

FEELING DOWN, BACKWARD, AND MACHINIC: QUEER THEORY AND THE AFFECTIVE TURN

SENTIR ABATIDO, REGRESIVO Y MAQUÍNICO: TEORÍA QUEER Y EL GIRO AFECTIVO

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Abstract

The engagement of queer theory with the affective turn, particularly in its divergence from the previous discussions preoccupied with the historical development and poststructuralist critique of sexual identity, has generated three distinct yet related strains of affective scholarship: queer negativity, queer temporality, and queer as machinic body. Each of the strains has raised different analytical challenges and potentials for both queer theory and affect theory, which I term respectively *feeling down*, *feeling backward*, and *feeling machinic*. These three types of scholarship describe the varied forms of sociality and levels of intensity that the queer body is affected by and bring three particular contributions to queer theory, including deepening the understanding of cultural processes, shifting epistemology at the temporal scale, and widening sexual ontology beyond its spatial privileging of the Euro-American experience.

Resumen

La implicación de la teoría queer con el giro afectivo, particularmente en su divergencia con las discusiones previas preocupadas con el desarrollo histórico y la crítica postestructuralista de la identidad sexual, ha generado tres cepas diferenciadas, aunque relacionadas de trabajos del afecto: la negatividad queer, la temporalidad queer y lo queer como cuerpo maquinico. Cada una de las cepas ha planteado diferentes desafíos y potenciales analíticos tanto para la teoría queer como para la teoría del afecto, que nombro respectivamente como *sentir abatido*, *sentir regresivo* y *sentir maquinico*. Estos tres tipos de trabajos describen las varias formas de socialidad y niveles de intensidad con las que el cuerpo queer es afectado y traen tres contribuciones particulares a la teoría queer, incluyendo una profundización en la comprensión de los procesos culturales, desplazando la epistemología a la escala temporal, y ampliando la ontología sexual más allá de su privilegio espacial de la experiencia euro-americana.

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Introduction

Queer theory and affect theory share equally ambitious goals in the initialization of the project of paradigmatic transformation beyond the linguistic or the cultural turn, shifting and troubling the boundaries, definitions, and approaches to identity, body, and matter. Emerging from academic and activist circles in the 1990s, queer theory resists the identitarian conception of politics that liberal movements promise and refuses to territorialize the scope of its object of study. In their introductory editorial, *What Does Queer Theory Teach US about X?* Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1995) state succinctly and strongly, “It is not useful to consider queer theory a thing” (p.

343). Broadly constitutive of a growing critique of the normative models of sex, gender, and sexuality, queer theory aspires to “create publics” (p. 344) that examine questions of sex and intimacy and think differently about the privilege and struggle one embodies across multiple references of power fields. The theoretical, political, and epistemological commitments to anti-identitarianism and antinormativity allow queer theory to be attentive to the intersectional consequences of social differentiation that consolidate regimes of normalization beyond a single inquiry focus of “sexuality” and toward an array of analytical categories of race, ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, and disability, and more recently, the human and the nonhuman.

Rooted in the poststructuralist critique of Foucault and energized by the contributions of feminists of color, the “queer turn” (Hall & Jagose, 2012) inspires antifoundational knowledge production that persistently challenges institutionally established identities such as “women” or “homosexual” and the biologically deterministic notions of the body as well as engages with various publics—mass media, science, medicine, religion, public policy, and so on—to trouble the fetishized normality and create alternative possibilities of politics and belonging. Most notably driven by Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s work on bridging queer theory with psychologist Silvan Tomkins’s theory of affect (Sedgwick & Frank, 1995; Sedgwick, 2003), queer affect departs from the initially deconstructive, linguistically oriented projects of antiessentialism and turns toward a more explicit engagement with the somatic and the biological. Recognizing the limited theoretical and political possibility of what Sedgwick terms *paranoid criticism* in the initial formation of queer theory, queer affect conceptualizes the erotic life beyond the either/or thinking of normality and antinormality, relationality and antisociality, the public and the intimate, shame and pride, oppression and liberation (e.g., Berlant & Warner, 1998; Grosz, 1994; Sedgwick, 2003). The promises of queerness—to move beyond disciplinary constraints in academia, to mutate and constantly undermine its own assumptions, to effect and provoke changes across established institutions and social life—have generated productive strains on affect theory that revitalizes the theoretical discussion on the feeling, emotion, intimacy, and sentimentality that were previously marginalized.

