Introduction: Affective Worldmaking: Narrative Counterpublics of Gender and Sexuality

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"In losing our voice, something in us dies" (9), writes award-winning British-Turkish writer, storyteller, essayist, academic, public speaker, and activist Elif Shafak in *How to Stay Sane in an Age of Division* (2020). Shafak emphasizes the importance of telling one's story as a means of restoring agency over one's life. While the COVID-19 pandemic, during which her book was published, lends a particular urgency to this imperative, her notion of the valence of story-sharing highlights the significance of storytelling as a personal, social, cultural, and political practice. Shafak's meditation on the need for stories outside the mainstream discourse is prompted by her observation of a trans woman who walks by Shafak's Istanbul apartment late at night: she is visibly physically hurt but resiliently and defiantly belts the experience of her abuse into the night. It is this particular act of witnessing which inspires Shafak's musings: "To be deprived of a voice means to be deprived of agency over our own lives. It also means to slowly but systematically become alienated from our own journeys, struggles and inner transformations, and begin to view even our most subjective experiences as though through someone else's eyes, and external gaze" (8).

Therefore, in Shafak's poetic description, storytelling is an integral part of our identity: "We are made of stories—those that have happened, those that are still happening at this moment in time, and those that

are shaped purely in our imagination through words, images, dreams and an endless sense of wonder about the world around us and how it works. Unvarnished truths, innermost reflections, fragments of memory, wounds healed" (9). Everyone's story matters. Stories that depict the lives and experiences of marginalized individuals and their communities are of particular importance, as they are often not present within dominant discourses. By creating visibility for underrepresented communities, stories also provide an occasion for readers to engage with these perspectives, experiences, and worldviews. As Shafak contends, "[t]he moment when we stop listening to diverse opinions is also when we stop learning. Because the truth is we don't learn much from sameness and monotony. We usually learn from differences" (16). Shafak summarizes this in the following aphorism, quoted in our book's epigraph: "Stories bring us together, untold stories keep us apart" (9).

Shafak's astute observations about the power of storytelling offer interesting starting points for a theorization of the worldmaking capacity of narratives. In *Affective Worldmaking: Narrative Counterpublics of Gender and Sexuality*, we start from the understanding that lived experiences are mediated, negotiated, and demarcated through language and narrative storytelling. Narratives are not restricted to literature but also shape and structure public discourse through various media and text forms. Indeed, dominant narratives have a significant impact on constructions of individual and collective identities, on whose identities are deemed comprehensible and are thus (in)validated, who gets to be a subject, how people position themselves in the world, and how they recover untold pasts, call attention to marginalized presents, and imagine possible futures for themselves.

Cultural and communal practices of marginalized groups have often been sidelined in dominant cultural narratives. They have even been met with hostility and discrimination. Marginalized communities have often responded to this violence by using and creating different forms of cultural production, media, institutions, and spaces to develop discourses of their own, to express themselves, to connect with each other, and to question hegemonic conceptions of, among others, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability. As Shafak's example

illustrates, these narratives engender new feelings, observations, and musings. Michael Warner conceptualizes this process as the creation of counterpublics through the circulation of discourses (Warner 65–66). These text-based counterpublics offer possibilities for conceiving alternatives to hegemonic narratives, and thus they can be understood as worldmaking projects.

Both in academia and wider public and political discourses, the relation between affect, emotion, identity, and belonging has been receiving increased interest. Particularly in the face of widespread feelings of crisis, growing from heightened political and socio-economic divides, the rise of right-wing politics, neo-conservatism, and a crisis of trust in political and intellectual elites, news media, and science, the question of what shapes people's individual and collective identities, what makes them feel they belong, and how these processes make use of particular narratives and appeal to emotional and affective structures has gathered new attention. *Affective Worldmaking* contributes to these conversations through three lines of inquiry that are present in all the contributing chapters, as they engage with literary and cultural narratives beyond questions of rhetoric, discourse, and representation. The first line of inquiry focuses on the level of texts' affective dimensions and the protagonists' experiences, relationships, and emotions. The second focuses on the reader and theorizes the affective attachments readers may form to texts. And finally, the third line of inquiry focuses on the context by considering the potential for societal and political transformation. All three lines are interconnected; by delineating their respective facets separately, we want to throw into relief the multiple layers of meaning affective worldmaking can have.

The first line of inquiry considers how texts' affective narrative strategies form bases for identification and belonging amongst protagonists and to what extent they offer potential points of recognition to audiences. Regarding the narratives' formal and aesthetic dimensions, we explore how particular affective experiences of the depicted worlds enable what this volume calls 'affective worldmaking,' and to what degree established canonical and genre traditions play a role in this. With the example of Shafak's use of a collective *we*, one might ask: Whom

does her we-narration include, whom does it potentially exclude? How does her use of the first-person plural affectively interpellate readers? What does a "we" look like that honors individual positionalities and subjectivities, as they are shaped by unique experiences, desires, and beliefs, while still indexing a sense of communal or collective agency and accountability?

The second line of inquiry addresses the level of affective experience when engaging with narratives of gender and sexuality. This places the focus on readers' interactions with these narratives and their participation in the kinds of affective worldmaking that occurs. We think of readers here not as instances within the text, as is common in reader-response theory, but as "sentient beings" (Schultermandl 13) who respond to narratives in unique ways. Shafak's narrative revolves around her simultaneous experience of feelings of solidarity with the woman she sees and her feeling of guilt for not actively asking her whether she was alright. Nevertheless, the encounter Shafak describes seems well etched into her memory and still resonates years later when she is already living in London. Regarding narratives' potential to do something to and with us, we ask: Which affective responses do the narratives' discussions of cultural traditions, community practices, and kinship rituals elicit, and how may they contribute to the audiences' sense of belonging? Going beyond the scope of individual affective responses, we also attend to narratives' potential to mobilize publics and counterpublics through particular forms of gendered belonging and affective worldmaking.

