5 Negativity/Affirmation
Moving Beyond Reverse Discourse, With – and Partially Beyond – Sara Ahmed Or: In Defense of Happiness

Introduction

Recent debates in queer as well as feminist theory have tended to be structured by binary opposition: paranoid vs. reparative reading (Cvetkovich 2012; Love 2007b; critically: Pedwell 2014; Stacey 2014), for vs. against the 'antisocial thesis' (Edelman 2004; Caserio *et al.* 2006; Muñoz 2009), negativity vs. affirmation (Love 2007a, 2007b; Halberstam 2011; Braidotti 2002). Thus, according to Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young:

> "The most prominent debates in queer theory of recent years have located the political promise of queerness in the espousal of one of two positions: one must be 'for' (a queer version of) the social or one must be, as queer, 'against' the social (as we know it). […] Such a binary, we argue, presents a false choice" (2011, 224).

Similarly, Brigitte Bargetz observes, citing Anu Koivunen:

> "Within current queer feminist debates on affect, 'two camps' (Koivunen 2010, 23) have appeared to emerge. For Koivunen, there are 'at least implicitly and metaphorically' two 'new caricatures of feminist scholars': 'those for joy, those for melancholy; those for life, those for

> death; those for reparative criticisms, those constrained by paranoia'." (2015, 583)

Some of those positioning themselves as embracing 'negativity' – such as Heather Love (2007a) and Jack (Judith) Halberstam (2011) – construe their position (which is left rather implicit) as if they believed it possible to embrace negativity without espousing affirmation precisely in virtue of doing so: as if embracing negativity meant only *opposing* an affirmation of anything, rather than, precisely, *affirming* negativity. Against such a self-misunderstanding, which fails to see or to acknowledge the paradox entailed in evaluating negativity positively, Sara Ahmed has argued (in the context of addressing the affect of shame):

> "I am not sure how it is possible to embrace the negative without turning it into a positive. To say 'yes' to the 'no' is still a 'yes'. To embrace or affirm the experience of shame, for instance, sounds very much like taking a pride in one's shame – a conversion of bad feeling into good feeling" (2006, 175; see also Ahmed 2010, 162).

Pure negativity, in other words, is an impossibility. Yet the position Ahmed takes regarding the emotion of happiness is in tension with this insight. Her treatment of the subject of happiness is riven with tension, as I aim to show in this chapter. In much of *The Promise of Happiness* (Ahmed 2010), Ahmed rejects happiness per se, for the most part without acknowledging that – as I wish to argue – this is, likewise, an impossibility. I propose that Ahmed does not take to heart the consequences of the insight that it is impossible to desire 'bad feeling' without converting it into 'good feeling' when this insight is applied to happiness and its negation, unhappiness: Effectively, her principal argument in *The Promise of Happiness* engages in a reverse discourse that promotes unhappiness as desirable or positive, yet without seeing that this is effectively to code it as the *happier* condition, or at least as a more positive state. In contrast, I argue that when happiness is understood (as it should be) as *being affected positively*, then desiring happiness is inescapable. As we shall see, much in Ahmed's writing on happiness

bears out this point. Yet her account remains contradictory in failing fully to acknowledge it. I believe that resolving this contradiction will advance critical discourse. What is needed, I argue, is not a blanket rejection of happiness as such, but an alternative, counter-hegemonic *framing* of what it might mean to be affected positively. Reclaiming the desire to be so affected – in other words, reclaiming happiness – is the theoretically more consequent lesson to be drawn from Ahmed's highly convincing political critique of the ways in which this term is framed *hegemonically*. We should not surrender happiness, and an appraisal of happiness as what is good, to hegemonic discourse – as she sets out to do (2010, 62).

But what is at stake in debating this issue is much more than Ahmed's line of theorizing happiness, in particular. By way of close-reading *The Promise of Happiness*, I wish to question the fundamental queer-theoretical consensus to the effect that queer theory is antinormative (Jagose 2015; Wiegman/Wilson 2015) or that 'the normative' exists only 'out there' in the hegemonic other (e.g., in "heteropatriarchy" [Ferguson 2004, 26–27, 29]). More than this, I question the very possibility of escaping normativity. The very term 'antinormative' is a contradiction in terms to the extent that to oppose normativity is itself a normatively charged act, if by 'normativity' we understand (as we should) any act that entails an evaluation, i.e., that assigns value. If queer theory is to live up to its self-imputed politicized character, then it needs to let go of the notion that it is normatively innocent. There is no such innocence – only competing styles of normativity. In what follows, I will work out what distinguishes hegemonic normative styles from an alternative style that is non-normalizing, based on Ahmed's analysis of happiness. Much as her analysis is riven with contradiction, it encompasses a normative style which I characterize as egalitarian and denaturalizing (and, as such, as power-cognizant rather than power-evasive [cf. Frankenberg 1993]). I argue that practicing a normative style that is self-avowedly implicated in power is politically more critical and theoretically more self-reflexive than styling one's own (queer-theoretical) position as being free of normativity. It is ultimately more in keeping with one

of Michel Foucault's central insights, contrary to a received reading of Foucault (Lemke 2007, 67–68) – and even with Friedrich Nietzsche's affirmation of the will to power. Scholarly writing that is unaware of being implicated in normativity risks being complicit more readily in hegemonic forms of normativity, which I characterize as unegalitarian and reifying (cf. Schotten 2019). Those are necessary ingredients of a *normalizing* normativity, which I critique as much as other queer feminist theorists do.

My disagreement with much queer theorizing, then, does not concern its substance – characterized in terms of "anti-morality" by C. Heike Schotten (2019, title) – so much as its self-understanding (the way in which its substance is framed at the metalevel), which I consider to be mistaken. This results, as I conclude, in a politically uncritical construction of 'queer (theory)' as being less implicated than it really is in what it contests. With Foucault, I want to insist that there is no outside to power.

Since my analysis owes much to Ahmed's work, particularly to *The Promise of Happiness*, I want to acknowledge at the outset how enriching I find her work to be as well as the large extent to which I agree with some aspects of her analysis of happiness, from which I have learned a great deal – much as I find its overall direction to be misguided.

In what follows, I first summarize Ahmed's critique of hegemonic framings of happiness. I then outline in what ways her rejection of happiness per se contradicts the implications of this critique, and is unconvincing in virtue of engaging a reverse discourse. In the next, lengthiest part of this chapter, I analyze these two main strands of the argument comprising Ahmed's account of happiness, in terms of mutually conflicting normative styles – one of them mimicking a hegemonic normative style that is unegalitarian and reifying, and the other exemplifying an alternative normative style which is egalitarian and denaturalizes normativity. Queer theory is always already normative – at its best, in just such an alternative form. Applied to happiness, I conclude, this form can be truly egalitarian only when it is non-dualistic, refusing to play happiness and unhappiness against each other in virtue of refusing to dismiss *either* of these

emotions, whether it be unhappiness (as in hegemonic discourse) *or happiness* (as rejected per se in parts of Ahmed's discourse). A counter-hegemonic normative style is receptive to both of these affects, whilst emphasizing their potential contiguity.

