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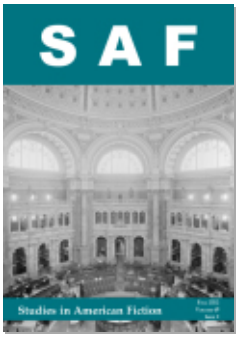

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Studies in American Fiction, Volume 49, Issue 2, Fall 2022, pp. 249-270 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/saf.2022.a920140

"One and the same": Morrison's Queer Phenomenology in *Sula*

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Introduction

In Toni Morrison's 1973 novel *Sula*, the two protagonists are girlfriends whose relationship crosses boundaries, physical and psychic.[1] In childhood, we are told, Nel and Sula find "in each other's eyes the intimacy they [are] looking for."[2] Their connection with one another is so deep they often have "difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the other's" (83). What is sometimes referred to as the "lesbian merger" theory[3] signifies the notion that two lesbians may become indistinguishable from one another because of their desire for one another. In the case of Nel and Sula, whose friendship is predicated on their sameness, we see such a merger physicalized first in their sexual play in the grass as adolescents, when they are closest emotionally, and second in Nel's disgust at Jude's act of infidelity with Sula, when they are furthest from one another emotionally. In the former case, Morrison delays explication of the emotion the girls feel in the moment in order to focus instead on their physical actions. The latter collapses the two into a singular pronoun, "they," which allows the reader to modify whom is referent with each reading of the pronoun. In each case, we are alerted to Nel and Sula's collapse into one another through formal elements: metaphor and innuendo, then syntax.

In the realist mode, we generally assume the psychic/emotional and physical planes to be distinct planes of existence, even as they may be related. Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) has a deep relation to the realist mode, presenting things as they are so well that its subject matter continues to be reason the book is banned.[4] However, with *Sula* and, a few years after, *Song of Solomon* (1977), we see a more magical realist mode develop in her prose. At this early point in her literary career, we should

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note, Morrison was constructing what would be a world-renowned style, and with *Song of Solomon*, a critical success, she joined the literary establishment. Using the framework of queer phenomenology, this article makes the case that the relationship at the center of the novel disrupts both the spatial planes on which the characters exist and the form of the novel itself. The effect this has is a queering of relation, gender, and form. I choose phenomenology because space and subjective perception seem to be quite important to Morrison's oeuvre. From *The Bluest Eye*'s traumatized protagonist to *Beloved*'s haunting history, Morrison's fiction could very well be characterized by the "ways of inhabiting and being inhabited by space."[5] Using this and other frameworks developed by queer of color theorists Gloria Wekker as well as Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith's theories[6] will bring into focus how Nel and Sula's relation to one another is so close—so intimate—that the traditional separation of the physical and the psychic planes is collapsed. The ramifications of that collapse manifest in the form of the novel.

This article disputes the notion that Black queer studies began with the writing of Audre Lorde, Gloria T. Hull, and others in the late 1970s and 1980s.[7] Instead, this queer reading of Morrison's second novel, published in 1972, combined with the theorizing of Morrison's contemporaries pushes the foundation of Black queer studies to *Sula*, notably a novel Smith herself reads as "inherently lesbian" in her field-defining work "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism."[8] The text, we will see, stands as a Black feminist text like no other because it extends back the commencement of Black queer studies and inserts this discipline into literary-aesthetic methods of critique, such as formalism.[9] The text is as multifaceted, that is, as the discipline it ushers in, concerned as it is with complex notions of relation, temporality, and the erotic. We will attend to the queer relation between the two protagonists of *Sula*—an area of scholarship that has been recently overlooked in labeling Morrison's work heteronormative and androcentric,[10] even as one of the most famous (and first) readings of *Sula* is Barbara Smith's lesbian reading.[11] As Bobuq Sayed argues, "sex maps relation,"[12] which is to say that the sexual act itself spatially and psychically connects its participants. For the phenomenologist, relation is always already spatial/physical. Thus, our reading will extend others by focusing on how the erotic plays on the spatial/physical as well as the psychic connection between Sula and Nel. What Audre Lorde has called the "psychic," immaterial plane collapses into or displaces the realist connotation of the material, physical plane. In Audre Lorde's theory, it is the erotic that bridges these two realms.[13] With *Sula*, published a decade prior to Lorde's momentous essay on the power of the erotic, Morrison has anticipated this.

The magical realist style developing in *Sula*, a style that ushered in the success of *Song of Solomon*, is one I read as an inherently *queer formalism*—a negation or undermining

of traditional forms in the service of alternative formal, temporal, or spatial categories of style.[14] The relationship at the center of *Sula* manifests stylistic shifts at the level of form whereby we move away from the chronological linearity established by the chapter names ("1927," "1937," etc.) toward a dissonant temporal experience for the reader that resembles what are described on the novel's last page as "circles and circles" (174). What is unique in *Sula* is how the emotional connection between the two girls extends their already intimate spatial relationship. That is, the connection between Sula and Nel goes beyond their physical relation, as they are intimate psychically even before they are with one another in person: each is "looking for" something, both daydreaming with "a presence, a someone" for whom they have no name until they meet (51–52). This psychic positioning between the two girls extends their phenomenological connection insofar as it extends their relation from the spatial to the supraspatial, supraphysical psychic plane. In this case, it *queers* their phenomenological positioning with one another by collapsing into one these seemingly separate boundaries of the "real" physical and the "affective" emotional. It is from this notion that I receive my title, "one and the same" (58). Yet, the women's supraphysical relation goes further: it is the form of the book itself that becomes disjointed when their relationship is physicalized in the form of a floating fur ball. While it may be said to be made up of "small defiling things," the floating fur ball gives us a new way of imagining their relationship as simultaneously physical and psychic and thus phenomenologically queer (59). Such a relation—between the two women, between the material and immaterial, between the reader and text—is brought into focus by that particular method of interpretation called queer phenomenology. Queer phenomenology allows us to attend to (a) the relationship at the center of the novel *as queer*, which is to say *as alternative to traditional (spatial) relations among women*, and (b) the nonlinear form that the novel takes on via the experience of the reader. Using queer temporality to consider that the fur ball is evidence of the disruption of the formal concern with linearity in the novel, we can see that it is actually a ghost. Certainly, its qualities are those of a ghost: spectral (which derives from a French word for "see"), just barely out of sight for Nel until she names it on the final page; both absent and present; existing *between worlds*, as it were, because it comes to be called Sula even though she has not yet died. Thus, the fur ball does not only provide us with an example of formal, temporal disruption to a presumably chronological, linear story. The fur ball's spectral qualities recast *Sula* as a queer ghost story where "alternative subjectivities" arise, then "break and scatter."[15] This is different from reading the novel as a lesbian one, because it foregrounds both formal elements in the text and how these dictate the experience of the reader. In so doing, this article sheds light on the queer theorizing that Morrison's novel was doing years before

the Combahee River Collective's meeting in the late '70s, Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic" essay, and other publications indicating a beginning to a Black queer studies separate from—even as it was in conjunction with—Black feminist studies.

