Chapter 25

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QUEER FEELINGS

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In this essay, originally a chapter from her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Ahmed explores the political potential of queer feeling in heteronormative culture. Through a phenomenological and performative account of the formation of bodies and identities, social and public spaces, and the enforcement of norms, Ahmed traces how queer feelings are produced. Arguing that living with norms produces queer affects of shame and melancholia, Ahmed considers how queers inhabit norms differently in relation to the idealization of the family, processes of grieving, and the distributions of pleasures. While agreeing that queer theory is anti-normative, Ahmed argues that queer does not have to mean a choice between assimilation or transgression; neither can it be free from norms or transcend the global circuits of capital. Her claim is that it is rather in the moment of queer's proximity to (hetero) normativity—the uncomfortable fit of queer bodies to heteronormative spaces—that queer can be at its most transformative.

> As the immigrant makes visible the processes of production, she also exemplifies the idea that the family is in need of protection because it is losing its viability, increasingly posed in the horrors of the imaginary as needing ever more fierce strategies of security to ensure its ideal of reproducing itself. It is this connection that is hidden – a relation between the production of life (both discursive and reproductive) and global production.
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> (Goodman 2001: 194)

THE REPRODUCTION OF LIFE itself, where life is conflated with a social ideal ("life as we know it") is often represented as threatened by the existence of others: immigrants, queers, other others. These others become sources of fascination that allow the ideal to be posited as ideal through their embodiment of the failure of the ideal to be translated into being or action. We might note that "reproduction" itself comes under question.

The reproduction of life—in the form of the future generation—becomes bound up with the reproduction of culture, through the stabilisation of specific arrangements for living ("the family"). The family is idealisable through the narrative of threat and insecurity; the family is presented as vulnerable, and as needing to be defended against others who violate the conditions of its reproduction. As Goodman shows us, the moral defence of the family as a way of life becomes a matter of "global politics". [. . .] What needs closer examination is how heterosexuality becomes a script that binds the familial with the global: the coupling of man and woman becomes a kind of "birthing", a giving birth not only to new life, but to ways of living that are already recognisable as forms of civilisation. It is this narrative of coupling as a condition for the reproduction of life, culture and value that explains the slide in racist narratives between the fear of strangers and immigrants (xenophobia), the fear of queers (homophobia) and the fear of miscegenation (as well as other illegitimate couplings).

These narratives or scripts do not, of course, simply exist "out there" to legislate the political actions of states. They also shape bodies and lives, including those that follow and depart from such narratives in the ways in which they love and live, in the decisions that they make and take within the intimate spheres of home and work. It is important to consider how compulsory heterosexuality—defined as the accumulative effect of the repetition of the narrative of heterosexuality as an ideal coupling—shapes what it is possible for bodies to do,[1] even if it does not contain what it is possible to be. Bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force. The work of repetition involves the concealment of labour under the sign of nature. I want to argue that norms surface *as* the surfaces of bodies; norms are a matter of impressions, of how bodies are "impressed upon" by the world, as a world made up of others. In other words, such impressions are effects of labour; how bodies work and are worked upon shapes the surfaces of bodies. Regulative norms function in a way as "repetitive strain injuries" (RSIs). Through repeating some gestures and not others, or through being orientated in some directions and not others, bodies become contorted; they get twisted into shapes that enable some action only insofar as they restrict capacity for other kinds of action.

I would suggest that heteronormativity also affects the surfaces of bodies, which surface through impressions made by others. Compulsory heterosexuality shapes bodies by the assumption that a body "must" orient itself towards some objects and not others, objects that are secured as ideal through the fantasy of difference. Hence compulsory heterosexuality shapes which bodies one "can" legitimately approach as would-be lovers and which one cannot. In shaping one's approach to others, compulsory heterosexuality also shapes one's own body, *as a congealed history of past approaches*. Sexual orientation is not then simply about the direction one takes towards an object of desire, as if this direction does not affect other things that we do. Sexual orientation involves bodies that leak into worlds; it involves a way of orientating the body towards and away from others, which affects how one can enter different kinds of social spaces (which presumes certain bodies, certain directions, certain ways of loving and living), even if it does not lead bodies to the same places. To make a simple but important point: orientations affect what it is that bodies can do.[2] Hence, the failure to orient oneself "towards" the ideal sexual object affects how we live in the world, an affect that is readable as the failure to reproduce, and as a threat to the social ordering of life itself.