Ahmed's critique of hegemonic framings of happiness

The Promise of Happiness offers a highly perceptive analysis of a number of ways of invoking happiness that reinforce inequality and domination. Happiness is socially *distributed*, Ahmed argues (2010, 162): happiness for some occurs at the cost of others' unhappiness. Thus, for instance, she writes with reference to Ursula Le Guin's (1987) short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas": "We recognize how much the promise of happiness depends upon the localization of suffering; others suffer so that a certain 'we' can hold on to the good life." (2010, 195). This occurs in part in virtue of what Ahmed calls a "happiness duty" (e.g., 2010, 59): Some subjects oblige others to pursue happiness by way of pursuing particular goals, or attaining particular things ("happy objects" [2010, 20–49, 54]). "[I]f you have this or have that, if you do this or do that, then happiness is what follows", as Ahmed (2010, 29) phrases what thus amounts to a promise of happiness held out as reward for orienting towards the 'right' goals or things (2010, 45, 54, 129). In this way, pursuing happiness assumes the function of a social prescription of conformity with *hegemonic* norms, in particular. More than that, the "happiness duty" is invoked according to Ahmed as a duty to be pursued so as to make *others* happy:

> "unhappy people are represented [in positive psychology, here: by the author Michael Argyle, C.B.] as deprived, as unsociable and neurotic […]. Individuals must become happier for others: positive psychology describes this project as not so much a right as a responsibility. We have a responsibility for our own happiness insofar as promoting our own happiness is what enables us to increase other people's happiness." (Ahmed 2010, 9)

So unhappiness is constructed as a state to be avoided, not (ultimately) for the sake of those potentially affected by it, but rather for the sake of those thus wishing to be made comfortable by way of imposing a happiness duty on others – that is, by way of pressurizing others into social conformity (2010, 58, 158): *I am (un-)happy if you are (un-)happy* (2010, 91).

It is not difficult to recognize in this framing of happiness modes of dominating others that pursue the happiness of some at the expense of others – and not contingently, but with a normalizing thrust: Not to conform, for instance, to heteronormativity is here minimally *implied* to be a recipe for unhappiness, and those who will not or cannot conform are thus likely both to be *made* unhappy by such normalizing discourse, and possibly to *prefer* being unhappy, *if 'happiness' is identified with just such normalization*.

Throwing the baby out with the bathwater: Ahmed's reverse discourse

Against happiness?

This seems, in fact, to be the ground based on which much of the argument comprising *The Promise of Happiness* – but not all lines of argument pursued in this work – reject(s) happiness *as such* in favor of being unhappy (as against merely rejecting a specifically hegemonic framing of happiness, as characterized above). Ahmed writes, for instance:

> "Imagination is what makes women look beyond the script of happiness to a different fate. […] Feminist readers might want to challenge this association between unhappiness and female imagination, which in the moral economy of happiness, makes female imagination a bad thing. But if we do not operate in this economy – that is, *if we do not assume that happiness is what is good* – then we can read the link between female imagination and unhappiness

> differently. We might explore how imagination is what allows women to be liberated from happiness and the narrowness of its horizons. We might want the girls to read the books that enable them to be overwhelmed with grief." (2010, 62; emphasis added)

> "I do not want to offer an alternative definition of happiness (a good happiness that can be rescued from bad happiness), as this would keep in place the very idea that happiness is what we should promote." (2010, 217)

> "If to challenge the right to happiness is to deviate from the straight path, then political movements involve sharing deviation with others. There is joy, wonder, hope, and love in sharing deviation. If to share deviation is to share what causes unhappiness, even joy, wonder, hope, and love are ways of *living with* rather than *living without* unhappiness." (2010, 196; emphasis in the original)

But this position – rejecting happiness per se, rather than merely specific discursive framings, or modes of understanding 'happiness' (see also Ahmed 2010, 2, 77–79, 192–193) – cannot be sustained except at the cost of self-contradiction. What, after all, could be the ground of Ahmed's critique of the uneven distribution of happiness which must necessarily result from its hegemonic construction as outlined above, if not the view that it is *unjust* to deny true happiness to some (whatever this might mean to them) – as she implies herself at one point (Ahmed 2010, 63)? Or, put the other way round, how to critique the unequal distribution of unhappiness other than on the grounds that it is *unjust* for some to be (made) unhappy in ways that relate systematically to social inequality and normalization – as she implies herself at another point (Ahmed 2010, 194)? To formulate this critique is, at least implicitly, to frame unhappiness as undesirable or uncomfortable to those affected by it – and, thus, is to cede the very point which Ahmed explicitly disputes: that unhappiness is undesirable. In turn, this point entails that happiness is preferable to feeling unhappy, let alone to pronounced

suffering. Thus, as Elizabeth Stephens characterizes one aspect of Ahmed's critique of the unequal social distribution of happiness:

> "a key point of Ahmed's argument is that happiness is a political condition rather than a personal state. We see this in the way happiness is unequally distributed amongst social groups and individuals, disproportionately experienced by those subjects who occupy privileged cultural positions. As a result, Ahmed argues: 'The face of happiness looks rather like the face of privilege'" (Stephens 2015, 278).

Clearly, the latter statement (by Ahmed, as cited by Stephens) implies that experiencing happiness is to experience an advantage over and against those who are denied this experience.

Beyond dualism

Perhaps what is needed is a more differentiated view of un-/happiness than one that would either reject or affirm unhappy affective states without qualification. This becomes apparent particularly when we juxtapose Ahmed's rejection of happiness with Rosi Braidotti's affirmative feminism, which Ahmed critiques for its inverse rejection of bleakness in favor of positive affects (2010, 87). Stephens reconstructs Ahmed's general critique as follows:

> "To avoid sadness, as Braidotti encourages us to do, is to ignore the plight of those who are excluded from happiness, and to transform political oppression into a personal failure to overcome that negativity. Compulsory happiness and positivity is thus for some an additional source of suffering and sadness" (2015, 277).

