

## Affect and subjectivity

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We are a group of critical theorists who read, thought, wrote, and practiced together while living in New York City during the emergence of Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and recently the US presidential election. While our biographies span multiple geographies, we met as researchers, theorists, teachers, and activists across a diverse number of campuses in the city's largest public university, the City University of New York. This special issue emerged as affect studies provoked our imaginations independently in ways that felt crucial for the development of our respective and reflexive political and theoretical projects. We entered the complexities of using affect studies, inspired especially by the generative tension of theory 'versus' practice. Through a collective process of collision and creativity, we experimented with what affect studies could do for our intellectual and political commitments, affecting subjectivity to politicize affect.

In this piece, we introduce this special issue, which advocates for affect studies as a mode of critical inquiry of use to radical projects of queerness, blackness, disability, decolonization, and temporalities of the body, a turn that is dependent on our re-engagement with subjectivity. After reviewing the legacy of scholarship on subjectivity to which our work is both continuing and responding, we discuss the debates around the role of the subject in affect studies and the political dimension of affect before thinking through the contributions of the five pieces in this special issue. Collectively, we are *affecting subjectivity* through an attention to matter, the non-conscious, and identity, and *politicizing affect* through an attention to form,

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ontology and practice. Overall experimenting, we hope, with Anzaldúa's call to, "move beyond confining parameters of what qualifies as knowledge" (1990, p. 230).

## From subjectivity to affect and back again

The concept of subjectivity has been tremendously important for the development of the social sciences and humanities since the second half of the twentieth century. In the editorial introduction of the 2008 launch issue of *Subjectivity* (previously *The International Journal of Critical Psychology*), Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulus, and Walkerdine trace subjectivity as a primary category of social, cultural, psychological, historical, and political analysis. With Althusser's demonstration that state apparatuses produce identities through institutions that interpellate and ultimately create subjects, the discursive creation of ideological positions first situated subjectivity at the center of structuralism. A less-passive subject capable of cultural resistance followed, through Stuart Hall's take on Gramsci in the 1970s, initiating the move of structuralism's subjectivity away from both a Marxist economic perspective and biological determinism. By the late 1970s, the study of subjectivity shifted from ideology to power/knowledge and from a theory of the subject to processes of subjectification. In this Foucauldian perspective, subjectivity came to be understood as "the experience of the lived multiplicity of positioning" (Blackman et al. 2008, p. 6), the experience of being subjected to power/knowledge-discursive practices and technologies of the social through which subjects subjectified (disciplined) themselves. Other contributions for the theorization of subjectivity during this post-structuralism came from phenomenology's grasp of the subject's accounting for experience, mainly through language, and feminism's insistence on the political character of personal experiences and the centrality of the body (see Enciso and Lara 2014).

According to Blackman et al. (2008), Badiou's critique of subjectivity as an epiphenomenon of the operation of power/knowledge within material, socio-historical, and institutional relations, initiated an ontological crisis that began to question the poststructuralist commitments to discourse and signification, inaugurating another turn in the study of subjectivity. Deleuzian philosophy and his notion of 'control society' claimed that "there are forms of materiality out of which subjectivity is modulated and augmented" (p. 9). This concern for material singularities that became the condition of possibility for an early interest in disciplines previously excluded or critiqued—most notably neuroscience—to help theorize these other-than-socially-constructed components of subjectivity. Eventually, these movements lead to 'the affective turn' (Clough and Halley 2007; Blackman and Venn 2010; Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Lara and Enciso 2013).

Two decades on affect studies has consolidated an important body of literature that, while diverse, shares a concern for attending to non-conscious, non-cognitive, trans-personal, and non-representational processes, as well as the communicative capacities of bodies and matter 'beyond' discourse. With Massumi's take on Deleuze (1995), and Sedgwick and Frank's take on Tomkins (1995) in early



