

## Introduction: Affective intimacies

*Marjo Kolehmainen, Annukka Lahti and Kinneret Lahad*

This edited collection, *Affective intimacies*, provides a novel terrain for rethinking intimacies through the lens of affect theories. It departs from the assumptions that, on one hand, there are a priori affective domains, such as care relationships or sexuality, that form a primary locus for intimacy, and on the other hand, that intimacy is about what is private and special (Kolehmainen, Lahad and Lahti, 2021).<sup>1</sup> It argues that the social sciences and humanities have not yet recognised and utilised the potential to imagine intimacy and affect in alternative ways, without starting from the already familiar terrains, theories and conceptualisations. Rather than assuming that we could parse affect and intimacy in a pre-defined way, this book asks how the study of affect would enable us to rethink intimacies – what the affect theories can do to the prevailing notions of intimacy and how they might renew and enrich contemporary theories of intimacy. This book has three sections that address the importance of re-imagining affective intimacies, the politics of affect, and the queering of intimacies. The chapters within those sections examine contemporary topics and push forward the current state of the art.

While pioneering in scholarship on both intimacy and affect, feminist scholars in particular have recognised intimacy as an important issue and advanced the field of affect studies. They have stressed how intimacy makes a contested field of power (Wilson, 2016; Illouz, 2007) and entails inequalities that operate through affective registers (Juvonen and Kolehmainen, 2018). Yet intimacy has often been discussed mainly in the context of certain issues, such as care responsibilities, heterosexual relationships or domestic work. These pre-defined domains, however, foster the idea of intimacy as something already known and defined (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018). The bracketing of intimacy to certain domains, such as sexuality, private life or interpersonal relations, has historically made it difficult for intimacy to be a subject of importance writ large (Latimer and Gómez, 2019). It has also led to associations of intimacy with ‘positive’ closeness, such as in (assumedly) close relationships and encounters (Wilson, 2016; Gabb and

Fink, 2015). Yet this is highly problematic and results in very narrow definitions and operationalisations of the concept. Intimacy also takes normative and even violent forms (Zengin, 2016). Proximity and closeness are not neutral practices but are imbued with power; that is, besides protection or pleasure, they might provide exposure or pain (Kinnunen and Kolehmainen, 2019). The open-ended use of intimacy supports an alternative that is useful in understanding intimacy in critical terms (Wilson, 2016). Thus, there is a lacuna in scholarship that asks how the study of affect would enable us to rethink intimacies in unforeseen ways.

While there are alternative definitions of affect, this book builds on Gilles Deleuze's understanding of affect – who for his part was inspired by the Spinozist notion of *affectus* – as bodies' capacities to affect and become affected (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; Coleman and Ringrose, 2013; Fox and Allred, 2013; Ringrose and Renold, 2014; Seyfert, 2012). Here bodies are not limited to human bodies, but entail all kinds of bodies – non-human, material, discursive, collective, inorganic (Bennet, 2010; Seyfert 2012). Thus, affect should be seen neither as human-only nor as private and personal. In other words, affect can entail emotions, but it is not synonymous with individual human emotion – even if one persistent way of defining affect is to discuss its relation with emotion. In relational affect studies, affects – understood as intensities, energies and flows, for instance – are conceptualised as emerging out of the dynamic encounters between bodies and things (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018; Seyfert 2012). These multiple encounters, intimate in themselves, challenge the prevailing notions of intimacy as a human relation. Moreover, a lens provided by affect theory enables situated analysis of intimacies, as affect emerges and entangles in asymmetrical networks of power. This further highlights the political potential of affect in studying intimacies.

This book taps directly into this challenge, making an effort to enrich the prevailing scholarship and imagination concerning affective intimacies. As a point of departure, we seek to reject such assumptions that human relations are the main nexus for intimacy and that the most intimate of encounters happen in human–human relations, and that non-humans (from animals to technology) can at best merely facilitate human-only intimacies. Thus, one of the aims of this book is to refuse the human-only notions of affective intimacies and rather post-humanise both affect and the notion of intimacy. Post-humanising both affect and intimacy is crucial (Lykke, 2018) as intimacies surface and wither in networks of human and non-human actors (Paasonen, 2018a). We thus perceive this edited collection as an invitation to radically and openly attune to affective intimacies as they unfold in the happenings of everyday lives and in their more-than-human entanglements.

### From ‘intimate relationships’ to affective intimacies

In social sciences and the humanities, the shifting forms of intimate lives have provided a major object of study. Paradigms such as individualisation and relationality have been important starting points when studying transformations concerning expectations, commitments and practices in intimate relationships in Western countries during the past few decades (Gabb and Silva, 2011; Roseneil, 2006). The shifts and pluralisation of intimate lives are connected to the decline of traditional institutions and social structures and to the impact of individualisation upon intimate lives (e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992). The critics of the individualisation thesis have pointed to the continuing connectedness, interdependencies and relationalities of intimate lives and to genderedness and classedness of intimate practices (Jamieson, 1998; Roseneil, 2007; Gabb and Silva, 2011). For example, it has been noted that in mixed-sex relationships men withdraw from emotional intimacy with women, making intimacy rather a source of control than a shared experience (O’Neill, 2018; Jurva and Lahti, 2019), and that same-sex intimacies have gained increased social acceptance and legal recognition in several Western countries, but this has largely happened at the expense of incorporating LGBTIQ+ relationships into already existing models of intimacy, such as marriage and the nuclear family (Warner, 2000; Duggan, 2002).