The first section after this introduction describes the queer relation between Sula and Nel using framework developed by Sara Ahmed to read the queer sex scene in the novel that takes place when the girls are still youths. I then argue in the section after that *Sula* aptly queers gender, with Gloria Wekker, whose anthropological study concerns women who have sex with women in the Afrodiaspora, as interlocutor. In the article's final section, I read the novel's form as phenomenologically queer, which is to say a reading experience made "wonky" or "slant-wise."[16] I hope to extend what has come to be called affect theory in literary studies by combining attention to reader experience[17] with a focus on the formal qualities of the text itself. This method is one way to describe close reading that foregrounds formalism as a phenomenological study. It reveals a new antecedent to Black queer studies or queer of color critique, as Morrison's lesser-known ghost story *Sula* resituates Morrison's oeuvre and which works of hers gain prominence in literary study. This article connects what has been called spectrality studies[18] to a novel of Morrison's other than *Beloved*, a more explicit ghost story, by means of Elizabeth Freeman's theory of a queer temporality. Despite her writing on ghosts, Freeman does not directly make the case that all ghosts are, by definition, queer. This reading of *Sula* seeks to do so.

Queer Relations: Lovemaking Across Two Planes

When they are adolescents, "their small breasts just . . . beginning to create some pleasant discomfort when they were lying on their stomachs" (58), Nel and Sula share in sexual play. As the girls "strok[e] blades up and down, up and down," they then find thick, phallic twigs that they use to beat into the ground to make their own separate holes "until the two holes [are] one and the same" (58). This overtly sexual play in the novel is told in typical Morrisonian fashion: poetic, indirect, and with incredible effectiveness; that is, without our knowing much yet about the two girls' romantic feelings, longings, or attractions, Morrison signals to us with "pleasant discomfort" a scene of adolescent play between the girls.

Expressing what Audre Lorde might call "the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic,"[19] this scene acts as a sex scene on multiple spatial planes between the two adolescents. Nel decides to tear up "rooted grass to make a bare spot of earth . . . when both twigs [are] undressed" and poke "her twig rhythmically and intensely into the earth, making a small neat hole that gr[ows] deeper and wider" (58). Sula joins Nel's

"grass play" and after Nel's twig breaks, she decides the hole will be a grave for debris they find and begins filling it, Sula following. The sexual tenor of "undressing" twigs and then "rhythmically and intensely" digging two-into-one deep hole is the "sex" of the sex scene, where the two twigs digging into the girls' holes function like fingers, "rhythmically and intensely" entering vaginas (the holes in the ground), which in another type of lesbian merger become one vagina as their holes become "one and the same."

The scene does not lack sexual innuendo, though Morrison had, at this point in her career, not often shied away from the straightforwardness of sexual intimacy, even if it was poetically articulated. Why, then, might these two adolescents not experiment with one another's bodies? This question, of course, relies on the nature of sexual performance being defined in one particular way: as physical touch or friction between specific areas of the body. However, this play with the twigs and holes can be sexual play without the two girls revealing any genitalia. Morrison was not unopposed to the representation of physical intimacy, but her previous novel *The Bluest Eye* had been criticized for being particularly heavy-handed when it came to sexual situations—and in the case of Pecola, sexual violence.[20] While we may read this more poetic sexual intimacy between Nel and Sula as a metaphorical version of what was a lesbian encounter between the two girls, this section reads the scene as sex between the two girls.

This is not the first reading of *Sula* as a lesbian novel. Indeed, both Adrienne Rich and Barbara Smith have provided quite extensive discussions of the relationship between Sula and Nel.[21] As Smith attends to the spiritual, non-verbal connection the two girls have to each other in their childhood, I would like to think through what is arguably the most overtly sexual encounter between the two—and how it complements the covert lesbian relation of which Smith writes.[22] Lorraine Bethel, whom Smith quotes in her reading of the novel, writes:

> I am not suggesting that Sula and Nel are being consciously sexual, or that their relationship has an overt lesbian nature. I am suggesting, however, that there is a certain sensuality in their interactions that is reinforced by the mirror-like nature of their relationship . . . Sula and Nel discover men together, and though their flirtations with males are an important part of their sexual exploration, the sensuality that they experience in each other's company is equally important.[23]

The "sensuality in their interactions" and "mirror-like nature of their relationship" are the subjects of this inquiry, as both of these depend upon phenomenological positioning; that is, they depend on the relation in space between Sula and Nel. Where Smith cites

Bethel's unpublished work to argue *Sula* expands the definition of lesbianism, I focus on the spatial sensuousness, a physical relation and might be called a *supraphysical* relation—above or beyond the physical.

Sara Ahmed uses phenomenology to define how "sexuality involves ways of inhabiting and being inhabited by space."[24] While Ahmed may be interested in sexuality(ies), though, her text is equally interested in the way "queer" is, she writes, "a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a 'straight line,' a sexuality that is bent and crooked."[25] That is, "queer" is not simply a social formation of LGBTQIA identity but a place in space that is "off-kilter."[26] Phenomenologically speaking, based on their perceptive experience, same-sex partners are equally likely to participate in what is called sexual intercourse, the phenomenon whereby the subject extends out to come into contact with an/the object of desire. The difference, though, is that same-sex desire has brought the subject into contact with an object of desire that is not necessarily in line with what has been repeatedly perceived by the subject as *normal* object-choice, where "normal" designates repetition of subjective perception, not objective ruling.[27] Therefore, while no genitals are involved in their sexual play in the grass, Nel and Sula are sexually oriented toward one another in it insofar as they have not normally done this type of play with anyone, because they are only "just beginning" to reach adolescence. We know this because prior to the episode, Morrison writes that "they fl[i]ng themselves into the four-cornered shade to taste their lip sweat and contemplate *the wildness that ha[s] come upon them so suddenly*," and we learn that despite their friendship being "intense," it is also "*sudden*"—meaning, literally, unexpected (57, 53; emphasis added). The unexpectedness of their relation designates their spatial relationship to each other in this scene as abnormal for them. There is a plethora of abnormalities about which their relationship circulates—and we will account for many of them—but it is this "sudden" and "intense" spatial relation at the moment they are in the grass playing that we ought to read as being a queer orientation. That is, we should read their orientation to one another as outside of their norm, situating them queerly in relation to each other. Their relation to one another, their orientation, or more accurately their oriented-ness, is queer.