foundational texts, affect studies became quickly recognized as a turn in critical theories characterized by a return to some expressions of ‘hard’ science as well as to process philosophies. Since this time, the scientific and philosophical sources of affect studies have diversified significantly. For example, if process philosophers like Deleuze, Guattari, Bergson, James, Whitehead, and Spinoza, were the initial background (Lara 2015), affect scholars are now also finding inspiration in contemporary thinkers like Ranciere’s philosophy of aesthetics (see Panagia 2009), Harman’s object oriented ontology (see Clough 2014), or Malabou’s material plasticity (see Sparrow 2015), among others, opening the field to both speculative realism and the continental tradition of Western philosophy more generally. Similarly, while affect studies’ relationship with science began with theories of neuroscience such as those proposed by Damasio or LeDoux, or with evolutionary perspectives on the physiology of the organisms such as those proposed by Ekman or Tomkins, it now also includes thinking with genetics and biological sciences, mathematics, and quantum physics/the physics of small particles, among others (Blackman and Venn 2010). Theorizations of technological advances, particularly with regard to digital media, have also become another important ally in affect studies, this time in thinking the human organism as endlessly mediated by technology in ways that challenge traditional forms of subjectivity (Clough 2008; see also Hansen 2015).

Most recently, post-structuralism is no longer the ‘straw-man’ of affect studies. As evidenced in the namesake of this journal, there has now also been a return to subjectivity. Mark Hansen’s (2015) “post-phenomenological phenomenology,” for instance, addresses human experience through the study of what he calls sensory environment in its interaction with human body. And Shaviro’s (2016) ‘discognition,’ speculating from science and science fiction literature, addresses what it is to be a conscious-*cum*-sentient being governed by mental processes that are not necessarily rational. Patricia Clough’s (2015) notion of the ‘non-human unconscious’ addresses the reconfiguration of subjectivity and sociality emerging from non-human relations and the dissociation of the self brought forth by the ‘datafication’ of experience. These examples take advantage of the theoretical and political potential of affect studies, which, according to Cromby, comes principally through two main focuses of attention: “the deliberate or incidental manipulation of material intensities” and “the ways that feelings can instantiate in the present the influence of the indeterminate future” (2015, p. 121). We too make use of these and other promises to contribute to this collective, radical work of rethinking subjectivity. But first, we consider the contentious debates around affect and subjectivity to recognize their importance in the framing of our projects.

## Missing subjects, apolitical affects

The ‘missing subject’ is one of the predominant critiques of the turn to affect. Whether decentered or entirely stripped of analytical meaning, in much of affect theory there was much unease about what a vacated subject meant for questions of power and agency. Wetherell explicitly bemoans this loss in determining that much



of affect theory “rest(s) on a kind of anti-humanist negation of subjectivity...(where) subjectivity becomes a no-place or waiting room, through which affect as autonomous lines of force pass on their way to something else.” (2012, p. 123) For her and other critics, this move threatened a centering of forces that, while impacting people, could not be traced in any meaningful way to their conscious (or unconscious) actions (Ellis and Tucker 2015).

The launch of *Subjectivity* very much recognized the significance of this threat. While standing by the need for scholarship that understands subjectivity as processual becomings, Blackman et al. (2008) warned that this scholarship could have the problematic effect of ‘flattening the subject’ into something fixed and static and presumably apolitical or at least theoretically non-valuable. Citing Hemmings (2005), they cautioned that a ‘giving up’ of the subject often inferred that theoretical work centering subjectivity was outdated, off-trend, and sometimes even intellectually naive. Those theorists that they were critiquing assumed that a decentering of the subject allowed for a theorizing that did not have to deal with the messiness of identity, representation, social construction, and experience where that messiness often led to work that folded back into essentialism and determinism. The affect critics pointed out that they unfortunately also circumvented scholarship that sought to decenter the normative subject by theorizing differential productions of marginal subjectivities; work that has become increasingly valuable for bringing to subjectivity an analysis of race, sexuality, gender, disability, and additional forms of alterity. The turn to affect, then, was rightfully critiqued as yet another instance of a refusal to engage in legitimate questions of oppression and being, as brought to the academic table by those who lived those bodily productions. Asking whose subjectivity matters, these critiques spoke more broadly to a tendency within hegemonic theory to avoid taking seriously subaltern theories that address the messiness of the marginality, identity, materiality, and politics of lives and liveliness.