In previous research, there have been attempts to shift the focus from certain privileged forms of intimacy to pluralised forms of families and intimate practices. New concepts have been created to capture the everyday ‘makings and mouldings’ of intimacies: for example, family practices (Morgan 1996), relatedness (Carsten, 2000), personal life and living ‘connected lives’ (Smart, 2007) and practices of intimacy (Jamieson, 2011). By moving the paradigm from ‘being’ to ‘doing’ intimacies, these attempts are designed to better grasp the diverse forms of relationships, rather than to draw on limited understandings of intimacy (Gabb and Silva, 2011). Thus, various forms of relationships beyond the conjugal couple with children have been made visible (Budgeon, 2008; Holmes, 2015; Roseneil, 2007). Yet, despite the foregrounding of practices, which cumulatively and in combination enable, create and sustain a sense of closeness and the special quality of a relationship (Jamieson, 2011), the focus still dwells upon the interpersonal bonds.

As long as only human–human relationships are seen as the nexus of intimate relations, the relevance of more-than-human intimacies remains underdeveloped. For instance, scholars drawing upon queer theory have challenged the idea that only certain intimate relationships are of importance, starting from making visible the hierarchical valuation of intimate

practices, from marriage to distinct sex acts (Rubin, 1993). Whereas the earlier work within queer theory provided such pivotal ideas as the concept of chosen families (Weston, 1991) – which illustrated how intimate lives in gay and lesbian communities were not arranged so centrally around couple relationships and biological ties, but friendship and community played a central role – or the concept of couplenormativity (Roseneil *et al.*, 2020) – which highlights how monogamous couple relationships are persistently valued more than other ways of arranging intimate lives – the most recent insights now ask what queer intimacies might look like when we think beyond human–human relations and consider intimacies with other species. For instance, attempts have been made to widen the idea of chosen families; that is, besides not being based on genetic kinship and the nuclear family, non-human-centred forms of kinship are to be included (Irni, 2020).

In recent years, scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds have suggested a shift away from human–human intimate relationships to more-than-human intimacies. For instance, the category of kinship has been broadened to include more-than-human intimacies. Yet while many concepts mobilised in the research on intimacies are bound to humans only, alternative concepts that both queer and post-humanise intimacy are also emerging. For instance, Nina Lykke (2018) uses the notion of compassionate companionship to resist normative terms, such as relative, to pay attention to corpo-affective dimensions and to the bodily becomings that extend into the more-than-human worlds. Companionship is a deeply affective relation of being for and with one other, and companionships extend to more-than-human bodies (Lykke, 2019). Kuura Irni (2020) asks what queer intimacies might look like when we think beyond human–human relations and consider intimacies with other species. Rethinking affective intimacies, therefore, is not only about rethinking the new forms and shapes of human relationships within and outside of institutional, legal and conventional frames; it is about rethinking, for instance, human–animal, human–plant and human–matter relations (see also Lykke, 2019; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Within this book, we wish to provide such ‘food for thought’ that helps to recognise and understand more-than-human intimacies.

### Infrastructures and structures of intimacy

One way to re-imagine intimacies is to look beyond the Western ontologies, both metaphorically and in concrete ways. In other words, we propose that re-imagining intimacies also requires a collective un-imagining of settler colonialism, nationalism, consumer capitalism, familism and patriarchy. Contemporary ideas of the early twenty-first century that are related

to intimacy, such as chastity and respectability, are linked to capitalist ideas of ownership, monopoly and the accumulation of goods (Duggan, 2002; Halberstam, 2005; Hennessy, 2000). Researchers examining post-colonialism, indigenous studies scholars, as well as academics, politicians and activists from the ‘Global South’, have also pointed out that the normative categories governing intimacies, such as monogamy, are often Western phenomena (Monro, 2015; TallBear, 2018). Yet these normativities extend beyond couple relationships, for instance, to widely accepted yet restricted notions of love and attachment that influence, for example, the practices of adoption (Myong and Bissenbakker, 2021). As Irni (2020) argues, calling into question colonialist politics and thinking not only requires a rethinking of Western modes of relating but also the human-centredness of intimacies. For example, Mel Y. Chen’s (2012) concept of animacies raises concerns that the relentless drawing of a distinction between human and inhuman, animate and inanimate is produced through racialised and sexualised means and political consequences. In this book, we especially foreground affect studies as a way to rethink and question this kind of human centrism.

