CULTURAL THEORY AS MOOD WORK

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**Abstract** *In staging an encounter between Sedgwick’s discussion of reparation, Spivak’s analysis of translation, and critical scholarship on mood, this article considers how we might understand contemporary cultural theory as a form of ‘mood work’ that is at once discursive and material, textual and affective, political and aesthetic. In particular, I am interested in how thinking reparation, translation and mood together might open up different ways of conceptualising and negotiating the affective ‘double binds’ central to both critical thought and socio-political relations at the current conjuncture. As Sedgwick and Spivak each show us, I will argue, tarrying with contradiction and ambivalence is the mood work that cultural theory must continue to pursue, both in order to understand the material implications of our own emotional investments in intellectual production and to appreciate the complex ways in which power operates within the structures of feeling of late liberalism.*

**Keywords** mood, paranoia, reparation, translation, double bind

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The mood within cultural studies has become increasingly disdainful of the legacies of textual analysis. At their intersection, the purported affective, ontological and new materialist ‘turns’ have been represented as moving away from ‘the privileging of text and discourse as key theoretical touchstones’ and indeed beyond poststructuralist approaches premised on linguistic, semiotic, discursive and psychoanalytic frameworks more generally.[[1]](#footnote-1) As Jackie Stacey puts it, ‘Rejoicing in the end of the cultural turn, critics from very different intellectual locations have announced a shift in their focus away from text, form, representation, subjectivity and code, placing such concepts in a (false) dichotomy with materiality, affect, presence, event and encounter’.[[2]](#footnote-2) Most famously, in his exploration of movement, affect and sensation in *Parables for the Virtual*, Brian Massumi diagnosed the linguistic turn and its theories of signification as a prison house for critical thinking.[[3]](#footnote-3) Writing more recently, in their collection *New Materialisms,* Diana Coole and Samantha Frost similarly call for the development of renewed materialist perspectives on the basis of their sense that ‘the radicalism of the dominant discourses which have flourished under the cultural turn is now more or less exhausted’ and that ‘more textual approaches’ are ‘increasingly being deemed inadequate for understanding contemporary society’.[[4]](#footnote-4) From these perspectives, any attempt to preserve the integrity of the epistemological tools of the textual, discursive and cultural turns is marked as decidedly out of step with the affective thrust of contemporary cultural theory.

Appreciating the nuances and complexities of the diverse contributions associated with these various conceptual ‘turns’, however, urges us to examine how many thinkers extend and enrich a much longer genealogy of scholarship concerned with the nature of texts and textual formations as ‘discursive-material’ assemblages, the materiality of language and its affective excesses, and the particular relations of feeling we finds ourselves in with texts. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work, in particular, has been pivotal in cultivating renewed engagement concerning our affective orientations towards discursive analysis and the epistemological and political implications of such practices. Indeed, some have suggested that Sedgwick’s influential analysis of ‘paranoid’ and ‘reparative’ reading practices[[5]](#footnote-5) has inaugurated a ‘turn’ of its own - the ‘reparative turn’ (despite how at odds with her own philosophical approach the epistemological reification implied by the language of ‘turns’ may be). Like Sedgwick, scholars working on mood are interested in the various modes of affective attunement we bring to our texts as research objects and what such relations of feeling *do*. In the context of critical theory, mood is understood ‘not as optional’, but rather ‘as a prerequisite for any kind of intellectual engagement’.[[6]](#footnote-6) As Rita Felski and Susan Fraiman argue*,* ‘a state of curiosity, wonder, irritation, or optimism animates us to pursue a certain path of inquiry. At the same time, the process is reciprocal and dynamic; styles of thinking, in their turn, also promote and sustain moods’.[[7]](#footnote-7) Moreover, scholars of mood have argued, if we always approach reading with a particular affective orientation, texts themselves exude their ‘own’ moods, linked to the affective atmospheres of their production and circulation. The ways in which we are affected by, and in turn affect, a particular text depends, in part, on the relation between ‘our’ mood and that of the text, both of which are fluid states produced within wider intellectual and political circuits of feeling.[[8]](#footnote-8) Questions regarding how we might become attuned to different textual moods - affective qualities that necessarily exceed the structures and codes of language - are at the heart of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s discussion of the politics of translation.[[9]](#footnote-9) For Spivak, ‘translation’ refers both to the ways in which we negotiate and convey the sensorial complexities of texts beyond linguistic codes *and to* wider discursive-material processes of becoming through which we might cultivate an ability to *inhabit* (rather than deny or resolve) the affective ‘double binds’ of late liberal social, cultural, political and economic life.

A ‘double-bind’ is a situation in which we are presented with contradictory instructions, where an effective response to one injunction results in a failed response to the other. The theoretical-political double binds that most concern me in this article relate to the challenges of engaging in textually-oriented, politically-engaged, cultural criticism in a context in which textual strategies risk being dismissed as anachronistic and inattentive to materiality in the midst of ‘new materialisms’; critique risks being labelled ‘paranoid’ and incapable of grappling with the ambivalences of power in the wake of ‘the reparative turn’; and the arts and humanities themselves risk being deemed superfluous and stripped of funding in the shift from public higher education to ‘the neoliberal university’. These various challenges emerge in a wider Euro-American socio-political and economic context in which neoliberal forms of governance offer modes of ‘choice’ and ‘freedom’ premised on submission to market logics, capitalist structures of feeling promise access to ‘the good life’ while routinely ‘attach[ing] us to the very conditions of our subordination’[[10]](#footnote-10), and social movements are routinely ‘co-opted by state and elite’ in ways that work to keep the political status quo in tact.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In staging an encounter between Sedgwick’s discussion of reparation, Spivak’s analysis of translation, and critical scholarship on mood, I consider how we might understand contemporary cultural theory as a form of ‘mood work’ that is at once discursive and material, textual and affective, political and aesthetic. In particular, I am interested in how thinking reparation, translation and mood together might open up different ways of conceptualising and negotiating the affective ‘double binds’ central to both critical thought and socio-political relations at the current conjuncture. As Sedgwick and Spivak each show us, I will argue, a tarrying with contradiction and ambivalence *is* the mood work that cultural theory must continue to pursue, both in order to understand the material implications of our own emotional investments in intellectual production and to appreciate the complex ways in which power operates within the structures of feeling of late liberalism.

