

(Para)paranoia: Affect as Critical Inquiry

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What does knowledge do – the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? How, in short is knowledge performative, and how best to move among its causes and effects? (Sedgwick 2003: 124)

Pregnant.

Sleeping over at my house in

May 2013 [The war in spilling over the border into]

We wake up to two explosions.

One after the other.

The rest of the family, not noticing the sounds, continue sleeping.

You immediately check the news.

Nothing.

They mentioned a gas explosion.

But if it was a gas explosion how come we heard two explosions?

In the good old analogico-digital days we would lay in bed listening to explosions, but at that time we almost knew, or at least we thought we knew, whom the explosions were targeting.

This time it was different.

We return to sleep.

20 minutes after the phone calls start ticking in.

It is family and friends from near and far: (), ,

, ...

Different parts of the world and different time zones, who want to make sure that we are all alright.

In a world shaped by Trumpian politics, neo-fascism, proxy- and Hot/Cold wars, can we still afford suspicion as one of the main *modi operandi* within critical theory and cultural studies? The situation requires of us to be no less critical to the politics and urgencies that we are subjected to, but to refrain queer, feminist & literary scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's now almost two-decade old phrasing, sited above, we might want to ask our selves "what does knowledge do – the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows?". Sedgwick posed these questions in her essay "Reparative Reading and Paranoid Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid That You Probably Think This Essay Is About You" (2003) in which she proposes the reparative practice or reading as a tool to circumvent the habitual paranoid hermeneutics of suspicion. Today the essay still provides an important wake-up-call to remind us that our epistemological and methodological toolbox needs to be repacked in response to the multiple urgencies and contingencies facing us today.

Written against the backdrop of the AIDS crisis and Reaganism in the US in the 1980s and Sedgwick's own diagnosis with terminal breast cancer, the essay sparked

a lot of methodological inspiration within arts and cultural studies, affect studies, queer and feminist studies. The essay opens up to a possibility to read or practice for reparative ends, rather than staying within the paranoid “hermeneutics of suspicion” which according to Sedgwick, following Paul Ricoeur, has become the habitual form of practicing knowledge within critical theory. However, Sedgwick’s essay was equally criticized for aligning critical theory with paranoia and understating critical theory’s impact and its importance in revealing power structures in society in favour of more affect-oriented and ameliorative practices (Hemmings). In what follows, I want to suggest that the reparative practice is not anti-critical, but critical in its performance: it has to enact the very same paranoia it sets out to criticise, in order to arrive at the reparative practice. I suggest that the reparative practice is a (para)paranoid practice – or a self-reflexive form of paranoia in which the subject is fully aware of its own paranoia, but it is only through a stylisation of the paranoid position that the subject is able to fashion a reparative practice. In addition, I wish to update the rather analogue, belated Cold War paranoia in Sedgwick’s essay to a digital (para)paranoia of the 21st century. To do so, I will draw on my own anecdotal encounters of being in the proximity to a feeling of what we might call feeling “car-bombed”, living and working on and off in Beirut, Lebanon between 2005-2013, in which numerous explosions took place, a method informed by Jane Gallop’s Anecdotal Theory (Gallop). The anecdotal will further be qualified by a reading of the seminal piece by The Atlas Group *My Neck is Thinner than A Hair*, in which Walid Raad in collaboration with Tony Chakar and Bilal Khbeiz intelligently worked on the public feelings in the aftermath of the Lebanese wars (1975 -1991) and gathered multiple documents in relation to the car-bombs detonated in Beirut during that period (Raad and The Atlas Group). My contribution to the discussion of suspicion in *Diffractions* is to propose that the reparative practice is not to do away with paranoia and suspicion all together, but rather that the reparative-positioned reader or

practitioner transforms the paranoid impulses into a creative, enabling and reflexive practice. More broadly, I find Sedgwick's concept of the reparative practice useful to inform a practice of artistic research, in which the critical enterprise precisely resides in a practice of the senses or what we might call affect as critical inquiry in itself.

