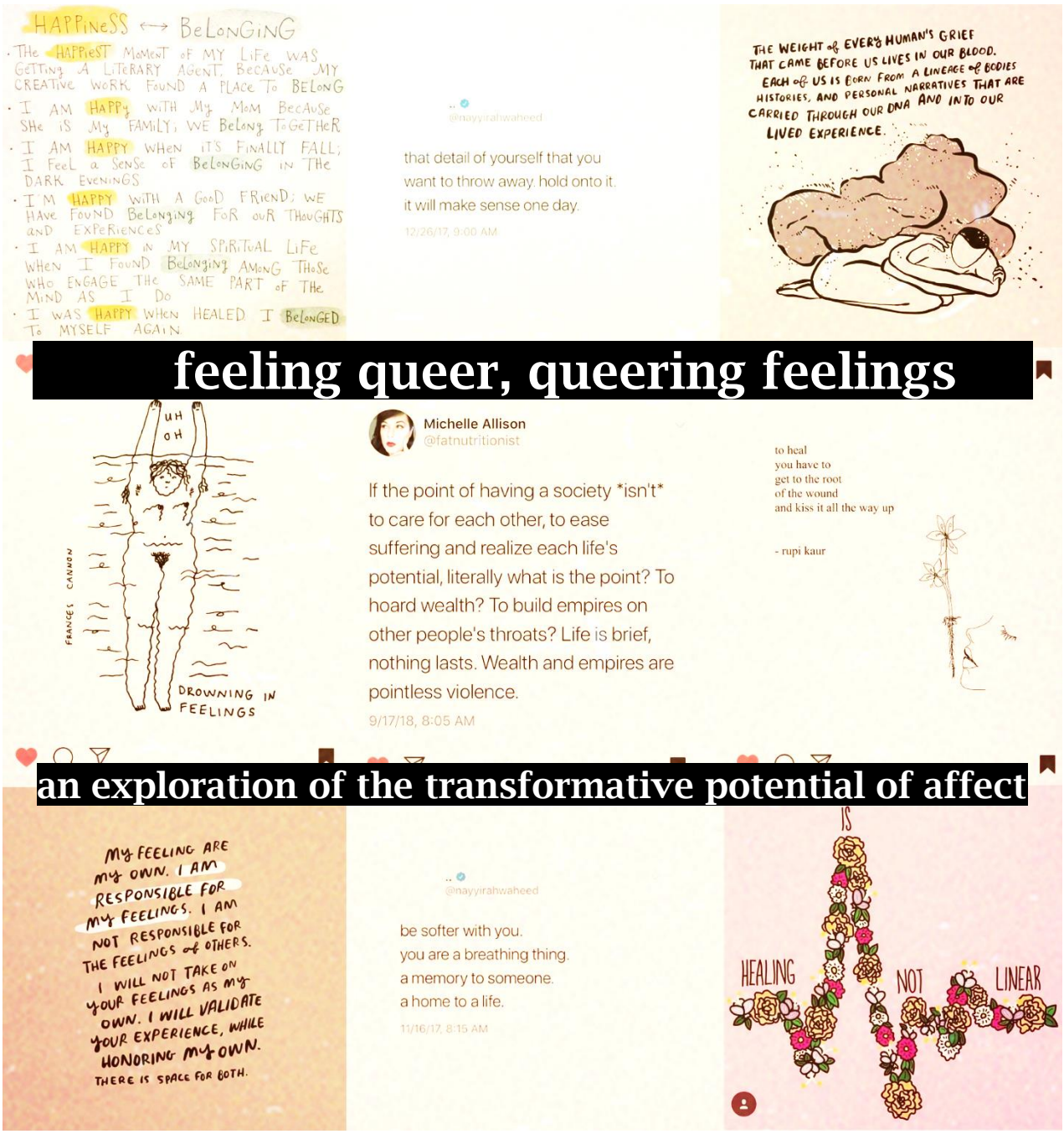

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15 October 2018

I would like to thank all the people that helped me in the process of writing this thesis. Gianmaria, for his critical eye, and Magda, for introducing me to the reparative. All the folks who have been brave by giving voice to how they feel this year and who continue to inspire. Marije, for inspiring me to delve into some of my own ambiguity. Sara Ahmed, whose work helped me give words to my feelings. I thank my family and friends, for giving me feedback, for being my rocks, and for giving me space to feel and letting me be part of their space. My grandfather, for being in my thoughts during the final stretch of this process, who I see on every page.

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Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation.

Healing is an act of communion.

- bell hooks, *all about love* (2000, 215)

Introduction the feelings mute within us

> I can wax political about everything, but I can't talk about my own heart.

This is the epiphany that gender nonconforming artist Alok Vaid-Menon shared in their talk on the online conference *Explore More Summit*. Alok emphasised something that I often wonder about when thinking about how we are affected: that we are not taught to acknowledge or process our feelings publicly in this society (specifically, in the Netherlands). Even more so, as they say, we are not taught to "bear witness to our own pain". I myself have often been at a loss as to what to do with my emotions, even when I could trace their causes theoretically to social phenomena such as homophobia, misogyny, mental health stigma etcetera. The connection between emotions, or rather *affects*, and the social is an often discussed topic in the discipline of affect theory. As I discuss in chapter 1, this is a debate not on how affect and the social interact, but rather how this relation should be represented. There are scholars within this field that theorise what affect is in order to show to what extent it has potential to transform theoretical representations (Massumi 2002, Sedgwick 2003). The aim of this thesis, too, is to explore the transformative potential of affect. However, my theoretical analysis has also prompted me to critically intervene in a field that is seemingly turning away from earlier feminist scholarship. As a feminist and a researcher, I find it important to engage with theoretical objects such as affect not only to produce theory, but also to enable social critique. Hence, the first chapter is focussed on situating this thesis within the theoretical debate by assessing the current state of this debate. The chapter presents a critical engagement with what has been heralded by various authors as affect's transformative potential and with the theoretical foundations of the so-called "affective turn". This engagement leads me to propose a critical intervention in this turn to *not* turn away from earlier feminist scholarship, but rather to read contesting theories (from different disciplines) in extension of each other to create new or different insights. My theoretical analysis also re-directs the way I approach the potential of affect: in this thesis my focus is not on what affect is, but rather what it does and what we can do with affective experiences in turn.

As I explain in the second chapter, this makes my approach to affect a phenomenological one. In this chapter, I build the theoretical framework that I use to analyse the critical potential of affect in the last chapter. This framework is based around the work of Sara Ahmed (2006, 2014), whose theories on "queer phenomenology" and "affect as contact" I use to construct a phenomenological approach to affect. Specifically, I focus on "queer

affects". As I discuss in this chapter, the method of "queering" (Salamon 2009) can be used to critically examine not only how one experiences affect and how one is orientated, but also to effect a critique of the social phenomena that seem to cause these affects *through* individual experience. The concepts I theorise in this chapter, *phenomenology* and *queerness*, are the methodological basis for the critical practice with affect I explore in the final chapter, which is a *reparative* practice. I propose the reparative practice as a way to carry out a phenomenological examination to affect combined with a critical self-attention, which this practice engenders.

In this final chapter, we see what we can do with affect, critically. My aim in this chapter is not prescribe *the* reparative method, as this is both a personal effort and one that needs to be translated differently to different theoretical contexts. Rather, I formulate a reparative practice from a queer, feminist perspective that aims to make affective experience and the (dis)orientations it makes us encounter its critical object. Through my analysis of a reparative practice I show how this method/practice can be used to enable a critique of normativity. In this, I argue that there is value in the way 'the structural' is felt and experienced.

Although my thesis has a theoretical approach, as I build on existing theory to make interventions in the field and conceptualise methods/a critical practice, it also has a more implicit methodological approach. The manner in which I analyse theory is also a form of reparative reading: I read theories in tension and in extension of each other in order to see what new understandings we can gain from re-assembling theory. Although I do not specify this, it is an extension of what I propose one does in the reparative practice: holding space for complexity.

> *How can we explore the transformative potential of affect? How has this potential been theorised in existing theory? What is the reparative potential of queer affects to effect a critique of normalcy?*

These are the questions that structure this thesis. As many scholars have shown before me (Audre Lorde, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks etcetera), experience of normative structures will always be a relevant object for feminist investigation. Instead of theorising social structures, starting from the experience of queer affects can indicate the pervasive nature of normative social phenomena. It can indicate the way affective experience makes social structures material as forms of being. Attention to material experience, I argue, can thus enable a different way of theoretically critiquing 'the structural'. In this, the reparative practice can contribute towards challenging norms and can enable critical engagement with (normative) representation.

This project is a step towards envisioning and realising a future in which affects are no longer able to be abused and illegitimised by those in power, but rather used as a tool to criticise (structural) injustice and inequality. With this project, I envision a future in which there is more space for feeling. Space in which we can hold the messiness, and, as Alok says, bear witness to our own pain and that of others. A space to sit with the violence that is done to us, so we might understand ourselves better and resist those who refuse to.

chapter 1: turning to affect

> The collective project, since all we can really enact is a representational schema of affect, is what we are now developing: an epistemology of ontology and affect. (Puar 2007, 207)

In the last decade, there has been a growing interest in affect across various scholarly fields. Although affect's emergence as a critical object is attributed to Silvan Tomkins and the field of psychology in the 1960s, it has recently been heralded as a promising new critical direction in cultural studies, gender studies, critical theory and literary theory, among other disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields. As Clare Hemmings points to in her critical essay "Invoking Affect", fields such as these are perceived to be at an impasse in terms of their critical potential. Hegemonic ideas on subject formation within these fields seemingly limit this potential, because they insist on the importance of social structures rather than interpersonal relations and experiences (Hemmings 2005, 548-9). A number of theorists are proposing affect as a way out of this impasse (552). Even though it is often proposed as a seemingly straightforward trajectory, affect itself is a slippery concept and, depending on the discipline, it is described and used in a multitude of ways. In this chapter, I address why affect is posited as the way out and what the arguments are to substantiate such a claim. By looking closely at the theoretical concepts staked in these arguments and by reading authors that both advocate for and denounce a turn to affect in extension of each other, I evaluate whether or not an affective break from feminist scholarship is warranted. In doing this, I aim to reconsider if the current trajectory in affect theory is, as claimed by proponents of the turn, the way forward in exploring the transformative potential of affect.

