

Claudia Schumann

On Happiness and Critique

From *Bouquet V* to 'possible elsewheres'

Abstract

The paper explores the relationship of happiness and critique. It is a reflection on a decade of being trained in and practicing philosophical critique. It is a reflection on experiences I had during teaching on social justice, inclusion and diversity; and it is a reflection on the on-going debate on negative vs. affirmative forms of critique within feminist philosophy. It is also an exercise in imagining a transformation of our critical practices, where the embrace of more affirmative (rather than destructive-negative) modes of critique does not entail overlooking or turning a blind eye to the barriers that unjustly restrain some movements and allow for others' privileges to persist. I suggest that a diffractive approach to critique would allow for joyfully interchanging and alternating appropriate modes of debunking, of being the killjoy against sedimentations that weigh some of us down, with other modes of critique which allow us to augment and lift up examples of already on-going structural change.

Keywords

Feminism, paranoid reading, affirmative critique, diffraction, Sara Ahmed, whiteness, social justice education

"I am not interested in critique. In my opinion, critique is over-rated, over-emphasized, and over-utilized, [...]. Critique is all too often not a deconstructive practice [...], but a destructive practice meant to dismiss, to turn aside, to put someone or something down—another scholar, another feminist, a discipline, an approach, et cetera. So this is a practice of negativity that I think is about subtraction, distancing and othering."¹

"It is not the time to be over it, if it is not over."²

1. Introduction

The last sentence in Sara Ahmed's *On being included* reads: "don't look over it, if you can't get over it."³ It is this sentence that this essay struggles with; as a reflection on a decade of

1 Karen Barad, Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, "Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers. Interview with Karen Barad," in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/ohp.11515701.0001.001>.

2 Sara Ahmed, *On being included. Racism and diversity in institutional life* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2012), 181. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822395324>.

3 *Ibid.*, 187.

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being trained in and practicing philosophical critique, as a reflection on experiences I had during teaching on social justice, inclusion and diversity, and as a reflection on the on-going debate on negative vs. affirmative forms of critique within feminist philosophy. It is also an exercise in imagining a transformation of our critical practices where the embrace of more affirmative (rather than destructive-negative) modes of critique does not entail overlooking or turning a blind eye to the barriers that unjustly restrain some movements and allow for others' privilege to persist.

In the beginning of the essay I explore an example from my own teaching practice within the school leader program at Stockholm University. In my lectures and workshops on diversity work in schools I choose to start from a problematization rather than a celebration of existing pre-conceptions and examples of successful diversity work in Swedish schools. The emotional responses to the negative-critical approach I choose in these lectures, both my own and the school leaders' moments of discomfort, satisfaction, frustration and happiness, serve as an entry point into understanding and motivating why the debate within feminist philosophy between proponents of affirmative and negative modes of critique is not just of theoretical, but also of highly practical, pedagogical interest.

2. Starting with *Bouquet V*

It is Sara Ahmed's *On being included* and some other supplementary texts which I use as a springboard for my lectures and workshops on diversity work in schools when teaching in one of the mandatory programs for Swedish school leaders. Often I start the lectures with a reproduction of Willem de Rooij's *Bouquet V* (2010), an artwork which is part of a series of bouquets exploring different social and political concepts; *Bouquet V* being concerned with the concept of diversity.⁴ The artist's instructions to a florist are to arrange 95 different flowers in a cylindrical vase. Each flower is only allowed to occur once and should be distinguishable from the other flowers through their size, color, or texture. The florist in charge of arranging the flower bouquet is supposed to avoid any hierarchy in terms of colors or through forming a visual center, instead having each and every flower be visible in its own right. From the challenge of arranging such a flower bouquet we then enter a joint discussion of the challenges of living up to the ideal of social diversity and justice in school, negotiating the tensions between uniqueness and unity, the center and the periphery, of norms and margins, of the individual and the collective, of representation and visibility, of developing non-hierarchical structures and so on. Following this initial exploration, I introduce the concept of intersectionality and how different forms of persistent structural discrimination continue to be shown in sociological research on schools, discussing social class and cultural capital, gender equality and sexism, ethnicity, cultural background, religion, ableism, ageism, sexuality, homophobia and transphobia. With the help of readings

