

■ Over the past decades, what is commonly referred to as the »affective turn« has swept across the world of academia.¹ Challenging the minor role accorded to emotions in both Western society and research, its proponents argue that taking feelings, emotions, and affects seriously offers new insights into life in contemporary late modern society and a possibility to reinvigorate critical perspectives on economic, social, and symbolic power structures such as capitalism, heterosexism, racism, and ableism.²

What characterizes affects, according to psychologist Silvan Tomkins, is that they are contagious.³ A yawn, a smile or a blush is transferred to others, creating a circuit of feeling and response that pulsates back and forth. Tomkins not only claims that affects are transferable between subjects, but also stresses their transferability with regard to their object. Any affect can thus attach to any object or subject, or, more precisely: affects can be described as constituting the very glue by which attachments between subject and object are made. While this notion of affect is by no means universally accepted, it highlights one of the attractions of the affective turn, namely that it introduces a paradigm for thinking about the sharing and multiplying of affects, dispositions, and orientations.⁴ To pay attention to affective life is to study our being in the world, how we become attached and un-attached to others and to the world and how our bodily movements are approved or limited. It concerns the collective and political spaces we inhabit as well as deeply personal experiences of embodiment, love, fear, resentment or belonging.

This special issue of *LIR.journal* is based on the activities of the feminist multidisciplinary Nordic and Baltic network *Exploring affect*. A part of the migratory scholarly institution Nordic Summer University, funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the network organized six conferences between 2013 and 2015. The articles published here are the outcome of the network's final year. The symposium *Exploring affect: Love* was organized in collaboration with the Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion, University of Gothenburg, in February 2015. The session *Exploring affect: Politics* took place in July the same year in Druskininkai, Lithuania, in cooperation with the European Humanities University. The network's coordinator Johanna Sjöstedt is the initiator and, together with Johanna Lindbo, the editor of this issue. Below, a brief sketch of the historical backdrop to contemporary affect theory will be followed by an introduction of the themes of the issue as well as the individual articles.

The lion's share of the vocabulary used in scholarship on

affects and emotions today – which includes the terms passion, affect, emotion, feeling, sentiment, and mood – have their origin in ancient Greek philosophy; often mediated by Latin translations and transformed with the arrival of modernity.⁵ The Greek notion of *pathos* is inscribed in a conceptual pair with *logos* or reason, a crucial distinction that resonates throughout intellectual history until today. As feminist philosophers Alison M. Jaggar and Genevieve Lloyd were early to point out, *logos/pathos* is a gendered pair, where men have been associated with reason and women with emotion.⁶ Although *logos* was valued higher than *pathos*, the split between the two was not clear-cut for the Greeks. In the *Phaedrus*, where Plato outlined his famous understanding of the soul, the relationship was formulated as one between horse and horseman, where emotions ought to be guided, but not suppressed, by reason.⁷ Aristotle considered the *pathe*, plural for *pathos*, susceptible to reason, but also emphasized that reason could be impaired by them.⁸ Among the two, Aristotle's notion of *pathos* has been more influential. On his view, *pathos* was close to appetite or desire. It formed one of three main categories of his understanding of the soul and played an important role in his ethical works, where the *pathe* were considered a fundamental part of the good life. Referring to the state of the audience, *pathos* was also one of three elements in Aristotle's understanding of rhetoric.