1.1 Affective twists and turns in cultural theory

Affect is a difficult concept to grasp, and there have been many theoretical approaches that engage with it differently. Within feminist scholarship, a few strands of affect theory appear most prominently. Patricia Clough, in her introduction to the collective volume *The Affective Turn* (2007), describes an approach to affect that is one of the most influential in the field: that which draws on the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze. The book explores engagements with a Deleuzian interpretation of affect, which foregrounds affect as bodily sensation rather than what is commonly associated with affect: its socially coded, or discursive, translation into emotion or feeling (2007, 2). The Deleuzian interpretation is likewise described by Jasbir Puar in the conclusion of her book *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007). Puar, whose work on the

racialisation of contemporary sexual politics draws on Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'assemblage', describes a split within affect theory between those employing affect as "a particular reflection of or attachment to 'structures of being' or feeling (per Raymond Williams)" and those understanding affect as "a physiological and biological phenomenon", the latter referring to Deleuze (2007, 207). Although Puar does not engage with Williams further, the juxtaposition between him and Deleuze indicates that within the debate there is a perceived split between the 'social' dimension of affect (how the social shapes affects) and the 'material' dimension of affect. This focus on the material emphasises "why bodily matter matters, what escapes or remains outside of the discursively structured (…) forms of emotion, of feeling" (206-7). This dichotomous view that emerges in discussions about affect (and affect theory) is constructed no so much to question to what extent affect is shaped by social elements (or not), as it is to examine how these dimensions can and should be represented in theory. This debate over representation is integral to the so-called "affective turn".

Unlike Clough and Puar, Hemmings does not position herself as an advocate of the affective turn, and in "Invoking Affect" she does not replicate the narrative in which the social and non-social aspects of affect are opposed to one another.[1] Instead, Hemmings analyses how two proponents of the affective turn, Brian Massumi and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, both "well-respected contributors to contemporary cultural theory", explore the critical potential of affect from different theoretical perspectives (2005, 550). Whereas Massumi's work *Parables of the Virtual* (2002) builds upon the Deleuzian conception of affect, Sedgwick's approach in *Touching Feeling* (2003) draws on the work of Silvan Tomkins. The Tomkinsian approach is more focused on how affects relate to the social, as it explores how affect creates circuits of feeling and response, and thus connects us to others and to the outside world (Hemmings 2005, 552).[2] In Hemmings' view, despite following different paths both Sedgwick and Massumi

[1] The non-social elements of affect are often conceptualised as either 'presocial' or 'asocial'. The term pre-social is indicative of the idea that affects are not always influenced by social meaning, as some affects seemingly do not involve processes of thought. For example, fear is often seen as 'instinctive' (Ahmed 2014, 5-7). The term asocial is associated with a Massumian interpretation of affect, which emphasises that affect cannot be wholly understood through language or cognition, even though it might be shaped by social elements (Puar 2007, 207). According to this view, emotions are social translations or interpretations of bodily sensation, whereas affect is prior to and/or outside consciousness (Leys 2011, 442).

[2] According to Sedgwick, Tomkins conceptualises affect as distinct from drives such as breathing and sleeping, but similarly as a motivational force. Affect has greater freedom of attachment to its object than drives, because each drive requires a specific response. For instance, one must eat to satisfy hunger, but satisfying the drive is also constrained by time and the 'object' that one eats. Contrastingly, any affect might have "any 'object'", as affective responses are not tied to specific objects, nor do the affects have specific aims (Sedgwick 2003, 18-9). Thus, affects manifest in singularities that create their own "circuits". As an analysis of affective responses might offer more complexity than was previously accounted for in structural approaches, it is seen as a "hopeful alternative to social determinism" (Hemmings 2005, 552). An important distinction is that this approach explores how affect

propose that the "way out of the perceived impasse in cultural studies" is turning to the critical potential of affect (549).

This turn to affect is not the only theoretical turn that has emerged recently in feminist scholarship and other related fields, such as queer theory and cultural studies. Across the board, concerns have arisen about the efficacy of existing theoretical approaches. Besides the turn to affect, there have been those advocating a "return to ontology" (e.g. Brian Massumi, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, William Connolly), which I will refer to as the ontological turn, and those advocating a "return to matter" (e.g. Elizabeth Grosz, Elizabeth Wilson, Karen Barad), which gave rise to the current of new materialism. Although we can differentiate between the three, there are significant overlaps in the criticisms produced in their name. Often encountered in these criticisms is a palpable exhaustion with the representationalist analyses of poststructuralism (Puar 2007, 206). Critics are concerned that representational approaches at hand to understand the social world cannot provide the fullest resonance of this world (Hemmings 2005, 549). Taken together, the turns to affect, ontology and matter point out the following shortcomings in contemporary cultural theory: 1) a failure to pay attention to matter and an overemphasis on the discursive, and 2) an overemphasis on the epistemological. Although these elements are entangled and often collapsed together, in this chapter I argue that the differences between them are significant. Focusing on these two critiques and differentiating between them, sometimes *despite* the authors who voice them, offers an entry point to look at the affective turn critically.

1.2 The matter vs. discourse debate

The theoretical movement that places more emphasis on the first debate, that of matter versus the discursive, is new materialism. As Sara Ahmed argues, a criticism that seemingly keeps recurring in this debate is that fields such as gender studies have failed to take matter and material experience fully into account, because of their focus on the power of social structures and discourses (2008, 24). New materialist scholars such as Grosz and Wilson call for a return to matter in order to intervene in a feminism that, in their view, has "forgotten where we have come from" (Grosz, quoted in Ahmed 2008, 26). In the conceptual separation of culture and the biological, "untheorized", body, as Wilson points to, feminism has become anti-biological (Wilson, quoted in Puar 2007, 208-9). A similar critique is formulated by Massumi in his work

creates within social connections, rather than exploring how affect is *shaped* by social elements, something that would risk falling under the social determinism that Hemmings describes.

on affect. Massumi argues that viewing culture as the sole force that "structure[s] the dumb material interactions of things", rather than paying attention to movement and sensation, has resulted in the body becoming merely discursive, or wholly socially signified (2002, 1-2). He goes on to argue that affects are bodily sensations that are inherently un-representable, which he calls the 'autonomy of affect', and that herein lies their transformative potential to *restructure* social meaning as *not* merely discursive (Hemmings 2005, 550). Similarly to Massumi, Sedgwick argues that an emphasis on the discursive and epistemological structures "obscures our experience of those structures" (2003, 21). However, if affect is relatively 'free' in the way it attaches, as per Tomkins, then we cannot conceive of affect as something that merely results from structures. According to Sedgwick, when theorising affects one must pay attention to the ways they manifest in "everyday experience", rather than as abstractions (Hemmings 2005, 559). Sedgwick thus proposes a focus on affect and lived experience instead of, or in relation to, theorising about structures. This focus can be enriching to analyses of social structures, as affects are part of how these structures manifest and are maintained.

Even though attention to matter, sensation and affect might indeed be enriching, there is a significant theoretical oversight within these critiques that advocate a turn away from focusing on representation and the discursive. As Hemmings and Ahmed point out, scholars suggest that it is necessary to turn away from representationalist approaches because there is no way to represent matter within these approaches. However, this argument is only made possible by lack of citation. Hemmings argues this by showing that in order for such a chronology to work, scholars must ignore the poststructuralist and epistemological work that does engage with matter and ontology, such as feminist standpoint theory and postcolonial theory (2005, 557-8). Ahmed likewise makes this observation regarding new materialist feminist scholarship in "Imaginary Prohibitions" (2008). In this article Ahmed criticises, in part, what she perceives as the tendency to argue that feminist scholarship does not deal with matter by stating this casually and without using sufficient examples (2008, 25, 27-8). Like Hemmings, Ahmed shows that this argument is misconstrued by providing examples of feminist theories that do deal with matter.[3] She concludes that "the argument relies on the omission" and that it precludes serious engagement with previous work (27-8).[4] Thus, the

[3] Both Hemmings and Ahmed go on to discuss theorists who have paid attention to affect and matter, such as Audre Lorde and Franz Fanon examining racial affect (Hemmings 2005, 561-2), and Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, Emily Martin and others engaging with questions of biology and materiality (Ahmed 2008, 27). Puar, a rather nuanced voice within the affective turn, also recognises that within queer theory there has been work on "'queer disability' that seeks to revitalize the study of biological matter" (Puar 2007, 209).