PARANOID CRITIQUE, REPARATION AND AMBIVALENCE

Eve Sedgwick has been among the most influential voice examining the links between affective investment and knowledge production in cultural studies (and beyond) since the early 1990s. In her chapter ‘Paranoid and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You’, Sedgwick famously interrogated the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ that, she argued, animated the majority of Euro-American critical theory in the theoretical wake of Marx, Nietzche and Freud.[[12]](#footnote-12) Understood in shorthand as a mode of critique premised on ‘the analytic work of exposure’[[13]](#footnote-13), such interpretive practices typically involve efforts to ‘*expose* residual forms of essentialism lurking behind apparently nonessentialist forms of analysis’, ‘*unearth* unconscious drives or compulsions underlying the apparent play of literary forms’, or ‘*uncover* the violent or oppressive historical forces masquerading under liberal aesthetic guises’.[[14]](#footnote-14) The hermeneutics of suspicion thus give ‘the critic sovereignty in knowing, when others do not, the hidden contingencies of what things really mean’.[[15]](#footnote-15) They also propagate an affective-epistemological paradigm premised on suspicion, doubt, anxiety, fear and cynicism while marginalising alternative frameworks lead, for example, by amelioration, nurturance, pleasure, joy, care and love and affirmation. For Sedgwick, a key concern is how these different affective and epistemological orientations powerfully shape what can be known, how it can be known and the material implications of such knowledges. Most profoundly, Sedgwick’s intervention troubles the belief that reading practices premised on suspicion and exposure are best positioned, or even necessary, for getting at the complex ways in which power works, and radically unsettles the assumption that there is a strong correlation between knowledge and progressive social transformation.

Central to critical methodologies driven by suspicion is the concept of paranoia. Following the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein[[16]](#footnote-16), Sedgwick understands paranoia not as pathology, nor as a stable personality, but rather as a ‘position’. In Kleinian psychoanalysis, the ‘paranoid/schizoid’ and ‘depressive’ positions are characteristic postures that ‘the ego takes up with respect to its objects’ from infancy.[[17]](#footnote-17) More specifically, as Stacey explains,

For Klein, the infant processes an ongoing ambivalence toward the mother and in the first instance, towards her breast: the infant loves the good object that feeds and satisfies it but it hates the bad object that inevitably frustrates its needs. This splitting of the mother/breast into good and bad objects produces the fear and suspicion of the breast (the paranoid-schizoid position), which is then superseded by the discovery that the breast it hates and the breast it loves are the same breast (depressive position).[[18]](#footnote-18)

As such, while the paranoid position deploys ‘a schizoid strategy of splitting both its objects and itself into very concretely imagined part objects that can only be seen as exclusively, magically good or bad’[[19]](#footnote-19), the depressive position ‘signals an acceptance of good and bad objects within the mother in her entirety’[[20]](#footnote-20). Similarly, in the domain of critical theory, Sedgwick suggests, paranoia is a mode of interpretation characterised by an implicit assumption that we know what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ for us, and social and political life more generally, and that we can split knowledges and practices into those likely to work in the interest of ‘social justice’ and those likely to work against it. Paranoid reading is thus fuelled by a state of constant anxiety and alertness focused on detecting and exposing ‘the bad’ (i.e. pernicious modes of power, oppression, regulation, violence, essentialism or stereotyping), in the belief that making what is bad visible is what is most required to eradicate or change it. As such, ‘paranoia requires that bad news be already known’[[21]](#footnote-21) and this means that the analysis it generates is often circular and foreclosing of discovery. From Sedgwick’s perspective, paranoid reading therefore tends to be limited in its capacity to either recognise or *produce* change, and remains particularly naïve about the complexities of social transformation. Generating more - or more accurate - knowledge about a particular phenomenon does not necessarily *do* anything, or at least does not necessarily do what we think or hope it will.

Importantly, in illustrating that ‘paranoia knows some things well and others poorly’, Sedgwick’s argument is not that we should (or could) do away with paranoid reading. Rather, she is concerned to highlight how, when ‘understood to be a mandatory injunction’, the hermeneutics of suspicion systematically marginalise or prohibit other ways of doing critical theory, especially ‘explicit recourse to reparative motives’.[[22]](#footnote-22) In Kleinian theory, reparation is the (ongoing) process by which the subject works through the conflict of the paranoid/schizoid position to inhabit (if only precariously) the depressive position. As Stacey explains,