The advent of modernity in the seventeenth century ushered in new ways of understanding emotions that still shape contemporary debates. With the rise of modern science, reason was stripped of anything relating to values and emotions.⁹ This development required a concomitant reformulation of emotions, which increasingly were understood as non-rational urges that swept across the body. In the wake of this transformation two dominating ways of conceptualizing the emotions crystallized: one strand that considered emotions to be cognitive, involving judgment or conceptualization, in contrast to another one where emotions were understood as bodily sensations.¹⁰ If the former tradition had its roots in Aristotle, the latter view was first articulated in the work of René Descartes (1596–1650) and later developed further by Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677). Versions of this claim were also taken up by British empiricism, for example in the work of David Hume (1711–1776), and by nineteenth century positivism.¹¹ In contemporary scholarship, both of these positions have advocates. The most well known proponent of the cognitivist view is perhaps the American philosopher and classicist Martha Nussbaum, who explicitly draws on the writings of Aristotle.¹² However, what typically characterizes the contemporary turn to affect, according to American intellectual historian Ruth Leys, is its adherence to the modern understanding of emotions, a position labelled »anti-intentionalism« by Leys.¹³

It consists of a) a radical separation between affect and cognition, and b) a flipping of the traditional hierarchy between mind and body, reason and affect, where affect and the body are considered prior to mind and reason. This view is evident in the influential work of philosopher and media theorist Brian Massumi, author of the seminal article »The autonomy of affect« (1995), where affect is described as independent of cognition.¹⁴ For Massumi and his followers the term »affect« denotes less a separate object of study than an ontological position that lays a foundation for rethinking fundamental concepts and distinctions in philosophy, such as the subject, the body, the world, politics, reason, representation, and the dichotomy between humans and other animals, to name but a few.

The articles in this journal issue can be divided into two sub-themes. The first theme is affect and politics. As political philosopher Linda M. G. Zerilli notes, scholars interested in the affective aspects of politics are united in their critique of the major role accorded to reason in political philosophy, for example in the thought of liberal philosopher John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative rationality.¹⁵ The nature of this critique ranges from Nussbaum's effort to reform the liberal tradition by emphasizing »political emotions«, to thinkers like Massumi, who rather strive to rethink political philosophy from the ground.¹⁶ In the perspective of movements for social justice, the relevance of affect theory for politics can be described in terms of its attempt to account for the tenacity of oppression in an era where formal obstacles to equality in many cases have been removed, but where affective attachments prove just as crucial to the persistence of inequality.

In the opening article, philosopher Kasper Kristensen enters into a recent debate about the merit of Massumi's non-cognitivist affect theory for political philosophy. Questioning the views ascribed to Spinoza in this debate – both by Massumi and his critics – he argues that there is a gap between Massumi's Spinozist-Deleuzean inspired notion of the affects and the definitions that Spinoza and Deleuze's reading of Spinoza actually present. Laying out a different interpretation of Spinoza, Kristensen suggests that his philosophy in fact offers a sophisticated solution to the question of the relationship between affect, cognition, and emancipation. Cultural historian Alena Minchenia tackles the theme of affect and politics from a social media perspective in her analysis of the reception of contemporary Russian television satire of Belarusian president Lukashenka in Belarusian Internet forums. By employing the notions of »killjoy« and »unlaughter«, she reveals the geopolitical imaginary underpinning Russian and Belarusian relations and its limits and possibilities with respect to critique and political transformation. Minchenia represents a vital strand

in affect studies, where new media landscapes introduce new patterns in the sharing of affects and the forming of political subjectivities.

The second theme of this issue is love. Just as there has been an intense buzz in connection to the affective turn more generally speaking, there is also an increased interest in the specific emotion of love, a change that is most noticeable in the social sciences.¹⁷ If love previously was considered too ethereal to be the focus of rigorous research, influential sociologists in the 1990s began to theorize love as an increasingly important value in late modernity. Love also became an important concept for philosophers in the left-Hegelian tradition, Alain Badiou famously defining love as »minimal communism«. ¹⁸ Simultaneously, there were feminist efforts to take love seriously, for example in the groundbreaking materialist work of Icelandic-Swedish political scientist Anna G. Jónasdóttir, who coined the concept of »love power«. ¹⁹ Without disputing the fact that there is indeed a growing interest in love in contemporary scholarship, in this context it might be more interesting to highlight what Catherine Vulliamy in this issue calls the »persistent question of love«, in particular with respect to the intellectual history of feminism. ²⁰ In fact, the problem of love and the critique of marriage have repeatedly surfaced as crucial concerns for thinkers who either have called themselves feminist or subsequently have been labelled so. This feminist interest in love is not reducible to any particular period; it turns up in early modernity in the texts of Mary Astell (1666–1731), during the Enlightenment in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), in the anarchist and socialist feminisms of Emma Goldman (1869–1940) and Alexandra Kollontai (1875–1952), in the existential phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), during the 1970s in the work of Shulamith Firestone (1945–2012), as well as in the thought of contemporary feminist and critical race theorist bell hooks (1952 –). ²¹ While their respective understandings of the relationship between love, oppression, and liberation vary, these thinkers share in common an interest in discussing love, passion and emotions in relation to questions of gender and power.