4 Cf. <http://www.galeriebuchholz.de/exhibitions/de-rooij-2010/>

of Ahmed's texts, we later problematize the idea of diversity as a performance indicator in Swedish schools, the limits and potential pitfalls of thinking with identity categories (even if in an intersectional understanding), the consequences of diversity's being embodied, and the necessity for making diversity more challenging by using "other words alongside this word, stickier words [...] like 'racism', 'whiteness' and 'inequality'."⁵

Each time I teach in these courses, I get happily surprised at the way in which the engagement with a philosophical text sparks a lively discussion regarding rather practical challenges of diversity work which the school leaders' experience as urgent and pressing issues in their ordinary, everyday pedagogical routines. Each time I teach these courses, some moments of discomfort and happiness, within the audience, within me, and between all of us, repeat themselves. Reliably, two or three of the audience members will come up to me after the respective session and express their surprise and gratitude for the lecture daring to explicitly address and name issues such as racism and whiteness norms that they have been struggling with during their own education and also meet in their present educational work. Often this is paired with an expression of this being the "first time" they encounter a serious critical discussion of these issues within their formal education. As a lecturer, of course, these reactions leave me with a mixture of happiness and satisfaction of having been able to address someone's needs, of having been able to 'do' something for them that they experience as valuable, but it also leaves me with a feeling of irritation, frustration, disbelief and anger at the fact that some of my students have gone through a good decade of higher education and years of teaching practice having been deprived of knowledge which they not only have a right to, but which is of vital importance for their own as well as their students' well-being. Reliably, at least one audience member, who is privileged regarding the larger part of the categories we discuss, will express their astonishment at the fact that they never saw a problem or even noticed that women and trans people, people of color, non-heteronormative sexualities, non-able-bodied, non-Christian characters are still notoriously absent from Swedish school books. Reliably, also, some school leaders express their irritation with the apparent lack of appreciation for the positive work that they are already practicing. This happens mostly during the earlier phases of the sessions, in the moment when I choose to start with Ahmed's critique of the potential pitfalls of diversity instead of celebrating achievements of diversity and anti-discrimination work in schools.

How do I defend this decision to first problematize the happy flower bouquet vision of diversity instead of simply embracing it and going straight towards presenting practical strategies which have proven successful or could be enhanced to better the present situation in education and beyond? Why do I select as a main reading in preparation for the seminars Ahmed's negative-critical analyses of the tendency of diversity documents becoming a replacement for actual transformative practice on the ground? Why do I feel

5 Sara Ahmed, "Embodying diversity: Problems and paradoxes for black feminists," in *Race Ethnicity and Education* 12, no. 1 (2009): 44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320802650931>.

this is a necessary disclaimer before any lecture on practical strategies of diversity work? And why do I, repeatedly, doubt whether this really is the best way to go about things?

It is these reflections after the lectures and workshops which steer the interest in the theoretical debate within feminist theory around different modes of critique; in particular, the debate between those writers who express frustration with so-called negative (or paranoid) critique and call for more affirmative (or reparative) forms instead, and others, who like Ahmed herself, insist on the persistent urgency of feminists (and others) practicing negative critique. When exploring the different approaches to critique, I want to take into account my own (sometimes very palpable bodily) exhaustion with the prevalence of certain forms of negative critique within academia ("our students find themselves so well-trained in critique that they can spit out a critique with the push of a button"⁶). Furthermore, I also want to reflect on which kind of reactions and emotional responses are produced in these specific situations of teaching diversity with Swedish school leaders, and to which extent these have potential practical consequences which can transform diversity work in schools.