Thus, related to this concern, is what the affective turn inferred about subjectivity itself. Some elements of affect studies deem affect distinct from emotion, thereby threatening to reduce emotion to a solely cognitive function. As Greco and Stenner point out, “Drawing an overtly sharp (and value laden) distinction between affect and emotion serves, paradoxically, to perpetuate the illusion that such words refer unproblematically to states of the world, thus bypassing the need to think carefully about the conceptual issues at stake” (2008, p. 11). Ahmed also highlights this problem when she argues that, “We might note as well how the turn to affect, and the designating of affect as what moves us beyond emotion, allows the reduction of emotion to personal or subjective feeling” (2015, p. 208; see also Terada 2001). While much of affect theory problematizes both ‘reason’ and ‘emotion,’ sidelining the latter as non-material could reenact the Cartesian binary in a way that marks subjectivity as a messy ‘feminized’ space of experience and emotion, while pure affect becomes the ‘masculine’ space of the ontological objective real that much of feminist thought has tried to dismantle. Likewise intent threatens to be sidelined as analytically non-valuable. As Leys (2011) points out, the loss of subjective intent seems to infer a loss of sociality that troubles the idea of subjective action. This deemphasizing of experience leaves behind troubled questions of politics, action,



and agency; for how might power be challenged if the subject is seemingly deterministically produced through forces of affect that leave no room for spaces of resistance.

Herein lies a second overarching criticism of affect studies—the ‘apolitical affect.’ Refocusing on ontology and processes instead of epistemology and identity threatens to not only abandon the subject’s capacity for agency but also selectively neglect the critical hermeneutic traditions of post-structuralism. For Hemmings (2005), the political productiveness of affect studies required a chronology of critical scholarship that took seriously subjects in the margins, holding up racialized and gendered bodies as rejecting naturalizing narratives. Hemmings argues that it is only based on such theorizations of power and the subject that affect studies can afford its freedom of attachment and ability to move beyond the binary structuralist positions. In this sense, the fluidity of affect, especially in Sedgwick’s and Massumi’s works, threatens some sort of anachronism. A discontinuity with poststructuralist constructivism, a faith in something “other,” and the exclusive priorities of autonomy and choice offered by affect neglect the ongoing role of social forces in the formation of subjects. However, rather than rejecting Sedgwick and Massumi, Hemmings suggests that affect studies could benefit from reassembling with “both the social and in critics’ engagements with the nature of the social” (p. 565).

From our perspective, affect studies are neither an ahistorical hegemony that denounces the significance of subjectivity, nor a celebration of the neoliberal illusion of free choice via its critique of mediated agency. The critique of the missing subject and the critique that affect is apolitical are one and the same: a critique of the lack of politics of the sovereign subject qua a conscious, self-contained organism of free will. How certain subjects affect and are affected is not a random process, but demands theorization toward the level of population, toward how affect moves through or gets ‘stuck’ to certain bodies-in-information and that also participates in creating subjectivities across various political contexts, or what has recently been called ‘Affective Capitalism’ (Karppi et al. 2016). In other words, affect theory does not need to denounce the important analytic category of the subject, rather it can highlight a kind of politics that addresses the subject through processes of circulation, engagement, and assemblage, rather than as originating from the position of a sovereign subject. Some examples of the theorization of subjectivity that addresses the affective experience in relation with social configurations are found in approaches such as Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012) who think through communal beingness in Steeltown in South Wales, Brown and Reavey’s (2015) affective approach to the sense-making process of people with traumatic experiences, Blackman’s (2012) approach to processes of mediation such as voice hearing, suggestion, and telepathy, and Stenner and Moreno (2013) who feature affective experience as liminal in the context of organ donation.