Two articles in this issue, both from scholars in gender studies and both based on interviews, take up the theme of emotions, gender, sexuality, and intimacy in late modern society. Combining two research projects on men’s and women’s friendships respectively, Klara Goedecke and Linn Alenius Wallin analyse friendship in contemporary Sweden. The authors highlight friendship as increasingly important in our times and develop novel feminist ways to question power relations, vulnerabilities and exclusions within such relationships. Catherine Vulliamy’s article focuses on stories of the lived experience of love, sexuality, and fluid subjectivities in

England today. Analysing the contradictory nature of the experiences shared with her, she investigates the extent to which love carries transformative potential and whether love itself can be transformed.

The final three articles discuss love in Swedish popular culture and literature. Using women's magazines as material, historian Emma Severinsson analyses discourses about self-supporting women and love in the 1920s, after the attainment of formal equality between men and women in marriage and the acquisition of the right to vote. The legal changes notwithstanding, Severinsson shows that marriage was still conceptualized as entailing subordination for women, which meant that the reader was confronted by a choice between freedom and love. Anna Nygren looks into the iconic relationship between horses and girls as portrayed in Lena Furberg's cartoons. Appropriating theoretical perspectives from post-humanism and practical knowledge, she pays special attention to how the girls love horses, both the individual horse and horses as a species. The issue ends with literary scholar Johanna Lindbo's article on embodiment and the relationship between young women and landscapes in contemporary Swedish novels. Combining affect theory with perspectives from materialist ecocriticism, she argues that the novels articulate intimate bonds between the young women and their organic surroundings in a way that combines creation with destruction, which has similarities with a certain notion of love.

In attending to emotions in a diverse spectrum of materials, the articles demonstrate the complexities and potential of the affective turn. Across different disciplines, they enter into dialogue with each other through their focus on emotions, power, and the question of transformation. Together they manifest a commitment to further explorations of the field.

— Johanna Sjöstedt,
September 2016

■ — ENDNOTES —

1 Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth: »An inventory of shimmers« in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.): *The Affect Theory Reader* (London & Durham, 2010); Anu Koivunen: »An affective turn? Reimagining the subject of feminist theory«, in Marianne Liljeström & Susanna Paasonen (eds.): *Working With Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing differences* (New York, 2010).

2 In this sentence, the words »feeling«, »emotion«, and »affect« are used in order to include different directions in the affective turn. As Koivunen points out, there is no agreement on

how to define these terms, Koivunen: »An affective turn?«, 10. In English, emotion and feeling are the general words in everyday language and the preferred terms by some scholars, whereas the term affect tends to be the choice of scholars following philosopher and media theorist Brian Massumi's non-cognitivist view (see below and Kaspersen in this volume). The editors make no commitment to any particular theory of affects or emotions and in this introduction the terms are used interchangeably, or in accordance with the vocabulary used by the authors referred to.

3 Silvan Tomkins: *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (New York, 1963). For a brief description of Tomkin's notion of affect, see Clare Hemmings: »Invoking affect« in *Cultural Studies* 19:5 (2005), 551 pp.