[T]he infant, Klein argues, really believes that its hateful thoughts and destructive impulses (triggered by the absence of the breast/food when it is desired) directed towards the mother/her breast have actually damaged or even destroyed he/it; and yet the infant simultaneously believes (through its phantasies of omnipotence) that is has the power to repair and protect this love object that it imagines it has harmed.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In moving into the reparative position then, ‘the baby who has hitherto been destructive or attached to “part-objects”, such as the mother’s breast, is now able to take in the whole mother’.[[24]](#footnote-24) For Klein, this to-and-fro process between phantasised destruction and reparation is fundamental to the cultivation of both ‘love’ and ‘responsibility’. Translating Klein’s psychoanalytic framework into the language of cultural theory, Sedgwick describes reparative reading as ‘undertaking a different range of affects, ambitions and risks’ than paranoid reading in a desire ‘to assemble and confer plentitude on an object that will then have resources to offer an inchoate self’. That is, rather than approaching cultural analysis with suspicion, anxiety, and a desire to expose, reparation reaches out with nurturance, hope and a desire to provide sustenance. At the same time, however, the reparative position does not presume that it already knows what it will find - surrendering paranoia’s primary goal of prediction, it opens the reader to the possibility of being surprised: for, while there can be ‘terrible surprises’, there ‘can also be good ones’.[[25]](#footnote-25)

While scholars have interpreted Sedgwick’s call for reparative reading practices in a variety of different ways, what has been called ‘the reparative turn’ in cultural studies might be broadly characterised as privileging ‘a critical practice that seeks to *love and nurture* its objects of study’.[[26]](#footnote-26) As Robyn Wiegman notes, citing the work of Ann Cvetkovich, Heather Love, and Elizabeth Freeman, as key examples, ‘[i]n the name of “reparative reading”, “weak theory”, or compassionate redescription’, scholars inspired by Sedgwick’s ontological incitement seek to displace ‘critical attachments once forged by correction, rejection, and anger with those crafted by affection, gratitude, solidarity, and love’. Indeed, in Wiegman’s account, *love* is key to reparation as understood by both Sedgwick and those inspired by her: ‘You could say that it is about loving what hurts but instead of using that knowledge to prepare for a vigilant stand against repetition, it responds to the future with affirmative richness’.[[27]](#footnote-27) Thus, across these literatures, ‘affect’ is not taken up in a move *away* from textuality or language, but rather as a mode of engaging more *intimately*, perhaps even lovingly, with the sensorial contours, tonalities and excesses of texts as research objects.

In this vein, we can consider how these engagements with reparative reading resonate with this special issue’s interest in ‘mood’ and ‘mood work’. While linked to emotion, affect and feeling, moods are often distinguished ‘in having a longer duration’. As Felski and Fraiman argue, ‘Instead of flowing, a mood lingers, tarries, settles in, accumulates, sticks around’. [[28]](#footnote-28) How then might we understand the relationship between mood and Sedgwick’s translation of the Klenian concept of ‘positions’? In Sedgwick’s reading of Klein, the paranoid/schizoid and depressive positions do not refer to ‘normatively ordered *stages*, stable *structures*, or diagnostic personality *types*’, but rather to ‘a much more flexible to-and-fro process between one and the other’.[[29]](#footnote-29) As critical reading practices, paranoia and reparation are therefore not ‘theoretical ideologies’, but instead, particular affective modes, among other modes, ‘of seeking and finding, and organizing knowledge’.[[30]](#footnote-30) Compare this to Lars Svendsen’s description of mood as ‘the very foundation of our ability to orient ourselves in the world’.[[31]](#footnote-31) ‘When you are in a given mood’, he suggests, ‘the world appears as a certain field of possibilities… Different moods realize different ways of relating to the world as a whole and to specific objects’.[[32]](#footnote-32) We could say then that both ‘moods’ and ‘positions’ are fluid and shifting affective states that play a significant role in conditioning how we take in and configure the world around us, shaping the kinds of relations we establish with our objects - both human and textual – and the knowledges we cultivate with and through them.

However, while the concept of positions draws on psychoanalytic ideas about human development that, although not bound to linear stages or structures, nonetheless assume a link between adult behavior, events in early childhood and unconscious drives, scholarly analysis of moods has been somewhat less reliant on psychoanalytic models. If the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions are understood in Sedgwick’s reading of Klein as relational and yet also relatively distinct and articulable postures (indeed Sedgwick provides five key criteria that can help us identify paranoid reading practices at work), moods are generally conceived as less possible to delineate because they are more ‘ambient, vague, diffuse, hazy, and intangible’.[[33]](#footnote-33) As Rene Rosfort and Giovanni Stanghellini argue, moods are ‘often ineffable phenomena with no apparent intentional object or clear experiential structure’. ‘Rather than providing answers’, moods ‘complicate them by introducing ambivalence, hesitation, and atmospheric uncertainty into our inquiry’.[[34]](#footnote-34) From this perspective, the concept of mood might both resonate with the idea of positions and productively open it up to a wider with engagement with affective ambivalence that both includes and exceeds the psychic parameters of human subjectivity.

