Abstract

This is an affect theory examination of the true crime and comedy podcast titled *My Favorite Murder* with a closer inspection of the episode "190 – Lick the Clock" which was published in the fall of 2019. This thesis uses autoethnographic vignettes, multimodal analysis, and affect theory to analyse the phenomenon of having an affect experiences by the podcast medium. First, it theorises the style of autoethnography and methodises autobiographical vignettes as reflexivity insights to affects and secondly, it theorises affects from a psychoanalytical, philosophical, and cultural approach.

To begin with the theory introduces and conceptualises autoethnography by relying on post modernistic traditions that disregards the concept of objective reality and meanwhile effectuates the stylistic choices of autoethnographies Michael Humphreys and Nina Lykke. It theorises affect theory by introducing the concept from a psychoanalytical point of view by Silvan S. Tomkins. Through his work, the nature and agenda of affects is made known which is later operationalised in the cultural approach. The psychoanalytical approach transforms into concepts of escapism and philosophical debate on the need to disappear for the sake of mental balance. Lastly, and most predominantly, affects are operationalised into cultural studies by theorising the works of Sara Ahmed, Denise Riley, Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth, Elspeth Probyn and others who have worked the affective theorisation before. Ahmed and the book *The Affect Theory Reader* edited by Gregg and Seigworth have made a huge impact on the cultural approach and theorisation of affects in this thesis. Furthermore, the methodology re-introduces Humphreys' autoethnographic style by first describing Carey Jewitt and Gunther Kress' application of the multimodal method, and then using Humphreys' vignettes as reflexivity modes throughout the whole thesis. The autoethnographic vignettes break the format of classic academic analysis by relying on personal experience as the main motivator for understanding a cultural phenomenon. It provides a subjective observation which is essential in understanding the affect agenda. The analysis, while also relying on vignettes for insight, is written in the style and method of Lykke's ethno-drama and describes the different modes, and how and why they have the capacity to impact an affect experience. Lykke's method can be characterised as an argumentative analysis and discussion which is why the analysis of this thesis ends in a similar fashion of both in-depth text analysis and a wider perspective analysis of the *My Favorite Murder* podcast and its format.

Based on the autoethnographic affect analysis, I determine why podcasting is an opportune medium for me in which to experience and achieve affect balance. Most importantly, I determine why *My Favorite Murder* is affect balancing for me and how it has come to be so in the last few years. This is evident both in the analysis and in the conclusion, but most importantly, it is evident in the exposé of the self through reflexivity vignettes.

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An Autoethnographic Affect Experience

Podcast Listening, My Favorite Murder, and the Art of Getting Personal

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1.Thesis Statement

By means of an autoethnographic style, I investigate the phenomenon of "affect experience" through a multimodal method approach to podcast listening. Through the medium of vignettes, the autoethnographic style double acts as a reflexivity art installation. In consequence of the nature of affects, both autoethnographic theory and style, and the psychoanalytical origins of affects are theorised as well as culturally theorised and investigated throughout.

1.1 A Special Thanks To

/M, thank you so much for putting up with me amid a global pandemic. Supervising me under normal circumstance would have been (and has been) challenging enough, and yet you not only had the patience to read a million first drafts, you also had the grace to be kind about it. Thank you for encouraging me to play with the format. I want to be you when I grow up.

2. The Introduction

The following work is an autoethnographic study into the cultural phenomenon of having an affective podcast listening experience. In a beginner's course to Literary Tendencies a few years ago, I had an epiphany which lead to this creation. A few semesters prior, I had zoomed in on the 'isms and ideologies closest to my heart and found my niche interest in academia. My 'thing' was postcolonial feminists, but even more importantly, I decided that those who taught me what it meant to be a postcolonial feminist *should be* postcolonial feminists. I thought, logically, that they were the experts. Sometime between finishing my bachelor's and this beginner's course to literary tendencies, I had begun questioning my own motives and affinity for liking this 'thing'. Why this? Why do I place all my eggs in this basket? Nobody asked me to account for always choosing something I loved to work with, and I always chose it, figuring it would feel less like work and more like a hobby. A labour of love. In papers, when I concluded that Bell Hooks was an incredible black feminist writer because she was a black feminist, nobody asked me if, perhaps, my inclination to conclude this was because I already had an affinity towards feministic texts. The epiphany was like realising that you had been standing next to an elephant this whole time and not seen it. A professor presented me with an article called "Affect Studies and Literary Criticism" by Patrick Hogan (2016) and suddenly, someone was asking me if I was aware of my own motives and biases when I conducted research. It was showing me that in any situation, I am just as important a factor to consider as the text. Had I known then what I know now, I would have recognised the post modernistic characteristics of affect studies; the self-referential, self-consciousness, the rejection of objective reality, the epistemological relativism. However, affect studies did something I thought was not allowed in the academic world because I had not seen it before. It focused on emotions, feelings, and affects.

"How to begin" Seigworth asks, "when, after all, there is no pure or somehow originary state for affect?" (Gregg & Seigworth, 1). I began my affect journey by trying to understand what affects were and why some, myself included, were drawn to texts that were classified as 'unaesthetically pleasing', like the works of Danish artist Michael Kvium (1955-). After that, while continuously trying to understand what an affect is, I conceptualised other affects in texts such as happiness, disgust, and shame. Still, I could not grasp what affects were. I read the same passage from *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010) over and over again: "Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities" (Gregg

& Seigworth, 1), and somehow forgot it immediately. I knew what they did, as I had multiple analyses of texts that were affective, but I kept getting blocked by a nagging voice in my head that asked, "*what makes them affective?*", and I realised my method of approach was wrong. I was using a narratological method with a focus on the text and, thus, unable to answer my question. As it is with brilliant supervisors and mentors, I shared my troubles with my supervisor a year ago just as we were getting started with the fall semester, and in a solemn *matter of fact* way, she said: "perhaps you should try to use the autoethnographic method". In researching this term, I again heard an audible *puff*, and standing next to me was a large elephant. "Oh, one of you guys again.. I must be on the right track, then", I must have mumbled. Imaginary elephants or not, here was a method that allowed me to approach affects in the same way I had approached postcolonial feminism, by questioning the expert(s). So, when asking, "*what makes them affective?*", my answer is, "*I do. I make them affective*". Choosing a "them" was the easy part. Texts are always affective to us, so it became a simple matter of looking at what affects me the most *right now*. *Right then* as it is with *right now*, I was wearing a headset and listening to a podcast. Realising I had experienced all affects in a podcast listening experience, choosing this media seems like an opportunity to explore *the autoethnographic affective experience of listening to a podcast*.

2.1 Introducing the Podcast

The *My Favorite Murder* podcast posted the first episode "1 – My Firstest Murder" on the 14th of January 2016 (Podcast). Since then, it has evolved into more than 400 episodes of regular hour-long episodes coming out every Thursday, and 25 minute-long 'minisodes' coming out every Monday. On their website it says:

> My Favorite Murder is the hit true crime comedy podcast hosted by Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark. Since its inception in early 2016, the show has broken download records and sparked an enthusiastic, interactive "Murderino" fan base who come out in droves for their sold-out shows worldwide. (myfavoritemurder.com)

The usual structure of an episode is simple: Kilgariff has researched a murder which she tells Hardstark, and Hardstark has researched a murder she then tells Kilgariff. They take turns starting an episode, and in the end they share an uplifting episode from the previous week, so they do not end on a sad note. Choosing an episode for an in-depth analysis regarding affects, I feel I have a responsibility to whomever is reading this to choose something 'light-hearted' in the true crime genre. I realise that this might be a fool's errand. I have no control over how

an episode might affect anyone besides me. True crime is not for everyone and within the genre there are degrees of awfulness, some that even I as a veteran true crime enthusiast, have troubles with. This includes stories about paedophiles, stories with detailed description of torture on both humans and animals, and young girls who are victims of sex trafficking. A few times I have not adhered to my gut feeling when it told me to stop listening and those stories still haunt me. So, if not for the readers sake, then for my own, I should not and will not spend weeks dissecting my affects about crimes against children whilst also being a mother. Episode "190 – Lick the Clock" as awful as it is that people died, is grazed by a historic nostalgia of the fight for women's rights in workplaces and is peculiar because it portrays a murder-by-passion case, which allows me to discuss how the law acknowledges the importance of affect (myfavoritemurder.com). It also has an interesting balance of horrible injustice, intriguing and puzzling historical facts, and over-encompassing jealousy which I find justifiable to analyse and share with anyone.

2.1.1 Hardstark's Story: The Radium Girls

In 1898 Marie Curie and her husband Pierre discovered radium. Not yet realising the side effects of radioactivity in general and the side effects of prolonged exposure to radium, this element became vastly popular for its glow in the dark properties. The use of radium as an industrial tool grew exponentially in the years following because, unlike some of the other elements from the periodic table with the same chemical properties, it was stable to work with (Foundation). When the radium salt crystals where mixed with glue and zinc sulphide, glow-in-the-dark paint was made. Having made what seemed like a relatively safe and fun product, uses for this grew: glow-in-the-dark pens, plates and all sort of everyday items were useful during The Great War on the frontlines; the soldiers did not have to light candles and make the enemy aware of their position. Especially watches and instruments for aeroplanes benefitted greatly from the illuminating paint. The factories who produced these parts hired young women to paint with the radium and "No safety precautions were taken, and the women were even encouraged to lick their brushes to keep the tip pointed and prevent the paint from drying. By the end of the day, the women themselves would be glowing from the radioactive paint on their clothes and skin" (Foundation). In the early 1920s, the company 'US Radium' hired a Harvard physiologist to investigate the work conditions of the factory and in the report, it said:

> Dust samples collected in the workroom from various locations and from chairs not
> used by the workers were all luminous in the dark room. Their hair, faces, hands,

> arms, necks, the dresses, the underclothes, even the corsets of the dial painters were luminous. One of the girls showed luminous spots on her legs and thighs. The back of another was luminous almost to the waist. (Foundation)

It got to a point where the factory workers would wake up at night to go to the bathroom and see themselves illuminated in the mirror. However, US Radium changed the report and filled it with praises instead, before publishing it.

> All along, the company assured the women that their work was perfectly safe. Within a few years, however, dozens of the women began showing signs of illness. The human body mistakes radium for calcium, so it filled their bones as calcium would, irradiating them from within. The victims had their bones break, teeth fall out, and spines collapse, and by 1927 more than 50 had died. (Foundation)

Any attempt at seeking compensation from US Radium where squashed. The company was well protected by politics and lawyers, and furthermore, medical and legal fees for these girls were enormous. Atomic Heritage Foundation adds: "Eventually, dial painter Grace Fryer filed a lawsuit along with four other women for damages of $250,000. In desperate need of money, they would eventually settle for $10,000 each and a $600 annual payment, although none of them would survive more than two years after the settlement." (Foundation). The Radium Girls became a national sensation. Although US Radium is not the only factory with severe cases of radiation poisoning, it is the most infamous. The story about The Radium Girls leaves a huge political and cultural legacy; laws in America have been passed that honour workers' rights to compensation for occupational illness, and several books have been written about these women. The 2018 film, '*Radium Girls'* depicted the true story of what the women went through (Girls).

2.1.2 Kilgariff's story: The Murder of Lisa Cihaski

On September 21st, 1989 Lisa Cihaski was found murdered in her car in a parking lot outside of a Hotel not far from her workplace. Lisa had the misfortune of being ex-girlfriend to young farmer Bill Buss. Bill had, in the summer months of 1988, broken up with his current girlfriend Lori Esker after they had been dating for a year and a half, and he and Lisa had rekindled their relationship afterwards. He had also told his friends that he wanted to give his now-again girlfriend Lisa Cihaski an engagement ring on her 20th birthday in October. However, Lori Esker was not ready to let go of Bill Buss and the dream of living on a farm with him. In a Wisconsin State Farmer article from February 2020 following the story today,

it states: "Friends and college classmates testified that Esker was obsessive and still wanted a relationship with Buss, and repeatedly told them she hated Cihaski and would get Buss back somehow" (Kottke). An article in the Chicago Tribune from October 8th, 1989 reported the murder as following:

> Last Monday Esker was charged with first-degree murder, which in Wisconsin carries a mandatory life sentence. The charges followed a statement Esker made Sept. 29 when she agreed to be questioned at the sheriff`s headquarters in Wausau. Sheriff`s Deputy Randy Hoenisch said that Esker told him she rented a car on the night of Sept. 20 and drove from the River Falls campus to see Cihaski. Esker said she confronted Cihaski in the motel parking lot as she left work. The two women sat in Cihaski`s car and talked. According to Hoenisch`s report, the conversation became heated when Esker implied that she was pregnant by Buss. Esker told him she and Chiaski exchanged insults. The two women struggled. Esker took a belt lying on the back seat and wrapped it around Cihaski's neck, according to the deputy`s report. Esker said she didn`t know if Cihaski "was dead or just passed out," the report continued. She held a mirror to Cihaski`s face to see if she was breathing, the report said. She wasn`t. (Worthington)

During the case "Marathon County District Attorney Greg Grau told the jury that Esker had to have held the belt tightly around Cihaski's neck for a minimum of 2 minutes in order for her to die" (Kottke), which lead the jury to believe that the strangulation was intentional instead of an accident, like Lori Esker claimed. After deliberating for more than seven hours, the jury agreed with Attorney Greg Grau and convicted her of first-degree homicide and a life in prison. Esker, now 50 years old, was released from a correctional facility in Racine County in Wisconsin in the spring of 2019 (Kottke). The story has also rippled through cultural tides and, in 1995, a made-for-tv film, called *Beauty's Revenge* aired on the American Lifetime channel (IMDB, IMDB.com "Beauty's Revenge (1995)").

3. The Theory

Early on, it will become evident that the stylistic choice and academic writing process of this master's thesis are vastly different from the traditional approach of a cultural master's thesis. The method and styles of autoethnography are new and considered 'modern' by some, however that may be interpreted. However, using an autoethnographical method and style can do something no other approach is able to: It addresses the intricacies of subjectivity by asking the author to be an active participant. It addresses, quite frankly, the idiosyncrasy of objectivity and the idea that the experiencer can remove oneself from the experience. The idea of objective reality has long been debated amongst philosophers like John Deely who published a book which he named *Purely Objective Reality* (2009) where he introduced his first chapter "The Problem of Objectivity" by tearing apart how the dictionary defines objectivity with:

> To make matters worse, this authoritative work identifies this word "objective" as in binary opposition to "subjective", by which is meant (we are told) anything "dependent on the mind or an individual's perception for its existence"; anything "based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinion. (Deely, 14)

and adding that:

> So what have we learned from this consultation? Pretty much what any late modern speaker of English intuitively (by reason of the habit structure of the language at this historical juncture) already 'knows', namely, that there is practically no such thing as "objective thought". (Deely, 14)

Autoethnography addresses the ghost of objective reality by framing the research around a core of subjective reality. The point is creating a body of work that proves that the conclusion reached in the end, has been affected by both culture impacting us and us impacting the culture. John Deely debunks the idea of objective reality, stating that the very word 'object' has been obscured in modern English into something that can only exist in opposition to 'subject' (Deely, 14-15). He proposes that the word itself should lean more towards Joao Poinsot's work from 1632 named *Treatrise on Signs* (Treactatus de Signis), which contemplates the definition of an object as something equal to the understanding of signs as something to be interpreted. Deely writes:

> Let me emphasize this point from the outset. Once it becomes clear that "all thought is in signs" (the realization first formulated by Poinsot's teachers, The Conimbricenses

1), it becomes further clear that all objects are objects signified, or, to suppress the redundancy, all objects are significates. Not all things are significates, but all objects are. In other words, to say "significate" is to say clearly what "object" says obscurely and confusedly, and in the late modern. (Deely, 15)

If we allow objects to be signs, we give them the action that they need to be understood by the reader of the sign, inevitably making the reader an active participant. In "Happy Objects", Ahmed builds upon this construction of objects as '*not objects but also objects*' in relation to affect theory, a point I return to later in the chapter. With her research, she shows how the making of objects is dependent on the maker, and not necessarily the reality it is made in (Ahmed, Happy Objects, 29). In short, that means that the making of objectivity and the understanding of objectivity are both individual processes which makes it, inherently, a subjective product in the end. The autoethnographic belief addresses the making of the subjective product and the understanding of the subjective product as tools in a cultural study. However, what seems much more pertinent to point out when using an autoethnographic method, is the style of writing that follows, which differs very much from cultural academic tradition.