As their sexual orientation to one another might be called sudden and out of line by the "straightened"[28] world of repetition, they are also in an intimate closeness. The relation between one's body and any given object is dependent upon the contextual position of the body in space—what objects are around it.[29] In the world of the novel, the girls are lying in the grass, "their foreheads almost touching" (58). The girls' proximity to

one another prompts their physical intimacy. They are in a spatial relation of closeness, foreheads near, and this nearness summons the intimacy that manifests in their sexual play. Rather than "reaching out" to touch the object of desire that is the other's body, they have intimate with each other *through* the play with twigs, grass, and holes in the ground. Moreover, where their nearness functions spatially to offer limited choice for sexual connection, they are even more intimate than this spatial proximity suggests. Their proximity goes beyond their physical place in space near one another in the novel. Their closeness is itself a theme of the novel, as Morrison often calls their intimacy something like "the safe harbor" for them (55). During this episode in the grass, we learn, "they [find] in each other's eyes the intimacy they [are] looking for" (51). In fact, as we will see in the section on the fur ball, even after Sula's betrayal of Nel, their relation in psychic space remains tethered. Just before it is revealed that the two have a friendship that is as intense as it is sudden, The narrator tells us that "[t]hey were solitary girls whose loneliness was so profound it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into Technicolored visions that *always included a presence*, someone, who, quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream" (51; emphasis added). The two girls were, it seems, oriented toward one another psychically, the intimacy they felt something "they [had been] looking for."

Ergo, Sula and Nel do not need a traditional scene of intercourse, as their intimacy seems to also be psychic. Their psychic connection to one another, though, is described by Morrison as if it were physical: they look "in each other's eyes" and have "visions that always includ[e] a presence, someone." Morrison's poetic prose notwithstanding, this is a physical relation even as it indicates an emotional or psychic intimacy. While the physical relation and emotional relation between individual subjects is not mutually exclusive, the phenomenological reading of their emotional intimacy must extend itself beyond the physical plane. That is, we need language to describe their psychic connection as distinct, even if not necessarily separate, from their physical relation. It is for this reason that we ought to extend the queer phenomenology of Ahmed's work to a psychic realm when we consider Sula and Nel. Their closeness is beyond the physical, which is to say it is supraphysical, or outside/above what we call the real spatial plane. A phenomenological model of emotions is a central part of the relation between Sula and Nel, as their emotional connection with one another is not only what they had been searching for prior to meeting; it is also this supraphysical realm of emotion that constructs Nel's identity *as a self*.[30] Morrison writes, "[Nel's] new found me-ness [gives] her the strength to cultivate a friend in spite of her mother" (29). This friend is Sula, whose mother Helene had referred to as "sooty"—reason enough for Nel not to befriend Sula.

Nel, of course, does so anyway, but only after establishing her selfhood as contingent upon this friendship-as-protest. The construction of Nel's "me-ness," of her identity as a self, causes "a gathering in her like power, like joy, like fear," emotions rooted in her individual subjectivity even as they will, on the next page, come to mean the feeling she has acting out her selfhood by befriending Sula.[31] This selfhood Nel is constructing each time she says the word *me* and about which she is registering strength of emotion directly concerns her relation to Sula, as she decides to disobey her mother's instruction in a specific performance of her "me-ness." She is, in other words, acting out her selfhood in being Sula's friend. This act of selfhood is vested in the affective realm, where emotions "like power, joy and fear" reside and "gather." It stands to reason, then, that the relationship between the two girls in physical space is primarily dependent upon the supraphysical construction of the self, for Nel, and the supraphysical relation both Sula and Nel desire with regard to intimacy. Moreover, Nel's search, what is phenomenologically called "reaching out" or "moving-toward," is written *as* emotion, *as* supraphysical, even as she establishes her relation with Sula prior to this construction as "the girl she had seen for five years at Garfield Primary"—that is, related physically. In other words, prior to the act of selfhood Nel performs in befriending Sula, her relation to Sula is strictly within the physical realm, at Garfield Primary. Morrison uses Nel's discovery of her selfhood, her me-ness, to establish a supraphysical relation between Nel and Sula—a relation that will play itself out in their sexual play in the grass and will, eventually, resurrect their physical relationship via the fur ball once Sula is no longer with Nel.

The novel indicates Sula and Nel have become psychically whole in this scene: "Together they worked until the two holes were one and the same" (58). We ought to read the holes in the ground not only as vaginas but a manifestation of the girls' unique me-nesses that, together, work to create union. This sex play builds the relationality between their bodies and is both queer in the sense that it takes place between two same-sex individuals and 'queer' in the sense that it is an odd relation between the two, occurring as it does using unclothed twigs and holes in the ground. Moreover, as I write above, the merger between the two girls' me-nesses seems to suggest that rather than simply being a union of metaphorical vaginas into a singular vagina into which they throw everything, the new hole is a manifestation of their union into which they throw everything they have. In other words, this new hole is now a physicalization of their relation to each other *as a union*—physical sexual union, supraphysical psychic union. This transformation, therefore, does not disrupt the erotic play between the two in their own holes but rather instantiates that their erotic play is *with each other*. This merging of the two is also

not without prior theorizing as a lesbian merger. Ahmed writes on the lesbian merger theory—that two lesbians may become indistinguishable from one another because of their desire for one another. While she critiques this theory as relying on the fantasy that women are the same, I find *Sula* an interesting case. As the quote above makes clear, in the sex play with the twigs and holes, the two holes become one, an event that Jan Furman also reads as a merger. Furman argues, "Adolescence for Nel and Sula is marked not by individuation but by merger . . . [they] have absolute control in this necessary rite of passage (without the intrusion of a masculine presence) that conjoins them until, like the holes, they are one and the same."[32] Furman's reading links Barbara Smith's reading to my own connection between *Sula* and Ahmed's critique of lesbian merger theory, which she lifts from psychoanalysis.[33] However, as Ahmed makes a point of clarifying, her criticism is of the lesbian merger's use in *delegitimizing* lesbian desire.[34] In line with such a critique, I read this merger *with* the phenomenological positionality of the two adolescents as, in Furman's terms, "symbolic sexual play" appertaining to their lesbian desire.[35]