Interestingly, although the Kleinian concept of ‘reparation’ might be understood precisely as a process of coming to terms with the reality of conflicted emotion, recent analyses of the reparative ‘turn’ in cultural studies have argued that one of its problematic tendencies is an *elision* *or forgetting* of psychic ambivalence. Wiegman, points out, for example, that the reparative position as Klein depicted it is more complex and less affirming than much current advocacy of reparation as a modality of cultural analysis explores: ‘the psychic complexity of the infant’s dependence on the maternal breast means that the arrival into “love” is never innocently given but instead part of a defensive maneuver against the infant’s own murderous impulses toward the projections and part-objects that make up its world’.[[35]](#footnote-35) Indeed, as Klein herself stresses, ‘feelings of love and tendencies of reparation develop in connection with aggressive impulses and in spite of them’.[[36]](#footnote-36) While Sedgwick certainly recognised this complexity and ambivalence, Wiegman argues, she ‘avoided grappling at length with the less salvific implications of reparation’.[[37]](#footnote-37) Similarly, Stacey is concerned with ‘the wishing away of ambivalence’ that seems to motivate many contemporary critical uses of ‘the reparative’. That is, how ‘the mobilisation of the concept of “reparation” as a reading practice installs a non-ambivalent subject, removed from its psychoanalytic grounding and thereby losing some vital insights about how our conflicted relations to objects might continue to inform our attachments to culture’.[[38]](#footnote-38) Thus, in ‘making their case for a textual encounter predicated on love’[[39]](#footnote-39), advocates of the reparative turn may problematically elide or contain psychic conflict and affective ambivalence, effecting a split between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ objects. Both Wiegman and Stacey are therefore particularly interested in how reparative reading might work differently to ‘provide a conceptual model for reading that is *grounded in ambivalence*’ – a possibility that seems ‘especially appropriate for a queer feminist criticism at this current moment’.[[40]](#footnote-40)

The following sections pursue this question of how we can negotiate affective ambivalence in and through cultural theory - in ways that include and but also exceed reparative frameworks (and psychoanalytic models more generally). In particular, I explore how attention to mood and translation, alongside reparation, might contribute to practices of mood work in cultural studies with the capacity to inhabit complexity, contradiction and mixed feelings which may not always be amenable to repair.

TRANSLATING MOODS

In conjunction with reflecting on the moods through which we encounter texts and how particular texts make us feel, scholars have also examined the moods of various texts themselves. From Svendsen’s perspective, ‘If you are to truly understand a philosophical text, then you must also somehow manage to come to term with its mood, because there will always be a mood of attunement at its core’. Moreover, he suggests, this affective process is always relational: ‘You will also be in a certain mood when attempting to interpret a text, and if your mood and the mood of the text are at odds with each other, there is the risk that the text simply will not “speak” to you’. [[41]](#footnote-41) Although we might query whether texts can be said to convey any one singular mood, Svendesen’s comments raise some interesting questions regarding the logics of a reparative ‘turn’ in cultural theory. To what extent, for example, do recent mobilisations of reparative reading take into account the moods of the texts they interpret or the relational dynamics between the affective approach they wish to bring to a text and that of the text itself? Is reparation an appropriate position from which to approach *any* text or do different textual objects (with ‘their’ specific affective qualities) demand different affective approaches? Should we (or can we?) *alter* the position or mood in which we approach particular texts to suit (or counter?) ‘their’ own position or mood? Furthermore, if both reading and writing are affective practices that take place within, through and against wider social and political atmospheres, including the often exclusionary workings of national and other ‘collective’ moods, how do we account for this in the ‘mood work’ in which cultural theory might engage?

In her analysis of the politics of the reparative turn, it is notable that Wiegman pays particular attention to the affective atmosphere in which Sedgwick’s piece was initially written and the implications of this for how its arguments have been interpreted and mobilised in the contemporary milieu. She points out, for example, that Sedgwick first made reference to the dynamics of ‘paranoid’ and ‘reparative’ reading in the introduction to a special issue of *Studies in the Novel* published in 1996 (which was then revised in 1997 and again in 2003 in *Touching Feeling*). Wiegman argues that many scholars have drawn only on Sedgwick’s 2003 version, aligning it ‘with a post-911 rethinking of paranoid sensibilities’, and, as such, have ‘skewed our understanding of her work’s own present, which was profoundly influenced by her disgust with the national fantasy of gay extermination propelled by the health emergency of AIDS and by her personal battle with breast cancer’.[[42]](#footnote-42) From this perspective, the personal and political significance of the ‘repair’ in Sedgwick’s reparation needs to be appreciated in relation to the specific temporalities of mood in which it originally emerged. The repair that makes sense in context of the AIDS crisis of the 1990s may be quite different than that desired (by differently located subjects) in the aftermath of 9/11, or, in turn, in the midst of the ‘declining economic and cultural support for the interpretive humanities’ we face today.[[43]](#footnote-43) Wiegman’s analysis therefore underscores the necessity of what might be called ‘affective translation’ – translation across personal, social and political atmospheres and modes of reparation – that is central to the ‘mood work’ that cultural theory requires.[[44]](#footnote-44)

We might also inquire more broadly into what it means for reparation to congeal into an intellectual ‘turn’, wherein reparation’s move from marginal to mainstream means that the ameliorative logics of ‘repair’ becomes expected rather than elided or maligned. In Wiegman’s reading, the taking up of Sedgwick’s call for reparative reading in the contemporary context of neoliberal capitalism is a reparative move in and of itself: it is about repairing or retrieving the value of *interpretation* as a critical practice in a political and intellectual context in which it has been battered and bruised. Deployments of reparation that revalue close reading as a vital discursive-material practice thus seek, in part, to repair the various injuries interpretation has sustained (in the context of the differential political agendas of new materialist critiques and the neoliberal university’s downgrading of the arts and humanities). Yet what are the implications of approaching cultural analysis from the ontological assumption that *damage* has been sustained and that *repair* is required? In contemplating this question it seems pertinent to remember, as Stacey does, that within Klenian psychoanalytic terms, reparation is ‘*a defence mechanism*, a “process of reducing guilt by an action designed to make good the harm *imagined to have been done to an ambivalently invested object*”’.[[45]](#footnote-45) While the desire to reduce guilt may be appropriate for some subjects in some intellectual and political contexts, it might be very inappropriate, incommensurable and simply absent in others. In the realm of cultural theory, guilt that is transferred into reparative practices before it can be consciously or collectively examined could arguably be counterproductive or dangerous. To what extent can texts ‘repair’ social, political or economic ‘damage’, and what (paranoid) ‘phantasies of omnipotence’ might the desire for textual reparation express and circulate? [[46]](#footnote-46) These concerns are linked to wider questions regarding the slippages that occur in translating frameworks and concepts from psychoanalysis/the clinic to cultural analysis/academia[[47]](#footnote-47) which, I suggest, is another strand of affective translation central to the mood work of cultural theory.

