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Sadzinski, Sylvia

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Sylvia Sadzinski

Discomfort, Disruption, Disgust. Queer Feminist Curating and the Affective.

With a Commentary by Jenny Tyburczy

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Göttingen Centre for Gender Studies
Project Office
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen
Centrum für Geschlechterforschung
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 7 • D - 37073 Göttingen
Germany

genderedthoughts@uni-goettingen.de | www.gendered-thoughts.uni-goettingen.de

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Discomfort, Disruption, Disgust.

Queer Feminist Curating and the Affective

Sylvia Sadzinski[1]
[1] sylvia@sadzinski.de
0009-0007-4444-4550

Abstract

This article examines how queer feminist curating operates through affect, emphasizing discomfort, disruption, and disgust as politically productive forces. Drawing on affect theory and queer theory, it positions the curatorial as a critical practice that unsettles normative regimes and destabilizes entrenched power relations. Through analysis of the exhibitions *Fat Femme Furious* by Julischka Stengele and *Und ich hab schon wieder Hunger/You make me very hungry* by Lisa Holzer, the article demonstrates how negative affects reveal internalized social norms regarding bodies, gender, care, and visibility. Rather than mitigating dissonance, queer feminist curating can strategically mobilize affective responses to expose hegemonic structures and cultivate spaces for various marginalized communities. Affect thus functions as both a methodological lens and a mode of cultural critique, enabling reflection on representation, spectatorship, and the transformative potential of exhibitions within contemporary social contexts.

Keywords
Queer Feminist Curating; The Curatorial; Queer Feminist Exhibition-Making; Affect Theory; Negative Affects; Queer Affects; Body Politics; Fat Activism; Care

"One thing that we can do in the arts
is to disturb the comforted and
comfort the disturbed."
Alvina Chamberland

"We may never touch queerness,
but we can feel it as the warm illumination
of a horizon imbued with potentiality.
We have never been queer,
yet queerness exists for us as an identity
that can be distilled from the past and
used to imagine a future."
José Esteban Muñoz

Curating & the Curatorial

Over the past twenty years, questions about the role of the curator have gained more and more relevance and publicity within the world of art, culture and beyond. Simultaneously, the notion of curating has widened; nowadays almost everything seems to be curatable — our social media feeds and playlist, our wardrobe and the food we eat. Curating is therefore no longer the preserve of curators and limited to the arts (Tyżlik-Carver 2017). At the same time, curating is understood within the arts as much more than the activity of putting together, selecting, showing or presenting. Within the concept of the curatorial, the curator is no longer seen as an administrator of art, caretaker for collections or invisible organizer, but a person who takes up discourses and, at the same time, shapes and expands them.[1]

Curating and the curatorial have become two different things. While the first one can be described as exhibition-making, the latter is, among many other things, "a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas, and so forth, that strives to create friction and push new ideas" (Lind 2012: 20).

The concept of the curatorial can be defined as a practice that goes beyond the mere making of an exhibition and beyond the exhibition itself. It reflects, generates and conveys themes, issues and knowledge, unites and can be found in practices, formats and aesthetics. Thus, the curatorial and the curator are attributed a specific sociopolitical relevance within contemporary society. Maria Lind imagines "this mode of curating to operate like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions — owing much to site-specific and context-sensitive practices and even more to various traditions of institutional critique" (Lind 2009: 103). Irit Rogoff claims that the curatorial has the capacity of bringing together "the necessary links between collectivity, infrastructure and contemporaneity [by] working simultaneously in several modalities, kidnapping knowledges and sensibilities and insights and melding them into an instantiation of our contemporary conditions" (Rogoff 2015: 48). Therefore, it becomes clear that the curatorial is political. It has its conditions, procedures and rules and it "cannot be separated from divergence and dissent" so that for Lind it becomes "a set of practices that disturbs existing power relations" (Lind 2009: 103).[2] For her, the curatorial is trying to seriously answer the self-reflective question: "What do we want to add to the world and why?" (Lind 2009: 103).

I began curating regularly in 2012 as part of a curatorial group while also carrying out independent curatorial projects. Since 2017 I have been a full-time curator within institutions as well as an independent curator. Since that time my curatorial practice has had a decidedly queer feminist and emancipatory focus. Because of this, I would answer Lind's question as follows: What I desire to add to the (art) world, among many other things, are exhibitions that make people reflect and feel simultaneously, creating and making space for marginalized positions, thinking critically about the status quo and especially challenging norms. My aim in curating is to actively broaden social discourses by resisting hegemonic narratives and filling gaps in discourse. This means not only naming grievances but actively changing them. I want to make clear that art, society, and politics cannot be considered separately. Curating is also mediating; a mediating between artists and institutions, between art and audience, between theory and practice, between utopia and dystopia.