3. From negativity and paranoia to affirmation and reparation

Before I turn to a closer exploration of my reasons for again and again choosing Ahmed's negative-critical problematization of diversity as an entry in my teaching, I want to spell out some of the reasons that I again and again consider as very strong and very valid counterarguments against this approach. After many years of reading, writing, and practicing in a theoretical framework that is situated within a negative-critical tradition, the idea of affirmative critique as advocated by Rosi Braidotti and many others seems to hold a high promise not just in potentially better motivating students, but it also has a strong personal appeal for my own living and thinking with a critical practice. Rather than trying to do justice to the many different variations of affirmative critique that have been suggested, my intention here is merely to capture the promise and motivation that connects these different approaches and has made them attractive as well as bothersome challenges to the way I have been practicing critique. In this spirit, I think it is helpful to start by considering the distinction between paranoid and reparative modes of reading as prominently developed in the early 1990's by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her article "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You."⁷ Sedgwick's distinction between paranoid and reparative modes of critique can roughly be mapped onto the more recent debate between negative vs. affirmative critique, and the article gives a very convincing, entertaining, joyful, and acute analysis of

6 Barad et al., *Matter feels, converses, suffers*, 48.

7 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and reparative reading, or, you're so paranoid, you probably think this essay is about you," in *Touching Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123-151. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822384786-005>.

the "paranoid character" of critical habits equally prevalent in Marxist, deconstructive, psychoanalytic, feminist and queer traditions.

Following Paul Ricoeur's notion of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," Sedgwick uses the notion of paranoia to describe, or better to diagnose, a form of critical practice that since Marx, Freud and Nietzsche is concerned with false consciousness and deciphering hidden truths, which anticipates the future in a way that is resistant to surprise and understands its object of critique (its enemy) through mimicry, and understands knowledge as having to do with exposure, demystification and "*unveiling hidden violence*."⁸ The paranoid mode of critique is not only aiming at a theory which in its strong predictive and explanatory claims tries to preemptively safeguard against surprises (bad or good), but it also excludes potential alternative interpretations and futures through its fixation on negative affects and their avoidance.

Sedgwick's central point is not admonish the critic to abandon the paranoid mode, but she wants to remind us of other possible modes of reading which produce other effects, most prominently what she, following psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, calls a 'reparative' mode:

"Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters and creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did."⁹

It is important to note that Sedgwick's critique of the limits of the paranoid mode of critique and her plea to recall other possibilities should not be understood as a call for abandoning the critique of structural power or as opening a binary contrast of paranoid and reparative forms of critique. As Heather Love emphasizes, "what the essay argues, and what it performs, is the impossibility of choosing between them."¹⁰ In a similar vein, Robyn Wiegman has read the "reparative turn"¹¹ in queer feminist theory following Sedgwick's essay "not as an alternative to critique but as a means to compensate for its increasingly damaged authority."¹² She connects this damaged authority of critique to the growing insecurity amongst in particular left-oriented critical theorists about the potential of scholarly know-

8 Sedgwick, "Paranoid reading," 140.

9 Ibid., 146.

10 Heather Love, "Truth and consequences. On paranoid reading and reparative reading," *Criticism* 52, no. 2 (2011), 239. <https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2010.0022>.

11 Robyn Wiegman, "The times we're in: Queer feminist criticism and the reparative 'turn,'" *Feminist Theory* 15, no. 1 (2014), 4-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700113513081a>.

12 Wiegman, "The times we're in," 7.

ledge to lead to social transformation and provide society with an idea of “what to do.”¹³ The reparative mode is thus understood as a way to break with the internal logic of paranoia, about remembering that “it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise”¹⁴ and “about learning how to build small worlds of sustenance that cultivate a different present and future for the losses that one has suffered.”¹⁵ This discussion following Sedgwick’s essay has been working out rather carefully that paranoid and reparative reading should be understood as different but inter-related impulses that each in their turn open different possibilities for critique, rather than figuring as two mutually exclusive modes or strategies between which we need to decide or where one should replace the other once and for all. It is useful to keep these points in mind when we now turn to the debate between proponents of negative and affirmative critique respectively, a debate which has received some prominence in educational research and which parallels the discussion on paranoia and reparation following Sedgwick’s essay in queer cultural studies in important ways.