Three Strains of Queer Affect

This engagement of queer theory with the “affective turn” (Clough & Halley, 2007), particularly its diversion from the previous discussion preoccupied with a specific traumatized sexual subject of gay and lesbian studies, has generated three distinct yet related strains of affective scholarship: queer negativity, queer temporality, and queer as machinic body. Each of the strains has created a new relationship between queer-

ness and affect that raises different analytical challenges and potentials—for both fields of scholarship—which I term *feeling down*, *feeling backward*, and *feeling machinic*. The three types of relations of the theories describe the varied forms of sociality and levels of intensity with which the queer body is affected. The proliferations of queer affect are certainly not limited to these three strains. The focus on these three engagements is to provide a roadmap that identifies the initial connected knots between the two fields in the past decade and center on their joint effects in the realm of the cultural, epistemological, and ontological. Particularly, this framework aims to detangle the contentious relationship between queer theory’s poststructuralism and affect studies. Following Clare Hemmings’ (2005) critical insight, the queer affective analytical potential I propose here is not about rejecting poststructuralist cultural interpretations as entirely futility or apolitical, but seeing how affect has built on the queer cultural critiques to generate the present theorizations on the multiple capacities of the body.

Whereas queer negativity challenges the increasingly problematic connectedness of the state and mainstream gay and lesbian politics and attempts to generate alternative forms of attachment between the queer body and negative affect (e.g., Ahmed, 2004/2014; Sedgwick, 2003), queer temporality reexamines queer becoming and articulates sexuality as a field of temporal constellation through the intellectual cartography of Foucauldian deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and women of color radical feminisms (e.g., Edelman, 2004; Love, 2007; Muñoz, 2009). Taking an approach of cultural critique, both strains (queer negativity and temporality) makes visible the feelings, sensations, and expressions that are often not recognized by the liberal framework of private emotions. They question the linear model of sexual identity formation and heteronormative futurism through the analytical perspectives of the negative and the backward turn. Here, queer affect interprets the queer body as a becoming agent and reconstructive possibility beyond the modern sexual history and private sexual identity in the prototypical white liberal subjectivity.

Furthermore, moving toward a Deleuzian theory of the porousness and permeability of the body (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), the queer scholarship of the third strain emphasizes the necessity of rejecting the preoccupation with conceptualizing the queer body as a unique, singular, and organic entity. Whereas queerness as a political subject has traditionally relied upon the strategy of humanizing queer bodily suffering, scholars in this body of literature such as Jasbir Puar (2017) question the consequences of universalizing and normalizing the Western human form through the discourse of modern sexuality. Affect works as a generative framework to resituate queer analysis in the machinic assemblages of bio-informatic and technological “soci-

eties of control” (Massumi, 2015, p.16), tracing power at the level of population management.

All three strains of queer affect illustrate how the noncognitive forces of the body and feelings matter and shape the social and political life of marginalized subjects across time and space. The intersection with affect overall has brought about three particular contributions to queer theory, which are respectively, 1) *feeling down* as a method to look at how affect circulates around and forms attachment to the queer body and deepens queer theory’s understanding of the cultural process, 2) *feeling backward* as an epistemological reflection that expands the capacity of queer theory on a temporary scale, and 3) *feeling machinic* as a theory of the assemblage that takes queerness to an ontological turn beyond the human form, and in doing so, moves away from its spatial privileging of Euro-American experience. Overall, queer affect emphasizes the body’s capacity toward alternative and multiple becomings through one’s attachments to negative affect, expanding queer history backward in time, and moving from an individualized organic subject to population arrangement beyond the human and the nonhuman.

Feeling Down: Circulation and Attachment of Negative Affects

Since the early 1990s, queer theorists and activists have criticized the growing connection between the mainstream LGBTQ movement and the regulation of the state. In the United States, particularly, the legalization of hate crime legislature, nondiscrimination policy, and the later legislation of same-sex marriage showed a problematic direction toward “progress” that became a ground of queer theorization and criticism regarding how the state deploys sexuality as a mechanism of normalization and control. The engagement with affect theory has enabled queer scholars to interrogate the notions of pride, safety, and happiness that are in fact a result of the mainstream LGBTQ movement’s troubling alliance with neoliberal capitalism, rather than the outcome of progressive politics or social transformation. Coming through the traditions of feminist, queer, and postcolonial critiques, the affective turn toward the framework of *feeling down* is not necessarily a new theoretical paradigm, but a continuation of the feminist analytical method that “the personal is political” and an extension of poststructuralist interventions in the binarisms of normality and antinormality, repression and liberation, and knowing and ignorance (Ahmed, 2004/2014; Cvetkovich, 2003, 2012; Hemmings, 2005; Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012).

