Working with Affect in Feminist Readings

Disturbing differences

Edited by
Marianne Liljeström and Susanna Paasonen

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

1 An affective turn?

Reimagining the subject of feminist theory

Anu Koivunen

Feminist theory, Teresa de Lauretis has argued, came 'into its own' through a self-conscious and self-critical redefinition of its key terms – subject, power and difference. In her account, it was 'the feminist critique of feminism' by women of colour and lesbians since the turn of the 1980s that made feminist theory possible and identifiable *as* feminist theory 'rather than a feminist critique of some other theory or object-theory' (de Lauretis 1990: 131). As a result of this critique, she maintained, the subject of feminism was reconceptualized as 'shifting and multiply organized across variable axes of difference', and social field redefined as 'a tangle of distinct and variable relations of power and points of resistance'. These redefinitions were a result of feminist critique becoming conscious of itself, turning inwards and examining its own terms. In 1990, therefore, amid intensifying identity politics around issues of sexuality, ethnicity and 'race', de Lauretis proposed a notion of feminist theory, in the singular, as a 'process of understanding' and a 'pursuit of consciousness' (de Lauretis 1990: 116, 131). Mapping a historical legacy of 'social and subjective transformation' within feminist theory, de Lauretis linked together the 1970s' practice of consciousness-raising, Adrienne Rich's call for the 'politics of location', and 'the theory in the flesh' or 'mestiza-consciousness' proposed by Cherrié Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Within such a frame, de Lauretis envisioned both the subject of feminism and the practice of feminist theory in terms of movement and self-displacement that is 'concurrently social and subjective, internal and external, indeed political and personal' (de Lauretis 1990: 116).

While firmly rooted in poststructuralist notions of language and subjectivity, and foregrounding consciousness as a key term, the way in which de Lauretis characterizes the movement of feminist thought seems, in hindsight, to foresee the broad interest in the question of affect feminist scholarship would take from the 1990s onwards. In the fields of philosophy, history, literature, cinema studies, art history, media and cultural studies as well as in sociology, anthropology, politics and science studies, feminist scholars have turned to the question of affect and the topic of affectivity in search of a new critical vocabulary for investigating and conceptualizing the subject of feminism as embodied, located and relational. This search has been highly visible

in the abundance of publications, conferences and course syllabi that across the humanities and social sciences have established the 'affective life' – affects, emotions, feelings, passions, moods and sentiments – as a new research area (Greco and Stenner 2008).

Beyond a mere 'hot topic' (Woodward 1996), however, what has been termed 'an affective turn' (e.g. Koivunen 2001; Gibbs 2002; Clough and Halley 2007, 2008; Gorton 2008; Tyler 2008) is best viewed as a broad range of criticisms of the linguistic turn and its effects on feminist research. Importantly, it will be argued, a turn to affect can be detected both *against* and *within* the poststructuralist, social constructionist theories of subject and power. Affects have become an object of interest both as articulations of culture, language and ideology, and as a force field that questions scholarly investments in those terms. Furthermore, the 'turn' features both an individualist and anti-individualist thread. While the question of affect for many scholars is a question of epistemology and methodology and, therefore, an opportunity for increased personal and political accountability through 'a lost language of emotion' (Middleton 1992) or a rehabilitation of 'the emotional self' (Lupton 1998), for others it reads as a possibility to move beyond the individual and personal, and to relocate critical attention from language, discourse and representations to the real, from body to matter, from cultures to nature, from identity to difference, from psychic to social. Whereas some view the concept of affect as a means to focus on the agency of the subject, others use it to displace the concept of subject and to radically rephrase the notion of agency itself. Whatever the focus, the affective turn is fuelled by a desire to renegotiate the critical currency of feminist thought. For some, the turn entails refining and complementing constructionist models and reworking the relations of the subjective and the social. For others, the turn is about new disciplinary alliances, most notably across the divide between human and natural sciences.

To talk about an affective turn in the singular is to imply a shared agenda and sense of direction that does not do justice to the diversified field of feminists 'working with affect'. This becomes all the more evident when focusing on the concept of affect, trying to locate the identity of the turn in a conceptual novelty, a shift from emotion or feeling to affect – a concept that beyond psychology or psychoanalysis, or as a term connoting physiological processes, was hardly used in the social sciences or humanities until the 1990s.

In one contemporary reading, 'emotion refers to cultural and social expression, whereas affects are of biological and physiological nature' (Probyn 2005: 11). Such conceptual division can be seen to reflect disciplinary preferences: the humanities and social sciences, those studying cognition, social expression and interpretation of cultures traditionally use 'emotion', whereas the sciences, those studying the brain and the body, privilege 'affect' as a term (Probyn 2005: xv). There is, however, little agreement on these definitions.