Of course, one does not have to do what one is compelled to do: for something to be compulsory shows that it is not necessary. But to refuse to be compelled by the narratives of ideal heterosexuality in one's orientation to others is still to be affected by those narratives; they work to script one's orientation as a form of disobedience. The affects of "not following" the scripts can be multiple. We can consider, for example, the psychic as well as social costs of loving a body that is supposed to be unloveable for the subject I am, or loving a body that I was "supposed to" repudiate, which may include shame and melancholia (Butler 1997a;

Braidotti 2002: 53). The negative affects of "not quite" living in the norms show us how loving loves that are not "normative" involves being subject to such norms precisely in the costs and damage that are incurred when not following them. Do queer moments happen when this failure to reproduce norms as forms of life is embraced or affirmed as a political and ethical alternative? Such affirmation would not be about the conversion of shame into pride, but the enjoyment of the negativity of shame, an enjoyment of that which has been designated shameful by normative culture (see Barber and Clark 2002: 22–29).

I could ask the question: How does it feel to inhabit a body that fails to reproduce an ideal? But this is not my question. Instead, I wish to explore "queer feelings" without translating such an exploration into a matter of "feeling queer". Such a translation would assume "queerness" involves a particular emotional life, or that there are feelings that bodies "have" given their failure to inhabit or follow a heterosexual ideal. Of course, one can feel queer. There are feelings involved in the self-perception of "queerness", a self-perception that is bodily, as well as bound up with "taking on" a name. But these feelings are mediated and they are attached to the category "queer" in ways that are complex and contingent, precisely because the category is produced in relation to histories that render it a sign of failed being or "non-being".[3] In examining the affective potential of queer, I will firstly consider the relationship between norms and affects in debates on queer families. I will then discuss the role of grief in queer politics with specific reference to queer responses to September 11. And finally, I will reflect on the role of pleasure in queer lifestyles or countercultures, and will ask how the enjoyment of social and sexual relations that are designated as "non-(re)productive" can function as forms of political disturbance in an affective economy organised around the principle that pleasure is only ethical as an incentive or reward for good conduct.

(Dis)comfort and norms

It is important to consider how heterosexuality functions powerfully not only as a series of norms and ideals, but also through emotions that shape bodies as well as worlds: (hetero) norms are investments, which are "taken on" and "taken in" by subjects. To practise heterosexuality by following its scripts in one's choice of some love objects—and refusal of others—is also to become invested in the reproduction of heterosexuality. Of course, one does not "do" heterosexuality simply through whom one does and does not have sex with. Heterosexuality as a script for an ideal life makes much stronger claims. It is assumed that all arrangements will follow from the arrangement of the couple: man/woman. It is no accident that compulsory heterosexuality works powerfully in the most casual modes of conversation. One asks: "Do you have a boyfriend?" (to a girl), or one asks: "Do you have a girlfriend?" (to a boy). Queer subjects feel the tiredness of making corrections and departures; the pressure of this insistence, this presumption, this demand that asks either for a "passing over" (a moment of passing, which is not always available) or for direct or indirect forms of self-revelation ("but actually, he's a she" or "she's a he", or just saying "she" instead of "he" or "he" instead of "she" at the "obvious" moment). No matter how "out" you may be, how (un) comfortably queer you may feel, those moments of interpellation get repeated over time, and can be experienced as a bodily injury; moments which position queer subjects as failed in their failure to live up to the "hey you too" of heterosexual self-narration. The everydayness of compulsory heterosexuality is also its affectiveness, wrapped up as it is with moments of ceremony (birth, marriage, death), which bind families together, and with the ongoing investment in the sentimentality of friendship and romance. Of course, such sentimentality is deeply embedded with public as well as private culture; stories of heterosexual romance proliferate as a matter of human interest. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue:

"National heterosexuality is the mechanism by which a core national culture can be imagined as a sanitised space of sentimental feeling" (Berlant and Warner 2000: 313).

