Esteban Muñoz. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity.* New York University Press, 2009, p. 1.

10 Omar Kasmani. "Thin Attachments: Writing Berlin in Scenes of Daily Loves." *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry,* vol. 1, no. 4, 2019, p. 36.

"Affective Empowerment" and Feeling like a "Space Invader"
The Role of Affects in Queer Spaces

Esto (Esther) Mader

> *"And at the moment, I totally enjoy spending some of my time in queer spaces ... where it has this being-at-home-effect."*
>
> *"I'm ruling here [laughs]. But I think in a non-queer space I'm not like this."*

I routinely encountered phrases like this during my fieldwork over the last few years in queer spaces in Berlin. In addition to my fieldwork, for more than eleven years I worked in my favorite queer bar. I used to call it my living room, although I also experienced many conflicts and arguments in, around, and about such places. The queer spaces I am interested in attempt to be safer spaces and perhaps that is one reason why they are very

contested. For sure, sometimes I felt those tensions. But sometimes the people involved feel warmly welcomed in these spaces of feeling-at-home and intimacy. In my current sociological study, I investigate how agency is produced through practices in queer spaces.[1] Although I understand the production of agency with regard to normativities and collectivity, I could not ignore affects and feelings. As an activist, I have been involved in controversial and emotionally charged discussions on racism. I learned that in these spaces, which are frequented by people who are vulnerable in many different and specific ways, the range of affects can be very broad and intense. Feelings vary from deep solidarity and belonging on one hand to outraged anger, disgust, or fear on the other. And sometimes all those feelings come together. In fact, I never really wondered why there is so much negotiation and fighting over such spaces, given that they are havens for people who experience hate and discrimination. Therefore, we fight for such spaces. In this fight, the question of agency is a very important one.

To come into being through others also means that we come into being through affects and feelings. It, therefore, follows that affects have an impact on the production of agency through practices. This essay focuses on the role of affects produced by practices in specific queer spaces in Berlin, and it investigates the function of affects within the production of agency. The affects traversing queer spaces are ambiguous. They can be stabilizing, community building, and transformative, but also ordering, excluding and normative. I want to illustrate the importance of affects and feelings for agency, and how they need to be considered in order to understand the empowering effect of queer spaces. In addition, only by analyzing affects and feelings it is possible to understand some of the most difficult challenges in such spaces – for example, repressive atmospheres. In many of my interviews, people describe queer spaces and, in particular, safer spaces as a "home" where they can be themselves, and in which they rule and feel safe. I also know this feeling very well myself. Yet, I want to explore the

ambivalence of this feeling of being at home. This feeling both reinforces scene-specific norms and excludes those for whom such spaces were also intended. These findings then have implications that can be useful for queer politics.

Theoretical background and concepts

According to Donna Haraway, knowledge is always situated and there is no objective perspective in the sense of neutrality.[2] The observer is always already a part of what happens and takes part in shaping the observed situation. I am an activist and researcher in queer spaces. Both positions influence each other. By situating myself and my own experiences in academic texts, and explicitly showing my own involvement, I intend to criticize the academic idea of being objective and of studying the Other.

To paraphrase Judith Butler: the self comes into being through others and their recognition, and hence, the self comes into being vulnerable. Precariousness and becoming a subject belong together.[3] In the queer spaces I observed, we find practices of subjects who are marginalized within heteronormative discourses because they do not fit into hegemonic norms.[4] Everyone is vulnerable because of being human, but some subjects are more vulnerable because of their position in society. Those subjects are threatened by social and institutional repression that is legitimized by the subjects' perceived transgression of norms.[5] Following Butler, agency is located in reiterative or re-articulatory practices – which do not oppose power but are inherent in power – such as parody, irony, and drag.[6] Agency is constituted by reiterating the norm in fractious ways. Deploying this performative account within my field allows me to investigate collective agency in the production of space. Through practices, bodies, and affects, queer spaces are established. These practices produce queer space by reiterating hegemonic norms, but also by undermining and reworking them. Hence, agency is located in the establishment of such queer spaces. But *how* does it arise and *how* can subjects feel it?

Essentially, I understand agency as transformative potential, as movement that leads to change in discursive or social structure, and as transformative potential that expands the spectrum of possible ways of living.

For my analysis, I distinguish affect and feeling. Following Brian Massumi and Sara Ahmed, I understand both affect and feeling as having a role in the production of the social order.[7] I understand affect as an intensity that connects bodies and fills space. It can enhance atmospheres, can stick to the body, and can be experienced as feelings. Affect is hard to grasp, but it can be enhanced ideologically and normatively, and it can be the basis for feelings. Feelings refer to subjective states and expressions. The body can feel and we are able to talk about it; we can express feelings. This distinction was quite helpful in my study as it allowed me to question subjects in the field about their feelings, while at the same time being able to address the atmosphere (of spaces) settling differently in diverse bodies. Here my understanding of atmosphere comes into play. Following Gernot Böhme, atmospheres are created by things, persons, and their constellations. "They seem to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze."[8] If we think of space as the product of social practices,[9] then queer spaces are produced by specific sets of different practices as well as bodies, matter, norms, and affects. In Berlin, we can find different forms of queer spaces. The queer spaces I am interested in are public or semi-public spaces like a queer neighborhood bicycle workshop or a queer party. Most of these spaces are labeled as queer-feminist or radical queer, which means that they attempt to be a place for people who are marginalized due to ableism, racism, classism, or hostility against trans* and queer people. In short: I focus on these queer-feminist safer spaces that criticize heteronormativity as well as discrimination based on gender, sexuality, race, and class. People in such spaces most likely question or subvert different hegemonic norms.

Feeling at home and the shared consensus

When my interviewees were asked what attracted them to come to such spaces and spend time and energy in and for them, they frequently responded with the notion of feeling at home, or what also was called the "being-at-home-effect" (see introductory quote). When asked about the reasons for this feeling, a recurrent reply was "because I feel safe there." The feeling of safety, in turn, is underpinned by the importance of an articulated critique of heteronormativity, racism, sexism, capitalism, and hegemonic norms in these queer spaces. While my interviewees barely defined those large concepts, most of them agreed that they felt safe due to such attitudes. This was expressed, for example, in writings found on walls and doors in queer spaces or in flyers asking visitors to behave in a respectful manner and making it clear that sexist, racist etc. expressions will not be tolerated. Interviewees called this critique in queer spaces a "shared consensus." It seems to create a feeling of belonging and of being in the right place as it implies shared values and ideology.

This shared consensus is a cluster of dos and don'ts that leads to the expectation of spaces in which discrimination is reduced. This generates feelings of safety for some people but also feelings of being out of place for those unfamiliar with these rules. Although there is no agreement on definitions of discriminatory behavior, it is nonetheless a pronounced consensus that 'this' kind of behavior is not allowed. The shared consensus works like other social norms in the sense that, in order to maintain itself, it represses and is experienced as repressive by those who do not follow it. Most of the practices in queer spaces are permeated by the shared consensus, and the way in which practices are performed follows these rules. In society, the functioning of norms remains mostly implicit. But in this case, buzzwords and phrases of the consensus (e.g. "sexism, racism, hostility against trans* and queer people is not accepted") as well as the demand to follow it are openly announced and thereby made explicit. Nevertheless, the ways in which this scene-specific

norm of non-discrimination is interpreted, and in which behaviors or expressions are perceived as discriminatory, remain unwritten and are contested on a regular basis. Despite that, everyone is expected to know these rules.

Heated discussions over what is perceived as behavior that is no longer tolerable can permeate the atmosphere of queer spaces over longer periods. According to my interviewees, such disputes could undermine feelings of being at home. But such disputes are important factors that keep the shared consensus alive; they shape and reproduce it. It is a paradox: contestation of scene-specific norms and disputes over who has the power to define what is tolerable and what is not stabilize the unwritten scene-specific norms and the reproduction of queer spaces.[10] Feelings of being at home accompany this ongoing reproduction, and it is on behalf of these feelings that such scene-specific norms are challenged. Disputes become highly affective particularly when they contest homes and intimate spaces.

To ensure that the shared consensus is reinforced – or in other words, to maintain the feeling of being at home – specific practices, such as awareness practices, are deployed. The function of such practices is to be aware, to support, to encourage, to care, to enforce mutual respect, and – of course – to implement specific rules of behavior. Awareness practices are mostly found in those queer spaces that are intended as safer spaces. Awareness practices are not unique to queer spaces; they are also very common in feminist spaces. Interviewees related feeling even safer when there is a so-called "awareness team," in particular at big events, demonstrations, parades, festivals, and parties – any place where big crowds assemble. In some queer spaces, we find a team with marked armbands or specific shirts, sometimes announced from the stage. In other queer spaces, we find signs directing us to talk to staff if awareness practices are requested. An awareness team is a point of reference available to respond to disrespectful or discriminatory behavior and to call out troublemakers. But in contrast to security, which is primarily responsible for expelling troublemakers,

awareness practices focus on supporting those who experience discrimination. This sometimes includes making a quiet spot or chill-out space available, to get the person away from trouble. It is not unusual for people working in queer spaces on a regular basis to undergo awareness training as preparation for tricky situations.

"A queer space, for me, means that I can already expect something from that space. It doesn't mean that it is a problem-free or trouble-free zone. But if there is trouble, there are mechanisms, there is someone to which I can go to ask for [doing] something against it."

This quote indicates awareness practices as a mechanism to ensure the safety of such spaces. This safety is produced by enhancing expectations of reduced discrimination in spaces where these practices are performed. Awareness practices have the explicit goal of ensuring that certain people feel at home. At the same time, by following the shared consensus, these practices also regulate such spaces, by producing and reinforcing scene-specific norms. Those who violate the rules of such spaces (sometimes out of ignorance) will face disciplining mechanisms such as being stared at, talked to, and excluded. Scene-specific norms in queer spaces help to create a sense of safety to some visitors by being repressive of others.

An atmosphere of respectful intimacy

While the feeling of being at home and the notion of safety were explicitly named in my interviews, the effects of particular atmospheres are harder to examine. Feeling safe can easily be traced back to the scene-specific rules termed "shared consensus" or "awareness practices," but there is more to this home feeling. It is also bound to an atmosphere of intimacy – a specific atmosphere in the queer spaces which I investigated. We feel at home in intimate spaces when we feel close to and bonded with one another. In my queer living room, I do not only feel this intimacy because the space is familiar, or because I meet familiar people and know the rules of such places. There are also specific practices happening that make

me feel good, welcome, and at home. Those practices, which occur quite often in queer spaces, are highly effective in generating feelings of intimacy and belonging. In what follows, I introduce three kinds of such practices: practices of imperfection, practices of mutual appreciation, and the example of haircutting.

First, practices of imperfection are particularly noticeable during queer or drag shows in queer spaces. The stage often plays a central role at queer parties, as demonstrated by its mostly central spatial position and in the way shows are structured sequentially during the course of the night. Many parties start with music playing, but just when the crowd starts to dance, the music stops and the stage lights up. The dancefloor can be interrupted up to four times in one night for shows happening on stage. Even when there are shows on a regular basis at some places, the shows do not lose their character of imperfection. Failures and mistakes routinely occur during such shows. Parts of costumes fall down, dance groups are not synchronized, performers stumble on the stairs leading up to the stage due to intoxication, they arrive far too late to their gig, or they even admit on stage that, of course, they never practice. Interviewees term this attitude of intended imperfection or professional amateurism the "trash factor;" it gives parties their quintessential charm and is highly appreciated by the crowd. Following Jack Halberstam, such practices can be read as a queer art of failure that effects a break with norms of striving and pressure to succeed.[11] And they are quite contagious. When the so-called *Choir of the Rats* told their audience that they are beautiful by nature and there is actually no need for this wig, which is actually falling off, the audience cheered enthusiastically. While it is hardly allowed to make mistakes against the shared consensus in queer spaces, imperfection is valued on stage with regard to hegemonic beauty and performance norms.

Second, the practice of mutual appreciation occurs in a way that is sometimes very obvious or even exaggerated. For example, in the backstage area of a queer party, and also on the street in front of the entrance or at the street corner, people give each other frequent positive feedback, appreciation, and compliments, particularly for

extravagant appearances. Regardless of whether people have put a lot of effort into styling or if they have put no effort at all into it, at the queer party they all look terrific. Much attention and positive feedback are earned by breaking with hegemonic gender and body norms. What is labeled as "being different" in the wider society is often very much appreciated within queer spaces. Yet, the practice of mutual appreciation goes beyond complimenting. It is the recognition of a specific vulnerability; it values what is considered deviant in broader society. Affective work is intentionally performed in queer spaces. Both practices of imperfection and practices of mutual appreciation create affective bonds in queer spaces.

At queer parties, when people come together to celebrate each other and to appropriate a space, turning it into a realm where heteronormativity is less valid, these practices can be contagious and can spread feelings of being at home. For many participants, such practices create feelings of strength and of being welcomed. One interviewee told me: "I'm ruling here [laughs]. But I think in a non-queer space, I'm not like this." This illustrates a specific effect of being in such spaces. Being there actually does something with the feelings of the participants. Although I cannot prove that the atmosphere is the cause for certain feelings, people tell me about it, describe it, and, in certain moments, I can also feel these affects myself. Atmospheres can be felt by attendees, they can become condensed in participants' feelings, and they can also ultimately influence their practices. In some cases, in the queer spaces which I investigated, this atmosphere causes feelings of belonging and empowerment for those who are able to connect to it. This atmosphere tells: "Here I can be who I want to be, here I do not have to hide, and I even get compliments" – and it implicitly whispers – "as long as you follow the shared consensus, whatever that means." In spite of this immanent paradox, places are appropriated through such practices as the practices of imperfection or of mutual appreciation and their atmosphere-enhancing effects. Places are turned into queer spaces with their own affective logic which I call respectful intimacy as it shows appreciation and respect for not following

hegemonic norms and creates intimacy for those who can connect. While the awareness team tries to produce the feeling of safety by enforcing the shared consensus, the scenarization of imperfection and practices of appreciation create an atmosphere of belonging resulting in intimacy. In particular, when practices of appreciation and of imperfection come together, they spread affects of intimacy and belonging. Bodies resonate with this atmosphere, the space is filled with it, and situational encounters turn into a collective happening. This resonance can be particularly felt when someone is *not* able to connect to an atmosphere. Nevertheless, such practices have transformative potential to create a wider realm of action for certain subjects at a certain time and in a certain place.

Third, this affective logic is also produced by specific haircutting practices. These create respectful intimacy by asking for pronouns, not expecting gendered behavior, and not asking identity-based questions. These practices are not only found in queer spaces, but here they are part of the creation of an intimate atmosphere. They often happen during queer events and parties. In general, this haircutting takes much longer than professional services in the low-price sector, mostly because it includes long talks, emotional support, and exchange. Such talks often start with how a person wants their hair to be cut in order to underline certain gender expressions. Sometimes a circle is formed around the haircutting action and more people join a conversation or discussion. These practices try to avoid recommendations of certain haircuts that generally correspond to perceived genders. This service is particularly welcomed by people who do not perform stereotypical gender roles, as they are likely to experience unpleasant situations at regular hairdressers. It produces respectful intimacy on the basis of shared experiences of discrimination. This manner of haircutting is based on the critique of heteronormativity, or more precisely: gendered body norms, lookism, and expectations of attractiveness. Such practices appropriate meaning and space, turning space into queer space.

The act of haircutting interrupts the party with bright light in a corner, hair on the floor, and sometimes even lines of people

waiting around or a talking crowd. It breaks with the usual expectations of partying and shapes the particular logic of such queer spaces. These practices can generate affects of bonding since people feel understood and share their fear that going to regular hairdressers would expose them to hurtful questions. One interviewee told me that they appreciate these haircuts because they provide mutual care. While feelings enhance atmospheres, the feelings that result from these practices seem to form bonds between inhabitants of queer spaces. The shared consensus underlies and supports these practices and the way the practices are performed influences the creation of this specific atmosphere. It can be described as an atmosphere of respectful intimacy since it is generated by behavior that, following the shared consensus, is based on values of respect for diverse identities, bodies, and practices.

Exclusion: Feeling like a space invader

The production of this scene-specific atmosphere materializes in feelings of home or intimacy for all those who are able to connect to these affects. But not everyone is able to or wants to connect. Of course, in any situation, people who are unfamiliar with scene-specific norms or who criticize them feel less welcomed. But it can be difficult to connect for reasons other than unfamiliarity with the rules and the atmosphere. Beyond that, people who are meant to be welcomed in such spaces can also feel excluded. For atmosphere production, bodies are important in addition to practices. The presence, as well as the absence of certain bodies, has an impact on the atmosphere. For example, interviewees told me that the bodies that are present in a space have a huge impact on how they feel in that space. They call themselves disabled, People of Color, and trans*. It is hardly a coincidence that people perceived as marginalized minorities told me this. This illustrates the invisibility of having a white, abled, cis body in a society that is white-, able- and cis-dominated. In particular, if other marginalized and therefore visible bodies are in the same space full of invisible

bodies, feelings of being alone can decrease for the visible ones. The co-presence of similar bodies that are marked as different (in the hegemonic discourse) can lead to expectations of shared experiences of discrimination. Following Butler, that can be phrased as recognition of a specific vulnerability of subjects with bodies beyond hegemonic norms. Bodies can feel the dissonance, the mismatch with the theoretical ideal of the body (the hegemonic norm) and its ontology (the actually existing body).[12] Such dissonances can be transmitted affectively. The atmosphere within a space is influenced by what kind of bodies are present and by the past experiences of those bodies. How strong these affects can be and how they affect bodies can be seen by the exclusion of certain subjects.

Let me illustrate this with an example. In an interview, Karl reported a lot of racist harassment, physical attacks on the street, and also discrimination in governmental offices because of trans hostility and racism. For him, queer spaces had been important spaces in which to find empowerment and support. But this changed once he could more easily pass as a man. After his transition (from female to male) he spent less and less time in such spaces because he felt increasingly out of place there. During the interview, he struggled to explain this feeling and he could not point to explicit incidents that made him feel this way. Karl names himself a "Trans* man of Color" and sees a connection between this identity and his feelings.