To expand more fully on the relationship between the reparative practice and critical practice, I will work my way through the questions: How is the reparative practice critical? And how can we consider affect as the very basis of critical inquiry?

(Para)paranoia as method

The work of The Atlas Group as well as many of the Lebanese artists that emerged after the Lebanese wars is interesting to revisit to devise other epistemological and methodological tools that (para)paranoia gives rise to. *In My Neck is Thinner than a Hair* Raad, Chakar and Khbeiz set up a research collective which assembles various materials including documents, interviews with locals, news footage, and photographs concerning one particular car detonated in the neighbourhood of Furn El Chebak. The neighbourhood is located close to the Green Line, which divided Beirut into East and West during the Lebanese wars. The project also entails a collection of archival photographs taken by photojournalists immediately after an explosion, documenting the engine that is often all that remains after a detonated car-bomb and a map of all the car-bombs detonated in Beirut during the Civil War. The Atlas Group is notoriously known for embodying a sort of paranoid aesthetics, in which the art works are referred to as files, which are not produced by the artist, but offered to him by agents including secret service officers, explosions experts and doctors. Subjects that in large are considered accountable and trustworthy in society. The art scene in Beirut has often been seen as almost too emblematic of a post-modern relativism, blurring fact with fiction, questioning authorship and authenticity, found footage with fabricated footage in the absence of one consensual

history of the war^[1]. My aim here is not to resurrect that whole debate here, but rather to see what kind of methods, it offers us to address the urgencies of our present. As such, I will not deliver an analysis or critical judgement of The Atlas Group's work, since that has already been done extensively (Lepecki; Wilson-Goldie), but rather use the piece's conceptual and aesthetic method to help inform a notion of the reparative practice and affect as a form of critical inquiry. *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair* is interesting to revisit in this regard, since the piece conceptually deals with the affect or everyday structures of feelings that occurs following the protracted war period. In addition, the work combines analogue and digital media in a complex multi-layered performance, which in my view can be seen as the way in which the reparative positioned practitioner gathers the fragments she is left with into something like a whole. This assemblage does not form a stable and consistent whole, that seeks to restore an irreparable past, but forms a critical fabulation for the future.

To further advance the conceptual and aesthetic toolbox of (para)paranoia I also draw on cultural theorist and feminist scholar Sianne Ngai's work on paranoia in her book *Ugly Feelings* (Ngai). Drawing on various debates around language, feminism and conceptual poetry Ngai notes how women, queers, people of colour, former colonised subjects and people with disabilities are denied the status of criticality, because we always arrive too late or are construed "belated". Through the conceptual poetry of writers such as Juliana Spahr and Diana Ward, Ngai develops a certain kind of female self-reflexive paranoia, or (para)paranoia, in which the subject knows that she is always already reactively construed and belated, yet, this very belatedness or complicity becomes the very condition of agency. According to Ngai, paranoia is precisely valorised as knowledge when claimed by some subjects or "denied the status of epistemology" when claimed by others:

[P]aranoia can be denied the *status* of epistemology when claimed by some subjects, while valorized for precisely that status when claimed by others. In the former case (female paranoia), a mode of knowledge structured by an affective orientation already involving the cognition that power operates systemically will be reduced to its subjective implications alone (an ignoble 'emotionalism'); in the latter (male), paranoia's cognitive dimensions will be emphasized as an enabling condition for knowledge (Ngai 302).

Reading Ngai's definition of paranoia as a form of knowledge when claimed by some and an emotionalism when claimed by others, next to The Atlas Group's works that are documents, offered to the group by doctors and scientists embody a similar (para)paranoid logic. When presented by the gang of fictive agents, the work is requiring or demanding of its audience a status of truth. And it is precisely since it borders on the undecidability between artistic/scientific, enabling/pathological paranoia that it is able to wrest the paranoia from a stiffening, deadlock narrative and to become an enabling, creative practice.

Propelled by Ngai, the Atlas Group and my own anecdotal experiences, I have paranoidly mimicked and mirrored Sedgwick's composite sketch of paranoia, which she spends her entire essay outlining to arrive at the reparative practice, to update the reparative practice's criticality to a form of (para)paranoia.