I find that my curatorial practice is defined more by questions than answers, some of which will be addressed in this text: How can curating

[1] For the history of curating see O'Neill, Paul. 2012. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s).* Cambridge: MIT Press, Obricht; Hans Ulrich. 2018. *A Brief History of Curating.* Geneva: JRP | Editions.

[2] For more definitions of the curatorial see e.g. von Bismarck, Beatrice (eds.). 2012-2019. *Cultures of the Curatorial.* London: Sternberg Press; von Bismarck, Beatrice. 2021. *Das Kuratorische.* Leipzig: Spector Books; Martinon, Jean-Paul. 2013. *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating.* London: Bloomsbury.

be feminist and queer? How are feminist and queer narratives created by curating? What role does the affective play in a queer and feminist understanding of curating? I would like to reflect on my practice and in turn (re-)embed it in theory. My aim is to show specifically how affect and affect theory can inform the articulation of curatorial processes, the experience of an exhibition, the production of knowledge, and to what extent affects serve the curatorial in a queer and feminist way.

Queerating

Within the framework of and with the curatorial turn, curators repeatedly have become important in framing discourses and are often part of an institutional critique. Therefore, the curatorial can or even should create a particular situation; a situation, where the status quo is challenged and potentially even changed with art, through the curatorial and its specific spaces, contexts and questions (Hoffmann & Lind 2011). Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff describe the curatorial as "enactment, dramatization and performance" (Martinon & Rogoff 2015: ix). For them, the curatorial becomes "an event of knowledge" exploring everything "that takes place on the stage set-up, both intentionally and unintentionally" (Martinon & Rogoff 2015: ix). With reference to Martinon and Rogoff as well as Lind, researcher and curator Carolina Rito understands the curatorial as an investigative practice "on the surface" (Rito 2020: 51). This surface is not meant to refer to a kind of superficiality or superficial research, but rather a ground for unexpected methods, for articulating ideas and connecting them with images, moving across disciplines and formats. Here, the curatorial "finds new ways of engaging with urgent and current issues and their figurative affects" (Rito 2020: 51). It thus creates knowledge by combining theory and practice, thinking and doing.

Coinciding with this, there has been an increasing debate about forms and methods of feminist and queer curating.[3] In recent years, questions about the 'hows' and the 'whats' of queer curating have become more popular. However, until now, no clear definition has been formulated of what queer curating is or could be. For Jonathan D. Katz and Änne Söll queer curating and queer exhibitions "[...] interrogate the passive position of the viewer and demand active engagement, honest investment, and frank questioning, while also leaving room for unanswered questions, gaps, and fissures" (Katz & Söll 2018: 2). Katz and Söll also refer to participatory or actively challenging exhibitions as queer exhibitions. Artist and museum educator Kerry Downey emphasizes the importance of making messes, of causing chaos and disorder: "Art resides not in the tidy stories of well-placed geniuses who changed the world; art is a practice, it is *how* we resist the stories stuck to us or stolen from us by those who know nothing about me or you. We talk back, make messes, and value each other's acts of creation, no matter small, no matter how weird" (Downey 2019).

Additionally, queer curating can be described as a mode of curating that consciously opposes heteronormative structures in museums and exhibition contexts by, among other things, asking questions about mediation and addressing a queer audience, which is understood as plural and heterogeneous within its queerness (Katz & Söll 2018: 2-3).

In her book *Curatorial Activism. Towards an Ethics of Curating* Maura Reilly defines curating as a potentially activist practice. In doing so, she refers to curatorial strategies that give voice to those who have historically been silenced or ig-

[3] See, for example, Dimitrakaki, Angela & Larry Perry (eds.). 2013. *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press; Krasny, Elke & Sophie Lingg & Lena Fritsch, Birgit Bosold, Vera Hofmann (eds.). 2021. *Radicalizing Care. Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating.* London: Sternberg Press; Molesworth, Helen. 2010. "How To Install Art as a Feminist." In: Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwart (eds.). *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art:* 498-513. New York: Museum of Modern Art; Sullivan, Nikki & Craig Middleton. 2020. *Queering the Museum.* New York: Routledge.

nored as well as to exhibitions that address current political and social issues as curatorial correctives. These curatorial "strategies of resistance" can provoke intelligent debate, disseminate new knowledge, consider a broader range of voices, especially those that have been overlooked (Reilly 2018: 22-23). In a broader sense, curating can therefore be understood not only as political and activist, but also as a form of care or community care and allyship. Curator Binghao Wong proposes the term and concept of 'queerating' as a mode of collective care. For Wong, queer curating or 'queerating' should focus on collaboration and thus strengthen queer communities and kinships as well as collectivity (Wong 2015).