This critique presupposes an evaluation of suffering and sadness as uncomfortable and (therefore) undesirable states for those affected by them, as we have seen. Yet, according to Ahmed, *it is precisely an attitude of rejection of such negative feelings that contributes to the unequal social distribution of emotions* whereby some are privileged to experience positive feelings while others are in large part excluded from that

experience. Her critique of affirmative feminism thus would seem to be that it is precisely an unqualified rejection of negative feelings that results in affective social inequality. It is, in other words, an *egalitarian* critique whose implicit normative thrust consists in the claim that it would be desirable for happiness to be accessible to all.

Obviously, this claim starkly contradicts the principal argument of the *Promise of Happiness* to the effect that to assume that happiness is what is good is to operate within the moral economy of happiness (see above; see also Ahmed 2010, 2, 13, 14, 77–79, 192–193). I posit that this contradiction is symptomatic of the impossibility of rejecting happiness wholeheartedly, or of desiring unhappiness wholeheartedly, without ambiguity or a qualifying 'but'. This is precisely because the identification of happiness, understood in the broad sense of being affected positively or benignly, with "what is good" (Ahmed, see above) is inescapable. To seek to dispute it must *necessarily* result in self-contradiction. This is what accounts for the contradictory character of the various, mutually conflicting arguments and normative styles comprising *The Promise of Happiness*: Apart from the implication of her egalitarian critique of affective social inequality, as demonstrated above – namely, that unhappiness is ultimately *un*desirable, contrary to Ahmed's explicit approach of rejecting happiness, and affirming unhappiness – she also contradicts that approach in that at times she *does* affirm positive affects as "what is good". She does so sometimes in the shape of using other terms that signify positive affects, beside the term 'happiness', while explicitly affirming this alternative as desirable. Thus she invokes "joy" as an alternative positive affect (e.g. 2010, 69). At other times, Ahmed even uses the term 'happiness' *itself* affirmatively (i.e. as something desirable, to be appreciated, to be wished for), thereby directly subverting her explicit approach of rejecting happiness as such (as against merely rejecting specific, hegemonic framings of the term). For instance, contrary to this explicit approach ("if anything I write from a position of skeptical disbelief in happiness as a technique for living well" [2010, 2]), she clearly does offer an alternative, affirmative framing of 'happiness' – as I am arguing that we should – when sketching what she refers to as "a revolutionary happiness" (2010,

198; see also Ahmed 2010, 103, 115–120). She even invokes alternative "happy object[s]" (2010, 115) despite her critical notion of such objects (2010, 198). These inconsistencies, too, are symptomatic of the fact that an approach of rejecting happiness *tout court* is unsustainable. Much in our discourse, including Ahmed's theoretical discourse, becomes unintelligible, incomprehensible, if we try to pursue this approach, since we cannot help but affirm 'happiness' if this term is understood as I propose we should understand it (see below), namely, in the general sense of 'being affected positively'. I submit that when we seem to reject happiness as such, it is really *particular notions* of happiness that we reject. (We might call our alternative, affirmative account of 'being affected positively' differently – e.g., 'joy' as an alternative to 'happiness' – or we might not. My own preference is to reappropriate the term 'happiness' for contestatory purposes rather than cede the terrain to hegemonic discourse.)

Ultimately, what I wish to critique about Ahmed's theorization of happiness is that it engages in a reverse discourse to Braidotti's, and to hegemonic constructions of happiness, in virtue of trying to reject happiness (without succeeding at it) as completely as those competing discourses reject unhappiness. In keeping with the recent debates in queer theory addressed at the beginning of this chapter, it is as if we could only be 'for' or 'against' happiness and, correspondingly, 'against' or 'for' its opposite. It is as if, with such a binary positing of the options available, it becomes impossible to qualify unhappiness *as a way of being affected negatively* which, while producing discomfort and potentially even extreme degrees of suffering, *is still to be accepted, and even opened up to*, because to reject negative emotional states will result in a biopolitical abjection and exclusion of those affected (the most) by such states – as indicated above in Stephens' words. The rationale here would be that negative states such as unhappiness and suffering cannot be wished away at will, and thus need to be accepted and attended to, without being applauded. This orientation towards negative affects entails *both* affirmation (of their reality) and negation (a recognition of the potential for severe suffering entailed in them, and thus, of the desire to escape

such suffering). As such, it entails a constitution of negative affects, such as sadness, as *both undesirable and unavoidable*.

Conversely, rather than attempting to maintain a blanket rejection of happiness, which cannot be sustained, as I have argued, happiness might simultaneously be affirmed as a desirable state and *critiqued to the extent that it is framed in hegemonic ways* that are oppressive to some of us (thus actually generating *un*happiness). I propose that this is a more coherent and a more differentiated approach to being affected positively than Ahmed's unqualified rejection of happiness as such. This approach acknowledges the impossibility of rejecting happiness (as 'being affected positively') wholeheartedly, and the ambiguity of embracing unhappiness (as 'being affected negatively'), which turns the negative into a positive (Ahmed 2006, 175; see above), thereby implicitly construing it as the ultimately *happier* or better state – in keeping with Ahmed's own insight concerning the affect of shame (formulated in another work), as cited above. In *Promise*, Ahmed does at one point acknowledge, in agreement with Michael D. Snediker (2009), that "queer affirmations of negativity are not simply negative. To embrace the negative or to say yes to a no cannot be described as a purely negative gesture. To affirm negation is still an affirmation" (Ahmed 2010, 162). But in this book as a whole, as an approach to un-/happiness, Ahmed fails to heed this very lesson. I will say more on how I conceive of the relationship between (un-)happiness as an affect and normativity (negativity vs. affirmation) further below.

To desire (political) change for the better *is* to desire greater happiness

Significantly, in some parts of *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed focuses on suffering rather than on more moderate states of unhappiness. In Chapter 2, entitled "Feminist Killjoys", she states in the general context of discussing (mere) unhappiness (e.g., 2010, 70) – in which context she casts "feminist consciousness as a form of unhappiness" (2010, 53) that she codes as constructive, as indicating "the limitations of happiness as a horizon of experience" (2010, 53) – that "[w]e could

describe happiness quite simply as a convention" (2010, 64). I consider this to be a rather un-affective characterization which fails to empathize with those excluded from happiness. But this is different elsewhere in the book, where Ahmed speaks, more dramatically, of (for instance) "misery" and "suffering" rather than only of "unhappiness" (2010, 195). Here, she emphasizes precisely the need for a willingness to open up to unhappiness and the unhappy rather than maintain an indifference towards them – in accordance with what, above, I have characterized as an egalitarian critique on Ahmed's part of affective social inequality. In line with such a more empathetic stance, Ahmed sometimes acknowledges that actually to *suffer* (rather than merely to be unhappy) is to desire to escape, or at least to reduce the intensity, of one's suffering (see, e.g., 2010, 114, 120). I feel that not to recognize this point would be to disavow how unbearable suffering, physical or otherwise, can be. Giving up on happiness (2010, 64) may seem to be possible and desirable more readily when the alternative is taken to be mere unhappiness than when what is at issue is severe suffering. Therefore, such a project may well risk giving up on those whose lives barely feel worth living, if at all. It may, in other words, entail the very indifference to the *most* unhappy which Ahmed critiques. It may be a project unaffordable to those who suffer to an extreme extent.