In addition to un-imagining the prevailing notions of intimacy, novel imaginations, mappings and explorations are needed in order to widen the scope of studies on intimacy. Feminist scholar Laurent Berlant (2000) addresses intimacy as the connections that impact people and on which they depend for living. The most evident form of this kind of intimacy in contemporary societies is networked connectivity that has grown into a matter of infrastructure reminiscent of electricity, gas, water or heating – they are, in many ways, what living depends on (Paasonen, 2018a). In connection to digital infrastructures, many also consider the growing importance of data intimacies, such as the intimate role of algorithms, AI or datafication as a key development in our everyday lives. Yet in a similar vein we can discuss, for instance, chemical or toxic intimacies – referring to multiple entanglements, from drug use that aims to increase emotional closeness between partners or lower inhibitions during sex acts (e.g. Anderson *et al.*, 2018; Hakim, 2019) to the cumulative exposure to endocrine disruptors, neurotoxins, asthmagens, carcinogens and mutagens that is an inseparable and unavoidable part of everyday lives (Cielemecka and Åsberg, 2019; Chen, 2012). In other words, our lives are entangled with a multiplicity of intimacies, many of which, perhaps, occur without us even noticing.

Finally, intimacy does not require physical proximity nor is it limited to the material presence of (at least) bodies, objects or things. Whereas even the novel conceptualisations – from data intimacies to chemical intimacies – foreground proximity, companionship and entanglement, intimacies extend beyond this kind of closeness. Thus, intimacy should not be understood solely through physical proximity and, in addition to material intimacies,

immaterial intimacies provide one way to re-imagine affective intimacies. To give a few examples, bodies and minds have capacities to communicate – to affect and become affected – largely in immaterial ways (Dernikos, 2018); meaning that material and other-than-human elements participate in producing post-mortem forms of affective intimacies (Alasuutari, 2021). Intimacies hence also take novel shapes; from dreams to fantasies, and from cravings to memories that haunt us. These can take both individualised and collective forms. Through thinking of the embodied experience of history, it becomes possible to explore how the experience of oppression and exploitation is embodied and transmitted across communities and generations and can, thus, continue to haunt us (Walkerdine, 2015; also, Rajan-Rankin, 2021). Affective intimacies thus exist on the limits of the phenomenal (also Lury, 2015), meaning that their explorations require methodological sensitivity and imagination.

### **Affective intimacies: Signposts for alternative research designs**

From the perspective of this book, then, the relevant questions start by asking how to approach affective intimacies. For instance, what is recognised as ‘affective’ or ‘intimate’ is a key question, yet the relation between affect and intimacy certainly forms another. We accept that methodology should enrich, not flatten the research process and thus think one should be aware of the limitations of working with stabilising concepts (Kolehmainen, 2019) – rather, mapping both fixity and movement is an essential part of a research process (Renold and Ringrose, 2008). Notably, this collection is not about affect and intimacy, but affective intimacies. Instead of foregrounding certain pre-defined categories of affects or intimacies, we wish to shift the focus to the processes, entanglements and encounters between humans – as well as between human and non-human bodies – that provide key signposts for comprehending affective intimacies. While recent years have seen advances in the theoretical and methodological scholarship on affect, thus far affect studies have not been fully utilised in rethinking intimacies. We advocate that thinking about intimacies through more-than-human entanglements offers a novel perspective to attune to the affective intimacies that emerge through relational networks and encounters, which include multiple elements and which are alive and vibrant, intimate in themselves (Bennet, 2010; Fox and Alldred, 2015, 2017; Kolehmainen, 2018). Taking this kind of co-constitution into account requires methodological elaboration.

Further, affect, we claim, offers new perspectives on the intimate as it is sensed and lived, networked across human and non-human bodies. One of the challenges in the examination of intimacy is to look at the socio-material

constitution of intimacy and its more-than-human constituencies (Latimer and Gómez, 2019). Complex, non-reductive understandings of materiality are key here (Wilson, 2016). This translates to a quest for methodologies that foreground processes (Knudsen and Stage, 2020). Further, for working with non-reductive understandings of affective intimacies it is important to pay attention to how they emerge in varying and unfolding conditions of the world (Tiainen *et al.*, 2020). Reclaiming the heterogeneous materiality of the intimate – with intimacy being made of and with multiple entangled materialities – counters the invisibilisation of affect (Latimer and Gómez, 2019). Yet, as indicated earlier, what is conventionally seen as immaterial also contributes to these un/makings of intimacy. Thus, we highlight the importance of explorations of and experiments with immaterial intimacies, even if this also means new methodological challenges.