At the beginning of the sexual play, Morrison establishes a paradoxical distance between the girls: they work "[i]n concert, without ever meeting each other's eyes" (58). The girls stroke the blades *in concert*, strip twigs of their bark *in concert*, and trace patterns in a dirt clearing *in concert*. But they never meet each other's eyes, and they create their own holes, establishing some distance between themselves. The narrator then tells us that the two work to make the two holes one "together." The ocular distance, then, is collapsed into closeness, as Morrison's narrative only focuses on the physical items before them. Morrison has, up to this point in the novel, been keen to let us into the interior life of each girl, but, in this moment, she rejects this and instead focuses entirely on the physical, rhythmic poking of the dirt with twigs. This erotic play between the girls is all narrated with regard to the physical even while this play is made meaningful through their collection into a singular wholeness via the girls' pre-existing affective connection. In abstaining from the psychic and requiring the reader to make meaning of the innuendos to do with the grass play in the physical plane using previous information, Morrison transforms the psychic, supraphysical plane—the plane on which the two girls seem to be looking for one another, where two souls might meet and become soulmates—into a kind of physical plane via the singular hole. Put another way, the relationship between Sula and Nel assumes that there are two planes of existence, the physical realm of spatial phenomenology *and* the psychic realm of queer phenomenology. Yet, as the two holes the girls dig become one, so too do the two planes of relation collapse into one. This collapse of the two holes qua the girls' interiorities represents a surreal disruption of the physical

so-called real plane by that psychic, supraphysical plane. In other words, Morrison has rendered what we, outside of the novel, separate as the material and immaterial into one.

Morrison, in fact, signals this collapse of the material and immaterial planes into one: After Sula hears her mother, Hannah, discuss loving her daughter but not liking her, Sula rushes up the stairs "in bewilderment . . . [and stands] at the window fingering the curtain edge, aware of a sting in her eye. Nel's call float[s] up into the window, pulling her away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight" (57). This moment in the text oscillates between those two spatialities of Morrison's narrative, the physical and the psychic. Sula's location is "in bewilderment," as if this is a place-name in which her physical self is being placed. This designation of her placement disrupts the physical/supraphysical boundary by collecting both the emotional state of *being bewildered* and uses the preposition *in* to locate her in space. Such a syntactical move is subtle, but our phenomenological reading—which focuses on spatial relation—has triggered the focus on such subtleties. After the moment of bewilderment, Sula's mother's words cause "a sting in her eye," as if the immaterial bewilderment, embarrassment, or any other feeling Sula has in this moment disrupts her physical state. It is, of course, not abnormal to cry as an effect of such causes, but Morrison does not use "crying" here; she uses "a sting in her eye," pushing that keen poiesis for which the author is known onto the reader, who has now imagined the physicalization of such an emotional affect. In other words, we might write this off as a poetic wording, but as phenomenologists we are quick to register the experiential affect here. A sting to the eye caused by emotion ruptures the physical/supraphysical boundary as well. Finally, Morrison translates the verbal call from Nel into a "floating" call up into the window that "pulls" Sula away. This imagery is also quite beautifully poetic—*and* it is phenomenologically interesting, as it renders a verbal call into something that floats and pulls at the young girl. In a phenomenological reading, these seemingly insignificant particularities become demonstrations of Morrison's authorial complexity as she queers relations between the two protagonists of her second novel.

Queering Gender: The Mati in the Bottom

In the chapter labeled "1940," when Nel is fighting Sula about the latter not seeking help for her sickness, Nel insists, "You can't have it all, Sula." Sula responds:

> Why? I can do it all, why can't I have it all?"
>
> "You *can't* do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't."

> "You repeating yourself."
>
> "How repeating myself?"
>
> "You say I'm a woman and colored. Ain't that the same as being a man?"
>
> "I don't think so and you wouldn't either if you had children."
>
> "Then I really would act like what you call a man. Every man I ever knew left his children." (142–43)

Sula here argues that being a woman and colored is "the same as being a man." At the very instant that Sula and Nel refer to their womanhood and their race, Sula queers gender. Nel argues against equilibrium, urging Sula to find someone to love and help take care of her. Sula rejects this as a paternalistic assignment and, taking it a step further, argues that autonomy is preferable even if it is lonely. In this section, I wish to use the relationship at the center of *Sula* to represent "mati-ism," the emic framework introduced in Gloria Wekker's writing on the Afrodiaspora and signified by the Sranan Tongo term for different "working-class women . . . [who] typically have children and engage in sexual relationship [sic] with men and women, either consecutively or simultaneously."[36] I read Sula and Nel as "contingent lesbians" in a framework specific to the working-class Afrodiaspora.[37] *Sula* debuts amore complexly articulated definition of gender as "a bodily orientation, a way in which bodies get directed by their [repeated] actions over time."[38] In this section's close readings, the combination of Ahmed and Wekker's work complicates and extends their queer of color theoretical work.

The figure of the contingent lesbian is one who has a desire not entirely reliant upon her relation in space to another woman, but whose relation to another woman in space seems to draw her body to that other woman's enough to resist compulsory heterosexuality, as if naturally.[39] This theory goes beyond the essentialist notion of sexuality rooted in identity formation and made famous in lyrics like "born this way" from Lady Gaga and instead prefers a more phenomenologically based set of definitions for sexuality according to which one's intimacy is decided based on the contextual circumstances into which one's body is placed in space along with other specific bodies.[40] Wekker's writing on the mati is an example of the contingent lesbian in that it finds its definition in practice rather than identificatory formations, relying instead primarily on the constructivist view of sexuality. Wekker calls mati-ism an example of Black lesbianism in the diaspora, just as Barbara Smith notes that *Sula* and other Black feminist texts expand the definition of lesbianism. As Wekker performs the anthropological reading of Afrodiasporic communities in Dutch Suriname, so too will my reading of Morrison's novel find the mati in the Bottom.