As one of the prominent scholars in the theoretical milieu of the Public Feeling Project, Ann Cvetkovich (2012) highlights queer affective capacities in attending to how feelings circulate in everyday life and how structural arrangements provide the

conditions to make certain affects “public” and disguise others. Public Feeling scholars are particularly attentive to the feminist analysis of emotional labor and the body’s capacity of embodiment and performativity, arguing that there has been a longer engagement between feminist theory and body and matter than the affective turn has acknowledged (Hemmings, 2005; Khanna, 2012; Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012). Whereas some feminist and queer scholars are cautious to embrace the turn to affect as a complete break from poststructuralist analysis, Sedgwick’s (2003) interpretation of Tomkin’s theory of affect argues that finding a relationship with both poststructuralism and materialism is necessary for the further development of queer theory, which she argues has been constrained and arrested by a sense of critical paranoia against biology, materiality, and the freedom in speculation. Combining these approaches, the queer scholarship of *feeling down*, centers on the utility of negative affects and is about resocializing public feelings and detaching from poststructural paranoid criticism. This body of scholarship understands affect not as an object produced by an organic subject but the surface and circuit in which power is felt. The contentious relationship between queer negativity with affect, which in turn is channeled into a reflexive and rehabilitative frame of reference to queer theory, provides a deeper and wider analysis of the cultural process of how queerness is formed and performed but also its capacity to affect the public beyond the categories of gender and sexuality.

Paranoid history. In her formative essay *Paranoid Reading*, Sedgwick (2003) argues that queer theory has been structurally bounded with paranoid affect ever since the AIDS crisis. The distrust of the government that resulted from the governmentally assisted spreading of misinformation about queer sexuality and the queer body has facilitated a particular tradition of the *hermeneutics of suspicion* in the queer theoretical practice and paranoia as “a privileged *object* of anti-homophobic theory” (p. 126) ever since the mid-1980s. The particular narrative of homophobic injury as a result of the AIDS crisis and the aftermath of losses, deaths, and habitual suspicion of the state, Sedgwick indicates, have formed an overdetermined relationship between paranoia and queerness, and limit the speculative capacity of queerness in generating alternative critical practices.

This paranoid position that queer theory has endured also comes from an incomplete utilization of Foucault’s theory of power as productive rather than negative. For Sedgwick, the almost “delirious promise” of Foucault’s theory of sexuality is his identification of ways to understand sexuality besides the Freudian “repressive hypothesis” (p. 9) that is outside of the dualistic framework of prohibition or repression versus freedom or liberation. In a sense, Sedgwick does not dismiss the theoretical potentials of the poststructuralist tradition but is concerned with the tendency in Foucauldian

queer knowledge production. This form of poststructuralist paranoia awaits the uncovering of “hidden” oppressive forces beneath the text and thus reifies a purely negative relation to sexuality in the queer scholarly practice. In search of a way out of the repetitive theatrical effect of uncovering the hidden traces of oppression and the binary switch between the repressed and liberated, Sedgwick turns to Tomkins’s theory of affect (1962; 1963) for its greater freedom of attachments. Tomkins’s well-known definition of affect, “any affect may have any ‘object’” (1962, p. 190), breaks away from the Freudian conceptualization of drive that is directed toward a specific object and aim. The traditionally understood positive affects such as joy and excitement can be experienced in painful events, and negative affects such as shame and fear can be invested and directed toward pleasurable activities.

Despite the fact that Tomkins did not develop the system of affect with an intentionally antiheterosexist agenda, Sedgwick’s reading of his work, particularly around the notion of shame, has opened up different possibilities for queer theorization. It disrupts the theoretical attachment between sexual shame and “internalized homophobia” that has been taken for granted in the construction of queer subject (see Liu, 2017; Sedgwick, 2003). Whereas shame is often read negatively in mainstream psychology as a sign of disengagement or distress that one must overcome (e.g., Herek, Chopp, & Strohl, 2007; Meyer, 2003), Tomkins argues that shame is only felt when interest or joy has been activated. That is, shame operates as a reduction of interest instead of the opposite or a lack of interest. This engagement of shame in Tomkins’s theory, rather than a binary switch of prohibition and activation, allows a way out of the short-circuiting knowledge production around the repressive hypothesis and its critique. The reparative reading of queer affect that Sedgwick offers through Tomkins is a speculative move toward knowledge production that welcomes surprises and opens up the future possibilities once restricted by the anxious paranoid position. The reparative practice, in other words, is to move from the Freudian homophobia-centered, queer injury narrative to “a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks” (p. 150) that can afford other paths of theorizing queerness.