4 In contrast to theoretical perspectives emanating from dialectics, which pit subjects against each other in a struggle driven by lack or scarcity, this notion of affect creates a paradigm whose critical purchase is derived from a notion of excess. However, it does not mean that all affect theory is incompatible with dialectics; indeed, there is quite a lot of recent scholarship that analyses love in a dialectical perspective. See Vulliamy's article in this volume.

5 The list of terms is taken from Koivunen: »An affective turn?«, 9. The general Latin translation of pathos was *passio*, whereas the subcategory of passions relating specifically to the soul was rendered as *affectus*. Latin is also the origin of the words »emotion« and »sensation«, or »feeling«. Introduced during early modernity they derive from *to emovere* and *sensus*, meaning to touch or to move and understanding or idea, respectively. »Mood« is inspired by German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) notion of *Stimmung*, which is an interpretation of Aristotle's understanding of pathos. J. Lanz: »Affekt« in Joachim Ritter (ed.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie Vol. 1* (Basel & Stuttgart, 1971); R. Meyer-Kalkus: »Pathos« in Karlfried Gründer (ed.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie Vol. 7* (Basel & Stuttgart, 1989); Amy M. Schmitter: »Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance Theories of the Emotions« in Edward N. Zalta (ed.): *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/emotions-17th18th/LD1Background.html>, accessed June 15th 2016.

6 Alison M. Jaggar: »Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology« in *Inquiry* 32:2 (1989); Genevieve Lloyd: *The Man of Reason: »Male« and »female« in Western philosophy* (London, 1984).

7 Plato: *Phaedrus* (tr.) Benjamin Jowett <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html>, accessed June 15th 2016 [360 BC].

8 Schmitter: »Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance Theories of the Emotions«; R. Meyer-Kalkus: »Pathos«.

- 9 Jaggar: »Love and knowledge«.
- 10 Sara Ahmed: *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh, 2004), 5 pp.
- 11 Jaggar: »Love and knowledge«.
- 12 Martha C. Nussbaum: *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001).
- 13 Ruth Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique« in *Critical Inquiry* 37:3 (2011).
- 14 Brian Massumi: »The Autonomy of affect« in *Cultural Critique* 31:2 (1995).
- 15 Linda M. G. Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment« in *New Literary History* 46:2 (2015).
- 16 Brian Massumi: *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge, 2015); Martha Nussbaum: *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, 2015).
- 17 Anna G. Jónasdóttir: »Love Studies: A (Re)New(ed) Field of Knowledge Interests«, in Anna G. Jónasdóttir and Ann Ferguson (eds.): *Love: A Question for Feminist in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 2014).
- 18 Alain Badiou with Nicolas Truong: *In Praise of Love* (tr.) Peter Bush (London, 2012 [2009]), 90. Quoted in Catherine Vulliamy: »Contradiction and radical hope: Utopia as method in the lived experience of love« in *LIR.journal* 7 (2016), 91.
- 19 Anna G. Jónasdóttir: *Love Power and Political Interests: Towards a Theory of Patriarchy in Contemporary Western Society* (Göteborg, 1991).
- 20 Vulliamy: »Contradiction and radical hope«, 75.
- 21 Mary Astell: »Reflections upon marriage« in Bridget Hill (ed.): *The First English Feminist: Reflections Upon Marriage and Other Writings* (New York, 1986 [1700]); Mary Wollstonecraft: »A vindication of the rights of woman« in Sylvana Tomaselli (ed.): *A Vindication of Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Cambridge, 1995 [1792]); Emma Goldman: *Anarchism and Other Essays* (Minneapolis, 2005 [1910]); Alexandra Kollontai: *Selected Writings* (tr.) Alixa Holt (Toronto, 1977). Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex* (tr.) Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, 2010 [1949]); Shulamith Firestone: *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London, 1972); bell hooks: *All About Love* (New York, 2000).