Instead of static events or certain relational forms, affective intimacies often emerge as barely perceptible events in the process of ‘becoming’ across social, material, discursive, human and more-than-human worlds (e.g. Tiainen *et al.*, 2020; MacLure, 2013). Entering the middle – an approach stemming from Deleuzian tradition (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013) – is especially fruitful in examining affective intimacies. It can be used to examine the entanglement of affect and intimacy, thus foregrounding the process or the relations instead of two distinct categories. Another beneficial avenue is provided by assemblage theory, which also offers methodological tools for the exploration of affective intimacies. Affective intimacies can be conceived of as assemblages wherein multiple and complex elements entangle. They are therefore temporal groupings of relations that are both unfinished and open-ended. Such intimate assemblages connect bodies with other bodies, matter, affect, ideas and societal processes in many different directions. An alternative approach is provided by the concept of meshwork, which stresses how individuals and forms of knowledge are entanglements: they emerge through encounters with others – they are not pre-existent, self-contained and separate entities, but a meshwork of interwoven lines of growth and movement (Ingold, 2007). In a research process, attunement to affective intimacies thus translates as a quest to become skilful in recognising the entanglements and loose ends (Ingold, 2011). In any case, such engagements that do not assume the separateness of affect and intimacy are crucial.

### Rethinking affect and intimacy

The first section of this book delves into the importance of re-imagining affective intimacies. Aligning with the notion that the concept of affect helps us to reconsider intimacy as something of which its existence does not

require our conscious attention or recognition (see Blackman, 2012), this book makes a serious intervention in its attempt to rethink the entanglements of affects and intimacies. We further propose that affective intimacies are about the happenings of the social (Lury and Wakeford, 2012) where the social is not restricted to humans (Tsing quoted in Mitman, 2019). Yet still, several concepts from meanings to discourses and from narratives to identities prioritise human-only agencies, without fully allowing an acknowledgement of the more-than-human and the entangled agencies. We thus align with such bodies of work that have emphasised either the employment of non-human centred concepts – meaning that, for instance, affect is not equated with human emotion (Colebrook, 2002) or intimacy with human sexuality (Fox and Alldred, 2013; Lahti and Kolehmainen, 2020) – or who have stressed the importance of reconsidering the uses of such familiar conceptualisations as ‘the social’ or ‘the political’ (e.g. Bennett, 2010; Tsing quoted in Mitman, 2019).

While many affect theories highlight the importance of the human body, as Jane Bennett (2010) reminds us, affect is not specific to humans, organisms or even to bodies: we should consider the affect of technologies, winds, vegetables, minerals – or, as we do within the first section of this book, we reach towards the affects of smoke, digital intimate publics and technological infrastructures. Further, when affect refers to registers best described as trans-subjective, non-conscious, inter-corporeal and immaterial (Blackman and Venn, 2010; Blackman, 2012), it cannot be reduced to individual physical responses even when registered or felt personally (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018). Rather, it inherently entails the notion of relationality, providing important insights into the ways that bodies – human, non-human, animate, inanimate, virtual, material – are conditioned and condition themselves to one another in a set of unequal and uneven relations of power (also, Ahmed, 2000; Zengin, 2016). Hence, in the context of this book, the catchphrase characterisation of affect as ‘capacities to affect and become affected’ should not be understood as entailing a symmetry or a balance between ‘affecting’ and ‘becoming affected’ (Schuller, 2018) but rather as a concept that points to the multiple entanglements of affect and intimacy.

It is widely acknowledged that affect as a concept resists such binaries as body/mind, self/other and subject/object, yet there is more to that: since affect also helps to question such dichotomies as individual/collective, human/animal or animate/inanimate, we believe that the lens provided by affect theories presents fruitful insights into the rethinking of more-than-human intimacies. Affect also allows ambivalence, uncertainty and multiplicity to be addressed, thus having the potential to enliven and renew the scholarship on intimacies. The three chapters in this section do not privilege human-only intimacies, but rather consider intimacies as they surface and



unfold in multiple matterings. These more-than-human intimacies remind us that the becomings of bodies, as well as their intimate entanglements, extend into more-than-human worlds. That is, bodies enter and exit transcorporeal (Alaimo, 2008) relationships with the more-than-human world (Neimanis, 2017; see also Lykke, 2019). Further, bodily in/capacities to affect and become affected pinpoint different co-dependencies (e.g. Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tsing, 2015) as essential for all forms of living. These co-dependencies are formed historically and culturally and across species, technologies, bodies and matterings. Their examination provides an important entry point to the study of affective intimacies.

### The politics of affect: Spatial and societal entanglements

The second section of the book examines the politics of affect in particular, by looking at the spatial and societal entanglements that are intertwined with affective intimacies. With the help of affect theories, it is possible to shift the focus onto the intimacies that emerge in the process of the ‘happening’ of everyday life (Stewart, 2007) that reach beyond pre-defined and top-down operations of power, such as capitalism, colonialism, sexism and heteronormativity. Yet still, economic, social and cultural forces hide in the happening of everyday life and might intensify in a person, an event or a scene (Stewart, 2007; Fannin *et al.*, 2010). It is in these encounters and events that these forces and forms of power come to matter (Fannin *et al.*, 2010). In particular, ordinary life has a peculiar materiality, where bodies of all kinds – people, atmospheres, spaces, expectations and institutions – are momentarily thrown together and then they fall apart again (Stewart, 2007). Attuning to this kind of materiality of everyday life opens up new ways of thinking about affective intimacies, as the three chapters in this section illustrate. They especially tap into the ways in which spatial and societal relations condition and co-produce such affective intimacies that are difficult to grasp empirically.