While the particularities of the communities in Dutch Suriname and the Bottom may not align exactly, their "indigenous" systems of sexual relation align quite well. It is clear as well that the Bottom is a working-class environment for the entirety of the time that Nel and Sula are present in it. While the story we are told does not begin or end with their laboring, the Bottom's Black community that is displaced by a gentrifying, white suburban community resembles the working-class community that is the location of study in Wekker's work. While the Bottom is not identified as developing out of a Dutch Surinamese background, Wekker's interpretation allows for flexibility. Her work on mati-ism corrects the assumption that Anglo-American theories of female same-sexuality as an identity formation and social practice are the only ways Black women may participate in sexual intimacy in the diaspora. She writes, "There are strong indications that the western categories of 'homo,' 'bi,' and 'hetero' have insufficient justification in some black situations. The concept of 'homosexuality' introduces an etic category that is alien to the indigenous, emic system which exists in some sections of black communities."[41] Moreover, Wekker points out in her book *The Politics of Passion* that the term "mati" derives from the same tradition as the Brazilian "malungo," Trinidadian "malongue," Haitian "batiment," and Surinamese "sipi"—all referencing the close relationships between two members of the same sex who were shipmates during the Atlantic slave trade.[42] Thus, the mati is a form of the spatial contingency of queer phenomenological relation insofar as, in Ahmed's words, "lesbian desires create spaces, often temporary spaces that come and go with the coming and going of the bodies that inhabit them."[43] Ahmed echoes Wekker here, stating that "the promise of queer" is not "uniform" (Wekker's word) like the way of being in the world that is normalized as heterosexual; rather, an "alternative" world is that which attends to the relation that is fleeting. That is, touch between two bodies in space relies on a specific economy of possibility-to-be-touched, and the very possibility is where queer orientation comes in: being oriented in a queer way means encountering things not reachable by the conventional lines of relation. This is, again, why it does not matter that Sula and Nel do not touch one another's physical bodies in their sexual play in the grass, as their contact has already been narrated as supraphysical and their relation to one another in space already assumes the queer orientation between them. This is what Bertha Harris means when she writes, "if there are strong images of women . . . the result is innately lesbian literature."[44] There is always already a queer orientation between the two women, as they exist "slantwise" to normalcy.

During Nel and Sula's argument, Sula classes herself as a man because she sees herself as having ownership of her own loneliness, something Nel cannot have, because

what Nel has is a "secondhand lonely" (143). Being "a colored woman" is the same as being a man because, as Sula will put it a few lines later, "My lonely is *mine*. Now your lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to you" (143). This line we should see as an off-kilter echo of the me-ness Nel finds in befriending Sula: Sula says "I got me" (143), meaning that she sees relying on men as not affording a woman the autonomous agency she wishes to have and that her self-making is more important than reliance, even if it is lonely. Nel does not classify gender in so androgynous or fluid a way, telling Sula she does not believe being "colored" and a woman is the same as being a man. In this scene, Sula, despite being bedridden and sickly, consistently registers her own agency as an inherently masculine possibility even as she references the stereotype of the masculine Black woman by saying she is "the same as" a man because she is a woman of color. This displacement of gender, then, is akin to Wekker's notion of gendered roles in mati relations: a same-sex relation seemingly repeats gendering by containing a "male" role and "female" role. Sula, whose loneliness is self-owned, is in the autonomous masculine role and Nel, whose loneliness is secondhand, is in the feminine role.[45] But it is just this: a *displacement* of gender. This "butch"-ing of Sula does not only establish Sula as masculinized; it is more complex than this. While Sula sees herself and her autonomy as inherently masculine, she also displaces this right after by saying "They ain't worth more than me" (143). This fight between Sula and Nel is a gendered play that establishes their mati-ism even as it troubles those roles.

Even as she undermines the masculinization of ownership, Sula reifies a masculine inflection to owning the self by classing herself as the same as a man. This dynamic plays out what Morrison writes in a 2002 foreword for the novel: "Female freedom always means sexual freedom" (xiii). In terms of the novel, Sula and Nel both view freedom in distinctly different ways. The argument between who has access to one's own loneliness is at its base about freedom, about the ways each of the women understand how loneliness bounds oneself to another in a way that may not feel free (according to Sula) or in a way that feels freeing (according to Nel). In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," Morrison confirms that Sula is "extracting choice from choiceless-ness, responding inventively to found things. Improvisational. Daring, disruptive, imaginative, modern, out-of-the-house, out-lawed, unpolicing, uncontained and uncontainable. And dangerously female."[46] In this final conversation, it is Sula who is fighting for her autonomy. It is perhaps ironic, then, that it is Sula who comes back, so to speak, in the form of the fur ball, as she is thereby tied to Nel's loneliness and thus not autonomous. This further instills the queer relation between the two women, as Sula is now the one beholden to

someone else, only it is to Nel, another woman. It is Sula who requires Nel to name the fur ball for it to no longer float just out of Nel's sight. While Jude "filled up the space" in front of, behind, and inside Sula—proving that phenomenological contingency upon which sexual intimacy is predicated—it is Sula who fills up Nel's spaces after the former's death. The fur ball's presence is the final demonstration of Morrison's disruption of that physical/supraphysical boundary, as it reverses who requires whom. Such a reversal of what Sula defined as gendered roles in the mati-like relationship confirms a queer theory of gender as "a way in which bodies get directed," a kind of play that constructs gender as spatially contingent.[47]

If, indeed, the fur ball is a ghostly body of Sula's made of "small defiling things"—and I think we can be sure of this based upon its naming by Nel and immediate disappearance on the final page—the masculinization of her role as autonomous is troubled by a change in orientation: Sula, who classed owning one's own loneliness as masculine, is, in her new ghostly embodiment, reliant on Nel. Nel, in the final scene, admits she had confused the fur ball for Jude—casting Sula again in the masculine role—but then immediately disassociates this gendering from Sula by saying "we was girls together . . . girl, girl, girlgirlgirl" (174). Such a "queer effect," Ahmed writes, results from "oblique or diagonal lines, created by bodies out of place."[48] In the following section, I will read the fur ball as such an out of place body—so out of place it collapses the psychic/physical boundary yet again.