One of the main points of concern in these debates is with the backward-looking orientation of approaches employing the modus of critique that is called negative. As educational theorist Dorthe Staunæs writes:

“Many critical analyses regard contemporary tendencies as negative. They are retrospectively oriented and sometimes influenced by a certain sense of resentment for the present and longing for a *retropia*; an utopia of what once (never) was. The danger of this way of conducting critique is that it only reflects or you could say mirror what is already there. What this methodology allows us to see is what we already see, but now in a reversed version.”¹⁶

Instead of creatively producing different and new ideas and outlooks, negative critique reproduces that which we already know, that which is already existing, even if it points towards its negative impacts and consequences. Instead of focusing on describing the problematic marginalization and forms of repression in present power structures, affirmative critique analyzes present “*tendencies* with the purpose of reconfiguring the world;”¹⁷ it is “curious”¹⁸ and points out “what could be different.”¹⁹ Importantly, Staunæs also stresses that affirmative critique is not about discarding a critical analysis of power but affirmative critique is a necessary “supplement”²⁰ which still confronts power “norm-critically;”²¹ however, it is “not a matter of judging or voting for or against,” but in Haraway’s spirit it is

13 Ibid.

14 Sedgwick, *Paranoid reading*, 145.

15 Wiegman, “The times we’re in,” 11.

16 Dorthe Staunæs, “Notes on inventive methodologies and affirmative critiques of an affective edu-future,” *Research in Education* 0, no. 0 (2016): 5.

17 Staunæs, “Notes on inventive methodologies,” 6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523716664580>.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

a matter of "producing possible 'elsewheres.'"²² In this way, Staunæs follows Foucault's call for a suspension of judgment when he reflects on how to properly analyze the nexus between power and knowledge in his famous essay "What is Critique?" and writes, "there is no case made here for the attribution of legitimacy, no assigning points of error and illusion."²³ She also follows Brian Massumi who describes the choice between 'debunking' and 'fostering' as a "strategic question"²⁴ and as a "question of *dosage*."²⁵ The logic behind the choice of which mode to apply is rather straightforward: "It is simply that when you are busy critiquing you are less busy augmenting."²⁶ Negative critique fixates on and thus reproduces its object of critique, rather than positively focusing on and augmenting alternatives which we can already decipher in the presence or imagine in a possible future. As network theorist Bruno Latour in his polemic essay "Why has critique run out of steam?" holds against conventional critical theory, the transformative power of critique lies not so much in its getting "matters of fact" right, but in engaging creatively and in a careful and cautious manner with "matters of concern."²⁷ The task and the strength of the critic is then redefined by him as follows: "The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather."²⁸ On the other hand, Latour himself is not so careful in his treatment of those traditions he criticizes and tends to contrast "debunking" with "assembling" in a manner that itself comes rather close to 'debunking,' not dissimilar to the kind of revelatory, negative form of critique he describes as problematic.

In the interest of not reproducing this kind of dismissive technique, operating by creating dichotomous oppositions to that which we criticize, I think it is more fruitful to follow Staunæs and other educational thinkers which promote a less polemic and a more varied and fine-grained picture of how we can think different modes of critique. Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, for example, agrees with Rosi Braidotti that "feminisms need to move away from the logic of negativity built into the Hegelian-Marxist dialectics of consciousness in critical theory [...] as well as in the central notion of lack in psychoanalysis," as this logic will "always require experiences of material, discursive or sexual oppression, marginality, injury or trauma, as a condition of resistance, counteraction and overturning."²⁹ The form of "diffractive analysis," however, which Lenz Taguchi suggests as an alternative, building on Karen Barad (2007) and Donna Haraway (1997), implies moving "from identifying bodies as

