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Affective Sexualities

Abstract: The fanzine *Butt* stages a different style of desire that does not reduce sexuality to the mere fulfillment of fantasies, but offers, beyond a psychoanalytical understanding of sexual encounters, new forms of contact. One way to understand this stylistic shift within post-pornography would be to say that in *Butt*, sexuality is transcended by affects. Through a critical engagement with theories of affect, a concept of *affective sexualities* emerges as a mixed phenomenon. For a strict distinction between sexuality and affects is not easily tenable. However, in order to counteract the desexualization of a queer analysis in the field of affect theory, the discussion about the critical potential of affects must be tied back to the topic of sexuality. To this end, we can read moments of affect in Foucault, which are addressed through the barely elaborated concept of *pleasure*, and which, in turn, maintain a proximity to Deleuze's concept of *desire*. In the context of *Butt*, however, what is at stake is not the processing and shifting of institutionalized forms of power as in the case of Foucault's example of S/M, but rather a different conception of *love*, as Lauren Berlant suggests, that can no longer be categorically distinguished from desire.

Keywords: Affect, Sedgwick, Freud, Berlant, Desire, Pleasure, Queer Love

Indeed, erotics [sic] is, among other things very much about presence: dwelling in the other's nearness; feelings of unity and being together; glimmering eyes; sharing a bottle of wine; walking along the Elbe; [. . .] sentimentality is part of it, and so is heart-throbbing.¹

Once the sexual is staged as the losing sight of self rather than its assertion or consolidation or indeed triumph, the obsession with sex becomes an obsession with a certain kind of love.²

1 Post-Phallic Masculinity

The attention to the male body, its surfaces, zones, and details do not work unrestrictedly toward an idea of masculinity. The gay gaze registers a becoming of the body's forms that aims to leave the category of gender behind. In *Butt*,³ gender is aestheti-

1 Henning Bech: *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity*. Chicago, IL 1997, 69.

2 Leo Bersani / Adam Phillips: *Intimacies*. Chicago, IL 2008, 96–97.

3 *Butt* is a gay fanzine with photos and interviews, published from 2001 onwards in Amsterdam and later in New York. Since 2011, *Butt* has only been published online, including a digital archive and a social network (buttmagazine.com), yet in 2022 there was a relaunch of *Butt* in its print form. In 2006, a *Butt* book with a best of selection of interviews and photos from the first five years was published by Taschen (see Jop Van Bennekom / Gert Jonkers [eds.]: *Butt Book: The Best of the First 5 Years of*

cally transcended: instead of a Butlerian gender performance that destabilizes masculinity through parody, or a celebration of the destruction of the masculine ego-ideal, which Bersani foregrounds, we find a non-essentialist transformation of the materiality of the male body. With Deleuze, we can say that the photographs in *Butt* document a *male becoming*. It is not the male body confirmed in its coded masculinity that is at the center of *Butt's* post-pornographic interest, but a maleness that oscillates back and forth between denaturalization and re-naturalization and in this rhythmic movement shifts the concepts of maleness and masculinity: *Butt* does not present a phallically organized scheme of masculinity/maleness, but a male body that reorganizes itself in the exhibition of different zones of the body.

In the context of the aesthetics of every day, a conception of the body is offered that moves away from the optimized porn image. The body parts which are presented do not fit into a fetish catalog or a checklist of sexual preferences which can be matched to specific erotic interests. In *Butt*, the reworking of the meaning of the male body takes place under the condition of a gay gaze and desire that cannot, however, unhesitatingly be considered sexual. *Butt* not only proposes an alternative body politics, rather it also brings a different conception of desire into play, one that leaves pornographic instrumentality behind. The mutability of the male body corresponds to a form of sexuality that is not only to be understood as a purely libidinous program.

Its pornographic content is hardly authoritarian in the sense of confirming the laws of genre. Rather, *Butt* creates alliances that renegotiate the representation of sex. In this way, an alternative idea of male sexuality is sketched out, as Paul Smith, for example, has also envisaged: “perhaps it would be useful to see what might happen if some more substantialist notion of male sexuality were pulled – heuristically and provisionally – away from the phallus.”⁴ In order to conceptualize the post-phallic understanding not only of maleness and masculinity, but of sexuality and sex, in this

Butt– *Adventures in 21st Century Gay Subculture*. Cologne 2006), and in December 2014, an expanded new edition of the *Butt* book was published under the title *Forever Butt*. Even beyond the magazine and its spin-offs, in the 2000s, *Butt* inspired a new gay indie aesthetic that has become a global phenomenon, focusing on an aesthetic, sexual lifestyle that brings together pornography and art. In the wake of *Butt*, a range of queer fanzines have emerged: *Kink*, *Kaiserin*, *Basso*, *They Shoot Homos Don't They?* With their young, bearded, imperfect men, they are visually close to *Butt & Co.* and its comparatively puritanical approach of only printing interviews and portraits of mostly naked young men. *Butt's* photos, printed in documentary style and on pale pink paper, can be situated in the context of the post-porn movement. Post-porn involves a renegotiation of the genre of pornography: *Butt* opens up the pornographic image to new aesthetic and narrative possibilities and proposes other conceptions of gender and sexuality.

⁴ Paul Smith: Vas. In: *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol / Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, NJ 1991, 1022. The fact that a non-phallic sexuality is not only euphorically celebrated on the queer side, but is also filled with fear has been described by Jonathan Kemp in his reading of Schreber: “Between the disciplinary command to have a body and the actual sensations of the body lies a space which, for men at least, is the cause of great anxiety.” Jonathan Kemp: *The Penetrated Male*. New York, NY 2013, 31.



Fig. 1: Ben photographed by Slava Mogutin. In: Van Bennekom, Jop and Gert Jonkers (ed.) Butt # 5, Autumn 2002, Cover.

chapter, I open a discussion between theories of sexuality on the one hand and affect theory on the other.