The third line of inquiry theorizes our critical engagement with narratives of gendered belonging. Given readers' specific positionalities, what are the potentials and limitations of narratives and their reception for affective relating, identification, and societal and political transformation? Conceiving of storytelling as expressions of one's identity, as Shafak does, might also mean that we mistake narrative portrayals for lived realities. How might we conceptualize narrative counterpublics reparatively, i.e., through reparative methodologies founded in a common vision of recovering the lives and narratives of marginalized individuals and honoring their collective strategies of resistance and sur-

vival, without assuming such a reductive mimetic relationship? According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, with regards to cultural and literary encounters, a reparative practice is characterized by the willingness "to experience surprise," both "terrible" and "good" (*Touching* 146), as it strives to discover "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the object of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (*Touching* 150–151). To achieve this, the reparative reader "seek[s] new environments of sensation for the objects they study by displacing critical attachments once forged by correction, rejection, and anger with those crafted by affection, gratitude, solidarity, and love" (Wiegman, "Times" 7). In this sense, our project pays attention to the ambivalence that affective responses might contain and, ultimately, perhaps, the impossibility of grasping and unequivocally naming affect's effect.

Counteracting Marginalization: Affective Worldmaking as Counterpublic Strategies

Notions of worldmaking have long been in circulation in literary and cultural studies, but with the recent turns to affect, they have begun to re-shape ideas about the affective potential of narratives, well beyond post-classical narratology and reader response theory.[1] Our notion of affective worldmaking attends to the ways in which particular affects become tangible in narratives in different media and how they potentially inflect audiences' outlook on the world, especially with regard to prevalent notions of gender and sexuality. This emphasis on the affective dimensions not only conceives of the reader as an implied instance but also as a sentient being who may or may not share the texts' ethos and may or may not be literate in the cultural codes via which affect

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1   For a discussion of worldmaking in media studies and narratology, see Bell and Ryan as well as V. Nünning, A. Nünning, and Neumann. See Goodman for a constructivist theorization of symbol systems and Zunshine for a neuroscientific one.

circulates. As prepersonal "intensity" (Massumi, *Parables* 24) and characterized by an "irreducibly bodily and autonomic nature" (Massumi, *Parables* 26), affect circulates via narratives. In turn, narratives can do a variety of cultural and political work, all centered around different affective responses: empathy, disgust, guilt, hope, and many more. Centering theorizations of literature's ability to do something to and with readers on texts' affective dimensions can generate novel insights into readers' ways of engaging with texts emotionally. Starting with observations about what Stephen Ahern has termed a "feel for the text" (1), and engaging with texts reparatively, throws into relief those intensities of being through which a sense of belonging can be manifested.[2]

Affect-centered scholarship has, by now, a robust tradition in literary studies. This ranges from neuroscientific work on reading to affect-based narratology.[3] Two of the most prominent traditions in literary studies today that investigate affect revolve around feminist and queer theorist work, on the one hand, and cognitive approaches to reading, on the other.[4] These diverging traditions employ affect-based understandings of the relationships between readers and texts to different ends. Especially from the perspective of feminist and queer narratology, affect plays a significant role in understanding narrative strategies such as narrative voice, the formation of the characters, the relation between the characters, etc., as well as the readers' affective attachments to narratives. Within the tradition of feminist and queer theorist work, Robyn Warhol's groundbreaking study, *Having a Good Cry: Effeminate Feelings and Pop-Culture Forms* (2003), observes that "[r]eading is a physical act" and recalls "the affects reading generates in our bodies" (ix). Warhol's project focuses on the somatic and sensory manifestations of reading experiences, including more immediate effects on readers' moods and more belated effects, such as laugh lines, on readers' faces.

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2   For a discussion of the "reparative turn" in queer feminist critique, see Wiegman.

3   For more detailed discussions of these issues, see Ahern; Wehrs and Blake.

4   For an overview of recent queer and feminist narrative theory, see Warhol and Lanser; for an overview of cognitive literary studies, see Aldama.

Building on feminist and queer literary studies, Warhol theorizes the affective attachments that emerge between readers and texts via aesthetic experience. In contrast, neuroscientific work on literature's affective dimensions employs scientific conceptualizations of cognitive processes. Patrick Colm Hogan's seminal study, *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories* (2011), brings together work on narratological structures—primarily plot—with neuroscientific insights based on "biological factors" (7). Comparing Warhol and Colm Hogan's respective work indicates that, while they are both concerned with affective impressions, their fundamental understanding of readers differs considerably. While Colm Hogan's work assumes readers to be similarly programmed to decode texts' affective work, Warhol's work, in contrast, conceives of readers as particularly interpellated, due to their prior experiences, social status, and cognizance of literary conventions. Thus, Warhol's understanding of readers resonates more strongly with postmodern theories that define identities as being non-essentialist, performative, and relational.

Affect's relational properties are also at the center of notions of worldmaking derived from critical theory. While there are several different critical traditions of affect theory,[5] Gilles Deleuze and Felix

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5   Gregg and Seigworth identify eight main orientations in affect studies by arranging them according to disciplines (6–8): 1. phenomenologies and post-phenomenologies of embodiment, 2. cybernetics and neurosciences focusing on the assemblages of human, machine, and the inorganic, 3. philosophy and philosophically inflected cultural studies linking matter with processual incorporeality, 4. psychological and psychoanalytic research combining biologism with broader systems of social desiring, 5. politically engaged work stemming from feminist, queer, disability and subaltern studies understanding individual experiences as collective, 6. research positioned between the linguistic turn's social constructionism and cognitive science, 7. critical inquiries of emotions beyond mere subjectivity, 8. science studies, especially focusing on materialism. See also Kate Stanley's discussion of different critical traditions in affect studies.