In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the notion of affect is vague, referring to necessary states of pain and pleasure, to unmeasurable and inner-directed

charges and discharges, and to qualitative expressions of drives (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 13–14; Green 1986; Giardini 1999). In clinical psychoanalytical practice, the notion of emotion designates the patient's first-person feelings, whereas affect is used to denote the analyst's observational description in third-person (Ngai 2005: 25). Within psychoanalysis, André Green foregrounds affect as the pivotal term for how psyche operates, using affect as a 'categorical term' grouping together 'the qualifying subjective aspects of the emotional life in the broad sense' (Green 1991: 8; see also Armstrong 2000). In the writings of Silvan Tomkins (1995), again, affect is a biopsychological notion based on empirical studies and defined as distinct from the psychoanalytic logic of drives. His model features nine discrete human affects that have distinct neurological profiles and measurable physiological responses. For Teresa Brennan, in her work combining psychological and philosophical theories with biology and neuroscience, affect stands for 'the physiological shift accompanying a judgement', yet is 'basically synonymous' with emotion (Brennan 2004: 5–6). Like Green or Brennan, Sara Ahmed (2004) uses emotion and affect interchangeably to highlight the fluidity of the conceptual boundaries. In many accounts, moreover, affect and emotion are defined as two aspects of the same phenomenon: emotion, thus, being 'a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is affect' (Terada 2001: 4), or 'emotion referring to the social expression of affect, and affect in turn is the biological and physiological experience of it' (Probyn 2005: 25). Whereas for some philosophers, the concept of emotion is the preferred categorical term (Rorty 1980; Nussbaum 2001), for others, the notion of feeling comprises 'all experiences people might categorize as emotions' (Campbell 1997:10) and serves as 'a capacious term that connotes both physiological sensations (affects) and psychological states (emotions)' (Terada 2001: 4). For Brian Massumi (2002) and proponents of 'new materialism', the very distinction between affect and emotion is a key argument.

There is, hence, no conceptual consensus uniting 'the turn'. To begin with, the conceptual multitude has historical roots, as translations of the Latin word *affectus* used the terms of affect, passion, desire and emotion as synonymous until the late 19th and 20th centuries (Brennan 2004: 3–4). More importantly, the concepts themselves are the battlefield. On one hand, the many, often contradictory definitions and uses of these key concepts witness the transdisciplinarity of the research field and the various disciplinary traditions involved. On the other hand, the choice of concept – is one to use affect, emotion, feeling or passion, and in what sense? – is a question of negotiating and positioning oneself in relation to the key conceptual sets of cultural analysis Teresa de Lauretis identified in 1990 as demanding feminist self-reflection: 'subject and object, self and other, private and public, oppression and resistance, domination and agency, hegemony and marginality, sameness and difference' (de Lauretis 1990: 115). In today's research context, the conceptual politics of affect is also permeated by new conceptual tensions, those of inside and outside, nature and culture, matter and meaning.

Following Teresa de Lauretis's impetus, this chapter traces the contours of contemporary feminist and queer interest in the question of affect, viewing it as a further moment in the historical process of critical self-reflection, as one further reconceptualization of the subject of feminism. In the following, the focus is on the uses of the notion of affect (understood both as an umbrella term and as a specific concept) for feminist theory: what kind of movement in thinking it entails and to what ends. Since 1990, the field of feminist scholarship has exploded, and it is impossible to do justice to its many contexts and traditions. With the risk of generalizing and missing important nuances, this chapter maps the affective turn by identifying four main threads: (1) revisiting the Cartesian subject, (2) an investigation of the subject of feminism as embodied, (3) a critique of social constructionist approaches to the subject, signification and the social, and (4) a historical, critical analysis of emotion cultures. If the first thread entails a feminist re-reading of the history of philosophy, the following two can be read as turns to phenomenology and ontology or materialism. The fourth thread is best viewed as a renegotiation of the social constructionist position from within. In other words, this chapter maps the affective turn as corollary to the 'the return of the body' (Braidotti 2006: 50) in feminist scholarship and, importantly, as a challenge both against and within social constructionism.

Revisiting the Cartesian subject

In her pioneering discussion of the role of emotion in feminist epistemology, Alison M. Jaggar discussed emotion both as a problem and a resource for feminist thinking. Jaggar (1992: 115) criticized Western philosophical tradition for prioritizing reason and, 'with a few notable exceptions', for regarding emotions as 'potentially or actually subversive of knowledge'. As a result of this attitude, she argued, philosophical thinking is constrained by a gendered mind-body hierarchy according to which emotion is associated with 'the irrational, the physical, the natural, the particular, the private, and of course, the female'. Starting from a critique of positivism, Jaggar outlined a model of knowing she characterized as 'nonhierarchical and antifoundationalist' because it viewed emotion and reason, evaluation and perception as well as observation and action as interdependent and simultaneously necessary (Jaggar 1992: 137).

Whereas Jaggar sought to solve the gendered epistemological dilemma indicated in the title of the groundbreaking anthology, *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (Jaggar and Bordo 1989), by theorizing 'outlaw emotions', 'new emotions evoked by feminist insights' (Jaggar 1992: 135–6), many feminist philosophers turned to the history of philosophy in order to re-examine how the gendered mind-body distinction emerged. In other words, they turned to the historical, early modern context of Cartesian dualistic oppositions between mind and body, reason and passion, and nature and culture – in order to unearth alternative legacies of

thought. From a repudiation of the past as 'anti-emotion', feminist philosophers have moved to a re-appropriation: a rewriting of 'the history of cartographies of the passions' as a neglected thread in the history of philosophy (Lloyd 2002: 14–15).

According to Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (1982: 159), the concept of mind and its activities changed significantly during the period from Descartes to Rousseau. The individual mind came to be comprehended as 'a field of forces with desires impinging on one another, their forces resolved according to their strengths and directions'.

As part of this redefinition, passions ceased to be viewed as 'reactions to invasions from something external to the self' and became 'the very activities of the mind, its own motions'. As passions transformed to emotions and sentiments, they became 'proper motives, and along with desires, the beginnings of actions'. To quote from Rorty, emotions were no longer 'merely turbulent commotions' and 'physical states with which a moral person must contend, and which he must redirect, control, transform or suppress'. Instead, as sentiments, as sympathy and morality, emotions now were seen to 'provide the conditions for civilized society' (Rorty 1982: 159).