<div align="center">3.1 Introducing an Autoethnographic Style</div>

Throughout this whole master's thesis, I both advocate, use, discuss, and reflect on the use of autoethnographic research in academia. I am introducing the style and a format suggested by Michael Humphreys and his years of autoethnographic research, which he condensed into an article called "Getting Personal: Reflexivity and Autoethnographic Vignettes" from 2005. In this article, Humphreys argues for the idea and use of autoethnographic vignettes throughout his own paper by discussing it's applicational value. He writes:

> the question arises as to where the use of autoethnography and first-person vignettes can take us as qualitative researchers. Is it applicable as a strategy for increasing the richness, reflexivity, plausibility, and authority of all our empirical research? Or is it of only limited use in special cases such as an autobiographical account of my academic career? In arguing for wider application, I agree with Ellis and Bochner (2000) that autoethnography "stimulate[s] more discussion of working the spaces between subjectivity and objectivity, passion and intellect, and autobiography and culture" (p. 761). I argue that the use of autoethnographic vignettes in any qualitative research account would enrich the story, ethnography, or case study and enhance the

> reflexivity of the methodology. (Humphreys, Getting Personal: Reflexivity and
> Autoethnographic Vignettes, 853)

These vignettes, he writes, comes from the idea that showing how a personal account of any given situation can be used as an academic tool in both presenting and reflecting on culture. However, as he writes, this is not done easily. Claiming it can be applied as a reflexivity tool only comes about after first discussing the idiosyncrasies of using ones-self to debate a cultural phenomenon. Humphreys uses the term 'academic career' as his phenomenon whereas this master's thesis works with 'affect experiences', but in discussions of the term and style of autoethnography, it is interchangeable. Another example of a cultural phenomenon which is represented in an autoethnographic style is Nina Lykke's article "Queer Widowhood" (2015), which I will return to. First, Humphreys makes in interesting observation regarding his phenomenon:

> The notion of an "academic career" is then examined before I present the story of my
> own post-Ph.D. career change. To enhance this story, I use three vignettes both as a
> means to "return the author openly to the qualitative research text" (Lincoln &
> Denzin, 1998, p. 413) and to overtly acknowledge my awareness that I am an "actor
> in my own life production" (Gray, 2003, p. 265). (Humphreys, Getting Personal:
> Reflexivity and Autoethnographic Vignettes, 840)

Humphreys' style highlights his personal accounts very clearly by announcing them as vignettes but also by presenting them in *italics* so whenever an autobiographical paragraph appears, the reader is aware. This is not the only way, as Humphreys contemplates the way in which autoethnographic research is being included in academic papers. He writes:

> Such "personal" accounts, according to Ellis and Bochner (2000), may take many
> forms including stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, journals, and
> social science prose. However, it is texts—which can be defined as "personal essays .
> . . fragmented prose [featuring] emotion, and self-consciousness" (Ellis & Bochner,
> 2000, p. 739)—that serve as the vehicle for my own reflexive autobiographic
> monologue in this article. I am here aiming to achieve what Saldana (2003) described
> as "a solo narrative ...reveal[ing] a discovery and retell[ing] an epiphany in a
> character's life" (pp. 224-225) and in the process, illustrate the potential added value
> for qualitative research accounts. (Humphreys, Getting Personal: Reflexivity and
> Autoethnographic Vignettes, 841)

Michael Humphreys is famous for creating and using the autobiographical vignettes, but he is not the only autoethnographically researcher. Although I will apply vignettes as Humphreys does for anecdotal purposes, I am also fascinated by Lykke's style in "Queer Widowhood" (2015). Lykke lost her 'beloved', as she calls her, to cancer and then, because she is in a perfect position to do so, conducted a study on what it means to be a queer widow in a heteronormative society. Her piece is riddled with personal anecdotes. In fact, the introduction is almost written as a scene from a film on the last few hours before her beloved died. Calling her partner "my beloved" consistently throughout the text is extremely affective to the reader. It invokes an empathy that does not usually exist in academic studies, which is exactly the energy autoethnographical writing is able to generate. Her approach is inspiring:

> We listened to your mouth. But no more breaths came. The only sound left was the mechanical murmur of the oxygen apparatus. We kept standing with our arms around each other, looking at your smiling mouth and your almost closed eyes. For a very long time. (Lykke, 91)

She becomes intrigued as to how her environment treats being queer and a widow because she is (unfortunately) an expert on the topic. She conducts her research on this phenomenon while being hyper-aware of her personal stakes in the findings. What makes Lykke's text relevant for this part of understanding the style, is her approach to her own mourning. She writes:

> With my insistence on queer widowhood and mourning, I want to resist neoliberal, health-normative and individualist culture, which fetishizes personal happiness (Ahmed, 2010) and requires that we ignore vulnerability, unhappiness and loss and instead look for a bright future with ever-new accomplishments. (Lykke, 85)

Lykke refers to affect theorist Ahmed's book, *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), a book I return to later when I theorise affects. Her autoethnographic style contains no vignettes but continues to refer to cultural reflections and theories throughout. In analysing the cultural phenomenon of queer widowhood, she writes, as Humphreys would categorise it, a 'personal essay [of] fragmented prose" (Humphreys, Getting Personal: Reflexivity and Autoethnographic Vignettes, 841). Both styles inspire me in their different capabilities, and I propose a mixture of the two, Humphreys' vignettes for specific relevant anecdotes and Lykke's personal essay form when analysing the phenomena in their cultural context, like when Lykke uses her grief and all the negative feelings of loss in an innovative way. She

pushes against the societal expectations of how to deal with "bad" emotions and invites them to play a part in both her personal and professional life. In doing so, she acknowledged that what affects her privately also affects her in public. Instead of only allowing the "fetishized happiness" in her public sphere, she allows the stigmatised 'negative' affects to affect her.

Somehow, it seems so simple to use those who live through an event as experts on this a phenomenon. Early on in my academic career I made a similar choice, not realising that what I was doing was using autoethnographically themed texts when I researched the ideology of black feminism using only black feminist as my sources. Who would know better what the ideology meant other than those who formed it and those who shaped its meaning every day? Perhaps, in reading the next part of theory, it will come as less of a surprise that, when researching 'the affect experience', in searching for the expert on the phenomenon, I am searching for myself. I recognise how new this style might seem. It is cutting edge and testing the boundaries of what is expected in an academic cultural study. However, looking back at traditions from feministic research, as with Bell Hooks' *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), Barbara Smith's *Home Girls* (1983), Patricia Hill Collins *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), writing 'what you know' is not entirely foreign, and what is more significant, 'writing it how you know it' also plays a part. I have always loved Gloria Anzuldüa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (1987) because she describes her experience growing up speaking both Spanish and English in California. This piece has long been used in postcolonial research as well as in feminism. What strikes me as particularly affective in her text is that she writes exactly how she thinks, which is translingual. Not completely English or completely Spanish, neither segment in the text are translated, because why should they be? Her experience of growing up is translingual and so is ours when reading about it. Ahmed has a similar tradition in her writing which almost becomes an installation in its making. In *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), she uses the experience of being a feminist to research what it means living a feminist life. In a similar feminist tradition, Humphreys has developed his vignettes, more as an organisation tool, he claims, but still they have a feminist connotation in their origins. He writes:

> By directly addressing myself as an organizational ethnographer via my feelings, my personal involvement, and my emotions in such "meaningful life vignettes" (Saldana, 2003, p. 221), I hope to encourage readers to taste the flavor of a crucial period in my academic life (Tayeb, 1991) by placing myself as one of the actors firmly within the "play" itself (Butler, 1997). Accepting Louis's (1991) argument that "I am an

instrument of my inquiry: and the inquiry is inseparable from who I am" (p. 365), my intention here is to provide access to some of my natural and spontaneous reactions and dispel any notion of a researcher as an independent, objective observer (Stacey, 1996). (Humphreys, Getting Personal: Reflexivity and Autoethnographic Vignettes, 842)

Not unlike Deely, Humphreys rejects the idea of an 'independent, objective observer' by using his bias to form well-rounded research. Instead of pretending his subjectivity does not exist, he, like a long history of black feminists and postcolonial feminists, highlights it and makes it an advantage.

3.2 Introducing Affect Theory

3.2.1 Vignette

It is quite late in the evening, but I have spent all day inside working. It is only the beginning of spring but somehow it is still a little light outside. As I am lacing my runners, I think that perhaps this is what energises me and motivates me to run at this hour: the dwindling light from the sun. Shoes are on, and as I am putting on my headset, I am also considering what playlist to hit play on. I think I will need the one where it ends with *Queen*'s "Under Pressure". It is impossible for me to run to any of my true crime podcasts. I get too paranoid and feel like someone is chasing me. But Freddie... Freddie always makes me feel invincible. In the beginning I feel like I can run for an eternity – the music makes me disappear into another world. I am at a concert – I am the singer – I am not running, which is the whole point of the rumbling bass in my ears. I need to forget that I am exercising. But eventually the reality catches up to me and my breath gets challenged. Just as I am ready to give up, thinking "come on, just walk. You have already done well", Freddie enters the scene: "Mmm num ba de - Dum bum ba be - Doo buh dum ba beh beh". Freddie Mercury died 193 days after I was born, but the affect in his voice and music makes me escape into another world 29 years after his death.

I spent my 8th semester looking for answers to why I was, and am still, fascinated by morbid art and fictional stories that brought me physical discomfort. Subsequently, I continued with affects in my 9th semester where I specialised in happiness. Working with and researching affect theory seems to be an endless tunnel of academic development and self-discovery. Perhaps then, it should no longer befuddle me that Ph.D. in Psychology, Silvan S. Tomkins, spent more than almost 40 years writing and researching the nuances of affects. In 1962-63 Tomkins published the first two volumes out of what would be five, of his lifework with

affects. *Affect Imagery Consciousness* I-V is a massive collection which deals with the supraordinate concept of not separating affect, imagery, and consciousness, but rather to think about the three terms as interlocking concepts that triggers each other constantly, in the end creating an awareness of who we are, which separates us from animals (Nathanson, xi). This being in the field of psychology, Tomkins used – at the time – highly advanced technology to study the human face in both cultural and social interactions. He used a machine that could take 10,000 frames/second and would later compile everything known about the human face (characteristics of the skin, musculature, thermal response, enervation) into findings that let him discover micro receptors. "Such receptors would allow sensitivity to subtle and almost microscopic movements of its musculature; the signals they picked up were made more salient by moment-to-movement alternations in facial circulation" (Nathanson, xii). Tomkins studied every single millimetre of the human face – he claimed the face was the display board of "the affect system" (Nathanson, xii). Tomkins has left behind an enormous legacy in the field of psychology and his research has also impacted cultural studies in various ways. While he might describe anger (something that is relevant for a cultural study), he would also conceptualise how to manage anger or how to locate it, which is far more relevant to psychologists. However, since affect theory and affect studies are much more than their psychoanalytical foundation, its transition into cultural studies is better understood by looking at the different approaches with which theorists have operationalised its ideas.

3.3 Operationalising Affect in Language Studies: An Early Attempt

One attempt to operationalise affects in a linguistic study can be found in *Impersonal Passion. Language as Affect* (2005) by Denise Riley. Her book is relevant because it is a discovery of how language without affect is, in fact, impersonal, and that affect is what makes language as forceful as it can be. In the introduction, she asks herself whether this hypothesis is "somewhat emotionally overwrought" (Riley, 5), an interesting comment at the time, as autoethnographic research was about to work its way into the academic world. She, like many researchers at the time, felt unsure of how much 'I' was allowed before the research was dismissed by peers, however she immediately follows it with:

> […] the conception of an affect-soaked power of language itself can be demonstrated quite pragmatically. If the affective quality of music can be granted to exist irrespective of its hearers' sensibilities and their quirks, then why not accord a similar relative independence to language's emotionality? There is a tangible affect in

> language which stands somewhat apart from the expressive intentions of an individual
> speaker; so language can work outside of its official content. (Riley, 5)

What she is trying to prove is how language can transcend its own reach without being spoken; it is still affective without a speaker and a listener. I find this idea interesting as one of the earlier ideas of affect theory. Riley tries to prove how affect is not only in the power of the receiver, but also the sender *and* the text itself. However, she quickly recants her initial thought. There might be affect in language *as it is*, but language cannot exist without at least a 'speaker'. She writes: "Language as a speaking thing, neither my master nor my instrument, is amiably indifferent to me" and "While the very idea of an affect of language does suggest that the self stands at a certain remove from itself, this is well removed from a mournful rendering of the self as a dispossessed phenomenon in its own eyes" (Riley, 7). Language is meant to be affective. Her book shows that there is no such thing as "impersonal passion", because even trying to remove passion from language will create an affect. If the speaker goes to great lengths to remove as much emotion from his/her language as possible, there is an unknown affect-factor to account for in the receiver. Of course, Tomkins said that everything in life is affect (Nathanson, xi), and Denise Riley is one of first scholars to acknowledge the power of affect in linguistics. By acknowledging that affect cannot be removed from language (or any other thing, really), it opens questions to discover then, what affects are.

3.4 Operationalising Affects in Cultural Studies: The Affect Theory Reader

Affects have always been around, Tomkins simply named them to make them more tangible to work with in psychology; Thought, feelings, moments of remembrance, never consistent nor stable, never in one state but always changing. Affects are untouchable, but they have more impact on what we do and how we act than anything. In *The Affect Theory Reader* Gregg and Seigworth begin their introduction "An Inventory of Shimmers" with: "Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (Gregg & Seigworth, 1). They, like Tomkins, make note of how active affects are; they are always connected to an action in some way. They describe how affect is both a state of relation as well as the passage of forces, meaning that in any situation, an affect will reinforce itself by continuing to drive other scenarios that will become affective. They both *are* and create situations where they will *arise*. They can only motivate us to act, but we also are the affects we create and, at some point, before it gets to ambiguous, it is important to understand that affects without any stimulus cannot exist. Stimulus, as the theory will show, is a Tomkins'

term for that 'thing' that activates the affect. They only arise when stimulated, but that also happens to happen all the time. Gregg and Seigworth add that: "Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotions – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations" (Gregg & Seigworth, 1). This, they point out, is proof of the body's "immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusal as much as its invitations", effectively stating that by existing we are having affect experiences (Gregg & Seigworth, 1).