Of all the contemporary engagements within curating and the curatorial, it can be stated that not only should the content of art shows – exhibited the artworks – be of particular interest, but also their mode of display. The important question in processes of queering exhibitions is thus not only what is presented but also how it is presented — and how it is conceived or, more precisely, how it affects people.

Queer Beyond Queer

Feminist scholarship has a long history of dealing with the emotional and the affective.[4] Feminist knowledge offers a way to identify the political in the affective because affect is seen to generate questions about how the world works or, as Sara Ahmed puts it: "[f]eelings might be how structures get under our skin" (Ahmed 2014b). I want to understand affect and emotion in regard to Ahmed as contiguous; "they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated" (Ahmed 2010: 231).

Feminist engagement with affective politics thus requires attention to the ways in which feelings can (re)produce dominant social and geo-political hierarchies and exclusions. For Ahmed affect is not something personalized that flows between bodies in a generic sense. Rather, some bodies generate different affective responses in a particular context rather than in others. Certain gendered, racialized, sexualized subjects become the objects of others' affective responses. Emotions are a matter of how we come into contact with subjects and objects. Through emotions and affects power is felt and negotiated. Therefore, affects are not seen as something individual or personal, but rather as indicators for social structures and even as possibilities to go beyond the rationally known or assumed; they are a way of feeling and thus experiencing everything which arises from social structures, or the results thereof (Ahmed 2014a: 208).

Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez defines affects as "diffuse and unstructured, immediate bodily (re)actions on energies, sensations and intensities (...)" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2011) and as "energies that come from encounters that cannot always be grasped in language, but are perceived physically" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2011). Queer and feminist theory understands emotions and affect as not clearly distinguishable from each other, especially when analyzing forms, structures, and outcomes of discrimination, just as they cannot be separated from materialities and bodies (Dietze/Haschemi Yekani/Michaelis 2012: 193). Positive as well as negative feelings thereby become possibilities of political mobilization (Dietze/Haschemi Yekani/Michaelis 2012: 194).

For example, discomfort is a moment that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as queer. Starting from the statement 'shame on you', Sedgwick develops the concept of a queer performativity by first describing the affect of shame as a disruptive moment of identity-constituting communication. Here, Sedgwick determines queer performativity as a strategy "for the production of meaning

and being, in relation to the affect shame [...] and related fact of stigma" (Sedgwick 1993: 11). She thus identifies a dynamic relationship between identity processes and shame, one that is

[4] With reference to Sara Ahmed, I understand the terms emotions, affects, and feelings to be synonymous describing visceral and relational intensity or sensation.

simultaneously constructive and deconstructive (Sedgwick 1993: 2). This also illustrates something else: while the term 'queer' is commonly used synonymously for LGBTIAQ+ individuals, the theoretical understanding of queer is much wider and more fluid. Thinkers like Antke Engel, Lee Edelman, Fatima El-Tayeb and Jack Halberstam, among others, put the understanding of queer beyond identity politics. They do not only understand queer as a condition or synonym for sexual identities, but also as a term intervening in dichotomies, questioning power structures and referring to marginalized and non-standard positions. Thus, it is a theoretical concept questioning, breaking through and crossing social orders (Hashemi Yekani & Michaelis 2005: 9). There is no clear genealogy or definition that distinguishes or describes queer, but rather its potential multidimensionality and processuality (Hashemi Yekani & Michaelis 2005: 14). Queer can serve as a perspective on hegemonic power structures, power-asymmetrical binaries, and norming processes, from which questions about political, social, economic relations as well as aesthetic representations, can be posed. Accordingly, desire and gender are not the sole focus of the localization of queer. Rather, a queer perspective also points to the gaps within dichotomous notions that play a thoroughly constitutive role not only for discourse on sexuality, but also for further categorizations of identity (El-Tayeb 2003: 137). One of its potentials is thus the deconstruction and destabilization of categories in general. Queer can be located as a potential, an analytical tool, attitude of reception as well as a political and visual practice and a possible critique of norms that does not reproduce the balance of power but questions it.

Accordingly, a queer feminist approach looks critically not only at gender and forms of desire, but also at the entanglements of various power and identity categorizations and their destabilizations. Gender and sexuality and their organization are simultaneously understood as origins and products of power processes, which in turn produce norms and hierarchies (Engel 2001: 348). Because of their critique of identity and politics of exclusion, queer approaches are suited to problematize an intersecting complexity of power structures (Engel/Schulz/Wedl 2005: 10). Queer strategies question ideas of fixed identities and attempt to destabilize dualisms such as the powerful and the oppressed, 'normal' and 'other', and hegemonic and marginal, thus breaking through social norms and power relations. In doing so, they primarily question the concept of normality.