Queer Form: The Fur Ball

The novel's chapters are seemingly set up chronologically, with each named for a year. However, with the figure of the fur ball that haunts Nel for the latter part of the novel, this chronology is disrupted in what we come to know is a physicalization of the relationship between Nel and Sula after Sula's death. It is not until the final page that we have confirmation that the fur ball represents Sula, and it is this delay that disrupts the formal chronology given to us by the chapter names as well. The ghostly fur ball that lives just out of sight is, we discover, a revenant. By definition, then, we have the past (in this case, Sula who has died) interpolating the present (where Nel resides). Morrison's fur ball disrupts what had been established in the novel's formal characteristics—chapter titles—and the realist mode that experiences time as chronological. In so doing, it produces a form which is out of joint even as it *seems to be* chronological. I read such a form as *queer formalism*—queer because it misshapes the linearity of chronology the chapter names establish. As Elizabeth Freeman has argued, the temporally and sexually disso-

nant are akin to one another.[49] Additionally, because Nel confuses the fur ball for Jude, it dismantles the heteronormative relationship that Nel had established with Sula when it is revealed that the fur ball is actually Sula. Finally, as the fur ball can be characterized as a kind of body out of place. Representing, as it does, Sula, who is dead, it collapses the psychic and physical boundary yet again by functioning to physicalize the intimacy of the two women, an intimacy that goes *beyond* death.

The first time the novel collapses the physical and psychic planes is in the sex scene in the grass when the girls are adolescents, just after they have been "looking for mischief" (56). We can imagine, then, that once Sula and Jude have sex, we may encounter another such episode. We see this when Nel and Sula are both collapsed into a singular syntactical element, the pronoun "they." After Nel finds out Sula had slept with Jude, she thinks, "But who could think in that bed where *they* had been and where they *also* had been and where only she was now?" (106–7). Here, the first "they" seems to represent Jude and Nel, while the second, unemphasized one seems to represent Jude and Sula. But this could easily be reversed, because the pronoun "they" does not refer to Nel or Sula specifically. Nel and Sula are collapsed into a single relation between each of them and Jude in this act of infidelity. The women's closeness is an intimacy that bends their own identities onto each other even as the reference at this moment in the novel is about Sula sleeping with Jude and Nel sleeping with Jude. Thus, while Nel and Sula have both slept with a man, this formal event ("they") suggests the two are, again, "the same" as the other—a repetition of the lesbian merger. Nel and Sula's thoughts had been one and the same up to the point of infidelity, a fracture of their relationship with one another; however, with just a small pronoun choice, Morrison has rejoined the two so that the emphasis is not on the fact both of the women slept with Jude in the same bed but on their closeness with one another. This event in the text occurs just before the fur ball appears to Nel and Sula dies. Nel, of course, thinks the fur ball represents the grief she feels for having lost Jude; however, the text is signaling that the fur ball is something to do with the relationship between the two women.

While the fur ball arises in chapter title "1938" *before* Sula's death in chapter title "1940," it has always resembled a kind of spectral revenant for the reader, representative of a loss come back to haunt Nel's life.

> She stood up frightened. There was something just to the right of her, in the air, just out of view. She could not see it, but she knew exactly what it looked like. A gray ball hovering just there. Just there. To the right. Quiet, gray, dirty. A ball of muddy strings, but without weight, fluffy but terrible in its malevolence. She knew she could not look, so she closed her eyes and crept past it out of the bathroom, shutting the door behind her. (108–109)

The floating gray ball contains "muddy strings" and is "fluffy," but has a "terrible . . . malevolence" that suggests it is haunting to Nel—and even in the end, when Nel names the ball correctly as Sula, it is "sorrow" that Nel feels. Nell spends the summer with "the little ball of fur and string and hair," afraid of looking at it. Morrison writes that Nel finds it hard not to sleep with her children and would rather think about their scary dreams than about the ball of fur. She even hopes for a nightmare herself that would distract her from her new reality with the fur ball, angry that she cannot speak to Sula about the ball because Sula had slept with Jude. Morrison's magical realist style merges the two queer protagonists and has now brought forth a figure without explanation: a floating fur ball. As with the former, the latter can be explained through the collapse of the psychic and physical planes that, in a more realist stylistic mode, would be discrete.

As the fur ball first appears in chapter title "1938," before Sula dies in "1940," the reader likely assumes this entity is *not* Sula. However, after reading the novel and getting to its close, where it is revealed that the fur ball is, in fact, Sula, we are left with a big question: How can Sula be both alive, far away from Nel, *and* haunting her close by as the fur ball in the summer of 1938? Nel gives us a clue when she says, "All that time, I thought I was missing Jude" (174) on the final page. Nel has thought the ball of fur represented her "missing Jude," a physicalization of her longing for his presence, even a bastardization of his presence, as it haunts her with a "terrible malevolence" the same way she holds the grief and anger with her about Jude and Sula's betrayal. In the end, we are told that it represents Sula's absence in Nel's life. Absence, betrayal, anger, and longing are all affective states connected to what we have established as the psychic plane. With the fur ball, Morrison has again interpolated the physical plane with the psychic plane—Nel's life is haunted by a physically real ball of fur, hair, and string that represents the affect she has because of having lost Sula from her life. The fur ball collapses the psychic plane, whereon Nel feels anger, grief, and longing, into the physical plane, whereon she is visited by this floating, nagging thing she is afraid to even look at (110).

The fur ball floating just out of sight and haunting Nel has a provocative resonance as a ghost. Reading the fur ball as a ghost is quite generative for literary analysis. As one contemporary ghost story puts it, "ghosts don't live by human rules."[50] This is true for the fur ball, as it disrupts our understanding of Sula as alive in 1938 even as, according to the end of the novel, it represents her. The notion that the fur ball must be something else in 1938 than it is in 1965 assumes that the text is linear—not an unusual assumption given the chapter titles being years. Once we know that the fur ball is Sula and we know that this fur ball exists even as Sula is still alive, the linearity of the novel given to us

by those chapter titles, though, begins to break down. Linearity and its relationship to ghostliness has to do with temporality, which is to say that a ghost represents a disruption in the assumed normal linear sequence of time. Ghosts, as revenants, do not abide by this linearity. Accordingly, the fur ball can be both Sula in 1938 when she is alive and Sula in 1965 when she is dead.