[4] In her response to Ahmed's article, new materialist scholar Noela Davis (2009) contests Ahmed's claim that new materialists routinely assert that feminist scholarship has not taken the body or biology in account. Although

argument that feminism and related fields place an overemphasis on the discursive appears to be based on a simplistic representation of what these scholarships are and can be. If the possibility exists to explore matter within approaches that focus on the discursive and structural, then turning away from these approaches does not provide the only way out of the perceived impasse. Rather than opening up *needed* new ways to explore affect, a denouncing of deconstructivist approaches and the discursive merely prevents (re)visiting scholarly work that might be conducive and amenable to affective approaches.[5]

If the discursive/matter question is used to distinguish the affective turn (as well as new materialism) from other theoretical paradigms within feminist scholarship, the question of epistemology/ontology within affect studies operates along similar lines. This question is also integral to the ontological turn. The two issues, that of matter/discursive and that of epistemology/ontology, are connected, but often not differentiated from each other by authors such as Massumi and Sedgwick. By distinguishing further between these two questions and examining the criticisms closely, I continue to critically approach the affective turn. In the next section, I address how the criticism of epistemology operates within the affective and ontological turns. From this point, we can further evaluate the efficacy of an affective break from feminist scholarship, and what might be gained if we do not break with earlier scholarship, but explore anew the (existing) meeting points between feminist and affect theory.

1.3 The epistemology vs. ontology debate

In order to examine why a focus on epistemology is viewed as problematic within the affective and ontological turns, it is important to explore how advocates of the two turns implicitly associate epistemology with the emphasis on representation and the discursive discussed in the previous section, and how this is connected to the accusation that epistemological approaches lay claim to 'essential truths' about the world they aim to represent. This concern for an epistemological claim to truth is present in both Massumi's and Sedgwick's work. Sedgwick, in her critique of the focus on epistemology in feminist scholarship, signals an "epistemological

I do not think it is Ahmed's point to discredit new materialism in this way, as Davis construes it, Davis does bring a valid and more nuanced point forth in what she argues is new materialism's contention. The contention would be that cultural/biological processes cannot be determined or categorised separately when discussing how they interact somatically, as this would repeat the ontological distinction between the mind and the body. However, such an acknowledgement (if not actual research into how these processes manifest, by combining cultural theory with biological, biochemical, neurological theory (2009, 70)) is certainly possible in feminist scholarship outside of new materialism.

[5] In labelling these approaches 'deconstructivist', I do not mean they are strictly Derridean. I rather use the term to indicate a shared attitude that is prevalent in feminist scholarship (which is influenced greatly by deconstructivist approaches such as Derrida's and Judith Butler's).

demand on essential truth" to be at the core of critical approaches which she calls "paranoid" (2003, 6). She characterises these paranoid approaches by their categorical imperative to undertake the tracing-and-exposure of social structures. She argues that the paranoid researcher tends to "construct symmetrical relations, in particular, symmetrical epistemologies", in which theories strengthen rather than contradict each other, and in which all elements are already accounted for (124). Paraphrasing Sedgwick, it seems to be the aim of the paranoid to construct an all-encompassing 'epistemology' that can explain phenomena systematically (126). Sedgwick poses that a reason to practice paranoid strategies is "the possibility that they offer unique access to true knowledge" (130). However, since theory in her view can never be all-encompassing, such epistemologies are constructed at the expense of attending to material, individual experience (124-6). Sedgwick doubts the transformative potential of such projects of "exposure", which she argues have become synonymous with epistemological approaches for those who practise them (124-8).[6] In order to shift conversations away from this "recent fixation on epistemology", Sedgwick proposes turning to the *textures* of everyday experience "by asking new questions about phenomenology and affect" (17). Affect is useful for Sedgwick precisely because it can manifest surprisingly, in ways that run counter to systematic interpretations - or "unpredictably", as Hemmings calls it (2005, 559).

Similarly to Sedgwick, Massumi constructs a narrative of epistemology as "unreflexive":

> Because [critical thinking] sees itself as uncovering something it desires to subtract from the world, it clings to a basically descriptive and justificatory modus operandi. (Massumi, quoted in Hemmings 2005, 556)

According to Massumi, attention to affect, whose autonomy places it outside of the realm of critical thinking, enables an ontological position that solves the representational problem of epistemology (Hemmings 2005, 557). For him, the solution to the problems of poststructuralist representational analyses lies in making affect un-representable: "the project becomes to represent the intrinsic unrepresentability of affect" (Puar 2007, 207). In order to study the unknowable, as Hemmings summarises Massumi's point, cultural theorists will have to "abandon the certainty that has come to characterize the field" (2005, 554). In other words, he

[6] Sedgwick criticises what she sees as paranoia's "seeming faith in exposure", which she describes as the belief that it will make a difference, or have transformative potential, to get "its story truly known". To this, Sedgwick remarks: "that a fully initiated listener could still remain indifferent or inimical, or might have no help to offer, is hardly treated as a possibility" (2003, 138-9).

seemingly means to abandon the systematic, or discursive, search and 'claim for truth' by abandoning epistemological approaches altogether, and trading it for ontology.

In both Sedgwick and Massumi we find a conflation of terms, as representationalism, discourse, and epistemology are tied together without being differentiated, which might make the reader interpret them as the same things. We see this, for instance, when Sedgwick does not distinguish between the concept of epistemology itself and the specific instance of the 'paranoid epistemology' (or theory), as she off-handedly states that "epistemology…suggests that performativity/performance can show us whether or not there are essential truths and how we could, or why we can't, know them" (2003, 17). It is rather striking that she conflates the two concepts, as she later does urge the reader (and the paranoid researcher) to view paranoid inquiry as only "*one* kind of epistemological practice among other, alternative ones" (128, emphasis added). What complicates Hemmings' reading of both Sedgwick and Massumi further is that neither the two authors or Hemmings herself give clear definitions of either term (epistemology and ontology). As the argument for proposing affect as '*the* way out' hinges on discrediting prevailing epistemological approaches as well as the validity of discursive practices, it seems prudent to consider how these concepts are used by Sedgwick and Massumi as well as Hemmings as their critic.

In an article in which he discusses the ontological turn in anthropology, anthropologist David Graeber argues that what is frequently invoked as ontology and epistemology is not what the terms actually mean. At its core, ontology refers to "a discourse (*logos*) *about* the nature of being" or about essences, while epistemology refers to "a discourse concerning the nature and possibility of knowledge about the world", or a theory of how (and if) one can produce knowledge (Graeber 2015, 15). Graeber argues that within the ontological turn, epistemology has often come to signify "systematic formulations of knowledge", or merely "knowledge", and what are referred to as epistemologies are actually theories. He gives the example of structuralism, which is "hardly a form of epistemology", though it might have *involved* one (17). Whereas an interpretation of epistemology as 'knowledge' might indeed infer that it is concerned with seeking 'essential truths', if we use the classical term, it rather suggests that 'essential truths' are de facto not accessible, as it recognises that there are different ways of 'knowing' and experiencing the world. A similar problem lies within the use of the word 'ontology', whose status as a *discourse about* the nature of being is often forgotten. For instance, Puar argues that Massumi regards affects to be "ontological emergence that is released from cognition" (2007, 207). If affect is to be viewed as non-discursive bodily sensation, as Massumi suggests, it can hardly be 'ontological'. Following Graeber, we might call affects

'essences', and affect theory might consist of ontologies that theorise on these essences. However, this would still be a discursive, representational practice. Thus, the conflation of the two interpretations makes it unclear what one means by ‘representing’ affect. By claiming that ontology can represent affects for what they are (not), it almost seems like one has direct access to these ‘essences’.

Massumi therefore contradicts himself in his claim that affect is inaccessible, which is ironically illustrated by the fact that he does not give an epistemological account of how he has come to this knowledge (which actually would make clear that it is 'just' a representation of its un-representability). Puar recognises this need to account for how one (un-)represents affect, when she argues that the collective project of the affective turn can only be to develop “an epistemology of ontology and affect” (2007, 207). However, Puar’s own formulation is distorted by the conflations that Graeber points out. She misuses the term ontology, as we see more clearly elsewhere: she refers to Massumi’s work as engaging with “ontology (being, becoming)” (214). Again it is omitted that ontology is '*discourse about*' being. We might carefully reformulate the collective project of the affective turn (despite some of the authors involved in it) as developing an ontology of affect and producing an account of the epistemology behind this ontology.

Now that we have established what the terms mean and how they are used, it becomes clear that epistemology and ontology are not conceptually opposite. Rather, we can see them as different levels, proposing different lines of questioning, in any account of knowledge production. Epistemology is as much *inherently* connected to 'critical theory' or 'poststructuralism' as ontology is to 'affect': that is to say, not at all. It thus becomes apparent that in the debate epistemology and ontology are artificially separated from each other, as Hemmings points out:

> the ‘problem of epistemology’ only materializes in the moment that it is chronically and intellectually separated from ontology. Ontology thus resolves the problem its advocates invent. (Hemmings 2005, 557)

This representational project is bound to be flawed regardless of whether one terms it ontological, epistemological or by any other term, as there is always a limit to language. Those who advocate a break from epistemology do not seem to notice that the ontological question of "what affect is" does not so much lead out of the perceived impasse, as it leads to a representational dead end by their own standards. The antagonisms and oppositions that are at the core of their arguments are not sufficiently argued in turn, and rather result from an

(unconscious or not) "vested interest in reading for generality instead of complexity" (Hemmings 2005, 555).

The discussion so far suggests that an affective (or ontological or new materialist) *break* from cultural theory is neither necessary nor necessarily efficient. So what might be gained by reading for complexity instead? Following this path, we might explore affect as a critical tool by holding these paradigms together, and reading contesting theories as extensions of, and in tension with, each other. One way to do so is to step away from the epistemological/ontological problem of what affect *is* and to approach its potential from the question of what affect *does*, and can do.