We can consider the sanitised space as a comfort zone. Normativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it. The word "comfort" suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it also suggests an ease and easiness. To follow the rules of heterosexuality is to be at ease in a world that reflects back the couple form one inhabits as an ideal. Of course, one can be made to feel uneasy by one's inhabitance of an ideal. One can be made uncomfortable by one's own comforts. To see heterosexuality as an ideal that one might or might not follow—or to be uncomfortable by the privileges one is given by inhabiting a heterosexual world—is a less comforting form of comfort. But comfort it remains and comfort is very hard to notice when one experiences it. Having uncomfortably inhabited the comforts of heterosexuality for many years, I know this too well. Now, living a queer life, I can reflect on many comforts that I did not even begin to notice despite my "felt" discomforts. We don't tend to notice what is comfortable, even when we think we do.

Thinking about comfort is hence always a useful starting place for thinking. So let's think about how it feels to be comfortable. Say you are sinking into a comfortable chair. Note I already have transferred the affect to an object ("it is comfortable"). But comfort is about the fit between body and object: my comfortable chair may be awkward for you, with your differently shaped body. Comfort is about an encounter between more than one body, which is the promise of a "sinking" feeling. It is, after all, pain or discomfort that return one's attention to the surfaces of the body *as body*. To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting, the surfaces of bodies disappear from view. The disappearance of the surface is instructive: in feelings of comfort, bodies extend into spaces, and spaces extend into bodies. The sinking feeling involves a seamless space, or a space where you can't see the "stitches" between bodies.

Heteronormativity functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape. Those spaces are lived as comfortable as they allow bodies to fit in; the surfaces of social space are already impressed upon by the shape of such bodies (like a chair that acquires its shape by the repetition of some bodies inhabiting it: we can almost see the shape of bodies as "impressions" on the surface). The impressions acquired by surfaces function as traces of bodies. We can even see this process in social spaces. As Gill Valentine has argued, the "heterosexualisation" of public spaces such as streets is naturalised by the repetition of different forms of heterosexual conduct (images on billboards, music played, displays of heterosexual intimacy and so on), a process which goes unnoticed by heterosexual subjects (Valentine 1996: 149). The surfaces of social as well as bodily space "record" the repetition of acts, and the passing by of some bodies and not others.

Heteronormativity also becomes a form of comforting: one feels better by the warmth of being faced by a world one has already taken in. One does not notice this *as a world* when one has been shaped by that world, and even acquired its shape. Norms may not only have a way of disappearing from view, but may also be that which we do not consciously feel. Queer subjects, when faced by the "comforts" of heterosexuality may feel uncomfortable (the body does not "sink into" a space that has already taken its shape). Discomfort is a feeling of disorientation: one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled. I know that feeling too well, the sense of out-of-place-ness and estrangement involves an acute awareness of the surface of one's body, which appears *as* surface, when one cannot inhabit the social skin, which is shaped by some bodies, and not others. Furthermore, queer subjects may also be "asked" not to make heterosexuals feel uncomfortable by avoiding the display of signs of queer intimacy, which is itself an uncomfortable feeling, a restriction on what one can do

with one's body, and another's body, in social space.[4] The availability of comfort for some bodies may depend on the labour of others, and the burden of concealment. Comfort may operate as a form of "feeling fetishism": some bodies can "have" comfort, only as an effect of the work of others, where the work itself is concealed from view.[5]