According to Engel, criticism is effective when, first, the premises of given relations are undermined; second, power relations regarding representations and relations to the audience are changed; and third, the understanding of what is seen and understood as political changes (Engel 2010: 75). Queer representations purposefully produce difficulties of acceptance that seek to break down, thematize, and problematize habits of viewing or abandon them altogether. Queer critique does not see itself as universally valid, nor does it not want to be hegemonic or authorized or even adopted by the so-called mainstream. Ideas, discourses and practices are developed and created sub-culturally and are primarily aimed at the queer communities themselves.

As claimed by Jack Halberstam, not even bodies need to be in the focus for a queer-theoretical endeavor. Halberstam rather suggests relieving bodies as preferred representatives of queer politics, to allow other forms of articulation for queer thinking (Halberstam 2005: xx). Accordingly, using queer as a concept might help to address questions around curating and the curatorial.

Fat Femme Furious *and* You make me very hungry*: Discomfort, Disruption, Disgust*

In the beginning of 2019, I curated a show with Vienna-based performance artist Julischka Stengele. Her first institutional solo exhibition called *Fat Femme Furious* was on view in the public and municipal gallery of Berlin's Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district, the Galerie im Turm.

In installations as well as sculptural, performative, auditory and photographic works, the dynamics of the social gaze, body politics and beauty standards, femininity and femmeness were investigated. For *Fat Femme Furious* the artists and I decided together to use a particular image for press materials and social media. Stengele's photographic work that we chose was *Pig-Up* from 2009*,* representing the artist herself. It was also displayed as a large-scale photographic print on one of the exhibition walls, not directly visible upon entry. It shows a nude white body in a grey surrounding with a plastic pig mask on all fours. The mask is pink and pulled over the whole head. The body stands sideways to us, with its head aligned to the left. The person rests on their fists. Different shades of rose, pink and red on the skin of the body, small veins and hair, dimples and cellulite on the legs can be spotted. The viewer might identify the body as female due to the breasts one can detect and the body might also be described as plus-size or curvy or, in a self-empowering sense, fat.[5] The pig head with an open muzzle is looking in the direction of the viewer who seems to stand a bit above the person with the mask indicated by a slight bird's-eye view. The work's title *Pig-Up* clearly refers to pin-up, which *Cambridge Dictionary* defines as "a picture of an attractive, usually famous person, suitable for hanging on a wall, or a person shown in such a picture".[6] The work mocks this original meaning. By providing a fat naked body with a pig's head, the common designation — you fat pig — something, that fat people often hear from others, is self-empoweringly appropriated by the artist. The person becomes the animal, while remaining a human being. This picture saw a wide reaction and seemed to emotionally affect a lot of people. I received two e-mails from women who wanted to sue me because they felt offended as well as discriminated against. Other negative reactions to this image appeared, prior to the exhibition opening, in the comment sections of social media channels, varying mostly between a vomiting or nauseated emoji. These two most popular emojis used in order to comment on the photograph or the opening itself were expressing disgust. As a curator, I took note of these reactions, moderated or deleted the emoticons in the institutions's social media channels and explained the artist's self-positioning and her activist and self-empowering claim in personal messages and e-mails.

In her book *Ugly Feelings* (2005) Sianne Ngai refers to disgust as "the ugliest of ugly feelings" (Ngai 2005: 335). She explores disgust as the opposite of desire and attraction, as an ugly feeling that "block[s] sympathetic identification" (Ngai 2005: 340). For Ngai then, disgust functions to police societal borders more broadly so that she refers to disgust as the most political of the "minor negative affects." But how can this affective reaction help us define what queer or queer feminist curating might be?

Affect arises through the evaluation of things. In her blog post "Making Strangers" from August 4, 2014, Sara Ahmed investigates how and why some bodies are "judged as suspicious, or as dangerous, as objects to be feared, a judgment that can have lethal consequences" (Ahmed 2014c). Even though Ahmed's main focal point is the white gaze and its related feelings that make a black man become a stranger, some of Ahmed's thoughts are also transferable to supposedly non-normative bodies. For Ahmed, it is the feeling that makes a body and a subject a stranger. Through these feelings that become affective judgements, strangers and bodies become objects, objects that are managed. Therefore, we cannot identify with someone we perceive as disgusting, but neither can we identify with someone we perceive as (a) strange(r). According to Ahmed, certain bodies, e.g. racialized bodies, are already understood as dangerous long before we see them. And so, it is not only the moment of encounter, the mo-

[5] I am deliberately using the term *fat*, which has been appropriated and reinterpreted by and within the fat empowerment and fat acceptance movement since the 1960s. Similar to *queer*, this term is and has been used as a swear word and is supposed to loose its discriminating power through self-appropriation.