Queer discomfort. Clare Hemmings (2005) interrogates the affective turn’s emphasis on the freedom of affect particularly in relation to the claims in the works of Sedgwick (2003), Gilles Deleuze (1997), and Brian Massumi (2002). She argues, “only for certain subjects can affect be thought of as attaching in an open way; others are so over-associated with affect that they themselves are the object of affective transfer” (p. 561). For instance, the gendered, sexualized, and racialized body frequently carries others’ shame, disgust, or fear, and is fixated in a specific affective relation that comes to define one’s subjectivity. Hemmings’s caution around affect theory comes from its

decentering of the subject and turning away from the messiness of identity, representation, and social categories that have been feminist theory's main concerns.

However, I argue that this commitment to the feminist engagement of the social and experience is in fact not in contradiction with affect theory. Whereas according to Tomkins and Sedgwick the directionality of affect is multiple, its investment in a particular object should always be examined as a politicized relationship. The attention to the directionality and mobility of affect in relation to different subjects is in close conversation with Sara Ahmed's work (2004/2014), in which she examines the circulation of queerness in the social arrangement of heteronormative institutions and the affective process that determines which affects become disproportionately attached to certain subjects and bodies and not to others. Rather than understanding affect as something that is invoked by an object because of its essential properties, Ahmed flips the directionality of the relationship and argues that feelings "take the 'shape' of the contact we have with objects" (2004/2014, p. 5). Central to Ahmed's work is an expansion of the feminist understanding of "the personal is political," in which the boundaries of what defines the personal and the political are not predetermined but instead effects of affective circulation in cultural spheres.

With this attention to how affect shapes social arrangements, Ahmed argues that heteronormativity functions not only as a structure of heterosexual hegemony and domination, but also as a structure of affect that secures heterosexual feelings of public comfort by allowing selected bodies to come into spaces "that have already taken their shape" (p. 148). In other words, the routine and compulsory heterosexuality in everyday life becomes a repetition of bodily acts, a particular pattern of flesh and attachment, which shapes the surfaces of interaction and produce feelings of comfort and discomfort, belongingness and alienation. Queer feelings of discomfort or pain do not originate from sexual identity per se, but from the mundane and repetitive labor in which queer subjects are forced to comply and sustain heteronormative spaces as their bodies encounter them in everyday interaction.

However, discomfort is not simply a sign of negativity or injury but, rather, a new form of sociality and opening. For Ahmed, this discomfort in queer subjects' conditional attachment to the heteronormative ideal can be generative and "*about inhabiting norms differently*" (p. 155, emphasis in original). Queer discomfort holds on to the object of desire, intimacy, and even family, and reworks it to make new impressions in the sphere and create alternative styles of attachment to spaces. As queer bodies seek alternative forms of attachment, they "'gather' in spaces, through the pleasure of opening up to others" (p. 165). Queer pleasure exists not in the binary opposition of normativity and antinormativity but, similarly to what Sedgwick has invoked through

Tomkins, as an emergence from the endurance of negative attachment of affect that has the potential to create deeper engagements and new forms of sociality.

Gay shame. This queer intervention of negative affect not only reconstructs the relationship between queer subjectivity and sexuality as injurious, but also troubles the psycho-political queer subject constructed through a purely negative relationship to shame. Continuing Sedgwick's idea that shame generates the formative forces for a depathologized queer identity and historical collectivity, "gay shame" has emerged as a both theoretical and social movement that rejects the increasingly neoliberalized queer identity and the politics of privatization and assimilation under the rhetoric of "gay pride." Most notably, David Halperin and Valerie Traub's (2009) edited collection *Gay Shame* explores the usefulness of shame as a method of historical inquiry that complicates the progress narrative of LGBTQ rights and as a source of queer performativity that parodies heteronormative masculinity. The collection highlights an abundance of shame in the archive of gay lives—in gay male gym culture, BDSM practice, queer childhood narratives, and the performative space of theater. To acknowledge and embrace these shameful archives, instead of fitting into the narrow image of gay pride and the "very exemption from the imperative to affirmation," can be "bracingly affirmative" (pp. 11–12). Shame, as a matter of fact, is not the opposite of pride but what drives the movement to declare pride in the first place. It is thus not an object to reject; instead, it must be examined as a formative element of queer identity.