As a means to grapple further with some of these questions concerning mood, reparation and translation in cultural theory, I want to explore what might come into view by putting Sedgwick’s call for reparative reading in dialogue with another incisive analysis of the affective politics of textual encounters first published in the political atmospheres of 1990s America: Spivak’s ‘The Politics of Translation’.[[48]](#footnote-48) If Sedgwick first makes the case for *reparation* ‘as a textual encounter predicated on love’[[49]](#footnote-49) in the midst of the harrowing destruction of the AIDS crisis, the violence of conservative political modes of governing it, and queer scholars’ and activists’ attempts to grapple with this trauma and violence, Spivak describes *translation* as requiring ‘a love that permits fraying’ in the context of the gendered aftermath of empire and decolonisation, debates surrounding feminist visions of transnational activism and solidarity, and the instrumentalisation of ‘translation’ as a mode of gaining knowledge about ‘other cultures’ against the backdrop of multiculturalist forms of governance and recognition.[[50]](#footnote-50) Of course, these affective landscapes are not separate, but rather intimately related. In the heady atmospheres of ‘identity politics’ in which various scholarly and activist interventions were mobilising in the 1980s and 1990s, Sedgwick and Spivak each sought, in different ways, to affirm the vitality of the complex political struggles that various enactments of ‘identity’ referenced, while simultaneously contesting the congealing modes of capture on which identitarian strategies often turned. Both authors turned to affect as a means of renegotiating these tensions, opening up different ways of grappling with the visceral workings of power through our engagements with texts. Reading Sedgwick and Spivak together, I am interested in examining the resonances between reparation and translation as affective modes of cultural analysis, and particularly in how exploring the sensorial possibilities of translation might enrich or productively refigure contemporary debates regarding the fate of textual interpretation in the wake of the ontological, affective and new materialist turns and the neoliberal university.

‘Translation’ is a concept that has long been central to Spivak’s writing, appearing throughout her postcolonial feminist interventions in a variety of guises. Contesting international civil society’s call for translation as ‘a quick way to “know a culture”’[[51]](#footnote-51), her influential chapter ‘The Politics of Translation’ examines its more critical workings as a transformative process that is unavoidably both affective and political at the gendered intersection of neoliberalism and postcoloniality. The problem with instrumental modes of translation, Spivak suggests, is that they assume that translation might involve a simple transfer of ‘bodies of meaning’, a linguistic move from one set of words and phrases to another, without attention to ‘rhetoric’: to that which exceeds the text. In the absence of care for rhetoric, she suggests, intimate engagement with the transnational affective workings of power and agency is impossible and it is likely that ‘a specific neocolonialist construction of a non-Western scene is afoot’.[[52]](#footnote-52) Interestingly, what Spivak argues is required of ‘a translation from a non-European women’s text’ that does not simply shore up neocolonialist structures and norms, is *lov*e – not as a romantic ideal, but in the form of a kind of affective surrender to the ‘rhetoricity of the original’[[53]](#footnote-53):

[T]he translator must surrender to the text. She must solicit the text to show the limits of its language, because that rhetorical aspect will point at the silence of the absolute fraying of language that the text wards off, in its special manner. No amount of tough talk can get around the fact that translation is the most intimate act of reading. Unless the translator has earned the right to become and intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Without this kind of love – which seems to refer both to ‘patient epistemological care’[[55]](#footnote-55) on the part of the translator and a particular form of affective resonance that might exist between texts – the sensuality of textuality is evacuated. It is notable then, that in the mid 1990s, both Sedgwick and Spivak invoke ‘love’ as what is vital to, but often missing from, interpretive practices within critical fields (queer, feminist and postcolonial studies) that emerged in part out of scholarly recognition of histories of oppression, violence and silencing. Love, for Spivak, however, appears to work somewhat differently than it does for Sedgwick: If, in a Klenian framework, love emerges through acts of reparation which serve in psychoanalytic terms as a defence mechanism, the love that Spivak describes as necessary to the ethical workings of translation is associated less with the desire for affective *repair* than it is with affective *surrender*, a yielding to the text and its particular rhetorical call – a call which goes beyond language, and beyond cognition – and yet may still, perhaps, be sensible.