Paranoia is anticipatory. (Para)paranoia is meanwhile and & at the same time.

Paranoia is reflexive and mimetic. (Para)paranoia is habit and practice.

Paranoia is a strong theory. (Para)paranoia is a poor mapping

Paranoia is a theory of negative affects. (Para)paranoia is a theory of affects.
Paranoia places its faith in exposure. (Para)paranoia does not place its faith in exposure.

(Para)paranoia is meanwhile and & at the same time.

Back in the living room in _____, we gather around the TV set to watch the breaking news reporting *LIVE* from what had happened, and what is happening, Now, outside the apartment, on the other side of the wall, 50m up the road and 50m down the road, where the two rockets struck.

As we watch the television transmitting *LIVE*, we discuss what to do: how to evacuate the family, while at the same time continuing the day as planned, meeting up with our friends for a picnic in _____

Even though the time that had passed might not have been more than 20 minutes, it felt like hours. The time as I experienced it was extremely slowed down, as if my inner camera was recording everything in 50,000 frames per second.

The competing formats created a time code conflict between the different frame rates in the room with the TV set broadcasting live in 25 frames per second and that of my internal one broadcasting at 50,000 per second.

My _____, pleased that _____ and _____ were calling from _____ and having lived her whole life in this volatile situation, did not seem to share the same panic that I tried to suppress, now that I knew that the rockets were small and homemade and their damage limited.

Downstairs, at the _____, yet another temporality was unfolding.

The _____ was mourning their _____ coming home from the war in _____ in a coffin.

We finally left the house and drove the less than 10 km into the _____.

Life there, the *LIVE*, or the real time seemed to go on unnoticed.

People there did not take much notice of the events in
The Marathon had just finished;
people drinking coffee in the cafés;
a woman packing her car to go to with her children.
Our time hooked up to normative time and life continued as usual.
We went to with our .

The first imperative of paranoia, according to Sedgwick, is that there must be no bad surprises. Surprise is what the paranoid tries to eliminate by knowing in advance what will come in the future. As a result, paranoia has a complex relationship to temporality that “burrows backward and forward because there must be no bad surprises” and “news [must] be already known” (Sedgwick 130). While (para)paranoia shares a complex relationship to temporality it seems to steer this complexity even further.

In Ngai’s reading of Diana Ward’s poem “Imaginary Movie”, she notes how over-the-top usages of repetition of the conjunction in the stanza “meanwhile & and at the same time”, link two terms that independently signify the temporal coexistence of events “meanwhile” and “at the same time”. To Ngai this incident, in which the poem’s subjects, who are watching the screen to find themselves spoken for in advance, opens up to two relationships to time existing within the same stanza or space: one that is “overdetermined simultaneity or contemporaneousness” and at the same time a “sense of redundancy and belatedness”(Ngai 305). Returning to my own experience described above, I want to suggest that the conjunction captures what I elsewhere has called “affect’s time”, when an affective experience enables a possibility of multiple different temporalities exist within in the same space (Dirckinck-Holmfeld).

In the essay “What is a Critic”, Irit Rogoff suggests a notion of “geography in real time” as the moment in which “some nebulous half- acknowledged entity, previously no more than a vague unease or a partially avowed recognition, crashes into our own reality by becoming a reality itself. The events of September 11 were an instance of suddenly being forced to live in real time.” (Rogoff 4). While 9/11, can be seen as the last real televisual event, in which the world’s clocks were synched to the time of American broadcasting agencies, I want to consider the ways in which my own experience opened up to a different experience of the “(a)live”, which was not televisual, but digitally perceived, not “always already” but “meanwhile and & at the same time”? In short, how did that situation enable multiple temporalities to coexist within the same room?