Before I continue my account of affect theory as a cultural studies term, I want to add that most of the sources I use to understand all the aspects of affect theory are written by social psychologists and philosophers. Even my 'bible' *The Affect Theory Reader* is labelled "cultural studies/philosophy". It is especially the relationship with philosophy that intrigues me; the power of affect is a curious thing that renders most affect theorists incapable of sticking to one academic tradition – neither should it. The theory of affects is just as un-confineable as affects themselves. What must be a true test of those who theorise it, is learning the academic traditions from psychology and philosophy, as well as cultural studies when trying to understand all its aspects. Gregg and Seigworth seem to have to come to terms with this challenge by acknowledging that, conceptualising affect into *the affect theory* is virtually impossible. Instead all the texts on affect theory become its own 'affect map', with highways, roads, small bike paths and huge intersections overlapping in an impossible pattern to vast to comprehend. They say:

> Traveling at varying tempos and durations within specific fields of inquiry while also slipping past even the most steadfast of disciplinary boundaries, the concept of 'affect' has gradually accrued a sweeping assortment of philosophical/psychological/physiological underpinnings, critical vocabularies, and ontological pathways, and, thus, can be (and has been) turned toward all manner of political/pragmatic/performative ends. (Gregg & Seigworth, 5)

Because affect theory is so versatile in its application to academic research, it can be tailored to suit anything. It's all-purpose flour, or the jeans in *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* (2005), it magically fits anyone and anything. The real challenge then, is in organising which

theories to include in one's own account of affect. In this, Gregg and Seigworth presents a map of 8 regions/roads/path to use as a template

3.4.1 The Regions

Gregg and Seigworth's list eight set of 'regions' or tendencies in affect theory which they credit as being highly inspired by Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect" (1995), Eve Sedgewick's "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold" (1995) and Tomkins' psychobiological affect theory[1]. Out of the eight routes to take, these are the three paths that this project will jump between:

> 4. The fourth occurs in certain lines of psychological and psychoanalytic inquiry where a relatively unabashed biologism remains co-creatively open to ongoing impingements and pressures from intersubjective and interobjective systems of social desiring.

> 5. The fifth is found in the regularly hidden-in-plain-sight politically engaged work – perhaps most often undertaken by feminists, queer theorist, disability activists, and subaltern peoples living under the thumb of a normativizing power – that attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workaday, of everyday and every-night life, and of 'experience', where persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide a body with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsist within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm.

> 6. The sixth can be seen in various attempts to turn away from the much-heralded 'linguistic turn' in the latter half of the twentieth century – from cultural anthropology to geography to communication and cultural studies to performance-based art practices to literary theory […] This turn to affect theory is sometimes focused on understanding how the 'outside' realms of the [text] intersect with the 'lower' or proximal senses (such as touch, taste, smell, rhythm and motion-sense, or, alternately/ultimately, the autonomic nervous system) while also arguing for a much wider definition for the social or cultural. Frequently this work focuses on those ethico-aesthetic spaces that are opened up by widely disparate assortment of affective

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[1] The way he theorises the affect system, as if it is part of our survival mechanism and encoded in our hardwiring is labelled. This gave him a reputation for being of a Darwinian psychoanalytical tradition bent on proving the evolution theory with psychology, (Gregg & Seigworth, 5)

encounters with, for example, new technological lures, infants, music, dance, and other more non-discursive arts, animals, and so on.

(Gregg & Seigworth, 7-8)

These approaches come with a set of expectations for the analysis and how affect theory will be operationalised. While there are endless paths to choose from (Seigworth calls it multiple trajectories, as if it were an explosion of affects in all directions), there is some common ground, a "path-ology", which is "a generative, pedagogic nudge aimed toward a body's becoming an ever more worldly sensitive interface, toward a style of being present in the struggles of our time" (Gregg & Seigworth, 12). This means that affect theorists are constantly aware of the space or body in which the affect theory is being formed or used. It is a constant awareness of surroundings and cultures, not just of the physical world but of the psychical as well. It is like having a finger on the pulse all the time in case the rhythm changes or stops. The other five regions presented in *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), while interesting, are useful in other areas.

3.4.1.1 The Fourth Region: The Affect System

The fourth approach is based on Tomkins' work. This is relevant to my current research because Tomkins' work is the baseline most other affect theories builds on. He named them and gave them agendas and described their nature, and thus provides me with a vocabulary to analyse the affect experience with. According to Tomkins, advanced lifeforms occupy two kingdoms – animal and plant. However, in the beginning of his career he struggled to define how the two kingdoms differed, until he realised the answer lies with the language: Animals are animated and plants remain still and planted (Nathanson, xiii). "But (so far) there is no evidence that any tree can learn, remember, or teach another what it has experienced, save for the species specific system of evolution" (Nathanson, xiii). The mobility of animals allows them (us) to seek out or escape specific situations and that are tightly linked to "the sophistication of its ability to analyze new data" (Nathanson, xiii) and moreover, it allows animals to remember what had happened for future utilization. While there are many and much more encompassing studies describing this phenomenon in animals, the result of this evolutionary traits means that animals (humans included) are incredibly adept at surviving.

We process data incredibly well, but we also remember data, and those two collectively are what interests Tomkins. With his affect system, he argued that we remember with our emotions. Tomkins described them as motivational mechanisms and, by doing so, he

gave affects an agenda. They motivate us based on past experiences. He categorised affects into nine headlines, and furthermore grouped them into "the positive affects", "the neutral affect", and "the negative affects". These affects are all considered "the inborn protocols that when triggered encourage us to spring into action" (Nathanson, xiii).

However, it is also important to notice that "Affect is motivating but never localizing" (Nathanson, xiii), meaning that affects only tells us that something needs our attention, and that other systems must be engaged somehow to see if the situation needs further action.
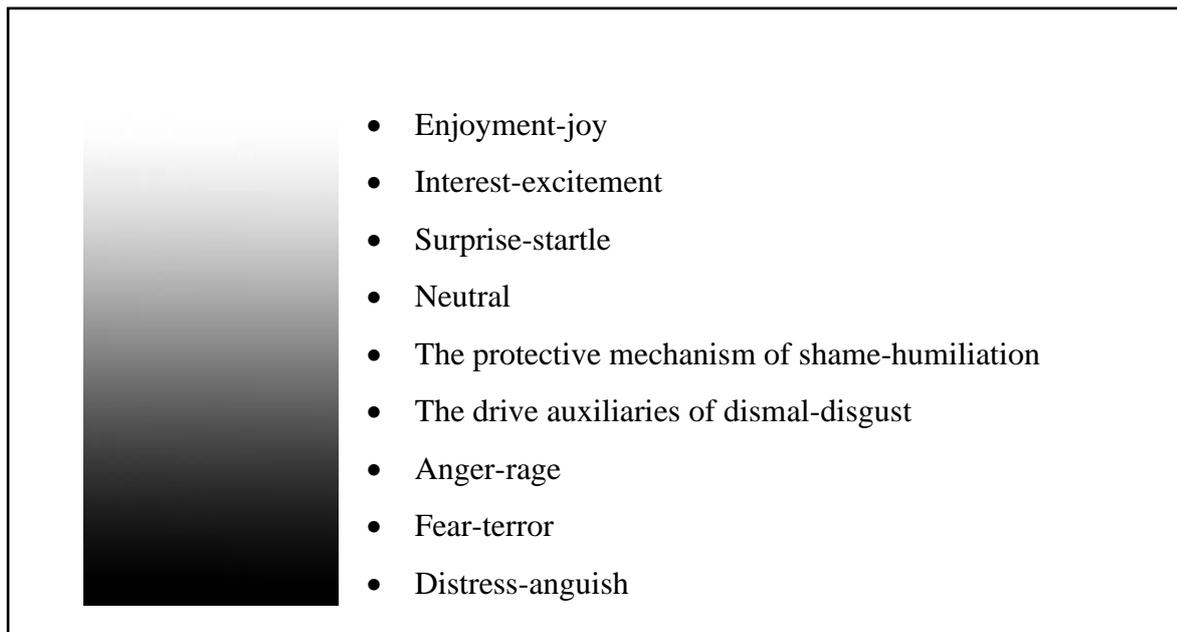
- Enjoyment-joy
- Interest-excitement
- Surprise-startle
- Neutral
- The protective mechanism of shame-humiliation
- The drive auxiliaries of dismal-disgust
- Anger-rage
- Fear-terror
- Distress-anguish

Figure 1 9th semesters' personal interpretation of Tomkins's Affect system

The first three are the positive ones, then a neutral and followed by the negative affects. Another way to envision their function is to imagine them as lightbulbs, they each switch on and off when they are activated:

> A good way to conceptualise this system of nine quite alerting mechanisms is to view them as a bank of spotlights, each of a different colour, each flicked on by its own quite individual switch, each illuminating whatever triggered it in a way highly specific to that light. We don't 'see' any stimulus unless and until it is brought into our field of awareness as colored by affect. (Nathanson, xiv)

As mentioned, Tomkins provided the affects with agendas: they motivate us into action. Only one other force, besides our emotional energy, has that power: pain. Pain, unlike affects, is both equally motivating and localizing. This pain is not of the heart – then it would part of the affect system, but rather pain inflicted on the body by outside influence. "Eyes and hands

move quickly and precisely to what hurts and as soon as possible." Nathanson says (xv).
When we think about how instinctually we react to pain, we must imagine that the same goes
for affects in order to understand how instinctually affects can move us to action. However,
with pain we have a physical element that focuses the action. The psychical element that
makes us react to affects might be more complex; pain is a simple and single minded focus of
the body, whereas affects have the possibility to change a mindset, a feeling towards
something, and so the physical response might be crying, walking away, or so forth. The lack
of a direct, clear, or distinctive consequence of the affect agenda should not belittle their
significance; they are extremely powerful, maybe even more so because they are invisible.

One of the tools Tomkins developed, to employ the significance of affect in
psychology, was the S-A-R script, short for Stimulus, Affect and Response. In his time,
psychoanalysis was used as a baseline for anything in psychology (Nathanson, xiv), and
Tomkins wished to add the affective perspective to the way psychoanalysis was used:

> As psychological mechanisms, the innate affects differ greatly from the biological
> drives that have for so long dominated the discipline of psychoanalysis and become
> part of our everyday language […] Breathing, ingestion, excretion, sleepiness, and
> sexuality are managed by instruction protocols that encourage an organism to initiate
> and complete specific actions at highly specific sites. (xiv)

However, the drive system proves ineffective because it lacks *motivation*.

> Tomkins noted that, for example, 'sexuality is a paper tiger' unless amplified by
> affect; sexual arousal cannot occur in the absence of affective amplification. Often we
> ignore hunger when preoccupied. (xiv)

When the S-A-R script occurs in a sequence, it is equal the motivation that catalyses us into
action and, in the final instance, creates our personality. As a tool to understand the S-A-R
script, I created a geometrical figure (fig. 2), but upon further inspection I realised it lacked
the action both Tomkins and Gregg & Seigworth attribute to the nature of affects. After
careful revision, fig. 3 more accurately depicts Tomkins' script in a geometrical figure.
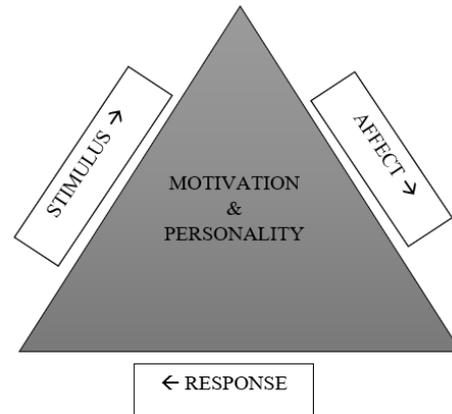
Figure 3 first interpretation of Tomkins script

Figure 2 redefined interpretation of Tomkins script

Nathanson describes the script as follows:

> Most of us were taught in the language of Mowrer's 1938 dictum that every response
> was triggered by a stimulus, that life was lived as sequences of stimulus-response
> pairs, 'S-R Pairs'. Yet in real life, life as it is lived by organisms with affects, no
> stimulus can trigger a response unless and until it triggers an affect. It is the affect that
> brings the stimulus to the attention of the organism that then mobilizes a response.
> (xiii)

By adding action arrows, it shows the never-ending cycle of affects. It is a self-enforcing
mechanism and the only reason 'organisms' become aware that they are being stimulated, is
when is realises it is in affect which will inevitably lead to a response (Nathanson, xiii). In
earlier projects, I concluded that, as conscious beings, humans seek stimulation they predict
will bring specific affects. When Tomkins stated that all affects needs to be activated
regularly he meant all affects, including the negative ones (Nathanson, xi). Depending on the
environment we live in, stumbling upon situations where 'fear-terror' or 'distress-anguish'
are being activated on a regular basis, might not be in our survival's best interest. However,
cultural texts allow us to trick the mind into activating the affects, but we are usually in
control of the environment. Instead of being chased in real life, we can watch a horror film
where someone is being chased. The affects are not particular to where the stimulus comes
from, so long as they get to be activated. I also concluded that, as intelligent beings, we can
adjust our response somewhat to our surroundings if we have sought out the stimulus in
expectance of an affective outcome. However, some initial reaction might be uncontrollable
when watching a horror film, such as elevated heartrate or sweaty palms. The last relevant
concept from Tomkins' work is that affects are mixable, and often that affects are

experienced in multiples. He writes: "Not only may affects be widely invested and variously invested, but they may also be invested in other affects, combine with other affects, intensify or modulate them, and suppress or reduce them" (Tomkins, 660).