Without a recognition of the link between suffering and the desire for change – change, specifically, for the better – political struggle would in fact be unintelligible; it wouldn't make any sense (see also chapter 3 of this book). This point, too, is implicitly acknowledged by Ahmed when she writes with reference to the novel, *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall (1982), that the suffering depicted therein could stir in queers a desire for revolution:

> "Not only does the novel explain the unhappiness of its ending as an effect of the violence of the happiness that resides within the straight world but it locates the promise of happiness for queers in revolution against the structures – the walls – that keep that world in place." (2010, 103)

A desire for revolution, as political desire for change, would be unintelligible, devoid of sense, if we did not acknowledge (whether explicitly or without avowing our acknowledgment) that suffering makes sentient beings want to escape it; to escape the sense of acute discomfort that suffering entails. But this *is*, at least implicitly, to affirm happiness as "what is good", contrary to the argument which Ahmed presents as the main thesis of her book: What do we strive towards if we strive to reduce suffering, if not for something *better* and (in that sense) towards at least *greater* happiness, in the sense of at least a certain affective improvement? Symptomatically, Ahmed in the above quotation connotes the "promise of happiness" – and thus, happiness itself – positively, contrary to her rejection of happiness at other points in her book of the same title. This is in tension with her statement, cited above, that: "We recognize how much the promise of happiness depends upon the localization of suffering; others suffer so that a certain 'we' can hold on to the good life." (2010, 195). In the previous quotation, Ahmed clearly offers an alternative framing of happiness and even of the promise of happiness – much as elsewhere in the book she rejects such a political project, as we have seen.

Even to affirm political hope – as Ahmed appears to do (2010, 160–198) – is indirectly to affirm happiness as "what is good", for what is hope if it is not hope for greater happiness to be attained in the future; for a better condition to be ahead? Ahmed disputes that such desire is necessarily entailed in hope – which, instead, she casts as ideally an affirmation of possibility without any particular content (e.g. 2010, 197, 218–219). But if hope does not necessarily entail a desire for a *better* future, then why bother to engage in political struggle, in the first place? I submit that to seek to escape suffering entails an evaluation of it as negative, and by the same token entails an appraisal of happiness – understood as the antithesis of suffering – as positive and, as such, desirable. Political struggle, and indeed any kind of struggle for change, is ultimately impossible without a desire for happiness.

It is impossible, then, to renounce that desire and the positive evaluation of happiness which is entailed in that desire. We can only avow such desire and the corresponding evaluation of happiness as

good, or disclaim it. Conversely, it is impossible fully to embrace negative affective states, especially when they approach intense and continuous suffering, without acknowledging at least implicitly that it can verge on the unbearable to be affected by them; that this is *bad* – in the sense of making some lives unlivable. (Except in the case of masochism, which can be construed as an attainment of happiness by recourse to pain. In this case, *pain* is coded, and experienced, as affecting the subject positively.)

Queer normativity as an alternative normative style: Reframing happiness

Towards an egalitarian, denaturalizing normative style

So, what is my positive proposition with a view to framings of happiness that do not buttress hegemonic norms and existing social inequalities? I argue essentially that to construct happiness as something to be rejected per se is to remain stuck in a reverse discourse; in an oppositional mode that adheres to the 'anti' and, in virtue of doing so, adheres to binary opposition rather than questioning dualism as such: It is to accept the binary scheme of 'being either for or against' as the underlying conceptual model of the debate, including one's own position. This is to narrow one's vision as to the field of possible orientations concerning happiness and unhappiness to only two options. Above I have proposed a possible path that would open up this field of vision by way of sketching an orientation to happiness and unhappiness in which negation and affirmation are entangled rather than split apart into an either/or-ism: Specifically, I have argued that unhappiness is both unavoidable and undesirable; both to be accepted as a given (as an emotion it exceeds conscious control [Braunmühl 2012b]) and acknowledged to be a *negative* state, which it is impossible to embrace without qualification – especially when it takes the form of extreme suffering. I now want to propose that this alternative orientation to unhappiness amounts to a *normative*

style of its own, one that diverges in politically significant ways from the kinds of hegemonic framing of unhappiness and happiness analyzed so compellingly by Ahmed. It is to the two main – mutually conflicting – argumentative strands discernible in her various specific analyses pertaining to these terms that I turn as a basis for explicating what most decisively differentiates normative styles of framing happiness that are, as I argue, politically objectionable from those that are politically constructive. I qualify as politically objectionable, hegemonic framings of happiness *accounts which reinscribe social inequality whilst naturalizing that very effect*. I evaluate as instantiating an alternative, truly counter-hegemonic normative style of framing happiness those moments in Ahmed's account of happiness in which she critiques framings of it that are *unegalitarian* and *reifying*. As I argue, this qualifies the normative style pursued by Ahmed herself in those moments as egalitarian as well as denaturalizing.

Before going into the details of this analysis, I want to make explicit what understanding of happiness and unhappiness I am operating with (as already alluded earlier). I understand happiness in the broad terms of 'what affects a subject positively' and unhappiness in terms of 'what affects a subject negatively'.[1] Such a broad understanding of happiness is important because, firstly, it can encompass many more specific framings of the term, including hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ones. Secondly, while this definition can appear to make tautological my claim that happiness is something one cannot not want (to borrow a formulation from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [1994, 285]) – after all, if happiness is what affects you positively, then 'of course' it is desirable for everyone – committing to this definition assumes specific importance in the context of Ahmed's work because it helps sort out a lack of clarity, even a certain amount of confusion, which shapes her analysis of happiness in my view: At times, Ahmed implies (as we have seen) that it is in such a broad sense that she rejects happiness, and refuses

1 This characterization has obvious resonances with Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza's philosophy (2018), but I do not wish to take on board other aspects of the latter.