Although gay shame has become a new form of collectivity that intervenes in the normalization of queer subjectivity, critics have pointed out that it is a subject adopted primarily by white gay men, prioritizing their experiences of gendered humiliation and pushing the public gaze onto the bodies of queer people of color, who are always already seen as "shameful" (Halberstam, 2005; Perez, 2005). As Ahmed (2004/2014) argues, how affect is stuck onto a particular type of body is always a politicized relationship. Tracing the directionality and circulation of affect indicates how subjects are activated but also at whose risk they become embodied. Critical psychologists such as Katherine Johnson (2015) and Rob Cover (2016) are specifically attentive to how shame produces "evidence" of risk that is disproportionately attached to queer youth and produces a one-dimensional victimized subjectivity, neglecting the intergenerational community bonding and resilience built around the performative capacity of shame (Blackman, 2011). Rather than fixating on and objectifying shame as evidence of internalized stigma to be rid of in the psyche, these scholars engage with shame as a social process and interaction for a reparative analysis of queer vulnerability (Liu, 2017). Integrating the queer embracing of negative affect and the affective resistance against individualization, these scholars challenge the framework of private psycho-

pathology and the fixation of sexual desire on the marginalized body as *the* object of interrogation and, instead, point toward new forms of transdisciplinary theorization that can elicit a “curious” becoming beyond the binarisms of shame and pride, health and pathology (Hegarty, 2011).

Feeling Backward: Expanding the Queer Epistemological Capacity

If queer negativity embraces what Sedgwick terms the “strangeness” of affect, and specifically queer shame, the scholarship in *feeling backward* connects queer relationality and antirelativity through the strangeness of time, rejecting the heteronormative structure of temporality that normalizes patterns of repetition and paths of becoming. This strain of queer affect continues the feminist work from the Public Feelings project to extend the temporal scale of “everyday life” toward the archive of the past (e.g., Cvetkovich, 2003; 2012; Love, 2007) and living beyond the conventional heteronormative time (Halberstam, 2005; Freccero, 2007), while others draw from the theory of drive and pleasure from Lacanian psychoanalysis (e.g., Edelman, 2004) and queer of color critique (e.g., Muñoz, 2009). Although scholars in queer temporality do not explicitly reference the Deleuzian or Bergsonian theories of affect and time, the work of queer temporality scholars together creates an epistemological intervention in queer theory, which extends beyond the modernist temporal scale, on the conception of queer identity and desire. By extending beyond this scale, queer temporality attempts to disrupt the linear progression of liberal politics that depends on a fixed articulation of the past and narrow imagination of the future, and it also questions the viability of the liberal fantasies and attachment to “the good life” in the present (Dinshaw et al., 2007).

This “turn toward time” provides a critique not only of the linearity, progress, and modernism, but also the “geopolitical histories of racialized sexualities” as Roderick Ferguson argues, particularly for queer people of color who are often marked outside of the Western time-space of sexuality (Dinshaw et al., 2007, pl 180). In *Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Jack Halberstam (2005) traces an alternative queer temporal logic that offers insights about counter-hegemonic embodiment practices of body, performance, and identity at a scale away from the canonical work on the “postmodern geography” (see Harvey, 1990; Soja, 1989). While queer temporality produces new understandings of space through various modes of queer counterpublics, the affective engagement with “queer spatiality” is not as strong via queer temporality, but rather, is strengthened through the critique of the sexual human form as I will present in the next section on *feeling machinic*. Partly it’s due to the reason Halberstam has illustrated, where the question of space often needs to address neo-

Marxist concerns on the scale of global capitalism that is not as intrinsically connected to existing affective queer scholarship on body and embodiment; partly it comes from the geographical bias of scholarship that centralizes on a North American reference of queer experience. Therefore, in this section, I will focus on the various enactments of affective queer temporality that mostly draws connection to the questions of suffering, death, survival, community, and futurity from the AIDS epidemic.

Backward queers. Attending to how the queer activist archive has informed the formation of queer subjectivity, Cvetkovich's (2003) work on AIDS activism illustrates the generative potential of remembering and acting out trauma, where traumatic memories of loss and death have created a sense of collective life that troubles the privatizing and medicalizing of everyday catastrophes felt by queer communities. This movement of theorizing queerness as a holding on to the unfinished past and the continued effects of heteronormative violence can also be found in Heather Love's (2007) work *Feeling Backward*, where she turns to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary texts marked by the queer suffering of irreconcilable same-sex desire and social exclusion. Due to the urgency of the LGBTQ rights movement to construct an affirmative gay genealogy, Love argues that some gay and lesbian historians have unjustly excluded these texts, which is an unfortunate loss for queer theory as a field and for the queer historical archive. Turning backward points to how modernism consists of internal temporal splitting. The increasingly attainable future of gay and lesbian normalization for some places a time stamp on queer suffering as something that only belongs to the past, where marginalized subjects—the nonwhite, the perverse, the irrational, and the gender transgressive—encounter extraneous obstacles to progress and advancement. By privileging the “nonnormative” sites of trans bodies and queer subculture in his analysis, Halberstam (2005) also illustrates how certain subjects, particularly rural gender-nonconforming bodies, are inevitably marked as backward by the dominant binary narratives of butch lesbian versus transgender male identity, unintelligible to the discrete categories of sexuality and gender. Given the paradoxical relationship between queerness and modernity, turning backward in time is not only a directionality toward the past but also a critique of the false promise of queer modernity that erases the ongoing oppression of the unassimilable Other.