Guattari's work on assemblage[6] has been particularly instrumental to concepts of worldmaking which foreground the multidimensional processes and connections between authors, readers, and protagonists via the text. In her syncretic model of narrative worldmaking, Claudia Breger applies assemblage theory to "the rhetorical loops of composition (or production) and reading (or spectatorship)," in an attempt to understand the "performative process of configuring affects, associations, attention, experiences, evaluations, forms, matter, perspectives, perceptions, senses, sense, topoi and tropes in and through specific media, including mental operations as well as graphic notations, words and gestures, images and sounds" ("Narratology" 242).[7] To this end, Breger conceives of narratives as forms of affective configuration that emerge from the emotional, somatic, or visceral responses between readers, narrators, characters, and authors. The affective potential of texts and media is therefore actualized when readers "perform[] comparisons" and make "associations" between previous affective experiences and textual and social encounters and the narratives they consume, affectively "orienting" themselves in relation to them (Breger, "Narratology" 245). Breger's notion of "affect in configuration" applies simultaneously to the protagonists' affective storyworlds, the narrative's rhetorical strategies of evoking affective responses, and the readers' predisposition to engage with texts on an affective level. As far as readers' involvement in affective worldmaking is concerned, Breger contends that "they interweave heterogeneous pieces of their (actual or fantasy) worlds . . . into their reception of the (analogously composed) 'invented'" ("Affect" 236). Consequently, processes of affective worldmaking are marked by complex, spontaneous, and unpredictable associations between elements of stories and our "lifeworld experiences" (Breger, "Affect" 244) and their associated affects. As such, they hold the potential to *(re)configure* our relationships

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6   The concept of assemblage runs through much of Deleuze and Guattri's work yet is never explicitly defined. For a typology of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory, see Nail.

7   See also Claudia Breger's chapter in this volume.

not only to the respective narrative but also to ourselves, our lives, and others.

Among the many responses that narratives may prompt is also a sense of hope. Narratives can invite readers into alternative worlds in which their own identities are affirmed, accepted, and appreciated. This kind of affective worldmaking validates readers' experiences in ways that they have yet to see in the real world. For instance, non-essentialist narratives about LGBTQIA+ folks may act "as lifelines for those deprived of other forms of public acknowledgment" in the face of the "patent asymmetry and unevenness of structures of recognition" (Felski, *Uses* 43). Indeed, as José Esteban Muñoz asserts in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), the heteronormative and cisnormative present can be made more bearable if it is "known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds" (*Cruising* 27). Narratives then become part of an "archive of feelings" (Cvetkovich), which honors minoritized and marginalized communities by validating their experiences through the dissemination of their narratives. Heather K. Love's insightful study, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), demonstrates that "feelings such as nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, ressentiment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness . . . are tied to the experience of social exclusion and to the historical 'impossibility' of same-sex desire" (4). While the historical discourses surrounding sexual stigmatization cannot be undone, rendering them visible and writing back at them may reclaim agency in the face of present-day discrimination and hostility. This affective worldmaking centers on the kinds of queer potentialities most forcefully described by Muñoz: "Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality for another world" (*Cruising* 1).

Therefore, practices of affective worldmaking also engender counterpublics whose sense of affiliation coheres around shared experiences of oppression, marginalization, and discrimination. Narratives themselves may hold potentialities for alternative worlds, and the circulation of these narratives provides further ground for communities to

emerge. Affective worldmaking's relational and multi-vectoral dynamics thus also generate a sense of community among readers. This notion of worldmaking builds on queer and feminist work on the public sphere. Additionally, work on the political salience of the personal and theorizations of the dialectical relationship between the public and the private has generated a new appreciation for the worldmaking potentialities of narratives.[8] Scholars such as Muñoz, Michael Warner, Nancy Fraser, and Rita Felski—in reverse chronological order—have introduced definitions of counterpublics that emphasize texts' agential function in the creation of counter-hegemonic communities through discursive practices and embodied activism. For instance, Warner defines counterpublics as "a multicontextual space of circulation, organized not by a place or an institution but by the circulation of discourse" (85) and as "a scene in which a dominated group aspires to re-create itself as a public and, in doing so, finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group, but also with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as a public" (80). In theorizing counterpublics, Warner and Muñoz foreground rhetoric, discourse, and representation in their discussions of the dissemination of books and the emergence of performance culture.[9] In turn, Nancy Fraser, whose work they reference, evokes the importance of communal spaces that facilitate collective engagement in a shared political project. Fraser's concept of "feminist subaltern counterpublics" depends on "subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (67). For Fraser, these spaces are spaces of knowledge production: "variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lec-

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8   The feminist credo that the personal is political comes to mind here and, in the specific context of American studies, the research collective "No More Separate Spheres!" (see Davidson).

9   Warner also speaks about concrete spaces like gay bars, sex shops, etc. See Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public."

ture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places" (67). Like Warner and Muñoz, Fraser suggests that counterpublics form in relation and reaction to dominant publics. The narratives through which they do so operate on two levels: they affirm the shared ethos of members of oppressed communities, and they disrupt oppressive discourses that target them in the first place. As Rita Felski, who first introduced the notion of a "feminist counter-public" (155) in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989), holds: "The feminist public sphere, in other words, serves a dual function: internally, it generates a gender-specific identity grounded in a consciousness of community and solidarity among women; externally, it seeks to convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims, challenging existing structures of authority through political activity and theoretical critique" (168). As these discussions of feminist and queer counterpublics and their interrelation to affect studies were fundamentally grounded in questions of gender and sexuality, we will briefly trace their connections in the subsequent section.