Such a feeling of being out of place can be phrased as being a "space invader."[13] Karl's body does not connect with the atmosphere of the queer space and feels like he is perceived as invading. In queer spaces, we find diverging norms, such as a devaluation of certain kinds of masculinity. This devaluation draws on the feminist critique of hegemonic masculinity.[14] In addition, racist stereotypes also operate in queer spaces, such as the notion that masculine People of Color are sexist.[15] Hence, Karl's feeling of being a space invader reflects hegemonic norms in queer spaces. These norms – in this case, hegemonic racist norms as well as counter-norms like the devaluation of hegemonic masculinities – inform affective atmospheres and materialize in Karl's body as a feeling of being a

space invader. Karl is certainly perceived as cis male and feels out of place in certain queer spaces. The way his body has changed makes a difference in queer spaces. This shows that norms and affects are connected with each other: affects become charged by norms and norms are affectively transmitted. Bodies feel norms, which are expressed in queer spaces as feelings of belonging or of being a space invader.

All these different practices produce queer spaces with specific atmospheres. They all follow the shared consensus and produce feelings such as a feeling of being at home or of a respectful intimacy – as long as your body is able to resonate with these atmospheres, i.e. as long as you are fitting in the scene-specific norms. The affects in the queer spaces I observed are charged with the content of the consensus, with these scene-specific norms. This is seen in the fact that the atmosphere of intimacy is created by behavior that follows scene-specific norms (like being aware of using the right pronouns, etc.). Affects are charged with and transmit norms. In the example of Karl, we can see that scene-specific, as well as hegemonic norms, are mixed within queer spaces and that they connect or disconnect the practices and bodies that are present.

Affective empowerment

So far, I have focused on how practices produce affects and feelings that can connect but also exclude people. Furthermore, the atmospheres of feeling at home and of respectful intimacy produced within these spaces can help to develop affective empowerment. Affective empowerment is an emotional and bodily condition that releases feelings of having control over one's life or actions.[16] It emerges in specific practices. I will give two examples of these practices that occur frequently in queer spaces in different forms: to emphasize the notion of "being different," and to reinterpret femininity by people who name themselves as femmes.

First, the practice of emphasizing "being different" is an appropriation of the label of "otherness" and sometimes even an

exaggeration of this ascribed "difference." This negative ascription is reversed and becomes positively valued. For example, when Lila opens the door, the first thing I see is the glowing color of her hair. Lila tells me that she gets a lot of attention anyway, as she does not fit into gender and body norms because of her perceived non-binary gender appearance. However, she feels better when she accentuates this label of "being different" with flamboyant clothing, glowing nail polish, and remarkable make-up. Her ascribed otherness is highlighted and exaggerated by her performance, and by doing this, she reinterprets this ascription. On the one hand, Lila says that this accentuation gives her a different standing: she feels stronger because she has more control over the information that others receive about her. On the other hand, she also described a situation of being harassed on the street because of her appearance and gender performance. But despite men on the street yelling at her, she feels like maintaining control over the situation. How such encounters end, however, remains uncontrollable. It is not only in queer spaces that these practices produce feelings of control. On the street, such practices of emphasizing "being different" are a magnet for attention, intended as well as unintended. I read this street harassment as the other side of the coin of attracting attention. It shows how fragile and contingent effects can be for subjects of affective practices.

Second, femmes adopt codes of traditional and non-traditional femininities, extract them from heteronormative contexts and resignify them in queer and trans* contexts.[17] Femmes reinterpret femininities. This works through reiteration, a norm repetition that is not hegemonic. Interviewees told me that such practices make them feel strong, but also that the queerness of femmes cannot always be seen. This practice can also be perceived as gender assimilation, depending on the context in which it is performed. A critique of gender assimilation or of the performing of hegemonic gender expressions is not part of the shared consensus. Yet, in these queer spaces, it is also perceived as not being critical against heteronormativity. Femmes report that they are frequently asked in front

"I am abandoning a city, I had once hoped to inhabit. There were after all a handful of places, where I could, if I so desired, bring to life in theatres of the mind, your passing presence. Although, admittedly, I never did, but resting in the thought was mere comfort that when you would no longer be around, I would be able to reclaim us in the architecture of the city: Like that misty labyrinth of underground compartments, naked, or perhaps, above it, on that corner of a cobbled street, where, in the passage of a moment, I had dressed myself in countless dreams. But the ground on which I now stand bears not a single trace that resembles your impression; between the sun and myself, I see floating, not a speck of your shielding cloud. I remember you once said that you wished to see me in daylight. It reminded me of how winter clothes, otherwise neatly locked in an iron almirah are fed with sunshine before an approaching winter in Karachi. The season turned up and turned away but not once did you tell me how my sun-baked, wheat-like complexion fared under your shrouded skies. If there ever was, neatly secured between pages of some book, a picture of you and I, in it would also lay trapped, a feeling, which on that last afternoon of ours, oblivious to the eye of the camera, your gentle fingers had craftily made me wear. Amid all that is changing, this feeling is the only trace of ours that refuses to fade."

These lines, first written in Urdu, then translated into English were meant for a lover who didn't

speak his language. Translation was all that there was between them. Once translated, he never sent it across. The diary that held his feelings was eventually lost. Years later, rummaging through an old hard drive he would chance upon the English version of his feelings. Suddenly, what had once been marked by loss, reappeared as a relation of recovery. Translation was all that there was … now left of a parting.

of queer clubs whether they are aware that this is a queer party. This points to the scene-specific normativity in these non-hegemonic spaces. Femmes sometimes are not recognized as they want to be depending on the operating norms of specific situations and spaces. Hence, the situation and context in which these practices are performed determine the production of affective empowerment. If such practices are misread, they likely feel less empowering. Whether practices of reinterpretation are successful and produce affective empowerment depends on operating (affectively transmitted) norms.

A feature of both, practices of emphasizing "being different" and reinterpreting femininity, is that, if they succeed, their performance produces a position for subjects that allows them to feel more powerful or empowered. Such practices can induce a feeling of agency; they produce affective empowerment. This points to the relation of agency to feelings and affects. Practices of emphasizing "being different" and of reinterpretation are identity-producing practices bound to the position of subjects; in my examples, they are about being feminine and queer – or being trans* without fitting in the gender binary order. These practices reiterate the norm differently from its hegemonic manifestation. By doing so, they produce subject positions that are felt as more powerful by the performers. Following Butler, discourses can be shifted when norms are reiterated differently and agency is produced by ironic reiteration, resignification, and recontextualization. In this sense, transformative potential is localized within these practices.

Agency and affects

People who perform these practices can feel empowered by them. In particular, they feel empowered when their surroundings create a fitting arrangement, that is, when space is filled with affects of feeling at home and of respectful intimacy. The practical production of a queer space filled with these atmospheres prepares the ground for affective empowerment. As this essay has shown, this ground

is produced by various practices. Practices of awareness and the shared consensus create experiences of feeling at home and safety in that they acknowledge the subjects' vulnerability while attempting to produce recognition and create a safer environment. Practices of imperfection, of mutual appreciation, and haircutting endow these spaces with appreciation, care, and support.

This affective production of space plays an important role in collective and felt agency. Firstly, collective agency is located within this production of space, because this establishment creates queer counter-discourses with objections to hegemonic norms. In their place, practices create scene-specific norms that are affectively transmitted and, again, generate counter-discourses. Secondly, the production of felt agency is also connected to the atmosphere and to the subject's feelings. Felt agency can arise from affective empowerment, but whether it arises depends on situations and contexts.[18] To feel strong and more or less capable of acting, or out of place and unwelcomed, depends on the situation and on specific normativities, practices, bodies, and – of course – affects. Whether someone can connect to a specific atmosphere or not depends not only on different elements but also on the arrangement of those elements as a whole. Queer spaces attempt to create space for affective empowerment.

At the same time, we saw that such attempts are also exclusionary and regulative. They sometimes end in fights about hierarchies and about who has the power to define rules. This is one important characteristic of queer spaces: they sometimes produce that which they are fighting against. The practices outlined above such as practices of awareness and mutual appreciation, create a specific affective logic that has scene-specific affects and norms, but can also have unintended hierarchical and exclusionary effects. These feelings generate and strengthen demands which are usually made by family and close friends. Such demands implicitly underpin practices and can easily become strongly normative. Hence, these homelike atmospheres can turn into repressive atmospheres for anyone whose body cannot connect to the normative enhanced affects, as

was the case for Karl. This essay shows that affects need to be examined for the potential exclusions and hierarchizations which can be transmitted by them as well. Yet, the repressive, norm-transferring, and exclusionary function of affects is not the opposite of the connective side. Rather, both sides of this coin are melted into one Möbius strip: one turns into the other.

From the results of this study, it is possible to deduce political inferences. If we want to develop intimacy based on the acknowledgment of vulnerability, social bonds need to be grounded not in sameness but in difference.[19] We need affective solidarity that is grounded on experiences of dissonance, which occurs with the feeling that one is not abiding by norms.[20] It is the dissonance between hegemonic norms and non-normative bodies. For such an affective solidarity, we need to learn to appreciate failures. To use transformative potential, we need negotiations and we also need to allow mistakes. An art of queer failure could be not only a characteristic of performances on stage but an important value that turns into shared consensus. The possibility of generating collectivity (through practices) always necessarily contains the production of unintended exclusions, and to keep the collectivity alive, exclusions need to be negotiated on a regular basis. Hence, negotiation with all its affects is crucially and fundamentally needed in the production of queer spaces.

1 My PhD project in social sciences works with ethnographic methods (17 interviews, fieldwork, analyses of documents) and follows the grounded theory methodology. Results on affects and emotions I gained from my own experiences, from observations (and logging), informal talks and interviews.

2 Donna Haraway. "Situiertes Wissen. Die Wissenschaftsfrage im Feminismus und das Privileg einer partialen Perspektive." *Die Neuerfindung der Natur. Primaten, Cyborgs, Frauen.* Campus 1995, p. 73-97.

3 Judith Butler. *Giving an Account of Oneself.* Fordham University Press, 2005.

4 I don't mark my interviewees by certain identities (like "a trans poc told me...") in this essay. This missing information can lead to irritation which is intended. Because the irritation refers to our expectations, e.g. to think about a white person unless they are pronounced as non-white. Nevertheless, I explicitly mark identities when this information is needed to understand the analyses and to point to social inequalities.

5 See for further explanation on Butler's notions to which I am referring here: Eveline Kilian. "Ein folgenreicher Paradigmenwechsel: Zwanzig Jahre Judith Butler." *Freiburger Zeitschrift für GeschlechterStudien*, vol. 24, 2010, pp. 95-108.

6 Judith Butler. *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* Routledge, 1993, p. 12 and 15.

7 For affects see Brian Massumi. "Navigating Moments." 2002, www.brianmassumi.com/interviews/NAVIGATING%20MOVEMENTS.pdf, Accessed 13 February 2020 and for emotions see Sara Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion.* 2004. Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

8 Gernot Böhme. *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*. 1995. Suhrkamp, 2000, pp. 113-114.

9 Martina Löw. *Raumsoziologie*. Suhrkamp, 2001.

10 Find this argument also in: Nina Schuster. *Andere Räume: Soziale Praktiken der Raumproduktion von Drag Kings und Transgender.* Transcript, 2010.

11 Jack Halberstam. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press, 2011, p. 3.

12 Find this concept of dissonance in: Clare Hemmings. "Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2012, pp. 147-161, p. 150.

13 Find this concept of being a space invader in: Nirmal Puwar. *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies out of Place*. Bloomsbury, 2004. Nirmal Puwar uses this notion to describe the feeling of Women of Color in leading positions in institutions. They feel out of place because the hegemonic norm of the white male is still strongly valid.

14 I use the concept of hegemonic masculinity from Connell, see e.g. Raewyn W. Connell "Der gemachte Mann. Konstruktion und Krise von Männlichkeiten." *Gender Studies,* ed. Franziska Bergmann, Franziska Schößler and Bettina Schreck, transcript, 2012, pp. 157-174.

15 I use People of Color as self-designated term of racialized communities. Find this concept in: Kiên Nghị Hà: “‘People of Color’ als Diversity-Ansatz in der antirassistischen Selbstbenennungs- und Identitätspolitik.” *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, 2009, heimatkunde.boell.de/2009/11/01/people-color-als-diversity-ansatz-der-antirassistischen-selbstbenennungs-und. Accessed 30 March 2021.

16 The concept affective empowerment is borrowed from Lawrence Grossberg. *We gotta get out of this Place. Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture.* Routledge, 1992, p. 85.

17 Fuchs examined this practice in her study. See Sabine Fuchs. *Femme! Radikal – queer – feminine*. Querverlag, 2009.

18 Affective Empowerment is one foundation for felt agency that I found in my material. There are different foundations which I have not focused on. Moreover, I understand felt agency as one form of agency.

19 Here I am referring to Kelzes understanding of solidarity which is based on recognition of mutual dependency and vulnerability. Solidarity as responsibility for each other then “is based on a notion of the subject as constituted by its relationship to the other.” Rosine Kelz. *The non-sovereign Self, Responsibility, and Otherness. Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler, and Stanley Cavell on Moral Philosophy and Political Agency*. Palgrave, 2015, pp. 78, 162.

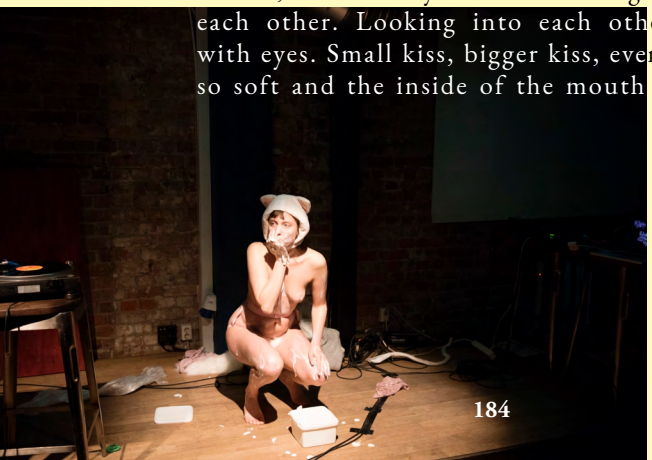
20 Find this claim in: Clare Hemmings. “Affective Solidarity.”

Let my pussy speak

Noemi Veberič Levovnik

I want to slam with my pelvis, I want to rip apart, I want to bite like a crazy animal, just bite and scream and blood running down my face and pop those inner organs like balloons. Pop them, bite them, scream, put a knife in them, kill every obstacle on my way, roar like a tiger, roar like Godzilla. I want to take with my strong arms and pull towards me, I want to smash heads into walls and jump on the skulls till they break and bite those pieces of bones into powder. I want to swing my arms as hard as I can and throw pieces of flesh and of bone against walls. I want to paint the whole room with blood. I want the room to be as red as my pain. As red as this fire inside me. I want to hit and hit and hit and cry. Become a river of crying, and scream again.

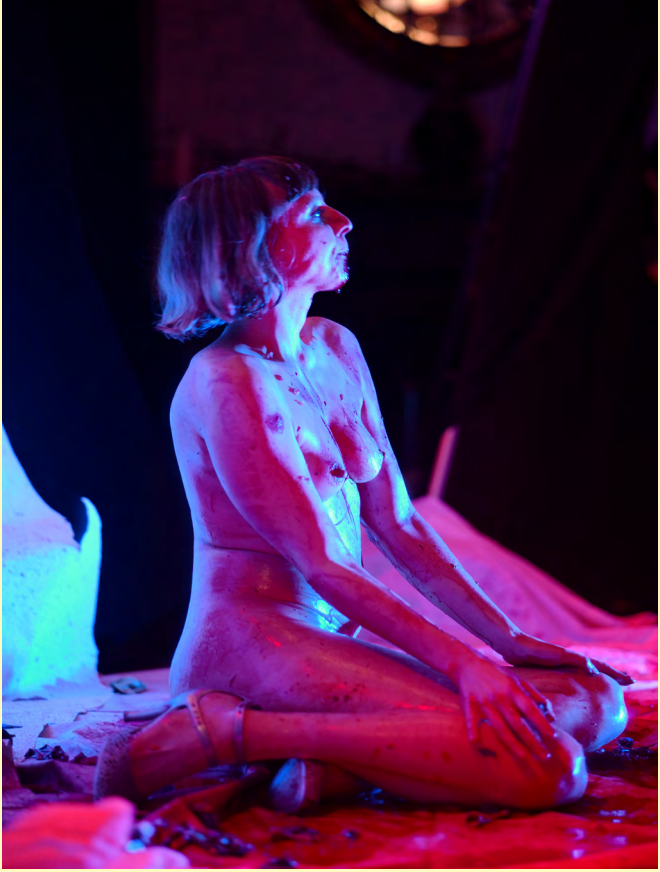
I am standing alone and naked in the middle of nothing, just me and nature. I've got only myself, and there is nothing in between but air. I know it's ok, but I am so sad. I'd like to feel that warm skin next to mine, that warm body, unharmed, strong, pulsating matter, next to my own. Breathing together, holding each other. Looking into each other's eyes, smiling with eyes. Small kiss, bigger kiss, even bigger kiss. Lips so soft and the inside of the mouth is warm and wet.



I feel your heart. It exudes warmth directly into mine. I know it's not right, I know this is us in the uterus, oh the heavenly prenatal feeling, but I enjoy it so much. Like I love smoldering you with my breasts when we fuck. This kid misses his mommy. But I'm here, I'm here. It's all gonna be alright. There will be summer and candy and flowers falling from trees. And I'll be here.

Let my pussy speak
The Pussy wants to be like a deep dark long tunnel, through which you pass to the other side. A fist fitting in there. Being completely held from the inside. Resting on your fist. Enveloping. The Pussy wants fire. A deep primordial fire. Brazing up houses, swallowing up everything, the end... of everything. Ashes for a new birth. Pussy wants death. Complete destruction... of everything holding back and then love. Deep love coming from the heart. Deep love from the chest like a powerful river. Such a strong current that it takes everything with it. Such a strong heart, pouring out, pouring love, like a powerful mountain, stream, river. Tearing down walls, flooding love. Splashing everywhere.
Let my pussy speak

Pussy is a temple with honey door. You lick the door frame, you bite and you eat, honey. It is made of honeycomb and halva, it is made of baklava. It is a big temple made of sweets, honey and nuts. You can just go and eat. And when you close your eyes, warm honey is dripping on your eyelids. You open your mouth and warm honey fills your mouth. That is Pussy. She will feed you. Worship her.