Although Hemmings' critique of the affective turn is key to understand contradictions and inconsistencies within the field, it is important to further unpack her analysis of Sedgwick's work to move beyond (and through) this debate. In so doing, we can see that her reconstruction of Sedgwick's trajectory with affect is the result of a partial misreading of her work. At the end of her critique, Hemmings suggests that affect, counter to what Massumi and Sedgwick propose, "might be valuable precisely to the extent that it is not autonomous" (2005, 565). However, her conclusion that Sedgwick, like Massumi, proposes an ontological approach to affect (in which affect is autonomous or 'free') does not follow from Sedgwick's argument. Hemmings argues that for Sedgwick "only a turn to ontology can redress the over-emphasis of truth and knowledge" characterising the paranoid position (557). Hemmings claims that for Sedgwick affective attachments need to be 'random' in order to enable critical freedom (559). However, Sedgwick does not argue that these attachments are random, but that affects have a relative freedom of attachment:

> Affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects. (Sedgwick 2003, 19)

These attachments might be surprising, which is why attention to the way they manifest is important, because "describ[ing] them *primarily* in terms of structure is always a qualitative misrepresentation" (Sedgwick 2003, 21, emphasis added). However, Sedgwick does not argue that this is because affects are 'free' in an ontological sense, but because they are "irreducibly phenomenological" (21). By confining Sedgwick's argument to the epistemology/ontology debate, Hemmings misses what Sedgwick is actually proposing: not an ontological, but a *phenomenological* approach to affect.

chapter 2: what affects do, and what they are not

Approaches that try to delineate what 'affect' is as a concept have their theoretical limits. Ontological analyses of affect oftentimes seem to reach a dead end precisely in their self-fulfilling reminder that affect is un-representable. Instead of theorising what they are, we might move to wondering what affects do and how we experience (things through) affects. One could describe such an approach as a "phenomenological" one, as Sedgwick does. Although Sedgwick describes affect as "irreducibly phenomenological", she does not clearly explain what is phenomenological about it. For her, questions about phenomenology and affect are useful because they can give insight into how social formation works on the level of the individual. According to Sedgwick, attention to affect can indicate "what *motivates* performativity and performance, for example, and what individual and collective effects are mobilized in their execution" (2003, 17, emphasis added). Sedgwick wants us to look at what moves us in everyday life, and in specific affective experiences, by turning towards the 'textures' of these instances. Textures, she poses, comprise "an array of *perceptual data* that includes repetition, but whose degree of organization *hovers just below the level of shape or structure*" (16, emphasis added).[7] This close perceiving is then at the base of what Sedgwick calls phenomenology. In order to engage with Sedgwick's proposed take on affect, it seems prudent to consider phenomenology itself and what it means to regard affect as a 'phenomenological object'.

In this chapter, I establish what a feminist phenomenology might entail and how one can produce a critical examination of (queer) affects with this method. I base this phenomenological approach to affect in the work of Sara Ahmed (2006, 2014). Using Ahmed's theory in this theoretical framework enables me to formulate this approach from a distinctly feminist/queer perspective, while bypassing conceptual problems that arise in ontological approaches. By developing concepts like 'disorientation' and 'queerness' as both method and object, I work towards outlining a critical phenomenological practice with affect in the final chapter.

[7] Sedgwick's notion of a level of (theoretical) organisation that "hovers below the structural" is useful, as it allows us to think about systemic issues, not in an deductive, but inductive way: instead of reading structures into matter, we might see how something akin to structures manifest out of lived realities and experiences. In this, we avoid saying that structures are actually *there*. Rather, this approach emphasises that there is value in the way 'the structural' is felt and experienced.

2.1 Towards a feminist phenomenology of affect

In proposing a phenomenological approach to affect, Eve Sedgwick made connections that had not often been made before. The discipline and method of phenomenology is one that in contemporary philosophy is not particularly in favour, and the combination of feminism and phenomenology is not yet well established in either philosophical or feminist academic discourse, although it does exist (Fisher 2010, 84-5). In order to understand how one might bring a feminist phenomenology of affect into practice, we must look at what this method entails and what it looks like from a feminist perspective. We might start by examining how Sedgwick and the authors she follows propose that one works with affect phenomenologically. As mentioned, Sedgwick's approach suggests that key to such a phenomenology would be an examination of the *experience* of affects. Sedgwick does indeed place a lot of emphasis on affective experience throughout *Touching Feeling* (2003). However, she bases this project in an affect theory – Silvan Tomkins – that is still mostly concerned with delineating what affect is (and what it is not). Sedgwick refers to Tomkins' work as a "formidably rich phenomenology of emotions" (2003, 94). However, critics of Tomkins indicate that Tomkins has an ontological approach to affect rather than a phenomenological one. In her article "The Turn to Affect: A Critique" (2011) Ruth Leys examines how current affect scholars are indebted to Tomkins' model of affect and what this means for the theoretical foundations of the affective turn. Leys states that many scholars in this field accept Tomkins' theory, which she refers to as the Basic Emotions paradigm. This paradigm refers to Tomkins' conceptualisation of a set of distinguishable affects, which minimally include fear, anger, disgust, joy, sadness, and surprise. These affects are

> rapid, phylogenetically old, automatic responses of the organism that have evolved for survival purposes and lack the cognitive characteristics of the higher-order mental processes. (Leys 2011, 437)

Thus, in Tomkins' view, affects do not involve cognitions or beliefs about the objects in our world (Leys 2011, 437-8). According to Leys, many contemporary scholars accept Tomkins' theory because "it seems to provide the empirical evidence they seek for a nonintentionalist, corporeal account of the emotions" (439).[8] By relegating affects to the 'corporeal' realm, they

[8] In saying that affects are non-intentional, Tomkins means that affective processes occur independently of (conscious) intention or (social) meaning (Leys 2011, 437). This assumption, as Leys argues, is based on the empirical experiments that Massumi also refers to, but which were actually highly inconclusive on this part. Leys thus argues that affects cannot be distinguished into ontological categories (2011, 439, 444-457).

are presented as essentially separate from the cognitive processing systems of the brain.[9] Considering that Tomkins is theorising on the *nature* of affect, and as he assumes that affect manifests sub-consciously and is distinguishable from one's experience of affect, it becomes apparent that his is an ontological approach, not a phenomenological one. As Leys states, scholars such as Massumi and Tomkins display "a commitment to the idea that there is a disjunction or gap between the subject's affective processes and his or her cognition or knowledge of the objects that caused them" (450).

This examination of Tomkins' and Massumi's work brings out an important theoretical concern. By emphasising the non-intentionality of the affect system (in order to avoid falling back into biological or social determinism) and by contrasting this with the intentionality of consciousness, both scholars inadvertently reproduce the classical dualism of mind and body (Leys 2011, 455-8, 465). By ontologically conceptualising affect as prior or detached from cognition, the 'mind' is conceived of as something separated from matter, which is ironically precisely what feminist poststructuralists have been accused of doing by proponents of the affective turn and new materialism. This conceptual assumption is brought up by new materialist scholar Noela Davis, who indicates the underlying assumption in some feminist scholarship "that the biological and the social can be examined and assessed separate and that their respective effects can somehow be added together" to describe the phenomena that are examined (paraphrasing Elizabeth Wilson, 2009, 70). We can conclude that as long as scholars keep conceptualising what affect *is*, as separable from the social, they will run into this problem.

How might a phenomenological approach bypass this conceptual issue? Linda Fisher discusses this question in her article "Feminist Phenomenological Voices" (2010). Fisher states that from a phenomenological perspective, "the material is what is always already there" (2010, 94). Even though any theoretical account is a linguistic representation and therefore suffused with social meaning, Fisher says,

> phenomenology nevertheless maintains the possibility of an immediate connection with and intuition of experiential phenomena on the one hand, while on the other hand affirming the capacity of reflection to thematize and theorize lived experience within socio-political, discursive, and linguistic operators, without being defined or determined by them (2010, 94).

[9] This is reminiscent of Massumi's ontological approach to affect as read in Puar, where she poses that Massumi describes affect as "emergence released from cognition" (Puar 2007, 207).

Our consciousness, where we experience (affective) phenomena, is always both bodily and 'reflective', or interpreting, and inseparably so. Because of this, one cannot conceptually separate affect from its experience in the phenomenological approach. We see this as well in Sara Ahmed's work *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), in which she examines how phenomenology and feminist scholarship can come together. She discusses how phenomenology, in its basic form, is the study of how we come to know things, or how "consciousness is…directed 'toward' an object" (2006, 2). Again, we see how phenomenology is predicated on one's *experience* of inhabiting a body, which clearly enables a focus on lived realities. Instead of following the traditional philosophical discipline, Ahmed brings a specifically feminist perspective to phenomenology. Ahmed's aim is to *queer* phenomenology in a multitude of ways. This entails addressing 'queer moments' through phenomenology (and moving queer theory to phenomenology as well) (4).[10] However, more importantly for Ahmed, queering the phenomenological method also involves queering the phenomenological point of 'origin' itself, or questioning what thinking from a "specific bodily dwelling" does (4-5). In this sense, phenomenology is used to not only examine how we are orientated towards 'the world', but also *how we have come to be* orientated this way. This queering of one's orientation involves an examination of one's positionality (how one is positioned in the world). In reconsidering the nature of being orientated, she builds on earlier work on feminist standpoint and intersectionality theory by asking how one's position orientates one in certain ways (5). Thus, the project of queering phenomenology has clear epistemological implications, as examining one's position and orientation becomes an integral part of accounting for one's knowledge production.