What emerges from Rorty's analysis is a historicization of the mind/body and passion/reason splits. In a similar revisionist move, Susan James (1997) demonstrates how passion indeed was a key concern for the seventeenth-century philosophers from Descartes to Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza and Malebranche. In her approach, she explicitly challenges the widespread view of early modern philosophers as operating with a clear, gendered division between body and mind and, therefore, as problematic or uninteresting for feminist scholarship. In James's reading, seventeenth-century philosophy appears as a sensitive, theoretically complex negotiation of passions in interpretations of mind and body as well as of relations between beliefs, desires and actions.

While many feminist philosophers have re-read Descartes, questioning 'familiar caricatures' of Cartesian dualism and investigating his particular ideas about 'thinking with the body' (Rorty 1992; Alanen 2003, 165ff), Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens turned to the writings of Benedict de Spinoza as 'an interesting counterpoint to Descartes', seeing his writings as 'a moment of the philosophical tradition where the polarization between reason and other aspects – imagination, affect – was not expressed through male/female distinction' (James 2000: 43–4). In particular, Lloyd and Gatens underline the lack of a mind/body or nature/culture distinction in Spinoza as an inspiring starting point for feminist investigations. From an understanding of imagination as a bodily awareness and an emphasis on the interaction of imagination, emotion and intellect, new perspectives emerge for ontology, epistemology and ethics. In all of them, affect is an important question (Lloyd 1996; Gatens and Lloyd 1999).

These feminist re-readings of philosophical classics highlight discussions on passion, affect and emotion as pivotal objects of research because they show how the Cartesian subject has been challenged. Rei Terada makes a similar case arguing how twentieth-century poststructuralist and deconstructionist philosophy and literary theory 'fracture the classical model of subjectivity'. Her argumentation demonstrates how the question of emotions as being inside or outside, as either a property or faculty of a mind or a 'nonsubjective experience in the form of self-difference within cognition' (Terada 2001: 3), has a long history in philosophical thinking. In Angela Pinch's reading, for example, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers from Hume and Wordsworth to Ann Radcliffe and Jane Austen, when trying to 'pin feelings down' and explain their origin, often discovered that 'one's feelings may not really been one's own' (Pinch 1996: 3). Instead of seeing poststructuralist theory of subject in language as contradictory with thinking about emotion, as Fredric Jameson (1984) did in his discussion of 'the waning of affect', Rei Terada argues that 'theories of emotion are always poststructuralist theories' because the question of emotion escapes the bounds of an individual, locating always the social or the intersubjective within the subject (Terada 2001: 3). This perspective is most evident in Denise Riley's work on 'linguistic emotion' in *The Words of Selves* (2000). In her words, 'feeling, articulated *is* words and is also *in* the words', which is why it is impossible to distinguish between 'language as carrier of emotion' and 'language as emotion' (Riley 2000: 36). Problematizing self-description as a desire and a social practice, Riley discusses language as both the means and the obstacle to constructing a self. Subscribing to a poststructuralist model of subjectivity as contingent, provisional and lacking in autonomy and authority in relation to language, Riley underlines how language in use – also when describing a self or emotions – 'both is and isn't under the control of its speakers and writers' (Riley 2000: 12; see also Butler 2005: 3–40).

Embodied encounters: Phenomenology meets poststructuralism

In a response to the linguistic models of subjectivity in structuralism and poststructuralism, bodies were placed centre-stage as the locus of thinking and as the object of thought in 1990s' feminist theory. It is this rehabilitation and rediscovery of embodied subjectivity that also laid the cross-disciplinary ground for a new interest in emotions. As Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey summarize in *Thinking Through the Skin*, 'the practices of thinking are not separated from the realm of the body but are implicated in the passion, emotions and materiality that are associated with lived embodiment' (Ahmed and Stacey 2001: 3). The notion of 'lived embodiment' indicates a dialogue with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's corporeal phenomenology and his thinking of the embodied subject as 'being-to-the-world', as worldliness (e.g. in Grosz 1994: 86–7). For feminist theory, this 'phenomenological turn' (Ahmed and Stacey 2001: 7) happened alongside feminist interest in the history of philosophy. It offered an understanding of 'experience' as located 'midway between mind and body', 'in their lived conjunction', because experience in Merleau-Ponty's

thinking is neither unquestionable nor untrustworthy as ideological, but 'always necessarily embodied, corporeally constituted, located in and as the subject's incarnation' and, as such, something to be explained (Grosz 1994: 94–5).

As Elizabeth Grosz wrote in her introduction to *Volatile Bodies* (1994), a landmark book for a generation of feminist scholars turning to embodiment, she attempted to refigure body as 'the very "stuff" of subjectivity' (Grosz 1994: ix). If feminist politics is embedded in feelings and if 'the very category of experience or feeling' is recognized as a result of ideological production, Grosz argued, 'the body provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable, a point from which to rethink the opposition between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the self and the other, and all the other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition' (Grosz 1994: 20–1).