Let my pussy speak

Read more books that wake you up, she's saying. Don't leave me alone like this. Don't ignore me, or I will get even angrier. I am already there screaming, wanting to march on the streets for my rights, open arms stretching for a strong touch, salivating at the thought of a fight. Another body to hold, to squeeze, to be on top of, to feel the weight of. Smelling the hair, hair is coming into my eyes, nose, mouth.

Inhaling deeply and biting. Kissing at squeezing as hard as I can. I need her to be strong. I need a rock that I can hit and bite and squeeze and be wild and crazy with, as much as I want, as much as is in me. And there is a lot. This wild energy is waiting for me to finally roar. I feel like a small animal in a cage.

The cage of daily life, the cage of biking uphill with music on my phone and earphones in my ears. The cage of going to the supermarket and cleaning once or twice per week. The cage of sitting in front of the computer and answering emails and watching Netflix. The cage of tiredness. The cage of observing the sky from my balcony. Still, that is a glimpse of the universe. A glimpse of freedom. How I want to fly. To fly away, to swim in the sky, to be free, to feel everything with my skin and my bones and my blood and my mouth and my nose. To feel everything with my heart and to touch. To escape the cage.

It is all about desire. About this body of desire. Trapped. Wanting to be naked. Wanting to feel, to be. All this energy of desire trapped inside, waiting to be explored. She comes and pulls apart the curtains of my pussy lips. Inside there is a space, a corridor down which she can walk. Inside there is a big space with high ceilings, and looking up you can see red and purple and yellow and even gold, from my soul. Through this pussy space, you can see my soul in its bright colors, light coming through like through a church window. You put your hand inside this warmth, which feels like a golden sun on your skin. Like my lips on your lips.

You know me, as you are inside me. You are drinking sweet raspberry nectar as you are inside me. It tastes like raspberry syrup, pure, no water. Then when you lick, the water that you were so thirsty for, comes. The sweetest cold wetness submerges you. Closing your eyes, you open your mouth and stick out your tongue for the summer rain, falling in big heavy drops.

Let my pussy speak

I want to rip her apart, but without hurting her. And touch and eat and feast on her interior organs, drink her blood like a big river coming down from the Cathedral rock, put my cheek on a tender, soft pink and bloody part of her interior. Somewhere inside her chest. Put my cheek and smear it all over me, rest there like on a pillow.

Let my pussy speak

I want to push her on the bed. I want to hit her very hard. I want to walk on her. I want to bite all of her. I want to swallow her like a snake.

Let my pussy speak

I want her arms around me, and yet I am already screaming. Her arms, melting into my body. Her lips, her eyes, melting. All of her melting and me drinking this. Sticky, sweet. Licking all of this. It tastes like blood, like sugar water, like salt. Inhaling her pussy makes me want to scream. Inhaling the sweet perfume of a lilac bush. My head in this bush, so I can't see out. I am completely covered by the perfume and the flowers, and I feel despair. From the bottom of me. Like I can't exist anymore. I want to break the world into pieces so maybe I feel like something has been released.

Let my pussy speak

I want her to kiss my eyelids. I want her to kiss my chest. I want her to tell me she loves me. She wants only me. She missed me terribly. I want her to kiss me. I want her to gently caress me, rub against me like a kitten. I want her to hold me in her arms, her heart radiating openly against mine.

I want to drink love from her eyes and her lips. I want her lips to move in love with mine. I want her mouth to move and pour words of love like a river, in which I swim, a happy fish. Then I will jump on her and kiss her and put my nose in her hair and mess her hair up and lick her and bite her skin and eat it off.

I want her more than the world. That is what it feels like.

I am in a valley, surrounded by mountains. I am only happy if she is there. I hold her in my arms. Mostly, I want her to hold me - I want her to prove that she loves me. She looks at me, with those puppy eyes. She is so pretty and cute and she isn't in love with someone else. She looks at me, she wants to take a photo with me. She kisses my cheek and squeezes me, against her body. Her body is talking to mine. Her body is saying I love you, Noemi's body. I love you, every centimeter. You are my river. You are my nature. You are my temple. My most beautiful house in the world. You are my desert with Saguaros. You are my sound of the river from the valley. You are my water. I love you so, I could be your child. I love you so, I feel your universe, I see your stars and planets. And I will sleep there, in that darkness. I will never ever want someone else more. You are my perfect woman. My dream. Please just love me back. Please let us just linger on each other's lips forever, in the colors of the sunset, suspended together above the desert. Orange and ochre and pink and purple and violet and blue.

Her hair is soft and I caress it. I could get lost in it, I want it to become my forest. I am so small and I dress myself in this hair. I inhale the hair. I plunge into the ocean. I come back, chewing the hair and eating it.





The sun is so hot. She is lying there on a big warm rock, come here. She presses her warm body against mine. She is still wet, and so am I. She presses so hard. Warm and cold. We lie there so, and then I want to chew on her some more, I want to bite, I want to let out some sounds. She laughs, I laugh, I chase her around and we land on the floor. She is on top of me and pushes her pussy against mine. She kisses me. I can't give you anything more. We kiss and I slowly start disappearing, sinking. I am going underground.

Photos:

p.4 below and p.5: Daniel Hansen
p.7 and 8 (above): Sophie Laroux
p.12: Jo Pollux
all other photos by the artist

METHODOLOGIES

Introduction

Affected Methodologies – A Few Steps on the Way

Jean-Baptiste Pettier

You go to do fieldwork with good intentions and come back with ugly feelings.

Your work is to give physical care for birth labor and you find yourself doing it on Zoom.

You felt that the atmosphere in the room was tense, but others tell you they felt warm.

Or, like myself, you work on questioning norms, but the more you do it, the more they seem to fit you well.

Is there a methodology to deal with situations that do not turn out as planned? Can and should you explicitly deal with what fieldwork, or your engagements with the world, do to you, especially if

it is hurtful? What should you do with the evaluations others make of you or that you make of them? Can they themselves become useful material for reflecting on our research and engagements with the world? Can they take us forward instead of hindering us?

While there is no right answer to these questions, we all develop tools in order to resolve them. Your research methods are the results of these attempts. They adapt and change along the way, following trial and error, depending on the specific questions and circumstances that research makes you face. If we follow Gaston Bachelard, any methodology should be subject to what he named a "(monitoring)^3," which is to say that it has to be constantly monitored on three levels: On the first level, you apply the methodology to search for certain facts; on the second level, you double-check that the methodology is applied properly; the final level is the epistemological work of reflecting on the methodology itself. Is it appropriate to the assigned aim? Does it produce false signals?[1] Monitored in this way, methodological issues embrace the entire process of knowledge production. On one hand, they concern how you carry out research, how you position yourself throughout the course of that research, how you choose your research questions, and how you address them. On the other, they concern how you give an account of this research, how you write it, the ways in which you narrate and share your results, whether it be in academic, artistic, or activist forms. Methodological questions are not necessarily comfortable. They force you to doubt the initial questions which guided your work when you encounter new grounds. Like Sisyphus with his rock or the Danaïdes with their sieve, it may seem that you should always start again. Was the initial reasoning valid? Was it well researched and well analyzed? Did you share the result in a comprehensible way? It questions your positioning as a historically situated and particular human being concerned and engaged in research involving social groups and individuals touching you as much as you touch them. Questioning methodology means refusing to obliterate the difficulties of these positional issues.

Dealing with disturbances

When you face new questions or are forced to reevaluate an old one, a few ways to engage with the disturbance seem most common. Let me consider three of the options on the table.

"As if" – ignoring the disturbance.
Denying, silencing, avoiding, ignoring, pretending. These are, seemingly, the easiest available attitudes. They amount to putting your head in the sand. Ignore what happened, do not mention it, continue as if *this* were not *there*. In order to be rigorous, disregard feelings and your body more generally. Emotions are better put aside for now. Your gender. Your sexuality too. Your social background as well. Others' perception of your skin tone or body shape, likewise. Be professional. Act professional. Don't take it personally, please. This is about science. *Nothing personal.* This is not about *you*.

Maybe this is not so bad an option if the intention behind it is to protect scientists from undesired scrutiny on their privacy, but is it a good way to do science? Maybe it is also not a bad way to do science as long as it still works. But what to do when it is no longer the case?

"Reset" – neutralizing the disturbance through corrective means.
This is a tool useful in many scientific disciplines, particularly when it comes to scaling and measurements. Measures and weights differ depending on precise circumstances, e.g. gravity. By recalibrating the data to the circumstances in which they will be used, you resolve the issue. Social sciences do not provide tools to correct the data following a universal law like gravity, but they offer ways to observe and analyze the variations of life experiences. Gender, power, culture, capital, social class, and race are a few examples of the numerous instruments that we mobilize in order to understand why the world does not weigh on every person in the same way. But what to do with this information? If, for example, you observe that female and male researchers obtain vastly different answers

from their interlocutors when carrying out interviews, how do you deal with the produced data? Which data would be more correct? And what if the data obtained do not only differ in accordance with the age and gender of the researcher but also with their social and cultural background as well as with their physical appearance? Correcting the data in qualitative research is rarely possible when it comes to the account of personal human experiences; but correcting the data is also very complicated in quantitative research. *Nothing personal?* Correction always requires one to set an arbitrary point of reference as normative. This is not to say that homogenization processes are not helpful. It's just that they only work for determined circumstances, beyond which they may create more problems than they solved.

"Say it!" – valuing the disturbance.

In the social sciences, acknowledging the subjectivity and individuality of the researcher has been a constant point of interest for decades, particularly among scholars influenced by psychoanalysis who argue that the methodological anxiety of the social sciences is actually their strength.[2] Many feminist anthropologists, from Michelle Rosaldo to Lila Abu-Lughod, have placed the study of emotions at the core of their research.[3] Others, like Gaston Bachelard or Renato Rosaldo, have paralleled their methodological and theoretical scholarship with works of poetry. How shall you deal with research or engagement that breaks your heart?[4] How do the struggles you endure, actually play and interact with your research questions?[5] Perhaps most recent are the attempts to systematize these approaches by working with "epistemic affects,"[6] or, as I myself have suggested elsewhere, to go into fieldwork with an "affective scope," and to take the ongoing exchange of feelings as seriously as any other type of data in an attempt to get a fuller picture of a situation.[7] This point goes beyond recognizing that data is subjective and situated. *Nothing personal!* It is to emphasize that the situations and people we study and work with have an active voice and that they are no more stable than we are. Fieldwork and

interlocutors, places or circumstances can feel unfair and hurtful. Should the bad moments, which undoubtedly occurred, be recounted? Can we learn from them? What happens when you stop being a researcher and return to being just another person?

Methodology – Or how to face the elements "on the way"

According to the word's Greek etymology, method is *the pursuit of a way*. It is the search for systematic ways to produce knowledge. Methodology is the effort to constitute this path as a branch of knowledge itself. When you are methodological, you pay attention to how you do things. By telling how you did something and from where you are speaking, you make it accessible to others. In the essays composing this methodology section, the three authors do precisely this. In the course of their research, they engage in finding ways to resolve the issues they are confronted with. Their positions and questions differ, but in each case, they search for how to move forward in the face of failure, outrage, or encounters with personal limits: be it the failure of infrastructures, the outrage they themselves feel or, indeed, cease to feel, or the limits of well-rehearsed scholarly vocabularies. In their essays, we see these scholars at work and learn from their reflections on that process. Because these essays reflect diverse questions and situations, each of them may pertain to you in a different way.

The first of the three essays, *Good intentions [ ] a non-violent gaze upon the object. [ugly feelings and their purification]*, from Stella Rehbein, is a piece of scientific subtlety and bravery. This effect, however, was not the intention of the author. On the contrary, Rehbein's text is careful to avoid any gesture of auto-heroization. Indeed, the essay recounts her personal confrontation with the limits of her empathy for her interviewees. She would have liked to understand them and to offer an illuminating account of their lives. However, as we learn, this is not what happened. In fact, she found the lives of some of the people she met with to be sad,

and she found herself judging them, going against the ethics of what, as social scientists, we would like to imagine ourselves to be and stand for. That could be seen as a small misstep, a moment of tiredness, which would be easy to hide. She does not. She felt herself participating in a socially violent act. She is the one who did this. She felt that in herself: she is the one who could not care. By writing this essay, she is not pretending that this did not happen, that it was a false move, nor does she retroactively whitewash her carelessness. She is not trying to overcome her failure, she is not seeking a pardon. She is facing this carefully, and questioning what it implies; all this without writing a cathartic text.

In her essay, *Facing Birthing Abuse: Repromediation and the Emergence of the Digital Doula,* Ash Teodorson is also doing something special. The author is involved on several fronts: she works, she carries out research, and she engages herself in the fight for reproductive justice. As we discover while following her, she makes this situation very productive. Her professional and intellectual work fuse together in this essay in which she questions practice from theoretical grounds, questions theory from practical grounds, and searches for concrete ways to support the people she works with. Her job as a doula consists in taking care of mothers-to-be in the face of institutions who routinely impose on them normalized ways for birthing. Confronted with inequality and birthing abuse, but also exposed to the media representation of mothers-to-be that constructs them as passive beings requiring salvation, Ash Teodorson is offering a theoretical critique of the birthing clinic. While this would have sufficed in the realm of the critical academy, her work is more involved: Rather than providing an external critique of the institution, she undertakes her analysis from within, informed by the care she gives to these mothers-to-be while siding with them when they need her. While she performs the job, she simultaneously mobilizes intellectual analysis in the search for solutions; this, as we see at the end of her text, including when a global pandemic that would seem to render her work impossible suddenly arises.

Lena Eckert's essay, *Atmosphere in Academia: A Queer-feminist perspective on the surplus in the pedagogical setting*, closes the book. It does so in an elegant and reflexive way, by looking at us retrospectively as a collective, and by posing new questions. During the conference that led to the publication of this book, she endeavored to question the seemingly least concrete of all things: the atmosphere of the conference itself. Participants feel good at this conference, or so they say, she observed. Her students of her seminars also say that they like the atmosphere of her queer-feminist classroom. But what does this mean? What do we mean when we say this? Is there an actual way to examine this? Is there a way to take this seriously? This is what she asks. You too, certainly, already had such questions. But how to address them? As we understand while following her fascinating enterprise, she is outlining a way to solve this, and she shares her findings with us here. She shows us what it takes to try to evaluate what an atmosphere, good, or bad, or tense, is, if it exists and if it can at all be useful. The path she offers is innovative and opens up new research possibilities for sociology. But there is more to it; the methodology she develops impacts the atmosphere and as such, contributes to its transformation. Retrospectively, it also offers a fascinating archive of the atmosphere as it existed at that time. Hence, her action-research assemblage is productive of new promising possibilities both as a scientific path and as a way to build future collectives.

Methodologies in motion: the ethical case for a non-neutral story

Let me conclude by stepping into the multiple discussions the three authors of this section have enabled and, based on where I stand, taking a more concrete personal position on the methodological issues that we are confronted with when we work on gender and affect. A few years ago, at a conference I attended, a renowned and senior historian of gender presented a very moving account of the misery and dramas of a migrant family she had been working with

over the course of several years in Beijing. I had lived in the capital of China a few years prior, witnessed the city transforming, and hence was aware of what the situation meant for some of its least advantaged inhabitants. The account she gave was moving, and I was indeed moved by her presentation. It held my breath and transported me back to experiences I had in contexts I imagined similar to the ones she was describing, giving me the impression that I could almost physically grasp the situations she was discussing. After her talk, I went to thank her for sharing her personal emotion in the scholarly account she gave us. With eyes still wet and blushing, she turned towards me and asked: *When was the last time that you have cried in public?* I felt severed from my empathy and ashamed of my compliment. As I understood, it had been too embarrassing an experience for her to allow for compliments. But it also unsettled me, indeed, with regard to the image I project in public, intentionally or not, and the norms I appear to fit in. Instead of being touched as I felt, was I simply unreflectively endorsing a traditionally masculine role? Was this something *personal*? Indeed, so many aspects enter into the manifold sites of interaction, whether it be when we carry out our research, engage with our interlocutors, say good-bye to them to return to where we came from, come back and work with colleagues, give an account of our results in public, or engage critically with each other's views and scholarly work. Each aspect involves power relationships, socialization processes, alienation, and inequality, but also intimate matters such as how we express solidarity and friendship, how we introduce ourselves, or how we convince our interlocutors of our goodwill and good faith. Here, we see how the methodological endeavors of the three essays potentially mix. Was my failure to recognize that this professor could feel embarrassed something to engage with? Or was this failure the product of the academic institution in which it took place, which makes human emotions into something to avoid? Or was there something special in the atmosphere of that day that I felt compelled to recognize? What seemed clear was that the affective dimension of her discourse had

conveyed some meanings to me, but surely not all. Yet, for others, this may have as well been true in different ways. Affect(s) are neither neutral devices nor stable signifiers. "We are all in a desert. No one understands anyone," Gustave Flaubert once said, I guess on a very sad day.[8] This pessimistic view may be why avoiding discussing emotions altogether can feel more comfortable for many. On the contrary, emphasizing the methodological importance of affects implies the intention to work with this ambiguity. But affect also has an uncommon efficiency in catching our attention, and the fact that we receive them differently does not make them entirely idiosyncratic. Otherwise, how would they connect us? They are our shaky, yet tangible, common ground. So to speak, there is a floor and sky to them, and their specific cultural histories only float within this limited space, explaining why we are still able to connect beyond all our differences. Maybe we can even actually actively build alternative atmospheres, as Lena Eckert suggests. Yet, that we can gloss over the differences between us does not imply that these differences are small. Emotions, affects, how you feel and how you express them, are constrained by very intimate histories unfolding along the contours of gender, cultural background and social class. Me, you, bring all this along when carrying out research or engaging ourselves. The people you work with see it and feel it, react to it, or interpret it in ways that you may or may not like, but that you have to deal with in any case. They have assumptions concerning you in the same way that you have assumptions concerning them, even if you would prefer to avoid it entirely. You might eventually adapt to and take for granted some of these assumptions concerning yourself as well. At least, this is what happened many times to me. Finally, you also bring these feelings and their backgrounds with you when you write about your research, or talk about it. Dealing with methodological issues when we decide to explore affect and gender implies confronting these issues in a direct way, and finding new, creative, ways to address these challenges throughout the entire research or engagement process. It matters because it implies that only the multiplicity of positions and diverse gazes can actually

allow us to advance together. These exchanges between people looking at the world from diverse standpoints, however difficult and bitter, trace maps, incomplete and moving, of knowledge that we can attach to and rely on, at least for a time. This implies that we do not work alone, for ourselves. We work for something larger, for imagined communities and collectives who will make sense and use of what we produce. The question of methodology loops back to the question of what purpose one does research or engages with other scholars for. In a way, producing knowledge is *just* organizing and solidifying unstable realities to make, at least temporarily, sense of them. Each in their own way, Stella Rehbein, Ash Teodorson and Lena Eckert do just this. In the following essays, they pause to look at the world, search for a way to understand what goes on, and allow us to learn from their work.