We also take a cue from Ann Cvetkovich’s (2012) suggestion that affects provide important entry points to diagnose political problems as well as an immanent force for societal change. We further claim that the study of affective intimacies enriches our understanding of politics by contributing to the exploration of mundane experiences of exclusion and injustice, where differences are also affectively, spatially and materially made and unmade (see also Kolehmainen, 2019; Lahti, 2018). By attending to affective intimacies, the chapters yield insights into how austerity, white privilege and sexuality emerge, entangle and become registered and felt through multiple encounters across human and non-human bodies. Hence, the focus on affective

intimacies opens up novel perspectives on the politics of power, but also refuses to centre solely on human-only notions of affective intimacies. Thus, the political potential of affect lies in the ways in which thinking with affect helps to address co-constitutions and interdependencies as a condition of life – also in its more-than-human forms.

A lens provided by relational affect theories enables us to resist such depoliticising, neoliberalist stances that rely upon individualising rhetoric and choice-driven logics, and that foster the idea of bounded, sovereign and human-only subjects (e.g. Blackman, 2012). An approach that foregrounds affect provides tools for the simultaneous consideration of multiple entanglements that co-constitute each other. From this perspective, vulnerability becomes the condition of life (Chouliaraki, 2020; Koivunen *et al.*, 2018). Affect theory provides a productive framework for the conceptualisation of vulnerability as an affective relation which entails both the entanglements with political conditions that hinder one's life, and the affective becoming of bodies that allow transformation and movement beyond a fixed and stable subject position (Rozmarin, 2021). This also has consequences for our understanding of the political: these vary from resisting such notions of intimacy where it is seen as opposed to the political (Kolehmainen and Juvonen, 2018) to the limiting of politics to humans only (Bennett, 2010; Tsing, 2015). This displaces the individual human or a human collective from the core of political analysis (Bennett, 2010), making space for affective, psychic, material and spatial considerations – as the three chapters in this section eloquently do.

### Queering intimacies: Affective un/becomings

The third section explores those forms of intimacy that (at least at times) escape the cultural recognition and intelligibility that would allow them to be acknowledged. Traditionally, mainly queer intimacies have been seen in this kind of culturally not-apprehensible form, even if, for instance, invisibility has perhaps also secured the survival of same-sex intimacies. Queer theoretical concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity have been groundbreaking in highlighting how heterosexuality is naturalised and privileged in everyday life in various ways, and how LGBTIQ+ intimacies have gained social acceptance and legal recognition by affirming the heteronormative model of long-term monogamous relationships that produce children (Duggan, 2002). However, we wish to highlight how sexuality-related norms function depending on how they are assembled with other elements, from intersecting (power) relations to multiple intimacies. When discussing 'normativities', there are elements that are more fluid and elements that

are less open to fluidity (Lahti and Kolehmainen, 2020; Osella, 2019). For instance, desire – often seen as fluid – also works through affective flows, surges and intensities. Thus, the relationship between norms and affect is not at all straightforward, and this relationship cannot be frozen and stabilised as it would be if norms were affectively attached to it, or if it were determined by pre-existing norms.

The internationally dominant systems for categorising sex, sexuality and gender, and the social inequalities they are likely to produce, at least partly stem from the Western colonial past (Monro, 2015). These categorisations were developed in synchrony with the racialised, sexualised and gendered social inequalities on which many societies are based (Haritaworn, 2015; Monro, 2015). However, the legacies of colonialism have proven very hard to decolonise (Singh, 2016) even if decolonisation would offer the potential to map intimacies in alternative and novel ways. In this section, though it focuses on queer intimacies, we advance a view that affective intimacies as a framework enables the destabilisation of the Western dichotomies, including the hetero/homo-binary. Affect theory, in particular, allows new questions to be raised that simultaneously tap into the continuing dominance of heterosexuality and refuse old, worn-out explanations and concerns. As Caroline Osella (2019) reminds us, our questions cannot be binary. Binary questions and concepts necessarily come up with binary answers, such as labelling objects as normative or non-normative. Alternative conceptualisations – many of which are sensitive to affect, such as feeling entities (Steinbock, 2014) or play (Paasonen, 2018b) – help us to see sexuality in a more vivid way than just normativity or lack thereof.