A future without queers. As stated by Love, the backward turn is neither a form of nostalgia nor a fetishization of queer melancholia; it questions the existing queer movement that only has a vision of the future and lacks a politics of the past. The attention to the persistence of suffering and negativity has generated abundant queer feelings about temporality that focus on queer theory's capacity to rework time against linearity, both toward history and toward the future. Whereas works such as

Cvetkovich's and Love's recuperate the political "usefulness" of a queer past, Lee Edelman (2004) argues against the "reproductive futurism" embodied in the figure of the Child that relies on the logic of heteronormativity rooted in all politics. However radical the politics' desire to reshape social order, he argues, it "remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child" (pp. 2-3, emphasis in original). Queerness, for Edelman, is less sexual desire and more antisocial relationality, antithetical to the reproductive imperative, a permanent refusal of futurism.

Unlike Cvetkovich and Love, who embrace a new politics toward the queer negative past, Edelman reconceptualizes queerness through invoking the psychoanalytic relationship between homosexuality and the death drive as a structural position against all fantasies of alternative social relations. This "antirelational thesis" put forth by Edelman posits that the politics of queerness always only exists through the failure to suppress the collective death drive—the idea that queer sex after all does not lead to anything but "pure fucking." This conceptualization of queerness demystifies the temporal order as a series of linear succession, and replaces it with an act of repetition for the sake of differentiating itself with directionality toward its own elimination. The antirelational thesis, indeed, can be a difficult political position to stand for, as it not only critiques any arrangement of queer inclusion but also rejects sexuality as a form sociality in itself. To this end, queerness becomes *nothingness* for both the left and the right, as Edelman writes, "for the right wing the nothingness always at war with the positivity of civil society; for the left, nothing more than a sexual practice in need of demystification" (p. 28). In this most extreme version of anti-identitarian politics, queerness is a libidinally charged affect that redefines the political by holding and suspending subjectivities in time from the imperative liberal becoming at the risk of its own annihilation.

However, a central weakness of Edelman's thesis is his failure to acknowledge that the figure of the Child is always coded as a white middle-class boy, and the political figure he critiques is reserved for white masculine queerness. That is, sexuality in racialized bodies can never be seen as "pure fucking" but carries additional historical baggage. As José Esteban Muñoz (2009) says succinctly, "the future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity" (p. 95). In this critique, the insistence on the link between pleasure and death reaffirms the structural imperative where all forms of desire are directed toward normative white reproductive futurism. Whereas the antirelational thesis is a powerful polemic against the failure of sexual liberalism, it may fail to examine queer lives and pleasure in their vibrant potentiality, alternative sociality, and multiple forms of becoming. In a more

affirmative turn, Muñoz's work draws on alternative archives in queer punk subcultures to illustrate how the potential toward alternative futurity exists in the everyday, however ephemeral and fleeting. Moving away from what Sedgwick terms the paranoid reading in queer theory, Muñoz embraces an affective openness he calls "feeling utopian" to capture the materialized idealism in queer of color performance in the face of hopeless and unimaginative pragmatic politics. According to Muñoz, in the context of perpetual state violence against queer and trans youth of color, we need to dare to seek a queer future of the "'not-yet' where queer youths of color actually get to grow up" (p. 96).

The affective now. Queer theory has been generative particularly in the ways that it makes explicit how conventional desire and attachment are managed in ways that are not yet noticeable. If queerness opens up the temporal fields of the past and the future, how about the present? In the present of everlasting crises of global capitalism, security, health, and ordinary survival, Berlant (2011) claims that the "present" is affectively perceived. The present is not an objective measurement of temporal parameters but orchestrated as a "temporal genre" (p. 4) that is felt and whose boundaries are constantly adjusting through the distribution of sensations across race, class, gender, and sexuality. Under this ever-present moment of crisis, Berlant argues that the good life as a political economic object is produced by everyday people's optimistic attachment, that is, the belief that "*this* time, nearness to *this* thing" will drastically change the outlook of life (p. 2, emphasis in original). However, Berlant observes that such attachments are ultimately "cruel" because our aspirations are inevitably failing, particularly around what have been traditionally conceived as elements of the good life: job security, economic and social equality, political stability, and sustainable intimacy. Under this condition of *cruel optimism*, the habits of survival and the dramatization of the present as a temporal field of potential for prosperity are in fact the very obstacles to what people have desired. This analysis of the affective present is crucial not because it provides a predetermined death of the future but because it encourages us to clarify what has been "stuck" between our desire and the material conditions of life.