Rogoff ’s quote describes a situation in which some dormant not yet realized (cognitive) but by the senses, vague unease crashes into our own reality by becoming a reality itself. This description, in which an affect that has hereto forth existed as pre-personal entity, not yet fully registered by the subject or not yet materialized itself into a fully quantifiable piece of information, emotion or knowledge, suddenly clashes with reality and becomes a reality of its own, encapsulate an understanding of affect as a critical encounter. What I want to suggest here is that Rogoff’s description of “geography in real time” describes an instant or incident where affect collides with matter, rips the matter from the movement of which it should form part and opens up directly to time or to an experience of time as direct. That day in the living room, I had an experience of conflicting time frames existing within the same living room – on the one hand extremely slow while at the same time extremely speeded up. As such the conjunction of the “meanwhile &, and at the same time” enables an experience of multiplicity of temporalities existing within the same space.

Part of The Atlas Groups works that are grouped under the title *My Neck is thinner than a Hair* contains a series of black-and-white photographs documenting the only remainder after a detonated car bomb, the engine, which often is catapulted out of the car and lands several meters away from the explosion. The engines are photographed by photojournalists. But the photographs are displayed showing the front and the annotated back of the photograph at the same time. As such they both anticipates or mimics digitisation of archival material where front and back are often scanned and stored at the same time. But by displaying both the front and the back alongside each other they perform an unfolded temporality – or what we might situate with John Akomfrah as “the Janus head of the photographic event”, one that points to that which was (the past) and one that points to that which might be (the future) (Akomfrah). As such the photographs and their performance, so to speak, is not a paranoid attempt to try to eliminate what might come in the future, but rather an unfolding of time where past, present and future co-exist alongside one another.

So how might this temporal disjunction or oversaturation of time allure us to the possibilities of affect as a form of critical inquiry? Returning to Sedgwick’s introductory question on the performativity of knowledge I find interesting, when she notes “the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows?” (Sedgwick 2003:124). While Sedgwick in this question refers to the paranoid’s mimicry and inhabitation of already knowing in advance, read in light of Rogoff’s notion of “geography in real time” it almost come to signify that there are certain knowledges – tacit, affective, contingent, intuitive, indigenous flows – that we carry within us or walk among, and sometimes an affective encounter activate that knowledge and it becomes an entity of its own. The ripped out engines comes to form such entities that disassemble to form new assemblages and in that process they open up to heterogeneous temporalities existing within the same space.

As I am watching the DVD-documentation of the performance *My Neck is thinner than a Hair* in The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, Ashkal Alwan's archive (2015), I cannot help but to feel a weird sensation of temporal disjunction. In the performance Raad, Khbeiz & Chaker meticulously gathered artefacts, testimonies and possible agents into a multi-layered PowerPoint performance that investigates the detonated car in Furn el Chebeck. The performance took place in May 2004, only a few months before a new series of car-bombs were launched and which led to the assassination of prime minister Rafik Hariri on February 14, 2005. The performance in ways treats the event as pertaining to the past, but while doing so the event keeps unfolding in the present and into the future. Into a point in the future where I am looking at the documentation of the performance from now, the archive.^[2]

(Para)paranoia is habit and practice.

Sedgwick's second definition of paranoia is that "one understands paranoia only by oneself practicing paranoid knowing, and that the way paranoia has of understanding anything is by imitating and embodying it" (Sedgwick 131). Sedgwick's essay points to this paranoid mimesis as "circumscrib(ing) its potential as a medium of political or cultural struggle", but she cannot help but enact this implicit knowingness and mimesis in her own essay. Only by enacting paranoid knowing is she able to mutate paranoia into a reparative practice. The reparative reading or practice enacts a certain paranoia, which is perfectly aware of its own paranoia; hence (para)paranoia. Rather than letting paranoia grow "like a crystal in a hypersaturated solution, blotting out any sense of the possibility of alternative ways of understanding or things to understand", (para)paranoia becomes a mutable position (Sedgwick 131). As such, it is less a circumscription of potential agency, but it becomes the very premise for acting at all.

Returning to my own feeling of “feeling car-bombed” what started as a default, maybe even an intuition or just a slight unease, might be turned into a habit or practice, which the subject continues to embody many years afterwards, even when the immediate reason for doing so has abated.