In the phenomenological framework, hence, the question of affect is posed both as a general question of experience and *affectivity* – a constitutive dimension of a subject's being in and relating to the world (Han-Pile 2006) – and as a question of affects and emotions. Sara Ahmed's *The Politics of Emotions* (2004) is a strong case in point, as she rephrases the basic question of 'what emotions are' into 'what emotions do'. While her philosophical project has many roots, her approach to emotions as 'shaped by contact with objects' evokes the phenomenological notion of experience as 'lived conjunction' (Ahmed 2004: 4, 6–7). Ahmed criticizes psychological notions of emotions as psychological states and individual self-expression, what she terms the 'inside out' model of emotions, but she is also critical of the sociological 'outside in' model of emotions as social forces that an individual gets from without. Both these models operate with stable distinctions between the inside and the outside, between the individual and the social. As an alternative approach, Ahmed suggests viewing emotions as relational: in her view, it is 'through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made; the "I" and "we" are shaped by, and even take the shape of contact with others' (Ahmed 2004: 8–10). In this sense, the redefinition of emotion leads to a new conceptualization of sociality: 'attending to emotions might show us how all actions are reactions, in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others' (Ahmed 2004: 4). In Ahmed's project, emotions are a site of embodied meaning-making and social ordering, but even more importantly they are the process in which very boundaries of individuals and communities are drawn and redrawn.

In the phenomenological frame, the subject of feminist theory is reconceptualized as embodied subjectivity. In an approach that emphasizes 'contingency, locatedness, the irreducibility of difference, the passage of emotions and desire, and the worldliness of being' (Ahmed and Stacey 2001: 3), the embodied subject is, furthermore, de-centralized as an expressive subject. In this desire to question the notion of interiority, of 'having emotions', so central to conceptualizations of emotion, Sara Ahmed's project can be compared

with Teresa Brennan's non-phenomenological study *The Transmission of Affect* (2004). In that book, Brennan seeks to question 'the taken-for-grantedness of the emotionally contained subject', which she sees as 'a residual bastion of Eurocentrism in critical thinking, the last outpost of the subject's belief in the superiority of its own worldview over that of other cultures' (Brennan 2004: 2). Drawing on psychology, psychiatry, biology and neuroscience, Brennan argues that affects do not originate from within a bounded individual personality, and she examines transmission of affect as 'a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect' (Brennan 2004: 3). Like Ahmed, in a different frame, Brennan argues that 'affects do not arise within a particular person but also come from without', 'via an interaction with other people and an environment'. Brennan argues that the everyday experience of absorbing an emotion from somebody else turns the conventional thinking about emotion on its head. Hers is a radical theory of affects as something social and cultural that nonetheless have physiological effects.

From emotions to affects and intensities: A turn to matter and ontology

In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz maintained that 'the body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution', but she also called for new articulations or disarticulations 'between the biological and psychological, between the inside and the outside of the body, while avoiding a reductionism of mind to brain'. She underlined the necessity to study 'the very question of the ontological status of biology, the openness of organic processes to cultural intervention, transformation, or even production' (Grosz 1994: 23). It is with the question of ontology that Grosz ends her book, asking how to not 'deny a materiality or a material specificity and determinateness to bodies' (Grosz 1994: 190).

Ten years later, in *The Nick of Time*, Grosz reiterates her criticism, arguing that 'without some reconfigured concept of the biological body, models of subject inscription, production or constitution lack material force; paradoxically they lack materiality'. The direction of her criticism has, however, changed as she accuses 'us' – 'cultural theorists, particularly those interested in feminism, antiracism, and questions of the politics of globalization' – of having 'forgotten the nature, the ontology, of the body, the conditions under which bodies are enculturated, psychologised, given identity, historical location, and agency'. In order to understand 'what it is in the *nature* of bodies, in biological evolution, that opens them up to cultural inscription', she turns to Charles Darwin and his evolutionary theory (Grosz 2004: 2). Grosz is not alone in her turn to either Darwin or the life sciences in her research agenda. Elizabeth A. Wilson challenges what she considers to be a widespread feminist view that 'political or intellectual alliances with the biological sciences are dangerous and retrograde'. In her view, feminists lack knowledge of anatomy, physiology or biochemistry and repudiate this in the name of

theoretical sophistication (Wilson 2004a: 69–70). In a study of psychosomaticism, she develops a 'psychobiology of affect' by combining cultural studies with neurosciences and evolutionary psychology that, in her view, help feminists to 'build more robust models of embodiment and emotion' (Wilson 2004b: 83).

Within the frame of cultural theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank turned to Silvan Tomkins in 1995 when searching for alternatives to what they characterized as 'the routinizing critical project' of theory today. In their view, critical theory 'after' psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, deconstruction, new historicism and feminism takes it for granted that in order to be sensitive to individual, social and historical differences, and to the possibility of change, accounts of human beings or cultures must distance themselves from biology. They summarize a mock-Foucauldian reading of any cultural manifestation: 'To demonstrate (or even assert) that something is not "natural" or not "essential" is always to perform a powerful act' (Sedgwick and Frank 1995: 1–2, 25). As a remedy to such experience of theoretical fatigue and what they call habitual anti-biologism, Sedgwick and Frank offer Tomkins' theory of an innate affect system with corresponding facial expressions as a radically different approach to emotions. Emerging from a mixture of ethology, neuropsychology, cybernetics and systems theory, and psychoanalysis, Tomkins' model of affects as innate links between physiology and psychology, as a 'neural firing', entails viewing affects as distinct from drives, as a 'system' that 'amplifies' and differentiates the drive system. Importantly for Sedgwick and Frank in their discussion of shame, Tomkins' theory is 'sublimely alien' to 'any project of narrating the emergence of a core self'. In a time when self-psychology, self-help and recovery movements dominate any discussion of shame as an emotion, Tomkins' approach to this affect underlined its link to interest and motivation, thus offering a non-individualist and non-pathologizing approach to it (Sedgwick and Frank 1995: 4–14; see also Probyn 2005: 13–24).