the notion of it as desirable, endorsing unhappiness as a preferred alternative – a position that is unsustainable, as argued earlier. At other times, Ahmed's rejection seems to be targeted more specifically at the *hegemonic* account of happiness which she reconstructs in her book (as briefly sketched above). In such moments of her analysis, she designates a preference either for alternative terms for 'being affected positively' – in particular, 'joy' – or even uses the term 'happiness' affirmatively (see above). This is to imply the very opposite of the first analytic move: namely, that happiness is indeed "what is good". So, *The Promise of Happiness* is starkly self-contradictory in that at times it endorses happiness or joy as a good (i.e., feelings that affect a subject positively by my definition), and at times rejects such endorsement as operating within the moral economy of happiness (2010, 62; see above), i.e. as itself being a hegemonic move. Since Ahmed refuses to offer a definition of happiness (2010, 217; see above), the contradiction does not necessarily surface as clearly as it could. (By contrast, the 'macro-definition' of happiness I have offered above helps bring the contradiction into focus.) But this leaves her entire analysis unclear. Her book thus conflates two alternative objects of critique: happiness per se (however understood) vs. happiness as framed in specific (especially hegemonic) discourses. The confused character of the analysis results from the fact that Ahmed does not distinguish these two very different objects of critique at all. Instead, she extrapolates from a critique of happiness *as framed hegemonically* to a rejection of happiness *as such*, as if the one clearly followed from the other – when it doesn't. So, her rationale for doing so remains obscure: Ahmed never justifies this move. (For instance, when she writes: "Happiness involves a form of orientation: the very hope for happiness means that we get directed in specific ways, as happiness is assumed to follow from some life choices and not others." [2010, 54]. Ahmed here too closely identifies striving for happiness with the particular '(happy) objects' it is hegemonically being tied to.) While this unaccounted-for leap renders her analysis intellectually somewhat unsatisfactory in my view, I think that it is all the more rewarding, as a way of clarifying what is at stake, to differentiate between these two main (mutually incompatible) strands

of Ahmed's account in order to determine their very different political trajectories. That will be one task to be pursued in the remainder of this chapter. My position that we require alternative framings of 'being affected positively' to a hegemonic framing of happiness is in line with the *first* strand of Ahmed's argument, as just recapitulated: It is in line with the nature of her critique specifically of the *hegemonic* account of happiness as summarized above.

The inescapability of normativity

To understand happiness as what affects a subject positively is to understand affect and normativity to be mutually implicating: feelings entail an evaluation of how a given state of affairs affects *me* (cf. Hochschild 2003, 230–232). This is also implied by the very notion of 'positive' and 'negative' affects, of course, as commented upon by Bargetz (2015) and Koivunen (2010), for instance (see above). Conversely, I would argue that happiness and unhappiness are affective dimensions of normativity: evaluations of something as good or bad (for me). Normativity is *felt*, and as such, is an inescapable aspect of sensing and thinking the world.

With this view, I feel that I am upsetting what might be termed a queer-theoretical, counter-hegemonic consensus: The view that it is possible to produce discourse (e.g. theory) *without* being normative. This consensus comes in several variants: the notion of queer theory's *anti*normativity, which Annamarie Jagose (2015) has shown to be extremely widespread among queer theorists, or (as an alternative term to seemingly similar effect), that it is possible to produce discourse that is "nonnormative" (Ferguson 2004, 14, 144, 148). Jagose argues:

> "Queer theory's antinormativity, we can say, is evident in its anti-assimilationist, anticommunitarian or antisocial, anti-identitarian, antiseparatist, and antiteleological impulses. While each of these terms indexes lively archives of sharp and sometimes unresolved discussion rather than points of critical consensus, what is notable is the extent to which the legitimacy and foundational rightness of

> different – sometimes even oppositional – positions are clinched via claims to antinormativity, a value that is thus universally acknowledged as the unimpeachable criterion for determining the queerness of any political stance or strategy." (2015, 27)

When I take issue with the queer-theoretical tenet that there is an outside to normativity (Wiegman/Wilson 2015) by insisting that it is impossible to escape the latter, it is important that we be clear as to what I do and do not mean by this. My understanding of normativity has nothing to do with Jürgen Habermas' position, that is to say, with any notion of transcendental norms understood as necessary 'foundations' that legislate an 'ought' which is presumed to be universally valid and binding on all (cf. Butler 1992, 6–8, 20, n. 4). Nor do I mean by 'normativity' what is meant by this term in much queer theory, namely, a *normalizing* discourse that distinguishes, for instance, between 'normal' and 'perverse' or 'pathological' (Wiegman/Wilson 2015; Jagose 2015; Berlant/Warner 1998). One of my central points is that *this is not the only form of normativity there is* (contra Wiegman/Wilson 2015). Normativity is to be understood in terms of *any practice or doing that has an evaluative dimension*. Queer discourse is not politically innocent of encoding values and, as such, hierarchies. It is, in this sense, implicated in what Foucault designated as an inextricable relationship between power and knowledge, or "truth and power" (1980). Contrary to readings of Foucault which assume that he was only interested in producing genealogies of how normative discourses have come into being and how they operate, as if this meant not being implicated, *oneself*, in a normative discourse in the sense which I wish to give this term (see, e.g., Lemke 2007, 67–68), I want to insist that the most consequent lesson to be derived from Foucault's dictum that there is no knowledge or discourse outside power is to recognize that this applies to *everyone*'s knowledge production, including one's own. And that, moreover, being implicated in power relations and dynamics includes being implicated in one of the central mechanisms Foucault has shown power to operate by (and which queer theorists are so fond of emphasizing [Jagose 2015, 27, 31]): in normative discourse.

But this is not the end of the story: I am not saying that everyone, including queer theorists, is complicit in the production of a *normalizing* normativity.[2] Yet we are more likely unwittingly to be so complicit if we do not realize that there is a normative dimension to our own discourse, and in what particular ways it is normative. This is why I propose that it would be politically productive to work with the notion of *competing normative styles*, which may but need not be normalizing. This can assist us in cultivating an awareness of exactly how we participate in normativity. What I want to question, then, is the notion that there can be such a thing as a *value-free* – and, as such, a non-hierarchizing – discourse. Such a notion would be thoroughly un-Foucauldian. It would be highly depoliticizing. This is why it is of consequence how we use the term, 'normativity': *if we restrict it to hegemonic, normalizing styles of normativity*, as is common in queer theory (see above), *then we perpetuate the power-charged myth of a value-free, non-hierarchizing discourse, in terms of which we implicitly frame our own, alternative position*.