From the perspective of the affective, ontological and new materialist frameworks referenced at the beginning of this article, Spivak’s focus on *linguistic* translation might be interpreted as limited by its reliance on discursive paradigms. Her intention, however, is precisely to illustrate how, in its affective attention to rhetoric, translation necessarily *exceeds* language and any notion of a closed discursive or psychic system. To attend to the rhetoricity of a text, she suggests, is to engage not only with its particular mood (indicated in part by its pauses and silences) and the gendered, classed, racialised and sexualised significance of such sensorial tonalities, but also with ‘chance’, with ‘sub-individual force-fields of being which click into place in different situations, swerve from straight or true line of language-in-though’. As such, ‘rhetoric points at the possibility of randomness, of contingency as such, dissemination, the falling apart of language, the possibility that things might not always be semiotically organized’. Thus, in exploring the politics of translation, Spivak argues that language is precisely ‘not everything. It is only a vital clue of where the self loses its boundaries’. [[56]](#footnote-56) Like Spivak’s translation, Sedgwick’s reparation ‘assumes that the line between words and things or between linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena is endlessly changing, permeable, and entirely unsusceptible to any definitive articulation’.[[57]](#footnote-57) And for both theorists, it would seem, a key mode of getting at this productive interplay between linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena is through attention to textual mood, atmosphere, or what they each refer to as the ‘weather’ of a text.

INHABITING THE DOUBLE BIND

If Spivak returns repeatedly to the theme of ‘translation’ in her writing, it is because, for her, its lessons have ‘larger political implications’.[[58]](#footnote-58) We might say that, as a mode of close reading concerned with language’s sensuousness – with the affective quality of that which exceeds discursive systems of meaning and regulation - translation offers one important critical and pedagogical approach to negotiating the multiple and overlapping ‘double binds’ that face us in the midst of late liberalism. At the intersection of psychology and communications theory, a double bind is understood as the emotionally distressing experience of being in, without the possibility of exiting, a ‘communicational matrix, in which messages contradict each other’, so that an effective response to one message equates to a failed response to the other.[[59]](#footnote-59) For Spivak, the concept of the double bind addresses the real affective contradiction, ambivalence and strife differently located subjects face in negotiating complex power structures and relations in pursuit of both everyday survival and various collective projects of social justice in the midst the ‘bipolarity’ of liberalism and transnational capitalism - whether they be in the form of neoliberalism’s dictate that we embrace freedom through submission to market logics, the ‘simple and forbidding’ contradictions of gender identity, or cultural criticism’s (paranoid?) rule that ‘when you look for something you find it’.[[60]](#footnote-60) Across these different realms, Spivak argues, our primary tendency is to *deny* the double bind, ‘even through we are adroitly managing it in practice’[[61]](#footnote-61), or, conversely, to think that we can somehow ‘*resolve* double binds by playing them’.[[62]](#footnote-62) The troubled fate of ‘strategic essentialism’, she suggests, stands out as an exemplary case of the limitations of the latter strategy: an attempt to play the double bind of identity that becomes damagingly normalised and congealed. As I will discuss further below, ‘translation’ for Spivak names the many ways in which we must negotiate the double bind over and over again, but it also refers to a discursive-material process through which we might be trained to inhabit contradictory instructions in more imaginative and potentially ethical ways, to cultivate what she calls ‘ethical reflexes’.

Drawing on Spivak’s conceptual language, we could consider how Sedgwick’s translation of the Kleinian notion of ‘positions’ into the realm of cultural theory offers its own kind of double bind. To start, Sedgwick describes the hermeneutics of suspicion as itself constituting a double bind in that, while its imperative is to attain maximum critical force, the very injunction to *always* be suspicious (‘you can never be paranoid enough’) ironically reduces criticality and responsiveness to unpredictability and change by legislating paranoia as an a priori requirement. However, if paranoid reading is itself caught within a double bind, the problems it presents cannot then, following Spivak’s logic, be ‘*resolved*’ by figuring it in oppositional relation to reparative reading and invoking reparation as a preferred alternative. When reparation is mobilised explicitly or implicitly as mode of critical engagement that can avoid (or repair) paranoia we can lose sight of the real affective ambivalence and complexity at the core of cultural theory’s double bind: that is, the seemingly competing desires to produce cultural analysis that is attentive to structural workings of power, violence and oppression and yet not circular, self-perpetuating, and inert to change; to provide an account that addresses intellectual expectations of incisiveness, criticality, and evidence without evacuating contradiction, uncertainty, and mixed feelings; to offer a narrative that addresses how our work is always ‘psychologically, affectively motivated’[[63]](#footnote-63), but also extends beyond our own psychic investments and defenses to pursue ‘an ethical scholarship that demonstrates the kind of relationality that our politically inspired criticality wants to promote’.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Sedgwick was certainly attuned to the risk of severing reparation from paranoia to figure it as epistemological ‘solution’. While highlighting the affirmative possibilities of reparation was necessary precisely because its status was so maligned in face of the dominance of the hermeneutics of suspicion, it bears repeating that Sedgwick was actually most interested in tracing the *relationality* of paranoia and reparation in cultural analysis: ‘in doing justice to the powerful reparative practices that, I am convinced, infuse self-avowedly paranoid critical projects, as well as in the paranoid exigencies that are so often necessary for nonparanoid knowing and utterance’.[[65]](#footnote-65) In this vein, it is notable that although Sedgwick argues forcefully for dislodging paranoid reading from its dominant position in cultural theory, her much cited chapter nonetheless arguably engages *its own* hermeneutics of suspicion – that is, it offers a detailed typology that allows one to *diagnose* paranoid critique at work, but provides comparatively little explicit thoughts regarding what reparation might look like in practice. From this perspective, Sedgwick’s text not only instructs us to view paranoia and reparation as constitutively connected, but also *performs* this inextricability.[[66]](#footnote-66) For Sedgwick, as for Klein, then, reparation is only possible through its continual interaction with paranoia and vice versa. Moreover, for both authors it is clear that reparation is never a secure state or final destination, but rather ‘an anxiety-mitigating achievement that the infant or adult only sometimes, and then only briefly, succeeds in inhabiting’.[[67]](#footnote-67) Just as love always exists in conjunction with ‘aggressive impulses’[[68]](#footnote-68), reparation and paranoia remain ambivalently bound to one another in an on-going process of generative interaction.