What has been termed 'ontological turn' (Hemmings 2005) or 'new materialism' (Hird 2004; Ahmed 2008) shifts, hence, its focus from studying embodied subjectivities to questions of matter and life. In a special issue of *Theory, Culture and Society*, the question of life, not as a mechanism but as a process, was explicitly proposed as a joint venture for the social sciences, humanities and life sciences. Alongside information, cybernetics and complexity as models of thinking about life as a process, the special issue also promoted readings and applications of evolutionary biology, terming it all 'new vitalism' (Fraser *et al.* 2005). While emerging in different contexts and with varied agendas, these invocations to reassess ontology and materiality nevertheless grant the concept of affect a special status in the critical vocabulary. Affect, in this approach, is first and foremost devised as potentiality, as a positively charged category of futurity, change and (at least possible) freedom. For such understanding of affect as a category of virtuality and of becoming, the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari has been important.

Diagnosing the linguistic turn and its theories of signification as a prison-house for critical thinking, Deleuzian media scholar Brian Massumi identifies affect as the key concept 'to understanding of our information- and image-based late capitalist culture'. In *Parables of the Virtual* (2002), he presents a model that explicitly contrasts affect with emotion, stating that they cannot be used as synonymous because they 'follow different logics and pertain to different orders' (Massumi 2002: 26). In his model, affect is a term for indeterminacy, emotion for determinancy. He characterizes affect as 'irreducibly bodily and autonomic', a feeling or 'intensity' that is disconnected from 'meaningful sequencing, from narration', whereas emotion is described as 'subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of a quality of experience which is from that point onward defined as personal' (Massumi 2002: 28). Massumi develops his notion of affect out of Spinoza's philosophy and Gilles Deleuze's (1988) readings of it.

In *Ethics*, Spinoza distinguishes between affection (*affectio*) and affect (*affectus*). Whereas 'affection' designates corporeal traces, the state of the affected body, and is associated with images, 'affect' refers to feelings – i.e. 'passages from one state to another in the affected body'. In this conceptualization, affects are a subgroup of bodily affections. (Lloyd 1996: 72–7; see also Deleuze 1988.) Reading how Spinoza locates in the body not only 'an affection' but also 'an idea of the affection', Massumi detects a notion of 'first-order idea produced spontaneously by the body'. Here, he sees 'a philosophy of the becoming-active' that, for him, is a way out of structuralist and poststructuralist theories of signification. As a result, affect and emotion are depicted as symptoms of this dividing line: affect as 'autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is', emotion as 'the most intense (most contracted) expression of that capture – and of the fact that something has always and again escaped' (Massumi 2002: 31–2, 35). While Massumi's dualistic model of 'liberating and mobilizing' affects versus 'rigidifying' meaning or conceptuality has been criticized as 'moralistic' (Colebrook 2004), it has a wide appeal in cultural and media studies. For instance, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova (2001) draw on Massumi's arguing that digital images, in contrast to celluloid film, do not need 'to recur to narratives of "trauma, loss and death" in order to capture our bodies'. Establishing an 'intimate loop between eyes, ears and hands' games and digital images engender 'a cybernetic re-wiring of vision' because they 'convey the power of affect, rather than the reaction of subjective emotions' (Parisi and Terranova 2001: 122).

It is through the writings of Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, that Elizabeth Grosz, too, when writing about art, extends her critical vocabulary to affects, intensities and sensations. Joining their critiques of signification, subjectification and representation, Grosz rejects questions of what art means or what kind of subject-effects it has. Instead, she asks how 'the arts produce and generate intensity, that which directly impacts the nervous system and intensifies sensation'. Whereas phenomenological approach would focus on

experience of art, the notion of affect, sensation and intensity 'link the lived or phenomenological body with cosmological forces, forces of the outside, that the body can never experience' – i.e. nature, chaos, materiality (Grosz 2008: 2–3). Here, the category of affect is literally offered as an opening outwards – in contrast to emotion as a category of inwardness, closure and fixity.

Also, Patricia Ticineto Clough envisions 'the affective turn' as a project distinct from subjectively felt emotions. She embraces the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, Henri Bergson and Spinoza as a starting point for thinking about affect as social instead of returning to the subject as a subject of emotion (Clough 2008: 1). For Clough and Halley and the contributors to their 2007 anthology, *The Affective Turn*, however, affect is not presocial, as Massumi claims, but a means of theorizing the social. In addition to being about the body, affect is 'also theorized in relation to the technologies that are allowing us both to "see" affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body's organic-physiological constraints' (Clough and Halley 2007: 2). Here, the concept of affect is presented as a promise to produce new research questions: from subject identity to information, from organic bodies to nonorganic life, from closed systems to complexity of open systems, from an economy of production and consumption to circulation of capacities. Like Parisi and Terranova (2001) or Rosi Braidotti (2006), Clough proposes affect alongside biomedia and new media as alternative models for conceptualizing the social.