The Personal is Political: Gender, Sexuality, and the Genealogy of Affect Studies

The so-called affective turn in the 1990s developed out of a critical confrontation with the poststructuralist emphasis on discourse and de-/construction and the accompanying disregard of materiality.[10] As part of this new materialist approach, the body and, therefore, affects, as bodily phenomena, received more attention, challenging prevalent poststructuralist inquiry. In their invigorating introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), the first anthology of its kind, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth state that it would be impossible to distill existing research on affect into a single definition. Instead,

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10   The anthology *Affekt und Geschlecht* (2014, Affect and Gender), which includes some of the most important texts in affect theory in German translation, is of particular interest for the German-speaking audience.

they highlight—much in the fashion of Roland Barthes' work—the multifaceted mosaic of affect theory by speaking of an "inventory of shimmers" (Gregg and Seigworth 11).

Nonetheless, they trace affect theory's emergence in the anglophone context by introducing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's and Adam Frank's essay, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold," as well as Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect," as starting points for further explorations in affect studies as we understand them today. Published in 1995, these essays have shaped two dominant directions in affect studies: While Sedgwick and Frank rely on Silvan Tomkins's psychobiology of various affects (1962), Massumi refers to Gilles Deleuze's take on Baruch de Spinoza's philosophy of embodied experience (1988). Gregg and Seigworth summarize: "affect as the prime 'interest' motivator that comes to put the drive in bodily drives (Tomkins); affect as an entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad becomings across human and nonhuman (Deleuze)" (6). While Tomkins conceives of affects as innate motivators for human beings in establishing a relationship to their surroundings, Massumi differentiates between affects as autonomous bodily reactions, on the one hand, and emotions as conscious states of being, on the other.

Although early works in affect studies were preoccupied with distinguishing the concept of affect from its apparent synonyms like emotion, feeling, and sentiment, recent scholarship has focused on accounting for their correlations and interdependence as well as their importance for political mobilization, community building, and identity creation. Although Massumi and some other theorists strictly distinguish affects from emotions or feelings,[11] Marta Figlerowicz argues, "it is debatable whether these three experiences are really distinct, whether they can be experienced independently of each other, and which of them is 'truest'" (5). Likewise, Sara Ahmed asserts that, although it may be possible to

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11   For a discussion of the difference between affect (as an unconscious reaction of the body to external stimuli) and emotion (as a conscious state of feeling or conventional/coded expression of affect in gestures and language), see Massumi, *Parables* 232 and Gould 26. For a distinction between affects and feelings, see Massumi, *Parables* 27 and Zournazi 5.

theoretically "separate an affective response from an [associated] emotion," this does not mean that they "are separate" in "everyday life." Rather, Ahmed asserts that "they are contiguous; they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated" ("Creating" 32). Accordingly, in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Ahmed does not define what emotions are but looks at their impact instead. Understanding emotions as social and cultural practices, which define the self's relationship to others (subjects and objects), Ahmed calls attention to their role in the formation of surfaces or boundaries that provoke either inclusion or exclusion, thereby proving emotion's public dimension.

Acknowledging the interpenetration and resonance of affect theory's starting points, Gregg and Seigworth arrange the main orientations in affect studies according to disciplines. They argue that politically engaged work in affect studies has its origin in the ways in which feminist, queer, disability, and subaltern studies understand individual experiences to be collective, "where persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide a body (or, better, collective bodies) with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm" (Gregg and Seigworth 7). Especially Cvetkovich calls attention to the feminist roots of understanding the seemingly personal as being political, which allows us to revisit the genealogy of affect studies through a focus on gender and sexuality in this book.

In the 2003 special issue on Public Sentiments of *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, affect scholars Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Pellegrini question whether feelings, emotions, and affects—as conventionally assumed—are phenomena that can only be assigned to the private realm and the intimacy of kinship, partnership, and friendship. They convincingly show how the above-mentioned phenomena play a central role in the organization of public life as so-called public sentiments: "from the deployment of affect to produce national patriotism, to the rallying of audiences on behalf of social forms of oppression and violence, to passionate calls for activism" (ibid.). Speaking of "public feelings" later in their text, Cvetkovich and Pellegrini reveal that they

strategically chose an often negatively connotated term for their special issue's title, namely "sentiment," that "[]bears the trace of that most disparaged of affective cultural forms, the 'sentimental', a term which continues to imply that particular feelings are excessive, insincere, and best relegated to the private. In other words: 'feminine'. . . . However, as feminist scholarship has also shown, sentimentality has been used to draw attention to important social issues" (ibid.). Similarly, Gregg Hendler's monograph, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2001), proposes that "feeling publicly" (11) is an affective experience in response to sentimental novels and their capacity not only to move readers privately but also to move them towards taking public action. Indeed, both Cvetkovich and Pellegrini's work and Hendler's text suggest that affect is public and political.

These connections between affect and the public sphere also found their expression in queer-feminist work on intimacy. In their book *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997), Lauren Berlant uses the example of the conservative Reagan era in US politics of the 1980s to illustrate what they coined the intimate public sphere: in public, the political manifests itself through the personal and the intimate: e.g., through campaigns against abortion, strengthening the traditional heteronormative family. According to Berlant, "institutions of intimacy" (Berlant, "Intimacy" 281) determine which narratives are privileged and thus worth striving for. Intimacies that go beyond the hegemonic conception of the heteronormative relationship between two people, privileged as a "life narrative" (Berlant, "Intimacy" 285), have not had an alternative canon, legal anchoring, or cultural manifestations so far. Thus, Berlant questions whether they are sustainable over longer periods of time. Problematizing the relationship between the hegemonic narrative of intimacy and its deviations in the delightfully titled article "Sex in Public," Berlant and Warner jointly formulate their concept of counterintimacies (562). The prerequisite for the formulation of counterintimacies is critical practical knowledge that allows them to be understood not only as transgressions from the norm or trivialized as a lifestyle but simply to be recognized as intimate. In the case of queer

counterintimacies, this should not result in a simplified emphasis on the personal life plans of gays and lesbians. Rather, the complex affective, erotic, and personal aspects of counterintimacies should be understood as public—"public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity" (ibid.).