While affect theory owes its categories and epistemologies to psychology, psychoanalysis, and Deleuzian philosophy, in order to develop connections between an affective and a sexual paradigm, I am focusing here on Michel Foucault's remarks concerning "bodies and pleasures" (in contrast to the dispositive of sexuality and truth), and on Laurent Berlant's concept of a "queer love." A conceptual pairing that is traditionally conceived of as dialectic if not antagonistic – the difference between pleasure/desire on the one hand and love on the other – must be deconstructed, I will argue, in order to establish a theoretical language that matches what's at stake with the representation of sexuality in *Butt*. To get there, I will start by outlining the importance of affect for the genre of pornography, before I excavate a specific queer line of thought that helps to grasp the meaning of *Butt*'s post-pornographic photos that owe their beauty as much to affect as to sex. I will conceive of *Butt*'s visual culture as a documentation of *affective sexualities*, that is to say as a mixed phenomenon in which the sexual and the affective dimensions of the ways in which gay men connect to each other continuously return in new constellations.

2 Porn and Affect

No discipline is more sentimental than the one that represses sentiments.⁵

DIY-porn challenges familiar patterns of commercial pornography, such as the elimination of anything that does not serve to increase sexual arousal. In this respect, it would, for example, be wrong to judge online pornography as a quasi-paralyzing form of sexual representation, within which the conventionality of pornographic imagery is always confirmed again. Instead, pornography should also be seen as a creative practice.⁶ Indeed, porn can be queer insofar as it presents "unresolved visions of desiring."⁷ What I am suggesting is that one way to distinguish between pornography and post-pornography is to understand the contextualization that post-pornography undertakes, using an everyday aesthetic as a means to open the genre toward emotions and affects.⁸

5 Guy Hocquenghem: *The Screwball Asses*. Los Angeles, CA 2010, 38.

6 Shaka McGlotten: *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality*. Albany, NY 2013, 14.

7 Nick Davis: *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema*. Oxford / New York, NY 2013, 7.

8 The terminology in the context of affect theory is often ambiguous and contradictory. Depending on the theoretical genealogy and methodology, there is talk of affects, affections, emotions, or feelings. Moreover, the multifaceted use of the English term "affect," and the question of how best to translate it, often confuses this situation. While my position, which I will further elaborate, takes up Sedgwick's impulse to use affects to critique the paradigm of sexuality, in doing so, I do not follow Sedgwick's

As Steven Marcus categorically noted 50 years ago, affects or emotions usually have no place in pornography: “Pornography is not interested in persons but in organs. Emotions are an embarrassment to it, and motives are distractions. [. . .] Sex in pornography is sex without the emotions.”⁹ In the pornographic representation of sex, emotions and affects are not part of the concept of sexuality. Sexuality is reduced to sex as an act. Marcus’ observations here refer to a personalized and codified form of affects in the sense of emotions. To the extent that pornography does not focus on individuals but on sexual types, subjective expressions of emotion are left out. Starting from this antagonism, which is crucial for pornographic narratives, the question arises as to what it would mean to shift the rules of pornography as a genre, and to see emotionality – especially if we understand it not only as the inner richness of individual personalities, but in a non-psychological context of affect – in the representation of naked bodies.

In her analysis of digital pornography, Susanna Paasonen reminds us of the importance of affect in the presentation of sexual acts: “Affect is an important analytical tool in studies of online pornography due to the visceral nature of both the imageries and the reactions they give rise to.”¹⁰ Affect here refers to a dimension beyond pornographic representation, as Zabet Patterson also explains:

The pornographic image can be a particularly dense semantic site, but it is one which functions only in and through a direct visceral appeal of the body. The appeal of the pornographic image is importantly corporeal, and images become effective as porn to the extent that they elicit certain bodily sensations, almost involuntarily.¹¹

So, what if we do not limit the “visceral nature” of both the pornographic act and its reception to an understanding of sexuality as desire and the fantasies that guide it but rather consider the bodies, body parts, objects, and environments that interact here beyond the paradigms of sexuality in terms of affect as a material and non-psychological dimension of connecting?

Tomkins reception, which understands affects as discrete, legible units of subjectivation. Rather, I understand affects first of all in terms of Massumi’s Deleuze reception, where affects are understood as a prelinguistic, precognitive, trans-subjective force. While this notion of affects is helpful in the context of a critique of sexuality, it also proves problematic in the light of Deleuze’s texts on affects. For on the one hand, Deleuze reserves the concept of affects for aesthetic processes; in relation to non-aesthetic processes, on the other hand, he speaks of affections. I am following the direction of his terminology here and therefore propose, for what is usually called “affect” in affect theory, either the more open concept of the affective, or, if it concerns concrete processes, that of affection. Without discussing these terms in detail, Claudia Breger also suggests translating the English “affect” with the affective and not with “affect.” Claudia Breger: *Nach dem Sex? Sexualwissenschaft und Affect Studies*. Göttingen 2014, 16.

⁹ Steven Marcus: *Pornotopia*. In: *Sexual Revolution*, ed. by Jeffrey Esscoffier. New York, NY 2003, 394.

¹⁰ Susanna Paasonen: *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*. Cambridge, MN / London 2011, Loc 676/3979.

¹¹ Zabet Patterson: *Going On-Line: Consuming Pornography in the Digital Era*. In: *Porn Studies*, ed. by Linda William. Durham, NC / London 2004, 106.



Fig. 2: Jason Whipple photographed by Miguel Villalobos. In: Van Bennekom, Jop and Gert Jonkers (ed.) *Butt # 18*, Winter 2006–07, 18.