In *The Spectralities Reader* introduction on "Conceptualizing Spectralities," María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren write:

> Ghosts, spirits, and specters have played vital roles in oral and written narratives throughout history and across cultures, appearing as anything from figments of the imagination, divine messengers, benign or exacting ancestors, and pesky otherworldly creatures populating particular loci to disturbing figures returned from the dead bent on exacting revenge, revealing hidden crimes, continuing a love affair or simply searching for a way to pass on.[51]

Such a capacious definition of the ghost allows us to read the fur ball as one such figure, a haunting specter that disrupts not only the lifeworld that Morrison has built with *Sula*, psychic and physical planes alike, but also the form of the novel itself. Morrison places clues in the text to signal to us that this fur ball is Sula before we know it is. When, in the scene in the grass where the adolescents partake in sexual play, it is "with a gesture of disgust" that Nel "thr[ows] the pieces [of her twig] into the hole they [have] made. Sula thr[ows] hers in too" (58). This disgust connects to the malevolence that the fur ball represents for Nel. She will never look at the ball and is afraid she might die from touching it. Moreover, the fur ball is made of muddy debris: a "gray ball . . . of fur and string and hair" (109) is how it is described just after its introduction. Into the hole Nel and Sula make during the sex scene, they throw a bottle cap, "paper, bits of glass, butts of cigarettes, until all of the small defiling things they could find were collected there" (59). What are the strings, mud, and hair that make up the ball of fur haunting Nel if not small defiling things? The fur ball defiles Nel's life, she thinks, until the very end when it is revealed to be her relationship with Sula. Moreover, the ghost's invocation always includes the shifting, settling, or movement of mud and leaves (107–108, 174). The fur ball is inherently connected to the ground in which the two girls perform their "sex" play because it is made up of dirt. We do not think of a ghost as dirty, but rather as the color of "creamy innocence" (58)—a white blanketed figure. However, Morrison upends this image and replaces it with floating, fluffy dirt made into a furry ball. The haunting is the same, but the ghost has been made new and made queer, because it is literally made up

of the same substance the girls use to establish their queer phenomenological relation via the sexual play in the dirt. The centrality of the scene in the grass comes up in the very form the fur ball takes, cluing us into it being Sula—or, at the very least, a physicalization of the queer phenomena that encounter us via the text with Nel and Sula.

Morrison, whose work is always being made-new each time we read, has created a story with *Sula* where this can be articulated in a phenomenological reading of the novel—which is to say a reading that attends to the reader's experience. Upon first reading the novel, the reader may interpret the fur ball as a kind of haunting grief about Nel having lost her husband and best friend—this is also what Nel will surmise of the floating ball. Yet, when rereading the novel, we perhaps encounter the fur ball with confusion because we know that Sula has not yet died but we also know from the end that the fur ball *is* Sula. Thus, the fur ball, as a specter, defiles even the temporal sequence of events by visiting upon Nel the ghost that is Sula's absence even though she is not dead until two years after the fur ball's first appearance. Indeed, any specter flies in the face of linear temporal progression since it is a visitor from other places in time. This is in line with Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds*, in which she theorizes a chrononormative temporality against which exists a *queer* temporality—the unsettling of chronologies, histories, or temporal linearities. She reads Cherríe Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* (1986) as an antecedent text demonstrating such a queer temporality as it unsettles borders between history and time. Toni Morrison's novel, though, precedes both of these texts even as its ghost, the fur ball, negates the chrononormative time set up in the form of the novel through the chapter titles ("1921," "1923," "1927," "1941" . . .). *Sula* demonstrates a structural, formal concern with temporality in that its chapter titles are named based on the year in which the chapter's events occur. When, in Part 2, Sula returns to Medallion accompanied by a plague of robins, we know that it has been some time since she left not only because of this ominous start to the chapter "1937" but because we know that the previous chapter was called "1927." The passage of time between Parts 1 and 2 is significant for the reader's notion that Sula has not gone away briefly but that she has lost a decade with Nel in the Bottom. Additionally, when, in the final chapter, "1965," the fur ball breaks up and Nel realizes it is actually her long lost companion, we know that she has been haunted for over a decade because the previous chapter was titled "1941."

Sula is formally linear, seemingly presenting a chronological unfolding of time by having chapter names simply be years. Yet, the second-time the reader encounters Sula in the form of a ghostly fur ball in chapter "1937," two years before the chapter in which Sula dies. I ask again: How can Sula be both the fur ball, haunting Nel in 1937

as a kind of ghost, and be alive? Such a question, I reassert, requires that time unfold linearly. Ghosts, though, do not follow that chrononormative time called linear. This fur ball, ghost that it is, subverts the present by inserting into it a future death (Sula's) that then becomes present (haunting Nel).

Long before *Beloved* made its way into the American literary canon as Morrison's ghost story that plays on time and history, *Sula* was playing with ghosts and time. In rereading the novel's queer relationship phenomenologically, we have seen that fluid place where emotion and physicality intermingle to form psychic intimacy. We know Nel and Sula are queer not just because of their sexual play, nor just because of the novel's focus on a relation among women that does not primarily concern men or patriarchal systems of relation. We know that *Sula* is a queer novel because in its textual phenomena, Morrison has rendered a relation (between Sula and Nel, between the reader and the novel, between the ghost and time) that is out of joint, off-kilter, *queer.* Through the queer phenomenology that queer of color theorist Sara Ahmed establishes, the anthropological-cultural work on the Black diaspora of Gloria Wekker's, and the queer temporality coined by Elizabeth Freeman, *Sula*'s queer phenomena are made new. The novel extends the lesbian merger theory to Lorde's notion that the plane of the erotic bridges the psychic and emotional, although it was written years before Lorde articulated such a use for the erotic. Therefore, *Sula* indicates queer of color theory does not begin with Lorde, or even with *The Color Purple,* but with Morrison's lesser-known ghost story. Finally, in returning to the era of spectrality studies, which has seemed to have passed, I have attempted to argue that Morrison's 1972 novel builds the spectral figure called the ghost as inherently atemporal—and therefore as inherently queer. Because they by definition disrupt chrononormative temporal borders, it would seem that *all* ghosts—whether fur ball or King Hamlet—have always already been queer.