As argued by Krause (2015), what affect theory rejects is the politics of the subject, the organic conscious subject that embodies the notion of sovereignty that is central in the establishment of liberal democracy. The turn to affect thus helps to rethink the assumption that agency and politics must begin with the subject and then to consider that affect studies require a re-theorization of subjectivity. Indeed, as



affect studies have grown, there has been an emergence of scholarship that explicitly connects affect and politics, or amplifies the inherently political capacity of affect (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). Scholars of affect studies have radically contested and destabilized social constructionism, epistemology, psychoanalysis, humanism, and disciplinary boundaries that occupy academia (Puar 2012). They have contributed to our understandings of how molar power and control circulates through affect, while simultaneously theorizing molecular resistance and visionary potential (Anderson 2014; Chen 2012; Clough 2008; Massumi 2015; Protevi 2009). Pointing to oppressive modes of control, Blackman (2012), drawing on Clough (2010), states that, “affect can be captured through strategies of biopolitical governance...(where) capitalism has developed more strategies and techniques for modulating and augmenting affect in ways that might close down hope and extend biopolitical racisms” (p. 22). Anderson (2014), for instance, analyzes an industry of carefully crafted scents that manipulate people’s affective experiences; Chen (2012), too, analyzes the ways in which matter is animated through transnational racism by theorizing the case of the lead crisis in the U.S. where matter—lead—is racialized as a product of China, depicted as harmful to innocent U.S. children. Affect then, can, “unite us, divide us, and determine the social and political value of different types of bodies” (Gatens 2014, p. 31).

That bodies can be induced to certain propensities and tendencies brings the necessity to “meet affective modulation with affective modulation” (p. 34), requiring, as Massumi (2015) continues, an aesthetic approach to politics. For Massumi, such politics are “dissensual,” a holding of alternatives “without immediately demanding that one alternative eventuate and the others evaporate” (p. 68). For Panagia (2009), the politics of sensation involve rupturing the configuration of that which is given to the sensible domain of the human body through aesthetic experience, the first political act, Panagia argues, is always an aesthetic one. For Highmore (2010), this is an “experiential pedagogy of constantly submitting your sensorium to new sensual worlds that sit uncomfortably with your ethos” (p. 135). Such expanding of “affect horizons” promises an “opening up to the affective, sensorial tuning and retuning of the social body” (p. 136).

These theoretical directions represent what we found most promising within the affective turn: its resonance with the ways that brown, black, feminist, queer, and Indigenous scholars have long been politicizing feelings, flesh, and spirit (e.g., Anzaldúa 1987; Lorde 1984; Nash 2013). Lorde’s (1984) seminal writing on the power of the erotic is just one example:

In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea. (p. 56)

Explicitly attending to the erotic as a means to trouble a splitting of the embodied from the political, Lorde’s project joins with the above quoted call by Anzaldúa’s (1990) for new kinds of theory and new theorizing methods; one that *could* be answered by affect studies. Within affect studies, “the body is as much outside itself as inside itself” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, p. 3). It is this entanglement that



witnesses an inherent participation and potential within the world, and thus that makes an intervention in the traditional notion of the individual and its ancestral demands for a particular kind-*cum*-standard of subject. This subject is, effectively, ‘He’ who is disconnected from the world—de-supernaturalized, de-sensitized, and emerging from the same explanatory principles that justified the occupation of Indigenous peoples, the enslavement of black peoples, and the institutionalization of mad peoples (Wynter 2003). Displacing the subject through affect studies, then, is an enactment of our critical commitments to queerness, blackness, disability, decolonization, and the temporality of the body.

## Affecting subjectivity, politicizing affect

With the 2008 launch of *Subjectivity*, the editors recognized that there was far more work to be done, “in linking the current recourse to affect, central to much contemporary sociological and cultural studies work, with models of psychical or neurological functioning that do not bring in psychological individualism through the back door” (p. 10). It is here that we locate the contributions of this special issue, where we use the affective turn to further our critical theorizations of subjectivity. However, we do so with another twist. One of the original priorities of *Subjectivity* was the creation of “an eclectic inventory of subjectivity that reads prior intellectual conceptualizations in the light of current political priorities.” Thus, we also put our experimental subjectivities to work for a range of intersecting radical political and theoretical projects. We use the promises of the affective turn to both affect subjectivity and politicize affect, collectively experimenting with how to do a more response-able scholarship within contemporary conditions of capitalism, racism, (hetero)sexism, and rising fascism.

## Affecting subjectivity

Among the various ways that our pieces affect the theorization of subjectivity, some common identifiable openings are the possibilities of affect for exploring the relation between material process and subjectivity, looking for non-conscious processes with relevance for the emergence of subjectivity, and rethinking categories previously associated with identity.