Affect has two main functions in this context: first, to name a realm of bodily experience beyond historically familiar forms of desire and sexuality. This critical perspective has a tradition: Gilad Padva, for example, confirms what Richard Dyer contends in his argument (which is in turn indebted to Foucault) that what is at stake in critical studies on sexuality is not a liberation *of* sexuality, but rather a liberation *from* sexuality.¹² Second, by turning to affect, it is assumed that this post-sexual realm is not

¹² Richard Dyer: *Coming to Terms: Gay Pornography*. *Only Entertainment*. New York, NY / London 1992, 121–134; Gilad Padva: *Male Bodies, Fantasies and Identifications in the Naked Issue of Attitude Magazine*. *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 7/4 (2002), 284. Or, to put it another way, the problem of sex is not only, or not necessarily, to be solved by having more or better sex, but rather by what that sex encompasses. Cf. Nick Davis' discussion of Linda Williams Davis: *The Desiring-Image*, 99.

fully translatable into identifiable forms. Affective dynamics do not follow a habit and they do not take place within a secure and demarcated territory. In an interview with Gregg and Seigworth, Lawrence Grossberg says about affect: “basically, it’s become everything that is non-representational or non-semantic – that’s what we now call affect.”¹³

In this chapter, I am interested in affect in relation to sex and sexuality as part of the post-pornographic culture. The point is to find a theoretical language that can do justice to the occurrence of desire and sexuality, as presented in *Butt*. Can affect be understood as a way of transgressing normative representations of sexuality in pornography? Can *affect* be furthermore understood as a transgression of forms of existing sexual “transgressions” that are all too well-rehearsed and have thus already lost their transgressive force? What remains of a critical perspective that takes sexuality as its starting point, if we use affect theory as a critique of the paradigm of sex and sexuality? Does affect replace sexuality?¹⁴

If we go on to understand affect theory as part of a feminist perspective, this brings us back to a familiar debate regarding the place of sex and sexuality within a queer project that aims, among other things, to bring together feminist and gay perspectives that are not always reconcilable.¹⁵ Eve Sedgwick, on whose later texts many basic assumptions about affect in the context of queer theory can be traced, already admitted nearly 20 years ago that: “The sexual interest of the essays, as I’ve mentioned, seems to decrease.”¹⁶ In a review of Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman’s *Sex, Or the Unbearable*, Tim Dean recently responded to this problem again, raising a polemic concerning the manner in which he primarily understands the affective turn to be a desexualization of queer studies, a movement which can similarly be seen in the history of the institutionalization of queer studies in the United States.¹⁷ In the same

13 Melissa Gregg / Gregory Seigworth (eds.): *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC / London 2010, Loc. 4271/5490.

14 According to Marie-Luise Angerer’s diagnosis, the affective dispositif has meanwhile replaced the sexual one Marie-Luise Angerer: *Desire After Affect*. Lanham, MD 2014. See also Breger: *Nach dem Sex? Sexualwissenschaften und Affect Studies*.

15 Bersani is skeptical here and speaks of a “puritanical feminism” Leo Bersani: *Homos*. Cambridge and London 1995, 55. In summary, for him, this means: “The relation of gay men to feminism is bound to be more problematic than anyone wants to admit” Bersani: *Homos*, 63. Twenty-five years after Bersani’s “Is the Rectum a Grave?” Lynne Huffer’s outline of queer ethics *Are The Lips a Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex* and a recourse to Luce Irigaray, seeks to reactivate a tradition of queer feminism Lynne Huffer: *Are the Lips a Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex*. New York 2013. In *Orgasmology*, Annamarie Jagose also thwarts this threatening opposition between queer and feminist in a clear way. Annamarie Jagose: *Orgasmology*. Durham, NC / London 2013.

16 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC / London 2003, 21.

17 Tim Dean: No Sex Please, We’re American. *American Literary History*. 27/3 (2015), 614–624.

issue of *American Literary History*, Berlant and Edelman counter that Dean's concept of sexuality – in its restriction to sex as a sexual act – is too limited.¹⁸ Is it possible to talk about sexuality in a different way through the use of affect theory, or do we, in turning to affect, depart from the realm of the sexual altogether?

The much-discussed post-pornographic film *SHORTBUS*,¹⁹ for example, succeeds in offering a counter-program to the commodification of mainstream sexuality through emotions, but in so doing, the film reverts to narrative patterns of selfhood and identity, as German critic Diedrich Diederichsen elaborates:²⁰

These images, however, also have in common with the rest of indie porn the idea that they, like a film like *Shortbus*, always want to read sexual experiences and pornographic experiences only as extensions and conquests of a self-actualizing self whose goal is closure and identity. The irreducibly fetishistic structure of desire must thus always be translated into tolerable morals, ethics or self-images, with the success that then [. . .] porn becomes stuffy and reactionary.²¹

Do the *Butt* boys with their images and stories chart another path that lies between a sentimentally tamed desire on the one hand and sexual rigor on the other?²² The premise of my investigation is centered on the notion that the sexuality in *Butt* differs from the representation of sex in mainstream porn. The aesthetic of the imperfect and mutating male body corresponds to an idea of sexuality that, in contrast to the aggressive sexual narcissism of mainstream porn, contains an “aesthetics of sexual awkwardness,” as Lauren Berlant puts it.²³ Post-pornography would thus be understood as a sexual-affective field that does not propose a sexual representation reducible to fantasies, and which thus has a less ideological politics of attachment to offer, without slipping into the sentimentality of canonized emotions. *Butt*'s post-pornographic aesthetic is about renewing a promise that Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman have formulated as follows: “Sex [. . .] holds out the prospect of discovering new ways of being and of being in the

18 Lauren Berlant / Lee Edelman: Reading, Sex, and the Unbearable: A Response to Tim Dean. *American Literary History* 27/3 (2015), 79–90.

19 Nick Davis recalls the exuberant reception *Shortbus* received. The film was credited with correcting the direction queer cinema had taken 15 years after the proclamation of “New Queer Cinema.” Davis: *The Desiring-Image*, 96–105.

20 For a fuller discussion of *SHORTBUS*, see Jagose: *Orgasmology*, 93–105; Davis: *The Desiring-Image*, 96–105.

21 Diedrich Diederichsen: *Kritik des Auges: Texte zur Kunst*. Hamburg 2008, 271, [Own translation, P.R.].

22 Hocquenghem writes, regarding this perspective on gay subculture early on in the 1970s: “[. . .] homosexual desire is mechanically recited rather than invented. It is because this desire functions exclusively around sex, and not on the totality of the body.” Hocquenghem: *The Screwball Asses*, 23.