Again, a lens provided by affect theory shifts the focus to entanglements and encounters between human and non-human bodies. It also invites us to see gender and sexuality as unstable categories that are on the move (re) assembling and connecting in new ways and taking new forms through intimate world-making practices (Fox and Alldred, 2013; Kolehmainen, 2018; Lahti, 2018). Furthermore, while post-humanist conceptualisations of sexuality point to the processes, entanglements and encounters of multiple bodies (Fox and Alldred, 2013; Lahti, 2018, 2020a, 2020b; Weiss, 2020), gender can also be conceptualised as a multiplicity that emerges as an effect of entanglements of multiple elements (Kolehmainen, 2020; Schuller, 2020). Gender and sexuality can be seen as the products of bodies' relations with other bodies; in other words, they are about 'becoming rather than being' (e.g. Coleman, 2009; Kolehmainen, 2018; Lahti, 2018, 2020a, 2020b), which allows for a consideration of queer intimacies and queering intimacies without reducing gender and sexuality to stable, individualised identity categories. In this book, we propose a shift away from human-centred and identity-based notions of gender and sexuality. The chapters in this section

propose that the relevance of gender or sexuality is dependent on the particular assemblages that it forms with other bodies (Malins, 2004; Renold and Mellor, 2013). By focusing on encounters, relationalities and entanglements that connect us queerly to others (Weiss, 2020) we take up the task of queering the whole notion of sexuality. The three chapters in this section re-imagine sexuality and gender as collective, embodied and affective processes. The chapters illustrate that it is relevant to ask how unpredictable and unruly affect might participate in queering intimacy.

### Mapping affective intimacies

The edited collection, *Affective intimacies*, provides a novel platform for re-evaluating the notion of open-ended intimacies through the lens of affect theories. In particular, it addresses the embodied, affective and psychic aspects of intimate entanglements across various contemporary phenomena. It advances the value of interdisciplinary perspectives in thinking in terms of affective intimacies. The diverse chapters introduce topical themes and contribute to current topics in social sciences, representing multiple disciplines from gender studies, sociology and cultural studies to anthropology and queer studies. In addition, the authors come from different academic backgrounds. This kind of diversity is also present in the methodological approaches, which both present and push forward different onto-epistemological points of departure. Theoretically, the chapters make significant advances: rethinking well-known concepts of care, lesbianism, the re-examination of debates on topics such as austerity or motherhood and the re-imagining of notions of empathy or gender. The attunement to experiences that are not usually afforded recognition, that remain ordinary or unspoken and invisible is characteristic to all chapters; thus, they enrich the study of the workings of power by addressing the under-the-radar operations of power. In this way, by addressing racism, capitalism, sexism and heteronormativity they also make the political aspects of affective intimacies visible, yet they avoid any shorthand explanations of power (Latour, 2005; Stewart, 2007). In their nuanced, vivid and rich elaborations of interdependencies and vulnerabilities across different sites from intergenerational to transnational they all contribute to the study of affective intimacies.

### Affective matterings

The collection starts with a section on ‘Rethinking affect and intimacy’. The brilliant chapter “‘Caring matter’: A love story of queer intimacies between

(her) body and object (her cigarette)’ by Dresda E. Méndez de la Brena opens this section and the whole book. Méndez de la Brena starts by asking what ‘care’ means when we go about thinking and living interdependently with beings other than humans in disabled worlds. In queering the concept of care in relation to matter, the chapter foregrounds the affective entanglements between persons and objects. Méndez de la Brena eloquently pinpoints the limits of human care while introducing two queer love stories, one about the process of becoming-in-love between her and her partner, and the second love story between her narcoleptic partner and smoking. Here cigarettes are acknowledged to be providing crucial care since they help the narcoleptic partner to cope with her illness – even if this is not the author’s desired situation. Different ways to write academically are not only looked for but successfully created when Méndez de la Brena discusses love and care in their manifold forms. Using an approach provided by ‘auto-phenomenography’, the chapter thus rethinks how we can create and imagine new possibilities. From these points of departure, the chapter beautifully contributes to the study of affective intimacies, in particular by introducing the novel concept of ‘caring matter’. The chapter concludes that caring matter can show us how non-human care ‘works’ when human-provided care is absent or insufficient. Finally, it asks for the rejection of normative and ableist notions of smoking, reminding us that for many people smoking offers possibilities for performance, survival and endurance. It invites us to rethink many ideas that are often taken for granted concerning intimacies and provides thought-provoking, eloquent work on affective matterings between people and objects.

Armi Mustosmäki’s and Tiina Sihto’s chapter, ‘The figure of a regretful mother on an online discussion board’, analyses a discussion thread in response to a post on regretting motherhood on an anonymous Finnish online discussion board. The chapter analyses the affective responses to the figure of a regretting mother, highlighting how negative maternal feelings are (not) allowed to enter a digital intimate public. The analysis shows that in the context of motherhood, the affective registers of regret are discredited and are instead subsumed by various motivations and pathological explanations. For example, expressions of regret are interpreted as symptoms of individualised perfectionism and ‘overdoing’ of motherhood, or as the mother’s inability to resist the societal pressure put on mothers. There are also responses that blame regretting mothers for parental incompetence or lacking the will to enjoy motherhood. The chapter insightfully suggests that the affective registers of regret are associated with weak or damaged agency and mothers’ inability to take charge of their lives. Mustosmäki and Sihto’s analysis makes an important contribution to affective intimacies by demonstrating how a mother’s negative feelings are pathologised and devalued.