As I said, the process of queering orientations also allows us to see how we have come to be orientated by reflecting on lived experiences (Ahmed 2006, 9). This is the point where queer phenomenology and affect theory can come together. When Ruth Leys signalled the current problem in approaches to affect, she suggested that a solution might be to follow a new model which is "based on assumptions that make the question of *affective meaning* to the organism or subject of the objects in its world a central issue and concern" (2011, 440, emphasis added). I propose turning again to Sara Ahmed to find such a model, which is a phenomenological approach to affective experience: Ahmed's model of affect as contact.

[10] This enables the radicalisation of phenomenology, Fisher says, as it pushes phenomenology onto social, political and gender issues (2010, 85).

2.2 A phenomenological model of affect

> Focusing on emotions as mediated rather than immediate reminds us that knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world. (Ahmed 2014, 171)

In this formulation of Ahmed's approach to emotions, we encounter an affect theory that is not based on a separation of (bodily) sensation and (cognitive) experience. Ahmed emphasises that her aim in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* is not to ask what emotions are, but rather, what they do (2014, 4). In order to do this, Ahmed proposes a model of affect as *contact*.[11] In tracing what affects do, she looks at what happens when we come into contact with 'objects'.[12] In Ahmed's model, feelings "take the shape of the contact we have with objects" (5). We can easily see how this idea of contact between ourselves and affective objects becomes phenomenological in its methodology. The model of affect as contact examines how we encounter and relate to objects *through* how we experience them affectively. Affects surface in different ways in the encounter, as affects themselves are generated in the encounter, as well as that objects become saturated with affect (it "sticks" to them, as Ahmed says (15)).

It is difficult to distinguish between the two aspects, because the encounter involves both simultaneously. In explaining how feelings 'take the shape of contact', Ahmed goes back to concepts that she had previously addressed in *Queer Phenomenology*. She states that emotions involve "a direction or orientation [as well as] a stance on the world, or a way of apprehending the world" (2014, 7). We encounter again the concepts of 'orientation' and 'position' in this model. Because the contact with the object already involves a position and orientation towards the encounter, the affects that are generated during the encounter reflect these positions and orientations. At the same time, however, the way affect surfaces also might be attributed to the object, making (future) encounters with the object already laden with affect. Hence, what characterises emotions for Ahmed, is that they are mediated, as the quote at the beginning of this section shows. Orientations and positions involve histories that come before the subject, which surface in the contact with the object (6). Through them, the "world [is read] in a particular way" (171).

[11] One might note that I am no longer using terms like feeling, emotion and affect as different concepts. Ahmed herself suggests, as has my discussion of phenomenology, that "the distinction between sensation and emotion can only be analytic, and as such, is premised on the reification of a concept" (2014, 6).

[12] As Ahmed points out, the phenomenological object does not have to be a physical object, or even physical matter (such as people), it might even be imaginary (2014, 7).

However, we also have just seen that the feelings surfacing in the encounter mediate how one experiences the contact with the object and the object itself. This experience can strengthen one's orientation towards the object. For example, Ahmed shows this, in relation to the "white subject as sovereign to the nation" (2014, 2). For the subject that upholds whiteness as a national ideal, the contact with those who are recognised as racially other intensifies the idea that this contact, and the other, is harmful: it carries the risk of the nation "becoming 'less white'" (3). Affective experiences thus can limit the contact between bodies, and orientate the subject (even farther) away from certain affective objects. One might be more or less unaware of this, as we are orientated toward what we can perceive. "As a result [of this], we continue to be compelled to follow our line without ever realizing our orientation is not wholly natural", as Elizabeth Ruchti says in her review of *Queer Phenomenology* (2008, 193). Ideals, or "objects of desire", might then also just be the objects one comes into contact with along one's line of orientation (194). It appears that the representation of these 'objects of desire' in the social narrative is very influential.

Conversely, affective experiences with (affective) objects might also reveal the fact that, and how, one is orientated. Ahmed describes how a recognition of one's (interpellated) orientation might enable a re-evaluation of this orientation. In her work, she invokes the figure of the lesbian, who "looks to other lines of orientation, which inevitably affect the things she might do" (Ruchti 2008, 194). Hence, this recognition of the way one is orientated through attention to affect indicates a form of agency in becoming positioned and orientated (anew). Next, then, we investigate the affects and objects that bring attention to, that *queer*, our experience and orientation, and what makes them queer in turn.

2.3 Queer affects, queer objects

In order to examine queer affects and affective experiences in the last chapter, I want to establish what I interpret as the 'queer' in queer affect. However, similarly to how I argued against theorising what affect itself is, my aim here is not to "delineate something that can be named and isolated as queer affect", as Puar suggests (2007, 207). In the conclusion to *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar discusses the hazards of trying to determine what 'queer' or the 'queer subject' might be. She argues that "representational mandates" that cast queerness as either an identity or anti-identity strengthen narratives in which certain sexualities are exceptionalised. Such narratives do not contest the existence of the dominant ideal (heterosexuality in this case). Because of their complicity with dominant formations, Puar argues against this form of identity

politics. Puar suggests that these politics run the risk of proposing new 'ideals' of being instead of representing a proliferation of ways of being (205). So instead of investigating queer identities, I examine how affects can make us *feel* queer.[13] However, I do not argue that there is something queer about affect itself, which Puar poses as another line of questioning (207). Rather, I once again suggest bypassing the (ontological) notion that there is something inherently queer about affect, and instead look at what affects do and how they have the capacity to queer objects.

We have seen how affects are involved in our orientations, and now I discuss how 'queer affects' disorientate us, or how affects orientate us 'queerly'. In this I continue following Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*. In its conclusion, Ahmed reviews the relation between disorientations and queer objects and what they can say about our functioning in the social. As she says, "orientations…shape what becomes socially as well as bodily given", hence shaping what is viewed as normal (2006, 158). Moments of disorientation, then, involve a sense of queerness, as they bring attention to how one deviates from what one has internalised as 'normal'. Feeling queer calls into question how we are related to the outside world and to the objects that we orientate ourselves toward. In the spirit of Frantz Fanon, Ahmed states that "disorientation involves becoming an object" (159).[14] Whereas phenomenological approaches have traditionally examined the relation between the subject and the world (or object), attention to queer feelings and disorientation turns the subject back onto itself. Coming into contact with queer feelings thus opens up the space for self-attentiveness, but also to critically examine one's relations and attachments. If we feel queer, then such an examination can indicate what it is we feel queer towards: why we experience our orientation as a 'dis'-orientation. Through this, we can form a critique of what it means to be 'normal'. However, it is not a given that disorientation has this effect: as Ahmed says, disorientation is not always radical (158). This is also what Puar warns against in her discussion of identity politics: not inhabiting the norm does not necessarily make one anti-normative or concerned with dismantling compulsory systems of normativity.[15] If the aim of this phenomenological examination is then to enable a critique of normalcy (even just within oneself), it must be predicated on a commitment not to (again)

[13] In using the word 'queer', I do not refer to it (only) as describing sexual orientation. Rather, I use it to indicate something being 'out of line', not following order, or 'oblique' as Ahmed says (2006, 161). For the importance of maintaining the multiple uses of the word queer, see Ahmed (2006, 161, 172).

[14] Although we see with Fanon that disorientation can be a violent feeling (160), moments of disorientation do not always need be experienced negatively. Rather, the affective experience indicates a shift in focus, through which one becomes aware of one's immersion in the social.

[15] This idea is also present in an article by Robert McRuer, who discusses how not adhering to the norm is not the same as subverting it. This is why queer theorists such as Michael Warner call for a *critically queer*, rather than *virtually queer*, perspective (McRuer 2002, 95).

place some ways of being over others. This is the queer commitment that Ahmed refers to, which is

> a commitment to an opening up of what counts as life worth living, or what Judith Butler might call a "liveable life"...It would be a commitment not to presume that lives have to follow certain lines in order to count as lives, rather than being a commitment to a line of deviation. (Ahmed 2006, 178)

In an effort to orientate oneself differently towards norms that produce (negative) queer feelings, we see how queerness might be taken both as object and method. Whereas queer affects produce disorientation, we can use this queerness to disorder the beliefs that produce these affects. Echoing Ahmed's commitment, this is what Gayle Salamon proposes, stating that

> queerness as a method would proceed [this way], by supposing a diversion or estrangement from the norm and using that divergence as a source of proliferation and multiplication with the aim of increasing the liveability of those lives outside of the norm. (2009, 229)

By examining queer affects critically, we become able to see how emotions can work within feminist politics, as a re-orientation device (Ahmed 2014, 16). The aim of re-orientating ourselves towards norms would be to ultimately effect a transformation of these norms. However, as we have seen, re-orientation is a matter of self-attention. This is where this phenomenological approach enables a different line of inquiry into what is often referred to as 'the structural'. This brings me back to Sedgwick, who pointed towards a flaw in the project of 'exposing structures': there is no guarantee that exposure *does* anything (2003, 138-9). Whereas structures are rather intangible, and therefore difficult to transform, the experiences of structures are often much more material and closer in reach. As Sedgwick suggested, we might look at what these experiences can tell us, in their everydayness, in order to seek larger transformative potential. The process of re-orientation might be tedious and slow, and not for everyone.[16] However, it does provide an accountable way of doing the work within oneself and of taking up agency in the process of personal and political orientation, the work of committing to a queer politics. Now that we have begun to see what moments of disorientation and queer feelings do, what might we begin to do with them? I suggest that we once again return to Eve Sedgwick and explore what she has proposed to be the *reparative* potential of affect.