It is hence for very good reasons that queer theory has been defined not only as anti-heteronormative, but as anti-normative. As Tim Dean and Christopher Lane argue, queer theory "advocates a politics based on resistance to all norms" (Dean and Lane 2001: 7). Importantly, heteronormativity refers to more than simply the presumption that it is normal to be heterosexual. The "norm" is regulative, and is supported by an "ideal" that associates sexual conduct with other forms of conduct. We can consider, for example, how the restriction of the love object is not simply about the desirability of *any* heterosexual coupling. The couple should be "a good match" (a judgement that often exercises conventional class and racial assumptions about the importance of "matching" the backgrounds of partners) and they should exclude others from the realm of sexual intimacy (an idealisation of monogamy, that often equates intimacy with property rights or rights to the intimate other as property). Furthermore, a heterosexual coupling may only approximate an ideal through being sanctioned by marriage, by participating in the ritual of reproduction and good parenting, by being good neighbours as well as lovers and parents, and by being even better citizens. In this way, normative culture involves the differentiation between legitimate and illegitimate ways of living whereby the preservation of what is legitimate ("life as we know it") is assumed to be necessary for the well-being of the next generation. Heteronormativity involves the reproduction or transmission of culture through how one lives one's life in relation to others.

For queer theorists, it is hence important that queer lives do not follow the scripts of heteronormative culture: they do not become, in Judith Halberstam's provocative and compelling term, "homonormative" lives (Halberstam 2003: 331). Such lives would not desire access to comfort; they would maintain their discomfort with all aspects of normative culture in how they live. Ideally, they would not have families, get married, settle down into unthinking coupledom, give birth to and raise children, join neighbourhood watch, or pray for the nation in times of war. Each of these acts would "support" the ideals that script such lives as queer, failed and unliveable in the first place. The aspiration to ideals of conduct that is central to the reproduction of heteronormativity has been called, quite understandably, a form of assimilation.

Take, for instance, the work of Andrew Sullivan. In his *Virtually Normal* he argues that most gay people want to be normal; and that being gay does not mean being not normal, even if one is not quite as normal as a straight person (to paraphrase Homi Bhabha, "almost normal, but not quite"). So he suggests that one can aspire to *have* a heterosexual life without *being* heterosexual: the only difference would be the choice of one's love object. As he puts it:

> It's perfectly possible to combine a celebration of the traditional family with the celebration of a stable homosexual relationship. The one, after all, is modelled on the other. If constructed carefully as a conservative social ideology, the notion of stable gay relationships might even serve to buttress the ethic of heterosexual marriage, by showing how even those excluded from it can wish to model themselves on its shape and structure.
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> (Sullivan 1996: 112)

Here, gay relationships are valued and celebrated insofar as they are "modelled" on the traditional model of the heterosexual family. Indeed, Sullivan explicitly defines his project as a way of supporting and extending the ideal of the family by showing how those who are "not

it" seek to "become it". Gay relationships, by miming the forms of heterosexual coupling, hence pledge their allegiance to the very forms they cannot inhabit. This mimicry is, as Douglas Crimp (2002) has argued, a way of sustaining the psychic conditions of melancholia insofar as Sullivan identifies with that which he cannot be, and indeed with what has already rejected him. As Crimp remarks, Sullivan is "incapable of recognising the intractability of homophobia because his melancholia consists precisely in his identification with the homophobe's repudiation of him" (Crimp 2002: 6). Assimilation involves a desire to approximate an ideal that one has already failed; an identification with one's designation as a failed subject. The choice of assimilation—queer skin, straight masks—is clearly about supporting the violence of heteronormative distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate lives.[6]

As Judith Butler has argued, one of the biggest problems in campaigns for gay marriage is precisely the way that they may strengthen the hierarchy between legitimate and illegitimate lives. Rather than the hierarchy resting on a distinction between gay and straight, it becomes displaced onto a new distinction between more and less legitimate queer relationships (Butler 2002: 18). As she asks, does gay marriage "only become an 'option' by extending itself as a norm (and thus foreclosing options), one which also extends property relations and renders the social forms for sexuality more conservative?" (Butler 2002: 21). In other words, if some of the rights of heterosexuality are extended to queers, what happens to queers who don't take up those rights; whose life choices and sexual desires cannot be translated into the form of marriage, even when emptied of its predication on heterosexual coupling? Do these (non-married) queers become the illegitimate others against which the ideal of marriage is supported?