[6] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/pin-up, 31.03.2021.

ment of visibility, that creates or triggers the affect. Affects are inscribed in our bodies much earlier through societal assumptions, histories and stereotypes "that come before subjects" and that then, in turn, elicit bodily responses when we encounter the respective other body. She emphasizes by describing the immediacy of bodily reactions as pedagogy: "we learn about ideas by learning how they become quick and unthinking. Somewhat ironically, perhaps, there is nothing more mediated than immediacy" (Ahmed 2014c). Affects as something quick and suddenly appearing can be disturbances or disruptions in our daily life.

Beatrice Miersch refers to moments of curatorial disruption as a strategy of queer curating. She claims that exhibitions do not only take place in the exhibition space itself, but rather already begin outside and before the actual exhibition space — through their media dissemination in the form of flyers, posters, other images as well as reporting (Miersch 2019: 209). For Miersch, queer curatorial strategies, such as disruption, can sustainably change practices of normalization, marginalization and discrimination in the exhibition context (Miersch 2019: 203). Apparently, *Pig-Up* was disruptive and read as provocative. Nevertheless, on the one hand, this reaction programmatically makes certain aspects of the exhibition visible and tangible: the judgmental gaze of others on non-normalized bodies as well as the power of the subjects affected by discrimination to accept and reverse this devaluation and to hold the gaze of other by consciously returning it, projecting back (self-)images and narratives of one's own. Furthermore, on the other hand, and following Linda Åhäll, the reactions towards the image could be described as "the affective-discursive in-between as shared meanings" (Åhäll 2018: 50). Åhäll's methodological approach, which she articulates in her paper *Affect as Methodology* (2018), helps to see how representational gaps can be identified through a moment of affective dissonance. For her, moments of affective dissonance can spark feminist curiosity about gender, agency and political violence (Åhäll 2018: 47). She explains the extent to which this dissonance can be used in a clearly feminist way to highlight norms and their resulting grievances and injustices. Affective dissonance makes societal grievances palpable. For Åhäll, "there is no feminism without affect" (Åhäll 2018.: 38), meaning that the affects we have or experience will demonstrate and indicate how the structures and the world that surrounds us works and functions. The emotional reaction towards the image used as the event picture for Julischka Stengele's *Fat Femme Furious* demonstrates a disruptive moment with regards to bodily and gendered social norms. Culturally and socially shared ideas about what (female) bodies should or should not do or look like are the objects (using Sara Ahmed's term) that affectively moved the audience. What we can see here is a feeling of structure, meaning that societal norms, ideas, and power structures are felt and become perceptible and clear through the affective. We can feel them. Though, depending on our own cultural baggage, we will encounter and feel those structures differently. By using affective dissonance as a methodological tool it is possible to unpack those feelings of structure as political.

In *Fat Femme Furious* we see a fat, potentially female body. In this case, a fat body becomes a queer body through the affective. The affective reaction moves beyond this single individual picture. The nude portrait is simultaneously a presentation, a representation and an exposition. Painfully, the image (and the exhibition) brings the audience face to face with their own internalized fat phobia. *Pig-Up* shows how fat bodies are seen, labeled, and evaluated in our society. Often, they are loaded with stereotypes, shamed and demonized, perceived solely as fat bodies, and sometimes even no longer seen as human bodies.[7] This is what Stengele is playing with, and the affective reactions again prove just that. And as the portrayed artist takes a look back, with and in the mask, confronting the au-

[7] For an introduction into the intersections of fatphobia, misogyny, racism and ableism see Harjunen, Hanele. 2020. 'Neoliberal Bodies and the Gendered Fat Body'. London: Routledge, *Fat Studies Journal*, London: Taylor & Francis.

dience with their feelings, these grievances are revealed.

In tackling regimes of the gaze, the tension between looking and being looked at is brought to the fore. It is the powerful gaze of others that attempts to define and classify us, forming identities and dictating their agency. Judging from the reactions, fat femininity seems to be insulting, threatening and therefore dangerous. Seeing fat naked women's bodies in the media is still a rarity and not a norm – it is strange. The reactions refer to this queer moment. They clarify what does not conform to the norm. They make it clear what a queer moment, a queer aesthetic and the practice of queering with art and curating can mean and be. Not because of the representation, but because of the reactions to that very representation, the body is defined as queer in its real sense.