3.4.1.2 The Sixth Region: Modality and the Escapism Perspective

The sixth approach is relevant to this thesis because it coincides with a multimodal methodology which expects me to analyse each concept separately whilst also keeping an eye on the bigger picture. Carey Jewitt named these concepts "modes" because they help make meaning of any experience one might have, especially an affect experience. The multimodal method is thoroughly described in the following chapter, appropriately named "Methodology", but regarding affect theory, which is mostly an internal analysis, this region 'turns the camera around' and looks at the surroundings to determine which outside forces add to the affect experience. Gregg and Seigworth mention that this region looks at the 'outside' realm, and perhaps even the effects of affect (Gregg & Seigworth, 7). Gregg and Seigworth also briefly mention an ethico-aesthetic space and the relation to affective encounters (p.7). In relation to autoethnography, the ethico-aesthetics term is similar to how Humphreys characterises the ethno-drama (Humphreys, 842) which is how Lykke operationalises her autoethnographic style in "Queer Widowhood". Furthermore, the ethico-aesthetic term is discussed or, perhaps even, experimented with, by Félix Guattari in *Chaosmosis; an ethico-aesthetic paradigm* from 1991, which leads to an effect of having affective experiences. In this book, Guattari contemplates the idea of subjectivity and the idea of self while trying to follow the structure of power (in a capitalistic society). While much of his thinking is irrelevant to affects and autoethnography, his dimensional thinking of universes created by culture is of some interest. He contemplates how affects in culture can make you disappear:

> A block of percept and affect, by way of aesthetic composition, agglomerates in the same transversal flash the subject and the object, the self and the other, the material and the incorporeal, the before and after . . . In short, affect is not a question of representation and discursivity, but of existence. I find myself transported into a Debussyist Universe, a blues Universe, a blazing becoming of Provence. I have crossed a threshold of consistency. Before the hold of this block of sensation, this nucleus of partial subjectification, everything was dull, beyond it, I am no longer as I was before, I am swept away by a becoming other, carried beyond my familiar existential Territories. (Guattari, 93)

He discusses the concept of travelling through dimensions with the mind while also staying in the physical world and how it alters him so profoundly that it can be felt in the 'real' realm. One perspective of the effects of culture consumption is the psychological drive of escapism. By allowing the mind to be transported to another dimension, the focus on what is happening in the real world is split. The term escapism has existed for a long time and is generally used as a definition of wanting to disappear from an unpleasant reality. In *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (2018), author Lars Konzack introduces the escapism with:

> The term escapism, to seek distraction from reality or from routine, first appeared in the 1933 Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (Ayto, 1999). This, of course, implies that it may have seen earlier use. "Escapism" should not be confused with "escapology," which is the performance of escaping from restraints, traps, or confinements. Hence, an "escapist" could be either a person who escapes from captivity or, as in this case, a person who indulges in a mental process of emotional diversion by means of entertainment or other kinds of leisure activities to avoid or retreat from what is considered an unpleasant or unacceptable reality. (Konzack, 246)

Konzack shows how escapism has a long tradition in the psychoanalytical world and is often used as the opposite of realism, with realism being the 'correct' term. When debating how Freudian psychologists think of the concept, he states:

> In this notion of escapism, it is not only a criticism of romantic literature, or a condemnation of a specific field of cultural misendeavor, but an overall criticism of any literature and fiction that contains fantastic elements. Consequently, it becomes a general criticism of any form of fantastic expression or cultural product— not merely escapist romantic literature. (Konzack, 248)

In modern times, escapism has evolved into something different than a wrongful coping mechanism debated by psychologists. While it still carries bad connotations, there are those who debate the term with a more positive outlook. Konzack discusses how escapism works towards something great when the escapist also displays a level of control, when the escapist becomes a "realist escapist reader" (Konzack, 253) and that "It can be either responsible or irresponsible, depending on the quality of the content and how it is read. One of the irresponsible escapist readings is daydreaming and castle-building." (Konzack, 253). It is an interesting paradox: If the only safe way to experience negative affects is in an escapist situation, then it is a testament to the experiencer that (s)he does not disappear too far into the

desired dimension. As the analysis will show, there are some tools which allows the escapee to be in control of the affect experience. However, it is a curious thing that escapism in Lars Konzack's text is only regarded as a good thing if there is total control.

3.4.1.3 The Fifth Region: The Individualistic Experience of Subjectivity

> *3.4.2 Vignette*
>
> "Why don't you try and force the contractions to speed up by jumping on this?" the midwife says. For the next two hours, while my husband reads a book in the corner of the room, I sit and jump, up-and-down, up-and-down, up-and-down on a large pink gym ball. My thighs hurt and the contractions are quite severe, but I am not present in that reality. I am wearing my headset and I am listening to a podcast that, oddly enough, makes me laugh out loud during, what midwifes describes as 'Active Labour Pain' and what most mothers would describe as the *profanity* phase of giving birth. Looking back now, I feel like I spent most of my labour in the company of Dax Shepard and Lena Dunham talking about body image in Hollywood in the podcast *Armchair Expert with Dax Shepard*.

The fifth region, which is also the most culturally focused approach, is important because it bridges the gap between Tomkins' affects as presented in psychology and traditional cultural studies where ideologies and terminologies are debated a cultural context. Ahmed's "Happy Objects" (2010) is an example of affect theory operationalised in a cultural approach. Ahmed's essay is carefully selected because it is one of the few texts on affects that represents and theorises Tomkins' positive affects. Ahmed herself makes a note of this:

> My essay contributes to what has been described by Patricia Clough (2007) as 'the affective turn' by turning to the question of how we can theorize positive affect and the politics of good feeling. If it is true to say that much recent work in cultural studies has investigated bad feelings (shame, disgust, hate, fear, and so on), it might be useful to take good feeling as our starting point, without presuming that the distinction between good and bad will always hold. (Ahmed, Happy Objects, 30)

Ahmed's essay is vital in operationalising 'good feeling' and she makes an important observation when she states that there might not be a 'good' or a 'bad'. This thought opens a discussion about how all affects are inseparable from each other. I would argue that all situations are tainted by both 'positive' and 'negative' affects – humans are too complex for one track minded affect experiences. Situations with pure happiness can occur, however, like all affects, happiness is fleeting and notoriously unreliable. Ahmed presents the affect of

happiness by describing what it means to be affected and what defines and characterises happiness as opposed to the other affects. She discusses what makes happiness special. She writes: "In this essay, I want to consider happiness as a happening, as involving affect (to be happy is to be affected by something), intentionality (to be happy is to be happy about something), and evaluation or judgement (to be happy about something makes something good)." (Ahmed, Happy Objects, 29). Furthermore, she explores how happiness functions as both a motivator and a compass that direct us toward certain objects. She explores how the specific agenda happiness has created an impact on our expectations on ourselves as a society, and what that means in terms of effect on the individual person being affected. She uses terms which demand some explanation; she gives affects a 'sticky' property, and she defines whatever they stick to as 'objects', whether they are actual physical objects or, perhaps, memories (Ahmed, Happy Objects, 29-30). She embodies non-psychical terms in order to effectuate the sticky properties of affect, making it easier to visualise how affects work and exactly what that means for those objects they stick to.

Happiness, or in fact all affects and their properties can be extremely abstract, especially when their actions and agendas are discussed. As Ahmed writes, happiness is not just happiness. In fact, happiness is exceedingly different from any of the other affects because it possesses intentionality in its agenda: we want to be happy and we actively seek out objects that will bring us happiness. Its intention is such a powerful motivator and a defining characteristic. It is rarely found to such a steady continually degree in other affects, as it is found in happiness and we always want it. Ahmed refers to Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's argument that: "happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random choice; it is not something that money can buy or power command. It does not depend on outside events, but rather on how we interpret them. Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated and defended privately by each person" (Ahmed, Happy Objects, 30-31). By accepting that happiness comes from within, we are acknowledging that the outside realm may present an object to us, but it is up to the individual person to 'stick' an affect to that object, and neither the object nor the person who is in affect, can know before if that affect will be happiness. However, this is where happiness proves to be extraordinary: even the promise of happiness can bring happiness. It is a future-directed affect and only anxiety has similar properties. By expecting something to bring us happiness, we are already happy about it (Ahmed, Happy Objects, 31).

Humans are most likely to want to surround their bodies with happy objects, in order to stay neutral or at ease – this is where we spent the least energy. However, it is all about balance. Neutral does not mean a constant input of happy objects, but enough happy objects to keep the negative bias at bay. We look for comfortability and some level of control over our affective lives, even though there is little control in how we are affected. The little control there is, however, is incredibility important; a control that coincides with the control Konzack states, is important in an escapism situation (Konzack, 248).

Ahmed continues her essay with: "We come to have our likes, which might even establish *what we like*" (Happy Objects, 32), however, what we like can also be placed on the same footing as *what creates balance in our affective lives*. We like the things that triggers the affects we seek on a subconscious level. That is why *what we like* is so vastly different for each person – it all depends on that individuals' affects. That is also why the idea of something being 'good' or 'bad' is somewhat of a paradox – in reality, a 'for you' should automatically be suffixed on that concept. By focusing on *what is good for you*, most likely what we experience as 'being good for us' brings us happiness. But it is far from simple. The phenomenological sense of 'good' is an unknown abstract concept depending on the individual. That means we might discuss what 'good' means in a broader sense, but that changes from organism to organism, and therefore simply equating good = happiness is a misguided conclusion many make. Rather, it also should be amended to *good for me = happiness to me*, with emphasis on how individualistic happiness and, indeed all the affects, are. Moreover, something similar is discussed in *Affect and Emotion – a new social science understanding* (2014) by Margaret Wetherell, as she contemplates the subject of affect. She writes: "Personal history, subjectivity and affective practice develop in social relations" (Wetherell, 122), as a way of reasoning that affect without a subject of relation, is like an "unspecific force, unmediated by consciousness, discourse, representation and interpretation of any kind" (Wetherell, 123). Because affects have no physical form, we need something or someone to tie them to, in order to comprehend their force. If there is a subject, we can discuss their affects, their agendas and the consequences it might have to act upon these agendas. Wetherell uses subject where Ahmed uses object, however, they both possess the same properties: Affects sticks to them, and they are then available for later use.

> *3.4.3 Vignette*
>
> I look outside and it is raining cats and dogs. But I still put on my runners. When I run in pouring rain, I earn a hot cocoa with marshmallows. That is the deal I have made with myself, and dread has transformed into happiness. The joy of hot cocoa keeps me going for a 5K. Strange.

When we stick an affect to an object, we give the object power. Like a battery, we charge it with an affect and store it somewhere for later. This separate affects from emotions; Emotions are fleeting but affects are rechargeable. And yet, sometimes the container (the battery/object) is unreliable. If we subconsciously register a need to recharge some happy batteries, happiness as we know, can be generated by proximity. This means we only must think about an object that brings us happiness in order to recharge the happy battery. However, the problem arises when we rely on objects because they, like us, are affected too, constantly. As we change and live, our objects can change too. I sometimes explain this phenomenon among my peers by starting a discussing on Michael Jackson and his music. Many can separate his person from his music, but not me. As a child, I created a happy object on the single "Thriller" (1984) because the dance was featured in one of my favourite teen-flicks, *13 going on 30* (2004). Today, I cannot recharge happiness by listening and dancing to "Thriller" as I used to do – to me, there are too many unanswered questions, and as soon as I listen to an Michael Jackson song, I do not think of his musical accomplishments, but rather how he (allegedly) got free passes from supposedly awful things *because* of his musical prowess. The same goes for the stand-up comedian Louis CK and his sexual harassment case, Bill Cosby and his crimes, Harvey Weinstein, etc. I am changing the objects I have because of outside circumstances that have changed them *postscript*. This proves that objects are not static as soon as they are created, rather they evolve along with the body. Furthermore, the objects have a vital part to play in how we balance our affects in order to stay neutral and comfortable. As mentioned, emotions are fleeting and only experienced in the now. As soon as we recall emotions, we are pulling on the energy from an object/battery where that affect is stored. As Tomkins presented this, a balanced affective life also involves the experience of unpleasant emotions (Tomkins, 660). However, the real-life situations where some of the most unpleasant feelings arise are not necessarily safe for our survival, but by storing them as objects, we can – when needed – recall the emotion and experience the 'badness' in proximity or from a safe distance. Ahmed discusses this way of acquiring the desired affect (in her essay it is happiness) by looking at objects as 'pointers': "Objects become 'happiness

means.' Or we could say they become happiness pointers, as if to follow their point would be to find happiness" and furthermore, "If objects provide a means for making us happy, then in directing ourselves toward this or that object we are aiming somewhere else: toward a happiness that is presumed to follow" (Ahmed, Happy Objects, 34). Because of the nature of affects, they all work in proximity to some degree: enough to satisfy the neutral state and nurture it. However, sometimes the need for a truly emotional experience arises. As formerly mentioned, there is a culture that nourishes that need: book, poetry, art, stories, films, music, theatre, dances, the list goes on. Through these things, humans can have access to affects and emotions on demand. Tomkins placed a lot of importance on balance however, which also means that we must include things that brings us a feeling of terror and pain (Tomkins, 660). This is where the affective life gets complicated and why affect experiences are incredibly interesting. Ahmed argues from the point of John Stuart Mill, that even things that initially bring us pain will eventually turn into happiness:

> The way in which a teleological model of happiness makes "all other things" "happiness means" is explicit in John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism. As he puts it, "The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable and the only thing desirable, as an end; *all other things being only desirable as means to that end*" (1906, 52, emphasis added). (Ahmed, Happy Objects, 51)

By that argument, even the experiences that initially bring us pain or horror, and therefore recharge the affect batteries accordingly, are all means to a happy end.

In situations dominated by anger, pain or stress, happiness usually works as a relief from that – a way to tackle the awful things, especially in a social setting. Happiness is a very social affect. We like being happy together because it is the closest to neutral and the most comfortable besides neutral. The saying "Misery loves company" is not true – it should be amended to "when we are miserable apart, we want to connect in happiness with another person so we can handle the misery better". Happiness is a pain relief for when there is actual pain to be felt. This demands a closer look at why affects are so incredibly useful to us when it comes to the negative ones. Affects needs to be activated by a stimulus, as Tomkins argued (Nathanson, xiii), and as mentioned earlier, affects can be stimulated by cultural texts – a characteristic that proves itself immensely important on a daily base. If we had to seek out situations where the whole affect system was activated by 'live' experiences, we would have to risqué our wellbeing and health constantly. Instead, we can experience the negative affects

by reading, watching a film, or by reading the news and so forth. By acknowledging that having cultural experiences is mentally healthy, The Fifth Region shows how important culture is in academic studies. In a bad situation, like a fight or even a breakup with a loved one, you cannot remove yourself from the situation with ease. However, if a cultural text proves to be too affective in fear-terror, it is a simple task to stop reading it and the affects dwindle. When dealing with the awful affects, the power to take a break is imperative to a balanced affective life, and cultural texts mounted on specific awful affects play an important role in this. We need them to recharge, but we control the doses they come in.

Even though all roads lead to happiness (or Rome), I want to take a closer look at essays that have operationalised the negative affects as well. The study of negativity is especially important in the fifth regions' sphere, because I believe there is an 'expectation of happiness'. In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) Ahmed introduces happiness by mentioning the societal focus on it as the ultimate goal, as if it is a competition (Ahmed, The Promise of Happiness, 3). This concept is no stranger in the Nordic countries. We pride ourselves on being (one of) *the happiest countries in the world*, and while there are multiple factors that plays vital parts in such a statement, in this 'world happiness competition' we 'win' year after year because we are almost always in top three (worldhappinessreport). While I genuinely believe that an overall satisfaction in life is great for a society, I have inquiries as to how we, as a culture, work with the other affects. Happiness is so desirable that it creates a vacuum in the affect system (Tomkins, 656-661) because, as we know, the other affects also needs a space, but we are expected to not give them any room. Or, when they inevitably need some room to be experienced, it is a private matter. In larger gatherings, you are simply not allowed to ruin the mood by pointing out ways in which you are not happy, as Ahmed debates in her chapter "Feminist Killjoys" in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010).

3.4.4 Vignette

I am in my twenties and for the first time in a long time I am truly unhappy, and I am sharing it with someone. From the age of fifteen to now, I have not confided in anyone if I was unhappy. Because of my mother's bipolar disorder, I learnt from home that my bad feelings were insignificant. Hers would cause another suicide attempt, but mine only made me cry sometimes. So, it was easier for my mother if I was *only* happy and comfortable. Then I did not have to compete with her, I only had to deal with her.