[16] Equally important, Ahmed states that disorientation must not be made an obligation or a responsibility for those who identify as queer. For more on this, see Ahmed (2006, 177).

chapter 3: practising vulnerability

After reviewing what feelings do, I now finally turn to ask what we might do with queer feelings. In this chapter, I propose the reparative method that Eve Sedgwick (2003) describes as a way of exploring the transformative potential of queer affect. The reparative method enables not only a phenomenological focus on affect and experience, but also places emphasis on the self-attention that is necessary to critically engage with them. However, in Sedgwick's work, the reparative remains rather opaque and is discussed more as an action than a concept. For Sedgwick, the reparative runs counter to the paranoid practices that she seeks to avoid, as it provides an alternative mode of criticism. To understand how the reparative practice functions and how it has been built on by scholars following Sedgwick (namely Ann Cvetkovich and José Esteban Muñoz), I first turn to the origin of Sedgwick's idea. In this final chapter, I come to a new way of formulating the reparative practice by taking the phenomenological and queering method described in the last chapter as its base. I then analyse a case in which a reparative practice is set out, namely in Ann Cvetkovich's discussion of Saidiya Hartman's book *Lose Your Mother*. In this analysis and in the concluding section I return to my main line of questioning into the transformative potential of affect, setting out what we can do with affect theoretically, as well as personally and politically.

3.1 Affective reparation

If we are looking to (re-)orientate ourselves queerly, a critical approach that promises a form of repair indeed sounds intriguing. The reparative method was introduced to affect studies by Eve Sedgwick, but has since been taken up by scholars such as Ann Cvetkovich and José Esteban Muñoz. Sedgwick relates the reparative to the concept of positions formulated by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (Sedgwick 2003, 128). Klein differentiates between the paranoid position and the 'depressive position', from which the reparative process is possible. While we have already encountered the paranoid position, which Sedgwick describes as "a position of terrible alertness" to dangers that one internalises and projects onto, the depressive position is in turn described as an "anxiety-mitigating achievement" (128). In explaining Klein, Sedgwick says that from this position, one might use one's own resources to "repair" (or reassemble) the objects that have impressed upon them into a sort-of whole that is beneficial, or 'comforting' (128). According to Sedgwick, this reparative

practice is concerned with seeking pleasure and is motivated by love, while the paranoid position is more focused on avoiding pain or harm, and is motivated by anxiety (137). Thus, Sedgwick contrasts the rigidity of the paranoid position to the porous and vulnerable nature of the reparative practice, which is more open to being surprised by its objects (146). The openness to surprise indicates that the depressive position provides a space to make new connections between the self and the objects, without having to justify or legitimise these connections (which the paranoid position does demand). Although Sedgwick does not explain how this psychoanalytical state can be turned into a reliable critical practice or how she does so (hence the opacity of her proposition), we can start to see how this re-assembling practice is useful in a process of becoming (re-)orientated through addressing affective experiences. In order to develop this further, it is useful to turn to those who engage with both affect studies and the reparative.

Ann Cvetkovich engages with Sedgwick's concept of the reparative in her work *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012). In the introduction, Cvetkovich describes that the aim of the Public Feelings Project, of which the book is part, is to "find new ways to articulate the relation between the macro and the micro" (2012, 12). By examining the ordinary, such as the textures and affective experiences of everyday life, Cvetkovich seeks connections between feelings, indicating that they might reveal to be public, or political (11-12). Like Sedgwick, the project argues in favour of paying attention to individual affective experiences to see how they may not be individual after all. These experiences might be closer to systemic (as they hover below the structural), and therefore have potential as a political resource. Hence, Cvetkovich focusses on depression as a public feeling and explores what might be gained from 'treating' depression not just as a medical problem, but as a socio-cultural phenomenon (103).[17] Cvetkovich states that crucial to the project's critical approach is Sedgwick's articulation of the reparative. Throughout the book Cvetkovich discusses examples of the reparative practice, but she does not elaborate on the theory behind the concept.[18] She seemingly uses the reparative because it provides an alternative to the

[17] For instance, Cvetkovich relates the feelings of depression to feelings generated by oppressive systems. Questions such as 'What does capitalism feel like?' play an important part in her assessment of depression as a public feeling (Cvetkovich 2012, 5).

[18] It is useful to discuss one of these examples. Cvetkovich describes various communal activities, such as sharing arts and crafts, as reparative practices. In one instance, Cvetkovich describes an art installation by artist Sheila Pepe, which consists of "suspending huge crochet pieces from gallery walls and ceilings" (2012, 178). In her series *Common Sense*, Pepe makes these pieces accessible to public participation, and in "a performative process of making and unmaking", invites viewers to use the installation's material to create something themselves (178, 182). Cvetkovich says that as the work unravelled, "its somewhat bedraggled appearance became an invitation to participate" (182). This invitation provides the viewer/participant to explore the messiness and rough edges,

paranoid approach and enables attention to feelings as "both subject and method" (5). Although readers may intuit what the reparative aspect of the practices that she discusses throughout the book is, it remains unexplained how she uses the concept and why it is of importance to theories of affect.

José Esteban Muñoz engages much more closely with the methodological and theoretical questions regarding the reparative practice in "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down" (2006). This article, too, is concerned with the topic of depression, but it focusses specifically on the relation of depression to racial formations. Muñoz argues that present depictions of depression are not only gendered, but also follow a cultural script that reproduces a default white subject (2006, 675). He examines how a specific depressive position related to race is transmitted to and between bodies of colour through a particular affective circuit, which he names "a feeling of brownness" (676). In thinking through this feeling, he combines theories of racial performativity with Kleinian object-relations theory, as well as Klein's and Sedgwick's notion of reparation. Muñoz emphasises the importance of the acts of translation that must occur when using psychoanalytical tools such as Klein's in the fields of queer and race theory, or when considering "any other modality of minoritarian being or becoming" (678).[19] Drawing on literary theorist Hortense Spillers, Muñoz examines how (re)turning to the emancipatory potential of such tools can deuniversalise them. This deuniversalising effort enables a translation of these tools to a (in this case) feminist or queer theoretical context. As Spillers pointedly says, the emancipatory potential of psychoanalytical tools such as the reparative practice

> hinges on what would appear to be simple self-attention, except that reaching the articulation requires a process, that of making one's subjectness the object of a disciplined and potentially displaceable attentiveness. (Spillers, quoted in Muñoz 2006, 678)

Thus, Muñoz suggests that Klein's concept of the depressive position and reparation provides tools not only for critical "self-attention" (which includes attention to affective particularities), but also to recognise paths to belonging. As a political project, it contains transformative and emancipatory potential because it might be instrumental in "combat[ting] a certain muteness that social logics like homophobia, racism, and sexism would project onto

creating the sensation that it is okay not to know what to do with the mess and that there is no set way to 'order' it. This enables the release of anxious feelings about failing to perform, to be coherent, to be enough.

[19] I found this effort of translating concepts lacking in Sedgwick and Cvetkovich. Once again, we see the importance of slowing down around theoretical concepts and of making explicit why and how we argue that affect is useful.

the minoritarian subject" (2006, 678). This finding one another through self-attention, which Muñoz calls the "larger collective mapping of self and other", is reminiscent of Cvetkovich's project of mapping depression as a public feeling. In theorising on affective particularity and belonging, Muñoz seeks to enable the project of imagining a position of being and becoming that can resist the influence of these social logics (677).

To Muñoz, then, affects as a political tool are "descriptive of the receptors we use to hear each other and the frequencies on which certain subalterns speak and are heard or, more importantly, felt" (2006, 677). By feeling and being receptive of the feelings of others we come in contact with, we might orientate ourselves more openly towards others and find affective connections collectively. This self-attentiveness might be described as a modality of recognition, as Muñoz does in describing what "feeling brown, feeling down" means (679). Whereas Sedgwick's approach to this position was to utilise it as a theoretical position or a methodology (as an alternative to the paranoid position), Muñoz's engagement with the depressive brings out more clearly how it can be used as a personal and political practice. From Muñoz's reading of Klein it becomes apparent that the depressive position is a position of interjecting 'the self' and 'the exterior' to see how they are intertwined rather than separated. This action, which is a form of reparation (re-pair), enables an experience of synthesis of self and object (or other), and so creates a feeling of wholeness. Although it is 'mere' feeling, the feeling of wholeness is crucial for survival within the social (681). The reparative practice, then, is aimed at repositioning the 'self' to find connection, to see anew how one relates to and belongs in the world. This likewise entails extending the attentiveness normally paid to the self to others, in an effort to know the other. Hence, Muñoz describes the practice as a resistance to disrepair within the social that would "lead to a breakdown in one's ability to see and know the other" (681-2). As a practice that is motivated by love as a desire and striving for belonging, as Klein states, the reparative has to be a collective, rather than individual, endeavour.[20] In short, for Muñoz the reparative practice is an acceptance of and engagement with the (negative) affects that "[underlie] the subject's sense of self" in an effort to strive for personal and collective belonging (683, 687).