Queer temporality rethinks the ways in which time is felt through the nonnormative body and desire—how past suffering continues to haunt the present and how the future only exists through the repression of queer pleasure. Affect produces relations in various temporal worlds through the queer encounters that shape and reshape the heterogeneous trajectory and directionality of history in which queerness is being created and rearticulated. As a result, feeling backward provides new epistemological conditions for queer theory to engage with sexuality beyond the narrow temporal

conception of Foucauldian sexuality. With the attention to pleasure instead of sexual desire, relationality instead of identity, feeling backward calls time into suspension, generating an intention to engage with the felt surface of text, speech, or skin through a temporally more expansive queer epistemology and queer reading.

Feeling Machinic: Queer Ontology Beyond the Sexual Human Form

The centrality of performativity in queer theory from Judith Butler's (1990/2011) formative work, *Gender Trouble*, emphasizes the productive effects of discourses through repetition on creating gendered bodies and undoing the fixity of biologically deterministic conceptions of sex. This engagement of performativity has been articulated by Karen Barad (2003), who proposes a new alliance of "agential realism" (p. 810) between the posthuman materiality of queer performativity and the relational ontology in quantum mechanics that emphasizes the intra-activity phenomenon in objects. This theoretical move allows a transformation of performativity from the semiotic discursive production of the human body to nonhuman agents. Whereas queerness was initially conceptualized as a potential external to the semiotic chains of signification of heteronormativity in Foucault's and Butler's work, Barad's "quantum queerness," as elaborated by Luciana Parisi (2009, p. 80), accounts for queer becoming in the intra-action of things that produces the condition of "exteriority within," where "the future is radically open at every turn...inherent in the nature of intra-activity" instead of a separate human agency acting upon matter (Barad, 2003, p. 826). In other words, discursive practices are not what is said or signified through language and sign, but "specific material (re)configurations of social arrangements that allow the relations of matter (e.g., gendered body and sexual desire) to be expressed.

Taking Barad's provocation further, Parisi suggests that Deleuze and Guattari's conception of queer ontology is an assemblage of the "abstract machine" (1987, p. 141), where desire does not act to express queerness as embodied sexuality, but creates the spatio-temporal regions where "microsexual multiplicities" enter the singular entities that correspond to them and produce new sexual forms and relations (Parisi, 2009, p. 89). To *feel machinic* is thus to recognize that the body itself is part of an abstract machine of virtually, politically, and techno-scientifically constituted relations that is constantly forming and rearranging (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7), instead of a matter that is passively prescribed with the meanings of heterosexuality, homosexuality, sex, or gender. This strain of affect emphasizes the body's capacity in deconstructing its prescribed territory—as an agentive matter that directly creates felt experiences, acts upon other matter, and transforms the field of relations. Feeling machinic is also about theorizing the body's incapacity that becomes defined by the normalized no-

tions of risk, chance, and probability through the techno-scientific apparatus. Moving away from the individualized construction of normality and pathology, productivity and unproductivity, the framework of machinic assemblage prompts consideration of how populations are produced and disciplined by the bio-informatic statistical calculations of life chances and death, and how differently capacitated bodies are recruited by the biomedical and pharmaceutical regimes to produce neoliberal subjects.

Techno-body. Feeling machinic incites a mode of queer scholarship that moves away from the liberal humanist conception of sexuality and subjectivity toward the self-organizing capacity of the body and matter in an assemblage. As Barad has articulated, agency and subversion are not enacted through discourses but the micro-movements of things; body parts accumulate and circulate in the biopolitical affective economy to constitute the boundaries of a legible subject. Paul Preciado (2013) describes the proliferation of biopolitical control at the molecular level, where a body's embodiment becomes assembled through the "pharmaco-pornographic" regime. The body as a site of endless modification is capitalized on by this regime and ultimately becomes inseparable from it—that is, power takes the form of a prosthetic body via the injection of hormones, the taking of pills, and the techno-scientific enhancement of desire through chemicals and stimulants.