Of course, the question of gay marriage remains a political dilemma. For not to support the extension of the right of marriage to gay relationships could give support to the status quo, which maintains the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate lives on the grounds of sexual orientation. As Judith Butler (2002) argues, the social and psychic costs of not having one's relationship recognised by others (whether or not the recognition is determined by law) are enormous especially in situations of loss and bereavement (see the following section). I want to enter this debate by considering how the political choice of being queer or straight (or an assimilated queer) can be contested. Butler herself contests the choice through adopting a position of ambivalence. Whilst I recognise the value of such ambivalence, I want to suggest that more reflection on queer attachments might allow us to avoid positing assimilation or transgression as choices.

To begin with, we can return to my description of what we might call a queer life. I suggested that "ideally" such lives will maintain a discomfort with the scripts of heteronormative existence. The reliance on this word is telling. For already in describing what may be queer, I am also defining grounds of an ideality, in which to have an ideal queer life, or even to be legitimately queer, people must act in some ways rather than others. We need to ask: How does defining a queer ideal rely on the existence of others who fail the ideal? Who can and cannot embody the queer ideal? Such an ideal is not equally accessible to all, even all those who identify with the sign "queer" or other "signs" of non-normative sexuality. Gayatri Gopinath (2003), for example, reflects on how public and visible forms of "queerness" may not be available to lesbians from South Asia, where it may be in the private spaces of home that bodies can explore homo-erotic pleasures. Her argument shows how queer bodies have different access to public forms of culture, which affect how they can inhabit those publics. Indeed, whilst being queer may feel uncomfortable within heterosexual space, it does not then follow that queers always feel comfortable in queer spaces. I have felt discomfort in some queer spaces, again, as a feeling of being out of place. This is not to say that I have been *made* to feel uncomfortable; the discomfort is itself a sign that queer spaces may extend some bodies more than others (for example, some queer spaces might extend the mobility of

white, middle-class bodies). At times, I feel uncomfortable about inhabiting the word "queer", worrying that I am not queer enough, or have not been queer for long enough, or am just not the right kind of queer. We can feel uncomfortable in the categories we inhabit, even categories that are shaped by their refusal of public comfort.

Furthermore, the positing of an ideal of being free from scripts that define what counts as a legitimate life seems to presume a negative model of freedom; defined here as *freedom from norms*. Such a negative model of freedom idealises movement and detachment, constructing a mobile form of subjectivity that could escape from the norms that constrain what it is that bodies can do. Others have criticised queer theory for its idealisation of movement (Epps 2001: 412; Fortier 2003). As Epps puts it: "Queer theory tends to place great stock in movement, especially when it is movement against, beyond, or away from rules and regulations, norms and conventions, borders and limits . . . it makes fluidity a fetish" (Epps 2001: 413). The idealisation of movement, or transformation of movement into a fetish, depends upon the exclusion of others who are already positioned as *not free in the same way*. Bodies that can move with more ease may also more easily shape and be shaped by the sign "queer". It is for this reason that Biddy Martin suggests that we need to "stop defining queerness as mobile and fluid in relation to what then gets construed as stagnant and ensnaring" (Martin 1996: 46). Indeed, the idealisation of movement depends upon a prior model of what counts as a queer life, which may exclude others, those who have attachments that are not readable as queer, or indeed those who may lack the (cultural as well as economic) capital to support the "risk" of maintaining antinormativity as a permanent orientation.