First, papers in this collection offer analyses of subjectivity that are rooted and embedded in material relations at various levels—from stolen land, to populations, to human bodies, to small molecules. Ashley and Billies, for example, explore non-representational thought through an analysis of “blackness as a material capacity.” Moving away from the individual subject as well as the individual human body, their analysis takes us to an understanding of the productive capacities of blackness at the level of population. The emergent event of race does not solely create black identities, but “black spaces, black thoughts, black presence, black bodies—human and otherwise,” ontologically *informing* black matter such that subjectivity is a processual post/relational population emergence. While in this theorization, black matter emerges from assemblages modulating affective capacity, in Nishida’s





contribution material relations work as the basis for the emergence of subjectivity. Nishida looks at relationality among different bodies in the healthcare system, particularly those entangled in recursive practices involving disabled bodies and care provider bodies. According to Nishida, “recursive encounters and practices slowly change the register of the bodies involved, allowing them to accumulate ontological knowledge about the other body.” This ‘affective relationality’ grounds the growth of a subjective process between care providers and care receivers whereby, “not only do some bodies slowly learn from and adapt haptically to one another, but also a sense of sympathy and intimacy begins to circulate between them.” Although material relations and subjectivity also might come from somewhere else than the organic relations, it is the openness of the human body that allows for this co-capacitation and subsequent creation of ‘something bigger.’ Switching scales, Lara develops a Bergsonian understanding of perception based on description and speculation. Bringing together notions like diffraction and attunement, he suggests an understanding of perception as “a process with material base,” or “the concatenation of material modifications of rhythm in different scales of the reality.” As well as exploring material interchanges and synchronization at the organic level, Lara also turns to a molecular scale of reality by speculating what kind of space–time entanglements are brought by red wine into the production of the subjective perception of time. Lastly, Liebert approaches a post-9/11 cultural and political paranoia as directly related to colonization, thereby invoking decolonial commitments and Indigenous ontologies that enable a reading of this affective milieu as potentially (r)evolutionary matter.

Second, our contributions offer theorizations of subjectivity as arriving through non-conscious entanglements or assemblages, thus opening questions around what kind of subjectivity productions emerges through non-conscious activity, and what could be done to subjects through this capacity for unawareness. Ashley and Billies describe inundation as an affective process where “knowledge” emerges as informational code, made material. It is through the coreferencing across innumerable sites of inundation such as memory, discourse, and materiality that memories of future events are felt but never lived. Blackness in this way becomes known, felt, *lived*, not at the level of consciousness but sensed, like the breathing of air. This capacity of blackness sets the condition of possibility for “black risk,” a pre-conscious process less dependent on black subjectivities than productive of them through population production. Another non-conscious event affecting subjective production might be found in what Lara calls “diffraction in the mind,” the sudden appearance of space–time–matter relations that are apparently not taking part in the current event, but that appear in human perception by virtue of our organic engagement with matter, expanding or contracting lapses of time, and even more, bringing physical qualities from somewhere else to the present event. In his words, “Perception—and subjectivity in general—is embedded in a material and spatiotemporal process aesthetically expressed that cannot simply be neglected.” Similarly, Nishida foregrounds ontological connections of bodies, instead of subscribing to the traditional understanding of human connections made through cognition-based communication (e.g., verbal communication). Exploring the relationality of subjects that are not only socially constructed as ‘different’ but





are made to differ based on the types of capacities they embody, she engages with a pre-conscious development of relationality. By doing so, her work also embodies the principle of disability studies which works to destabilize cognition- and rationality-centered definitions of human subjects. Drawing on Anzaldúa, Liebert proposes an unsettling and reparative reading of pre-paranoid subjects that appeal to the concept of *la facultad* as a pre-conscious engagement with human and non-human entities, reclaiming this experience as a capacity that references our participatory relationship with the world.