Affect plays a prominent role within the formations of neoliberalism, where therapeutic ethos becomes visible in the ways in which women are expected to be resilient and self-sufficient. The chapter innovatively sheds light on normative intimacies, exploring how maternal affects are mediated in the digital intimate public.

Marjo Kolehmainen's chapter, 'Intimate technology? Teletherapies in the era of COVID-19', examines affective intimacies in teletherapy settings. Empirically, the study explores therapy and counselling professionals' experiences of the role of technology in their work, particularly in relation to the 'digital leap' brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than pre-defining teletherapies as similar or different to traditional therapies, the chapter takes the position that technological infrastructures condition and shape the affective processes of support-seeking and support-giving. In particular, the analysis taps into the question of how intimacy comes to matter in teletherapy practices, tracing the ways in which intimacy is being made and unmade, of and with multiple entangled materialities. Kolehmainen argues that therapy and counselling could best be understood through the Baradian lens of intra-action, wherein agency is distributed across various human and non-human actors: from professionals and clients to therapy venues, from psychic conditions to legislation, from technological equipment and software apps to economic factors. With this approach, Kolehmainen makes visible the socio-material constitution of intimacies in teletherapy practices, thus enriching our understanding of affective intimacies. The chapter thus develops tools to rethink intimacy as co-constituted by several dynamic processes that have capacities to affect and become affected. The chapter concludes by arguing that the distancing capacities are not distinct from those capacities that generate the feelings of intimacy. Rather they both exemplify the distributed agencies of entangled materialities.

### **Spatial and material politics of affect**

The following three chapters are a part of the section 'The politics of affect: Spatial and societal entanglements'. 'The empathiser's new shoes: The discomforts of empathy as white feminist affect', Andrea Lobb's theoretical chapter, asks how and why the capacity for empathy – long celebrated in Anglo-American feminism – no longer appears to be such a straightforward ethical virtue when read through the double lens provided by affect and critical race studies. Engaging with philosophical theories, Lobb views the empathy of the white feminist as an acutely ambivalent affect – one tied up in complex ways with the asymmetric power relations of race. In her contribution, she argues that the efforts of feminists from white settler societies

are embedded in moral ambivalence as, on one hand, they wish to maintain their empathetic identifications but, on the other hand, they must divest themselves of willful ignorance regarding their racial privilege. Lobb thus suggests that white feminist politics needs to be prepared to relinquish the attachment to feeling virtuous and good, and work instead with the affective dissonance of ambivalent empathy. By so doing, she offers a fascinating critique of the affective building of the intimate-political assemblages of feminist solidarity and argues that paying attention to the imbrications of racial domination and the intimacies of affect dislodges the taken-for-granted normative ‘goodness’ so often ascribed to empathy within feminist theory. As Lobb eloquently shows, there is an urgent need to rethink the affective politics of empathy within white feminist politics.

In Ilektra Kyriazidou’s chapter, ‘Neighbouring in times of austerity: Intimacy and the “noikokyrio”’, we are presented with an incisive analysis of female residents’ experiences of austerity in a low-income neighbourhood in Thessaloniki, Greece. Her contribution to affective intimacies unfolds the ways in which politics of austerity are lived and felt – in her words experienced as a ‘blow to the body’, as bodies are overwhelmed by daily obstacles and commitments. By drawing upon an ethnographic study, the chapter provides novel insights into the ways that intimacy between neighbours is constructed in everyday relations developed from sharing the difficulties and the exhaustion they face in their efforts to help their families during austerity. Yet, as Kyriazidou underscores, the affective patterns within these intimate relations also take different and exclusionary forms as they are driven by the wider political climate of austerity and a particular affective economy of antagonism. This is further oriented by the conservative ethos of the ‘noikokyrio’, the local model of the family household. Kyriazidou attunes to models of support but also to criticism and judgements as they unfold in the everyday relations between neighbours, painting a vivid picture of these intimate affective dynamics. More generally, her chapter also illuminates how evaluations of one’s neighbours are well-matched with the ideological reinforcements of austerity and neoliberalism. Thus, the affective intimacies of the neighbourly relations, as discussed in the chapter, are conditioned by diverse political and economic circumstances and effects of austerity.