Just as I have argued that there is no outside to 'desiring happiness', so I am now arguing that there is no outside to normativity. Since 'happiness' on the view I am defending here *is* the feeling that associates with the evaluation of something as 'good', both points are connected: Subjects cannot *not* evaluate, and subjects cannot not *want* at an affective level what they evaluate as good. Conversely, merely in feeling

2 While Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson (2015), too, state that (contrary to much queer theory) there is no outside to the normative, they implicitly treat normalization – i.e., a hegemonic form of normativity – as the only form of normativity there is. By contrast, I am concerned to show that normativity can take other, counter-hegemonic and politically constructive forms. (While Wiegman and Wilson view norms as *productive*, they question the possibility of a political alternative to normalization and do not allow for what I am referring to as a politically *constructive* – in the sense of 'counter-hegemonic' – mode of normativity.) For an in-depth discussion of the notions of normalization and normativity in their complexities, mutual relationship, and 'productive' vs. 'negative' dimensions, which considers in detail the changing usage of these terms by Foucault as well as their highly discrepant forms of usage 'post-Foucault', see chapter 4 and the Introduction to this book.

happy or closer to unhappiness, we engage normativity; we evaluate a situation or object.

The normative character of Ahmed's discourse

Contrary to what Ahmed presupposes in her Editorial to a *New Formations* special issue on "Happiness" (Ahmed 2007), her own discourse is very clearly normative. Like other queer theorists, Ahmed presumes that it is possible to stand outside normativity, and that standing outside normativity is characteristic of Cultural Studies approaches to happiness. This presumption is entailed in part in the following passages from the Editorial, entitled "The Happiness Turn":

> "Critiques of the happiness industry that call for a return to classical concepts of virtue not only sustain the association between happiness and the good, but also *suggest that some forms of happiness are better than others*. This distinction between a strong and weak conception of happiness *is clearly a moral distinction*: some forms of happiness are read as worth more than other forms of happiness, because they require more time and labour. Noticeably, within classical models, the forms of happiness that are higher are linked to the mind, and those that are lower are linked to the body. [...] *Hierarchies of happiness may correspond to social hierarchies that are already given*." (2007, 11; emphasis added)

Ahmed then juxtaposes a Cultural Studies approach to happiness to the above, as an alternative to it, and states:

> "Cultural Studies might in its very worldly orientation, offer a rigorous analysis of happiness and power: ideas of happiness support concepts of the good life that take the shape of some lives and not others. Reading happiness is a matter of reading how happiness and unhappiness are distributed and located within certain bodies and groups." (2007, 11)

The two kinds of approach are juxtaposed by Ahmed *as alternatives* – as if a Cultural Studies approach as envisaged by Ahmed did *not* "*suggest that*

some forms of happiness are better than others" (see the previous quotation above). This involves picturing Cultural Studies in much the way Foucauldian genealogy is commonly understood, namely, as outlining (histories of) normative discourses and practices as if this entailed the possibility of abstaining from a normative perspective oneself, qua analyst (see above). As I have already argued, such abstinence is impossible. Ahmed is, in the above quotations, disavowing the normative character of her own 'take' on happiness. Yet its normative character is clear even in the above quotations themselves, which imply that a Cultural Studies perspective upon happiness is *better* than classical concepts of virtue. In her book, *The Promise of Happiness*, moreover, Ahmed at times (and at the end of the book) very clearly offers an alternative framing of 'happiness' that she presents as *better* than hegemonic or conventional framings of the term. Thus, the book ends in part on the following note, which is a comment on the film *Happy-Go-Lucky* (2008) by Mike Leigh:

> "In coming to value that which is not valued, and in finding joy in places that are not deemed worthy, we learn about the costs of value and worth. The happy-go-lucky character might seem unweighed by duty and responsibility; she might seem light as a feather. She might seem careless and carefree. But freedom from care is also a freedom to care, to respond to the world, to what comes up, *without defending oneself or one's happiness against what comes up*." (2010, 222; emphasis added)

This statement postulates an alternative value hierarchy (a distinction between better and worse forms of happiness) which, as such, is clearly normative. Yet, unlike the notions of happiness critiqued by Ahmed – both classical ones and those found in the "happiness industry" (see above: Ahmed 2007, 11) – Ahmed in the above quotations is promoting an *egalitarian* notion of happiness: "*Hierarchies of happiness may correspond to social hierarchies that are already given*", as she observes in a critical vein. As against hierarchies of happiness that thus reinforce existing social inequalities, Ahmed proposes *valuing that which is not valued*, not *deemed worthy*. Her account (here as elsewhere) renders explicit the act of

assigning value, and denaturalizes what is being naturalized or reified in hegemonic accounts of happiness, which Ahmed refers to as making "*a moral distinction* [in which, C.B.] some forms of happiness are read as worth more than other forms of happiness" (2007, 11; emphasis added; see above). Throughout her critiques of conventional, unegalitarian accounts of happiness, Ahmed analyzes how value within them is coded as *inhering in things* (e.g., in "happy objects"; see above) or *in subjects* (see also Ahmed 2010, 33–34, 37). Thus, in "The Happiness Turn", she writes:

> "Rather than assuming happiness is simply found in 'happy persons,' we can consider how claims to happiness make certain forms of personhood valuable. Attributions of happiness might be how social norms and ideals become affective, as if relative proximity to those norms and ideals creates happiness." (2007, 10)

In contrast, Ahmed's own account often – though not throughout – assigns value as an overt act ("coming to value that which is not valued"; see above). She even explicitly writes that: "Where we find happiness teaches us what we value rather than simply what is of value." (2010, 13). I suggest that this is the second decisive difference between a politically constructive, progressive normative style and a hegemonic one, beside their respective egalitarian vs. unegalitarian character: an alternative normative style is one that is explicit about assigning value – and thus, in establishing hierarchies of (political) priority – rather than naturalizing its own normative commitments. For instance, in critiquing inequality or normalizing, exclusionary features of dominant notions of happiness, Ahmed's writing explicitly commits itself to equality as a political value. I agree with her when, in referring to a contrary normative style that would reify hierarchies of value as intrinsically given (i.e. as inhering in subjects or objects themselves), Ahmed in the above example qualifies this as "a moral distinction [in which, C.B.] some forms of happiness are read as worth more than other forms of happiness". Schotten has similarly constructed queer theory in terms of (Nietzschean) "anti-morality" (2019, 213), critiquing morality as foreclosing critical contest, and as therefore depoliticizing (drawing on earlier interventions by Gayle Rubin and

Judith Butler) (Schotten 2019, 222–223). In line with the contrast drawn by Schotten between morality and politics, Schotten's and Ahmed's own discourses could, in contrast, be referred to as politicizing rather than moral, in that processes of naturalization or reification are here explicitly traced as such in a critical (egalitarian and anti-normalizing) spirit. Such denaturalization makes visible how power is entailed in discursive and other social processes that ostensibly are not about power; i.e. in which power is reified as a matter of 'nature' or 'fact' (cf. Schotten 2019, 222–223). I suggest that the latter forms the essence of a *normalizing* normative style: To declare something as 'normal' or 'abnormal' ('perverse'; 'pathological') is to *naturalize normativity*, and is thus to naturalize the very hierarchical relationship between these two terms that their distinction serves to establish (see chapter 4). It is to designate one's referent as *intrinsically* normal or abnormal, and thereby to render invisible the act or technology of normal*ization*. That is what both Schotten and Ahmed refer to in terms of the moral, and to which I would juxtapose the term "politicizing", understood as a practice oriented to rendering power relations and effects explicit. These practices – a normalizing, hegemonic style vs. a counter-hegemonic, egalitarian, denaturalizing normative style – could be qualified with a view to their relationship to power as power-evasive vs. power-cognizant, respectively, leaning on Ruth Frankenberg's terminology (1993). While a hegemonic normative style isn't *necessarily* normalizing, it can be identified by its anti-egalitarian and reifying character. (There might be other variants of such reification, after all, than a [specifically modern] [Foucault 1990, esp. 143–144] normalizing discourse.)