I should amend my earlier statement that happiness is a social affect that likes company, to the more accurate statement that happiness is a socially acceptable affect. The negative affects, however, are much more intimate but intimacy reverts to idea that it needs privacy. As a child of a mother with diagnosed bipolar disorder, I know first-hand how the taboo on mental health can ruin any conversation because it gets 'too personal'. As a feminist, I know first-hand how pointing out misogynistic comments can ruin a social setting. I am emphasising ways in which I am not happy, so I am ruining the illusion of sociable happiness. They are not responsible for ruining the happiness by making those comments, but I am for pointing it out. Ahmed contemplates happiness as a social instrument and how happiness dictates how we act:

> happiness is not simply used to secure social relations instrumentally but works as an idea or aspiration within everyday life, shaping the very terms through which individuals share their world with others, creating "scripts" for how to live well. We can think of gendered scripts as 'happiness scripts' providing a set of instructions for what women and men must do in order to be happy, whereby happiness is what follows being natural or good. (Ahmed, The Promise of Happiness, 59)

Furthermore, she questions what happens when people do not conform to the 'social script' on how to live a happy life. Ahmed conceptualises the idea of "The Happy Housewife", and while the subject is irrelevant, the arguments around it is of some importance to the fifth regional theory of affects. Earlier, I argued that happiness does not equate to good, and this is where I am able to polish my argument: What if the thing that brings you happiness is not considered 'good' by those who conceptualise the 'happiness script'? In the article "Cruel Optimism" Lauren Berlant discusses this. She starts by contemplating if all optimism is cruel because it will eventually disappoint and because it cannot be recreated. She writes:

> One might point out that all objects/scenes of desire are problematic, in that investments in them and projections onto them are less about them than about the cluster of desires and affects we manage to keep magnetized to them. I have indeed wondered whether all optimism is cruel, because the experience of loss of the conditions of its reproduction can be so breathtakingly bad. (Berlant, 21)

Her observations are interesting because she operationalises it on different cultural texts, in particular on an untitled poem by John Ashbery. While the poem remains insignificant for now, how she analyses the (possibly cruel) optimism is not. She wonders how important it is

to let oneself be swept away by the reality if offers, "Be open to he who comes up to you" (p. 26), that optimism should accompany the experiencer first and foremost. The other thing to contemplate, she writes, is the writer. How shall that person affect what experience that follows and what enormous power such a person has; to be able to affect others with either optimistic texts or otherwise. Berlant writes:

> At the same time, one might note that it matters who wrote this poem: a confident person. He finds possibility in the moment of suspension and requires neither the logic of the market to secure his value nor the intimate recognition of anything municipally normal or domestic to assure that he has boundaries. (Berlant, 26)

However, no matter how confident the writer or 'he' might be in a poem, when it comes to intersubjectivity, it matters greatly how the object, as a provider of optimism, is perceived both in the world of the poem and in real life, and that is why optimism can be cruel. As beings, we are affected by objects as they become known to us. How they affect us and with what affects they become known to us, are not entirely in our control. Because affects can be based on past experiences, there are expectancies, but objects of happiness, desire, or disgust can come from things we might not want them too. For instance, many sexual fetishes both explore and are hindered by the fact that they are taboo. Too many times we are confronted by a 'happiness script' because our happy objects do not follow the 'rules' and this brings me back to the point of how one object almost always activates multiple affects. If happiness comes from a "troublesome" object (an object that we recognise as not conforming to the happiness script) then, happiness will most likely have 'shame', 'humiliation' or perhaps 'disgust' as companions, and perhaps they will diminish the happy feeling to a point where it does not recharge the happy affect battery sufficiently. Even knowing that seeking out these undesirable desirable objects might not provide that proper affective experience, it cannot be helped. That magnetism of 'what-if', that is cruel optimism at its core, overrides logic and the fear of feeling shame and fear, because happiness might come from it.

> From this cluster we can understand a bit more of the magnetic attraction to cruel optimism, with its suppression of the risks of attachment A change of heart, a sensorial shift, intersubjectivity, or transference with a promising object cannot generate on its own the better good life. (Berlant. 35)

Instead of discussing undesirable desirable objects in public, we know that shining light on anything other than pure happiness is too personal, too intimate to be exposed to, without

some requisite warning or base level of intimacy between the participants. Experiencing predominantly negative affects in a situation can make people feel extremely vulnerable – especially if the situation is 'live' and not provoked by negative affect-inducing texts, like sad music or horror films. It could be even more exposing if it is happening in a social setting. Perhaps that is why we like the illusion that we have control over the negative affects, if we recharge them in a controllable environment. Perhaps if we desensitise ourselves with enough negative affect inducing culture, we are better prepared for when those affects are activated 'live'.

The following methodology chapter contains a researched description of the multimodal method, but it also includes a bit more on the autoethnographic style and method and how those two will co-exist in the analysis. Since the autoethnographic writing style differs greatly from traditional academic writing style, it felt imperative that an introduction to the theory of it was the first thing to be read. However, Humphreys' vignettes and Lykke's ethno-drama style of writing are included as both a method of analysing and sharing the affective experience of podcast-listening, and a mode coinciding with the multimodal method.

4. The Methodology

I am splitting the methodology into two parts; first, a multimodal method as written and developed by Carey Jewitt and Gunther Kress in chapter one, two and four of *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis* (2014) and secondly, an auto ethnographical method as done by Michael Humphreys in the article: "Getting Personal: Reflexivity and Autoethnographic Vignettes" (2005), and Nina Lykke in the ethno-dramatic essay "Queer Widowhood" (2015). The reason for this division comes from the nature of affect theory itself. Affects exists in the space between a text and a person. As theorised in Tomkins' S-A-R script, affects are nested between the stimulus and the responds, and in his terminology any text is a stimulus and any person a vessel of response. As the methodology will show, the multimodal method fits perfectly when analysing technology-focused text and its affects, while the autoethnographic method focuses more on the person, the persons' affects and the response. Fused together, they will be able to provide the analysis with a comprehensive method for interpreting the affect experience.

4.1 A Multimodal Method

Approaching any text with a single-minded focus will create blind spots where valuable insight will get lost. Imagine analysing a film and only focusing on scenery. Leaving out sound, screenplay and everything in between, a comprehensive understanding of the scenery is ensured, but not of the film. Multimodality surpasses that issue by systematising 'modes' into one all-encompassing method. Every ingredient in a dish plays a part in the eating experience, and multimodality is a way to separate each ingredient, to examine them up close to better understand the finished product, but still evaluate the dish as one unit. In other words, multimodality is "the social interpretation of language and its meanings to the whole range of representational and communicational modes or semiotic resources for making meaning with employed in a culture – such as image, writing, gesture, gaze, speech, posture" (Jewitt, 1). The multimodal method has, as mentioned, an integrated relationship with technology. Jewitt describes how modes and semiotics started to exist as technology-based culture started to increase and other, more traditional, methods simply could not encompass or keep up with a rise in the technological evolution (Jewitt, 3). Culture, that of which is experienced through technology, created a vacuum for analysing, because the focus on the linguistic lacked depth. "The facilities and features of multimodal configurations can impact on design and text production and interpretative practices" (19), Jewitt writes, and continues

with a description on how multimodal research shows how important the role technology has in communicational situations. She highlights Kress' ground-breaking research with:

> Gunther Kress explores how modes shape knowledge and practices and the role of layout in the social and ontological consequences of the designed multimodal classification of information. The need to rethink what it means to learn and be literate is a thread that runs through much multimodal research. (Jewitt, 21)

A traditionalist will advocate picking up a book to acquire knowledge, but today, it has become common knowledge that listening to an audiobook, watching a video on YouTube or physical movement provides just as much learning. Learning, processing and analysing new information does not follow universal recipe. This becomes relevant when discussing impact and effect of any given technology on a cultural group. What role does technology play in the affect experience?

4.1.1 Vignette

I have been blessed with a sweet and incredibly smart mother-in-law. At the age of 50 she completed her Master's in Specials Needs Education which enables her to help humans of all ages who are born with disabilities or who, somehow later in life whether that being a traffic accident, aging, or complications from a stroke, are now more functionally challenged. She helps by providing platform-based technology that broadens their independence in innovative ways. This is mostly apps that enables them to learn things formerly inaccessible to them- One time I visited, she was gluing a touch-pen to a peaked cap to help a young quadriplegic man use a smart tablet. This enabled him to send pre-inscribed messages to his mom, so when they were apart, she could receive 'I miss you' texts from him for the first time in over 20 years. He was suddenly able to show his mother affection.

Modes are "understood as an outcome of the cultural shaping of material" (Jewitt, 22). They are resources for understanding that comes into play when people use them, he says. This means that modes can only ever be perceived *after* they have occurred. "Modes are shaped by the daily social interaction of people" (Jewitt, 22-23), so when we need to reflect upon them for analytical reasons, they must have happened. In turn, this makes the reflector, (s)he who analyses them, smarter in a way. Every analysis is done in retrospect of the situation. They can always be presumed and expected, but, they only exist in real time. Methodising modes means recognising which modes are relevant for the specific culture it

needs to work on. For a podcast, obvious ones such as *sound* and *speech* come to mind. But, as Gunther Kress states, "phenomena which are the product of social and cultural work have meaning in their environments, so that furniture, clothing, food also 'have' meaning" (Kress, 60). Operationalising the modes with attention to affect theory means dividing them into two groups: what the text does to affect me (sounds, speech, technology), and how I affect the text, how I experience it and become affected by it (autoethnographical). The first group is what the podcast represents, what, I would argue, anyone has access to. The second group is following a fish that becomes aware of the sea in which it swims; it is a self-reflective understanding of my role in the culture I experience.

<div align="center">4.1.2 Representational Modes</div>

A mode is a way of making meaning in culture. By giving certain areas of a cultural thing a headline such as *speech*, it creates a focal point where everything related to *speech* is presumed to add to how affective *speech* is. Kress discusses the difference between the modes by aligning *writing* and *speech* with:

> Sound is received via the physiology of hearing […] Sound offers resources such as (variation in) energy – loudness or softness – used to produce *stress* as *accent*; and through alternations of stress as rhythm, the rhythmic organization of speech. *Pitch* and *pitch variation* – the variations of the frequency of oscillation of the 'vocal' cords [which produces] intonation in languages such as English. Speech as *vowel quality*, *length* and *silence* as *pauses*. (Kress, 61)

The mode *speech* consists of meaningful words. Words uttered in social interaction can be categorised into genres which then represent their own set of rules and expectations; true crime, pleasantries, books, news, etc., Each genre has its vocabulary that acts as an indicator for the genre, and certain words and sentences can have such specific connotations attached to them, that the listener is immediately "caught up" with that specific social interaction. In any public place, a stranger can walk up to you and say, "so, do you come here often?", and without any prerequisite interaction, the cultural value of that sentence alarms you to its actual meaning (Kress, 62).While s*peech* and *writing* share the label of 'language', semiotically, the logistics of the two could not be more different in modes. Making meaning of writing is vastly different than making meaning of speech. Language offers 'only' an indication of the overall cultural resource of the modes. It acts as an indication of culture, English, French, Danish, rather than a mode in itself. "the shared label", Kress says,

"obscures their distinctness as modes with related yet importantly distinct affordances" (Kress, 62).

Speech is an immensely encompassing mode – especially within the perimeter of podcasting. *Speech* is the defining mode in spoken media because it carries the whole foundation, and in an analysis of a podcast, *who says what, what is being said, how is it said* all fall under the mode of *speech*. However, when it comes to the experience of listening to a podcast, *technology* wins the award for best supporting actress. In general, digital technology can be divided into software and hardware, but both have an impact on the listening experience. Jewitt describes the relationship between making meaning and technology with: "Changes in the use and social history of technologies, the manual tools, mechanical tools, and laser and digital technologies have each affected how people engage in meaning-making, although the effects of each have been transformative in varying and uneven ways" (Jewitt, 120).

<div align="center">4.2 The Autoethnographic Perspective</div>

The execution of an autoethnographic style can be done many ways, all which include presenting a subjective reality to the reader. There is not an exact recipe to follow in an autoethnographic method, and much like the multimodal method, I am free to tailor its theoretical foundation into a method applicable to my project. Humphreys presents his subjective reality in explicit boxes which allows further insight and reflection to the topic of the article. He introduces his style with an example of how it worked in his doctoral thesis:

> As an organizational ethnographer, I have searched for analytical and representational strategies and forms that would enable me to increase self reflexivity and slough off any notion that I might be one of the "academic tourists who only manage to get to the surface of any inquiry they pursue" (Pelias, 2003, p. 369). In my doctoral thesis (Humphreys, 1999), I used narrative vignettes described by Erickson (1986) as "vivid portrayal[s] of the conduct of an event of everyday life" (p. 149) to enhance the "contextual richness" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 83) of ethnographic research both as an outsider in Turkey and as an insider in the United Kingdom. (Humphreys, 842)

His way both highlights and warns the reader of his subjective reality, while Lykke's ethnodrama is much more subtle. An example of Lykke's subtlety is when she advances on the concept of widow:

> I not only identify as a widow, though, but also as a queer widow, and a queering of
> the figure of the widow, of course, adds layers of complexity to my project. What is a
> "queer widow"? As iconic figures in western cultural histories, both the widow and
> the widower are embedded in centuries of heteronormative discourses, myths and
> narratives. The term "widowhood" is profoundly linked to ideas about the death of
> one of the spouses in a heteronormative marriage arrangement. The icons of the
> widow and the widower make up a binary pair, and each of them has their specific set
> of culturally different mythologies, shaped by their historical entanglement in
> societies with many kinds of hegemonic and structural gendered inequalities. (Lykke,
> 87)

I proposed a mix: an autoethnographic stylistic hybrid of the two formats because my
phenomenological research of an affect experience cannot conform to either way entirely
without suffering from it. In order to achieve the reflective insight to an affective experience,
as Humphreys theorises that the autoethnographical method can provide, I am sharing both
anecdotal insights regarding my inspiration for this research as was notable in the theory, and
also of specific affective episodes in relevance to the analysis. Other than the intercepting
vignette now and then, the analysis will follow Lykke's style entirely as both a
phenomenological analysis and autoethnographic discussion, intertwined. Due to the
psychoanalytical and philosophical traits of affects as aligned by the theory, analysing them
without also discussing them in the autoethnographical style defeats the purpose of sharing an
insight into a subjective reality. For autoethnographic styles to work as intended, the lines
between analysis, discussion, and perspective gets blurred. What then follows in the analysis
is an insight to the representational modes within the podcasts' perimeter and a reflectional
insight to how a subjective reality conforms to the affects within the podcast and of the
affected listener, me.

5. The Analysis

Before I dive into the analysis, I feel it is imperative that I justify its autoethnographic existence. It is an analysis based on the personal experience I have when I listen to a podcast. This way of doing an analysis in academia feels unnatural; We learn early on to look at the resources the text has to offer us, and we learn to focus on that. In a film analysis this would mean that we look at the camera angles, we listen to the audioscape for natural vs. unnatural sounds, we dissect the format into little pieces in order to understand what makes it work within the premise that this film. But, how do we define 'working'? Is it working when it generates an audience? Or perhaps when it makes money and wins awards? In looking for the responsible party in this definition, I am unable to find a definitive answer. If a film wins awards, it is only an effect of the thing that makes it work. Rather, it makes more sense to acknowledge that the effect is caused by affects. That the effect is a response to a stimulating affective text. Affects are nostalgic. They are tied to our memories, so we remember stimulating texts by how they affected us. Have you ever read a book that made you cry or laugh out loud? Or perhaps it broke your heart into a million pieces so when you recall it now it can still make you teary.