The press photo for the exhibition, which in the sense of Beatrice Miersch can already be understood as part of the exhibition, is questioning power structures and referring to marginalized and non-standard positions. It opens up a space where discursive and normative preconceptions of desire, beauty, health and gender are made manifest, leading to societal processes of inclusion and exclusion. It is not the pure representation of the body, but the reactions that show, what can be seen and understood as queer. The affective dissonances clearly open up a discursive field of body and beauty norms, of the representation of fat bodies within Western culture, referring to fat activism and fat empowerment. Stengele's solo exhibition *Fat Femme Furious* becomes a queer exhibition not only through the affective reaction of disgust, but also through the irritation and discomfort of the public and the visitors. The pictured body is judged as disgusting and therefore also as dangerous. And while part of the audience might be uncomfortable and feel like throwing up, Stengele is and remains furious through her artworks, when staging herself as a pig-up, handing out pieces of cake with her naked buttocks printed on it to a large number of visitors at the opening of the exhibition, who made it one of the most visited of the year, and with an installation of 32 knives on the pillars of the gallery. Of course, she thereby plays willingly into the hands of the pejorative stereotype of the angry feminist. At the same time, the exhibition was one of the most visited exhibitions of the year at the gallery and created a self-empowering space for queer and feminist communities through the opening night performance and the supporting program, which included film screenings such as *Riot Not Diet* (2018) by Julia Fuhr Mann. Many activists became guests in the gallery who were not otherwise part of the regular audience. The exhibition thus also became a queer exhibition in the sense of Binghao Wong, as it offered queer communities a space for exchange, visibility and care, and thus strengthened communities.

Another exhibition I want to discuss is a solo show by photographer Lisa Holzer called *Und ich hab schon wieder Hunger/You make me very hungry*, which took place at the same gallery in September 2018. Here, it is not disgust, but the moments of discomfort and disruption I want to focus on. For Sara Ahmed a queer potential lies in the feeling of discomfort. She describes discomfort as a moment of disorientation, a feeling of strangeness and tension through experiences of exclusion, isolation and sanction for queer people. For her, discomfort is full of uncertainty, hence productive (Ahmed 2014a: 155). Additionally, Ahmed defines discomfort as an important feminist concept, since feeling uncomfortable and actively expressing discomfort in moments of injustice is one of the motivations and starting points for feminist work, politics and activism which she further elaborates on in her conceptual figure of the feminist killjoy (Ahmed 2017). Bodily and sensory disease indicates that things should or ought to be different. The feminist killjoy does not laugh at or look past sexist as well as racist jokes or behavior. Rather, she points it out and sometimes spoils the mood by causing discomfort after sensing "that something is wrong" (Ahmed 2017: 22). Dwelling on the meanings of discomfort for research and analytic work and with reference to Donna Haraway, Rachelle Chadwick argues, that staying with discomfort "make[s]

you question the world, yourself, and all your cosy and familiar truths" (Chadwick 2021b). In her understanding, discomfort lies in "moments of dislocation and dizzy disorientation" and is not at all enjoyable (Chadwick 2021a: 5), but is, among other things, an "embodied point of rupture" (Chadwick 2021a: 7) that can lead to new ways in the production of knowledge. For Chadwick the politics of discomfort become "integral to the development of inclusive, emancipatory and alternative feminist knowledges" (Chadwick 2021a: 11).

In *Und ich hab schon wieder Hunger/You make me very hungry* Lisa Holzer also creates discomfort — through the press text she wrote herself and through the choice of motifs in her images as well as through the installation, placement and hanging of the photographs, which can be understood as an artistic decision that arose in dialogue with the curator.

The press text mentioned above, which can be understood, with regard to Beatrice Miersch, as part of the exhibition, breaks with common norms of press releases and exhibition announcement texts:

"Photographs of food that was loosely hand-moulded (in an infantile way?). Vanilla and strawberry ice cream, rice pudding with more or less cinnamon (Gautama Buddha's final meal before his enlightenment was a large bowl of rice pudding), richly-tossed butterhead lettuce in pale sepia colours, somehow heaped into figures. To this, add one picture of slightly droopy chrysanthemums, from which the colour green --calming-- is filtered out. The photographs are accompanied by text posters. Green is avoided (negated?) or altered digitally. Green is calming, or at least said to be. Now and then, the rice pudding blushes. Rice and ice cream and butterhead (for the adults?). I bring the flowers.
The funny in the figure of the mother.
Side dishes and desserts – no main course; no middle.
And death or flowers of death, devoid of green.
Bodies are absent. I am not there. I am hungry for your absence. Photography is passive-aggressive, as you might perceive.
It is interesting what comes out of pictures. I like time loops. As a rather loving, motherly, performative gesture, I will reproduce the moulded vanilla ice cream from the pictures at the opening, for the public's pleasure.
_ Lisa Holzer, Berlin and Sikås, summer 2018"[8]