In *The Female Complaint* (2008), Berlant further differentiates their idea of a public permeated by intimacy by discussing women's culture as one of numerous intimate publics (5). In doing so, they no longer focus only on the political content of women's culture, but also on its economic structure. Accordingly, an intimate public arises when a market opens up to selected consumers and claims to be circulating texts and goods that are of particular interest to them (ibid.). Intimate publics function—like the nations defined by Benedict Anderson (6) as imagined communities—through a feeling of belonging among strangers, which they believe existed before the establishment of a market that addresses them.[12] Berlant describes such publics, in the sense of Nancy Fraser, as "weak publics" (75), which are interested in the cultural upswing of certain groups but which do not necessarily address their structural disadvantage akin to strong publics (ibid.). Here, Berlant distances themself from the political concept of the counterpublic, which Warner formulates with recourse to Fraser: "Most nondominant collective public activity is not as saturated by the taxonomies of the political sphere as the counterpublic concept would suggest" (Berlant, *Female* 8). According to Berlant, in intimate public spheres, the political sphere is often perceived as a threat which degrades and retraumatizes rather than offering opportunities for transformation. Following Berlant's careful differentiation, we will discuss the potentials and limitations of affective worldmaking in the next section.

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12   While Anderson focuses on the role of print capitalism and the use of common, increasingly standardized languages that create an image of the national community as being natural and long-standing (Anderson 46–47), Berlant looks at the more differentiated, modern mass-consumer market that targets specific social groups by referencing common-sense notions of conventional lifeworlds and experiences of such groups (Berlant, *Female* 5).

Beyond Empathy and Identification: Potentials and Limitations of Affective Worldmaking

Narratives are particularly conducive to affective worldmaking. Their use of plot development and character perspectives invites readers into the emotional storyworlds of novels, short stories, auto/biographical pieces, narrative poetry, newspaper articles, myths, and narrative films. They present situations where readers can witness the circulation of affect in moments of personal encounters among lovers, friends, family members, strangers, and allies. This focus on ontological and psychological dimensions of characters invites readers to partake in the sharing of feelings. As mentioned above, to think of narratives as opportunities to engage with the emotional worlds of characters and narrators is a well-established practice within various traditions of literary studies concerned with the workings of affect.

This is also the gist of Shafak's gripping statement about the power of stories to "bring us together" (9). Who is the "us" in her aphorism, one might ask, and what qualities of "togetherness" does she evoke? As her anecdote exemplifies, Shafak's own narrative takes precedence over the trans woman's story, which is vital for Shafak's story and acknowledged as important, but actually never gets told. In other words, this woman is a figure in Shafak's narrative but does not possess narrative agency herself. Given the untold nature of this woman's story, what does this mean for the potential emergence of a sense of solidarity, affinity, or kinship within Shafak's narration? Therefore, Shafak's example also seems to suggest that there are limits to the sense of belonging which affective worldmaking may generate.

Reading is not a zero-sum game: While readers may respond with a sense of sympathetic identification, affect may also register utterly ambivalently. A mimetic stance towards a text's affective dimensions oversimplifies affect's much more complex workings. For one, affect also circulates outside the realm of emotional responses to characters or narrators. Moreover, non-narrative texts also operate with affective economies that do not depend on depictions of lived experience, thoughts, or feelings. In *Affect and American Literature in*

the Age of Neoliberalism (2015), Rachel Greenwald Smith argues that the "belief that literature is at its most meaningful when it represents and transmits the emotional specificity of personal experience" (1) extends neoliberalism's emphasis on the private and the individual into the realm of aesthetic reception, where readers "consume" (29) texts or emotionally "invest" (3) in the lives of the characters. Such affective attachments—which Greenwald Smith terms the "affective hypothesis" (1)—assume that feelings translate from the realm of the text into the realm of the audience.

Likewise, the theory that literary reading positively impacts readers' ethical and moral values is an appealing but perhaps ultimately not sustainable thought. The well-known empathy-altruism debate in literary studies is a great case in point. Popularized by philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, the thought that novels provide readers an occasion to see and experience the world through someone else's eyes has gained significant traction. In her book *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1997), Nussbaum argues that novels are characterized by

> a commitment to the separateness of persons and to the irreducibility of quality to quantity; its sense that what happens to individuals in the world has enormous importance; its commitment to describe the events of life not from an external perspective of detachment, as the doings and movings of ants and machine parts, but from within, as invested with the complex significances with which human beings invest their own lives. (32)

However, Nussbaum's claim about novels' ability to shape readers' sense of justice overlooks the complex interrelationships between readers, characters, narrators, and texts. For instance, her focus on realist novels leads to assumptions that do not hold for experimental novels or novels about unfamiliar worlds and lives. Missing from Nussbaum's considerations are also the potential preconceptions readers may bring to texts and their unforeseeable aesthetic and emotional responses. Certainly, the utilitarian understanding of literature's valence, which Nussbaum

employs, has been challenged by more recent work on aesthetics,[13] but the belief that literary reading can make us better people still holds strong to this day, possibly also due to the need to justify literary studies' worth in an era when neoliberalism increasingly shapes higher education.[14]