22 Ibid.

23 Michel Foucault, "What is critique?," in *The Politics of Truth* (Cambridge, MA and London: semiotext(e), 1997), 60.

24 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the virtual. Movement, affect, sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 14. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822383574>

25 Massumi, *Parables*, 12.

26 Ibid.

27 Bruno Latour, "Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004), 225-248. <https://doi.org/10.1086/421123>

28 Latour, *Why has critique*, 246.

29 Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, "A diffractive and Deleuzian approach to analyzing interview data," *Feminist Theory* 13, no. 3 (2012), 269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700112456001>.

separate entities with distinct border to think in terms of entanglements and interdependences in processes of ongoing co-constitutive co-existence of different kinds of bodies" as well as "thinking as a process of co-constitution, investigating the entanglement of ideas and other materialities in ways that reflexive methodologies do not."³⁰ The gesture here is still motivating diffractive modes of critique in relation to that which was left out in earlier forms of critique (e.g. the activeness of matter and its involvement in the co-constituting rather than just passive instruments); "that which has been considered passive and minor is now seen as active and forceful in its into-activities with other bodies."³¹ Yet, the gesture nevertheless construes these as complementary forms, and not necessarily as a radically new method to fully replace negative or reflexive modes of critique. In line with Barad and Haraway, Lenz Taguchi's understanding of diffractive analysis extends beyond the reflexive mode and focuses on difference in a positive sense, on the way in which differences come to matter and become productive and effective in the world, without the (patriarchal, colonial) gesture of trying to assimilate, eradicate or sublimate differences in a Hegelian dialectic. Furthermore, the turn to the material does not minimize the question of responsibility, but it is "simultaneously about *intervention* and *invention*; *responsibility* and *ethics*."³² So, when looking at how affirmative critique and diffraction as a mode of analysis are put into practice in educational research, in the best cases the extension of researchers' focus on lifting the importance of our embodiment as well as on the active involvement of materiality in the respective phenomena or events studied, should lead to an actual deepening of the critique, to developing critique that cuts deeper and develops further transformation than more traditional radical critiques; it should inspire a critique that goes more "minoritarian" (Deleuze) and develops even more challenging, more dangerous analyses.

4. Returning the feminist killjoy

In 2008 Sara Ahmed wrote a noticed response in the *European Journal of Women's Studies* that opened a critical questioning of some of the "founding gestures" of new materialism.³³ She particularly took issue with new materialists' "routinization of the gesture towards feminist anti-biologism or constructionism,"³⁴ constructing the claim for offering something new through a call for a return to biology, a return to matter which, according to Ahmed, only functioned through "a forgetting as well as a caricature."³⁵ For her, a tendency to caricature rather than critically engage with feminism's history goes against the politics behind how to distribute our critical attention as feminist philosophers. How

30 Ibid., 271.

31 Ibid., 278.

32 Ibid., 278.

33 Sara Ahmed, "Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the 'New Materialism,'" *European Journal of Women Studies* 15, no.1 (2008), 23-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506807084854>

34 Ibid., 25.

35 Ibid., 36.

carefully do we engage with feminism's history? How much attention and care do texts by male philosophers receive?³⁶ Another problematic she points out in new materialists' claim to newness, is the omission of historical materialism, which "does not haunt this emergent field even in its absence."³⁷ An anecdote from last year's NERA conference in Copenhagen (2017) comes to my mind here. I attended a panel on an upcoming book project on new materialist research methodologies. In the question section after the presentations, the different participants of the panel were asked to outline how their respective projects related to questions of 'political economy.' The first answer from one of the panelists was 'I am not familiar with the concept'. While the other panelists later on developed some quite interesting answers as to how the question of political economy would be addressed in their respective project, this first answer struck me quite uncomfortably. What is the state of social research and scholarship if currently active members of the community are unfamiliar with the concept of political economy or find it laughable enough to dismiss it as a joke?