So, what I refer to as a politicizing, power-cognizant normative style is very much what Schotten qualifies as a (queer) discourse of "anti-morality". The problem with the latter designation is that it can be read as obfuscating the normative character of such discourse and that – contra Schotten – this is precisely to risk naturalizing the political effects, the power-effects, of (queer) discourse. In perpetuating the myth of a discourse innocent of power effects, distinguishing only between "morality" and "anti-morality", or the normative and anti- or nonnormative, is ultimately as un-Foucauldian as it is un-

Nietzschean (however Foucault and Nietzsche may themselves have understood their own respective discourses). For, the point that gets lost in such nomenclature is that moral *and* politicizing discourses are *both* normative, albeit in contrasting ways. To presume one's own discourse to be free of normativity or a 'will to power' would be profoundly uncritical.

Competing normative styles in Ahmed's discourse on happiness

Specified to the matter of happiness and unhappiness, an important task for an alternative, queer normative style is to denaturalize the ways in which "[h]appiness is expected to reside in certain places, those that approximate the taken-for-granted features of *normality*" (Ahmed 2007, 9; emphasis added). Such denaturalization would promote the recognition that there is no such thing as 'happiness as such'; that happiness only ever comes in alternative discursive framings, and that no one framing must be mistaken for 'happiness as such' (beyond its generic understanding as 'being affected positively', whatever that might mean to any one subject). For, it is a *naturalizing, reified* account of happiness that obscures the politically loaded character of hegemonic framings of the term, as critiqued by Ahmed (see above). For instance, constructions of happiness that Ahmed characterizes as coercive (2010, 91, 212) or disciplinary (2010, 8) in that they are aimed at compelling subjects to pursue very specific goals as a means to attaining happiness (so as to make others happy) can assume such a function only in virtue of naturalizing the connection between happiness and certain particular, supposed "happy objects". Denaturalization makes coercive prescriptions as to what happiness must mean to anyone the subject of critique, namely, for reifying a specific framing of 'happiness' which is then imposed upon others in the name of social conformity. Denaturalization thus makes discourses of happiness explicit as discourses and, as such, debatable. This forestalls their moral, coercively prescriptive character.

I venture the argument that 'happiness' construed in an alternative, normative but counter-hegemonic manner, as indicated above, is *not* subject to the critique Ahmed levels at conventional narratives of the term. Thus, in many strands of her argument in *The Promise of Happiness*, it is clear that the alternative framing of 'happiness' which she does offer (while at other times protesting that she does not want to offer such; see above) is non-dualistic in the sense that she refrains from playing off 'happiness' and 'unhappiness' against each other. This contrasts both with hegemonic notions of happiness and with affirmative feminism, as critiqued by Ahmed in Braidotti (see above). As we have seen earlier, sadness and other negative feelings in both of these discourses tend to be rejected – which rejection Ahmed argues results in socially excluding those associated with, or affected by, such feelings.

I see a clear instance of a counter-hegemonic, non-normalizing normative style in what earlier I have characterized as an egalitarian critique, advanced by Ahmed, of the unequal social distribution of happiness. It is neither 'for' nor 'against' unhappiness in any simple sense (unlike other strands of argument in *Promise*), but avows unhappiness as experienced by the unadjusted and subordinated as both a sad or negative state that some have to endure, and a state to be acknowledged – especially given that the hegemonic discourse of happiness, as sketched earlier, *contributes* to the unhappiness of those who will not or cannot conform. Due to the "happiness duty", or "compulsory happiness" (Stephens 2015, 277; see above), some pursue their own happiness at the cost of others (by urging social conformity upon them). This diagnosis exposes that it is unjust to reject or – put with a nod to psychoanalysis – to repudiate unhappiness or even suffering; to set up happiness and unhappiness as mutually exclusive opposites, one construed as positive and desirable, the other as abject. Ahmed in this strand of her argument in *Promise* is thus critiquing, on my reading, an approach to un-/happiness that operates on the model of a *reified hierarchical opposition*. Thus, she writes:

> "I submit that if unhappiness cannot be willed away by the desire for happiness, then the desire for happiness can conceal signs of

> unhappiness or project them onto others who become symptoms of the failure to be happy. To desire only happiness in a world that involves tragedy is to ask others to bear the burden of that tragedy." (2010, 279, n. 12)

> "The freedom to be unhappy is not about being wretched or sad, although it might involve freedom to express such feelings. The freedom to be unhappy would be the *freedom to be affected by what is unhappy*, and to live a life that might affect others unhappily." (2010, 195; emphasis added)

> "It is thus possible to give an account of being happily queer that does not conceal signs of struggle." (2010, 118)

The relationship between happiness and unhappiness is here formulated as one of potential contiguity rather than of mutual exclusivity or repulsion, in which only one of these feelings would be avowed at the cost of the other. The openness or receptivity entailed in Ahmed's alternative formulations forestalls an exclusionary effect vis-à-vis those living with (the most) unhappiness. This is what enables the egalitarian trajectory of Ahmed's alternative framing of happiness, contrary to the ultimately unegalitarian (exclusionary) trajectory of the dualistic accounts offered by Braidotti – as read by Ahmed – as well as hegemonically.