It is written from the artist's first-person perspective and can cause the reader some irritation, as it has several layers, linguistically moving between being descriptive and being associative. In the exhibition space, Lisa Holzer displayed oversized, designed photographs of rice pudding, ice cream and lettuce. These photographs of loosely hand-moulded food, partly in pastel colors, partly in pale sepia, exist alongside remains of vanilla ice cream, fingerprints and candle soot which can be spotted on the glass of the not always fully varnished frames. Some photographs remain without frames, becoming posters attached to the walls with paste. They are put in the strangest corners of the space, hanging crooked or over the walls and corners and sticking out from edges. Another aspect of the exhibition was that all framed photographs are not displayed at eye-level, but depart from the conventions of hanging art works at 1.5 meters from the ground. They are instead arranged to the sight lines of smaller people, e.g. children. Together with the installation work *The Lap of the Gallery/Mother (small site-specificity)* and the text *The Fun in the Figure of the Mother*, these works reflect upon and refer to the mother's role as carer as well as to the invisibility and low social recognition of care work and reproductive labor in general. With the figure of the mother, the figure of the child is in the space too. The role of mother constantly resonates with the role of the child — suggesting that it is the child, ultimately, who creates the mother in the first place. Linguistically and performatively, mother and child cannot be separated from each other, they are mutually dependent. Every mother has a child, every child has a mother. The photographs and the hanging system allow the supposedly infantile and the playful to double-back on one another, simultaneously allowing for a visual immersion of taller adults, too, as they

[8] Exhibition announcement for Lisa Holzer: Und ich hab schon wieder Hunger/You make me very hungry, Galerie im Turm 2018. https://galerie-im-turm.net /you-make-me-very-hungry/, 30.04.2022.

have to bend down to look at the artwork. Without being overtly visible, several bodies are present and palpable in the exhibition space despite their absence: the mother, the caretaker, the child. In particular the hanging of the work, but also the potential banality of the photographs displayed, might create irritation and discomfort. Discomfort refers to the feeling of disorientation when "one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled" (Ahmed 2014a: 148). While most of the time we subconsciously feel comfortable or at ease within our surroundings, it is discomfort that can provide information about social norms and rules and reveal itself to be a cipher of codified culture (Ahmed 2014a: 148). Discomfort is therefore a social affect and not only an individual one. In *Und ich hab schon wieder Hunger/You make me very hungry* discomfort refers, on the one hand, to culturally shared ideas about what an exhibition should or should not do, what it should or should not look like. Lisa Holzer's way of presenting and installing her works becomes a practice that disturbs existing power relations as Maria Lind defines them. Within *Und ich hab schon wieder Hunger/You make me very hungry* "curating is not so much the product of curators as it is the fruit of the labor of a network of agents" (Lind 2009: 103) – the artist and the curator together. The display and the motifs point not just towards the conventional 'caring mother' – but broaden this image by dealing with forms of care work. Holzer's mother figure (which is not necessarily female) is humorous, funny, playful and cheerful. However, she may also be prone to and ok with perceived flaws, uncleanliness, and thus may not always conform to a perfect image or ideal.

Conclusion

In this paper, I wanted to explore how curating can be queer and feminist and, particularly, which role the affective plays in a queer and feminist understanding of curating and the curatorial. I have claimed that so-called negative affects can be seen as crucial when describing an exhibition as queer. Queer has been defined as anti-normative, as a term that resist all kind of norms, not only heteronormativity. Rather, the understanding of queer in this paper goes beyond queer. My aim was to clarify that all norms are regulative, and that we can feel those norms or, to be more precise, that the deviation from norms affects us. Deviations move us, disrupt us, make us feel uncomfortable, sometimes maybe even disgusted, make us react repulsively, can cause us to rebel or revolt against them. We can learn or re-learn from negative affects. They point towards what can be understood as non-normative and therefore as queer. This paper further demonstrates that what we might understand and define as queer today, might not be queer tomorrow.[9] What we understand as queer is always bound to time, temporality and space – and in this discussed case of an exhibition also to the audience. Furthermore, *Fat Femme Furious* can also be described as a queer exhibition in the sense how it created a space for feminist and so-called fat activist communities. It created a space and place for queer and feminist communities within the art world by actively questioning societal norms. Taking up the opening quote from artist, writer and activist Alvina Chamberland as well as by academic José Esteban Muñoz, I hope that it has become clear that one thing that we can do through curating is to disturb the comforted and comfort the disturbed and thus, hopefully, make a contribution to pointing out social structures that cause grievances and to changing them at least for a short little warm and illuminated moment.