23 Lauren Berlant: Starved. In: *After Sex? On Writing since Queer Theory*, ed. by Janet Halley / Andrew Parker. Durham, NC / London 2012, 79.

world.”²⁴ At issue is the status of these sexual-affective representations; at stake, after the loss of conventional pornographic fantasies, are new and creative ways of living in a sexual/affective space that is not yet controlled by biopolitics.

Within a psychoanalytic framework, *jouissance* as a decentering experience is seen to be the primary force by which ideological formations are interrupted. While authors such as Foucault primarily strive to define these sexual potentials as being beyond genital sexuality, Bersani understands gay anal intercourse as being a scene of *jouissance*. The dissolution of the subject, as Annamarie Jagose describes it, occurs at the moment of orgasm.²⁵ In this regard, David Halperin writes:

Only something so very bad for the integrated person that the normalized modern individual has become can perform the crucial work of rupture, of social and psychological disintegration, that may be necessary in order to permit new forms of life to come into being.²⁶

Lauren Berlant's version of affect theory, which becomes the focus of attention toward the end of this chapter, is about finding the unbinding power of *jouissance* in affect beyond sex. The project of “living with negativity” – an experimental way of living that is not anchored in conventional fantasies – is thus not meant to be limited to sexual experience in general, and gay sexual experience in particular.²⁷ Such a perspective represents a critique of the narrowness of the concept of sexuality insofar as this concept has nevertheless been formative for queer theory, as Tom Roach explains: “The primary subcategories through which we understand sexuality – principally homo- and heterosexuality – have provided an all too efficient framework for classifying and evaluating human affection.”²⁸ By shifting the concept of sexuality from coded sexual acts and positions toward affect, the juxtaposition of sexual identity, on the one hand, and *jouissance*, on the other, is destabilized.

I am suggesting that *Butt*'s aesthetics offers a path that leads away from sexuality as a coded system toward an “aesthetics of existence.”²⁹

With *Butt*, it is not a matter of overcoming sex and sexuality, but of opening them up and reorienting them by making room for affect. This results in a double movement: on the one hand, the concept of affect serves to relativize Foucauldian notions of sexuality and sex and to emphasize their ontological dimension; on the other hand, turning to Foucault, is a movement that is directed against the tendency toward desexualization within affect theory. What would it mean to think of the sexual as

24 Berlant / Edelman: *Reading, Sex, and the Unbearable*, 625–629.

25 Jagose: *Orgasmology*, 11–15.

26 David Halperin: *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York, NY / Oxford 1995, 107.

27 Berlant / Edelman: *Sex, or the Unbearable*, 63–118.

28 Tom Roach: *Friendship as a Way of Life: Foucault, Aids, and the Politics of Shared Estrangement*. Albany, NY 2012, 12.

29 Halperin: *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, 72–79; Roach: *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 77–78.

affect? Berlant's notion of "queer love," which undermines the psychoanalytical demarcation of desire and love, will further help to define the repertoire of styles, attachments, and situations in the sexual-affective world of the *Butt* boys.

3 Affect as Pleasure, Pleasure as Affect: Foucault

The ultimate horizons of the ethical project of the self are not so much its original trauma (as Freud would have it) and its inevitable death (as Heidegger urged) as its aesthetic becoming and cultural generativity. But, for Foucault, this was not an aestheticist becoming, or at least it was not only an aestheticist becoming, in a cultivated development of the self [. . .] It is also situated in (and in theory it might be thought and lived as) a series of unmotivated, even unformed, deflections and devolutions in the social relations of sensuous erogenous human being – in effect a counterbecoming or what might best be called an unbecoming.³⁰

In the context of affect theory, Foucault has yet to be treated as an important author. This is not surprising to the extent that within queer theory, he has been primarily read as an author of the history of sexuality. First and foremost, Foucault addresses sexuality within the space of discursive formations and thus as a question of institutions and power.³¹ This perspective has, above all, been popularized by Judith Butler's texts, when she, for example, writes in relation to the possibilities and limits of alternative formations of sexuality and gender:

Here it seems wise to reinvoke Foucault who, in claiming that sexuality and power are always coextensive, implicitly refutes the postulation of a subversive or emancipatory sexuality which could free of the law.³²

Without question, this reading of Foucault is more than legitimate. Above all, Foucault's critique of the "repression hypothesis" is a contribution that focuses on sexuality as a question of discourse. However, Foucault also makes some proposals that seek to think through sexuality beyond the paradigm of power and knowledge. At the end of *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, there is the much-cited allusion to a world of "bodies and pleasures,"³³ which seems to escape the paradigm of sexuality as *scientia sexualis*,

30 Withney Davis: *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond*. New York, NY 2010, 251.

31 This perspective is also noticeable in Foucault's engagement with Freud. Foucault treats psychoanalysis primarily as a question of social institutions and hardly engages with the concepts of psychoanalysis.

32 Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY / London 1990, 29.

33 Michel Foucault: *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Volume I. New York, NY 1978, 159.

which Foucault still sees at work in psychoanalysis.³⁴ In later texts, such as the preface to the writings of Herculine Barbine, or in his meditations on friendship, or occasionally in interviews, Foucault repeated and commented on this formulation.³⁵ Here, as Lynne Huffer writes “this other Foucault” appears.³⁶ These alternative ideas of a sexuality beyond sexuality, however, are hardly elaborated from a theoretical perspective. Bersani comments, for example, that Foucault’s “move from desire to pleasure remains schematic, unexplained.”³⁷ According to Sedgwick, Foucault failed in the project of developing an alternative conceptual apparatus for the analysis of a sexuality that exists beyond dominant power formations.³⁸ Indeed, her own project of a queer theory of affect can, in contrast to her early work, be understood as a continuation of this project.³⁹ In doing so, however, Sedgwick shifts the emphasis from the Foucault of sexuality to the realm of non-sexual affects. On the other hand, for Bersani, the unresolved status of “bodies and pleasures” is an opportunity to read Foucault against Foucault and to place him in proximity to a psychoanalytical ontology of the drives:

The ambition of performing sex as only power is a salvational project, one designed to preserve us from a nightmare of ontological obscenity, from the prospect of a breakdown of the human itself in sexual intensities, from a kind of selfless communication with ‘lower’ orders of being.⁴⁰

Bersani’s project is one in which the overall aim is to think Freud and Foucault together, i.e., to put an ontology of sex alongside the discursive understanding of sexuality.⁴¹ In these moments, “beyond discourse” in Foucault, Butler recognizes the point in which the sexual, in its ontological dimension, appears as a regression of Foucault’s otherwise systematic critique of power. Bersani is not alone in his interest in further developing the potentials of the beyond of sexuality that appears in Foucault’s texts, both Tom Roach and Elizabeth Grosz emphatically share this somewhat vague project. Last but not least, it is precisely this inarticulateness that – somewhat surprisingly –

³⁴ For an overview of the most important reactions from Jagose, Halperin, Warner et al. to this passage in Foucault, see Huffer: *Are the Lips a Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex*, 73–74.

³⁵ Jagose: *Orgasmology*, 185–189.

³⁶ Huffer: *Are the Lips a Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex*, 82.

³⁷ Leo Bersani: *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*. Chicago 2010, 182. See Bersani’s remarks on forms of eroticism as desexualized pleasure in Foucault. Bersani: *Homos*, 80.

³⁸ Halley and Parker summarize: “Sedgwick argues that Foucault himself failed to elaborate any of his utopian hunches, and that queer theory—which she sees almost completely dedicated to reproducing this failure—entrenches and solidifies (better said perhaps symptomatizes) the repressive hypothesis in every purported denunciation of it.” Janet Halley / Andrew Parker: *After Sex? On Writing since Queer Theory*. London 2011, 10.

³⁹ This point is also made by Claudia Breger when she writes: “To my knowledge, no one has yet traced in detail how the conceptualizations of affect that occasionally appear in these later works of Foucault in the context of the techniques of the self-anticipate motifs of contemporary studies of affect [. . .].” Breger: *Nach dem Sex? Sexualwissenschaft und Affect Studies*, 18.

⁴⁰ Bersani: *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*, 29.

⁴¹ This is also possible insofar as Foucault ignores rather than engages with psychoanalysis.

brings Foucault closer to psychoanalysis, where, as Elizabeth Grosz shows, these questions are just as poorly articulated. “The reorganization of this libidinal structure – which Foucault nowhere discusses – is precisely what I believe that psychoanalysis has not been able to adequately address.”⁴²

An understanding of affect theory that does not marginalize sex and sexuality but includes them in the discussion of the dynamics of affect, thus has the potential to become the common denominator between Freud and Foucault, even if this remains essentially unarticulated in both Freud or Foucault. It is through the reference to affect theory that this territory can be revealed, and a bridge to affect theory can certainly be built via Foucault’s remarks on pleasure.⁴³

Beyond the discussion of affect, the question of an extended understanding of sexuality has been pursued through the use of the keyword “erotic”⁴⁴ or within queer theory as a question of “sensuality.” An example of this can be found in Bersani, who understands “sensuality” as a non-psychological category beyond sexuality: “sensuality, de-psychologized, is prevented from mutating into the sexual.”⁴⁵ A similar idea can be found in Roach’s definition of “sensuality” as a surface phenomenon.⁴⁶ If affect is the name for the non-identificatory, deconstructive and productive potentials of a sexuality beyond its psychoanalytic understanding as a drive, it shares this zone of indeterminacy, which is not yet conditioned by historical and institutionalized forms of power, with Foucault’s “bodies and pleasures,” and with “sensuality” as articulated by Bersani and Roach. What I am proposing here is to understand affect in relation to Foucault’s “bodies and pleasures,” thus emphasizing the vicinity of affect, sex, and sexuality.

The phenomenon of pleasure appears interesting to Foucault insofar as it takes place on the surface of the body without being understood as the response to an already encoded desire, a lack or the fulfillment of a fantasy. That is to say that pleasure occurs without any prior knowledge of its possibility: pleasure is not the object of knowledge. José Muñoz highlighted the importance of this moment for the project of queer theory: “it also seems important to dwell upon modes of being in the world that might be less knowable than sex.”⁴⁷ Pleasures take place at the border of a registerable desire and of coherent sexual identities. They are not in the possession of the subject:

42 Elizabeth Grosz: *Experimental Desire: Rethinking Queer Subjectivity*. In: *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. by Donald E. Hall / Annamaire Jagose / Andrea Bebell / Susan Potter. New York, NY / London 2013, 202.

43 Roach: *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 21, 129; Frida Beckman: *Between Desire and Pleasure: A Deleuzian Theory of Sexuality*. Edinburgh 2013, 38.

44 Zygmunt Baumann: On Postmodern Uses of Sex. *Theory, Culture & Society* 15/3–4 (1998), 19–33; 20–21. Elizabeth Freeman: *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham, NC / London 2010, 13.

45 Leo Bersani: *Thoughts and Things*. London / Chicago, IL 2015, 12.

46 Roach: *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 5.

47 José Esteban Muñoz: The Sense of Watching Tony Sleep. In: *After Sex? On Writing since Queer Theory*, ed. by Janet Halley / Andrew Parker. Durham, NC / London 2011, 142.



Fig. 3: Julian photographed by Wolfgang Tillmans. In: Van Bennekom, Jop and Gert Jonkers (ed.) *Butt # 16*, Summer 2006, 11–12.