Third, in our papers, race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability are no longer identitarian containers for the sovereign subject so much as dynamic processes. Liu's contribution explores shame's capacity for circulation and its potential to rethink theories regarding the formation of queer identities as shameful subjects. An alternative formation of queer subjectivity is possible, Liu suggests, if we develop a curious engagement with shame "as a capacity for circulation and an intensification of affect that can accumulate on particular 'sticky' social objects," which can benefit the theorization of subjectivity via a theorization of identity at the level of populations. The question of the accumulation of properties in certain populations is also present in Ashley and Billies' expansion of blackness. For them our understanding of blackness could move not only from a racial quality of subjects to an ontological becoming attached to bodies, but also body parts, places, events, ideas, and so on. Their analysis leaves identity as an epiphenomenon of emerging of events (rather than an inescapable quality that the subject is tied to), thus asking what blackness does and what kind of surplus value derives from its production. In a similar vein, Nishida's analysis points to the production of identities within the U.S. neoliberal assemblage of public healthcare for low- (or no-) income disabled people. Disabled and care provider bodies participate in this exploitative assemblage, yet in doing so they relate through difference resulting in their co-capacitation. As Nishida explains, the subject enters into care practices that cultivate the openness of the body, as well as its constant relation with other bodies and its surroundings, thereby reconfiguring the subject. Directly facing the practices by which one is cast into identity categories, Liebert names the effect of the colonial subject haunting psychology's diagnostic practices. Her diffraction of these practices opens up a landscape where the paranoid subject lives "beside-the-mind," a psychic borderland of pain and possibility.

### Politicizing affect

In affecting subjectivity, our papers also experiment with politicizing affect. We have chosen to break the rules of habitual or dominant modes of critical inquiry and activism. Breaking-&-entering established forms, ontologies, and practices, we trespass to breach borders and invite alternative kinds of engagement.

First, committed to exploring the different registers, temporalities, and scales of activity participating in affective circulation, affect studies require that epistemology and methodology be considered in terms of emergent ontologies and thus that we might look to aesthetic resources for their speculative and evocative capacity. Ashley and Billies rely on experimental writing "to evoke an experience in which



the reader becomes immersed within a field of sensory blackness while expressing an affective analysis that exposes black affective relations... in a prolific, nonlinear fashion.” Swarming the reader with elements of inundation, their form provokes a feeling of how informational blackness emerges as felt sensation that expands beyond a conscious knowing, demonstrating an understanding of population production through both quantitative and qualitative evocations of coded blackness. Lara, too, attends to form, proposing experimental writing as a way to speculate about the molecular relations that escape phenomenological experience, to take seriously causal relations expressed in poetry while simultaneously exploring organic interaction through observation. This “non-methodological” procedure doesn’t pay fidelity to any epistemological model, it is rather engaged with a disobedient and creative believing that “knowledge has more possibilities when it emerges from an entanglement of science, philosophy and aesthetics.” As well as by selecting human and non-human interlocutors that trouble a colonial divide between the Knowers and the Known, Liebert experiments with a “slippery” style that enacts and demands the “mystified” approach to paranoia, and to present day politics, invited by her analysis.

Second, we disobey through ontology. Liu’s contribution elaborates on how the epistemological commitments of both LGBTQ psychology and the queer approach to gay shame make them coincide on “localizing shame as an object attached to a single subject, whether it be the white gay male or the unhealthy queer.” As an alternative, Liu turns to psychologist Silvan Tomkins’ theory of affect to address shame as a process of circulation and movement between bodies. This approach allows an ontological move towards a curious engagement with how shame moves across differently sexualized and racialized bodies, therefore shifting a seeming political obsession over the binaries of pride and shame, health and pathology, toward a broader concern with the affective movements of populations. In their analysis of black risk as an affective surplus that produces and moves populations, Ashley and Billies likewise offer a counter-framing that invites black resistance as excess, modulating the production of populations primed for forms of political intervention. Importantly for them, this intervention can be analyzed at the ontological level in order to take seriously the affective modulations that lead to resistant possibilities across, not within, bodies. With her concept of affective relationality, Nishida examines solidarity and relationality through ontology. She asks how “solidarity—or in this case, relationality—may be developed and nurtured when the differences among people are based on not only identities but also embodied differences in capacities.” She continues that “[a]s much as such capacity and debility are constructed socially, I also integrate the ontology of impairment or disability into my analysis—by foregrounding the reality of embodied capacity and debility which gives a rise to the care industries.” Offering an unsettling and reparative reading, Liebert’s ontology welcomes paranoia’s liveliness, allowing this capacity to “look back” at psychological and political practice, inviting us into an apprenticeship that may lessen colonization’s grip.