[9] This concluding sentence was inspired by the title of an exhibition named *What is Queer Today is not Queer Tomorrow*, taking place in the non-commercial Berlin art space nGbK neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst in summer 2014. https://archiv.ngbk.de/projekte/what-is-queer-today-is-not-queer-tomorrow/, 02.03.2021.

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The Queerness of Curation.

A Commentary on the Article by Sylvia Sadzinski

Jennifer Tyburczy[1]
[1] University of California, Santa Barbara, USA; tyburczy@ucsb.edu

At the time that I introduced the term "queer curatorship" in an article of the same name in 2013 and then further elaborated the concept in my 2016 book *Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display*, the conversation on curating queerly in the museum and other display spaces was only just beginning. Sylvia Sadzinski's article, "Discomfort, Disruption, Disgust. Queer Feminist Curating and the Affective," is now situated within an exciting and varied global engagement with the theory and praxis of queer curatorship. Some of these studies build on the foundational history of exhibiting LGBTQ identity and experience in museums, while others draw from the ongoing search for queer traces in the archives. Sadzinski's article is an important contribution to the growing body of work on queer curatorship, what the author refers to, citing curator Binghao Wong, as "queerating." These display practices extend beyond LGBTQ identity to incorporate a multiplicity of queer bodies and cultures. Following in the footsteps of queer scholars who approach queer as a doing, as a mode of worldmaking, the author's article shows how curating queerly, in both form and content, provides a political, activist, and collective tool for subverting normative exhibitionary logics both inside and outside the walls of the gallery or museum.

Sadzinski's article encapsulates both the potentials and the risks when curating queerly. Based in a long tradition of feminist and queer disruptions in the public sphere, the article outlines the continental discussion on queer curatorship to foreground how affect plays an indispensable role in the creation and reception of museum display. Written from the perspective of a museum curator, Sadzinski offers us the compelling example of her collaboratively curated exhibition *Fat Femme Furious* to analyze how the reception of an exhibition, and particularly the negative affects directed at certain works displayed therein, can determine which bodies "can be seen and understood as queer," to cite the author. For this Berlin-based exhibit, it was the white fat female body as represented in the 2009 photograph *Pig-Up* by Vienna-based performance artist Julischka Stengele that became the main target of disgust for some reactionary museum audiences. Monumentalized as a large-scale photographic print at the exhibition, the curators and artist also decided to use this image to publicize the show. The backlash that ensued highlights how museum displays become controversial often through decontextualized affective responses that stigmatize certain works or exhibitions even before the disgusted viewer enters the space of display. As the author so aptly puts it, "*Fat Femme Furious* becomes a queer exhibition not only through the affective reaction of disgust, but also through the irritation and discomfort of the public and the visitors."

Inspired by *Fat Femme Furious,* curators dedicated to the representation of queer and trans cultures in public spaces would do well to cri-

tique the incorporation of "queer" and "LGBTQ" into mainstream museums and the gentrification of the grittiness of queer and trans experience so as to render it comfortable and palatable to audiences assumed to be straight and phobic. Museums can play a role in countering sex panics and pathologization, the national and foreign policies that help to mobilize them, and their attempts to harmonize diverse sexual cultures into a vanilla and uniform world. Sadzinski's article and exhibition demonstrate how playing with, rather than pushing away, what the author calls "affective dissonance" offers curators a tactic for actively confronting certain publics who deploy affect to surveil and banish queerness from the space of the museum.

In and through this example, Sadzinski's exhibition and article implicitly raise important questions about what kinds of disruptions queer curatorship could perform next. What are the contents and discontents between feminist curating and queerating? How does trans studies, and what we might tentatively call trans curating, disrupt normative viewer assumptions on gender binaries and discomfort certain feminist assumptions on gender liberation? How do we form connections between transnational queer curators to collectively disrupt the nation-state to focus instead on the subnational and the regional? How can we apply the pivotal work of institutional critique artists of color, such as Fred Wilson, Isaac Julien, and Adrian Piper, to forge queer of color curation that upends heterosexism as a core facet of white supremacist display practices? Riffing on the scholarship of Sara Ahmed and José Esteban Muñoz, Sadzinski's article shows how the affective valences of queerness describe potentials, not promises, for the politics and performance of display. What is certain is that queerating, queer curatorship, and queer feminist curating can certainly transit in their own brand of norm-making; and yet, these display practices retain the possibility to discomfort and disrupt by reveling in the negative affects, in the sexiness and the messiness of queerness despite those who would destroy it. An urgent project at any time, no doubt, but one with particular importance as museums once again become 21st-century battlegrounds for the public display of social and cultural difference. We need the discomfort and the disruption of queerating more than ever, and articles such as Sadzinski's serve as potent reminders of what's at stake when we do (and don't) curate queerly.