In this kind of context, Ahmed's work tends to figure as the kind of feminist killjoy which she has spent ample time motivating and defending as one of the key figures for an important and necessary feminist critique of happiness.³⁸ According to Ahmed, keeping categories such as gender and race in place as critical analytical categories will never be considered as laughably outdated by those who experience the effects of structural oppression in their everyday lives:

"In giving up these terms, we give up more than the terms: we give up on a certain kind of intervention into the world. [...] The very tendency to 'look over' how everyday and institutional worlds involve restrictions and blockages is how those restrictions and blockages are reproduced. It is not the time to be over it, if it is not over. It is not even the time to get over it. Social categories are sediments: they go all the way down, and they weigh some of us down."³⁹

Furthermore, when Ahmed defends the figure of the feminist killjoy as a necessary critique of happiness, she – amongst many other aspects – also positions this critical figure against Rosi Braidotti's call for a more affirmative rather than negative critical practice in feminist theory:

"Rosi Braidotti has suggested that the focus on negativity has become a problem within feminism. She offers a rather bleak reading of bleakness: 'I actively yearn for a more joyful and empowering concept of desire and for a political economy that foregrounds positivity, not gloom'. The call for affirmation rather than negativity in her work involves an explicit

36 Cf. *Ibid.*, 30.

37 *Ibid.*, 32.

38 Sara Ahmed, *The promise of happiness* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822392781>.

39 Ahmed, *On being included*, 181.

turn to happiness. As she argues: 'I consider happiness a political issue, as are well-being, self-confidence and a sense of empowerment. These are fundamentally ethical concerns. [...] The feminist movement has played the historical role of placing these items at the centre of the social and political agenda: happiness as a fundamental human right and hence a political question'. My desire is to revitalize the feminist critique of happiness as a human right and as the appropriate language for politics. To revitalize the critique of happiness is to be willing to be proximate to unhappiness."⁴⁰

I would like to consider Ahmed's figure of the feminist killjoy in relation to the debate between affirmative and negative critique; namely, that sometimes there are things more important than happiness.

Holding on to certain forms of negative critique (such as in relation to political economy or historical materialism; or in more traditional critiques of sexism and racism) might be worthwhile even if they do not promise or guarantee to make us (the scholar, the researcher, or their audience) happy. In her 2010 *The promise of happiness*, Ahmed motivates the figure of the feminist killjoy both from the liberal feminist criticism of many ideas of happiness actually being instrumental in the oppression of women, as well as from the black feminist critique of these ideals of happiness as a "political myth"⁴¹ which reserves happiness and its approximation for white women, imagining black women as always already falling on the unhappy side of life for lack of the pre-conditions that would make a happy life possible. Interestingly, Ahmed ascribes education a central place in the construction of these ideals of happiness. Education, as an "orientation device,"⁴² has since Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* attempted at orienting women to understand their happiness in supporting and aligning themselves with the happiness of others. It has been feminists' critique of these educationally enforced ideals or women finding their happiness in pleasing their parents, their husbands, their children, that from Mary Wollstonecraft onwards have been considered "troublesome" since they pose an immediate threat towards the happiness of others. Ahmed positively takes up feminism's "history of making trouble"⁴³ through its violation of "the fragile conditions of peace"⁴⁴ not only for its destruction of false and oppressive ideals, but also in its opening for broader, other images. The construction of women's happiness, as for example in Rousseau, was often related to a "renunciation of desire."⁴⁵ The feminist critique of happiness thus could have a freeing effect, by allowing women to dream of following their desire beyond narrow visions of happiness, beyond what would make them the 'good girl' in they eyes of others, beyond what would first and foremost serve others' happiness.