Notes

1. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 53–59.
2. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Vintage International, 1973), 52. Hereinafter cited parenthetically.
3. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press), 94.
4. Toni Morrison's first novel has been banned as recently as January 2022, See Helen Holmes, "'Maus' and 'The Bluest Eye' Were Banned By School Districts This Week," *Observer*, January 28, 2022, https://observer.com/2022/01/maus-and-the-bluest-eye-were-banned-by-school-districts-this-week/.
5. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2006), 67.

6. Here, I use "theorizing" in the present progressive tense to indicate a lineage from Barbara Christian's notion that people of color have always already been theorizing, just in different (narrative) ways. See Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 67–79.
7. See E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, eds., *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2005), ix and 3–4.
8. See Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," *Conditions* 1, no. 2 (October 1977): 39.
9. The comprehensive work of Black queer studies is entirely relevant to the novel's titular character and her best friend and lover Nel. Beginning from what Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley conceptualizes in "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic" as "the turbulent fluidities of blackness and queerness," I hope to offer another reading of the Black Queer life in *Sula*. For as much as queer is a spatial term, so too is blackness dependent upon spatial perception. See Emily S. Lee, ed., *Race as Phenomena: Between Phenomenology and Philosophy of Race* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). Offering what M. Jacqui Alexander writes is "making the invisible tangible," *Sula* is queer in orientation and form. See M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2005), 313.
10. Aretha Phiri, "Expanding Black Subjectivities in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*," *Cultural Studies* 31, no. 1 (January 2017): 121–42.
11. It was not until the 1990s that we were introduced to the notion of queer readings. While Barbara Smith's piece reads the novel as inherently lesbian, it is worth noting that she may have used the term "queer" should she have written this article a couple decades after its original publication. Smith's labeling the novel "lesbian" is noteworthy for the time, as there was a sort of renaissance of Black lesbian literary production during the late 1970s and the 1980s.
12. Bobuq Sayed in Marina Magloire, "Sula" (class lecture, ENG 655: Black Feminism, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL, October 4, 2019).
13. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 56.
14. Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez, "Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social," *ASAP/Journal* 2, no. 2 (May 2017): 233.
15. Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2004), 118.
16. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), quoted in Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 65.
17. This was previously called phenomenological reading by Wolfgang Iser but is now almost entirely referred to as "reader response."
18. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, eds., *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 16.
19. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 56.
20. The book has been continually banned in different communities throughout the world due to the nature of the sexual violence of which Pecola is a victim.
21. Smith, writing only a few years after the novel's publication, argues that the novel "works as a lesbian novel not only because of the passionate friendship between Sula and Nel, but because

of Morrison's consistently critical stance towards the heterosexual institutions of male/female relationships, marriage, and the family."

22. Smith writes, "What I have tried to do here is not to prove that Morrison wrote something that she did not, but to point out how a black feminist critical perspective at least allows consideration of this level of the novel's meaning." "Toward," 14.
23. Lorraine Bethel, "Conversations with Ourselves: Black Female Relationships in Toni Cade Bambara's *Gorilla, My Love* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*" (unpublished paper, 1976), quoted in Smith, 35.
24. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 67.
25. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 67.
26. Ahmed, and Judith Butler before her, argue that normativity is the result of repetitive bodily relations in the world rather than objective systems of definition placed upon the body. While Butler uses discourse and, notably, French post-structuralist linguistics and psychoanalysis to make this case about gender and sex with regard to the body, Ahmed uses major names in phenomenological philosophy. Ahmed, though, twists the Eurocentricity of these philosophical forefathers in innovative ways that allow her to discuss how sexuality is, phenomenologically, an *orientation* (to objects/people in space) and how *the Orient* is also the result of a subjective-perceptive positioning (as opposed to an objective place-name). Put another way, what distinguishes Ahmed's citational praxis from Butler's is her undermining major Eurocentric theories of philosophy. What Ahmed's book offers as queer to phenomenology is a focus on subjective perception and the body's spatiality—its place in space—as central to understanding queer phenomena as they play out in the world. Thus, she bridges queer theory and affect theory quite well.
27. "While same-sex desire has the attributes of heterosexual desire, it moves toward an object that is 'normally outside the sphere' of that desire." Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 71.
28. Ahmed writes that there are various ways the world has us encounter "straightening devices" that offer the repetition in perception of the normal relation of oriented-ness. Living queerly, she notes, is defying these devices.
29. Ahmed uses Husserl to suggest that "[t]he action is what brings things near other things at the same time that the action is dependent on the nearness of things . . . What puts objects near depends on histories, on how 'things' arrive, and on how they gather in their very availability as things to 'do things' with." *Queer Phenomenology*, 88.
30. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2015), Ahmed writes of emotional intentionality, "emotions are directed to what we come into contact with: they move us 'toward' and 'away' from such objects" (2).
31. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 28.
32. Jan Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2014), 22.
33. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 194 n30.
34. Ibid., 193 n29.
35. Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, 23.

36. Gloria Wekker, "Mati Work" in *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press), 172.
37. Ahmed coins "contingent lesbian," *Queer Phenomenology*, 94.
38. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 60.
39. Ahmed writes, "We need to ask how lesbian tendencies shape and are shaped by how bodies extend into worlds; and how even if this desire does not simply reside within the lesbian body, how such desire comes to be felt 'as if' it were a natural force." *Queer Phenomenology*, 94.
40. Ahmed notes that this version of the "contact lesbian" theory—that one may become a lesbian through contact with lesbians— seems to be used to delegitimize one's sexual orientation. Yet, she writes, "I want to suggest that there is some 'truth' to this idea." *Queer Phenomenology*, 94.
41. Gloria Wekker, "Mati-ism and Black Lesbianism: Two Idealtypical Expressions of Female Homosexuality in Black Communities of the Diaspora," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 1, no. 1 (1997): 18.
42. Wekker, "Mati Work," 175.
43. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 106.
44. Quoted in Smith, "Toward," 33.
45. Wekker, "Mati-ism," 16.
46. Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" (Tanner Lecture on Human Values, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, October 7, 1988, https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/m/morrison90.pdf), 153.
47. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 60.
48. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 61.
49. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2010).
50. Viet Thanh Nguyen, "Black-Eyed Women," *The Refugees* (New York: Grove Press, 2017), 10.
51. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1.