1 See Gaston Bachelard. *Le rationalisme appliqué.* Paris: PUF, 1949, 77-81. The translation I use comes from Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Jean-Claude Passeron. *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries*. 1968. Translated by Richard N, De Gruyter, 1991.

2 See Georges Devereux. *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences*. Mouton & Co., 1967.

3 Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo. *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot notions of self and social life*. Cambridge University Press, 1980. Lila Abu Lughod. *Veiled Sentiments, Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society.* 1986. University of California Press, 1999.

4 See Ruth Behar. *The Vulnerable Observer. Anthropology that breaks your heart.* Beacon Press, 1996.

5 See Renato Rosaldo. *Culture and Truth. The Remaking of Social Analysis*. 1989. Beacon Press, 1993.

6 Thomas Stodulka, Nasima Selim and Dominik Mattes. "Affective Scholarship: Doing Anthropology with Epistemic Affects." *Ethos*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2018, pp. 519-536.

7 Jean-Baptiste Pettier. "The Affective Scope: Entering China's Urban Moral and Economic World through Its Emotional Disturbances." *Anthropology of Consciousness*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2016, pp. 75-96.

8 This quote is attributed to him in Guy de Maupassant. "Solitude." *Le Horla.* Librairie Générale Française, 2000, p. 133. Translation is my own.

Good intentions [ ] a non-violent gaze upon the object [ugly feelings and their purification]

Stella Rehbein

This essay explores some feelings that come with the embodied perspective of my social position during the research process of my doctoral project. It is about me being entangled, affectively, with my body present. It is also about my being entangled in social categories (as a female, white, middle-class academic) – and oh, how they play out! By acknowledging these entanglements, this essay is aimed at giving the unflattering, the messy (as opposed to the neat, the pure, the unflawed by issues of bodies and power) some space and some thinking.

The unflattering are my ugly feelings[1] during the research process and the realization of how I am doing class while I am doing science and that social class is ultimately an affective thing. What is the character and the quality of these feelings, what makes them so utterly ugly? Staying with them, treating them as an epistemic object, as a means for theorizing and knowledge production, I

found that through them I encountered the limits of my sympathy, the inability to cast a non-violent gaze upon my research object, a specific classism through my being affected. Poverty and hardship – that is the face *my* terror and loathing of difference wears.[2]

Good intentions

I research both homosexual and heterosexual couples, their daily routines, and domestic lives as well as their strategies and practices to establish and maintain strong feelings of intimacy, emotional commitment and romance. The couples I research are, when put in *Bourdieusian* terminology, low in cultural and economic capital, meaning that they have relatively low incomes and a low level of formal education. Class was from the very beginning a paramount category of interest to me. When putting together my corpus of literature and examining the current state of research, I was often surprised at how theoretical approaches, as well as empirical investigations, were marked by a quite crude class bias, generalizing a middle-class perspective.

I started my project with a critique of a hegemonic understanding of intimacy that narrows down intimacy to a specific type of verbal and therapeutically informed communication, most prominently seen in Eva Illouz's research. To her as well as to other prominent theorists on love and intimacy,[3] intense romantic encounters are primarily mediated by a type of emotionally charged and dyadic communication. Middle-class couples are, according to Illouz, better equipped with "emotional capital." This term refers to a dimension of cultural capital and describes communicative skills for handling emotions. These include capacities of self-expression and self-reflection. Using this metric as the baseline, working-class couples thus consistently fall short.[4] I interpret this line of thinking as a hierarchization of different forms of emotional habitus or emotional cultures.

To empirically reconstruct practices of intimacy-building beyond a middle-class logocentrism, I introduced the dimension

of materiality, expanding my research object to pre-lingual dimensions – namely spatiality, affectivity and rituals. Following Sara Ahmed as well as the Durkheimian approach of affective ties that are mediated by objects and which strengthen the cohesion of moral communities,[5] I proposed an understanding of material intimacy as a proximity of bodies and their being directed (bodily, affectively) in the same way. In order to grasp the dimension of materiality, I relied on a combination of narrative interviews with *walking interviews*[6] – as shared explorations of the domestic sphere. In my analysis, I sketch out these constellations of *happy objects* that bind the couple together. For now, I am calling these *tableaux* (taking this term from Lauren Berlant) which describe scenarios of affective orientations towards bodies, objects, practices and ideas that give a sense of possibility or are part of an optimistic attachment. Intimacy, framed in this way, would then be understood as the proximity of bodies and their bodily and affectively being oriented in the same way, relying on a (in a very literal way) being close, being gathered in the same space of bodies and objects. Instead of perceiving intimacy as a reflexive-communicative event between two individualized subjects who have seemingly nothing "at hand" (no objects, no body, no situation) except for communicative skills and a "deep" emotional life that needs talking about, I frame intimacy as having more of a triadic or network-like structure: as the same affective orientation towards a whole cosmos of "thirds" (objects, practices, fantasies) that one holds dear and near.

At the beginning of my project, during this phase of *good intentions*, I felt on top of things. I felt on top of class after having detected aspects of classism in other theoretical approaches of intimacy. Giving up on logocentric approaches and introducing materiality felt like a smart move, as if I had outwitted class. It felt like I could solve a moral problem intellectually, through the practice of assiduous reading. I thought that if only I did well enough, if only I was aware enough, if only I read enough critical theories, I'd be able to play a trick on class, that I could escape it, that I could somehow neutralize my standpoint, make it so transparent that it

would shine through; I would be so considerate that I would not execute symbolic violence – I did not expect how affect would mess it all up.

[ ]

My thinking for this essay started with a gesture of turning away. The gesture of a shrug and the speech-act "Oh, I don't know if I can use this interview. That was sad," after I had finished the interview with Sabrina and Daniel.[7]

A long and non-violent gaze upon the object

There is a (fragment of a) phrase that I hold dear, that I heard somewhere, that resonated in me and that I wrote down and put on the pinboard over my desk, serving as an orientation, an ideal: the long and non-violent gaze upon the object ("der lange und gewaltlose Blick auf den Gegenstand"[8]) by Adorno. I wish that my research was that: a long and non-violent gaze upon my object. I wish it was that all the way through: in my exposé, written with good intentions, in the field, when encountering physically Sabrina and Daniel and their intimate space, and in the analysis, when ultimately writing about them, making them the objects of the readers' gaze.

The first thing I learned was that my conceptual shift (turning towards "materialities") did not solve the problem of standpoint; of a theoretical reasoning from a specific perspective. Conceptually turning towards objects was in no regard a way out of class(ism) – but a way *in*. Finding a language for Sabrina and Daniel's likes and dislikes that was appropriate and fair turned out an unsolvable task. Could I pretend not to already possess knowledge about hierarchies in tastes and lifestyles, performing an innocent naiveté? Could I rely on just naming things, listing things? Naming things, relying on a like-minded reader to "get the picture"? Would a mere protocol of what had been "there," of what had been mentioned, unburden Sabrina's and Daniel's objects of socially stigmatizing meanings?[9]

The sofa. The resting. The chihuahuas. The daytime TV. The fortune of a hard-fought-for flat. The others, the non-Germans, who threaten this fortune. Being German. The pride to live (finally) in a quiet neighborhood. The arcades. The holy Sunday. The sleep ("only watching something on TV where it doesn't matter when you fall asleep"). The two dogs as happy objects – as a promise of commitment when Daniel was still married to someone else. For two years they owned a dog together without living together, without officially being a couple. The dog wandering between them, materializing a shared future that was just not there yet.

In writing, after the immediacy of being affected by Sabrina and Daniel, their objects and their space, I could pretend that this gesture of turning away and the affects it was caused by didn't happen. I could write a *tableau* of their *happy objects*, scarce as they were. I could muster appreciation for it. I could attribute value to those *happy objects,* to those things and spaces and practices that felt strange to me. I could acknowledge the structural side of tiredness, acknowledge that there is a "politics to exhaustion," acknowledge that the costs for the reproduction of life are very unequally distributed.[10] I could find in me, a true, genuine appreciation for the pleasure of lying down, for the delicacy of resting. I could argue (and I *will* argue for this in my dissertation) against theorizing in the line and logic of deficiency and for appreciating the fabric of what binds Sabrina and Daniel together. There *are* different and equally valid good-life-fantasies,[11] optimistic attachments that lie in having some calm and not in being stimulated or affected – affective ties that are fastened to the ideal of reproduction and endurance and not onto intensity. I am claiming the validity and appropriateness of Sabrina and Daniel's practices and objects.

I could leave it at that. I could write a chapter on "results" that corresponds with the good intentions of my exposé, a hopefully not-so-classist investigation into intimate materialities/material intimacies.

But. There was this instance of **[ ],** a bracketed space. The gesture of turning away: What do I do when I realize that I do not

have this non-violent gaze, that my looking at Sabrina and Daniel is not non-violent? What do I do when I do not have (immediately) enough "intellectual love,"[12] as Bourdieu calls it – as a specific way of looking at something different – for my object of research?

Revisiting the space of the [ ] meant for me turning my attention towards myself and my perspective. A perspective stemming from a position in social space and the damage of middle-class norms that comes with it, the violence of my "scientific" gaze.[13] A theory that was meant for the analysis of the (*happy*) *objects* of Sabrina and Daniel could, as I found out, serve equally as a tool for thinking about my own affective likes and dislikes, as a means for self-reflection. The gap, the bracketed space, is to be filled with my own being affected when in the affective space of someone else, my own bodily positioning towards the *happy objects* of others. Turning towards objects does not only shed light on the creation of intimacy, but also the creation of difference, or more precisely, distance: the "feeling strange" in the intimate sphere of someone else, the "feeling sobered" when encountering a life that seems devoid of intensities, sensations and pleasure, the feeling of "this is not familiar," "this has no positive value for me," "this repels me," "these are sad objects for me."

[ugly feelings]

I found Sabrina and Daniel through a friend's mother who is working in a property management firm and who has an extensive social network. She rents out the pub that Daniel manages, and has known both of them for many years. Sabrina and Daniel feel committed to her, maybe even indebted – as she was often helping them with bureaucratic problems – and this is supposedly one of the reasons why they agreed to be interviewed.

They explained to me that they wouldn't have more than an hour for the interview. I was offering alternative dates, but they said that it was not about a specific date but that they simply didn't have more time. Both of them work double shifts six days a week,

and Sunday, the only free day in the week, is holy – they have a rule that they do not plan anything on that day. When we were talking on the phone to set a date for our meeting, Sabrina also indicated that she wasn't sure if they could help me, "I am not so much of a talker" she explained, "but my partner is better at it, he will do the talking."

It didn't "go well." Apart from the lack of time (bumping into my unnoticed assumptions: people have time for narrative interviews), I felt that there was nothing "in it" and that I could not say anything about them afterwards. There hadn't been time for my *walking interview*. There were no narrative passages. Sabrina's prediction that Daniel would do the talking proved wrong. Sabrina and Daniel felt openly uncomfortable, they told me: "We normally don't talk so much about ourselves."

When we met, they were both very tired, as we were meeting in between their work shifts. He had done the shopping in the central market for his pub and she had been working a shift in an amusement arcade. Now they had about three hours to get some rest, feed the dogs, eat and get ready for their evening shifts, where she would be waitressing at the pub, and he would be driving around checking gaming machines and collecting the money. They normally get at home between 2 and 3am.

What does tiredness mean in an interview setting? Is tiredness something that gets in the way of a "normal" interview because the participants cannot but give a distorted account, a somewhat deformed picture of how it "really" is? Or is tiredness an upright result that is to be taken seriously? Valued even? There is a striking theoretical lack of interest in tiredness.[14]

After I had left them, after the concentration and awareness of my role as an interviewer dropped, I felt an overwhelming sadness. I was relieved to leave their place – their bodies, their apartment, their neighborhood, their life. I did not like the impression they gave me, the imprint they left on my body; I didn't want to feel that. I did not want to look at them anymore. But whose sadness was it? Was it their sadness or mine? This sadness felt really hard to

pin down, really hard to locate. It felt like it was bouncing between us, back and forth. They never said that *they* felt sad. They were simply tired. *I* found them sad, they gave me a sad impression. But I was not touched, not really affected by it, as it was clearly *theirs*.

I didn't want to make this *my* feeling, I was inwardly saying "no, thank you!" I didn't want to get familiar. And this sadness seemed to serve exactly that purpose: it was a means to not get involved, a means for dis-identification. The sadness set us apart, the sadness was creating distance (between my body and theirs). When I got home to *my* peers, *my* objects, *my* world I could say that "Oh, that was sad, that was depressing," and shrug. Their being depressing for me meant that we were not alike. The sadness had to remain with them. The sadness was stuck onto them,[15] their tired bodies, their inability to speak, their insecurity. Sadness made me move away. Through this unengaged sadness, a sadness that doesn't make me lean in, a sadness that establishes no relationships or bonds, a sadness with no consolation or comfort, I encountered the limits of my sympathy.

Affect is a device for judgement. My sadness is a device for judgement: those are sad lives.

(I am not feeling sad; I am merely noticing their sadness. My sadness is the un-involved and passive sadness of a seemingly innocent bystander.) I want to strip off the innocence of any bystander's vision and affective reaction: What is the bystander's (my) specifically un-affected affect of a shrug? The dismissive gesture of turning away?

Ugly feelings can, according to Sianne Ngai, be described as *negative* because they are organized around repulsion and phobic strivings "away from," rather than around attraction and strivings "toward." For her, disgust is the "ugly feeling par excellence"[16] as the immediate and urgent reaction to things to turn away from. No, disgust was not what I was feeling; it was less acute, less involved. However, the affect that resembles tolerance more than disgust, she describes as contempt. This is a reaction that is also negative, as it also makes one move away, but the kind "one has for someone

perceived as inferior but basically harmless."[17] Ah, that was closer! I felt caught. She further argues that objects of contempt "simply do not merit strong affect; they are noticed only sufficiently so as to know that they are not noteworthy."[18] That was it. That was my shrug. That was my dismissing of Sabrina and Daniel as sad. That was also my dismissing of the interview for not being "good" or relevant or "rich" material. In revisiting this site of the **[ ],** I've come to re-read this sadness, I've come to re-name it.

Contempt is not only a means for dis-identification but it appears to me as the moment where *a social hierarchy (in feeling, through feeling)* sets in: disgust is in a way equal, as the disgusting object is fearsome, monstrous; the object of disgust is, at least, granted *relevance*.

[purification or: bringing my coldness to the consciousness of itself]

I could sense that these feelings were ugly because I didn't know where to put them in my dissertation. I couldn't find an adequate chapter, I couldn't find a legitimate format for them to be read and seen and I couldn't find a language for them that would, at the same time, be appropriate in the academic field. These ugly feelings are not supposed to be part of my academic work. They stain the rest of what is written (all the attempts of the analytical, the well-balanced, the considerate, the well-founded and thought-through) and they also seem to taint the picture of the academic persona that I aspire to be. They give me away. (Oh, how well I've done; all this assiduity to do it correctly, to not make mistakes (formally, ethically), all the anticipation of objections, ethical or otherwise… eagerly writing a research journal, self-reflecting, exchange and supervision with peers, neatly documenting the interviews in protocols, including my own affectivity – because that's what you're meant to do, right?)

Of course, self-reflexivity is desired, something that has a positive value, something that has become an ethical standard in qualitative or ethnographic research, a *comme-il-faut* practice; It is not

courageous, not out-of-line to then publish these self-reflections. So, why am I so afraid to show this? I sensed that it was neither because it was "subjective," nor because it is about "bad feeling" per se (I would have been far more comfortable in writing about affective/hierarchical entanglements in the fieldwork that harmed *me*; sexist instances in the field when I experienced my body as vulnerable or exposed or, *in its lacking neutrality*, as un-scientific – another topic I thought of for this essay). But what makes these feelings so ugly is that I am the aggressor, it is *me* being violent. So where to put it? The only legitimate way one could come up with ugly feelings would be in a narrative of solution, of cure and overcoming. One has to figure it out alone, in a research diary maybe, and then one can go to the public/into publication with a neat solution ("How to overcome classist biases in fieldwork"). Talking about the problem of ugly feelings seems only possible after having solved it, after a process of purification, a process of re-establishing one's own moral integrity. Speaking of this problem is only legitimate when one can claim a transformation, as in "I struggled with ugly feelings but I have come out of it pure again, I have overcome my cruelty." The problem of ugly feelings itself has to be boxed away, has to be bracketed [ ].

What does it mean to leap into the bracketed space and to *stay* in it, to endure that there is no "next step," no utopian consolation? What is this movement of a suspended agency, that lies at the core of ugly feelings? What is the movement of a non-transformative gesture, the act of not acting? There will be no call for something better, something more; no appeal for having what I am lacking (love, sympathy). Adorno, in his plea for dwelling with the negative, *warns* of the encouragement to love: "The exhortation to love – even in its imperative form, that one *should* do it – is itself part of the ideology coldness perpetuates. […] The first thing, therefore, is to bring coldness to the consciousness of itself, of the reasons why it arose."[19] For him, the turn to the negative/the ugly is ethically superior to turning to positive feelings; it is to be favored. In the same line, Ahmed is arguing against an affirmative ethics and its wish to

"be over it," to overcome suffering: "We might need to attend to bad feelings not in order to overcome them but *to learn by how we are affected by what comes near*, which means achieving a different relationship to all our wanted and unwanted feelings as an ethical resource."[20] That meant for me to give up my attempts to purify, to solve, as the only one profiting from this purification of my affects would be me, having restored my moral integrity. But to follow this trace of cruelty, enduring it, seeing where it leads me, treating it as an epistemic object. *This essay being non-cathartic is an ethical choice*.

the left [of ugly feelings] the right

Sabrina and Daniel uttered different and multiple forms of racist resentment. When they recounted how hard it was to find an affordable apartment and how they had been searching for over a year, they expressed a strong resentment towards "foreigners." The German term "Ausländer" made me flinch. It functioned as a warning light, a red flag, it repelled me. It also repelled me how they imagined me – white, German – as solidary; how my nationality created closeness, how I was categorially *alike*. An important factor in my moving away through sadness, in creating distance, in experiencing and also in producing difference was *their* ugly feeling of resentment. But making this a narrative about my disgust of their disgust wouldn't tell the whole story – even though it was tempting: dwelling on their ugly feelings as a reason for my dismissing them was offering a neat way out, as their resentment seemed to prove me morally superior in my moving away from it. That would be a trick for purifying my ugly feelings.