A more nuanced discussion of the relationship between reading and altruism has emerged from the scholarship of Suzanne Keen, who not only shares Nussbaum's interest in the novel's ability to create an empathetic response in its readers but also highlights the crucial role that readers play in this process. In her seminal study *Empathy and the Novel* and subsequent projects, Keen suggests that processes of "narrative empathy cannot be expected invariably to work," as readers' responses will vary (Keen, *Empathy* 72). According to Keen, "no one narrative text evokes empathy from all its readers" (Keen, "Readers' Temperament" 296). She argues that this is dependent on the respective "readers' cultural contexts and individual experiences," as these "influence the degree of their responsiveness to the emotional appeal of texts" (Keen, "Readers' Temperament" 296–297) and their resultant "collaboration in fictional worldmaking" (Keen, "Intersectional" 142). Moreover, although Keen maintains that processes of "narrative empathy" may allow readers to share the "feeling[s] and perspective[s]" of others and to empathize with their "situation and condition," she also holds that this rarely results in solidarity with members of represented minorities (Keen, "Narrative"). Indeed, even if readers "experience narrative empathy," this does not necessarily cause them to take "prosocial action in the real" (Keen, "Readers' Temperament" 297). Nonetheless, Keen still holds that "[n]arratives are extraordinarily effective devices for opening the channel of fellow feeling and breaking through barriers of difference thrown up by distance, time, culture, experience" ("Intersectional" 142).

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13   See, among others, Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* and Jacques Rancière's "The Aesthetic Revolution."

14   Rita Felski's work on literature's "uses" openly addresses the necessity to legitimize literary studies by highlighting its benefits. Her *Uses of Literature* is a case in point.

While Nussbaum and Keen—as well as the critical traditions they have shaped—approach the novel's overall potential to generate empathy in different ways, they both center their studies around a shared premise: namely, that literary reading means engaging with the lives of others, the lives of fictional or historical persons. Both critics assume that the lives and worlds of these persons are different from those of readers and that readers may thereby encounter perspectives different from their own or from those of the people with whom they interact in "real life." In other words, literary reading may introduce us to new and unfamiliar ways of seeing and knowing the world.

Affect's inherent ambivalence can generate a variety of responses from readers. *Affective Worldmaking* shifts the focus towards a different dimension of interaction between texts and audiences, such as narratives' capacity to prompt or contribute to the emergence of counterpublics. By focusing on literature's function as "'windows' into [a] presumed alterity" (Amireh and Majaj, 2), critics like Nussbaum and Keen overlook the affirmative potential literature can have for readers who can relate to the struggles depicted in texts. For example, alterity and empathy for the other is less an issue when readers experience a sense of validation of their own queer identities through the engagement with narratives about queer lives. Similarly, recovering racial histories that are often overlooked or misconstrued in mainstream historiographies can offer points of recognition for racialized communities. In the same light, amidst prevalent ethno-nationalist myths of belonging, subversive narratives can affirm alternative registers, structures, and practices of community building.

Recognition can therefore occur on (at least) two levels: it can be a moment of recognizing one's (marginalized) identity in a text; it can also be a moment of recognizing one's affective responses to a text. With regards to the first one, Sarah Nuttall, for instance, argues, "[r]eading may often be about recognizing the self as known, identifiable or acknowledged by a text, as if for the first time" (391). For, as Rita Felski highlights, recognition in reading and representation can bring about both a "moment of personal illumination and heightened self-understanding" and "practices of acknowledgment," as well as "acceptance and validation,"

in the wider social and political realm (*Uses* 30). Surely, seeing one's experiences acknowledged within narratives of various media may help to mitigate feelings of isolation and invalidation. In fact, as Hil Malatino argues with regards to transgender rage, moments of recognition may help process trauma and (re-)build resilience through witnessing that others also "share a similar crucible" (Malatino, "Though" 135). This can produce a sense of communality that seems to emanate from a shared feeling of "history" between readers, texts, characters, narrators, and authors and "their ongoing attachments and actions" (Berlant, *Female* 5). Similarly, Felski notes that reading as an "[a]esthetic experience crystallizes an awareness of forming part of a broader community." Consequently, moments of recognition in textual or interpersonal encounters "may offer solace and relief not to be found elsewhere, confirming that I am not entirely alone, that there are others who think or feel like me" (Felski, *Uses* 33). Indeed, Lauren Berlant suggests that "a tiny point of identification can open up a field of fantasy and de-isolation, of vague continuity, or of ambivalence" (Berlant, *Female* 11). Moreover, as Silvia Schultermandl suggests, readers may also "feel[] connected to an unknown reading public based on the understanding that what unites them is their experience of the affective structures a text evokes" (253), as they "become part of the text" by "invest[ing]" their "own ideas[,]" experiences, and emotions "into the text" (260).

On the other hand, members of marginalized communities are also able to engage in resistant worldmaking practices through narratives that fail to address them. To this end, Muñoz introduces the notion of "disidentification" to highlight how minoritarian communities engage in worldmaking practices by de- and reconstructing majoritarian culture to establish "alternate views of the world" (*Disidentification* 195–196). According to Muñoz, "[t]o disidentify is to read oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject" (*Disidentification* 12). Yet, as Muñoz makes clear, these strategies of narrative production and reception (*Disidentification* 72) are neither wholehearted rejections of dominant discourse nor their reproductions, but rather "both expose[] the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and

recircuit[] its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications" (*Disidentification* 31). However, moments of recognition may not only be reassuring or empowering. They can also be marked by experiences of discomfort and disruption and may even be (re-)traumatizing. As Rita Felski suggests, "moments of self-apprehension can trigger a spectrum of emotional reactions shading from delight to discomfort, from joy to chagrin" (Felski, *Uses* 29). In fact, Suzanne Keen argues that "[e]xtreme personal distress in response to narrative usually interrupts and sometimes terminates the narrative transaction" and with it affective worldmaking (Keen, "Narrative").