Habit is central here in that it is both the form and method through which paranoia is enacted, but it is eventually only through this enactment or stylisation of a habitual practice that the possibility of continuing to live emerges. In Sedgwick’s own case, it is only through her own over-the-top acting out of paranoia throughout the essay that she is able to come up with the notion of the reparative. Habit and practice come to play an important part in Sedgwick’s Buddhist practice as the way in which the subject, through a refinement of the practice of everyday life, changes or styles herself, to continue living.^[3]

Philosopher Cathrine Malabou exquisitely brings the dual enterprise of habit to life, in her introduction to Félix Ravaisson’s work *Of Habit*:

There are, in the European philosophical tradition, two basic ways of speaking of Habit. (...) The first (Aristotle, Hegel, Maine De Biran, Ravaisson, Bergson) sees in habit a primary ontological phenomenon. For beings subject to change, habit is the law of being. Without a general and permanent disposition, a ‘virtue’, which is developed as a result of change, as resistance to this change, the finite being cannot endure, would not have time to live. For such a being, being is fused with the habit of being. The second way (Descartes, Kant etc.) sees in habit the epitome of inauthenticity, a simulacrum of being, an imitation of virtue. Pure mechanism, routine process, devitalization of sense, habit is the disease of repetition that threatens the freshness of thought and

stifles the voice, repeatable but never stale, of the categorical imperative. (Malabou vii)

Malabou asks if we are not habituated by the latter version of habit, that is habit as inauthentic imitation of being. Malabou's differentiation between the two basic understandings of habit might resonate with the difference between repetition and the reparative as seen in the work of Judith Butler and Sedgwick. In Butler's early work, mimesis, repetition and re-appropriation is often seen as the only means for agency in today's world. This understanding of repetition is, according to Sedgwick producing a stiff, deadlocked narrative in which nothing new can emerge. But if there can never be one habit (mimetic) without habit (vitalist), then Sedgwick's and Butler's habitual practices are part of the same mould. In other words, this affirms that it is one and the same force, which produces habit at once as grace (ease, facility, power) and as addiction (machinic repetition), as Malabou reminds us (Malabou vii). And it is precisely through this habit or stylization of the self that Sedgwick and Butler come to approach one another. In Butler's reading of Foucault's "What is Critique", critique precisely becomes a practice, a virtue, or art of existence in which the subject styles itself in order to continue living (Butler). In Sedgwick, the paranoid position is able to migrate to a depressive position, which she describes as a Foucaultian "care of the self". Here the subject provides the self with "pleasure and nourishment" in an environment that is otherwise perceived as hostile (Sedgwick: 137).

Raad, Chakar and Khbeiz enact certain paranoid habitual practice – because they cannot afford not to, or because growing up during the Lebanese Civil War, certain practices that to people growing up in peace time would seem totally arbitrary, became habitual. As such, while the work mocks or mimics a paranoid habitual practice it also refines and style that practice into an art of existence to continue

living. From the basis of that we can deduce that (para)paranoia and affect as a critical inquiry one is not dissociated from one's object of inquiry, but closely intertwined with it (Rogoff). (Para)paranoia requires a sort of relational, habitual practice in which one has constantly to analyse and anticipate what objects and subjects in one's vicinity might do and how best to move among its causes and effects. As such, this alertness is extended beyond the limits of the subject and forms a co-assemblage with the objects/subjects it involves. Manoeuvring this situation requires agility, improvisation, intuition and being literally attuned "to the heartbeat of contingency" (Sedgwick). (Para)paranoia has a different relationship to narrative development. One does not proceed from a – b, since a sniper or an explosion might get in one's way so instead one takes detours or go from A to F and back to C to reach B[4].