But it made me think of the politics of ugly feelings, their being located on the political spectrum, the left and right of ugly feelings. Ngai says that, historically, there has been an appropriation of disgust by the political right and that it, in fact, should be summoned by the political left more often, namely when it has to identify racism, misogyny and militarism *as intolerable*.[21] She states "divergent fates of attraction and repulsion in critical theory"[22] where academics

fostered an attraction to desire and share a disinterest in disgust. There is an ethics to this preference, a political dimension of this *fit* between academia and attraction. Academia's love for the "academically routinized concept of 'desire'" for example is, according to Ngai, "simply more concordant, *ideologically* as well as *aesthetically*, with the aesthetic, cultural and political pluralisms that have come to define the post-modern."[23] Ahmed is, similarly, pondering on *the moral superiority of attraction or positive feeling*: "To be on the side of happiness or to be for happiness (as a way of '*being for being for*') means you are on the side of the good."[24] There is a peculiar connection between affect and ethics, an ethics of positive feeling: positive feelings make you good, negative feelings impair you, morally.

In this associative link of being left, having positive feelings (towards rather than against) and being morally pure, I stand exposed. And I also have the feeling that by writing and thinking it further, that by filling the bracketed spaces, I am writing myself out of an academic circle, out of an academic peer group: can I still legitimately claim to be critical and left (anchors for self-identification) when I am affected in a way that blocks sympathetic identification with my object?

Even though Ngai argues against the binary classification of right-wing equals disgust,[25] while left-wing equals an absence of it, she falls for the misunderstanding that the left is *only and exclusively* disgusted by the ugly feelings of others, only disgusted by the misogynist and racist hatred of their political other; left disgust then would be the disgust of the disgust – which appears to me as just another purifying trick of making something ugly disappear. Or, to put it another way: ugly feelings are *not really* ugly when they are caused by something ugly: the ugly object *deserves* the ugly feeling of disgust; it deserves nothing better. (But is the political left disgusted only by disgust? Or don't come up – when feverishly *being for being for*, feverishly being for attraction, feverishly being for positive and intensive feeling – other bodies and objects that they turn away from?).

[the happiness distinction is a reification of a social distinction[26]]

I am still not done with the sadness. I need to return to it again. I was re-reading my judgement of Sabrina and Daniel as being sad as a form of contempt on my end. It was an affective judgement, an evaluation through my being affected. But it was also a judgement *of* their affect/ivity. It is not just *any* form of contempt when dismissing someone for being sad. There is a specificity in dismissing them *for being sad* (and not for, say, being silly or being petty which would be other common forms of contemptuous judgements) that I want to follow up, a specific register or ethical framework connected to it.

When I was writing about their resentment, I said that it was not only their disgust that I was moving away from. I want to dwell more on what it was that I was also turning away from – their tiredness, the flat level of intensity, their objects that I didn't like. *I came to call them sad because "intensity" was missing.* There is a hyperactivity in their life with both of them working two shifts, working 14 to 16 hours per day, always *afoot*, always busy, always moving, but not an affectivity one expects to accompany that hyperactivity: being energetic, being vital, being lively. When I sat down after the interview, I noted in my research journal: "poor". Poor not only moneywise but poor in experiences, poor in social contacts, poor in places they go or spaces they inhabit, poor in language and expression, poor in those "meaningful objects" I eagerly wrote down in my exposé as hoping to find; poor in affective involvement when speaking about their lives. They want to lie down.

There is a very specific cruelty in the notion of "a good life," the happiness-assumption, the intensity-expectation, the normativity of a specific affective endowment *one should have*.

While this essay is an attempt to acknowledge how these ugly feelings are genuinely *mine*, I also aim at reconnecting them to a more structural aspect, pondering on what of my (dis-)appreciations are also collectively shared. I want to reflect on where I am coming from, theoretically, ideologically and institutionally – which is, in my case, a graduate school[27] that aims at grounding Hartmut Rosa's

Resonance Theory in empirical fieldwork. With its roots in Critical Theory, the graduate school as a utopian enterprise has the question of "the good life" at its core. This approach is potentially symptomatic when thinking about positive feelings and the underlying ideal of intensity.

In his book on *Resonance,* Hartmut Rosa[28] argues against common research on happiness which is tracing happiness or living standard back to material conditions, accessing happiness through economic parameters and statistical modulation: quite the opposite, he says: happiness, the good life, is to be measured in qualities of how life is subjectively experienced. It is certain *emotional qualities* that "really" count – he sometimes calls this new yardstick for evaluation "the shiny-eye-index." There is no good life, *unless you feel it*, unless life is experienced bodily, affectively, emotionally as resonant. Correspondingly, resonance's counterpart, alienation, is also described in emotional or affective terms – as being numb, indifferent, incapable of creating "vibrating" bonds or attachments to people, objects or transcendencies. French philosopher Tristan Garcia analyses intensity as the core, central modern value, as the guiding orientation in modern societies. According to him, intensity's logic is grounded in the *feeling of being alive*. Intensity has turned upside down *the moral standards from which to judge an existence*: the fetish of intensity has replaced an external moral for an internal ethics which has no fixed end or substance (you should do this or that), but that lies in the form of *how* you do it (no matter what you do, do it with intensity): "We ceaselessly try to evaluate our own lives. But a single law presides over the modern trial of the self vs itself: that what has been done was done with a fervent heart."[29] Rosa, as well as Garcia, are both *for* intensity. They celebrate lives that succeed in establishing intensity and they mourn when intensity fades. And they treat the longing for intensity as a universal human feature, a feature of "us," an "us" that stays unidentified.[30]

Making *feeling* the yardstick for the evaluation of a "good life" is an interesting handling of class: it comes across as an inclusive gesture. There is a promise of sameness or equivalency in it if it is

all about feeling in the end. There *is* something distinctly utopian about the universality of affect. But with the yardstick of feeling for the judgement of an existence, a new figure of the "cultural other" emerges: the unresonants. The blunt, the dumbfounded, the tired, the fearful, the depressive, the passive, the repetitive, the negative, those driven by resentments. An ethics of affect that is *for* positive feeling can become a medium for distinction,[31] a type of judgement which is genuinely *classist* – but seemingly innocent because it doesn't (primarily) draw on material or economic dimensions but on emotional or affective ones.

Alenka Zupančič calls this new ethics of affect "bio-morality," in which "[n]egativity, lack, dissatisfaction, unhappiness, are perceived more and more *as moral faults* – worse, *as a corruption at the level of our very being* or bare life."[32] What I have read as classist or classism, Zupančič calls a new type of racism: "The poorest and the most miserable are no longer perceived as a socioeconomic class, but almost as a *race* of their own, as a special form of life. We are indeed witnessing a spectacular rise of racism, or more precisely, of 'racization.'"[33] In this process of racization, socioeconomic differences become naturalized. What is new in this "racism of successfulness" is that it doesn't draw on economic success or achievements of a public self, but, as it is focused upon the level of being or bare life, on our private or intimate lifestyles, "our ways of life, our habits, our feelings, our more or less idiosyncratic enjoyments."[34] If one fully acknowledges the violence of hierarchies centered around the – *bio* – of a bio-morality it suddenly becomes very hard to think of the universality of affect as an emancipatory device.

I am claiming that if one is *for* happiness, for positive feelings, for intensity, for livelihood, one is *not* automatically on the side of the morally righteous. Not only because negativity is skipped in a hasty abrogation and not only because of the ambiguous promise that wealth and status do not "really" count. But because of the uglification of tiredness, of flatness, of exhaustion that comes with an ethics of good feelings; an uglification that sticks on persons, on bodies – and not on a merciless, tiring structure.

1 In her book *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard University Press, 2005), Sianne Ngai sheds light on some, as she says, weak, nasty and unprestigious affects which she traces in literature, film and theoretical writing. Her affect-analysis on disgust is what I am mostly relying on in this essay. Her general interest lays with dysphoric feelings that are all marked by *suspended agency* and "*noncathartic*, offering no satisfaction of virtue, however oblique, nor any therapeutic or purifying release" (6, my italics). This characteristic of being *noncathartic* was exactly what drew me to the analysis of ugly feelings and guided my thinking about how an ethical handling of ugly feelings would look like: I chose to stay with them, *unsolved*, over the desire to present a narrative of overcoming.

2 I have taken the appeal for self-questioning from Audre Lorde's *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* where she pleads for acknowledging the racism and homophobia in white feminisms and for a different, non-dominant handling of difference: "I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices." Audre Lorde. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches.* The Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 110-114, here p. 114.

3 An understanding of love and romance as resting on a specific type of authentic, self-expressive or therapeutically infused communication can be found for example in Giddens, Luhmann and Rubin. A countering of universalization within intimacy-building can be found in Bellah et al. In *The habits of the heart,* they show that the urban middle class holds up the ideal of (verbal) self-expression and transgression whereas rural and especially Christian groups share an ideal of stability and repetition. See Robert N. Bellah et al. *Habits of the Heart. Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Perennial Library, 1985; Anthony Giddens. *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love & Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford University Press, 1992; Niklas Luhmann. *Liebe als Passion. Zur Codierung von Intimität*. Suhrkamp, 2015; Lilian Rubin, Lilian. *Worlds of Pain. Life in the Working-Class Family*. 1976. Basic Books, 1992,

4 Illouz describes a logocentrism of the middle classes that has also transformed love relationships and illustrates this with two examples: once, she quotes from an academic middle class couple, once from a janitor who has been left by his wife, concerning their mutual working on relationship problems. Whereas, according to her, the academic couple has "self-awareness, the ability to identify their feelings, talk about them, empathize with each other's position and find solutions to a problem" and make use of a therapeutic language which helps them "to further their intimacy," thereby functioning as a "resource to help ordinary middle-class people reach ordinary happiness in the private sphere" (69), she finds that the janitor is voiceless and missing a symbolic frame of reference to make sense of his emotions. See Eva Illouz. *Cold Intimacies. The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Polity Press, 2007.

5 Émile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. 1912. Oxford University Press, 2008.

He couldn't have known why he wished to photograph the bed. It wasn't his own; it wasn't his either. Perhaps it was the whiteness doubled by that of his lover or its hotel-like anonymity that had struck something in him. Its white sheets came with an Airbnb in Barcelona. Each morning as they got out of it, he felt that in unmaking the bed through the night, they had made it their own. Where does one look for traces of a brown body amidst so much whiteness, he would wonder years later as he went through the nine photographs. Intimacy in this constellation of images wasn't an abstract idea but a concrete presence pressing upon fabric, affect had a way of imprinting itself not just on bodies. Some of it had found its way in that spot where the mattress sagged just a wee bit, or in the crumpled sheets willowing with ghost-like presence, in the disheveled feathers full of gossip inside pillows. He wouldn't have articulated what he was feeling in these exact terms just then, but he knew as much that what he captured in a photograph each morning was all the same and yet not the same: creases, folds, volumes of intimacy and sunlight that entered the room were all unique, ones he then would himself out-crease, fold up, cover, flatten – making the bed each morning so that it could return to its anonymous white self. This wasn't destined to be "furniture without memories,"[11] Toni Morrison's phrase that Avery Gordon repurposes to describe the effects of those rituals, habits, structures, and behaviors whose history we do not ask for, so ingrained in our ways of being

that we never pause to question their purpose. This, he reckoned, was furniture with memory, imprints he knew he wanted to return to long after the queer folds of nine nights had been straightened out, morning after morning, ready, almost waiting as if for other bodies of color to arrive, take cover in its engulfing whiteness.

11 Avery Gordon. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 4.

6 See for example Jana Kühl. "Walking Interviews als Methode zur Erhebung alltäglicher Raumproduktionen." *Europa Regional*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2015, pp. 35-48.

7 The names have been anonymized.

8 Theodor W. Adorno. *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords.* Columbia University Press, 2005, pp. 127-134. I chose to deviate from the English translation which termed it "the long and uncoercive gaze upon the object" (130), staying – in my perception – closer to the German text: Theodor W. Adorno. *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II. Eingriffe, Stichworte*. Suhrkamp, 2003, p. 602.

9 The impossibility to step out of one's class position and the modes of perception, evaluation and *naming* it entails, is shown by Bourdieu, arguing that also scientific practices are perpetuating social hierarchies of class: "Or, in a more ordinary case, how is one to refer to the hairstyle of a low-ranking clerk without playing on class prejudice, and how is one to communicate, without seeming to approve it, the impression she inevitably produces one someone attuned to the canons of the dominant aesthetic – an impression that forms part of her most inevitably objective truth?" Pierre Bourdieu. "Understanding." *The Weight of the World. Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, edited by Pierre Bourdieu et al., Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 607-626, here p. 623.

10 Ahmed thinks in *Feeling Depleted* of privilege as an energy saving device: less effort is required to pass through; Berlant, too, is taking up on this social/unequal dimension of exhaustion, when saying: "People are worn out by the activity of life-building, especially the poor and the nonnormative" (44). Rubin shows in her empirical analysis the excessive costs that the reproduction of life has for some: "For, in fact, in the working class, the process of building a family, of making a living for it, of nurturing and maintaining the individuals in it, costs 'worlds of pain'" (*Worlds of Pain*, p. 215). See Sara Ahmed. "Feeling Depleted." *Feminist Killjoys*, feministkilljoys.com/2013/11/17/feeling-depleted/, 17 Nov. 2013, Accessed 27 May 2020. See also Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.

11 I am taking this term – good life fantasy – from Lauren Berlant who also is interested in "affective attachments to what we call the 'good life'" (27). Fantasy to her "is the means by which people hoard idealizing theories and tableaux about how they and the world 'add up to something'" (2). See Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*.

12 Pierre Bourdieu. "Understanding," p. 614.

13 Reay shows the symbolic violence of a classed vision that is also frequently exercised in academia: she sees "the damage of middle class normativity" (70) not as a problem of deficit of seemingly deviant interviewees, but as a problem of one's own heuristic of reasoning and judging in scientific practice. Eribon calls this type of violence of classed modes of perception "class ethnocentrism" (142) which he detects – interestingly enough – for the academic *left* in France. See Diane Reay. "Gendering Bourdieu's concept of capitals? Emotional capital, women and social class." *Feminism after Bourdieu,* special issue of *The Sociological Review*, vol. 52, no. 2., 2004, pp. 57-74; Didier Eribon. *Rückkehr nach Reims*. Suhrkamp, 2016.

14 Illouz, when researching the romantic rituals of working class couples (or, more precisely: the lack thereof), dedicates only few words to this, stating that the physical exhaustion of working class *men* when coming home in the evening is often hindering the occurrence of conversation, sexual encounters and intimacy. Tiredness appears in this line of theoretical reasoning like a personal deficiency. I have, throughout researching for this project, never found a genuinely interested sociological account of tiredness. Through this academic void I read a dis-appreciation, maybe even a fear, of the poor body. Of bodies marked, stained by hardship and physical labour and the exhaustion that comes with it. Incisive to me were accounts of Didier Eribon and also Édouard Louis about the structural violence that was forced onto their parent's poor bodies, Eribon talking about his mother's body being so worn out, so "wrung out" due to work, and Louis claiming that it was the politics of the past decades in France that ultimately took his father's life. See Eva Illouz. *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism.* University of California Press, 2007; Édouard Louis. *Wer hat meinen Vater umgebracht?* S. Fischer, 2019; Didier Eribon. *Rückkehr nach Reims.*

15 When Ahmed is, in *Affective Economies*, describing economies of fear she shows vividly how this affect becomes stuck onto bodies, how certain bodies become associated with it; economies of fear produce bodies of fear. To me it felt like not fear, but – in the ethic and hierarchy of what is considered a "good life" – sadness was stuck onto Sabrina and Daniel. Sara Ahmed. "Affective Economies." *Social Text*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2004, pp. 117-139.

16 Sianne Ngai. *Ugly Feelings*, p. 334.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 337.

19 Theodor W. Adorno. *Education after Ausschwitz*, josswinn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/AdornoEducation.pdf, 1966. Accessed 20 April 2021, p. 9.

20 Ibid.

21 Sianne Ngai. *Ugly Feelings*, cf. p. 339.

22 Ibid., p. 338.

23 Ibid., p. 344, my italics.

24 Sara Ahmed. "Affective Economies," p. 199, my italics.

25 Such an argument can be found for example in Bröckling, with an othering of disgust which ascribes fear and resentment exclusively to the (political) "other," namely nationalists, fascists and populists. See Bröckling, Ulrich. "Man will Angst haben." *Mittelweg 36*, vol. 6, 2016, pp. 3-7.

26 This is Ahmed's reading of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* where she retraces the logic of affirmation versus negation in two different modes of evaluation that correspond with its position in the social hierarchy: the aristocratic and the slave morality. While the latter "begins by saying no to what is outside" (205) and is a move of being against, of negation, the former can, according to Nietzsche,

positively create something: "For Nietzsche, the gesture of saying 'we the happy ones!' is an admirable gesture, a self-affirmation, a creation of something out of nothing" (205f.). Sara Ahmed. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press, 2010.

27 www.uni-erfurt.de/max-weber-kolleg/forschung/forschungsgruppen-und-stellen/forschungsgruppen/igs-resonant-self-world-relations, Accessed 10th January 2022.

28 Hartmut Rosa. *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*. Suhrkamp Verlag, 2016.

29 Tristan Garcia. *The Life Intense. A Modern Obsession*. Edinburgh University Press, 2018, p.10.

30 I find it enlightening who exactly makes a lack of intensity a (philosophical) problem. bell hooks analyses, in *Eating the Other*, racialized fantasies of the (black) Other as a stimulus that can foster the feeling of being alive (again). These fantasies of a revived livelihood serve as an imaginary cure for the experience of "cultural anhedonia," the insensitivity to pleasure. But whose problem is this, who is suffering from anhedonia? hooks argues, in quoting Foucaults' own account on his incapacity and relentless search for *the* pleasure that this is the "problem" of the "white west" (27). bell hooks. "Eating the Other." *Black Looks. Race and Representation*. South End Press, 1992, pp. 21-39.