Queer lives do not suspend the attachments that are crucial to the reproduction of heteronormativity, and this does not diminish "queerness", but intensifies the work that it can do. Queer lives remain shaped by that which they fail to reproduce. To turn this around, queer lives shape what gets reproduced: in the very failure to reproduce the norms through how they inhabit them, queer lives produce different effects. For example, the care work of lesbian parents may involve "having" to live in close proximity to heterosexual cultures (in the negotiation with schools, other mothers, local communities), whilst not being able to inhabit the heterosexual ideal. The gap between the script and the body, including the bodily form of "the family", may involve discomfort and hence may "rework" the script. The reworking is not inevitable, as it is dependent or contingent on other social factors (especially class) and it does not necessarily involve conscious political acts.

We can return to my point about comfort: comfort is the effect of bodies being able to "sink" into spaces that have already taken their shape. Discomfort is not simply a choice or decision—"I feel uncomfortable about this or that"—but an effect of bodies inhabiting spaces that do not take or "extend" their shape. So the closer that queer subjects get to the spaces defined by heteronormativity the more *potential* there is for a reworking of the heteronormative,[7] partly as the proximity "shows" how the spaces extend some bodies rather than others. Such extensions are usually concealed by what they produce: public comfort. What happens when bodies fail to "sink into" spaces, a failure that we can describe as a "queering" of space? When does this potential for "queering" get translated into a transformation of the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality?

It is important, when considering how this potential is translated into transformation, that we do not create a political imperative; for example, by arguing that all lesbian parents should actively work to interrupt the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality. As Jacqui Gabb shows, some lesbian parents may perceive their families to be "just like other families" (Gabb 2002: 6; see also Lewin 1993). Now, is this a sign of their assimilation and their political failure? Of course, such data could be read in this way. But it also shows the lack of any direct translation between political struggle and the contours of everyday life given the ways in which queer subjects occupy very different places within the social order. Maintaining an

active positive of "transgression" not only takes time, but may not be psychically, socially or materially possible for some individuals and groups given their ongoing and unfinished commitments and histories. Some working-class lesbian parents, for example, might not be able to afford being placed outside the kinship networks within local neighbourhoods: being recognised as "like any other family" might not simply be strategic, but necessary for survival. Other working-class lesbian parents might not wish to be "like other families": what might feel necessary for some, could be impossible for others. Assimilation and transgression are not choices that are available to individuals, but are effects of how subjects can and cannot inhabit social norms and ideals.[9] Even when queer families may wish to be recognised as "families like other families", their difference from the ideal script produces disturbances—moments of "non-sinking"—that will require active forms of negotiation in different times and places.

To define a family as queer is already to interrupt one ideal image of the family, based on the heterosexual union, procreation and the biological tie. Rather than thinking of queer families as an extension of an ideal (and hence as a form of assimilation that supports the ideal), we can begin to reflect on the exposure of the failure of the ideal as part of the work that queer families are doing. As Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan suggest, we can consider families as social practices, and "more as an adjective or, possibly, a verb" (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 2001: 37). Families are *a doing word and a word for doing*. Indeed, thinking of families as what people do in their intimate lives allows us to avoid positing queer families as an alternative ideal, for example, in the assumption that queer families are necessarily more egalitarian (Carrington 1999: 13). Queer lives involve issues of power, responsibility, work and inequalities and, importantly, do not and cannot transcend the social relations of global capitalism (Carrington 1999: 218). Reflecting on the work that is done in queer families, as well as what queer families do, allows us to disrupt the idealisation of the family form.

This argument seems to suggest that queer families may be just like other families in their shared failure to inhabit an ideal. But of course such an argument would neutralise the differences between queer and non-queer families, as well as the differences between queer families. Families may not "be" the ideal, which is itself an impossible fantasy, but they have a different relation of proximity to that ideal. For some families the ideal takes the shape of their form (as being heterosexual, white, middle-class, and so on). The "failure" to inhabit an ideal may or may not be visible to others, and this visibility has effects on the contours of everyday existence. Learning to live with the effects and affects of heterosexism and homophobia may be crucial to what makes queer families different from non-queer families. Such forms of discrimination can have negative effects, involving pain, anxiety, fear, depression and shame, all of which can restrict bodily and social mobility. However, the effects of this failure to embody an ideal are not simply negative. As Kath Weston has argued, queer families often narrate the excitement of creating intimacies that are not based on biological ties, or on established gender relations: "Far from viewing families we choose as imitations or derivatives of family ties created elsewhere in their society, many lesbians and gay men alluded to the difficulty and excitement of constructing kinship in the *absence* of what they called 'models' " (Weston 1991: 116, see also Weston 1995: 93). The absence of models that are appropriate does not mean an absence of models. In fact, it is in "not fitting" the model of the nuclear family that queer families can work to transform what it is that families can do. The "non-fitting" or discomfort opens up possibilities, an opening up which can be difficult and exciting.