Paranoia is a poor mapping

In the Atlas Group's online Archive, *The Thin Neck Files* includes a map with the title: "I was overcome with a momentary panic at the thought that they might be right" (Raad). The file is a map or scaled model of the 3,641 car bombs detonated in Beirut between 1975 and 1991. The map is attributed to Nahia Hassan, whom we are told was a senior topographer in the Lebanese Army's Directorate of Geographic Affairs. Hassan had presented the map to the Lebanese parliament's Committee on Development and Reconstruction in 1994, and created such a fuss that it led to a suspension of all reconstruction activities. In addition, we are told that this is a replica of the original model, which was vandalised and destroyed during the debates. I am not so interested in the whole narrative that surrounds the map, and whether or not it is true, but rather that the map itself is "weak" or "poor". The map does not create an all-encompassing strong theory which can account for the complex mesh that makes up the civil war and its car bombs. Rather it is a map that obstructs its own

accountability as a map and the epistemic and operational power that comes with being a map. But precisely because of that, and as a consequence of being full of holes, a replica of an original, is the map able to capture the contingencies of affect. In the article “In Defence of the Poor Image”, Hito Steyerl propels an image economy of the poor and the wretched of the screen, in response to the hegemony of high-resolution images in what she calls “the late screen capitalism” (Steyerl). The emergence of the poor images, through the distribution and sharing of low-resolution copies of copies on web-networks as YouTube and Ubuweb, are constructing anonymous global networks and shared histories, what we might situate with Dalida María Benfield as a tri-continental third cinema of the now that is operating from within rather than from the outside and against (Benfield). The poor image, Steyerl writes

builds alliances as it travels, provokes translation or mistranslation, and creates new publics and debates. By losing its visual substance it recovers some of its political punch and creates a new aura around it. This aura is no longer based on the permanence of the 'original,' but on the transience of the copy. It is no longer anchored within a classical public sphere mediated and supported by the frame of the nation-state or corporation, but floats on the surface of temporary and dubious data pools. (Steyerl)

Reading Steyerl’s notion of the poor image in view of The Atlas Group’s map is it possible to conceive of “poor mapping” as a self-reflexive, ethico-aesthetic practice of (para)paranoia? Poor mapping does not aim at building an all-encompassing high-resolution narrative, or data visualization, but offers a weak map full of holes,

but from which the subject can navigate and manoeuvre in an environment that might be hostile to the subject?

What characterizes paranoia, according to Sedgwick, is that it is a strong theory of negative affect, which leaves no room for contingencies and good or bad surprises. The paranoid is always already able to analyse and know in advance what its adversaries would be able to do it and thus ward off any future contingencies whether good or bad. In contrast poor mapping does not offer an all-encompassing theory, but rather opens up to other modes, or more tacit and contingent forms of knowledge production. The Atlas Group has to enact certain paranoid strategies and to ally themselves with the traditional producers of true, scientific knowledge (topographers, secret agents, doctors etc.), and their findings are presented as diagrams and maps. But the map is literally full of holes; it is a strong map but only in its quality of being poor – a copy of a destroyed original, its data-basis in itself dubious.

Would it be possible to say that the quest is not so much how to build an all-encompassing strong theory, but to loosely weave a poor map out of the fragments, partial objects, catapulted engines and shrapnel shells one is left with. And this poor map forms an ethico-aesthetic paradigm, which does not try to signify and communicate or to govern and control, but to produce assemblages of enunciation capable of capturing affective layers and singularities of the situation (Guattari). An affect-scape, which does not “operate from a single principle that maps everything in an outward-bound motion with itself at the centre” (Rogoff), but rather forms a mapping that is composed of clusters of intensities.

(Para)paranoia does not place its faith in exposure.

[2005] Black banners and posters with white inscription in Arial Black, decorated the walls and hung from the balconies. The banners demanded to know

THE TRUTH of who had planted the one-ton TNT car bomb that blew up
alongside 21 of his security and advisors on of
2005. As the years passed, the digital clock, at the entrance to , which
marks the days since the assassination, reached more than a thousand. The clock
ran out of digits to continue its task.
The banners vanished from the cityscape, but **THE TRUTH** remained concealed.
What had happened to desire of knowing **THE TRUTH**?
Had the promise of **THE TRUTH** itself expired?
Had the machine, invented to count the point in a near-possible future, when we
would know **THE TRUTH**, reached its own limit?