31 In his book *Distinction*, Bourdieu elaborates on how class (as a position in social space due to capital endowment) and taste correlate and how lifestyle choices serve as means of positionings in the social space. Pierre Bourdieu. *Die feinen Unterschiede. Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft*. Suhrkamp, 2013.

32 Alenka Zupančič. *The Odd One In. On Comedy*. MIT Press, 2008, p. 5, my italics.

33 Ibid., p. 6.

34 Ibid.

Facing Birthing Abuse
Repromediation and the Emergence of the Digital Doula

Ash Teodorson

In labor, I move with my clients. In the beginning, when things are moving slowly we walk together, we laugh. Once contractions pick up, I sway with them. I use my body to hold and support their bodies. I breathe with them. Sometimes we moan together. When emotions go deep, we often find our faces close, and our eyes focused on one another. I quietly reassure them, sometimes no more than a whisper in their ear. Lunge, hip squeeze, massage. Together we work through the surges of intensity and relish the moments of respite.

Orientations

This text began a couple of years ago when I was researching a state of crisis in contemporary Western birthing practice. At the time of its original writing, this work centered on the disproportionate

impacts of particular practices on queer and trans people of color as well as on economically disadvantaged and minoritized communities. I was trying to grasp how a system as strikingly ineffective and harmful as 21st-century mainstream American birthing was being fed forward, and to brutal ends, through our screens![1] In other words, how was it that what we saw normalized in movies and on television ended up impacting how we conceived of both the immensity and intimacy of actual human birth on a broad scale? As a working birth doula (labors support provider), I wanted to understand why what I was seeing across a diverse set of clients, both private practice and community-based non-profit, did not match up to the cinematized portrayal of the birth scene. Why was it that we had come to expect the level of crisis, abuse, panic and emergency that was synonymous with birth across many realms of popular media? I first inquired about the impacts of televisual media on the perpetuation of extractive birthing practices via the case study of *One Born Every Minute*.

In working as a community doula, a crisis worker and a sexuality educator, I have come to understand that the role of the contemporary birth doula is not homogenous, and thus an explication of the way I undertake this role seems appropriate. The contemporary birth doula is a professional birth attendant who provides physical and emotional support for a birthing person and their family during the course of pregnancy, at the time of birth and in the immediate postpartum period.[2] Each provider handles care differently depending on their own practice and the needs of the particular family they are supporting. In general, care always includes prenatal visits, labor and delivery support, and postpartum follow-up visits. Doulas generally provide education on prenatal and postpartum health, breastfeeding, sexuality, exercise, nutrition and sleep.

It is common practice for the doula to work with the birthing family to develop a birth plan based on the resources available and the needs and preferences of the parent-to-be. This is often one of the first opportunities birthing people have to access remediating birth narratives, beyond those encountered in popular media

representations. As an experienced birth attendant, the doula offers information about the range of birth options and possibilities, including (1) location (i.e., home birth, freestanding birth center, hospital-attached birth center and conventional hospital delivery room), (2) provider (i.e., Obstetrician/Gynecologist (OB-GYN), Certified Nurse Midwife or Lay Midwife), and (3) pain management options (i.e., massage, relaxation, hypnosis, movement, water birth, oral medication, intravenous medication, walking epidural or full epidural).

When labor begins, the doula comes to the mother-to-be and provides continuous support until she is settled into a state of relative rest following her delivery. The doula is a reliable constant, there is no shift change. The doula is familiar, having met with the family in their own home many times. The doula is also trustworthy; experienced, fluent and strong. Whereas the obligation of the OB-GYN or midwife is to ensure medical health, the doula's job is to attend to the physical and emotional needs of the mother. The doula brings food for the family, provides massage, offers tools and techniques for comfort and the progression of labor, provides a safe and familiar space to process emotions and fears, and translates the opaque language of the hospital and medical staff; they also offer information on various interventions. Whereas the legal obligation of the medical provider is to secure consent, rather than understanding, for interventions, the doula challenges these ethics and epistemologies by always privileging the subjective experience of the birthing mother. The doula will meet with the mother the day after delivery and generally one or two additional times within the first two weeks. At these visits, the doula's primary role is to support the mother with breastfeeding, infant care, and postpartum physical and emotional wellness. Central to the role of the doula is the consideration of maternal experience and preference. Doulas work in private practice, for non-profit organizations, at community clinics, and in hospitals. They often structure fees on a sliding scale and work across disparate populations.

In addition to my work as a doula, I come from a field called

Performance Studies, which can broadly be conceived of as integrating theoretical and practical contributions from a number of disciplines and genres. The field could easily be critiqued for its perceived disciplinary promiscuity, however, it is precisely this interdisciplinarity or maybe even non-disciplinarity that has created the space for some of the most interesting attempts at creation, critique and understanding within academic discourse in recent decades. Among other calls, Performance Studies have taken up the problem of representation and questioned its epistemological and ontological implications.

As a birth worker with a decade of experience attending live births, I am tempted here to claim that there are few areas in which the inadequacy of representation is felt more profoundly than in the face of events that occur entirely outside of the public sphere. In particular, I am thinking here of birth (or sex or death), which are inarguably private bodily scenes that run the risk of impoverishment when processed through contemporary representational practices and how they are re-presented to the public for entertainment consumption and profiteering. As direct, live in-person exposure to reproduction in nearly all of its phases – preconception, conception, pregnancy, birth and the postpartum period – is generally limited, the powerful role of technological mediation and popular televisual representation cannot be overstated in presenting and perhaps even prescribing expectations of this otherwise hidden experience. Popular reality TV representations of birth, for example, generally depict labor and childbirth as an emergency requiring extensive medical intervention and the oversight of a surgically trained physician. By foregrounding these particular narratives, which are largely focused on harnessing intrigue, suspense and shock to garner viewer ratings, these representations normalize expectations of bodily trauma during birth. At the same time, they re-inscribe the authority of the medical-industrial complex and its right to impose surveillance and intervention technologies on maternal bodies with or without their consent, in an effort to regulate and control the subjects

over which they have assumed jurisdiction.

While filmmakers and producers may argue that televisual representations of birth are not creating or prescribing certain approaches to birth, but rather allowing viewers a glimpse into the experiences of some labors and deliveries, the fact is that contemporary American birth is in a state of radical crisis. The United States now has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the western world.[3] At the same time, rates of surgical intervention have increased to over 32%, nearly double to triple the rate described as safe and healthy by the World Health Organization.[4] Beyond statistical concerns about intervention and mortality rates, it is clear that birth is becoming homogenized. Its practice is being prescribed by a convoluted combination of federal, state and regional institutional regulations, and fed forward by popular media representations of medicalized birth. Many contemporary American approaches to birth constitute a form of sexual and gendered violence. This violence is not applied equally to all subjects. Drawing on the work of Gayatri Spivak, we can assert that the notion of the "one western way of knowing" has canceled out all other forms of knowing/being.[5] Under current US conditions, more women are having major abdominal surgery than ever before to deliver their babies, more women of color and poor women are dying at and around the time of birth than their white counterparts, and more of their babies are dying at and around the time of birth.

This piece does not propose a solution to the problem of representation, rather it engages with *ways of making sense* that emerge out of post-structuralism, affect theory and critical race studies by performing a speculative framework. This is an effort toward what we might call reproductive justice. This statement, though it is intended to situate this work, is also not an attempt to escape responsibility. As Kalindi Vora asserts, any "effort toward justice is always a speculative frame."[6] It is the best we can do in light of systems of knowing and acting that all but foreclose any hope of a better life, and even the idea of resistance. Here, I would like to pause and suggest that the following text be read in the context

of its speculative frame moving forward: a frame I call *repromediation*.[7] By *repromediation*, I mean to describe the various filters, technologies, interventions and practices that mediate reproductive experiences, bodies and organs. This includes assisted reproductive technologies associated with conception, fetal surveillance instrumentation which are used to gather data in utero during pregnancy, and cinematic techniques employed to curate representations of reproductive experiences by way of reality television, art films, short documentaries, feature-length films, memes, social media stories and videos and so forth. *Repromediation* allows us to consider the way modern birth is represented, mediated and remediated through complex transhuman assemblages. While contemporary obstetric practices apply protocols produced by the logics of the medical-industrial-entertainment complex, the doula follows the rhetoric of the reproductive body, in and through both virtual and physical spaces. This performative experiment has allowed me to see the way in which the contemporary doula inhabits a queered space, one that challenges popular "data" induced representations and constructs of reproduction in both the bodied exchange as well as on through digitally constituted bodies on the digital stage.

One Born Every Minute

Let us move now to the case study of the television program, *One Born Every Minute*.[8] This hour-long show began as a British observational documentary series broadcast on the Channel 4 network in 2010. In 2011, it aired its first season in the United States on the Lifetime network. It has since also been reproduced in France, Sweden and Israel. For popular episodes, the audience can reach up to 5 million viewers, where images of "a bustling maternity hospital" capture "new lives beginning and others changing forever."[9] The program itself follows the footsteps of a number of reality television series such as *A Baby Story* and *Bringing Home Baby* (TLC/Discovery Channel, US), both of which reflect a similar characterization of the birth scene.

The first episode aired in the United States opens with Jamie Lee Curtis, as narrator, stating that, "The nurses at Riverside (Methodist Hospital) have one mission: delivering healthy babies." Forgetting the importance of the birth scene as the site of initiation into the maternal subject position, this voiceover opens every episode to the soundtrack of ambulance sirens fading into screams of birthing mothers. The visual register is populated by flashing red and blue emergency lights and images of machines and monitors signifying medical crisis. Every episode follows the same script. Siren, scream, flash, beep, and a brief foreshadowing of the trauma that lies ahead for the parents to be. The show's opening is always followed by prenatal interviews through which we are introduced to three sets of expectant parents. The remainder of the episode revisits clips from these pre-labor interviews interspersed with "actual birth footage," postnatal reflections of the parents, and the retrospective commentary of the medical staff. While the show occasionally includes non-white bodies, in the first two seasons, there is only one same-sex couple and no representation of expectant parents who are gender-non-conforming or trans.

Of particular note in this series is the explicit claim that all of the birth footage is captured by fixed cameras tucked into the corners of each birth room. This claim is made verbally by the narrator during the opening credits as well as visually and sonically through rapid jump cuts and the sounds of the mounted cameras as they shift and re-focus. This implies to the viewer that they are direct observers of unmediated and unmanipulated "reality." The viewer is primed to receive the footage in the same way that they might encounter security footage of a gas station robbery. This is no curated and carefully scripted cinematic portrayal, this is "real life caught on camera."

In terms of content, each episode features emphatic depictions of maternal distress, the clearly established necessity of various medical technologies, and a depiction of the doctor as savior. To this end, *One Born Every Minute* configures mothers into the following three tropes:

– The *challenging mother:* In this case, the mother portrayed may have her "own ideas about how she wants to do things." She is characterized as willful and difficult, challenging the protocols of the medical institution and complicating the roles of the medical staff. If labor is considered too long or too intense and any suggested medical intervention is declined, this becoming-mother is scripted as a subversive character bent on putting her own desire for a particular "kind of birth" ahead of her baby's safety.

– The *lucky mother:* If on rare occasion, any mother comes to deliver and does not require extensive intervention, she is marked as "lucky." Generally speaking, the only time this trope is engaged is when a mother comes to the hospital and her labor is moving so quickly that the hospital does not have time to anesthetize her or insist on any number of the standardized interventions that monitor and regulate the birth process.

– The *mother who is saved:* This is by far the most common portrayal of a mother in this television series. In this case, the mother is initially scared but optimistic about her birth. As her labor progresses, she is subjected to intervention after intervention: Pitocin, a medication to speed up labor, epidural to take away the pain, intravenous fluids to hydrate, a catheter to empty the unfeeling bladder, an internal monitor to assess the impact of these interventions on the baby. Each intervention invites the next, and before long this mother is in crisis and needs the doctor to come to save her from peril. The doctor is the hero, and the mother a suffering patient, confused, traumatized, and grateful to have survived at all. In effect, the only legitimate role of the maternal body in these representational visualizations is to perform and re-inscribe the narrative of the suffering mother. This depiction relies on the characterization of birth as a medical crisis. Unlike actual birth, popular representations of birth are usually formulaic and predetermined according to the anticipated contours of audience response.

Theory and the politics of being born

Birth, as depicted in *One Born Every Minute*, demands that we address questions around subjecthood and control. How is it that subjecthood is established and what structures oversee these subjects? In their respective writings on control and society, both Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze consider the source of power within a given society along with the mechanisms of enforcement and re-enforcement of power, and the roles of both racism and capitalist structures. For his part, Deleuze begins by outlining the "disciplinary society" as articulated by Foucault.[10] For societies engaged in these organizational patterns, power functions at the level of the enclosure in families, schools, barracks, factories, hospitals and prisons, to name a few. There is an explicit understanding of surveillance and regulation. Here, citizens are always starting over as they move from one enclosure to the next. Deleuze explains that enclosures function as molds and that these are central to the establishment and execution of power and control over subjects.[11] In contemporary society, however, it could be argued that this model, has largely receded in favor of a newer form of power and control, that is what Deleuze names "societies of control." In this framework, the disciplinary structures endemic to the previous epoch give way to a more subversive, disseminated power structure that feels a whole lot like "freedom." Enclosures (molds) are replaced by controls (modulations), factories are replaced by corporations with their remote work environments and merit-based pay structures. Schools are replaced by perpetual training, monetary valuation shifts from a gold standard to floating rates of exchange. For the maternal subject, who is positioned both as a participant in new media and an institutional patient, the cuts between what these theorists call "disciplinary societies" and "societies of control" must be troubled. These mothers (or perhaps more appropriately, becoming mothers) are thoroughly subject to the regime of the medical institution, they also emerge into the scene of birth anticipating trauma. This is what they have seen on TV, this is what they have

seen on social media platforms, and it is what they have been told by others who have been there. The medicalized birth center thus becomes a sort of hybrid site structured to regulate and control the bodies that pass through its doors, with the explicit understanding that the abuse they often perpetrate upon maternal subjects is already anticipated and conceived of as normal. Following this line of inquiry, I am interested in what happens when the affective expression of a birthing mother within the medical institution *exceeds* the range that is considered normative. What happens when there is an excess of affect? P. Ravindra De Silva's work postulates that a transparency or an over-abundance of affect is generally conceived of as indicating a less developed and more infantile expression of experience, whereas the ability to contain or hide emotional or affective responses signals a higher degree of development.[12] Thus, the ability to remain regulated, or, in other words, to maintain one's affective composure within the "normative range" becomes conflated with the attainment of fully developed personhood. This is exactly what is demanded of the attending subjects if they care to avoid regulation by institutions and governments alike. Analogous to the American approach to the involuntary psychiatric hold,[13] becoming mothers are subject to affective assessments that determine their rights to personhood. Should their affective expression exceed what is deemed socially acceptable, they are considered unfit to make decisions about what happens to their bodies. This sort of regimentation of affect is re-inscribed in *One Born Every Minute*, where the maternal subject is regularly figured as incapable of making decisions in her own interest. What I am suggesting here is that the birthing body is both perceived and portrayed as unregulated, animalistic, and in need of affective containment. Its rights are demeaned accordingly.

In her piece *Unsettling Metaphors,* Kalindi Vora asserts that the language that we engage to describe bodies, in this case, maternal bodies, comes to prescribe what we can imagine as their acceptable societal and economic roles, and that these roles are deeply reliant on "imperial histories of science."[14] In the context of transnational

gestational surrogacy, she describes the body as a site of "colonization, conquest and contestation of power." Of primary interest to me in her piece is the notion that the uterus has been conceived of as a wholly separate and outsourceable organ whose function is limited to the operation of carrying a fetus. This concept emerges by way of a shift from a clinical orientation toward maternal outcomes to fetal outcomes. We might say that under this framework, the maternal body is no longer what Lisa Cartwright would call the "body of interest," but instead a passive and replaceable container.[15] This claim, however, is now being met with a mountain of evidence that reaffirms the central role of exchange between maternal and fetal bodies during the course of pregnancy (see research on fetal cell microchimerism) and childbirth.[16] Work along these lines is troubling the previously maintained autonomy of the uterus in favor of a more appropriate and wholistic articulation of the intimate and inseparable nature of the maternal-fetal dyad. These emerging understandings can be taken as a call to action to provide becoming mothers the resources and support that they both require and deserve in order to move toward more comprehensive labor practices that adequately acknowledge the emotional and biological significance of a birthing person feeling as though they had agency, choice, in their birth space.

Present-day American birth, it could be argued, is a colonized space, a space of domination. There is inarguably a hierarchy wherein administrators and doctors are situated as master and king-constructing rules to manage and control bodies that risk excess, codifying the right of the institution to impose regulations of any variety deemed necessary to maintain order and control within their doors. Power-knowledge systems founded on settler education, according to Fanon, are an indoctrination project, and thus decolonization requires a new kind of education that aims to undo the brainwashing of the minds of the colonized people.[17] Dare I say here that any effort to undo contemporary systems of birth in the context of the United States of America demand not only a refiguring of the subject of color but also the integration of

alternate and indigenous approaches to birth that expand the scope of possibilities for the maternal subject? In her piece *Seduction and the Ruses of Power*, Saidiya Hartman writes on the violent and extractive historical relationship between slavery conditions and the sexual assault of subjugated persons.[18] By utilizing a combination of individual narratives and historical archives, Hartman theorizes the many ways in which the racialization and gendering of bodies can be traced back to the earliest days of American slavery. In recounting the horrifying details of select legal case studies, Hartman re-contextualizes contemporary notions of sexual assault and the body of the black woman. "The normativity of sexual violence," she writes, "underlines the inextricable link between racial formation and sexual subjection. As well, the virtual absence of prohibitions or limitations in the determination of socially tolerable and necessary violence sets the stage for the indiscriminate use of the body for pleasure, profit, and punishment."[19] Hartman's work raises troubling questions for the black becoming mother. How can her work be used to explain the alarming racial differences in maternal mortality rates, for example? "In the United States, black women are 2 to 6 times more likely to die from complications of pregnancy than white women, depending on where they live."[20] How can this work be used to situate the representation of black women in *One Born Every Minute*, which are figured as animalistic and in need of containment? These are questions that demand explication and which I do not have time to properly answer within the confines of this paper. Yet I would like to suggest that a logical next step in this analysis would be to question conceptions of violence and consent itself and follow Hartman in asking: "How can violence be differentiated… when 'consent' is intelligible only as submission?"[21]

Thus far, I have suggested that the failure of representational practice is nowhere more salient than in the face of human birth. Contemporary popular representations of birth are excellent at depicting and prescribing a particular kind of birth experience: OB-GYN attended delivery in a hospital with extensive use of fetal monitoring and biomedical technology. These representations are

a moving ensemble
of rhythms, refrains, relations
–felt and enfleshed–
that though arise in particular arrangements
or involve a local interplay
of heterogenous forms,
figures, what not
are always-already-veering figurations
that expand, forward and exceed
the sum and span of their contexts
and so moving move us too
from what
[in concrete terms] is
–space, time, mood, bodies–
to what [in terms of desire]
could/might be
or what
[as conviction]
ought to be

Omar Kasmani

heavily invested in the maintenance of a medical power-knowledge system that pretends to empower birthing mothers while grossly obscuring the lack of agency that characterizes medicalized Western birth. The result of these representational and data-technological practices is neither illogical nor unpredictable, but mere reinscription; it is the endless reproduction of homogenous narratives of birth, medicalized and commodified under capitalist and racialized logics. Contemporary medicalized Western modes of birth include forms of institutionalized violence perpetrated on maternal bodies. I suggest that critique and remediation of dominant Western representational visualizations of medicalized birth will produce less inadequate depictions of labor and delivery. They will invite a wider range of experiences for the birthing mother, and improve birth outcomes. Yet, this work does not suggest that there is any "right way" to give birth or any right way to depict birth. Instead, it aims to trouble a system of medical power-intervention and representation that regulates bodies into a highly controlled and more or less homogenized birth experience. I am interested in understanding and reclaiming the birth space as a site of bodied knowledge, maternal initiation and power.