It is an event “outside the subject”, or at the limit of the subject, taking place in that something which is neither of the body nor of the soul, which is neither inside nor outside – in short, a notion neither assigned nor assignable.⁴⁸

Non-codified pleasures can be considered to be a queer event.⁴⁹ The sexual is never completely regulated by the regime of sexuality and sex thus remains bound to the unknowable. In the register of affect, Foucault’s pleasure would be a way of naming the site of a non-historical, non-psychoanalytic sexuality.⁵⁰

The question arises as to the manner in which the destabilizing modality of an affective sexuality can make itself felt, and as to how it is realized. While a psychoanalytically understood sexuality as *jouissance* is said to have the quality of a momentary interruption that is supposed to gain transformative value for the process of subjection, e.g., as ego-shattering, and which can be allegorized by the orgasm but does not have to be limited to it, affects are about processual transformations over a longer period of time. What place could affective sexuality take here, and what rhythm

⁴⁸ Foucault quoted in Halperin: *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, 94.

⁴⁹ The difficulty of naming a “queer event” has been pointed out by Lee Edelman, among others. Cf. Chapter 3 Edelman: *Unbecoming: Pornography and the Queer Event*. In: *Post/Porn/Politics*, ed. by Tim Stüttgen. Berlin 2010.

⁵⁰ Frida Beckmann comes to a similar conclusion when she writes: “I would argue that as those multiple surfaces rub against each other, a pleasure must be possible that is not about culmination, or ‘erectilinear’ pleasure, as Marjorie Worthington would have it, see Worthington 2004, 393, but about sexual and deeply pleasurable resonances.” Beckman: *Deleuze and Sex*, 13.

would it follow? While for Foucault S/M held the promise of a reorganization of pleasure, Lauren Berlant's project is to question the difference between desire and love. In following these trajectories, we approach the images and histories of *Butt's* affective and sexual intimacies evoking *Butt's* aesthetic program that we should understand as a new rhythm of pleasures and affects.

4 S/M

such a program may necessarily involve some radical, perhaps even dangerous, experimentation with modes of what used to be called making love.⁵¹

Like affect in Sedgwick, pleasure in Foucault gains the function of making porous the boundaries of sexual subjectivities. Bodily encounters take place in a situation that remains open to the occurrence of new pleasures. They become the occasion for a continuous process of self-transformation. "The relationship I think we need to have with ourselves when we have sex is an ethics of pleasure, of intensification of pleasure."⁵² Pleasures are tied to an ethical project,⁵³ and therefore cannot simply mean "orgasm" as the endpoint of a rehearsed sexual script.⁵⁴ One of Foucault's best-known examples for reorganizing pleasures is S/M.⁵⁵ S/M should be understood as an experimental context in which the exploration of pleasure leads to a redefinition of sexuality.⁵⁶ In this, Foucault follows Freud, who in the *Three Essays* had already pointed out the difficulties of making sexual experiences accessible via a binary logic of pleasure and pain, or fore-pleasure and end-pleasure. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud pursued this problem with the introduction of the death drive. After Foucault, such an interpretation of sexual experiences which lie beyond the subject has found expression, above all, in the investigations of Bersani, Dean, and Edelman. Here, sexual experiences are always a matter of transgressing concepts of identity and desire, which are habitually regulated by biopolitics, through a dissolution of bodily boundaries.

For the aforementioned authors, these forms of dissolution are always located in the space of sexual subcultures, their practices and rites. Foucault's sexuality is transgressed by an excessiveness of sexual stimuli. Even if this experience itself can no lon-

⁵¹ Bersani: *Homos*, 81.

⁵² Michel Foucault: An Ethics of Pleasure. In: *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*. New York, NY 1989, 377. For an account of Foucault's ethical project vis-à-vis institutionalized forms of sexual morality, see, for example: Jeffrey Weeks: *Invented Moralities: Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty*. New York, NY 1995.

⁵³ Roach: *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 33.

⁵⁴ Jagose: *Orgasmology*, 3.

⁵⁵ Or fisting. For a reading of fisting, see, for example: Huffer: *Are the Lips a Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex*, 73–90.

⁵⁶ Bersani: *Homos*, 81–83.

ger necessarily be understood as sexuality in the narrower, genital, sense, access to it in the archives of Bersani, Dean, or Edelman is given exclusively through gay sexual encounters: S/M, fisting or barebacking. This brings us back to the problem that in queer studies, transgression is thought of exclusively as an option for (gay, male) sexuality. Accordingly, Annamarie Jagose characterizes Halperin's and Bersani's projects as follows: "for both critics the erotic practices associated with male-male sexual subcultures continue to offer the most recognizable models for political engagement through sexual practices."⁵⁷ While Sedgwick's approach to affect theory, for example, risks leaving sexuality behind altogether, a reconnection to sexuality via Foucault's notion of pleasure entails the return of this problem. To this end, Lynne Huffer asks: "Can women, like men, forge a queer praxis and a new way of life? Which body parts are required to get the job done? Can women do it too?"⁵⁸

Butt offers a different archive of gay sexualities than Foucault's S/M subculture. The question is therefore not only whether women can do it too, but also whether men can do it differently. I would like to end this contribution by following Lauren Berlant's suggestion that sexuality and affect, or in her terminology, desire and love, can conceptually be brought together. While the critique of authors such as Heather Love and Jack Halberstam sets itself up in opposition to the material choices of Foucault, Bersani, Dean, and Edelman, Berlant's project is to question the boundaries between sexual experiences on the one hand, and affective experiences on the other, as opposed to merely affirming the notion of affect against sexuality. Indeed, Berlant's perspective coincides with the one developed here: to understand the intimate scenes in *Butt* as both affective and sexual. Or, as Guy Hocquenghem wrote: "The gays in my dream, my lovers, my friends, my enemies and myself, we can no longer distinguish desire from what is called love."⁵⁹

5 A New Love

As for us, we must rid it [love] of that sentimental glue that socialist as well as capitalist culture has enjoined to smother raw emotion, anesthetize the sensory.⁶⁰

A Lover's Discourse is an attempt to get rid of 'love'— its roles, its attitudes — in order to find the luster that remains when the stereotypes have been sent packing.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Jagose: *Orgasmology*, 202.

⁵⁸ Huffer: *Are the Lips a Grave?*, 78.

⁵⁹ Hocquenghem: *The Screwball Asses*, 42–43.