Tuula Juvonen’s chapter, ‘Becoming a lesbian at lesbian and gay dance parties: Lesb laboratories as affective spaces’, introduces the groundbreaking idea of ‘les laboratories’, opening up a completely new research strand in the study of affective intimacies and in lesbian studies. Looking at past gay and lesbian communities, the chapter taps into the question of venues that were also actively participating in the production of what was then an emerging idea of a lesbian. Lesb laboratories acknowledge the role of matter in the making of lesbians – as Juvonen eloquently illustrates, a lesb laboratory as a

novel conceptualisation argues for understanding lesbianism as a collective, embodied and affective formation. Here Juvonen departs from such scholarship that has mostly theorised LGBTIQ+ identities as being based on language, discourse and norms; or focused solely on the social relations between people. Instead of following these paths, Juvonen applies the thinking of Karen Barad to her study, arguing that bodies and spaces cannot be separated, as both arise together in an intra-action in which they are entangled. Empirically, the chapter draws upon accounts from oral history interviews regarding lesbian and gay party venues run by the local lesbian and gay organisation in Tampere, Finland in the 1980s. It argues that lesbolaboratories influenced both the ways in which women were able to become lesbians and how they were able to create communities of their own. Lesbolaboratories underline the intimate, collective bonds through which the affected bodies became with the materiality of the spaces of lesbian and gay dance parties. The chapter vividly enlivens political imaginaries of the past, and leads us to the next section, which highlights how approaching sexuality and gender as collective, affective processes offers fresh perspectives on the embodied entanglements that connect us queerly to others.

### **Collective formations of gender and sexuality**

Yiran Wang's chapter, "Lack" of languages: Affective experiences of female same-sex intimacies in contemporary China', opens the section titled 'Queering intimacies: Affective un/becomings'. It examines the collective, trans-subjective processes of becoming a women-loving woman in China. Drawing upon an ethnographic study, her analysis taps into the complicated relationship between affect and language. There is often a lack of 'proper' language for expressing female same-sex love and describing sexual practices, since the dominant discourses do not acknowledge them. Wang examines ineffable feelings, 'misused' words and affective and bodily practices, and illustrates insightfully how it is not despite this 'lack' but through it that it becomes possible to understand the inter-corporeal processes of becoming intimate and becoming a women-loving woman. By applying concepts and ideas that are sensitive to affect and embodiment she investigates assembled, relational subjectivities, particularly utilising the ideas of 'nomadic subjectivity' theorised by Rosi Braidotti and intra-action by Karen Barad. By theorising '(first) love without articulation' and re-appropriating the notion of 'penetration', she shows how the women's affective memories reach beyond available discourses. Through her analysis that is sensitive to embodiment, she is able to grasp the inter-corporeal entanglements and affective forces that shape affective intimacies. In other words, by attending



to the trans-corporeal aspects of becoming a women-loving woman in contemporary China, Wang makes a unique contribution to the exploration of affective intimacies of these collective processes.

The experiences of gender non-binary individuals in Slovenia are the focus of Nina Perger's chapter. In 'Affective obligations and obliged affections: Non-binary youth and affective (re)orientations to family', the young people illuminate the affects of being silenced or rejected by their families in response to their gender non-binary identities. By bringing together Sara Ahmed's (2014) conceptualisation of affective orientations and Pierre Bourdieu's (2000, 2001) conceptual pairing of affective obligations and obliged affections, Perger offers a complex analysis into the ways in which affective orientations towards family as a happy object and a 'straightening' device are maintained. Taking up this line of inquiry her research demonstrates that the promise of familial happiness is bound up with the securing of social hierarchy, as the analysis of interview data vividly illustrates. By acknowledging the embodiment of affective obligations, family life emerges as a space where affects are entangled with bodily sensations and thoughts that move agents towards and away from certain objects. The chapter demonstrates how this movement can be stuck in an ambivalent experiential mess of belonging and alienation, which in turn can entail guilt and shame alongside memories of care and pleasure among gender non-binary individuals. The chapter thus makes a valuable contribution to the study of affective intimacies from the perspective of non-binary gendered people and their familial ties, as it departs from viewing these affective processes as individual but rather highlights their collective entanglements.

Annukka Lahti's chapter, 'Affective intimacies of gender assemblages: Closeness and distance in LGBTQ+ women's relationships', explores the significance of gender in LGBTQ+ women's relationships. The chapter begins with an observation of the closeness and easiness of certain LGBTQ+ women's relationships, while others struggle with unequal approaches to sharing childcare and domestic responsibilities in ways that strikingly resemble the gendered conventions of heterosexual relationships. Arguing that the framework of gendered conventions is limited, Lahti analyses gender as becoming in and through affective assemblages. The chapter thus shifts the focus from the human-centred paradigm that would approach gender as an identity that 'belongs to a person', to seeing them as collective formations. A more nuanced approach, where multiple elements and affective intimacies of a gender assemblage can be identified. For the purposes of the chapter, she analyses two data sets: interviews with LGBTQ+ women who have experienced a recent relationship break-up, and a longitudinal set of interviews with bisexual women and their variously gendered (ex)partners. Her analysis shows how the accumulating affective intimacies of a gender assemblage,

which are a co-constitution of many elements – e.g. sexual desire, cultural norms and ideas about gender, (shared) interests, events and material spaces – have an ability to bring certain gendered bodies closer to one another, while pushing others away from one another. The chapter also shows how equalities and inequalities emerge in temporally shifting ways in LGBTQ+ women’s gender assemblages and how this is entangled with closeness and distance in their relationships.

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