Placing their fate in exposure is where the analog paranoia and the digital (para)paranoia might differ the most. The (para)paranoid position, operates from the contingent position that knows, that no matter how hard we try to know **THE TRUTH**, we will never know. The (para)paranoid knows that it is a complex, enmeshed assemblage of conspiracy theories, foreign powers, intelligence services and cell-phone networks, where each one in itself contains as many different factors as what we call “the weather”. No matter how hard we try “to reveal” it, “to untangle” the mesh, “to map out” the different components, we know that we will never know. Or by the time we are done mapping, the map itself has moved on. But this does not mean that the (para)paranoid reduces everything to post-post-modern relativism, because the (para)paranoid knows that when it hits, it hits violently, physically and materially. Even when it hits discursively, it burns and injures. As such, the (para)paranoid always analyses, screens her surroundings, takes detours and changes sidewalks, simply because she cannot afford not to. She knows that, no matter how great the desire for the truth, she will never know, but she is still left with the same habits of mimicry, exposure, gathering documents and mapping as her

paranoid brothers. She assembles the data into huge data visualisations only to find that they are full of holes, a copy of a destroyed original, a low resolution jpeg, that obstructs data clarity. In *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair*, Raad collects as much data as possible only to deny his own truth building capacity: “I’m not sure what you will know, and the same goes for the victims.” (Wilson-Goldie). In so doing, he seems almost to perform a what we might call a “Foucaultian tease”. In his lecture “What is Critique”, Foucault approaches some sort of “originary freedom” only to deny it and say: “I did not say that” (Foucault). In so doing Foucault stake freedom only to denounce it again. The Foucaultian tease opens a gap of potentiality where something might occur, but this something has still not taken on a fixed form or identity. In a similar fashion, the documents of the Atlas Group cannot be traced back to one singular artist or consistent and accountable subject, but a more or less fictitious group. This group again has just compiled the documents presented or offered to them by more or less delusional agents, chief investigators, secret police, documentary photographers and doctors. The Atlas Group’s fiction – becomes no less true, but true in its “power of being false” (Deleuze). In Ngai’s reading of Juliana Spar and Diana Wards poems, bureaucracy and complicity become the engine for creative production – a similarly bureaucratic, paranoid sensibility is at stake in *The Thin Neck Files*. What seems as an almost auto-generated or generic mode of artistic production is punctuated by the always excessively poetic titles and an almost frantic sensibility for the materiality and affective qualities of the documents. And it is by alternating between those different scales and sensibilities that projects like *The Thin Neck Files* are able to capture the singularity of a situation while opening up to a larger ecology; that is how weak theory interacts with strong theory and creates a more ecological view of knowing. The assemblage does not attempt to restore history or build an all-encompassing grand theory, yet it is, as Raad note, the fable “that may cure you.” (Wilson-Goldie).

That is when we can say that affect as a critical inquiry becomes a practice of the “without” (Phelan and Rogoff). In Rogoff’s terms “without” becomes an epistemology that knows, but doesn’t know, a hermeneutics that desires the truth, but knows that the truth is true in its power of being false (Deleuze). (Para)paranoia or the feeling of “feeling car-bombed” is not something we sit and wait for because we find it sexy or titillating – even though it might be. It grips us like an act of violence and it forces a reaction from us. But this reaction we are without, we do not have a prescribed mould which can fit adequately. We are, so to speak, given to each other’s textures – to find new practices and habits in order to continue living. But rather than seeing it as a without, I like to think of it as a with – or and – as an oversaturation of temporalities existing within the same space as captured by the stanza of the “meanwhile & and at the same time”. Like the “without” the “meanwhile & and at the same time” has run up against the limits of the ordering capacity in question, but it is by styling, enacting and assembling those fragments and habits that it is able to mutate the paranoid impulses into a creative practice.

Concluding Notes

Sedgwick’s critique of critical theory takes place at a methodological level and whether or not her enactment of a certain belated Cold-War paranoia in the mid-90s/early 2000s was a timely one, I do think it offers an important check-and-balance wake-up-call to remind us that our epistemological and methodological suitcase needs to be repacked in response to the multiple urgencies and contingencies facing us today. By enacting the very same paranoia that she sets out to criticise, Sedgwick’s call for the reparative practice is not a do away with critical enterprise, but to open our habitual ways of knowing and performing knowledge up to an ecology of knowledges tied to other affects.