Taking the different approaches to the reparative proposed by Sedgwick, Cvetkovich and Muñoz together with theory on phenomenology and affect, we arrive at a specific

[20] Muñoz relates how Klein describes the reparative practice coming in three different modes: one of manic reparation, one of obsessive reparation, and one that is "grounded in love for the object" (Muñoz 2006, 683). In reading Muñoz, it becomes apparent that the former two have either as goal or consequence the harming of the 'exterior', whereas the practice that strives for synthesis and belonging with the 'exterior' must be rooted in love.

articulation of the reparative as follows. First, the reparative practice fits easily with phenomenological approaches, as it is a practice of recognising and reflecting on one's relation to the 'outside'. This reflection can indicate how one's consciousness is orientated towards objects. It thus 'queers' one's orientation and makes room to view oneself as an 'object' (per the discussion of Ahmed in the previous chapter). Affective questions such as "What moves me? What has moved in this way?" are grounded in lived realities and take seriously affective experiences and the ways the world impresses upon us, as well as the ways one impresses upon it. As the reparative approach can be used, as we have seen, to critically address and re-evaluate one's own position and orientation, it has the potential to be accountable epistemologically and in a distinctly feminist manner. From the depressive position, one can pay attention to "those things mute within us", the queer feelings that social logics aim to negate (Muñoz 2006, 687). These queer feelings might be attributed to affective experiences, but they can also stick to one's daily experience of the social. To articulate what might have been mute, or hidden, we might critically ask and stand still with the question of *how something makes you feel* and *why it makes you feel this way*. By giving space to feelings and being open to letting them come to you in a new fashion – without trying to cleanse them of their queerness or negativity – one can re-pair these relations and re-orientate themselves openly to the complexity of the self and other. In the reparative practice, one therefore opens the space to critically examine how one is related and attached to the social and the (normative) modes of being that the social represents. By remembering the queer commitment, we can inhabit a position that recognises the affective costs that the social incurs on those who are and/or act 'queer', and we can continue to critique what is perceived as normal. Thus, attention to queer feelings can "lead to an insistence on change and political transformation" (Muñoz 2006, 687). Moving forward, I examine how queer, marginalised feelings can become ground for instigating change. What might the transformative potential of the reparative be, especially when we take 'queer' affects as the object? In the next section, I address these questions by analysing a reparative practice found in Cvetkovich (2012), that of Saidiya Hartman in *Lose Your Mother*.

3.2 Analysing a reparative practice in Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*

In *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Cvetkovich relates plenty of examples of reparative practices, but one of them I find particularly interesting. This is Cvetkovich's reading of the book *Lose Your Mother* (2006), written by cultural historian Saidiya Hartman (Cvetkovich

2012, 125-133). Hartman's work is a memoir that traces connections between her own family and a history of slavery, in order to explore contemporary racism in the U.S.A. as "the afterlife of slavery" (126). Cvetkovich relates that in this memoir, Hartman aims to convey the "'elusiveness' of slavery's so frequently absent archive" by showing the complexity of the feelings that are inherited from this past (126, 131). Hartman's consideration of these feelings, as presented by Cvetkovich, makes for an insightful example of what one can do with queer feelings, both personally and politically (as well as critically). Although Cvetkovich brings out the reparative aspect and potential of the affective process Hartman describes, I want to relate this process more clearly to the concept of the reparative and extend this analysis to see how we can critique normative and oppressive structures through the affective violence they perpetrate, by examining our experience of these affects.

Cvetkovich tells us that in her search for the connection between her present experience of the afterlife of slavery and its violence in the past, Hartman is able to see only their ghostly presence (2012, 126). The connections are opaque, as they cannot be articulated through clear material evidence, but rather surface affectively in feelings of despair. Hartman attempts to trace the past lead her to an "encounter with nothing", as the archive of slavery is often absent (126). We start to see why it is so difficult for Hartman to articulate the feelings that stick to these encounters. Hartman describes her feelings as a "sense of alienation", as she feels estranged from both white people in the U.S.A. and the "African Americans who can sustain a hope for home or a dream of return" (127). A sense of uneasiness accompanies these feelings, because she falls between the margins: there is no prescribed or visible way for her to relate her experience of ghostly encounters with the history of slavery. There is no public space that can mediate these feelings, as I stated in the introduction of this thesis. However, by representing her personal struggle of how to relate to the unfinished struggle against racism (as the legacy of slavery), Hartman opens this space. As Cvetkovich states, Hartman "opens the way to an important understanding of political depression as a condition in which history shapes even the most personal experience of the present" (130). The process of assessing her experiences, feelings and relations surrounding her ancestral past is what I referred to as "sitting with the violence" or "bearing witness to one's own pain" in the introduction. I argue that this is a reparative process, as it enables Hartman to examine not only how she feels and experiences the present, but also how she has come to feel this way. Although it may not be a connection that can be proven, she is able to come to an new *understanding* of her relations and experiences. This in turn helps her to examine contemporary racism.

As Cvetkovich describes, Hartman resists seemingly easy solutions that might "aim to talk her out of her sense of alienation" (2012, 128). By holding on to this queer sense of alienation, she tries to capture "the everyday affective life of racism", or how structural racial inequality affects People of Colour (131). Because she examines her personal experience, she represents how this affects herself in the position of a middle-class black intellectual (129). Hartman describes her method of coming to these understandings as an "epistemology of rupture" (132). This notion of the rupture is insightful, as it highlights how Hartman comes to new understandings by holding different narratives and histories in tension with each other. On the one hand, Hartman makes an important move of

> using history as a resource for understanding the despair and weariness that are frequently cited as symptoms of depression but are in this case read *as the effects of racism* and a sense of homelessness, not a medical disease. (Cvetkovich 2012, 130, emphasis added)

This is a particular point of interest for Cvetkovich, whose book precisely intends to depathologise feelings of depression and see how they are a result from social structures rather than individual (2012, 2). We can see that Hartman uses personal affective experiences to examine how the affective functions in the perpetuation of racism. Discerning between negative affects as signs of depression (which are often modelled on white subject (Muñoz 2006, 675)) and as structurally imposed on *some* bodies is an important step towards critiquing social logics. It can indicate how dominant social logics are inherently racist and intend to make the structure of racism and its affects invisible (hence their absent archive). We can start to recognise the inconsistencies and ideologies embedded in these social logics that tell us how (not to) feel regardless of our material experiences and positionalities.

However, Hartman makes another important move besides questioning dominant narratives. She also ventures into a different dark side of colonial history, from which her sense of isolation as an American of the African diaspora stems (Cvetkovich 2012, 132). As Cvetkovich relates, Hartman is confronted by "the spectre of African-on-African violence that gives the lie to a simple white-on-black exploitation or a heroically victimized African subject" (132). The ambiguity of such realities complexify questions of how to relate to the violent history of colonialism. This process is made even more complex for Hartman by narratives which she calls "celebratory" (128). Hartman locates these narratives in the era of civil rights and decolonisation, in which some People of Colour had a "dream of return". This narrative heralds Africa as "a source of ancestors, Afrocentric culture, and welcome

continuity with the past" (127). Hartman gives voice to her sense of isolation, when she says:

> What had attracted the émigrés to Ghana were this vision of a new life and the promise of rebirth; what attracted me were the ruins of the old one. They were intent upon constructing a new society; I was intent upon tracing an itinerary of destruction from the coast to the savanna. They went to be healed. I went to excavate a wound…For me, the rupture was the story. (Hartman, quoted in Cvetkovich 2012, 127)

In the emigrants need for healing, Hartman locates the risk of falling prey to "a historical amnesia that has consequences for the present" (128). Cvetkovich suggests that it is naïve to think that by glossing over bad feelings, and by moving too easily to celebratory narratives, one can get to past the root of trauma (133). By ignoring negative feelings, one rather circumnavigates the root of the trauma, therefore leaving the problem untouched and able to fester.[21] Instead, Hartman acknowledges these complexities and keeps them together in tension. In this, she resists orientating herself towards these histories in a comfortable, familiar way. Rather, she disorientates herself by letting queer feelings and queer objects come to her. This is akin to the (depressive) position that Muñoz envisions of being and becoming that can resist the influence of social logics (2006, 677). This practice leads Hartman to a space of openness and 'displacement', which is what self-attention can bring about, as Hortense Spillers suggests (Muñoz 2006, 678). In this space connections do not come to Hartman clearly, but she is able to make them *differently*. By making the rupture the story, she can see how the story itself is ruptured by the affective costs resulting from both social logics and their conflicting messages. Reading the story from a queer angle grants Hartman a reparative understanding of her depressive affect (Cvetkovich 2012, 132-133).

By analysing Cvetkovich's account of Hartman's reparative practice and making the reparative practice in it more explicit, we have come to see how this phenomenological practice can be used as a (personal) re-orientation device, as well as how it can provide a different way of approaching and critiquing the structural, namely through affective experience. Nevertheless, I want to expand on this critique further by explicitly reading (some) ideas I encountered in my analysis together with (some) queer theory. I aim to show how a reparative reading enriches and informs a (short) analysis of, in this instance,

[21] However, what might appear to be "glossing over feelings" can sometimes be a survival mechanism, as not everyone has the ability or capacity to deal with their trauma because of time and place, because they do not have the tools or for other reasons.

dominant social narratives. In order to do this, is it useful to turn to Cvetkovich's formulation of Hartman's experience of racism. She remarks that "the story of everyday racism…is notable for its ordinariness rather than its spectacularity" (2012, 131). The notion that these encounters have become ordinary, *normal*, in the social landscape indicates a gap in the dominant social narrative. This is the absence in this narrative of the affective experiences of those who are racialised, discriminated and violated. We can recognise that this is what Muñoz means when he states that there is a "certain muteness that social logics like homophobia, racism, and sexism would project onto the minoritarian subject" (2006, 678). This *normalisation* of violent encounters can point us to the norms at the root of dominant social logics.