Recognition, however, does not only mean seeing one's identity represented in and therefore acknowledged by a narrative, but it is also a worldmaking endeavor in the sense that it asks readers to engage with and interrogate their own identities and experiences. In *Uses of Literature* (2008), Rita Felski names recognition as one particular aesthetic experience through which readers might relate to texts. Distinguishing recognition from the more unilateral practice of identification, Felski suggests that "[w]hen we recognize something, we literally 'know it again'; we make sense of what is unfamiliar by fitting it into an existing scheme, linking it to what we already know" (*Uses* 25). This etymological precision of the term 'recognition' as re-knowing something rather than identifying with something previously unknown highlights the "metaphorical and self-reflexive dimensions of literary representation" (Uses 44) and leads Felski to conclude that "[w]e do not glimpse aspects of ourselves in literary works because these works are repositories for unchanging truths about the human condition ... Rather, any flash of recognition arises from an interplay between texts and the fluctuating beliefs, hopes, and fears of readers" (*Uses* 46). Like Felski, Winfried Fluck describes recognition as a dynamic worldmaking process. Fluck terms recognition as the "in-between state" (58) readers must occupy, in order to actualize the protagonist in the fictional world they have never experienced themselves. Readers do so by drawing from their personal experiences of the world around them and bringing their own views to the text. In this vein, literary reading is an exercise not primarily in getting to know a new world but in getting to know oneself, prompted

by the aesthetic experience with a literary text. Furthermore, the ways in which readers may come to feel a text will depend on the experiences and connections they draw on and not just the texts themselves (Steinbock, 10). For, as Sara Ahmed reminds us in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), "what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival" (41) as well as the contents of a given situation or text. In other words, potential moments of affirmation and recognition are actualized differently, depending on the respective reader's intersectional positionality and the content of the respective narrative. This, in turn, also implies that a text's potential for evoking recognition and affective interpellation is not universal, guaranteed, or necessarily unproblematic. In fact, as Fraser makes clear, despite their potential for "expand[ing] discursive space[s,]" subaltern counterpublics can also be marked by "their own modes of informal exclusion and marginalization" (Fraser 67).

Moreover, Felski emphasizes that a purely reductionist reading or interpretation of texts reproduces a "naïve realism" (Felski, *Beyond* 79) which runs the risk of reducing the text purely to its political function. According to Felski, a "repoliticization of culture" (Felski, *Beyond* 167) helps to re-embed texts and their reception within broader social contexts. It highlights the dialectics of politics and aesthetics rather than neglecting one in favor of the other in a one-dimensional reading. Hence, studying the political implications of texts should not be equated with reading them as a straightforward instrument of ideology.

The study of affective worldmaking can help clarify the relationships between the aesthetic dimensions of texts and the socio-political worlds inhabited by their readers, thus giving insight into potentials for the formation and perseverance of identity and community as well as for political action via textual encounters or through inspiration from the text. By combining theoretical, literary, and analytical texts, our edited volume hopes to offer methodological impulses and reflect on the possibilities and limitations of combining affect with literary, cultural, and media studies.

Structure of the book

The structure of this edited volume reflects our engagement with various genres, media forms, and functions of affective worldmaking that we understand as the entanglement of narrative and affective structures. The contributions not only discuss but also represent and illustrate these different functions. The volume combines theoretical reflections on narrative, affect, the creation of publics—in short, the interwoven aspects we understand as affective worldmaking—and analyses of concrete examples from various media forms and various geopolitical and cultural contexts, with examples of literary and artistic practices that are consciously engaged in the project of worldmaking. In this way, the volume brings into conversation academic practices of theoretical reflection (from literary and film studies to media and discourse analysis) with artistic and activist practices concerned with challenging social norms and narratives and the creation of new social relations, affective structures, and publics.

Consequently, the book offers foundational theoretical texts and examples of academic analyses and connects these to the field of political organizing and social movements, while continuously reflecting on the interconnections of the different 'publics' or discursive and practical platforms and their differences. The transnational scope of the volume aims to detach the theoretical models discussed above from their narrow cultural and political contexts—a narrowness that frequently remains unacknowledged, suggesting an illusionary universal validity of theories originating from North America or Western Europe. The volume attempts to test the applicability of theories and concepts of affect and narrative to different spatial and temporal contexts as well as to assorted media forms. The contributions critically engage in theoretical canons of gender and affect studies and illuminate parallels and specificities to enhance a better understanding of theories of affect, gender, and sexuality, in addition to their associated analytical and methodological practices.

The question of media form and genre is not only reflected in the book's structure but is also directly discussed in the individual essays.

Using the study of narrative and storytelling as a connecting analytical mode, the contributions examine a variety of texts (in the wider sense of the word, including film, artworks, and performance) and thus bring together various fields of media and literary analysis. The contributions tackle the question of how form and content relate in different media, how narrative strategies relate to affective responses, empathy, recognition, and identification, and how the media form impacts the mode of circulation and communicative practices associated with the production and consumption of narratives.

The book's contributions are arranged in three separate parts concerned with different aspects and functions of affective worldmaking. They are enclosed by two contemporary artistic texts: the collection opens with a selection of poems by Adisa Bašić, which appear here for the first time in English translation by Mirza Purić. These poems focus on the gendered experiences of women in Bosnian-Herzegovinian post-war society. The edited collection closes with the chapter "Plan B" from the graphic novel *Zemlja–voda–zrak* (2020, Earth–Water–Air, translated by Tag McEntegart), edited by Damir Arsenijević, written by Šejla Šehabović, and illustrated by Marko Gačnik. It is part of a newly established platform of the same name, which promotes environmental humanities in Bosnia-Herzegovina at the intersection of activism, academia, and art. With these creative pieces bookending our edited collection, we aim to combine the affective experience of texts with the theoretical reflection on affect and reading offered in the book.