***Pandemic Amendments 2021**

In March of 2020, my home community in northern California, along with much of the rest of the world, entered lockdown. What was initially intended to be a two-week quarantine to try to slow the spread of COVID-19, has now continued for more than fifteen months. We remain isolated, cycling through waves of orders that limit our physical and proximal contact with anyone outside of our home. We are still mandated to wear masks covering our nose and mouth. We are still required to stay more than 2 meters away from one another. We are surrounded by plastic dispensers of disinfectant gels, foams, creams and liquids. We have lost loved ones to this disease. We stand by and wait still, hoping for more to change.

While my research is primarily engaged with the relationship between reproduction and technology, my practice as a doula is so much about the actual body. The physical body.

When I was first getting trained as a doula, some 13 years ago, my instructor told me that if I ever found myself at a birth without the usual supplies that I carry in my doula bag (essential oils, wraps, heating and cooling packs, birthing ball, massage tools, a handheld mirror), I need not fret. This is because the primary tool that a doula needs to do her work is her body – her hands, her voice, her physical presence.

It wasn't until May of 2020, two months into COVID-19 home quarantine orders in California that I would come to realize how my most fundamental modes of care as a doula – physical proximity, touch, and intimacy, would be complicated beyond belief as I set out to care for my first clients since the emergence of the pandemic.

At this time, we were several months into isolation and hospital protocols had shifted in an effort to control the spread of COVID. The family that I was supporting was located in West Hollywood and consisted of two mothers. As has now become standard in United States hospitals, visitors and support people were limited and there was a very real threat that the non-biological mother would not be

allowed to support her wife in the labor and delivery process. These mothers were required to wear masks at all times, including during the pushing phase of their birth. They were limited to their small hospital room overlooking Los Angeles, prohibited from walking the halls or the grounds as is common during this process. Further, they were told that they could not use live video chat apps like Facetime or Zoom. During the course of their three-day induction, labor and delivery, George Floyd, a 46-year old black man was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota by a white police officer who knelt on his neck for seven minutes while he suffocated, all the while crying out for his mother. The country responded with outrage that yet another black man had been killed by yet another white police officer. Americans took to the streets to protest by the millions, desperately hoping to disrupt this terrible history of ours.

I wondered how I could do my job, how I could support them with my most basic tools made unavailable. We texted back and forth. I sent pre-recorded videos to encourage them through the different phases of labor. Every now and again, one of the mothers would sneak a call. All this while police gunshots could be heard outside of their hospital. They labored on. Once their baby was born and they were released, they were told they could not drive home on their planned route, because violence and abuse in the streets had escalated to such a level that roads had to be blocked off, closed completely. City-wide curfews prevented them from leaving their apartment for essential supplies like food and toilet paper. Even visits to the pediatrician for routine care became nearly impossible. Thus, I was initiated into a new reality and spent the summer body-working in the cloud. Attending births remotely, making breastfeeding videos with baby dolls, becoming a digital doula as an adaptation to this time of prohibition and ruin.

While these challenges have been substantial, the pandemic has opened up a new focus in my research at the nexus of reproduction and techno-mediation. I have moved toward an interest in the various technologies and platforms being used to facilitate distanced care. These include the Facebook Portal, the Ava bracelet

and the Modern Fertility application – all technologically advanced devices and platforms that mediate between people and their reproductive health. The proliferation of such technologies, which utilize machine learning, artificial intelligence and ubiquitous computing, attempts to do the work of both bringing people closer to one another and to their own bodies without physical contact. How have these forms of technological mediation become actors in this landscape of pandemic, and how they will endure once it has passed? Do we even want them once we can touch again? There is a part of me that sees the value in embracing these devices, seeing how they work for us and how they may even expand the horizon of care across space. And on the other hand, I just keep thinking about the power of one body physically holding another.

The baby that I wrote about above is named Story and this month she turns one year old. The other day her mothers sent me a video of her first encounter with another baby her own age. Due to the pandemic, they had to be separated by a sliding glass door, Story on the inside of the home, and the other baby on the outside. It was the best they could do given the virulent nature of COVID-19. They just stood there looking at each other, unable to touch. They banged away at the glass. Desperate, eager and utterly unfamiliar with how to respond. Bang, bang, bang. Just like we all want to do from the inside of our Zoom boxes. Perhaps the difference is that, as non-babies, we know what came before, how it feels to live outside of quarantine, and this is somehow a small comfort in a time of chaos and isolation.

1 Mark Hansen. *Feed Forward. On the Future of Twenty-First-Century Media*. Chicago University Press, 2015.

2 Dr. John H. Kennell. "Doula Training and Doula Certification." *DONA International*, April 2021, www.dona.org.

3 The World Factbook, Maternal Mortality Rate, Central Intelligence Agency 2021, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/maternal-mortality-ratio/, Accessed 10th January 2022.

4 Michaeleen Doucleff. "Rate of C-Sections is Rising at an 'Alarming' Rate, Report Says." *NPR*, October 2018, www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/10/12/656198429/rate-of-c-sections-is-rising-at-an-alarming-rate, Accessed 10th January 2022.

5 Sara Danius et al. "An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Boundary 2*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1993, p. 24.

6 Kalindi Vora. "Tecnoutopias racializadas e coloniais em relação ao futuro do trabalho: entrevista com Kalindi Vora" *Digilabour*, 28 Dec. 2020, digilabour.com.br/2020/11/08/tecnoutopias-racializadas-e-coloniais-em-relacao-ao-futuro-do-trabalho-entrevista-com-kalindi-vora/.

7 Ashley Teodorson-Taggart. *OBEM*. Davis, CA, 2019.

8 Magnus Temple and Nick Curwin. *One Born Every Minute*. *Channel 4*, Feb. 2010, www.channel4.com/programmes/one-born-every-minute.

9 A+E Corporation, One Born Every Minute Season 1 Episode 1, Lifetime Television 2011, www.mylifetime.com/shows/one-born-every-minute/season-1/episode-1.

10 Michel Foucault. *Society must be Defended. Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. Penguin, 2020.

11 Gilles Deleuze. *Postscript on the Societies of Control*. Camas Books, 2018.

12 Andrea Kleinsmith et al. "Cross-Cultural Differences in Recognizing Affect from Body Posture." *Interacting with Computers*, vol. 18, no. 6, 2006, pp. 1371-1389.

13 In the case of the 5150, the subject is often experiencing an affective state or states that are confusing or non-normative. They are deemed to be out of control of their own bodies in a way that potentially poses a risk of harm to themselves or others. Under these conditions, and in this state of affective expression, the individual temporarily loses their subjecthood in that they are no longer afforded the rights of citizenship. They may not make decisions about their bodies-where they go and with whom they interact. They may not make decisions about what medications are pumped into their bodies. They may not choose their food, their clothes, their roommate. They are a subject without rights, and we are told it is for their own good. Here, the question of the carceral subject is appropriate thought given time restraints I am ill equipped to go into this subject position.

14 Kalindi Vora. "Re-Imagining Reproduction: Unsettling Metaphors in the History of Imperial Science and Commercial Surrogacy in India." *Somatechnics*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2015, pp. 88-103.

15 Lisa Cartwright. *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

16 Kalindi Vora. *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

17 Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Penguin, 2021.

18 Saidiya V. Hartman. "Seduction and the Ruses of Power." *Callaloo*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1996, pp. 537-560.

19 Ibid, p. 543.

20 Mary Beth Flanders-Stepans, Birthing Briefs: Alarming Racial Differences in Maternal Mortality, The Journal of Perinatal Medicine 2000, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1595019/pdf/JPE090050.pdf.

21 Saidiya V. Hartman. "Seduction and the Ruses of Power." *Callaloo*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1996, p. 543.

Atmosphere in Academia
A Queer-Feminist Perspective on the *surplus* in the Pedagogical Setting

Lena Eckert

@ the reader - prelude:
When was the last time you consciously felt an atmosphere? Do you feel it now? Do you - right now - feel an atmosphere? I am sure you do. Atmosphere is always present. There is no space without an atmosphere. It may be that you just haven't been aware. Once you do become aware - maybe it changes or has just changed. Do you feel the atmosphere around you right now? What inspires you? What bothers you? What do you desire? Would you consider taking a pen and jotting down these answers for 10 minutes, just freewriting (set an alarm clock, start writing, don't put the pen down, don't worry about spelling or grammar, and stop when time is up)? Start with: "The atmosphere right now…."

Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and
"felt the atmosphere"?[1]

Most people have a personal understanding of atmosphere, what they experience as comfortable, scary, melancholic, stressful, harmonious, exciting, unnerving, ecstatic, collegial, sublime, productive or rather prohibitive of inspiration/motivation/cognitive awareness. Yet, defining atmosphere is quite a challenge – most people I ask struggle to give a spontaneous answer. Atmospheres seem to be diffuse, hard to pin down – ambiguous, in most cases. However, they are present – maybe even *the* present or a presence. Atmospheres surround us and influence us, but they are also influenced by us and other various factors.

My interest in pedagogical atmospheres stems from my experiences teaching Gender and Queer Studies. Often, I come across the word "atmosphere" in student evaluations. Positively enough, most of the time I read that my seminar has had "a good atmosphere." I began to wonder: what makes "a good atmosphere" in teaching situations, what makes atmosphere at all, and what different qualities of atmosphere are necessary for teaching and learning? Perhaps even a "good atmosphere" needs closer examination.

Evaluation sheets, as German universities provide them, are hardly designed to trigger people's desire to give extensive feedback on a seminar. As such, I made it a part of my research agenda to explore the meaning of an atmosphere in academic or pedagogical settings. By no means am I the first one to ask this question. Educational theorist Wiltraud Gieseke stated a decade ago that pedagogical atmospheres are topologies that have not yet been probed.[2] She asked for an interrogation of the interrelation and arrangements of constituent parts of atmospheres in pedagogical settings.

Even within my field of Gender and Queer Studies, some of the classes I offer are regarded as quite controversial so it can hardly be that my seminars are harmonious or univocally comforting. What does a "good atmosphere" mean in the queer-feminist classroom that is located within a (still) heteronormatively- and patriarchally-structured academic world? And what makes or renders an atmosphere good for learning in a pedagogical situation where

controversial and sometimes subversive topics are taught, and where we have heated debates which, I assume, often challenge the students' common views in their lives, beliefs and politics?

When one's beliefs are challenged, one may feel discomfort, anger, anxiety, despair, or the feeling of suffocation. I presume that all these possibilities contribute to an atmosphere that might not always feel good. However, in a seminar, students expect to learn. Most of the things that happen in class are perceived in the light of something valuable to know or to think about. And even if one is not prone to learn, it will still have happened in the context of the atmosphere of an educational institution. As such, the bad feelings mentioned above may be considered as being part of a good atmosphere because the knowledge gained was of interest, potentially made an impact or produced a change in perception *and* thinking. Thus, in an educational context, anything that challenges, inspires, or changes the self is influenced by something other than the direct feeling of comfort. In other words, even if the specific consequential affects experienced may cause discomfort, the overall experience within the pedagogical atmosphere can still be considered useful or impactful. In my eyes, the impact made in a queer-feminist pedagogical setting could be roughly described as being conjured by inspiration/motivation/cognitive awareness. It also boasts the possibility of becoming different and of a change in perception and thinking. I assume that this atmosphere is crucial for facilitating these processes, which I also consider to be necessarily controversial and potentially subversive. In other words, to learn and study queer-feminist concepts requires something different than what happens in mainstream pedagogical settings. I perceive it as a special event.

What is this "something else" that I assume is necessary in the queer-feminist classroom and its specific atmosphere? How to question this, how to approach it and what method can assist me in coming closer to what I want to know? When thinking about the design of a method, my impulses turn to theories of partial knowledge and feminist standpoint epistemologies, as well as Deleuzian

conceptualizations of affective assemblages. Yet, rather than simply asserting that a method "works," I found that I needed to ask why and how it was working. I realized that in order to approach atmosphere as an event, I needed to give way to an event. This is what I did at the conference and what is at the core of this essay: the affective arrangements that we collectively composed while doing freewriting essays.[3]

In Teresa Brennan's view, as quoted above this text, atmosphere is understood as processes that "come via an interaction with other people and an environment,"[4] and therefore cannot be limited to a particular person's body. Instead, she understands affect and atmosphere as pre-personal and transpersonal intensities. I began to think about a methodology that can approach atmosphere in teaching and academic settings in general – and at the conference, which led to the book you have in your hands, I decided to introduce the audience to my first steps. In fact, I asked the participants to take one of these first steps together with me – with a collective interrogation of the atmosphere through the particular method of freewriting.

Those of us who present papers at conferences think about how to introduce our research and ideas. We use didactical methods and try to be clear in our explanations and in the following discussions. Conference settings are pedagogical situations in which a specific sort of teaching and learning happens, albeit ones in which the traditional hierarchies between teacher and learner are even more defined than in seminars or university classes.

Seminar rooms are arranged in a particular manner, we are dressed in a specific way (often not too casual), our habitus tend to be what can be described as "academic" – we are, for example, not having a picnic at the beach in shorts or trying to climb Mount Everest in mountain gear. At the conference and in the queer-feminist model classroom, we are favorably interested in each other's thinking, knowledge, theoretical, practical, and artistic work and are therefore in an interaffective pedagogical arrangement together, even if we vehemently disagree. All persons present perceive the

atmosphere in the room – probably in very different ways – and they are all integral parts of its emergence, its qualities and shifting nature, even if only by their physical presence. That day, I decided to let the room and situation in which I presented this paper become a part of my research into the "atmospherology" of the queer-feminist classroom.

Pedagogical atmosphere in the queer-feminist classroom

What is the specificity of an academic or pedagogical atmosphere? Megan Watkins, who coined the term *pedagogic affect*,[5] is interested in how students display different degrees of discipline in regards to learning. "There are those who readily apply themselves to their work and are actively engaged in learning, and others who have great difficulty concentrating and working independently."[6] She accounts for various reasons for these differences, such as class, gender, ethnicity, and age. They all have their own pedagogic affects/effects. She states: "Classrooms have their own ambience and spatiality resulting from their specific interiority and the interrelations of those present, especially between teacher and students and the students themselves."[7]

Researching atmospheres in organizations is always research into sociality. I am convinced that atmospheres do have the power to modulate and reshape the conditions of social co-existence, but how exactly? I would answer that power is not an inherent feature of atmospheres, but that it essentially unfolds atmospherically.[8] Teaching and learning bodies are separated by discipline, distrust, trust, respect, disrespect, desire, rejection and many other things. The atmosphere between those hierarchically organized bodies is thus composed of affects that are connected to these relations. The power structures that develop in these situations are carried by moods and feelings such as fear, wariness, uneasiness, disheartenment, fatigue, denial, attraction, longing or enervation. Without such emotions, power would not thrive.

At universities, theory and its discussion often scare students

– in many instances, the theory-saturated queer-feminist classroom produces anxieties. Feminist anthropologist Elspeth Probyn even describes theory in the classroom as operating in terms of a "'fear/terror' couplet of affect."[9] This, for me, is intimately connected to an authoritarian atmosphere, or what Stuart Hall has called an "authoritarian mood"[10] that can occur across the spheres of law and order, education and welfare.[11] Describing one of her courses on gender and race, Wendy Brown reports that the "students' experience of this course is intensely emotional – guilty, proud, righteous, anxious, vengeful, marginalized, angry or abject."[12] The issue of gender and race is extremely charged, politically and emotionally. Students already enter the course with unease and discomfort, whatever position they occupy, privileged or underprivileged. This does not imply that these very different positions produce the same feelings – rather the opposite – but this is beyond the scope of this paper. However, students enter the classroom already predisposed, which will somehow influence the atmosphere. They enter the room with the intention to learn; the room setup is designed for teaching and learning. The interaffectivity between human and non-human components is a fundamental constituent of the pedagogical process to take place. Representational categories and frameworks are responsible for ordering bodies and subjects in hierarchies of worth and value. Affects play a fundamental role in producing and organizing social differences. As queer-feminist scholars such as Jasbir Puar[13] and Sara Ahmed[14] have demonstrated, signifying apparatuses are responsible for the differences in the individual experience of collective moods. One's capacity to affect and be affected is made through gendering, racializing and other similar power-driven modes of social differentiation.

Atmospheres, as I see them, are passively perceived and at the same time actively influenced and created. I also regard atmosphere as the very specific unfolding of an event. Instead of enclosing given objects, atmosphere in academic and pedagogical settings creates scenarios of differential affective processes.[15]

Collective affects as atmospheres: Interest and interaffectivity

What makes an event of teaching and learning? How can we examine what one can or cannot do if we do not know the situation if we do not know more about the in-betweenness of human and non-human components of that very setting? What if we don't know anything about the concrete, momentary, and actualizing condition of existence – the atmosphere?