There remains a risk that "queer families" could be posited as an ideal within the queer community. If queer families were idealised within the queer community, then fleeting queer encounters, or more casual forms of friendship and alliance, could become seen as failures, or less significant forms of attachment. Queer politics needs to stay open to different ways of

doing queer in order to maintain the possibility that differences are not converted into failure. Queer subjects do use different names for what they find significant in their lives and they find significance in different places, including those that are deemed illegitimate in heteronormative cultures. The word "families" may allow some queers to differentiate between their more and less significant bonds, where significance is not assumed to follow a form that is already given in advance. For others, the word "families" may be too saturated with affects to be usable in this way. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's vision of the family, for instance, is "elastic enough to do justice to the depth and sometimes durability of nonmarital and/or nonprocreative bonds, same-sex bonds, nondyadic bonds, bonds not defined by genitality, 'step'-bonds, adult sibling bonds, nonbiological bonds across generations, etc" (Sedgwick 1994: 71). But hope cannot be placed simply in the elasticity of the word "family": that elasticity should not become a fetish, and held in place as an object in which we must all be invested. The hope of "the family" for queer subjects may exist only insofar as it is not the only object of hope (see Chapter 8 [of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*], for an analysis of hope). If we do not legislate what forms queer bonds take—and presume the ontological difference between legitimate and illegitimate bonds—then it is possible for queer bonds to be named as bonds without the demand that other queers "return" those bonds in the form of shared investment.

It is, after all, the bonds between queers that "stop" queer bodies from feeling comfortable in spaces that extend the form of the heterosexual couple. We can posit the effects of "not fitting" as a form of queer discomfort, but a discomfort which is generative, rather than simply constraining or negative. To feel uncomfortable is precisely to be affected by that which persists in the shaping of bodies and lives. Discomfort is hence not about assimilation or resistance, *but about inhabiting norms differently*. The inhabitance is generative or productive insofar as it does not end with the failure of norms to be secured, but with possibilities of living that do not "follow" those norms through. Queer is not, then, about transcendence or freedom from the (hetero)normative. Queer feelings are "affected" by the repetition of the scripts that they fail to reproduce, and this "affect" is also a sign of what queer can do, of how it can work *by working on* the (hetero)normative. The failure to be non-normative is then not the failure of queer to be queer, but a sign of attachments that are the condition of possibility for queer. Queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us.

Queer grief

The debate about whether queer relationships should be recognised by law acquires a crucial significance at times of loss. Queer histories tell us of inescapable injustices, for example, when gay or lesbian mourners are not recognised as mourners in hospitals, by families, in law courts. In this section, I want to clarify how the recognition of queer lives might work in a way that avoids assimilation by examining the role of grief within queer politics. There has already been a strong case made for how grief supports, or even forms, the heterosexuality of the normative subject. For example, Judith Butler argues that the heterosexual subject must "give up" the potential of queer love, but this loss cannot be grieved, and is foreclosed or barred permanently from the subject (Butler 1997a: 135). As such, homosexuality becomes an "ungrievable loss", which returns to haunt the heterosexual subject through its melancholic identification with that which has been permanently cast out. For Butler, this ungrievable loss gets displaced: heterosexual culture, having given up its capacity to grieve its own lost queerness, cannot grieve the loss of queer lives; it cannot admit that queer lives are lives that could be lost.