5.0.1 Vignette

Before becoming a mother, I could not have imagined anything more gross that watching a birthing video. Now, I tear up whenever I see a clip of a birth on Instagram or Facebook. Not because their births are beautiful, but because both of mine were. They were the most amazing and lifechanging experiences in my life, so whenever I see someone going through that, I am reminded of how I felt. A love so great that is supressed excruciating pain in an instant.

In a chapter titled "Affects as Stabilizers of Memory: The Literary Representation of Emotion, Affect, and Feeling in Self-Reflexive Autobiographies" written by Christiane Struth in *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and The Study of Culture* (2015), she argues how memories are tied, not to the situation, but to the affects that were activated in the situation. She writes: "Affects have the power to shape our perceptions and thus contribute at a very basic level to the formation of autobiographical memories (Struth, 124)." and further:

> Thus, affects can determine the contents of memory by determining what is selected from a host of more or less relevant information in a certain situation. More generally, emotions, of which affects form part, have a cognitive function in assigning relevance to certain information or events. They can guide our attention through bodily signals

as reactions to certain external or internal states. In other words, emotional arousal can direct perceptions and influence what goes into the formation of our personal memories. (Struth, 124)

Any memory I can conjure about the *My Favorite Murder* podcast is subjected to a subconscious affect-filter of nostalgia. They are fixated on me because I was affected by them. Struth describes it as emotional arousal; that something stimulated enough affects in us that it created a permanent connection. As I have mentioned, what usually causes me emotional arousal is feministic texts. And because aging sometimes can be kind, I have become a little wiser in the last couple of years in my own awareness of said emotional arousal. I know now, that I (sub)consciously eliminate films if women or any minority group are underrepresented in the cast or plot. I turn off stand-up comedy specials on Netflix without blinking the first time a male comedian uses the 'man vs. woman' trope or if he uses the word 'bitch'. In analysing the affects in a text, there simply is not a way around addressing my affective bias. Had I chosen any other text that I was less personally invested in, I would still have experienced emotional arousal towards it and it would have had to be addressed. The subjective reality is inevitable. I am aware of the traps I am facing. I am asking me – who is incredibly bias towards myself and my works – to be reflective and critical of myself. This is the academic trial of autoethnography. However, I am also able to turn the argument around and say, the one person who knows most about how affective this podcast and episode 190 are to me, is me.

5.1 Representational Mode: The Presenters

Having spent the last couple of years listening to these people on a bi-weekly basis, I feel somewhat familiar with their personalities. I have spent around 600 hours listening to them talk. To me, they are like old friends but to them, I am another listener. The enigma in that power structure is typical of podcasting. The communication is one directional from them to us. Only by their administration is the communication path occasionally open towards them from us and a controlled environment though media platforms.

> *5.1.1 Vignette*
>
> The following boxed paragraphs contains biographical information about the hosts Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark, and the sound technician Steven Ray Morris. All of this is written entirely from memory to show how the affect-filter has tied my affections to their lives, regardless of their awareness of my existence. I might know more about them than I know about some of my family members.

Karen Kilgariff is of Irish descent and lives in L.A. She has two dogs, Frank and Georg, and she turns 50 years old on May 11th 2020. In 2018, Karen and Georgia visited Norway and Sweden on their European Tour of 2018, and the crowd sang happy birthday for her because they had a show on her 48th birthday. This can be heard on episode "131 – Live at the Chinateastern" in Stockholm. She grew up in Petaluma, CA and tried to go to college in Sacramento but eventually dropped out. She grew up in Southern California in the golden era of serial killers, and the famous Golden State Killer terrorised her neighbourhood. Her father, Jim, is a retired firefighter and her mother, Pat, now deceased, was a registered nurse who focused on mental health and hated Nixon. She also has an older sister who works as a schoolteacher and a niece. Karen worked as a stand-up comedian and a comedy writer for Ellen and various shows for many years, but as the podcast took off, it became her fulltime occupation. She is a recovered alcoholic and, although it is not mentioned when she stopped drinking nor are there any online resources to confirm it, I believe it was sometime in the 1990s.

Georgia Hardstark is a former TV personality. She worked as a presenter on various food channel shows. When we meet her, she in unemployed but about to get married to Vince Avrill. He later becomes their tour manager. Georgia has multiple cats, and her cat Elvis quickly becomes a fan-favourite and he tends to get a lot of presents and attention in emails and at live shows. He is also featured on all episodes as he can meow when asked if he would like a cookie. Elvis meowing has become the outro of the show. Georgia struggles with mental health issues and, like Karen, she is very open about is. She frequently mentions her medications being changed, talks with her therapist and other situations related to her diagnoses. All in all, mental health issues and its politics are huge themes throughout the show and it has created hashtags such as #myfavoritemeds on Instagram and Twitter. Georgia grew up in northern California with a brother and a sister. Her parents are divorced, and she has often mentioned visits from her dad Marty who smokes a lot of weed and her mother, Janet, whom she often has fights with. She is 10 years younger than Karen and turns 40 on June 8th 2020. Steven Ray Morris, or STEVEN! as he is often referred to, is the producer and sound engineer. He joins the women in episode "17 – Episode SE7ENteen" and quickly becomes a prominent personality. Karen fires him quite often and Georgia teases him with his 'Millennial look'. He has his own podcast, The Purrrcast, which is later adopted into The Exactly Right Network.

They have talked to me for the last three and half years, and even though I have not had to chance to reply, it does not matter. Intentionally or not, they have wormed their way into my life with personal talks, private information and intimate details, and this should be considered when looking at the modes the podcast has. In many episodes they discuss why they divulge so many intimate details: when people write them emails thanking them or commenting on murders they presented, Kilgariff says something like 'you forget that somebody is actually listening'. I want to focus on this because it adds so much to the listening experience. When Kilgariff and Hardstark are recording, they are lying on the couch, drinking a hot beverage and relaxing. They talk like they would were they not recording. It is not scripted except for the details of the murder. However, the whole episode will be incredibly spontaneous and improvised. I am sure there is quite a lot of producing and editing going on afterwards and it is a testament to Steven that the conversation between them seems to flow naturally throughout the episodes. My point here is that listening to Kilgariff and Hardstark talking about murder is like eavesdropping on two best friends who gossip on a slightly perverse subject. Over time, it is as if it changes from eavesdropping to being included into a private sphere of friendship. However, this is only because Kilgariff and Hardstark display personal and vulnerable information that creates a common ground with the listener.

5.1.1 Perspective on Presenters: Gender

In the first twenty episodes, you can hear Kilgariff and Hardstark doing meta-discussions on the success they are experiencing. When they first reach the top ten on the Apple podcast chart, they mention the fact that they are women talking about true crime and how unusual it is; the female presenters, the success, and the genre they work with. It is also noted on multiple occasions that the listenership and the audience at live shows are predominately women. I am somewhat hesitant to embark on this journey of discussing the gender ratio of the listenership. Not because I disagree with the observations of Kilgariff and Hardstark, but because there is no empirical evidence to support the claims they are making. However, this is what I have observed: In the minisodes they ask for the listeners to write in with the hometown murders/stories. The emails Kilgariff and Hardstark read out loud are mostly from women. Although I have not been to a live show, I have listened to all the recordings The Exactly Right Network has published on Google Podcast of *My Favorite Murder,* which includes 66 recordings of live shows, and I have seen photos from the meet and greets afterwards. When they ask for an audience member to come up and tell their hometown story,

out of 66 live shows, I can remember three audience members being male, of which one was Kilgariff's friend and a fellow comedian that they invited to tell his hometown murder because he also has a true crime podcast. The second one was a genuine audience member and the last one was on stage to propose to his girlfriend who was a massive fan of the podcast. All the meet and greet photos they post on their official channel are of women. Another gender observation comes from the group of fans, referred to as the 'fan cult'. The fans of *My Favorite Murder* call themselves 'Murderinos, which turns out might be borrowed from Ned Flanders in a Halloween-themed episode of The Simpsons called "Treehouse of Horror XXIX" which aired on 21 October 2018. (IMDB). I mention this because naming themselves Murderinos, and because Kilgariff and Hardstark (in the beginning) interact and take advice from their listeners, have led to several social media communities. If you are a Murderino, you do not lack options for seeking out like-minded people, predominantly on Facebook: there is a Scandirinos group for Murderinos of Scandinavia, a Crafterino group for those who like arts and crafts, Les Murderinos for those who love musicals as well, Infertilerinos for those who live with infertility. Golden State Killeriones for those who want to discuss the Golden State Killer, My Favorite Avada Kedavra which is a crossover between Harry Potter Fans and *My Favorite Murder* fans, and the list could go on forever (Facebook). There even is a group on Facebook called "There is an mfm group for that", which is a group that directs you toward the niche '-erinos' group you are looking for. Even though I am not a member of all of them, in the few I am a member of, it is mostly women. The reason for this is something I can only speculate on, which is why I am so hesitant to discuss it. I have not asked them why they joined the groups nor why they listen to two women discussing true crime stories. I can only discuss why I, a woman, listens and joined the groups.

Before I dive into that, I want to make a last observation regarding gender; in the first live show episode "36 – Live from LA Podcast Festival", Kilgariff's friend and podcaster, Dave Anthony (one of the men who has been on stage performing a hometown murder), makes a remarkable observation (ep.36). 14 mins into the episode he starts to tell his hometown murder, and he starts by introducing the serial killer 'The Trailside Killer'. Dave Anthony is also a host on a true crime/history themed podcast called *The Dollop*, and in his introduction to The Trailside Killer he explains how the to-be murderer grew up in an abusive home, which gave him a terrible stutter at the age of seven. When this fact is known, Hardstark – even though she knows he will grow up to be a killer – says: "aaawww" in a sympathetic tone like she feels bad for the child he used to be. Dave then pauses and says:

"See, what she just did, I just told her back stage, that is why we don't do terrible, really, really terrible murders on *The Dollop* because neither I or Gareth would go 'aaaww', ever [laughter from Kilgariff and the audience] and then it is a different show. Oh look, empathy helps" (ep.36: 14m, 26s -14m 57s). It is not explicitly said that Kilgariff and Hardstark displays more empathy in their podcast because they are women, however, when it comes to most true crime podcasts there is a fact-based inclination to how they are portrayed which, as regular listeners will know about *My Favorite Murder,* is far from how they do it. In Kilgariff and Hardstark's presentations they tend to focus more on feelings, both affects of the case and how it made them feel when they read about it. They rarely include facts from both sides of the story, and they are extremely partisan in their view of any given case. They include personal opinions, not backed-up-by-evidence theories, conspiracy theories, occult sightings, opinions and ideas from reddit subscribers and the so-called 'couch-detectives'. By their statement, they do research before they record, but they have little to no source criticism. They choose to include what they find interesting and not necessarily what is true. This brings me back to the idea that listening to *My Favorite Murder* feels like you are eavesdropping on two best friends who are talking about something slightly gossipy and forbidden. It is intimate because they do not focus on cold facts and because they re-tell the cases like anyone who grew up near the murder would; with conspiratorial ideas and perhaps a little shame that such juicy details tickle them.

However hesitant I might be to claim something about the listenership, I do what to include a quote from Kilgariff and Hardstark where they discuss it: in an interview with *The Independent* from October 2019, when asked by Samantha Eve, "Who is your audience?", Hardstark says:

> The majority are women that are in their twenties to thirties. We keep getting asked, "Why does true crime appeal to women?" I think there are 50 answers [that] would all be accurate to somebody. It's fascinating; it's scary; it makes you feel like you're getting prepared, it makes you feel like you're learning something that's been kept from you. Sometimes it's empathy; sometimes it's assuaging your anxieties. It appeals to different people in different ways. (Eve, 2019)

This is a true crime podcast that, instead of offering facts about murders and murderers, offers affects about murders and murderers, which is what sets them apart from the other popular true crime podcasts. Whether the focus on affects came about because they are

women, I can only speculate. As I have disclosed in the theory, I am predisposed to like something if feminism is involved. Furthermore, the more I listen to Kilgariff and Hardstark, the more common ground I find we share. If I believe they do a good job at being female podcasters in the true crime genre because they display compassion and empathy for even the worst characters, instead of relying on facts only, then again, I am defending a podcast I am emotionally invested in.

5.2 Representational Mode: The Format

Usually a podcast will adhere to a traditional genre like romance, comedy or true crime; a system not unlike how we categorise books, music and films. However, there are three formatting genres that generally define the way the podcast is produced. The first one, The Gabfest, also known as 'Chumcast' is, "Where two or more people chat about something they feel strongly about. It might be a recap of a television show, it might be the week in politics, sport or women's issues. What matters is that the hosts have chemistry and passion" (Wollongong). Secondly, The Interview, "Here, the host relies on finding interesting people to bring into the studio. They might be celebrities, or just ordinary people who have done unusual things." (Wollongong). Thirdly, The Storytelling format:

> These podcasts often take a deep dive into a topic - it might be a murder investigation or a trip to Antarctica - and unfold the subject by delving into the characters and events in a compelling, carefully structured way, that keeps you listening all the way through. They can be told over several episodes, or each episode can tell a self-contained story. Either way, they need a strong plot (something has to happen), interesting characters (the people things happen to), solid research (distilled via good writing and editing) and a tight structure (careful craft and narrative arc). They are the hardest to do - but the most powerful when done well. (Wollongong)

As it is in film and books, there are typical themes that work well together; sci-fi/fantasy, romcom (or romantic comedy), action/thriller. In podcasting, as in books and music, the thematic genres are more general but sometimes also bi-focalised. The genre division works great from a marketing perspective as it gets easier for the listener to discover similar podcasts when the software detects a preference for either Technology, TV/Movies, Science, Music, and/or True Crime. In true crime, a thematic baseline for the genre is crime and non-fiction. The thematic baseline is a framing of expectance, so when a podcast arises that has a dual categorisation that seems to pull the thematic baseline in opposite directions, it creates

an interesting energy. *My Favorite Murder* is categorised true crime/comedy, an unlikely bi focalisation because those who seek out true crime stories usually do not expect it to be funny as well. Kilgariff and Hardstark have been confronted by this strange genre mix enough times to a point now that whenever they hold a live show, Kilgariff does a disclaimer upfront saying something along the lines of: "This is a true crime and comedy show. We realise that is a strange mix, and it is not because we (Kilgariff and Hardstark) find it funny that people get murdered, but simply because the world can be really awful, and we need to laugh at that to deal with the awful feelings. If you don't like that, well, then we kindly invite you to get the f** out"[2] and the crowd usually cheers. Although their reasoning seems simplified for the sake of entertaining a crowd, there is some value in the idea. I will come back to this point later in the paragraphs about affective listening. Another point is how some thematic genres seem to 'belong' to a specific format. True Crime tends to follow the Storytelling format and Comedy is typically Gabfest or Interview. In *My Favorite Murder* it is its own mix. Kilgariff and Hardstark have the chemistry and passion needed for a Gabfest format, but they mix it with Storytelling when they each dive into their murder case. I have listened to more than fifty podcasts in both English and Danish over the last four years or so, and I have not yet discovered a podcast that mixes formats like they do, except the Danish concept adaptation *Mørkeland* (Mørkeland).