If cultural critique is itself a double bind, I want to argue, we need to think further about what it might mean to really *inhabit* its affective ambivalence in our research and analysis - to move towards ‘learning *of* the double bind – not just learning *about* it’.[[69]](#footnote-69) For Spivak, inhabiting the double bind can be described most simply as the process of ‘learning to live with contradictory instructions’. This does not mean, of course, that we must simply accept or resign ourselves to neoliberal rationality or hegemonic gender norms any more than it means that the dominance of a hermeneutics of suspicion should remain unquestioned. Rather, I want to suggest, it compels us to continue exploring what it might mean, not just to ‘know’, ‘describe’ or ‘account for’, but also to *viscerally inhabit* – to register, feel, sit with, learn, relate to, respond to and be affected by - the emotional, psychic and political complexity of the multiple double binds we encounter in both daily life and critical scholarship. This process of inhabitation suggests an affective, material, bodily mode of ‘relating to’ akin to what Spivak refers to as love as affective surrender – a surrender that opens oneself out to ways of knowing and feeling that do not simply confirm what one thinks one already knows. It also calls for a reparative need to work towards ‘the simple, foundational, authentically very difficult understanding that good and bad tend to be inseparable at every level’.[[70]](#footnote-70)

For Spivak, this is precisely what *translation*, as an affective modality of cultural interpretation, prepares us for: it neither denies nor attempts to resolve the double bind, but rather trains us to *inhabit* the ambivalence of contradictory instructions, to discover the ethics of responding to everyday injunctions that are both ‘necessary but impossible’.[[71]](#footnote-71) In the realm of literary translation, for example, translation asks us to respond both creatively and critically to the call to demonstrate faithfulness to an ‘original’, to produce an ‘accurate’ reading or an ‘equivalent’ account, when one knows that these tasks are impossible, that there exist neither ‘original’ texts nor perfect equivalences between texts. From this perspective, we might say that translation as an ethical practice occurs only when ‘we are faithful to the perpetual newness of the self, the other, the world’.[[72]](#footnote-72) Beyond linguistic or literary practices, Spivak understands translation as a wider affective mode of inhabitation and ‘relating to’ that calls forth the imagination and the senses and teaches ‘the subject to play’ and ‘to discover’. Translation is hence a ‘description of reading in its most robust sense’. It is ‘the irreducible element of an aesthetic education’ through which we might learn and feel the double bind in all its ambivalence and complexity.[[73]](#footnote-73)

In considering further what this process of inhabiting the double bind might entail in the realm of cultural studies, it is helpful to return to thinking about mood. If Sedgwick describes paranoia and reparation as inherently relational psychic-epistemological positions, the idea of *affective relationality* is also central to critical analyses of mood. For Felski and Fraiman, moods ‘are often shared, collective, and social, shaping our experience of being with others’. They are ‘shaped by broader social currents and by the linguistic and cultural world into which they are thrown’.[[74]](#footnote-74) As such, although moods often feel very personal, they are not simply ‘inside’ subjects but rather involve ‘a blurring between individual and public affect’.[[75]](#footnote-75) Moods are therefore simultaneously personal and impersonal: they are both ‘with us’ and before and after us, inhabiting but also exceeding relations of human subjectivity. Importantly, given the multiple relationalities through which moods arise, congeal, circulate, shift and dissipate, they can never be fully subject to our control or agency. In Jonathan Flatley’s reading, for example, although we do exert some ‘agency in relation to our affects and affective experiences’, moods ‘may not be *directly* subject to intentions – I cannot, after all, simply *decide* not to be depressed or anxious anymore (I wish!)’.[[76]](#footnote-76) Or as Svendsen puts it, ‘we cannot simply choose how to relate to the world, because moods cannot be changed at will’.[[77]](#footnote-77) This understanding of moods is consistent with the Klenian notion of positions, which are conceived as both pre- and post-conscious. Reparation, for Klein, is a process we will have passed through, rather than an active process we intentionally orchestrate.

From this perspective, contrary to what might be signalled by the emergence of a reparative ‘turn’ in cultural studies, the ‘mood work’ that cultural theory requires is not (and cannot) simply be a matter of *deciding* what kind of ‘mood’ or ‘position’ we wish to adopt or mobilise in our orientations towards others, including our texts. Rather, I want to argue, we need to *inhabit* moods as a means to understand their ambivalence as well as their discursive-material power. We might begin to do this, for example, by paying further attention to the moods we are ‘in’ when we read and write and the nature of the mixed feelings they involve, to how ‘our’ moods might relate to both psycho-social investments and wider intellectual, cultural and political atmospheres, and what this affective complexity might mean for the knowledge we produce. We could ask what ‘our’ moods do to ‘us’ and what we do to them, how we grapple with different moods or vacillate between them, how our moods bind us to or differentiate us from others across space and time, and how we may be attuned to or alienated from the moods of our texts. We might consider moreover, whether further attention to the affective relations among ‘human’ and ‘textual’ moods might enable different ways of thinking through the visceral, diffuse and ambivalent workings of knowledge, power and transformation at this current conjuncture.