⁶⁰ Hocquenghem: *The Screwball Asses*, 40.

⁶¹ Wayne Koestenbaum: *My 1980s and Other Essays*. New York, NY 2013, 52.

A queer gaze that would question the psychic separation of love and desire, as well as the social forms that follow from it, is hard to be found in psychoanalysis.⁶² What might a critique of sexuality in the name of love that is not nostalgically installing a romantic program as a defense against a sexuality supposedly permeated by the logic of capitalism look like? How might the relationship between love and desire be rethought, beyond the duality of love as possession and selfish desire as its counterpoint: “What do we need to know and do in order not to repeat the usual denunciations and utopianisms?”⁶³ In the past 20 years, this question has played a crucial role in the history of queer sexual politics,⁶⁴ and has more recently been discussed under the label of “polyamory.”⁶⁵

Berlant argues for an instability of love which is comparable to the instability that desire brings.⁶⁶ Like Marcuse and his concept of Eros, she is structurally interested in a dissolution of the difference between love and sexuality, but without Marcuse’s conciliatory utopianism, “sentimentality, say, might be a much bigger threat to someone’s defenses than any sexual event is.”⁶⁷ The risk of being together,⁶⁸ from her

62 Adams Phillips / Barbara Taylor: *On Kindness*. London / New York, NY / Toronto 2009, 90.

63 Berlant: Love (A Queer Feeling). In: *Psychoanalysis and Homosexuality*, ed. by Tim Dean / Christopher Lane. Chicago, IL 2000, 437.

64 Cf. Mike Laufenberg: An Army of Lovers Cannot Lose. In: *I is for Impasse: Affektive Queerverbindungen in Theorie_Aktivismus_Kunst*, ed. by Käthe von Bose / Ulrike Klöppel / Katrin Köppert / Karin Michalski / Pat Treusch. Berlin 2015, 61–72. Where he states that, among other things: “The escape from the molar categories of the sexuality dispositif that we now associate with queer was in fact driven by a desire and a lust to be different with each other: to feel differently, to love differently, to desire differently.” Laufenberg: *An Army of Lovers Cannot Lose*, 69.

65 In the advice book genre, Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy have addressed the issue of polyamorousness. Dossie Easton / Janet Hardy: *The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships and Other Adventures*. Berkeley 1997. Overall, however, their successful book is more of an account of sexual promiscuity, which they also address under the name of “love,” and in this respect offers little guidance for the question of the promiscuity of affects. Some critical questions posed in Hipster Porn, such as the sovereignty of the subject or the negativity of sex, have no place in this practical guide. In this respect, it is a sex-positive, sexual reconciliation project, as one might say with regards to Bersani. For a critical discussion of the polyamorous subculture in neoliberalism, see Volker Woltersdorff: “I Want To Be A Macho Man”: Schwule Diskurse über die Aneignung von Männlichkeit in der fetisch- und SM-Szene. In: *Unbeschreiblich Männlich: Heteronormativitätskritische Perspektiven*, ed. by Robin Bauer / Josch Hoenes / Volker Woltersdorff. Hamburg 2007, 107–120.

66 Berlant: Love (A Queer Feeling), 433.

67 Berlant: *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC / London 2011 Loc. 1989/4461.

68 Mike Laufenberg also formulates the goal of a reorganization of love: “In order to grant affection through love a constituting capacity, it is necessary to overcome the appropriation of love through sentimentality, romanticization or identity politics. The two predominant corrupted forms of love, the identitarian love between equals (for example, familialism, nationalism, racism) and the fusing love (love as an ideology of becoming one in couple relationships or as a religious love of God; cf. Michael Hardt / Antonio Negri: *Empire*. Cambridge and London 2000, 192ff.), should be opposed by alternatives that do not personalize or essentialize love.” Laufenberg: *An Army of Lovers Cannot Lose*, 70.

point of view, is a form of self-expansion as boundary violation, a movement which Berlant calls queer insofar as it does not necessarily have to be enshrined in the form of the couple.⁶⁹

The ways of describing self-extension – the desire to become more than oneself, to become exchangeable, to become oriented towards a publicness that corresponds to an expanding interiority suggests the appropriateness of naming love a queer affect.⁷⁰

Love as affective expansion would have the potential to put barriers between inside and outside, ego and environment, private and public at risk and, as such, to operate similarly as regards sexuality, sex, or desire. Thus, Berlant writes: “Foucauldian categories of pathogenic sexuality could then be seen as the detritus of normal love’s failures to organize the subject.”⁷¹ Analogous to Foucault’s pleasures, affects would be experiences that have not yet been codified, that have not yet found their form, that are without a defined place within the constitution of subjects and relations. A symbolic definition has not yet taken place.

If we pursue such a design of affective mobility as an alternative to the psychoanalytic program of love, a crucial question at this point is whether we can think love beyond the category of “personhood.” In a conversation with filmmaker Werner Schröter, Foucault describes this problem by distinguishing between love and passion:

It’s a distinction between two kinds of individuation: one, love, through persons, and the other through intensity, as though passion dissolved persons not into something undifferentiated but into a field of various persisting and mutually interdependent intensities [. . .]. Love’s a state of, and a relation between, persons, subjects. But passion is a subpersonal event that may last as long as a lifetime [. . .], a field of intensities that individuates independently of any subject.⁷²

In contrast, Berlant’s reformulation of a queer love is no longer about the interiority of persons, but about a non-psychological affective expansion beyond individuals.⁷³ This possibility of love beyond the psychological or psychoanalytic subject is also considered by Bersani and Philipps:

Love is perhaps always – as both Plato and Freud suggest – a phenomenon of memory,⁷⁴ but what is remembered in the expansive narcissism of an impersonal intimacy is not some truth

69 In addition to self-emptying as part of the structure of the feeling love, its instability, according to Berlant, is also conditioned by a series of contradictions such as conventionality/uniqueness, knowledge/non-knowledge, form/mysteriousness. Berlant: *Love (A Queer Feeling)*.