40 Ahmed, *The promise of happiness*, 87.

41 Ibid., 79.

42 Ibid., 54.

43 Ibid., 60.

44 Ibid., 61.

45 Ibid., 63.

Yet, it is not that feminism's promise of happiness that Ahmed is interested in or even convinced of; (as when she writes, "making women happy is not the point of feminism."⁴⁶) Rather, it is a re-appraisal of the critical practice of "consciousness-raising"⁴⁷ that remains Ahmed's main point of interest:

"Feminist consciousness can thus be thought of as consciousness of the violence and power that are concealed under the languages of civility and love, rather than simply consciousness of gender as a site of restriction of possibility."⁴⁸

It is through the dismantling of the misleading, false, and oppressive ideals of happiness, so Ahmed, that it is possible to counter a pervasive logic of misunderstanding the "angry black woman" or the "feminist killjoy" as the source of the problem, as someone causing trouble because they are angry, rather than as someone who is angry because there is a problem:

"Your anger is a judgment that something is wrong. But in being heard as angry, your speech is read as motivated by anger. Your anger is read as unattributed, as if you are against x because you are angry rather than being angry because you are against x."⁴⁹

This kind of logic falls into place when "an oppressed person does not smile or show signs of being happy, then he or she is read as being negative: as angry, hostile, unhappy, and so on,"⁵⁰ and it is particularly vicious for the "angry black woman" who may "even kill feminist joy, for example, by pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics."⁵¹ Rather than drawing attention to and being read as a call to address and transform the structural inequalities and oppressions they name, the killjoy is attributed with an individual, angry personality that unpleasantly destroys the otherwise good mood of the situation.

5. Instead of a conclusion: Sediments that go all the way down

Returning to the debate between affirmative and negative critique, it is interesting to see how Ahmed connects her insights from her study of diversity work in higher education institutions with the recent critique of more traditional forms of feminist and post-colonial critique in *On being included* (2012). Ahmed here defends traditional terrains of critical practices, such as situated knowledges' understanding of providing a more adequate account of the world by pointing to the ways in which racism and sexism develop as structural problems, and claims that her phenomenological approach can show "how a critique of the

46 Ibid., 78.

47 Ibid., 53.

48 Ibid., 86.

49 Ibid., 68.

50 Ibid., 66.

51 Ibid., 67.

ontological basis of categories does not mean that the categories themselves disappear."⁵² She argues that the new materialist claim to re-doing our ontology covers over rather than transforms the inequalities of our practices in a similar way as in her research some institutions understood diversity work as changing the "perception of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of the organization."⁵³ She cautions that:

"To proceed as if the categories *do not matter* because they *should not matter* would be to fail to show how the categories continue to ground social existence. [...] The very idea that we are beyond race, that we can see beyond race, or that we are 'over race' is how racism is reproduced it is how racism is *looked over*. [...] At the very moment of 'overing,' a category is redone."⁵⁴

The difficulty of not blaming those who continue pointing at the problem as the ones causing (or at least perpetuating) the problem, then poses itself for these internal feminist debates. In Ahmed's view, those that are painted as holding on to "dated"⁵⁵ forms of criticism, to social categories which new ontologies can reveal as without good grounding, might be the ones that are angry because they continue to experience a problem, because they continued to be weighed down by certain inequalities and categories more heavily than others, rather than being those that continue to experience a problem because they decide to remain angry.

In a rather refreshing engagement with these criticisms of new materialism, Peta Hinton and Xin Liu develop an approach which openly embraces this problematic as a charge to be taken seriously, rather than defensively negated: "'Yes, new materialism contains a white optics'. 'Yes, it might generate, or generate *as*, a white episteme'. One only has to look at the new materialist canon and its genealogical informants for evidence of this – Braidotti, Barad, DeLanda, Deleuze, just to name a few."⁵⁶ However, Hinton and Liu suggest that new materialism's "perverse ontology" makes abandonment "im/possible," i.e. it embraces the paradox of abandoning and refusing to abandon at the same time,⁵⁷ whereas the critics of new materialist critique do not admit in equal manner to their own forms of abandonment and omission. To this, I would like to return once more with Ahmed that there is something worrisome in stylizing difference as something that "just *was* or even *is*,"⁵⁸ that "the desire for Deleuze, which is not necessarily Deleuzian [...] can be questioned in part because it allows scholars to by-pass certain political questions and categories; it might be 'desirable'