<div align="center">5.3 Ethnographic Mode: The Listeners Job</div>

I stated that to experience a podcast, the listener only needs a device with a connection to podcasting software; a phone or a computer. In a sense, that is true. However, I would argue that there is an unspoken agreement amongst those of us who use podcasts or listens to music, that headphones are equally important when it comes to the overall experience. There are two main sound systems when it comes to a podcast listening experience: Public speakers and personal speakers. Public speakers have the potential for multiple listeners but that also means that sounds from the outside world mixes with the podcast itself. A car radio is adequate, but the immersive experience of escaping into a podcast would be better with the proper equipment. In the Hi-Fi community, there are three categories of headphones one might turn to in order to get the best listening experience; in-ear, on-ear and over-ear. Whichever you prefer is quite individualistic, but the common thing is that the sound travels directly into the ear effectively shutting out all sounds of the outside world. Most headphones

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[2] A recently published live episode "223 – Live at the Paramount Theatre in Oakland (2018)" from May 2020 contains a disclaimer at 14m, 50s.

these days have a 'noise cancelling' function where they remove even the most hardcore sounds from the outside world. Listening with headphones vs. car radio makes a difference in a way one can only describe if you have tried it. When looking at affect theory and cultural affect experiences, headphones are like amplifiers for the affects because they cancel out any sound distractions you would otherwise hear. In a sound-only medium like podcasting, that has a massive importance. Headphones, as opposed to public speakers, also provide an immersive affect experience whilst doing other tasks. In a way, headphones open a portal to another dimension for your affect life while your body continues to live in the normal world. Instead of involuntarily escaping from a cruel reality into a safe space, like how Konzack described was the fallacy of escapism and mental illness, headphones are a dimensional key that requires intent and purpose from the key-holder. There is split of attention when the headphones are on; where you can be fully in the podcast world while also be fully in the normal world. That split is much more difficult to achieve with public speakers because the normal world can be extremely noisy. This allows the listener to do tasks that the body normally does but where the mind is less engaged.

> ### 5.3.1 Vignette
>
> My most important task Sunday night is charging my headset. It's a Bluetooth over-ear headset and very comfortable to wear. And they need to be – I wear them around six hours a day, sometimes more. I wear them when I work and when I work out. I bought them specifically because they have 40 hours of battery life and I am awful at remembering to recharge them. However, at the thought of not having any battery on them, I get anxious. How will I ever be able to fold laundry without my headphones on?

It is the listener's job to prepare for the proper podcast experience by acquiring the correct hardware and software. The listener can also prepare by investigating what format and genre is to their liking. In the beginning it might be trial and error, however, when a podcast strikes true, a whole new dimension opens.

> ### 5.3.2 Vignette
>
> Conan O'Brien is laughing maniacally which makes me smile. I like his laugh and his comedy. Mostly, I like it when he fights with his assistant Sona Movsesian. They have an amazing banter. An hour in the company of the Conan Needs A Friend podcast Monday morning is a great start my week. Also, somehow while I was visiting Conan and Sona, I also vacuumed, emptied the dishwasher, changed bedsheets and made coffee.

5.4 Affect Mode: Autoethnographic Discussion

5.4.1 Vignette

If I look back at the beginning of my time at university compared to now, my work routine has evolved from an amateurish blue-eyed and unexperienced student to a hardcore no-time-to-waste mother-of-two student, where putting on a headset to *get down to business* is part of the uniform. Seven years ago, I would listen to music (not podcasts) on my in-ear headphones that came free with the purchase of a smartphone. I would download music directly to my phone and have on-phone storage of my albums or I would just listen to a radio channel. So, what changed? The turning point for me, was my maternity leave with my firstborn. I was lucky enough to get twelve months paid maternity leave from my degree. While I spent the last month of my pregnancy eating donuts and literally being a beached whale on my couch, when our first daughter was born, she would not sleep unless the pram was in motion, and thusly I had to be in motion. I also had a fear of getting out of touch with my English – like any skill it must be kept sharp, and I feared returning to my studies. Something happens to a parent: the lack of sleep and interrupted naps, weird eating habits and the constant pressure to keep this tiny soul fed and happy messes with the ability to function. I had trouble even formulating sentences in Danish because I forgot what I was saying halfway through it. However, I am not one to suffer bitter defeat, so I did what any millennial in need of help does, I googled. I had only listened to one podcast before, a Danish one, but I had this idea that I would listen to English speaking podcast while walking the baby around, getting both exercise for the body and mind. That decision has had the most profound impact on my academic life to a point that I am doing *this* right now.

"How to begin", Gregg and Seigworth ask in the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010) (Gregg & Seigworth, 1). There is no solidified state of affects that makes them concrete and easy to discuss. They will always be conceptualising and philosophising – it's their nature. In my experience, affect is a power source. I continuously use the analogy of batteries because they give us power. Sometimes they even give us too much power and we short-circuit by disconnecting our brain from our body. It would be infinitely easier if affects where actual batteries we had inside us, like batteries in my daughters' toys. Then I would be able to open the hatch and see a system named after Tomkins' nine categories and look at which batteries were currently being drained by my actions and which batteries were being recharged by my experiences. However, I am stuck with creating visualisation analogies in

hopes of making more sense of something without a body. Again, that is the nature of affects; they lack a body and, like a parasite, seek to inhabit anything we can place them in. Memories can become (happy) objects as conceptualised in "Happy Objects" (Ahmed, Happy Objects, 29-51) and in "Affects as Stabilizers of Memory" (Struth, 124-132). Physical objects can also act as bodies for affects; wedding rings can carry multiple affects. I would place *My Favourite Murder* in a state in-between. The world of *My Favorite Murder* is a complex body of affect objects where my headset, phone, physical surroundings, my mindset, the story and culture all interact in a network, both draining my energy and recharging it.

5.4.2 Vignette

The first podcast I discovered was *My Dad Wrote A Porno* and I remember suddenly looking forward to the daily pram marathon. I remember walking in the supermarket with my headset on, laughing like a lunatic at the podcast. It made me so happy to walk in pouring rain giving the little girl a long nap because 'I' was not doing that, only my body was. I was at home with three friends reading a truly awful and funny porno one's dad had self-published on Amazon. I had escaped from the depressing world of no sleep, no real food, no sunshine and I had travelled to a much nicer place where I was not only 'mom', I was also still me. Looking back now and with the knowledge about affect theory I have accumulated since then, I know I was saved by a comedy podcast. I had very little energy, let alone energy for situations with spontaneous laughter. The first three months with the baby where pure survival for both my husband and me. He was doing his master's thesis in software engineering and looking for jobs, while also coming to terms with being a father and husband to a mother. We did not laugh together like we used to. We did not create the happy objects together. We only created negative objects between us. Our batteries were filled to the brim with negativity and we needed something to balance it out. He had friends at the University that he talked to everyday, but I only had other moms who were equally as stressed out as I was. Through podcasts I suddenly had a cultural experience that could recharge my happy affect battery which balanced out all the baby stress.

5.4.3 Being Overpowered: Shame, Jealousy and Other Negative Affects

Sometimes a collective of affect objects stands as a direct opposite to an individual affect object. It is common in a group to dislike something the other members of the group likes, or vice versa. However, sometimes cultural connotations have already attached itself to the object which makes the dislike seem 'wrong' by the other group members. Again, to attach

negative/positive affects to certain objects is innocent and an involuntary act, and to dislike certain objects that are considered 'universal likes', like chocolate, will probably be interesting in the group. Furthermore, to like objects that are considered universal dislikes, in particular, really complex objects, have a history of generating supressed behaviour and shame. For many, shame is especially sticky, and it will almost always stick itself to an object. Shame-objects can almost overpower the mind unexpectedly and force itself to be re-experienced. When I think of true crime, the first thought I recall is shameful objects. An example is my obsession with the Austrian kidnapping of Elisabeth by her father Josef Fritzl. When Elisabeth Fritzl escaped her father's basement after 24 years of being in his prison, I read every article I found. I knew everything about him, the family and what had happened to Elisabeth during those 24 years. I followed the case and tried with my rough German skills to translate court transcripts from the Austrian Courtroom before the general news had it translated for me. However, I did not tell anybody about this. Although the case was on everyone lips, the conversation was based on polite clichés like "oh how awful", "24 years", and "he raped her, they had children and the mother pretends she did not know anything about it". I would nod and not participate. I was ashamed that I had spent hours researching him, his life, and that I had read the psychologist report about his mental state. My interest was first and foremost in the rapist and his actions, and secondarily on Elisabeth.

In the essay "Writing Shame", Elspeth Probyn writes about how painful shame is. She writes about her own journey in researching shame and how writing about shame brought forward not only shame but also fear: "Of course shame is a painful thing to write about: an exposure of the intimacies of selves in public" (Probyn, 72). She says that an effect of her shame turned out to be a fight or flight response, not unlike what Tomkins categorised as 'fear-terror'. She writes that her outwards signs of "clenching fists and jaws, the twisting and tensing of feet" made her aware about how psychical shame and moreover, fear-terror, is. It is affects that, at the peak of their experience, send signals to the brain that makes the body react subconsciously (Probyn, 72). In the chapter "Affect and Feminist Methodology, Or What Does It Mean to be Moved", Clare Hemmings operationalises Probyn's works as well when she discusses affects, queer theory, and shame:

> Queer theorists in particular have taken up Sedgwick and Adam Frank's emphasis on the transformative capacities of shame, insisting that it should not be something we strive simply to overcome by turning to its dependent opposite, pride. Shame itself, as Elspeth Probyn has argued, has a resonance well beyond its homophobic generation,

enabling queer subjects both to identify the bodily resonances of a heterosexual status quo, and to create community through the empathy born of shared experience (Probyn 2000). (Hemmings, 148)

In situations where one is faced with an obligation that must be tackled, like Elspeth Probyn's submission of an essay about shame, the affects can overpower the logical and conscious self to a point where it can be crippling. Before I dive into the specific affect experience I had when I listened to Kilgariff's rendition of the murder of Lisa Cihaski, I want to indulge in the idea of shame and true crime, because listening to *My Favorite Murder* turned out to be a cathartic experience for my true crime shame. As I have already mentioned, I have great loyalty towards the *My Favorite Murder* podcast. It was the first podcast that addressed the paradox that morbidity can be fascinating in a way I understood. All the other true crime books, websites, and news articles hid this paradox behind a wall of facts and news. In my mind, they were 'allowed' to talk about murderers because it was their jobs. Morbid fascination was more like a hobby for me and one I felt I could not share with others for fear and shame of how psychotic I might seem. In Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette* (2018) (a 2019 Emmy award winning stand up special from *Netflix*, emmys.com) she addresses how crippling shame can be in a profound way. She talks about how she grew up being raised a homophobe and in a homophobic country. The shame she describes within herself about being gay really resonated with me. She was so incredibly ashamed of being who she was that she spent a whole career deprecating herself and her values to a point where the realm between 'Stage Hannah' and 'private Hannah' blurred. She hated herself because she had placed hate on herself her whole life. She had surrounded herself with objects that everyone around her told her were shameful, and so she herself thought of them as shameful. On an infinitesimally smaller scale, I was ashamed that I loved true crime. I was fascinated by how gruesome and horrible some people can be, and especially how gruesome some men can be to women. The image I had of myself as a feminist was not allowed to include an interest in serial killers who targeted women because I erroneously thought those interests were non-compatible. Therefore, when confronted with a group that did not treat the object as shameful, a weight was lifted off my shoulders. Gadsby had to learn to transform her shame into something other than self-deprecating comedy, but I discovered a podcast that did the transforming for me, and more importantly due to the format of podcasting, I was able to do so extremely slowly.

With headphones on, nobody knew if I was listening to an audio version of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* or a description on how Ed Kemper killed his mother. At first, the anonymity-seclusion culture of podcast listening worked in my favour. As I have described, with a podcast you transport the mind to another realm while the body continues to function in the real world. For the first time ever, I could go about my everyday life while continuously practicing my hobby. The loyalty I feel to towards *My Favorite Murder* has a foundation in experiencing that freedom.

In the story about the murder of Lisa Cihaski, the murderer, Lori Esker, strangled her in a jealous rage. In the true crime world, being overpowered by an emotion to a degree that it feels like the affect controls you, and not the other way around, is a common circumstance. There are multiple examples of all types of people who succumb to an emotion and commit a horrendous crime. Afterwards, newspapers will interview neighbours and friends who say something along the lines of "we never thought that (s)he was capable of something like that". In the 1989 article from *The Chicago Tribune,* it states: ""Everybody was shocked and surprised. None of us thought she was capable of that," said Jodi Blomquist, a friend and fellow student at the University of Wisconsin at River Falls. She said she never saw a sign of bad temper in Esker." (Worthington, 1989). What is interesting in affect-based cases and in Lori Ekser's case, it that 'murder/crime by passion' becomes part of the Defence case as it shows 'lack of intent'. Especially in homicide cases, this makes a massive difference in the sentencing. A crime committed in passion shows that the perpetrator did not intend to commit a crime but was so overtaken by an affect that the rational part of the mind had been squashed into submitting to whatever affect rose to the challenge. Like batteries being over-fuelled to a point where it short-circuits the entire system. This relates to the affective experience of previous emotional arousals. Because affects sticks to memories, when I hear about Lori Esker's jealous murder rage, I experience that by remembering experiences I have had with jealousy. This goes for all portrayed affects in a text. They only become affective experiences if the person reading the text have been in those affects before. This nostalgic trait of affect re-enforces their own importance. In order to have text-based affective experiences in the future, we need to remember affects as they are happening. We supply them with the glue that makes them stick to objects because they need to be recalled later by us.

5.4.2 My Affect Experience of Episode 190

In the end of Humphreys' article, he writes about the purpose of the autoethnographic method. "This article" he writes, "therefore, has been a reflection of my life and career

direction in its discursive turn toward qualitative methodological issues, particularly reflexivity and "alternative forms of data representation" (Eisner, 1997, p. 4)." (Humphreys, 854). He contemplates that sharing experiences can work at reflective resources for those who has something to learn from it. Humphreys describes the applicability of autoethnographic in academia with:

> In advocating the use of autoethnographic vignettes as an enriching representational strategy for *all* qualitative research, I am arguing for the construction of "a multi-layered text which allows rather than specifies a wealth of insights reaching well beyond the author's particular predicament" (Sparkes, 2001, p. 221). (Humphreys, 854)

He argues that his research and his conclusions depend on who he is and what his experience was, in writing and researching a particular phenomenon, so in order to make the reader understand the full concept, all the areas of how something came to be must be shared, including biographical thoughts and experiences. When Lykke conceptualises queer widowhood, she can very precisely do so because she is a queer widow. Her account seems stronger for it because it is believable as well as informative. Just because she is marginalised in her society, her affective experience is still important in a broader understanding about how society treats those who does not conform to the standards. Using my analysis and discussion can, according to Humphreys and by Lykke's example, be a reflective tool that allows the reader to have a better understanding of one's own affect experience. Therefore, asking *how* affective something is, is wrong. It cannot be measured or quantified in that matter without conducting quantitative research. Instead, it would be more correct to ask *what* affects are activated and recharged *for you, when* this is happening. Affects are always activated but the emotional arousal is a subjective experience.

In episode 190, Kilgariff establishes common ground with me by taking the point of view of the mother to the victim. Lisa Cihaski's mother wonders why her daughter did not come home from work which sets off the investigations which leads to the body of Lisa being found in a car. Already, affects I never want to experience in real life regarding my children, are triggered and I am hooked. Through the awful experience of Lisa's mother, I am allowing myself to feel what a mother feels when her daughter is first missing, and later found murdered. I experience all the negative affects but with none of the negative consequences.