The first part, "Senses of Affective Worldmaking," lays out the main theoretical observations that have informed our collaborative work and the development of our concept of affective worldmaking. It uses different genres of text to highlight the multiplicity of possible approaches to this field of study. Claudia Breger's essay connects her theory of narrative worldmaking with the Deleuzian concept of affective assemblages, underlining the connections of narrative and affect, their worldbuilding properties, and the potentials and limitations of the idea of reparative reading. May Friedman makes use of the personal reflective essay to disentangle the interconnections of larger affective narratives and structures and the navigation of one's own personal life and aca-

demic practices along (or against) those normative structures. Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton's short essay exemplifies how black writers reclaim agency through writing mythology, thereby demonstrating the importance of counternarratives and histories for those excluded from dominant narratives, worldmaking practices, and publics. Lastly, a conversation with Ann Cvetkovich draws from her extensive theoretical work in affect studies and reflects on the various levels of academic, artistic, and activist practices and how these practices can help in understanding the complex interrelations between the political and the personal in public spheres and the way affective structures connect, separate, and shape them.

The second part, "Affective Be/Longing: Redefining Public Spheres," discusses the 'public sphere' as a discursive and communicative reality as well as a theoretical concept to analyze communicative structures and the circulation of norms, ideas, and values in societies. The contributions critically engage with the concept of the public: What constitutes a public or multiple publics, whose voices are heard or silenced, which rules and structures govern communication, discourse, and the reception and reproduction of discursive patterns? They ask what enables people to access dominant discourses and affective structures—i.e., what makes people feel they 'belong' or feel seen, heard, or represented within various public platforms. Si Sophie Pages Whybrew's contribution analyzes the worldmaking potential of North American science fiction stories for trans readers, reflecting on the relationship of a particular genre to a specific audience and its implications for representation and recognition. Jelena Petrović traces continuities of Marxist feminist theories of emotional and reproductive labor in contemporary art and performance in the post-Yugoslav space against the backdrop of a revisionist conservative turn. In a conversation about their graphic novel *Zemlja–voda–zrak* (Earth–Water–Air), Damir Arsenijević and Šejla Šehabović discuss 'public feelings' in response to Bosnia-Herzegovina's transition from socialism to capitalism and their complex linkages to questions of social and environmental justice. Jana Aresin outlines the way women's magazines in the immediate post-WWII period in Japan used different narrative and affective strategies to renego-

tiate identities of womanhood and femininity in the face of the disruption and delegitimization of previously dominant narratives and ideals. Heike Paul's contribution reflects on the way the motif of family separation has been used in US literature in different time periods and contexts to elicit sympathy and identification, while questioning in how far this narrative strategy challenges or reaffirms normative social relations.

The third part, "Counternarratives and Community Building," shifts the perspective from the side of the production of discourse and narratives and focuses more concretely on the reception of a multiplicity of publics. It investigates if and in what ways the emergence of different publics can potentially lead to the development of alternative communities and forms of resistance to dominant norms, ideals, and affective structures, while critically reflecting the notion of the counterpublic. The contributions focus on the political potential and limitation of alternative and marginalized forms of community building, of the role of counternarratives within society and the tension between representation and recognition within a hegemonic public sphere that is perceived as homogeneous and that exerts a normative force, and other (counter)publics that offer different forms of being, feeling, and belonging.

Dijana Simić discusses two examples of contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian fiction and their reparative potential by centering on otherwise overlooked lesbian narratives. Iveta Jansová analyses creative and participatory practices of queer media fans, in response to the absence of queer representation in mainstream media. Renate Hansen-Kokoruš's contribution is concerned with the political potential of satire and humor in challenging social norms, without alienating conservative readers. Silvia Schultermandl turns to the affective communities and new protest forms created in social media activism in response to sexual harassment and violence. Lastly, Ahmet Atay takes the COVID-19 pandemic as a starting point to reflect on the affective functions of fictional narratives and characters in times of social isolation.

Even though we have separated the contributions into different categories, based on their main focus, there is naturally an overlap between the different topics. All works reflect on both the production and reception side of narratives, how they are connected, and how affect circulates between them. And they all expand on theoretical considerations while referencing selected case studies and personal experiences.

As mentioned above, this collection aims to cover a wide geographical and temporal range but has, unsurprisingly, still left many blind spots. Nevertheless, we believe that the contributions will not only prove to be of interest to scholars of the specific regions covered here, but they also raise larger questions regarding the study of affect and the universality or limitations of foundational theoretical texts in affect studies by North American writers. We further attempted to cover a wide range of media, including literary texts of various genres, magazines, graphic novels, TV series, art exhibitions, archival projects, and social media content. As such, this book provides paradigmatic examples that are intended to serve as a starting point for the study of affective worldmaking in different media forms from a comparative perspective.

Lastly, while most of our contributions share a strong focus on analyzing factors of class, gender, and sexuality, other important identity categories that impact both the production and reception of affect in media, such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, and dis/ability, require further study in our future research. The goal of this collection is to examine the manifold ways different social groups and communities negotiate and fight for their place in society, how they define or question their own and others' identities and social norms and values through narratives in various media. It is concerned with the relation between storytelling and political and social agency—again referring to Shafak's essay, the dominant stories through which we negotiate our lived realities and identities as well as the untold and silenced stories that are yet to be uncovered and reclaimed.

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