Within the ontological thread, Rosi Braidotti stands out as a theorist who bridges poststructuralist theories of subject and the turn to 'life itself'. In *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (2006), Braidotti hails 'the return of the body', but not as a phenomenological question. According to her, the return entails 'real bodies' as an effect of bio-technologies and 'genetic social imaginary'. In her reading, the change for feminist thinking is a methodological one as 'the return of the "real body" in its thick materiality spells the end of the linguistic turn' and proposes a new ontology (Braidotti 2006: 50). Quoting Luce Irigaray and Deleuze as her allies who stress 'the primacy of the prediscursive or the affective substratum in the life of the subject', Braidotti discusses this 'return of the real' as 'affectivity' and 'overwhelming vitality' that expresses 'the subject's propensity for life, as in *zoe* and in *bios*' (Braidotti 2006: 174; see also Chapter 8 in this volume). While echoing proponents of 'new materialism' and 'new vitalism' and drawing explicitly on Spinozist philosophy, Braidotti does not give up the language of subjectivity, the major critical legacy of 'the linguistic turn'. In her version, affectivity is a question of 'transformative ethics': 'Being an affective entity means essentially being interconnected with all that lives and thus be engulfed in affects, emotions and passions' (Braidotti 2006: 164; see also Gatens and Lloyd 1999). Therefore, ethics must necessarily be concerned with 'human affectivity and passions as the motor of subjectivity'. Against 'the neo-determinism of the geneticists, the euphoria of their commercial and financial backers, and the techno-utopianism of their academic apologists', Braidotti (2006: 13, 264) proposes an updated version of her 1990s' theories of nomadic subjectivity. She emphasizes bodily materialism understood, as in Grosz, through Irigarayan sexual difference, and an ethics of transformation 'of negative into positive passions', 'essentially and intrinsically the expression of joy and positivity'. For Braidotti, 'the ethical moment' entails overcoming 'the intrinsically negative structure of one's passions' – e.g. the sense of shame. It involves 'relinquishing the paranoid-narcissistic ego and installing instead an open-ended, interrrelational self'. A Spinozist philosophy of joy and positivity underpins Braidotti's calling for 'schemes of thought and figurations' that enable feminists to account for changes and transformations 'in empowering and positive terms' (Braidotti 2006: 201–2, 31).

The cultures and politics of emotions: Affects, norms and power

As has become obvious by now, proponents of new materialism renounce social constructionism and its focus on language, representation, discourse and ideology as a critical prison-house. Besides criticizing the legacy of the linguistic turn for 'anti-biologism', critics reject it as a version of self-psychology, for reproducing the very cultural binarisms it attempts to dismantle (Sedgwick and Frank 1995), for 'the postmodernist over-emphasis on textuality, representation, interpretation and the power of the signifier' (Braidotti 2006: 50), or they describe it as an outdated and insufficient frame for the critical thought of today. What these criticisms ignore, however, is the significant amount of critical work *within* so-called representational thinking or poststructuralist emphasis on language that explicitly displaces the focus on a true self of emotions, arguing instead for the cultural and historical contingency of emotions, and investigating emotions and emotion cultures as contingent technologies of subjects (Riley 2000; Terada 2001; see also Hemmings 2005.)

A historicization of emotions has involved investigations of nineteenth-century sentimentalism and sensationalism (Cvetkovich 1992; Williams 2001; Berlant 2008) as the literary, cinematic and cultural forms that inform our thinking about gender, sexuality and race. As Lauren Berlant (2008) argues, an 'intimate public sphere of femininity' emerged in the United States in the 1830s. 'Women's culture' served the purposes of this 'relatively politically disenfranchised' group, by offering a sentimental publicity – and setting up an example for later therapeutic publicities – in which a non-dominant group could voice complaint and seek reassurance in an experience of shared emotion. Investigating the sentimentalist legacy, Linda Williams describes the mode of melodrama as a specific cultural matrix, a vocabulary for understanding social problems in 'black and white Manichean polarities' and through a process of victimization (Williams 2001: 42). The investigations of these nineteenth-century cultural modes have been important in understanding how embedded in particular emotion cultures the political language of feminism and other social movements are. Whereas 'intimate publics' operate on an assumed shared worldview and emotional knowledge (Berlant

2008: viii), the melodramatic mode uses the tropes of scandalous vice and virtuous victim to make its moral argument. These nineteenth-century affective dynamics manifest themselves in current notions of compassion as a political programme: as Berlant (2004: 4) argues, 'in operation, compassion is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is *over there*'. While establishing a social relationship, the notion of compassion sidesteps discussions of structural inequalities, foregrounding instead a discussion of moral obligations.

The alliance between voicing a complaint, presenting social critique and promoting an identity is pivotal to Wendy Brown's discussion of feminist politics as energized and fuelled by 'the wounded attachment', identification with pain and victimhood. In her book, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Brown (1995: 69) describes 'the late modern liberal subject' as 'seething' with *ressentiment*. Addressing identity politics of the 1990s, Brown identifies 'a tendency to reproach power [on moral grounds] rather than to aspire to it' (Brown 1995: 55). In this way, she argues, late modern politics follow the logic of Nietzschean slave morality which, in essence, is 'a critique of a certain kind of power, complaint against strength, an effort to shame and discredit domination by securing the ground of the true and the good from which to (negatively) judge it' (Brown 1995: 44). Brown points out how the alliance of powerlessness and morality implies a juxtaposition of power and truth: '[P]owerlessness is implicitly invested in the Truth while power inherently distorts. Truth is always on the side of the damned or the excluded; hence, Truth is always clean of power, but therefore also always positioned to reproach power.' Notably, a politics of ressentiment always needs 'a hostile external world in order to exist at all' (Brown 1995: 44–6).