Third, through this collection of papers, we break-&-enter taken-for-granted modes of practice, seeing political capacity where it is perhaps not otherwise allowed. Liu’s turn to Tomkin’s theory of affect rethinks the political potentials of



embracing the affects that are traditionally thought as negative. Rather than conceptualizing shame as an object to be rid of, or to be reprivatized through homonormative policies such as same-sex marriage, Liu argues that “shame can, indeed, be transformative in the context of relational reciprocity, as Tomkins states that it is motivated by an ‘incomplete reduction of interest or joy’ (1963, p. 354) that is about mutual gaze and interconnectedness,” especially at a time of neoliberal hyperindividualism that fractures collective agency. Nishida argues that affective relationality between disabled people and care providers offers a basis of self-organized assemblages, or what Harney and Morten (2013) call the undercommons, which interrupts the neoliberal assemblage that violently produced their relationship in the first place from within. Likewise, Liebert’s reparative reading asks if there might be radical potential within the very coils of “psycurity” assemblages, which otherwise direct paranoia in ways that animate a neocolonial security state. As a response to the bifurcation of nature within psy practices, her subsequent conceptualization of paranoia as a capacity beside-the-mind further opens the possibility that instruments that might otherwise be used to ignore experiences may instead be used as a means of attunement, while redirecting any interventions away from the individual and toward experiences’ space of encounter.

## Twists and turns

Further theorizing subjectivity via the insights developed in affect studies leads necessarily to conditions of possibility in the emergence of subjectivities outside conscious and rational activity. We have pointed out ways in which our contributions look at material relations and non-conscious processes as some of those conditions for subjectivity to emerge and that exploring them allows us to rethink categories previously associated with identity. One of the most interesting provocations of affect studies is that some of these conditions of possibility for the emergence of subjectivity might be distance-driven—made possible, for example, by configurations of the social environment that bypass conscious human activity. In that sense, as Clough (2008) has suggested, the political power of affect studies lies not just in what the body can do, but also and more importantly in the analysis of what the body can be made to do. We can expand that principle towards an analysis of the tendencies or propensities in the emergence of human subjectivity, or what subjectivity can be made to do. In that vein, politics emerging from the theorization of subjectivity based on affect theories are necessarily politics beyond a sovereign version of the subject. It is a politics aware of a distributed agency surrounding us in our lively world. Politics beyond the politics of the subject doesn’t mean neglecting the politics of the subject, rather it means to further explore the ways in which new forms of control and manipulation of populations are setting conditions for the emergence of racialized, gendered, disable bodies, as well as the perpetuation of general homogeneous states of the body. Rather than an abandonment of the subject, we find in affect studies a provocation to return to a desire to diversify the theoretical approaches to subjectivity.



In their introduction to the *Affect Studies Reader*, Gregg and Seigworth (2010) advocate for theory—any theory, with or without a capital T—to operate with “a certain modest methodological vitality rather than impressing itself upon a wiggling world like a snap-grid of shape-setting interpretability” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, p. 4). Such shape-setting is rather like what Liebert in this issue calls a “think-net”—casting a mode of ‘explanation’ that captures, domesticates, stills the world, rather than respecting the mystery and liveliness of all matter, or what Barad (2007) might describe as “meeting the universe halfway.” In contrast, Anzaldúa describes theory as that which, “produces effects that change people and the way they perceive the world” (1990, p. 26), an unending practice of border-crossing and metamorphosis, perhaps what one might even call shape-shifting. Overall, in this special issue, this collective experiment, we hope to have welcome turns in the theorization of subjectivity and twists in the affective turn, strengthening our own capacities to be theoretically nimble and humble, responding to the world in ways that challenge the dominant conceptions of reality that circulates through the present political moment.

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