Geopolitical racial ontology. For Preciado, intensifying the scale of bodily becoming particularly in relation to the proliferation of trans subjectivities indicates a new site of resistance at the molecular level, where the micro-prosthetic body is built with a flexible relationship with the neoliberal economy. However, Jasbir Puar (2017) is cautious to celebrate such ontologizing of the molecular as a protest against societies of control that operate in the spatial scale of both the body and geopolitics. Specifically, she points out that the increasing visibility of transgender rights in the Global North not only generates a new process of normalization and citizenship formation through creating technologically assisted gendered bodies, but also creates new "biopolitical failures"—those whose bodies are too gender variant, too racialized, or too disabled (2015, p. 46). "Transgender whiteness," according to Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, is constructed through "a process of value extraction from bodies of color" (2013, p. 10). The techno-body, in becoming trans, thus generates a new affective spatio-temporal field where whiteness can be circulated and generate new values. Rather than looking at trans becoming as molecular resistance against the biologically determinist categories of sex, Puar (2017) proposes that "*becoming trans* is a capacitation of race, of racial ontologies, that informs the functioning of geo- and biopolitical control" (p. 58, emphasis in original), where white masculinity particularly is capacitated through gendered bodily modification. To put another way, feeling machinic calls

into question of which body deems to be flexible and which body is seen as incapable to transform and be modified. In other words, the queer affective critique of the human form problematizes how the white masculine queer and trans body in the Global North is assigned with more agentive and mobile capacity by decapacitating bodies of color in the Global South, excluding them from the sexual and gendered human form.

Under the neoliberal regime, the production of trans bodies relies upon medical intervention, the pharmaceutical industry, and the legal system, which are the very systems of hierarchical exclusion that normalize gender binarism and regulate access to basic resources from trans, racialized, and disabled bodies. This paradoxical relation of how differently capacitated bodies are pitted against one another, circulating and bouncing back and forth between institutions, thus demands an analysis of the machinic assemblage of trans and queer bodies at the level of population—how the vitalization of one body depends on the debilitation of another. Feeling machinic as an analytical framework on the scale of both molecule and population allows the theorization of transness not to be constrained by the ontologies of gender and sexuality, but to territorialize and deterritorialize the boundaries of whites and nonwhites, humans and the nonhumans (Chen, 2012; Chen & Luciano, 2015; Puar, 2017). Via this theorization, the queer affect of feeling machinic challenges moral discourses of LGBTQ rights and queer suffering as universal and, instead, explicitly critiques the geopolitical ontology of queerness and transness as they are produced and capacitated by whiteness and the Euro-American construction of the human form.

Feeling Connected? The Unruly Encounter of Queer and Affect

While the queer affective modes of feeling down, backward, and machinic expand the primary scales of analysis on the cultural, textual, and bodily, they do not operate across all scales of reality. Unlike the call of the affective turn to engage with what Patricia Ticineto Clough (2008) terms the biomediated capacity of the body at the molecular level, except for recent scholarship on trans subjectivity (e.g., Preciado, 2013; Puar, 2017), queer affect has primarily focused on the circulation of affect and the intensification of attachment between and upon bodies. This unruly encounter, however, has taken both queer theory and affect theory out of their “comfort zone” and disrupted their assumed scale of analysis. For queer theory, affect deepens and widens the boundaries of the “publics” that were contained by sex and intimacy toward new “counterpublics” (Berlant & Warner, 1995, p. 558) constituted of the materiality of feelings and the strangeness of interaction beyond the binary of normality and antinor-

mality. Furthermore, the engagement with temporality and machinic assemblage enhances the capacity of queer theory not only epistemologically on the temporal scale but also ontologically on the scales of geopolitics and inter-speciesism: humans and nonhumans. Whereas the counterpublic initially was meant to open up the heteronormative sexual, intimate, and domestic space, it is now expansive and constituted of various modes of affective relations about negativity, identity, time-space, and the non-human form. Queer affect provides a new analytical lens that rethinks the question of scale and connects the intimate practices of desire and the body and global forms of sociality. Most importantly, it refuses to treat sexuality based on a binary framework of normality and antinormality, but rather, insists on the multiple capacities of the body beyond the hegemonic logic of queer liberalism, biological essentialism, modernist notions of space-time, and Western ontology.

On the other hand, queer theory pushes the affective turn to “theorize the social” (Clough & Halley, 2007) above and beyond the scale of matter, forming and forging new relations with the desiring body in societies of control. Queer affect is about taking risks in theorization and making a speculative commitment toward the capacity of pleasure. As Spinoza emphasizes, “No one has yet determined what the body can do” (1959, p. 87); the capacity of the body is not confined or determined by the body itself but is instead a web of relations, beyond and besides the human. Since the debates on queer antisociality (see Edelman, 2004), queer affect is moving toward a direction of more porous forms of connectedness virtually (Cho, 2015; McGlotten, 2013), chemically and nonhumanly (Chen, 2012), and psychically and melancholically (Eng & Han, 2019). The encounter between affect and queers is not limited in the production of a shameful subject against assimilation, the backward queer unfit for modernity, or even the figure of the cyborg. It is about dismantling the sexual human form, which is only made possible through a geographically specific history and politics of modern sexuality, and the porousness of the body, particularly its capacity to affect and be affected by the ever-emergent desiring publics.

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