Sara Ahmed critiques the concept of atmosphere as unequivocal. She states that in the teaching situation, as in any other situation, atmosphere can be misrecognized: "So we may walk into the room and 'feel the atmosphere,' but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point. The pedagogic encounter is full of angles. (...) The moods we arrive with do affect what happens."[16]

Ahmed's intervention is pivotal because she cautions against assuming that atmospheres are simply received by a neutral body. Her account emphasizes the dynamic aspect of atmospheres, but also the pre-existence of atmospheres as well as our capacity to attune. Put in a less positive way, the perception of atmospheres is preconditioned by former experience of power structures such as inclusion, exclusion, discrimination, respect or disregard and violence or recognition. Everybody is assumed to be the same or rather to perceive the same, but this may not be so in the queer-feminist classroom, at least not in the ideal one, one in which participants acknowledge normalizing forces and counter them.

Affects accumulate, become stored and retained; they form spatial compositions of subjects which are part of the educative process. When we move in pedagogical/educative settings we move our bodies. We walk from the lecture hall to the classroom, the laboratory, the cafeteria, or the library. In each of these spaces, our bodies are arranged in different manners and accordingly feel differently. Each of these spaces will produce different atmospheres – as moving bodies, we will be affected by them and we will affect

the spaces we enter. As bodies, we will be responsible for making them feel crowded, empty, calm, unnerving. We sit on a chair fixed in theatre style, on a podium, at a desk, in front of a blackboard, a flipchart, or a PowerPoint presentation. We read, we write, we talk. We feel connected, lonely, controlled, watched, empowered, forced, bored, inspired. All of these are atmospheric and affective impressions and deeds. They produce relations between subjects but also between objects and subjects.

In educational processes, the subject becomes formed and comes into existence through the connection with the world, with other subjects and with the affects it experiences and produces. Affect in this figuration is a fundamentally relational concept – and it becomes a key figure. The pedagogical relation is based on a process of relational recognition, which becomes realized as affective transaction, which in the same moment can foster the desire to teach and to learn. Affects are the bodily transcription of recognition, which can be positive or negative. The accumulation of affects and their relation to recognition in the interaction between teachers and students are very influential. I would consider this moment to be an event taking place in a lived space.

Collective freewriting as part of an action-research assemblage

Within this experience of lived space, I see the need to develop a methodology that can account for the event of atmospheres and at the same time be an event in itself. In the design of a methodology to research atmosphere, I find it helpful to not think of what a method *is* but what it can *do.* A method's capacities are both explicit and implicit and are contingent upon what that method or technique does micropolitically within the research process; in other words, which possibilities for action the method opens up and which it closes down.

Regarding the re-calling of atmospheres, one approach is the intensification of particular moments that capture the participants' and the researcher's attention. At the conference, I created such

an intensification by "pressuring" the participants into bringing one particular moment in time back to mind by using the writing method of freewriting, which is often deployed in therapeutic situations in order to make someone associate freely and dig up (repressed) memories, as well as to free oneself from psychic ballast. However, less therapeutically, the method of freewriting is also likely to make you associate ideas freely and can dig up thoughts you didn't think you had.

> @ the reader - interlude: Perhaps you too felt pressured at the beginning of this paper? Maybe you thought that you were actually not willing, interested, relaxed, etc. enough to pick up a pen and do the freewriting. As a lone reader, you were much freer to resist or subvert, but in the seminar room, collective pressure is present: people look to their right and to their left at what others (more senior people maybe) would do. Once they realized that most people were engaged and writing, they also began and were thus subjected to the method – the event – the pressure.

The challenging part of an empirical approach to atmospheres and their making is the question of how habituated bodies, interaffective states and materially modulated environments are stabilized. There are also questions of how they can fall apart or how they sometimes change and allow for the emergence of new atmospheric compositions. A non-dualistic understanding of atmosphere may be vague, but this is due to the vague nature of atmospheres and not the consequence of the vagueness of the conception.[17] In other words, the ambiguity of atmospheres is unambiguous.

By not addressing this ambiguity or by even trying to erase it, the research process would fail. However, I assume that it is possible to attend to patterns in the composition, reproduction, and

modulation of atmospheres. Although atmospheres are multiple in themselves, they do resemble one another (albeit never exactly). As researchers, we can try to trace and describe as well as analyze similarities and perpetuations, repetitions, and resemblances. In order to do so, a closer look at the mutual interplay between material conditions and sensing bodies seems appropriate.

Moreover, the organization of empirical social/ethnographic research itself can be seen as an atmospheric composition. Various components of qualitative research can be framed in terms of affective atmospheres such as specific tools, buildings, habituated bodies, practices, vocabularies, etc. The process of doing research itself is a way of reproducing atmospheres by inserting aspects of the above-mentioned components. Understanding any research process as performative also means to understand the methods of gathering and analyzing empirical material as performative, which is why action-research methods offer themselves to interrogate atmosphere. Action-research modes handle this performative aspect very openly and disclose the mechanisms of the interplay between researcher, researched, research and constituents which are at play in the process.

With this aim, I compose a research assemblage of human and non-human relations within the research process of pedagogical atmospheres.[18] My research-assemblage's design encloses examining what particular methods or techniques actually *do*. By doing so, I give credit to the micropolitics of specific interactions between events of atmosphere and my particular acts.

Events "are understood differently by differently positioned subjects, through different lenses and in this sense are always multiple."[19] Therefore, social differences are a fundamental aspect in experiencing atmosphere.

With the advent of new materialist theories in methodology, there is also a shifting of attention away from human bodies and individuals to the intra-actions within material assemblages of bodies, things, ideas, and social institutions. I am interested in the multiplicity of affective relations in the research process, including

the events to be researched and in developing a perspective of what happens when an event is subject to social/ethnographic inquiry. In order to give credit to these affective flows as well as the performative aspects of the research machine, I distinguish between *chronos* as linear time and *kairos* as a particular moment in time. *Kairos* allows for this bracketing of time and a closer examination of the factors that might contribute to a moment of affective intensity, i.e., the event. And then – in writing and retrospect – one moment in time of this particular conference became a compositional aspect of my research assemblage: I asked the conference participants to take about ten seconds to think of a particular moment (a *kairos*) that unfolded during the last two days. And then I instructed them: "Please begin writing with this particular sentence: 'The atmosphere of the conference at that particular time that just came to my mind was….'"

Nearly all of the participants took a pen and paper, looked left and right to see what the others did, lowered their heads, and started writing. I set the alarm clock for ten minutes and started writing myself. For a full ten minutes of the event, a collective freewriting happened.

After the exercise, I asked how the participants fared. People responded, for example, that they were only able to think of the atmosphere right now and that they couldn't really recall or remember a particular moment in time at the conference. From these responses, I determined that there emerged a collective affect while the participants were writing. Some included the reflection upon this affect into their freewriting and commented on the feeling of uneasiness and pressure but also of a feeling of flow in the group and "something intensely personal and intimate going on" (freewriting A). In collective freewriting, people often feel that they are forced to go through and articulate things – things that they normally wouldn't articulate or even less write down. During the ten minutes, some examined the way the desks were arranged and the feeling of being observed and unable to actually write what they wanted to write because of the proximity to others.

Some reflected on the familiarity in the context of this specific conference in contrast to other academic events. One freewriting reads as follows:

> The atmosphere at that particular time in the workshop was less stiff than that of other conferences which I attended. I guess it was so for a lot of different reasons, like the fact that I knew the organizers and also other presenters already, but it was also because of how the organizers performed, which was less "academic" than at other conferences. Thirdly, it was because of the people who seem to come from queer studies or other critical fields and were certainly interested in activism or even call themselves activists or feminists. Maybe this is something else that influenced it… (freewriting B)

During the conference, one specific event emerged when Omar Kasmani read from his auto-ethnographic research, which was more poetry than academic prose. The piece he read was also very intimate, intense, and funny. Several participants wrote in the freewriting about this particular event. In the following, I will quote one complete freewriting as it reflects the collective aspect of the affective atmosphere:

> In this special moment of the workshop, I perceived of the atmosphere as follows: the room, the people in it and I (were) moved, touched, amused, flashed, excited by that which Omar, who read on stage, represented. I was in the room beside them with he who was rushing ahead in my own head in my own feeling, because my emotions were so intense. Everybody seemed to be a little in love with the texts, the language, the method. I thought I felt more than the others, but it seemed to me some were equally convinced that they were more impressed than me. The common laughter, feeling together, the collective being affected produced belonging, consensus and the feeling of being with. When something enfolded in front of us, which was a tangible overlapping of art and academy maybe also activism [sic!]. (freewriting J.)[20]

What is described here is an intense peak of emotions and personal entanglement but also a reflection on the inter-affectivity and the intensity of feeling together and at the same time. This past moment in time is the *chronos*. It is the event of the freewriting, which enabled the reminiscing. This aspect of collectivity and shared affectivity appeared in a number of freewriting essays. Sara Ahmed's point that it is vital to consider from which angle one enters the atmosphere is however confirmed by the experiment. Atmosphere feels different for people depending on where they stand or are positioned in academia. This implies that whether one is used to and familiar with academic spaces or not is crucial. The reason for this may lie in the difference between being an established scholar, a young student, or any situation in between. Other factors include people's milieu and class background as well as their gender, or whether they are a native speaker or not, but equally their age, ethnicity and other social positions that do not represent a hegemonic "angle" to be coming from. Yet, the various aspects that have been described in the freewriting pieces do have overlaps. Even though people chose to refer to different moments of the conference, personal and private feelings blend with shared experiences and emotions.

Methods can also create atmospheres. My assumption is that we became (if we already weren't) a queer-feminist conference when the participants were able to reflect about the moment when the power of defining our reach and research object was shared and turned the moment into an event. Some of the freewriting pieces which I was given after the conference contained doubt and anger, towards the method and ultimately towards me – the speaker and researcher. One of the freewriting pieces only contained swear words without intelligible content in capital letters (freewriting H). This freewriting captured and reproduced the intense disagreement that was aired throughout the conference by one of the participants and contributed thereby to the intensity of the atmosphere. The freewriting pieces contain an intensification of the past *chronos* as well as the present *kairos*, i.e., the event we created.

Primary conclusions and open questions concerning queer-feminist pedagogical atmospheres and adequate methodological approaches

Processes of education in formal settings happen in material and factual atmospheres. Intelligibility and visibility can be hindered or fostered by specific atmospheres. I understand the enabling of such processes in the queer-feminist classroom as being rooted and conditioned in spatial-atmospheric occurrences, albeit of course not solely and never exclusively. Atmospheres envelop those who experience them; yet, they are also influenced and produced by human and non-human components.[21] Interdependency and reciprocity are bound up in sociality and structures of perception, which also determine the meaning and adequateness as well as the regulation of affective intensities. Affective intensities and therefore atmospheres are not antecedent to sociality but need to be understood as figurative contexts in which self and other are conjoined. In the moment when atmospheres are researched collectively, an event takes place. The *kairos* that is seized becomes the culmination and intensification of the event – the affective assemblage that is collectively interrogated intensifies. In other words, "collaborative writing not only inquires into but activates a form of radicalism and subversion that has the potential to problematize the inegalitarian divisiveness and inherent conservatism of thinking and practice within contemporary neoliberal academic institutions."[22] The experiment produced an assemblage of various accounts of the atmosphere in the room. In this remains a radical and subversive potential of the *kairos* created by this shared writing experience. While this is not queer-feminist as such it is indeed one of the main characteristics of the assemblage of texts which were produced that day, distinguishing them from the largely patriarchal and heteronormative academic world in which this event took place.

By becoming part of a research process that investigates atmospheres such as the situation described above, it is possible to compose empirical data, which can help understanding affective

atmospheres in pedagogical and educative contexts. This, however, produces a dilemma in the sense that the *kairos*, that is the moment of the freewriting, does create itself a shift in atmosphere.

While we did the freewriting, we created a new atmosphere and we started to know *in, about,* and *through* this atmosphere what we had learned at the conference.[23]

It is therefore possible to know *in*, *about*, and *through* atmosphere and also to *think through* atmosphere when interrogating the queer-feminist classroom (as part of life[24] of course). Yet, the methods have to be chosen quite consciously and patiently, though, in this instance, the main critique towards how I proceeded was that it was not collectively decided on. It is not good for the atmosphere – or the cultivation of a queer-feminist atmosphere - to order people to perform a freewriting exercise. A better alternative would have been to make a collective decision, at least concerning when to do it. Most people, however, felt comfortable enough (or discomforted enough) to participate. I still argue that the event *per se* was able to shed light on the efficiency of the method and on the atmosphere as well. While researching the queer-feminist classroom via action-research, we collectively create it anew. We produce the community, political awareness, and action while researching ourselves. And I argue that such a specific atmosphere is necessary to enable the subversion of the white, heteronormative and patriarchal academic way of thinking and working.

By interrogating ourselves through the atmosphere, we question our perception, our resistance, our willingness, our desires, our bodies, our locatedness, and the power-coordinates according to which we are arranged affectively in the room – in the space of our collective experience in the queer-feminist classroom. This very specific classroom is created by deciding to focus on the collective affects of the learning atmospheres. When we consciously focus as a collective on the atmosphere that we create, we find we cannot ignore it. I maintain that ignoring the atmosphere is a defining feature of conservative academia, while to become aware of it is a queer-feminist move and one of the aspects that can enable the

queer-feminist classroom.

Here, the queer-feminist atmosphere can be conceptualized as a deeply onto-epistemological vision of ourselves as learners. It is defined by the collective intent of accepting difference, of giving space to difference – in opinion, position, perspective, interest and demeanor. It is being part of something, it is becoming something else than what one was before and being allowed to show this transformation. It is transparent in transformation and it is neither to be held responsible for correct answers (or questions), nor for having the right knowledge but for acknowledging that everything is contingent and that we exist in ebb and flow, especially in educational contexts and in a learning environment.

1 Teresa Brennan. *The Transmission of Affect*. Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 1.

2 Wiltraud Gieseke. "Atmosphäre in Bildungskontexten – Beziehungstheoretische Überlegungen." *Sinnliche Bildung? Pädagogische Prozesse zwischen vorprädikativer Situierung und reflexivem Anspruch,* edited by Rudolf Egger and Bernd Hackl, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010, pp. 57-70.

3 This essay is based upon a paper I gave at the conference in May 2019 but also upon the moment of giving it, which means that the work in progress of developing this method started before the conference, continued throughout the conference and has by no means ended yet.

4 Teresa Brennan. *The Transmission of Affect,* p. 3.

5 Megan Watkins. "Pedagogic Affect/Effect: Embodying a Desire to Learn." *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2006, pp. 269-282.

6 Megan Watkins. "Gauging the Affective: Becoming Attuned to Its Impact in Education." *Methodological Advances in Research on Emotion and Education*, edited by Michalinos Zembylas and Paul A. Schutz, Springer, 2016, p. 75.

7 Megan Watkins. "Disparate Bodies: The Role of the Teacher in Contemporary Pedagogic Practice." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 28, no. 6, 2007, pp. 767-781.

8 See also Christian Julmi. "The Concept of Atmosphere in Management and Organization Studies." *Organizational Aesthetics*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2017.

9 Elspeth Probyn. "Teaching Bodies: Affects in the Classroom." *Body and Society,* vol. 10, no. 4, 2004, p. 35.

10 Stuart Hall. *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left.* Verso, 1988, p. 27.

11 A mood that, for Hall, was central to the "authoritarian populism" of 1980s Thatcherism. See also Ben Anderson. *Encountering Affect: Capacities, Apparatuses, Conditions*. Ashgate, 2014, p. 111.

12 Wendy Brown. "The impossibility of women's studies." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1997, p. 93.

13 Jasbir Puar. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2007.

14 Sara Ahmed. "Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others." *Theory, Culture & Society,* vol. 21, no. 2, 2004, pp. 25–42.

15 E.g. Wiltraud Gieseke. "Atmosphäre in Bildungskontexten – Beziehungstheoretische Überlegungen."; Megan Watkins. "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect." *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 269-88.

16 Sara Ahmed. "Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness." *New Formations,* no. 63, 2007-2008, p. 126.

17 Andreas Rauh. "Bewährungsproben – pädagogische Atmosphäre und Aisthetische Feldforschung." *Atmosphären: Dimensionen eines diffusen Phänomens,* edited by Christiane Heibach, Fink, 2012.

18 Nick J. Fox and Pam Alldred. *Sociology and the New Materialism: Theory, Research*, Action. Sage, 2004.

19 Emma Uprichard and Leila Dawney. "Data Diffraction: Challenging Data Integration in Mixed Methods Research." *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2019, p. 10.

20 German original: "In diesem speziellen Moment des Workshops habe ich die Atmosphäre wie folgt wahrgenommen: der Raum, die Leute darin und ich ergriffen, gerührt, amüsiert geflasht, begeistert von dem was Omar, der auf der Bühne las, präsentierte, darstellte. Ich war im Raum unter ihnen mit ihnen der in all dem in meinen eigenen Kopf meinen eigenen Fühlen ihnen voraneilend weil meine Ergriffenheit so intensiv war. Alle schienen ein wenig in Love mit den Texten, der Sprache, der Methode, ich so dachte fühlte ich mehr als alles anderen, und doch so schien mir, muss wohl so manche_r genau so sehr davon überzeugt gewesen sein, mehr als alle mehr als ich begeistert zu sein. Das gemeinsame Lachen, mitfühlen, die gemeinsame Affiziertheit stellte Zugehörigkeit her, Konsens und das Gefühl dabei zu sein. Als sich etwas vor uns entfaltete, was eine greifbare Überschneidung war von Kunst und Akademie, vielleicht auch Aktivismus."

21 Christiane Heibach, ed. *Atmosphären: Dimensionen eines diffusen Phänomens*. Fink, 2012.

22 Jonathan Wyatt and Ken Gale. "Introduction to the Special Issue on Collaborative Writing as Method of Inquiry." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies,* vol. 14, no.4, 2014, pp. 295-297.

23 Shanti Sumartojo and Sarah Pink. *Atmospheres and the Experiential World: Theory and Methods.* Routledge, 2019, p. 12.

24 Federico De Matteis et al, eds. "Phenomenographies: Describing the Plurality of Atmospheric Worlds (Phenomenographies: Décrire la pluralité de mondes atmosphériques)." *Ambiances,* no. 5, 2019.

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