52 Ahmed, *On being included*, 182.

53 Ibid., 184.

54 Ibid., 182 f.

55 Ibid., 181.

56 Peta Hinton and Xin Liu, "The im/possibility of abandonment in new materialist ontologies," *Australian Feminist Studies* 30, no. 84 (2015), 130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2015.1046304>.

57 Cf. Ibid., 141.

58 Salla Tuori and Salla Peltonen, "Feminist politics. An Interview with Sara Ahmed," *NORA - Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 4 (2007), 259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740701691941>

for some to talk more about becoming molecular than about whiteness, for instance."⁵⁹ Instead she highlights the importance of structural distributions and inequalities, which require scholarly attention, understanding and the tracing of their historical development so as "not to take the social categories as given but to track how they come into being as effects of processes."⁶⁰ I am thinking of Clare Hemmings' self-critical engagement with the opposition between paranoia and reparation:

"Is it accidental, I wonder, that I find myself most drawn to thinking through affect rather than critique at a point when it is institutionally harder and harder to sustain a paranoid position invested in (my own) marginality? That I turn to memory and fantasy intellectually and invest heavily in a body that feels good (running-yoga-rest; running-yoga-rest) at the same time that I am recognized by an elite institution as a professor? And indeed that I am not the only one thus drawn to a move away from paranoia at precisely the moment when it would be absurd to keep on insisting on constraining structures (while taking a nice long period of research leave)? To what or whom is reparation being made here? To the institutions one previously critiqued? To the misguided earlier self mired in paranoia?"⁶¹

This is what Ahmed means when she writes that: "Social categories are sediments: they go all the way down, and they weigh some of us down."⁶² For some, critique is optional, for others it is not; and we can wonder with Hemmings how to think about the line between the charge of paranoia and the weight of the actual constraint some bodies (in certain contexts, times, places) experience more than others, and how this connects to the different critical impulses (negativity, paranoia, affirmation, reparation) that urge different bodies to produce different kind of scholarship and research at different times and places.

In many ways, the impulses from affirmative critique seem to hold promise for addressing the challenges of diversity work in schools in a different, more productive manner. Rather than reproducing problematic categories and boundaries, we think beyond human-non-human and address the world shaping and co-creating surprising new and different realities. With Ahmed, however, one also feels obliged to caution against these promises of happiness. In a reality where basic issues of recognition and representation in school leadership itself, in the power hierarchies within schools, regarding personnel and staff as well as students, regarding the teaching material and curricula, remain under-theorized and are not taken into adequate account, embracing affirmative critique can too easily lead to a comfortable silencing of issues that still need addressing and clear naming. I have been trying to argue in this paper that we need not think of affirmative and negative critique as two binaries; opposed and mutually exclusive alternatives. Instead, and in a more dif-

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 260.

61 Clare Hemmings, "The materials of reparation," *Feminist Theory* 15, no. 1 (2014), 29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700113513082>.

62 Ahmed, *On being included*, 181.

fractive spirit, we should multiply different modes of critique and employ them in their overlapping and intersecting characters. In this way, we might achieve multiple ways of engaging with different forms of critique of persistent oppression and marginalization in schools which can lead to a thorough transformation of current practice. A diffractive approach to critique would allow for joyfully interchanging and alternating appropriate modes of debunking, of being the killjoy against sedimentations that weigh some of us down, with other modes of critique which allow us to augment and lift up positive examples of emancipatory and liberating diversity practice which illustrates creative and already on-going structural change.