Affect becomes a critical inquiry because it pushes us to the limits of our surest ways of knowing. In this passage – or urgency – the critical impasse has not yet taken a form, it does not have a mould it can be fitted back into but is left open to contingency. But at the same time, the affect also re-unites a passage where we become one with others; it forces us to create other affective assemblages of enunciation through a process of developing thought, practices and desires through juxtaposition and disjunction. This excessive repetitiveness opens up to a possibility of styling ethico-aesthetic practices of the “meanwhile and & at the same time”.

It is thus not only a question of “What does knowledge do” but indeed how do we perform knowledge or how to be attuned to the pursuit of knowledge as an affective enterprise, where suspicion and paranoia – might be one out of many possible affects.

The reason why I have chosen to share with you my own personal anecdotes of being in proximity to the “feeling of feeling car bombed” is to show that there are certain instances when affect strikes, and strikes violently, demanding of the situation improvisation and being literally attuned “to the heartbeat of contingency” (Sedgwick). Affect becomes a critical inquiry which both forces a reaction from the affected body but also styles a new way of being in the world, which does not have a mould or adequate form which it can easily slip into. Habit becomes central here, as the way in which subjects fashions their habitual mode into a new practice in order to continue living. And this is when the epistemic limits become closely tied to the ontological ones of what counts as a subject at all. Here I have argued with the work of the Atlas Group that this style, or art of existence, becomes a collective, historically dense assemblage of materials, which operates on different affect-scales and scapes. In the end it is not true in building a strong theory, but true in its power of being false.

With Judith Butler, I have tried to show that critique, or what we might situate with Rogoff as criticality, is not only a question of epistemology – what it means to know – but also ties onto questions of ontology – who counts as a subject. As such, affect as a critical inquiry becomes a practice of assemblages, of producing other affective milieus of enunciation (Guattari). Assemblages that cut across or queer other relational fabrics including social, physical, bodily (in the broadest possible sense), psychological, institutional, technical and machinic fragments into new co-assemblages.

While the explosions for me were terrifying experience, for my mother in-law, who had lived her entire adulthood in this volatile situation, it became a moment to connect with friends and family from afar. This incident testify to that there are no such thing as “negative” / “positive” affects or “sad”/“happy” affects. Affects can take on a multiplicity of knowledges and feelings. (Para)paranoia is thus not necessarily a negative affect but rather a mitigating position that does not turn “the terror out of error” (Sedgwick), since in this case it was pure terror, but rather is able to migrate the destructive forces embedded in the paranoid impulse towards reparative ends. During that following trip to the mountains there was a sense in which our friendships slid up more intimately alongside one another. In Sedgwick words, “whatever else we know, we know there isn’t time to bullshit.”

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[1] The Taif Agreement (1991), which brokered the peace agreement between the warring factions in Lebanon, gave amnesty to all the involved militias, which means that there has been no official truth and reconciliation process and no agreed upon narrative of the events.

[2] In hindsight, the performance almost comes, unintentionally to mock or mimic the Hariri Tribunal before it happened. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) also referred to as the Hariri Trial in The International Criminal Court, The Hague, into the assassination of Rafic Hariri, could almost be seen as a large scale re-enactment of the performance.

[3] In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant also turns to habit or *intuitive rehabilitation* for the which "the subject/world's capacity to maintain itself admit an impossible, but no

longer unlivable, situation” that is living with HIV/AIDS (Berlant). In Ngai’s reading of Juliana Spahr and Butler the subject’s inevitable complicity (or perhaps even her ‘paranoia’) might eventually become “the condition of agency rather than its destruction” (Ngai 331).

[4] In Rabih Mroué & Hito Steyerl’s performance lecture “Possible Title: Zero Probability” Mroué has an excellent expose of navigating from A – B, during the Lebanese wars (Mroué and Steyerl).