These logics include and have included a naturalisation of relations (between the 'races', between the 'sexes' etcetera), as discussed by Robert McRuer in "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled existence" (2002). In this article McRuer gives insight into the idea of 'normalcy' operates in the social narrative. The naturalisation of relations is made possible by "the ongoing subordination of [e.g.] homosexuality (and bisexuality) to heterosexuality", and of disabledness to abledness, as is McRuer's focus (2002, 90). In this case, it is made possible by the subordination of the Black subject to the white subject. This naturalisation is a result of the idealisation of the white, heterosexual, able-bodied subject. However, the normalisation of this subject also perpetuates it as the ideal: queer theory continually demonstrates that it is "the introduction of normalcy into the system that introduces compulsion [to fulfil this ideal]" (90). It is the naturalisation and compulsion within these narratives that leads other modes of being to be cast as (inferior) alternatives, or queer, or erased completely.

Not adhering to normative modes of being can produce queer feelings. These moments of resisting the call to interpellation, might be experienced as bodily injury, as pain or discomfort, as Ahmed states (2014, 147-8). This sense of bodily discomfort makes one turn inwards and be aware of the "surfaces of the body". Queer feelings thus might make one experience a separation of the social. One might experience the pressure not to be or act queer publicly (148). This might render the queer subject mute. We keep queer feelings mute within ourselves out of fear of our bodies being singled out. This might indicate that we are still invested in the norm, as Ahmed says, or that we dread the repercussions of our way of being not being seen as legitimate (which is still to be affected by those narratives) (146-7). Either way, queer feelings are erased from the narrative, and harmful social relations become invisible. We see then what Ahmed means in saying that emotional

intensities and the neglect thereof can "allow [social] structures to be reified as forms of being" (12).

What we have seen in the analysis of Hartman is that she resists the narratives that render her queer feelings invisible. By representing her experience and her process of trying to understand it, she emphasises the oppressive social relations that racism produces. As Hartman says, she rejects "a dwelling in the past that is not connected to the present" (129). Rather she repairs this connection, by seeing how her present and a collectively shared past are intertwined. By giving voice to the ambiguity and complexity of feelings of her feelings, she refutes the social logics that tell her how (not) to feel, thereby presenting a different narrative. This is why it is useful to pay attention to the emotional effects of social structures and the way they are experienced (queerly), as it provides a way of critiquing them. Affective experiences and intensities are integral to the stories that we are being told and to the stories we tell ourselves. Being critical of them can enable us to read and tell these stories differently.

Hartman's epistemology of rupture thus represents a way of inhabiting the norm differently. In her work, readers might find their own space to examine and articulate complexities of feeling, and different ways of being in the world. As I have argued, this is a different way of taking up agency in the process of personal and political re-orientation. The point of Hartman's investigation, as Cvetkovich suggests, is not to 'heal' from or do away with negative affects (2012, 127). Neither is it to get stuck in negative feelings. Hartman rather "wants to avoid an interminable sadness that remains fixed in the past and doesn't make connections to the future" (133). By holding on to her depressive affect and examining it critically, she can envision a different utopia: one "in which people find ways to move forward by coming together around violence and despair" (132-3). Indeed, we find new and different paths to belonging, once we open the space to feel.

3.3 The reparative potential of affect

Throughout this thesis, I have been examining what the transformative potential of affect might be. In this chapter, I have shown various facets of this potential. Once we start examining feelings from the point of our experience, we see how their theoretical potential is inextricably interwoven with their potential for personal and political transformation. I have argued that a critical examination of one's affects can create an understanding of how and why one is orientated in a certain way: towards the self, towards others, towards norms

and the social itself. The reparative practice thus functions as a personal re-orientation device, as it allows us to see different ways of relating to the world. It is a practice of learning how to bear witness to your own pain, of re-orientating yourself towards your experiences in a way that lets you feel with compassion to yourself and others. I have stated the importance of having such spaces, where one is allowed to not know how to feel and recognise that there is no set way to how one should feel. We can see differently how normative and oppressive social structures are experienced and maintained through the social logics we learn to internalise. In the understandings we gain from a reparative practice, we can find new ways of dealing and surviving. These understandings can be used to find the new ways to articulate the "relation between the macro and the micro" that Cvetkovich hopes for (2012, 12).

The reparative practice allows us to inhabit a critical position from which we can address harmful social narratives. As Jack Halberstam pointedly says, we can work against this narrative of normativity, by finding "ambiguity across a range of embodiments and represent[ing] it as the human condition" (2011, 103). The practice of resisting normative narratives by *queering* them then has to be predicated on a commitment to not normalise other ways of being, as I argued. In Ahmed's words, this means not "presum[ing] that lives have to follow certain lines in order to count as lives" (2006, 178). In resisting social narratives within yourself, within communities, there resides a form of agency in re-orientating yourself. If we are queerly committed, then this agency does not only mean allowing yourself to be and feel, it also means examining yourself critically. As Sara Ahmed says, it means we always have to question our own investments (2014, 178). Our investments are challenged by coming in contact with and being open to others (188). If we want to strive politically for belonging for everyone, then I believe we must stay open to the complexities and contradictions within ourselves and others. By allowing the complexities and messiness of feelings to exist and be present, we can come together around the violence and despair that affect us negatively, as Hartman hopes. There is power in being messy and in showing incoherence. Representing this and publicly acknowledging what affects us carries the potential for people to stop and recognise the things that are mute within them, too.

Conclusion Imagining an affective politics

In calling for a reparative practice as a form of attention to queer feelings, I have perhaps been doing exactly what prominent affect scholars have told me not to do: calling for more representation of affect. The debate on representation is central to contemporary affect theory and the current trajectory within this field. Advocates of the 'affective turn' have proposed turning to affect, and away from earlier forms of (feminist) scholarship, in order to find the transformative potential of affect. The purpose of this thesis, too, has been to explore this transformative potential, but not by dismissing important work done by feminist and queer scholars. Rather, a recurring theme in this thesis has been reading for complexity, by reading different approaches, methods and disciplines in tension with and in extension of each other. Following Sedgwick, I have called this method "reparative reading" in the introduction. By reading reparatively, I have come to understand affect differently than how it is often represented, as something separate from (cognitive) experience. In the first chapter, reading advocates and critics of the affective turn together led me to critically examine the arguments that this turn is founded on. This discussion made me reconsider how we might approach the critical potential of affect. Instead of investigating what affect is, I turned to wondering what affects do. As a way of doing such a phenomenology of affect, I proposed a reparative practice that allows one to 'queer' one's orientation and experience. In describing and analysing how this practice can be used method of critical inquiry, we saw what queer affects do, and what we can do with them in turn. We encountered the reparative potential of (queer) affect as a re-orientation device, as it allows us to examine our affective attachments and experiences critically, but also with compassion to ourselves. The reparative practice allows us to be complex, to experience conflicting feelings without having to have them make sense. Rather, this complexity gives us important understandings of how we are imbedded in the social, and how social logics impact on us. Paying attention to feelings thus provides a critical way of examining how feelings are sometimes not just individual, but indicative of how structures function and how they are reified as modes of being. If the aim of critiquing normative structures is that we can (eventually) experience them differently, then working to transform them by addressing them critically through theory is not the only way. We might also work to change the way we experience oppressive structures, by learning again how to feel and by creating public, collective spaces to do this. After all, as bell hooks reminds us,

> Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion. (hooks 2000, 215)

My discussion on the reparative and transformative potential of affect indicates various possibilities for further research. I would like to address a few that I wish I could have developed further in this thesis. The first is on the method of reparative reading, which I have used as a method of analysing theory. It would be useful to develop this method further, and see how it relates in particular to the new materialist concept of 'diffraction', as formulated by Karen Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). My way of reading different authors together and through one another in order to find new 'meeting points' might also be called diffractive, although I have not explicitly called it so. It would be interesting to see how the two methods compare to one another. A second point of further research would be to use the reparative practice to see how affective experiences function in relation to other normative structures (and their reification). An extension of an analysis like mine could be useful in critiquing and recognising oppressive social logics. A work that could be of further use in such an analysis is Clare Hemmings' *Why Stories Matter* (2011), which provides insight into how affect is used as tool to make narratives believable, and with which I unfortunately could not engage in the scope of this thesis.

A final point of further inquiry would be to do more research on how we might use the reparative practice and attention to queer affects as tools in an affective politics. As I mentioned in this conclusion, my discussion on affect and its transformative potential has lead me to call for more representation of affect. An affective politics would therefore not be necessarily different from a politics of representation. However, I do not mean this in the way that Jasbir Puar warns against when she talks about the potential risks of practising identity politics. Such politics of representing ways of being as 'identities' might indeed produce models that are exclusionary and premised on *some* bodies, letting others again fall in the margins. Rather, an affective politics might be representative of different ways of being, and in that be queerly committed "not to presume that lives have to follow certain lines in order to count as lives" (Ahmed 2006, 178). In such a politics, we could talk of *identifications* rather than *identities*, as Gayle Salamon suggests (2009, 229). This would underscore the notion that we are always shaped by how we relate to what exists outside of ourselves, by our contact with others. As Ahmed suggests, such a representation of proliferating forms of being and feeling "would be forms of sociality…that are not available as lines to be followed, although they might emerge from the lines that already gather" (2006, 178). In times when feeling queer is so often used against us, we need more representation of what it means to feel queer, of how we can inhabit norms differently and critically. A reparative practice can help us to open the spaces to feel and to hold these spaces open, in

order to make connections within ourselves and towards others. We need such spaces in which it is said that it is okay to be messy and to be affected. Without them, it is no wonder people feel a sense of un-belonging. This is why an affective politics, a politics of representing affective experiences, is needed. After all, queer feelings, too, demand to be felt.

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