What is investigated, here, is the 'psychic life of power', the passionate nature of attachments to particular forms of subjectivity and subjection (Butler 1997). The focus is on how emotions are historically contingent but also how, as such, they are formative not only of subjects but also of social relations and forms of politics and political mobilization. This is explicit in a 'turn to affect' in queer studies (Halley and Parker 2007), characterized by an abundance of important and influential work on negative emotions: studies of trauma cultures (Cvetkovich 2003), of loss, pain and melancholia (Brown 1999; Eng and Kazanijan 2003; Butler 2004) and, most notably, on shame by writers like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1995, 2003), Michael Warner (1999), Douglas Crimp (2002), Sara Ahmed (2004), Elspeth Probyn (2005), Sally Munt (2007) and Heather Love (2007). Analogous to the notion of queer itself, recent critical work on loss, for instance, has attempted to recuperate its common-sense meanings, apprehending loss as productive, abundant, social and militant rather than pathological, lacking, solipsistic and reactionary (Eng and Kazanijan 2003: ix). Similarly, Ann Cvetkovich (2003: 7–10) has demonstrated how affective experiences of trauma in the domain of sexuality, migration, diaspora and AIDS activism organize publics and produce 'the basis for new cultures'.

In queer thinking, the understanding of shame has undergone the most significant transformation. If once rejected as a toxic feeling to be turned into

pride, shame has been reconceptualized as productive: 'integral to and residual in the processes by which identity itself is formed' (Sedgwick 2003: 63). As such a transformational force, shame is understood as central to performativity: shame is 'available for the work of metamorphosis, reframing, refiguration, transfiguration, affective and symbolic loading and deformation, but perhaps all too potent for the work of purgation and deontological closure' (Sedgwick 2003: 38, 61–3). In *Shame and Performativity*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1995: 210) explained the very 'political potency' of the term 'queer' by highlighting the childhood experience of shame as 'a near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy'. In this frame, shame appears as a generative and performative mechanism that engenders both queer subjection and agency. As Judith Halberstam summarizes, childhood experiences of sexual shame are seen as 'the deep emotional reservoir on which an adult queer sexuality draws, for better or for worse', something 'that has to be reclaimed, reinterpreted, and resituated by a queer adult who, armed with a theoretical language about his or her sexuality, can transform past experiences with abjection, isolation, and rejection into legibility, community, and love' (Halberstam 2005: 221).

While Sedgwick's reconceptualization has inspired many queer scholars to theorize shame in positive and productive terms – e.g. as a 'special kind of sociality' and a mode of 'collectivity of the shamed' (Warner 1999: 35–6; Crimp 2002: 66), Judith Halberstam has criticized the queer attachment to shame as 'a white gay male thing'. In her reading, the reclaiming of shame tends to universalize the subject of shame, to ignore the politics of privilege at play and to disavow shame as 'the gendered form of sexual abjection' (Halberstam 2005: 220–6). First and foremost, she attacks 'the notion that social change can come about through adjustments to the self, through a focus on interiority without a concomitant attention to the social, political, and economic relations' and describes it as potentially 'a disastrous tactic for queer studies and queer activism' (Halberstam 2005: 224).

Halberstam's critique draws on Lauren Berlant (1997, 2002, 2008) who, in her response to Sedgwick's turn to affect, asks 'Must the project of queerness start "inside" of the subject and spread out from there?' She maintains that individuality, 'that monument of liberal fantasy, that site of commodity fetishism, that project of certain psychoanalytical desires, that sign of cultural and national modernity' is a form that needs 'interruption' (Berlant 2002: 74). As a critic of 'sentimentalization of culture', an emergence of a 'privatized' US citizen, of 'intimate publics' and 'public sphere femininity' – also as a feminist strategy and form of pedagogy – Berlant is suspicious of 'the very general sense of confidence in the critical intelligence of affect, emotion, and good intention'. In her reading, this confidence shared by many feminists and queer activists results in 'an orientation toward agency that is focused on ongoing adaptation, adjustment, improvisation, and developing wiles for surviving, thriving, and transcending the world as it presents itself'. What this therapeutic language lacks is a possibility to traverse or translate into the

political register (Berlant 2008: 2). Therefore, Berlant's important work can be read as explaining and understanding but also as problematizing and repudiating what she terms a 'politics of true feeling': grounding feminist and queer politics in emotions and granting emotions a given explanatory value and status to organize 'analysis, discussion, fantasy and policy' (Berlant 2000: 35).

In her recent work on class, self and culture, Beverley Skeggs (2005) has demonstrated how, in the age of therapy as 'the new emotional style' (Illouz 2008), notions of self and affect become sites of class politics. Concepts of 'the reflexive self' and 'extraordinary subjectivity', hailed by consumer culture and assumed by critical scholars, promote a view of affects as a key form of self-knowledge and a moral act. Skeggs argues that, while affects – experiencing, choosing and displaying affects – are currently understood as a form of social capital and a way of investing in one's self, of accruing value in the self, these strategies are not available or desirable to all. In her critical scrutiny, both the display of ethical personhood and the use of affect as a means of claiming political victimhood, read as making of the middle-class self, as signs of the imperative to subjectivity that authorizes middle-class standards and, hence, as modes of making class (Skeggs 2004, 2005). The critical work by both Skeggs and Berlant draw attention to the normative work of affect as a quality of particular personhood: to be recognized as a person, one must emote properly.