I am wondering if my attraction to this type of podcasting format with the storytelling and their internal chemistry overshadows the murder story, almost like a Disneyfication of Murders. That could be the case sometimes; I forgive them quite easily for getting details wrong or for laughing inappropriately because I have years of emotional investment in their ability to balance my affects. This inclination is also based on my affect experience through Hardstark's rendition of the Radium Girls. As awful as the death of the Radium Girls are, the affects in play shifts from jealousy and terror surrounding the Lisa Cihaski murder, to the total injustice and absolute disgust in the actions of the US Radium cooperation. All in all, this episode is a curious study in how death is affiliated with the whole spectrum of affects, and the story about the Radium Girls proves that. First off, Hardstark starts by saying: "This is the story about the Radium Girls" (ep. 190: 13m, 50s) and Kilgariff interrupts, saying: "aaaaaarh, it is soooo good" (ep. 190: 13m, 52s), and Hardstark continues with: "Yeah, this is like, f*cking next level" (ep. 190: 13m, 54s). They immediately set the stage for excitement and epicenes. I did not know about this beforehand, so my immediate emotional arousal follows theirs, as they are people I trust. We have similar tastes in murders, I think. However, when Hardstark goes into details about how radium replaces the calcium in bones and teeth which makes the bones turn into swiss cheese and eventually makes the teeth so brittle that they crumble into dust, I am overtaken by a wave of nausea at the thought that people had to experience that (ep. 190: 15m, 50s-19m, 21s). There are multiple levels to this; Hardstark speaks with such conviction and narrates the story with small, involuntary interjections and exclamations. Had she told the story *sotto voce* and had she stuck to dry facts, I would not have engaged with such affects, but I cannot help by emphatically aligning myself with her. Furthermore, while she divulges the awfulness of radium, she also includes little titbits of morbid information, like "it was used to treat cancer so it made people believe it was an all-healing health tonic, in the same way that people were like, heroin, let's put that in baby formula, it makes babies to quiet" (ep. 190: 16m, 33s), "some really rich people even got it injected in them" (ep. 190: 17m, 21s). Affectively, it becomes a roller-coaster of awful consequences of radiation poisoning and astonishing disbelief at how naïve people were a hundred years ago. It is an affective tipping scale of disgust on one side and amusement on the other which Hardstark controls in her narration.

Comparing the different styles Kilgariff and Hardstark use to present their murders, it becomes evident how important their roles are in the affective experience. Kilgariff has worked as a comedy writer for the most of her life and that shows in her style. She is

intentionally funny, but she also seems to keep an emotional distance to the story, perhaps, as she mentions at the beginning of every live shows, through her comedic approach to awful things. Kilgariff seems more interested in the detective work, the media surrounding the story (mostly the films or TV shows it can generate) and the story itself. In episode 190 Kilgariff says: "Two months later, on the morning of September 21st, Shirley Cihaski would find the body of her daughter lying dead in her car in the parking lot at her work" (ep. 190: 57m, 20s) to which Hardstark adds sympathetic noises, and Kilgariff continues with an intention joke, saying: "The police are called to the scene, they determine Lisa's cause of death to be strangulation" – interruption from Hardstark mumbling "holy shit" (ep. 190: 57m, 33s) – "and they announce that they are on the lookout for either a male or a female… okay, so everybody keep your eyes peeled for *everyone around you*" (ep. 190: 57m, 47s). Furthermore, Kilgariff focuses on the fact that it takes two minutes (roughly) to strangle a human being to death, which in her mind proves that Lori acted intentionally "So the idea that it was an accidental death is *impossible*" (ep. 190: 1h, 01m, 15s).

In general, and in this case, Kilgariff rarely comments on emotions other than when they are extremely pronounced, like when she gives Lori's own account of the murder (ep. 190: 1h, 02m, 36s). Affectively, that makes a difference in listening. If she does not display the whole spectrum of affects in her voice in a pronounced manner, it is up to the listener to fill in the gaps. That becomes problematic in affect recharging because entering the dimension of *My Favorite Murder* is a passive experience, and one where, given the label 'true crime' one might expect certain affects to be available for recharging; it is a one-way communication path where I cannot ask them to engage in a social exchange in order to stir the topic onto something I might unknowingly need. When Kilgariff glazes over the murder with humour and interesting observations regarding the media coverage[3], I do not necessarily feel as affected as when Hardstark emotionally tells the story about how the US Radium cooperation treated the female workers after it was thoroughly proved how horrible the working conditions were in a radioactive environment.

As affective a mode as speech is, is it also super diverse. In this podcast, the affectiveness of speech settles on the speaker because so much of what they say is born of out who they are. When Kilgariff fails to activate my negative affects properly, it is not a fault on her part. Rather, I do not respond to her style to the same degree as I respond to Hardstark.

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[3] In episode 190 at 1h, 03m, 58s Kilgariff talks about the made for TV movie titled *Beauty Revenge* from 1995 that was inspired by this murder (IMDB).

However, since they are a duo, Hardstark responds to Kilgariff quite affectively and by podcast-proxy, engages my negative affects to a sufficient degree. Because I align myself subconsciously with Hardstark, her emotional arousal dictates mine. My affects are enhanced by Hardstark's responses to Kilgariff which amplifies my sought-after affect experience. However, had it only been Hardstark, I am convinced that I would lose touch with reality and disappear too far into the affect experience. When dealing with the true crime genre, the paradox is that the more you have in common with the story, the more affective it is. However, the more you have in common with the story, the deeper the dive into the affect experience and the further it is so 'come up for air', which, as Konzack conceptualised about escapism, is absolutely crucial if the escape functions as a small break and not a mental health issue.

Podcasting seems to have a real affinity towards escapism because of how technology can support the affect experience with the proper hardware and sound improving software. However, I would also argue that there are genres riskier to escape into than others. If the need for a break also coincides with a need for negative affect recharging, in the case of *My Favorite Murder*, the humour acts as a safety valve. Humorous podcasts that recharge positive affects can seem like a more effortless dimension travel, but podcasts that recharge predominately negative affects needs an anchor in the real world, otherwise the risk of losing control is too great, as according to Konzack (Konzack, 253). When escaping purposely, sound is also one of the modes that acts as either amplifier or as an anchor, just like humour. In podcasting, sound is the main mode and it makes a major difference in the affect experience what goes into improving the sound, who and what makes the sounds in either speech or nonverbal sounds. There are a few examples throughout "190 – Lick the Clock" where both speech and sound break the illusion for me, and anchor me in reality. Affectively, it shifts from recharging mostly negative affects to recharging predominantly positive ones, which if done too much, is problematic. The main thing that acts my anchor is Kilgariff's humour and commentary, both of which consist of not only her speaking but also the non-verbal sounds she makes like laughing or swallowing. Her comments help glaze over the terror, like when Hardstark tells her the nickname for the luminous paint was "liquid sunshine" (ep. 190: 18m, 16s) because radium stimulates the red blood cells which immediately gives a rosiness to the cheeks, and Kilgariff says: "what the fuck" almost under her breath and in an astonished voice. At some point around the 26th minute, Kilgariff says something Steven must *bleep* out. The bleep is very unnatural and disrupts the flow. When

Hardstark says how the radium girls would blow their nose and the tissue would become luminous, instead of feeling horrified that these women were so exposed to something so lethal, Kilgariff launches into a personal anecdote about her sister having glitter in her nose (ep. 190: 27m, 41s). Another thing that I want to point out, which is an extremely personal preference, is Kilgariff's laughter. It overtakes her quite easily and diffuses tension immediately. Her laughter is throaty and rasp, and she sounds exactly like my best friend whom I never get to talk to because she is always somewhere in a jungle without reception. Before I got to know Kilgariff through the podcast, for the first 10-20 episodes, I was constantly reminded of my friend whenever she laughed. All the love and loyalty I have towards my best friend after ten years of friendship kept bubbling up whenever Kilgariff laughed. While it might have helped with the longing I suffer from having a best friend I never get to talk to, I listen to *My Favorite Murder* because it is a soothing and safe way to have affect experiences that activate and recharge the negative affects. When Kilgariff is too dominate, it creates a vacuum because I unconsciously expected to be mortified and happily entertained, but instead I am only happily entertained.

As an ending paragraph on the analytical discussion, I want to express the need to solidify the concept of affects because it becomes easier to describe the objects they have attached themselves to, than to describe the affects themselves. Affects have strings attached to multiple objects and the more knowledge I acquire about the world of *My Favorite Murder*, the more complicated the network of strings become. It also makes me more emotionally invested in the text. In order to analyse if something affects me, instead of answering *it just does*, by giving affects bodies, I am conceptualising them into a cultural text which stands open for others to also have affective experiences with. The solidification of my affects regarding *My Favorite Murder* also provides them the agenda for which they work for me. I need a text to elevate tension and balance out my affects in a safe environment and with this podcast, I am doing so in a way that appeals to me, with humour, with female hosts, in private but also with a bodily freedom to complete other tasks.

6. The Conclusion

This concludes a thesis that provides an autoethnographic insight into the phenomenon of having an affective podcast listening experience. This thesis is an analysis of a simulated situation that has been created because it recharges specific affects that otherwise would be unsafe to activate. However, anything regarding the agendas and the nature of affects is circumspect. All affects have one thing in common which overrides all the other mechanisms – they need a vessel. They need a *someone* to exist in. No matter what modes a text has, it will create an affect experience with no impact if there is no one to experience them. In the forest of affects, a tree will not make sound when it falls, unless there is someone there to hear it. In this thesis, I have analysed the affect experience by using myself as a vessel for the affects. Humphreys and Lykke inspired a mix of anecdotal vignettes and ethno-dramatic writing to provide a reflective insight into how affects work within a vessel. The vignettes are instalments of reflexivity thoughts throughout my life that have impacted the affective experience I had when I listened to this specific episode of this specific podcast. They are essential to understanding what makes any experience an affective one. The phenomenon of affect experience is universal, however, to display a specific affect experience, Tomkins' script must also include an analysis of the stimulus and the response. Since the three concepts are dependent on each other for existence, choosing a specific stimulus to analyse is already tied to affect-responses from the past which have created affected objects in the present. The stimulus was best suited for the multimodal method because it displays all the ways a text can affect you, should you be so inclined. Furthermore, to really understand the response, an autoethnographic method had to be applied, because the response to a text will depend only on the responder's past affected objects.

In every culture, there are an impossible number of texts that cater to every affect on Tomkins' spectrum. Those texts (books, movies, podcasts, pictures, and so forth) have been categorised into genres which point us in an approximate direction of which affects they will active, should we engage. There are certain affect expectations in genres. A horror film will most likely create a simulated situation that activates negative affects, and a romantic book with most likely create a simulated situation that activates positive affects. Furthermore, the text itself will have some preliminary boundaries that dictates how the simulated affect situations will play out. In this thesis, I show how the format of podcasting impacts the affective experience of listening to a podcast. There are certain boarders that a podcast cannot cross, like visual stimulus or physical touch. However, within the limits of podcasts, there are

plenty of opportunities to control the simulated situation for better or for worse. By using a multimodal method to display the different modes that impact the affect experience, I am highlighting which limitations that work in the podcasts' favour. Overall, all texts have the capacity to affect. They have certain areas where the affect experience will stimulate certain senses more, and in podcasting the affect experience is only through the hearing sense. Instead thinking of it as a disadvantage for the affect experience, technological advantages have proven to enhance the affect experience, should a person wish to do so. However, affects have agendas that pre-sets whatever modes a text present.

Affects are conceptualised movements that attach themselves to objects. They are immensely powerful and affected objects become inhabited by their power. Affective objects such as memories, turn into nostalgia that can makes us cry with little provocation, and physical affective objects, like wedding rings, suddenly becomes a vessel for whatever emotions the marriage encompasses. It is in the nature of affects to make sure they create movement in the person they exist in. They need to create movement because they need to be activated and they activate themselves by emotionally arousing us which causes us to make affected objects. Their energy capacity is constantly being drained just by us being alive and they need to recharge the energy capacity by emotionally arousing us. Some affects seem easier to recharge than others. Most of the positive affects are readily at hand because we surround ourselves with happy objects and promises of happiness. Happiness is a cost-efficient affect in term energy spent versus energy recharged. Only the neutral affect is better at passively recharging the battery as well as passively spending the energy from the battery. However, affects needs balance; in order to experience the nuances of the positive affects, one must also dive into the nuances of the negative ones. However, spending too much time with the negative affects can have a negative effect on the mental health. Most negative affects are recharged in horrible situations where the body and mind have little control. Therefore, we seek ways to simulate negative affect situations that trick the mind into emphatically recharging the negative affects, but where the body is still in control. Since the mind does not sort through if the affects are activated from a real or simulated situation, it provides the necessary emotional arousal that alarms the body of what is going on. The simulated situations work for all the affects, both positives and negatives, however, since real situations with negative affects are almost always uncontrollable, as a protective mechanism of both body and mind seeking out simulated situations within comfortable and controllable environments seems preferable.

With a simple motion of putting on my headset and turning on the *My Favorite Murder* podcast, I can recharge affects I do not normally have at my disposal. While the podcast also recharges positive affects, I am mostly fulfilled by episodes which reaches the negative affects, predominantly. The format of podcasting provides me with a dimension where I can concentrate on fulfilling the affective needs whilst also experience a bodily freedom. I am not confined to the couch or in front of a screen. It is a sufficient and almost passive affect recharging as I am escaping into the other dimension, whilst also completing tasks in the real world. I occasionally experience a dive too deep into the other dimension, but the deep dive is only because I have enabled it by having the correct hardware and removing it will immediately bring me out of that dimension. Instead of losing control in my escape, the podcast format is an easily controlled one, which makes it an extremely easy and lucrative affect experience. Even while experiencing the most horrific affects, by doing so via a podcast I am in complete control and able to stop it at any given time. Affects are above any societal reach. They do not care if the stimulus comes from a culturally considered 'good thing' or if they get stimulated by something the culture considered a 'shameful thing', they just want to be activated. What is also important to factor in, is that in the end, getting the negative affect activated in a safe and controlled space, is good and essential for being satisfied and comfortable. That means emotionally arousal even by shameful things, such as true crime, will feel good for the vessel. All affect experiences are predestined to act as good objects because they elevate tension, as theorised by Ahmed. I have shown this enigma by writing in the style of Lykke about how I, through the podcast, have transformed what I thought was a shameful obsession with true crime, into an affective experience that balances me in my everyday life.

I want to add a little more insight into why true crime and comedy in this mix has proven to be a great combination for affected experiences for me. It is clear to me that by the time I reached episode 190, I was already heavily invested into the format of *My Favorite Murder* which made me wonder if I was overlooking some of the ways the podcast no longer created the sought out affects. What if, since I anticipated an episode to recharge my negative and positive affects correctly, it was already doing it by the promise of it? I wondered if I had created so many affected objects that no matter how the episode played out, I was getting high on my supply of affected objects? There is evidence to support that I do not need this particular podcast to have the needed affected experiences, I just need *any* available podcast which will activate the whole spectrum of affects. However, in my catalogue I have podcasts

that are only categorised as comedy and podcasts that are only categorised as true crime. With *My Favorite Murder* I am activating two affect categories at the same time which I am not used to be able to recharge together. In hindsight, that is the appeal for me.

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