But at other points in *The Promise of Happiness*, where Ahmed dismisses the association of happiness with what is good as intrinsically operating within the moral economy of happiness, she postulates an equally reified, inverted hierarchical opposition, as already indicated. This 'anti-happiness' strand of her argument, as it might be called, produces an exclusionary effect of its own – which I find coercive vis-à-vis those who avow happiness as good (as affecting subjects positively), in that to do so is dismissed as succumbing to hegemonic logic. As such, this move is unegalitarian, promoting affective social inequality even if it privileges unhappiness over happiness rather than the other way round. It also naturalizes, rather than denaturalizing, the normative

hierarchy which Ahmed is establishing at this point in her account of happiness. Avowing happiness as good is here, after all, constructed as an orientation *intrinsically* subject to what she analyzes as the moral economy of happiness, thus ruling out in principle any counter-hegemonic point of view alternative to her own: Ahmed's own view is naturalized as intrinsically superior and enlightened, whereas any other perspective is a hegemonic perspective. (If elsewhere in *Promise*, Ahmed writes that "[h]appiness can involve an immanence of coercion, the demand for agreement" [2010, 212], I perceive the said move by her as demanding just such agreement in a rather coercive manner.) This is itself to mimic a hegemonic normative style, as characterized above. It is also clearly to contradict Ahmed's own avowals of an alternative framing of happiness, made elsewhere in the book (see above).

Conclusion: 'Counter-hegemonic/hegemonic' as a non-dualistic distinction

Only a non-dualistic framing of happiness and unhappiness, which refuses to dismiss *either* of these emotions, is truly egalitarian. In fact, Ahmed's critique of exclusionary framings of happiness – to the effect that these result in *social* exclusion and a devaluation of the unhappy (2010, 9) – is unintelligible in its critical force *except* when happiness is avowed as desirable (in virtue of affecting subjects positively). Otherwise, there could be nothing objectionable about the unequal social distribution of un-/happiness, and nothing desirable about seeing these affects distributed more equally amongst subjects. We can *both* avow as desirable the experience of 'being affected positively' (whether we refer to it as happiness, as joy or otherwise) *and simultaneously* acknowledge unhappiness as real, something that won't go away and without which political critique, resistance and struggle would be unthinkable – yet without 'hyping' pain and suffering, and without idealizing lives experienced as unlivable by those concerned. This would be to practice a politics that is self-consciously

normative, *otherwise*: Namely, egalitarian and denaturalizing, rather than generating reified social hierarchies.

To be sure, the normative style framing Ahmed's egalitarian critique of hegemonic 'happiness' along these lines (as instantiated in parts of her argument, though not throughout *Promise*) is hierarchizing, too – *in a certain sense*. It is hierarchizing in the sense that critiquing an unequal social distribution of unhappiness is to imply that it would be just for happiness to be (more) equally distributed, and thus, that it is *better to feel happy than to feel bad or unhappy*. Happiness here, too, is thus being normatively privileged over and against unhappiness. Moreover, as we have seen, in "The Happiness Turn", Ahmed (2007) implicitly, but transparently privileges the take on happiness which she proposes (qua Cultural Studies' take) as better than the established approaches which she is questioning. This, too, is to establish a hierarchy of 'better' and 'worse' that is clearly normative. But this occurs in an *egalitarian* vein which contests affective *social* hierarchies (see above) that systematically privilege some categories of subjects over others, when it comes to access to happiness or – put in other terms – to being affected positively. Moreover, a counter-hegemonic normative style as I have characterized it in this chapter, based on Ahmed's writing about happiness, is overt about postulating a value hierarchy or a set of political priorities – thus acknowledging the potential for alternative priorities and, hence, the possibility of contesting any one set of values – rather than reifying any one such set as inhering in the objects which, or in the subjects who, are being constructed in its terms as their *intrinsic* value.

'Normativity' and 'antinormativity' have, alternatively, been construed in terms of a binary opposition, i.e. as mutually exclusive (as Wiegman and Wilson [2015] argue occurs in queer theory; an argument I find convincing) *or* the very difference between the two has been leveled (as happens when Wiegman and Wilson assert that there is no escaping a *normalizing* normativity [2015; see above and note 2 to this chapter; see also Wiegman 2012, Ch. 6]). These theoretical alternatives, taken together, resonate with the pattern of a meta-dualism of the kind identified by Lena Gunnarsson (2017) to pertain to separateness

vs. inseparability or – as I have reread Gunnarsson in the Introduction to this book – between identity or affinity vs. (hypostatized) difference, one of which tends to be privileged one-sidedly at the cost of the other within the different context of feminist debates on intersectionality. In the queer-theoretical context to which I am referring here, both alternatives collude in a shared consensus that treats normativity and normalization as coextensive. It is this consensus that I wish to question, and to which I have sought to formulate a theoretical alternative through distinguishing between qualitatively (politically) different, hegemonic vs. counter-hegemonic normative styles. This alternative moves beyond the above meta-dualism that would have us either dilute the very distinction between queer antinormativity and a normalizing normativity, or would construct the former as an '*outside*' to normativity altogether; as politically 'pure' or innocent.

As should be clear from this book as a whole, I propose the distinction between a hegemonic and a counter-hegemonic normative style – and conceive of the distinction between the terms 'hegemonic'/'counter-hegemonic', more generally – as a *non-dualistic distinction* (see chapter 1 for more on this notion). If counter-hegemonic and hegemonic moments of discourse conflict – which should be obvious and which we must surely hope they do – I would at the same time view their relationship as one of interdependency in the sense that they are mutually constitutive: On the one hand, as argued in chapter 3, the human subject is discursively constituted and, hence, resistance takes place in terms that cannot but relate in some way to discourses that have achieved a certain amount of hegemony. On the other hand, as chapter 3 has made equally apparent, it is at least partially in virtue of resistance (especially its affective dimension) that discourses transform over time, historically speaking. The relationship between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses (as well as the practices framed in terms of them) can thus be viewed as chiastic: they are mutually implicated, yet distinct and even mutually antagonistic at the same time. In both of these aspects we are dealing with a relational distinction; in the strong sense that neither term is autonomous and in the weaker, yet equally important sense that the

tension between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices *qualifies* as a form of relation or connection. This conception guards against the danger of a binary opposition that would situate the counter-hegemonic entirely outside of what it opposes, idealizing it as immune to political complicity and what Paul Gilroy has so felicitously described as "antagonistic indebtedness" (1993, 191).

The subject of this book – the persistence of dualism in much critical theory – attests to the power hegemonic discourses hold over even the most sustained efforts to move beyond them. I hope that this book has contributed in some small measure to this movement and, more specifically, to the collective undertaking of rendering poststructuralist theory as well as Cultural Studies *more* critical. 'Producing critical theory' is, in this sense, an unending task, rather than a goal that could be achieved in any final sense. In this chapter, I hope to have sketched constructively (based on Ahmed's example) what kind of progressive, even queer normative style might orient us in the labor of 'radicalizing' theory – as much as practice – further; of pushing ever further *beyond* any inadvertent complicities with unegalitarian discursive and social arrangements, including a normalizing, hegemonic normativity.