Feminist politics of affect

Mapping the recent feminist thinking on affect, be it under the banner of affect, emotion, passion or feeling, involves encountering many turns: to embodiment, to phenomenology, to Darwin, to biology, to history, to politics and so on. Yet, one could also argue that affective turn never happened. For the issue of affect did not emerge from nowhere to feminist and other critical scholarship. In the fields of anthropology, sociology and psychology, new interest in the previously neglected issue of 'the emotional' was already diagnosed in the 1980s (Lutz and White 1986; Smith-Lovin 1989; Kemper 1990; Hochschild 2003). Furthermore, to talk about an affective turn is, to an extent, to ignore generations of feminist scholarship on articulating subjective and social experiences of injustices (e.g. Frye 1983; Lorde 1984; hooks 1990). What, if not about work with affects, is the long history of feminist engagement with psychoanalysis? Even if the mainstream of feminist scholarship has, in some sense, moved 'from desire to affect' (Angerer 2007; Gorton 2008), feminist psychoanalytic work remains to be re-conceptualized as being about affect in the contemporary sense. Just consider the work on love by Julia Kristeva (1987), Jessica Benjamin (1988), Teresa de Lauretis (1994) and Kaja Silverman (1996), all distinguished psychoanalytical thinkers and theorists of 'passionate subjects'.

Moreover, as Teresa de Lauretis's insistence on an historical consciousness manifests, questions of experience and emotion have been central to the feminist tradition of consciousness-raising and autocoscienza (de Lauretis 1990). Likewise, they have been at the heart of discussions on feminist methodology and discussions of alternative modes of knowledge (Fonow and Cook 1991; Walkerdine *et al.* 2001). Feminist standpoint epistemology in its different versions (Hartsock 1983; Harding 2003) is explicitly about the connections between ontology, epistemology and political change: calls for 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1991) indicate, if anything, a reflection upon and a problematization of emotional and political investments in research practices. In literary and cultural studies, proponents of so-called personalist criticism have employed the autobiographical mode as an epistemological strategy (Tompkins 1987; Miller 1991). Beyond 'the autobiographical turn', as Lynne Pearce (2004) has shown in her work on 'the rhetorics of feminism', scholars have also experimented with a non-referential and non-confessional use of the 'first person strategic' to effect epistemological innovation and new modes of knowledge production (Probyn 1993; Kuhn 1995). From these perspectives an affective turn never happened. The question of affect and the reflexive link between ontology and epistemology were always already there in feminist self-consciousness.

As a rhetorical figure, the affective turn promises drama and change of direction. And, indeed, many proponents of 'a turn' use big words. As Sara Ahmed (2008: 24) argues, a labelling of feminist thought as 'anti-biological' has become a routine-like 'founding gesture' for scholars highlighting the novelty of their own approach. With such caricature, previous feminist engagement with biology, science and materialism is effectively forgotten. Taking up the equally spectacular dismissing of the linguistic turn, Clare Hemmings suggests that Brian Massumi and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in their different approaches, 'invariably overstate the problems of poststructuralism' in order to offer the concept of affect as a solution to the critical dilemmas. In her words, 'ontology thus resolves the problem its advocates invent' (Hemmings 2005: 556–7).

The mapping of the various threads of the affective turn demonstrates how the process of self-consciousness that Teresa de Lauretis envisaged in 1990 has led to many philosophical and theoretical directions, and resulted in new cartographies of the embodied feminist subject. The different choices of research questions, theories, concepts and disciplinary allies witness an ongoing and fierce debate on what is good feminist research, what kind of research is needed now and what kind of knowledge has most transformational potential or political power. This becomes evident when reading Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz, all of whom outline new research agendas in their latest work. New caricatures emerge as feminist scholars, at least implicitly and metaphorically, are interpellated into two camps: those for joy, those for melancholy; those for life, those for death; those for reparative criticisms, those constrained by paranoia.

Alongside these various rhetorical constructions in the service of persuasive argumentation, the mapping of the affective turn draws attention, perhaps

somewhat surprisingly, to a new common ground for many of the discussants: critique of individualism, the notion of interiority and identity politics. Be the project about linguistic emotion (Riley), affective economies (Ahmed), politics of emotion (Berlant) or affect as virtuality and becoming (Clough, Grosz, Braidotti), it is around these issues that the distinctiveness of the contemporary appeal of affect can be discerned: a possibility to theorize the social and the subjective in new ways.

For the feminist subject, this process of self-displacement has been the bumpy ride Teresa de Lauretis predicted in 1990:

> [L]eaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is 'home' – physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically – for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other; a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain, unguaranteed.
>
> (de Lauretis 1990: 138)

Such 'remapping of boundaries between bodies and discourses' entails 'pain, risk, and real stake with a high price', but is unavoidable in the 'pursuit of consciousness' (ibid.: 138). When writing this, de Lauretis most certainly was talking about the politics of differences challenging the key categories of feminist thought. From a perspective 20 years later, however, her words appear curiously evocative of the contemporary yearning for new theoretical and political vocabularies, structuring metaphors and for a transdisciplinary dialogue across the divide between the human and life sciences. The conceptual negotiations and disagreements around the embodied subject of feminism continue to be the battleground of feminist scholarship.

Acknowledgement

Research for this study was made possible by a grant from Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in Political Thought and Conceptual Change, The Politics of Philosophy and Gender Research Team (2006–11). I would like to thank the editors as well as the participants of the PPhG I Christina Workshop (January 2009) for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, and Katariina Kyrölä, Ingrid Ryberg and Kirsi Saarikangas for inspiring discussions on the question of affect.

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Part I

Affective attachments