70 Berlant: *Love (A Queer Feeling)*, 443.

71 Berlant: *Love (A Queer Feeling)*, 440.

72 Kenneth Surin: *Existing Not as a Subject but as a Work of Art: The Task of Ethics or Aesthetics?* In: *Deleuze and Ethics*, ed. by Nathan Jun / Daniel W. Smith. Edinburgh 2011, 149.

73 Anu Koivunen: *Yes We Can? The Promises of Affect for Queer Scholarship*. *Lambda Nordica* 15/3–4 (2010), 55.

74 Surin: *Existing Not as a Subject but as a Work of Art*, 162.

about the self, but rather, as Philipps says, “a process of becoming”, or, in other terms, evolving affinities of being.⁷⁵

6 Incoherent Love

The desired result is a systematic openness: an open system.⁷⁶

indiscernibility, imperceptibility, and impersonality remain the end points of becoming.⁷⁷

A love that does not find its form is a love that does not fit into the world of domesticity, monogamy, privacy, and permanence. It is a love that does not take emotion or affect as reconciliation in the face of desire’s restlessness. It is a love that cannot keep its promise, that does not conform to the script of the happy ending but is more likely to lead to betrayal.⁷⁸ For Berlant, love is interesting as a phenomenon insofar as it must fail: “love as an exercise in failure.”⁷⁹

Beyond its fantasy as a protective zone in which subjects are assured a comfortable home, love would be a risky form of self-expression, “in love, the human subject is exceptionally open to otherness.”⁸⁰ Love is uneconomic insofar as it exposes the subject to the danger of not being able to carry the prize home again as a calculable gain. As “wrong” or “disappointed,” love cannot be thought of as a profitable investment in life planning. Love that can be described in such a way – as an endless form of uncertainty – is not culturally admitted or expressed. Rather, love is either captured by the “marriage plot,” or is accepted only as a dramatic delay on the way to a given goal. Stylized in the genre of the *amour fou* and dressed as an intensity of experience, uncertain love is granted an unruly life of its own that is permitted, if not required, within the eventfulness of youth.

Berlant’s dissecting gaze, however, aims to allow love to stand beyond these cultural classifications as a capacity for unpredictable and unreliable experiences and attachments. Without its conventional, narrative framework, love as an affective self-expression, becomes an experience in which the subject neatly cannot settle into the context of reliable genres. Such a love risks cultural unintelligibility that cannot be sublimated in the gesture of “love as blindness” or “love as stupidity” and to this end, Berlant speaks of “love’s sheer incoherence.”⁸¹ Here the critical interest of affect the-

⁷⁵ Bersani / Phillips: *Intimacies*, 124.

⁷⁶ Brian Massumi: *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham / London 2002, 18.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Grosz: *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington / Indianapolis 1994, 179.

⁷⁸ Compare, for example, Bersani’s reading of betrayal in Genet as a gay mode of anti-relationality in Bersani: *Homos*.

⁷⁹ Lauren Berlant: *Desire/Love*. New York, NY 2012, 21.

⁸⁰ Bersani / Phillips: *Intimacies*, 74.

⁸¹ Berlant: *Love (A Queer Feeling)*, 441.

ory is to subvert the binding forces of conventional emotions and the genres in which they have been historically organized, given that Berlant's project relies on revealing love's incoherence as an existential condition:

To my mind, love is queered not when we discover it to be resistant to or more than all its known forms, but when we see that there is no world that admits how it actually works as a principle of living. This designation refracts as negativity the state of affect I have been calling incoherence.⁸²

Incoherence occurs as an impulse to question and abandon existing genres: Historically generated organizing structures of social life that can be exposed as forms of institutionalized power. Without its ideology cast as a fantasy of fusion, the idea of love no longer conjures a violent defense against its own destabilizing moments. In Berlant's work, however, this movement does not occur in the name of better, future-oriented genres (or "better stories" as Grossberg writes). Following Foucault, for Berlant, the project of affect theory cannot be about a program, but is rather about a practice of affective distraction. Unlike Love,⁸³ Berlant is concerned with making room for incoherence as a condition by which our existence is ontologically defined. Here again, there is a structural similarity to Bersani's self-shattering sexuality. Both Bersani and Berlant understand negativity as an ontological condition of subjectivity where Berlant's contribution is to contest sex and sexuality's monopoly on the subject of negativity, not thematically via negative affect or emotions like shame, but through the unstable structure of affect itself.

What, in the archive of queer theory, is primarily related to the experience of gay sex, Berlant claims to be able to say about the experience of love as a queer feeling. Love, not only as experimental sexuality but also as an expenditure unbound by any genre, becomes a practice of becoming/unbecoming, in which incalculable affective constellations undo subjective and social stabilities.⁸⁴ With the disclosure of the affective incoherence of love, the juxtaposition of a sexuality that leads to unknown pleasures on the one hand, and love as a fantasy of fusion on the other, becomes unstable. Both love and sexuality (or desire, pleasure) appear here as experiences of negativity. What distinguishes them if no familiar genres organize their division of labor anymore? How does a sexuality as pleasure articulate itself if not through identity, and how does a love that does not bind itself to persons show itself? If we assume, following Berlant, a structural similarity between love and desire, by what criterion can they be distinguished? To what extent does it still make sense here to speak of sexuality *or* love? Is there a temporal or spatial difference, is there a rhythm that carries us from one scene to the next, or do the two ways of connecting with the world, affectively or sexually, collapse in a space they now share? In contrast to the notion of the

⁸² Berlant: *Love (A Queer Feeling)*, 443.

⁸³ Heather Love: *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge / London 2007, 4.

⁸⁴ Davis: *Queer Beauty*.

erotic or to sensuality, which aims to summarize these two libidinous/affective modalities, I here suggest the notion of *affective sexualities*, which reminds us that we are speaking of a mixed phenomenon when we place the disintegrating power of sexuality in relation to that of love, even if our aim is to envisage a field beyond the rehearsed oppositions of love and desire.

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