For both Sedgwick and Spivak, like scholars of mood, I want to suggest, this tarrying with affective ambivalence remains a key and inescapable project of cultural theory. My discussion in this article has sought to identify some key theoretical-political modes through which this project can be/is being pursued, and specifically, how we can negotiate the double-binds of textually-oriented, politically-engaged, cultural criticism in the current academic and socio-political context. Firstly, I have suggested that, rather than positioning ‘considerations of materiality, affect and embodiment in opposition to textual analysis’, we should investigate ‘their interrelations as intimate co-dependence’.[[78]](#footnote-78) Secondly, I have argued that instead of mobilising reparation as a solution to paranoia, we need to attend to the ‘instability and mutual inscription’ of these affective positions[[79]](#footnote-79), while also situating this pairing within a wider range or network of possible affective orientations and moods. Inhabiting the ambivalence of ‘our’ moods and translating between relational moods (personal and collective; human and textual) is one critical-affective practice through which we can attend to the constitutive connections among discursivity/materiality and paranoia/reparation, while exploring the multiple ways in which we are affectively oriented towards, invested in, and constitutively entangled with texts as research objects. Furthermore, the forms of affective translation and attending to ambivalence and that such mood work involves can also train us to approach the complexities and contradictions of contemporary neoliberal political relations (and our enmeshment with them) in somewhat less deterministic ways – that is, in ways that resist a desire to understand power as a ‘zero-sum game’ and instead encounter it, in Sedgwick’s words, as ‘a form of relationality that deals in… negotiations (including win-win negotiations), the exchange of affect, and other small differentials, the middle ranges of agency’.[[80]](#footnote-80)

Far from signalling resignation to the inevitability of neoliberal forms of governmentality – including the neoliberal university - this approach to cultural analysis acknowledges that both *understanding* and *changing* these complicated structures, processes and atmospheres requires more than exposing the ways in which they are pernicious and damaging *or* responding to them with an affirmative effort to provide sustenance. We might say that, in the longer term, it calls for the continuing development of what Spivak refers to as ‘ethical reflexes’. In its referencing of both the politico-ethical and the biological-material, the concept of ethical reflexes points provocatively to the deep, affective nature of the change in ourselves that she suggests is necessary to make meaningful changes in our world(s). Like Sedgwick in her analysis of the hermeneutics of suspicion, Spivak is critical of the assumption that the intellectual and political work of consciousness-raising via exposure is a sufficient or necessary catalyst to positive social transformation. What is required to generate material and political change beyond ‘the drama of exposure’[[81]](#footnote-81), Spivak argues, is ‘patient epistemological care’ that cultivates our ability to think, feel and respond ethically at the most deepest levels of embodied being. ‘Otherwise’, she argues, ‘there’s no training when the oppressed emerges from “freedom from” to “freedom to”… Otherwise the imagination is not strongly enough trained to realize that “social movements” are co-opted by state and elite, with different agendas, ceaselessly’.[[82]](#footnote-82) Of course, for Spivak, as for Sedgwick, to think ethically is, by definition, to interrogate universality, and thus to move with and through contingency, contradiction and change. Ethical reflexes are thus not pre-programmed to make us respond to others or the world any particular or predictable ways. Rather, once cultivated over time, they might make more automatic qualities such as intellectual curiosity, openness to discovery, an ability to sense difference and change and a capacity to respond imaginatively and critically to the ambivalence of power. And it is through the development of ethical reflexes, Spivak contends, that new political atmospheres and structures of feeling might emerge.

CONCULSIONS

In the midst of intellectual and political atmospheres in which linguistic, textual and discursive analysis are increasingly positioned as outmoded or anachronistic, both Sedgwick and Spivak, like scholars of mood, explore the materiality of textuality and ask what role close reading might play in wider practices of social sustenance and affective transformation – practices that might diagnose and expose but also nurture and ameliorate, that might cultivate ethical reflexes rather than solidifying dominant habits, and that might reinvigorate our efforts to negotiate the affective complexities and contradictions of power in and through our writing. As I have discussed, both reparation and translation offer sensorial modes of textual engagement concerned with negotiating affective ambivalence in both intellectual production and political life. Yet when reparation, figured as an intellectual practice of love and nurturance, congeals as a preferred way of ‘doing’ cultural theory, we may lose sight not only of our ‘necessarily conflicted relation to objects’[[83]](#footnote-83) (including textual objects), but also the ways in which positions and moods may be resistant to our best intentions. Moreover, when reparation is upheld as a preferred alternative to paranoia – a way out of the hermeneutics of suspicion – we may ignore or deny the affective double bind at the heart of critical theory, a bind which Sedgwick both acknowledged and performed in her own writing. As a mode of interpretation attuned to affective nuance and complexity, and one that proceeds in awareness of its own impossibility, translation is, within Spivak’s framework, precisely about inhabiting the double bind. Although translation also figures love as vital to ethical cultural analysis, it associates love less with psychic repair than with surrender – an opening of the self to the particular rhetorical call of a text, to the affective qualities of textuality that may exceed language. As such, it compels us to hesitate in response to the impetus to repair - to sit with ambivalence a little longer, to reflect on the complexity of ‘our’ moods and those of our texts, to feel the often conflicted relations between affective attunement, knowledge and power. For both Sedgwick and Spivak, I would argue, it is through this kind of mood work that we might continue to cultivate our imaginative abilities to negotiate the contradictions of contemporary power relations, in all their cultural, economic and psycho-social complexity.

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